**Tom Imhoff:** Welcome everyone. I'm Tom Imhoff, I'm, as well as being a professor of Philosophy here at Chico State. I guess most of you guys already know that because you are my students. I'm the director of the peace institute at CSU Chico. Tonight we got a program on school violence. Three presenters here. Our first presenter will be Cindy Carlson who is a longtime educator currently working in the Orland School District right now with a special interest in figuring out how to treat students who have trouble fitting into normal educational environments. So she will talk first and then I'll do a little presentation about 20 minutes or so on violence. A general theory that I think hooks in well with what's going not only in our schools but also in our society. So I'll get to that. And then we will finish up the formal part of our presentation with a friend of mine, a filmmaker from France who now makes his home in Chico, Gerrard Ungerman. He'll, he promised to surprise us. So if you can hang around for Gerrard's part of the program. He said he will be surprising, I urge you to stay and be surprised. So without further ado I'll hand it over to Cindy.

**Cindy Carlson:** Welcome. I'm going to read mine because I, sometimes I get a little nervous when I stand up here. And I had a lot that I wanted to say and I just wanted to make sure that I covered it all.

So, I want to welcome you and thank you for coming to tonight's panel discussion on school shootings. My goal for tonight is that we can discuss the issues and circumstances occurring today and begin to problem solve and generate possible solutions to this tragic widespread epidemic. I would like to dedicate this evening to my sister Connie Carlson who in 1960 at the age of three was shot and killed by a seven-year-old boy with his father's gun. That being said as a sister and a mother, gun
violence is an issue that weighs heavy on my heart and mind. As a lifelong peace activist, violence of all types weigh heavy on my heart and mind. As an academic coach for the past 10 years for Chico State students with ADHD, giftedness, autism, bipolar disorder, dyslexia, and other learning challenges and strengths school shootings on university campuses weigh heavy on my mind and heart. As a K-12 educator for 37 years and a current education specialist intern with the Chico State credential program working with children and adults with mental health issues, school shootings at K-12 schools is an issue that weighs heavy on my heart and mind.

That’s why last year after the incident at UC Santa Barbara I proposed and scheduled this event for tonight. I believe it’s time for us as a society to embrace mental health issues and begin to raise the stigma associated with mental illness. When I was 16 my boyfriend’s mom had cancer. She asked to see me before she passed away but I was too afraid to see her. At that time in 1971 there was a huge stigma associated with cancer. I was too young and afraid to confront it face-to-face. I've always regretted that I couldn't bring myself to visit her. Today cancer has touched all of our lives. Chances of healing and survival are amazing, the stigma is gone. After the Columbine shooting I read an article in Time magazine. They’ve done some research on the causes and possible solutions for school shootings. They claim that the underlying issue behind the violence was a lack of empathy. When we treat people who seem different than us as if they are less than we are they can retreat socially, become isolated, angry, and disenfranchised from society. The article looked at 17 curriculum programs in the United States that focus on empathy training and they rated the Second Step empathy training curriculum program out of Seattle. It’s by the committee for children as the number one program in the United States. The article
recommended beginning empathy training in preschool and continuing it all the way through high school.

For the past seven years I ran my own private school in Chico called Rose Scott School. It was a school for K-12 kids with ADHD, autism, giftedness, and other learning challenges and strengths. Every Monday for the whole morning K-12 students participated in empathy training. It set the tone for our week. Over the years we saw evidence that our kids became very empathic towards each other and our school community became a strong close caring group of people. As a current Chico State graduate student we are trained in alcohol awareness and dating violence. I just finished my Not Anymore online training that took like two hours, I was amazed how long it took but it was great information and I think its good information for people at the university to know. I really believe that all freshmen should also receive empathy training. Reaching pre-K to 12th grade would be a huge step towards a more accepting society but adding university students into the equation just makes good sense to me. And as a follow-up to tonight’s event on Saturday from 9 to 1 in Sylvester’s we’re going to be having an empathy training session with Diane Suzuki. So I’d like to invite you all to attend that too. Thank you.

Tom Imhoff: Thanks Cindy. We’re going to have question and answer afterwards too so if you have questions we will do it as soon as Gerrard gets finished. What I wanted to do with my part of the program was introduce a theory of violence that is proposed by one of my intellectual heroes, James Gilligan.
Tom Imhoff: Professor retired of psychiatry and medicine, Harvard Medical School. He proposed, and wrote his book which is up here Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic, came out in 1996. And he wrote a follow up. He retired right around 2000 from teaching. But he is continuing his research. In 2001 he wrote a follow-up book entitled Preventing Violence which summarizes a lot of his finding that he lays out in this particular book. So I just wanted to go through that to lay a foundation because it turns out when he wrote this book in the late 90s there the National Academy of Sciences went on record as saying one of the things that we need in the social sciences is a comprehensive theory of violence and as of the mid-1990s we didn't have one. So Gilligan has been worried about violence his entire life. And he was said about construct, construct a theory of violence and he came up. And I'm going to summarize that here in about 15 minutes. So here it goes.
Tom Imhoff: He starts out with a family story. It turns out that violence has always been a part of James Gilligan's life. And his thesis is that people become violent in order to protect what he calls their soul. And by soul he doesn't mean something mysterious and ethereal, he means your personality, he means that social construct that makes up who you are as a psychological being. And when that starts to disintegrate we call that going crazy, losing your mind. And he spent a quarter of a century of his professional life working in the Massachusetts state prison system, 10 years of that, running the psychological department for the entire prison system. So he talked to a lot of very violent men and as he says in his book because a lot of his friends asked him why James, why are you going, why are you studying in prison's I mean there's a lot of things you can do, that seems depressing and dangerous. And he said well I want to understand violence and if you want to understand something you go where you can see it the most clearly and that's our prison system.

