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TRIGGER WARNING

Gun Guidelines for the Media



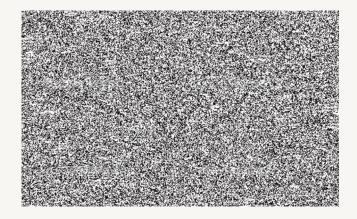




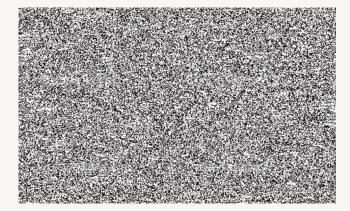


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America has more guns than people; more homicides, suicides, and unintentional deaths by firearm than any of its high-income peer countries by orders of magnitude. The number one cause of death for children and teens in America is gun violence.

So it makes sense that guns seem to be everywhere in our media, too. From late night news to Saturday morning cartoons, cop shows to comedies — guns are ubiquitous on our screens. But film and television have the power to shape public perception, normalize habits, and even effect policy, which is why the way we talk about and depict guns and gun violence matters so much.

The data on the following pages represent a snapshot in time of trends over the past 20 years, as well as a warning of where those trends are headed without conscientious action. As a storyteller, you are in a unique position to change the narrative, reset the bar, and provide representation of safe, acceptable behavior when it comes to firearms. Your voice and talents are needed now more than ever.

Your stories matter.

REAL WORLD STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

- There are **111 gun-related deaths** per day and over 40,000 per year. LINK
- Every day 321 people are shot in the United States.
- The **48,830 total gun deaths in 2021** were by far the most on record, representing an 8% increase from the year before, a 23% increase from five years earlier, and a 45% increase from a decade prior. LINK
- The **20,958 gun murders** that took place in 2021 were the most since at least 1968, exceeding the previous peak of 18,253 recorded by the CDC in 1993. LINK
- The **26,328 gun suicides** that took place in 2021 were the most in any year. LINK
- Gun violence is estimated to cost the American economy at least \$557 BILLION every
 vear. LINK

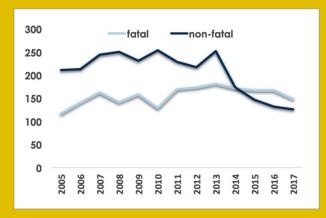
CHILDREN

- Firearms are the **#1 cause of death** for children and teens. LINK
- **2,571 children died** from firearms in 2021 alone. LINK
- **85% of children** under 13 who are victims of gun homicide die in their home. LINK
- An estimated **30 million children in the US live in households with firearms**, and 4.6 million live in a home with at least one loaded and unlocked gun. LINK
- More than 352,000 students have experienced gun violence at school since Columbine. LINK

OFFICER-INVOLVED SHOOTINGS

Black Americans account for less than 13% of the US population but are killed by police at more than twice the rate of White Americans.

- Over 1,100 people are killed by police every year. That number has not changed since the Washington Post started recording police homicides in 2015.
- A Black unarmed person is just as likely to be shot by police as a white person who is armed.
- Unarmed Black civilians are 5x as likely to be shot by police as unarmed white civilians.
- White cops discharge their guns several times as often as Black cops when sent to 911 calls in heavily Black neighborhoods.
- Police violence means people stop calling 911 in cases of emergency. This is called THE JUDE EFFECT after Frank Jude was brutally assaulted by police in 2004 in Milwaukee. Even as homicide rates in the city rose, the city received 22,000 fewer 911 calls; the decline was most pronounced in black and brown neighborhoods most in need of protection and assistance.



Officer-involved shootings — Major Cities Chiefs Association. National Police Foundation.

In 2019, the research-focused nonprofit National Police Foundation released a study of 1,006 police shootings at 47 departments over two years that found that 4 out of 5 officers who fired in those shootings had never discharged their guns before. LINK

- Within those shootings, there are officers who seem to be involved in multiple fatal shootings without consequence.
- Some departments, like the PD in Columbus,
 Ohio, employ an outsized number of officers involved in multiple shootings.

5

MYTHS

▼ GUNS MAKEUS SAFER

American citizens own

FOUR TIMES the amount
of guns as the next highly
developed country and
suffer FOUR TIMES the
amount of gun homicides.

If guns made us safer, America would be the safest country in the world.

