Received: 16 November 2016 | Accepted: 16 May 2017
DOI: 10.1111/soc4.12497

WILEY

ARTICLE

The sociology of U.S. gun culture

David Yamane

Department of Sociology, Wake Forest University

Correspondence
David Yamane, Department of Sociology, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC 27109, USA.
Email: yamaned@wfu.edu

Abstract

Despite the fact that a robust culture centered on the legal ownership and use of guns by law-abiding gun owners exists in the United States, there is no sociology of U.S. gun culture. Rather, the social scientific study of guns is dominated by criminological and epidemiological studies of gun violence. As a corrective to this oversight, I outline what a sociology of U.S. gun culture should look like. In the first section, I give a brief history of U.S. gun culture from the founding era through the 1960s. Guns began as tools of necessity in the colonies and on the frontier, but evolved into equipment for sport hunting and shooting, as well as desired commodities for collecting. The second section examines these recreational pursuits which formed the core of U.S. gun culture for most of the 20th century. Although recreation remains an important segment, the central emphasis of U.S. gun culture has gradually shifted to armed self-defense over the course of the past half-century. The third section examines the rise of this culture of armed citizenship, what I call "Gun Culture 2.0," the current iteration of the country's historic gun culture. I conclude by suggesting important avenues for future research.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The world today is awash in a sea of small arms in the hands of civilians, with the United States leading the way by a considerable margin. Although there is no official registry of firearms, the Small Arms Survey estimated that there are 270 million civilian owned firearms (and counting) in the United States., including handguns, rifles, and shotguns (Graduate Institute of International Studies, 2007). Two decades ago, Wright (1995, p. 64) observed that there is "nearly one gun for every man, woman, and child in the country." This remains true today, as the size of the population and the civilian gun stock have grown together.

Despite the fact that "gun ownership is normative, not deviant, behavior across vast swaths of the social landscape" (Wright, 1995, p. 64), there is no sociology of guns, per se. Most research examines guns in connection with crime and violence, either from a criminological (Harcourt, 2006) or public health perspective (Hemenway,

2004). As a corrective to this oversight, I take my cue from Wright (1995) and use the scant sociological literature on the legal use of firearms by lawful gun owners to outline what a sociology of U.S. gun culture should look like. I focus here exclusively on the U.S. because it has more guns than any other country and appears unique in the world in having a strong cultural association of guns with personal identity and national values—i.e., in having a gun culture (Cook & Goss, 2014, p. 155; Wright, Rossi, & Daly, 1983).

In the first section, I give a brief history of U.S. gun culture from the founding era through the 1960s. Guns began as tools of necessity in the colonies and on the frontier but evolved into equipment for sport hunting and shooting, as well as desired commodities for collecting. The second section examines these recreational pursuits which formed the core of U.S. gun culture for most of the 20th century. Although recreation remains an important segment, the central emphasis of U.S. gun culture has gradually shifted to armed self-defense over the course of the past half-century. The third section examines the rise of this culture of armed citizenship, what I call "Gun Culture 2.0," the current iteration of the country's historic gun culture. I conclude by suggesting important avenues for future research.

2 | U.S. GUN CULTURE: A BRIEF HISTORY

In "America as a Gun Culture," historian Richard Hofstadter (1970) remarked on—more accurately, he lamented—the uniqueness of the United States "as the only modern industrial urban nation that persists in maintaining a gun culture." In Hofstadter's account, U.S. gun culture is rooted in the reality of widespread, lawful possession of firearms by a large segment of the population. He recognizes that guns as material objects are central to the construction of any gun culture. Without guns, there is no gun culture. But in itself, this is a trivial statement. What is crucial to explain is how people understand and use guns, as well as how guns themselves change over time, both responding to and facilitating different understandings and uses (Haag, 2016; Kohn, 2004).

