

# Misfire

## Arming Schools with Counselors Not Guns

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### Introduction

According to bell hooks (1994), “to educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn” (p. 13).

As a result of the now constant news reports describing school violence in its various forms, more and more people in the United States are begging our political leaders for help. But what if we already have people in our schools who can mitigate the violence? What if our schools already have trained professionals with master’s degrees in identifying and monitoring children’s academic, professional, and social and emotional needs? What if these professionals, despite their training and demonstrated competence, are currently assigned clerical duties and tasked with high-stakes testing?

Although the answers to these questions are obvious to some, many outside of education are not aware that professional school counselors are perhaps the most highly educated professionals in our school systems. Though the certification requirements for school counselors in the U.S. vary with the policies of different educational agencies, the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational

Programs, the premier accreditation agency for counselors, requires a 60-hour master’s degree. If our school systems have counselors with such high levels of training who can implement school-wide guidance programs, conduct individual planning, and administer responsive services and school-system support, how can we access such invaluable experts?

Twenty years ago, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) began a radical effort to reform school counseling, at the heart of which was the philosophy of changing behaviors by changing mind-sets. This effort gave rise to standards, competencies, and a comprehensive model (with two companion documents focusing on counselors and students) designed to train school counselors to be proactive agents in eliminating emotional, physical, social, and economic barriers to student success.

We believe that the ASCA model and its companion documents provide school counselors with a comprehensive framework for intervening to prevent violence. Within the context of the greater school climate is a mission of safety for all students. Collectively, these documents ensure that both students and school counselors have the knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes necessary for taking the lead in keeping students safe, and school counselors are equipped to implement the ASCA model (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012).

For this reason, we believe that the ASCA’s model, standards, and competencies are a natural starting point for demonstrating how ASCA-competent school counselors establish benchmarks for ensuring that students not only graduate but are also not victims of gun violence. In this way, counselors can

provide a gateway for addressing the impact of gun violence on our schools, communities, and youth. As the following scenarios and reflections show, the *ASCA Model*, the *ASCA Counselor Competencies*, and the standards and grade-level competencies outlined by the *ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors* could prove useful in addressing gun violence and other forms of violence.

### Literature Review

In an interview following the Parkland school shooting in Florida, Eric Spark, the assistant director of the ASCA, argued that “having strong relationships with students and building that sense of community within a school” (WUSA 9, 2018) is a safety precaution put in place by professional school counselors. However, while the ASCA (2012, 2016) recommends a 250:1 ratio of students to counselors, the average ratio in schools across the United States is 480:1 (WUSA 9, 2018).

Lapan et al. (2012) found that smaller ratios of students to school counselors correlated with higher graduation rates and lower rates of disciplinary incidents. Similarly, in examining disciplinary data from 23 public elementary schools in Florida, Carrell and Carrell (2006) found that lower ratios of students to counselors decreased disciplinary incidents by 25% in a given school year. Although it is evident that more research is needed to understand the impact of student-to-counselor ratios on discipline and violence, the need for mental health practitioners and services in schools cannot be disputed.

Efforts to understand and prevent school shootings have resulted in several

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well-intentioned but faulty solutions (Borum et al., 2010). For example, research has not shown profiling and warning-sign checklists to be effective (Borum et al., 2010). Likewise, limited research has been conducted on the impacts of surveillance cameras and metal detectors (Borum et al., 2010). Cuellar (2018) suggested that future research could examine the “collective effect” of commonly employed school-safety strategies.

According to Borum et al. (2010), Muschert (2007), and Preti (2008), school shootings are rare, and schools are actually much safer than children’s neighborhoods and home environments. Leading scholars on school violence (e.g., Lawrence & Birkland, 2004; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014) believe that these school shootings provide an emotionally charged stage on which the media act out their social and political agendas, which focus heavily on gun control.

In an interview following the Sandy Hook tragedy, Glenn Muschert, a leading expert on school shootings, reported to Tucker (2013) that the presence of armed guards at Columbine High School did little to deter the shooters and that “teaching peer mediation and conflict resolution skills” has been shown to be more effective. Similarly, Gray (2018) reported that on the day of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Broward County deputy Scot Peterson failed to “engage the alleged shooter” and was instead seen standing outside the school as the tragedy unfolded inside.

