Managing High-Risk Adolescents in Community Contexts

CASE STUDY

The Averted Paw Paw High School and South Haven Pier Shooting in Michigan

ABSTRACT

Does adverting a school attack ensure that the threat of violence has been mitigated? This case study analyzes an averted school attack at a Michigan high school and an act of targeted violence carried out by the intended school attacker three years later.

This incident highlights the need for ongoing engagement and management of subjects of concern during and after incarceration and the need for collaborative multidisciplinary interventions to prevent acts of targeted mass violence that may endure after mitigating an initial crisis.

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INTRODUCTION

Although mass violence attacks at schools are statistically rare, their impacts far exceed their occurrences in the communities in which they occur and across the nation. Bath Township, a community 100 miles northwest of Detroit, Michigan, experienced the deadliest school attack in U.S. history, an attack that killed 45 and injured 58. On May 18, 1927, a Bath resident and former school board official murdered his wife, destroyed his farm, detonated explosives he had planted in the school, and then detonated explosives in his truck, killing the school superintendent, himself, and three others outside the school. Ninety-four years later, the Michigan town is still healing from the attack.1

Too many communities across the country, some well-known – Littleton, Colorado; Newtown, Connecticut; Parkland, Florida; and Oxford, Michigan, and others less known, try to make sense of the deadly attacks that have occurred in their schools and heal from the tragedies. Sadly, school violence continues to represent a vexing challenge for school officials, law enforcement, mental health providers, communities, researchers, and elected officials.

The number of completed attacks is far smaller than the number of averted attacks thanks to the actions of persons in the school or in the community. Averted incidents may be overlooked or have only a short-term local impact because the person(s) involved did not achieve their goal, because the incident did not meet the requirements for a school to document it, or because of underreporting in the media.

To address this need, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), provided funding to the National Policing Institute (NPI) (formerly the National Police Foundation) to develop and maintain the Averted School Violence database. The ASV database team collects, analyzes, and publishes averted and completed acts of school violence that have occurred since the April 20, 1999 attack on Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. The data is drawn from open-source media articles as well as from law enforcement, school officials, and others entering reports directly into the ASV database.

In 2019, the NPI conducted a preliminary analysis of 51 cases of averted school violence in the ASV database to identify basic information about the schools involved, the perpetrators and suspects, the weapons, and the plots and incidents. Also, in 2019, the NPI conducted a comparison of 51 averted and 51 completed school attacks from the ASV database to identify important similarities and differences between the types of incidents.

In 2021, the COPS Office released the NPI's analysis of the 171 averted cases that had been recorded in the ASV database. The Report provides critical data to inform the development and implementation of school violence prevention and intervention strategies. The report identifies the states in which the 171 averted cases occurred, with California (23), Florida (13), Pennsylvania (11), Michigan (9), and New York (8) being among the highest.

The majority (153 of 171) of the averted school attacks examined in the 2021 analysis occurred in public schools in suburban (48.8%) and rural (25.9%) communities. High schools were the primary targets for plotters (111/171). Schools with student populations of 501-1000 (51) and those with 1001-2000 (41) were the most frequent targets.

In 132 incidents, one person planned the attack. In 110 (64.3%) cases, current or recently enrolled students plotted the attacks. In 93.5% of the incidents, males were the plotters. The majority were younger than age 18 (61.5%), with 38.4% over the age of 18 (48). Of the plotters, 53 (40.2 %) were white.

The following significant characteristics were identified among the plotters:

- Impaired social/emotional feelings
- Depressed mood
- Disgust for authority and rules
- Social withdrawal – isolation from peers
- Easily agitated
- Lacked empathy, guilt, or remorse

A significant life-changing or traumatic event occurred prior to the planned attack. In those instances where a reason for the planned attack could be identified, the following were identified:

- Hate people
- Revenge seeking
- Bullying
- Resentment
- Paranoid delusions/command hallucinations
- Rivalry

In 139 of the 171 (81.3%) cases, firearms, specifically handguns, were the primary instrument of the planned attack, followed by explosives in 45 cases.

The 2021 Averted School Violence report concluded that positive school environments that provide violence prevention programs, foster trust among students and staff, provide support for all students, and encourage early intervention for students with behavioral challenges are key to averting school attacks.2 In many cases, school attacks can be prevented by persons who recognize the indicators of violence and report their concerns to school and law enforcement officials directly or through anonymous reporting systems.

Multi-disciplinary behavioral threat assessment teams are the foundation of early identification and intervention. In addition, carefully selected, well-trained, and properly equipped school resource officers provide an important resource in the prevention and response to school attacks. In the end, efforts to prevent school attacks must be a "whole of community" effort in which everyone—school administrators, teachers, and staff; school-based and community mental health providers; law enforcement; parents and students—see something, say something, and do something to identify and extend resources to students in need of help before they hurt themselves or others.

The case study presented in this special report was prepared by subject matter experts in law enforcement, psychiatry, trauma, behavioral threat assessment, school and mass violence who are at the National Policing Institue and Michigan State University's Department of Psychiatry. It is illustrative of many of the cases in the ASV database and describes an averted attack that occurred in 2018 at the Paw Paw High School in Michigan and the homicide/suicide the plotter committed three years later, after he was released from a juvenile detention facility and court-directed supervision.

The case study draws our attention to the urgent need to study averted school attacks as well as averted attacks in other public spaces. It also calls for decisive action, based on research, to identify strategies to prevent acts of violence. The Center for Targeted Violence Prevention is committed to working with communities in Michigan and nationally to identify and implement cross-system identification, intervention, mentoring, and intensive community-based treatment strategies to prevent future mass violence events.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018, Aidan Ingalls (AI), a Michigan high school student, was arrested after his mother reported that AI was plotting to attack his high school using modified firearms and homemade explosives. The school shooting was averted, but three years later AI conducted an act of targeted violence after he was released from a juvenile detention facility. His case highlights the need for early identification, ongoing engagement, and management of adolescents and other persons of concern to promote violence desistance and rehabilitation.

This case study uses publicly accessible information and information obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request. It presents valuable lessons learned for education, public safety, juvenile justice, and behavioral health professionals. The case study highlights the need for collaborative multi-disciplinary interventions to prevent acts of targeted mass violence that may occur after mitigation of the initial crisis because the plotter continues to experience thoughts of committing violence despite being in detention and treatment.

Disclaimer: Although this case study investigates the impact of mental illness on an adolescent responsible for an act of violence, the authors in no way argue that mental illness is a precursor to violence or an explanation of violence or that most individuals who experience mental health challenges are inherently more dangerous than the general population.

AI's background; AI lived with his mother, three sisters, and stepfather in Paw Paw, Michigan. He and his biological sisters had not seen their biological father in several years and had been estranged since their father and mother divorced. AI spent significant time with his grandparents and had a close relationship with his grandfather. Although AI had a small group of friends that he maintained from his previous high school in South Haven, Michigan, and a small group of friends at Paw Paw High School, he was described as private, closed off, and a person who struggled to form relationships.

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INVESTIGATIVE THEMES FOR THREAT ASSESSMENT

√ COMMUNICATION: There was observed leakage behavior before AI's arrest regarding the planned Paw Paw High School attack. Specifically, AI told one of his friends he would blow up the school. This information was not reported to authorities until after the arrest. He also asked his girlfriend if she knew anyone who could buy him ammunition. His girlfriend also observed what she believed was a pipe bomb in his bedroom. She did not report this information to authorities until after AI's arrest. Other students associated with AI were aware of his interest in homemade explosives, and at least one of them was aware of his interest in white supremacist ideas.

√ RESEARCH AND PLANNING: AI's writing and images indicated in-depth research, very complex planning, experimentation, substantial consideration of the effects of using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and intent to build devices capable of seriously injuring and killing others.

√ MENTAL HEALTH HISTORY: AI did not have a history of a psychiatric or mental health diagnosis or any history of receiving services or treatment before his arrest. However, on at least one occasion, his mother unsuccessfully attempted to obtain services through Community Mental Health. After his arrest, AI was found to have multiple psychiatric symptoms and diagnostic considerations, including the possibility of anxiety, mood disorder, autism spectrum disorder, and psychosis. AI expressed grandiose delusional thinking, mood, and anxiety symptoms. Evaluators also elicited a history significant for lying, fire setting,[3] and animal cruelty,[4] as well as persistent suicidal and homicidal ideation.

