



93 PEOPLE IN THE U.S.
DIE EVERY DAY FROM
GUN VIOLENCE
WH[⊗] IS NĒXT?






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WH  **IS NEXT?**

WHO IS NEXT?

ALANA COHEN

APRIL 21, 2017

INTEGRATIVE PROJECT THESIS PAPER

I. THE INTRODUCTION

I feel my phone vibrating in my pocket. I reach into my jacket and pull out my device, which illuminates with a variety of incoming information. I scan my lock screen and see text messages, social media notifications, missed calls, and a breaking news alert. The alert from CNN states that 5 people have died in a mass shooting. I feel a momentary ping of sadness and as I swipe my finger to unlock my phone, all of the information disappears. I respond to my messages and scroll through other applications on my phone, subconsciously forgetting about the breaking news alert entirely.

Due to modern day news distribution I am no longer surprised to learn that there has been a mass shooting. With technological advancements my generation has news accessible at our fingertips instantly. I receive breaking news updates on my phone in the form of text messages. Once I unlock my phone the alert disappears without expanding on the information, ultimately leading to me forgetting about the news within minutes.

I am exploring how to portray gun violence in a way that will make viewers take notice. There were more mass shootings than days in the year 2016. I want to evoke emotions that will inspire people to take action and in doing so create more conversations about gun violence and gun laws. While many Americans enjoy using guns as a form of hunting, sport, and self protection, an increase in gun violence has led me to believe that there should be rules and regulations implemented in order to prevent guns from falling into the wrong hands. It is my job as an artist to use design as a tool to better the world. Art has the ability to inform through more than words and in doing so, have an impactful affect. In order to accomplish this successfully I must look into how gun violence is currently handled in the news and why it isn't impactful. What ways have artists approached it and has it worked better? What are the statistics and facts that I'll need to address in my work in order to inform my viewers?

II. GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

The Second Amendment of the United States Constitution declares, "The right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."¹ This amendment is still intact today despite tremendous political controversy. While many Americans enjoy using guns as a form of hunting, sport, and self protection, an increase in gun violence has caused many to believe that there should be rules and regulations implemented in order to prevent guns from falling into the wrong hands. There are 12,000 gun homicides every year in the United States with at least 91 Americans killed by guns on a daily basis. This rate is 25 times higher than all other developed countries through out the world. Due to this unfortunate reality, there is no shortage of articles, conversations and segments on gun violence in the news. While it is pivotal and essential for news distributors to inform their

¹ Second Amendment." LII / Legal Information Institute. Accessed December 04, 2016.

audience on the influx of shootings occurring, the abundant information on this topic leaves many numb to the information. Gun violence in the media is so prevalent that it is no longer shocking and becomes expected to the audience. The abundance of reporting on this topic results in a decline in conversation as well as action among US citizens.²

III. GUN VIOLENCE IN NEWS

Barack Obama, the President of the United States, has addressed the nation responding to mass shootings 14 times through out his eight-year presidency. While addressing the audience after 10 were killed at a College in Oregon in 2015 he laments, "Somehow, this has become routine. The reporting is routine. My response here at this podium ends up being routine. We become numb to this."³ There are a variety of reasons why this numbness occurs. One reason is for the abundance of shootings in America. While it is important that the President as well as news distributors report on shootings in order to inform on a large scale, this can often have a negative effect on the American audience. Steven Maier, a psychology professor at the University of Colorado Boulder states, "If you repeatedly experience something your reaction to it diminishes."⁴ The more stories there are on gun violence, the less striking and noteworthy the problem becomes.

So far in 2016, the New York Times has published over 250 articles pertaining to guns and gun violence. This abundance of reporting can leave the U.S. audience feeling hopeless and helpless. By being informed about the amount of shootings occurring and the lack of control over gun violence, U.S. citizens are less likely to believe they can make a difference due to the enormity of the problem. Brad Bushman, a professor of communication and psychology at University of Michigan states that, "the more people are exposed to something bad and no one tries to fix it, the less people believe it can be fixed, which breeds complacency."⁴ His studies find that, "People exposed to media violence are less helpful to others in need because they are comfortably numb to the pain and suffering of others."⁵ Headlines such as "Just another day in the United States of America – another day of gun-fire, panic, and fear" solely contribute to gun violence being viewed as normal.⁶ There is nothing normal about innocent people losing their lives because of dangerous gun owners.