Guns were a significant aspect of the social history of the U.S. from the outset (Winkler, 2011). As Cramer (2006, p. 236) argues, "Gun ownership appears to have been the norm for freemen, and not terribly unusual for free women and at least male children, through the Colonial, Revolutionary, and early Republic periods." Of course, guns then were not as plentiful or as loaded with symbolism as they would come to be. 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. At midcentury, *Schützenbünde*—fraternal shooting clubs—flourished in many cities with sizable German populations including New York, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and San Francisco (Gilmore, 1999). These realities in the United States, and the organization of rifle/target shooting organizations in England and Canada in the 1850s and 1860s, make the founding of the National Rifle Association (NRA) in 1871 more understandable (Gilmore, 1999; Hummel, 1985). The NRA has played a significant role in promoting America's gun culture since its founding in 1871, beginning with its efforts to promote rifle marksmanship through long-range shooting competitions. Although better known today for its political activities, for over 100 years, the NRA has overseen rifle and pistol target shooting competitions at Camp Perry, Ohio, known as "The National Matches" (Hummel, 1985). These marksmanship events represent on the national and expert level a type of recreational shooting enjoyed by thousands of gun owners across the country.

Into the 20th century, hunting continued to be an important part of U.S. gun culture, particularly in the South, but in rural areas of other regions of the country as well, and among urban-dwellers looking for some escape from city life (Marks, 1991). Especially as part of socialization into hunting, receiving a "real" rifle became seen as a rite of passage from boyhood into manhood (Littlefield & Ozanne, 2011). The gun industry also promoted guns as objects of (typically

masculine) desire through the mass advertising that was increasingly embraced by corporate America to fuel consumer capitalism. Gun collecting as an avocation and business arose in the early 20th century in conjunction with this evolution away from a purely utilitarian view of guns (Haag, 2016).

As the citations in this brief section suggest, sociologists have been noticeably absent in historical studies of U.S. gun culture. This is unfortunate because, as Tonso (1982) suggested decades ago, understanding Americans' contemporary attachment to guns would benefit from understanding the roots of its attachment historically. As the following section on contemporary studies of hunting, target shooting, and collecting as recreational activities demonstrates, sociologists continue to ignore significant aspects of U.S. gun culture today.

3 | RECREATIONAL GUN CULTURE

Writing in the mid-1990s, Wright (1995, p. 64–65) observed that most guns in America are "owned for socially innocuous sport and recreation purposes," and therefore, that "gun ownership is apparently a topic more appropriate to the sociology of leisure than to the criminology or epidemiology of violence." A 1978 survey of gun owners found that 71 percent owned them for leisure purposes (hunting, target shooting, and collecting) (Wright et al., 1983, p. 60). Twenty years later, an ABC News/Washington Post poll similarly found that nearly two-thirds of the respondents cited recreation as the main reason they owned a firearm, including 49 percent hunting, 8 percent target/sport shooting, and 4 percent collecting (Pew Research Center, 2013). The 2015 National Firearms Survey allowed respondents to name multiple primary reasons for firearms ownership and found that 40% named hunting, 34% collecting, and 28% sporting use (Azrael, Hepburn, Hemenway, & Miller, 2016). Unfortunately, only a handful of scholars have considered gun culture as a form of recreation akin to other "collective passionate avocations" (Gillespie, Leffler, & Lerner, 2002, p. 286) like swing dancing, adult league tennis, and birding. There is, however, good reason to see a large part of gun culture as "serious leisure" (Stebbins, 2001).

The concept of "serious leisure" was pioneered by Stebbins (2001), who initially distinguished between casual leisure and serious leisure. Casual leisure involves mundane activities that require little specialized training, while serious leisure is complex and specialized and requires a greater level of commitment and training (Anderson & Taylor, 2010, p. 36). Unlike casual pursuits such as watching TV, activities involving guns tend toward serious leisure because of the cost and the dangers of firearms, as well as the amount of time and effort necessary to master their use.

As with other serious leisure pursuits, gun culture grew over the course of the 20th century. The previously noted transformation of hunting from a necessity of survival to a sporting pastime was amplified with the broader rise in leisure activities in the 20th century, as work days and hours shrank and income (and consumer credit) grew. Although many still hunt in order to harvest game meat, not many people in the U.S. hunt for subsistence (Grandy, Stallman, & Macdonald, 2003). Kellert (1988) argues that over the course of the 20th century a "utilitarian" attitude toward hunting has declined. An increasing proportion of hunters can be characterized as "sport hunters"—those who enjoy being outdoors with others and displaying their skills—and "nature hunters"—those who hunt to participate in nature for "inner-directed, virtually mystical, reasons" (Wright et al., 1983, p. 59).

