

EXPLORING WOMEN, GUN OWNERSHIP, AND GENDER

by

CINDY WHITNEY

B.A., Adams State College, 1992
M.S., Mankato State University, 1997

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

How and why individuals choose to become gun owners is a complicated issue. Historically, in America, firearms have been associated with patriotism, citizenship, and freedom. Also, historically, much of the research on gun owners has primarily focused on males. Despite the fact that many women do, indeed, own firearms; women, even today, are still often considered an anomaly when it comes to owning guns and participating in the shooting sports. This research utilized an historical analysis, direct interviews with female gun owners, and participation-observation at National Rifle Association (NRA) sponsored Women on Target events, to explore and examine how and why women become owners; as well as how they negotiate the often masculine world of the shooting sports. The data is analyzed through a gender lens, primarily focusing on doing gender, othering, and boundary maintenance. Findings show that firearms ownership is a complex issue and that stereotypical gender beliefs strongly influences the interaction and images of men and women shooters alike.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
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Table of Contents

List of Tables	viii
Acknowledgements.....	ix
Chapter 1 - Introduction.....	1
Purpose of the Research.....	6
Examining Shooting Through A Gender Lens	8
Theories of Gun Ownership.....	18
Overview of Methodology.....	21
Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature	23
General Theories of Gun Ownership	23
Gun Subcultures and Types of Shooting/Shooters	28
Fear, Victimization and Likelihood of Ownership based on Gender	31
Self-Defense: Defensive Gun Ownership and Defensive Gun Use.....	41
The Gun Stock in the U.S. – Who Owns Guns?.....	45
Gun Ownership Rates in the United States.....	48
The Gender Gap in Reporting Gun Ownership	54
Gun Control and Regulation.....	55
Suicide, Homicide, and Assault.....	57
The National Rifle Association and Women	59
Women on Target	62
Popular Culture, the Media, and Representations of Women’s Fear.....	62
Gun Magazines for Women	63
Deconstructing Stayin’ Alive: Armed and Female in an Unsafe World.....	66
Fear and Self-Protection in the Popular Literature	74
Chapter 3 - Research Methods.....	80
Interviews and Participant Observation.....	81
Sample Selection.....	81
Location Characteristics.....	84
The Interviews	85

Transcribing, Analyzing, and Coding.....	88
Demographics.....	89
Historical Analysis of Women Shooters.....	91
Women on the Frontier.....	92
Annie Oakley and Lillian Smith.....	93
Calamity Jane.....	97
Osa Johnson.....	99
Plinky Topperwein.....	100
Wartime Women.....	101
Armed Women Criminals: Belle Starr, And Bonnie Parker.....	102
Chapter 4 - Analysis.....	105
First Contact/First Time Shooting.....	105
Becoming Owners.....	111
Protection and Alone Women.....	121
Abused Women – Protection from Others.....	122
Alone Women – Armed by Others.....	124
Training: Men as Experts.....	126
Shooting with Men.....	132
Technique, Skill and Expertise.....	134
Experiences Shooting: Women on the Shooting Range.....	141
Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion.....	143
References.....	153
Appendix A - Informed Consent.....	165
Appendix B - Interview Schedule.....	167
Appendix C - Respondent sheet for Demographic Information (to be filled out by Interviewer).....	169

List of Tables

Table 3-1 Education	89
Table 3-2 Types of Shooters	90
Table 3-3 Occupations	90

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

I grew up shooting. As a child my dad would take the whole family, my mom, my older brother, and I, out to the dump where he would dig through the trash to find bottles for us to shoot at. My mother never shot, but would sit on the tailgate and cheer us on. My brother and I both started with BB guns, then progressed to a .22 long rifle, and then finally to a .20 gauge shotgun. I distinctly remember the first time I fired a shotgun. I was twelve years old and my brother has just received a .20 gauge for his seventeenth birthday; we were out at the dump shooting at sporting clays that my dad would throw up with a handheld thrower. My brother was firing shot after shot and missing every single clay my dad threw up in the air. I finally convinced him to let me have a turn. As my dad threw up the clay I pulled the shotgun up to my shoulder and fired. I smoked it. From that instant on, I was hooked.