² Willingham, AJ. "A Visual Guide: Mass Shootings in America." CNN. June 21, 2016.

³ "Statement by the President on the Shootings at Umpqua Community College, Roseburg, Oregon." The White House. October 01, 2015. Accessed December 04, 2016. Accessed December 04, 2016.

⁴ Itkowitz, Colby. "President Obama's Right: Americans Might Be Growing Numb to Mass Shootings. Here's Why." The Washington Post. December 3, 2015. Accessed December 04, 2016.

⁵ "U-M Study: Violent Media Numb Viewers to the Pain of Others | University of Michigan News." U-M Study: Violent Media Numb Viewers to the Pain of Others | University of Michigan News. February 19, 2009. Accessed December 04, 2016. <http://ns.umich.edu/new/releases/7001>.

⁶ "California Shooting: 'Another Day of Gunfire, Panic and Fear'" BBC.com. December 3, 2015. Accessed December 4, 2016.

There needs to be a change in the distribution of this information in order for there to be change in attitude among the American people.

Photographs or illustrations typically accompany the abundant news articles pertaining to gun violence. One New York Times article is titled, "On The Beat of Black Lives and Bloodshed." The article is written from the perspective of a police officer who recalls multiple crime scenes throughout his career where he has showed up to discover "a young black man my age or younger dead with a halo of blood or brain matter splashed on the pavement."⁷ While the article is touching and tragic, the information is nothing new or shocking resulting in a normalcy to the text. The article is, however, accompanied by a bold and disturbing graphic (fig 1.) The illustration, by JoHee Yoon, portrays five black silhouettes of guns, drawn in all different sizes and orientations. Inside each gun etched out in white there are abstract looking faces and body parts with haunting expressions.

In one gun an etched figure has its hands raised, in another a figure is shedding tears and writhing with a pained expression. These figures and body parts emerge from the blackness of the gun, appearing ghostly as if the guns each tell a story of the lives that they have taken. The guns are portrayed over a bright red splattering of color, imitating the blood shed from each implied narrative. There is a lot to take in throughout this one small illustration. Each gun appears to have more details and disturbing subtleties with each look. The faces within the guns haunt and captivate the audience, making it visually difficult to look away and ignore the disturbing narrative illustrated.

With the abundance of articles pertaining to gun violence a reader flipping through the newspaper may not read this particular passage, yet the bright red black and white illustration is likely to catch their attention and leave a lasting and haunting impression. In this way, art has the ability to inform and impact greater than words. It is evident that news and broadcasting companies are no longer effective outlets due to the abundance of incoming information and reporting on gun violence. It is, however, still essential that this information reaches the public in order to publicize this tragic, on-going crisis. Art has the ability to inform on this subject through an entirely different approach.



Figure 1 – JoHee Yoon, Black Lives and Bloodshed, New York Times, 2016

⁷ Lee, Trymaine. "On the Beat of Black Lives and Bloodshed." The New York Times. January 28, 2016. Accessed December 04, 2016.

IV. GUN VIOLENCE IN THE ARTS

Art created in response to gun violence has the ability to create a conversation and ignite a feeling of shock, rage, and fear in viewers beyond capabilities of traditional news distribution. The exhibition “Unforgotten” uses art to shock viewers by portraying disturbing sculptures in a surprisingly public environment. The public traveling exhibit was created by art director Jordan Sparrow as a remembrance to the victims of gun violence, humanizing and transforming headlines into more than statistics. Sparrow states his intention was to “come up with a new way to stop people in their tracks and understand that gun violence truly is a problem.”⁸ This exhibit was launched by FCB Chicago and served as a campaign for the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence. The exhibit uses faceless statues with the exact height and clothing of gun violence victims. The artist spoke to families who have lost their children in shootings throughout Chicago in order to make the sculptures have as accurate of a resemblance as possible to the victims. Chicago is a state with an enormous and increasing gun violence problem. The purpose of this project is to not only honor and remember gun violence victims, but to also shock the Chicago audience with an eerie and powerful art piece. By installing this exhibit in the public St. James Cathedral Plaza in Chicago, by-passers will be surprised to come across these haunting, faceless, sculptures. While these by-passers may be aware of Chicago’s gun problem, being presented head on with a nearly identical faceless shrine is a much more powerful reminder of the innocent lives lost from gun violence. Due to the fact that limited amounts of people are able to view this exhibition in person, the campaign released a video that takes viewers through the experience of creating and installing these sculptures.



