

Gun problem or mental illness?



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The letter to the editor in *The Washington Times* called “ Look at Hollywood and Mental Health” by Maureen Branch submitted Tuesday, January 15, 2013 had a very controversial topic. Branch’s son was in the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007 and “ thank God he was safe, but 32 of his classmates and a professor were killed” (para. 1). The outbreak of shootings recently are causing issues and arguments to rise whether it is to have more gun control or is it the lack of knowledge of the mentally ill. “ These events can cause us only to shake our heads in disbelief at the deaths of innocents at the hands of the mentally ill who roam our streets” (para. 1). The mentally ill should be institutionalized and Hollywood should not glamorize violence.

Branch’s youngest son did survive the Virginia Tech shooting but others did not survive and, the other lives did not survive the recent shootings. The innocents that have lost their lives should not have been put in those situations. “ This is not a gun problem; it is a mental health and moral values problem” (para. 2). Over the years, many people of society have decided to look past the differences of the mentally ill and in a way that is right, but to look past a possible danger is harmful. The gun control debate is illogical. No matter how much the government tries to ban guns or put strict control over gun users, the ones who want to cause harm will find a way to get a hold of a weapon. These past two years Hollywood has been releasing movies about gangsters, wars, or just violence in general which gives those who want to do harm ideas.

Maureen Branch feels like the issue should be openly talked about and discussed because she, as a parent, had to deal with the emotional scare and trauma that her youngest son had to endure in the Virginia Tech shooting. To know how that feels and knowing that five years after that there were more incidents that could have been prevented is probably the worst thing imaginable. She does have credibility because it is very personal that she is a parent to a son who was in that situation. She mentions that “ in 1963, the Community Mental Health Act was enacted and forced the mentally ill back to their families and into the community” (para. 3). The problem with that is that many of the families probably did not receive the right training to help care for the mentally ill and nowadays many choose to deny that their children have a mental disorder until something dangerous occurs. Branch states facts to make her article credible.

Branch decided to write her letter in a way that there is no specific audience. It does grab attention by the fact that she mentions her personal connection but as the writing goes on, it loses some attention because it is written to the general. The writing is so broad that it loses the purpose of her writing. If she was to write to the government then she could have stated more facts to have them open their eyes on how different we care for the mentally ill now compared to the 1900's. If the writing was intended for Hollywood, she could have put in more information on how the violence of movies, television and games can give people idea to do monstrous things.

Even though the writer does not have a specific audience she does use appeals to grab attention and support from the readers. Branch's writing is reasonable because it is stating all facts that she needs to back up for

purpose which is that the problem is not gun control but the lack of care to the mentally ill. She has the readers' feel some form emotion when she mentions that her son was in a shooting while he was in college and luckily survived. Her credibility is stated in her introduction about her history of an incident that should have been prevented. The author creates urgency by stating the question " what is the country doing about the mentally ill" (para. 3). The question forces the audience to think if they are handling the situation the appropriate way. The writing can cause agreement or argument from the readers because the topic of shooting and the mentally ill is very controversial. No one has a right way to approach the situation without a debate forming.

The way Maureen Branch selectively picks out her words to write this letter was thoughtful. She used words that were not offensive or rude. Her tone was that of an emotional mother in the beginning but then turns to a kind of angry tone on why the problem is not being solved. The tone transitioned throughout her writing which made the purpose unclear at parts. Her initially purpose was to blame Hollywood yet it turned into what the government was not doing for the mentally ill. It mentioned gun control but then lost the audience with if the government used " the same strategy against automobiles as they are using against guns, all cars would be banned" (para. 4). She was trying to compare guns to cars which cannot be done because they are drastically different. The effectiveness of her tone lost some of her purpose. Since the tone changed it could have lost a few of the readers. It probably lost the reach of her goal for writing this letter to the editor.

This letter to the editor was in different way effective and ineffective.

Branch's beginning paragraph about her son was the most effective part of the article because it grabbed the audience that were whether for gun control or for the mentally ill to be institutionalized. It worked because all the readers were interested at the point. The third and fourth paragraph is where she most likely lost the readers or the readers got confused. Then at the end of her writing she goes back to blaming Hollywood but throughout her letter there was not a connection to Hollywood at all. To reach the writers goal or achieve the purpose of the letter, Branch could have picked a targeted audience and picked a solid base for her letter. She is somewhat all over the place when it comes to her reasoning. Her appeals were effective and she did have facts but the facts were not strongly connected to her purpose.

As a reader, I agreed and disagreed with Maureen Branch's letter. I was initially interested in the letter because of her son and I agree that " the answer is not more gun control" (para. 2). The problem is the way she blamed our government for the mentally ill not being better cared for. Not everyone who has a mental health problem is a danger to society. Most of the shootings that have happened, the shooters do plead to having mental health issues but no one actually saw it coming. Branch wants to have them institutionalized but that is not right either. Her writing is all over the place and her purpose comes across but it is not as a strong as it should have been.

References

- Branch, M. (2013, January 15). Look at Hollywood and mental health. *The Washington Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtontimes.com>