As the above story attests, I was introduced to shooting long before I became enthusiastic about it. I enjoyed shooting bottles with the .22 rifle, and enjoyed watching the bottles explode when I hit them. It was not until the day I picked up that shotgun, however, that I became truly hooked. The sense of satisfaction I felt when the clay pigeon exploded was powerful. The pride I felt from my mom and dad even more so. I spent the next several years shooting sporting clays every Sunday afternoon and reloading shells every Saturday afternoon.

It also never occurred to me to keep a loaded gun handy until I was 21 and about to go camping alone for the first time. As I was leaving the house my dad handed me a .357 revolver to take with me for protection. I had never fired this gun, I'm not sure I had

even touched it prior to that day. When I pointed this out he shrugged off my concern with a “you’ll be fine, you know what you’re doing” and then made sure to tell me to shoot the bear that we was *sure* was going to get into my tent until he was dead.

I got away from shooting around my sophomore year of college, although I still considered myself a shooter and owned my own .20 gauge by then (a birthday present) although I never stopped considering myself a shooter or someone competent and comfortable around firearms. I did not think about firearms again until I was in my mid-thirties and searching for a dissertation topic. A random conversation with an Anthropology professor at K-State starting me down this path. At the onset of this research it had never occurred to me that guns were such a hot button issue. In fact, I was unaware when I began the research that Republicans were more likely to own firearms than Democrats. As a Democrat, who also happened to own a gun (even though it hadn’t been fired in well over 15 years) I considered myself a normal, average, gun carrying American. I soon realized the subject of guns, gun ownership, and shooting in general was much more complex and convoluted than I had ever imagined.

A simple images search on Google for “Women and Guns” brings up the following images in order: a woman lying in the grass holding an assault rifle, a woman in a tank top holding an assault rifle, and a woman in a bikini, yes, also holding an assault rifle. Using the same search engine but substituting “men” for women brings up three men wearing camouflage and holding what look to be 30.06 rifles, an image of James Bond holding his Walter PPK, and an image of another male with his semi-automatic pistol pointed towards the camera. If one knew absolutely nothing of American firearm

culture the perception might be that women use assault rifles while men use pistols and hunting rifles.

These images, while seemingly innocent, demonstrate a deeper issue when it comes to the topic of guns and gun ownership. There is nothing, by nature that should separate men and women when it comes to guns and gun ownership. At their base level guns are simply a tool, some bigger, some smaller, and some more powerful than others. However, the perception of a woman with a gun still appears to be an anomaly.

Similar to other masculine dominated domains, (i.e. policing, the military, and the ‘hard’ sciences), gun ownership reflects unwritten and often unspoken gender arrangements in society. If we examine gender using *only* a simplified male/female dichotomy, the general public typically imagines men as filling the roles of police officers, military personnel, engineers, and people who shoot guns, to name just a few. Unfortunately, even in this day and age those occupations and hobbies are often perceived as transgressing gender norms for women.

This research adds to the existing literature by looking at gun ownership in general, and how and why women become gun owners in particular. Much of the existing literature focuses primarily on men, with women as an afterthought. If women become the primary focus, the argument often revolves around women becoming owners out of a sense of fear or need for protection (Arthur, 1994; Bankston, Thompson, Jenkins, & Forsyth, 1990; Blair & Hyatt, 1995; Bugg & Yang, 2004; Casey, 1995; Hill, Howell, & Driver, 1985; Hoffman, 2014; Kelly, 2004; Kendy, 2014; Ludwig & Smith, 1998; Ludwig, 2000; Marciniak & Loftin, 1991; Marks & Stokes, 1976; May, Rayder, & Goodrum, 2010; McDowell, 1995; Owens, 2013; Quigley, 1995; Quigley 2005; Sheley,

Body, & Wright, 1994; Smith, 2015, Stanko, 1995; Stange, 2000; Vogt, 2007; Young, 1982; Young, 1986). This research will fill the void that exists about *how* women shooters become owners, not necessarily *why* they become owners, although that is important as well. Historically, male ownership of firearms has not been questioned; the same is not necessarily true for women.