Although the proportion of the U.S. population that hunts has declined, millions of Americans still hunt and in some locations hunting is sufficiently normative that public schools close on the opening day of hunting season. Unfortunately, sociologists have not seriously studied recreational motivations for hunting, perhaps because, like much of the non-hunting population, they do not approve of hunting for non-utilitarian, sporting reasons (Grandy et al., 2003). It would be an enormous benefit to our understanding of gun culture for someone to ethnographically study animal hunters in the way Fine (1998) studied the culture of mushroom hunters.

Slightly more research has been conducted on sport shooting and collecting as part of recreational gun culture. Kohn (2004) uses the phrase "gun enthusiasm" to characterize the orientation of the sport shooters she studied ethnographically in the San Francisco Bay Area. Kohn (2004, p. 9) argues, "At its most basic, gun enthusiasm is an enjoyment of and enthusiasm for firearms. Gun enthusiasts, like enthusiasts of any kind, take pleasure in the handling and use of the object of their pleasure." In other words, they approach shooting as a form of serious leisure. One

shooter interviewed by Stenross (1990, p. 59) explained his enjoyment of shooting by comparing it to another popular but less stigmatized recreational pursuit, golfing. "It's my day off, people might ask if I play golf. Well, I don't play golf, I shoot. 'Shoot what?' That upsets their world. Shoot what! Most people don't understand that it can be a sport." In fact, the shotgun sport known as "sporting clays" is often called "golf with a shotgun." In sporting clays, the participant moves from station to station and shoots at clay targets that are thrown from different locations and in different directions, much like a golfer moves from hole to hole, each of which is different.

Treating target shooting like any other legitimate leisure pursuit, a recent online survey utilized a 35-item Leisure Motivation Scale (LMS) and a 34-item Leisure Satisfaction Scale (LSS) to understand what gets and keeps target shooters involved in the activity. In terms of motivations, the highest rated reasons were "because it is fun" (mean of 4.83 out of 5), "to improve my marksmanship" (4.78), and "to challenge my abilities" (4.50). Factor analysis of the responses to the LMS identified six underlying components: escapism (34% of explained variance), social interaction (9.6%), self-actualization (7.9%), physical activity (6.2%), efficacy/skill (5.2%), and family history (3.9%) (Martin, Murray, O'Neill, MacCarthy, & Gogue, 2014, pp. 212-13).[1] Escapism included such items as "to relax" and "to relieve stress and tension," characterizations of shooting guns that could be very foreign to those outside gun culture. In terms of the satisfaction target shooters derive from their activity, "it is fun" (mean of 4.83 out of 5) and "I like it" (4.66) are the two most widely embraced responses. Factor analysis of the LSS survey responses identified eight components: self-actualization (37.3% of explained variance), social interaction (7.2%), respite (5.7%), physical benefit (5.2%), connection (4.5%), technical (4.1%), and hedonic pleasure (3.8%) (Murray, Martin, O'Neill, & Jason Gouge, 2015, pp. 9–10). These quantitative data reinforce Kohn's (2004) and others' qualitative data on the pleasure and enjoyment people get from their participation in this aspect of gun culture.

In addition to shooting, gun collecting is also understood as a form of serious leisure. Of the 14 gun collectors, Stenross (1990, p. 60) interviewed, most owned at least 30 guns, and four owned 100 or more. While target shooters and hunters see guns as useful for particular purposes, and anti-gun people sees them as implements of death, gun collectors see guns as "aesthetic objects" to be understood and appreciated like other collectables (Stenross, 1994, p. 30). The pleasure of collecting firearms comes from an appreciation of their beauty, the craftsmanship that goes into making them, and their connection to history (Stenross, 1990, p. 61; Anderson & Taylor, 2010, p. 44). Indeed, like those who collect stamps or other material objects, gun collectors often see themselves as "curators" of history, helping to preserve valuable objects for the future (Stenross, 1994, p. 31).