The US has:

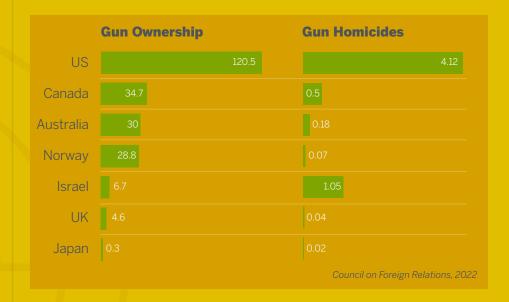


guns & gun homicides



IXI THE GOOD GUY WITH A GUN

This myth is used to justify lenient concealed-carry legislation that allows people to carry loaded guns in public. However, a recent study found American states that allow concealed carry have **higher rates of gun homicide** than those that do not. LINK



▼ GUN VIOLENCE IS CAUSED BYPEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

The truth is only 3-5% of gun-related deaths in the US are caused by people with diagnosed mental illness. In fact, people with mental illness are more likely to be victims than the general population. The US is not the only country with mental illness, domestic violence, or hatefueled ideologies, but our gun homicide rate is 25 times higher than other high-income countries.

The difference is easy access to guns.

DRAMAS, COMEDIES & TROPES

According to a study published in 1992, the typical American child saw 40,000 simulated murders by the age of 18. With the advent of cable, streaming, YouTube and more, it's likely that number has increased.

THE PROBLEM

- 60% of popular television includes gun-related content. LINK
- Of these, the majority are from **police shows**.



- Nearly 1 in 3 episodes of popular television portrays at least one character discharging a firearm.
- Whereas those holding guns were largely depicted as "good guys," those shot by guns were typically portrayed as "bad guys." More than half of casualties were unsympathetic white men with small roles. LINK

SOME SOLUTIONS

- Avoid portraying law enforcement use-of-force as heroic. Consider showing law enforcement characters facing consequences, or at least scrutiny for such actions, which are rarely depicted.
- Humanize and diversify depictions of those affected by gun violence. Nuanced depictions of shooting victims can make audiences care about gun violence as a public issue.
- Appeal to common values. Heavy-handed stories can be alienating to gun owners who feel their freedoms are being threatened, or their beliefs mocked. Instead of making gun owners the antagonist, appeal to the common values shared by parents and others who care about keeping children safe.
- According to research by the <u>USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project</u> (MIP), gun storylines are most effective on viewers who do not own guns. Even though gun owners are tougher on the whole to persuade, gun storylines do still have an effect on their opinion. In other words, your stories matter.

5 COP SHOWS



CONTEXT

Every police procedural owes its DNA to *Dragnet*, a show so invested in the valorization of the police that LAPD Chief William Parker got final approval on every script. LINK It was the same Chief Parker who said of the Black Angelenos his department was notorious for violently beating: "We didn't ask these people to come here." All of our most familiar "TV Cop" tropes stem from *Dragnet*. Hollywood created them; Hollywood can change them.

According to the MIP study looking at depictions of gun safety on television: LINK

- More than 9 in 10 law enforcement characters with guns were portrayed as sympathetic compared to few civilian characters.
- Civilian characters were more likely than law enforcement to fire their weapons or shoot someone.
- Civilians who held a gun were more than twice as likely to shoot someone as law enforcement officers.

CONSEQUENCES

- Sympathetic criminal justice professionals on TV often commit wrongful actions that are presented as routine, harmless, necessary, or even noble. These characters rarely face consequences and are almost always rewarded. LINK This frames bad actions by law enforcement as relatable, forgivable, acceptable, and ultimately good.
- "Good guy" law enforcement characters

 often people of color frequently
 act as implicit endorsers of a variety of
 wrongful police actions. This trope may give audiences the impression that any actions
 by law enforcement, up to and including shooting civilians, are inherently justifiable.
- Whereas law enforcement officers with guns are depicted as diverse "good guys," those who are shot on TV are typically nameless "bad guys," who are perhaps surprisingly predominantly white. This inaccurate representation of gun casualties masks and distorts the ways in which shootings by law enforcement disproportionately affect communities of color. In reality, this violence is far from colorblind: Black Americans are three times more likely to be killed at the hands of law enforcement.

SAFE STORAGE

Firearms are the #1 cause of death for children and teens.

