Episode 136-- Unpacking the Violence Project

Fri, 6/25 8:29AM 43:52

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mass shootings, shooting, people, firearm, gun violence, violence, brady, database, life, guns, contagion effect, talking, crisis, perpetrators, shooter, school, mass shooters, pandemic, individuals, research

SPEAKERS

Dr. Jillian Peterson, JJ Janflone, Dr. James Densely, Kelly Sampson

JJ Janflone 00:00

This is the legal disclaimer where I tell you that the views thoughts and opinions shared in this podcast belong solely to our guests and hosts and not necessarily Brady or Brady's affiliates. Please note, this podcast contains discussions of violence that some people may find disturbing. It's okay, we find it disturbing too Hey everybody. Welcome back to another episode of Red, Blue and Brady. IN the last episode, I promise while I'm flying solo, yes, Kelly is coming back. But if there ever was a week to fly solo, I have to say I think it was this week, because I was blessed with some amazing guests who made the conversation so so easy. This week, I was joined by Dr. Jillian Peterson, always live another Jillian and Dr. James Densley. Both authors of the forthcoming "The Violence Project: how to stop a mass shooting epidemic," and co founders and co presidents of a nonpartisan nonprofit research center of the same name. Well, both are prolific researchers and writers. Their center is perhaps best known right now for their mass shooter database, which has examined hundreds of data points, and has identified some very concerning trends in mass shootings and shooters within the US. We talked about all of that. But thankfully, we also talk about how they've identified some interventions that can help. Thank you both so much for coming on. Can I go ahead and have you both just sort of introduce yourself to our audience?

D Dr. Jillian Peterson 01:18

Sure. I am Jillian Peterson. I am a psychologist and an associate professor of criminology at Hamlin University and co founder and co president of the violence project.

D Dr. James Densely 01:28

I'm James Densley. And I'm a sociologist. I'm a professor of criminal justice at Metropolitan State University, where I'm also the department chair. And I am a co founder and co president of the violence project.

 JJ Janflone 02:04

So I'd love to know you know, what prompts a sociologist and a psychologist to get into the study of gun violence and mass shootings specifically,

D Dr. Jillian Peterson 02:13

I think James and I each kind of had our own pathway to this topic, I started out my career before I was an academic, I was an investigator, and I worked for the New York capital defender's office. And it was my job to meet with people who were facing the death penalty, and put together what we call the bio psychosocial developmental life histories, which is essentially how someone gets to the point of committing murder. And I did that for a few years. And when it came to mass shootings, after James and I met, and we're kind of talking about our, our interest in gun violence, we realized that we really didn't understand that that pathway to violence when it comes to mass shooters, and because we didn't understand that we were doing a really poor job at kind of preventing them and responding to them.

D Dr. James Densely 03:04

And I think for me, I've been doing work previously, looking at gangs and youth violence. And I've been doing that internationally. And so when you study gang violence in the United Kingdom, for instance, it's mostly knife crime. But when you pivot and start doing that research in the United States, you quickly start to realize it's about gun violence. So that was my sort of first entry into gun violence. And then also a lot of my work was starting to look at social media and other sort of societal issues, and realizing that they were also having an influence on this phenomena of mass shootings. And as a former school teacher, in a previous life, I was a special ed teacher in a in a middle school, I noticed that kind of infrastructure around school safety and school security. And so we

kind of brought those two perspectives together, it was an end, it was this sort of perfect match between psychology and sociology to look at it holistically.

JJ Janflone 03:59

So we're going to be talking about things that are both in your database that edit in your upcoming book, but I'd love to discuss the database study you did, where you meticulously researched public mass shootings since the 60s, you know, what, what did that entail? And in particular, I wonder if maybe we could start off with your definition of mass shooters with our audience, because I think your definition differs from how Brady and then other organizations like the gun violence archive would define a mass shooting, which for us is to say, a shooting were more than four people not counting the shooter were shot.

