

Mass Killings: What We Know and Where Do We Go: Roundtable Discussion, Southern Criminal Justice Association, 2015

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Abstract

There have been a number of mass shootings in the U.S. These may be addressed from different contributing and causal aspects that address the gamut of mass shootings. The paper is restricted to those shooting that comply with the FBI definition of mass shooting as an attack in which a minimum of four victims are killed and the murders take place in a relatively close proximity. The current paper will provide a short history of mass shootings, applicable theories related to mass shooting, detection and warning signs and mental health as well as media / press limitations and effects, and the effects of the internet, movies, and violent games.

Keywords

Mass Shooting, Mental Health, Criminology, Bullying, Gun Control

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1. Introduction

The Southern Criminal Justice Association Annual Conference in Charleston, SC was the setting for a roundtable discussion of criminologists from four educational institutions focusing on the topic of mass shootings. Joining in the roundtable were Professor Frank Schmalleger, distinguished professor emeritus from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, Dr. Tom O'Connor, associate professor, and Criminal Justice Director, Institute for Global Security Studies Austin Peay State University School of Technology, and Dr. Jeff Rush, Chair of the Criminal Justice Department at Troy University. The final discussant and chair of the roundtable was Professor Michael Eskey, the program coordinator and professor of criminal justice at Park University.

Overall, there have been a number of mass shootings in the U.S. The discussion addressed these in a number of ways, but was not intended to cover the entire gamut of mass shootings. At the core of the discussion was an agreement on a definition of mass shootings. The FBI definition dating back to 2005 was used in defining a mass shooting as an attack in which a minimum of four victims are killed and the murders take place in a relatively close proximity (Lemieux, 2014)

Each discussant focused on specific areas of mass shooting. The roundtable included a short history of mass shootings, applicable theories related to mass shooting, specific causes, views on prevention views, and current debates on gun control, gun laws, and enforcement. Additionally, discussants addressed detection and warning signs and mental health as well as media / press limitations and effects. Finally, the importance of the effects of the Internet, movies, and violent

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computer games were discussed, finalized with a focus on lessons learned for law enforcement & related agencies.

2. Focus of the Discussion

Researchers have attempted to measure, forecast, anticipate, speculate, and predict the myriad of motives of revenge, power, loyalty, betrayal, terror, profit, etc., coupled with the public's outrage, fear, beliefs, and anxieties that the problem of mass shooting, is getting worse. And, news coverage and internet news, and social media have brought mass shootings to life. Today, the American public can watch chilling live coverage much like many people did from their home, a public place, or Internet sources on August 26th when a perpetrator shot and killed two former co-employees on live television. Even more recently, the attention of the United States was again focused on a mass- shooting at Umpqua Community College with the senseless shooting deaths of ten innocent victims. We find mass shootings, at various distant locations, simply by turning on the big screen, or Internet news media feeds. This has had an impact on the perception and fears of the public.

Just some mathematical 'facts' about mass shootings (and this is not from the stance of an economist, statistician, or mathematician). There are 11,000-plus homicide deaths by firearms every year, and roughly 21,000--plus suicide by firearms (slightly over 65 percent) (Ehrenfreund and Goldfarb, 2015). Thus, though we pay close attention to the number of deaths by firearm each year (around 32,000 – plus), we do need to be mindful that more than 65 percent of these are suicides. We have 3.5 homicides by firearm per 100,000 people per year. Mass Shootings account for a rate of 0.001 per 100,000 people per year (an average of 25 per year). For example, in the 30-year period through March 2013, there were 78 public mass shootings in the United States – that is shooting incidents with 4 or more people killed by a gunman (Bjelopera, et al, 2015).

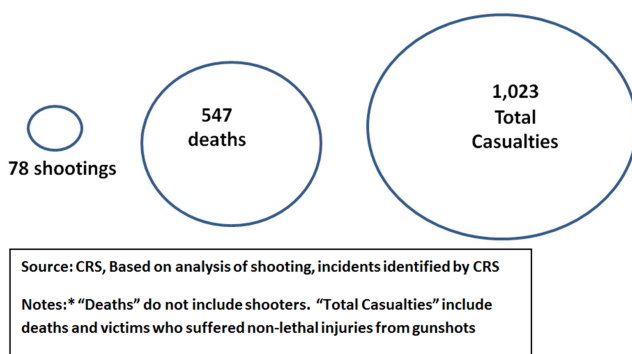


Figure 1. Public Mass Shootings in the United States 1983 – 2012 Deaths and Total Casualties.

These 78 incidents accounted for 547 deaths of people which

are less than one tenth of one percent of the 559, 347 people that the FBI estimates were murdered in the U.S. over this period of time. (Salentan, 2013; Yamana, 2014; Leghorn, 2013) The point is that the number of mass public shootings, where the shooter intends to commit mass murder in a public place, has not exploded over the last five years. Mass shootings have not increased, as frequently claimed in the media, either in terms of the number of attacks or the number of people killed. Instead, the evidence points to a stabilization of the numbers of attacks and victims.