THE PROBLEM

- 54% of gun owners don't lock all of their guns securely. LINK
- Everyday, 8 children are unintentionally shot or killed by an unsecured gun in the home. LINK
- Every year, nearly 350 children under the age of 18 unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else. LINK
- Access to a gun in the home increases the risk of death by suicide by 300%. LINK
- On average, 54% of child and teen deaths by firearm occurred through homicide, 38% through suicide, and 5% were unintentional. LINK
- Over 80% of child gun suicides involve a gun owned by a family member. LINK
- 85% of child gun homicides occur inside the home. LINK
- An estimated 30 million children in the US live in households with firearms, and 4.6 million live in a home with at least one loaded and unlocked gun. LINK
- One study showed that 1 in 5 parents who said their child never handled guns without supervision were contradicted by their child's reports. LINK
- A relatively modest increase in safe storage locking all household firearms could reduce firearm suicide and unintentional firearm fatalities among youth by up to **32%**. LINK

ŏ ON TV

Guns are ubiquitous but depictions of secure gun storage, their origins, laws, and impacts of intimate partner violence and suicide are virtually nonexistent.

Fewer than 10% of episodes with guns show any kind of gun storage, including a mix of secure and unsafe gun storage. LINK



Everytown for Gun Safety's Guide to Secure Gun Storage Devices LINK

SOME SOLUTIONS



- THE SOLUTION ON SCREEN = THE SOLUTION AT HOME
- Lock it up at home. Lock it up on screen.
- When a character comes home with a gun, show them locking it away separate from its ammunition. No more laying the gun on the counter, bedside table, or under the pillow. The action should be as natural as putting on a seatbelt when driving.
- Representation of safe storage is imperative to the normalization of safe storage for your audiences.
- <u>Use this guide</u> from the Bullet Points Project for the myriad forms of safe storage.
- Show how quickly guns can be accessed from safe storage in an emergency.
 - O Don't make retrieval of a gun from safe storage an opportunity for consequences.
 - O Audiences shouldn't be made to feel less safe in locking a gun away securely, since the truth is empirically the opposite.
- On the other hand, consider consequences for the characters not interested in safety.
- Gun safety represents a largely untapped story opportunity.
 When told, these stories can change hearts and minds.
- If they choose to depict or discuss a school shooting, content creators might consider explicitly drawing a connection to unsafe storage or gun laws in the show's geographic setting.



Shooting Straight: What TV Stories Tell Us About Gun Safety, How These Depictions Affect Audiences, and How We Can Do Better LINK

Although portrayals of gun safety and gun violence prevention are rare, when they do appear, they can have a substantial impact on viewers' knowledge, attitudes, and support for what are referred to as common-sense gun laws.

In the MIP study looking at depictions of gun safety on TV, a storyline about a child shooting a playmate with an improperly stored gun led viewers to feel less safe with a firearm at home, and made them more likely to endorse the importance of storing guns and ammunition separately.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

尚KIDS TV

Social Learning Theory proposes that children learn how to behave by observing and imitating the behavior of models.

Research has shown that children who watch movie characters smoke cigarettes are more likely to smoke themselves. LINK

Children who watch characters drink alcohol are also more likely to drink themselves. LINK

The same is true for guns.

- On screen representation of characters using guns desensitizes children to the consequences of guns but increases their interest in them.
- In one experiment analyzing the effects of gun representation in film and TV on kids, children who viewed a PG-rated movie containing guns played with a real gun longer and pulled the trigger more times than did children who viewed the same movie not containing guns.
 - O Some of the children in the experiment played with the real gun by pointing it at themselves, at their friend, or out the window at pedestrians on the street.

THE PROBLEM

- The typical American child sees over
 40,000 simulated murders by the age of 18. LINK
- **85% of children** under 13 who are victims of gun homicide die in their home.
- An estimated 30 million children in the US live in households with firearms, and 4.6 million live in a home with at least one loaded and unlocked gun.

SOME

Children are mimics. With millions of children living in homes with loaded and unlocked guns, representation of guns in children's programming is dangerous.

Making the gun unique colors, strangely shaped, or futuristic is likely not enough.

Remember that children don't need a toy car to look like a car to know it's a car!