D

Dr. James Densely 04:30

Yeah, it's a it's actually a big debate at the moment about what qualifies and what constitutes as being a mass shooting. And historically, the FBI and sort of academic researchers for about the last 40 years had created this sort of arbitrary threshold where they said four or more people killed as being a mass killing. And then if that was perpetrated with a firearm, you then get mass shooting, and then it was this question around the differences between domestic violence and public violence, and also violence that occurs in the commission of other crimes. So if you've got a gang related drive by shooting, that's sort of qualitatively different from an individual that walks into a shopping mall or walks into a school armed to perpetrate a mass shooting. So it was a way in which of sort of separating those different phenomena. And I think it's important to recognize that like, on a sociological level, all gun violence matters. And it's really important to focus on the victims and the communities and the mechanisms by which those things occur. But if you think about it from that sort of more psychological standpoint, the mechanisms underpinning a gang related shooting where you've got, you know, two rival gangs drive by is very different to you know, a teenage boy who walks into a school and kills his teacher and his classmates. And so it's important when you're dealing with these issues around definition is to be very clear about what it is you're talking about. So that you, you can really look at the profiles of those individuals involved, and then get to really tailored solutions to the specific problems that are at hand. So when we talk about mass shootings, we're talking about four or more people killed in a public space. Without that kind of, you know, a robbery gone bad or drug deal gone bad gang related shooting, and it also excludes, then domestic violence as well. So it's a narrow focus, but it's an important one, because it gets us a lot closer to what are the solutions to that problem?

JJ Janflone 06:42

You know, I want to thank you so, so much for clarifying that. Because I think that could be something that's very difficult to suss out. Right. You know, I'm thinking, in particular, the first known mass school shooting, which happened at the University of Texas in the 60s, which originally, you know, that was a domestic violence situation.

D

Dr. Jillian Peterson 06:57

So we use the definition of more than half of the victims have to be non family members. So it's actually fairly common for them to start at home and kill a family member and then move to a second location, we call it bifurcated in our database. So in that second location, kill a whole bunch of strangers. So as long as our criteria, which again, it's arbitrary, right, it's more than half the victims, non family sort of gets us to the phenomenon that we're really interested in. And that's not to say, we are capturing every mass shooting, right? It's just this is a group that we can definitively say, this is this really specific phenomenon we're interested in that really has been increasing over time that we really need to get a handle on.

JJ Janflone 07:45

Of your cases, which I believe you have 164. And that's due to the the parameters that you set, you know, more than half of the shootings that you have occurred since 2000. And more than that, I'm sorry, to quote your own study at you know, 33% since 2010, you know, why do you think there was this increase? You know, can we unpack that progression a little bit?

D

Dr. James Densely 08:09

So our database goes back to it was funny, you mentioned that 1966 shooting in Texas, because that is the first case in our database. And we we mark it with that case, because there were mass shootings before that. But because we think of it as being a sort of a first modern mass shooting, it was a mass shooting that unfolded live on radio, and on television. And so it beamed it into the lives of the American public, and it sort of changed the narrative ever since. So you look at them over time, what has been those changes, and there's been some things which are very constant throughout American society in that time. And then there have been things which have changed in recent years, which may well be having a contributing factor. So we have seen in our data, for instance, a rise in recent years of shootings, which were connected to things like fame seeking, or, and so with that, you also see a change, post Columbine, with shootings that are sort of media

savvy, if you will, people were posting on social media, people were trying to do these things, for the kind of celebrity status that was associated with it's one of the reasons why. And I know that this is important for you as well that we follow a no notoriety protocol. So thinking about the way in which social media and the internet may have provided models of behavior that kind of give people an incentive to perpetrate these types of crimes, that thing that we've seen in recent years, which could be having a contributing factor. And the other thing as well as accessibility of firearms is greater today than it has been any point in American history. And that is, of course, a contributing factor. A lot of people don't like to hear that. But that is something that is sort of out there. And it's a part of the phenomena. So you look at things that could have changed over time. And those are some of the factors that you look at. But it's tricky to sort of really pick out, what's the one thing that's making the difference. But we do have a script for this type of violence across American society. And the more these things occur, it ends up becoming almost like a self fulfilling prophecy. Right? There's a contagion effect attached to that. And I think that is part of that cycle that as more of these shootings have occurred, you inevitably get more shootings, unless we do something about it.