Unlike some others who engage in serious leisure, however, the objects of shooters' and collectors' enthusiasms are frequently associated with emotional and physical pain. They therefore have to negotiate the stigma associated with guns—a stigma which is not applied to coins or stamps (Stenross, 1990, p. 62). This reminds us that categorizing something as a form of leisure does not mean it is normative. Recreational drug use, shooting pool, and sexual "swinging" have historically been seen as "disreputable pleasures" or "morally controversial leisure" (Olmsted, 1988, p. 277). Gun collecting, target shooting, and hunting have all been viewed through this lens.

Gun avocationists find themselves having to give "dignifying accounts" of their use of guns to justify owning and using them (Stenross, 1990; Taylor, 2009). Hunters, for example, highlight the ethics of killing an animal appropriately ("quickly and cleanly") and of harvesting the meat, horns, and hide rather than allowing them to go to waste. Here, they draw a strong contrast to their cosmopolitan critics who are morally compromised because they are more distant from the sources of their food (Tonso, 1982). Target shooters emphasize the calmness, discipline, and self-control required and cultivated by shooting (Stenross, 1990, p. 59). 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" (Olmsted, 1988, p. 278). Those who own cars and drink alcohol are rarely blamed for drunk driving generally, but gun owners are sometimes made to feel partially responsible for the very existence of gun violence. So 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, 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).

Hunting, target shooting, and collecting continue to be important aspects of U.S. gun culture today and merit further investigation by sociologists. At the same time, the center of gravity of U.S. gun culture has shifted over the course of the past half-century from recreational shooting to armed self-defense, from "Gun Culture 1.0," America's historic gun culture that Hofstadter described, to "Gun Culture 2.0."[2]

4 | THE RISE OF GUN CULTURE 2.0

Gun Culture 2.0 is centered on armed self-defense, or what I call the culture of armed citizenship. The concept of armed citizenship recognizes the large and growing number of people in the United States who are exercising their rights as citizens to carry firearms in public for self-defense. Although, as we have seen, the motivations for gun ownership are complex, the majority of gun owners today—especially new gun owners—point to self-defense as the primary reason for owning a gun. In a 1999 ABC News/Washington Post poll, 26 percent of respondents cited protection as being the primary reason for owning a gun; by 2013, that proportion had grown to 48 percent (Pew Research Center, 2013). Hunting, target/sport shooting, and gun collecting together declined by a roughly equal amount. More recently, the 2015 National Firearms Survey found 63% of respondents indicated "protection against people" to be a primary reason for owning a firearm (Azrael et al., 2016). Significantly, a 2013 Washington Post/ABC News poll found more Americans saying that having a gun in the house makes it a safer place to be (51%) than a more dangerous place to be (29%) (Clement & Craighill, 2013). This view extends outside the home, as well. A 2015 Gallup Poll found a majority of Americans (56%)—including 50% of women and 48% of non-gun owners—believe that if more Americans carried concealed weapons, the country would be safer (Newport, 2015). These statistics are reflective of the changing legal structure governing the carrying and use of firearms for self-defense. The dramatic liberalization of gun laws over the past four decades reflects and facilitates the development of Gun Culture 2.0.

In the early republic, no special licensing was required to bear arms, either openly or concealed. But beginning with Kentucky in 1813, there was a movement in several southern states to ban the carrying of concealed weapons in public (Cramer, 1999). In time, these prohibitions spread from the south to the rest of the United States. This "restricted era" of gun carry continued through the 1970s, but over the last four decades, there has been dramatic shift toward the liberalization of concealed carry laws (Patrick, 2009). The dominant movement in concealed carry legislation has been toward state passage of what have come to be known as "shall issue" laws (Grossman & Lee, 2008). From 1980 to 2013, 38 states passed these laws that require state or local authorities to issue a permit to any applicant that meets the objective statutory criteria if no statutory reasons for denial exist. The issuing authority's discretion over subjective criteria like the "good moral character" or "good cause" of the applicant is removed from the process. Two hundred years after Kentucky banned the carrying of concealed weapons in public, state or local governments in all 50 states must have (according to court decisions) some provision in place for issuing permits to citizens allowing them to carry concealed firearms in public, though nine states maintain more restrictive "may issue" laws under which the issuing authority is not required to issue a concealed carry license but *may* issue one at its discretion.

