

# The Virginia Shooter's Social Media Promoters



Virginia shooting victims,  
Alison Parker and Adam Ward

This morning I was logged in to Twitter when news reports began streaming in on the identity of the murder suspect in the shooting of Virginia reporter Alison Parker and cameraman Adam Ward. The suspect was said to be a disgruntled, former colleague of the victims.

Until that moment, I hadn't been paying much attention to the story. But when someone suddenly tweeted the suspect's Twitter handle, I clicked on the link, curious if the man's profile picture would resemble the grainy video-still I'd seen briefly about 30 minutes earlier.

Beyond the picture, I expected I'd find a short bio on the suspect. What I didn't expect to see were brand new tweets, literally a couple of minutes old. It took me a second to realize that the man eluding police was actually online at that very moment, live-tweeting about the heinous crime he'd committed.

In his posts, he described his motivations for the murders (which I will not share here), and before I knew it, a brand new tweet emerged in the form of an uploaded video that began playing on its own (with the audio muted). It showed the person who had filmed the video walking up behind a woman and a cameraman who were in the middle of conducting an interview.

Not until I saw a raised a pistol did I realize that the suspect had recorded his act of murder, and was now proudly sharing it across social media for the world to see.

I wish I had paid closer attention to the story earlier. Otherwise I would have known to shut down the video the moment it began. Fortunately, I managed to end it before the shots were fired. I had no interest in seeing the victims' lives taken.

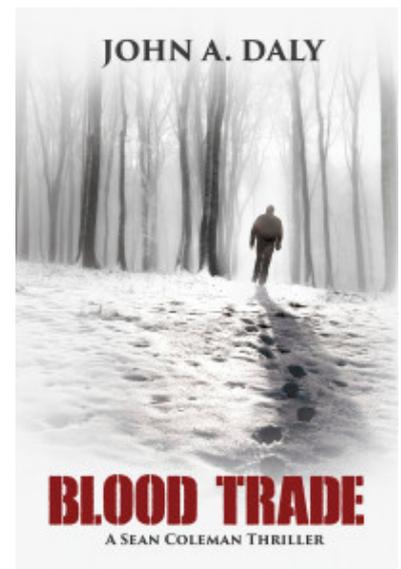
I spent the next few minutes trying to contact Twitter support to let them know how their platform was being used by the killer. I'm certain others were doing the same. To Twitter's credit, the account was suspended just a couple of minutes later, but not before a disgustingly high number of retweets of the video and the killer's previous tweets had been achieved. I later read that Facebook had gone through the same drill.

It's too early to present a logical case for what (if anything) could have been done to stop the murders of Alison Parker and Adam Ward (though the political and ideological mud-slinging began almost immediately following the shooting). I *don't* think it's too early, however, to take a look at how we, as a society, can tamp down the perverse allure of such horrific acts.

Technological advances and our on-demand, social media culture have given us the means by which to serve as an unfiltered, real-time audience to many things, including – in this case – an evil doing by an evil person. As individuals in that

audience, we have the choice of remaining in our seats, leaving our seats, or becoming active participants in the show.

In my view, those who were spreading the word of the killer by sharing his thoughts and video across social media were active participants – not in the crime, but in the promotion of exactly what the killer wanted: notoriety.



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Though I wouldn't presume to understand what all goes on in the head of a monster who would post a video of himself murdering two people on the Internet, this man's need for fame was obviously a big motivator. He wanted to leave behind a legacy – one that would spread like wildfire. And he knew just where to go to build that legacy: social media.

Of course, nothing can go viral without people participating in the effort, and that's where society can step up and do their part by turning off the megaphone. When these things happen, we need to have the discipline not to make ourselves part of the story, but rather part of the effort to refuse its glorification. As we all know, events like the one in Virginia

inspire others to act out in similar ways. Unstable people take note of the fame garnished by high-profile murderers, and they dream of standing in the glare of their own spotlight.

We must do our part in starving that notion from their heads.

We won't always be able to stop evil people from doing evil things, but we can at least deny it a recruitment platform.