So why did he become interested in violence? He tells his family story. Happened in the mid-1800s. He tells a story of an Irish immigrant who escaped the potato famine in Ireland to start a homestead in kind of what's now the Badlands area in Nebraska, South Dakota. And he worked hard. He was a violent man and Gilligan says he really had to be where he lived, there was no law. And he was just trying to get a living raising cattle, he is a rancher. He worked really hard and realized after setting up his ranch that he forgotten about one thing, he wanted to start a family. And he was not married. One day certainly after he realized this a small family came across walking the prairie, this big expanse of grass, nobody around. And he invited them in because that's what you do when travelers are coming across the country and he gave them a place to stay for the night. It was a French trapper and his Native American wife and
their 14-year-old daughter. And when they left the next day they left their daughter with him to be his wife. They had children pretty rapid succession after that, one every year. But this, her favorite, the mom's favorite was her youngest. And by the time the little guy was five years old it was a really disturbing pattern that developed because the rancher couldn't control his anger. And he would, he's an abusive, an abusive parent. And he would smack his kid around which is really disturbing if you're Native American because that's one thing you don't do in Native American culture. You don't strike children. And he was beating this kid up quite regularly. And his mom couldn't think of any way to protect him but to threaten him and said look you've got to stop hitting my kid if you don't you're going to be sorry. Well he couldn't stop hitting his kid and one day the child disappeared. The husband was frantic so he got his field hands together and they went out searching and they found the body. They found the boy dead at the bottom of a well and they pulled him out. And the rancher was kind of frantic with grief and anger, how could this of happened. And he called for a relative of his who lived in a nearby town to come who was also a doctor and the doctor came and examined the boy and the body. And discovered that the kid was dead before he hit the water, his lungs had not filled up with water they had already collapsed by the time he ended up in the well. So he was killed somehow. They went back to the house, the mom's gone by now but what's on the dining room table or the table in the kitchen is a pie, fruit pie filled with strychnine. So they examined the boy's body and he died from strychnine poisoning.