√ PAST AND PRESENT STRESSORS: AI experienced acute stressors preceding his arrest related to the recent discovery of his "notebook," breakup of an intimate relationship, chronic stressors related to relocation and change in schools, social isolation, ongoing perceived bullying, academic difficulty, and negative engagement with one of his teachers. AI's high school relationship with a young woman with whom he shared intimate aspects of his life ended due to pressure from her friends and an incident in which his mother intervened in a private Facebook messenger conversation between AI and his girlfriend.

√ PROTECTIVE FACTORS: AI had positive relationships with his siblings, grandfather, and mother. Ultimately AI's admission to his mother and her boyfriend that he planned to conduct a school-based attack helped avert the initial tragedy.

√ RISK FACTORS: AI had a history of suicidal statements. He chronically struggled to build relationships with peers. He was estranged from his biological father. He also struggled academically, resulting in disciplinary action for missing assignments. His mother hoped that he would be held back because of his academic challenges. During an interview, Van Buren County law enforcement sources familiar with AI's family advised that AI's mother was challenged by substance abuse and was incarcerated at the Van Buren County Jail while AI was also incarcerated awaiting judicial proceedings.

FULL CASE SUMMARY

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND ∞

AI and his four sisters grew up in the 3.4 square mile community of South Haven, Michigan, with an estimated population of 3,964.[5] During an interview with Van Buren County Sheriff's Office investigators, AI's mother described him as an academically challenged student, whom she hoped would be held back or asked to repeat in his grade; however, he was passed on year after year.[6] AI's academic struggles resulted in 27 incidents of detention, referral to Saturday school, and referrals to summer school for missing assignments, failing grades, and excessive tardiness from October 2014 to November 2016.[7]

At the time of the averted school attack and the South Haven shooting, AI lived in the Village of Paw Paw, Michigan, with his stepfather, mother, and three sisters. One of AI's sisters was the child of his mother's live-in boyfriend of four years. AI and his two biological sisters did not have a close relationship with their biological father. By 2018, AI and his sisters had not seen their father since approximately 2009, when they attended their father's wedding to his second wife.[8] After the wedding, plans were made to visit their father, who resided in Texas, but their father canceled the visit.

AI's mother and stepfather reported AI had a close relationship with his grandparents and his sisters.[9] AI frequently played with his sisters and read to them. There were incidents of intra-sibling conflict, but AI's mother and her boyfriend reported them to be fairly inconsequential normal sibling conflict.[10] Although AI's mother and boyfriend did not see cause for alarm, they did report incidents of AI being brought to tears when his sisters entered his room, removed things from his room, or left his room not as they had found it. The seemingly intense emotional response may have been cause for concern, considering what would later be discovered in the bedroom.[11] The degree of emotional dysregulation related to unauthorized entrance into his room or disruption of his belongings seems extreme in comparison to what is usually seen in adolescence. There were also several other instances of seemingly intense emotional reactions to things left out of place or unclean in spaces outside AI's room. AI's mother would later tell investigators that her son would become intensely angry and sometimes made statements regarding self-harm when his sisters left dishes.[12]

AI's abnormal emotional reaction and suicidal ideation point to significant psychological distress and increase the likelihood of a serious underlying psychiatric condition. His heightened need for order, predictability, structure, and routine may be consistent with features of autism spectrum disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or anxiety. It is also very possible that AI was worried that his sisters or mother would discover materials associated with his planned attack.

Outside of AI's close relationship with his mother, grandparents, and sisters, AI had a core group of three friends in South Haven. The boys spent weekends together until AI and his family moved to the Village of Paw Paw, Michigan (population 3,500).[13] In Paw Paw, AI enrolled at Paw Paw High School, a school with 685 students, 34 teachers, two counselors, and three administrators.[14] AI struggled to build relationships and was reported to be a shy child who did not thrive in large group settings.

His ability to fit in was made more difficult by an incident that occurred the summer before he began at Paw Paw High School. On a summer day after having recently moved, AI walked outside of his house in a pair of white underwear, a costume prompted by his admiration for the main character in his favorite book, A Clockwork Orange, by Anthony Burgess, who wore what looked like undergarments (i.e., a codpiece) over his pants in the story.[15] He took a garbage canister to the street wearing only what was referred to as "whitey tightees." Another youth filmed him with her phone, and the images were shared widely throughout the Paw Paw student body, leading to bullying once school began.[16]

AI started school at Paw Paw High School in September 2017, and although the video of him in a compromising state had become a viral image, he did establish several significant relationships with peers. AI formed an intimate relationship with a same-age female student. The two dated for approximately two months, but the relationship was tumultuous and may have presented a significant stressor for AI. The relationship ended approximately one week before AI's arrest. When interviewed on March 18, 2018, by police, AI's ex-girlfriend told investigators that their relationship ended because AI suspected her of cheating on him.[17] The relationship was also impacted when AI was sent to the school office because he refused to show one of his teachers his notebook and the student body later learned that he had been drawing pictures of explosives. After students learned that AI had drawn explosives, his then-girlfriend refused to be seen publicly with AI. In a subsequent event, his girlfriend asked AI via Facebook messenger to place a piece of her vape pen in her locker. AI's mother was monitoring the conversation, and she learned that his girlfriend did not want to be seen with him because her friends disapproved of the relationship.[18] AI's mother intervened in the Facebook conversation, and AI viewed the intervention as an unnecessary intrusion, which led to feelings of embarrassment and anger.

The end of AI and his girlfriend's relationship and her refusal to publicly engage with him were significant because he saw the relationship as "intimate," and he had invested considerable trust in her. AI's former girlfriend told investigators from the Van Buren County Sheriff's Office that she went to AI's residence only once. During her visit, AI took her to his room, where she observed what she described as a pipe bomb in his closet with a screw top and fuses in it.[19] She also told investigators that he showed her several knives in his room.[20] AI's girlfriend told investigators that she later connected what she thought was a pipe bomb in AI's room to news reports that a pipe bomb was involved in the threat against her school.[21]

AI trusted his girlfriend to the point that he invited her into his bedroom, a bedroom that, when entered by his younger sisters, caused AI to become angry and upset. AI also asked his girlfriend on one occasion (roughly February 2018) if she had older friends who could buy him ammunition.[22] She told him that she did not know anyone. She also told investigators that AI had once disclosed information about a previous act of arson in which he tried to set on fire a shed that belonged to a neighbor.[23] He also told her that he hit his neighbor with a block of ice.[24] AI's girlfriend did not know if AI was telling the truth, and the incidents were never confirmed. But if true, they indicate that AI had a history of violence towards individuals, fire setting, and targeted aggression. These admissions also seem to suggest that AI trusted his girlfriend enough to share secrets and to ask her to assist him in accessing objects that would aid him in his planned school attack.

AI was reported to have had another significant relationship with a peer at Paw Paw High School. AI's girlfriend told investigators that AI's closest friendship was with another male Paw Paw Student.[25] The male Paw Paw student (Paw Paw Associate 1 or PPA1) and AI were both in a Paw Paw High School civics class. Neither of the students liked the teacher, and this was the class that AI was in when he was sent to the principal's office after refusing to show the teacher his notebook. During interviews with law enforcement, AI reported that he did not like PPA1 very much.[26] He described PPA1 as a white supremacist and told police that he frequently spoke about killing black people.[27] AI told police that in one instance, PPA1 stated that he hated those dirty people and that he was going to kill them. AI told investigators that when PPA1 made the statement, he (AI) high-fived him. However, when investigators asked AI if he felt the same way as PPA1, he said that he did not care about race, which appeared to be incongruent with some of AI's writings and drawings. During the interview, AI admitted that he had talked about building bombs with PPA1 and had shown him his notebook. Although AI told investigators that he never disclosed his plans to put bombs in the school, shoot people there, and then kill himself, he and PPA1 had discussed putting napalm on their civics teacher's desk.