D Dr. Jillian Peterson 10:35

And even in some ways, our response to mass shootings, so things like running our children through active shooter drills, and lockdown drills in schools, up to, you know, 10 times a year, year after year, and kind of normalizing that script that this is just something that happens in American society. And the best we can do is kind of sit quietly in the classroom and hope to minimize casualties, the way that our response to these shootings has been, in some ways could even be contributing to that sort of societal script that we're seeing play out.

 JJ Janflone 11:08

I wonder if we could dial in sort of on the contagion effect to for maybe listeners who who kind of aren't familiar with that research or aren't familiar with the role of social media? This isn't an argument that you know, video games, do it or anything like that. It's not the the violent video games Marilyn Manson argument that sort of did pop up post Columbine, it's, it's much actually more complicated than that.

D Dr. James Densely 11:33

It really is more complicated than that. Yeah, it's, people like to draw the straight lines, and they say, well, you play violent video games, you become violent. And of course, that's

not true at all, what we see in the lives of the mass shooters in our data, both the ones in the database, but also individuals we've interviewed and families that we've interviewed, through the course of this research, is that you have people who are really struggling in life. And they're searching for meaning in their life, they're searching for answers to make sense of their life. And what they're finding is models of behavior on the internet, in the life stories and life histories of the mass shooters who've come before them. So if you think about it, is if I'm somebody who's truly struggling in life and don't know where I fit in, I then look online, and they find all look, this individual is also really struggling in life, it didn't know where they fit in. And their solution to that problem was to take out their anger and frustration on their colleagues at work, or on their friends at school, and they perpetrated a shooting. And so I think that's really where that mechanism comes into play is that you're you're searching for answers. And in the past shootings, you find you find them, then when you have that societal script, when there is a mass shooting, there's a lot of media attention about it. And for some people who feel like they are not getting the respect that they deserve, or the attention that they deserve, they might then decide this is a way to get that. And so that's where you get that kind of copycat phenomena. And that's where you might have some of that fame seeking behavior that's attached to that as well, where the media cycle could be contributing to some degree on on this sort of broader ecosystem around these types of shootings.

D Dr. Jillian Peterson 13:30

And sometimes we talk about mass shootings is sort of a form of performance in kind of a terrible way. But mass shootings are suicides for the most part. So the person goes in not kind of having a plan to get out, they plan to either shoot themselves or be shot or be arrested and spend the rest of their life in prison. And so but it's not like a suicide because it is this public form of suicide, it's this way to kind of get your grievance out to the world and mass shooters choose a location for their shooting that represents their grievance with the world. And so you do this and to get that anger to get that message out. People are doing things like leaving quote unquote, "manifestos" or leaving YouTube videos or things behind to be found. And then when we watch them, and we read them, and we obsess about their lives, it essentially works. It gets like we play a role in that as the audience of that performance. And the more that we pay attention and obsess and give them a sort of that platform they're looking for the more that inspires the next one.

 JJ Janflone 14:36

You know, and I think the million dollar question, especially for a podcast like ours, you know, what role are guns playing within these mass shootings? Or what specific behavior around firearms Have you seen in your research?

