By Scott Heller

_To envy is ignorance; imitation, suicide._ -- Emerson

The problem of the increase in gun violence in suburban schools offers little in the realm of a rational explanation. Many thoughts on this subject have surfaced; many solutions have been put forth. I, however, offer only one idea. This is my attempt to reduce the cause of this deviance down to one primary thought. This is my Rome, where all roads lead to - a lack of self-identity.

**Self-identity** - noun 1) Sameness of a thing with itself. 2) INDIVIDUALITY <self understanding is the necessary condition of a sense of self-identity -- J. C. Murray>

Self-identity, for any individual, comes from social interaction. Being with other social groups allows us to compare and evaluate our own behaviors and norms, and modify them into a unique group of values. With increasing burdens being placed upon our families, most socialization now occurs in the workplace or in school. We’ve become too closed up as a society. Nobody socializes with other people. Friends and families don’t gather just for pleasant conversation or a good dinner; there’s too much work to be done.

Young adults need social control to learn societal norms. While in past generations, the family has mainly been in charge of the social control of their children, a change has occurred; not only in the foundation of the family institution, but in our cultural transmission, the messages we pass between generations. The family’s once rock solid foundation has been made silly-putty by the demands of our post industrial society. Divorce and remarriage, single parents and deadbeat spouses, babies having babies, all these situations force the family unit into turmoil. The pressure and necessity of having both parents work, bringing about a proliferation of day care services, have made it more difficult to find quality time within the family. The emphasis in our culture has been placed on obtaining wealth and material goods, symbols of success. This striving to keep
up with the Jones has helped the focus of social control to stray away from the family. Parents who both work, some with two jobs, others with demanding or stressful careers, don’t have the time to teach proper norms and values, the difference between right and wrong. That’s when kids flock to other sources to learn what’s “right”.

There has been a critical shift of institutional power throughout our culture. It has moved away from the family, schools, the church and religion. The majority of the power has transferred to the institution of the mass media. The bombardment of a violent mass media upon our modern society has warped our sense of social interaction and has encouraged a strange conformity. Peer groups, young men and women, who should be looking toward other institutions for their socialization, instead flock to the latest craze; movies, videogames, web sites, wrestling pay-per-views. Kids today have become a mire of sound bites and mind candy wrapped up in the latest fashion fad.

Another shift, a slippage if you will, has occurred within our culture with the way we deal with deviance. In our increasingly violent society, our system of norms has changed. What was shocking or wrong for society twenty years ago is considered commonplace today. Those in charge of social control treat this slippage with a ghastly ambivalence. When norms change, and nobody becomes concerned, our view of deviance changes in relation to these norms, creating a downward spiral.

Juvenile delinquency, most deviance within children, could be viewed as the traditional cry for help. Young people, living in the most open society in the history of the world, crave guidance from caring individuals, communities, and institutions to mold them into individuals, able to make solid choices and live a full and happy life. Too often in our modern times, children and even adults get caught up in the murkiness of our violent society without their boots on, and unfortunate events occur. To stem the flow of violence, to stop the guns in schools, no amount of education, gun control, community action, or good parenting can help. This can not occur until the post-industrial, modern individual looks beyond the Nintendo, AOL, and Pokemon, and learns to develop themselves into a real individual; to have self understanding and therefore a true self-identity.