

Gun Violence

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Violence related to firearms is a prevalent form of death in many regions of the world. The United States of America has the highest rate of gun ownership in the world (*Gun statistics in America: US gun culture vs. The world in charts—CNN*, 2019), with half the civilian controlled guns in the world residing in this region. On a global stage, millions of individuals are harmed by guns, whether they are wounded or killed. Assault related to firearms has caused thousands of individuals to die while unintentional accidents have also led to the death of tens of thousands. The level of violence related to guns varies among the different regions of the world with countries like Singapore and Japan barely having any gun-related violence at all. However, the south and Central American countries like Venezuela, El Salvador, and Guatemala have the maximum rate of gun-violence related deaths (*Countries With The Highest Rates Of Firearm Related Deaths—WorldAtlas.com*, 2018). This paper will explore the role of media in gun-related violence as well as the social constructions that lead to said violence. Moreover, it also discusses the political structures and the framing of the subject at hand.

Monisha C. Nayar-Akhtar is a Ph.D. psychologist and psychoanalyst who deals with children, adolescents and adults in her field of work. According to her, the relationship between media and the growing rate of violence is not as simple as one might think. It is not a straight line that leads from media to violence but a multifaceted structure that includes socio-cultural influences, political involvement, and difficulty in distinguishing fantasy from reality. The last point is especially valid for children (Nayar-Akhtar, 2016).

According to the facts and figures gathered by Nayar-Akhtar, violence in the media industry has not only increased in quantity but in quality as well. The violence portrayed in media is increasingly becoming more sadistic, sexual and graphic (Nayar-Akhtar, 2016). By the

age of 18, most of the teenagers have watched around 16,000 murders and 200,000 other acts of violence through the media. These acts include those in video games that contain extreme levels of violent content. Around 89% of the best-selling video games encompass violent content and almost half of that content is extremely serious (Nayar-Akhtar, 2016). Most importantly, young children who do not retain the ability to separate fantasy from reality are seriously damaged by the acts of violence, they witness on an almost daily basis. Moreover, there are almost 20-25 acts of violence shown on Saturday morning cartoons that are watched by almost every child (Nayar-Akhtar, 2016). Over 1,000 studies have suggested the same opinion that showing extreme levels of violence to children leads to aggressive behavior. Furthermore, there is a greater likelihood of learning violence if the violence depicted is closer to reality. Lastly, even President Obama has asked the media industry to not glorify gun-related violence (Nayar-Akhtar, 2016).

In reference to the social context of gun-related violence, Nayar-Akhtar mentions the foundations of violence and how media often depicts violence in such a manner that the audience becomes desensitized to it, which leads to a lack of empathy with the victims of gun-related crimes (Nayar-Akhtar, 2016). Cyberspace also plays its part in this situation and the case of teenage girls in Florida is cited (Nayar-Akhtar, 2016). These girls beat up one of their class fellows to become instant celebrities on the internet. It is clear from these examples that while media does play its role in the increase of violence, other social influences are also responsible for increasingly erratic and violent behavior in individuals.

Melissa K. Merry offers up a different perspective on the issue of gun violence. As a Professor of Political Science at the University of Louisiana, her focus remains on the construction of gun-violence debate and how it needs to be bettered to be more effective. She argues that the debate on gun-violence is focused on outlining a policy for gun control with a

particular focus on the portrayal of the victims of gun violence. These portrayals usually include the race and age of the victims. Interestingly enough, gun rights organizations also use the arguments of age and race in terms of self-defense to promote their policies (Merry, 2018).

Firstly, the author highlights the issue of the public attention span on the subject of gun violence. Gun control policies are rarely at the top of the political spectrum and the attention to gun violence or gun-control policy only shifts in the aftermath of an incident before shifting back to other agendas. These dramatic swings of attention are the main cause of no political action taken against gun violence. Interest groups are faced with trials related to building up a sustainable political momentum that would drive the cause of gun-control forward (Merry, 2018). According to Merry, there does exist a solution for the said problem in the form of framing narratives. The author claims that interest groups should construct narratives that include a plot, characters, and settings. This will draw the public towards the subject and the support of the public will steer policymakers.

Secondly, it should be noted that the focus of gun control groups is on mass shootings. This is not surprising as mass shootings provide a strong narrative even for individuals who have been desensitized to violence. Moreover, it should also be noted that the matter of race is only highlighted in subtle ways and not directly (Merry, 2018). This can happen due to the quarrelsome politics of race and does not necessarily mean that gun policy organizations do not care about racial minorities. It only means that groups tend to stay away from any topic that may invite discussion on bias and hence lead the conversation away from the main problem.

Conclusively, gun violence is a serious and rising trouble in the world but especially in the United States. The factors leading to such violence are various but media plays a significant role in the glorification of such violence. Moreover, the social and political structures in place are

extremely relevant in the policymaking regarding gun control. The lack of continuous attention to the subject has harmed the cause of gun control. Hence, it is important to analyze the causes of gun violence and take create policies that lead to the protection of individuals from gun violence.

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