**Inspired is Another Word for a Copycat**

Breaking News reports are almost never good. When we see those words we now brace ourselves for more carnage of some horrific proportions. Most people are getting numb and don’t know how to process yet more bad news. Oftentimes it is easier to turn away and look to other areas of our lives for happiness. But regardless, there it is – again.

Unfortunately, the more we see this, the more this will happen. It is the unspoken law of the copycat effect: what we see we produce more of. There is always someone who watches these happenings and translates them to a twisted sort of permission to do the same, or even worse, to outdo what has already happened.

While all these horrific shootings are categorized as terrorism because they do terrorize, many are not directly organized by a terrorist group or organization. Instead they are ‘inspired’ by the images of terror and anger played out on an international stage. The Merriam Webster dictionary’s definition of inspire is “to make (someone) want to do something: to give (someone) an idea about what to do or create: to cause (something) to happen or be created.”

Inspired is another word for an imitator or a copycat. When the media says that the shooter was ‘a lone wolf, inspired by Isis’ it means he imitates them in order to be like them. He is not directly affiliated with them, rather he got the idea from them; he is copying them. He may well ‘sympathize’ with religious terror groups as we often hear, but mostly he is using their well-publicized platform as a vehicle for his exploding frustration and overpowering anger. He can use it as a justification to attain the glorified attention he inwardly seeks.

We are now seeing the same with cop killers and other attacks fueled by anger and prejudice. Why? For some of the angry, frustrated mentally unstable in our culture who are looking for an excuse to share their anger on a global grand stage for all to see, they identify with the rage and they want it to be rewarded with fame. While it is not the intentional reward of mass media and society, nonetheless it is the prize that those who feel they have no voice attain in their final acts.

These recent attacks in Orlando, Texas and Nice as well as many others are inspired by what someone has learned in the media. Without television or the Internet, it most likely wouldn’t have happened. While many years ago someone might have imitated a neighbor they would not have duplicated what happens a continent away.

This is not to blame journalism as reporting the facts is an essential task and certainly the Internet is here to stay. If you dig deeper you will see that these acts are rarely committed by women; they are committed largely by young men whose lives aren’t working well. Usually there is a trigger event that leads up to the planning of some sort of attack that is fueled by the shooter avenging he is ‘going to be heard from.’

We need to look at the social issue of prejudice, religion, anger and violence committed primarily by young men. It is cool to be violent? Maybe, but that in itself is part of the problem. If dying and killing are better than living, what does that say about the quality of life for young men. Not much.

The well-documented and disturbing copycat effect has been around for years and we can help to deter it by keeping the shooter’s name and profile out of the media on a continuous basis. While that may

prevent someone from following through with a copycat crime, I think we will keep seeing sad scenarios like this if we don’t start dissecting the problem from the bottom up. To quote Shakespeare, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves.”