D

Dr. James Densely 14:47

Here we've seen a really notable example actually was some of the more recent shootings where you saw that people were purchasing firearms at a time in the lead up to the shooting. Where family members and friends and others had already kind of clocked that the setting was not right at that time. So as we talked about earlier, these crisis points and notable change in their behavior from baseline, that's not the time to then be going shopping for a firearm. And so we've seen in our data, lots of examples of individuals purchasing their weapons, within very short proximity to when the shootings eventually occur, and purchasing their weapons at a time where people around them were starting to have some concerns, or at least notice that something wasn't quite right. And I think this gives us sort of a little bit of context around some of the interventions that people are talking about right now, when you think about extreme risk protection orders, also known as red flag laws, or if you start to think about waiting periods or permit to purchase. And there's been studies that have actually used our database recently to explore these types of policies and how many mass shootings maybe could have been prevented, had they been enacted. Of course, the tricky issue with all this is we have a patchwork of laws throughout the United States. And even in states and in cities that have strict gun laws, guns travel, they travel across borders. And so we even see some examples where people who shouldn't have been getting access to firearms because they're too young, or they shouldn't be given access to firearms, because in that particular state, the laws were strict. They found ways to circumnavigate that stuff, where they'd been able to get a firearm from a friend, or from a family member, or they've gone across the state border and purchased a firearm, or they've gone to a gun show and got a firearm. So you look at all these things, and you just realize that we need a more comprehensive baseline, recognizing that federal law is the floor, not the ceiling, on gun legislation. But at the moment, the floor is very low. And so the states are playing catch up, in terms of filling in the gaps on those on those loopholes. It was astonishing to us really, that time and time again, we saw examples where the existing system failed, essentially, that somebody who shouldn't have passed a background check did or somebody because of some weird loophole in the state statute, or somebody who should have waited for a particular period of time, and then the wait period expired, and they were able to get the firearm anyway, and those types of things. And so there's, there's definitely stuff that we can do here to fill in those gaps. And they don't infringe upon anyone's Second Amendment rights. They're not particularly controversial. They seem to have support of the vast majority of the American people. But of course, the Senate doesn't represent the American people. And I say that purely from a mathematical standpoint, right? You have population density not represented when you've got two senators for every for every state, and then you need a filibuster to get things passed. And so that's why we have the kind of gridlock that we

have right now. And it's really tricky. It's really tricky.

D Dr. Jillian Peterson 18:32

And the only thing I think, I would add to that is when it comes to school shooters, in particular, they almost exclusively are using guns from family members, they're using parents guns or grandparents guns, because they can't buy guns. And so things like safe storage campaigns, which some states have started, right, like really educating people on safe storage, handing out locks, making sure people have the resources, really, you know, sending out letters of commitment, and really doing that work. That might make a huge impact. And not only on school shootings, right, also suicides and accidental deaths, and all of those things. So I think at that level, there are things that we in our communities can do without having the senate need to pass anything.

 JJ Janflone 19:18

And if we can, as we start to talk about some of the things that the violence project has identified, as, you know, key factors this idea that shooters are in a quote unquote, noticeable crisis, and in the days before their attacks, can we take a second to be really clear and and I think you do a really great job with this within the violence project, just to be clear, and detailing how a shooter might do something that, you know, we would define as irrational, you know, committing an act of violence, but that act itself doesn't mean that a shooter is mentally ill, you know, this is a really complicated thing.

D Dr. Jillian Peterson 19:50

Yeah, this is a really complicated and complex area.

 JJ Janflone 19:54

So I you know, just a simple question to answer really quickly, if you could just, you know, break that down.

D Dr. Jillian Peterson 20:00

And we for our research, we built that database. And in addition to that, we actually conducted interviews. So we interviewed perpetrators of mass shootings, people who knew these perpetrators victim, first responders. And so a lot of our conclusions come both from the interview side and also the database side, what we see is that mental

health histories are common amongst mass shooters. Now, mental health histories are common amongst people in the United States, right? It's about over 50, roughly 50% of people who will meet criteria for something within their lifetime, so it is not abnormal. And you see that slightly elevated in the life histories of perpetrators. But that doesn't mean that mental illness caused a mass shooting, right, you also see trauma histories, really significant early childhood trauma, you see rejection from peers, you see different sort of stressors in their lives, you see this online radicalization, and then you've got mental illness playing some role in that, but the role it plays for each person really differs. We recently published a paper where we look specifically at symptoms of psychosis, so actual hallucinations and delusions, and the role that they play in a mass shooting. And it's really, it's only about 10%, of perpetrators in the database, were really being directly motivated by hallucinations and delusions for the other 90%. This story is a lot more complicated. What we do see consistently, though, is this crisis point. And so a crisis can be related to mental illness, it can not be it can just be sort of stressors building in your life. And we define a crisis, as your current circumstances overwhelm your ability to cope. And those circumstances are different for each person, there's usually something that kind of pushes them over the edge, whether that's a breakup or a job loss, or something significant. That's just kind of the final straw, and they are in crisis. And when you're in a crisis, there's noticeable changes in your behavior. And that's one thing we see consistently. It's not the same change in behavior for everybody, right, but it's a change from how you're normally acting. And we see that in over 80% of perpetrators in the database that people are saying, Yes, they were acting differently, they were more depressed, or they were agitated, or they were had mood swings, or they were isolating something that was a shift in their behavior. And so we are really interested in how we can use that crisis point to think about how you can do intervention and prevention in that moment, if we can identify those crisis points, and respond holistically rather than responding in a punitive way.

