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Will my imbalance end?

Wendy W. Tan
CUNY Hunter College

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Tipping off Thanksgiving spree of activities, surges of unfortunate events, leading the pack by Covid 19-cases and hospitalization, seem to have frustratingly dominated American lives. From the viewpoint of an average citizen, like myself, all of them are products of maddening development. I would like to state my disappointment to this chaos, in a casual style, instead of just pouting and continuing to stay silent about this unacceptable *normal*.

Before I begin to vent, I must make it clear that I have no anguish over the Pandemic of Covid 19. Mainly this is reportedly not man made, and it affected the whole world. Every country and everybody have been working hard toward the same goal—Controlling the spread of the virus. This health crisis is ironically a manifestation of global cooperation, and I began to come to terms with the “mystery” (including the new variant of Omicron) of Covid 19. With this rationale, my focus, in this narrative, is various *imbalances of* the Pandemic on the society, NOT the disease itself.

The *epidemics* of violence, fatal robbery, repetitive burglaries, inflation, shortage of labor, and a variety of abnormal phenomena, which may be (or may not be) related to the Pandemic, are my targets. To be honest to my own conscience, they have gradually become **my own** imbalance. Just like counting the blessings, one by one, is a way to remember how much you have been blessed, I am doing the same method for getting rid of frustration, by listing the following episodes with which I was SO disturbed.

I am ashamed to say that those incidents are simply the synopses of the headlines, reported in the news I heard or read (with some of the cases being personally experienced), NOT out of in-depth research, over a span of October and November 2021 in the United States. Hence, this is a **reflective** thought. The title is **not** a question to anybody ELSE, nor is scholarly with its contents of the article.

While I had tried my best to verify the truth of those events being described on this paper, it was inevitable that some are not perfectly accurate. Certainly, I bear all the responsibility for the unintentional errors.

VIOLENCE, FATAL ROBBERY, REPETITIVE BURGLARIES

1. Subway violence

On November 18th, there were two subway stabbings, one hour apart in two lines (4 and 2 lines), and one was fatal. The victim was a young male who happened to be sleeping when this killing occurred. Number 4 and 2 are the trains I frequently take, and I dozed off, from time to time during a long ride from work to home. Wow! This incident has hit me so hard because I could be on the target of those attackers.

According to NY Police statistics, subway violence in NYC, such as: serious assaults; pushing passengers to the tracks, or physical fights on subway cars, etc. has

alarming increased 140%, in comparison with the same period of 2019 (before Pandemic)

2. Killings, murders, slaughters of homeless people

On November 19th, one homeless person, while sleeping outside a New York Project building, was purposely set on fire by an attacker, and was burned to death!

When I watched the news of this report, my heart sank into a big black hole. My sadness was not only triggered by this disheartening killing of an innocent soul, but also reminiscent of other brutal crimes on homeless people, which were on the news for the past 18 months. Being homeless is already a tragedy to a human being but it was extremely difficult during Pandemic. It is true that nobody can come up with an ideal solution to this social problem, but at the very least we should not have more harmful behaviors than they have already suffered.

3. Violence in high schools

Near the end of October 2021, 5 guns were found, in a 24-hour period, on students at NYC high schools. Some of them were loaded with bullets.

In the meantime, on November 22nd, there was also a shooting incident on the street in the Bronx, just steps from a high school. As a result, one non-targeted boy, who was only 13 years old, unfortunately got killed. At the news report, when I heard his mother hysterically cry, I was also numb and in tears. According to one school safety officer, for schools without metal detectors, there have also been butcher knives which were brought into schools. Bloody fights among students have been reported frequently.

More devastatingly, epidemic of high school shootings has no discrimination between small towns and huge cities. On November 30th, there was a shooting, killing 4 people, in a Michigan high school. The shooter is only 15 years old.

4. Murder cases in Chicago and University of Chicago

During the first weekend of November, there was a gun fight in Chicago, which cost 10 lives, and 50 people got injured. On November 10th, a Chinese student, who just obtained his master's degree, and was about to return to China, was robbed and then killed while he was walking on the campus of University of Chicago. In fact, that was the 3rd murder case of Chinese student, for year 2021 in the campus. Subsequently, there was a sizable protest, proclaiming "***We are here to study, not to be killed***"

According to police statistics, for the first half of 2021, there were already 332 shootings in Chicago, representing a 10% increase, compared to the same period of 2020.

