**The Causes of Violence**

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The mass shootings at America’s schools and colleges, shopping malls, even a theater and a Sikh temple, unleashes a psychological terror that reminds us that murder can happen anywhere. One of the most urgent questions is to decide which discussion we should be having. Should discussions be limited to access to assault weapons, an apparent American preference for mass shootings? Or do we focus on the ease in obtaining a weapon without mental health screening? Or is it possible that the actual violence is far more pernicious and systemic and we are unwilling to acknowledge and confront it?

Could it be that only the most overt forms of violence that occur in our backyards draw our attention and demand immediate dialogue? If this is so, then is it even worth considering the inability of the US to shed a tear or demand a public outcry for the slaughter of hundreds of thousands native peoples, nor confess to the abysmal treatment of minority groups, especially African American. And where is the national remorse for the estimated 3.8 million Vietnamese killed, according new figures published by the British Medical Journal; and an additional 300,000-500,000 Cambodians and Laotians killed during indiscriminate bombing campaigns.

Would Americans have been equally outraged and be demanding gun control if the carnage had not occurred in the prosperous community of Sandy Hook, but had happened in Camden, New Jersey, or a Detroit ghetto? And, finally, as a nation, are we capable of separating out the means of violence (e.g., guns) from the underlying cause of violence?

Violence is a highly lucrative and intoxicating progenitor of the American lifestyle. It permeates our culture, such as mixed martial arts and video games and comic books glorifying war and murder. Verbal violence and emotional taunting are perceived as crowning achievements of reality television, when a normal everyday event can be transformed into a cruel spectacle in order to entertain viewers. Each of these examples share an anticipation and provocation through threatening actions, ridiculing and mocking words, and finally emotional and physical violence.

Why are we not shocked by the large number of children who are physically abused and die every day without guns. Or how many kids miss school because of bullying and intimidation without a firearm. Or the epidemic spousal abuse not involving guns.

When was the last time a national debate in Congress or in the churches and temples took place to question the legitimacy of hundreds of thousands of dead men, women and children, the elderly, due to America’s incursions into Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya and Yemen? If we are not willing to examine each of these militarist intrusions, then can we understand the true cause of individual acts of violence, such as a mass killing of innocents on a school campus?

What does it tell us about ourselves that the Hunger Games is one of the top grossing films, a film about kids killing kids for the pleasure and delight of young and old alike?

Today anything enacted in the name of nationalism or patriotism, in defense of our biases and prejudices, is considered normal and worthy of praise. The consequences of this illogical psychology then qualifies us to believe we are an exceptional people, a culture second to none. Such an unearned exceptionalism, accompanied by a false sense of entitlement, has become a disease rapidly coursing through our population, and especially surging among the younger generations.

What is rarely discussed are the consequences of poverty and fractured family life because the overarching ideal of American elitism has turned into an extension of the biases, prejudice and hatred towards those lower down the social ladder. This has resulted in the commodification of dysfunction and a moral decay now embodied by special interest groups. Today, dysfunction is necessary advantage in a typical American corporation’s business strategy. For example, the psychiatric drugs that are now institutionalized across all social and economic levels are known to have the same adverse effects of mania, hallucination, psychosis, violence and a higher risk for homicide and suicide that has been shown to be a common characteristic in the majority of mass shooters.

If we begin to stand back and take in all of these pieces and then ask if they fit into a realistic portrait of the illusions that America has mastered and sustained, then it is highly likely we will see the real nature of what the country has become and, worse, what it is morphing into.

After every school or community shooting, we attempt to identify and rationalize the threat. We demonize it and then finally struggle to have the menace surgically removed by legislative decree. We are willing to sacrifice some of our freedoms and give permission to the powerful to rule over more of our lives in order to feel better protected: increase the number of school guards, arm teachers, intensify stricter rule and discipline over students.