Figure 2/3 – Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence, The Unforgotten, 2015

The video opens with the mother of a gun violence victim explaining how her son was killed on a bus when a teenager opened fire. At 0:26 the video screen goes black and text appears which reads, “30,000 victims die from gun violence every year, we brought some of the victims back to tell their stories.”⁹ The video

⁸ Martinson, Sarah. “Traveling Art Exhibit Honors Gun Violence Victims.” Columbia Chronicle. April 20, 2015. Accessed December 04, 2016.

⁹ *Help Us Make Sure Their Lives Are #Unforgotten*. Directed by Jordan Sparrow. The Unforgotten. April 21, 2015. Accessed December 4, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvKx-uwN02Zs>.

then cuts to the same mother who is donating her son, Blair's clothes to the campaign. The viewer is then presented with what appears to be the back of a person walking. The person appears to be frozen, standing still and not moving forward yet his clothing portrays a sense of movement. His backpack is slung over his shoulder and his right arm is in an upward motion as if he is stepping forward. When the camera rotates 360 degrees around the figure, and only then, do we realize that underneath the hood of the jacket there is only darkness. The figure is fully dressed, wearing casual elements that range from sneakers to a t-shirt and jacket completed with a name-tag reading "Blair Holt (fig 2.)" Other sculptures are shown throughout the video, each appearing to be people until the viewer notices the dark hollowness of where a face should be (fig 3.) This shocking and fast realization that the figure is not actually a person is meant to replicate the realization that these victims are ripped from their lives so quickly. The weapon of the gun has the ability to end someone's life nearly instantly with the pull of a trigger. These eerie sculptures are meant to encompass that same gut-reaction shock to innocent by-passers who frequent the area.

On the website for this campaign is a petition which viewers are encouraged to sign stating the support of efforts to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people. "The Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence saw a record number of site visits, stories shared and petitions signed, and declared the exhibit the most successful initiative in its 42-year history."¹⁰ Although gun violence is a known problem to many of the exhibition's viewers, by presenting the information in a way that humanized the victims and enabled people to visualize the news rather than absorb the information solely through text, a beautiful response occurred. Viewers made the choice to act on the issue rather than solely absorb the information because they were moved through art in a way that news and media could not portray.

Art created in response to gun violence also has the ability to address current flaws with the nation's response to this ongoing crisis. The film, "Speaking is Difficult", takes it's viewer through 24 shooting incidents in America from present day back until 2011 in fifteen-minutes. The goal of the film is to remind people that despite the common occurrences of gun violence, it should never be viewed as normal. It aims to impact viewers and motivate them to take action and engage after viewing the piece. It is not enough to simply feel emotions; people must be inspired to act upon them.

The film "Speaking is Difficult," was released online in April and is continually updated and expanded on with each mass shooting. The film uses the 911 audiotapes taken at the initial reporting of each shooting. As the frantic audiotapes play, the screen cuts through a series of static shots taken at the locations of each shooting. For example, at 1:54 the screen portrays a variety of different angles of a complex titled, "The Grand Theatre (fig 4.)" The audience is shown the main road of the theatre, multiple parking lots, and a shrine to the victims at the entrance of the complex. The videography is very eerie and disturbing. The shots were recorded while the camera was fixed on a tripod, creating a strange illusion to the viewers. While at first it appears that the scenes are photographs, tiny movements in the screen such as rustling in response to wind or a car

¹⁰ "Unforgotten." Current Marketing. Accessed December 04, 2016. <http://talktocurrent.com/works/unforgotten/>.

in the distance imply that it is a recording of time rather than a captured moment. The stillness in this film is shocking and reminiscent of the stillness that occurs when a tragedy such as a shooting happens. The viewer is stuck in a trance as time moves, unsure how to navigate and make sense of their surroundings. The audio of a very panicked, breathless man plays as the viewer takes in the static shots. Upon hearing “911 what are you reporting?,” he frantically reveals that a shooting has occurred in the theatre where he was viewing a film. The woman on the other end of the line calmly asks him multiple questions, such as “how many shots did you hear” and “can you describe the man?,” her tone tranquil tone contrasting greatly with the mans exasperated breaths. While the officer is solely taking the necessary steps in her reporting, it is alarming to hear the normalcy in her voice amid such a horrific call. Her tone fits with the very off stillness of the shots of each seemingly normal venue.