It should be noted that these mass public shooters differ from other killers in many systematic ways. They usually die at the scene of the crime. And, over half are known to have suffered from mental illness at some level prior to the attack (this percentage varies by various studies) (Lott & Riley, 2014). The killers also usually, carefully plan out their attacks. These are not 'heat-of-passion'- random acts. The active shooter tends, more often than not, to be motivated by a deeply personal grievance tinged with feelings of persecution and humiliation, real and perceived; whereas, terrorists are oftentimes going to be motivated by more than ideological reasons (Twenge, 2014). The shooters are typically cowards; almost all mass shootings take place where civilians are not allowed to defend themselves (Goode, 2015). The typical attack involving so-called assault weapons is no more deadly than those involving other types of weapons, e.g., semi-automatic rifles or pistols (Fox and DeLateur, 2014). What motivates and deters "mass public shooters" is quite different from gangs fighting over drug turf (Singal, 2007). They want to make a statement against a specific "target," or group, or type.

It has been a disturbing five years, for mass shootings across our nation with such incidents as Roseburg, Roanoke, Lafayette, Nashville, Charleston, and locations that bring memories such as New town, CT, or Aurora, CO, Tucson, AZ, Fort Hood, TX , and the Navy Yard shooting. Certainly there were others between and within these and the past five years, and in fact, the Roanoke and Lafayette shootings did not actually meet the FBI standard of a minimum of four shooting deaths. When these events occur, before the death tolls are counted in our mass shootings, we already have our pundits, critics, politicians, relatives of victims, police experts, and even criminologists putting forth proposals and solutions to this problem. Initially, experts tend to focus on guns and gun control. Others focus on our need to expand our mental health services; and, others point at our need to increase our levels of security at schools, military installations, shopping malls, theaters, churches, and wherever is next.

No matter what the agenda and no matter how much passion is involved, a multitude of "experts" have made certain

assumptions about murderers, especially mass shooters. The problem is their assumptions aren't always consistent with the facts. The current paper includes the discussion and presentation of four criminologists. Many have attempted to offer explanations for the causes and underlying factors related to mass shooting. The current paper does include the publications of experts and other contributors to this topic. This work is intended to add to discussions and add to the current body of knowledge on the topic.

3. Theory

There are a number of criminological and sociological theories that can be utilized to attempt to explain the phenomenon of mass shootings. Most of the theories have a three- stage sequential model consisting of antecedent variables which are usually your deep factor variable, your background factors, that may go back to the childhood trauma (such as getting hit on the head as a kid, a childhood sickness, social or mental impediment or something similar). And, occasionally policymakers will listen to the third factor and try to get at the root causes of the deep backgrounds. Typically, researchers focus on the mid-range variables which are referred to as intervening variables and we note that the most non-complex crimes usually have one or two prominent intervening variables. However, particular types of crime, like terrorism or mass shooting, have multiple intervening variables; thus, there are many black boxes in the middle to account for in the analysis. Next, the importance of facilitating variables is included in the analyses. These are the triggering events that occur at the end of the event. These generally involve co-conspirators or leakage or some sort of activity that allow for risk factors/warning signs approach to be addressed (O'Toole, 2012).

There is also the danger of stereotyping, and the similar research with the risk factors approach. This may result in test results of false positives and false negatives. These may

come up when viewing this from a theoretical sense. There is always the risk of committing a Type II error (Miller, Reynolds & Pilkonis, 2005; Smith, et al, 2002). Obviously, there are numerous possibilities of measuring and testing theories, and this has provided an overview and introductory platform for theory as related to mass shooting.

a Strain Theory

The type of strain theory that appears to be applied to most of the subject of mass shooters, is Agnew's General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992). This was introduced in 1992 and consists of three main variable groups: (1) failure to achieve positively valued goals; (2) loss of positive-valued stimuli; and (3) presentation of negative stimuli. Stress and life-stressful events have consistently and statistically produced a high predictability finding by performing multiplicative terms, which you might multiply such variables/events as Christmas holidays with divorce or something that might end up producing a more effective stressor variable. The author has personally tested Agnew's theory empirically, using various regression techniques, e.g. step-wise regression, multiple-regression, multiplicative terms, and models; and, it generally has not yielded significant results testing the independent variable of "stress" alone. It is relevant to what is sometimes called, in this area, "injustice collectors", referring to people that tend to collect injustices, or grievances, or gripes, and so forth (Sichel, n.d.; O'Toole, 2012). It may very well be that this is some psychological variable, or "locus of control" or something along this line that its backward form is such that these individuals perceive the coming of things like Thanksgiving, or Christmas, divorces, and similar events as some undeserved entitlements, with personal, negative consequences. In actuality, it is unknown if they perceive their stressors differently or not; it may very well be the case, or, conversely, it may not be the case.

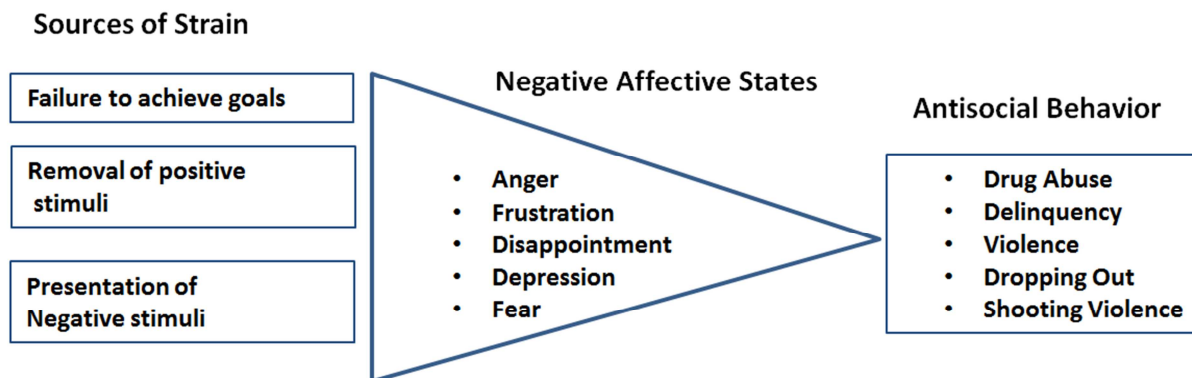


Figure 2. Elements of General Strain Theory.

