

Virginia Tech tragedy stuns world

Taking time to reflect on massacre at nearby university, sort out feelings of anger and confusion

Lack of affection in society leads people to violent acts

By Allie Haake
STAFF WRITER

Blaming the school will not solve our problems. Cho Seung-Hui's classmates are not at the source of the problem. Changing the current gun laws and regulations will only temporarily address the situation.

The basic foundation of our society is at the root of this week's brutal massacre leaving at least 30 Virginia Tech students dead. We justifiably hold the gunman personally responsible for his actions, but must also consider his upbringing and other societal factors that could have led him to act in such an inhumane way.

The way we are used to living and relating to each other in modern American society has created a fast-paced, desensitized world ideal for breeding people with violent inclinations.

A typical person's definition of success centers around long workdays and making his or her mark on the world, leaving little room to ensure the formation of a healthy family.

Our basic values and the way in which we bring up our children and youth is at the root of the problem, according to James W. Prescott, developmental psychologist and former health scientist administrator at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Highly globalized societies have replaced tight-knit communities of our past, leaving video games, nannies and isolation to shape the minds of our children. People are interacting with others on a global scale now more than ever, but this has only decreased the number of quality personal relationships.

The youth of our country are not receiving adequate amounts of attention, specifically physical affection, from parents. This change in our early life experiences is the principle root cause of violence, according to Prescott.

Without proper guidance and close contact from parents, children become adults without ever understanding the basics of human relationships and emotional expression.

Backtracking the progress of our society is not possible and also unbeneficial. Instead, we must assess our current situation and create a plan of change for a peaceful future.

It's easy to put blame on school policies or government legislation, and those areas of the issue deserve serious attention. However, by tightening our security and creating more distance between individuals, we are only continuing this trend toward complete personal isolation.

The truth of the massacre at Virginia Tech hurts us and leaves us in a state of utter devastation. We all must find a way to come to terms with our heart-wrenching loss. And, after some time, the only way we can truly address this issue is to look at the core structure of our modern society that leads someone to commit random acts of violence.



Allie Haake
Editor-in-Chief

Lax Virginia gun laws in need of revision, strengthening

By Ben Smith
SPORTS EDITOR

The inadequacies of Virginia's gun control laws put murder weapons in the hands of a documented mentally unstable individual, Cho Seung-Hi.

Virginia law requires that adult purchasers of firearms pass a National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), but requires no waiting period and no police involvement before purchase.

Approval takes only minutes for legal citizens or alien residents without criminal records.

This brief and flawed search failed to flag that Montgomery County, Va. detained and declared Cho mentally ill by Montgomery County, Va in December, 2005, according to the Associated Press.

Since no waiting period exists beyond these instant checks, and purchasers are not required to obtain a license or permit or receive formalized gun training before purchase in Virginia, Cho was able to purchase both guns used in the rampage legally and easily.

Even North Carolina gun laws, considered relatively loose by national standards, require individuals to obtain a gun permit through law enforcement prior to purchasing a gun, which may take up to thirty days.

In New York, applicants wait for a six-month period before law enforcement issues a permit, allowing purchasing, according to the Brady Campaign, a political lobbying group for increased gun laws.

Such police involvement in this case would have likely revealed the temporary mental illness declaration as well as two instances of police questioning after two females, whom Cho allegedly stalked, contacted authorities on separate occasions, according to the Associated Press.

In addition, Virginia law fails to require NICS background checks for gun shows and for private individuals and gun collectors, according to the Brady Campaign.

The Virginia General Assembly, and states nationwide, must pass stricter measures on gun control to prevent this from happening in the future.

Currently 35 states have no required waiting period before obtaining firearms.

No longer should gun control be viewed as a partisan, political matter to divide voters.

Instead lawmakers and citizens alike must respect the government's ability to prevent such occurrences from happening, even if it inconveniences citizens who purchase firearms with legal intentions.