When law enforcement investigators later interviewed PPA1, he said that the only thing that he and AI had discussed was the Anarchist's Cookbook and the process of making napalm.28 PPA1 went on to tell investigators that when AI brought these topics up, he didn't want to have the conversations because he suspected that AI was researching these topics to do something terrible. PPA1 reported telling AI that he did not want to talk about these things. This account differed from AI's, but PPA1 did tell investigators that AI had planned to show his journal to him in civics class and that he was aware that AI had a number of firearms from previous conversations. When investigators asked PPA1 if he had researched any of these topics on his own, he reported that he had not, but that he had caught AI using his (PPA1's) Chromebook approximately a week before the interview.29 PPA1 denied having any interests in these topics other than researching weapons concealment for a school project.30 He did confirm AI's report to investigators that he was involved in a white supremacist group, although PPA1 assured investigators that he was no longer involved. PPA1's parents, who were also present, advised that they were dealing with the white supremacist issue but told officers that PPA1 was also experiencing racist stereotyping because he was Hispanic.31

Although the true nature of the relationship between AI and PPA1 cannot be accurately discerned because of their differing accounts of the relationship, it does appear that for some time, AI had a peer who shared his dislike for the civics class, the teacher (shared interest), and an interest in white supremacy (shared affinity/identity). PPA1 may very well have struggled with his own mixed identity (Mexican-German ancestry) and had disassociated from a group of white supremacists at the time of his interview. But PPA1's previous involvement and beliefs, of which AI was aware, normalized and created an ideologically affirming echo chamber for toxic and harmful beliefs.

OBSERVED WARNING SIGNS AND FAILURE TO REPORT ∞

Law enforcement interviewed several other Paw Paw High School students described as friends of AI. One of the young men, PPA2, who identified himself as a friend of AI's, told officers that he had limited knowledge of AI's engagement with weapons.32 PPA2 told investigators that he knew AI had access to a napalm recipe from the Anarchist's Cookbook.33 He also told investigators that approximately a month and a half before he was interviewed (March 18, 2018), AI made a comment about blowing up the school.34 PPA2 told officers that he felt that the statement was made in jest.35 Investigators asked him if he was aware of the school's "OK2SAY Program," which allowed for reporting anonymous tips regarding concerning behavior. PPA2 told investigators that he was aware of the program but did not know much about it.36 These admissions raise several concerns. A 2008 study on prior knowledge of school-based shootings conducted by the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education found that some bystanders did not report because they did not believe the attacks would occur.37 This finding aligns with PPA2's belief that AI was "joking" when he said he would blow up the school. This is an important observation for school officials responsible for educating their students on warning signs and behavioral indicators of dangerousness. Furthermore, PPA2's lack of understanding of the school's OK2Say program is instructive. Having a process to facilitate anonymous reporting helps combat some of the barriers to reporting found in the 2008 Secret Service and Department of Education Study previously referenced. However, these programs are only effective and beneficial when students understand them at a level that allows them to trust the systems enough to use them.

PPA2 was not the only individual in AI's life who observed significant warning behaviors. PPA1 expressed concern that AI was researching dangerous topics and feared that this could potentially result in AI engaging in acts of violence. Yet these concerns were not shared with school officials. AI's ex-girlfriend's knowledge of his attempt to acquire ammunition illegally and the presence of what she believed was a pipe bomb in his bedroom was also not shared with school officials or police. It is unknown what, if any, training or education AI's ex-girlfriend, PPA1, and PPA2 had regarding recognizing potentially dangerous behaviors and what reporting mechanisms were available. It is also unknown if they believed AI had the capability and intent to hurt others.

These adolescents cannot necessarily be held accountable for not sharing this information with the appropriate adults as it is uncertain that they perceived AI's behaviors as cause for alarm, that they knew what reporting resources were available to them, or that they could have identified appropriate trusted adults in the school setting.

PLANNING AN ATTACK - RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ∞

The notebook that AI refused to show his civics teacher on February 22, 2018, and the interview conducted by investigators on March 18, 2018, provide insight into AI's planning. AI's notebook was filled with detailed notes regarding his experimentation with homemade explosives. The notebook entries begin with a key that describes two abbreviations, UR and KR. The legend indicates that UR signifies untried recipes while KR indicates known recipes.38 Throughout the notes, AI details his experiments with different homemade, easily accessible precursor materials (for IEDs), noting what aspects of specific designs present challenges and which design elements were effective. The detailed notetaking displays a significant investment of time and energy in developing devices that would result in severe injury and death. The notes include information on the modification of firearms that AI completed at his grandparents' house, which was detailed in the notebook. Furthermore, the texts and diagrams detailed how AI could conceal the weapons using a modified backpack,39 displaying a disturbing level of planning.

The law enforcement officer who initially responded to the school after the principal observed the notebook's contents requested that an evaluator from Van Buren County Intermediate School District come to the school and conduct a threat assessment. The evaluator conducted an assessment, and although there was a concern, it was determined that AI's behavior did not meet the criteria for arrest, school disciplinary action, or referral to a mental health provider. After the interview at school, the responding law enforcement officer conducted a consensual search of AI's room, but no bomb-making materials were located. Although the responding officer and the threat assessor did not believe they had grounds to use disciplinary action or criminal justice measures, they were right to be concerned. Many of the items depicted in the notebook, such as homemade IEDs and firearm schematics, which AI drew were later (on March 18, 2018) located in his home. The notebook drawings and notes that were indicative of a planned attack were described in the investigators' interview with AI on March 18, 2018.

During the March 18, 2018, interview with investigators, AI initially denied having any plan or intent to hurt others. However, many of his responses were inconsistent with what the investigators already knew, what AI had told his mother, and other statements he made to authorities. Furthermore, AI had several inappropriate responses, such as inappropriate smiling and laughing. to serious questions the interviewers asked when it appeared he was being untruthful or concealing information AI's abnormal or inappropriate response to questioning and his indifference to the seriousness of the situation represent a significant difference in social and emotional communication that may be indicative of the impairments commonly observed in individuals with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, those with grandiosity, or those with an antisocial lack of guilt or remorse. Eventually, AI began to share both intent and his plans with the investigators. AI told investigators that he intended to set all of the clocks back in his house to keep his sisters from getting to school on time. He also told the investigators that he planned to take the keys for his mother's vehicle so that she could not take his siblings to school. He went on to tell investigators that he had materials in his room to make napalm so that he could take it to school on Monday (the next day). AI planned to place the napalm and Molotov cocktails in his backpack.

Although AI initially said that his mission was not to hurt people, he later said that if he committed suicide, no one would care and that this made him change his mind about only killing himself. AI admitted to altering (sawing off the barrels) two of his grandfather's firearms (a Marlon .22 and a Savage Over Under 410 .22) on Friday, March 16, 2018. He also admitted concealing the weapons and ammunition in his backpack, taking them from his grandfather's house, and hiding them in his room.

During the interview, AI did not name a specific target. However, he did tell investigators that there were people who deserved it. When asked to expound on who deserved it, AI said that the people at school who hated him. He later identified them as the "emo-edgy kids."40 He said he did not like them, and they did not like him.

AI's interview and notebook indicated that he had conducted significant research before his planned attack. He also created weapons and illegally acquired others before his mother's intervention. He had selected a date (March 19t, a location (Paw Paw High School), and potential targets. Furthermore, he had decided that if he were to make his death matter, he would have to take others with him. The interview describes a young man who intended to end his life through suicide and was consumed by ego-syntonic homicidal ideation with the intention and plan to inflict death and great harm on others before his death.

Additional insight regarding AI and the averted attack is revealed in a journal he kept, which was found during a search of his room by law enforcement. On February 22, 2018, the day his notebook – or as AI referred to it, his "bomb book" – was discovered by his civics teacher and he was interviewed by the law enforcement, AI writes about how he was able to "bullshit so well." "No sir I have a curfew." "I have no access to guns" "blah blah." "I was amazing." Additionally, AI wrote:

"I may have to kill them sooner… I need to get to work faster as soon as I possibly can. I need to get bombs and guns ready. I am officially ready I only hate the fact that my mom may have to die. She keeps standing up for me…I love her so much. But I need revenge. I need to die. Every damm day I think of nothing else except chaos and destruction. I see no other path for me, and that is really fucking sad."

On February 25, 2018, AI wrote that he got "bit by a fucking cat. I was trying to drown it but it shouldn't just die peacefully. But today got me thinking how am I going to kill people if I can't kill a cat?... I brought a knife to stab it but I just couldn't do it… But throwing the cat into the lake over and over again was easy. Maybe I'm just not a stabbing guy. I wish I had a hammer though, that seemed to be a lot easier. Okay a quick update. I kept thinking about how the cat didn't die. It was bothering me unless I saw it die. So I went looking for it … I found it hiding under an electricity box … I strangled it with my gloves … It wasn't sad… I just fucking killed something. I feel like God."

