

## **Narcissism or Psychosis?**

The aftermath of the Aurora, Colo., shooting tragedy is grief: grief for the victims, grief for the families who lost a loved one, and grief for the parents of the killer. This kind of mass shooting affects many people including the family and friends of one of our own right here in Ahwatukee Foothills. Alex Teves, 24, died protecting his girlfriend from the gunman.

Many of us try to figure out why? Why would a young man who seemed to be extremely intelligent, working on a PhD, suddenly go on a killing spree? At this time we don't have enough information to know for certain why James Egan Holmes murdered 12 people and injured 58. We don't know if he is mentally ill (psychotic) or if he is a psychopath.

Psychosis is characterized by a radical change in personality and a distorted or diminished sense of reality. If Holmes is psychotic he is most likely schizophrenic. Men with schizophrenia are often not diagnosed until their 20's. Holmes is 24. Some psychologists are theorizing Holmes is schizophrenic and others believe that he is faking mental illness because he is smart enough to do so.

Labeling a person a psychopath is not defined as a disorder by the DSM-IV; although, Narcissistic Personality Disorder is and it has many of the characteristics of what laymen call a psychopath. Psychopaths, like narcissists believe "It's all about me and I need to be in control." They are glib with superficial charm (have you seen the video of Holmes giving a presentation when he was just 18?). There is some element of truth to their lies that makes their stories more believable. They exhibit a grandiose sense of self. They are callous and incapable of being empathetic or compassionate, unless it serves their own purpose (Holmes methodically planned the event, rigged his own apartment with explosives, shot people in cold blood and wrote pages and pages about killing people). They are deceitful and manipulative. They are incapable of intimate relationships (Holmes' classmates have stated that he was a loner and when he spoke he was sarcastic and had few friends).

There is a significant amount of research that suggests that psychopaths may have a genetic predisposition and that their brains process information differently. Psychopaths can have a high IQ but they have a low EQ (emotional intelligence). When their IQ is low, they often end up in prison. But highly intelligent psychopaths frequently own businesses or even run countries. Many killers are psychopaths, but not all psychopaths are killers. As a matter of fact, most psychopaths are not. Psychopaths generally do not seek therapy because, quite frankly, they are satisfied with themselves and with their lives. A court order or a desperate relative is most often why they end up in therapy and generally psychopaths play the victim. When that role fails they often attempt to con the therapist into believing they are rehabilitated.

Researchers estimate 1 in 25 people is a psychopath. So, it is quite possible that you know, or are involved with a psychopath. If you suspect that someone you know is a psychopath, don't blame yourself. Know that you are not alone. Do not create power struggles. Set firm ground rules. Seek professional counsel. Attend support groups. But, most importantly, if you are involved with someone who is psychopathic with violent tendencies: create a plan of action, tell a trusted friend, and when possible get out.

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