The second area group is hassles (daily life events) as they are called from what Agnew's theory extracts from the sociological group of the emotions field, taken from the research of Lazarus (1980). Hassles are the daily interpersonal kinds of gripes and dislikes or rivalries or envies that you have when you meet other people every day and you might say, I wish I had a body type like them, or, I wish I had a brain like him; or, I wish I was smart or rich like him, or something similar. In fact, the top five hassles were found to be concerns about weight, the health of family members, rising cost, home maintenance, and just too much to do. We have discovered with mass shooters, particularly with school shooters, that a lot of this rivalry and peer envy goes on (Ghose, 2012). But, that comes up under learning theory which is more of a pure learning theory than strain theory.

The third area of general strain theory is inequity. Agnew derives inequity from an old exchange theory which might be recognized in strain as from Merton, or Cloward & Ohlin, as the disjunctive and dysfunctions between aspirations and expectations or a means-ends gap theory, or differential opportunity as is sometimes called in criminology. The idea is that if you have an "American Dream" or if you are following the American Dream, or you have some psychotic case of neuro-stratus belief or aspirations that you want to, for example, go down in history as the guy that killed the most people, or something similar, it may be hard to predict and prevent. We have these aspirations of glory or high aspirations of how "I'm going to be captain of the school debate team or quarterback on the football team; but, we find out that we can't reach these goals or reach these dreams". So, your expectations are low (as will be your accomplishments); but, your aspirations are high. This is probably the most common definition of strain. Here, the use of the idea of strain is used as opposed to the word 'stress.' Merton's strain theory argues that strains or stressors increase the likelihood of negative emotions like anger and frustration. Agnew (1992) would quite frequently interchange the concept of stress and strain.

The next concept is a strain theory devised by Alan Fox and Jack Levin, the Northeastern University professors, most people know as the 'deans of death' (Cornwell, 1996). Fox and Levin are co-authors to numerous books, articles, and studies on this topic. In 2005, they wrote an article that had a five stage model title "Cumulative Strain", which consisted of the usual strain variables – failure in school, failure in occupations, and romantic failures (the inability to have a steady girlfriend) (Fox & Levin, 2005). Levin and Melfis (2009) followed this study up with what they called uncontrolled strain. This included a lack of pro-social

attainment, isolation, rebellion, and facilitating variables (triggering variables) involving the acute factors such as grades, graduation (sometimes brought out by Agnew, that even good things such as graduation and finishing school successfully can be as painful and stressful as "not" graduating) (Agnew, 2007). Thus, it is possible to have stressors where good things happen, yet the person reacts by doing bad things. This is somewhat of an unusual reaction of strain conceptions. Additionally, there is a fantasy stage of planning, and related things that occur with deviant or unlawful act. And, then, finally, there is the weapons facilitation of the acts (Levin and Malfis, 2009).

It should be noted and mentioned, there is a related theory that comes from sociology, not primarily criminology: bullying. Starting in the late 20th century, sociology began using the bullying hypothesis (Baldry & Farrington, 2000; Eslea, et al, 2004). There has been extensive research in this area and it may be hypothesized that the average r-squared in bullying research is about 15 percent, or 0.15 of explained variance of bullying. But, there have been extensive spin-off ideas in the bullying literature (Patchin & Sameer, 2011). The famous latent homosexual panic defense, a form of homophobia where males view other males as too-feminine-looking or too-feminine-acting; and, this can result in an individual lashing out in a more masculine way. (Lee, 2008; Lee and Kwan, 2014). This was somewhat used to explain gay-bashing in the 1970s and 80s (Herek, 1986). And, additionally there is the famous 'Southern' hypothesis that has come out of the bullying hypothesis (Anderson and Anderson, 1996; Lee et al, 2007). This implies that the southern states have more of a macho culture, resulting in more violence. Some males just can't live up to the macho expectation and can't wear the big belt buckles (symbolic) and this causes them to do evil things.

b Control Theory

There are sociologists that address this phenomenon and this is somewhat of a spin-off of sociological theories. Control theory, was introduced by Travis Hirschi (1969) with four concepts of the bond: attachments, commitments, involvements, and beliefs. The attachment variable, of course, is related primarily to the family. We have a number of interesting findings with mass shooters. One is the parental "death" where sometimes one has died or there is a step-parent; or, there is a divorce or separation or absent parent or something along those lines. The family factor of parenthood is important and then there is also sibling order and sibling rivalry. Most of the mass shooters have also been the youngest child; and, there is also the physical size, especially height. On average the shooters are five feet, one inch, which is fairly short compared to the national average. Some

researchers have suggested (sociologists and some of the control theorists) that this has to do with some sort of birth issue or something related (such as hormones and things related to growth).

