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Engl 211C

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### Mass Shooters: Insane or Just Pretending to be?

Mass shootings have been a huge topic in today's society and will probably be talked about for generations to come. Mass shootings evoke emotions from people, emotions such as fear have been very prominent to be exact. People seem so want the people who do these heinous crimes to be put away for a while, but what good does it do if they plead insane? The media portrays these people to be mentally ill which not only helps the shooter, but hurts people who are truly mentally ill. Mass shooters who use being mentally ill as a scapegoat in the criminal justice system in the United States is the reason why the mental health stigma is viewed so negatively.

Those who are truly mentally ill have problems every day either because it is hard for them to function, or they are facing the backlash of having a mental illness because of how they are portrayed in the media. If people see that mass shooters are being seen as mentally ill or "insane," what good does that do for the mentally ill community? The only thing it does is cause problems for them because it causes everyday people to second guess someone just because of their mental health status. This is unfair because these people could be denied jobs, housing, or even education because of the negative mental health stigma that goes around.

The media is a huge reason why people think the way they do. People watch the local news or go on social media to find out what is happening in the world today and they believe what they see. Usually, people form their opinions based on the news they watch, so if they see a mass shooter being named as mentally ill, what will they think? Will they think that mentally ill people were as nice as they thought before? The answer is probably not. If someone believes everything they see on the television, then they are going to believe that mentally ill people are just as horrible as the media portrays them to be. This is how most of today's world thinks, unable to form their own opinions.

A mass shooter pleading insane does not only cause a negative mental illness stigma, but it is also insulting to the victims or family/friends of the shooting. By using the mentally ill card as a scapegoat and getting away with it is basically a slap in the face to those affected by them. Giving someone a slap on the wrist for committing such a disgraceful act is the reason why the criminal justice system is so backwards now.

Pleading insane should be used by those who are truly insane. Those who did not know that what they were doing was wrong at the time, or those who were not aware of what they were doing at the time of the crime. This does not work for mass shooters because it takes time to plan something as horrible as this. It takes time to collect guns and plan to take the lives of many.

### Annotated Bibliography

Markowitz, Fred. "Mental Illness, Crime, and Violence: Risk, Context, and Social Control."

*Aggression and Violent Behavior*, vol. 16, pp. 36-44, *ScienceDirect search complete*,

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2010.10.003>. Accessed 9 Sept. 2018.

In his scholarly journal article, "Mental Illness, Crime, and Violence: Risk, Context, and Social Control," Fred Markowitz, Northern Illinois University states that people associate

those with mental illnesses to be violent or will assume that all of those with mental illness

have some sort of psychosis. He supports this claim by first stating that throughout history, the mental illness stigma has indeed gotten better, but some people still have negative assumptions about those with mental illness. There are those who believe that mental illness is just psychosis and not other illnesses like depression, bipolar disorder, substance abuse, or schizophrenia. There are the mental illnesses like substance abuse and psychosis that could indeed trigger a violent response to others, but there are others like depression that most likely do not. Because people combine every mental illness, it still creates and carries on this negative mental health stigma. In return, it makes it hard for those with said illnesses who are not violent to live their lives without certain individuals judging and assuming negative things about them. Markowitz states that those

with mental illness are sometimes rejected jobs or housing because of the negative stigma that they face every day. Markowitz's purpose is to inform those of the relationship between crime and mental illness in order to stop the negative reputation of those with mental illnesses so that they can live their lives without fear of rejection, violence, or negative assumptions. He establishes a formal tone for scholars and professionals in the Sociology department. This work is significant because my topic is explaining why and how white criminals in America use mental illness as a scapegoat when they are guilty of a crime. They are only adding more negative thoughts about mentally ill people to those individuals who are ignorant of the topic.

Van Dorn, Richard et al. "Mental Illness and Crime: Is There a Relationship Beyond Substance Use?" *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, vol. 47, pp. 487-503, *Springerlink search complete*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-011-0356-x>. Accessed Sept 2018. In their scholarly article, "Mental Illness and Crime: Is There a Relationship Beyond Substance Use?," Richard Van Dorn et al, University of South Florida, claims that there is a relationship between severe mental illness and violence. They support this claim by first stating that there is a significant difference of those in prisons who have mental illness or disorders than those without. Substance abuse is a huge part of this mental illness statistic, but it still counts, as it is indeed a severe mental illness. Substance abuse has a high chance of making a person violent than a person who does not use substances at all. A person under the influence is prone to be more violent, incompetent, and disrespectful to

themselves and others. They then compare those in prison who have severe illnesses to those without them at all. They find that a lot of violent crime offenders have some kind of mental illness (which is not to say that you have to have a mental illness to commit a violent crime,) while only a fraction of them do not. Van Dorn et al's purpose is to inform or even persuade people that mental illness has something to do with violent crimes in order to help inform those ignorant of it. They establish a formal tone to those in the field of psychology.

