

Many Wear the Jersey but Few Play for the Team: Misfits Masquerading As Terrorists

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As we reflect back on President Obama's January, 2014 comments on Al Qaeda Groups: "If a Jayvee Team puts on Lakers uniforms that doesn't make them Kobe" perhaps we should explore the analogy (Remnick, 2014). First let me say that I do not profess to be an expert on terrorism but I do know something of human behavior and psychopathology. Recently we have seen an increase in killing attributed to terrorism. In some cases there appears to be evidence that supports this attribution but in many cases the perpetrator "wore the jersey but was not playing for the terrorist team". Unfortunately the incident is often heralded by many as a Jihadist attack and of course the action and the player are claimed by one or many terrorist teams. It is unfortunate primarily because the media and many experts give the killer the name and notoriety he wants and secondarily the incident, seen as a jihadist attack, creates the fear in society so sought after by the terrorist organizations. Reference to words spoken by these perpetrators indicating their alliance to terrorist organizations can often be a premature designation and is meant to conjure up fear in the minds of citizens. Media "experts" and government officials seem to be quick to credit these acts as organized and give unwarranted fuel to the fear.

I cringe when the media refers to killers as "Professionals", "Shooters", "Jihadists", and even "Terrorists". It glorifies them in a way that attracts other "misfits" of society to want that notoriety. These descriptors captivate the pathological minds of other "wannabee terrorists" who want an identity to tag onto their overvalued beliefs and this draws them into the spotlight as moths to a flame. Our media presentation of these individuals is a key piece in preventing similar occurrences. The mind of the person with overvalued ideas who is drawn to a cause can be powerfully influenced and is vulnerable to "the flawed narrative of an evil West intent on destroying Islam" (Neer & O'Toole, 2014, p.151). The glorification of these individuals by name, photos, and video should be minimized as we should do with all criminals whose narcissism plays into offending. The photo identification of one killer recently in Paris, left in a vehicle as a calling card, is an indication of this narcissistic personality. I choose not to refer to these killers by name and would rather remember the victims' names than that of the misfit who took innocent lives.

In light of recent incidents that have received unprecedented media attention we must attempt to minimize the contagion element that so often follows with increased incidents of violence. In the summer of 1966 there were 2 stories that dominated the news. The murder of 8 nurses in Chicago was

followed by the shooting of 45 people at the University of Texas. These incidents preceded a rise in the homicide rate in Chicago and influenced another 5 murders in Arizona (Berkowitz & Macaulay, 1971). The contagion effect or "Copy Cat Phenomenon" has been strongly associated with suicide over the years but has also been attributed to increased aggressive and violent behavior after direct exposure to bombings, torture, and murder. The effects were even more dramatic when observations of mass media were included (Huesmann, 2011). Offenders that I've interviewed over the past 35 years who have been influenced by contagion effect have often noted the mechanism (planning/execution) was derived from media portrayal of recent events.

In a recent article titled Lone Wolf Killers: A Perspective on Overvalued Ideas, published just prior to the Paris attack, I presented the belief that we would see more similar attacks in stating "I expect we will continue to see this type of individual emerge with radical political and terrorist groups who beckon them to do their dirty work". Also in that article the prediction that "Lone Wolf may be a misnomer as this type of killer is not always alone and in the future I believe we will see more "packs" of these wolves as they unite on common beliefs and themes"(Logan, 2014).

We have now seen packs of wolves descend on Paris. Whether or not they play for a Muslim Terrorist team, they are no less misfits of society and should be labeled as such. I am aware that this is a derogatory term but it is time to recognize that the public portrayal of these individuals is an issue of public safety.

When we associate these killers to terrorism we often disregard their psychopathology and just focus on political indoctrination and religious views. In developing a clear picture of who these individuals are so we can intervene prior to bloodshed, we must deepen the focus to include factors that we consider in any threat evaluation. These factors include: Previous violence, age, recent losses, evidence of multiple loss, revenge orientation, access to weapons, rejection, social support, recent threats to others, evidence of psychopathology and perseveration on overvalued ideas. These indicators and a more enlightened society who may be able to see these players both in and out of uniform and inform law enforcement will change the game and save lives.

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