Another Mass Killing Spree in California. The Insanity of Modern Life

The Epidemic of Mental Illness

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Yet another mass killing spree erupted in an affluent beach town in Southern California at the start of this holiday weekend. Normally every Memorial Day Americans annually mourn the loss of fallen soldiers who have become victims in never ending US wars. But this year Americans are additionally mourning the tragic loss of a half dozen college students victimized by the never ending US war on mental illness.

The insanity of modern life is creating so much strife and despair, more and more individuals are reaching their breaking points and increasingly acting out their anguish and severe disturbance through violent horror. The growing frequency of these terrible lethal attacks are always accompanied like clockwork with another flurry of loud calls for gun control and a renewed focus on mental health issues. But the horror and indignation comes and goes and nothing ever changes in any substantial way regarding either efforts to control gun access or addressing the national epidemic of mental illness... until the next heinous bloodbath. This cycle just keeps repeating itself indefinitely almost now on an ever week to two week level. Yet nothing ever is done about it.

Mass murdering killer Elliot Rodger spent his final hour on earth last Friday night first knifing his three roommates to death and then taking his BMW out on a last hurrah, drive-by shooting spree killing three more young victims in his Isla Vista neighborhood adjacent the UC Santa Barbara campus. In addition to killing four young men, three of who he lived with, and two female university students, Rodger shot and injured eight others and ran over and wounded five more victims during his reckless and brutal rampage.
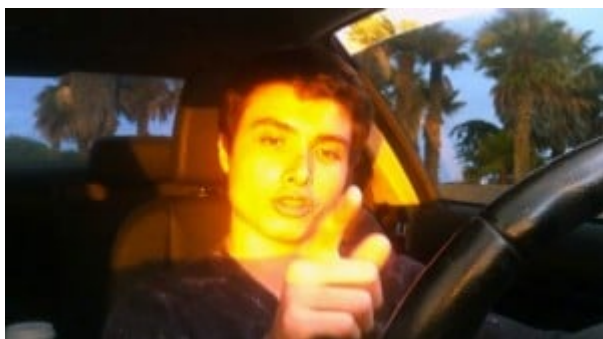
Elliot Rodger was a 22-year old Santa Barbara Community College student who made frequent short videos just weeks and days leading up to last Friday evening's tragic mass murder-suicide. Minutes before embarking on his murder spree, he emailed his 140-page manifesto called "My Twisted World" that chronicled both his life and pain to several others including his mother detailing his "retribution plan" to kill. In addition to his autobiographical account, his selfie videos recorded near his home in Santa Barbara also became his final confessional, serving a function of venting his

anguish, anger and pain that he had felt trapped in for nearly a decade. The plight of his lonely, tortured life days before his death was matter-of-factly delivered in a series of videos, indicating he had long been planning his "revenge against humanity."

Clearly he felt far more comfortable with the camera running than speaking directly to other human beings. A family friend and spokesman told the LA Times that his family believed he had a mild yet undiagnosed case of Asperger's Disorder, a form of mental illness that is a developmental disorder related to autism. Asperger's symptoms include difficulty socializing and developing relationships, exhibiting very limited eye contact. Victims of this disorder often display movement that appears awkward and uncoordinated to others. His family ensured that Elliot had been in therapy for years but were unaware that he had legally acquired a gun and never believed him to be violent. The family spokesman stated that Elliot was always socially withdrawn and that the more confident persona viewed in Elliot's videos was not the same person he had known for years.

However, on April 30th his mother residing in the Los Angeles area viewed several of his posted videos on youtube that she felt were bizarre and disturbing enough to prompt her to contact his therapist who in turn called the Santa Barbara police to pay him a visit at his apartment. Because Elliot presented polite and cooperative behavior explaining that it must have been some sort of misunderstanding, the officers were sufficiently satisfied to conclude that he presented no threat to himself or others and after a few minutes left the premises. Elliot wrote in his 140 page manifesto that included that when he saw seven police officers at his door, "the biggest fear I had ever felt in my life overcame me." He figured that he would likely be busted right there on the spot fearing his written murder plan and cache of loaded weapons in his bedroom would be discovered but the police never bothered to inspect his apartment.