Bob Smith
Sports Editor

Politicians only worsening the effects of massacre

By Ashley Horne
COPY EDITOR

Monday's tragedy at Virginia Tech left so many across the nation absolutely speechless, glued to their TV with hopes of hearing straightforward reporting. Instead, the nation heard politicians and lobbyists immediately taking sides on the issue of gun control.

After tragic events, the nation seems to come together despite all of our differences. This tragedy, called "the worst school shooting in United States History," does not just affect the Virginia Tech community but us all, as this was unexpected.

This togetherness and uniform thought seems appropriate after such an event. What does not seem appropriate is the need for many politicians to make the tragedy into their own political agenda. We have all heard the Second Amendment arguments for "the right of the people to keep and bear arms," which pro-gun supporters and lobbyists are so quick to spout off. We have all also heard the gun-control lobbyists shouting for laws to prohibit many Americans from purchasing semi-automatics and other lethal weapons.

No matter what your opinion on the issue is directly after tragic deaths, it seems completely inappropriate for either side to advocate their opinions. At least wait a few days, not less than 24 hours, before directing the public's attention to your agenda.

Sen. John McCain said at a Presidential rally in Texas Monday afternoon that he was saddened by the day's earlier tragedy, but the events reaffirmed his pro-gun belief.

"I do believe in the constitutional right that everyone has, in the Second Amendment to the Constitution, to carry a weapon. Obviously we have to keep guns in the hands of law-abiding citizens," McCain said, according to a BBC news report.

Why did Senator McCain feel it was necessary to talk about his beliefs the same day one gunman killed 32 people and wounded around 15 others? The Republican senator was not the only pro-gun lobbyist to come forward within 24 hours. Their action to defend gun-rights diminishes the magnitude of the event and transforms attention and outrage away from the suffering Virginia Tech campus.

This kind of immediate lobbying is not abnormal to see after school shootings. Gun lobbyists, including the National Rifle Association, appeared in the media within a couple days of the Columbine High School shooting in 1999. The same occurred last fall after the Amish school shooting.

It is understandable for lobbyists to use such events as backing for their arguments, but people deserve at least a week to mourn before politicians divert the main issue.



Ashley Horne
Copy Editor

Unity and forgiveness will bring us through times of sorrow

By Paul Petrequin
GUEST WRITER

When tragedies befall us, it calls into question the nature of both the world and the people who inhabit it.

We find ourselves searching for answers, reasons and sanctuary, all of which are difficult to see in a future that is so much darker than it was just four days ago. It calls into focus the small things, details so minute we don't notice them until they are all we have to remember 32 innocent Americans gunned down on a university campus.

In an era of countless technological abominations meant to convenience life, when a young man finds a handgun as his best resort, it dumfounds us. It shatters senses of security the world over. It leaves us unsure of where to begin a rebuilding process, if it can even be called that.

We can all find solace in the fact that the entire nation is shedding tears for people they will never know and families they have never met. That, in itself, is humanity.

The ripple effect of the event on the Virginia Tech campus has been felt by all of us, and the counteracting tidal wave of love and support from this great nation is the first stone in a foundation of security that we all witnessed topple in a matter of hours.

I don't know Cho Seung-Hui, whom police have identified as the 23-year-old shooter. I don't know the type of man he was, what music he listened to, what his favorite movie was, or what sports he played as a child.

And contrary to what many talking heads will lead you to believe, all any of us can do is speculate as to what drove him to such an atrocity.

I know nothing about him, nor do I know anything about the 32 others who died yesterday, and yet I grieve. I mourn for these people and their families like I would my own kin, and from this I hope and pray for change.

No one can make sense of what has just happened. At best we confide in each other, come closer to one another, and pray that a soft hug or simple handshake can alter the future of a distressed individual who has lost touch with his or herself.

For it is people who make the difference, it is people who promote change within each other, and it is people who define one another through the same loving and caring support we show to complete strangers as we do our best friends.

