

**OH, SHOOT: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF GUN CULTURE IN THE AGE OF
CAMPUS CARRY**

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ABSTRACT

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The slippery beast that is Gun Culture finds itself weaving itself in and out of all aspects of daily American life. What once originated as a means of protection from a tyrannical government and a way to, quite literally, bring food to the table, has slowly transmogrified into a dire public safety issue. What has become of the “well regulated militia?” The right to bear arms has pushed well beyond an act of pure necessity and mechanism for survival.

This paper seeks to establish a historic predecessor to today’s gun-rights culture, through examination of both state and federal legislative mandates that have co-opted the gradually loosened interpretation of the Second Amendment. Further, this paper will, with the help of decades-old and fairly recent publications, identify key sociological aspects of behavior influenced by gun culture, and answer questions about gender roles within gun culture; how gun culture impacts notions of masculinity; and how different regional populations both benefit and are harmed by gun culture.

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INTRODUCTION: GUN CULTURE STARTS EARLY

A gun is no longer, and has never been, just a handheld metal alloy device stuffed with explosive powder and a projectile. A gun is a final word in an argument, a difference between a passing and failing grade because professors are afraid to assign disappointing grades to armed students, and the peppering of senseless tragedy after senseless tragedy. A gun is a "well-regulated militia" packed into the back of a pickup truck in Vidor, Texas. A gun is turgid and exposed and coursing with testosterone. A gun may become just as much at home in a college student's backpack as a laptop charger. Most importantly, across the board, a gun is, invariably, without fail, and unsurprisingly, dangerous. The 1996 Dickey Amendment precludes the Center of Disease Control from researching the nationwide consequences of widespread gun ownership, but, looking back at research published a year before the fateful budget rider was passed, guns can escalate any dangerous situation. Alba, et.al write, "When a gun is present...1.662% of violent encounters with criminals end in homicide...when a gun is involved, the risk of homicide is 43.7 times...its magnitude when no weapon is present... The presence of guns, in short, make incidents much more lethal than they otherwise would be."¹

What, then, defines the culture surrounding gun ownership? The *American Sociological Association* defines culture, simply, as, "the languages, customs, beliefs, rules, arts, knowledge, and collective identities and memories developed by members of all social groups that make their social environments meaningful."² This definition, extended to guns, can be interpreted as attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors tied to gun ownership. Gun culture can manifest in certain ways: legally, through guns-everywhere laws that permit the carry and use of lethal weapons in

¹ Alba, R. D., & Messner, S. F. (1995). Point blank against itself: Evidence and inference about guns, crime, and gun control. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 11(4), 391-410.

² Culture. (n.d.). *American Sociological Association*. <http://www.asanet.org/topics/culture>

different circumstances; socially, through shooting range or hunting outings, and through "Come and Take It" Gonzalez flag renderings; and even psychologically, through an individualistic, *hands off my rights and my guns* stance. Gun culture can be seen as a resistance toward 'gun control' legislation. This paper is intended to study predominant aspects of gun culture in the U.S., especially within the state of Texas.

Guns may have historically been wielded for the purpose of a Wild West duel and scaring off backyard coyotes and grizzlies, but now, they are marketed as a necessity for men, women, and children's teachers, alike. Texan gun culture, specifically, has found its way into all facets of life: in schools, TV shows, protests, pawn shops, and billboards in small towns off the highway.

Texans can sell their guns and gold in the same place for cold, hard cash. Young children are taken to the firing range out in the country to watch their dads shoot at unmoving targets. They may be lucky enough to give it a go under their parent's supervision. After all, it's legal to take minors into some firing ranges.³ It's entirely under the jurisdiction of each business.

Shooting a lethal weapon at 8 years old may be just as much of a rite of passage as is the first middle school dance, or the first family vacation. The overarching reasoning behind exposing young children to the ever-pervasive gun culture is teaching them *respect* of lethal weapons. The National Rifle Association's *American Rifleman* publication released an entire article dedicated to tips and tricks for teaching minors to shoot lethal weapons for the first time. An introductory excerpt reads, "I thought about how lucky I feel to have been born into a time, place and family in which the shooting sports were a part of our recreational activities. My siblings and I were taught from a young age to respect firearms, to use them ethically and to handle them safely. My wife grew up with the same values. So when our children began to

³ "Range Rules." *Eagle Gun Range Inc*, www.eaglegunrangetx.com/about-lewisville-based-eagle-gun-range/range-rules/.

arrive, we had a good idea of how we wanted to introduce them to the shooting sports.”⁴ The article proceeds with some steps encouraging a subjective check of the child’s energy level while shooting, measuring the child’s enthusiasm, and following standard NRA-endorsed gun safety procedures.

The author continues, “All kids are different, my 14 year old daughter didn’t shoot until we were in the adoption process when she was 13. My 5 year old shot his first shots at 4 years old...My 8 year old has been shooting for a year, but I make sure I’m one on one with him to be as safe as possible. Every kid matures differently and it’s the parents’ responsibility to be the judge on readiness and safety.”² The nonchalant way in which this presumably experienced recreational shooter and NRA affiliate touts how his 4-year-old can handle live ammunition is, for lack of a better term, astounding. Evaluating the maturity of a child in terms of eligibility to shoot, to him, is under the jurisdiction of the parent, not the government. This reasoning almost invokes the argument of individual liberties, as in, *you can’t tell me what to do with my kid. This is my God-given right*. Toddlers shooting firearms is often seen as endearing, as seen in this publication. Some who grew up around guns want to propagate that facet of their childhood throughout generations. While the image of a toddler holding a hunting rifle twice its size may appear comical and cute, the normalization of this idea may prove dangerous.

More shockingly, in some families, this activity is seen as *normal*. Shooting a lethal weapon can be thought of as another step toward manhood, like the first sprout of armpit hair. The firing of a loaded gun carries with it the same cadence as a pubescent voice crack, and is celebrated just the same. After all, data from a recent national survey shows that there are even

⁴ Horman, B Gil. “6 Tips for Taking Kids Shooting for the First Time.” *American Rifleman*, National Rifle Association, 2014, www.americanrifleman.org/articles/2014/12/22/6-tips-for-taking-kids-shooting-for-the-first-time/

gendered expectations for kids' involvement for gun-related activities: 70% of men interviewed who grew up around guns were taken hunting at *some* point during their childhood. Conversely, only 39% of women did the same. As far as visiting a sport shooting range, 73% of men under the same guns-at-home circumstances responded that they had, while only 51% of women had done the same.⁵

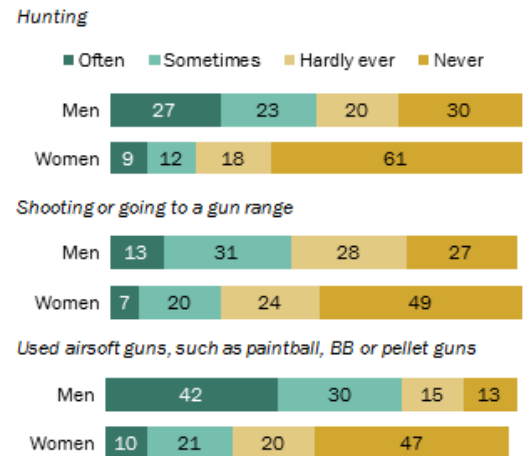
Hunting for sport carries with it an entirely different set of circumstances. Hunting culture, itself, is a phenomenon of its own. It carries with it the image of waking up at dawn, donning bulky camouflage, bringing along a Thermos of steaming hot Folgers, and polishing a big and heavy rifle. The honorable duty and skill that comes with accurately felling wildlife appears to

almost be ritualistic in nature. Becoming one with the elements, whether in a manufactured deer blind or just sprinting amongst the foliage, is celebrated. And this celebration often involves bringing the kids along. In rural areas, it is not uncommon for avid hunters to take their young children hunting and show them the ropes, so to speak. A *New York Times* article titled “Confessions of a Sensible Gun Owner” details a firsthand experience of children’s exposure to hunting culture. Mccalou recounts,

“When we hike together, my oldest son, who is 5, scans the ground for the perfect “gun...’ he lifts it for a test fire — *pew, pew*. A mile in, he’s usually got one in each hand but is still on the lookout for an upgrade: anything smoother or more gunlike. My youngest, who is 2, isn’t far behind. He’s been saying the word ‘gun’ for more than a year.

Among those who grew up with guns, men are far more likely than women to have participated in certain gun-related activities when they were young

% of those who grew up in a gun-owning household saying they did each of the following when they were growing up



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 13-27 and April 4-18, 2017.

“America’s Complex Relationship With Guns”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

⁵ “The Demographics of Gun Ownership” *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, 20 June 2017, www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/06/22/the-demographics-of-gun-ownership/psdt_2017-06-22-guns-01-03/.

Should I forbid this kind of play? Ignore it? Set ground rules such as ‘Ask for permission before you shoot someone’?...it bothers me, as a gun owner and a hunter, to watch my children violate basic rules of gun safety, even if armed only with sticks. I want my kids to grow up to be what I am: a responsible gun owner.”⁶

This author sees hunting not as an absolute necessity, but as a sport that requires extensive training and respect of the craft, itself. However, she presents a problem that she contends with as she takes her children along on her hunting trips: her sons are becoming quickly accustomed to her own favor of gun culture. Whether she likes it or not, her sons try to parrot her, perhaps without the proper guidance. This article represents a more nuanced perspective of a gun owner. Mccalou recognizes and laments the ever-pervasive gun culture that is influencing children of gun owners. This sentiment, shared by a self-proclaimed environmentalist from Oregon, is not often shared by equivalent hunters in states like Texas.

