

# “Running Amok”

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Running Amok is no longer widely used in current lingo, but I do think that it does describe our current society and the mass shootings we are experiencing.

What I have to say will not be popular with everyone who are in my circle of friends and family, but I feel this to the tips of my toes...

Let me preface this with the statement that I grew up in a hunting and gun owning family and we always ate what was killed. Guns were always unloaded and locked in a cabinet, but readily available. My father wanted my sister and I be interested in hunting and took us with him on a hunting trip in the mountains of southern New Mexico. A young deer topped a hill and Daddy shot him, killing him instantly. My sister and I were upset because it was a young (but legal) deer who still had his spots. Later I accompanied my Daddy on an errand and he stopped to do something, saw a fox and shot him. The way that animal screamed (almost a human scream) turned my stomach, and I never went hunting again.

So guns are not new to me and I can use them. But what I cannot understand is the fascination with gun owners and these semi-automatic (some easily convertible to a nearly fully automatic by the attachment of an innocuous piece of plastic) weapons. The only logical use for these weapons is to destroy bodies, human or animal, in the most brutal and damaging way possible. There is no practical use except to inflate the egos and psyche of gun owners, giving them a sense of destruction at their fingertips. Not that your average gun owner would run amok, but troubled individuals, usually lone wolves, do so on a repeating and seeming senseless agenda in the U.S. I found this quote about Running Amok this morning, but I have been mulling this piece over in my mind since the Las Vegas tragedy.

*Individuals perpetrating unspeakable acts of violence is not a new phenomenon. What's new, rather, are the altered states of consciousness induced by ... drugs well-documented to promote homicidal and suicidal behavior in susceptible individuals.*

Although semi-automatic weapons have enabled the infliction of mass casualties at an unprecedented scale, massacres perpetrated by lone individuals are not new phenomena. Rather, these tragic and inexplicable events may represent an incarnation of a more ancient phenomena called “running amok,” formerly believed to be a culture-bound syndrome isolated to certain societies.

## **The Resemblance of Mass Shootings to Running Amok**

Used in colloquial verbiage to indicate an irrational individual wreaking havoc, the linguistic origins of “running amok” stem from the description of a mentally perturbed individual that engages in unprovoked, homicidal and subsequently [suicidal behavior](#), oftentimes involving an average of ten victims (1).

Although it was not classified as a psychological condition until 1849, amok was first described anthropologically two hundred years ago in isolated, tribal island populations such as Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Laos, where geographic seclusion and indigenous spirituality were hypothesized to be cultural factors implicated in this culture-bound

syndrome.

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1. Saint Martin, M.L. (1999) "Running Amok: A Modern Perspective on a Culture-Bound Syndrome". Primary Care Companion to the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 1(3), 66-70.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC181064/?tool=pmcentrez>

We all need to demand that Congress start the process of instituting sensible gun ownership laws. Not that I want to take anyone's guns... as most of my family own multiple guns. I know that NOT having a gun in the house has personally saved my life on more than one occasion as my first husband and I had a very volatile relationship and I may have injured or killed him several times, and the reverse was also true. My family also has a tragic link to suicide by firearm.

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