#EndGunViolence

<u>Overview</u>

While gun-related violence, especially homicide, is highly concentrated in cities in the United States ("Gun Violence Statistics," n.d.), mass shootings occur globally, which show that gun violence can in fact impact anyone at any time. As a result of the appalling number of gun-related deaths occurring regularly, the United States seems to be leading the conversation around gun violence prevention. Leaders around the world respond to acts of gun violence in their country very differently than the United States, which greatly influences how the public reacts. For example, after the Christ Church attack, New Zealand immediately banned assault rifles and semi-automatic rifles as well as various gun pieces (Besley & Peters, 2019), while in the U.S., we react the opposite way after such a crisis in that we arm ourselves further and implement active shooter drills in schools. The perpetrators of mass shootings in the United States also seem to inspire, one could say, the perpetrators of mass shootings in other countries (2019). Columbine is not only recognized as being a profoundly detrimental mass shooting with a many fatalities after an extended period time, but the catalyst for mass shootings that followed. Since Columbine, media coverage and the conversation around mass shootings have shifted from victim/family focus to policy focus (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). Columbine shocked the nation as a whole, but with each event that occurs, the shock wanes. The same applies to gun-related violence in U.S. cities like Baltimore, where media coverage is has become very impersonal and victims become statistics. The conversation around policy change is virtually non-existent, especially from those in positions of power. If there is any conversation around inner-city violence, it pertains to the complexities of the unrest.

The goal of this analysis is to identify themes around messages pertaining to gun violence. A thematic and sentiment analysis will be conducted on an aggregate of tweets that incorporates the hashtag #endgunviolence. Themes will be identified through an analysis of content, specifically observing word choice as a means of understanding the goals of each tweet (i.e. emotional response, overarching message, target audience).

References

1. Besley, T., & Peters, M. A. (2019). Terrorism, trauma, tolerance: Bearing witness to white supremacist attack on Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 1–11. doi: 10.1080/00131857.2019.1602891

2. Gun Violence Statistics. (n.d.). Retrieved October 23, 2019, from Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence website: https://lawcenter.giffords.org/facts/gun-violence-statistics/

3. Schildkraut, J., & Muschert, G. W. (2014). Media Salience and the Framing of Mass Murder in Schools: A Comparison of the Columbine and Sandy Hook Massacres. *Homicide Studies*, *18*(1), 23–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088767913511458

Methods

The first task at hand was identifying the specific hashtag I wanted to analyze. The goal was to choose a universal hashtag with a very concrete meaning to ensure that only tweets pertaining to gun violence were pulled. I avoided choosing hashtags that stemmed from specific massive shootings (i.e. #nevergain) or hashtags that included words like "reform", to avoid limiting my tweet aggregate.

I decided to obtain my sample of tweets from Vicinitas.io, as opposed to NCapture, because it is easier to navigate the aggregate given the smaller default sample size. Also, Vicinitas automatically offers the option to download an aggregate into excel, where I am able to remove

retweets and leave original tweets only. Once the data was cleaned in excel, it was imported into Nvivo where I conducted a preliminary analysis.
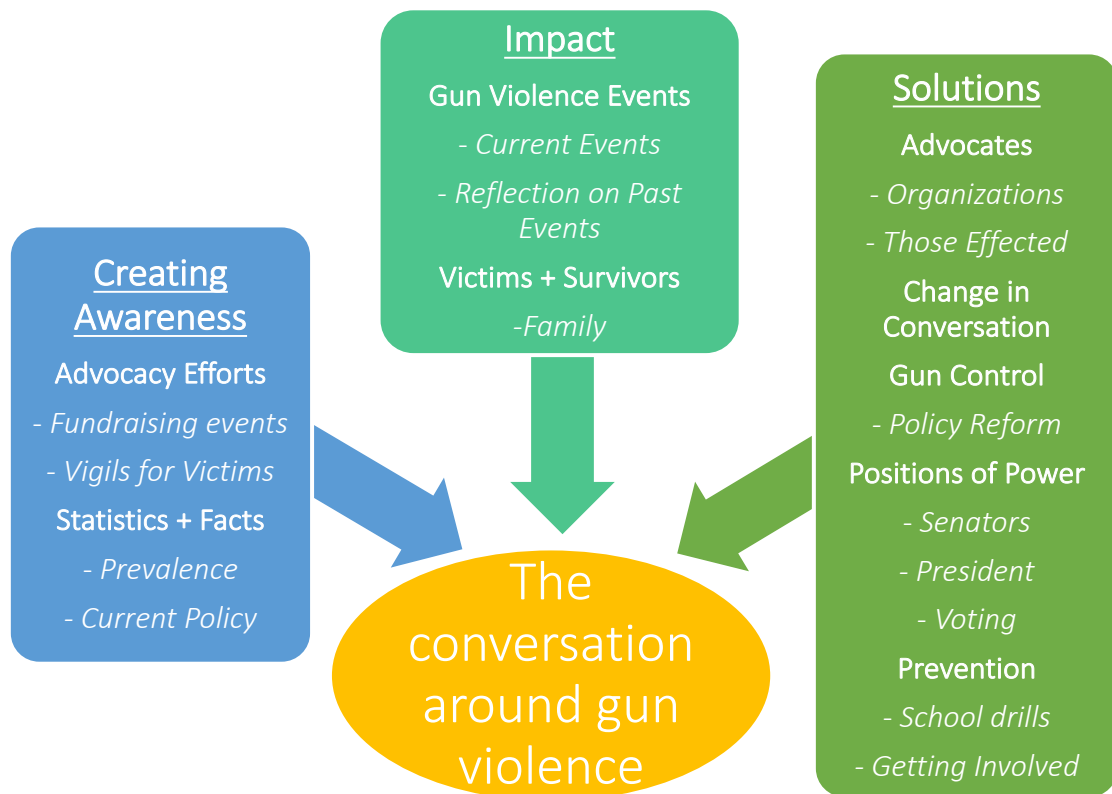
I first obtained a word frequency query, and from that I created a word cloud that includes the most frequently used words, after removing words like "the" and "has", and lastly emphasizing the most frequently used words. Next, I coded every tweet so that they became nodes that I could sort into categories, similar to process coding. I then continued to sort them into even broader categories, similar to theoretical coding. I completed both a thematic and sentiment analysis through this coding method. I then created a pivot table in excel in order to understand who is using this hashtag most frequently.