We often hear news reports regarding male use of firearms; often taking the form of self-defense or crime reports. Consider, for example, the Charlotte, N.C. headline from August 13, 2015: “CMPD: Resident shoots intruder in W. Charlotte” (<http://www.wcnc.com/story/news/crime/2015/08/12/cmpd-resident-shoots-intruder-in-w-charlotte/31587639/>). The heading on the Facebook article is: “Resident defends himself against multiple intruders” (Rocky Mountain Gun Owners – Official Page). However, women also use firearms in many of the same ways men do, as sport, self-defense, employment (police officer, military personnel), or criminal activity, with the exception of mass shootings. Looking at a history of mass shootings from 1999 through 2013, none of them, have been committed by women (<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/mass-shootings-central-american-history-article-1.1457514>). One may remember Amy Bishop who fired upon her colleagues after being denied tenure. This did not fall under the definition of mass murder as defined by the FBI, which designates a mass murder as four or more people in one location at one time. Amy Bishop killed three of her colleagues (<https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/serial-murder/serial-murder-1>; http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/13/us/13alabama.html?_r=0). Annie Oakley and Calamity Jane are probably two of the most well-known women shooters in United States

history. Some lesser well known, but equally important, include Lillian Smith, Plinky Topperwein, Bonnie Parker, Belle Starr, Pauline Pushman, and Loretta Velasquez. Each of these women is important in her own right. Annie Oakley, often called Little Miss Sure Shot, was the first famous female shooter in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Calamity Jane is perhaps more infamous than famous. Lillian Smith was a lesser known member of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, but history indicates she may have been an even better shooter than Annie Oakley. Plinky Topperwein was a competitive shooter in the 1900s (Browder, 2006). Bonnie Parker, of Bonnie and Clyde fame, is probably one of the most notorious women criminals, along with Belle Starr (Browder, 2006; Kelly, 2004). Pauline Pushman and Loretta Velasquez were wartime women, women who dressed as men in order to join the armed forces (Browder, 2006).

With this history in place, what makes women shooters so unique? There are very few resources, outside of the fear-based literature, that specifically focus on the subject of women and gun ownership. Paxton Quigley (1989; 1995; 2005), for example, has published several readily available, easily readable, pop culture books on the importance of women owning firearms for self-protection. Vogt (2007) in *See Sally Kick Ass: A Woman's Guide to Personal Safety* also advocates firearm ownership for self-protection for women; as well as pepper spray and self-defense courses. From an academic perspective, Stanko (1995) examines women's fear of crime and how government advice to protect themselves often increases women's fear. The majority of the information that is available is often focused on the unique, the extreme, or women's fear. None of these examine how and why women choose to become gun owners; or, as gun owners how they are the same or different from men who choose to own firearms.

Of those resources that are available, both in popular culture and academic journals, the majority of articles involving firearms research typically examine crime rates, homicide specifically. If women are mentioned in these articles it is typically in connection to women as victims, either as crime victims, suicide victims, or victims of their own ineptitude. Consider, for example, the following news story from the December 31, 2014 issue of USA Today: “Toddler reaches into purse and gun goes off, killing mom” (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/12/30/woman-shot-with-own-gun/21062089/>). Other topics involving women and firearms in academic journals revolve around children and firearms, and mothering Blair & Hyatt, 1995; Browder, 2006; Casey, 1995; Hemenway, 2011; Hill, Howell, & Driver, 1985; Kelly, 2004; Metaksa, 1997; Siegel, Ross, & King, 2013; Thomas, Miller, & Murphy, 2008; Vacha & Mclaughlin, 2004; Vogt, 2007). This research looks specifically at women gun owners and women who shoot, their pathways to ownership, and their experiences as women in a stereotypically male dominated arena.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to address a void in the existing research about how and why women choose to become gun owners or shooters; someone who shoots guns. What are their pathways to ownership, how did they decide to become a shooter or owner, and what have their experiences been like? By primarily interviewing *everyday women*, i.e. women who do not use a gun as part of their profession (military or police), who shoot or own firearms, this research will examine the motivations and reasons behind this interest. By looking at who first took them shooting or taught them to shoot, how they obtained their first firearm, what kind of training they have, what type of

shooting they do (sport, hunting, protection, etc.), and the experiences they have had while shooting, the goal is to identify gendered pathways to ownership as well as how women shooters do gender. In other words, what role do men play in women becoming shooters and how do women negotiate gender norms in such a way that they can be gun owners without threatening their femininity or the masculine domain of the sport.

