**Applying the Social Sciences to Life: Case # 2**

On April 6th of 1999, at around 2:40 pm, city bus maintenance workers for OC Transpo in Ottawa saw a former employee drive his car into the parking lot. He got out carrying a loaded Remington hunting rifle. Pierre Lebrun walked deliberately into the bus garage. In less than six minutes, he killed four co-workers and seriously injured two others. He entered a bus where eight workers were finishing their afternoon coffee break, swore at them but did not fire a shot, and finally killed himself.

An inquest was held to investigate the incident. Joseph Casagrande, one of the workers at the bus garage that day, as asked how Lebrun seemed when he entered the garage. Casagrande replied: “He was blank, just blank. He didn’t sway. He didn’t even blink an eye.”

Pierre Lebrun was a quiet and reserved man who appeared to live an isolated life. He did not really have close friends, and there is no evidence that he had any romantic relationships. His parents lived in Ottawa, and they were virtually his only social contacts. Many of his problems at work related to his stutter, which became worse when he was agitated or frustrated. Some of his co-workers mocked him by mimicking his speech, which naturally made the problem worse.

Lebrun had no criminal record and had given no indication that he was capable of such violence. He had been in trouble only once. In August 1997, he punched a co-worker at the bus garage. He was moved to another garage and forced to take a twelve week anger management course. In a self-evaluation at the end of the course, he wrote that he did not feel he had met the goals he had set for himself. He offered no further explanation for what this meant. After completing the course, he returned to his usual location, but quit a few months later. Almost exactly a year after completing the course, he returned to the garage and went on his shooting rampage.

At the coroner’s inquest, Dr. John Joanisse provided information about over fifty visits Lebrun made to his office over eight and a half years. Lebrun complained of stomach cramps, insomnia, depression, diarrhea, and a host of other conditions. He would sit quietly in the doctor’s room, for hours if necessary, until his turn came.

On many occasions, Lebrun complained that people from OC Transpo were following him all over town. By July 1994, Dr. Joanisse was writing “paranoid” in Lebrun’s medical history, meaning that the patient was suffering from delusions. This diagnosis indicated that Lebrun had a mental illness characterized by irrational feelings of persecution from others. People with such an illness are likely to feel that family or co-workers are out to get them, even when there is no evidence to support such a feeling.

Lebrun made genuine efforts to deal with his problems. He did not miss a single class at his anger management course. Nor did he miss a class when he was being treated for his speech impediment in 1997.

But Lebrun was never fully able to solve the problems that overwhelmed him. His sense of reality began to fail. He tried unsuccessfully to deal with the demons that haunted him. On a trip to British Columbia and Las Vegas in March of 1999, he wrote in his diary that union officials from OC Transpo were following him. Evidence given at the inquest showed that he cut short his trip, drove the 5000 km from Las Vegas to Ottawa in three days, and went on his rampage the following day.

In recent years, there have been a number of recorded cases of men returning to their former places of work and shooting former colleagues. Most of these cases have occurred in the United States. Many of the men who did such things shared some common characteristics.

In many ways, Pierre Lebrun fit the image of such a person. He was unpopular. He was a loner. He had felt the pain of being mocked by others. He appeared to have a low tolerance for frustration and had problems controlling his anger.

During the inquest, there was a lot of testimony that showed Lebrun’s behaviour was unusual. At OC Transpo, he spent his breaks alone, eating quickly then sleeping until it was time to go back to work. There were a number of “red flags” (warning signs) whose significance was not understood until after the rampage. These included the assault, being harassed at work, low self-esteem, and access to a rifle. Such experiences and factors are common among people who have shot their workplace colleagues.

Many employees at the bus garage spoke at the inquest. The OC Transpo bus garage had nurtured a poisonous environment, characterized by hostility and aggression. Employees felt that managers did not respect them and treated them, in the words of one witness at the inquiry, “like children.” Morale was low, he continued. People had expected that one day an employee would come into the office and “shoot a manager.”

This workplace culture may have contributed to a sense of worthlessness, causing employees to act in antisocial ways. Virtually all of the mechanics and support workers were male, and there was much macho behaviour. Many had nicknames such as “Moose” or “Gonzo.” They talked about fishing trips, hockey, and women. There was great pressure to accept the values of this culture in order to fit in and be accepted.

**Your tasks:**

Complete the following tasks in your notebook.

1. A) Make a timeline of events involving Pierre Lebrun as told in the section above.

B) Do you think anyone at any stage could have done anything to prevent this tragedy?

1. Do you think anyone at the OC Transpo bus garage on the day of the shooting could have prevented the tragedy? Give reasons for your answer.
2. A) Describe what aspects of the case would interest an anthropologist.

B) Describe what aspects of the case would interest a psychologist.

C) Describe what aspects of the case would interest a sociologist.