

**In the Shadow of Columbine:
Working Parents Rethink their
Strategies for Raising Teenagers**

Elaine Bell Kaplan, Ph.D.

Working Paper No. 57

Elaine Bell Kaplan is a Senior Postdoctoral Researcher at the Center for Working Families and Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Southern California.

Acknowledgments: All names and locations have been changed to protect confidentiality. I am indebted to the Berkeley Center for Working Families at the University of California-Berkeley and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for providing funds to support this research. A special thanks to Roberta Espinoza, who conducted six of the interviews. Thank you to Arlie Hochschild, Barrie Thorne and, especially, Allison Pugh for reading and commenting on earlier drafts.

© 2001 Center for Working Families, University of California, Berkeley

Abstract

This study is based on in-depth interviews with thirty-two employed middle-class parents of teenagers. This study addresses the parent's notions about safety, danger, violence, the Internet and the care required to raise teenagers. The findings suggest that parents divide into two groups of parental care by age of the teenager: Each grouping captures these parents' belief systems about parenting, their own experiences as teenagers, and their desire to understand the world of their teenagers. This study reveals that each group of parents had to contend with a number of challenges to their parental authority and with institutional and cultural changes that affected their relationships with their teenagers. In this study, parents admit to feelings of insecurity, uneasiness, and of doubting their ability to parent teenagers. The study concludes by arguing that parents of teenagers need support from their communities and from the larger society.