Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them Study Guide

Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them by James Garbarino

Contents

Plot Summary

Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them by James Garbarino, Ph.D. was a study of the increase of violence in the United States of America from inner-city to small-town. It focused specifically on troubled young men who served time for violence that led to fatalities. Garbarino offered insight into methods society could use to recognize and respond to help troubled youth and decrease violence.

In the 1990s, media showed a haunting trend. There was a dramatic increase in homicides by troubled youth spreading through the American heartland. Safety was no longer a given for children going to school anywhere. Looking into history and interviewing the incarcerated young men associated with lethal violence offered clues to common denominator, which could be addressed to decrease violence in the nation.

In the first part of the book, Garbarino highlighted reasons that boys get lost. Using specific examples (with changed names to protect identities), he demonstrated circumstances and events that led up to the lethal killing that led to each young man's incarceration. Shame, depression, rejection, and neglect were common factors amongst the perpetrators. Children who didn't have a positive role model and felt vulnerable often lashed out via bad behavior. Young men seeking acceptance often found it from negative influences who initiated and furthered their criminal career. Many of the troubled youth also had a skewed form of justice and morality.

All was not lost, however, and the second part of the book focused on ways to help the "lost boys". When people take the time to look around them and study the behavior of boys who are causing trouble, they have the opportunity to intercept. Instead of just judging the boys, people can look at the boys lives to see what needs can be met to help the boys.

The author reflected on his own youth, recognizing that he was on a path to trouble. he also remembered that he had a support system that intervened and taught him that the behavior wasn't acceptable. He had a role models that showed him the correct way to behave socially, and he knew that he had people who care for him. He also had opportunities to get involved in community and school activities, and he was taught to believe in God. He had a solid anchor, and that helped him make choices that did not harm society.

It wasn't an easy task, but the author suggested that it is possible to reclaim lost boys and even nip some of the negative behaviors in the bud by becoming the anchor for some of the "lost boys". Some of the boys needed just one person in their life who will truly love them. Others needed someone they could trust. Some needed security and guidance. Many needed some or all of the above. It was the author's belief that these boys could be reclaimed by means of the power of psychological, social, and spiritual anchors. He believed in this so strongly that in addition to pointing it out in the book, he and his colleagues began an initiative within their own workplace to incorporate some of

the strategies highlighted in this book, including the monastery model which incorporated spiritual development as part of rehabilitation.

Preface - Chapter 1

Preface - Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them by James Garbarino, Ph.D. was a study of the increase of violence in the United States of America from inner-city to small-town. It focused specifically on troubled young men who served time for violence that led to fatalities. Garbarino offered insight into methods society could use to recognize and respond to help troubled youth and decrease violence.

In the preface, Garbarino addressed the fact that youth violence was once confined to war zone neighborhoods, but now was spreading across America. People began to question what was happening and what they could do to stop it from happening. Garbarino hoped to help people who are asking how to make a change by offering his unique insight after listening to interviews with the violent youth themselves. He hoped to offer strategies for rehabilitating violent teenagers in teaching nonviolence. Garbarino spent over twenty-five years studying violence and its impact on children. He interviewed the children of war as a representative for UNICEF and also used some of his experience as a father and stepfather. He offered thanks to his colleagues for working with him to help troubled youth.

Chapter 1, "The Epidemic of Youth Violence", was also considered a prologue by the author. The chapter began with his experiences in Chicago of January 1994. The author lived in Chicago for nearly ten years, until the mid-1990s. That month, the newspaper highlighted all the children who had been killed in 1993. Garbarino was concerned about his own son who was heading out into the neighborhood, but his son reassured him, pointing out that hardly any white teenagers were murdered victims. By 1998, things had changed. His family had moved to the small town of Ithaca, New York, and his children began to realize that even the school they went to in the remote area wasn't safe. This was because of the lethal youth violence that occurred in the 1997 to 1998 school year.

During that particular school year, sixteen-year-old Luke Woodham from Pearl, Mississippi, killed three students and wounded seven in his high school. Fourteen-year-old Michael Carneal went to a high school prayer meeting in West Paducah, Kentucky and killed three students. Eleven-year-old Andrew Golden and thirteen-year-old Mitchell Johnson from Jonesboro, Arkansas, killed four of their schoolmates as well as a teacher. In Edinburgh, Pennsylvania, fourteen-year-old Andrew Wurst attended a school dance and killed the teacher. Fifteen-year-old Kip Kinkel, from Springfield, Oregon, killed his parents then went to school and shot twenty-four students in the school cafeteria, killing two. These were not ghetto children. They were all middle-class, white teenagers from suburbs or small towns.