According to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, children 13 years and younger need to be supervised by adults while hunting. The state mandates a Youth Hunter Program for minors, as well as a licensing requirement for children 12 and up.⁷ Conversely, in Texas, the requirements are much less regimented. Every hunter younger than 48 must complete a standard course for eligibility. Children between the ages of 9 and 16 can be supervised by licensed 17 year olds.⁸ According to a 2017 Pew Research Center Survey, this is a widespread phenomenon: 48% of rural gun owners cite hunting as an important reason to carry a firearm, second only to gun ownership being a means of

⁶ Mccalou, Lily Raff. “Confessions of a Sensible Gun Owner.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 7 Oct. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/10/07/opinion/sunday/responsible-gun-ownership.html.

⁷ “Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.” *ODFW Home Page*, www.dfw.state.or.us/.

⁸ Smith, Sherard. “Go Fishing!” *Texas Parks & Wildlife Department*, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/

protection.⁹ The concept of gun ownership for protection will be expounded upon later, but the distinct transition in attitudes with regard to use of guns for hunting versus protection is noted by Shapira and Simon: "In terms of attitudes, there has been a dramatic shift away from hunting to self-defense as the primary motivation for gun ownership. A recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center documents the enormity of this transformation. In 1999, the primary reason gun owners gave for owning a gun was hunting (49%), with only a minority (26%) claiming 'protection' as their motivation. By 2013, these figures were reversed, with protection becoming the number one reason (48%), and hunting dropping down to a secondary motivation (32%)."¹⁰

Protection tops the list of reasons for owning a gun

% of gun owners saying each is a major reason they personally own a gun

	All gun owners	Urban	Suburban	Rural
For protection	67	71	71	62
For hunting	38	27	34	48
For sport shooting	30	31	30	30
As part of a gun collection	13	12	11	15
For their job	8	12	6	7

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 13-27 and April 4-18, 2017.

"America's Complex Relationship With Guns"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Back to gun ownership being tacitly extended to children: this commonality is so deeply ingrained that it is often an overlooked fact that there are deadly consequences, daily, to children's access to firearms: just this year, there have been more than 50 incidents where children unintentionally harmed themselves or someone else with someone else's firearm.¹¹ Many younger individuals who carried out mass shootings in the past -- I will forego expounding upon the details -- used borrowed guns, or had plenty of experience with target practice during

⁹ Mitchell, Travis. "The Demographics of Gun Ownership in the U.S." *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project, 25 Oct. 2018, www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/06/22/the-demographics-of-gun-ownership/

¹⁰ Shapira, H., & Simon, S. J. (2018). Learning to need a gun. *Qualitative Sociology*, 41(1), 1-20.

¹¹ "The #NotAnAccident Index of Unintentional Shootings." *EverytownResearch.org*, 4 Apr. 2019, everytownresearch.org/notanaccident/.

their youth.¹² This is not to say that early exposure to firearms will invariably breed murderers, but there is something to be said about the normalization of gun culture in early childhood. The earlier an impressionable child embraces the lethal capabilities of the guns offered by their family members, the more readily gun ownership, as a whole, is normalized. It is no longer *taboo* to carry around and fire a lethal weapon at leisure. As it is, extensive coverage of mass shootings, by the day, makes this concept more accessible. Coupled with the popularity of harmless Nerf guns and first-person shooter video games, the obvious next step, along those lines, would be shooting a real gun.

Moreover, gun culture truly is ingrained early on among certain populations, especially through the avenue of introducing sport hunting to children. Hunting is a long-sought tradition. It is equal parts affirming of resilience, and protection. An interview with historian Philip Dray elaborates:

"But either as subsistence hunting or later as sport hunting, it's always been a very powerful narrative in American life. Obviously, the presence of the frontier, the birth of kind of the outdoor tourism industry, a lot of these things were connected to hunting. Later, during the Teddy Roosevelt era, the idea of hunting became linked to this idea of preparing America to become an imperial power — mankind shaping up for the military and preparing to be conquerors. This kind of thing was sort of his vision."¹³

While it is often seen as an innocuous and traditionally sound activity to share with Dad or Grandpa, the Pew Research data cited does seem to affirm that hunting may be the gateway for continued gun ownership. Kids must obviously be excited to see their kin handling such a noisy and powerful thing as a firearm, and-- as most kids operate--want to do the same. Even

¹² FBI study of pre-attack behaviors of active shooters. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/national/fbi-study-of-pre-attack-behaviors-of-active-shooters/3046/>

¹³ Steck, E. (2018, June 12). How America's hunting culture shaped masculinity, environmentalism, and the NRA. Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/conversations/2018/6/12/17449154/hunting-culture-shaped-masculinity-the-nra-and-environmentalism>

with the proper kids' safety training, there is only so much that separates a lethal weapon from a toy in a child's eyes. The NRA has a litany of resources for firearm education for children, marketed under the Eddie Eagle brand.¹⁴ Such resources include coloring pages for Pre-K levels, as well as illustrated stories and workbooks for parents to employ. This kind of marketing, while serving the purpose of dissuading kids from messing with firearms that their parents have left out, acts as a very palatable sugary coating that conceals the true danger of guns getting in the hands of those not legally eligible to handle them. The *monkey see, monkey do* aspect of taking kids hunting at an early age may well translate to future gun enthusiast behavior.

¹⁴ "The Eddie Eagle Tree House." *The Eddie Eagle Tree House*, www.eddieeagle.com/#/.

CHAPTER 2: THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS: HOW GUN CULTURE CAME TO BE

It is safe to say that a certain clause penned in 1791 started it all. The fated script follows: “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.” The Second Amendment is rooted in a genuine *fear* of tyranny and oppression on the part of a governing body. The intention was never to establish a militia comprised of ordinary citizens with 4-6 hours of classroom training and a skewed interpretation of a centuries-old text. Raising taxes-- within the historical colonial context, that is-- and quartering soldiers against the will of the home’s inhabitants is no longer an issue held by modern Americans, but the insistence on holding onto the initial intention of the Second Amendment has become almost a personality trait.

What shifted it all was the historical Supreme Court ruling in 2008: *District of Columbia v. Heller*. Justice Antonin Scalia, himself, introduced implicitly that the right to keep and bear arms is not just extended to those in fear of an oppressive colonial government, but to the individual for self-protection.¹⁵ The “well regulated militia” is now obsolete. The individual has been instilled with the power to become his own militia. Scalia, a staunch originalist, famously went against his established belief system. He prided himself on ruling based on by-the-book interpretation of law, but took it upon himself to invoke individual responsibility in order to necessitate the lawful bearing of arms. The burden of protection was effectively shifted from the community to each and every one of its members, 21 and up. Justice John Paul Stevens’s dissent, reflective of the sentiment of all those opposed to this novel and misguided interpretation of the Second Amendment, reads: “The reasons that motivated the framers to protect the ability of

¹⁵ Yuhas, Alan. “The Right to Bear Arms: What Does the Second Amendment Really Mean?” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 5 Oct. 2017, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/oct/05/second-amendment-right-to-bear-arms-meaning-history.

militiamen to keep muskets, or that motivated the Reconstruction Congress to extend full citizenship to freedmen in the wake of the Civil War, have only a limited bearing on the question that confronts the homeowner in a crime-infested metropolis today.”¹⁶

Then, in 1934, tides shifted. Under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the National Firearms Act passed, instituting a relatively high tax on certain firearms. Handguns, however, were not included in this legislation, but, regardless, it was the first piece of legislation that imposed any sort of sanctions on firearms. Four years later, the Federal Firearms Act was enacted to impose licensing restrictions on gun dealers and manufacturers. Both of these bills were then repealed under the 1968 Gun Control Act, which imposed regulation and restriction of firearms that were not considered of “sporting purposes.”¹⁷ The law also barred felons, the mentally ill, and citizens under 21 from purchasing firearms. The 1986 Firearm Owners Protection Act looked to be a retroactive step when compared to its predecessors. It essentially protected gun dealers from any sort of registry and loosened some administrative regulations, but included language that allowed for stricter regulation of machine guns and their various accoutrements.

A considerable success for federal firearm regulation came in 1993 after the shooting of White House aide James Brady: the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, which instituted the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, which allowed law enforcement more jurisdiction over maintaining that “prohibited purchasers,” enumerated in the 1938 Federal

¹⁶ Yuhas, Alan. “The Right to Bear Arms: What Does the Second Amendment Really Mean?” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 5 Oct. 2017, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/oct/05/second-amendment-right-to-bear-arms-meaning-history.

¹⁷ “Key Federal Acts Regulating Firearms.” *Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence*, lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/federal-law/other-laws/key-federal-acts-regulating-firearms/.

Firearms Act, remain barred from purchasing firearms.¹⁸ Currently, the National Instant Criminal Background Check System has different requirements in different states, including state-reported mental health checks, juvenile delinquency records, arrest warrants, drug and alcohol offense records, and protective order information. Misdemeanors, in some states, result in denial for some applicants.

Another legislative success is the 1994 Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act, which is also known as the Assault Weapons Ban, whose provisions expired in 2004. Under the Assault Weapons ban, military-style weapons and high-capacity ammunition were banned from production and purchase.¹⁹ This law was met with controversy from start to finish, as the firearm industry made attempt after attempt to classify these military-style assault weapons as, essentially, *just doctored-up rifles*. Any subsequent attempt to renew the Assault Weapons Ban has failed.

2003 and 2005 introduced laws that essentially served the same purpose: to protect the gun industry from litigation. Absurdly enough, the individuals who take it upon themselves to deal lethal weapons are protected, under law, from being sued from the damage their wares were manufactured to do. The 2003 Tiahrt Amendment barred the public release of data that would reveal where criminals purchased their weapons. The 2005 Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act was made “to prohibit causes of action against manufacturers, distributors, dealers, and importers of firearms or ammunition products, and their trade associations, for the harm

¹⁸ “Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.” *Brady Law* | *Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives*, www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/brady-law.