Payton et al. (2017) found that a significant number of parents attribute the gun problem in schools to inadequate mental health services. Unfortunately, policy makers continue to advance a narrative that incriminates the mentally ill, despite little evidence of a direct link between mental illness and violence (Wolf & Rosen, 2015). If people with mental illnesses are to take the blame, a look at budget cuts to mental health services seems appropriate. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (2011), between 2009 and 2011, states cut from their budgets more than \$1.8 billion for mental health services for children and families. Nevertheless, school shootings are most often related to mental illness (correctly or not), and this systemic issue requires the unique strengths of professional school counselors.

Teich et al. (2008) found evidence that school counselors are the most widely utilized mental health professionals in schools. The profession of school counseling is more than 100 years old

(Gysbers, 2012), and the positive impacts of counselors in schools are well documented in the literature (Cholewa et al., 2015; Duarte & Hatch, 2015; Williams et al., 2015). Professional school counselors impact student academics (Duarte & Hatch, 2015; Williams et al., 2015), influence students’ postsecondary decisions (Cholewa et al., 2015), build community partnerships (Kaffenberger & O’Rourke-Trigiani, 2013), and provide a variety of mental health services (DeKruyf et al., 2013). Furthermore, professional school counselors receive specialized training in advocating for students and families and in helping them overcome institutional and social barriers to their academic, professional, personal, and social development (Lee, 2012; Toporek et al., 2009).

It is evident that school-aged children falling victim to gun violence, including in school shootings, ranks among the most critical issues in the U.S. today. Although professional school counselors work to improve students’ mental health, research shows a need for more school counselors in general, more school counselors trained extensively in mental health, and more school counselors licensed as professional counselors.

More research should also be conducted into the combined effects of the school-safety measures already in place. In addition, the role of professional school counselors in minimizing gun violence in schools is undoubtedly significant, and their presence is needed in future deliberations on school safety. Most importantly, however, it is apparent that we need more school counselors, not more guns. The following is a brief overview of the model, the competencies, and the standards, which we will use as theoretical lenses for addressing gun violence in our scenarios.

### **ASCA’s School Counselor Model, Standards, and Competencies**

The *ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success* standards (2014) replaced the earlier *Student Standards* (1997) designed to help school counselors help students. The *Mindsets and Behaviors* standards became the next generation of *ASCA National Standards for Students*. Together, All three of the ASCA documents (model, competencies, and mind-sets and behaviors) can help school counselors create comprehensive school counseling programs that are delivered in accordance with established professional competencies, teach student competencies, and focus on student

outcomes. For this reason, they serve as the conceptual framework for this article and, ultimately, as a means by which school systems and school counselors can address gun violence in schools and against school-aged children.

Like the ASCA model, the *ASCA School Counselor Competencies* and the *ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success* are data driven, comprehensive, equitable, and rigorous. Together, they serve as an evaluative tool that allows school counselors to promote student achievement. Moreover, the *ASCA School Counselor Competencies* allow school counselors to promote student safety.

For instance, these competencies give school counselors the authority to promote student safety because student safety affects student achievement. The *ASCA’s Model, Standards, and School Counselor Competencies* are also powerful tools that school counselors can use to understand and address gun violence on school campuses and violence against school-aged children.

### **ASCA School Counselor Model**

The four basic components of the ASCA model are *foundation* (the basis for the counseling program), *management* (i.e., organizational work to implement the counseling program), *delivery* (the provision of services to students), and *accountability* (the responsibility of the school counselor). The *ASCA School Counselor Competencies*, the *National Standards for Students*, operationalize the four components of a comprehensive school counseling school counseling program outlined in the ACSA Model.

This means that school counselors choose competencies that align with specific standards as the foundations for activities, classroom lessons, and small-group sessions to address students’ developmental needs. These competencies directly reflect the vision, mission, and goals of the ASCA model and align with schools’ academic missions.

### **ASCA School Counselor Competencies**

The *ASCA School Counselor Competencies*, similar to the *ASCA Model*, have five sections, four of which correspond to the basic components of the ASCA model: (a) school counseling programs, (b) foundations, (c) delivery, (d) management, and (e) accountability. The first section, “School Counseling Programs,” states that school counselors should possess the knowledge, abilities, skills, and

attitudes necessary to plan, organize, implement, and evaluate comprehensive, developmental, results-based school counseling programs in accordance with the ASCA national model.

The second section, “Foundations,” states that school counselors should possess the knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes necessary to establish the foundations of school counseling programs in accordance with the ASCA national model.

