



THE BORDERLINE BAR AND GRILL: A TALE OF MEN AND MASCULINITY

ABIGAIL SHRIER

The mass shooting at the Borderline Bar and Grill in Southern California on November 7, 2018 is a tale of men and masculinity.

Lost in the carnage is a lesson we would *all* be advised to heed. That lesson has little to do with the monster who took lives and everything to do with the men who saved lives.

The killer was 28 years old, lost, lonely and living with mom.

He had been a regular at the Borderline Bar and Grill. He knew that on Wednesdays—college country night—the place would be packed with kids laughing and dancing. He entered tossing smoke grenades, then unloaded his handgun—fitted with an illegal extended magazine—into the crowd.

But there were other young men there, too. One of them was 20-year-old Matt Wennerstrom. In interviews, Wennerstrom looks like a typical college student—backward baseball cap, gray T-shirt, jaw scruffy with a few days’ growth. On camera, he seems laconic, humble, willing to answer questions; neither eager for the limelight nor afraid of it.

As soon as he heard the shots, Wennerstrom told ABC News, he knew “exactly what was going on.” He and some friends grabbed everyone they could and pushed them down behind the pool table, placing their own bodies on top of the girls. One woman, who was celebrating her 21st birthday, told *Good Morning America*: “There were multiple men who got on their knees and pretty much blocked all of us with their back toward the shooter, ready to take a bullet for every single one of us.”

When the shooter paused to reload, Wennerstrom grabbed a bar stool and tossed it through a window. He and his buddies pulled 30 to 35 people to safety. After getting each group safely to the parking lot, Wennerstrom and his buddies went back for more.

A reporter asked Wennerstrom how he knew immediately what was going on in the loud, crowded bar. “Instinct, I guess,” he said. “I’m here to protect my friends, my family, my fellow humans, and I know where I’m going if I die, so I was not worried to sacrifice. All I wanted to do is get as many people out of there as possible.”

This is the masculinity we so often hear denigrated. It takes as its duty the physical protection of others, especially women. This masculinity doesn’t wait for verbal consent or invitation to push a person out of harm’s way.

It sends hundreds of firefighters racing up the Twin Towers to save people they've never met. And it sent Sgt. Ron Helus of the Ventura County Sheriff's Office rushing into Borderline Bar and Grill, where the shooter was waiting for him. "I gotta go handle a call," Helus had just told his wife over the phone. "I love you." The 54-year-old husband and father died at the hospital from the wounds he suffered as he tried to stop the rampaging gunman.

The way so many women have a natural ease with caring for children, so many men have the instinct to protect and serve. It is a refined sort of masculinity that must be developed and praised. The military has done this for years. Police academies and fire departments do it, too. Only the educated classes have learned to sneer at it. Would that they never need it.

There will always be young men like the Thousand Oaks shooter—full of rage, mentally unstable, failing to launch. We can work to eliminate the threat they pose or treat whatever mental disease hobbles them. But we will never stop every evil-doer from obtaining weapons. The extended magazine that enabled the shooter to fire so many rounds is already illegal in California.

As many laws as we pass, we will never eradicate evil.

So here's the lesson: Masculinity is a style of behavior, not a code of conduct. It can be used for great good and it can be perverted into evil. One of the most important tasks of a moral society must be to make boys into good men.

If we continue to disparage the male impulse to act heroically—if we mock those who want to protect women—we will fail in our task. Yet many seem bent on doing just that, especially in our institutions of higher education. Fortunately, Matt Wennerstrom and his friends missed the lecture that young women don't require male protection.

Thank God they did.

I'm Abigail Shrier for Prager University.