



When I listen to politicians and pundits try to pin the tail of mass shootings on their favorite donkey, I feel a mixture of ire and despair.

What “donkeys” am I referring to? The most popular is mental illness. If we could just keep guns out of the hands of the mentally ill, they maintain, then these blood baths would be far less common. In fact, persons with mental illness are far more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. Granted, many mass murderers have a history of childhood abuse and trauma, predisposing them to depression, anxiety and, sometimes, social isolation. However, the vast majority of persons who endure childhood trauma do not commit murder. So, what’s the missing catalyst? More on that shortly.

Rising to a new level of absurdity, some politicians suggest that violent video games are the culprit. What does research tell us? Even so-called first person shooter formats, where one blasts away at various game characters, show no cause-effect association with an increase in physical violence. Can these games de-sensitize the player to violent images and depictions in media? Yes. But, *in media* is one thing, and in the real world is yet another. If violent video games were the cause, then one would expect other nations equally saturated with this kind of “entertainment” to have similar rates of mass murder. They don’t.

So, what is the common thread among murderous humans who slaughter innocent people, often randomly? Hate. And, in case you’re wondering, hate is not a mental illness. It is a disease of the soul, a poisoning of the human spirit.

By definition, hate is a feeling of intense hostility and aversion to another person or group, usually derived from fear, anger and a sense of personal injury (“I’ve been unfairly wronged”). It often incorporates a mindset characterized by an “us (or me) versus them” attitude.

Yet, even hate alone may not be sufficient to spur someone to perpetrate this kind of carnage. In many instances, the would-be killer needs one more straw on

the camel's back — validation. He (the vast majority are males) requires external affirmation that his actions are for some worthy cause. The El Paso shooter, for example, apparently believed he acted in defense of his race and to sustain “white America.”

If a potential mass murderer hears his purposeful belief, however twisted, echoed by others, particularly voices from the powerful and influential, this validating process becomes amped up considerably. The individual may feel he has license to act, that persons in high places in government and media agree with his motivations, even if they publicly decry his methods after the fact.

So, for all those who want to find convenient scapegoats to blame by looking in all the wrong places, I offer a quote from the film *The Big Short*:

“It’s ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.”

Out of My Mind Melds: Read more of them on my website: philipchard.com