Women shooters, similar to women in other male dominated activities arenas, may be seen as challenging a gender norm. Shooting is often perceived as a masculine domain, as something “guys do with other guys.” Prior research primarily focuses on men when it comes to the subject of gun ownership (Cao, Cullen, and Link, 1997; Dixon and Lizotte, 1987; Lizotte and Bordua, 1980; Ludwig, 2000; Marciniak and Loftin, 1991; McDowell and Loftin, 1983; McDowell, 1995; Wright and Marston, 1975; Wyant and Taylor, 2007). The empirical research which includes information about women and guns examines single or alone women and gun ownership (Athur, 1994), fear of crime and guns for self-defense (Bankston, Thomsons, Jenkins, and Forsyth, 1990; Hill, Howell, and Driver, 1985; Ludwig, Cook, and Smith, 1998; McDowell, 1995); and how guns are marketed to women; or, more accurately, whether guns *should* be marketed to women (Blair and Hyatt, 1995). Sheley, Body, and Wright (1994) examined women and handguns in general, as did Bugg and Yang (2004) who examined trends in women’s gun ownership. What these researchers did not necessarily examine was women’s pathways to ownership. While they indicate that most women become owners or shoot guns because of men in their lives, that is typically not the primary focus of the research. In truth, it is relatively rare that women are the sole focus when it comes to empirical research on gun ownership

Research also indicates that women who engage in male dominated activities, or activities perceived to be directed towards males, often negotiate their status in these settings by focusing on maintaining their femininity (Ezzell, 2009; George, 2005; Kohn, 2005; Riley and Etulain, 2003). Kohn (2005), for example, describes dressing up in evening wear with her significant other to go shooting at a range. George (2005) describes how women soccer players attempt to control the amount of muscle they build in their legs out of fear that legs that are too muscular will not be attractive to members of the opposite sex. These studies highlight the ways women do gender in daily activities, while keeping in mind that doing gender is something that is done in context. The way someone performs gender may vary based on location, who they are with, what activity they are engaged in, and what other people around them are doing (Ridgeway, 2009). Women shooters, similar to women in other stereotypically male dominated fields such as, policing, engineering, fire-fighting, and the military, are often subject to strict performance management, regardless of their skill and expertise.

Examining Shooting Through A Gender Lens

Doing gender focuses on gender as an accomplishment that occurs through interaction. By placing gender in the realm of an accomplishment, as something that occurs through interaction with other people, West and Zimmerman (1987) redefined gender as something people “do” rather than something that they are, or something inherent in the individual. Gender, however, does not seem to be separated from sex category. Gender is an accomplishment and describes the expected behavior associated with being a particular sex. The prevailing societal belief seems to be that one’s biological sex should match ones gender. A current example of this would be Caitlyn Jenner. Caitlyn Jenner is

currently going through sex reassignment surgery so that her biological sex will match her gender. In this study, the focus will be on the dichotomous categories of male and female as none of the participants identified as transgender. In the shooting sports, men are often perceived of as the normative version of what a shooter or gun owner *should* be, while women shooters are often seen as an anomaly. Regardless of the history of women shooters in the United States it is still considered somewhat outside of the norm for a woman to be a gun owner or shooter.

It is these gendered expectations that are often inherent in structured institutions, or what Acker (1990) calls “gendered organizations.” People are expected to behave in particular ways, in particular situations, based on the presumed social rules and norms of that social arena. Acker (1990) states that “organizations are one arena in which widely disseminated cultural images of gender are invented and reproduced” (p. 140). It is through these that we develop cultural images and expected of masculinity and femininity. The NRA, for example, could be described as a masculine organization. It was not until the late 1990s when the NRA made a concerted effort to get women involved in the shooting sports, and this was primarily because of declining gun sales. The NRA assumed that as “keepers of the home” women would be the ones who would allow their children to get involved in the shooting sports.