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The Banner is a designated public forum and welcomes letters to the editor and articles, considering them on a basis of interest, space and timeliness. Letters and articles should be e-mailed to banner@unca.edu and limited to 300 words. They should be signed with the writer's name, followed by the year in school, major or other relationship to UNC Asheville. Include a telephone number to aid in verification. All articles submitted are subject to editing.

Mentally disabled people susceptible to abuse

By Lisa Gillespie
MANAGING EDITOR

Words hurt.

Don Imus found that out. But there are other words, words people use every day, that are just as hateful and just as unjustified.

They call my Aunt Betsy "retarded."

My aunt has Down Syndrome. I did not realize this until I was about twelve, when I played cards with her and realized that I was continually winning. My father explained to me that she is mentally disabled and, mentally, would remain a child for her entire life.

When people use the word "retarded" to mean "stupid," I think of my Aunt Betsy. She is not stupid. She holds down a job, is artistically talented and is a kind person.

She is not "retarded." She is developmentally disabled.

To some, "retarded" means stupid. "Mentally retarded" is no longer a mental-health term, and when one connects this word to "stupid," it is linked to actual mentally handicapped persons. It is hard to give entitlement and a sense of rights to able-minded persons, even harder for persons with mental disabilities.

Eighty-three percent of women with disabilities will become sexual abuse victims in their lifetime, according to the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities.

Some see children with disabilities as inhuman or less important than their "healthy" counterparts and therefore are not taught their rights and are more susceptible to

"Mentally retarded" is no longer a mental-health term, but people use it to mean stupid.



Lisa Gillespie
Managing Editor

abuse.

A study of 120 children, made up of 60 abused, 30 neglected and 30 nonabused children, reported that 25 percent of the abused group was diagnosed as mentally retarded as compared to 20 percent of the neglected group and three percent of the nonabused group, according to the AJMD.

In American society, where the assault and rape of an individual is often blamed on the individual, it is important not to see mentally handicapped individuals as retarded, or stupid, because this justifies the action of abuse. The individual was either not listening, was acting out or could not tell the person to stop. They were stupid. They were retarded.

Sexual assault implies a lack of consent, which can arise from an inability to say yes or no. A person is considered incapable of consent when they are mentally handicapped or less than 16 years old, according to the West Virginia Foundation for Rape Information and Services.

Iraqi government officials said Al Qaeda uses mentally handicapped children as suicide bombers and spies in Iraq, Iraqi families consider mental handicaps to be a burden and sell them to Al Qaeda or they are kid-

When there are no major penalties for abuse upon mentally handicapped persons, the actions perpetuate.

Similarly, the majority of American society views mental handicaps as a burden. Though we have no reports of mentally handicapped children being sold off to insurgents, mentally handicapped children are the most likely to be sexually and physically abused.

A more recent study of 40,000 children in Omaha schools from 1995 to 1996 found that children with disabilities suffered a rate of abuse 3.44 times greater than children without disabilities. The relative rates for sexual assault was 5.5 times greater, for neglect 6.7 times higher and for emotional abuse seven times higher.

Caregivers are more likely to abuse children with difficult temperaments, behavioral disorders and mental handicaps, according to the American Journal of Mental

Taking "retarded" out of our vocabulary is not only politically correct, but more importantly, it is considerate.

Deficiency. Usually, caregivers do not give children and youth with disabilities the power to make choices for themselves. Their dependence on caregivers also puts them at risk for becoming sexual abuse victims. They are taught to obey the caregivers, and compliance is reinforced.

Second degree sexual abuse in West Virginia, which has the highest amount of mentally handicapped persons in the United States, is sexual contact when the victim is mentally handicapped or mentally incapacitated. The perpetrator faces only up to one year in jail or a \$500 fine, according to the 2000 U.S. Census and WVFRIS.

When there are no major penalties for abuse upon mentally handicapped persons, the actions perpetuate, and using the word "retarded" to describe someone stupid, only makes the action of the perpetrator justified.

Taking "retarded" out of our vocabulary is not only politically correct, but, more importantly, it is considerate.

Al Qaeda blows up mentally handicapped children. America does not do this, but they treat them just as well.