

The background features a dark blue gradient with faint, glowing circular patterns and a scale on the left side. The scale is marked with numbers from 140 to 260 in increments of 10. Several circular elements, some solid and some dashed, are scattered across the background, some containing arrows. The overall aesthetic is technical and futuristic.

# CONFRONTING SCHOOL THREATS

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MARCH 15, 2023

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*So, how the hell did I end up doing threat assessment work?*

# SCENARIO

- 14-year-old boy in outpatient treatment for inappropriate sexual behavior reports that he has been following Andrew Tate and really likes his vibe. The boy has a history of social isolation and peer difficulty, and a female classmate he likes recently declined his invitation to hang out. The boy's mother reports that he has been spending more time alone in his room and follows various *subreddits* about guns.

*Does this boy present a risk?*

# BRAINSTORMING QUESTIONS

- What constitutes a school attack?
- What is the approach your local school adopts in addressing attacker threats?
- Do you consult on school threat cases?
- Why is school threat assessment relevant to clinicians?

# SCHOOL ATTACKER TERMS & DEFINITIONS

- Targeted violence
  - Any incident of violence where an attacker selects a particular target prior to an attack (cue: premeditated)
- Threat assessment involves...
  1. Identifying concerning or threatening individuals (identify)
  2. Conducting an evaluation of the concerning individual (evaluate)
  3. Taking action to manage the risk (management)
- Multi-disciplinary threat assessment team
  - Teachers, school administrators, guidance counselors, school resource officers, community leaders, law enforcement, mental health professionals

# SCHOOL ATTACKER TERMS & DEFINITIONS

- Elements of a school attack
  - Actor is a current or former student
  - Attack occurs on or near school grounds
  - Attack is planned in advance
  - Purposeful use of a weapon...
  - To injure at least one other student or faculty
- Excludes violent offenses on school grounds, which are attributable to other motives or phenomenon (i.e., gang violence, drug violence), or spontaneous occurrences

*Why am I using the term school attacks/er as opposed to school shooter?*

# SCHOOL ATTACKER TERMS & DEFINITIONS

- Mass attack
  - Includes harm to three or more persons, not including the attacker
- National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC)
  - Created in 1998
  - Under the auspice of the U.S. Secret Service
  - Conducts research, consultation, and training regarding threat assessment, including potential school threats

# FREQUENCY OF SCHOOL ATTACKS

- How many U.S. school attacks occurred in 2022?

*It depends...*

- 302 (K-12 School Shooting Database)
  - Includes gang shootings, domestic violence, shootings at sports games and afterhour events, suicides, fights that escalate into shootings, and accidents
- 51 (Education week)
  - Includes events where one person other than the attacker is injured by gunfire on school property or during a school-sponsored event



# NTAC'S PROTECTING AMERICA'S SCHOOLS 2019 REPORT

- Examined 41 incidents of targeted school violence, occurring between
- 2008-2017 (excludes more recent attacks, including Marjorie Stoneman Douglas (Parkland) and Robb Elementary Schools (Uvalde))
- Assorted records collected from:
  - Police investigations
  - Publicly available court materials
  - School
  - Mental health
  - Collateral interviews
  - Social media content

# NTAC'S PROTECTING AMERICA'S SCHOOLS 2019 REPORT

- Attacks occurred almost exclusively at public schools
- Evenly divided among urban, suburban, and rural settings
- Most schools had some type of physical safety measure implemented
- 2/3 had either a full-time or part time SRO
- Only 7 (17%) of schools had an early reporting system
- 9 schools (22%) had some type of program to assess potential threats
- Most attacks occurred during the first half of the day
- Attacks frequently happened after a return from a school break (September & January)
  - Many coincided with the anniversaries of past shootings/tragedies (April 20th)
- Most attacks ended within 5 minutes, 2/3 (88%) lasting two minutes or less
- Half of attacks ended without external intervention (suicide, fleeing to the scene, or surrendering to school staff)
- No attacks were ended by outside law enforcement agencies responding to the scene from off campus