On March 3, 2018, AI wrote about bombing the 4th of July celebration in South Haven using pressure cooker bombs. He wrote that he was "torn between a strong desire to end everything as soon as possible and a desire to kill as many people as possible." A March 6, 2018, journal entry indicates that he had decided to attack the school. On March 17, 2018, AI wrote – "due to recent events, I had to move my plan to Monday."

AI appeared challenged by low self-worth, feelings of persecution, and the belief that there was no alternative other than an act of violence. During the March 18, 2018 interview, AI told investigators that "his mom has so many kids, so it really doesn't matter if she just dropped one."41 He went on to say to them that "he is probably not going to graduate" and that "he's not going to graduate and be some tech guy.'42 AI also told investigators that he couldn't go home because "he had stolen his grandfather's guns and sawed them off to kill people."43 He assured them that his grandfather was not fond of him. AI appeared to have felt that he could not mend his relationship with his grandfather or atone for what he had already done. He expressed a sense of ineptitude and believed that his mother would be ok or better off without him. These statements indicate that AI felt that there was no choice but to go forward with the attack and that if he were not arrested, he would have no place to go.

AI indicated that school stressors contributed to his mental decline and maladaptive behaviors. AI reported that he faced bullying from several students. However, when his friends at Paw Paw High School were interviewed, none of them reported that they had observed any bullying or were aware of AI being bullied. AI's family also believed that he was recently bullied. However, it is unknown if incidents of bullying occurred or if AI's reports were a misperception, misinterpretation, or form of manipulation.

It is also possible that AI used being called a "bomber" by students (unconfirmed) as justification for violence since he stated that if people were going to call him the bomber, he might as well do it. [44]

AI indicated that he had not sleep well for several days preceding the averted attack, potentially indicating that he was experiencing a manic episode. When asked on Sunday when the last time he got a good night's sleep, AI told an investigator he hadn't gotten a goodnight's sleep since Wednesday. Although the investigators did not inquire about how much sleep he had gotten over the period, it is likely that if his sleep was significantly limited, or if he had not slept at all, or if he had a sleep or mood disorder or a manic episode, he would have been susceptible to significant cognitive impairment.
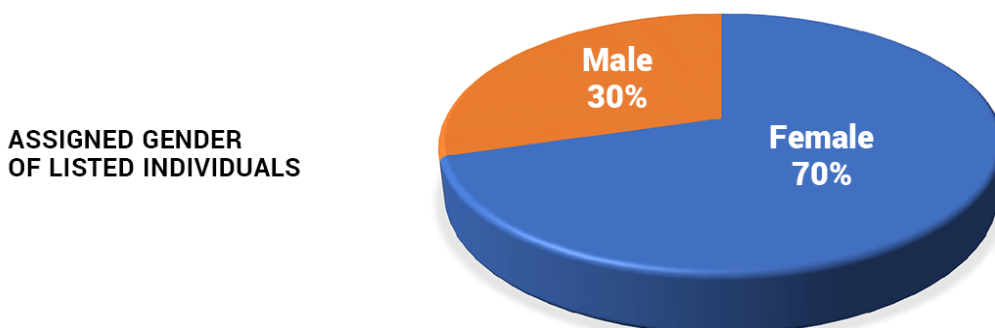
DEHUMANIZING LANGUAGE ∞

One of the items seized from AI's residence after his arrest and a series of search warrants was a notebook containing a list of 27 individuals. The list includes individuals who AI knew personally and famous politicians, actresses, and entertainers. Each entry in the list is followed by physical descriptions and descriptions of their behaviors and characteristics. Much of the language is dehumanizing, with individuals being compared to feces and described with a mixture of misogynistic, racist, and homophobic insults. The language used is not simply a matter of being offensive. Violent talk may serve as an affirmation of identity and serve as one way to address grievances. [45] Furthermore, various studies indicate that dehumanizing language can, in some instances, be associated with desensitization to violence. However, there is debate as to whether the most significant impact is instrumental violence or moral violence. [46,47,48]

AI's commentary extends further than commentary based on the appearance of individuals and reflects an association between behavior, identity, and value. Many of the affronts that AI describes are not personal to him but are a commentary on sexual behavior and individuals acting outside of what he believes as the behaviors associated with their racial and ethnic identity. Although the list is not labeled as a "hit list" or a "kill list," it is clear that AI held grievances against the individuals on the list and that many of them, such as his civics teacher, were accessible to him at Paw Paw High School. [49]

It is also noteworthy that most of the individuals listed were women. As figure 1 shows, 70% or 19 of the 27 individuals on the list were women as indicated by the gender AI ascribed to them in his writing. While it is unknown whether AI took issue with all women, there is an observable overrepresentation within the list of transgressors. Furthermore, some of the listed male transgressors were described in terms of gender, with one male being described as "one of those weird feminists."

FIGURE 1: ASSIGNED GENDER OF INDIVIDUALS IN AI'S LIST

ASSIGNED GENDER
OF LISTED INDIVIDUALS

Male 30%
Female 70%

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Overall, the list of transgressors seemingly indicates that AI had well-established grievances and was a "dangerous injustice collector"– someone who perceives many injustices associated with things that happen to them and that have "at least one incident in their past when they reacted to a real or perceived injustice in a manner that was (1) disproportionate to the original event (the shed burning) and (2) aggressive."[50] It is also significant that many of the injustices collected by AI had to do with women's sexual behavior. During an interview with investigators, AI told investigators that other peoples' attitudes towards people impacted his decision to use violence. AI provided them with a specific example. He told officers that he "saw a girl bragging about how she had sex with one dude and broke up with him to have sex with another dude."[51] AI told investigators that this was disgusting and that it bothered him.[52] The admission was almost identical to some of the grievances detailed in the list of 27 individuals. This is an important observation because it indicates that this was not just a product of a momentary crisis. These issues were long-standing.

AI's writings and drawing detail rape, sexual exploitation, and dehumanization of women. Feelings of ineptitude were translated into hatred, which he perseverated on for an extended period and should have been viewed as a strong indicator of the potential for violence and the need for assessment, treatment, and monitoring. One statement made to investigators during AI's interview captures this need perfectly. During the interview, AI told investigators that he had a conversation with his mother about whether he would have gone through with the Paw Paw attack on the following day. He informed the investigators that he told his mom that he would have waited until he was 21, and if things had kept happening, he would have done something then.[53]

INCARCERATION AND RELEASE ∞

After AI's mother and stepfather discovered the sawed-off rifle and shotgun that belonged to his grandfather in AI's room and the plot to conduct a school attack, AI's mother took him to the Van Buren Sheriff's Office, where he was eventually taken into custody. AI was remanded to juvenile detention and, although initially charged with 10 counts, pleaded guilty to two firearms and explosives-related felonies in March 2018 in juvenile court.[54] He was later sentenced to spend a year in a residential treatment center under the supervision of the Michigan Department of Human Services.[55] AI remained at the facility until his 19th birthday when he was released to the custody of relatives for two years.[56]

AI's probation ended July 20, 2021. Two months later, on August 20, 2021, he dropped off a backpack at the place of his employment.[57] The backpack contained three photo albums, 10n envelopes containing cash marked for employees and family members totaling $1,379, and two journals.[58] One of the journals had the following entry:

"I don't feel anxious, nervous, excited, happy, or sad. I feel absolutely nothing except content and acceptance."[59]

> " I don't feel anxious, nervous, excited, happy, or sad
> *I feel absolutely nothing except*
> *content and acceptance.* "

On August 20, 2021, AI was wearing a black backpack like the one he intended to use during his averted 2018 school shooting. Armed with two handguns, he shot two people, killing one of them on a pier in South Haven, Michigan.60 After shooting the two people, he made his way back toward the beach, firing several shots at people on the beach, missing them as they ran for cover. He subsequently stopped and shot and killed himself.61

A video was later discovered that was apparently filmed by AI the night before the shooting on the pier. In the video, AI talked about the "mission" he would carry out the next day while providing more insights into his actions.62 The video, which can be considered a recorded manifesto and a goodbye letter, articulated his grievances against society. He expressed a sense of futility regarding his life saying that there is no happy ending in sight and that he did not want to live a long life and work just to meet his basic needs.63 He argued that it did not make sense that attractive women did not choose to be with him, calling himself fit, intelligent, and a superior male at the top of the totem pole.64 His grandiose statements stand in contrast to his many statements indicating a true sense of low self-worth.