JJ Janflone 22:42

So I've also seen both of you write about how, you know, to your definitions, we saw a dip in mass shooting numbers in 2020. But I do want to be really clear, according to you know, numbers like the gun violence archive that Brady uses, we saw an increase. But no matter what we both agree that in 2021, we've seen another increase. And so I'm wondering if you can unpack for our listeners why that might be why that jump in your 2021 numbers?

D

Dr. James Densely 23:05

Yeah, I think I think it comes down to opportunity as the real driving factor for that decrease in 2020. Which is to say that, by our definition, we had two mass shootings in

February and March of 2020. We then didn't see another one that met our definition until March of 2021. So there was literally a whole year, whole calendar year right there, where we didn't see any. And, of course, it's difficult to have a public shooting when the public are at home. And you can't have a mass shooting when the masses are not gathered. And so opportunity, I think, really explains that phenomena. But then something that's going on during that year too, people are at home lockdown, and they are turning inward, essentially going online on the internet to spend more time which might not be the healthiest coping mechanism for everybody. If you're in an abusive household, you're now locked inside of that abusive household. If you have lost your job because of the pandemic, the just general stresses of juggling children and issues in your lives. I mean, everybody felt the stress of that pandemic. And so it was then a case of once the doors reopened, there was a lot of unmet need, and a lot of frustration and anxiety like pouring out into the public. And I think that then explains why in March of this year, we had that cluster of mass shootings that occurred in quick succession. You know, we've sort of suggested that something was different here. But your point is also really well taken, which is when we look at gun violence period. Last year was an it truly exceptional year and this year is even worse than last year. So we know that there is something going on. And you look at some of the other factors that are there where you say, well, we had a lot of unrest around George Floyd and some of the questions around racial justice, and the lack of legitimacy in law enforcement, that could be a contributing factor to the violence that we see today, a lot of the stresses of the pandemic could be a factor. And then we also had record gun sales last year, people in proximity to firearms that, you know, perhaps, are not particularly competent with those weapons, and perhaps as well are not storing them safely. So they're getting into the hands of people that could then use them for a shooting. And so there's all those things in the mix disaggregating, all that and saying this is the one factor, I think, is impossible. But all those things are piling on top of one another and kind of give us the result that we have today.

D Dr. Jillian Peterson 25:57

I think the fact that we did have this just incredible rise in gun violence last year, while this very particular phenomenon of a public mass shooting completely disappeared, shows how sort of these are really two distinct kind of social phenomenon that we're talking about. And those I think the other couple things that we could mention in terms of them disappearing during the pandemic. One is we were talking about contagion. And so they fell out of the news cycle, right? We weren't talking about them. We're talking about a global pandemic, we have this common enemy, that the news just wasn't covering them. And so it is interesting to think about, like, what role does media coverage actually play? And then the second piece is we know that when people do this, they feel this kind of grievance with the world that they feel like they haven't been given what they deserved.

And they're trying to figure out why. And it's possible that during this global pandemic, we were all kind of suffering. And maybe individuals didn't feel quite so personally aggrieved, because we were sort of dealing with this global pandemic. So it's hard to isolate. There's opportunity. There's contagion. There's grievance, but we know they disappeared. And now we know, sadly, that they seem to be kind of roaring back when the pandemic ended.

