



What Pushes Shooters Over the Edge?

Psychiatrist: 'Take the Paris Hilton Attention-Seeking Out of Crime' or Innocent People Will Die

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After a week of deadly shootings across the country, including at least six-high profile rampages that killed 24 people, Americans are asking what made these mass murderers snap.

A man guns down five people at a city council meeting in Missouri. In Los Angeles, a standoff leaves four family members and a police officer dead. On the campus of Louisiana Tech, a nursing student kills two of her peers before turning the weapon on herself. In Maryland a gunman opens fire in a restaurant, killing three. Last weekend in suburban Chicago, five people were killed inside a Lane Bryant store.

One expert says the common element in all these horrible crimes is the desire for attention.

"Mass homicide is a crime that can be completely eliminated by the press, teachers, parents and society. If we take the incentive of attention out of it, we can eliminate it," forensic psychiatrist Dr. Michael Welner said today on "Good Morning America Weekend."

Kirkwood Killer

Charles Lee "Cookie" Thornton, who shot five people at a city council meeting in Kirkwood, Mo., on Thursday, was described by friends as regular guy who battled the town over parking tickets and the right to speak at council meetings.

"He wasn't crazy. He knew what he was going to do," said his mother, Annie Bell Thornton. "All these years, I just feel it had just taken a toll on him."

Seeking Notoriety

"Rampage killings have an important common thread of someone seeking notoriety. Someone who feels they are a failure, who had high expectations for themselves, and sees the attention that these shooters get and says, 'I can get that. Somebody will care about my manifesto. Somebody will care about my letter,'" Welner said.

The media's focus on the manifesto and the life of the criminal appeals to these killers who feel like failures that nobody notices, Welner said.

"[Robert] Hawkins in Nebraska who said 'I'll be famous that's why I did it.' He taught us something, we

made him famous. We should not be focusing on the manifesto. We should be focusing on the suffering," Welner said, referring to the 19-year-old who opened fired in December in an Omaha mall, killing eight people before turning the gun on himself.

Attention and Anger

"We have to take the Paris Hilton attention-seeking out of crime, or strangers and innocent people will be killed," Welner said.

Not all of the recent mass killers have seemed like classic attention-seekers, though. For example, the suspect in the Lane Bryant killings shot six people while carrying out a robbery attempt, police said, and he is still on the run. And Thornton had a grudge over a specific battle with city hall.

Welner, however, said that even in these cases the anger that led to the killings was ultimately fueled by the shooters' perceptions that no one was noticing them.

"It's about anger in a person who has a sense of failure. What he says is, 'My life is going nowhere, and I failed. But this is my ticket. I can undo all of my disappointments in an instant. Everybody will care about my grudge, everybody will care about whom I am,'" Welner said.

If a person knows that no matter how many people he kills he will "be ignored or thought of as a pervert or pariah, it takes the incentive out."

Super Bowl Tragedy Averted

Last Sunday, Kurt William Havelock drove to the site of the Super Bowl with an assault rifle and 200 rounds of ammunition, vowing to "shed the blood of the innocent," as he wrote in a manifesto that he mailed to media outlets.

For some reason Havelock changed his mind when he reached a parking lot near the University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Ariz., where fans were enjoying pre-game celebrations. He called the police and turned himself in.

"He thought about others, instead of thinking about himself," Welner said. "The guy at the Super Bowl turned back because he focused on humanity of the victims."

"It's a crime of indulgence, to say my fame is more important than your life, but if some spark of humanity can kindle in someone & if we can make those people & connect to the suffering and humanity of it, then they will stop and they will see there's no answer," Welner said.

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