*Is any of this data surprising?*

# NTAC'S PROTECTING AMERICA'S SCHOOLS 2019 REPORT

- No prototype offender or profile (contradicts an earlier FBI report)
  - Attackers varied according age, race, sex, education, socioeconomic class
  - 7 attackers were female
  - However, all attackers were grade 7 or higher
- Varied motivations, but....
  - Perceived grievances were most often cited
    - Peers were most often targeted for alleged bullying
    - Staff and romantic partners were also targeted
  - Desire to kill, which was defined as
    - Sadistic interest, interest in violence or related topics, desire for power,
  - Suicide
    - But suicide was never identified as a chief motive, rather tertiary
  - Infamy/notoriety
    - Intersection with livestreaming violence

# NTAC'S PROTECTING AMERICA'S SCHOOLS 2019 REPORT

- Half of attackers engaged in planning
  - Weapons research and selection, packing an attack bag, surveillance, etc.
- Firearms frequently employed, which were routinely secured from home
- Contact with law enforcement beforehand (arrests, welfare checks, etc.). None of the attackers had a hx of sexual offending.
- Mental health hx
  - 20% had mental disorder dx
  - Depressive symptoms, suicidality, anxiety, psychosis\*, authority noncompliance, impulsivity, ADHD\*, neurological issues, narcissism\*

# NTAC'S PROTECTING AMERICA'S SCHOOLS 2019 REPORT

- Violence
  - Half of attackers had a violence hx (physical or verbal aggression)
  - Interest in violence and past attacks (Columbine, Hitler, & Nazis recurrent themes)
- Chaotic homelife
  - Nearly all but one had experienced an ACE (most frequent: divorce followed by financial strife)
- Recent stressor (< 6 months of attack)
  - Social stressor most frequently encountered

# NTAC: AVERTING TARGETED SCHOOL ANALYSIS (2021)

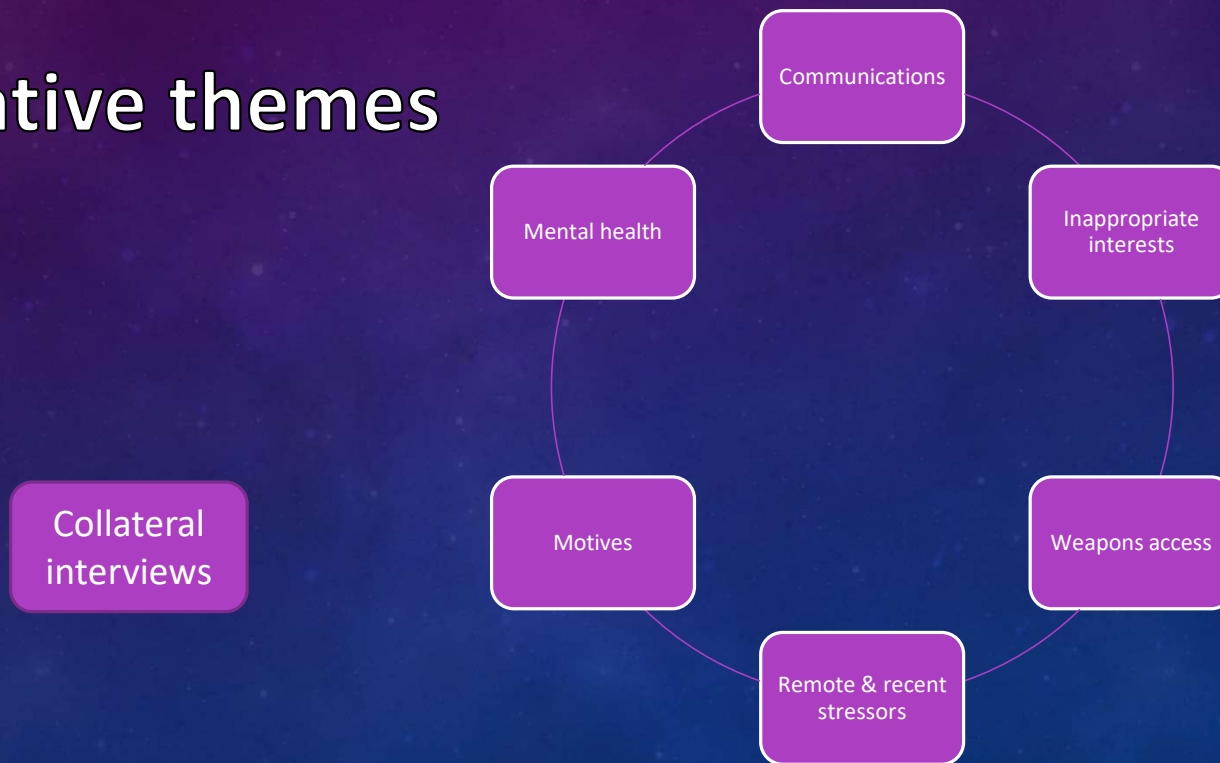
- Involved 67 instances of averted school violence, spanning from 2006 to 2018
- Key findings
  - School attacks are preventable
  - Schools should intervene before a student's behavior warrants legal consequences
  - Students were most likely to observe and report potential threats
  - Families of attackers also thwarted attempts via early reporting
  - Removing a student from school does not alleviate risk