As concealed carry laws have been liberalized, the number of concealed carry permit holders have grown considerably. The Government Accountability Office estimated that there were at least 8 million active permits to carry concealed handguns in the United States at the end of 2011 (GAO, 2012). This amounts to at least 3.5 percent of the eligible U.S. population (adults who are legally allowed to possess guns). The portion of individual state populations with a concealed carry permit varies but shall issue states like Georgia (600,000 permits, 11.5%), Iowa (243,000 permits, 10.9%), and South Dakota (62,000 permits, 10.6%) have the highest rates in the country. It would surely surprise many to know that one out of every 10 adult citizens in these states is potentially legally armed in public, not to mention 3 to 4 out of every 100 Americans overall.

This lawful carrying of firearms for legal purposes has received very little attention from sociologists, who have largely ceded the topic to criminologists. Criminologists have examined aggregate levels of legal gun carrying using

data on the number of concealed carry permits issued in different jurisdictions. These studies tend to find that the political orientation of a locality matters (more Republican, more permits), as do shifts in racial composition (more racial minorities move in, more permits), and population density (more suburban, more permits) (Costanza & Kilburn, 2004; Thompson & Stidham, 2010). Although these studies are suggestive, the names of individual permit holders are not generally matters of public record, leaving scholars to analyze aggregated administrative data on permits. Establishing causality is difficult and the ecological fallacy looms large.

A more common approach has been to use statistical analysis of survey data to understand the individual decision to carry a firearm. As in studies of gun ownership more generally, these studies often identify demographic correlates of gun carrying such as age, gender, and region of residence (Bankston, Thompson, Jenkins, & Forsyth, 1990). More sophisticated studies try to capture additional subjective or situational factors, emphasizing fear of crime and history of criminal victimization, as well individual beliefs in self-protection, as principle motivators (Kleck & Gertz, 1998). While helpful, the strong emphasis on individual decision-making without understanding the broader cultural context within which that decision makes sense is a limitation of these studies.

Fortunately, two recent studies by sociologists have taken a more qualitative approach to studying concealed carry permit holders. In *Citizen Protectors: The Everyday Politics of Guns in an Age of Decline*, Carlson (2015) examines the decision to carry a gun in public in a wider context. Carlson's study of gun carrying (both legally open and concealed) in the Detroit, Michigan metro area is based on 60 interviews with male gun carriers and observations of firearms training, shooting ranges, activist events, and Internet gun forums. She understands the decision to carry a gun as a response to a very broad pattern of socio-economic decline, the feelings of economic and physical insecurity it produces, and related concerns about crime and police ineffectiveness. 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.

Stroud's (2016) *Good Guys with Guns: The Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry* follows closely on the heels of Carlson's study. It is based on open-ended interviews with 36 concealed handgun license holders in Texas as well as observation of Texas concealed handgun license (CHL) courses and gun ranges. Rather than focusing on situational factors like fear of crime in one's immediate environment or a past history of criminal victimization, Stroud looks at the broader cultural meanings of concealed carry for Texas CHL holders. Her male respondents drew on ideal images of masculinity in emphasizing the need to protect their families and to compensate for lost strength due to age as motivations for concealed carry. Stroud's female respondents, by contrast, emphasized a need to protect themselves (rather than their families) and felt empowered to do so because guns are "equalizers" that compensate for strength differences between women and their male victimizers. What both male and female CHL holders have in common, Stroud concludes, is their embrace of a cultural ideal of personal responsibility.

Carlson and Stroud can be profitably read together for their similarities and differences. Both seek to understand why average citizens in the United States today feel the need to carry a firearm in public. Both find answers not primarily in the practical utility of guns as tools of self-defense but in the symbolic value of guns to individuals in particular social circumstances. For Carlson, gun carrying says "I deserve to be treated with dignity as a law-abiding citizen." For Stroud, it says "I am a good guy." Carlson situates gun carrying in the context of social insecurities created by postindustrial economic decline and neoliberal policy ascendance. Stroud sees it primarily through the lens of gender, racial, and class inequality, though implicates neoliberalism in her conclusion. Significantly, both argue that white male gun carriers in the suburbs are motivated by emasculation (due to economic marginalization for Carlson and physical decline for Stroud), as well as race-based fears of crime.