The stories devastated the nation, a nation who didn't even take into account all the inner-city children who were killed on a regular basis. Garbarino saw firsthand how this

affected society as crimes committed by non-minorities. He saw an America that never really cared about the increase of violence before it suddenly became very aware of the fact that they shared the problem. This book was intended to go beyond class and race to find the common emotional and psychological similarities that link violent youth together. The author's goal is to understand why the kids kill so that others could help prevent fatalities in the future.

When considering how much killing occurs in the United States every year, the author pointed out that the accounts don't take in improved medical technology, so comparisons to previous decades were inaccurate. He pointed out the inaccuracies of homicide data while pointing out that the greatest period of growth was from the mid-1980s to the 1990s. In this time, youth homicide rate increased 168%. Between 1994 and 1995, it dropped 17%, although that was still 50% higher than 1980. The author suggested that to truly understand the cause of violent fatalities, people need to look beyond the short-term trends. He also pointed out that the statistics to not include suicides, which had also skyrocketed. Youth suicide increased 400% since 1950.

In history murder in America, the author pointed out that the populations in the US that are most affected by youth violence are ones who are influenced by the south. Psychologists who study the phenomenon point out that the increased rate of African-American youth homicide correlates more to their Southern heritage and their African heritage. The authors point in this arena is that lethal youth violence is a result of a complex set of influences. He referred to the risk factors that Robert Zagar identified as correlations to a young man's chance of committing homicide. These risk factors include: child abuse, gangs, substance abuse, weapons, arrests, neurological problems, and difficulties at school.

All across the country, youth were experiencing in increased amount of negative influences related to youth violence. The young boys involved in the 1997and 1998 killings were prime examples. The author pointed out how these boys didn't have secondary criminal motives such as drug dealing or robbery like inner-city kids would experience. Many inner-city youth have dropped out of school, but middle-class teenagers outside of the city areas have school as a central part of their lives and communities. Garbarino pointed out how throughout history negative aspects began in lower income neighborhoods where nutrition and sanitation conditions were lacking. He used the Black Death of the Middle Ages as an example. He then pointed out how its spread out to you the surrounding areas until everyone was hit by the negative. Sometimes it mutated, but it still affected everyone. The author talked about the way unmarried teenage pregnancy followed this pattern as did latchkey children and lethal violence. He called it an epidemic.

Garbarino was very specific and deliberate about using the word epidemic because it showed how conditions had the ability to change quickly and dramatically. The author felt that it was a dark result of neighborhood decline, and he cited the case of Jonathan Crane, a geographer from Illinois, who identified where a neighborhood hit the point of social decline. He found that it was when the "affluent leadership class" families dropped under 6% in a neighborhood. When the more affluent and influential people

leave, the people who were struggling to survive had to fight each other for the rights to do so. The author remembered when he lived in the projects of New York City. When his father's income became too high for them to remain in the projects, they had to move out. This demonstrated how the poor were forced to live with the poor. A decade later, the area was an urban war zone. The author defined a war zone as a neighborhood where young teenagers regularly witnessed shootings and friends die.

Garbarino noticed that the war zones were not limited to large cities, and by the mid-1990s, even small cities had small pockets of war zones. This brought the violence into the schools. He remembered visiting a town in the American heartland back in 1970. He observed as town members politely listened to his mentor Urie Bronfenbrenner talk about the trends he saw of increasing violence in American society. Twenty-five years later, a group in the same area recalled Bronfenbrenner's words, telling Garbarnio that his experiences with youth violence were exactly what they were dealing with then. When Garbarino went back and told his mentor about it, the old man sadly pointed out that he had been trying to run intervention before became a big problem.

Garbarino found that when people talked about violent news, they didn't really want to understand the acts. All they were concerned about was the threat to their own existence. People were quick to jump on the death penalty, but this led him to question about who the child was inside the killer. The author, himself, sees the killers as "lost boys" whose personal experiences led them on the path that resulted in heinous crimes. Each boy had a unique story, and some of the stories were successful such as Julio who was a student at Cornell University. He was sent to a maximum-security prison when he was thirteen for shooting someone. He used the experience as an opportunity to change his ways. Religion helped put him on the path to controlling his anger.

When interviewing the boys, Garbarino noted that their lives were so filled with violence that killing someone was just another step on their normal path. He began a project, along with his partner Claire Bedard, to interview violent boys in there and their stories for common links. They did that at the Austin MacCormick Center, fifteen miles outside of Ithaca. It was a model facility that dealt with dangerous boys. It was here that he met Malcolm, a boy sentenced to four to ten years for second-degree murder. His life was filled with violence, and the night before they met, Malcolm's girlfriend was shot. She was six months pregnant, and the child died. Garbarino worked with Malcolm for months. Since Malcolm enjoyed reading, Garbarino bought him a book that he couldn't find in the prison library. The boy was very unused to gifts, and a tear fell as he received the gift. In Part One, the author planned to look into the history of each boy to determine why he became lethally violent. In Part Two, he planned to trust what people could do about it.