¹⁹ “The Effects of Bans on the Sale of Assault Weapons and High-Capacity Magazines.” *RAND Corporation*, www.rand.org/research/gun-policy/analysis/ban-assault-weapons.html.

solely caused by the criminal or unlawful misuse of firearm products or ammunition products by others when the product functioned as designed and intended.”²⁰

The most controversial federal law that arguably causes the most long-term public harm is the 1996 Dickey Amendment, coddled by the National Rifle Association. This budget rider that slipped its way into a spending bill essentially freezes all research on gun violence done by the Center of Disease Control. The perilous origin on the Dickey Amendment follows:

“The Dickey Amendment arose in response to efforts made in the early 1990s to begin treating gun violence as a public health issue. In 1992, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) converted its violence prevention division into a center that would lead federal efforts to reduce deaths and injuries resulting from violence. Soon, studies funded by the center began to draw attention to the gun issue. In particular, a 1993 study by Arthur Kellermann and his colleagues revealed an increased risk of homicide associated with presence of a firearm in a home.¹ The Kellermann study and other similar investigations struck a nerve and began to receive widespread attention in newspapers and other media. The National Rifle Association (NRA) accused the CDC of being biased against guns and began lobbying for the elimination of the injury prevention center. Although the center survived, the NRA persuaded its allies in Congress to take action.”²¹

Such explains how the National Rifle Association has such a strong grip on the whims of any sort of gun legislation. Any sort of funding toward sensible gun control advocacy or research is stifled. The data is there, loud and clear, but, somehow, the injudicious rhetoric of the National Rifle Association and its affiliates remains louder.

A *Journal of Political Sciences and Public Affairs* article writes on the NRA's vast influence on policy:

²⁰ Gray, Sarah. “A Timeline of Gun Control Laws in The U.S.” *Time*, Time, 22 Feb. 2018, time.com/5169210/us-gun-control-laws-history-timeline/.

²¹ Rostron, Allen. “The Dickey Amendment on Federal Funding for Research on Gun Violence: A Legal Dissection.” *American Journal of Public Health*, American Public Health Association, July 2018, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5993413/.

"The NRA's lobbying arm, the Institute for Legislative Action, was established in 1975, and ever since then, it has been very successful by influencing the gun control policies in the United States. The institute has lobbied for 100s of bills, and it has played an influential role in passing and stopping many bills; furthermore, the NRA-ILA has influenced the outcome of state, local, and national elections... The NRA has been successfully lobbying at all government branches and federal agencies... In 2008, the NRA assisted Mr. Heller [14] to win his case of attaining a gun in the District of Columbia restriction.. Due to the NRA's skilled lobbyists and the large account of money they possess, they can run campaign ads, spend money for direct lobbying, and mobilize the public to force policy makers to change position on certain issues."²²

Some hope, though, was instilled as some leeway was granted to the CDC to *finally* coordinate tenuously funded research on gun violence motivations, but the stipulation remains that any research deemed to “advocate” for control is to be totally stifled. The judgment lies in the legislative branch. It is worthwhile to mention that the opposition “research” conducted by the likes of John Lott remains unmonitored, but still contested by many critics. Lott's famed book, *More Guns, Less Crime*, is cited often by political stakeholders fighting for ‘guns-everywhere’ legislation,²³ and the logic of such references looks to only be questioned by those in opposition.

As firearm manufacture and marketing continues to grow and diversify, it appears that gun legislation has yet to catch up. As aforementioned, any effort to uphold and reinvigorate the Assault Weapons Ban has failed. The political climate grows more sour by the day, and the NRA's grip on firearm-related legislation remains strong. Given how the Supreme Court is stacked, at the time of the finalization of this piece of writing, there

²² Musa, S. (2016, September 18). The Impact of NRA on the American Policy. Retrieved from <https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access/the-impact-of-nra-on-the-american-policy-2332-0761-1000222.php?aid=83220>

²³ Kennedy, Donald. “Research Fraud and Public Policy.” *Science*, American Association for the Advancement of Science, 18 Apr. 2003, science.sciencemag.org/content/300/5618/393.

is very little chance of a more modernized and accurate interpretation of the Second Amendment. That is, Antonin Scalia's ruling stays.

CHAPTER 3: CURRENT TEXAS LAW TAINTED BY GUN CULTURE

On the more upstream side, these antiquated values remain very much at play in terms of the history of gun laws in the U.S. At the University of Texas at Austin, the site of the first recorded school shooting in U.S. history, where engineering student Charles Whitman traipsed to the top of the UT Tower and gunned down 16 and an unborn baby, the ‘good guy with a gun’ fantasy is put very much to the test. UT Austin is very much at the whim of the Texas Legislature, whose Republican influence knows no bounds. While campus carry finally broke the surface in January of 2016, Texas’s inimitable gun culture slithered its way into relevance over the years.

Way before campus carry was a blip on the legislative radar, the concealed carry of handguns in certain public places was a Texas commonality. Shapira and Simon write,

“... over the past two to three decades we have witnessed the dramatic liberalization of gun laws (Spitzer 2015; Winkler 2011). Such liberalization is evidenced in the rise of ‘shall-issue’ laws across the country, which make it much easier for civilians to obtain LTC’s and carry guns with them in public by removing discretion on the part of the issuing authority (Grossman and Lee 2008).”²⁴

Some other relevant legislation dates back to 2007, where then-governor Rick Perry designated Texas a “Castle Doctrine” state that allows for an NRA-esque “Stand Your Ground” policy within Texan homes. Even the language of this particular measure proliferates the ‘good guy with a gun’ phenomenon; shooting an intruder point-blank is said to prevent “aggravated kidnapping, murder, sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, robbery, or aggravated robbery”²⁵. While this may sound like a no-brainer to some Texans who wish to keep their families safe, the

²⁴ Shapira, H., & Simon, S. J. (2018). Learning to need a gun. *Qualitative sociology*, 41(1), 1-20.

²⁵ “Texas Legislature Online: History of Senate Bill 378.” Texas Legislature Online - 84(R) History for HB 2165, capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=80R&Bill=SB378.

“Castle Doctrine” state measure is claimed to be totally ineffective, if not even more harmful . While some gun owners may feel emboldened because they, themselves, have the power to prevent the felonies enumerated by SB 378, introducing another lethal weapon into the equation is anything but safe. Those who elect to “Stand Their Ground” are often hit with murder charges and life in prison.²⁶

It is important, though, in the context of these “Stand Your Ground” measures and campus carry discrepancies, to discuss the logistics and ease with which a Texan can obtain a Concealed Handgun License. Central Texas Gun Works²⁷, spearheaded by Michael Cargill, an outspoken gun rights advocate and ever-controversial figure, published a relatively short list of requirement for legally obtaining a LTC. Under the “Eligibility” tab of Central Texas Gun Works’ website, in summary, all one has to do is make sure that they are of sound mind-- a very relative metric, admittedly-- and not a felon. Following that, there’s a \$65 class fee that covers the four hours of training, and a fingerprint. Four hours of classroom training is followed by about an hour of range work, and an hour-long break.

According to the Department of Public Safety, the overall requirements for obtaining a License to Carry are as follows:

"Texas Government Code Chapter 411, Subchapter H sets out the eligibility criteria that must be met. Applicants must be at least 21 years of age (unless active duty military) and must meet Federal qualifications to purchase a handgun. A number of factors may make individuals ineligible to obtain a license, such as: felony convictions, some misdemeanor convictions, including charges that resulted in probation or deferred adjudication; certain pending criminal charges; chemical or alcohol dependency; certain types of psychological diagnoses, and protective or restraining orders."²⁸

²⁶ Washeck, Angela. “New A&M Study Finds ‘Castle Laws’ Escalate Violence.” Texas Monthly, Texas Monthly, 21 Jan. 2013, www.texasmonthly.com/articles/new-am-study-finds-castle-laws-escalate-violence/.

²⁷ “Eligibility.” Central Texas Gun Works, Central Texas Gun Works, 30 Sept. 2015, centraltexasgunworks.com/chlclass/eligibility.

²⁸ Texas Department of Public Safety. "Handgun Licensing." <https://www.dps.texas.gov/RSD/LTC/faqs/index.htm>

This is the formal process with which one can obtain a handgun that can be legally carried into some classrooms, places of worship, daycare centers, grocery stores, and the top of the UT Tower. Five and a half hours, an ink-stained thumb, and a sweaty brow later, a 21-year-old UT System student can carry a lethal weapon and work to fulfill the common dream of taking down an active shooter, protecting their off-campus apartment, or keeping extra vigilant on the way back from the grocery store.

For perspective, the accuracy rate of a New York police officer is, on average, 30-40%²⁹. This statistic is often invoked in arguments against the 'good guy with a gun' concept, but it does illuminate the issue with widespread gun ownership with little to no regimented instruction. The 'good guy with a gun' notion, to put it simply, entails the belief that there should always be a 'responsible,' legal gun owner-- the 'good guy'-- to defeat the armed criminal with intent to harm, or 'bad guy.'

