

The Will to Power...Or a Cry For Help?

(Complete article can be found on the website: HeWasAQuietMan.com)

"What surprised him most was the terrible, impossible gulf that lay between him and everyone else. They seemed to him to be a different species, and he looked at them and they at him with distrust and hostility."

In "Crime and Punishment," Fyodor Dostoevsky's Rashkolnikov, pushed beyond his limits and alienated from the collective body of mankind by his own feelings of insecurity, weakness, and self-loathing, plans and commits a murder in order to prove to himself that he is not a "nobody."

The Dostoevsky novel, considered by many to be the definitive work on the fractured man, was published in 1866, indicating that feelings of hostility and alienation toward our fellow man are not merely a recent phenomenon. Unfortunately however, in a society where the individual has become catalogued, compartmentalized, and numbered, the Rashkolnikovs of the world seem to increasingly be slipping between the cracks; that is, until their frustrations compel them to lash out and splash themselves across our collective consciousness in seemingly random acts of senseless violence.

Why Did He Do It?

Everytime we hear of another school shooting or office worker going on a killing rampage, we're left with the question of why, if the perpetrator was so bent on self-destruction, he felt the need to take so many with him? What prompts these spree killings and how can we prevent them or protect ourselves and our loved ones from the line of fire? An article from Bully Online.com offers the following insights:

"Spree killings differ from serial killings in that the perpetrator bears a grudge and eventually some incident, sometimes identifiable or sometimes only guessed at, causes him to flip and he immediately commits a killing spree, shooting those he sees as responsible for his predicament, and sometimes randomly shooting and killing people who he sees as representative of those who have failed or rejected him. Rejection is a common trigger in violence. Sometimes the killing appears spontaneous, but most often it is planned, even if the precise date and time are not. In most cases, the spree killing ends with the gunman shooting himself or being shot dead by police."

In many cases of spree killings, the gunman appears to have been a victim of abuse or a target of bullying, often for many years, and sometimes throughout his life. The bullying and abuse have built resentment which culminates in a violent outburst. A triggering event occurs, which may be minor in nature but is the last straw; the individual reaches his breaking point and extracts revenge on those he perceives as responsible for his circumstances, or responsible for failing to deal with his allegations. He may phrase this as "accountability" or "retribution" or "revenge" or "reckoning" depending on his state of mind. He may emphasise the lack of respect he's gotten throughout his life. He might also unwittingly allude to his delusional thinking processes by inferring how his act will finally bring him that respect.

Sometimes there is a history of mental health problems and in many cases it appears the spree killer was starting to experience delusional thinking but it may not have been significant

enough to warrant medical attention or intervention. In many cases I've suspected the spree killer may have had some symptoms of schizophrenia."

Recognizing the Danger

So what, you ask, could possibly drive a normally rational person to just snap? If you think it could never happen to you, consider this: In any given year, roughly 22% of American adults suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder. Of them, about 5% has some form of depression and 1.5% has bi-polar disorder or schizophrenia. Is it any wonder that, with all stress-related versions of mental illness on the rise, suicide is now the 11th leading cause of death in the U.S.?

To quote To Know A Killer, a Richmond-Times Dispatch article by David Ress and Frank Green:

"It's hard -- most mental-health experts say impossible -- to tell when someone is ill enough to kill 32 people and then himself... Often, people simply will not talk. Or they will talk to someone who isn't there. Often they are in a place so dark the only escape they see is suicide."

Red Flags

"People talk about red flags -- they're really yellow flags. They only become red flags when blood is spilled upon them."

While none of us will ever be completely safe from such random acts of violence, there are steps we can take to reduce our chances of becoming a victim.

Awareness of your surroundings and those with whom you come in contact on a daily basis is the most important of these. Naturally, not everyone who exhibits these behaviors is a potential spree killer, but experts agree that combinations of these warning signs can indicate a problem is imminent.

IMPORTANT! If you observe someone exhibiting behavior that you believe is threatening to himself or others, **SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL ABOUT YOUR SUSPICIONS**. Unless you have training in the area of personality disorders, you could end up placing yourself or others in more danger by trying to handle the situation alone.