Chapters 2-3

Chapters 2-3 Summary and Analysis

Chapter two is the beginning of Part One, which is titled "How Boys Get Lost". Chapter two, itself, is titled "Rejected and Neglected, Ashamed and Depressed". It opened with the thought that there was a divine spark in every human, even in infancy. To connect with "lost boys", Garbarino found that it was important to look into their past to determine their journey in relationships. This gave insight to how their spirit developed.

This chapter was broken up into subheadings. In the section "Can a Soul be Murdered?" Garbarino showed through Byron's story that if not murdered, a soul could certainly be wounded. Byron was a young man on death row who was there because he killed a police officer back in 1994. He was a victim of extreme neglect himself. When Garbarino went to interview him, he found a beautiful soul. They talked for two hours, and Byron explained that the four years he spent in prison awaiting his trial gave him a chance to reflect on his own life and the meaning of life.

According to the author, the soul was protected through temperament, resilience, love, divine intervention, and talent or ability. Garbarino focused on connection, both human and spiritual. He showed how it was important to child development. He felt that some children could adapt to the environment they were put in, having the temperament to withstand the difficulties life threw at them. Other children had a more negative temperament, which meant surviving was a struggle. He found that resilience was a crucial part of the equation for a healthy soul. People needed the ability to overcome adversity. Love was another factor that kept the soul alive, whether it was from a family member or someone else. Another factor Garbarino believed in was divine intervention. This could come in the form of a spark that kept the soul alive, or a unique talent or ability that a child possessed. The divine intervention was what the author found in Byron who is able to withstand extreme abuse. The young man also had his mother's love and religious beliefs passed on by his grandmother.

In the section titled "Does Parental Behavior Matter?" Garbarino talked about the critical role parents played in the lives of their children. Not only did parents determined whether or not a child will live or die (thousands of children are murdered by parents on an annual basis through neglect and abuse), but they also affected the psychological well-being of a child. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, serious depression in American youth increased from 2% to nearly 25%. According to research, most violent boys struggled with depression before carrying out lethal crimes.

When a parent wasn't around for a son, he could feel personally rejected. When a mother rejected a son, he could feel shame. If a parent didn't take care of a child properly, he could lose his respect for any authority figure, and he might never learn the importance of attaching emotionally to other people. This was a common issue with

many of the lost boys that Garbarino interviewed. Rejected by society, they felt alone and socially vulnerable.

Chapter three, "How Early Vulnerability Becomes Bad Behavior", expounded on the topic mentioned in chapter two. The author focused on the story of Dennis, who was a troublemaker in school. He was kicked out of several different schools and soon entered a life of crime. Thomas, another young man the author interviewed, had a very similar story, as did Malcolm. Many violent youth started misbehaving early in their lives. For most of them, their parents gave up on them when they were young instead of taking time to help them change their negative behaviors. Garbarino pointed out studies that discussed bad behavior starting early. He addressed the fact that it is very important to understand when chronic bad behavior begins. A youth resorting to bad behavior later on in life was easier to work with than one who had Conduct Disorder from a very young age.

When negative behavior began during childhood rather than during adolescence, it had a longer period of time to build up to, and it could interfere with normal development. If the bad behaviors began when a youth was in adolescence, it was generally part of the phase. The violent boy most likely had more positive relationships and experiences from the past to fall back on. Many adolescents experienced a period of bad behavior, but when that that behavior began during childhood, it most likely had no relation to peer influence. The author pointed out that according to research, a child with a pattern of bad behavior might have been dealing with problems related to separation, violence, abuse, physical temperament, or neurological deficits.

The author also pointed out that it was very important to understand why a boy was behaving badly, rather than just labeling the bad behavior. It brought up the old nature versus nurture question, and the author pointed out that boys are born with different temperaments. Behavior was a result of society and biology. Many of the boys interviewed were abused and emotionally abandoned. The author cited circumstances where a boy exhibited negative behavior at an early age, but adults intervened and set them on the right track. He also pointed out that children with harsh backgrounds struggled cognitively, hindering intellectual development.

When delving into the background of an incarcerated boy, psychologists attempted to determine what caused the negative behaviors. They found that children maltreated at an early age were more uncooperative with other children than those who never suffered maltreatment. Psychologists also noted that children who didn't have parents bond with them in infancy were more prone to discipline problems as they became older.