The problematic circumstances surrounding the swift process, from beginning to end, of legally obtaining a handgun extend nationwide. 35 states, including Texas, are under 'shall-issue' jurisdiction³⁰, meaning that if an individual ticks off the few boxes that determines that they are capable of holding and firing a gun, they must be granted a concealed handgun license. In some states that have what's considered pure shall-issue jurisdiction, it is not up to the entity that grants the LTCs to decide who deserves or has earned the permit. In those cases, whether or not an individual pursuing a license to carry is of good character is not an issue. Some states that have limited discretion, which allows for the permit-granting institution to deny requests from

²⁹ Watts, Shannon. "Do More than 7 in 10 Police Bullets Miss Their Mark?" @Politifact, 25 May 2018,

³⁰ "Concealed Carry." Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/guns-in-public/concealed-carry/.

individuals who objectively look as if they pose danger to themselves or others. However, the line that separates the power of institutions in any shall-issue states is entirely unclear. As the notion of gun ownership for 'self defense' rises in popularity, more states are leaning into 'shall-issue' territory.

Comparably, states under 'may-issue' jurisdiction have systems in place--at county-level, in some cases-- that allow issuing authorities to determine LTC eligibility. Some states require letters of reference, a resume, and even an official check of mental health records for obtaining an LTC. The notion of determining "good cause" is entirely lost in "shall-issue" states. This presents a significant public health issue. An *American Journal of Public Health* article reports that states under 'shall-issue' jurisdiction encounter more criminal activity under certain circumstances: "Shall-issue laws were significantly associated with 6.5% higher total homicide rates, 8.6% higher firearm homicide rates, and 10.6% higher handgun homicide rates, but were not significantly associated with long-gun or nonfirearm [sic] homicide."³¹ Texas's 'shall-issue' status has never been contested, which serves as testament to the stubborn culture that encourages and incentivizes unmitigated gun ownership. As national trends move toward the self-defense aspect of gun ownership, Texas's gun laws follow suit, loosening regulation on firearms as much as possible as every legislative session goes by. Texas wasn't always a 'shall-issue' state: state laws appear to mirror the ever-developing culture surrounding guns.

Along a similar vein, the prospect of "constitutional carry" finds itself on the docket during every Texas legislative session. A policy that has been adopted fully by 16 states, "constitutional carry" allows for the entirely unrestricted carrying of firearms--openly or

³¹ Siegel, Michael, et al. "The American Journal of Public Health (AJPH) from the American Public Health Association (APHA) Publications." *American Public Health Association (APHA) Publications*, ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304057?fbclid=IwAR30Sx6cARMptDUCkwqYXxpQNnC5b96a1eji23W39v9Yy-DYZkf53z1UbQM&.

concealed-- without a lick of training. That said, many states that have implemented “constitutional carry” institute stipulations that may prohibit access in designated ‘gun-free zones,’ like restaurants that sell alcohol, as well as mandating an age limit for open and concealed carry, respectively.

However, while “constitutional carry” has not been signed into law in Texas, that does not mean that the notion of the unhindered right to bear arms doesn’t have its staunch advocates within the state government. Jonathan Stickland, a staunch Republican who represents some of Tarrant County in Texas, has continually pushed “constitutional carry” for sessions abounding. A *Texas Monthly* article detailing the contentious gun debates that arise during session reflects on Stickland’s very individualistic rationale for pushing the bill, time and time again: “Stickland, whose bill would legalize constitutional carry, noted that while he could afford the fee, that might not be true for a poor person, and if so, that person’s right to self-defense would be restricted. Brandon Creighton, a Republican senator from The Woodlands, suggested that the public safety risks of constitutional carry were overstated. ‘It’s legal to ride a horse to the Wells Fargo in Vermont, but most people don’t.’”³² This tenuous logic egregiously misrepresents the crux of the issue with unrestricted carrying of lethal weapons *sans* training. Instead, it draws at an entirely unrelated point of affordability and access, even though it currently costs \$40 to obtain an LTC in Texas.³³ The same argument is reflected on pro-gun forums, like the following blog post from Relentless-Tactical.com:

³² Grieder, Erica. “Pistol Pushers.” *Texas Monthly*, 2 Aug. 2015, www.texasmonthly.com/politics/pistol-pushers/.

³³ DPS Web Team, “LTC Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).” *Texas Department of Public Safety*, www.dps.texas.gov/RSD/LTC/faqs/index.htm.

As Doctor King said, ‘A right delayed is a right denied.’ Constitutional carry makes it possible for hard-working, low-income individuals to protect themselves without undue burden. Constitutional carry would also reduce government bureaucracy...Constitutional carry takes the right to bear arms and returns it to the status of a right. If you need to be permitted to carry a gun it’s a privilege and not a right.”³⁴

Employing both a *hands off my rights!* stance, as well as one that seemingly preserves the collective good, is a common tactic used to defend these controversial mandates. Clinging to local control and the issue of *rights vs. privileges* is the Texan way.

As the law is laid out currently, it is legal in Texas to carry concealed handguns on public college campuses, as aforementioned. Additionally, though, it is perfectly legal to openly carry a firearm in public spaces. There are currently very few restrictions on long guns-- there is no permit required to openly carry a long gun, as long as it is not positioned in a subjectively threatening way.³⁵ This loophole, of sorts, is enjoyed by many pro-gun advocacy groups-- namely, the likes of Open Carry Texas. This fringe gun-rights advocacy group is known for strapping AR-15s and shotguns to their backs and attending protests, legislative press conferences, and visits to certain lawmakers’ offices. While their following is minimal, at best, they are a prime example of the *hands off my rights* crowd. They are well-versed on how far they can push the envelope with respect to carrying firearms. Another loophole that this advocacy group takes advantage of is Texas’s perilous reciprocity agreement.

Concealed Carry Reciprocity allows that a License to Carry obtained in another state, regardless of that state’s requirements for obtaining an LTC, be accepted in Texas (with the exception of Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Oregon, Vermont, and Wisconsin). The

³⁴ “All about Constitutional Carry.” *Relentless Tactical*, relentless-tactical.com/blogs/rto/constitutional-carry-explained.

³⁵ Moritz, John C. “Here's What You Should Know about Texas Gun Laws.” *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, Corpus Christi, 19 May 2018, www.caller.com/story/news/local/texas/state-bureau/2018/05/18/what-you-should-know-texas-gun-laws/624655002/.

remaining states have varied and nuanced requirements for obtaining a state LTC. For example, South Dakota, all there is to get an LTC is a \$10 fee, no fingerprint, no training, no photo... and a copy is mailed within about 5 business days. This LTC is fully valid in Texas, which presents obvious safety concerns. Concealed Carry Reciprocity effectively overrides states' rights, which is directly in conflict from the usual arguments of the pro-gun community. Concealed Carry Reciprocity (CCR) allows a License to Carry obtained in another state, regardless of that state's requirements with few exceptions, to be used in Texas. States have disparate requirements for obtaining a license, so Texas accepts licenses obtained from states with significantly fewer prerequisites. Similarly, an individual who was denied a LTC in their home state for whatever reason may pursue a LTC in another state with more lax requirements. Currently, the State of Texas requires 4-6 hours of classroom training, including range instruction, with a DPS-certified instructor; a full criminal background check that determines felony/misdemeanor/juvenile delinquency status; and various forms of identification. However, Texas has a reciprocal agreement with Arizona, which is a "permit-less carry" state, and a permit is only required if the individual plans to carry in a state with a reciprocal agreement.

Concerns about Concealed Carry Reciprocity are not just shared among gun control advocates-- law enforcement officials often express their disapproval. In 2016, the National Law Enforcement Partnership to Prevent Gun Violence warned against nationwide reciprocity, citing that they "could create potentially life-threatening situations for law enforcement officers...forcing officers to make split-second decisions for their own safety."³⁶ Open Carry Texas is no exception to the fact that those ineligible to obtain a Texas LTC often exploit

³⁶ Jackman, Tom. "Police Chiefs Implore Congress Not to Pass Concealed-Carry Reciprocity Gun Law." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 19 Apr. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/news/true-crime/wp/2018/04/19/nations-police-chiefs-implore-congress-not-to-pass-concealed-carry-reciprocity-gun-law/?utm_term=.6329544a22bf.

Texas's reciprocity agreement. Many who have outstanding child support debt or misdemeanors under their belt turn to other states, knowing full well that *that* LTC would be considered entirely acceptable in the State of Texas.

Texas lags behind with respect to gun sense policies. The majority of state legislators have a decent NRA rating, and many will not budge regarding any legislation limiting firearms around the state. The theme during the 86th legislative session seems to be mandating guns in schools. Senate Bill 2146 by Representative Hall would mandate armed school marshalls inside public schools and at school-sanctioned events. House Bill 227 by Representative Krause would exempt 'Texas-Made' firearms from federal restrictions. House Bill 1949 by Representative Hefner would allow firearms in private school parking lots.³⁷ This is just a few of the bills supported by organizations like Gun Owners of America and Open Carry Texas. This is Texas's reality.

³⁷ "Gun Rights in Texas: Weekly Update." *Gun Owners of America*, gunowners.org/txstatealert3119/.

CHAPTER 4: AN OVERARCHING SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON GUN CULTURE

Nationally, the gun lobby realized its newfound purpose after the massacre at Virginia Tech in 2008. The National Rifle Association and American Legislative Exchange Council drafted a “model bill” that would remove the restrictions on guns on university campuses, citing gun ownership on campuses as a means to prevent any more mass shootings and campus sexual assault. The argument is that, as Lipka (2008) recounts, “[Students] would like some other recourse...than hiding under their desks.”³⁸ We 18-22 year old students may finally be able to relive our carnal fantasies of gunning down a villain and being lionized in the news.