The third section, “Delivery,” states that school counselors should possess the knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes necessary to deliver school counseling programs in accordance with the ASCA national model.

The fourth section, “Management,” states that school counselors should possess the knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes necessary to manage school counseling programs in accordance with the ASCA national model.

Finally, the fifth section, “Accountability,” states that school counselors should possess the knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes necessary to monitor and evaluate the processes and results of school counseling programs in accordance with the ASCA national model.

### **ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors**

The *ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors* are organized by domains, standards, categories, subcategories, and competencies. The domains comprise standards arranged within categories and subcategories and grade-level competencies. The domains promote mind-sets and behaviors that enhance learning processes. The *ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors* describe three areas, knowledge, skills, and attitudes, that students need and extends between the categories of *mind-set* standards and *behavior* standards.

The behavior standards are divided among the following three subcategories: (a) learning strategies, (b) self-management skills, and (c) social skills. It is important to note that all 35 standards are grounded in empirical research and best practices found in a wide array of educational standards and efforts. These mind-sets and behavior standards identify and prioritize the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that students should acquire in a school counseling program. The document is organized into three broad domains: academic, career, and social/emotional development.

**Personal/Social Domain.** Although all 35 of the standards in the *ASCA*

*Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success* can be applied in all three domains, the personal/social domain is most closely aligned with safety and thus the tool that school counselors need to help reduce gun violence. In “Category 1: Mindset Standards,” five of the six standards are needed: (a) belief in the development of the whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional, and physical well-beings (M 1); (b) confidence in one’s ability to succeed (M 2); (c) a sense of belonging in one’s school environment (M 3); (d) belief in using one’s abilities to their fullest to achieve high-quality results and outcomes (M 5); and (e) a positive attitude toward work and learning (M 6).

According to “Category 1: Behavior Standards,” to address gun violence, students need *learning strategies*, *self-management skills*, and *social skills*. According to the “Learning Strategies” subcategory, students need to (a) demonstrate critical-thinking skills in making informed decisions (B-LS 1); (b) apply self-motivation and self-direction to learning (B-LS 4); (c) identify their long- and short-term academic, career, and social/emotional goals (B-LS 7); (d) gather evidence and consider multiple perspectives in making informed decisions (B-LS 9); and (e) participate in enrichment and extracurricular activities (B-LS 10).

The following standards apply from the subcategory of “Self-Management Skills”: (a) demonstrate the ability to assume responsibility (B-SMS 1); (b) demonstrate self-discipline and self-control (B-SMS 2); (c) demonstrate the ability to delay immediate gratification for the sake of long-term rewards (B-SMS 4); (d) demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with problems (B-SMS 7); (e) demonstrate the ability to balance school, home, and community activities (B-SMS 8); (f) demonstrate personal-safety skills (B-SMS 9); and (g) demonstrate the abilities to manage transitions and to adapt to changing situations and responsibilities (B-SMS 10).

According to the “Social Skills” subcategory, it is important for students to (a) create positive and supportive relationships with other students (B-SS 2); (b) create relationships with adults that promote success (B-SS 3); (c) demonstrate empathy (B-SS 4); (d) employ effective collaboration and cooperation skills (B-SS 6); and (e) demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to one’s situation and environment (B-SS 9).

We apply the *ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors* and the *School Counselor*

*Competencies* grounded in the ASCA school model to our scenarios, demonstrating the direct impact that ASCA-competent school counselors could have on violence affecting school-aged children. By adding our voices to those of ASCA-competent school counselors, we hope to deepen the current national conversation on working together with schools and communities to reduce gun violence against school-aged children.

Our scenarios demonstrate how the four overarching constructs of the *ASCA School Counselor Competencies*—foundation, management, delivery, and accountability—and the competencies and standards of the *ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors* are critical to the mission of school counselors to create environments that foster growth.

In doing so, we also hope to educate teachers, administrators, school board officials, and legislators about the importance of actively working toward the 250:1 ratio of counselors to students recommended by the ASCA. When this ratio is achieved, school counselors can spend “eighty percent or more of their time in direct and indirect services to students” (ASCA, 2012, p. xii).

We believe that the ASCA framework can be applied by school counselors across the nation to effectively develop campus, district, and community approaches to creating and maintaining environments that are both conducive to learning and development and able to prevent violence against our youth.