Opponents of America’s gun culture believe that if we simply remove firearms the country will magically transform into a culture of civility. But since when have we been a civil culture? For much of our history the American promise has excluded the poor, the working class and other ethnicities from sharing in the same respect given to those who rule. Never is an average citizen included in the debate over which country to invade next. The entire debate ignores the critical and ominous fact that American culture continues to devolve into a penal colony that institutionalizes cruelty, bullying and violence. Our patriotism thrives on the adrenaline of the country’s wealthy and powerful, our physical might, and our penchant for exploitation and abuse. The US is the top bully in the global playground and we love being number one. It makes us feel omnipotent. Yet we remain clueless about what or who is really threatening us. It is a delusional concept of security. What if we look in the mirror and see our true nature staring back. Then we may finally grasp that the real enemy is ourselves.

The truth of the matter is that our values and moral bearings are not honored. Most Americans believe that possession of the world’s most powerful military force gives us the mandate and absolute right to use it for any purpose that strengthens our national power and corporate interests. Cost of human life is not calculated into the equation. This merciless power has even been codified into the Patriot Act under Bush and then further expanded by Obama in the National Defense Authorization Act. We train young impressionable minds and transform them into bullies. A grotesque alpha-dominant standard for both genders, believing in a personal manifest destiny, has become the new ideal to strive for. There is no outcry that America’s forces are now present in over 130 countries around the world to champion a democracy and freedom that is absent in homeland. And this grand illusion, in Chris Hedges’ words, is America’s “celebration of power.”

The recent analysis of the American Freshman Survey, a 47 year old survey of college freshmen’s perceptions of themselves compared to their peers, notes an alarming increase of narcissistic attributes among young adults: exaggerated perceptions about themselves and their skills that don’t match their real abilities, “ambition inflation,” unrealistic expectations, and self-centeredness lacking humility. What the study failed to explore is the high degree of competition between young people, which motivates them to battle and defeat others in order to achieve naive aspirations. This is why the younger generations have been consistently criticized for their demands of believing they are entitled to everything, while conversely resenting anyone, any institution, any belief or value that threatens their vacuous existence.

Consider the American power structure and the great efforts people undertake to attain power, acquire wealth and rise to celebrity status. The drive for power and wealth blinds us to what brings true happiness and the superior gifts we receive when we care and show compassion towards others. Since we live in a corporate culture, wherein we are desensitized from life’s vitality by the social media, everything and everyone outside our inner circle are no more than inanimate objects. Therefore there should be little wonder why people have the urge to escape normal feelings and find relief in virtual relationships such as Facebook, in mood altering medications and other substances.

Our society has mutated into a mind-numbing toxin; it has itself become a drug that desensitizes our youth because violence is among the best-selling commodities for a consumer-based entertainment economy. And among our most successful exporters driving GDP growth are the private military industrial complex, the poisons unleashed by the pharmaceutical and agro-chemical industries, and the financial industry that keeps the machine greased and running.

How many citizens can honestly admit they feel outrage towards their nation’s crimes against humanity, which has cost millions of children’s lives across the Middle East and other nations who don’t buy into the Washington Consensus. What does it tell us when President Clinton’s Secretary of State can tell the American people over 60 Minutes that the price for the deaths of half million children due to US sanctions against Iraq was “worth it.” This form of violence against the innocent would be genocide by any other humanitarian standard. However, today this is permitted because it is the new norm of US foreign policy, and it is again being repeated with sanctions against Iran. We have desensitized ourselves from a decade of indiscriminate bombing ventures across Afghanistan and Iraq, drone warfare, and decades of playing possum in order to avoid our personal role and responsibility for the world’s largest concentration camp, better known as Gaza.

When 250,000 Indian farmers commit suicide, frequently by drinking the pesticide Roundup, is this not an act of escape from the violence perpetuated upon them by a heartless agro-chemical corporation solely concerned with seed and pesticide sales. Monsanto would never shed a tear for numerous dead farmers who were swindled to purchase seeds that destroyed themselves and their families. On the other hand, what would happen if 250,000 American corporate executives committed suicide by drinking Roundup in their Wall Street suites? Would that capture our attention? Would the country be calling for an emergency national dialogue?