We, with our hangover headaches and loose grips on our futures, will be the ones who save the day. And, of course, we are to use our legally-acquired handguns only for good. We are not to accidentally bring them to drunken house parties; we are not expected to leave our guns floating in our backpacks, locked and loaded; and we are never to use them in an aggressive state. We are to regulate our emotions at all times, though we are faced with higher rates of anxiety and depression. A *Civil Rights Law Journal* article states,

"Mental health issues and the risks of suicides among college students is another prime reason to prohibit or limit access of guns by college students. Researchers have found that youths ages eighteen to twenty-five experience the highest rate of mental health problems...between nine and eleven percent of college students seriously considered suicide in the last school year...If a gun is used in a suicide attempt, more than ninety percent of the time the attempt will succeed."³⁹

After all, the Brady background checks would have precluded the Virginia Tech shooter from buying his firearms in the first place, due to his mental state. Siebel states, "As it turns out, the Virginia Tech shooter had been 'adjudicated as a mental defective' by a judge prior to purchasing the two handguns he used in his rampage...Unfortunately, those mental health records were

³⁸ Lipka, Sara "Campaigns to overrule campus gun bans have failed in many states." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 54.32 (2008): A16.

never included in the National Instant Criminal Background check System" ('NICS')."³⁹ We are sleep-deprived and insecure and miss being back home. Some of us are also nursing wicked hangovers. This brings about the unique threat of alcohol and drug use among student populations, and its synergy with the danger of gun ownership. Siebel writes,

"There is... a strong connection between gun ownership by college students and an increased likelihood to engage in dangerous activities. Two studies of college students found that those who owned guns were more likely than the average student to: (1) engage in binge drinking, (2) need an alcoholic drink first thing in the morning, (3) use cocaine or crack... The researchers concluded that 'college gun owners are more likely than those who do not own guns to engage in activities that put themselves and others at risk for severe or life-threatening injuries.'"³⁹

But we should all know, after our four-hour training, how exactly to spare the lives of our classmates in the event that a crazed shooter comes into our lecture hall. The role of 'responsible gun owner' is thrust upon us.

The idea is that if a 'bad guy with a gun' runs into a classroom, gun cocked and ablazing, students and faculty--the self-assigned 'good guys with guns'-- are responsible for taking him down. If the four dozen students at Virginia Tech had been armed, some may have argued, things might have been entirely different. Since then, battles have been waged across the country to combat the increasing occurrence of guns-everywhere bills being enacted in response to the model bill, sometimes to no avail. The U.S. is arguably irrevocably entrenched in gun culture fueled by fear tactics and last-resort, survivalist mindsets.

This begs the question: through what lens should pro-gun advocacy be examined? If the logic follows that increasing the prevalence of guns on college campuses would protect the a large portion of a public university's student body from being exterminated at the hands of a marginalized, bullied "Bad Guy with a Gun," the argument could go one of two routes: an

³⁹ Siebel, B. J. (2007). The case against guns on campus. *Geo. Mason UCRLJ*, 18, 319.

individualistic perspective or a collectivist perspective. Collectivism can be described as communal work toward the greater good of the general public. Individualism embodies the “every man for himself,” hegemonic-masculinity-tinted argument that Second Amendment advocates swear by.

Pro-gun arguments could be looked at through either approach. From a collectivist side, those who argue for widespread gun ownership employ the “Good Guy with a Gun” spiel once again. If a good, responsible citizen is armed, they have the potential to save the lives of dozens of mothers and fathers and sons and daughters. These vigilantes are painted as true American martyrs who will sacrifice all for their fellow man. Many decide to carry because they want to take the extra step to protect their families from danger. Teachers, amidst constant news of classrooms being peppered with bullets, decide to carry to protect their students. License-to-Carry instructors open up shop so they can preach the gospel of protecting peers.

Individualism and all of its trimmings are applied to gun-rights proponents by Celinska (2007); she writes:

“Individuals who do not rely on law enforcement for providing protection (thus abandoning institutionalized collective means) purchase guns to achieve the individualistic goals of protecting themselves and family—even if collective security might suffer. To lend moral legitimacy to their individualistic motives, gun owners frequently evoke the rhetoric of protection and individual rights, citing the Second Amendment of the Constitution. Thus, the opponents of gun control measures focus on securing their individual rights even if the collectivity could benefit from restrictions of the distribution of guns.”⁴⁰

This rhetoric is invoked often by rabid Second Amendment activists; they cite that any form of gun control--whether it be strengthened background checks, mandatory firearm registration, or

⁴⁰ Celinska, Katarzyna. "Individualism and collectivism in America: The case of gun ownership and attitudes toward gun control." *Sociological Perspectives* 50.2 (2007): 229-247.

stricter rules on state distribution of Concealed Handgun Licenses-- infringes upon their individual right to the well-regulated militia promised by the Bill of Rights. Individualism presents a pungent air of machismo. The Lone Wolf, by-the-book trope is palatable for some who are willing to risk it all to defend themselves and their loved ones. The duality of the concepts of individualism and collectivism, though, comes to a head here: it is one's individual right to protect their peers and families and coworkers and fellow students, so is there a droplet of collectivism within their individualistic argument? The "Good Guy with a Gun" argument may, in fact, reference both sides of the sociological spectrum, but there is one thing that unites them both: the loss of lives is a necessary consequence either way.

Liqun et. al (1997) delves further into the survivalist lens through which to examine individualistic attitudes toward gun ownership. Specifically, the article details various pathways to consider why an individual in a larger city would seek to own a firearm. The authors examine the economic resources, socialization, fear and victimization, racial prejudice, and conservative ideology approaches. One concept out of the six that hasn't yet been explored is the racial factor that plays into gun ownership. Due to many factors, such as residential segregation, anticipation/experience of discrimination, dearth of occupational or educational opportunities, lack of upward mobility, and stereotype threat-- the fear that a racial minority, through behavior, is upholding negative stereotypes about their ethnic group as a whole-- stress levels and health outcomes contribute to an entirely different experience in the realm of firearm ownership. The fear and victimization pathway, in synergy with the economic resources pathway, is not mutually exclusive from its racial prejudice counterpart.

The interaction of the influence of the cost of obtaining and maintaining firearm ownership, along with the obvious victimization and valid fear that comes with racial prejudice--

whether anticipated or directly experienced-- are strong determinants for likelihood of gun ownership. This also ties back significantly to the notion that handgun ownership allows for mobility from the margin to the middle, thus allowing racial minorities an outward sense of peace and assuredness of safety. These circumstances, too, play with the bifurcation between collectivism and individualism, but add a more realistic component. The truth is, the fear that racial minorities and other marginalized groups do experience is historically prevalent, and it is difficult to determine whether gun ownership, in this case, is self-serving, or promotes extra vigilance and collective protection of the surrounding community.

A psychological concept known as the Southern Culture of Violence is worth mentioning with regard to attitudes toward gun ownership. This concept has some historical background to it, citing economic disparities, retributive violence, and power dynamics with respect to a history of slavery and unrest in the South. The South was once inhabited by herders who worked to protect their wealth and their belongings from thieves, and the evolution of this constant vigilance has manifested itself in a much more dangerous and instant fashion, exacerbated by a culture of gun ownership. Cohen and Nisbett write,

“The bulk of settlers in the South were Scotch-Irish herding peoples... Cultural Anthropologists have observed that hurting cultures the world over tends to me more approving of certain forms of violence... An economy of hurting, it is important to establish a reputation as a tough character as a deterrent to theft. Herders must be willing to use force to protect themselves and their property when law enforcement is inadequate and when one's livelihood can literally be wrestled away. This emphasis on self-protection was probably especially adaptive in the frontier South when adequate law enforcement cannot be depended on.”

The authors mention a historical dearth in reliable law enforcement, which is a concept often cited by the more staunch Second Amendment advocates. The belief is that a well-regulated militia must be established in order to make up for what law enforcement

lacks. Cornell and DeDino write, “For the most ardent supporters of this view, the Constitution protects the right of individuals to have firearms for self-protection, hunting, or to wage revolution against the government itself. Many, but certainly not all, advocates of gun rights support the notion that courts are to interpret the constitution in terms of the original understanding of the founders.”⁴¹ Can best be argued that some gun owners do feel the personal responsibility to be prepared for any sort of infringement upon the rights of the collective. Cohen and Nisbett write:

“Where enforcement of the law is inadequate, it becomes important to defend one's reputation for severity to establish that one is not to be trifled with. Allowing oneself to be pushed around, insulted, or affronted without retaliation amounts to announcing that one is an easy mark. Self-defense becomes very broadly defined as preservation of one's person, one's family, one's home, or one's honor. In the absence of law and order, power and hierarchy are established through social mechanisms underlying the culture of Honor. Seemingly trivial offenses can be great meaning about who dominates whom in a society without adequate law enforcement.”⁴²

The “culture of honor” that precedes the act of “tooth for a tooth” violence is yet another sociological phenomenon that encompasses a culture's tendency to avoid confrontation. It can be argued that “Southern Hospitality” arises from this. The idea is that a true Southerner honors the property, family, and individual liberties of his peers. Avoiding confrontation and treating one another with respect is an underlying understanding among Southerners. But if the line is crossed, if one’s safety or honor is threatened in any way, retributive violence is permissible, if not encouraged. An insult to one's masculinity or homestead can be answered with retaliation. The biblical concept of “an eye for an eye” may be invoked in these circumstances.

⁴¹ Cornell, S., & DeDino, N. (2004). A well regulated right: the early American origins of gun control. *Fordham L. Rev.*, 73, 487.

⁴² Cohen, D., & Nisbett, R. E. (1994). Self-protection and the culture of honor: Explaining southern violence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(5), 551-567.

