

# Songs, books, video games and mental health are all essential elements of our culture. They are also used to explain school shootings. But this only distracts from the real solution: common-sense gun-safety laws.

STAFF EDITORIAL

In 2010, an unsuspecting music group called Foster the People released their debut single, “Pumped Up Kicks,” hoping for their first breakout hit. With its bouncing guitar chords and catchy chorus, the track quickly skyrocketed to the top of the charts, eventually peaking at number three on the Billboard Hot 100 for eight weeks.

In an interview with the band’s leader, a Billboard critic hailed the record as a “crossover hit that catered to multiple genre formats and ... helped usher in a new era of commercially successful indie-leaning pop music.” But behind the band’s “ultimate breakthrough” are its stunningly sinister lyrics.

“All the other kids with the pumped up kicks, you better run, better run, outrun my gun,” Foster the People sang. “All the other kids with the pumped up kicks, you better run, better run faster than my bullet.”

The song that enchanted millions of listeners is about a school shooting. Nevertheless, we all sang along, in blissful ignorance, as it tore through the upper echelon of the music industry.

Similar references to school shootings are evident in Stephan King’s “Rage,” a novel about a high schooler who kills his teacher and holds the rest of the students hostage, and in the Boomtown Rats hit single, “I Don’t Like Mondays,” inspired by the 1979 shooting at Cleveland Elementary School in San Diego.

However, violent songs, books and video games exist everywhere; a person in Japan can listen to the same music, read the same books and play the same video games as a person in the US. Yet, the person in America is 300 times more likely to die from gun violence than the person in Japan.

Mental health is also used as a scapegoat to make

sense of senseless shootings. Although these illnesses should be a public health priority, they are tangential to the issue at hand. In fact, in his 2015 study, Jeffery Swanson, a medical sociologist at Duke, estimated that only 4% of American gun deaths could be attributed to mental health issues.

These factors of pop culture and mental illness are therefore an excuse — not an explanation — for the uniquely American phenomenon of mass shootings. Instead, irresponsible gun safety laws are to blame.

According to Adam Lankford, a professor at the University of Alabama, out of the 91 countries in the world with more than 10 million people, America ranks second per capita in the rate of mass shootings — second to Yemen, a country entrenched in civil war and one of the poorest in the Arab world.

Uncoincidentally, this same study found that Yemen has the world’s second-highest rate of gun ownership — second only to the United States. In other words, gun ownership and mass shootings are inexplicably intertwined. Despite overwhelming research that corroborates Lankford’s findings, widespread political inaction persists.

Common-sense gun-safety laws have worked internationally, as evidenced in Britain and Canada. But when faced with the same issue, the US historically prioritized one freedom above all else and consciously decided to let the killings continue.

In support of this decision, gun lobbies like the National Rifle Association and conservative politicians are quick to point out two things: self-defense and the Second Amendment. However, their argument falls flat when we contextualize the Bill of Rights and un-

derstand the data surrounding self-defense.

According to David Hemenway, a professor at the Harvard School of Public Health, more guns only intensify already-hostile interactions and increase the likelihood of more violence. This cocktail of high emotions and powerful weaponry is better appreciated when comparing Revolutionary-era rifles to contemporary technology.

In 1791, as James Madison drafted the Second Amendment, the gun of choice was the Charleville musket. Today, 230 years later, there are an estimated five million AR-15s in circulation, which are ten times more accurate and three times as powerful.

Thus, we reach Nov. 30, 2021, when a student at Oxford High School opened fire on the school and killed four students, Hana St. Juliana, Justin Shilling, Madison Baldwin and Tate Myre, and injured seven others. This marked the 28th — and most deadly — school shooting of the year, and it took place only 60 miles from Ann Arbor.

The attack spurred subsequent threats throughout Southeast Michigan and temporarily shut down dozens of districts throughout the region, including Ann Arbor Public Schools.

As students, we cannot idly accept these tragedies to be a tradition. We must emphasize reforms that not only seek to prepare us for shootings but prevent them entirely.

Now, in the wake of yet another preventable attack on our fellow students, we must turn apathy to sympathy and pass common-sense regulations. Until then, bullets will keep flying, blood will keep spilling and students will keep dying.