And Gilligan says this is a family story. He says I know this because the doctor who examined the body that was my great grandfather. And the family, the Gilligan family talks about this all the time in hushed tones because they never figured out what
really happened. Did, obviously the mom baked the pie but was the pie meant for the kid? Did she want to kill her favorite son? And if that’s true, why would she want to do that? Maybe the child ate the pie out of..., you know, it was an accident. Maybe the pie was meant for the father. And then, you know, why did she leave? Did she run away? Did she walk into the river that was on the edge of the ranch and just drowned herself? Or did she just disappear because she was so stricken with grief, at having her favorite son killed? Or maybe her husband killed her in a fit of rage? But she was gone, the sheriff couldn't question her. And Gilligan wanted to make sense, how could something like this happen? And so it remains a mystery. But that's kind of where Gilligan's ideas start.
One of the things that Gilligan did was say we need a new approach to violence. And the approach was to stop treating violence as a criminal justice issue and start treating it like it's an issue of public health, needs a doctor. He said if we can, if we treat violence as an issue of public health then what we need to do is isolate the cause. What causes violence because diseases are caused by various kinds of pathogens, so we can find out what the pathogen is that's causing violence? We could isolated it, get rid of it and if you get rid of the cause of disease you get rid of the disease. And decides that if violence is a public health issue, you can treat the symptoms too as opposed to a criminal justice issue where the main problem is to identify who the evildoer is and punish them. And that hasn't worked out. That model, what he calls the moral model hasn't worked out so well for humanity.
He also says that violence should be considered tragic. And what does that mean? He has a definition of tragedy that means and he distinguishes tragedy from what he calls pathos, natural disasters, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods that kind of stuff that kill people. There's nothing you can do about that stuff. There's no, well very little that humans can do to stop it. We prepare but I mean if tragedy, I mean if the hurricane knocks down your house and it falls on you you're dead. But violence is different from that in the sense that it has to do with traces that people are making. So it is under to some extent human control and that means for Gilligan it didn't have to happen that way if we just make different choices we won't have violence and deadly outcomes. That means that, and this goes back to the idea of violence as a public health issue. When you treat violence that way, what you are studying is a preventable and predictable event that's going to have causes. So that's what he wants to isolate.
The stakes are high. If we don't, we've, since the dawn of civilization the violence that human beings are perpetrating on others remains out of control. And our killing technologies are becoming more and more deadly. Gilligan even mentions the idea of the fact that we have nuclear weapons now. Means that if we don't get this under control it's only a matter of time before human species becomes the first species in the history of the planet to bring about its own extinction. We have to get violence under control and so far we've been doing a fairly bad job of doing that.
And here's the surprise, here's the surprising thing. There is an obstacle, one of the main obstacles to understanding what violence is, is the fact that we're using the wrong model. What we're using is the moral model what I called earlier the criminal justice model. And with the criminal justice model the point is not so much to understand why people kill other people as to identify who the perpetrator of the violence was and then punish them giving them their just desserts. The main thing about the moral, of the moral model is that people should get what they deserve. And that means we, after we identified who the wrongdoer is we blame them and we punish them. And that's been remarkably unsuccessful in getting violence under control. I mean we keep building prisons, we have harsh sentences, the violence rates don't go down.
So why should we think that it's possible, why is it actually even possible to get violence under control and the answer for Gilligan is because it can be done. And how do we know that? Well because it has been done. Gilligan did it. When he was director for 10 years of the psychological unit, psychological disorders unit in Massachusetts State Penitentiary he retrained using his theories about what causes violence, the staff. And he brought what had been a very violent institution, got rid of lethal violence in about two years. So it's remarkable, a remarkable record. And this middle bullet here, predictive power, that's one of the two criteria that philosophers of science used to identify a useful scientific theory, can you predict what's going to happen and can you replicate your results. And Gilligan predicted that if we do this then we will eradicate at least lethal violence. And his experience in a prison was that, that worked. His theory did have very good predicted power. The other, and I won't have time to go into this today because it's a long story. The predicted power one is a pretty short story but the other criterion for an adequate scientific theory whether it's the hard sciences or the social sciences is whether or not the theory has explanatory power. Can it hook, can it connect the dots? And if you read Gilligan's book you'll see that he does a lot, I mean it's like 400 page book and he does a lot of work connecting the dots for us to make it plausible. He's got a very good explanatory theory.
There's another bit of evidence that's really important not to forget. And that is that most other developed countries in the world, on the planet have gotten rid of most of the lethal violence in their societies. The United States by contrast has rates of violence between 2 and 10 times as high as any other developed country. In fact if you want to see higher levels of violence you have to go to Third World countries. You know Guatemala, Pakistan, I mean places where violence is really high but you have to look at undeveloped countries. So why should we think that violence can be prevented, because every other developed country on the planet already has done it. Think of, he's thinking of the Scandinavian countries Western Europe, Japan Canada, Australia, New Zealand. The United States is kind of the leader of the developed world in rates of violence and it doesn't have to be that way.
I mean the fact that it is that way, Gilligan identifies as a tragedy. So what if his theory, it's kind of remarkably simple and straightforward. He says that the pathogen that causes, and this is from his research, the pathogen that causes violence is an emotional, and it's an emotional cause, shame. And that people get violent when they are exposed to overwhelming amounts of shame. And what, he took this up to the beginning story about the mother and the child who died of strychnine poisoning. When she, when Gilligan said she was worried about saving his soul what she was worried about is the kind of shame that her little boy was feeling every time his father beat him, right. Because what beating does is that it gives you the message that there's something wrong with you. I don't love you I hate you and I hate you because you are defective and to show you how angry I am I'm going to beat you. And that's the message you get emotionally and that destroys people and that is what Gilligan is surmising. Was the motive for the mom baking the strychnine pie, was the she was, if indeed she killed her son it was because she judged saving his soul to be more important than saving his body. If she doesn't do anything he gets broken by his father. But if she kills him she's doing a good thing, she's saving his soul, she's allowing him to die not having been broken. And Gilligan also points out that the prisoners in the prisons where Gilligan worked and interviewed and interviewed hundreds of them, told him the same thing. It's all about self-respect and self-respect if you are a self-respecting person that means you don't feel ashamed. If you feel ashamed that means that you got defects, there's something wrong with you. And Gilligan's idea was to stop shaming people, help them with their defects because we are all defective, we all have problems that we have trouble dealing with. And what we don't need to do is blame people for having problems, that's the moral model and shame them, punish them for having those defects. What we need to do is help
people get rid of their defects and that's essentially the training that Gilligan did in the prisons.
Shame is not the problem. That's important to recognize. Shame is actually a very useful emotion because shame tells you when there's something wrong with you. When you feel ashamed, he actually points out, he says the worst emotion to have is the feeling of being, a feeling of shame is the worst emotion that you can experience. Because the feeling of shame points to something that is wrong with you. And this next stuff I'll just say a few words about another psychologist, Abraham Maslow who's writing in the 1940s. He had a hierarchy of needs psychological needs that he identified and this is pretty much agreed with in the physiological community. No dispute here that two of the important psychological needs that every human being requires to survive, belongingness and love, rank and status. People have to care about you, they have to love you and you have to have a position in the social order that can be respected. So that hooks up very nicely with Gilligan's idea of shame and that's what happened in the prisons. If you let people know that they belong there, that you're not going to humiliate them and you're not going to point out their defects. What you are going to do is help them get rid of their defects, they stop becoming violent.
In the prisons the, well actually I should say that Gilligan went to look at the prisons because that's where the patterns of violence are most obvious. But he says once you understand the patterns you can take a look at society in general and see the same patterns at work but you have to know what you're looking for. So he went to the prisons so he can find out what the patterns were and then he noticed them working in our society. And the main pattern is that shame is brought about through domination and humiliation and in fact that it's humiliating to be dominated. And that's what happens when you force people to do things they don't want to do. And if you humiliate them by pointing out mistakes they made instead of helping them figure out how to not make those mistakes again it demonstrates weakness. And having your defects on display for the whole world which is people who blame other people are intending to do, that's humiliating. And that's what, there is a lot more to it but that's kind of the basis of where violence comes from. People are trying to stave off the feeling of shame and humiliation.
Now when you take this idea that shame is the pathogen that causes violence when it's overwhelming. A little bit of shame is a good thing. A lot of shame is toxic. You can see that Littleton, Colorado the shootings at Columbine fit that motto really well. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the trenchcoat Mafia. They were vilified, they were humiliated on a daily basis by much of the rest of the student body. If you go back and take a look that's what the reports say. In Gilligan, in chapter 4 of Gilligan's second book Preventing Violence he goes into this in some detail about what exactly Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold went through. And how violence allowed them to get some amount of self-respect. Remember that self-respect in our value system in the west, actually in the east too, it's kind of a general theory means that if you can dominate others you demonstrate that you are superior to them. And if you're superior to them they're not going to dare point out any of your defects, that's what shame is, having your defects on public display. And Gilligan also points out that violence actually works as a strategy, short-term strategy in the long-term it doesn't work at all. Can't go into that tonight. But in the short term violence works to remove feelings of shame because when you're being shame that means people are laughing at you, they're humiliating you for the kind of defects that you have. Whether it's a stutter or whether you don't, you're not quick enough in understanding jokes, or you're just making mistakes in whatever your job is, or maybe you're not a good student. I mean you can be ashamed about all kinds of things. And one of the things that violence does is it gets people, if the violence is directed at them, the people that are laughing at you they're going to stop laughing real fast. And the best way to get somebody to stop laughing at you is to make them cry, that's where humiliation comes in. It takes the spotlight off of you and puts it on to the person who formally was humiliating you.
Well that's where empathy comes in. I mean what Gilligan points out is with respect to Littleton, Colorado, the shootings at Columbine. And virtually you know the kid down in Santa Barbara who murdered a bunch people. The kid who was up in Oregon who murdered a bunch of people. Those guys were humiliated. I was talking to a friend of mine about this today. They were humiliated because they weren't successfully, these were all young men who weren't successful making relationships with other with young women. They were continually being rejected. There is a long story there about why being an adequate man in our culture requires men to have relationships with women, but that's and Gilligan goes into that in a lot of detail. But the point is that if you can't, if you're a young man and Gilligan points out, this is kind of surprising when I read it, violence is a male problem. It doesn't mean that women don't get violent. But what he does mean is the vast majority of violence in the world is perpetrated by men against other men. It's not to say there's not a lot of violence perpetrated by men against women. And there is a lesser degree of violence per day by women against women. But he also points out that women commit violence against men much more often than they commit violence against women. And he comes up with a label to remind us that this is actually the case. And he says that men in our culture, I guess in western culture are violence objects. They are the proper subject of violence, it’s good to commit violence, it’s okay, it's acceptable to commit violence against men and it's okay for men to commit violence. Women are sex objects, they're not violence objects. Women are shamed for using violence that's why women are called bitches if they're too aggressive. They compete to well, you try to shame them by saying you know you’re too powerful you shouldn’t be this powerful, that’s the job of a man to be powerful.
And a lot of his book is going to be about how our gender roles, what we expect men to do and to behave properly. What we expect women to do to behave properly. That needs to change. That's kind of at the basis of the violence that men are perpetrating against each other. Both men and women but mostly about men. So where does empathy come in? If you empathize with somebody it's hard to hurt them because you know what it's like to go through what they're going through and you don't like it so why should they like it. If you empathize with somebody you're going to try and help them stop feeling ashamed and humiliating. You're going to help them, you're going to give them nonviolent ways to build self-esteem. So violence is one way to build self-esteem but it causes a lot of damage. The trick or the technique that Gilligan is proposing is that we offer nonviolent ways to build self-esteem. To empathize means to help people overcome their defects and to comfort people who are in pain because they had been humiliated. We know what humiliation feels like and we think nobody should be subjected to that.
So what does that mean? It means that we need to reimagine our social institutions. We can reimagine our prisons the way that Gilligan reimagined the Massachusetts State Prison when he was in control. He tried to push it in the direction of becoming a junior college, much less punitive. Education is a good way to what I call building your resume and people who have strong resumes don’t usually get violent because they know that they’re valuable people. How do they know? Look at their resume. So the prison as a community college will help people build their resumes. Societies, I already mentioned this, help people the people to build self-esteem nonviolently by taking care of them. Remember Abraham Maslow, everybody needs belongingness and love, rank and status. That means you need to have skills that society needs that gives you rank and status, and you need to have people who care about you that’s belongingness and love.