Acker (1990) also states, “some aspects of individual gender identity, perhaps particularly masculinity, are also products of the organizational processes and pressures” (p. 149). In this sense, one way for men to maintain their masculine identity and presence in the NRA is through focusing women’s participation around vulnerability and victimology through development of Refuse to Be a Victim courses, which focus on

teaching women how to avoid being victims of assault by strangers when alone. Another way to do this is by being the primary instructors at Women on Target events. By being the disseminators of information, they are maintaining their position of authority in the organization, and might also be doing what Ezell (1009) refers to as boundary maintenance. Boundary maintenance, “allows members of the dominant group to hoard resources” (p. 123). By only allowing women access to certain parts of the shooting world (i.e. as vulnerable victims) it could be perceived that the dominant group is, in a sense, lowering a boundary, but still maintaining primary control of the boundaries (Risman, 2004).

Ridgeway and Correll (2004) examine gender from a social relational context. The authors define gender as “an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference” (p. 510). By focusing on the difference between men and women, Ridgeway and Correll examine how power differences occur in social relational contexts. “Social relational contexts comprise any situation in which individuals define themselves in relation to others in order to act” (p. 511). Individuals are often constrained in structural/social situations to behave in particular and often gender appropriate ways. The authors assert that in these situations, individuals must first “define themselves in relation to those others to anticipate and manage the situation” (p. 512). In terms of shooting, the social relational context is often the shooting range. As sex category is often the first salient way individuals are categorized, women shooters often stand out like the proverbial sore thumb on the range since they are often the minority. By recognizing their ‘femaleness’ in contrast to the

‘maleness’ of the range they must adapt, anticipate, and manage the situation. This is often done by deferring to the gendered stereotypes of men as better and more natural shooters; as such, men are the dominant group on the range, regardless of skill level.

Ridgeway and Correll (2004) examine cultural beliefs in terms of status and hierarchy. They argue that “men are viewed as more status worthy and competent overall and more competent at things that ‘count most’ (e.g. instrumental rationality). Women are seen as less competent in general but ‘nicer’ and better at communal tasks” (p. 513).

When individuals enter situations

that require them to define themselves in relation to others, their default expectation is that others will treat them according to hegemonic gender beliefs.

Given the status distinction contained in hegemonic gender beliefs, then, men and women enter most social relational contexts expecting that others believe that men are generally more competent than women. (p. 513-514).

This appears to be particularly in true in stereotypically culturally defined masculine activities, such as shooting.

Ridgeway and Correll (2004) begin their theory by first looking at sex category. As individuals, we are often first categorized and judged by our sex category. As such, we often construct our appearance in such a way that we are easily recognized as belonging to the sex category we claim for ourselves. Along with appearance, individuals are also constrained by behavioral expectations based on sex categorization. In other words, we expect a female teacher to look and behave differently than a male teacher based on culturally scripted stereotypical norms about males and females. Identifying specific behavior and attributes based on sex category leads into gender expectations.

Historically, gender has been used in a simplified male = masculine, female = feminine dichotomy.

Ridgeway and Correll (2004) argue that “Gender also becomes effectively salient in contexts that are gender typed in that the stereotypic traits and abilities of one gender or the other are culturally linked to the activities that are central to the context.” Thus, if shooting and firearms ownership is culturally defined as masculine then women who attempt to enter the realm shooting are often constrained by the structural context already in place. This can be seen in terms of competency. “When hegemonic gender beliefs are already salient in a situation, hierarchical presumptions about men’s greater status and competence becomes salient for participants, along with assumptions about men’s and women’s different traits and skills” (p. 517).

A consequence of “status-based expectations for competence is that they affect people’s behaviors and evaluations in self-fulfilling ways” (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004, p. 518). Those who do not “belong”, or who are not expected to be competent, often have lower performance expectations for themselves and defer to those with status. “Men are advantaged in such contexts not only by the assumptions about their general competence but also by presumptions about their specific gender skills.” (p. 519). Essentially, gender beliefs about ability and competence can create a double-standard.

Consequently, even when men and women perform objectively similarly in contexts in which hegemonic beliefs are salient, the men are likely to be judged by themselves and others as having somewhat more ability at the task than the women. To be judged equally able, the women may have to actually have to perform better than the men. (p. 519).