Apparently Elliot Rodger became intoxicated at a college party he attended not long ago and became so enraged that he turned violent toward both male and female partygoers, allegedly trying to push them off an apartment balcony. He created such a stir that his peers ended up pushing him off the balcony railing.

Born to an affluent family in England, his 140-page life account reflects back on his childhood as his best and only positive memories. He felt loved and taken care of by his parents who were both in the entertainment industry. His Malaysian born mother worked as a nurse on film location where she met his father Peter Rodger, a successful film director with assistant director credit on the 2012 blockbuster "The Hunger Games" as well as a longtime professional photographer, the same field with which Elliot's grandfather also achieved some acclaim.

In his early youth, Elliot went to a nearby private school where he wrote that the most stressful activity was being forced to play soccer, writing that he avoided it as much as he could by hanging around the goalie net trying to be a second goalie. Elliot has a four-year younger sister who is reported to be well adjusted. Elliot especially struggled emotionally when his parents divorced.

In his videos Elliot repeatedly complained that he had no friends, also corroborated by his family. With his camera on while driving his BMW around town, he playfully winks and nods at the camera for effect. Then in another video he seeks solace at his favorite local park commenting on how much he loves its natural beauty.

In so many ways Elliot was the embodiment of America's quintessential values. Just days prior to his killing spree, he casually commented how he went to such great lengths to dress well and look good, bragging how he spent $300 on his slick pair of sheik sunglasses, pleading with the camera and us as his would-be viewers to give him the answer to his pressing question why so many girls hated him so much and never gave him the time of day.

The disturbed young man admittedly lamented he was a virgin, never having a girlfriend or even kissing a girl or holding hands. What becomes readily apparent on video is that Elliot was an insecure narcissist who thought his physical appearance was so "magnificent" and "beautiful," he could not comprehend how such a magnificent physical specimen who always made sure he wore the most fashionable clothes and accoutrements, drove the right car, and otherwise had everything going for himself, could never attract women. He obsessively repeated why a young man like himself with such a "sense of style, sophisticated, well traveled, and so intelligent" could not attract girls. He hated that beautiful women in Santa Barbara would always love "obnoxious, ugly, undeserving guys" who in comparison to him were no match for all that he offered and possessed.

A telling and rather chilling moment captured on one [video](#) is when he was walking in a golf course parking lot where he frequented to watch the sunset, marveling at the beauty of the world around him. Then as he approached his sleek black BMW and noticed his reflection in the car window, he narcissistically pointed to himself and uttered, "There's me, in all my fabulousness... oh yeah, Elliot Rodger... [laughs] I am so awesome." After getting into his car, he marvels how beautiful the world around him is, but how unfair life has been for him because he had been denied love, sex and companionship that he constantly saw his peers enjoying. But then he began pointing his finger at the camera as a sinister smile came over his face, and he vowed to correct the problem of women never being sexually attracted to him, "rectifying" life's unfairness with a vengeful laugh and the following ominous statement:

"In all my magnificence and power, I will not let this fly... it's an injustice that needs to be dealt with."... [end of video].

A short time later he was murdering six innocent young people in a violent orgy of revenge. His bewilderment over why he was so unlovable to women turned into years of loneliness and pain that had festered inside him like a clicking time bomb. In recent months his built up hatred and deep narcissistic wound morphed into bitter anger and raging revenge acted out heinously last Friday night.

