On mass shootings and mental illness:

Psychology as a profession does NOT say that to plan, entertain, and execute the assassination of as many persons as possible whom you do not know IS a matter of being mentally ill.   At times, psychology says effectively that it's a not matter of suffering mental illness at all!   Some in psychology say that concern about mental illness in mass shootings wrongly stigmatizes all persons who suffer mental illness.

The thesis here is NOT that MENTALLY ILL PERSONS HAVE A TENDENCY TO VIOLENCE. Rather, it is being argued that persons who commit mass murder of persons anonymous to themselves are mentally ill by the empirical fact of their action(s) and how a human psyche might 'reason' or justify such an act, - or, - 'reason' notwithstanding, - might commit such an act on the basis of unalloyed wish.

It is patently illogical and absurd to say that because only a very small percentage of mentally ill persons are violent, discussion of mental illness in mass shootings should be repudiated.   The fact that most persons with serious mental illness pose no harm to others does not in any way subtract from the fact that to plan, relish, and carry out a mass shooting IS a matter of egregiously unhinged affect and severely muddled judgment.   [For the record, many persons with serious mental illness are cantakerous and difficult to deal with, even if never inclined to commit an unspeakable act like mass murder.]   On the other hand - tongue in cheek - maybe persons considering mass murder have a deep and genuine understanding of the depravity of such an act, empathize with victims, and spend their days in tortured repentance - even as motive and urges (or voices) prompt to kill.

An FBI report in 2018 indicated that of a pool of 63 mass shooters 25% had been diagnosed as suffering mental illness.   At the same time there are *studies* countering a strict association of mental illness with mass shootings but we have long forgotten to <u>think,</u> instead of rely upon, *studies* - (the investigations of which finds them to be greatly irreplicable and hence greatly unreliable).   Socialized and self imposed limitations on our own behavior (and that of others) in doing what is expected and accepted makes a person "normal".   Lack of self limitations ending in the murdering of victims who are arbitrary targets at a point and space in time makes a person's behavior and mentation abnormal - grossly beyond the norm of what is expected and accepted.   One cannot methodically, determinedly, execute other human beings who are strangers for the most part and be of "sound mind".

Forensic psychiatrist James Knoll who has researched mass shooters was recently referenced in a regional psychology newsletter as having found that "mass shooters feel aggrieved, are extremely angry, and have nurtured fantasies of violent revenge" (quotation marks mine).   Ah, nurtured fantasies and carried them out. Fantasy as reality.   The report said that Knoll called mass shootings a "sociocultural

phenomenon" rather than mental illness.   Does this mean that mass shooters are rational in what they do? - un-mentally ill? - just extremely angry?   Think about going where people are congregated and murdering as many strangers as possible because of "grievances". Sounds like abnormal behavior to me - or is it idiosyncratic, or individual preference, or sociocultural.

I do not follow the news of mass shooters save from the periphery but perpetrators who were perniciously mentally ill come to mind such as Adam Lanza (Sandy Hook Elementary school 2012) and James E Holmes (Aurora theater 2012).   How about serial killers - are they just "normal" but angry people?   And to understand the Las Vegas killer Stephen Paddock: I have to kill these people because... There must be a *sensible* reason for him to have transgressed all that is prohibited and profane and often referred to as 'evil'.   The dude must have needed anger management!   After a mass shooting, it is also strange and misleading to the public for the news media inevitably to note that a 'motive' for the killings is 'still under investigation' as if a motive exists which can provide understanding.