5. Fatal stabbing and shootings in Manhattan & the Bronx

On October 16th, a 51-year-old food delivery man was stabbed to death and his e-bike was robbed in the Lower East side of Manhattan. This was the 2nd homicide in this area in less than 24 hours. On the day before this incident, there was a 16-year-old boy lying in the Street with a gunshot wound to his body during a gunfire, with an unreported cause, around this location. This teenager died later in the hospital. One month later, in mid-November in the Bronx, one 46-year-old restaurant worker was shot in the back by a man after snatching his gold chain. These three fatal cases made the neighborhood residents of those areas feel scared about their safety, because they were met with robbery, and afterwards they were brutally killed.

In fact, they also raised a red flag about delivery business during the Pandemic. It is not news that delivery workers have been the victims of violence, when the demands for food delivery were extremely shot up, especially when the messenger used E-bikes, which are known to be costly. This vehicle can make the deliveries more efficient, but also make the delivery workers magnets of robbery and subsequently jeopardize their lives

6. Repetitive burglaries

Although there was no “life and death” situation, this kind of crime generated lots of disturbance and unrest to the societies.

According to some criminal studies, for some crooks, who lost their jobs and did not have intention to secure replacement jobs, burglaries to stores or wealthy households “conveniently” became their means of solutions.

From a news report in October 2021, a criminal from Queens, NY was arrested at least **46** times in 2021. On November 29th, there was a house invasion by experienced robbers, in an upscale New York State area, the owner lost \$10,000 in cash, and over \$ 100, 000 worth of jewelry. Likewise, repetitive burglary cases have also been reported in San Francisco for the same period.

Why did this kind of crime occur so frequently in metropolitan cities of New York State and California? From my superficial grasp of those happenings, it seemed to me that there was a delusion existing in the **laws** of these two states, such as: NYC’s revised Bail Law, and California Bill #47, which somewhat *fuels the* shoplifting spree, or more exactly, petty crimes, Are they??

7. Casualties of Gang crossfires

Gang fights in the United States have a LONG history, so their occurrences are certainly pre-Pandemic problems, although the chaos has been known as a worsening

social pathology. However, I would like to have a touch of a heartbroken outcome, as my tearful mourning to that innocent 23-month-old boy.

Jasper Wu was killed on the highway of Oakland, Calif due to a brutal gun fire in November. Little Jasper was in a car with his mother when a bullet, among many fired during gang crossfires, went through their windshield, and Jasper was shot in the forehead. It took his precious life before the EMS arrived at the scene. His father, who was in China when this accident struck, NEVER had a chance to meet his own son due to the restrictions in travel between these two countries.

To the best of my knowledge, the suspect is still on the loose. More alarmingly, according to the police statistics, this kind of non-target tragedy has increased tremendously at Oakland since the Pandemic lockdown.

In fact, I don't need to dig too deep in my memory about violence, because this kind of tragedy keeps going on and on. According to the TV news reports, two NYC policemen got shot in the evening of Thanksgiving; On the day after Thanksgiving, there was a shooting in a shopping mall of a small town of Washington State; Another shooting in the shopping mall of Durham, NC, which is a quiet city.

I am saddened to say what I heard in this segment was just the tip of the iceberg (even for 2 months only), but it is already enough to prove that there is no "holiday" for, and NO place in the States can be immune to, gun violence.

INFLATION AND SHORTAGE OF LABOR

1. Inflation

According to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), published by the Department of Labor, every aspect of the American economy has been affected by inflation. As a matter of fact, I, as a consumer, can testify, from my personal shopping experiences, the truth of this report.

I must admit that I am not a big fan of home cooking, so part of my way of survival has been to patronize "takeout" services, from many restaurants. Therefore, naturally I collect quite a few restaurant menus, for a span of many years. When I compared the prices for the items I frequently ordered, my finding of the price changes during the Pandemic was dismal, to me! For some cases, they are even higher than the inflation rates of milk, eggs, meat, vegetables, and gas.

Food delivery was a lifeline for many people during that difficult period, and those services have been highly demanded and appreciated. Although I often questioned (myself) the necessity of skyrocketing prices, I truly believe that those merchants did business with great conscience and integrity, and the imposed price difference reflects inflation.