He narcissistically regretted that others were unable to recognize his extraordinary traits and attributed this lack of recognition to the pervasive imbecility of others. Lack of female attention is perceived as universal rejection and appears to have fueled his feelings of inadequacy and the need to dehumanize the female gender. He lamented that beautiful blonde women choose to be with "bulbous black bastards" instead of him, highlighting frustration with his inability to find a successful partnership with a woman who meets his standards and perceived racial inequities.65 He called women traitors for choosing lesbians instead of him and discussed how society glamorizes mental illness and obesity while accepting pedophilia and "transgenderism."66

During the video, he became distracted several times and indicated that there was noise outside before saying that nothing was there, potentially experiencing auditory hallucinations and responding to internal stimuli. During the video, AI played with a pocketknife and a black semi-automatic handgun painted with a swastika and the numbers "1488".67

Throughout the video, AI vacillated from flat affect to excitement and anger while pointing the firearm at himself and the camera, stopping to pose with the gun several times before laughing. AI provided insights into his early life, saying that he has experienced suicidal thoughts since he was 12 years old.68 AI reported that he was both bullied in the 9th grade and sexually assaulted by an African American woman when he was young.69 However, it is difficult to determine the veracity of these statements. AI said that he made up the bullying incident at Paw Paw in which he was photographed in his underwear because he wanted his mother to transfer him to another school where the young woman (not the young woman from Paw Paw) he was dating was a student at the time.70 AI called several of his old classmates failures and spent significant time discussing how he despised substance use and people he said were addicts.71 AI discussed his intent not only to kill himself but to kill others, rationalizing it as a way to make his death meaningful.72 To AI, killing is both ego-syntonic and justified. AI told viewers that he found suicide comforting and reiterated his love for his family and his hate for most people before saying that he wished that it had turned out different and that he would have found love, and then he ended the video.73

POTENTIAL INDICATIONS OF THE PRESENCE OF IDEOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION ∞

AI's online search history displays curiosity in various topics, many of them concerning. Figure 2 displays the frequency of searches by distinct categories. The results are disaggregated for PPA1's and AI's devices. Both are displayed because PPA1 told detectives that AI used his laptop without permission. Although this cannot be confirmed, the results are still insightful. The results show either that AI had an unhealthy association (one student described PPA1 as AI's bully) with a peer who consumed disturbing content or that AI consumed worrisome content on a peer's device.74

INTERNET SEARCH TOPICS BY INSTANCE
(FEBRUARY 18, 2018 - MARCH 19, 2018)
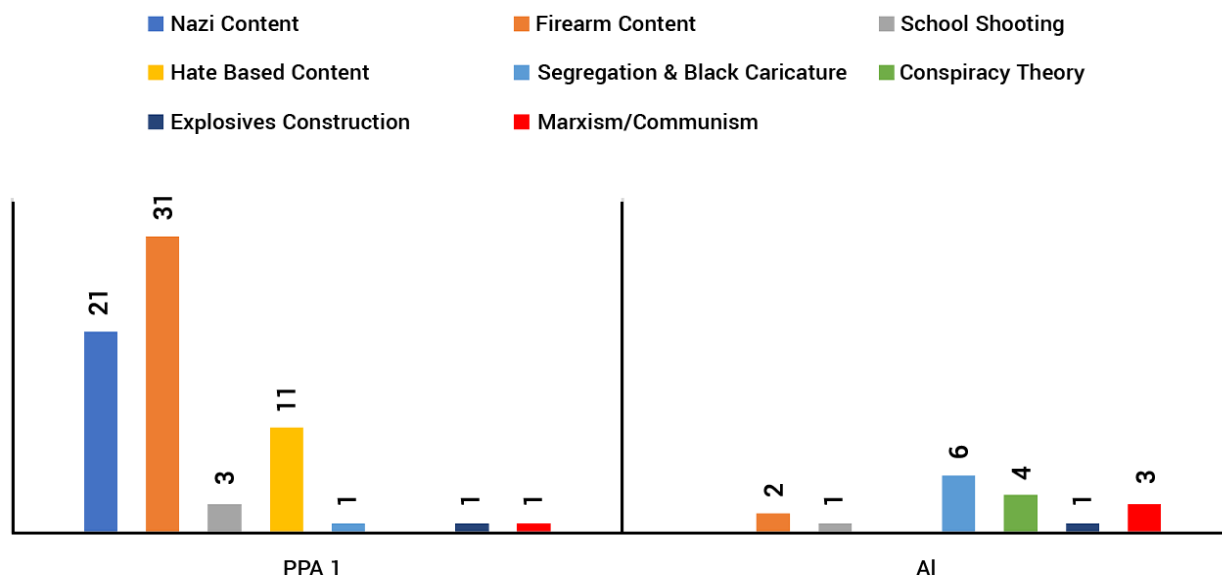
These heterogeneous categories contain homogenous search topics grouped by relationship.

- **Nazi Content:** Searches on the American Nazi party, notable figures within the German Nazi Party, and Nazi military unites, specifically several SS units.
- **Firearm Content:** Searches on the 2nd amendment, weapons concealment, age of purchase, state gun laws, ghost guns, and specific firearm models.
- **School Shooting:** Searches of previous school shootings and school security measures, such as whether teachers carry firearms.
- **Hate Based Content:** Searches on hate groups, such as the KKK and hate symbols.
- **Segregation & Black Caricature:** Searches on Jim Crow laws and cartoonized racial caricatures, such as Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben.
- **Conspiracy Theory:** Searches on lizard people or questions such as how to spot a reptilian.
- **Explosives Construction:** Searches on the Anarchist Cookbook and white flour
- **Marxism/Communism:** Searches on the communist manifesto, F*** the communists, and a Marxist website.

As previously stated, it is difficult to determine whether the searches conducted using the device belonging to PPA1 are attributable to AI. However, it is clear from AI's search history, language in his list of transgressors, his interview with police, his illustrations, and the markings on the firearm used in the South Haven pier shooting that AI had some interest and affinity with misogyny, conspiracy theories, racist beliefs, white supremacy, Nazis, and anarchism.

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Furthermore, AI's journal contained an image of what appeared to be a horned demon, and his interests, affinities, and beliefs intersect within his writings and drawings as shown in figure 4.

FIGURE 4. FOUR IMAGES FROM AI'S JOURNAL

The intersection of various ideologies in the writings of a school attacker—especially satanism, white supremacy, and fascism—is not unique to AI. Peter Langman, an expert in the psychology of school shooters, has highlighted several mass shootings in which the attackers held and expressed an affinity for satanism and Nazism, including Luke Woodham, Kip Kinkell, Kimveer Gill, and the Columbine shooters.[75] It is noteworthy that AI's drawings and writings contain ideological framing and that he authored a list of previous attackers, including Edward Snowden (non-kinetic attack), Timothy McVeigh, Pekka Eric Auvien, the Unabomber, Guy Fawkes, Lee Harvey Oswald, and Marvin Heemeyer. Only one of the individuals on the list, Auvien, attacked a school. The other individuals attacked government targets. It is difficult to determine how deeply AI held his beliefs because he could not be interviewed; this case study, therefore, relies on primary source documents and reporting. However, it is worth noting that these beliefs were practiced and distilled in private writing and illustration. Furthermore, the firearm that AI used during the shooting at the South Haven Pier had swastikas and other white supremacist markings on it.[76] Therefore, AI's affinity and self-affiliation with white supremacist iconography and ideas persisted after he was detained and treated at the inpatient center to which he was sentenced. AI's list of previous attackers and his editorialized notes adjacent to their names also indicates an interest in politics and government. The list also shows evidence of violence immersion that, like his engagement with white supremacy, endured beyond his incarceration.

VIOLENCE IMMERSION ∞

AI engaged in significant violence immersion before his arrest. AI's mother and other family members told investigators that his favorite book was A Clockwork Orange, which was reported to be the impetus for wearing his white underwear outside before beginning at Paw Paw High School. When describing the book to the police, AI's mother said the book was very dark and included a gang rape scene. AI's mother told officers that her son read the book numerous times. For most individuals consuming violent content may not be concerning in and of itself or indicate a potential desire to recreate acts depicted in the content. However, in AI's case, it is concerning because he was consumed by and obsessed with viewing, researching, and planning violent acts. He derived a sense of dominance, pleasure, and meaning from fanaticizing about completing violent acts. He overidentified with violent characters, often dressing as they did, which is a significant warning behavior in threat assessment.[77] He spent a significant amount of time creating violent sexual illustrations as found in one of his notebooks with images depicting the rape and torture of women. Detectives also located several other books in AI's room, including a book on handgun combat tactics, a violent fantasy novel (Kop Killer), and a book about the Zodiac serial killer.