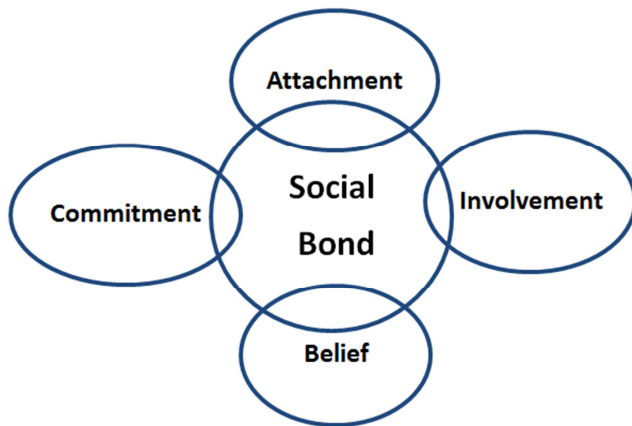


Figure 3. The Four Components of the Social Bond.

Source: Schmallegger, F. (2014) *Criminology*, Prentice Hall

Concerning the commitment variable, a lot of these people are like what the FBI profilers, John Douglas and Robert Ressler (initial investigators of serial killers; in fact, coined the term “serial killer”), found that these appear to be cop ‘wannabe’s’ or military ‘wannabe’s’ and have military aspirations or they want to join the military only to have no means of going into some type of profession that is action-oriented and then, they just failed at their attempt (Wilson, 2007; 2014). The other interesting thing about it is what we saw with the serial killers literature was the wannabe criminal justice major. There have actually been a few cases of these school shootings that the shooters have been criminal justice professors’ sons, the youngest son, and the shortest son. So, anecdotally, if you have short kids, you might be careful, as criminal justice sons might be an at-risk group.

Involvement with control theory usually includes things like midnight basketball and the like. Keeping individuals busy so that they stay out of trouble, e.g. idleness is the devil’s workshop. A lot of community and relocation factors, as well as migration are considered. There have been several of these shooters that have been either immigrants or sons of immigrants, or they have moved around the country a lot because their family has moved around. This makes it harder to be involved in the local community activities and so forth. Travel is a factor/issue.

In the belief concept of social control, we have the first contact with police obviously a big factor that produces an ideology of whether you like police or don’t like police or whether you are pro-law enforcement or anti law-enforcement. The issue here is to ensure that our criminal

justice majors are pro-law enforcement, and not anti-law enforcement. Our biggest issue on screening is to ensure that they are pro-law enforcement.

c Learning Theory

Finally, the learning theory by Ronald Akers utilizes peer variables as facilitators (in a leakage context). I think the percentage is somewhat around 80 percent of mass shooters leak their plan to others (peers) either directly or indirectly. This is done through social media or something similar. So you have a warning sign at that point.

Substance abuse is a big issue. Covert rehearsals are an issue. The levels of risk-taking and avoidance behaviors are important. The media influence, to include video games, is important. The following video games have been linked fairly strongly to mass shooters: Doom, Postal, and Grand - Theft Auto, Quake, and Resident Evil (*Video Games*, 2011). Movies of influence include: Natural Born Killers, Elephant, Schwarzenegger movies, Clint Eastwood movies, the Fight Club (Brad Pitt) and Saw.

d Other Theories

Finally, these are some left-over theories to be included. Psychological theories of Yacov Rofe’, Smirnoff personality theories, reality theories made a comeback, various other theories of anti-social personalities, narcissism, psychosis, childhood traumatization, and then, sociology and criminology contain various imitation and copycat theories, usually based on Jack Katz’s phenomenological theory of senseless murder, and the like. This is a conclusion to the theoretical scope of this field and a large important portion of the usage of theories to the challenging crime of mass shooting was introduced.

4. Prevention

Some readers may recognize Professor Schmallegger (co-author) as a textbook author; that’s what he does. He does this every day, but he spends the first four hours of each day at his computer looking to see what’s been published and what major news media networks and web sites are writing. This enables him to search for topics to write about. He tries to stay abreast with the latest information and news. So, in preparation of this presentation and article, he utilized mainly newspapers to see what the news media, are saying about mass murderers. Keep in mind that these opinions are those of *laypersons*, not officially “qualified” criminologists or clinicians.

There was an informative article in *The Wall Street Journal*, indicative of popular writing on mass shootings (Smith, 2015). The writer was Tom Smith from the University of San

Diego, a law professor. Smith asserted that mass shooters aim to tell a story through their actions. They create a narrative about how the world has forced them to act. And, then they have to persuade themselves how to behave so that they can go and act it out. The final steps are the crafting of the story and it's telling through outer warnings before the attack itself.

Experience, according to Smith, suggests that mass shootings are a kind of theatre to them. That is, the entire world is a stage. Seen this way, shootings are a kind of theatre, and the shooter is acting out a public spectacle. The mass slaughter of random victims is really an attack against society. Then, the typical consummation of mass shooting and killing is suicide by the perpetrator. This perverse revenge against society denies justice or closure because the offender does not allow for a trial or punishment; yet the offender gets his pound of flesh for the perceived sins committed against him.

Another writer also in *The Wall Street Journal*, Ari Schulman, opined that we should use a public health model for analyzing mass shootings (Schulman, 2013). This is a credible idea because there are some studies that have been done using the epidemic model, and they have looked in particular at suicides. So, the goal of this approach would be to prevent the spread of similar events, even though we don't understand why they are occurring.

