



*Somewhere these boys learned that violence is a tool for asserting anger . . . and that it's acceptable to direct it toward female peers.*

Like many of America's boys, Andrew Golden learned early about guns.

# Don't overlook gender in Jonesboro

BY EUGENE M. HYMAN

**T**HE EVENTS that occurred at Jonesboro, Ark., have been the subject of conversation by everyone, everywhere. Santa Clara County Superior Court's family-law division — where I work deciding divorce, child-custody and domestic-violence restraining-order cases — is no exception. Even judges who deal with volatile and violent situations on a daily basis are finding the events in Arkansas surreal, impossible to imagine or comprehend.

But there's a missing component to much of the discussion: the fact that all five of the people killed, and nine of the 10 wounded, were female.

The nightmare of Jonesboro was extreme, but it was a nightmare that has occurred previously over the years: in Canada, Stockton and most recently in Pearl, Miss., and Paducah, Ky. The media have concentrated on some possible causes of this violence, but we need a better explanation and a greater understanding of what has happened, why it happened and, most important, how future Jonesboros can be prevented.

In an effort to find explanations, the media have pointed to a violent South, widespread availability of weapons, too many graphic movies, bad parenting, lax juveniles and a breakdown of the family.

I seriously doubt any one of the above factors, or even all of them together, is "the cause." I've been working with family-related problems for more than 20 years as a police officer, as an attorney and, for the past seven years, as a judge. And I am constantly amazed and disillusioned at the amount of violence present everywhere in our community.

Our socioeconomic standing, race, age and other considerations don't make us immune. We have come to expect and, in some situations, even tolerate violence. In many instances, we accept victim-blaming behavior such as "she was dressed like a tramp," or "if it's so horrible, why doesn't she just leave?" Violence is much easier to tolerate when we don't put a face on our victims, when it doesn't become too real and possibly too familiar.

Historically, we have tolerated violence directed to-



Two girls mourning in Jonesboro, Ark.: Forgotten in the discussion of the shooting is the fact that the male perpetrators' victims and intended targets were female.

ward what used to be considered property: women, children and slaves. Now we no longer have slavery, and we have made great strides in reducing violence against women and children: targeting gang violence on school playgrounds and street corners, increasing police efforts to fight drug-related violence.

From a cultural perspective, though, we still have a way to go if we wish to stop violence toward women.

We need to target gender-related violence with the same commitment and resources we have directed toward other violence that pervades our cities. In Jonesboro, we know that all those slain were female, that the killers were male and that at least one of the accused was angry toward a young girl who apparently rejected a relationship with him. This violent behavior mimics the adult violence that often occurs in the family home, and lately,

in the workplace.

Somewhere, these boys learned violence is an effective tool for asserting anger and control. Somewhere, these boys also learned it's acceptable to direct anger and assertions of power toward female peers.

Who can doubt that the boys were experiencing overwhelming feelings of powerlessness, anger, and hurt, and that they responded by hurting and trying to control people around them? For many reasons — cultural acceptance and perhaps family history among them — girls became the acceptable targets of that behavior. Hate got focused there.

Jonesboro is an extreme example of a spectrum of gender-driven behavior that exists in many different forms in schools around the country. This is not the first place or time that girls and women have been the principal victims of violence and gender-related crimes. School districts find it legally necessary to have sexual-harassment policies that address student conduct precisely because gender-related incidents affecting students of all ages are no stranger to school campuses.

This is not a definitive explanation or answer for what happened in Jonesboro or at the other schools hit by mass violence. No research exists to explain these horrible incidents in a meaningful or reliable way. There are no sure and quick answers.

But we must continue to try harder to teach our children that there is a better way to solve our many personal problems than violence. We must more diligently teach children, beginning at a young age, that — despite what they might see in their home and in their communities at large — it is unacceptable to victimize women.

Larger-than-life events such as Jonesboro present us with an unfortunate opportunity to explore solutions to violence and to examine our community's problems in new, intelligent ways. I can only hope our focused examination of this tragedy produces improvements toward understanding and dealing with these very real-life issues — before another surreal headline appears. ■

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*Dave Gonzales*

helps NATURE SURVIVE  
IN CREEK BEDS. Without  
him, we'd be in a

*Amel Co*  
**YOUR OUTDOOR  
ADVENTURE  
BEGINS HERE**