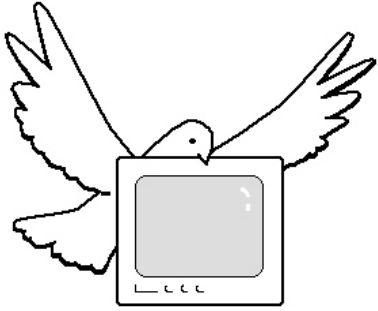


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New look at the roots of Columbine

***By Mary Jo Kochakian, 2001, South Florida
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Finally, the parents of Columbine killer Dylan Klebold have disclosed their story. We are learning that Tom and Sue Klebold are "without a doubt" good parents -- "attentive, involved, and loving." Not abusive. Not neglectful. Not disturbed. What happened to the Klebold family could happen to you, concludes the authors of a new book.

Hence this dedication: "To Tom, Sue and Byron Klebold and for all the families who have lost children" in *Parents Under Siege* (Prepress, \$24) by Cornell University professor James Garbarino and Claire Bedard. The bottom line on the Klebolds, last time the media had them up for judgment, was that they had to be at the very least negligent in not knowing that Dylan, with his friend Eric Harris, was plotting a massacre and building bombs.

Now we have Garbarino, the leading authority on violent boys, saying it's not that simple. His book *Lost Boys* was published the same month as the Columbine shootings, in which Klebold and Harris killed 13 people and themselves at the school in Littleton, Colo., in April 1999. The Klebolds read *Lost Boys* and then sought Garbarino's help in trying to understand what happened to their son.

"When we sat down with Tom and Sue Klebold in the wake of their son's killing spree and suicide, they asked us for only one thing: that when we were done analyzing, we would help them understand what had happened. In many ways this book is the result of trying to meet that commitment," Garbarino and Bedard wrote.

Do not look to the book for a tell-all account of the Klebolds' family story. There are absolutely no details about Columbine or the family's history. Lawyers have told Garbarino not to discuss his conversations with the family because of pending lawsuits.

What happened with Dylan Klebold, it seems, is a sad confluence of vulnerability, modern culture and the entertainment industry.

Harris and Klebold were both troubled. If they had been in high school in the 1960s rather than the 1990s, Garbarino speculated in an interview, they might have vented their rage through phone pranks or locker-room sabotage. But

because they were young and troubled in the 1990s, they were immersed in a pop culture that sells rage, revenge, lethal violence and anarchy.

"Today's `normal' adolescence culture," the book reads, "contains elements that are so twisted, degraded, vicious and dark that it becomes harder and harder for parents (and professionals) to distinguish between what in a youth's talk, dress, and taste in music, films and video games indicates psychological trouble and what is simply a sign of the times. And these influences are being felt by younger and younger kids. Preteens as young as 8 are often steeped in that culture.

"It is often extremely difficult to figure out if a kid is just a chameleon changing colors to fit in with his peers by looking and sounding like what MTV says is cool, or if his attachment to the dark culture is a way of expressing his internal troubles." At the time when the entertainment industry is shaping children's views of the world, a sense of spirituality is absent in many homes, the authors note. Parents must actively work against pop culture to give children a sense of meaning and purpose, they say.

Now more than ever, troubled children can develop secret lives that they can hide from their parents. People think good parents will know what their kids are doing, but Garbarino points out that in marriages, a spouse can conceal an extramarital affair for years. Dylan Klebold hid his secret life.