### **Nuthin’ but a G Thang aretha faye marbley**

On a Friday afternoon in summer 1989, I got an up-close-and-personal view of gun violence. I was living on the border of the Uptown and Edgewater neighborhoods in Chicago, just two buildings away from Foster Avenue, the border between the two. That morning, I had taken my 2-year-old son to the Board of Health for his immunizations and his annual checkup. Although the Board of Health was located in the heart of the notorious, crime-infested, impoverished Uptown neighborhood, it was only two blocks from the lakefront (a highly affluent area), one block from Weiss Memorial Hospital, and one block from the local high school.

When I stepped out of the clinic, I was feeling great; the sun was shining, and my baby was up to date on his shots, shots he had taken with no tears. We held hands to cross the street on our way to the McDonald’s a block west and



a block south. To my left was a group of teenaged Black boys. They were skipping school and huddled together, talking. One of them was holding a brown paper bag. I had turned my head slightly in their direction when I heard what sounded like a firecracker. This sound was immediately followed by what I had dubbed the “GDDD,” the battle cry of the Gangster Disciples (GDs).

Before our feet had reached the far sidewalk, the boys had begun to run and scatter in different directions, all chanting the GDDD. Curious, I turned around and saw one of the young men falling slowly, blood gushing from his mouth as he tried to stand up. His big, beautiful, soulful ebony eyes pleaded for me to help him. For what seemed like an eternity, I stood in shock, rooted to the ground, holding my gut with one hand and my baby with the other. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw one of the clinic’s clerks walk out, shake her head, and go back in.

Somebody must have dialed 911, because I heard sirens somewhere in the background. Even now, I am not sure how much time passed before the ambulance showed up. What I remember vividly, though, was that not one nurse or doctor at the clinic came to his rescue. In my mind’s eye, I can still see the paramedics looking him over (perhaps they checked his pulse) and tossing him into the back of the ambulance.

The life in his eyes had gone out moments before, however, as his humanity faded, and folk walked around him as if he was just another mangy dog hit and lying in the street. Then his body was tossed like a sack of potatoes into the back of the ambulance. I stood watching the ambulance (its sirens off) taking his body to Weiss Memorial Hospital. It took the best part of me with it, the part that believed in the goodness of mankind, the part that believed that God loves all the children of the world, the part that believed that I could make a difference, and, most importantly, the part that prayed. God have mercy when I found out he was my neighbor’s child!

Five years earlier, in 1984, we had lost Benji (Benjamin Wilson), a high school senior and potential NBA superstar, to gun violence. We had also lost many other children—most of whom were African American or Hispanic/Latino—to gun violence in Chicago and other big cities throughout the country. My best friend, Donna, and I were able to mobilize our community and get the support of not only our city alderman but

also the local school board, local churches, the chief of police, the narcotics and gang squads, and the mayor of the city of Chicago. We stopped the violence, at least for a little while.

More than 30 years have passed since I watched *Ebony Eyes* die. I’ve healed, but it still hurts and haunts, especially because even though it is 2021, kids are still dying, gangs and guns are still plentiful, and the GDs continue: Gangster Disciple, Gun Debate, GDamnIt. Just maybe Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg were right: “It’s like this and like that and like this and uh—nuthin’ but a G thang.”

### Reflection

Several standards of the ASCA trio could have saved *Ebony Eyes* (and Benji), that is, if the school counselors had been well trained, armed with this knowledge, and possessed of quality time to work with children who were at high risk of dropping out of school and joining gangs. When my children were in high school, I remember trying desperately to explain to the school administrators that I was not in their faces so my children would succeed academically but because I wanted them to love school so much that the streets could not claim them. I was afraid that the call of the streets would become more powerful than both the attraction of school and my voice.

Inner-city children—most of whom are of color—including *Ebony Eyes* and Benji, other child victims, and teenagers with guns, are trapped in historically and socioeconomically violent enclaves like project housing and impoverished neighborhoods and are forced to grow up too soon. The 35 standards outlined in the *ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success* are relevant and, sadly, have to be instilled before a child reaches middle school to be successful.

The ASCA model, competencies, and standards are not a stand-alone solution, however, but must instead be accompanied with more, such as a communal caring. This “village” approach is not meant to be mere rhetoric but rather to be embodied in tangible, visible, and viable actions taken both in and out of school. Identifying resource people in schools and communities and knowing how to seek their help could save children like *Ebony Eyes*. For this reason, school counselors must seek what is integral to Black pedagogy (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002), namely, communal caring and triune or three-way engagement.