Masculinity can thus be restored. This may explain the ceremonial hanging of the polished rifle above the mantle, or the heirloom shotgun tucked away in a safe in the bedroom, or the Glock under the pillow. This outright demonstration of a tendency or preparedness for retributive violence manifests in the leather holster attached to the belt. The Southern Man is often known to have a gun in his car, or a rifle in his garage, in the case that he must protect his homestead, or his family, or his property and individual rights to safety. Cohen et. al⁴³ argue that Southern men, specifically, harness and act upon and deal with their masculinity in a very nuanced way. Aggression and dominant behavior is a hallmark of true Southern masculinity:

“Compared with northerners...southerners were (a) more likely to think their masculine reputation was threatened, (b) more upset (as shown by a rise in cortisol levels), (c) more physiologically primed for aggression (as shown by a rise in testosterone levels), (d) more cognitively primed for aggression, and (e) more likely to engage in aggressive and dominant behavior. Findings highlight the insult-aggression cycle in cultures of honor, in which insults diminish a man's reputation and he tries to restore his status by aggressive or violent behavior.”⁴⁴

Acting upon primal instincts, the Southern Man is prepared to act upon an insult to his livelihood. It is as if it is deeply and biologically ingrained to be ready at any time to shoot for self-defense, or defense of his kind.

Cohen and Nisbett in a separate article write, through a meta-analysis of three older surveys, that southern white males, specifically, endorse violence as an act of self-defense. As trends of gun ownership rise, This plays into the observed masculine gun culture of the South. “National surveys invariably show that Southerners are indeed more likely to own guns...Not only are Southerners more likely to own guns, they are more likely to see their guns as

⁴³ Cohen, D., Nisbett, R. E., Bowdle, B. F., & Schwarz, N. (1996). Insult, aggression, and the southern culture of honor: An experimental ethnography. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 70(5), 945.

⁴⁴ Cohen, D., & Nisbett, R. E. (1994). Self-protection and the culture of honor: Explaining southern violence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(5), 551-567.

instruments of protection... More likely to carry their guns with them, more likely to feel safe if they have a gun around the house, and were ready to use their guns if their homes are broken into.”³⁵

An AmmoLand article expounds upon this notion in their article titled, “Fifteen Reasons You Should Own a Gun:” “Having a gun makes you better able to defend your family... Guns in the home are safe, when gun owners keep guns responsibly... Self-defense is more honorable and better for society than being a victim. It is up to you to act responsibly for your own safety, and the safety of your family...people who own guns... Are better able to serve their country than people who are ignorant about guns.”⁴⁵ The perception of Honor and responsibilities to protect Ken is not lost here. These statements capture the crux of the Southern Culture of Honor, but framed around gun ownership. An armed home is a safe home, and victimization and vulnerability is looked down upon. Either the herder is weak and defenseless and allows for his wares to be robbed from him, or he stands his ground and uses force to protect his belongings. This fear is prevalent today--Shapira and Simon write about a particular gun owner's rationale for carrying at all times:

"Ben envisions a brutal outcome for either himself or one of his family members if he does not carry his gun with him. A potential brutality, expressed time and again among the gun owners with whom we spoke, that includes death, rape, or having your child kidnapped. 'The stakes,' as Ben tells us, 'are too high. I can't afford the price of not being prepared.'"⁴⁶

In the nearly unprecedented article on a suggested sociological framework for analyzing gun culture at its core, sociologist David Yamane revisits the roots of gun ownership:

⁴⁵ Ammoland. “Fifteen Reasons You Should Own A Gun.” *AmmoLand.com*, Ammoland Inc, 2 July 2016, www.ammoland.com/2011/08/fifteen-reasons-you-should-own-a-gun/#axzz5joBYFWIO.

⁴⁶ Shapira, H., & Simon, S. J. (2018). Learning to need a gun. *Qualitative Sociology*, 41(1), 1-20.

“The 19th century shift from craft to industrial production, from hand-made unique parts to machine-made interchangeable parts, dramatically increased manufacturing capacities, and gun manufacturing played a central role in this development. And like other mass produced commodities, the guns had to be sold to the public; where markets for them did not already exist, they had to be created (Haag, 2016). As the nation developed, so too did gun culture. ‘What began as a necessity of agriculture and the frontier,’ Hofstadter (1970) observed, “took hold as a sport and as an ingredient in the American imagination.’ Hunting became not only a source of food but a dominant form of recreation for many, and casual target shooting competitions were commonplace on the frontier in the 19th century.”⁴⁷

As established earlier, gun ownership transmogrified from a means to protect the homestead and subsequent belongings, to a form of identity. Yamane then introduces the concept of “serious leisure,” which differentiates between more casual activities, like golfing and playing chess, and leisurely activities that require more specialized training--namely, shooting for fun. This phenomenon developed as societal conditions changed. As days-long hard labor slowly moved toward 9-to-5's, the potential for free time invariably increased. What was then a necessity--to some-- for protection, security, and nourishment, has now become a surrogate for masculinity and an accessory. Thus emerged the gun enthusiasts, who feel that they must go through great lengths to dignify and defend their craft.

Yamane writes that since guns are obviously associated with more negative consequences than some more innocuous hobbies, gun enthusiasts have to contend with the fact that their leisurely activities may be seen as “disreputable pleasures,” much like drug use or sexually deviant activity.⁴⁸ Many go so far as to ardently defend their leisurely pursuit. He recounts,

“Taylor (2009) highlights how gun collectors must use impression management techniques to negotiate the stigma of engaging in a leisure pursuit involving ‘morally controversial products...’ gun enthusiasts have to rationalize their avocations so as to distance themselves: ‘I know that guns are used as weapons to kill people every day. Those aren't my guns. The world is safe from my collection. I own over 100 guns’ (Anderson & Taylor,

⁴⁷ Yamane, D. (2017). The sociology of US gun culture. *Sociology compass*, 11(7), e12497.

⁴⁸ Yamane, D. (2017). The sociology of US gun culture. *Sociology compass*, 11(7), e12497.

2010, p. 49). Those attracted to these avocations are often called ‘gun nuts.’ Some gun collectors coopt the ‘nutty’ characterization of those so obsessed with firearms and characterize themselves as such, but in the sense of being quirky—like a professor or stamp collector can be nutty (Stenross, 1990, p. 61).”³⁸

The coy way in which some gun owners venture to justify these deviant and possibly life-threatening activities posits some sort of character trait that seems to embrace the very valid criticism of their hobby. This behavior exhibits some sort of masculine defense mechanism. The idea that the populace is “safe” from a warehouse full of 100+ firearms is nearly unimaginable, but this attempt at absolution from guilt is far from unfamiliar. A further examination of the rationale gun owners use to negotiate their gun ownership is a sort of detachment from the actual lethal purpose of a firearm. Approaching a lethal weapon as a *necessity* and a *mechanism* for self-defense is often employed. Killing someone, in some cases, is a moral obligation for gun owners. Shapira and Simon write,

"When gun owners recognize guns as “tools,” they remove the lethal potential from the gun itself, and place it on people operating guns. This understanding is an important way in which guns become normalized for those who are new to them, and constitutes a key part of the socialization process that occurs within gun schools... Other interviewees used similar analogies, comparing guns to cars, hammers, and even ballpoint pens. The clear differentiator here is the intended function of each of these items—unlike any of these other “tools,” the primary function of a gun in the context of self-defense is to kill or injure another person... In addition to learning to understand guns as safe objects, in the process of becoming a gun carrier, our respondents learned to think of the potential act of killing another human being as a legitimate, and indeed moral and necessary, action. The gun owners we met learned to do this by learning to create a binary between “good guys” and “bad guys.” Within this binary, gun owners are defined as morally virtuous (good guys) and their potential target is defined as so utterly immoral and violent (bad guys) that the very act of killing them is conceptualized not as killing, but as saving a life. Indeed, a part of the practice of gun carrying involves denying the very violence contained within the act of shooting someone.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Shapira, H., & Simon, S. J. (2018). Learning to need a gun. *Qualitative Sociology*, 41(1), 1-20.

Again proceeds the argument about the 'good guy' vs. the 'bad guy.' The mental gymnastics employed, even by NRA-certified LTC instructors, is almost *necessary* to defend the ownership of a lethal weapon. Perhaps the notion of becoming one's family's 'sole protector' imbued with the God-given right to carry a handgun begins to supersede in importance the cold-hard fact that this form of self-defense almost always, if done correctly, results in murder. This concept is echoed in the NRA's "Stand Your Ground" rhetoric. "Stand Your Ground" measures allow people who shoot and kill others in response to a perceived threat to, essentially, walk free. the Dawkins v. State ruling describes this law: "The 'stand your ground' law... provide[s] that a person has a right to expect absolute safety in a place they have a right to be, and may use deadly force to repel an intruder... for a person to be justified in using deadly force, the person must not be 'engaged in unlawful activity.'"⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Criminal Law Materials and References, 7th ed. 2012; John Kaplan, Robert Weisberg, Guyora Binder

CHAPTER 5: DATA AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF GUN OWNERSHIP

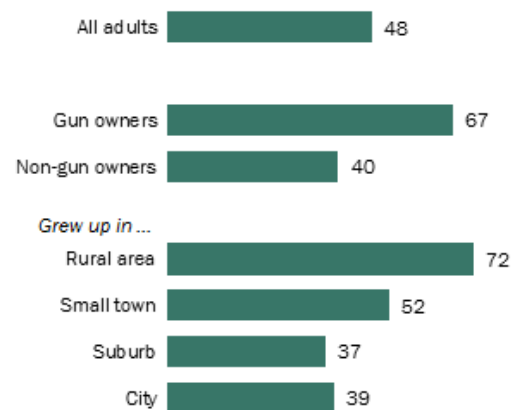
Children's exposure to *Gun Culture 'Lite'* translates nearly directly to statistics of gun ownership across the U.S. According to the aforementioned 2017 Pew Research survey, 67% of subjects who self-identified as gun owners grew up around firearms in the home, with 76% reporting that they shot their first gun as a minor.⁵¹ Similarly, 72% of those surveyed who considered their community a rural area grew up with a gun in the home. Demographically, gun ownership boasts its contingencies and differences across regions, the gender spectrum, and the socioeconomic divide.