A perpetrator may have been seen as having 'kept to himself', as a loner (if 'seen' at all - i.e, functionally uncared for in private life and unnoticed in public life), as volatile, and/or as attracted to violence.   A person with mental illness does not necessarily behave in stereotypy   and a superficial appearance of a mundane presentation does not preclude mental illness. Also, **serious mental illness is hardly only schizophrenia**. In an increasingly speeding cyber age with changed and changing ways of living, the underpinings for personal psychology and mental illness must incorporate a new psychologic and psychiatric landscape of desensitization, numbing, media violence, media dominance, aloneness, bewilderment, anonymity, ANOMIE, nihilism, decline of religion to serve as stricture, painful nuclear family upheaval, daycare wardship, marginal parenting, anxiety, perpetual stress - especially financial, severe frustration(s) as a daily routine of contemporary existence, a fearful and resentful sense of powerlessness, inchoate world view(s), survivalist narcissism, and failure of communal self adjusting curbs on ideation.   Paradigms of psychopathology must adjust for contingencies that characterize experience and affect mental and emotional health as a matter of contemporary realities - i.e., modern-type mental illness(es).

If mass shooters do not have mental illness, how about a moment of insanity, many moments of insanity - eg, during the detail of planning - building up to execution, sometimes 'enjoying' or being dispassionate to the deadliness, or better yet, *failing to grasp the turpitude in what they do.*   If not mentally ill, persons in the fantasy and planning modes of mass shooting who may hope to shoot as many living units as possible would have time to consider how terribly abominable their motives are and ultimately how terribly wrong their plans.   But they are in the throes of emotion over which they lack control, want to cancel life, often their own as well, and make others feel pain as do they - and worse.   Technically, some mass shooters may 'know' what they are doing, the here and now of it, but merciless violent fantasy, emotion, and proclivity to kill are beyond their control.   They are mesmerized by mayhem.   They are likely in a state of extremely uncomfortable dysphoria, even if there is a veneer of superficial neutralism or detachment.   Only a collossal shattering event is seen to alleviate or resolve it.   They are crazed. The process is gradual wherein options become drastically dwindled and dark.   They *need* to kill to be a close-up personal witness to a horror and grief - of others - that they get to cause.   They need to *get control*, be 'somebody', even the score on wretchedness, own the power, be recognized/acknowledged,

and match their forlorness with commensurate scale.

Pres Trump brought up the need for facilties to harbor those who cannot function safely in society or be responsible citizens for themselves or for others in their conduct, or, eg, with medication compliance. Now the mentally ill are greatly unchecked *and greatly uncared for*, especially thanks to institutional closings.   Worse yet, we can't know many if not most of the mentally ill because we are a cyber society anonymous to ea other - even within a single household. I'm reminded of Dylan KLebold's (Colombine '99) parents being reported as apparently oblivious (unmindful?) to his plans and the guns he was stocking in his room even as his manner of dress within the context of his life at the time was itself a matter for curiosity and concern.   I remember arguing with my now deceased father at the time Colombine happened that Colombine was to be a watershed for mass shootings.   I've recently seen that there is a video game called Super Colombine Massacre.   This leads me to ask in rhetorical amazement: who is sick(est) - the mass shooter, the maker and distributer of such a game, or the adults who play or allow play of such a 'game' for younger persons.   Think of walking around with the satisfaction and thrill of virtually having massacred a lot of high school students.

On video games and mass shootings:

Pres Trump also made comments about violence in video gaming - the painting of heinous game imagery and purpose - within the games - on the mental canvas of players.   There is also a cornucopia of graphic violence for violence's sake in media in general.   Many objected to the President's comments, some citing *studies*, and said that immersion in violence gaming does not have ill effect, or no big ill effect, on persons.   Some research has concluded that young persons are mildly more aggressive after playing violent video games. This is circumstantial as to whether violent video gamers are more likely to enact a mass shooting.   The key issue is what is in a repertoire of experience, conditioning, and memory when conflict to a person of poor emotional competence feels extreme, i.e., when emotion and desperation reach a breaking point.