Buried beneath the gun control debate is our collective, national denial about America’s moral decay. We need to wake up to the fact that much of our culture is cruel and violent. And we are exporting this violent temperament globally. It is one of the few manufactured commodities America has left. America is a nation built upon the right to gun ownership. In and of themselves we should not believe guns are a primary cause for violence. This is too simplistic and untrue.

If it were true that guns are a fundamental cause behind mass shootings, then Switzerland, the world’s fourth largest gun-totting nation, would have comparable homicide and gun crime rates. But for many social and regulatory factors that the Swiss understand and Americans intentionally ignore there is no evidence this is the case. The Swiss do not engage in a fruitless war against drugs at huge expense to taxpayers but highly profitable for corporate vultures running the privatized prison system. For years the Swiss have forgiven drug use and prostitution in order to reduce unwanted elements associated with violent crime. Unlike the US, Switzerland doesn’t have one in four children under the age of six living in poverty. Nor are 12% of Swiss children and teens taking psychiatric drugs for conditions that are non-existent. Instead Switzerland boasts one of the highest standards of living in the world, with greater economic equality in the GINI ratings than the US. And equally important, Switzerland prevents citizens with past or present mental conditions from purchasing firearms.

It is time for the US to be honest with itself. People with violent dispositions pull triggers. So do people who have been victims of abuse and compulsively act out aggressively against a culture that is fundamentally cruel, callous and lacking in compassion. Before arguing about the role of guns in crime, homicides and suicides, we must first accept we are becoming a violent nation and then ask why is our culture so cruel. Similar to most medications, it is easier to treat symptoms than cure disease. For that reason, drawing a redline between those who would fight for the right to keep their guns and those who yearn to enforce laws to take them away misses the more serious issues and is non-constructive.

So what are the many forms of violence that characterize America as a deranged culture?

**The Rise of Gangs**

According to the National Gang Intelligence Center, between 48 to 90 percent of violent crime is gang related in state and local jurisdictions where gang activity is prominent. And as of 2011, there were over 33,000 gangs in the US representing approximately 1.4 million members. This number will increase substantially if the country pursues its current economic, social restructuring and domestic policing trajectory. In large part, the war on drugs and regressive court rulings have contributed to the upsurge in gang membership. Gun prohibition will only reproduce the failures of past historical prohibitions that strengthened crime syndicates and gangs. It is therefore wise to ask ourselves a serious question posed by philosopher [John Kozy](http://www.globalresearch.ca/violence-the-american-way-of-life/5318698), “do you really believe that gun control will miraculously make America into a tranquil nation?”

There are many reasons behind the escalating growth in gang membership, including abject poverty, fractured and dysfunctional families, bullying and the fear of injury, domestic abuse and violence, city and police harassment in lower income neighborhoods, the dismal failures of War on Drugs, and miserable, underfunded school systems. Gangs serve as an extension of the protected family in ways where American society has failed. A boy who joins a gang will be capable of supporting family members with food, clothing and a roof over their heads. Gang membership empowers youth; they are respected because they are feared, and no longer will they be bullied but can be the bully. But in return, the boy must undergo a thorough initiation, usually by committing a violent act, to become a worthy member of the new family.

Gangs will remain a significant feature in American culture as long as no effort is made to deghettoize our bleakest neighborhoods. After the 2008 financial meltdown, over 50 million Americans either lost their homes or are underwater in their mortgage payments. A neighborhood with an inordinate number of empty homes decreases the value of those occupied. The consequence is that the ghetto has now reached the suburbs.

