

When heart strings snap

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Seven killed at California State University in 1976. Five killed at Cleveland Elementary in 1989.

Four killed at Lindhurst High in 1992. Thirteen dead at Columbine. Another seventeen dead in Parkland last month. When will this infinite string of school shootings end? As it turns out, America's teens have traded out their safety scissors and are ready for the final cut. The national news has recently been tied up with devastating tragedies surrounding the school shooting in Parkland, Florida; the second shot heard round the world has been fired.

Revolution is beginning. The only thing more moving than the choked words of a grieving mother, father, or friend is the response by America's youth to ensure that an event like this could never be repeated. Ever. Again. Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School was not the first school to be involved in gun-related deaths such as these, though. It wasn't even the deadliest.

The question then presents itself: why now? Amidst the tangles of their everyday lives, teenagers looking for a purpose have found their calling in anti-violence campaigns; this desire could be due to the fact that 63% of teenagers have reported what they determine to be a serious gun threat in their schools. While some are joining hands and rising against violence in schools, others are using those hands to point fingers at the people involved. In this case, the finger-pointing usually begins with politics. The debate over the role of firearms in schools (a prominent topic as of late) has normally been associated with two sides: pro-gun and anti-gun. Contrarily, the high school population has altered the argument to add completely new viewpoints, unraveling the hard truths of modern-day life. John Kopicki,

superintendent of Central Bucks School District in Bucks County, PA, is well-versed in the opinions of teenagers in 2018 on this issue.

The administrator feels that there are “ a lot of different emotions. You have people that are on both sides of the fence in terms of how they feel about weapons in our country” and that those views have been heavily expressed in his schools. While 14% of teenagers are opposed to gun control, 67% would say that the best solution to guns in schools is a higher restriction on who is allowed to obtain firearms. There is a reason that these numbers don't combine to make the perfect 100%, and it's woven in the problem itself; it's much more complex than people realize. This complexity creates tension surrounding the matter, aching to be relieved.

However, this tension is laced with jarring opinions that invite the possibility of more than two stances. Even if there were two rigid viewpoints, the problem lies in the solution. All members of society, their heads smugly shaking, their know-it-all smiles evident, feel they have discovered the Holy Grail of answers. How could no one else have thought of this? Surely, I must tell everyone! And the fights ensue. These so-called grails range from expelling guns to stockpiling them.

Kopicki discusses the students “ talking about longer background checks, getting rid of the bump stocks they put on automatic weapons to make them fire more rounds or faster rounds ... to the elimination of citizens in our country being able to purchase assault-type weapons.” Surprisingly, only 1.2% of teenagers believe arming teachers is the most effective resolution to preventing school shootings, and more than half are uncomfortable with the

idea of guns on their campuses – even for school safety. Many are naming it a social problem. More are naming it a gun problem. This encompassing idea surrounding gun control is also taut with controversy.

These grievances of school shootings inspire debates over natural rights – particularly on the issue of the Second Amendment. Originally, the looping script of the American Constitution claimed “ A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” And more fights ensue. On one side of the spectrum, you have people who generally favor this amendment and guard it as a tenet of personal liberty, for if this change is made, where does that place our attachment with America’s traditional values? One anonymous teen that seems to agree with this view thinks that “ in order to strive to be the idealistic country we were meant to be, we have to follow the ideals that were set in stone from the beginning,” adhering to traditionalism. The right-leaning society also values personal safety as justification for the amendment’s validity— another teenager believes that gun control measures “ would leave the public in much more danger than us having [guns].” There are also those who harshly advocate against the binding contract our founding fathers knotted around their future country, claiming the antiquated doctrine can be cut from American ideology.

How will school shootings occur without anything to shoot with? More teenagers like Odri Maja argue that the Second Amendment is “ invalid and should be removed or at least altered” or that “ the Bill of Rights should change as the world changes”, according to another anonymous sixteen-year-old. Rather than personal safety, this view wraps itself around public

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safety. Much of the American youth finds themselves agreeing with senior Edward Loveday who says, " If someone wishes to defend themselves...there are other means of doing so without endangering the lives of others." Not all kids are highly conservative or liberal on this problem, though. " I'm not ' anti-Second Amendment'... nor am I a hardcore NRA fanatic," says sophomore Kendall Wisniewski, one of countless teenagers caught between sides. This is where many young people find themselves due to the passion (or more aptly - extremism) on both sides.

This inextinguishable tug that teenagers feel based on their political, social, ideological, psychological values envelops the world in a net; when one side pulls, the other is yanked along with it when, truly, we are all trapped by the singular network of jailing threads. And the consensus is that if we act on this in one, large, consolidated group, we just might make it out alive. For the time being, though, these actions have roped in the newest generation of America. Their national responses are the focus of high school - and sometimes middle school -life in 2018. Where their government is slacking, teenagers are hauling.

Peaceful protests such a walk-outs, sit-ins, and even lay-downs have shown the steps taken in opposition to a lack of action by their elders. Nearly two-thirds of teenagers would actively participate in a form of these protests if given the opportunity, regardless of the political divergences. Kopicki says his students are " not being heard and that they're going to be heard. They've made their minds up that they're going to do something to make sure that people hear them and understand their concerns" in the forms of protest that have occurred in the schools in which he is superintendent.

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Similarly, Kopicki believes that the nation's high school population has " the potential to captivate an audience...they are very passionate about having their voices heard...and having a sense of awareness about them to advocate for change.

" If adults can see this trend, so can the president. In terms of contacting people who possess the ability to pull Congress into passing legislation to safeguard students, the teenage response has similarly been popular.

Whether it be teachers, principals, superintendents, representatives, senators, or President Trump, teenagers are pleading for the day when horrors like these will not haunt the mind of a child. Or the day when pure eyes don't need to be on a constant scan for the item that can steal life. Or the day when a loud noise in the hallway doesn't inspire the fight or flight response.

Or the day when there is no hesitation to a fire alarm's whine. Legislative members are not the only ones hearing these calls to action; Superintendent Kopicki himself said that his administration has definitely been contacted on a more frequent basis since February 14th, the day of the Parkland shooting. He believes that our nation is " definitely on the precipice of something in terms of encouraging others to listen, to pay attention, to wake up... we cannot have these tragedies happen in our schools." It only takes a single thread to fray a rope. " Today, two children were laid to rest" Snip. " A high school junior, shot three times" Snip.

" We are broken" " No one deserves this" " It's time to do something" Snip. Snip. Snip.