It is often generalized that the majority of gun owners are men in rural areas preparing to rally against a tyrannical government. The actual data, indeed, both corroborates and dispels this assumption. In terms of actual firearm ownership, though, the US. Department of Justice Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives reports, in a single month in 2017, that among *destructive devices*, machine guns, silencers, rifles, shotguns, and any other firearms, a total of 5,203,489 weapons were

registered under the National Firearms Act. The state of Texas, alone, contributed 588,696 of

About half of U.S. adults say they grew up in a gun-owning household

% saying there were guns in their household when they were growing up



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 13-27 and April 4-18, 2017.

"America's Complex Relationship With Guns"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

⁵¹ Mitchell, Travis. "The Demographics of Gun Ownership in the U.S." *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project, 25 Oct. 2018, www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/06/22/the-demographics-of-gun-ownership/

those registered weapons.⁵² This data does not include firearms that were loaned, rented out, or bought from gun shows and unlicensed gun dealers.

With these numbers in mind, a New York Times report shares 2016 data of existing License-to-Carry holders in the state of Texas. Fernandez writes, “As of April 30 [2016], there were 1,017,618 active handgun license holders in Texas...that means there are more people in Texas with permission to carry a gun than there are residents of the city of Fort Worth,”⁵³ A monthly FBI report detailing background checks for firearms displays numbers way above the amount of licensed gun owners: pulling from a list of privately sold, returned, pawned, and regularly-issued firearm purchases, a total of 1,721,726 National Instant Criminal Background Checks were initiated in Texas.⁵⁴ It is important to note that background checks are not initiated for firearm rentals at sports shooting ranges or LTC training facilities. The various loopholes employed by gun owners and dealers, alike, make it nearly impossible to get an accurate grasp of the litany of firearms in the U.S.

In terms of Texas’s demographic distribution, the annual Texas Department of Public Safety report on LTC issuance states that in 2018, a total of 342,083 concealed handgun licenses were issued. Broken down further, 97,307 were issued to women, and 244,776 were issued to men. In total, 82.46% of those new LTC holders were white, compared to 8.29% black applicants.⁵⁵ Data was not specified for Latinx applicants. As far as denied LTC applications by race and assigned sex, the disparity is tweaked: of a total of LTC applications denied in 2018,

⁵²United States Department of Justice Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives , “Firearms Commerce in the United States.”, [Atf.gov](http://atf.gov), 2017.

⁵³ Fernandez, Manny. “Licensed to Carry: Handguns in Texas.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 21 Dec. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2016/05/12/us/licensed-to-carry-handguns-in-texas.html.

⁵⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “NICS Firearm Checks: Year by State/Type”

⁵⁵ *TxDPS - Demographic Reports for CY 2018*, Texas Department of Public Safety, www.dps.texas.gov/rsd/LTC/reports/demoreportscy18.htm.

65.21% were applications submitted by whites, while 21.29% of applications were denied for blacks. Shapira, et. al write, "In Texas, between 1996 and 2013, whites were 2.0 times more likely than blacks to apply [for a LTC]...white men are the group most likely to seek out CHLs. These trends follow the more general pattern of gun ownership being higher among men than women, and whites than blacks...in Texas, between 1996 and 2013, blacks were 3.3 times more likely than whites to be denied [for an LTC]."⁵⁶ This may appear to be still a big discrepancy, and when juxtaposed with the number of LTC applications accepted for black Texans in 2018, there appears to be an unsavory trend.

As far as age distribution for 2018 Texas LTC applications, percentages are at their all-time highest for applicants between the age of 30-60.⁵⁷ This data is, albeit indirectly, corroborated by a meta-analysis connected to the 2015 National Firearms Survey,⁵⁸ which breaks down U.S. gun ownership statistics across a variance of factors that may provide some insight into who is most susceptible to the influence of gun culture, whether through upbringing, media, or other factors. From a subject pool of just 3,949 individuals across the nation-- including military veterans-- some astounding trends were extrapolated: 25% of respondents were aged 60 or older, with 24% aging 45-59, and 21% aged 30-44. While this small subject pool may not be statistically representative of the population as a whole, similar distributions are echoed in both national and statewide databases.

⁵⁶ Shapira, H., Jensen, K., & Lin, K. H. (2018). Trends and patterns of concealed handgun license applications: a multistate analysis. *Social Currents*, 5(1), 3-14.

⁵⁷ *TxDPS - Demographic Reports for CY 2018*, Texas Department of Public Safety, www.dps.texas.gov/rsd/LTC/reports/demoreportscy18.htm.

⁵⁸ Azrael, D., Hepburn, L., Hemenway, D., & Miller, M. (2017). The stock and flow of US firearms: results from the 2015 National Firearms Survey. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 3(5), 38-57.

CHAPTER 6: GUN OWNERSHIP AND ITS GENDERED GENESIS

An oft-overlooked consequence of gun culture is its totally disparate effects on men and women. As far as Second Amendment advocacy goes, the female voice is vastly underrepresented. Fewer than a dozen women sit on the NRA Board of Directors, excepting for NRA media's outspoken Dana Loesch. Not a single woman sits on the Board of Directors for national advocacy group Students For Concealed Carry. Gun Owners of America, a Political Action Committee that moonlights as an advocacy and lobbying group, only has one woman on the Board of Directors. This lack of representation begs the question: is gun ownership just a Boys' Club?

A 1985 study conducted at North Carolina State University notes that women are often entirely left out of the already scant research done on gun ownership demographics. Hill, et. al demonstrate, "The tendency to exclude women from studies of defensive handgun ownership is in part a methodological problem...given the preeminence of sex-role socialization over regionalism... the traditional mapping of guns into the male domain, one can certainly expect that gender will be a better predictor of gun ownership..."⁵⁹ Many older studies on gun ownership exclude women on the premise that the men of the household are more likely to feel comfortable to assume the responsibility of handling a lethal weapon, which may lend to the stereotype that women are nominally weaker than men and thus need to *be* protected, rather than exercise their right to protect themselves.

A vastly more recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center provides some insight into *why* women make the conscious choice to carry a firearm: ". Male and female gun owners are about equally likely to cite protection as a reason why they own guns: About nine-in-ten in

⁵⁹ Hill, G. D.; Howell, F. M.; Driver, E. T. (1985). Gender, fear, and protective handgun ownership. *Criminology* 23(3), 541-552.

each group say this is a reason, and 65% and 71%, respectively, say it is a *major* reason. But far larger shares of women than men who own guns say protection is the *only* reason they own a gun: About a quarter of women who own guns (27%) are in this category, compared with just 8% of men.”⁶⁰ Could this be a product of conditioning women to believe that they are in *need* of making an extra effort to ensure protection? While more men are reported to carry a firearm for recreational shooting or hunting for sport, women are more likely to own a firearm in preparation for much more dire circumstances.

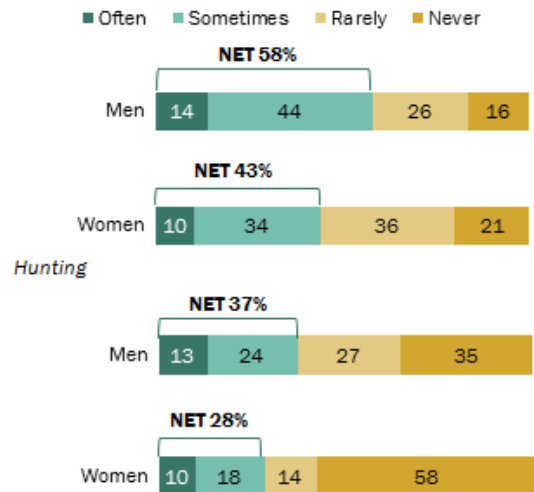
However, the same study reports a surprising- and perhaps even contradictory-- judgement on women’s attitudes toward gun ownership in general.

Horowitz states, “Majorities of both groups of gun owners consider the right to own guns to be essential to their personal sense of freedom (70% of women and 77% of men), and somewhat similar shares say being a gun owner is very or somewhat important to their overall identity (46% and 52%, respectively). On each of these questions, the differences between men and women are not statistically significant.”⁴⁷ While rationale for women owning guns is vastly different from that of men, the way that gun culture

Female gun owners are less likely to go shooting, hunting than male gun owners

% of gun owners who do each of these activities ...

Shooting or going to a gun range



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 13-27 and April 4-18, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

⁶⁰ Horowitz, Juliana Menasce. “How Male and Female Gun Owners in the U.S. Compare.” *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 29 June 2017, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/29/how-male-and-female-gun-owners-in-the-u-s-compare/.

impacts one's identity transcends the limits of gender roles, in a way. This may be precipitated by a sort of twisted empowerment that the impact of gun culture imbues in women.

The National Rifle Association has taken to marketing guns and various related accoutrements to a female audience, touting it all as an infallible self-defense measure. They tailor their products to be pink and glitzy and glamorous, allowing for the gun lobby to extend its reach to those susceptible to very gendered marketing. Holsters are made to look sexy and unassuming. Pink pistols are made to be impossibly small and effortless to use and pull out of a fresh leather purse at moment's notice.

A website called *Future Female Leaders: America's Leading Social Movement for Young, Conservative Women* published an article titled, "10 Reasons Why You Should Consider a Concealed Carry Permit". The article almost immediately starts off with a sprinkle of fear tactics, stating, "We live in an increasingly dangerous world where crime and attacks can happen anywhere..."⁶¹ and:

"It's a great feeling knowing that if a dangerous situation arises, you have a way to protect those you care about... You'll have to go through some pretty extensive training and/or classes in order to apply for your permit... Those around you will also be able to rest assured knowing you have passed the requirements to prove you know how to handle a firearm responsibly,"⁶²

This marketing looks to take advantage of the irrefutable threat of sexual violence, especially toward women, but, at the same time, communicates a few misconceptions about personal safety. A quick look at gun laws in several states--including Virginia, where the author of this particular article resides--demonstrates that obtaining a gun is easier than one might think.