The author pointed out four elements that were specific for the code that abused children develop. He pointed out that children became hypersensitive to negative social cues. They became oblivious to positive social cues, developed aggressive behaviors that they were ready to use, and determine that aggression was the best way to get what they wanted.

Not all abused children became violent criminals, but many of the ones who were resilient had other sources that offered them love and guidance. The author ended the chapter with the story of Roger Torrey Peterson, a troubled youth that found his niche as an internationally acclaimed expert on birds. A teacher invested time in him and cared enough to start a Junior Audubon Club in the school so he would have a positive setting in his troubled life. The chapter ended with a message of hope.

Chapters 4-5

Chapters 4-5 Summary and Analysis

Chapter four, "Discovering the Dark Side", focused on the human side of violence. The world was filled with violence, and one couldn't turn on the news without seeing a litany of crime. The children who were vulnerable were more susceptible to the violence that surrounded them. The author made a point that humans already had an inclination toward violence, and now the world itself was a more dangerous place. He recalled the conference he went to in 1986 that focused on ritualistic child abuse and serial killers. During the seminar, he gained deep insight into the dark side of human nature. A side so bad that many choose to ignore it. The author found in his research that understanding when and how young boys learn the secrets of the dark side is a tool to unlocking why they become lethally violent teenagers. Some filled the emptiness inside them with violent images and violent acts.

Garbarino recalled how times had changed since his own youth. He remembered offending somebody by writing about them in his high school newspaper column. It made him angry, and they dumped garbage on his lawn. Yet he felt that in the world the violent boys lived in when he was writing the book, instead of garbage on the lawn, there would have been a shooting. Children had easy access to weapons, and due to rejection in their own lives, lacked the social mores that would prevent them from hurting others.

To demonstrate how times have changed, the author recalled a visit to a day treatment programs for emotionally disturbed children in Chicago. The school director asked for help. They started the program in 1970 and used the same model. In the 1990s, the program was no longer effective. in the author's opinion, the social environment of the country was so negative that it affected the violent youth, and the program collapsed.

Children with no hope for the future weren't worried about ramifications for their own behavior. Many troubled boys were surrounded by evil, and couldn't live in their environment without joining in and becoming violent themselves. The dark side was very human, and no one was immune. Once this was realized, according to the author, one could examine a violent boy's moral universe in order to see it clearly in its own terms and saw how it related to the moral codes and values of society.

There were several factors that the author highlighted that he felt contributed to increased youth violence. In addition to noting easy access to weapons, he highlighted rejection from society. Racism, devaluation, and isolation were related to increased violence. A realization of how fragile the body is could be another contributor. A sense of being responsible for one's own survival is another factor. When a boy realizes that he can't trust anybody, that he needs to stay strong physically rather than being eaten down constantly, and then have to fight for his own survival, there was a higher chance to become violent.

Violence comes from depersonalization and desensitization. The other pointed out that the personalization leads to treating others in an impersonal way. The military uses desensitization to overcome the natural human inhibitions against killing other humans. Before World War II, soldiers practiced shooting at full-size target. They had a difficult time killing humans in reality. After World War II, the military changed this training tactics and started using desensitization. Garbarino's felt that society was getting desensitized through the media, and that the increased legal violent acts relate to easy access to weaponry, desensitization through violent video games, violent images in movies and television, and the loosening of social controls.

Chapter five, "A Boy's Code of Honor", showed the reader that a common conception of morality was not necessarily the same idea of morality that a violent youth sees. Garbarino stated that this was the most difficult challenge to address when dealing with kids who kill. He brought to light different questions about morality, especially about killing. He challenged the reader to think about certain situations when murder might be appropriate. In doing so, the author pointed out that there are gray areas, but there are also areas that society considered part of the standard moral circle.

For example, some might think that there is no excuse for killing another being. We might judge kids who kill as boys with no moral sense. What we might not have factored in was that to some young boys, killing is perceived as a necessity. They might feel it's their only escape from abuse, or they might be put in a situation where they think they will be killed by someone else, such as a gang member, if they don't do the killing.

The author recommended that everyone look in a moral mirror and to look into history. There was a time when it was deemed acceptable for a husband to beat his wife after marriage. There was a time when slavery was morally accepted. The rules change in wartime, when it's considered acceptable to kill somebody to save your own life. The author does not condone the actions of the violent youth, but encouraged society to take a deep look at the perpetrators sense of social mores. He stated that when working with troubled boys, it's important to understand where they stand on these moral grounds. In the author's opinion, few boys ever hit a point where they are beyond morality. These few are considered psychopaths. He pointed out different ways to work with boys, citing specific examples in helping the youth deal with perceived injustice, shame, violence, being wronged, and making moral mistakes. Garbarino showed how it was possible to nurture morality and help a violent youth develop a conscience and a sense of empathy. He demonstrated the importance of helping the youth understand that morality is a very prevalent part of living in the world. Garbarino used Malcolm's story to show that caring and conversation could actually change a behavior. After five months of conversation, the young man who earned a healthy living fighting pit bulls confessed that he no longer could put any of his dogs into the ring. He had developed a sense of empathy.