Consider the case of Annie Oakley and Frank Butler. It was only when Annie beat Frank in a shooting competition that she was allowed to perform in the Wild West Show. This is also especially true in stereotypically male-dominated arenas such as policing, shooting, and the military. Women have been serving in the military, in some form or the other, for the past 400 years (Hoffman, 2014; Browder 2006). “Disguised as men, some four hundred women, three of them African-American, volunteered for and served in the American Civil War” (Kelly, 2004, p. 49). However, it was not until 2013 that the U.S. military lifted a ban on female soldiers serving in combat roles. As reported in The Guardian,

Pentagon Defence Secretary Leon Panetta and General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that women had already proved themselves in action on America's battlefields and the move was simply a way of catching up with reality. (Harris, Friday 25 January 2013)

However, according to Time magazine article, Robert Maginnis,

a retired Army lieutenant colonel and West Point graduate...spells out what he sees as the dangers of opening combat billet to women in his new book, *Deadly Consequences: How Cowards are Pushing Women into Combat*. His key concern is that, under political pressure, the military will ease its standards, resulting in a less-capable force. (Thompson, July 25th, 2013).

It is obvious that women who choose to enter combat roles will be facing opposition based on presumptions about their specific gender skills. As Ridgeway and Correll point out, “individual lives are lived through multiple, repeating, social-relational contexts” (p. 520). Here are woman who want and are willing to serve their country in combat roles,

yet the immediate response by a male in a leadership position is that this will result in a less-capable force. In this sense he is presuming that being female is equated to less competent.

Unfortunately, women soldiers often experience the same kind of treatment from others upon returning home after serving. Hoffman (2014), in a powerful story for the New York Times article begins with the following vignette:

The injury wasn't new, and neither was the insult. Rebecca, a combat veteran of two tours of duty, had been waiting at the V.A. hospital for close to an hour when the office manager asked if she was there to pick up her husband. (April 1, 2014)

This is a classic example of how, as individuals, we live our lives in structured settings; or what Ridgeway and Correll refer to as social-relational contexts. Military is still perceived as male, just as shooting is still perceived as male. There is nothing, by nature, that indicates that men should be better in the military, in combat roles, or as shooters than women, yet clearly this belief still remains. This research provides another example of how unspoken gender arrangements still influence individual lives.

In a similar vein, but using different language than Ridgeway and Correll, Risman (2004) argues that "we need to conceptualize gender as a social structure, and by doing so, we can analyze the ways in which gender is embedded at the individual, interactional, and institutional dimensions of our society" (p. 446). Citing Lorber (1994), Risman emphasizes Lorber's point that "gender difference is primarily a way to justify sexual stratification" (p. 430). By emphasizing difference, inequality can be justified. According to Lorber, this typically occurs by socially constructing women to be subordinate to men

(Risman, 2004). The comments by retired Army lieutenant colonel Robert Maginnis reflect this perfectly.

Risman (2004), points out that “we must pay close attention to what men do to preserve their power and privilege” (p. 438). One way this occurs is through the process of “othering” which is where the dominant group treats the subordinate group in ways that separate and devalue them, which creates “devalued statuses and expectations” (p. 438). Up until 2013, this occurred in the military by keeping women out of combat roles. Since advancement in the military often begins with the infantry it will, perhaps, allow women to rise in the ranks; or at least be given the opportunity for career advancement. In shooting, one of the ways this may occur may be through the making and selling of “women’s guns.” These guns, presumably designed for smaller hands, are smaller and more lightweight than guns that men typically use. A consequence of a smaller and lighter gun is that they less powerful and less accurate. As such, someone shooting this type of firearm may not be able to shoot as far or be as accurate, which may lower expectations by others and lower their status as a shooter. Another way othering happens in shooting is through misinformation and lack of proper training. Risman (2004) gives an example of how othering happens through politeness. “Men effectively do this in subversive ways through ‘politeness’ norms, which construct women as ‘others’ in need of special favors, such as protection” (p. 438). Another manner in which othering could occur in shooting is through the arming of women in the absence of men. A man giving a woman a gun to protect herself during his absence could be interpreted as othering in the sense that he is constructing her being alone as being helpless and in need of protection, symbolically provided by him through the presentation of a gun.