AI's books and list of mass killers display an interest and immersion in violent literature that become concerning when situated alongside his interest in bombmaking, his engagement with white supremacy, his experimentation with explosives, access to firearms, violent drawings, his online search history, grievance laden writings, animal cruelty and his admission of setting his neighbor's shed on fire. These behaviors display identification with violent actors (mass killers) and extensive fascination with violence both in vivo and online and are linked to engagement with hateful supremacist and anarchist ideologies.

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS ∞

AI's risk factors to commit acts of violence far outweighed his potential protective factors (close relationship with mother, siblings, and grandparent) and thereby resulted in the death and injury of innocent citizens. Timely identification of modifiable risk factors and enhancement of protective factors may change the trajectory of at-risk adolescents and ensure the safety of the public.

There is indication that AI was experiencing a number of co-occurring mental health conditions in the lead up to his attack and at the time of the attack. Careful review of documents, including police reports, AI's journal, and psychiatric reports, show that he appeared to exhibit features that would be consistent with autism spectrum disorder, psychosis, psychopathy, anxiety, and mood disruption.

It is important to note here that the authors of this report have not evaluated or assessed AI themselves and so are not making any conclusions regarding the conditions he might have had. Rather the discussion here is attempting to highlight some of the psychological or behavioral features he exhibited in the lead up to and during the attack that may be indicative of (or consistent with) conditions he may have been experiencing that are worth considering in more detail.

AI's social isolation; difficulty understanding, establishing, and maintaining relationships; and an inability to demonstrate empathy or social reciprocity may have been early indications of the need for evaluation, but these symptoms were not addressed. Despite a persistent social difference from an early age, AI did not receive services or assistance.

In addition to increasing social difficulties, AI also had academic difficulty and was experiencing increasing difficulty in the school setting. His chronic social and academic difficulties likely contributed to his frustration and feelings of inadequacy in the school setting. AI displayed symptoms that were consistent with psychopathic tendencies, including a grandiose sense of self, engagement in pathologic lying, manipulation for personal gain, lack of remorse and empathy, impulsive anger, shallow affect, depiction of sexual aggression, recent aggression directed toward animals, inability to maintain relationships and engagement in criminal activity.[78]

Psychopathic tendencies in adults are often seen as pervasive and permanent, but these same tendencies in adolescents may be more amenable to intervention and necessitate early identification and a multisystemic treatment approach with close monitoring. The possibility of a serious untreated psychiatric diagnosis, such as a mood disorder or psychosis, was also alluded to in the records. These conditions increase the risk of suicidal ideation. This concern was left unaddressed until after his arrest. Homicidal ideation often co-occurs with suicidal ideation and the combination mandates assessment, intensive treatment, monitoring, and efforts to limit access to weapons.

As is often the case with individuals who commit acts of violence, AI was not engaged in mental health treatment or monitoring at the time of his initial arrest. High-risk symptom classification and identification may aid in future diagnostic clarification, which can only be issued after an adolescent has been referred for services. Unfortunately, AI had limited access to care. It is of the utmost importance that those posing a threat of violence toward self or others are referred for and receive treatment.

Environmental factors also contributed to an increased risk of violence in AI. Access to weapons increases the risk of committing a violent act, especially in an individual who has a proclivity toward violence as AI did. Stressors such as those AI had can heighten the risk for suicidal and possibly homicidal ideation in adolescents and include estrangement from his biological father, academic struggles, a recent breakup with a girlfriend, perceived rejection, embarrassment, and humiliation. Social isolation, feelings of social rejection, lack of close positive relationships, and influences also played a part in AI's sense of a futile future. His obsession with violence provided the only "meaning" in life and significantly increased the likelihood he would commit an act of violence.

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In attempting to draw lessons from this incident, it is helpful to view a timeline of events and consider intervention opportunities.

SUMMER 2017 √

AI's mother located pieces removed from fireworks, lighter fluid, and lighters stashed in his room. She took the items and began to check his room regularly. AI had previously constructed smoke bombs using modified Red Bull cans. AI's smoke bomb-building hobby was allowed until his mother located the dissembled fireworks parts in his room. AI's mother was concerned enough to check the room regularly but may not have known or been able to articulate why she was concerned. This may have been why she did not notify law enforcement or school officials; AI's concerning behavior may not have been deemed to warrant such a response. However, if the authorities had been told, they may have been able to seek the support of mental health professionals and to have collaboratively accessed the situation and AI's need for help. A multi-disciplinary team, if it was available, could have been contacted and evaluated AI to begin the process of connecting AI and his family to support resources and start threat mitigation and management by, for example, contacting AI's grandfather and getting him to take away AI's access to his firearms. These events also supports the need for parent-focused training on the behaviors that indicate children may be on the pathway to violence, the resources that are available to parents, and how and when they should engage resources and community support.

FEBRUARY 22, 2018 √

AI's notebook containing detailed notes on how to build explosive devices was discovered at school. Police are notified, and the responding officers requested that a school district official conduct a threat assessment. The evaluator was concerned but found no cause for school disciplinary action. The responding officer searched AI's room but did not locate any items related to explosive construction and found no grounds for arrest. The evaluator and officer were likely limited in what they could do outside of punitive measures. However, this episode in AI's trajectory towards violence presents an opportunity for non-punitive intervention. In instances where punitive measures are inappropriate, law enforcement and school officials should have access to supportive resources and have the authority to make direct referrals and connections to treatment. This need became more apparent because shortly after this incident, AI asked his mother to speak with a mental health professional. During an interview with investigators, AI's mother told them she sought help from a community mental health service on February 26, 2018.[79] However, her call was never returned.[80] The lack of a response may have been due to several reasons; AI's mother and stepfather suspected it was due to the type of insurance the family had.[81] It also may have been due to limited public mental health resources in their location. In any case, the lack of mental health attention AI received highlights the need for social services and publicly accessible mental health resources in small and rural communities. Regardless of the reason, it is clear that AI was experiencing a mental health crisis before his arrest, needed professional support, and struggled with suicidal and homicidal ideation. However, he had never been formally diagnosed or seen a therapist.[82] A therapist who evaluated him after his arrest testified in court that AI suffered from significant mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and a real sense of social awkwardness.[83]

MARCH 18, 2018 √

AI told his mother and her boyfriend that he had firearms in his bedroom and discussed his plan to attack his school the following day. She subsequently took him to the Van Buren County Sheriff's Office where he was taken into custody.

MAY 11, 2018 √

AI and his lawyer negotiated a plea bargain in juvenile court resulting in AI pleading guilty to two felonies related to firearms and explosives offenses.

JUNE 2018 √

AI was sentenced to an inpatient juvenile facility for a year.

FEBRUARY 12, 2019 √

While in the juvenile facility, AI was evaluated and treated by a child and adolescent psychiatrist. Although limited records were obtained for review, a progress note dated February 12, 2019, indicated an assessment had been previously completed and AI received ongoing psychiatric treatment. The physician's note indicated that AI was evaluated by "his clinician" and that previous psychological testing highlighted symptoms consistent with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The psychiatrist agreed that AI had some symptoms consistent with ASD, but emphasized that a diagnosis of ASD did not explain all of his symptoms and behaviors. ASD was left as a rule out diagnosis on the initial psychiatric evaluation and in the follow-up note. The psychiatrist stated that "the psychological evaluation did NOT explain his symptoms consistent with paranoia and disordered thought process that he was clearly exhibiting upon initial evaluation." Paranoia and disordered thoughts were present at the initial psychiatric evaluation and were a significant concern as documented in his follow-up appointment with the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist also commented on AI's "disturbing journaling" that continued after initial placement in the juvenile facility. The psychiatrist speculated that he may have "stopped only because he knew he was being monitored."

On February 12, 2019, he denied depression, but acknowledged a blunted affect and the inability to "feel his emotions." AI also admitted to "feeling anxious." There was no evidence of psychosis on that particular day. At a previous appointment, however, AI made an "out of context" statement that made the psychiatrist concerned for prodromal psychosis. He denied suicidal or homicidal ideation and had no episodes of violence or aggression on the unit. Sleep was reported as variable. No racing thoughts were noted. He was taking Risperidone 0.5mg/1.5mg daily, an atypical antipsychotic, presumably for possible prodromal psychotic symptoms. Recommendations included: continue Risperidone, consider Zoloft for anxiety, projective testing, an EKG, and follow-up labs (Thyroid Stimulating Hormone on July 24, 2019 was elevated at 6.36 and a drug screen when off-grounds).