Results

The hashtag I decided to pursue for my analysis was #endgunviolence because it is concrete but also leaves room to be used in various contexts. The aggregate that Vicinitas created stemmed from a three-day period, and was composed of 2,039 tweets; however, after deleting retweets and duplicates, 160 tweets remained for the analysis. After turning every tweet into a node, I ran a word frequency query, and uploaded the 40 most frequently used words into WordArt to create a word cloud. There were three words that were used considerably more than the rest; gun (40), violence (29), and @momsdemand (29). Initially, I had no knowledge of @momsdemand, but have since learned that it pertains to the Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America organization, whose goal is enhancing public safety by advocating for stronger gun laws.

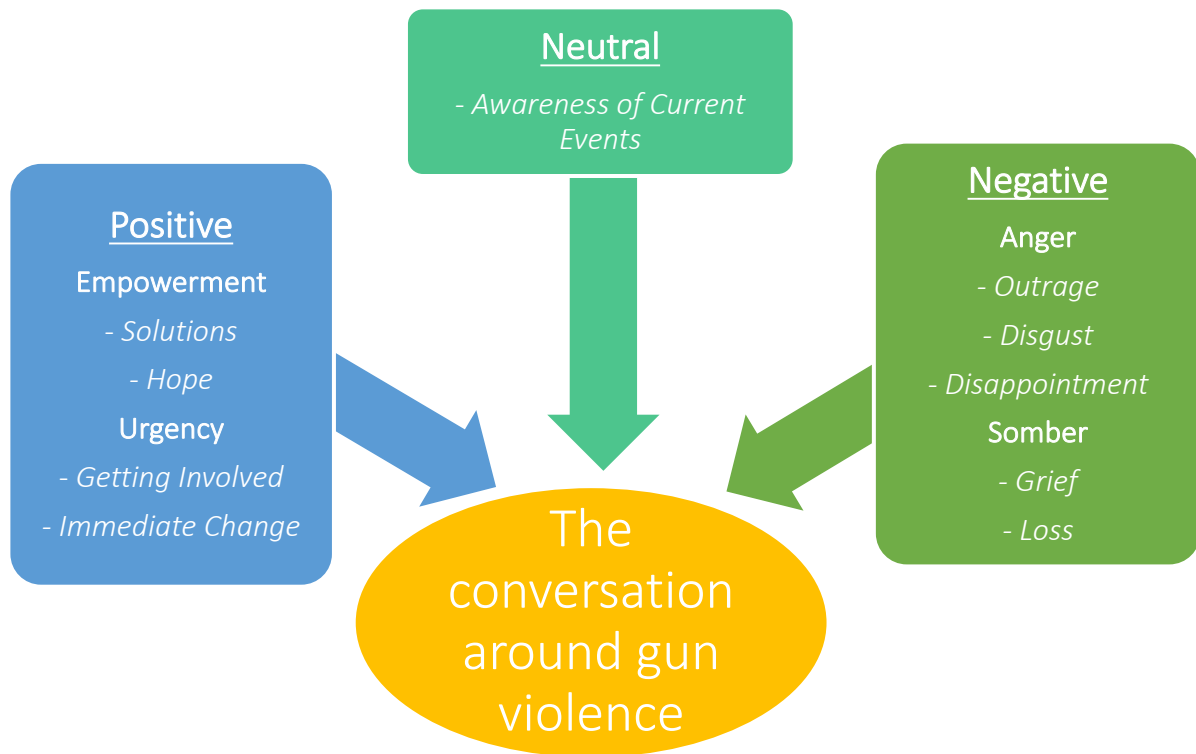Next, I conducted a content analysis. Comparable to process coding, I sorted the tweets into categories based on their content. The initial categories included *advocate events*, which included public events like fundraisers, vigils, and other similar events, *global*, which, included gun-related violence outside of the U.S., *informative*, which included statistics and facts pertaining to firearms

