

Prevalence – Here a Gun, There a Gun Putting Guns Back in Their Holsters

Depiction Suggestions

◆ Consider having police confiscate a homeowner's guns after investigating a domestic dispute and holding them for a "cool off" period. (Note: This action is legal in California, where it has been shown to be effective in deterring domestic homicides.)

When a security guard got into a physical altercation with his wife about her suspected infidelity, blows flew from both sides, though no one was injured. The police intervened and confiscated the man's gun as a precautionary measure. The man desperately needed the gun for his job and begged the police to return it. After a few months, the police finally granted his wish after receiving assurances that the gun would not be used in any domestic confrontation. The man kept his word, but just a few days later, the wife's lover sneaked into his house while he was taking a shower and used the same gun to shoot and kill him. The lover and the wife, who was in on the murder, were subsequently convicted of the killing.

–San Bernardino Police files, 7-98

◆ When considering the use of violence, particularly gun violence, think through whether or not it is essential to the plot line or whether other scenarios could work just as well.

◆ Attempt to highlight alternative resolutions to conflict rather than relying on gunplay as the only or automatic means of settling confrontations. Clashes can be resolved by other less lethal means, perhaps by characters using their wits and cunning to overcome opponents.

◆ If negotiation or compromise will not work for a story line and some form of physical confrontation is indicated, try opting for less lethal weapons than guns, such as fists, for example.

◆ Try to achieve suspense through implied jeopardy, innuendo, lighting, music, editing and so on rather than a straight-on show of gun violence, where appropriate.

◆ Consider the age of your likely audience when deciding whether to portray gun use.

◆ Give thought to starting the story after any gun violence has already occurred, and confine the plot line to the aftermath - detection, prosecution, coping of survivors, and so on.

◆ If a shooting is deemed necessary to the plot, consider using less lethal weapons, such as stun guns, beanbag guns, rubber bullets, net guns, and so on.

◆ Consider having characters successfully use alternatives to guns for self-defense, such as pepper spray or mace.

◆ Consider portraying an enraged individual looking for a gun to commit suicide or kill others while in the heat of the moment but being unable to find one; later the person may be shown cooling off and the situation resolving itself without the gun.

A man fulfilled a lifelong dream by becoming a Marine. But when he failed to qualify in an important rifle shooting test during boot camp, he suddenly got in front of another shooter's weapon, grabbed the barrel and put it in his mouth, killing himself instantly.

–Louisville Courier Journal, 8-5-98

◆ Exhibit alternate forms of household security when possible, such as alarms, dogs, lights triggered by movement, and so on. Consider making the point that, unlike guns, none of these are potentially lethal to household members themselves.

◆ Try raising the dramatic stakes with other kinds of suspense-builders, like deep dark secrets, threats to the future, treachery, intrigue, and so on.

Spotlight on Depiction of Health and Social Issues

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Prevalence – Here a Gun, There a Gun *Deglamorizing Gunplay*

Depiction Suggestions

- ◆ Avoid, when possible and appropriate, scenarios where gun violence is depicted as effective, justified or heroic.
- ◆ Try emphasizing the fact that introducing a gun into an argument lethalyzes anger: What could have been resolved with just harsh words, or even cuts and bruises, may end up with a death. Guns don't allow for cooling off or reconciling once the momentary or situational anger subsides.

Two men got into a drunken argument about which breed of dog is the best when one grabbed a gun and shot the other. He was charged with first-degree murder. Neither the victim nor the shooter actually owned a dog.

–APB News, 1-3-00

- ◆ If gun violence is shown, depict it, where appropriate, as a thoughtless tool of those who seek easy solutions.
- ◆ Avoid, where possible, portraying those who use a gun - other than police or military personnel in the line of duty - as being rewarded for their gun use.
- ◆ Consider showing a police officer, though hailed as a hero for shooting a criminal, feeling conflicted and demoralized for taking a life and causing grief to the victim's family.

- ◆ Avoid, where feasible, showing violence out of context, as in movie trailers and commercials or TV on-air promotional spots, for example. Where stories may not be inherently glamorous in their firearm portrayals, multiple exposures of an isolated moment, out of context, may inadvertently desensitize younger viewers to violent gun use.

- ◆ Avoid, where possible, invoking sympathy for the perpetrator in a shooting event, particularly when the character is the protagonist.

- ◆ Try, when possible, to characterize police officers as being there to "protect and serve", rather than to kill and take names. Avoid portraying them coming into a situation with their guns blazing unless the situation absolutely warrants it.

- ◆ Attempt, where appropriate, to consider the innocent bystanders being caught in the cross-fire between criminals or between "good guys" and "bad guys".

