

# BLOOD BROTHERS

HOW OUR CHILDREN BECOME KILLERS



A DOCUMENTARY FILM

PRODUCED BY SHARON FREY MD  
AND ANENE TRESSLER-HAUSCHULTZ  
DIRECTED BY JIM HAUSCHULTZ

## Blood Brothers: An Overview

**This project began with this question:** How can an American child, untrained by the standards of military basic training, pull the trigger on another human being? We wondered about the circumstances that seem so typical in areas of high violence.

Colonel David Grossman, in his book On Killing, described the difficulty of training soldiers to fire at other soldiers. His examples include the battle-grounds of Gettysburg. Weapons collected after the battle often contained several bullets jammed in the barrel, a sign that combatants wanted to appear to fire, but in fact did not. He said that not until Viet Nam did military training begin to achieve high rates of fire directed at the enemy. The answer

comes mostly from behavioral conditioning. Our question was: how does this behavioral training occur in civilian populations? What has increased the ease by which we are able to shoot one another?

These five half-hour programs feature felony ex-offenders, representatives of public safety and academic study, mental health profession-

als, as well as those who represent the age groups most likely to be affected by and to use gun violence.

These are not the headliners, but the day to day stories that are part of our daily fabric, and represent the steady statistics that, for the most part, go unnoticed. Perhaps what is most remarkable is that communities largely unaffected by gun violence are beginning to imitate the behavior in evidence where hopelessness and poverty are common. Legally obtained conceal and carry permits, for the purpose of self-protection, mirror the reasoning for those living in high crime areas.

We are a nation that loves family, sports and apple pie. But ours is a culture increasingly accepting of, and used to, gun violence on our streets, our game consoles, and our entertainment media, and in our responses to the horrors of multiple homicides. As advertising alcohol to underage minors increases the odds of consumption, it shouldn't come as a surprise that repeated exposure to other high-risk behaviors has consequences. Rather than actively searching for solutions to stop this tragedy that is ripping apart our neighborhoods and our nation, we are arming ourselves in response.

Three of our interviewees provided thought-provoking summaries to urban gun violence in St. Louis. Richard Wright of the University of Missouri Saint Louis: "I don't think there's anything particularly unique about St. Louis style violence." And Harold Pollack and Roseanna Ander of the University of Chicago Crime Lab: "It is surprising to many people how dangerous some of the Western European cities are in a lot of ways when it comes to nonlethal violence." "...It's not that we are a more violent country, we're just a much more lethal country."

## From the **Executive Producer:**

Thank you for your interest in this documentary, *Blood Brothers*.

This program is divided into 5 episodes. Although we recommend you view all 5 episodes in order, each one can stand alone. Whether you are viewing this documentary as part of a group, or alone, we believe this guide will help deepen and enrich your experience.

### **Before you begin, we'd like you to know about the genesis of this project.**

A few years ago, while our director, Jim Hauschultz, was visiting a school in North St. Louis City, one of the teachers pointed out a girl on the school yard. The teacher told him that the girl's cousin had been killed by gunfire the night before. When Jim asked why the girl wasn't home with her family after such a tragedy, he was told that she was in school because she felt safe there. He wanted to know more about the victims of gun violence—especially those 18 and under. What was it that made people turn to gun violence? How did someone—often someone still in school—pull the trigger to kill someone else? These and other questions led to this documentary.

Yet, St. Louis is not unique. The prevalence of gun violence and the stories behind it, could be told in virtually any other American city. In 2011, there were more than 32,000 firearm deaths, including homicides and suicides. The injuries average five times the number of fatalities. Forbes.com reported that in 2010, firearm injuries cost the United States more than \$174 billion. The cost in lives lost and the suffering of families is immeasurable.