This work is significant because it is a counterclaim to my claim that criminals should not be using mental illness as a scapegoat or a reason as to why they committed an act or crime.

The authors are explaining that there is some kind of correlation between violence and mental illness.

Peterson, Jillian. Skeem, Jennifer. Kennealy, Patrick. Bray, Beth. Zvonkovic, Andrea. "How Often and How Consistently Do Symptoms Directly Precede Criminal Behavior Among Offenders With Mental Illness?" *Law and Human Behavior*, vol. 38, no. 5, 2014, pp. 439-449, *Google Scholar*, doi: 10.1037/lhb0000075. Accessed 23, Sept. 2018. In their scholarly journal article, "How Often and How Consistently Do Symptoms Directly Precede Criminal Behavior Among Offenders With Mental Illness?" Jillian Peterson, University

of California, Jennifer Skeem, University of California, Patrick Kennealy, University of South Florida, Beth Bray, University of North Dakota, and Andrea Zvonkovic, Columbia University state that most mentally ill criminals did not commit their crimes solely because

of their mental illness. They support this claim by first stating that a direct relationship means that the criminal's mental illness directly drove them to commit their crimes. In other words, they are saying that these people are either going through psychosis, or a specific symptom causes them to commit an illegal act. Their findings conclude that only a

very small percentage of mentally ill criminals actually acted directly because of their mental illness. Peterson et al. also state that there is a difference between symptoms and traits. For example, they go on to say that a symptom of psychosis is anger. This may be true, but anger is a human emotion, and anyone can act on anger. Someone does not have to be mentally ill to be angry and commit a violent crime because of it. Peterson et al. purpose is to inform people by using their experiment results in order to tell their audience

that not all mentally ill criminals committed crimes directly because of their mental illness.

They establish a formal tone for scholars and professionals in the Criminal Justice field. This work is significant because it helps people understand that not every act committed by

a mentally ill person is because of their illness. People are more than their illness, and others

ignorant to that fact assume that crimes committed by that group of people is only solely because of that fact.

Dutton, Donald. White, Katherine. Fogarty, Dan. "Paranoid Thinking in Mass Shooters."

*Aggression and Violent Behavior*, vol. 18, no. 5, 2013, pp. 548-553. *Google Scholar*

*search complete*. doi: 10.1016/j.avb.2013.07.012. Accessed 20 Oct 2018. In their

scholarly journal article, "Paranoid Thinking in Mass Shooters," Donald Dutton et al,

University of British Columbia, argues that mass shooters have some kind of mental

illness or past troubles that caused them to commit their crimes. They support this

claim by first stating that many of the "famous" mass shooters have all either been

bullied by their peers or have had a terrible home life. They use examples like Eric

Harris, who was one of the Columbine shooters, who said he was tired of being made

fun of by his high school peers. This was his fuel to commit such a heinous such as his.

Towards the end of the text, the authors continue to use examples of mass shooters who

all had some kind of hate or anger, even saying that their mental illness fueled their anger

even more. They say that mental illnesses such as paranoia or schizophrenia could have

pushed them to commit the acts that they did. Dutton et al's purpose is to persuade in

order to convince the audience that mass shooters too may have some kind of pent up

feelings or mental illness, which was the reason for their actions. They establish

a formal tone for those in the Psychology field of study. This work is significant

because it explains to people what goes on in mass shooter's brains and why they

committed their actions.

Corrigan, Patrick. Morris, Scott. Michaels, Patrick. Rafacz, Jennifer. Rüşch, Nicolas.

“Challenging the Public Stigma of Mental Illness: A Meta-Analysis of Outcome Studies”

*Psychiatric Services*, vol. 63, no. 10, 2012, pp. 963-973. *Google Scholar search*

*complete*, doi: 10.1176/appi.ps.005292011. Accessed 21 Oct. 2018. In their scholarly

journal article, “Challenging the Public Stigma of Mental Illness: A Meta-Analysis of

Outcome Studies,” Patrick Corrigan, Illinois Institute of Technology, et al. argue that the

mental health stigma is a very negative one because people are judgemental and ignorant

of the topic. They develop this claim by first conducting an experiment. Their experiment

gathers random people from different countries to read articles and statistics about

those who are mentally ill. Their experiment consists of 38,364 people from 14 different

countries and lasts from 1972-2010. Overall, people’s stigma about mental illness

changed greatly as years progressed. People who participated when the experiment first

started had negative views because of the lack of knowledge and open-mindedness on

the topic. Further into the experiment, people knew more about mental illness and were

more inclined to learn and be less cruel about the topic. Corrigan et al’s purpose of the

text is to inform people now about the topic they conducted on the opinions of mental

health over the years in order to show how the mental health stigma has changed. They

establish a formal tone for scholars and professionals in the psychology field of study.