Carlson and Stroud provide an excellent starting point for sociologists studying Gun Culture 2.0, the non-criminal culture of armed citizenship at the core of U.S. gun culture today. But as with recreational gun culture, much more can

be done to understand this important and emergent social phenomenon. In the final section, I consider some future directions for the sociology of U.S. gun culture.

5 | FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Compared to the criminology and epidemiology of gun violence, the sociology of U.S. gun culture has lagged considerably behind. Decades ago, Stenross (1990, p. 56) observed that those who only associate guns with violence and crime cannot understand why people use guns "for fun," sociologists included. There is no doubt that ignorance of and bias against guns is common in the discipline. Kohn (2004, p. ix) discusses the considerable hostility she encountered from academic colleagues when she was researching guns in the 1990s. Although less hostile, when I tell colleagues today that I am studying "gun culture," they routinely hear me saying "gun violence" or "gun control." As gun culture remains a significant social reality, sociologists would do well to pay more attention to it. I conclude, therefore, with three suggested directions for future research.

5.1 | Focus on Social Practices

Gun culture is part of the broader American culture, so obviously reflects some of its dominant themes (Kohn, 2004). This is as true of Gun Culture 2.0 as it was of Gun Culture 1.0. Carlson (2015), Stroud (2016), and Melzer (2009) have shown this, particularly the way that gender ideology shapes gun ownership and use. But understanding gun culture only as reflecting broader ideas and ideals—about gender, race, freedom, rugged individualism—is too limited. We also need to understand gun culture on its own terms, especially the practices that constitute it. Being a part of gun culture is not simply about holding a particular set of beliefs but involves participation in a particular social world (Shapira, 2013). Kohn (2004) approaches gun culture this way, but more solidly ethnographic work like hers is necessary.

The social world of gun culture is shaped by broader social institutions including the legal system, economy, and technology, and these requires greater attention as well. For example, the widespread practice of legally carrying a gun in public was facilitated by the movement for shall issue concealed carry laws. The growing practice of concealed carry that is facilitated by these laws also creates a number of new challenges for the individuals who do so, as well as for the broader social worlds (other people, spaces, and places) in which they do so. These challenges are individually and collectively addressed through the developing culture of armed citizenship—both the "hardware" of material culture like guns, accessories, and other products, as well as the "software" of ways of thinking, legal frameworks, and the development of relevant abilities.

5.2 | Focus on Wider Social Worlds

Related to the focus on social practices is greater attention to the wider social worlds in which gun owners participate. According to Stebbins (2001, p. 54), "Serious leisure participants typically become members of a vast social world, a complex mosaic of groups, events, networks, organizations, and social relationships." The same is true for participants in both recreational and self-defense gun culture. America is not just a "Gun Show Nation" (Burbick, 2007), it is a nation of gun clubs, training classes, shooting events, network meet-ups, and gun collectors and shooters associations. Although Taylor (2009) and Kohn (2004) have captured small slices of this reality on the recreational side, and Carlson (2015) on the self-defense side, this aspect of gun culture has not been adequately studied to date.

5.3 | Focus on Marginalized Populations

Although the predominance of socially privileged (white, heterosexual, and middle class) men among gun owners suggests the importance of masculinity in studying gun culture, sometimes this focus has come at the exclusion of gun owners who come from marginalized populations. Two decades ago, McCaughey (1997) studied women's armed

self-defense classes as part of her pioneering study of "physical feminism." Despite the expansion of such classes and of women's gun ownership more generally—part of the rise of Gun Culture 2.0—no one has yet followed McCaughey's lead. Similarly, the Pink Pistols, an LGBTQ organization founded in response to hate crimes, remains unstudied. And we know very little about legal concealed carry by those who are most likely to be victims of criminal gun violence, African Americans living in urban areas.