Video games may not *cause* mass shootings.   Most mass shooters reportedly were not violent video gamers though they likely may have been otherwise attracted to violence and violence in media. Violent video games DO give shooters the idea of what shooting a lot of people is 'like' - just as simulated flying shows pilots what and how to do.   If a misfitting person is angry - at parents, lack of same, teachers, bullying, cruelty, *emotional neglect*, lack of attention, workplace difficulties, etc, etc, video games of murder certainly facilitate an avenue of relief and a template for when derangement hits an inflection point.   It is in the human psyche and culture to kill and/or want to kill - even as when someone innocently intones "I'll kill you" in anger or in pleasant foolery.   But with video games and movies, it is a <u>diet</u> - you are what you eat and you are what you are moved to pursue - as in rape, torture, and as many dead bodies as possible on a screen.   A person is CONDITIONED to solace and reward through violence and killing.   Recently I saw a Gamespot forum in which a long thread of discussion concerned persons wanting to know if there were any games in which babies could be killed.

A vulnerable and unhappy, even rageful person looks around and sees no recourse or oasis of safety, love, stability.   If the world is frightening to that person and he/she wants to escape or resolve the fright,

if he/she has disordered thinking by virtue of temperament or sociocultural environment, if he/she craves notice and acknowledgement, if he/she hates, - the experience of video gaming supplies memory and an impetus to respond as trained in practice. [There is also the frustration of violent video gamers who, though they have the template, do feel personally inhibited to obliterate what they feel is in their way.] This is all simultaneous with psychiatric issues for young persons being on an increase. Persons can become so deeply attached to cyber space - gaming or otherwise - that reality becomes a kind of footnote to experience. The gaming community has spoken about gamers being so addicted to gaming that they lose all sense of reality. Several gamers have died due to many hours of non-stop play.

It has been well noted that a young person has a developing capacity to know the difference between fantasy and reality. It is also well noted that modeling is a powerful influence on behavior. Young and older persons imitate what they see. Young persons are attracted to and/or involved with fantasy to a lesser or greater extent and they decidedly imitate what they see in real time and real life. **If advertising is so effective, why aren't video games.**

There is often little social community for persons, often no communal eating or extended recurring communal experience, and often latchkey or effective latchkey existences for young persons; nor is society focused on youth except for what to sell to and for them. And we kill unborn, sometimes born or near-born, babies, and sell their parts, don't we? We are in the clockwork orange-Alvin Toffler-atomizing-'future now'. If something in a tv or youtube commercial has appeal to one's getting relief or feling better or good, does not the killing and decimation achieved in a murderous virtual game supply significant reward/satisfaction and increase the chance of more of the same response. That is especially so if developmentally fantasy and reality are not too distinct or if fantasy rules. When an unbalanced person, becomes desperately in need of gratiation, what might he/she do. We cannot expect relatively cicumscribed or tenuous minds, because of taboo, to have no trouble emotionally isolating the joy and relief of killing people who may, eg, feed a frustration or 'deserve it'. Video game killing tears away at the societal prohibition of murder.

Mass shooting is such a problem in the US because of the breakdown of family and communities, together with digitalism, wherein persons do not know or repeat-see each other on a daily interactional and observational basis. Persons interact virtually, often anonymously. We cannot know who's who or what's what. Close community serves as an 'adjuster' of ideation according to community norms. In relatively cohesive society the 'unadjusted' stick out like sore thumbs. Since community controls ideation, community disappearance with little to nothing in its stead makes fertile ground for deviancy. To the emotionally disadvantaged person, cyber reality is an extremely poor guide or foundation. Further, it is not 'deviant' to kill mercilessly in video games. It is a reward to self and from others.

All in all, in assessing the effect of cyber games of violence, we have conveniently forgotten about branding, CONDITIONING, displacement, projection, etc, and the fact that cyber reality is fantasy at its finest and most compelling.

As we keep feeding persons poison cyber thrills, fantasy will continue to become ever more reality. I also remember Vietnam veterans tell me that killing a person is a thrill and that once you do it, you want

to do it more.   According to sociologist Jack Levin, there is a category of murder called "thrill killing" which is killing for the thrill.