

The psychology of self-destruction

In 2020, there were nearly 45,000 recorded suicides in the U.S. which makes suicide our tenth leading cause of death. The top five states for suicides per 100K inhabitants according to the CDC were Wyoming (29.3) followed by Alaska (28.5), Montana (26.2), New Mexico (24) and Colorado (22.1). The five states with the fewest suicides were: New Jersey (8), New York (8.3), Massachusetts (8.7), Maryland (10.3) and California (10.7).

Another sobering statistic is the number of drug overdose deaths that have resulted in May 2019 to May 2020. That number is a shocking 81,000. There is no question that some of those deaths are attributable to willful ingestion of excessive amounts of illicit drugs like cocaine and heroin along with prescription pharmaceuticals like opioids. Suicide by firearms number nearly 40,000/yearly and account for 60% of total suicides. But it's not just the methods we use to end our lives that trouble me; it is the reasons we end our lives that are worrisome. There are the obvious ones like terminal illness diagnoses, chronic unmanageable pain, emotional imbalance, feelings of futility, etc. Then there are those that don't fit into the traditional categories that are especially troubling.

How desperate must a person be to take his or her own life, to say goodbye to literally everything? What can motivate such a drastic decision? Doctors, psychologists, clergy and researchers have studied the root causes for decades and have arrived at many different conclusions. And while suicides can be filed under select categories, the back stories of these suicides have similarities but also differences. The effects on the suicide victims' families and friends are devastating and long-lasting as are the effects on society in general.

Nature or nurture?

Geneticists and biologists are trying to determine whether or not there is a specific genetic link that can explain why some people rather than others are more prone to committing suicide. While the jury is still out on the physical root causes that can lead particular groups of people towards self-destruction, there is the nurture aspect to consider. Nurture refers to all the related environmental variables that impact who we are, including our early childhood experiences, how we were raised, our social relationships and our surrounding culture. We have all seen family members, friends or acquaintances exhibit occasional inexplicable mood swings, anti-social or aggressive outbursts, a tendency towards reclusivity and depression. Many of us don't immediately associate a tendency towards suicide with that behavior, but they may very well be warning signals of something deeper more profound influencing their lives.

Self-destructive behavior also manifests itself in other areas of our society. In business it can be a willingness to risk one's own standing in a company by employing 'unprofessional methods' to secure a deal, for example. Deliberately and publicly challenging a company's established ethos is another. Engaging in self-destructive behavior can either be voluntary (a conscious decision based on knowledge of the consequences to follow) or involuntary (so deeply ingrained in one's personality that it is bound to occur without a thought given to the consequences to follow). We often revere the risk-takers who 'boldly go where no one has dared go before' and push the envelope of the status quo. We call them *revolutionaries* or *mavericks* and we describe their actions as 'brave' or 'courageous.'

Unfortunately, many of these outwardly courageous actions are not terribly well thought through and are often perpetrated by people with power or sway and whose ideology does not take into consideration historical precedents or the consequences of creating a situation that is detrimental to society at large. In other words, their proposals are not only self-destructive but they have extended that destructive component to the rest of us. It is also egotistical behavior which assumes what is good for *them* is automatically good for the rest of us. This is the stuff of political ideologues and it is precisely where we find ourselves today - in a situation where the powerful have forbade dissent or disagreement and are intent on implementing unworkable and previously debunked

philosophies (like Marxism) into the fabric of our laws and in the teaching of our youth. Other examples are their attempts at creating a utopian state complete with 'open borders,' forced Federal health mandates and a re-ordering of our energy sector and economy in general that would retard our competitiveness and make us dangerously vulnerable to the whims of supplier nations.

A prime example of self-destructiveness can be found among certain U.S. lawmakers, largely on the ultra-Left, who are willing to write and pass legislation that would bankrupt not only our coffers, roll back gains made in race relations but also eliminate our right to disagree. These are the people commonly referred to as zealots - persons so committed to their ideology that they are willing to completely destroy centuries of success built on a solid foundation of personal freedom and access to opportunity and replace it with one that only works in theory.

These zealots are what author Erik Hoffer described in his 1951 book, "Thoughts on the nature of mass movements" as *true believers*. True believers are the kamikaze pilots ready to crash and burn on the deck of our society to achieve what can only be described as a pyrrhic victory - success at the expense of a greater loss. America cannot afford to give in to the pipe dreams and propaganda of the far Left nor should it relinquish its right to dissent. Knowledge is not wisdom, but without it, the only wisdom left will be the conventional wisdom of the powerful.

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