Imagine being a 15 year old, awakened by a marshal and law enforcement officers to evict your family from your home and having no where to go? For a teenager there is the humiliation going to school and knowing you are among the poorest of the poor. There is social isolation and denigration. A gang offers more than government social service projects. This scenario is well known by sociologists but the elite refuse to pay heed. Why didn’t the President execute a moratorium on foreclosures, or force too-big-to-fail banks to reduce homeowners’ payments and suspend interest? But we don’t want to look at this kind of institutionalized violence against families, nor discuss the growing income disparity, low wages and rising costs of the essentials to live as contributors to violence.

**Violence as Entertainment**

Violence is one of our most popular past times. The multimedia entertainment and video gaming industries capitalize on a vicious assault upon the senses of youth and adults alike. The Department of Defense surely doesn’t mind. It applauds the popularity of video games such as Gear of War, Soldier of Fortune and Call of Duty because they desensitize our children, reshaping them into easy prey for future military recruiters. And if that is not enough, especially after 911, we have witnessed the Pentagon strengthening its collaborations with Hollywood to fund nationalist propaganda on the big screen. Boys can be further bullied through images that distort the virtues of honor and integrity to serve an imperialist agenda. It is an illusion, a grand betrayal, that is now well known to numerous traumatized veterans who have returned from the killing fields in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**America’s Prisons as Gulags of Violence**

Another way violence is being reinforced in our society is through a privatized prison system that is completely dependent upon rising crime rates for its sustenance. Through the detention industry’s lobbying efforts, violence is a lucrative asset. American prisons are nothing but gulags that further incubate and unleash violence. Rape and assault are endemic. Judges, lawyers and state legislators know this all too well but permit this violence to continue unrestricted in order to not upset private entrepreneurs controlling the system.

License for violence spreads like a virus: more incarceration means more financial incentives for state and local authorities to bully citizens. Police departments have been militarized and now collaborate closely with our military services. They have turned into hives of legalized thuggery, the rights of citizens are abused, and the preservation of civility and community well being is undermined. For example, the Stop and Search program by the New York Police Department has victimized hundreds of thousands of citizens, mostly men and women of color. As a result, many who have been illegally harassed and arrested for crimes never committed.

**The Violence of Dogmatic Faith**

Even religion has been infiltrated by our culture of cruelty. At one time most religious faith advocated love and compassion over hatred and violence. That was when religion was more relevant and believed it contributed constructively to educating children with the higher ideals of respect and tolerance towards multiethnic and multicultural diversity. Today, along the pavements of Main Street, many American churches have morphed into Christian madrassas, communities of dogmatic cruelty and abuse. The Gospel has been reinterpreted to mandate rule by the rod. Jesus is then transfigured into a cosmic warrior leading America’s crusades under a banner of hatred towards all who do not bow down to its ideology.

Historically religion has offered a forum to understand the nature of violence and rage and then seek solutions to resolves the issues leading to cruel behavior. This was traditionally done within the congregations and they could serve this function again. At a national level, those truly vital religions and spiritual traditions, not plagued with intolerance and hatred, might have an enormous impact in curing many social ills, including the disease of irrational religious dogmatism that has been another cause of violence.

**Violence Towards Veterans**

I have produced four separate documentaries about the plight of veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Gulf War Syndrome. Never before are we finding so many homeless veterans. I have found thousands living throughout the woods in northeast Florida. They had no food, electricity, medicine or beds. I have spoken with hundreds of homeless men and women, almost all who told me they were victims of violence. Many of them suffered from PTSD due to violence they inflicted on others during combat. Similar to gang initiates, these vets underwent indoctrination. Worse many were heavily medicated with cocktails of drugs while in the combat. This deadly combination of pharmaceutical drugs and mind-altering indoctrination methods transforms soldiers into the fools of conquest and destruction.

One woman told me that she never imagined it possible that her mind could be so conditioned by the military to violate another person without any feelings of emotion and empathy. This is what enables soldiers to destroy homes and terrorize families during night raids. She was anesthetized to the suffering of others. After completing her military commitment and returning home, she became volatile towards her spouse and children. Three months later, she found herself homeless without friends, family, food or money. During the following months she had been harassed, beaten, raped until she heard about groups of veterans living in the woods. Now she and others like her struggle to survive by relying on their military skills.