There is a relevant—and very interesting—example from a Columbia University study: In 1984, there was a rash of suicides in the Vienna subway system. This amounted to folks just going down to the tracks, and when the train came they would jump off the platform, throw themselves in front of the train, and get killed. So the newspapers in Vienna wrote all about these events. Each incident was detailed, naming the person committing the act, how he did it, how he prepared, what he was wearing, what he did the morning before, and whether he had left a note. All these gory details appeared in the print media.

But then the Viennese official policymakers asked, why don't we get the media to stop publicizing all this? Or, at least, if we must abide with publication, let's get the media to bury those stories in the "back pages," rather than give the suicides front-page headlines? The officials were able to get the media to effect this change, and suicides-by-subway declined by 75 percent—almost immediately—when the mass media changed their handling of those events.

This may be getting a little ahead in our discussion topic, but the same author, Schulman, asked, How do you prevent mass murders? He stated that depriving the killers of what they want—publicity and notoriety—will help to prevent these crimes. Schulman asserted that authorities and the news media should *never* publish or reveal shooters' propaganda manifestos, notes, other proclamations or even basic

information. That is, don't publicize the evidence left behind because that will only amplify their actions and the killings. Hide the evil-doers' names, and hide their faces. Don't put them on television in the newspaper, or on the Internet. Don't report their biographies or speculate on their motives. Minimize specific actions and events' gory details.

A related shocking topic was revealed in researching this topic. The author came across data related to a bizarre phenomenon called "crush killing." It turns out that there are some men who fantasize about naked women actually killing animals. And such cruelty *does* happen. In actual incidents, the naked women usually wear high heels while they stomp on animals and commit other abuses. The animals suffer greatly and eventually die. What kind of person does that to a defenseless animal? And would they go so far as to do it to a *human*? And what kind of man gets his jollies fantasizing about it? A Texas woman was arrested for committing this crime numerous times. Fortunately, she was found guilty of a federal crime and was sentenced to prison.

That shocking incident and such behavior is definitely thought-provoking. The same occurs with mass shootings; that is, as loathsome as they are, the details of these events stick in our minds. While certainly, the large majority of people are certainly *not* going to go out and produce crush videos. But, if someone with an off-kilter mindset obsesses about such events and even thinks, "What a great idea! I ought to go out and do that!" then one wonders at the full extent of their deviant capabilities – and of the elements of imitation involved, the results can be devastating.

So, it is important to consider minimizing the specifics. Hide the details. Don't provide photos or videos of the events. Just this year in late August, we had the Roanoke, Virginia shooting of reporter Alyson Parker her and cameraman, Adam Ward, by Vester Flanagan, who actually videotaped the killing. In the author's opinion, at some point the television station should have had a delay and made the decision that little would be shown to the viewing audience.

But, they showed enough—enough, perhaps, to motivate another person to commit a similar act. Someone else in the future may copy the crime, or at least consider copying it. The media should, of course, talk about the victims, those that are hurt or killed. However, the media should minimize the description and identity of the killer.

The media must decrease the saturation. Move the stories to the last page of the paper, rather than giving them front-page headlines. If they are local stories and have local interest, limited coverage about the victims might be justifiable. But the consuming public's fascination with gruesome headlines that feeds twisted voyeurism is the only reason why have these stories end up in the mass media around the state,

across the nation, and, indeed, around in the world. In short, to stop the spectacle of mass killing, we need to keep them from being mass spectacles.

5. Gun Laws and Gun Control

An interesting point concerning mass shootings is that after they occur, the first response is gun control (Fuller, 2014; Johnson, 2014; Dodrill, 2014). There is an underlying belief that guns are evil and we must ban guns; and, if we ban guns, the shootings will stop and critics that argue against gun bans (Annear, 2013; Kates & Mauser, 2007). That is, if we ban guns, the violence will stop and the deaths will stop and the mass-whatever will stop. And, yet, we still have millions of guns in the United States, 270 million by last count and 88 per 100 residents in the United States (Washington Post, 2014).

We still have mass murders in other countries without gun, such as Australia and China (McDonnel, 2014; Pearlman, 2014). There we see similar events with knives and swords. Now, with the recent events in China, which results in a personal conversation with a colleague and their response was, “well, at least not a whole lot of people died; if you use a knife, not as many people will die.” This is a result of the focus on the measure is death as opposed to violence, which is a controversial issue. Death occurs either way; but, the issue is violence. It is important to note that the idea of gun control, especially mass shooting and particularly, school shootings, did not just start with Columbine. These type of shootings go back to pre-Civil War and there is a 30 April 1886 editorial in the New York Times suggesting that perhaps guns be banned *at school* (emphasis added) or that every boy be equipped with “the most approved and deadly-pistol, ... that there may be an equal chance at least of their shooting as of being shot (k-12 academics, n.d.). The gun control discussion has been going on for quite some time, e.g. 200 years (k-12 academics, n.d.). And, we perhaps, have not learned. Adam Lankford, University of Alabama criminal justice professor, is a recent scholar to address this topic. In a meeting of the American Sociological Association in the first week of September, 2015, he presented a paper that attracted media publicity. He stated that part of the problem of these mass shootings is gun ownership in America (Lankford, 2015a). We have lots of guns; he identified 270 million registered firearms in the United States and gun ownership of 88 per 100 people (Lankford, 2015; Van Brussel, 2012; Rogers, 2015). Additionally, Lankford noted this abundance of gun ownership. This got the attention of the press. This resulted in a few articles (to include the *Wall Street Journal*); but, then the issue somewhat dwindled away, surprisingly. Possibly, when Lankford’s presented paper comes out in the