If you have those, and the welfare state model, Denmark or pretty much any of the Scandinavian countries or any of the western European countries, and of course you can through in Japan there. They have very low levels of violence because they take care of their people. And people who have their needs taking care of don’t feel humiliated, don’t feel that they are being laughed at. They feel cared for and helped. And in schools we have to reimagine our schools so that they don’t become places like Littleton did where people who are identified as outcasts and misfits and instead are given nonviolent ways to build their self-esteem, to build their resume. Humiliation only causes people to get angry and self-defensive because being humiliated destroys one of the psychological needs that you have. And with your psychological needs, I mean things that are necessary for you to survive as a human being if that being taken away from you you're going to die. You're dying
psychologically, nobody wants to die psychologically. And people instead of being killed psychologically they will fight back that’s why violence that is what violence is useful for. It’s for, useful in self-defense. In fact the way the prisons are ran right now and Gilligan points this out, as people who kill other people they’re always innocent. How come? Because the person they killed had it coming. And what was the damage that was being done? That guy was humiliating me, he was challenging me, he was saying that he was better than I was. And as one of the inmates said, you can’t let a challenge go by because when somebody challenges you to a fight you have to fight him. If you don’t fight them you lose your self-respect and if you don’t have self-respect you don’t have anything. So we have to give people ways other than violence to build their resumes, to develop their self-esteem.
So that means we just have to stop pulling the trigger. Violence has a cause, overwhelming shame. We have got to stop shaming people who are inadequate, that's all of us. And prisons that do this get rid of the lethal violence, Gilligan proved that. And societies that do that get rid of most of the lethal violence, that's the Scandinavian model, the welfare state model. So it's not a mystery.
It has been done and we can do it here in the United States. But why don't we? Well it turns out that there are people who benefit from the status quo. Of course you could read Gilligan's book, either one of them and he will go into this in a lot more detail. But the status quo by definition benefits some people otherwise we wouldn't continue the way it is. And if we have a very violent society guess what happens. People in society get distracted from the, being ripped off for example and the bankers in 2008. They ripped off most of the middle class, to trillions of dollars. Nobody has gone to jail, nobody is going to go to jail. And the collapse of the economy in 2008 got people's attention. That's when we had the 99% movement against the 1%. But the 1 precentors want the things to stay the way they are because they are doing quite well. And violence helps us get distracted by being afraid of poor people. Most of the violence in the societies are committed by poor people and there is a reason for that. Those are the folks who are humiliated most frequently. It all ties into Gilligan's theory of the cause of violence being overwhelming shame. Most poor people though are not violent. They have belongingness and love. Poor people who don't get violent have families who care for them. So they have other ways to get self-esteem. The people who don't have families who love them they're the ones who end up in prison.