The moment these veterans enter a town to get their daily bread and perhaps find clean water to wash, the local residents make their disdain towards them clear. In the past when I have asked veterans how they feel when Glen Beck and Sean Hannity bark about supporting our troops and their feelings about Bush and Obama, the generals, the VA and corporate media refusing to confront this national disgrace, they have said, “I can speak for every vet I have met. Only now do we realize what absolute degenerate hypocrites we are as a society.” This is another example showing how violence is pervasive even at the highest levels of American culture.

**Child Abuse**

Why are we not addressing the nation’s epidemic of child abuse that ranks highest among developed nations. According to the Department of Health and Human Services 6 million children were abused in 2011 and abuse has been increasing equally across ethnic, religious, socioeconomic and educational level groups. Five children, 80 percent under 4 years of age, die from abuse every day. This is a conservative estimate because an additional 50-60 percent of child-abuse fatalities go unreported on death certificates. Where is the mourning for the almost 2000 children who die from abuse, not associated with weapons, in this country?

**Bullying and Violence**

There is another epidemic, what the Crisis Prevention Institute calls the “silent epidemic,” of children abusing children that is ravaging the country. Special needs children, such as Adam Lanza, are especially singled out as victims. For example, in October of 2009, another young adult with Aspergers Syndrome, 17 year old Tyler Long from Murray County GA, was the victim of school bullying. Tyler however turned his rage upon himself by committing suicide. Dan Olweus at the National School Safety Center estimates 2.1 million bullies in the American school system. This violent behavior has contributed to almost 300,000 students being physically attacked in secondary schools every month. Approximately 160,000 children every day miss school out of fear and intimidation from bullying threats by other students. Many of our most deluded corporate and political leaders want to blame teachers for the failures of students learning. The truth is probably closer to the fact that for many children, schools are only dysfunctional care centers for intimidation and maltreatment.

Other statistics are more shocking and should make us pause when we consider the Sandy Hook shooting and many other mass killings before it. An estimated 90 percent of 4th thru 8th graders report being victims of bullying; 86 percent of students believe that victimized students will turn to lethal violence for revenge, and 61 percent of students believe that physical abuse at home is the cause for kids shooting others.

**The New Violence of Cyber-Bullying**

Along with new technologies, a more interconnected world through telecommunication advances and the internet, bullying is no longer limited to school grounds. Entire organizations are now founded to fight against the rise in cyber bullying that has affected 43% of school children, mostly directed against girls. The psychological and emotional traumas from cyber bullying are comparable to real life bullying. Because it is easier for a bully to get away with taunting and demeaning another student in the virtual world, cyber bullying is growing into a serious problem without any certain solutions.

**Big Pharma as Big Bully**

Each of the institutions associated with the violence noted above, private and pubic, benefit from cruelty. However, two other institutions have contributed directly to most of the indiscriminate mass shootings over the past 20 years: the pharmaceutical industrial complex, including the entire psychiatric establishment, and our federal health agencies, particularly the Department of Health and Human Services and the Food and Drug Administration.

Is there a direct causal relationship between the epidemic in drug prescriptions for mental health and the rise in mass shootings, such as the latest at Sandy Hook? It is now well established that the majority of teenagers and young adults responsible for mass shootings were taking medications for psychological conditions. Physician [Dr. Gary Kohls](http://evergreendigest.org/batman-shooter-and-his-psyche-drugs) has documented numerous student homicides that have been traced to psychotropic drugs. The most frequent medications found in student homicides have been Luvox, Prozac, Paxil, Ritalin and Zoloft. How can there be almost 100 mass shootings in 20 years, almost all the killers have been on psychiatric drugs or in withdrawal, and no one at the national level can see an association?