Consider any and all alternatives to actual firearms. Holstered ice cream scoops. Teddy bear catapults. Rubber duck bubble gooshers. **Get weird with it!**

MASS SHOOTINGS & SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

THE PROBLEM

IS THAT THERE ARE BIGGER PROBLEMS

- Although suicides account for the majority of gun deaths in the US, nearly 1 in 4
 Americans believe mass shootings to be the greatest gun violence threat facing their communities. LINK
- However, of the 45,222 people killed by gun violence in 2020, mass shootings accounted for just 1% of all gun deaths.
- And yet 95% of American public K-12 schools have implemented active shooter drills and at least 40 states have mandated them. LINK
- Guns in the home, not school, pose the biggest threat to children. 76% of school shootings are facilitated by kids having access to unsecured and/or unsupervised guns at home. LINK

Active-Shooter Drills:

- There is little evidence to suggest these training methods are effective at preventing mass shootings or minimizing their impact.
- Instead, these drills are shown to cause depression, stress, and anxiety in children.
- In one survey of American youth, 60% reported that active shooter drills leave them feeling "scared and hopeless" and 21% reported feeling afraid to go to school. LINK

SOME SOLUTIONS

SOME REAL LIFE SOLUTIONS

- Healthy ways to prepare for school shootings:
 - o Tabletop exercises, which involve bringing together groups of students and teachers to talk through a hypothetical active shooter situation step-by-step without engaging in a simulation, have proven to be less traumatizing and equally effective.
 - Schools should be required to get parental consent before any type of shooter drill.
 - Schools must screen students for trauma after drills and provide counseling.

SOME MEDIA SOLUTIONS

- According to research at MIP, a storyline about children traumatized by an active-shooter drill caused such tactics to be perceived as less effective and more emotionally harmful.
- This storyline also motivated increased support for policies regulating the use of these training techniques in schools, particularly those with any form of simulated violence.
- Your stories matter.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

THE PROBLEM

- The mere presence of a firearm can threaten, intimidate, psychologically abuse, and force compliance on a partner.
- Every 16 hours, a woman is shot dead by her current or former partner.
- An average of 547 women are shot and killed by a current or former male intimate partner every year.
- **1 million women** alive today report having been shot or shot at by an intimate partner. LINK
- **4.5 million women** have reported being threatened with a gun by an intimate partner. LINK
- Women in the US are 21 times more likely to die by firearm homicide than women in peer nations LINK and 92% of all women killed with guns in 2015 were from the U.S.LINK
- Abusers with firearms are **five times more likely** to kill their victims, and guns further exacerbate the power and control dynamic used by abusers to inflict emotional abuse and exert coercive control over their victims.
- Nearly 3 in 4 children and teens killed in mass shootings were shot by a person connected to domestic violence.



- Black women are 2x as likely to be shot by an intimate partner as white women.
 - O Younger Black women are at the highest risk Black women between the ages of 18 and 34 are 3x more likely to be shot and killed by an intimate partner than are white women in the same age group. LINK
- Research on intimate partner violence (IPV) among the LGBTQIA+ community suggests that lesbian women, bisexual women and men, and transgender individuals report the highest rates of lifetime IPV compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts.
 - O However, **research in this area is severely limited** due to the lack of gender identity and sexual orientation ID on death records.

ĕ ON TV

FROM "DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN HOLLYWOOD FILM: GASLIGHTING" BY DIANE SHOOSA LINK

Films about domestic violence rely very heavily on pretty standard Hollywood genres... where we absolutely anticipate there will be a confrontation between the victim and the abuser. So the work of the narrative is to completely isolate her and make it — ironically — totally her problem that she has to solve. In a strange way these movies are seen as empowering to women but they're not, because everything is put back on women's shoulders. What's astounding is that the prototypical narrative is for the woman to kill the abuser. And as any kind of real-life solution, this is totally fantastical and in fact dangerous; women who confront their abusers typically are attacked and killed themselves.

When you have a social problem like domestic violence, which is behind closed doors, what's in these movies matters incredibly. The public conversation is still uncomfortable. Or just one that's not as likely to happen. So what the screen is telling us is really important. It's going to be a primary factor in forming our opinions.

SOME SOLUTIONS

A California study found that women who purchased a gun died by firearm homicide at twice the rate of women who did not. LINK

There is no research to support the idea that women's gun ownership increases their safety, regardless of whether they are IPV victims. In fact, studies show the opposite—that women living in households with a firearm are at greater risk of homicide. LINK

Media and storylines that advocate for women to be armed with guns is particularly dangerous since the empirical truth is this: access to a firearm is directly associated with an increased risk of intimate partner homicide.

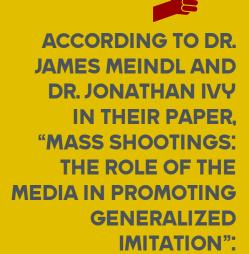
 The only real way to reduce intimate partner homicide is to disrupt access to firearms for both victim and abuser.