In the making of this documentary, we did not take a position “for” or “against” gun control. Instead, we set out to discover what the people involved—at both ends of the barrel—had to say on the subject of gun violence. Our team spoke to ex-offenders, gunshot victims, mental health professionals, law enforcement, health care providers who care for victims, a former military sniper, and other professionals. We also talked with three groups of high school students including Innovative Concept Academy (ICA), an alternative school that's considered the last stop for students who are no longer in the public school system, either through suspension or expulsion. We also interviewed students from both public and private high schools who are part of a program known as Cultural Leadership, created

to explore the common historical challenges faced by African-Americans and Jews. And we interviewed students from Saint Louis University High School, a Catholic boys' school in St. Louis with a reputation for academic excellence. We asked the same questions of each group of students. As you'll see in Video Number 4, the answers, and the interactions within each group, vary widely.

We deliberately avoided filming interviews or action that cast one group or another in a “stereotypical” situation. Although we found that many ex-offenders had some history of gang involvement, we did not seek gang members as a group for interviews. Instead, we wanted people to share their experiences and insights. We wanted to know how they assessed the problem, and what they saw as movement toward a solution. At virtually every turn, we were impressed and grateful for the candor of these interviewees.

Our research and production took more than 3 years and resulted in more than 600 pages of transcripts. We don't provide “the answer” to solving gun violence in this program. But we present life stories and commitments—some of them startling—from many sources.

We hope this program will be viewed by students and adults alike. Discussion questions tied to each of the 5 programs are provided to promote the conversation necessary for us to come together and find solutions.

We welcome your feedback. We've provided contact information for you in the back of this booklet.

Thank you,

**Sharon Frey, MD**

Professor of Internal Medicine  
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## Discussion Questions:

### SEGMENT 1:

1. We talked with several ex-offenders in this video. What stays with you about their stories?
2. Does hearing the ex-offenders' stories affect your reactions to the choices they made?
3. How did the ex-offenders in this documentary meet your expectations or differ from them?
4. All of the ex-offenders we spoke to had grown up in poverty. What, if any, difference does that make in your opinion?
5. Clark Porter says that poor children in the city have no idea of the world beyond a few square blocks. Do you think this is true? What impact does that have? What can be done about it?
6. Several of the ex-offenders said that they carry guns for protection.... that even if they put their guns down, their enemies may not. And they will become victims. What do you think about this?
7. One ex-offender says that children in poverty survive by "hustling." If they have drugs to sell, they will. If the drugs run out, they'll sell purses. What—if anything—can be done to break this cycle?
8. Clark Porter talks about the fact that he is more admired in his old neighborhood because he survived 15 years in prison, than because he pursued an education and is now a law-abiding citizen. How do you react to that? How do you think the "values" of people who live in North St. Louis differ from your own values?
9. What role do you think drugs play in gun violence?
10. Some people say that the easy availability of guns is at the root of gun violence. What are your thoughts?

11. Clark Porter makes the point that even though children may hear messages about the importance of staying in school, they see even stronger messages about quick money to be made through hustling and drugs. How do you react to this? What do you think can be done about it?
12. He also said: "You are ready when you pick it (the gun) up, because you done played it out in your head over and over. It's just a matter of just doing it now (pulling the trigger). You know, you simulated it in your head time and time and time and time again to the point where you're already desensitized to it." Compare that to playing video games like "Black Ops" over and over.

### SEGMENT 2:

1. The emergency room physician we spoke with said that when he talks to parents of children who have been shot, they often show their own gunshot scars...as though a gunshot was a "rite of passage." What is your reaction to this?
2. The woman in the Prison Arts program says that youth who commit crimes are "not necessarily bad kids" but kids who "have been handed a bad life." What's your reaction to this?
3. Roseanna Ander makes the point, as does Harold Pollack, that as a first world country, we look more like a third world country when gun violence is counted into our standard of living. What do you think of this?
4. Roseanna Ander and Harold Pollack both talk about the difference between situations that might be violent, but not lethal. They attribute lethality to the ease of access to guns. What do you think?
5. Several people in the documentary mentioned the importance of "respect." That if a person didn't feel respected, they might resort to violence. Why do you think this means? How is that similar to/different from how you would react?

