

Editorial

The Theatre of Firearm Injury Research

Brian P. Smith* and Mark J. Seamon

Department of Surgery, University of Pennsylvania, USA

EDITORIAL

The real trouble with mass casualty events is that they are thought of as events. As if there is some beginning, middle and end that play out in a logical sequence with tidy openings and closures. Little *Romeo and Juliets* that fragment tragedy, making the stories more digestible.

Eric and Dylan were bullied. They dressed up in trench coats and they murdered 12 children in a high school. Dim the lights. Wipe the tears. Move along.

Adam was pre-occupied with violence. He brought a gun to an elementary school and ended so many young lives. Band playout. Comment on the absurdity. Back to work.

Omar cased a nightclub. Doctors soliloquy. Biggest production ever. You get the picture.

This process of isolating events into their own little stories is part of our nature. It organizes and catalogues. It is efficient. It is how we have learned, and how we have incorporated, and how we have taught for centuries. It is the mechanism by which I can remember that Dylan's last name was Klebold; Bushmaster manufactures a type of AR-15 style rifle; and bystander transport of victims is rapid. But it is not without risk. Las Vegas is already yesterday's news.

It has been said that America is addicted to guns [1]. The metaphor is true not only in the numerics of firearm ownership in the US, but even more so with regards to our reactions to these "events" that come and goes from each tidaling news cycle. Like an enabling spouse, we accept, we tolerate, and we acquiesce the very behavior that is killing us.

You can't protect a concert. The second amendment is there to keep me safe. Firearm reform is hard. Don't expect to make the evening news if you only shoot one person. That's just not news anymore.

The truth, however, is that our mass casualty deaths that garner so much attention on the news (as they should) account for less than one half of one percent of firearm deaths throughout the United States each year [2]. And yet all those other shootings generate barely a whisper. If Sandy Hook is Broadway, then the four boys that were shot in Philadelphia last night are an elementary school playbill. And unless your kid is in the play, no one cares about elementary school playbills.

*Corresponding author

Brian P. Smith, Department of Surgery, Division of Traumatology, Surgical Critical Care and Emergency Surgery, University of Pennsylvania, 51 North 39th Street, Medical Office Building, Suite 120, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA, Tel: 215-662-9396; Fax: 215-243-4679; Email: Brian.Smith2@uphs.upenn.edu

Submitted: 04 November 2017

Accepted: 05 November 2017

Published: 08 November 2017

ISSN: 2373-9363

Copyright

© 2017 Smith et al.

OPEN ACCESS

And therein lies the real risk. Twelve hundred and seventy-nine PEOPLE shot in Philadelphia last year [3]. Over 15,000 People killed in the US. Over 462,000 People dead as a result of firearms from 1999 to 2013 [4]. This is cancer. This is HIV. This is opioids. The time to stop it is now. And the onus to stop it falls on us. Our patients are begging, and no one else is coming to help. The last administration was ineffective (with an executive order on gun violence that fell short of its aspirations), and the current one doesn't care. If 64,000 drug overdoses last year is only a public health emergency (rather than a national emergency), then 59,000 shootings is barely a side effect of our second amendment right.

But there are some of us who refuse to be complicit. Not by some measure of altruism, or self-righteousness, and certainly not because benevolence or humanitarianism. Rather, from the simple fact that our "events" never end. Text message and pager alerts serve as constant trauma bay reminders that America's Uncivil War is just as fierce today as it was 20 years ago [5]. And if we stop caring, it will rage on for 20 more. We, as clinicians, academicians, and citizens, must inform the changes that are desperately needed. If we don't, then we are just another character in the decade's long saga of events. Researchers complained about progress. Nothing was accomplished. Curtain call.

REFERENCES

1. Herbert B. In America, Addicted to Guns. The New York Times. 2001.
2. Berkowitz B, Gamio L, Lu D, Uhrmacher K, Lindeman T. The math of mass shootings. The Washington Post. 2017.
3. Philadelphia Police Report. Annual Murder and Shooting Victim Report: 2016. 2017.
4. Resnick S, Smith R, Beard JH, Holena D, Reilly PM, Schwab CW, et al. Firearm deaths in America: Can we learn from 462,000 lives lost? *Annals Surg.* 2017; 266: 432-440.
5. Schwab CW. Violence: America's uncivil war- presidential address, Sixth Scientific Assembly of the Eastern Association for the Surgery of Trauma. *J Trauma.* 1993; 35: 657-665.