A Hawaiian woman's family was concerned that Las Vegas was not the safest place to go for a vacation to celebrate her birthday. Their fears were realized when she was shot and killed by a stray bullet fired in a shoot-out between a casino's security officers and a theft suspect. Two men were arrested and charged with murder.

–LA Times

- ◆ Consider showing the emotional consequences felt by police officers or even criminals when innocent by-standers are killed or wounded by their actions.

A tough teenage gang member, proud to “live by the sword”, was fired on by a rival gang member while he was in a car with his girlfriend. He took three bullets and survived, but his girlfriend, who took the fourth, was gravely injured and spent months in a coma. Though the teen expected to “die by the sword” himself, he was grief-stricken at what happened to the love of his life and felt enormously guilty for causing her all her suffering. After ten operations, she pulled through, but has many remaining disabilities. He married her and disavowed both guns and violence.

—from an interview of a Los Angeles ex-gang member by Arnold Shapiro Productions documentary “Teen Files”

- ◆ Consider occasionally having “junk” guns misfiring or jamming at critical times, as these guns are prone to do after a period of use.
- ◆ Try incorporating statistics on gun violence into scripts by having appropriate characters, like law enforcement personnel, DA’s, and teachers cite them. (EIC would, of course, make this information available.)
- ◆ Try to portray the reality of how easy it is to buy guns and how there is often no legal limit to the number of firearms an individual can purchase. An interesting facet may be the exploration of the “gun show loophole”.
- ◆ Try to highlight the fact that teenagers often act impulsively and the presence of guns may increase the likelihood that a transient emotion may turn into a fatal event. A situation quickly escalates into one from which there is no turning back; the anger or despair may be fleeting but the outcomes are permanent and can destroy lives on both sides of the gun.

In the middle of his six-week-old daughter’s funeral at a California cemetery, the young father got into a skirmish with the baby’s aunt and uncle at the cemetery and shot both.

—APB News, 1-12-00

- ◆ Consider underscoring the “cycle of violence” - how violence begets violence in a downward, ultimately lethal spiral.

A grandmother gunned down the man she believed had shot and killed her grandson, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. It turns out she shot the wrong man, the victim wasn’t involved in her grandson’s death at all, according to police. The grandmother faces fifteen years to life for assault to kill while armed.

—APB News, 7-14-00

- ◆ Consider making the point that many illicit drugs, as well as alcohol in particular, decrease inhibitions, impair judgment and often increase belligerence - and the factors when combined with ready access to a gun, can make for a lethal situation.

A Cleveland policeman, reportedly showing his girlfriend a self-defense move, unintentionally shot her in the neck. He was charged with four misdemeanors, including using a weapon while intoxicated.

—Cleveland Sun, 4-22-98

- ◆ Try highlighting the fact that, while massacres like Columbine may grab the headlines, there are hundreds of firearm tragedies every-day which, though devastating to those involved, are tragedies too small for the media to take notice.

Everyone knows of the Columbine High School massacre, but not many know that within the year, two Columbine High sweethearts died in a shooting at a sandwich shop within sight of their school. The senseless killing was considered to be part of a robbery.

—AP, 2-15-00

- ◆ Consider tracing the “life” of a gun - how it’s passed from criminal to criminal and crime to crime.
- ◆ Avoid, wherever possible, treating gun use lightly or humorously.
- ◆ Keep in mind that shelters will turn away people who are found to be carrying weapons.

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Spotlight on Firearm Violence and Safety
Chapter 7: Prevalence —
Here a Gun, There a Gun
Delegitimizing Gunplay

Prevalence – Here a Gun, There a Gun

Providing a Positive Role Model

Depiction Suggestions

- ◆ When appropriate, incorporate parents having heart-to-heart talks with their children, especially teenagers, about guns not being an acceptable resolution to the problems they face with school yard bullies or anything else. Likewise, try showing parents and teachers telling kids that guns may just make their problems worse by escalating an angry situation into a lethal one.
- ◆ Attempt to show safe ways school kids can tip off the police or school authorities that a fellow student has a gun, and show that this action can bring about a positive outcome.
- ◆ Where appropriate to the story, consider portraying a teenage girl threatening to break up with her boyfriend unless he gets rid of his gun - or a boy doing the same with a gun-owning girlfriend.
- ◆ When sensible to the plot, consider having characters use a confidential “gun tip hotline” where callers get cash rewards for supplying information about illegal gun use.
- ◆ Try to provide role modeling behavior by showing friends trying to dissuade a character from arming him/herself after the gun death of a friend or family member.

- ◆ Attempt to show friends reacting negatively to a youth who’s showing off a gun. Reactions might range from alarm, fear or outrage to disapproval or simply concern.

