



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on October 5, 2015

## Medical Examiner: Oregon Shooter Committed Suicide

On Saturday the Oregon state medical examiner's office [ruled](#) that Chris Harper-Mercer, the shooter who killed nine people and injured more than a dozen others at Roseburg's Umpqua Community College last Thursday, died by his own hand and not as the result of a shootout with police, as some initially surmised. Despite being heavily armed, the 26-year-old apparently turned one of his weapons on himself rather than engage the police in a firefight.



This announcement has once again raised the question: Why? Why would a quiet loner with no history of aggressive or threatening behavior enter classrooms and begin taking lives before taking his own?

Part of the answer may be in a "hate-filled" note he left at the scene, which law-enforcement officials said reflected anger. He wrote that he "felt the world was against him," that he was "in a bad way ... depressed ... sullen ... [that he] had no life ... [and that he] would be welcomed in Hell and embraced by the devil."

Harper-Mercer, a student at the community college, apparently had no girlfriends despite putting up his profile on a dating site for "spiritual singles," saying that he was "looking for someone who shares my beliefs ... [such as the] Internet, killing zombies, movies [and] music." On his Myspace profile he listed Sci-fi and horror movies as among his favorites, along with romantic comedies.

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He lacked interpersonal communication skills, according to people who knew him. One his classmates, Bryan Clay, said that every day "I'd see Chris ... shaved head, combat boots, camo pants and a plain brown or white shirt. He would just walk really fast [and] avoid anybody who came towards him."

Neighbors commented on his occasional temper tantrums, which they could hear emanating from his mother's apartment. Said Reina Webb, "He was kind of like a child, so that's why his tantrums would be like kind of weird. He's a grown man. He shouldn't be having a tantrum like a kid."

He hung out online with a loosely organized group that called itself the "beta boys," the members of which shared a "profound disappointment" with their lives and the lack of meaningful relationships. Even the U.S. Army discharged Harper-Mercer after a brief stint in 2008 for "failing to meet the minimum administrative standards to serve."

Adam Lankford, the author of *The Myth of Martyrdom: What Really Drives Suicide Bombers, Rampage Shooters, and Other Self-Destructive Shooters*, noted that shooters who commit massacres such as the one in Roseburg last week have some common traits: The killer feels victimized, oppressed, unappreciated, or even bullied, and so he feels justified in taking revenge on innocents in order to "get even."

Often, said Lankford, the disaffected loner first decides to commit suicide, and then to do it in a spectacular fashion that somehow justifies what otherwise would be a singular and largely unnoticed event.



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Tim Dees, a criminal justice technology writer, noted that often a shooter such as Harper-Mercer wants to commit one “last great act of revenge and defiance”:

Most of these people are angry at the world over the way they have been treated, or at least the way they perceive they have been treated.

This is payback. They go into this situation with the full intent of killing themselves to deny the world its opportunity for retribution.

Justin Freeman, a former police officer, wrote in 2012 that his initial reaction to shooters taking their own lives was that they were cowards, noting that the shooters at Virginia Tech, Newtown, Columbine High School, and elsewhere committed suicide once they were confronted by police. But now he’s not so sure: “Suicides may have been their intent all along ... that the shooter’s suicide is really an act of violence against his victims’ loved ones.”

It is worth noting that none of the experts quoted or researched for this article blamed guns, gun availability, or gun ownership as a causative factor in these mass shootings. And when the president (seeking always to advance his anti-gun agenda) or media outlets such as CNN blame “mental illness,” they enter a veritable and dangerous minefield. As Dr. Dewey Cornell, a forensic clinical psychologist and professor at the University of Virginia and the author of *School Violence: Fears Versus Facts*, noted:

It seems intuitive that anyone who commits a mass shooting must be mentally ill, but this is a misuse of the term “mental illness.” Mental illness is a term reserved for the most severe mental disorders where the person has severe symptoms such as delusions or hallucinations.

Decades of mental health research show that only a small proportion of persons with mental illness commit violent acts, and together they account for only a fraction of violent crime. Some mass shooters have had a mental illness. Most do not.

The most dangerous conclusion to make, according to these experts, is to assume that shooters are mentally ill. Even worse, to assume that government should be the final arbiter of just who is mentally ill and who is not.

The Oregon shooter exhibited many of the symptoms of someone who is immature, and angry at the world for not recognizing him as a valued individual — for rejecting him. Finding support in a group that feels the same way merely solidified his feeling of worthlessness.

At some point, he decided to show that world that he was somebody after all, and took it out on not only himself but others as well.

*A graduate of an Ivy League school and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at [www.LightFromTheRight.com](http://www.LightFromTheRight.com), primarily on economics and politics.*



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