JJ Janflone 27:16

So when it comes to that contagion effect, or that media effect that we're talking about here, do you, have you seen any differences in terms of which, if a shooting gets more attention than the normal? Or how the media reports on a shooting? Have you seen that have any impact? I think one of the things that you bring up is like during the pandemic, all the air got taken out of the out of the room, right, there were three or four types of news stories that people were focusing on. And unfortunately, I think all gun violence just sort of got pushed to the wayside.

D

Dr. James Densely 27:44

Certain sort of studies have looked at this. And they found that sometimes the profile of the victim, the profile of the offender, the type of location can dictate the new cycle. And so this is true of all news cycles, right? There are certain narratives which seem to get more attention than others. And that plays out most definitely in mass shootings as well, there's been some studies, which have looked at the ways in which white offenders are treated differently from black offenders, for instance, in terms of the the narratives around the justification for the shooting, and the motive for the shooting, as a good example. And then there is this sort of sad phenomena that like you get to a point where so much gun violence just becomes like white noise. And I think this is especially troubling at the moment, when you move beyond just the traditional mass shooting definition that we're working with. And you just look at gun violence. In general, when you have shooting after shooting after shooting in our cities across the United States at the moment, it's really difficult for to put a new spin on that or to write to retrace those steps again, and say, Well, these are the reasons why this has happened. And the thing is one of those situations of if you keep doing the same thing over and over and over again, you can't expect different results. And and so there needs to be a kind of break with this where you see something qualitatively start to change. And that can be big picture, things like gun laws, but it can also be small scale stuff as well, like the ways in which we deal with gun violence in our communities, whether it's from a community led or focused approach. It's one of the reasons why in our research, and we wrote about this a lot in the book is we think about the ways in which mass shootings, they operate on these different levels. And

so do our solutions. So there are things that we could do tomorrow as individuals that could actually eat away at the phenomena of gun violence. So say like safe storage is a great example. Lock up your firearm and you're doing your bit right. Get trained in crisis intervention and suicide prevention and you're doing your bit, right that's you can do that as an individual. There's things we can also do as institutions, we can put best practices in place in our schools and in our workplaces, create safe spaces to report where we're worried about people not so they can get in trouble. But so they can get the help they need. That stuff that could also eat away at that phenomenon. And then there's also things we have to do at the societal level, which might be a harder push, that's where you might need to write to your Congress person and, and get something changed. And again, it's not just about guns, either. It's about we need to create a better social safety net. You know, there's a big debate going on in our society right now about we need to defund the police in order to fund public services. I think Jill and I turn around and we'd say, No, we just need to fund public services period. There's so many things that have been defunded for generations, let's put the money into those services again, so that people can get the help they need and get the support they need. And so it's thinking about solutions on all those different levels to really tackle this problem.

D Dr. Jillian Peterson 31:11

And I think one thing, when we interviewed perpetrators of mass shootings, we always ask the question, was there is there anyone or anything that could have stopped you? And every time they say yes, right, every time they say, yes, if someone anyone had talked to me, you know, and this is looking back 10 years later, if anyone would have sort of knew what was going on, or given me a reason to hope, or, you know, just made that human connection, I'm not sure I would have done it. I mean, there's perpetrators who are calling crisis lines before they go in to do the shooting. So I think, for me going into this research, I didn't know if I was going to come out hopeful. But I did. I came out very much thinking we absolutely can stop this. And there's many different ways we can do it from gun laws, to being willing to ask somebody if they're okay, right, that we wouldn't normally ask.

 JJ Janflone 32:04

One of the things I found so interesting about your research, too, is this specific attention paid to school shootings. And now hearing that both of your backgrounds, I can understand why, but I love the way that you break them all down. And I think it's so great that you've both addressed how things like armed teachers or threat assessment teams, you know, aren't necessarily the solution. And I'm wondering if we could dig into that for a moment, you know, why was the violence project so concerned with these types of

shootings? And you know, why are these solutions that are normally pushed, you know, why don't they work?