Trying to be a tough guy while making a gangster rap video, a young man, performing in front of both a camera and his friends, reached for a handgun, swinging the muzzle to his temple. The gun appeared to go off without any conscious effort, shooting the man in the head and leaving him on life support.

–Columbia Dispatch, 2-29-00

- ◆ Try to incorporate the negative peer pressure placed on high school or college students who carry guns.
- ◆ When appropriate, try to depict parents, teachers, counselors and even peers giving advice to students about alternate forms of conflict resolution.
- ◆ If a character is offered a gun for self-protection or retaliation, consider having him or her refuse it as a bad idea that could just worsen the situation.
- ◆ Consider showing a parent chastising his or her spouse for leaving a gun where their children can find it.

When her four year old son shot his six year old brother in the face with a gun he'd found in his home, his mother was led out crying and screaming that she had begged her boyfriend to get rid of the gun. Both mother and boyfriend faced criminal weapons charges.

—Louisville Courier Journal, 6-4-99

- ◆ Consider showing the “cool”, popular high school kids making disparaging remarks about teens having guns.
- ◆ When appropriate, show a careless user being chided by others and warned to treat all firearms as if they were loaded.
- ◆ If guns are shown in the home, consider having parents respond to children who ask to look at it or play with it by relating stories of firearm tragedies that have occurred among kids their age.
- ◆ Attempt to show kids being rewarded for urging friends not to touch a gun they’ve found.
- ◆ Since bringing shame to the family is of major importance in some cultures, consider showing a young person forgoing the use or possession of a gun because these actions may come to disgrace his or her relatives.
- ◆ When appropriate, demonstrate individuals in a community taking an active role in the prevention of gun violence.

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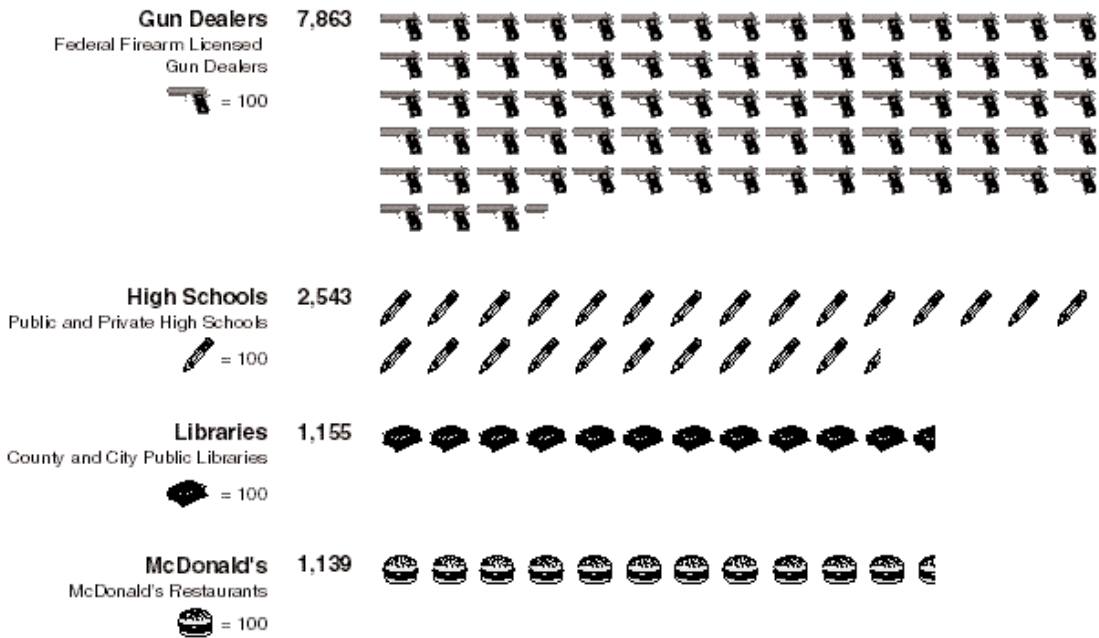
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Prevalence – Here a Gun, There a Gun The Numbers