journal publication, the interest will resume. But, in a more general way, what Lankford found, and that was important, is that we are able to tie all of this to an “American Culture,” In this American Culture, in which guns are ‘a part’ of that culture, we have a lot of guns. And, the reason we have guns according to his review of the literature is largely for “protection from the government.” Even in 2015 (not meant in a political way) this is an apolitical subject in a survey that is two-or-three years old, that Lankford cites that the reason that the majority of people gave for having guns, other than self-protection, is protection from the government. Thus, if that is true, and if that is part of the prevailing American culture, then 1. We will most likely never be rid of guns, and 2. We are not so sure that we should. But, the other two concepts that tie into theory and prevention is what Lankford states is part of the American Culture (at least with mass shootings) is guns; and, Americans possesses and use multiple guns (Lankford, 2015a).

The logic is that fewer guns kill fewer people. Lankford found further that the American Dream, the means-ends-goals type of thing, are that people who want the American Dream and can’t attain it, or they believe they can’t get it. According to string theory, there’s a social pressure to achieve the American dream, but a lack of means to do so (Timberg, 2015). Another goal is fame. Thus, we need to make it less ‘famous’ (for lack of a better term). The bottom line is that ‘if’ this is a cultural thing, then 1. We are never going to get rid of all the guns. If Lankford (2015) is right, and there 88/100 households have at least one gun, does anyone think it’s possible to get all the guns? And, if it is possible, how long might that take and at what effect on society? The idea that somehow, gun control solves the problem is not substantiated. But, more importantly, what we are having a conversation about is cultural factors that may make more sense. Because, the Charleston shooting, for example, resulted from an individual who procured his gun legally (there was apparently a glitch in the system that he ‘probably’ should not have been allowed to purchase a gun) (Holpuch, 2015); but, the fact remains that he purchased his gun legally. That is a separate issue. Let’s talk about how we can fix the system to keep these glitches from happening.

The Roanoke, VA shooter (Vester Flanagan) purchased his gun legally. In his case, there was some evidence that he was having some mental health issues. But, there was no mechanism for anyone to say, “He’s not wrapped too tightly, maybe we can’t sell him a gun.” He purchased his gun legally. Most mass shooters get their guns legally (Ehrenfreund and Goldfarb, 2015). If they don’t get their guns legally, then they steal them from people who got theirs’ legally. There was a discussion concerning New Town, CT (Adam Lanza) about why Lanza’s mother let him

use guns when she knew he had mental health issues (socially awkward, mildly autistic). Yes, his mother was aware of his issues. Are we going to keep parents from purchasing guns if their kids have mental issues? Personally, my opinion is that the gun control issue has sailed. And, if we want to do some things with prevention or to try and understand this, the reliance on gun control as the be-all, end-all to these things is not the way to go because this is not going to happen. It is a cultural thing and we need to get off that because it keeps us from focusing on other issues such as Langford's cultural issues. These include the idea of mental health, the idea of police response, the idea of when do police respond, and how they respond (and what and when they use force as a rationale to engage – life threatening situations, victim safety, etc.).

The focus on gun comes and goes. There is a big push and then a lull. It is usually the same major groups, e.g. the NRA professing “good guys with guns stop bad guys with guns.” And, then it goes away and we have more shootings, because taking away guns was not the answer.

Three days after the Roanoke shooting, the father of Alyson Parker, the newscaster shooting victim, was on CNN in a televised interview. He vowed that he would become the John Walsh of mass shootings and gun control. Five minutes later, same station, same interviewer had James Gilmore (former governor of Virginia and current Democratic presidential candidate). Gilmore stated that there was no way that the second amendment rights of citizens would be taken away. He stated it was a noble effort by Mr. Parker, but it will not work. So, here we have conflicting views. And, adding to this, will background checks keep guns out of the hands of dangerous criminal? Of mass shooters? The answer is – No. Why? This will not work because; typically the mass shooters do not have anything on their records that would have prevented them from purchasing a weapon. Additionally, they don't have a record or history of receiving treatment for mental illness. They would not be disqualified or denied from buying a gun legally.

In a recent study of Mayor's Against Illegal guns, of 43 mass shooters over a three-year period. Of the total 43 none of these shooters were denied the ability to purchase a firearm under federal law. They were not disqualified. And, in only four of the 43 cases did the perpetrator come to the attention of mental health practitioners. So, this proposal may be a good idea; but, it won't help the problem of mass murderers.

6. Mental Health

There is an effort to determine if there is a set of factors not just of a person, but of agencies, that deal with the person (Metzl and MacLeish, 2015). We often hear that this heinous

act was committed by some individual and he suddenly snaps. There has been an effort by experts to determine if there is a set of factors or characteristics to be addressed (Meloy, 2014). For most viewers, this is simply a lunatic, nut case who suddenly snapped and goes berserk and shoots anything and anyone that moves. Further, there is speculation that they kill somewhat indiscriminately. However, the idea that they suddenly snap, is somewhat unfounded. What would make them suddenly snap? From the obvious planning, to include selection of the time, place, weapons, and targets, this really does not seem to correlate with an individual just suddenly snapping. Examples related to this are the Columbine students, Harris and Kebold, or Cho at VTU, or Hasan at Fort Hood, or Loughner at Tucson, or Holmes at Aurora. Did these killers just suddenly snap and have a stockpile of ammunition to go with their legally acquired weapons just coincidentally at their disposal?