This step increases to five the ASCA standards for the development of the whole self: the other four are “confidence in one’s ability to succeed,” “a sense of belonging in school,” “belief in one’s abilities,” and “a positive attitude toward learning.” To win, we need more school counselors armed with the ASCA model, standards, and competencies and loaded with academically relevant, culturally relevant, and politically relevant ammunition that can be used to stop gun violence in schools and against school-aged children.

### Change of Direction Ian Lertora

As my father and I pulled open the huge wooden doors of the chapel, my eyes locked immediately on the sweat-streaked face of Davis, an impetuous little second-grade student whose strawberry-blond hair bounced as he came barreling through the crowd toward me. He squeezed me with all his might, his smile widening, and then darted off to chase another child. His older sister Lacy, whom I had taught the year before, walked slowly up to me. With her shoulders slumped, she forced a semblance of a smile through the tracks the tears left on her round, freckled face as her deep blue eyes overflowed. Her lip began to quiver, and I knelt in response. She buried her head in my arms, and my shirt absorbed her tears.

I looked up for a moment to see Lacy’s and Davis’s mother hugging my father in the same way that Lacy was hugging me. He had taught her two eldest children and was now the principal at the school that their middle child attended. My ears picked up fragments of conversations laced with clichés—“it’s a shame,” “wrong place at the wrong time,” “too young,” “if he just would have . . .” A projector flashed images of a young man of high school age while a soundtrack of Tupac, Nirvana, and Sublime played in the background. I saw Lacy’s mother and my father turn toward the images, clap their hands together, and walk toward the front of the chapel. Lacy sniffled, lifted her tear-stained face, brushed aside her long, golden locks, put her tiny hand in mine, and followed.

As we reached the front, Lacy took me to the flower-lined, cherry-stained wooden box directly under the projected image of her older brother Mason, with his sandy hair pulled back in a ponytail over his JV basketball uniform. As I looked down into the box and saw his

bloated, lifeless face, the chatter behind me muted and the world moved in slow motion. “This can’t be the same kid,” I thought, but the squeeze from Lacy’s hand let me know it was. My hearing returned just as Lacy was saying, “It’s almost like he is sleeping, but I know he’s not.” I made myself look at Mason’s face again, so I would always remember. There lay Lacy’s role model, Davis’s playmate, a son, a friend, and a family’s glue, gone at the hands of someone who got pissed off about something and decided to unload a few 9 mm rounds into a high school party.

At the time of Mason’s death, I was 25 and in my second year of teaching at a public elementary school in inner-city Houston. After school, I coached boys’ JV basketball at a nearby high school, where my father was an assistant principal. Running practices and being on the sideline for games was a dream come true for me. But after Mason died, something shifted. I never coached again.

In the days that followed, the high school counselors offered no grief groups because it was time to schedule classes for the upcoming school year. With only four counselors to serve the more than 2,000 students at the school, not enough trained counselors were available. My players began coming to my father’s office to get a hold of me to talk about how they felt about not seeing Mason anymore. I remember feeling that I was in over my head, unprepared, and without any guidance—except for the guidance my father offered, but he had not been trained for that kind of situation.

At the elementary school, where we shared our counselor with another campus, aside from Lacy’s current teacher and me, no one checked in with Davis, Lacy, or the rest of the family. A little over two months later, when the family was still recovering from their devastating loss, Lacy got sick and missed a couple days of school. On the third day she was absent, her teacher came to my classroom to let me know that she had passed away from the flu the night before. I quit teaching the next year.

### Reflection

A decade later, the projector still flashes images of Mason while a soundtrack for his life plays in the background. As teachers and counselors, we often pray for a chance to turn back the hands of time and save a child’s life. In reality, however, I know that nothing, not even prayer, will bring Mason back.

Perhaps my looking back and trying to find ways to save Mason could help school counselors save other Masons both on- and off-campus. Like Mason’s life, the clock has paused, giving me a chance to use this narrative to help school counselors save lives. As a first step, I know that we must get the guns out of the hands of the shooters and the children out of range of the gunfire!

The national conversation about gun safety features recommendations that we enforce stronger laws, regulate gun ownership, lock up our guns, and love our kids more than we love our guns. Taken together, these are credible solutions and would represent a significant step toward saving kids like Mason, but they are not enough. According to the ASCA model, school counselors are skilled and responsible for the mind-sets and behaviors of their students. To save kids like Mason, the mind-sets and behaviors that counselors impart to students must expand beyond the school walls to wrap around the entire community, embracing all its children.