This work is significant because it shows that even though the mental health stigma

has slightly improved, it still had and has bad representation. This still affects those with

mental illnesses every day.



Keller, Mary. "Jumping the Gun on Mental Illness: How Television News Coverage of Rampage Violence Promulgates the Stereotype That People with Mental Illness Are Violent," *Southern California Review of Law and Social Justice* vol. 26, no. 3. Summer 2017. pp. 273-296. *Google Scholar search complete*, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/scws26&i=301>. Accessed 19 Oct 2018. In her scholarly journal article, "Jumping the Gun on Mental Illness: How Television News Coverage of Rampage Violence Promulgates the Stereotype That People with Mental Illness Are Violent," Mary Keller, University of Southern California Gould School of Law, argues that the media portrays mentally ill people to be negatively stigmatized because of how they claim mass shooters to be mentally ill and rampant. She supports this claim by first stating that the media negatively views those who are mentally ill, therefore forecasting their views onto those who watch the news or read the paper. Keller claims that people watch the news for facts, so if someone sees a mass shooter that news outlets are calling mentally ill and/or criminally insane on television, they are most likely going to believe so. She goes on to use examples from when the AIDS epidemic became a huge thing back in the 1980's-1990's on the news. When people heard negative things about it, they had negative & ignorant opinions and views on it, which caused the negative stigma that it still has to this day. Just like the negative stigma AIDS has, mental illness could have one too if news outlets keep associating it with negative connotations. Keller's purpose of this text is to persuade media & news outlets not to use such harsh and negative connotations about mental health when addressing mass shooters. She does this in order to hope that as a whole, people will not have a negative stigma of those who are affected from mental illnesses. She establishes a formal tone to scholars and professionals in the Psychology field. This

work is significant because it helps explain that there is indeed a negative mental health stigma because people still compare mass shooters to those with mental illnesses. It negatively impacts those with mental illnesses in their everyday lives.

Smith, Steven. "Neuroscience, Ethics and Legal Responsibility: The Problem of the Insanity Defense."

*Science and engineering Ethics*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2012, pp. 475-481. *Google Scholar Search*

*Complete*, doi: 10.1007/s11948-012-9390-7. Accessed 19 Oct 2018. In his scholarly journal

article, "Neuroscience, Ethics and Legal Responsibility: The Problem of the Insanity

Defense," Steven Smith, California Western School of Law, explains that the insanity

plea is not only complicated for the defense to achieve, but also complicated for the jury

and jurors. He supports his claim by first stating that it is hard to actually be "not guilty

by reason of insanity." He says that 30-40% of people plead insanity, but less than one

percent are granted not guilty by reason of insanity. It is hard to judge insanity pleas

because there are many variables that go into this. Smith states that judges and jurors

have to consider if it is either cognitive or volitional impairment, which basically means

that the defendant either did not know that their actions were wrong or if the defendant

was not aware of what they were doing. It is easy to see why it's complicated for people

to judge or even believe. Smith's purpose is to inform the audience in order to help

them understand that it is not as easy as everyone seems to not be convicted in

reason of insanity. He establishes a formal tone for scholars and professionals in the

Philosophy field of study. This work is significant because it helps the audience

understand the complications of the insanity plea. He makes sure that people know that it

is not as simple it seems.

McGinty, Emma. Webster, Daniel. Barry, Colleen. "Effects of News Media Messages About Mass Shootings on Attitudes Toward Persons With Serious Mental Illness and Public Support for Gun Control Policies" *Am J Psychiatry*, vol. 170, no. 5, 2013, pp. 494-504. *Google Scholar search complete*. doi:0.1176/appi.ajp.2013.13010014. Accessed 21 Oct 2018. In their scholarly journal article, "Effects of News Media Messages About Mass Shootings on Attitudes Toward Persons With Serious Mental Illness and Public Support for Gun Control Policies," Emma McGinty et al, Johns Hopkins University, claim that media has a significant influence on why people react to people with mental illness the way they do. They develop this claim by conducting an experiment on two different groups. The first group was given nothing but their own knowledge on mentally ill people, while group 2 was given three stories about mass shooters who the media claimed were mentally ill. In all stories, these shooters were all severely mentally ill, adding to the dramatization of the experiment. In the end, group 1's views on mentally ill people were relatively neutral (because these were their set opinions) while a lot of group 2's opinions were hostile and judgemental. Forty percent of the participants in that group believed that mentally ill people were far more dangerous than the general population, which is an outrageous statement to make. McGinty et al's purpose is to inform their audience of the negative mental health stigma that the media has caused on individuals in order to guilt them into having more compassion towards those with mental illnesses. They establish a formal tone for professionals and scholars in the psychology field of study. This work is significant because it proves that people would rather believe the media rather than form their own opinion about an issue as serious as this one.