D Dr. Jillian Peterson 32:35

I think for a long time, we didn't know anything about these perpetrators. And because we didn't know anything about them, we retreating them. And we talked about this in the book, like they were sort of these scary monsters that we had to trap outside the building. The reality is that over 90% of school shooters are current, mostly current, some former students of the school, but the most likely perpetrator of a shooting at your school is a child that goes to school there every single day, right. And so these are children going through the same doors and the same security systems. They know, they've been running through lockdown drills at the school, or the last, you know, however many years they know exactly how the school is going to respond. They know that there's an SRO or somebody armed there and where they are right. And what we see in some, a lot of these cases is that the perpetrator is actively suicidal. And so that armed officer they plan to go in and be shot by that officer, that becomes an incentive not a deterrent. So when we think of the perpetrators of the shootings as insiders, right, these are children that we see every day, these are not some scary outsiders, we can't block them out with security, right? That really changes the perspective. And if we think of them as suicidal, we can't punish our way out of this right or scare someone out of this, we really have to think about some really different solutions. And also, as we sort of put up those barriers and the bulletproof doors, and that we change the dynamics of this school, right, we change how safe and how warm and how trusting that school feels, when the reality is the that's all violence prevention, warm, trusting relationships, right, children who feel connected with adults in the school, people who feel safe to disclose when they're feeling certain ways or when they're worrying about others. That is all violence prevention. And so a lot of the things we've done to our schools have made kids feel less safe and less trusting. We recently launched a website called off ramps and so the off ramp project is really focused on those more holistic, warm violence prevention strategies for schools things like crisis intervention and suicide prevention and building strong healthy relationships. And we we have a protocol for crisis intervention teams which are slightly different than threat assessment teams, they're similar in the sense that it's a lot of people gathering information. And it's a safe place to report when you're worried about someone, but different in the sense that you're not looking at a student as a threat. And you're not thinking about a law enforcement or a punitive response. If there is a threat of violence, you're thinking about a student being in crisis, and what services do they need to get them through and out of this moment. And so it's sort of a shift in perspective, it's a little bit softer, it's a little bit warmer and a bit more holistic.

D Dr. James Densely 35:30

And I'll just say some of it's just even a semantic change, which is, when you hear the word threat, some teachers and administrators are like, well, we only then do this if there's threatening behavior. And we're trying to say, Well, actually, we should be doing this not because they might be a potential school shooter, but they might be might be somebody who's just struggling with suicidal thoughts, or they're worried about what's going on in their lives, they still need our help, even if it's not inherently threatening. And so we've taken a lot of stuff from those threat assessment protocols, we really support that idea. But sometimes we found that the language can be a barrier, especially where we're based right now. You know, we're coming to you from Minneapolis, St. Paul. Right now, we're in the epicenter of the debate around police officers in schools, police reform, after George Floyd, the landscape has dramatically changed. And if you go into a school building in Minnesota right now, and say, we want to build a threat assessment team, that is code for we want to target black and brown children, to wrap them up in the criminal justice system on the school to prison pipeline, you've got to approach that very differently. And so we're thinking about No, these are kids who who need help. And they don't need a punitive response. And so that was one of the real reasons of sort of like, this needs a rebrand, essentially, even though there's really good ideas throughout that, that product,

D Dr. Jillian Peterson 37:02

We have been just working like crazy the last six months to launch this off ramp site, which I think really does do some of that holistic work in terms of both policy and resources and training and trying to sort of translate our research and our data into really tangible stuff for people's and people can always go there and sort of check out more things that they can do.

 JJ Janflone 37:26

Well, and you know, speaking of things we can do not pressure on you, you know, how do we prevent mass shootings? How do we do it? How do we solve gun violence? You know, if you could just, you know, make my job easier, that would be great. I'll send you a fruit basket, I promise.