On January 15 of this year, the Summit on Reducing Gun Violence in America at Johns Hopkins University completed its long deliberations to create a long litany of recommendations for curtailing gun violence. Among the many proposed law changes, there is finally recognition that rules should be tightened for people with mental health problems and to mental health histories with the National Instant Check System used for gun buyers. However, nowhere are specific medications, especially the SSRI drugs that have been most associated with violence to self or others, mentioned and recommended as disqualifying criteria for a purchasing a gun.

It is certain that the Sandy Hook shooter, Adam Lanza, was prescribed one or more medications for treating at least a diagnosis of Aspergers Syndrome. There is no single drug ideal for Aspergers; therefore, a cocktail of psychotropic drugs is frequently prescribed for a variety of symptoms observed in a patient. These drug combinations can be deadly and no concise clinical studies have ever been performed to warn us about how these drugs might interact when taken together. It is has been the FDA’s gross neglect in permitting these dangerous psychotropic drugs to proliferate and reach epidemic proportions as a first course of treatment for countless children and teens.

Although the Sandy Hook school shooting occurred a month ago, investigating authorities have yet to release details of Adam’s medical treatment history. In order to protect the drug industry, which is being cornered by a growing body of scientific evidence confirming these drugs are a serious threat to the country’s health and safety, I doubt Adam’s drug history will ever be “officially” released.

The over-medicating of children is a national disgrace and embarrassment. Nowhere else in the world can you invent illness, such as “authority defiance disorder” and then create pills to treat it. The psychological health of the American population is severely compromised by psychiatrists sitting on national boards, almost every one of them funded by the pharmaceutical industrial complex, for the sole purpose of approving and distributing patented drugs for obscene profits.

Schools may try to ban aggression but these are futile efforts if we continue to support and reward the sources that are institutionalized in our national identity. This culture of violence is led by leaders, many of whom are unsympathetic bullies themselves, who are psychologically numb to the mass atrocities inflicted by our foreign policies, blinded by their allegiance to corporate lobbyists who reward them with wealth and a means to hold power, and who prefer to remain deaf to the cries of the millions of children in poverty, who go hungry, or are being physically or psychologically tortured in abusive families and by a social system that doesn’t really give damn about much other than its own self-perseverance.

**Conclusion**

When we investigate all the different forms of violence and their multiple causes, we realize the depth of America’s disconnection from the higher values that sustain and preserve the well being of all of life. Instead the nation has chosen a path that has digressed into a winner take all attitude. The only thing this path nurtures is a coldhearted disregard towards the pain inflicted upon others. What remains of a national pride has mutated into the perversion of manifest destiny. The consequence as been the emergence of a new caste society that is more representative of Medieval India than the vision of the nation’s founders.

Everything that lives and breathes is a potential commodity for commercial interests. Billions are spent on reelections thereby making the vote of citizens irrelevant. Shadow corporate organizations, such as ALEC, are permitted to operate and meet in secret to create laws benefiting the profits of its members while harming 98 percent of Americans. Mainstream corporate media edits the truth because it lacks a conscience to value the truth. Public school teachers are no longer permitted to teach critical thinking skills because this might empower students to become independent, free thinking adults who might turn out far wiser than elected officials and corporate executives.

When the average American family today is too dysfunctional to parent wisely;

When children are being programmed to relate better to a virtual reality than to real life encounters;

When inflicting pain is as pleasurable as watching it;

When selfishness so permeates society that the thought of helping our neighbor is anathema;

Then, should we be surprised by a shooting occurring at Sandy Hook elementary school?

If we wish to ban assault rifles, then what will be next? Handguns? Clubs and knives? A fist or foot? Or how about words fired like bullets into another’s psyche? What needs to be banned are the causes of the pathologies leading to violence and those begin at the highest levels of America’s economic caste system.

In the meantime, we will be unable to engage in an honest dialogue leading to positive change if we are unwilling to embrace a higher truth about ourselves and the consequences of our ignorance.