ON THE NEWS





- Mass shootings are 6 times as likely to make the news than any other kind of gun related death. LINK
 - This creates an outsized fear for a relatively rare event while simultaneously obscuring the real and prolific dangers of gun ownership when it comes to suicides, domestic violence, and unintentional shootings by children.
- That said, coverage of mass shootings needs to be carefully regulated as research shows that media can influence imitation.
 - O Coverage of mass shootings often repeatedly presents the shooter's image, manifesto, life story, and details of the event. Doing so can directly influence imitation. LINK



Social status is conferred when the mass shooter obtains a significant level of notoriety from news reports. Images displaying shooters aiming guns at the camera project an air of danger and toughness. Similarities between the shooter and others are brought to the surface through detailed accounts of the life of the shooter, with which others may identify. Fulfilled manifestos and repeated reports of body counts heap rewards on the violent act and display competence. Detailed play-by-play accounts of the event provide feedback on the performance of the shooter. All of these instances serve to create a model with sufficient detail to promote imitated mass shootings for some individuals.

SOME SOLUTIONS



- The Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training team, in collaboration with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, has developed the "Don't Name Them" campaign LINK aimed at curbing media-induced imitational mass shootings. It suggests:
 - Minimizing naming and describing the individuals involved in mass shootings.
 - Limiting sensationalism.
 - Refusing to broadcast shooter statements or videos. LINK

Other strategies include:

- Present the shooter's actions (preparation, planning, shooting) as cowardly and shameful, since associating observed behavior with punishment has been shown to decrease the likelihood of imitation.
- Avoid in-depth descriptions of the shooter's rationale for engaging in the behavior.
 - For example, stating that a shooter took revenge after years of bullying may portray a mass shooting as one possible response option for individuals experiencing bullying and with similar backgrounds as the shooter.
- Reduce overall duration of news coverage.
 - An increase in imitation suicides has been linked to increased media coverage of a suicide event. The same may be true for imitation mass shootings.
- Limit the use of live press events immediately following a mass shooting.
 - This would minimize the perceived reward and help decrease overall interest, by not adding "excitement" to the event. LINK
- Avoid sensationalism. Present only the facts and aim to do so in a dull manner.
 - Frantic, breathless energy around the coverage of a mass shooting might look like a reward to a would-be imitator.
- Avoid providing detailed accounts of the actions of a mass shooter before, during, or after the event.
 - The less the behavior is described, the less likely it is to be imitated. LINK

ON THE NEWS SUICIDE



THE PROBLEM

 Suicide is contagious. Over 100 studies worldwide have found that risk of contagion is real and responsible reporting can reduce the risk of additional suicides.

SOME SOLUTIONS

- Report suicide as a public health issue. Including stories on hope, healing, and recovery may reduce the risk of contagion.
- Include resources. Provide information on warning signs of suicide risk as well as hotline and treatment resources.



- Use appropriate language. Certain phrases and words can further stigmatize suicide, spread myths, and undermine suicide prevention objectives such as "committed suicide" or referring to suicide as "successful," "unsuccessful" or a "failed attempt." Instead use "died by suicide" or "killed him/herself."
- Emphasize help and hope. Stories of recovery through helpseeking and positive coping skills are powerful, especially when they come from people who have experienced suicide risk.

ON THE NEWS

RACE

THE PROBLEM

- White shooters are 95% more likely to be described as "mentally ill" than their Black and brown counterparts. LINK
- Even when Black shooters were described as mentally ill,
 the coverage was not as forgiving as it was for whites
 responsible for similar kinds of attacks.
 - O When shooters were framed in the media as mentally ill, 78% of white attackers were described as being victims of society as being under a lot of stress, for example versus only 17% of Black shooters. LINK
- Violent acts by white criminals are almost always treated as anomalous incidents of mental illness, out of step with who they "really are." Whereas violent acts by Black criminals are treated as endemic to their inherent criminality.

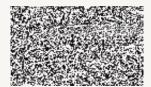
A SOLUTION

 Conscientiousness. By succumbing to tropes and stereotypes, the perpetuation of these narratives makes it harder to adequately assess threats and enact policy that can truly help to reduce gun violence for everyone.



Researchers at Ohio State University compared coverage of two mass shooters — Josh Boren, a white man, and David Ray Conley, a Black man.

"The comparison between Conley and Boren is striking. Both shooters were adult men who murdered their families. Both had a history of domestic violence and drug abuse, and both had received treatment for mental illness. However, whereas the media described Josh Boren as a quiet, gentle man — a 'teddy bear' — coverage of Conley described him as perpetually violent, controlling and dangerous," the researchers said. LINK









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