In promoting the sociological study of U.S. gun culture, I do not mean to suggest that criminological, epidemiological, or public health approaches to the study of guns are unimportant. Rather, because the vast majority of guns will never be used to commit crimes and the vast majority of gun owners will never commit or be victims of gun violence, they simply offer a partial perspective. To the extent that efforts to mitigate the harmful effects of guns require a collective response—including (perhaps especially) law-abiding gun owners—understanding U.S. gun culture in its various dimensions is an important step forward.

ENDNOTES

[1] It is important to recognize that those characteristics that are most universally embraced also explain the least amount of variance in scale scores because they do not themselves vary. This is true of both the "skill" component in the LMS scale and the "hedonic pleasure" component in the LSS scale.

[2] Terms I borrow from gun journalist Michael Bane.

REFERENCES

Anderson, L., & Taylor, J. D. (2010). Standing out while fitting in: Serious leisure identities and aligning actions among skydivers and gun collectors. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *39*(1), 34–59.

Azrael, D., Hepburn, L., Hemenway, D., & Miller, M. (2016). The stock and flow of US firearms: Results from the 2015 National Firearms Survey. Unpublished paper presented at Russell Sage Foundation conference on "The Underground Gun Market," New York, 29 April. http://www.russellsage.org/sites/all/files/RSF_Journal/Cook_Pollack//Azrael_et_al.pdf. Retrieved 7 November 2016.

Bankston, W. B., Thompson, C. Y., Jenkins, Q. A. L., & Forsyth, C. J. (1990). The influence of fear of crime, gender, and southern culture on carrying firearms for protection. *The Sociological Quarterly*, *31*(2), 287–305.

Burbick, J. (2007). *Gun show nation: Gun culture and American democracy*. New York: New Press.

Carlson, J. (2015). *Citizen-protectors: The everyday politics of guns in an age of decline*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Clement, S, & Craighill, P. (2013). Majority of Americans say guns make homes safer. *The Washington Post*, 18 April. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2013/04/18/majority-of-americans-say-guns-make-homes-safer/. Retrieved 19 October 2016.

Cook, P. J., & Goss, K. A. (2014). *The gun debate: What everyone needs to know*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Costanza, S. E., & Kilburn, J. C. (2004). Circling the welcome wagons: Area, income, race, and legal handgun concealment. *Criminal Justice Review*, *29*(2), 289–303.

Cramer, C. E. (1999). *Concealed weapon laws of the early republic: Dueling, southern violence, and moral reform*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Cramer, C. E. (2006). *Armed America: The remarkable story of how and why guns became as American as apple pie*. Nashville, TN: Nelson Current.

Fine, G. A. (1998). *Morel tales: The culture of mushrooming*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

GAO 2012. Gun control: States' laws and requirements for concealed carry permits vary across the nation. GAO-12-717. United States Government Accountability Office. http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-717. Retrieved 19 October 2016.

Gillespie, D., Leffler, A., & Lerner, E. (2002). If it weren't for my hobby, I'd have a life: Dog sports, serious leisure, and boundary negotiation. *Leisure Studies*, *21*(3–4), 285–304.

Gilmore, R. S. (1999). 'Another branch of manly sport': American rifle games, 1840–1900. In J. E. Dizard, R. M. Muth, & S. P. Andrews, Jr. (Eds.), *Guns in America: A reader* (pp. 105–121). New York: NYU Press.

Graduate Institute of International Studies (2007). *Small Arms Survey 2007*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grandy, J. W., Stallman, E., & Macdonald, D. W. (2003). The science and sociology of hunting: Shifting practices and perceptions in the United States and Great Britain. In D. J. Salem, & A. N. Rowan (Eds.), *The state of the animals II: 2003* (pp. 107–130). Washington, DC: Humane Society Press.

Grossman, R. S., & Lee, S. A. (2008). May issue versus shall issue: Explaining the pattern of concealed-carry handgun laws, 1960–2001. *Contemporary Economic Policy*, *26*(2), 198–206.

Haag, P. (2016). *The gunning of America: Business and the making of American gun culture*. New York: Basic Books.

Harcourt, B. (2006). *Language of the gun: Youth, crime, and public policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hemenway, D. (2004). *Private guns, public health*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Hofstadter, R. (1970). America as a gun culture. *American Heritage*, *21*, 6 (October 1970). http://www.americanheritage.com/content/america-gun-culture. Retrieved 23 March 2015.

