

SOME OF THE REAL CAUSES OF GUN-RELATED VIOLENCE

Bill McConnell, Ph.D.

Some people these days think we need to pass more gun laws. But in the past few years a tremendous number of new gun laws have been passed, especially in California, many of which are unenforced and/or unenforceable. Of course, politicians who pass gun laws do not care about enforcement or results. With them it is all about the propaganda value of being able to say they passed more gun laws. One needs to ask how many new laws it will take to significantly reduce gun-related violence. If you look at the research evidence you can find a lot of it on both sides of the issue of whether the number of gun laws reduces gun-related violence. If you go one step down you will find that the pro and con evidence is highly correlated to the political bias of the source of the so-called research and the debate continues to rage.

Common sense is a phrase often used in this debate. So, let me ask what seems like a common-sense question. Since there are many things involved in the generation of gun-related violence, why is the debate almost exclusively about guns and gun laws?

Why is there such a reluctance to seriously consider many things which are real causes of gun-related violence? Perhaps it is because many of these things are complicated and difficult to address. Instead, we focus on guns and anyone who has anything to do with guns. This is the classic scapegoat solution—find an easy target and blame it for the entire problem.

Let me suggest instead that we all put energy into solving just some of the following real causes of gun-related violence.

1. Mental illness. The mental health industry has largely failed in treating the Severely Mentally Ill, including not pushing for mandatory treatment when it is obviously needed--the result of suffering from a severe case of political correctness. Mental health treatment needs to be better funded and mandatory treatment needs to be expanded.

2. Access to guns for people who should not have them. Serious problems exist with the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). This system was established with the understanding that it would in fact be

instantaneous and based on accurate reporting. The federal government has never been able to achieve this goal. Your representatives in Sacramento and Washington need to be encouraged to fix this before considering any expansion.

3. The culture we live in. We seem to be living in a me-oriented instant gratification culture characterized by many feelings of entitlement. Some people think that if they do not get what they want or if their feelings get hurt they are entitled to correct the situation as they see fit. I don't see an easy fix for this but maybe you do. We should at least recognize it.

4. See something—Say something. This is not working very well. Why aren't people willing to do this? First, because they are understandably focused on their own lives and do not want to get involved. Second, they see that exposing yourself by reporting does not result in any action anyway and may cause you a lot of grief. Law enforcement should be encouraged to tighten up this whole area.

5. Social media. Social media makes a major contribution to gun-related violence by providing a platform for seriously disturbed individuals and promoting copy-cat crimes. Another item without an easy fix, but maybe the creators of this movement should apply more of their talents to fixing this unintended consequence.

6. Gender. Why are all the mass shooters boys/men? What is our culture doing to males that causes this? The social scientists surely have some solutions.

7. The entertainment industry. Entertainment media, especially gaming, are filled with endless carnage and violence. The scientific evidence is clear that exposure to violent content increases violence in the participants. How about some overdue violence control regulations for this multibillion dollar industry?

8. Drugs. The demand for illicit drugs and the criminal enterprises that work hard to fill this demand with the accompanying turf wars is probably the biggest single cause of non-suicide gun-related violence in the country. This is a prime example of an intractable and long-standing problem that is much more difficult than blaming guns.

9. Bullying. Bullying is a major cause of violence, including mass shootings. Surely, more could be done about this in the schools and workplaces.

10. The news media. The major media make a significant contribution to gun-related violence by going far beyond their journalistic requirements and making shooters into media celebrities in the finest traditions of the celebrity culture that obsesses so many of our fellow citizens. Talk to the journalists you know and tell them to stop it.

11. The gun culture. The gun culture of the US which derives from the Constitution and US history is overwhelmingly a good thing and people who are seriously engaged in shooting sports are one of the most responsible citizen sub-groups in the country. But that culture, together with the other factors outlined above, help to produce aberrant individuals. Even with this unintended outcome we should never give up the gun culture and the many good outcomes that flow from it such as the best military in the world.

12. Criminals. Oh yes, we must not forget that one of the major contributors to gun-related violence are the criminals who commit gun-related violence. Is the criminal justice system doing enough to address this problem?

So, good luck with the challenge you choose to tackle. Rest assured it will probably be more productive than passing more gun laws which mainly serve to scapegoat guns and gun owners.