and firearm-related deaths, *gun violence events*, which included instances of gun violence within the U.S., *victims*, which included tweets about both survivors and families who have been effected by gun violence, *advocates*, which included both public figures and ordinary individuals, *change*, which included messages about changes in the conversation around gun violence, *control*, which included tweets targeting policy change, *positions of power*, which included tweets directed toward people in power such as policymakers, both for and against gun reform, and *prevention*, which included tweets pertaining to preventing gun violence but also preventing death during shooting events. Comparable to theoretical coding, I sorted these categories into three broader, overarching categories, which were *awareness*, which included advocate events, global, and informative, *impact*, which included gun-related events and victims, and *solutions*, which included advocates, change, control, positions of power, and prevention. From this, I created a model pertaining to the conversation around gun-violence.

Impact

Gun Violence Events

- *Current Events*

- *Reflection on Past Events*

Victims + Survivors

-*Family*

Creating Awareness

Advocacy Efforts

- *Fundraising events*

- *Vigils for Victims*

Statistics + Facts

- *Prevalence*

- *Current Policy*

Solutions

Advocates

- *Organizations*

- *Those Effected*

Change in Conversation

Gun Control

- *Policy Reform*

Positions of Power

- *Senators*

- *President*

- *Voting*

Prevention

- *School drills*

- *Getting Involved*

The conversation around gun violence

Proceeding this, I conducted a sentiment analysis. Similar to the content analysis, I sorted all tweets into categories based on their sentiment, paying especially close attention to word choice. The initial categories included *anger*, which included tweets that used profanity and those that expressed things like disgust, unrest, and disappointment, *somber*, which included tweets that incorporated words like "grief", "sad", and "trauma", *empowerment*, which included tweets that used words like "proud", "inspiring", and "badass", *urgency*, which included tweets that incorporated phrases like "we must" and "we won't stop", and *informative*, which included tweets that were informative as opposed to emotion-evoking. Proceeding this, I sorted these categories into broader categories which included, *positive*, which included empowerment and urgency,

negative, which included anger and somber, and *neutral,* which included all informative tweets. I also created a model from the sentiment analysis regarding the conversation around gun violence.

Neutral
- Awareness of Current Events

Positive
Empowerment
- Solutions
- Hope
Urgency
- Getting Involved
- Immediate Change

Negative
Anger
- Outrage
- Disgust
- Disappointment
Somber
- Grief
- Loss

The conversation around gun violence

When creating a pivot table, I chose the screen name for both rows and values in order to see who is utilizing the hashtag repeatedly. I found that NewtownAction used the hashtag most frequently, with a total of ten references. Newtown Action is national alliance that was formed after the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012, whose ultimate goal is influencing legislation pertaining to gun control policy. The next most frequent hashtag user, with a total of eight references, was cathnjrn. Catherine holds a leadership role in the Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America organization, the same organization that represented the third most frequently used word (@momsdemand). The next most frequent hashtag user, with a total of seven references, was

Alexis_TX_mom, who is also a gun violence prevention advocate heavily involved in the same organization.

Discussion

When looking at the content analysis as a whole, *solutions* contained the most tweets out of the three main categories, representing approximately half of the tweet sample. This shows that the vast majority of tweets associated with #endgunviolence are very much about finding a solution and ending gun violence. When looking at the sentiment analysis as a whole, approximately forty percent of the tweets were categorized as positive, which tells me that a sense of hope and a positive energy around ending gun violence still remains. Approximately forty percent of the tweets were also neutral, meaning informative, which shows that twitter is not only a venue to express emotion, but also a venue to spread awareness and inform the public.

I learned quite a few things from this analysis. First, manually analyzing 160 tweets is extremely time-consuming. Similar to qualitative analysis in general, sentiment and thematic analysis is very subjective, and therefore I found myself overthinking and second guessing through my sorting process. I felt that most tweets fell into more than one category, so my goal was to view each tweet broadly and choose a best fit. Ultimately, I knew that the second round of sorting was broad enough where every tweet would end up in a fitting category. With regards to the tweet content itself, I learned that almost all tweets that incorporate #endgunviolence stem from the United States, which unfortunately is reflective of gun violence prevalence. Lastly, I have a better understanding of what the conversation around gun violence entails. Of course, people are angry and gutted by the consequences of gun violence, but with that comes hope, and with hope comes a monumental effort to end gun violence.