# NTAC: ENHANCING SCHOOL SAFETY USING A THREAT ASSESSMENT MODEL



# STEP 4: ESTABLISH ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

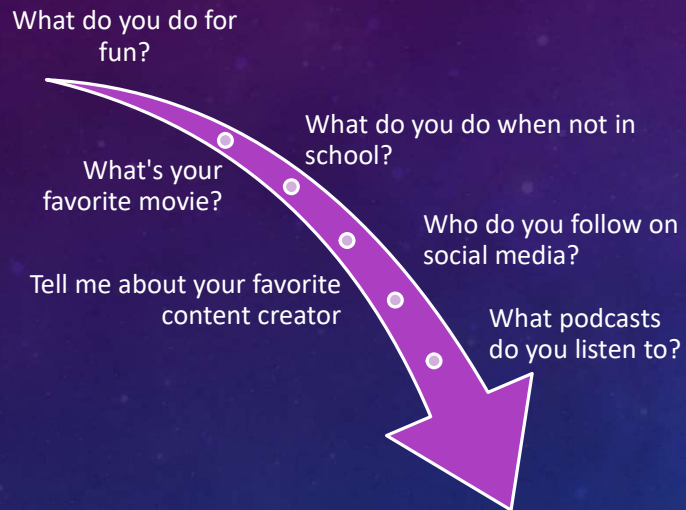
## Investigative themes





# STEP 4: ESTABLISH ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

## *HOW DOES ONE ASSESS FOR VIOLENT INTERESTS?*



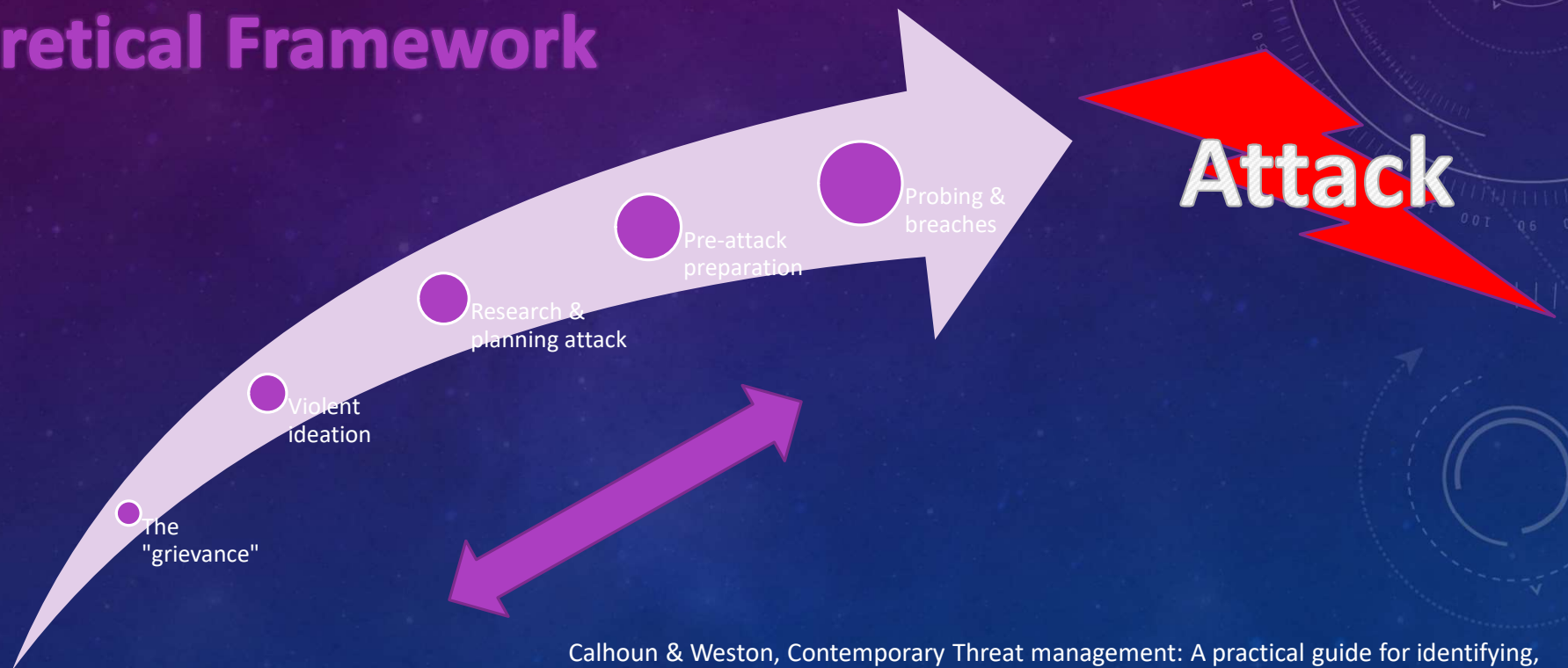
- Violent ideas, fantasies, preoccupations, belief that violence is an acceptable means to resolve conflict, identification/idolizing mass murderers, school attackers, terrorists (WAVR-21)

# STEP 4: ESTABLISH ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

- Collateral informants
  - Peers
  - Parents
  - Teachers
  - Mentors
  - Guidance counselor
  - Mental health provider
  - Athletic coach (if relevant)
  - Religious leader (if relevant)

# STEP 4: ESTABLISH ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

## Theoretical Framework



Calhoun & Weston, Contemporary Threat management: A practical guide for identifying, assessing, and managing individuals of violent intent (2003)

## STEP 4: ESTABLISH ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

- Threat assessment vs. risk assessment (What's the difference?)
- Remember risk is not a static factor operating in a vacuum
  - Person x environment x time = risk
- No available actuarials, adopt a structured professional judgment/case management approach
- Construct risk scenarios (low-risk vs. high risk scenario) (timing: hours, days, weeks)
- Identify behaviors that signal escalating/de-escalating risk
- Earlier intervention is better
- Continue to monitor after an initial assessment

# Questions & Discussion

The background features a gradient from dark purple to blue, overlaid with a field of small white stars. On the right side, there are several technical diagrams: a large circular gauge with a scale from 0 to 210, a smaller circular gauge with a scale from 0 to 100, and a circular diagram with a dashed arrow pointing clockwise. In the bottom left corner, there is a partial circular diagram with a dashed arrow pointing counter-clockwise.