In other words, there must be solutions for the kids who are mentally ill; those who aimlessly walk the streets; those who have been locked up; and those who have dropped out, been kicked out, or simply left school. Counselors can train teachers, parents, administrators, clergy, and community leaders. Together, we can teach these kids learning strategies, self-management, social skills, belief in their abilities (M 5), and positive attitudes (M 6) while fostering a sense of belonging to the school (M 3), church, and community.

In this way, we can make everyone accountable for the guns. Together, we can save the children of the community, if not Mason. To save Mason, I make myself look at his face again, so I will always remember. The chatter behind me is unmuted, the clock resumes its ticking, and time moves on, but still in slow motion.

### A Heart Shot Paula Abbott

“Was it minutes or hours ago?” Though time was a blur, the voice was still there—Jen’s voice, yelling “Daniel was shot! He’s dead!” When she yelled it through the phone, it shot straight through my head and into the depths of my 17-year-old heart. I remember just sitting on my bed, paralyzed, with only my pink comforter to hold on to, wondering whether Jen was serious and if it was all

real. The myriad memories in my room created a firestorm of feelings. My energy chased two rabbits down two holes: one leading directly into my mind and the other leading straight into my heart.

Though I took comfort in keepsakes and pictures of my friends, I was suffocating. I kept looking around my room, tears burning, pleading, desperate for shelter, searching for answers and a shred of normalcy. I noticed the floral jewelry box with the dancing ballerina on my dresser and my favorite doll with the hand-made dress in the corner. I wished she would get up and crawl into bed beside me. But she just sat there, staring at me, like she knew I had tossed her aside. I took comfort watching my huge, stuffed St. Bernard sitting in the corner. Though I should have discarded him years ago, I was grateful that I had kept him around.

Decorations and band posters were plastered around my room, a display of youth gone wild, but they became as invisible as the childhood that I had attempted to reject and were all that was left of the former me. Daniel’s death took away my lifeline, my teenage persona, leaving behind a shadow of my little-girl self. Before the call, before I knew a friend had murdered Daniel and before the grotesque images of his body sitting in a truck, one arm out the window and one leg still resting across the other leg, played repeatedly in my mind, I had been a typical, difficult, carefree teenager living in a world where nobody ever died.

Whenever I glanced at the picture of him taped to my wall, his infectious smile would beam at me and trigger another bout of tears, which took with them the tough exterior that I wore like faded war paint. I sat there wanting so badly to run into the living room to tell my parents what had happened to Daniel, but I knew that if I did, they would remember that just an hour before, I had begged to go to that same place, the one to which they had forbade me to go.

Oh God, this was painful in many ways. I was afraid to share my grief with my parents and denied myself the comfort of my daddy’s arms, keeping all my pain bundled up inside me. How could I tell them that Daniel was murdered outside a house, a house at which I had spent many nights partying? I didn’t know how to tell them that I had been lying to them, and I didn’t know how to tell them that they had been right about the danger. Guilt (perhaps survivor’s guilt) enveloped me, and all I could do was nothing.



I felt guilty for wanting to go with Daniel, guilty for not going, and guilty for leaving him there. I felt guilty for knowing that if I had been there, I would have died too, and I felt guilty for being glad I wasn't. I felt guilty for feeling like a baby, surrounded in my room by stuffed animals, safe from what had just happened. I felt guilty for needing to do something, even though the chasm between 17 and adulthood was too wide. I felt guilty for lying and guilty for being a coward by not coming clean to my parents. The guilt was so massive that I just sunk down deeper into my bed, muffling my cries, waiting for the feeling to end. It didn't.

"Was it minutes ago or hours?" Decades have past, and it's 2018. I am now a school counselor living in an era in which school shootings and gun violence have become everyday occurrences. I have witnessed too many incidents of gun violence and known too many Daniels who have died in my city, state, and nation. Yes, I'm still hurting, feeling helpless, and desperately waiting for the feeling to end.

### Reflection

When I think back to the night that Daniel died, I realize that my 17-year-old self was scared and confused, carrying a survivor's guilt that has since lasted 30 years. Years, experience, and wisdom have not diminished those feelings; instead, they have cultivated a sense of urgency for finding ways to save the Daniels of today.