Chapters 6-8

Chapters 6-8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter six is the first chapter in Part Two, which is titled "What Boys Need". Chapter six itself is titled "The Power of Spiritual, Psychological, and Social Anchors". Part Two of the book contained a full section on helping young boys who were already violent and creating a world where less violence is spawned. As the chapter opened, the author remembered when he was a child. His behavior was under control, but his thoughts were not. He was kept on track, however, thanks to people who cared for him, activities that he participated in through this community, through school, through cultural messages that taught moral responsibility, and through his belief in God. He called these factors his anchors and addressed the fact that it is critical for society to create anchors for boys prone to violent crimes.

Giving violent boys a sense of meaning, an idea that they are in the world for a real reason, might be enough to ward off some of the negative behaviors. Psychologists noted that sometimes troubled to young men change their behaviors after fathering a child. The child gave them a sense of meaning, something to live for.

Giving violent boys a sense of meaning, an idea that they are in the world for a real reason, might be enough to ward off some of the negative behaviors. According to studies that the author pointed out, religion also played an important role in helping reduce violence in a boy. In a study organized by Andrew Weaver, adolescents involved in spirituality had reduced suicide rates, less depression, less casual sex, a better response to trauma, and they abused substances less.

In order to survive and change their behaviors, young men must develop a sense of resilience. They have to find a way to overcome adversity and thrive, dealing with stress in a positive manner. Having people in their life to care about them can offer young men the stability they need to develop resilience. It can also give them an authentic sense of self-esteem. Social support promotes pro-social behavior and offers young men the emotional affirmation they might need to remain resilient.

Chapter seven, "Saving Violent Boys Isn't Easy", addressed helping prevent violence in boys before problems even began to happen. One recommendation was to begin helping parents early to create an ideal environment before the child was even born. Since neglect and abuse were strong components that contributed to violent boys, a trained professional visiting a home could assess the environment and help parents provide an environment that met the needs of an infant and young child emotionally and physically. Continuing visits could help prevent violence in a boy as trained professionals help parents with their parenting and help identify potential problems in a child's development. If a problem was identified, the professional could help the parent find assistance to help the child work through problems before they became a real issue. The author also recommended finding quality early childhood education

programs that offer children support, education, and monitoring. He also stressed the importance of violence prevention programs both in the community and in schools. Conflict resolution, mediation, and peer counseling programs were also points that were brought up in preventing violence in young men. On a political level, the author recommended setting up standards that reduced the exposure of children to violent images. He also recommended making weaponry more inaccessible to youth, especially ones of the propensity towards violence.

Chapter eight, "Reclaiming Lost Boys", focused on ways of working with boys who were already violent. The author pointed out that reversing the negative momentum was difficult to do, but not impossible. Many youth advocates believed that treatment should begin outside an institution, using therapy. Studies showed that communities that offered multi-systemic therapy had a decreased rate of re-arrest and incarceration. When this didn't work, or a community couldn't offer therapy outside of institutions, violent boys could benefit from time in a juvenile institution. Garbarino pointed out that once a boy came out of prison, the chances of rearrest were very high. This was often because the boys were put back into a tough environment filled with temptation. He recommended that violent boys receive counseling that encouraged them to change the way they approached life and changed their way of thinking. To create a successful counter-violence program in a prison, the first item in the agenda was safety. When a boy doesn't feel safe, he isn't going to think about changing his behavior. A therapist would define the weakness in the violent boy, and help the boy develop strategies for facing their future environment. Many violent boys didn't consider their future, since they didn't think that they had much of one. A therapist could help a boy think about his future so he had the desire to change and continue living. The violent boys needed to realize that they were important, and many needed help developing a sense of empathy.. Garbarino believed that religion was one of the major healing points for violent youth. He and his coworker believed so strongly in this that they set up a monastery model in the youth detention facilities they worked in.

Characters

James Garbarino, Ph.D.

James Garbarino, Ph.D. is the co-director of the Family Life Development Center and a Professor of Human Development at Cornell University. He is a father who has seen how violence has spread across America over the decades. He sees the impact that violence has on his own children as they prepare to go to school while hearing about shootings and killings around the country, even in rural areas. Garbarino works with troubled youth who have committed violent felonies. While he doesn't condone their actions, he understands that there are events in situations that have happened in their lives which have led up to the point of committing the act that precipitated their arrest. His goal is to really understand the boys in order to help them and to help prevent violence in the future for the boys he works with, as well as other young men who are on the same violent path.