2. Shortage of labor

It was one morning in November 2021, my waiting time for my subway train to arrive was an hour and half (with average interval of 10 minutes), and there were constant updates, from PA, with messages like “We have difficulties in managing crew availability among a few lines”. With this serious delay, it took me about three hours to get to work that morning for a normal one-hour ride. On Returning home that evening, I saw garbage bags, which should have been picked up by Sanitation crew 10 days before, still piled up along the houses in my block. I witnessed shortage of labor supplies here and there, everywhere!

In fact, the “hiccups” I stated above, due to lack of manpower, were far from the worst. I also heard the news report last week that the Emergency Service of a hospital at Long Beach on Long Island will be closed for at least a few weeks, because of shortage of ER staff. With this closing, the closest Emergency facility to the neighborhood residents is about 25 minutes away! I hate to imagine what kind of disaster it could turn out to be if there was a worst scenario.

I recall, when the re-opening of different facilities in the United States was open for discussion, the reluctance of returning to the workplace was prevalent. Of course, fear of the spread of virus was perceived as a roadblock, but the government's extended unemployment assistance, along with different kinds of work “accommodations” (mandates by various work unions) were also counterforces to making the process warmly embraced. The outcry for many employers, for this period, has been “*Where did all the workers disappear to?*”

Meanwhile, I also “heard” that those UPS & post offices are planning to hire **23,000** seasonal workers to handle holiday deliveries!! Duh! Did I get the news and the number right? If yes to both parts, then I wish good luck to both facilities for their noble plans!

ABNORMAL PHENOMENA

1. The freedom of gun ownership in the United States

Besides above-mentioned cases of violence, then perhaps the biggest “headline” in November was the Rittenhouse_verdict. The outcome is not the point of discussion here, but the question which was in my mind is: What kind of law would “nurture” a teenager to carry a gun in travelling a few states and having the audacity to kill three men? After the verdict, I was extremely horrified to know, in a news report, that half of the total guns used by civilians in the world are in the possession of Americans. Yes! I got the answer to my question.

I know this kind of freedom has been offered in the Constitution, but there **MUST** be a way to work out revisions to have an effective fix or control over the disorganized conditions, as the American society has become under the disparagement of gun violence.

This epidemic of gun possession has been with American history ever since the birth of the United States, and it has been labeled as part of the American *spirit*. However, the Pandemic has made people realize “NOTHING can stay unchanged forever”, I sincerely wish that the law governing gun ownership will fall into this natural law of **CHANGES**.

2. The widened gap between the rich and the poor

During the Pandemic, for reasons beyond our comprehension, the stock market has spiraled much higher than the ordinary expectations (though 2 trillion dollars were lost at the end of November due to the new variant of COVID-19). This market “triumph” has made a great number of Americans, engaged in stock business, accumulate fortunes much faster than even pre-Pandemic. Unfortunately, most of the public, **NOT** in this career, struggled to make ends meet, but may still end up losing their jobs or closing their businesses. These two classes of extremes represent **imbalance** in a society, especially in New York City.

Adding frost on the ice, those “instant” wealthy people started to have different visions of their lives and some of them wanted to take early retirement or just quit the daily jobs and moved out from the city to suburban areas. This scenario could partially explain why as of November 2021, less than 40% of the workforce returned to the office in Manhattan. Also, in October 2021, there were 14 million people, the record high in a month in American history, who decided to quit their jobs.

Moreover, there have been steep price increases in houses and cars in the United States, for the past 18 months. Although there was no report about the background of those buyers, chances are that “easy money” made from rising stock markets has contributed to the booming real estate and new car demands.

Absolutely, they are entitled to enjoying their good lives and dispensing their wealth with the ways they chose, but it is undeniable that these circumstances have a complicated impact on the economy and societal development.

3. Assaults to Asian Americans

On November 17th, there was a mentally & physically violent incident occurring on the Philadelphia subway, SEPTA. It involved 4 young black girls, 3 young Chinese males, and 1 young Chinese American girl. As a matter of fact, **ALL** of them were high school students in Philadelphia.

To sum up the incident: Three standing black girls initiated (with **no** reason) a verbal (Fxxxing China) and physical (throwing punching) attacks to four sitting Chinese boys. To an unbearable point, the Chinese girl walked to those attackers to stop these aggressive assaults. Her good intention went with NO avail. Rather, her good behavior cost herself furious revenge by those offenders. She was knocked to the floor of the car, was dragged near the car door, and her head was forced to bump the door. Also, one of the attackers took off her shoes, threw them, aiming at her head to contemplate injuring her more seriously.