Figure 4 – AJ Schnack, *Speaking Is Difficult*, 2016

The purpose of this film is to remind viewers that mass shootings are not, and never should be viewed as normal. By portraying the locations of these 24 shootings, the film not only informs viewers but also reminds them that unless action is taken – safe spaces no longer exist. Film Director, AJ Shnack states the title “Speaking is Difficult”, “is about the fact that our ability to have a national conversation has been not only difficult, but almost impossible.”¹¹ The film is purposely repetitive. Each shooting is portrayed in the same manner, with a variety of static shots playing over 911 audiotapes. This repetitive style is meant to imitate the repetitive handling of gun violence by news outlets and other sources. Despite the recurring nature of the film, the audiotapes are each different, haunting and disturbing enough to ensure that the scenes are captivating, real and full of raw emotion. The viewer does not watch this fifteen-minute film with ease; no part of the viewing experience feels normal.

¹¹ Murphy, Mekado. “A Documentary Grows With Each Mass Shooting.” *The New York Times*. April 15, 2016. Accessed December 04, 2016.

V. METHODOLOGY

I was no longer fazed when informed about a new mass shooting. I started making in order to remind myself and others about the extremity of gun violence. In each phase, **questions** prompt me to explore new approaches while expanding on previous **successes**.

PHASE I

I began with the thought that if people were surprised to come across the information initially, an element of shock would be brought back to the unexpected news they were receiving. I laser engraved a jean jacket with a target and the words "WHO IS NEXT?" on the back. Focusing on the fact that someone is 40% more likely to be shot while at school, I first wore the jacket around campus. While doing so provoked various conversations, the information on the jacket was as fleeting as the breaking news notifications that inspired my project. To combat this, I began photographing the jacket on and off of people at public places related to mass shootings. While the jean jacket was graphic and symbolic, it had the unfortunate association of appearing as a fashion statement. It also didn't necessarily reach the shock value that I was trying to achieve.

Successes:

Target Symbol
WHO IS NEXT? slogan

Questions:

Does a single target imply precision?
Does the jacket look too fashionable?



PHASE II

At this same moment, I received a bulletproof vest from a classmate whose father is a cop. Still drawn to the effectiveness of the phrase "WHO IS NEXT?," I combined typographic elements with the graphic symbol of the target in order to create a distinct and recognizable brand for my project. I also began documenting myself wearing the bulletproof vest at public places related to mass shootings. People seemed scared and shocked when they saw me. Despite the bulletproof vest's success in person, I wasn't convinced that the shock translated in photographs.

Successes:

Shocking
Instills Fear

Questions:

How do I translate these emotions and experiences into photographs?



PHASE III

I turned back to the powerful symbol of a target that I began with. The target implied a victim, yet the precision of it implied a calculated shot, which was not true of mass shootings. Experimenting with projection and layering multiple targets, I again began photographing the target in places reminiscent of mass shootings. It wasn't until I approached an empty auditorium that I discovered the power of ambiguity. When projecting my target in the empty auditorium, I realized that the space felt both familiar and unfamiliar. Everyone has been and will be seated in a venue like this. I further manipulated and layered my projection in order to simulate the disorienting nature of a mass shooting. By using an ambiguous space for the focus of my project, I ensure that a viewer can relate to the image and feel as if they are next.

Successes:

Disorienting Effect
Ability to have multiple targets

Questions:

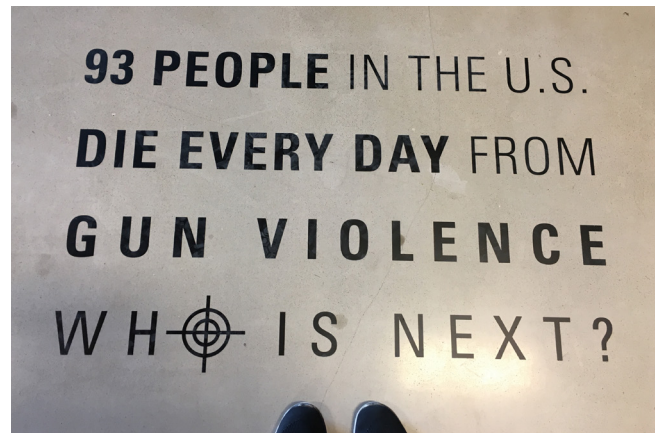
Should people be in the photographs?
How do I make the viewer relate to the location?