We also have our puritanical origins in this society. The Puritans, this is supposed to be I think my last slide. I think it's my last point, yeah this is my last point. The Puritans I used to think where these poor persecuted people who came over to escape religious persecution in Europe. The truth is that they are a bunch of assholes. They were always condemning people, right telling you that you're sinning. I'm going to get Puritans out here in the free speech area all the time, they will come by every
semester and tell the students that they are all going to hell, and what stuff they are doing that is wrong. It's an attempt not very useful anymore to shame but that's who the puritans were. And of course they would kill you if they could and they thought you were being sinful enough. And they killed a few people you know drowning, drowning witches, people who were really evil. So our Puritan upbringing means that we as a culture think that justice is really important and it’s important to stop people from being unjust and if we have to kill them well that’s what we have to do. And the interesting thing about that puritanical background is that both the police, the criminal justice system, and the people who commit the murders, the criminals they think the same way. They both think that they are bringing about a more just society. And that's why Gilligan says we got to stop thinking in terms of justice, in terms of giving people what they deserve because that just creates, escalates violence. We have to start thinking in terms of medicine and public health. And isolate the causes of violence and treat that and then you'll get rid of violence. And how do we know that it can happen? Well like I said the, most of the other, every other developed country on the planet has managed to do that. Got rid of most of the lethal violence. Of course you can't get rid of all of it, violence is on a continuum. But if you just take a look at the statistics demographic, the United States has 10 times as much violence as most other developed countries. Pretty much every other developed country, most other developed countries on the planet. So we know how to do it but there are some significant impediments. And that's Gilligan's theory of violence and I'm going to hand it over to Gerrard now.
Tom Imhoff: Surprise us Gerrard.

[Aplause from Audience]

Gerrard Ungerman: Alright. So first of all I would like to thank Cindy for inviting me to speak to this panel. And I would like first to tell you what I do now, sort of put into perspective what I would tell you next. I've been doing documentary films now for about 20 years focusing a lot on in particular exposing the war business. I have done several films about the war in Iraq, Middle Eastern, and Columbia. And now I have an ongoing project about interviewing people doing good things for others around the country called Respectful Revolution. Where we want to inspire people to do better. So that's for the perspective.

So now I would like you to envision something. And I mean it must occur in a scene that you would expect in a movie and you’ve seen something like this now I'm guessing. Imagine walking in high school as a student, you know 14, 15, 16 maybe. Walking in your high school, carrying an M-16 on your shoulder. A loaded M-16. Or imagine going to a math class and being very bored and for various reasons, but [inaudible]. Taking from your bag a pistol and taking it down and proceed to cleaning it to show off. I mean do you imagine the response that you would have today to 1% those kind of behaviors? How many helicopters would you have hovering over high school? How many SWAT teams deployed, for that probably I guess and rightfully so?

But that was exactly what I was doing when I was 15. I was collecting guns, into martial arts, knives, I had [inaudible]. I was actually flirting with far right groups and I
was extremely miserable at school, and I will dive into that some more. I was wittingly bring guns at school. And once for Mardi Gras where every students were dressed up, I was dressed up as a soldier and I was carrying my M-16 which I bought, on my shoulder. The principal was at the door welcoming students, you know little girl dressed as fairies, and boys dressed as Robin Hood or what have you. There comes you know, and I walk through the school and I get stopped by the principal and I feel a hand on my shoulder “What is that? What are you doing?” And I tell the guy well look, the form and stuff is plastic, it’s a toy. Well what are M-16’s made of? Of course it’s plastic. So he didn’t know and let me go. And the background of this was a long, long, long story of shame and humiliation.