Recent research (Fox & DeLateur, 2013, Metzl & Macleish, 2015, and Rosenberg, 2014) has looked at whether mental illness and the expansion of treatment reduce the chances of mass murder. Metzl & Macleish (2015) suggest mass shootings are not representative of the mentally ill population as a whole, and those shooters which evidence has suggested being mentally ill are distortions of the population (p. 241).

We simply are not reading the signs (Ghose, 2012). For example, Cho at VTU regularly went to the target range in the next town and stored up a small arsenal of ammunition (Healy, 2012). Harris and Kebold at Columbine stored up a hate for jocks and those that bullied and made fun of them and planned their attack at the high school two years in advance of their attack (Cullen, D., 2004). Witnesses often note that mass shooters seem so cool, calm, and collective, even smiling. Why is that? For Columbine, they had their “mental” plan; they had gone over the scenario- over and over, so that they were comfortable with their planned attack much like Hassan at Fort Hood; much like Loughton at Tucson; like Holmes at Aurora; like Lanza at New Town; and, like Cho at Virginia Tech.

There is always the chance that some individuals will identify with the “power” of the perpetrator (much like Vester Flanagan who stated in his 23- page Manifesto that he was inspired by the Virginia Tech shooting and the Charleston shooting), which he stated was his ‘snapping point’ (Cooke, 2015). Some may empathize with the perpetrators frustrations and even admire their instant, undeserved celebrity (Christensen, 2015). And, some may want to imitate the actions, such as Aurora, and Lafayette, and even Nashville. There are always concerns about copycats (par. 12). The effect of violent video games must also be addressed.

The rest of the viewing public is taken completely by surprise even those that say they “knew” the shooters and are surprised at the final day of the attack. Frankly, we have many people who are strange acting, keep to themselves, go to the shooting range, and other related behaviorisms. So what do we normally think is the motive? Mass murderers see themselves as the victim, as someone who has been mistreated, as treated unfairly. So, they retaliate. Essentially, mass murders kill specific people for specific reasons: their family members, or people at work (as many as needed) or people they represent something against their beliefs (religion – Hasan); racism – Roof; Political motivation – Loughton; military – Nashville; women – Rusty House; racism – Vester Flanagan.

For example, a few years back, Amy Bishop, an assistant professor at the University of Alabama at Huntsville, was denied tenure – she went to the department meeting and killed three colleagues and wounded three others. She felt this was unfair to her and systematically went on a shooting rampage aimed at the person who had denied her tenure request --- and those related to the process (Keefe, 2013). Mass murderers target certain types or kinds of people: students – who might be potential bullies (Cho); jocks and bullies (Harris and Kebold); bullies (Jonesboro, AR). These also include Immigrants, or Whites, or Blacks, or Gays, or any other group that they hold “responsible” (Lott, 2013)

After each shooting incident there is a media frenzy, a period of outrage, a pledge to stop these killers, bolster mental health, crack down on gun control with stiffer background checks, and various other methods to identify potential offenders and, then, there is a lull until another shooting, related or not. (Frances, 2013; Fox, and DeLateur, 2013; Fox and Levin, 2014) Was the latest shooting related to Charleston, or Chattanooga? or Lafayette? or Aurora.

Mass Shooters often “want” to be notorious. They crave this social reinforcement through being “notorious”, “known”, “noticed” publicized” (Pappas, 2012; Pappas, 2015). As has been referenced, mass shooters are cowards. The vast majority of shooting occurs in Gun Free Zones or assumed gun-free zones where there will not be armed resistance (Army Posts -other than armed guards at gate; Schools – VTU, NIU, Sandy Hook, Columbine, Jonesboro; Church – Charleston; Movie Theatre - Aurora, Lafayette; Work Place). In the wake of perpetrators that have extended mental / psychological issues or problems we constantly hear (following the incidents) that maybe we need to have expanded treatment available. Maybe we need some types of expanded and improved mental treatment. Even though expanding mental health care is a noble cause, the expansion of such a network most likely will not reach those on the fringe who need it the most (Fox, and DeLateur, 2013, pg.

135). But, this would most likely not reach the very individuals that are committing the mass murders.

The mass shooters don’t feel that they have a problem. It is everybody else. It is society that is corrupt and needs to be fixed. Cho had been to counseling and resented the treatment, and the teasing/bullying of his roommates and other bullies. Loughner had mental issues of adjustment, but stopped attending his treatment. Abdulazeez (the Nashville shooter) had drug and alcohol problems and issues with work. Holmes was at one time attending counseling. Flanagan was advised to seek treatment. Reports suggest that up to 60 percent of perpetrators of mass shootings in the United States since 1970 have displayed signs and symptoms including paranoia, depression, and delusions before committing their crimes” (Metzl & MacLeish, 2015, p. 241). However, to emphasize the point, the shooters feel that other people are at fault. They don’t want treatment. They don’t feel they need treatment. Flanagan, for example, felt that he was totally treated unfairly, by everyone.