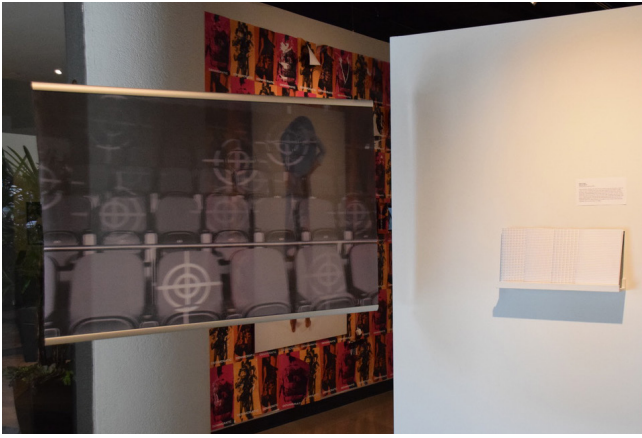


VI. CREATIVE WORK

By printing my photographs on transparent fabric, I create a dynamic and ambiguous environment. As people move around the gallery space, they will see others behind the targets, implying that anyone can be the victim of gun violence. The typography on the floor creates an environment for the viewer to physically step into and combines my branding with the power of statistics. In addition, I decided to include sporadic gunshots from a directional speaker hanging from the ceiling. When the viewer steps in front of the piece they will hear these gunshots as they observe by-passers moving behind the targets.

My project has been a year-long exploration into how to more effectively present the issue of gun violence. While my final installation successfully creates a haunting environment within a gallery space – I had difficulty separating from the most successful aspects of previous explorations. As evidenced in my Methodology section, each phase of my project guided the next. I decided to accompany my piece with booklets portraying documentation and annotation of my previous phases. I included gun violence statistics, facts, and powerful quotes as well in order to inform viewers about the topic even further and contextualize my piece.





VII. CONCLUSION

This year long project has brought me enormous growth as a designer. I have truly witnessed how powerful design can be. Design exists beyond screens and has the ability to have an impact in real life. Being that my project is easy to compact and install – I can envision myself creating pop-up installations of my piece in areas where gun violence is particularly prevalent. While I may step back from tackling the issue of gun violence exclusively, I will continue to challenge myself to create pieces responding to breaking news updates that I receive. I will persistently use design as a tool to inform and better the world from a new perspective.

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alana COHEN

www.alana-cohen.com

alanaco@umich.edu

914 409 5206

Honors & Exhibitions

University Honors

Dean's List
Cum Laude

Undergrad Juried Exhibition

Irene Bychinsky Bendler
Award in Design 2017

Skills

Adobe CC (PS, ID, IL, AE)
Conceptual Design
Visual Identity
Cover Design
Packaging Design
Illustration
Art Direction
Photography
Printmaking
Client Communication
Creative Research
Time Management
Website Design

Education

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design
Bachelor of Fine Arts May 2017
GPA: 3.7/4.0

Central Saint Martins, London

Integrated Semester Abroad Program: Graphic Design
Jan 2016 - April 2016

Experience

Penguin Random House, Cover Design

Designed book covers in response to manuscripts
Created poster interpretations of book covers
Created back advertisements and social media banners
New York, NY / May 2016 - August 2016

Hearst Digital Media, Graphic Design

Created and edited advertisements across all web pages
Created and edited keynote presentations
New York, NY / May 2015 - August 2015

J. Fleet Designs, Graphic Design

Created designs for lacquer trays, bowls & bathroom accessories
Worked with companies such as Barneys & Bloomingdales
Pleasantville, NY / May 2015 - May 2016

Green & Tonic, Graphic Design

Created packaging & designed labels for food & beverages
Wrote & published blog entries for company's website
Greenwich, CT / May 2014 - August 2014

Worldwide Orphans Foundation, Ranger

Served as a service ranger for 2 weeks each summer
Volunteering at orphanages in Haiti, Bulgaria & Ethiopia
Haiti, Bulgaria, Ethiopia / 2013 - present