This heart-clenching short course of the incident was recorded by surveillant camera, and, naturally, it was reported throughout all the Chinese-language newspapers in America and in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China. Even BEFORE the Pandemic hit American land, Asian Americans had already suffered tremendous assaults by our fellow Americans, all colors. This cliché: **WE are Americans, NOT the virus** is STILL sounding so loud in our hearts, even nearly 2 years after the inception of the Pandemic!

4. Too many protests than necessary

It has been known that Americans love to voice their disagreements of certain policies by staging protests on the streets. From my humble opinions, these opposing behaviors have been indiscriminately *misused* since the onset of 2020. According to reports (for those catching my attention), there have been protests by various unions, which cover more than 10 million members. My question is: Did ALL these members have “appreciation” for what their unions did on their behalf?

For instance, when the Mayor of NYC required City employees to return to the office effective May 1st, 2021; and ALL City workers should get vaccinated by November 1st, 2021. I work for the city and think these two legitimate mandates sound very reasonable. Therefore, I had no issue following these executive orders. On the other side of the fence, I saw countless protests, in defiance of these mandates and claimed, “representing the members”! Humm! Did I miss something?

5. Dark side of Astroworld Music Festival at Houston

This Festival took place on November 5, 2021, at Houston, with a crowd of over 50,000 attendees. This Festival was originally scheduled as a 2-day event, but the 2nd day was forced to cancel because on the first day, there was an absurd calamity which cost 9 precious young lives and many people were hospitalized.

According to a news report, amid the concert, with the singer’s “calling”, a densely packed crowd surged and stampeded toward the stage. As a result, the stadium was really like a scene from a horror movie! From what I heard, in 2019, with a festival by the SAME singer, three people were trampled and injured. How could the tragic history repeat itself without precaution, especially during the Pandemic when

“social distance” *should* be strictly reinforced? How could Americans be so oblivious of the history and current protocols?

6. Symptoms of mental disorder

Technically, all above-mentioned occurrences are tied to a thread of mental issues. There is no doubt that COVID-19 virus brought an unprecedented threat of physical illness to the public, but not-easily-to-detect individual mental impairment could be more harmful to the society. When it comes to Mental disorders, prevention is more effective than treatment, and the approach and cooperation of the community can really make a lot of difference in the result. Mental health is a major undertaking, during and after Pandemic.

POINTS TO PONDER

As a librarian, I had been an avid lover of reading books. However, during the Pandemic, pathetic events, NOT knowledge pursuits, have been my focuses. Tracing back my own experiences for the past 2 years, I question myself “WHY did I get into this *morbid* mindset?” and “WHY I let sad happenings, among a sea of news, become a fixture in my mind” The answers, in a nutshell, are: **doubt and fear**. These are also my imbalance of vision. Frankly, this kind of *NEW normal* is not to my liking at all. More than anything else, at this point, I want to reach the end of this imbalance.

Some psychologists constantly suggested (which could be paraphrased as)” *outward happenings, as being perceived, sometimes are derived from your inner thoughts*”. After a long struggle, during the Pandemic, I finally realized the truth of this simple psychological conception.

The final push for my change happened from viewing an old movie. When I had a chance to review the movie series Star Wars, I was drawn by an imaginary character *Yoda*, for the resounding saying “*FEAR is the path to the dark side. FEAR leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering*” In the meantime, this perception coincides with a quote (always being stuck in my mind) “*Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood*”

With this awareness, I can answer “YES! There is an ``end to imbalance” to the question of the title. It is all about perspective!! Composing this article is my vehicle to move forward from my imbalance! Of course, I would not be afraid to explore current events in the future but would vow to **not** lose my balance of vision, again. It has become clear to me why things happen, during this era, will never be certain, and what lies ahead will always be a “mystery”.

Regardless, I will stay optimistic and positive about the world despite how bad it all seems right now. I start to understand that I can’t always have a good day, but I can face a day of “bad happenings” with an affirmative attitude with a hope that things will eventually get adjusted. In doing so, I can maintain healthy mental health. One important thing I have learned is that we need protections, physically & mentally, and protection for sound mental health starts SELF.

Since many people consider American societies are presently in shambles, I truly believe that I have not been alone in the *journey*, with this kind of psychological imbalance. I do think the process of trying to end those imbalances from my chaotic thoughts and get back to a balanced life may render helping tips to fellow Americans who may be going through what I went through, and this is the main purpose of this narrative.

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