Elliot was a product of a society and culture that emphasize and value all the external assets with which he was lavishly and plentifully endowed. In all the popular movies, TV shows, commercials, and music North Americans are saturated with every single day, the mantra message that all we need in order to be happy and content in life are the right look, the right clothes, the right car, on down to the right sunglasses and we will automatically get that hot girlfriend or boyfriend we always wanted. Just as relief from any physical pain and discomfort is an instant fix away with a Big Pharma pill, so are loneliness and sadness just some buyable commodity away and instantly we will finally be able to start enjoying the good life we always fantasized and desired. Ordinarily these superficial props in a superficial society are enough to attract superficial guys and superficial girls. According to all the unwritten rules, subliminal messages, societal customs and the propaganda hype drummed into our heads daily, Elliot should have gotten the girl. After all, that is what is promised and

guaranteed in a culture that judges and defines individuals by skin deep appearance, by what we wear, what we drive and where we live.

No doubt Elliot bought into all that society bullshit that assured him he possessed everything he needed to produce the desired result. By virtue of all he owned and offered according to the cultural brainwash, for all intents and purposes he should have been a happening dude. All his assets entitled and earned him the coveted status that guarantees being deemed a desirable catch for any young woman. In his and our world of crass materialism and surface level appearance that means everything especially to young people, Elliot could not fathom, understand or grasp why he had seemingly been cursed with so much rejection and utter sense of invisibility over his last eight years.

Sadly Elliot Rodger failed to realize that the empty void he felt inside could never be filled or adequately compensated for by all those externals he believed automatically entitled him a beautiful blond girlfriend by his side, complete with wild sex, companionship and love. He could never escape his inner sense of loneliness, emptiness and chronic low self-esteem. His inner angst is what he most likely projected externally, transparently manifesting as social anxiety and fear that crippled him from ever developing a relationship and enjoying the longed for experience of having a girlfriend and feeling loved. And then feeling so inwardly insecure and different from his peers, he was always the frustrated outsider looking in, never accepted or gaining a feeling of belonging to any peer group. His inner sense of social inadequacy and impairment from his mental illness that he likely minimized or was in denial of prevented him from fitting in with his peer group his entire life.

But once again this latest tragedy of violence and devastating loss of life is another national wake-up call to finally do something constructive to address this mushrooming mental health epidemic exploding in America. A first critical step is addressing the enormity of mental illness in America. Another massive problem needing radical change is addressing violence in American culture. A third intervention is to decrease access to lethal weapons.

Obviously as a nation we desperately need a comprehensive plan to begin to adequately address the growing epidemic of mental illness. Historically for several decades in this era of deficits and cutbacks, always the first "entitlement" program funding to be cut has always been mental health. Forty years ago state hospitals across the nation shut down and pushed severely mentally ill people into board and care facilities with minimal treatment. A high percentage of them have ended up homeless as discarded refugees living and dying on our city mean streets ever since. With such depleted funding sources from the federal, state and community levels, mental health services have subsequently been drying up to become nearly extinct. Thus, our care and treatment for the mentally ill has become pathetically minimal to nonexistent.

As a result, the long term costs of maintaining a revolving door broken system of providing acute hospitalization care for the mentally ill whose conditions become so severe and acute in crises that they pose a danger to themselves and/or others has never worked. Doping someone up to smother acute symptoms for a couple of days on the mental ward and then releasing them right back into the community with no further treatment or aftercare until the next crisis is applying the band aid approach that has never been an effective treatment for our chronically impaired population. It is also neither cost effective nor humane. What all this calamity, misfortune and tragedy has led to is the current national emergency to come up with a large scale plan of action to provide comprehensive mental health services at all

community and statewide levels. This will then lead to early detection of mental health issues amongst our general population that will more effectively identify troubled youth and young people most prone to acting out violently and subsequently be able to deliver more effective long term care and treatment to those most in need.