D Dr. Jillian Peterson 37:44

We, we have these kind of four commonalities that we see in the lives of mass shooters that we think of is kind of four intervention points. So the first being early childhood trauma being incredibly common and really significant childhood trauma, there's things

we can do as individuals in terms of mentoring as institutions in terms of things like social emotional learning, and, you know, the bigger picture level in terms of access to resources, that we can really intervene and think about early childhood trauma. There's this crisis point that we've talked about that we can do things like build Crisis Response Teams train ourselves in crisis intervention, you also have to have the mental health resources in place in the community to do more long term follow up, right? We talked about social proof and this contagion effect. So thinking about we can what we can do as both consumers of media and as people creating media and what the media and social media's role is in this. And then finally, we convened about access, and that's primarily guns, right? And then we can also talk about how do we reduce access to guns for people who really shouldn't have access. And so you can think about intervention in each of those four stages, we tend to get stuck at one stage or think like, I only believe in this one so strongly, I can't talk about the other ones. But I think if we're really going to do this, we have to think about it holistically and sort of using that multi pronged approach.

JJ Janflone 39:16

No, I think that's a fabulous answer. And, as always, I put links to everything in the description of this episode. But where can people find you if they want to learn more about your work or the upcoming book.

D

Dr. James Densely 39:27

So we are at the violenceproject.org. And that's where you can download for free the database, and also look at some of the other work we've been doing. And we then have offramp.org, which is linked to the violence project. And that's where you'll find all those resources, particularly around crisis intervention, suicide prevention, building a crisis response team in a school or in a workplace. We also have kind of a lot of downloadable forms and all sorts of things that people can interact with.

D

Dr. Jillian Peterson 40:03

And then we're on social media @theviolencepro on everything.

JJ Janflone 40:07

Well, James, Julian, thank you both so, so much for coming on the podcast. I learned a ton. I can't wait to read the book. I've played around with the database a lot. I highly recommend it to all of our listeners. So thank you again. So I'm gonna start this week's

story out with a very firm statement that normally I have to tell Kelly, which is that this man is okay. I repeat, he's okay. But if that doesn't clue you in this story is one that is very frightening. And if you do look the story up online, I hate to say it, but there is also a video. Please don't watch that. So a man in Ohio was at a shooting range about 30 miles east of Cleveland. He was shooting a nine millimeter automatic pistol when the bullet casing is the shell was ejected from the gun and flew down the back of a shirt. Now if you've never fired a gun, those shells are brass and they're hot. So basically a hot piece of metal went down his shirt, the man started to move around trying to dislodge the shell. And well he unintentionally fired his pistol shooting himself in the cheek. This is truly horrifying. But while the man was injured, he is thankfully going to be alright. Now this was some very bad luck. But it also goes to show you that even those who are comfortable with firearms need to remember how dangerous these weapons are, and always treat them very, very seriously. Now in the news this week, I am very jealous because Brady's youth program team enough has taken off on an amazing road trip from Tallahassee to Miami, Florida, making a number of stops along the way and meeting with young people concerned about gun violence in their state. They are going to be recruiting new members and of course mobilizing their important voices to join Team enough and the movement to prevent gun violence. Now you can find their full itinerary a teamenough.org/Floridatour and be jealous with me and cheer them on. And additional good news, we got some more good news in the Biden administration. This week the administration announced a comprehensive strategy to prevent gun violence and to address gun trafficking. The proposals will significantly aid local law enforcement and stopping the flow of crime guns which we've talked about on this podcast into communities across the country, taking a supply side approach to stopping gun violence that addresses the source of the traffic firearms, rather than over policing the communities most affected by this epidemic. Now this strategy includes a commitment to hold firearm dealers accountable for violating federal laws, investing in community violence intervention programs, and ideally, addressing the root causes of violence through expanding education, employment, and housing opportunities. Hey, want to share with the podcast? Listeners can now get in touch with us here at Red, Blue, and Brady via phone or text message! Simply call or text us at (480) 744-3452 with your thoughts, questions, concerns, ideas, whatever! Kelly and I are standing by!

K Kelly Sampson 43:01

Thanks for listening. As always, Brady's lifesaving work in congress, the courts, and communities across the country is made possible thanks to you. For more information on Brady, or how to get involved in the fight against gun violence, please like and subscribe to the podcast, get in touch with us at bradyunited.org, or on social @bradybuzz. Be brave, and remember: take action, not sides.