Claire Bedard

Claire Bedard is Garbarino's colleague. She is a specialist in human rights education and works internationally with street children. The author respects her insights on communicating with troubled boys. Bedard and Garbarino worked together to assemble a small team at Cornell University's Family Life Development Center to interview kids who were in jail or awaiting trial for committing acts of lethal violence. She was a big influence in this book. It was Claire who studied Christian and Buddhist contemplative practices that inspired Garbarino in his own spiritual development and his decision to use the monastery model with troubled youth. Claire teamed up with Garbarino and some other staff members in 1999 to implement the monastery model with a small group of violent and troubled boys. The entire group, including Bedard, was frustrated by the way the system worked, and were willing to risk their time and efforts to make some changes.

Josh

Josh was Garbarino's seventeen-year old son who went to school in Chicago.

Joanna

Joanna was Garbarino's fourteen-year-old daughter who went to school in Ithaca, NY.

Eric

Eric was Garbarino's fifteen-year-old stepson who also went to school in Ithaca, NY.

Urie Bronfenbrenner

Urie Bronfenbrenner was Garbarino's mentor.

Julio

Julio was an example of a success story in which a lost boy who was redeemed.

Byron

Byron was a death row inmate who learned the light of life.

Malcolm

Malcolm was a boy whose story Garbarino referred to numerous times throughout the book. He was a prime example of depression turned lethal.

Racheen

Racheen suffered from emotional disconnect.

Terrel

Terrel had dominance issues.

Sharif

Sharif struggled with abandonment and relationships.

Dennis

Dennis had a long history of being a "bad boy" in school.

John

John had an emotional disconnection.

Sharnell

Sharnell struggled with fear.

Peter

Peter was very reliant on his guns.

Allan

Allan was very reliant on guns.

Corneel

Corneel pointed out that girls were attracted to violence.

Stanley

Stanley was a psychopath.

Objects/Places

Pearl, Mississippi

This is the town where sixteen-year-old Luke Woodham killed three schoolmates and wounded seven others.

West Paducah, Kentucky

West Paducah, Kentucky is the place where fourteen-year-old Michael Carneal killed three students in a prayer meeting at school.

Jonesboro, Arkansas

Jonesboro, Arkanses is where thirteen-year-old Mitchell Johnson and eleven-year-old Andrew Golden killed four schoolmates and a teacher.

New York City Projects

This is where the author grew up.

Chicago

Chicago is the place where the author lived before moving to Ithaca.

Ithaca, New York

Ithaca, New York is where the author lived while writing this book. It's a rural university town in central New York.

Austin MacCormick Center

Approximately fifteen miles from Ithaca, the center is a model facility that works with "lost boys".

Guns

The author feels that easy access to guns has escalated the fatalities caused by "lost boys".

Television and Film

The author feels that increased violence seen on television and in film has increased the incidents of fatal violence.

Internet

The author feels that increased violence seen on the Internet has increased the incidents of fatal violence.

Themes

Lost Boys

Watching the news, it's simple to lay blame on the perpetrators who conduct violent acts that result in the death of innocents, or even not-so-innocent, victims. In this book, the author delves into the lives of these perpetrators in order to ascertain why they became so violent. His goal was not to glorify the deeds, or even to make excuses. His goal was to identify any common factors that contributed to the violence in "lost boys" in order to help save them and prevent more violence in the future. He took the time to get to know each "lost boy" as an individual rather than just an anonymous criminal.

The author sat down with them and learned their stories while analyzing their behaviors. He learned that many of the boys lacked love and structure. Abandonment played a large role in their lives. Many were victims of abuse, and many of the "lost boys" were forced into a violent lifestyle because of their own environment. They owned weapons to protect themselves and became involved in criminal activity in order to save their own lives. Some of them were looking for a place to belong, a place where they could be accepted. They found this acceptance in gangs and in different cults such as satanic cults. To maintain their status in the games and cults, they were forced into criminal activity, which escalated to the point of the fatal violence for which they were incarcerated.

Violence

Violence has been part of human existence for as long as anyone can remember. In the United Sates of America in the mid-1900s, violence was mostly associated with the inner-city and the ghetto. This changed over time. In the latter part of the century, youth violence had increased and spread across America, reaching rural communities.

Children as young as eleven years old were going into school and shooting other children. The author interviewed boys who were incarcerated because of violence that turned fatal. He studied the works of people dedicated to understanding youth and violence and compiled his own thoughts on why the boys in America have turned violent.