Perhaps what is most necessary to help overhaul our near nonexistent mental health system currently reduced to shambles is education on a massive scale to remove the unjust stigmatization of mental illness. Every horrible crime committed by a mentally ill person means that the stigma of the mentally ill invariably goes up a huge notch, reinforcing the enduring false stereotype that all mentally ill people are violent and dangerous creatures. The fact is the mentally ill population is less violent than the so called normal population (normal in this case being the non-mentally ill). This is where education needs to make in roads into the widespread ignorance that drives stigmatization. If our nation is to realistically execute a strategic and feasible plan to collectively improve the mental health of its citizenry, the approach needs to obviously be a multi-layered, multi-disciplinary approach operating together at all levels of our society.

Educating people is getting them to realize and understand that to be human is to be imperfect and flawed, and that part of the human experience is to have problems. No one family or individual is perfect and immune from possessing at least some problems or level of psychological dysfunction. Once everyone is in agreement in understanding the universality of the imperfect human condition that is in all of us, we are then able to realize that human problems manifest on a wide spectrum of severity, from the most minor, neurotic and least impaired to the most severe and profoundly psychotically debilitated.

The fact remains that there is no such thing in real life as normal, it is a mere abstract construct of what is the statistical mean or average in any human behavior. Not one person is normal, and if we honestly examines ourselves or anyone else close enough, slight deviations from that statistical normal state that is nonexistent in the real world can be found in all of us. Thus, this most basic human understanding frees us from all interpersonal judgment. If we simply accept the universality that in one way or another at some moment in time in our lives we all might be considered a little crazy, then we may learn to not judge and stigmatize others but actually embrace our individual differences, the richness of our human diversity and increase tolerance. Finally, most people would likely agree that those of us deemed closest to the statistical aggregate of what is most normal in behavior and lifestyle also tend to be the most dull, boring and forgettable amongst us. Bottom line, few of us actually desire to ever be average and mediocre.

We need to change the culture of violence by changing our very psyche as a people. This is a process that can only be attained if intervention strategies are launched on multiple fronts. Implementing mental health programs that educate us as a society by teaching tolerance and compassion would also assist in decreasing the widespread incidence of bullying.

Though bullying has been around forever amongst younger people, bullying today has been recognized as the modern plague for school aged children. It targets innocent, vulnerable and often defenseless individuals as victims who, as a consequence, are alarmingly killing both themselves and others at unprecedented, never before seen rates today. Today suicide is the third biggest killer for youth up to age 24 with males more than four times more likely due to using firearms to do it.

Virtually every single mass murderer is a longtime loner who was bullied, ridiculed and made fun of to the extent that over many years their hatred turned to plotted revenge of the worst kind. Elliot Rodger was no different. As a society we must stop the bullying by intervening immediately, taking serious action against bullies and then with a nationally and culturally enforced zero tolerance policy ensuring it does not continue. We must also readily identify victims of bullying and provide ongoing support, protection and treatment when and if needed.

Offering a support system and safety net with proactive comprehensive mental health services and education built in at every age and level of our society would facilitate early identification of individuals suffering from depression, emotional problems, suicidal and/or homicidal thoughts, poor anger control, alienation, social withdrawal and any warning signs of potential mental illness. Instead of having one school psychologist assigned to each school, a mental health team of professionals should be in place providing supportive and educational services in and outside every classroom that would be guaranteed to reduce the risk of violence.

Only by changing the culture of violence and emotional and mental health at the micro ground level can the culture be transformed with real and substantial improvement and progress at the macro level. It requires a never before commitment as both a people and a nation. In the aftermath of this latest crisis, it does not mean merely paying lip service or a passing fancy based on pious platitudes and disingenuous rhetoric, never fully backed up by action in the form of robust funding and implementation.

Just as teachers responsible for educating and shaping our children's lives that are our future have historically been undervalued and underpaid, mental health and childcare workers have also been grossly underpaid and undervalued. To attract the best and brightest minds and hearts for such valuable, vital contribution and entrusted responsibility for our society, we owe the special and gifted people in these noble helping professions far more than what has been given them. When a day laborer or garbage collector/aka sanitation engineer makes more money than such important and needed people holding masters degrees and years of training and credentials, something is inherently wrong with both our national system and national priorities.