You know I grew up, I never knew my father. I grew up with a mom that was very, very weak. I was raised by a grandmother who was very primitive, to say the least. Prone to violence by the way. And I had, I was never diagnosed but afterwards and reading about it I discovered that I seem to have traits which are tied to Asperger's Syndrome. High functioning autism. As a kid I had high difficulties even talking, I was stuttering, I was speaking too fast, nobody could understand me. I mean it's not perfect now but it's, you know. And I could not talk to more than, I mean I couldn't talk perfectly [Inaudible] without peeing my pants. And I was, and my grandmother who was convinced she knew everything and nobody else knew anything. She would like to dress me in ridiculous old men outfit. But of course it would draw a big enough reaction you could imagine from other kids. I would get ridiculed by boys and girls either too regularly. Thirteen, 14-year-old girls running themselves against me and pretending they're having an orgasm just because I was ridiculous.
And so this build up what you can imagine. And when you're kids the only direction that you have to go from there it's either you hang yourself I suppose or you try to become strong and potentially violent as a way to demand the respect that nobody is giving you. And so I went into martial arts and I started collecting guns. And it's not as easy to get guns in France, because I was born in France, not as easy to get guns in France as it is here, but if you like them and if you want them you will find them. And so I started collecting guns and shooting and I had some friends. I had very few friends but late actually when I was 16 I had a friend who was very much into guns too. And so he sort of pushed me further into that in a sense. And I started walking to school with guns and at the time it was like not a common thing, nobody did it. It's like, not like now where you expect something to happen. So nobody really knew how to deal with that. And can a person be so cuckoo in any way, but not dangerous. I wasn't violent. Some other kids were violent, no I was subjected to violence. I was sometimes, you know some guy wants, there was a guy, I had no idea why, but again because some people hated me because I was so ridiculous they attacked me in the bathroom. I was doing my business facing the wall, they guy comes behind me and punches me as hard as he could in the back of my head. My head fly on the wall and started bleeding and I thought I'm going to kill the guy, I'm going to kill him, I'm going to kill this fucker. I don't know him, and I have no idea why he is hitting me, I'm going to kill him. And the idea kind of simmered in my brain. I came to school a couple times with a gun in my bag. And luckily a friend of mine, one of my rare friends, a bigger guy, cornered the guy and beat him up. So your friends sort of [inaudible] in a sense, so it decreased the desire to exact revenge. And, but I was doing a lot of posturing to try to make up for my ridiculousness and try to build my machismo.
One thing I did once for instance was to, I exploded the cartridge of 22 rifle on benzene burner in chemistry class just to make a big noise and you know. I mean I was an idiot and so you do kind of stupid things. I mean in retrospect it is more of an idiot and that's how people see you. You do stupid things. And where I think empathy comes is that in this particular case after your whole track record of doing all kind of things that today would bring SWAT teams and police would send you straight to either jail or more likely to the cemetery. I got a couple times called by the principle in her much reasons the guy went away and there was a [Inaudible] and I remembered being called in her office for I forgot what. And on her desk she had the exploded case of the 22, it had burnt in the school, in the class, the chemistry class. And she was playing with it, she was twirling it in her fingers as she was talking to me. I mean the message was super clear. The message is we know it was you and we know what you're doing, we are no fool but you know we are not going to give you shit for that because what is it going to do, you don't seem to be a violent kid. I mean I never created any trouble, I was bolstering even if I came really close to doing something horrendous. I think the reason why I didn't do something horrendous because I felt a double shame, a double. It's even more shameful to do something bad like this, you know you become a total freak. So I guess I redirected my wanting to use violence to assert myself.

And after high school luckily I was I was good and some class and not so good and some others but I graded pretty decently and I and I went eventually to a [Inaudible] school. It would be equivalent to West Point in France. And I went for the military. And so I redirected my thirst for violent posturing, you know there, even though that was not me. And I had an epiphany there that's the whole main, it started with that
but it's a long story. But sort of what I want to say about it is based on my own experience. Yeah I mean it is, it's triggering a time-bomb to humiliate kids that somehow have [Inaudible] because of other things. It can be many things, it can be you're too skinny, you're too fat, you're too tall, you're too small, you stutter, somethings wrong, you dress funny or whatever. It's very easy. And I think we have probably in us, it's very primitive similar mechanism of isolating a different cell and destroying it. I think it's part of how life guarantees a resistance against diseases you know for instance. But we are not bacteria's or we are not these simple cells, we are to evolve and praise diversity and indeed understand where people come from and love, and empathy, and compassion. So that is to give people the time of day and the minimal amount of respect that they need because if you don't have that I mean, especially men more than girls. I mean girls can be violent too of course in different ways. But I think a girl would probably tend to shrivel and shrink to oppose to some guys who are going to try to strike back like scorpions.

And so [Inaudible] this is, you know I wanted to share my experience because this to me is extremely important. And I think, I never done any work around this. I want to mature some more, think about that, eventually read more about this, kind of educate myself around this. But eventually I would love to do some work on this because if we don't I mean is not per se even though it doesn't help, it's not per se the access to guns that does it, it's not per se they long slide of violence on TV. It doesn't help, all those things don't help. But I think the core thing is to try to understand the value of compassion and respect and to start teaching it at school you know like we teach other things. We used to teach at least you know basic civic principles and now we try to teach against racism, you know these type of things.
which is awesome. But I think we also need to realize the importance of not humiliating people and making time-bombs. The person may not walk into school with a gun and start shooting at people who humiliated them. Maybe they will just grow up as this sort of nerd with a twisted side that end up wearing a suit carrying a briefcase and working for some devil. Somewhere harming people, exploding people, getting even. Or it may be a case of people going into the business of weapons whether as soldiers of [Inaudible] and getting even with people. And taking any opportunity they can to themselves humiliate people back or even kill them. So I think all these points to a desperate need to study this kind of work and do the work and disarm this horrendous mechanism from hell. And that is what I wanted to share.