Hummel, R. (1985). Anatomy of a wargame: Target shooting in three cultures. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, *8*(3), 131–143.

Kellert, S. R. (1988). human-animal interactions: A review of American attitudes to wild and domestic animals in the twentieth century. In A. N. Rowen (Ed.), *Animals and people sharing the world* (pp. 137–175). Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Kleck, G., & Gertz, M. (1998). Carrying guns for protection: Results from the National Self-Defense Survey. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *35*(2), 193–224.

Kohn, A. A. (2004). *Shooters: Myths and realities of America's gun cultures*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Littlefield, J., & Ozanne, J. L. (2011). Socialization into consumer culture: Hunters learning to be men. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, *14*(4), 333–360.

Marks, S. A. (1991). *Southern hunting in black and white: Nature, history, and ritual in a Carolina community*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Martin, D. S., Murray, D., O'Neill, M. A., MacCarthy, M., & Gogue, J. (2014). Target shooting as a serious leisure pursuit—An exploratory study of the motivations driving participant engagement. *World Leisure Journal*, *56*(3), 204–219.

McCaughey, M. (1997). *Real knockouts: The physical feminism of women's self-defense*. New York: NYU Press.

Melzer, S. (2009). *Gun crusaders: The NRA's culture war*. New York: NYU Press.

Murray, D. W., Martin, D., O'Neill, M., & Jason Gouge, T. (2015). Serious leisure: The sport of target shooting and leisure satisfaction. *Sport in Society*, *19*(7), 891–905.

Newport, F. (2015). Majority say more concealed weapons would make U.S. safer. http://www.gallup.com/poll/186263/majority-say-concealed-weapons-safer.aspx. Retrieved 19 October 2016.

Olmsted, A. D. (1988). Morally controversial leisure: The social world of gun collectors. *Symbolic Interaction*, *11*(2), 277–287.

Patrick, B. A. (2009). *Rise of the anti-media: In-forming America's concealed weapon carry movement*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Pew Research Center (2013). Why own a gun? Protection is now top reason. http://www.people-press.org/2013/03/12/why-own-a-gun-protection-is-now-top-reason/. Retrieved 19 October 2016.

Shapira, H. (2013). *Waiting for José: The minutemen's pursuit of America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Stebbins, R. A. (2001). Serious leisure. *Society*, *38*(4), 53–57.

Stenross, B. (1990). Turning vices into virtues: The dignifying accounts of gun avocationists. In C. R. Sanders (Ed.), *Marginal conventions: Popular culture, mass media and social deviance* (pp. 56–64). Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

Stenross, B. (1994). Aesthetes in the marketplace: Collectors in the gun business. *Qualitative Sociology*, *17*(1), 29–42.

Stroud, A. (2016). *Good guys with guns: The appeal and consequences of concealed carry*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Taylor, J. D. (2009). *American gun culture: Collectors, shows, and the story of the gun*. El Paso, TX: LFB Scholarly Publishing.

Thompson, J. A., & Stidham, R. (2010). Packing heat in the tar heel state: A county-level assessment of concealed carry permits. *Criminal Justice Review*, *35*(1), 52–66.

Tonso, W. R. (1982). *Gun and society: The social and existential roots of American attachment to firearms*. Washington, DC: University Press of America.

Winkler, A. (2011). *Gunfight: The battle over the right to bear arms in America*. New York: Norton.

Wright, J. D. (1995). Ten essential observations on guns in America. *Society*, *32*(3), 63–68.

Wright, J. D., Rossi, P. H., & Daly, K. (1983). *Under the gun: Weapons, crime, and violence in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction.

David Yamane is Professor of Sociology at Wake Forest University. He is author or editor of seven books, mostly in the sociology of religion. In a recent departure from his previous work, Yamane has begun studying guns, particularly the rise of Gun Culture 2.0—the emerging culture of armed citizenship in the United States. He blogs at GunCulture2point0.com.

How to cite this article: Yamane D. The sociology of U.S. gun culture. *Sociology Compass*. 2017;11:e12497. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12497