Improving and stabilizing the floundering economy is at the bedrock of drastically needed change in America. The growing disparity between the rich and poor has fueled the mental health crisis. Our struggling economy has created so much stress and despair on so many people for so long, more who are no longer able to cope have been driven over the edge and resorted to unspeakable acts of violence as an unhealthy maladjusted reaction. Thus, more jobs are desperately needed to put more people back to work, more financial opportunity given to access higher education that has become increasingly unaffordable to a growing segment of our population, along with more programs that will benefit people at the lowest socioeconomic level to become financially stable and independent. The horrendous debt of college loans needs to be eradicated. Programs specifically assisting families to move from poverty to middle class should be given top priority. Of course with a sluggish economy still barely recovering from major recession, all these goals and programs should have been in place a long time ago. Instead movement in the opposite direction has ushered in an era of austerity and a fast disappearing safety net currently unfolding.

A comprehensive multi-pronged approach to combating the epidemic of violence in the US has to move far beyond the realm of mere economic development but towards a

fundamental transformation of America's values and priorities. Embedded in our cultural roots is the 1st Amendment right of free speech. Under the guise of free speech and notion that so called art merely reflects what already exists in the cultural milieu, the entertainment industry has gotten away with saturating the public with graphic violence, death and destruction for far too long. Meanwhile, decades of empirical research examining the negative effects of violence embedded as a staple of popular music, films, television, video games and other mass media venues have determined bi-directional causality between violence in the media arts and actual violence in reality in the communities.

Mass media effects play a role in copy-cat crimes, where one sick individual is motivated to competitively outdo another sicko's previous crime or copy cat what they have seen already in film or video. Some unstable individuals are motivated by a sense of becoming notoriously infamous, with delusions of grandeur that movie deals and books will follow, which have not always been so delusional. Only relatively recent legislation in some states has outlawed a criminal's future financial gain from prior convicted crimes. But knowing their crimes will stir a media frenzy is enough to motivate and prompt some to take violent action. To some degree Elliot Rodger was addicted to leaving his mark through video and writing his manifesto as a parting legacy beyond his horrendous killing.

All the enormously profitable entertainment industries make trillions of dollars off of violence. Their grand scale global platforms showcase violence as not only acceptable but in many cases desirable. They simply brainwash, desensitize, influence and negatively impact especially impressionable young males to commit violence, be it in mass shootings in malls, movie theaters, schools, or mass drive by shootings (not to mention killing on some faraway oil-rich war zone).

The bottom line is violence has always been highly rewarded in American culture. Top paid athletes typically compete in extremely violent yet very popular sports making trillions of dollars off of gladiator-type violence. Musicians regularly write songs and sing about hatred, crime and violence and often live it out in real life. And for a century now actors have been acting out violently in bigger than life stories on the big screen that glorify and glamorize violence.

Studio industry executives behind all these violent front men get even filthier rich pushing and peddling violence on the masses like a drug. They do it amorally because depicting violence has always been a proven moneymaker for them. Responsibility is a two way affair. Short of censorship and violating free speech, the industry needs to clean up its act. But audience goers need to take responsibility by weaning themselves off violence and boycotting violent films, TV shows, music and video games. If the industries made no more money peddling violence, they would no longer make violent products for mass consumption.

The entertainment industry is not the only guilty party. For over half a century America's little boys have been entertained every Christmas and birthday by toy soldiers like GI Joe, toy guns galore, military models of planes and tanks, board games, hundreds of video games, all glorifying and rewarding war and violence. In mass marketing and production a highly profitable partnership between the entertainment industry, toymakers and fast food chains churn out thousands of violent superheroes and warlike figures to keep young boys mesmerized and brainwashed by violence and war – all by design not only to rake in money but readilyproduce fresh generation of young Americans willing to die for their Empire half a

world away on foreign soil.