[Applause from Audience]

**Tom Imhoff:** How about, we have some time for some questions but if some of you guys have to take off you can take off now. But if anybody has questions for any of the panelists we can give you the mic and you can ask something that comes to mind that you're interested in.

**Audience Member:** Appreciate the open forum on this important topic. It is interesting that empirically my experience in life and understanding the history, the limited history that I have I come to play different conclusions. When I looked at the history of violence in America in the rapid increase of violence it’s interesting to me that the forsaking of the moral foundations of our country actually have facilitated an increase of violence. And you know when you make a statement about Puritans being assholes it seems to me that is kind of a moral judgement in of itself and its
personally in my understanding it's not these evil Puritans that are a problem. The problem is that we are not recognizing the fact that we all as you state, and I agree with you, are all inadequate and that it is how we deal with that inadequacy. And the work that I do in prisons at San Quentin for over 10 years, when I meet with these murderers, these convicted murderers in the context of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and dealing with shame through the [inaudible] blood of Jesus. These men have deep intimate loving relationships and that shame has gone away through that one time perfect sacrifice through Jesus Christ. So when you look at atheism in violence you will get Pol Pot. You look at Stalin and the millions upon millions that were killed in the name of atheism. I'm not so sure that morality is the problem and you are, it seems to me that your moral judgement when you say that's that, morality is the problem, that in itself is a moral judgement. Thank you.

Tom Imhoff: Thanks for that. If you mind take a look at James Gilligan and the idea of the medical approach as oppose to the moral approach. He says over and over again he says "Look I'm a scientist here. I'm not telling you what you should or shouldn't do. I'm not making any moral judgement. I'm telling you what works and what doesn't work. And if you shame people they're going to get mad and they're going to get violent. If you don't shame people they don't get mad, they don't get violent". He also has a lot of stuff to say. It's interesting you bring up Christianity. He was raised in an Episcopalian household, he is an atheist now. And I guess his idea, a couple of ideas here. First of all he says that it's ironic, I guess it's ironic, or paradoxical maybe is a better word. That the best way to create a less violent more peaceful world is by getting rid of the moral model. That is the model that tells you what you need to do is identify who the evildoers are and correct them because his idea is that people who
commit violence are just trying to defend themselves and always feel self-defensive. And he points out that from his 25 years in the prison system in Massachusetts, says the most innocent group of people you will ever find are murderers and rapists in prison because they all know that their violence was justified. And but understand why they think that, you have to understand it from an emotional point of view that they felt they are being emotionally attacked by the woman that they raped or murdered or the man that they killed or mugged. That they were actually innocent victims. And with respect to Christianity, his take on Christianity is that Christianity was a valiant yet failed attempt to get rid of violence. He says what it did was it turned violence around so that you no longer committing violence against people who are shaming you. But instead what Christianity does is it requires you to turn the violence on yourself and feel guilty for the kind of wretch that you are. And he says, that in one sense it helps and that you are no longer having people who are killing others. But when you turn the violence on to yourself that's not psychologically healthy either. And he says what we got to do is help people build self-esteem nonviolently. And although Christianity represents a valiant attempt to get rid of shame it just redirects the violence from the outside to the inside which is still destructive. So that's why he turns away from Christianity and religion in general. I mean he would say the same things a problem with Judaism or Islam. I mean any moral value system is aiming at identifying what's wrong with people. And the problem with violence is that people always feel that letter of violence they use against others is justified. So they're using the moral, they're using the moral attitude as well. And he just wants to say that we need a different model, we got to get rid of identifying evil people who are doing evil things. And instead figure out why are they doing that, why are you harming people like that. And it turns out that people harm
when they feel that their lives, their psychological lives, emotional life is threatened. So how do we stop that from happening? That is kind of his approach.

**Audience Member:** That's a misrepresentation of Christianity. Actually the violence is turned towards Jesus Christ on the cross. And there is no shame.

**Tom Imhoff:** Right there is no shame.

**Audience Member:** [Inaudible]. There's forgiveness, there's mercy, there's love and grace. And it isn't about shame it’s about freedom from shame because the violence that Jesus suffered on the cross as a perfect sacrifice. So that's I think a misrepresentation of Christianity.

**Tom Imhoff:** You know what, I think that you're saying is, because I was raised Catholic.

**Audience Member:** I'm no longer Catholic but I was Christian.

**Tom Imhoff:** And I’m no longer Catholic either. Well I am a fallen away Catholic. But the point is that if you take like Pope Francis now, he's preaching a kind of a nonjudgmental Christianity that makes a lot of sense to me. Instead of condemning people because that is the gospel of love should be about mercy and forgiveness. But when I run into lots of religious people, certainly not all of them, they're all about identifying who's doing wrong stuff and trying to get them to stop doing what's wrong.
Audience Member: That's why he met with Kim Davis privately with private audience who encouraged her to stand strong. Is that, you interpret that as being [inaudible].

Tom Imhoff: Well that's about not judging people right. He says who am I to judge. The church isn't going to change its view on homosexuality. But he says I'm not going to condemn a homosexual either. So but see the church has been all about, historically, except for the first 300 years. The first 300 years the church is about love and mercy and forgiveness and it was growing like gangbusters. And then the Catholic Church became the state religion of Rome. And it all of sudden turned from a requiring people to follow certain laws and rules and it got way off track then. So I like a lot of what you're saying. But Gilligan's view is that we need a different model. That the way, the moral model whether it's done religiously or not. I mean you don't have to be religious to be moral. The moral model is all about condemning people and we need to help people instead of condemning them that is kind of his main point.