Why, after every mass shooting, are we suddenly concerned about mental health treatment? Is this because the people truly have mental problems or issues, or is this because “we” are afraid they will hurt or kill someone (the latter really stigmatizes these treatment processes)? If there are all of these profiles in place, then are extended background checks there to keep the guns in the hands of law-abiding mentally competent citizens and out of the hands of those with mental problems and criminal records? The Supreme Court strongly endorsed the right to bear arms, but also endorsed prohibitions on gun ownership, “by felons and the mentally ill” because of their special potential for violence.

Unfortunately, we have a mental-health system that simply refuses to take proper care of the dangerously ill, either for their personal protection, or for the protection of society at large. There may be steps that can be taken to keep guns out of the hands of the truly mentally ill. But, speeding up the process of committing unstable individuals could come with its own risks. For example – Adam Lanza was socially awkward and mildly autistic; but, he showed few other signs of his capabilities for evil of murderous intentions (Hsu, 2012). Do we need a policy to sweep up socially awkward, autistic young men?

Are mass shooters (who most of us have never heard of until ‘after’ the shooting event) throwing out red flags of their intentions? For many people they would be. They are at least warning signs, yet nobody wants to get anybody in trouble, unless they are absolutely sure and wait until it’s too late; the event occurs, and people are dead (Wright, 2015). Then, it becomes perfectly clear, of what we ‘could have’, or ‘should have’ done to read the signs and prevent the shooting.

Can we profile mass shooters? Absolutely, we can profile some of the latest killers (Ghose, 2012; Fox and DeLateur, 2012). They seem to have similar symptoms and characteristics: depression; resentments; socialization issues; violent media fascinations; interest in weapons; interest in violent games; anger – against women, other races, and other Americans (Leary, et al., 2003; Meloy, et al., 2004, Fox and DeLateur, 2014). But, these characteristics describe lots of Americans, many of us used to play *Doom*, *Wolfenstein*, and related games. There are tens of thousands of American that this profile fits; but, they won't kill anyone, much less, commit mass murders.

The problem with profiles and checklists that are defined or devised to “predict” a very, very rare event such as mass murder is that the ‘predictions’ simply end up ‘over-predicting’ (Pappas, 2012). As such, the models have very little, if any useful predictive value. We can't find Waldo, although ‘he’ is normally a male, he varies in age, some vary in nationality, education, occupation, etc., just like everyone in society. There are many in the profile of anger, frustrated, have issues, and resentments, jealousies, complexes, etc.; but, very, very few have actually committed murder, let alone mass murder (Lankford, 2015).

7. Conclusion

We are critical of how to control mass shooters. As this discussion has referenced many policies, methods, preventions, and treatments have been attempted related to gun control, standard mental health services, and current school security; and, these have had a very limited ability to prevent mass shootings. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't try. We need to keep trying. We need to be even more so watchful, mindful, vigilant, and responsible. In the aftermath of Sandy Hook and similar shootings in Charleston, Lafayette, Nashville, Roanoke, and Roseburg there is a new momentum in state legislatures and Congress to design policies and procedures to make us all safe; and, there really are many good things, and good ideas, and solutions; but, often, there is not a sustained follow-through.

We are not and have not necessarily proposed things for the best reasons to prevent these events. The odd thing, or irony, is that we are working to prevent mass murders. This is unlikely. Mass murders are an extremely rare event committed in any state, within any city or town, oftentimes when we least expect it. Mass shootings are the least - occurring crime that is preventable. The next mass shooter is out there; he has already picked his targets, most likely his timeframe, and circumstances; and, for the most part, we don't have a clue. When it happens, we will all know within 10 minutes; and within two days we will know everything about it to include

details of the incident and the shooter and victims.

The gun restrictions, gun control, gun security, etc. may not stop our next mass murderer, wherever he may strike; but, they may be able to enhance the well-being of millions of Americans in the process of doing “something. This is simply a type of crime that creates a kind of feeling of helplessness or worthlessness that many of us feel whenever such crimes occur. We don't expect to be a victim; but, we may actually visualize what we might do in such a random situation. While we have many well-intentioned prevention ideas that come in the wake of each mass shooting, there is still a strong possibility that they will continue in America. We have people say, especially after each mass shooting (and we are in that group), that we need to do X, Y, and Z to ensure that this never happens again. The problem is this will happen again. It very likely will not happen in the same location or circumstance again; but, it will happen again. Mass killers typically plan their assaults for days, weeks, or months (see, for example, Fox & Levin, 2012; Walkup & Rubin, 2013).

We want to eliminate the risk, and bring the number of mass murderers down to zero; however, we live in a free United States with protections for every citizen. These, unfortunately tend to impact on some. For example, there is an unwillingness to abolish the 2nd Amendment or retrieve the 270 million registered guns from our citizenry. We cannot and will not establish perfect neighborhoods and will continue in a society that has festered mass killers for any number of reasons that can be controlled, partially prevented, discouraged, slowed, but not abolished. Our mental health system cannot be relied on to determine gun control and labeling of ‘potential’ mass killers. We have addressed many causes, views, areas, and speculations of mass shootings in America and, short of extreme measures and extreme agreements between many major agencies we may have to consider mass murders as a price of our valued personal freedoms in America.

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