



Both Sides of Gun Violence

Every time a trigger is pulled, lives shatter. Current news reports of the uptick in gun violence rarely mention the trauma experienced by those who are witnesses, victims, and perpetrators of gun violence. Normalized trauma is the real epidemic. We need to create space for these lives to get back to normal.



THE ISSUE:

Crime is understood as best addressed by punishment. In reality, that thinking oversimplifies the issue and yields lazy responses. Easy fixes do not allow for discussion about the trauma and hurt that leads to gun violence and perpetuates the issues. We'd like to invite the public and those affected by gun violence to respond with more courage and try something different.

WHY IS YOUR STORY IMPORTANT?

We'd like to reach communities who are affected by gun violence, and break down the "silence is strong" culture. We'd like to reach the public to help shift their response. We believe that too many people are under the impression that gun violence rarely affects them, and that it's between people who are probably criminals anyway. We would like to help the public understand that we need a new approach to bringing this cultural crisis to an end.

NOMINATED BY:

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The Issue

Background

Thirteen people shot in a Chicago park, including a three-year old. One-year old shot and killed in Brownsville, Brooklyn. Three-year old shot in the arm in Yonkers, NY. Shootings in urban spaces is nothing uncommon in the U.S. While the conversation quickly moves from incident to punishment of the perpetrator, there is little attention given to the trauma associated with experiencing gun violence on both ends of the gun, and even less attention given to the trauma felt by close friends, neighbors, and loved ones. Paradoxically, in mass shootings in places like Newtown and Aurora, a swarm of mental health professionals come into the neighborhoods where those that experienced the violence to check on their mental health. There is much attention to how the shooters in the aforementioned tragedies were victimized by mental illnesses such as depression. That same attention should be given to those people that engage in gun crimes in impoverished communities where gun violence is the daily stew. Further, many of the people in the urban spaces, mainly Black and Brown, are unaware of the psychological effects of gun violence, hence, they do not seek professional help which could result in unaddressed trauma, which then could lead to them (us) replicating the same trauma in our everyday lives. Moreover, we are wary of mental health services for fear of being thought of as being crazy.

Gun violence is a complicated epidemic that requires a multiplicity of angles to reduce its occurrences significantly. There are great organizations that are doing gun violence interruption work on the ground level such as the Cure Violence replications throughout the US. Some of these organizations are even doing intervention in hospital room emergency rooms when gun violence victims are rushed there. Another less explored angle that requires attention as an avenue to address gun violence mental health awareness.

Our goal in this effort is to raise public consciousness around the unaddressed trauma associated with gun violence, from a gun that goes off into the air to a bullet piercing a person's skull. None of those experiences are insignificant. Allow me to share the following excerpt from a piece I wrote for the "<http://brooklynmovementcenter.org/post/gun-violence/>" Brooklyn Movement Center:



"So imagine we have a family somewhere in Ghetto, USA. Let's focus on the son. At four-years old he hears gun shots outside of his window; he gets scared and cries. At five, six, seven, eight, nine... (you get the point) he hears the same cacophony of gun shots on a regular basis, most notably on New Year's Eve.

His mother is barely lower middle class, and his father is undereducated with a prison record, so they can't afford to move to a better place...the ghetto and all of its abnormalities is home sweet home. By pre-pubescence, this boy has heard gun shots almost daily; he has heard from the media, the streets, and school (where his teachers are under-resourced) that violence is the way to handle problems, especially if you are a male.

So when this boy reaches about 16-years old he has been conditioned to believe that having a gun:

- *Ensures masculinity;*
- *Secures protection;*
- *Celebrates a new year;*
- *Attains peer social acceptance;*
- *Hides insecurities*
- *is normal.*

In essence, a culture of violence, particularly gun violence, is normalized by the conditions of which this boy has been exposed to from early childhood."

Audience

Those who experience gun violence: and how to de-stigmatize the mental health implications of being subjected to it, so that people are more open to seeking support or at least checking in on issues like mental health.

Those not experiencing gun violence, but who probably make assumptions about why it exists.



Goals

First, within communities affected by gun violence, we want to erase the stigma associated with mental health, particularly as it pertains to gun violence for all parties directly and indirectly associated.

We would take an approach from the HIV/AIDS awareness circles: we should all regularly check our mental health status.

Secondly, we want to introduce into the national discussion the trauma that is cyclically perpetuating itself in these gun-ridden communities. Acknowledging this trauma that can lead to problems such as PTSD, depression, and other illnesses is a much needed issue to add to the many approaches to reduce gun violence.

Some hooks/ideas from the Re³Team

On this second audience, the contrast between mass shootings and the mental health support that emerges from that, and the many many many single shots, with no support.

Can we get any data about the link between PTSD and exposure to gun violence, or between mental health and gun violence, or more generally the stats around gun shootings, injuries, deaths, over time.

I could see this being something interesting for a filmmaking team to explore - one idea would be simply filming different children asking them how often they hear gunshots / have been exposed to gun violence / know someone who's been killed .