⁶¹ "10 Reasons Why You Should Consider a Concealed Carry Permit." *Future Female Leaders*, 24 Feb. 2018, futurefemaleleader.com/10-reasons-why-you-should-consider-a-concealed-carry-permit/.

⁶² Koppel, Maria D. H., Nobles, Matt R., "Understanding Female Gun Ownership." *Feminist Criminology*, SAGE Journals. (2015).

First, however, the circumstances that surround gun ownership among women must be revisited once more. Koepfel and Nobles' article identifies that lifestyle similarities and common belief systems held by female gun owners. While the metadata examined by the article did not establish a clear link between fear-influenced behaviors and recent firearm purchases, Koepfel and Nobles do substantiate that firearm marketing targets a misguided notion of female fragility: "The marketing strategies used to entice women into purchasing guns were based on victimization and fear of crime, elements that were presumed to differentially influence female consumers."⁶³ The fear tactics were, over time, more and more tightly embraced by the National Rifle Association's marketing team-- warnings about the consequences of going unarmed are often backed by unsubstantiated claims:

"the NRA circulated information pamphlets emphasizing the danger of sexual assault faced by women, arguing that a gun is their only hope against rampant victimization... [advertising] gun ownership as a mechanism for protection against the (mostly exaggerated) specter of lurking, dangerous people, and situations, although these fears were unsupported by official statistics."⁵⁰

Stroud substantiates this logic as she details the rhetoric used in the National Rifle Association's popular magazine, *American Rifleman*. The publication features stories of armed citizens successfully defending themselves, a shameless ploy to sell more guns. She writes, "...most of the victims in these stories are women, the elderly, or in some way disabled or in failing health... 'classically vulnerable' people heighten the narrative structure of the stories, because as otherwise helpless victims, they are able to 'achieve masculinity' with firearms,"⁶⁴ .

⁶³ Koepfel, Maria D. H., Nobles, Matt R., "Understanding Female Gun Ownership." *Feminist Criminology*, SAGE Journals. (2015).

⁶⁴ Stroud, Angela. "Good guys with guns: Hegemonic masculinity and concealed handguns." *Gender & Society* 26.2 (2012): 216-238.

This provides an obviously stark contrast with firearm marketing aimed toward men. Men buy guns often for sport: skeet shooting, competitive shooting, hunting, and evenings at the firing range with coworkers. Men's guns are family heirlooms that are passed onto the prepubescent grandson when the time comes. Rifles are to be mounted on the mantle as a point of pride. Long guns are polished religiously in the garage. Revolvers are brandished in a rugged leather holster on the hip of a strong and masculine gun owner. For men, guns are marketed as a fun and manly accessory; for women, they are marketed as a necessity.

Stroud introduces the sociological concept of "hegemonic masculinity," which entails a notion of male dominance that transcends even the most stratified groups of men. When armed, neither socioeconomic position nor race nor sexuality matter. All are American heroes, just the same, if they succeed at fulfilling their ingrained role of the "Good Guy with a Gun." Brains and brawn matter not, as long as the trigger is pulled and the bullet ends up in the aggressor. The White Knight can be of any color or social class or education level. The mold to fill is malleable and any man of sound mind with a LTC can fit. Stroud writes,

"Gun users heroically defend the defenseless... and they care deeply about 'American virtues,' particularly individual freedom (Melzer 2009) and family values (Connell 1995). These NRA discourses 'provide a cultural framework that may be materialized in daily practices and interactions' and thus represent what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 850) call a 'regional' hegemonic masculinity."⁶⁵

This writing also introduces the American flavor of individualism. While hegemonic masculinity may help bridge the constructed divide among men of different backgrounds, Stroud discusses that the way in which guns are used is different among different groups. The big, brawny man is often seen hunting and bringing back giant stags to mount on the wall. The expectations may be

⁶⁵ Stroud, Angela. "Good guys with guns: Hegemonic masculinity and concealed handguns." *Gender & Society* 26.2 (2012): 216-238.

different, though, among more marginalized, underrepresented groups of gun owners. Men perceived as weaker or subordinate may use their weapons in more insidious ways. They wish to move from “margin to center” and use lethal force to do so. Ownership of a firearm imbues an additional dose of masculinity that empowers some and disempowers others.

David Yamane’s comprehensive sociological review of the impact of gun culture draws on the notion that guns are an equalizing factor that levels the playing field between men and women. He writes:

“Carlson sees gun carrying for men as being strongly connected to their cultural conceptions of masculinity. The socio-economic ‘age of decline’ Carlson identifies has affected men in particular and their role as breadwinners, so male gun carriers reassert their relevance as men by identifying themselves as ‘citizen-protectors’ (her term, not theirs). Emphasizing the connection between the cultural ideal of personal responsibility and a broader conception of citizenship—what Kohn (2004) calls the ‘citizen soldier’—gun carriers as citizen-protectors are morally upstanding citizens exercising their historically masculine duty to protect their families and others.”⁶⁶

Today’s men do not typically have to spend their lives “roughing it.” The image of a rugged frontiersman defending his honor, day by day, by the muzzle of his gun, is a distant prospect. Perhaps owning a gun acts as a subconscious homage to *what once was*. Gun ownership mitigates any emerging feeling of emasculation that could arise from the gradual degradation of gender roles, or expectations of domestic life for the modern man. As the empirical utility of having a gun strapped to the belt begins to drop out of relevance, what remains is maybe an underlying need for some semblance of abstract protectionism. Women, in turn, get a taste of the same expired brand of masculinity, when they choose to own a gun. While performative, this may have a deep effect on feelings of responsibility.

⁶⁶ Yamane, D. (2017). The sociology of US gun culture. *Sociology compass*, 11(7), e12497.

Gun ownership carries with it an altered sense of self and a destructive disruption of societal roles. The overarching burden of gun ownership, though, is the socially detrimental air of individualism that permeates the political context of gun advocacy.

CONCLUSION

Gun culture looks really bad right about now, doesn't it? From its genesis, the wildly-misinterpreted Second Amendment has translated into the most powerful political agenda that looks to have no plans of dying off. 97 mass shootings (shootings with more than one victim/injury) have been reported in the US since the first of January, 2019.⁶⁷ Nothing has changed as far as sensible gun legislation.

From gendered marketing of firearm and accessories toward women, to the decades-long tradition of taking children hunting continually being celebrated, the culture surrounding gun ownership pervades. More and more states are accepting "constitutional carry" status, and an even higher number of states considers allowing the concealed carry of firearms onto public college campuses. Texas is hearing bills that allow guns all over schools and around children, under the veil of school safety considerations.

How does the in-depth analysis of federal and state legislation regarding firearms connect to the proliferation of gun culture? Guns-everywhere legislation, combined with gridlock in all branches of government, allows for potentially harmful firearm practices to continue. Barely any legislation has been enacted to limit children's access to firearms, and the hunting profession remains essentially untouched.

This, in turn, substantiates the more sociological implications of gun culture. The *hands off my rights and my guns* sentiment runs deep. The protectionist mindset that has placed gun ownership at the forefront of self defense mechanisms is upheld by the synergy of firearm-friendly lawmaking. Gonzalez flags hang high on the backs of Texas Ford F-150s, inside lawmakers' offices, and on front lawns in the rural South. The individualistic *Don't Tread on Me*

⁶⁷ "Mass Shooting Tracker." *Mass Shooting Tracker*, www.massshootingtracker.org/data.

mindset--yet another vast misinterpretation of colonial-age political movements, like the Second Amendment--persists in American culture.

While any solutions enacted now would barely scrape the surface of the indelible mark that gun culture has left on the American psyche, some common-sense gun legislation to mitigate further damage is long overdue. Some recommendations would be to withdraw Texas's reciprocal agreement with other states regarding licenses to carry (HB 3506 by Representative James Talarico, drafted and proposed by *yours truly*); pass legislation that would make Texas a 'may-issue' state, thus expanding states' rights and allowing for the Department of Public Safety to more thoroughly determine eligibility for obtaining a License to Carry (HB 3508 by Rep. Talarico, also directly proposed by me); and extend the National Instant Criminal Background Check System to firearm rentals at sport shooting ranges (HB 3507 by Talarico, also my final and most controversial bill proposed). On the other end of the spectrum, while "constitutional carry" by Representative Johnathan Stickland met its demise after Speaker Dennis Bonnen received threats from gun-rights groups, it is important to resist bills that would allow more guns into schools.

While there is no way to reconstruct anyone's individualistic mindset regarding run rights, the most accessible solution for the issue of gun culture rests in politics.

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Ana Lopez was born in Austin, TX on September 16, 1996. She enrolled in the Plan II Honors program at the University of Texas at Austin in 2015, with a second major in Health & Society. In college, she co-founded Students Against Campus Carry in response to the passage of Senate Bill 11, which allowed the concealed carry of handguns on Texas public college campuses. She helped organize the "Cocks Not Glocks" protest, which gained international coverage and ruffled a lot of feathers. She worked as Legislative Aide for Congressman Lloyd Doggett, Field Organizer for Julie Oliver's 2018 congressional campaign, and Legislative Aide for Representative James Talarico. Ana is a Virgo sun, Scorpio moon, and Sagittarius rising. Ana hopes to become an elected official one day, and to reinstate the Assault Weapons Ban within her first 100 days in office.