Despite diagnostic uncertainty, the psychiatrist emphasized that AI was a threat to the community. "AI is very high risk to the community; suggest complete risk assessment and psychoeducational testing prior to discharge." In the assessment portion of the note, the psychiatrist summarized AI's concerning symptoms and the need for risk assessment, continued treatment, and close monitoring. "AI is a 16-year old boy who presents with some behavioral problems, including animal cruelty, fire setting, and planning to kill himself and shoot his school. He also has mood and anxiety symptoms and possible delusional beliefs. There is a question of whether he exhibits signs of Autism as well. AI is exhibiting very concerning symptoms. He seems to have narcissistic (or grandiose delusional) traits, as he speaks about himself being superior to others. Along with this are possible lack of empathy and conduct traits. It is a concern whether or not these symptoms are c/w a psychotic process." Of note, fire setting, animal cruelty, ego-syntonic homicidal ideation, and grandiose sense of self, are risk factors for psychopathy, which increases the risk of violence directed toward others.

NOVEMBER 4, 2019 √

AI was released from an inpatient facility on probation into the community.
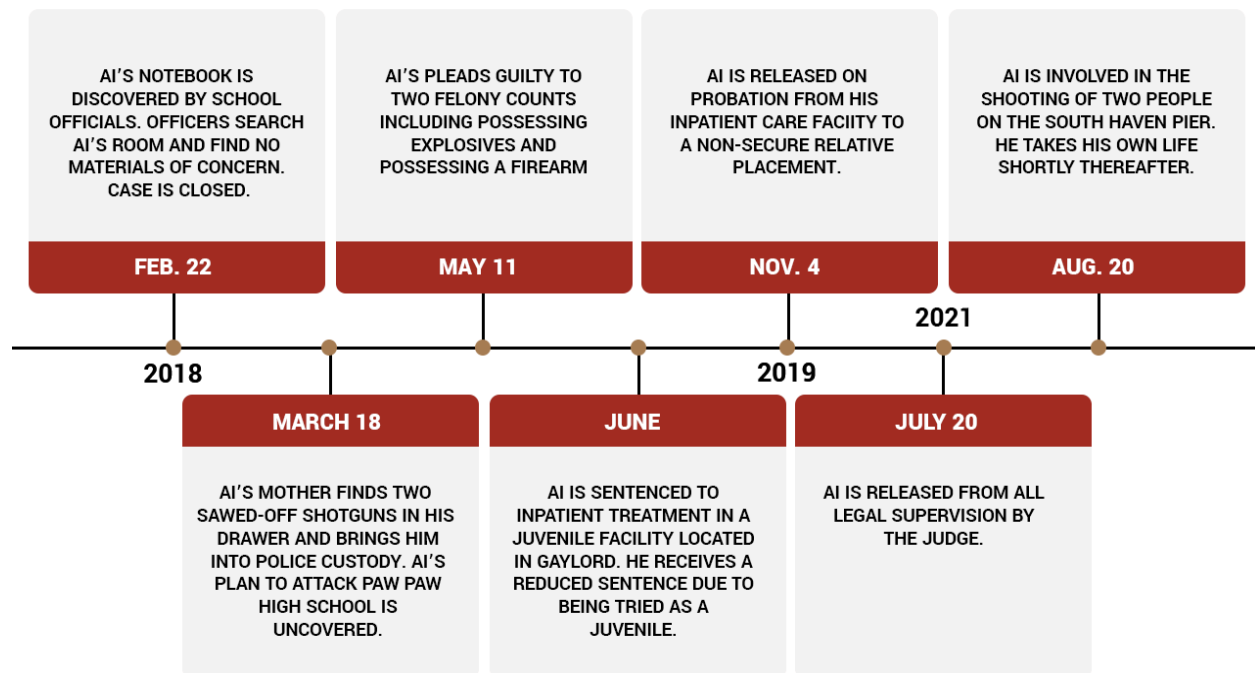
A judge released AI from all supervision. Although court supervision ended, AI would likely have benefited from continued monitoring, treatment, and management. This is not a condemnation of the judge that released AI from court supervision. However, the incident of violence that occurred shortly after the release from supervision indicated that he needed access to long-term treatment, monitoring, and case management post-adjudication and release to continue to mitigate his suicidality and homicidal. Furthermore, behavioral threat assessment and management is not a stagnant process. Evaluators may assess individuals several times and alter their management strategies over time as violence risk mitigators and enhancers change over time. A multi-disciplinary behavioral threat assessment and management team could have been leveraged at the end of AI's probation to assess for dangerousness and determine what steps should be taken to prevent future violence.

AI took two handguns to the South Haven, Michigan, pier and shot two people, killing one of the victims. AI fired at a man riding a jet ski, striking the vehicle. He then fired at people on the opposite pier before shooting himself and ending his own life.[84]

FIGURE 5: AI'S TIMELINE OF MAJOR EVENTS, FEBRUARY 22, 2018 TO JULY 20, 2022

AI TIMELINE

FEB. 22	MAY 11	NOV. 4	AUG. 20
AI'S NOTEBOOK IS DISCOVERED BY SCHOOL OFFICIALS. OFFICERS SEARCH AI'S ROOM AND FIND NO MATERIALS OF CONCERN. CASE IS CLOSED.	AI'S PLEADS GUILTY TO TWO FELONY COUNTS INCLUDING POSSESSING EXPLOSIVES AND POSSESSING A FIREARM	AI IS RELEASED ON PROBATION FROM HIS INPATIENT CARE FACIITY TO A NON-SECURE RELATIVE PLACEMENT.	AI IS INVOLVED IN THE SHOOTING OF TWO PEOPLE ON THE SOUTH HAVEN PIER. HE TAKES HIS OWN LIFE SHORTLY THEREAFTER.

2021

2018   2019

MARCH 18	JUNE	JULY 20
AI'S MOTHER FINDS TWO SAWED-OFF SHOTGUNS IN HIS DRAWER AND BRINGS HIM INTO POLICE CUSTODY. AI'S PLAN TO ATTACK PAW PAW HIGH SCHOOL IS UNCOVERED.	AI IS SENTENCED TO INPATIENT TREATMENT IN A JUVENILE FACILITY LOCATED IN GAYLORD. HE RECEIVES A REDUCED SENTENCE DUE TO BEING TRIED AS A JUVENILE.	AI IS RELEASED FROM ALL LEGAL SUPERVISION BY THE JUDGE.

VIOLENCE RISK ASSESSMENT ∞

In an effort to identify risk factors and points of intervention and to develop a model for adolescents who in the future are deemed to be at risk, we applied the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) to the information gathered in the construction of this case analysis. The SAVRY is a tool intended to help assess risk factors, so we applied the criteria to all information written, recorded, and generated prior to AI's final act of violence on August 20, 2021. We did not include the August 20, 2021 homicide, attempted homicide, and suicide in the application of the SAVRY because we were interested in assessing and highlighting risk factors and points of intervention prior to the act of violence in an effort to hopefully prevent future acts by adolescents at risk.

The SAVRY is a 24-item structured assessment tool used to evaluate risk and protective factors in adolescents age 12-18. The empirically grounded tool relies on "structured professional judgment." It is not intended to serve as a test or predictor of violence, and no specific scores are generated. Instead, the SAVRY allows for risk assessment and emphasizes critical factors that contribute to acts of violence based on the existing research.
The assessment is divided into three domains: historical factors, social/contextual factors, and individual/clinical factors. There is also a two-factor (present or absent) rating assessment of protective factors, as well as a Summary Risk Rating (low/moderate/high) section based on consideration of dynamic factors that influence the risk of violence.

The SAVRY tool is useful for individuals and management teams working with at-risk adolescents. By highlighting risk factors, protective factors and allowing for clinical impressions, the SAVRY has the potential to guide assessment based on the current literature, directly influence treatment recommendations, and generate targeted interventions according to the SAVRY Professional Manual.

Although the prediction of violence remains a challenge, the SAVRY provides a systematic approach to assessing clinically important risk factors that lead to acts of violence.

In AI's case, we applied the case information to the SAVRY 24-item risk factor ranking (low/moderate/high), six item protective factor (present/absent) indicator, commented on additional factors, and gave an overall impression or summary risk rating.