ASCA's national model describes the importance of delivery in response to a crisis. It states that counselors should demonstrate the ability to provide counseling for students during times of transition, separation, heightened stress, and critical change (IV-B-3c) and understand what defines a crisis, the appropriate response in a crisis, and a variety of intervention strategies to meet the needs of individuals, groups, and the school community before, during, and after crisis response (IV-B-3d).

As Daniel's counselor, I would have been a visible presence that made students feel connected and safe enough to share their concerns. Before that night, Daniel's killer likely had red flags that other students feared. While school authorities are sometimes hesitant to identify and label potential risks, competency IV-B-3f states that a counselor "involves appropriate school and community professionals as well as the family in a crisis."

A high school counselor is not the only protector of the life of a Daniel. I-B-4 states that a counselor "collaborates with parents, teachers, administrators, community leaders and other stakeholders to promote and support student success." Thus counselors in elementary, middle, and high schools must communicate and coordinate responses to services and utilize proactive approaches to mental health issues.

As an elementary school counselor, if I were concerned about a student, I would call the middle school campus and ask them to pay attention to that student. I would expect the counselors there to listen and to take the time to pay heed to my trepidations, instead of allowing themselves to be overwhelmed with noncounseling duties, such as coordinating testing, cafeteria duty, scheduling, helping students set career goals, and ensuring they will graduate on time with the required number of classes.

Daniel's fate could not have been changed by simply removing that weapon or arming him and his friend with bigger artillery because the root of the problem would have remained the same. Youth, school administrators, and community stakeholders must be armed with mental health awareness and resources.

### Q: The Game-Changer Shot Patrice Dunn

"Wait. What?" My thoughts were firing like an out-of-control pinball machine. No matter how hard I tried to focus on what the caller was saying, I could not make sense of what I was hearing. Dead? Shot? Execution style? Drugs? I felt like Alice falling down the rabbit hole into Wonderland: scared, out of control, stuck in a dream. Nothing was making sense. Who knew that an early-morning phone call on January 30, 1994, would forever change my life? Stop!

Still a newlywed, I was yet in the bliss of waking up early on Sundays to make breakfast for my husband and my children before heading off to church. I would typically turn on praise and worship music, open the blinds, let the sun (and Jesus) fill the room, and then start a fresh pot of coffee. The morning of January 30 was no different. I can still smell the bacon, even 24 years later. Still in my nightclothes, I placed several slices of thick-cut bacon into the cast iron skillet. The sizzling of the bacon joined the symphony of morning sounds that filled the house. I was happy, and my life was

good. My two boys and my stepson were still asleep upstairs, and my husband was getting dressed in the bedroom. The ringing of the phone pierced my morning routine and, unbeknownst to me, would shatter my joy and happiness.

I remember that as I turned to walk out of the kitchen and answer the phone, I was met by my husband. As he handed me the phone, the look on his face was puzzled, as if he was not sure who was on the other end. Before I could finish saying hello, Alex, one of my students, cried out that Q was dead. The room grew dark. I wanted to scream. I tried to scream, but nothing came out of my mouth. I could no longer smell the coffee or the bacon cooking in the kitchen. I felt faint and fell to my knees, holding on to my husband for support. Tears filled my eyes, and an emptiness filled in my stomach and my heart. I watched my husband's mouth moving, but I could not hear his words. I was unable to connect with him or to accept the comfort he offered.

I could not explain that beyond my tears was the guilt I felt for not spending more time with her. Nor could I explain how huge it was remembering how she had told me that I was the big sister she had never had and knowing that I would never see her reach her full potential. I could not articulate how much I would miss the beautiful 16-year-old—her laughter, her love of life, and the huge smile that made her eyes squint. In the moments that followed, a slideshow of her passed slowly before my eyes, each image holding me captive to her joy, her laughter, and her wit. They prompted questions about her death and put anger and a physical pain where my heart used to be.

I had no experience with death, no frame of reference. I thought to myself that things like drug deals gone wrong and the buying and using of illegal weapons happened on TV and in the movies, not in real life and certainly not to me—I'm from the suburbs. Yet there I sat on the cold floor, wrestling down the fear, knowing it was real and wondering what went through her mind in those final seconds. I sat holding on for God to explain it to me, afraid to ask Him.