America needs to take a hard, brutally honest look at itself and wake up. As a nation and society we have been profiting off of violence far too long. In the same way we are addicted to oil as mass consumers, we are also addicted to violence not just as consumers but too often as perpetrators as well. Incidence of males typically bullying other males as well as battering and abusing girlfriends, wives and children is far more common than ever gets reported. Yet based only on available reported statistics, one in four women experience domestic violence and one in six is sexually assaulted. One in three women in the military are sexually assaulted. One third of all murdered women are killed by their intimate male partner.

Males in our culture have long been conditioned to accept anger as their only acceptable emotion to feely express without fear of being thought of as weak or feminine. They have also been conditioned and socialized to embrace violence as an honorable and desirable function of manhood defined as masculine strength and prowess. Millions of American males like Elliot Rodger have very serious anger and violence issues that desperately need to be effectively dealt with and significantly reduced. This calls for fundamental changes in our culture's values as well as redefining how males are socialized, treated and perceived. We need to free males to express their softer, more caring, feminine sides without fear of being called a sissy, a wimp, a little girl or some other derogatory, damaging label. Men need to grow up and evolve from being twisted up little boys acting out uncontrollably.

Instead of hype and irrational hysteria when it comes to guns that is always merely reactive and does nothing, the US needs to execute a plan that is both proactive and rational. First, we need to not allow the National Rifle Association (NRA) to sabotage and kill every effort to take constructive gun control action. As a nation we must make it harder for people to gain

access to guns. When the founding fathers came up with the 2nd Amendment right to bear arms, they hardly had in mind military assault weapons with multiple magazine clips capable of mowing down a classroom of first graders or people in the streets.

The stale argument that bad people will always access lethal weapons is a given. Illegal flow of handguns selling on the black market is big business that law enforcement must make a priority of going after and intercepting in order to make a dent in taking them off the streets. And this means never selling weapons to drug cartels and criminals as the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms did. Though trying to stop the flow of illegal gun sales will not stop all bad people from getting guns or from killing, it will definitely lower the murder rate by gunshot.

It also does not mean we should not make every effort to make it more difficult for any Joe Schmoe to buy a gun legally. It is unacceptable to spew off rhetoric about the urgency of gun control now and then a week later when it becomes yesterday's news go back to being a non-issue again. Now is the time for the hype to stop and the nation to act.

In recent years as mass killings have gone up exponentially, under the power of the NRA gun control laws and their enforcement have actually gone down. First order of business is banning all high powered weapons with rapid fire magazine clips made strictly for soldiers fighting wars. Yet even after the Connecticut classroom shooting, disgracefully spineless politicians were afraid to pass any laws for fear of recrimination from the NRA.

Perhaps the Newtown shooter would never have gotten his hands on his mother's three

legally purchased guns and killed 27 people if they were not so readily available to him. Much more stringent requirements than just a quick background check and a small waiting period before issuing gun permits is necessary. Keeping weapons out of the hands of mentally ill persons and convicted felons is not enough. Much tighter control over various gun shows around the country to ensure that they are in full compliance with all current gun laws is also sorely needed.

In conclusion, the fact remains while mass killing sprees have steadily been on the rise, mental health funding throughout the United States has always been on the decline for national, state and county cutbacks over the last thirty years in this country. There currently are extremely limited mental health services even left.

This nation is all about hype with leaders who pay lip service and never mean what they say. Mental illness has never been an urgent priority in America or long ago its leaders would have put their money where their lying mouth has been. There simply is no honest commitment or national will to develop any comprehensive plan to implement any large scale change regarding both mental health or gun control. Instead only hysteria and protests for change ring louder for a few days after each unfolding disaster then quickly fade. Something major either has to drastically change or the horrors of gun violence and people acting out more violently more often than ever will only continue.

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