Any other questions, comments? That was good, thanks.

Audience Member: I have a question. I hate speaking on the microphone. I just wanted to ask you in your own personal experience since you have been so kind to share it with us. I know it must have been somewhat difficult to share some personal things. And I appreciate that when I say that. First when you were called into the principal’s office, the chancellor’s office who had the bullet thing in her hand and she, it sounds like she met with some empathy for what you were going through at the time, am I correct.
Gerrard Ungerman: Yeah for sure. I mean this lady happened to, she could have played on any football team. She was strong, she was a strong lady. And people were kind of making fun of her because she was not very feminine and she was obviously a total strong lesbian at the time when it was not necessarily, well I guess it is not as fashionable as today. Like today nobody is going to go after you, at the time mmm. So I am guessing she had a fair-share of bullying of something maybe. So I am sensing she had learned compassion this way. But I think it was a rational. And I think some teachers were [Inaudible]. I mean it’s cool teachers keep track of students, they take notes about their frustration, their performances. They try to figure out who to assess, to know who the kid is especially if there is some kind of problem. And yeah. To give you an example again at school we are always making balls with paper, with rubber-bands, with scotch tape during boring classes and then playing soccer or handball [Inaudible] or some kind of baseball at recess. Once we were playing outside with a paper ball and I threw it and the wind carried it and hit a gym teacher [Inaudible] the guy was super tall, very fast, and it was only a couple seconds and he punched me right in the face. And he came back to me, and I never had him before, and I knew of him and he knew of me a little bit. He came to me a couple days later and he apologized so much saying I am constantly under attack sometimes I am physically attacked, we are all under stress, and I realized you are not a bad kid, you never did anything bad against anybody. And I am so sorry for having done this, and I think he was just so fearful for his position because [Inaudible]. Still you know I don’t see you get a purple heart to the teacher for hitting, for punching a student in the face. But there was clearly you know things around me that pointed towards, that kid is cu cu but he doesn’t seem to be so dangerous. So as oppose to pushing his head underwater, you know you should try to help him grow out of [Inaudible] and
hopefully turn to be a decent person. So that is kind of the sense that I had.

**Audience Member:** Did you find it helpful for you to turn your way [Inaudible] in terms of empathy instead of.

**Gerrard Ungerman:** Oh yeah there's no doubt.

**Audience Member:** Yeah so you are living proof then that coming at people with empathy instead of opposition is a useful tactic.

**Gerrard Ungerman:** I mean there is no doubt. I mean everybody craves a little bit of recognition, a bit of respect, a bit of love. And of course you harden for not having it and you harden in different ages depending on the situation. But I think I never got to this point where you harden, where you become the sort of monster you dream of becoming because you don't know any better. So I think it's important, yeah of course. It makes a whole difference.

**Audience Member:** Hi, was there any Gilligan book that talks about joining the military [Inaudible].

**Tom Imhoff:** Not about joining the military. He does mention that WWI and WWII represent for him kind of a society wide attempt to get rid of shame. He mentioned especially the rise of Hitler as a result of trying to rid the Germans of the shame of Versailles, this really brutal reparations treaty that they were forced to sign by the British, the Americans, and the French. And that was very humiliating for the German
people. And that the period 1914 to 1945 really represented one long war. And Gilligan talks, thinks that the low rates, the low murder rates, violence rates that I guess exemplify Western Europe now were only possible because of this bloodbath that happened between with World War I and World War II where millions and millions of people lost their lives. And that's what gave the Western Europeans the motivation to turn towards what you can call the welfare state model, taking care of people instead of shaming them for their inadequacies. And that's why they got these Democratic Socialist social welfare states now and have relatively low levels of violence when compared for example the United States. So that is what he talks about was a guy in World War II. I don't know about, he doesn't really talk about individual people turning to the military. But I mean what was Gerrard was saying is that you didn't have your epiphany about violence until you were in the military and realized that really is not you. But our culture allows for people to be violent as a way to demonstrate their manhood.

Gerrard Ungerman: I mean yeah. To give you an idea when I think I was 16 I'm guessing, probably. I was, I remember bragging to a girl who could care less that I just bought a high power rifle that could probably blow a skirt 300 yards like it was kind of my pride. And indeed you know I did buy high power rifles, I was pretty good shot. I went through, even though it wasn't necessary I went through sniper training because I liked it. And I still, something lingers about that, I like air gunning now. So it's not so dangerous [Inaudible]. But there is no doubt there is an attraction for the carrier of the sword or the forum because it is going to make the man deep down you are not. I'm not saying everybody that joins the military or the police is necessarily [Inaudible]. But it was my case at least. And I did have actually when I was probably
19, I had kind of a spiritual awakening which I don't want to talk about that here. But I had kind of an awakening that turned me around in most overnight. And it's not that I met Mohamed, Buddha, or Jesus but something kind of along these lines in some ways. That sort of infused me with a sense of goodness and wanting to do good in the world. That overnight it raised my fake drive for being a violent person to assert myself.

**Tom Imhoff:** Okay well I want to thank you very much for coming. Join me in thanking our panelist up here. And hope to see you at our next event.