Somewhere in the midst of this storm, I found strength for Q, strength to work through the salty taste of my tears and tell my children that their favorite babysitter was never coming back. I found the words to explain to the classmates and teammates of this popular basketball player that she was gone, and I found the wisdom to recast

my guilt as a celebration of Q's life and not of her death. She had died next to two of her male friends, shot execution style. Their bodies were left on the side of the road. I found the courage to say goodbye to my little sister. Last, I found the nerve to work through her death so that I could save the lives of other children and teens, so that I could take the time to ponder why the caged bird sings.

### Reflection

A three-pointer in basketball is a shot made from outside the three-point line. A "trey," the informal name for a three-point field goal, has become a symbol not only of Q's amazing athletic prowess but also of her spirit, reaching beyond death to score. Q was not a superstar like Benji, and her death did not get the same national coverage, but she was a superstar student-basketball player and a star to those who knew and loved her—to her family, to her teachers, to her coaches, to her friends, and to me, her counselor.

Reflecting on solutions that may have saved Q's life has become a vehicle for me to help save the lives of others, especially the staggering number of student athletes who, by virtue of their athletic status, become victims of gun violence. Young athletes like Q tend to be both victims and perpetrators, highly vulnerable to drugs, alcohol, sexual abuse, suicide, mental health issues, and gun violence.

To save students like Q, ASCA-competent counselors can connect the appropriate mind-sets and behaviors to athletic skills and abilities, such as teamwork, decision-making, and critical-thinking skills. The mind-sets and behaviors must include a sense of activism. Critical mind-sets include an arsenal of effective collaboration and cooperation skills, ingrained confidence in one's ability to succeed (M 2), and a sense of belonging in the school environment (M 3). However, these in and of themselves are not enough to save a Q.

To make this field goal, our nation must partner with schools and communities to create drug-free environments—drugs and alcohol are intimate partners to gun violence. We need professional sporting leagues to join their voices, their talents, and their monies with those of communities and schools to save children from guns and from themselves. We need teams and fans to focus as much on saving lives as they do on winning games. We need child victims

of gun violence like Q to not have died in vain. Let students and student athletes take their rightful places as leaders and become activists and instruments of nonviolence. Just like Q, making the three-point game-changer, the trey, from behind the line.

### Up Front and Personal

As we pick up the pieces of our lives, we hope that our efforts will change people's mind-sets and beliefs about gun violence and gun control. We hold as our truth that nothing is more sacred than the lives of our children. With this truth in mind, we have spent countless hours reliving the horrors surrounding their deaths. We have spent even more time searching for real solutions to gun violence. Our scenarios and reflections suggest that we must set aside our differences and education and counseling hats, think outside the box, and work together. We need new and old resources, wraparound services, and new paradigms. We need to join hands and create a strong village to save our children.

We believe, with bell hooks, that our vocation has a sacred aspect and that our purpose is not merely to share information but also to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. For this reason, it is our hope that our scenarios, our confessional narratives describing school-aged children who have been the victims of gun violence, are held sacred. Our reflections are a last-ditch effort to find solutions so that the deaths of these children will not have been in vain and other children can be saved. Their deaths were real and tragic and are presented in a way that allows them to speak for themselves and to help neutralize the power of guns.

Up front in our reflections is an acknowledgment that critical thinking is crucial to solving gun violence. For this reason, not just critical thinking but nonconventional critical thinking should be more than just a standard; it should be fundamental to ASCA's model, its code of ethics, and its mind-sets and behaviors. In addition, teaching students to transgress against gun violence achieves the gift of freedom and safety from gun violence and should be a counselor's most important goal.

This means that the necessity of the relationship between critical thinking and teaching delineated in hooks's *Teaching to Transgress* must be conveyed in the education of both teachers and counselors. Moreover, the progressive,

holistic, and engaged counseling and pedagogy outlined in the ASCA framework must continue to emphasize the well-being of students.

In conclusion, we have learned that the ASCA documents are an excellent tool for counselors, and we have learned about the misfire: more counselors, not guns, are needed in schools. We have learned that our children, our future generations, not critical-thinking skills, are the most important instrument for stopping gun violence.

Thinking unconventionally, children, perhaps in grades as low as preschool, should be taught social reform, how to be social-justice activists, and how to be responsible for their own lives. They should be shown that they are the best part of our village.

By working with students in a triune manner that incorporates the historical, the current, and the future, counselors create a unique form of teaching predicated on students' lived experiences and on the political realities their generation faces. This manner of teaching respects and cares for their souls—personally, providing the conditions under which learning can most deeply and intimately begin, a place where no one dies at the end of a gun.

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