There are 10 items in the Historical Risk Factors section. Aiden received a high rating, on the History of Violence (1), Childhood History of Maltreatment (7), and Poor School Achievement (10) subscales.

He received a moderate rating on the History of Non-violent Offending (<5 acts), History of Self Harm or Suicide Attempts (5, which includes threats and gestures), and Early Caregiver Disruption (9) items.

He obtained a low rating in the following subcategories, Early Initiation of Violence (3), Past Supervision/Intervention Failures (4), Exposure to Violence in the Home (6 unknown), Parental/Caregiver Criminality (8).

The Social/Contextual Risk Factors section contains six items. AI was rated as high on Peer Rejection (12), Stress and Poor Coping (13), and Poor Parental Management (14). He was rated as moderate on Peer Delinquency (11) and Lack of Personal/Social Support (15) and obtained a low rating on Community Disorganization (16).

There are eight items under the heading, Individual/Critical Risk factors. AI received a high rating on six of the eight items, including, Negative Attitudes (17), Risk Taking/Impulsivity (18), Anger Management Problems (20), Low Empathy/Remorse (21), Poor Compliance (23), and Low Interest/Commitment to School (24).

AI was given a moderate designation on Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Difficulties (22) and a low mark on Substance Use Difficulties (19). Protective Factors were then applied to the case information. There are six protective factors listed in the SAVRY; five of the six were believed to be absent in AI's case. AI was absent Prosocial Involvement (P1), Strong Support System (P2), Positive Attitude Toward Intervention and Authority (P4), Strong Commitment to School (P5) and Resilient Personality Traits (P6). AI's protective factors included Strong Attachments (P2) to mother and siblings.

Critical items included History of Violence (1), Poor School Achievement (10), Peer Rejection (12), Stress and Poor Coping (13), Negative Attitudes (17), Low Empathy/Remorse (21), Low Interest/Commitment to School (24), Absence of Prosocial Involvement (P1), Positive Attitude Toward Intervention (P4) and Authority and Strong Commitment to School (P6). The Additional Risk Factors we considered included AI's extensive journals detailing plans for acts of violence, chronic suicidal ideation, and the fixed belief that death would bring "meaning" to his life. AI was given a high Summary Risk Rating.

Psychopathic traits are often seen in individuals who engage in acts of violence. The literature suggests that intervention and prevention of violent acts in adults with psychopathic tendencies is often unsuccessful. In adolescents, however, psychopathic traits and behaviors may be more malleable if identified early and interventions are instituted.

In an effort to assess the possibility of psychopathic traits in AI, we applied the Hare Psychopathology Checklist: Youth Version (PCL:YV) to the information gathered in the review of his case. The PCL:YV is a 20-item rating scale of psychopathic traits, based on a semi-structured interview and collateral information normed for adolescents age 12-18 years. Items include:

- Impression management
- Grandiose sense of self-worth
- Stimulation seeking
- Pathologic lying
- Manipulation for personal gain
- Lack of remorse
- Shallow affect
- Callous/lack of empathy
- Parasitic orientation
- Poor anger control
- Interpersonal sexual behavior
- Early behavior problems
- Lacks goals
- Impulsivity
- Irresponsibility
- Failure to accept responsibility
- Unstable interpersonal relationships
- Serious criminal behavior
- Serious violation of conditional release
- Criminal versatility

We applied the PCL:YV to police interviews with AI, a self-recorded video, journal entries, and records obtained post-mortem. Responses were assigned numerical values (No-0, Maybe-1, Yes-2, and Omit-X) and then divided into the following subcategories: Factor 1: Interpersonal; Factor 2: Affective; Factor 3: Behavioral; Factor 4: Antisocial. Finally, a total score was calculated, T-scores generated, and percentiles were provided for comparison. The T-scores and percentiles used in AI's case were for males on probation. The percentile rank is reflective of the percentage of adolescents in the standardized comparison group who score at or below AI's level.

For Factor 1: Interpersonal, AI had a raw score of 8, T-score of 73, with a percentile rank of 100. On Factor 2: Affective, AI had a raw score of 7, T-score of 62, and percentile rank of 94. For Factor 3: Behavioral, AI had a raw score of 6, T-score of 50 and a percentile rank of 52. On Factor 4: Antisocial, he received a raw score of 7, a T-score of 56 and percentile rank of 78. AI's total raw score was 32, T-score was 65 and percentile rank was 94. Figure 6 is a table showing the scores for each factor.

FIGURE 6: AI'S SCORES ON THE HARE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY CHECKLIST YOUTH VERSION (PCL:YV)					
FACTOR	1: INTERPERSONAL	2: AFFECTIVE	3: BEHAVIORAL	4: ANTISOCIAL	TOTAL
RAW	8	7	6	7	32
T-SCORE	73	62	50	56	65
PERCENTILE	100	94	52	78	94

Based on the scores generated on the Hare PCL:YV, it appears that AI displayed a high degree of psychopathic tendencies and had an increased risk of engaging in serious criminal activity. All of AI's scores were above the 50th percentile, with significantly high scores in the interpersonal, affective, and antisocial trait categories. Although the authors caution against using the term "psychopath" as a diagnosis, assessment and comparison of psychopathic tendencies may be useful in the intervention, monitoring, and development of treatment programs. The PCL:YV serves as a measure and derives scores for concerning behaviors, attitudes, and affective symptoms that can be used to develop a targeted clinical plan. In this case, interventions in the interpersonal realm, treatment for affective symptoms, behavioral management strategies, and monitoring of antisocial factors may in the future prove to change the trajectory of adolescents who are like AI (HARE PCL:YV-Technical Manual and HARE PCL:YV Rating Booklet).

CONCLUSION

The authors from the National Police Institute and Michigan State University School of Psychiatry Center for Targeted Violence Prevention conducted an exhaustive review of all records that were made available in response to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request that was filed with the Van Buren County Prosecutor's Office and the Van Buren County Sheriff's Office. The FOIA request for access to juvenile records, which as filed with the Van Buren County Courts, was denied. The records provided by the Prosecutor's Office and the Sheriff's office, as well as the insights they provided during interviews, were invaluable in developing the case study. Nevertheless, there were significant areas we were unable to address. Additional information was developed through media accounts of the events described in the case study as well as from various social media sites.

The case study demonstrates a significant challenge for schools, law enforcement, mental health providers, the criminal/juvenile justice system, and communities who may be confronted by an adolescent who is "deranged and dangerous." The case study demonstrates the need for specially trained community-based teams that can provide counsel, intervention, treatment, mentoring, and long-term support to at-risk adolescents and their families. Had such a team existed, it could have been engaged immediately following the discovery of AI's notebook by his teacher, the risk evaluation, and law enforcement response. A second opportunity to engage such a team presented itself upon AI's release from the juvenile facility.

The Prosecutor and Sheriff advised that they participated in this case study because they believe Paw Paw, like many other rural communities in Michigan does not have the resources and experience to respond to situations in which at-risk adolescents fall in the "grey area" between mental health, law enforcement, and criminal/juvenile justice system responses. The NPI/MSU team believes that in their analysis of this case and their extensive review of averted and completed school attacks, the creation of specially trained community-based intensive support teams provide an important opportunity for the early identification of adolescents at risk for violence and the implementation of intervention, treatment, and mentoring to reduce dangerousness and support rehabilitation.

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APPENDIX 1

STRUCTURED ASSESSMENT OF VIOLENCE RISK IN YOUTH (SAVRY)

The SAVRY is a 24-item structured assessment of violence risk in adolescents. The items are clustered under three risk domains:

(1) Historical Risk Factors: A history of violence, self-harm and suicide attempts, and exposure to violence within the home.

(2) Social/Contextual Risk Factors: Focusing on peer delinquency and rejection, stress and poor coping skills, poor parental management, lack of personal support and community disorganization.

(3) Individual/Clinical Factors: Examining negative attitudes, risk taking/impulsivity, substance use difficulties, anger management, lack of personal and social support.

Also examined on the SAVRY are protective factors like:

- Prosocial involvement
- Strong social support
- Attachments and bonds
- Positive attitudes towards intervention and authority
- Strong commitment to school
- Resilient personality traits.

The SAVRY is not designed to be a formal test or scale to "quantify risk;" there are no assigned numerical values nor are there any specified cut-off scores. The purpose of SAVRY is to provide operational definitions of risk factors for examiners to apply.

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