## SEGMENT 2 *continued*:

- Roseanna Ander from the University of Chicago crime lab, says there are no gun stores within Chicago city limits, but guns are a huge problem. How do you think the guns are being distributed in the city if there are no stores?
- Proposals to deal with gun violence include arming more non-professionals. Are we losing faith in law enforcement to keep the peace? Would this practice make us safer?

## SEGMENT 3:

- Officer Simpson talks about the constant stress police feel when driving through neighborhoods. What is your reaction to this statement?
- Several people said that “black on black” crime doesn’t really get much attention from law enforcement, and that’s why inner city youth often resort to settling their problems through gun violence. What are your thoughts about this?
- Most of the gun violence crimes—though not all—are committed by males. Why do you think this is?
- Although most gun crimes are committed by males, more females are starting to use guns. Why do you think this is happening?
- Professor Wright said that police are in a tough position because if they use force, they are seen as abusing their authority. But some groups don’t respect the police...and the police believe force is necessary. What do you think about this?
- Rosemarie Harris talks about how, when she was an officer patrolling the streets, not so many criminals were shooting back...and with bigger guns than the police had. What’s your reaction to this statement? What do you think can be done to change this?

## SEGMENT 4

- The interactions of the three high school groups—and the answers they produced—varied widely. What are your impressions after seeing these three groups interact?
- At least one member of each of the three student groups had been touched in some way by gun violence. How do you react to the stories they shared about this violence?
- What, if anything, surprised you about any of the students’ answers?
- One of the students talked about video games that feature war and gun violence. He said that these games desensitize us to violence. What are your thoughts about this?
- Several of the students we interviewed talked about how they don’t relate to kids who live in the city, or how they don’t want to be perceived as poor, just because they live in the city. What are your own ideas/perceptions about where people live? Or where they go to school?
- Some people say that people who live in poverty don’t want to get out of poverty. But the students at ICA all have dreams for their futures: doctor, lawyer, restaurant owner, etc. What did you think/feel when those students shared their dreams?
- We heard that youth who live in areas of high violence don’t dream and lack opportunity. They experience hopelessness. They do not see a future for themselves. What are your reactions?
- Would you ever shoot someone? Under what circumstances?
- What can be done—if anything—to help the next generation of at-risk youth to avoid a life of gun violence?

## SEGMENT 5:

1. Roseanna Ander from the University of Chicago discusses the economic costs of gun violence...and she says that part of that cost is people living in the county, away from city violence, but needing to spend many hours commuting to their jobs. Do you have any reactions to this?
2. Do you think we, as a society, care about gun violence? Do you think we care equally when someone is killed in North City as opposed to St. Louis County? Discuss your answers.
3. A couple of people (the retired sniper and one of the high school students in Segment 4) made a distinction between gun violence in defense of one's country—serving the military...as opposed to gun violence...even for self-protection on the streets. Talk about whether you agree or disagree with this, and why.
4. Almost everyone we spoke to said the problem of gun violence is not decreasing, and may, in fact, be getting worse. What are your thoughts about this possible trend? What do you think should be done? Just as importantly, what can be done?
5. Judge Edwards says that children who use guns are not bringing those guns into the neighborhoods. How do you react to this? Who do you think is bringing in the guns?
6. A 1993 study sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control concluded that having a gun at home offered little protection, but it increased almost three-fold the risk of one family member shooting another. Estimates place the number of guns in the United States well in excess of 250,000,000. Will more guns increase or reduce gun violence?
7. Missouri recently passed legislation allowing the use of conceal and carry of guns. Professor Wright makes note of this tendency to imitate behaviors of high crime areas. He suggested that people in the county are carrying guns when there is very little justification. Why do you think this is?
8. Do you think training someone to shoot a weapon safely should include advanced training with certification for its use in public situations?
9. Several people spoke about the large numbers of the US prison population...that 1 in 3 African American males will do time in prison. And that even when they get out of prison, they are not part of main stream society: they can't vote, they may have great trouble finding a job, etc. How do you react to this? What do you think we could do differently?
10. Which, if any, of your opinions on this topic have changed after seeing this documentary?

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