He also researched methods on ways to work with the boys to help them become less violent and to reduced violence in upcoming generations. In order to do this, the author studied the lives of the boys including their home environment, their neighborhood, their schooling, and their own personalities. He also focused on societal issues such as what it means to be a male in the United States today and what females look for in a male. He looked into the contributions of Internet, film, games, and television. In doing so, the author noted a direct correlation with the increase of violence in relation to the type of

media many of the perpetrators immersed themselves in. Another key factor in the increase of violence in youth, according to the author, is the easy availability of guns.

Attitude

Attitude is another main theme in this book, and it affects everyone from the reader to the author to the perpetrator. The author has a very compassionate attitude. These lost boys have been scorned by society, and he sees them as real individuals who have a chance of redemption. He doesn't agree with their actions, but he doesn't reject the human behind the actions. Rather, he does everything he can to help them. He takes on the attitude that violence can be decreased in youth if people take the time to understand what is behind the violence.

Attitude plays a serious role in the rehabilitation of the violent youth. Some choose to cut off any type of assistance, while others embrace a change. Those who have an attitude of hope are or are fine but the way that they view the world changes. They learn about empathy and also learn that there are some people out there to help them. This is a very positive attitude adjustment for an individual who has never experienced love before in their life.

The author wrote this book hoping to affect a reader's attitude. Instead of harshly judging criminals, ideally, the reader will have an attitude that encourages open mindedness, which leads to an understanding that can help promote healing for the "lost boys". The goal of this book is to have readers understand that they can help youth so that they never become "lost boys" themselves, further damaging society.

Style

Perspective

Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them was written by a man who dedicated his life to working with troubled, incarcerated young men. He spent the early years of his childhood living in the projects of New York City, then had to move out because his family was making too much money. He clearly saw the flaws of the system as people in poverty were thrown together without hope. He saw a direct correlation with the increase of violence on the streets and in the households with the increase of lethal violence across the country.

This book is a compilation of stories that work together to prove a point that violence in the young men frequently stems from a genetic past. The author hoped to prove a point that if people saw the warning signs and worked with the youth from an early age, there would be a decrease in violence. There is clear throughout the book that the author has done his research. Not only does he cite personal experience and interviews with the incarcerated young man, but he frequently cites quotes and studies that back up his points. These are studies and quotes from psychologists who dedicate their lives to certain areas a psychological study that he is using to prove his own point.

Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them shows that we have a very real issue of violence in our society. It also shows how there can be hope to decrease the violence. The book offers practical solutions for addressing the issue in creating change.

Tone

The tone of Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them is subjective, and the book is written in first person. When reading it, it's easy to feel as if one is attending a well-rehearsed lecture. The author clearly states his purpose then backs it up with examples that the reader can identify with. It almost comes across as conversational, and although some very difficult issues are addressed, the reader never feels overwhelmed or lost.

The author provides a good balance of the importance of the topic of violence, the heaviness of the trauma that has happened to the boys he worked with, and the sensitivity of the reader. Rather than focusing on glorifying the negative things that have happened in the boy's lives, or even using the events as an excuse, the author clearly defines the issues and makes the reader feel the need to take action to help the boys. Then, the author gives some specific examples of methods that have worked for centuries, say some examples of methodology that is working currently, and offers ideas for working with "lost boys" today and in the future.

In addition to never feeling lost, the reader is given a sense that they, too, can take steps to help "lost boys". Because of the way the author has set up the book, the reader understands that one doesn't need a fancy degree to help others. Rather, it begins at home or in the neighborhood with individual contact, some understanding, and some love.

Structure

Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them has a preface in which the author explains the importance of this book and why people should read it even if their own child does not have violent tendencies. It shows how the behaviors of violent youth affect everyone in the country, and the preface explains why the author is taking the time to explain and make sense of youth violence. The process is followed by eight chapters. The first chapter goes into more details on the epidemic of youth violence, as its title suggests.

Chapters two through five make up part one, which details how boys get lost. Each chapter focuses on a certain area. In part one, readers focus on rejection and neglect and ashamed and depressed boys, vulnerability turning into bad behavior, the dark side of "lost boys", and the Code of Honor. In part two, readers learn more about what boys need. They do this by learning about the power of various anchors, focusing on how saving violent boys is not easy, and reclaiming "lost boys".

Part Two is followed by an appendix which highlights places to go to get help. It lists a variety of resources for prevention and intervention. Instead of just listing various resources, the appendix also provide summaries of each resource explaining specifically what the mission of the resource is. It also provides contact information for the various resources. The reference section comes right after the appendix, listing all the resources used in this book chapter by chapter. After the reference section there is an index.