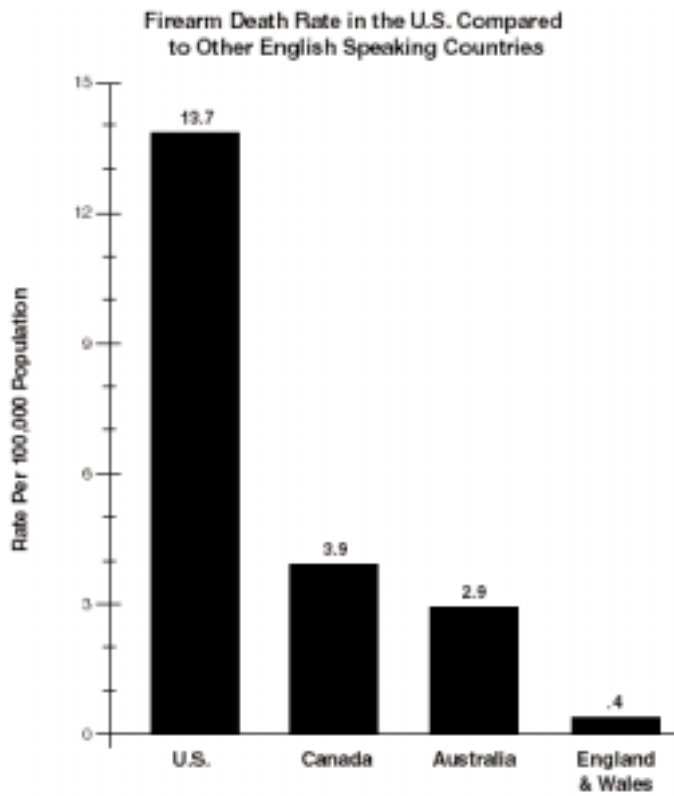
Fact Sheet

- ◆ There are more than 223 million firearms in the United States, 76 million of which are handguns.¹
- ◆ Licensed firearms dealers sell an estimated 7.5 million guns every year, of which 3.5 million are handguns.²
- ◆ 39% of households in the U.S. have at least one gun and 24% contain a handgun.³
- ◆ In 1980, less than 15% of firearms produced in the U.S. were pistols. That amount rose to almost 40% by 1994. Meanwhile, domestic production of rifles and shotguns dropped by 40% and 14% respectively during the same period.⁴

State of California Gun Dealer Comparisons



Source: The Campaign to Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids. Adapted from statistics for the State of California: Gun Dealers – Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, 4/16/97; High Schools – Department of Education, Research, Evaluation and Technology Division, 10/96; Libraries – California Library Directory, 1996, Library Development Services Bureau; McDonald's – McDonald's Franchising Department, Oakbrook, IL, 3/31/97.



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, 1998. Based on 1995 data.

- ◆ A new handgun is produced in the U.S. every 12 seconds.⁵
- ◆ The wholesale value of guns and ammunition in the United States in 1995 was about 1.7 billion dollars.⁶
- ◆ An estimated 3.2 million non-powder guns (e.g., bb or air guns) are sold in the U.S. each year, most intended for use by people aged 8 to 18.⁷

- ◆ Over 40 million handguns have been manufactured in the U.S. since 1973.⁸
- ◆ In 1999, there were 8.6 million Americans who applied to buy firearms, more than double the number of prospective buyers in 1998.⁹
- ◆ One percent of the nation's gun dealers sold nearly half (45%) of the guns used in crimes in 1998.¹⁰

Sources

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2. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms estimate, 1994.
3. Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research, 1998.
4. American Firearms Industry, Firearms Production 1973-1996, updated 1998.
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9. San Francisco Chronicle, 6/22/00.
10. Los Angeles Times, 6/8/99.

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Chapter 7: Prevalence — Here a Gun, There a Gun The Numbers



Prevalence – Here a Gun, There a Gun *Firearms and the Sexes*

Fact Sheet

Women as Targets

- ◆ In 1997, 393 females - more than one per day - were shot and killed by their husband or intimate acquaintance during an argument.¹
- ◆ Among all female victims in 1997, 29% were killed by husbands or boyfriends; only 3% of male victims were killed by wives or girlfriends.²
- ◆ More than twice as many females were murdered by a spouse or intimate acquaintance with a gun than were killed by a stranger with a gun, knife or any other kind of weapon.³
- ◆ 90% of female firearm victims were murdered by males.⁴

Men as Shooters

- ◆ In 1996, over one quarter (26%) of all deaths by firearm were young men between the ages of 15-24. This accounts for over 8,700 young male lives lost to gun-related injury.⁵
- ◆ Men and boys accounted for 86% - or over 29,000 - firearm-related deaths in 1996.⁶
- ◆ Between 15-19 years of age, the firearm death rate for males is more than 7 times the rate for females; at 20-24 years, the firearm

death rate for males is almost 9 times the rate for females.⁷

- ◆ For young Black males, guns are the leading cause of all death.⁸
- ◆ Among young Black males, 91% of homicides occurred by firearm.⁹
- ◆ 79% (13,820) of firearm suicide victims in 1997 were White males.¹⁰
- ◆ In 88% of firearm homicides, both victim and offender were males.¹¹

Sources

1. Violence Policy Center analysis of FBI Homicide Report, 1999.
2. FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1998.
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5. Peters K., et al., National Vital Statistics Reports, 1998; 47.
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