Quotes

"The 1997-1998 school year will go down in American history as the turning point in our country's experience and understanding of lethal youth violence."
Chap.1, Lost Boys, p. 2

"Harvard psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint said, 'When white middle-class kids kill, there is always a public outcry of why and a search for what went wrong, but when inner-city minority kids kill, the public is warned of demons and superpredators.'"
Chap. 1, Lost Boys, p. 4

"My goal is to understand why kids kill and to help other parents and professionals understand so that they can do something to prevent it in the future."
Chap. 1, Lost Boys, p. 6

"He recounted this as I sat within one of the facilities two isolation rooms, used both to punish boys who were in trouble to keep a watch on boys who were sick or were thought to be suicidal (and reminder that more violent individuals die at their own hands than are put to death by a society committed to the death penalty)."
Chap. 1, Lost Boys, p. 27

"The risk factors are there to be found in the more subtle forms of psychological maltreatment, in alienation from positive role models, in a spiritual emptiness that spawns despair, in adolescent melodrama, in humiliation and shame, in the video culture of violent fantasy that seduces many of the emotionally vulnerable, and in the gun culture that arms our society's troubled boys."
Chap. 1, Lost Boys, p. 28

"Faith is the most profound cognitive restructuring that I know of."
Chap. 2, Lost Boys, pp. 37-38

"Shame at abandonment abandonment begets covert depression, which begets rage, which begets violence. That is one of the powerful equations of life for lost boys."
Chap. 2, Lost Boys, p. 44

"In the hours and minutes leading up to their crimes of carnage, some violent boys seem genuinely unaware of the human significance of what they are about to do."
Chap. 2, Lost Boys, p. 54

"Today's violent high school boys are, for the most part, the bad boys in elementary school from five or six years ago."
Chap. 3, Lost Boys, p. 65

"According to the results of a study conducted by Johns Hopkins University psychologist Sheppard Kellam and his colleagues, violence prevention programs and effective classroom management techniques in first grade can have a dramatic effect on the likelihood that an aggressive six-year-old will become a violent 13-year-old."
Chap. 3, Lost Boys, p. 66

"According to the studies by Dodge and his colleagues, children who are maltreated are much more likely than non-maltreated children to develop a chronic pattern of bad behavior and aggression."
Chap. 3, Lost Boys, p. 80

"Recall the study in Germany conducted by Friedrich Losel and his colleagues showing that in low-risk families, high school bullies had unusually low heart rate (62 beats per minute, compared to 70 beats per minute for other boys) and victimized children had higher heart rates (75 beats a minute)."
Chap. 3, Lost Boys, p. 88

"Recognizing the humanity of troubled boys does not mean ignoring or rationalizing their legal behavior."
Chap. 4, Lost Boys, p. 95

"A boy once said to me, "If I join again I'm fifty percent safe. If I don't join a gang I'm zero percent safe.' Adults don't enter into this equation."
Chap. 4, Lost Boys, p. 111

"We can save our sons, even our temperamentally volatile sons, from turning violent by connecting them to positive values and embedding them in positive relationships."
Chap. 6, Lost Boys, p. 149

"Materialism cannot anchor boys, but a sense of meaningfulness rooted in higher purpose and a more enduring reality can."
Chap. 6, Lost Boys, p. 152

"As we will see later, harnessing spiritual forces may be the key to reclaiming troubled boys even after they are established on the path of lethal violence."
Chap. 6, Lost Boys, p. 154

"Communities with a majority of high school students attending religious services at least once a month were twice as likely to be among the communities with the fewest problem behaviors among youth than were communities in which a majority of kids did not participate in religious experiences."
Chap. 6, Lost Boys, p. 170

"Although this legal trend seems quite consistent with the fact that younger and younger children are leaving childhood to enter adolescence, with all its special issues and challenges, it highlights the importance of preserving childhood for at-risk boys as a strategy for saving them from violence."
Chap. 6, Lost Boys, p. 177

"Literacy and literature are vitally important in the process of reclaiming violent and troubled boys, because they can find new alternative models for themselves in a positive lives of others."
Chap. 8, Lost Boys, pp. 227-228

"The goal is always to convey acceptance as an antidote for shame and to build a justifiable sense of pride and responsible and appropriate self-esteem among boys who have been 'looking for love in all the wrong places.'"
Chap. 8, Lost Boys, p. 229

Topics for Discussion

What part of James Garbarino's background made him want to work with "lost boys?"

What did Garbarino think of the violent youth that he worked with and interviewed on a regular basis?

What did Garbarino think of the crimes that the boys committed?

What were some of the common elements that Garbarino found in the lives of the "lost boys?"

What were some of the suggestions Garbarino offered for helping violent youth?

How does the spirituality affect a troubled youth?

What types of programs are in place to help perpetrators and potential perpetrators?

What can you do to help decrease violence in young men in today's society?