Ezell (2009) added to the “othering” literature in his study of rugby girls. Ezell focused primarily on “defensive othering”, by which he means “subordinates distancing themselves from other subordinates and reinforcing the legitimacy of a devalued identity in the process” (p. 111). Ezell argues that this happens two ways. First, by identifying with dominants, “identifying with the values associated with the dominant group members”; and secondly, by engaging in “normative identification (identifying with the normative values prescribed by dominants for subordinated group members)” p. 112. Finally, Ezell (2009) looks at how those in subordinated groups deflect stigma by propping up dominants, or “reinforcing the idea that dominant group members are, and should be, dominant” (p. 112). The players in this study were engaging in these actions to avoid being stigmatized in sexist and homophobic ways.

By identifying with dominant group members, Ezell describes how members of a female rugby team essentially act like dominants (men) by putting themselves squarely in positions of authority, power, and prestige, often at the expense of other women rugby players at other schools. The way the respondents did this was by focusing on femininity while doing masculinity. In other words, the players made a concerted effort to focus on being very feminine off the field, but very aggressive on the field. In this sense they were able to display toughness in an appropriate, albeit temporary, setting, and then revert back to what they considered appropriate female behavior.

Identifying with dominants through defense othering is a way that members of subordinate groups may engage in “reinforcing the power of stigmatizing labels by arguing that the label is true for other members of their social category, but not for themselves” (Ezell, 2009, p. 114). One of the ways the women in Ezell’s study

engaged in defensive othering was by seeing themselves as unique, special, and different. They were not like other women rugby players, they were straight, attractive, but still tough players. In fact, they were top of their league. This status gave them power over other teams, which they used to establish themselves as dominant. However, the players were careful not to challenge the dominance of the players on the male rugby team and went out of their way to make themselves less threatening by focusing on their femininity off the field. Ezell refers to this as wanting to be part of the dominant group, but seeking approval from the oppressor class. The players in this study did this by “identifying with dominants *and* dis-identifying with women outside of their team” (p. 115). In other words, “We’re not like those other women” As Myers (2002) states, “Gender inequality is reproduced when individual actors—even those with less institutionalized power—enforce the gendered rules” (p. 14).

Normative identification involves acting the way the subordinate group is expected to act, based on the normative values and norm established by the dominant group. This allows the subordinate group a way to access the dominant group without threatening their authority. Ezell (2009) used the term “heterosexy image” to explain how the rugby girls negotiated this. “The players essentialized their femininity and heterosexuality, claiming them as natural expressions of their selves” (p. 118). This term could also be applied to Annie Oakley, Paxton Quigley, and Abigail Kohn. All of these women, who were/are accomplished shooters, also focused on presenting an idealized feminine image while engaged in what might still be considered a masculine pursuit. The following theories on gun ownership examine just how specifically a masculine pursuit shooting appears to be.

Theories of Gun Ownership

Research on gun ownership has been conducted for decades. The typical profile of a gun owner identifies middle-class men, living in the South, who are Protestant, Republican, and most likely reside in a rural area (Cao et al, 1997; Celinska, 2007; Dixon and Lizotte, 1987; Hepburn, Miller, Azrael, and Hemenway, 2007; Lizotte and Bordua, 1980; Ludwig, 2000; Marciniak and Loftin, 1991; Saad, 2011; Sheley et al, 1994; Wright and Marston, 1975; Young, 1985). The primary areas of research are focused on ownership, crime, fear, protection, and gun control and regulation. Very few of these include women in their analysis, thus contributing to the dearth of knowledge about women and gun ownership.

Cao, Cullen and Link (1997) identified six main explanations for gun ownership: economic resources, socialization, fear and victimization, fear and loathing, collective security, and conservative ideology. The economic resources explanation looked at guns as an expensive item only available to those who can afford them. The socialization explanation examined gun ownership from a social learning perspective, “people possess firearms if they have been in social situations in which they have learned pro-gun values and have been trained to use weapons” (p. 630). The fear and victimization explanation looked at firearm ownership as a response to real or perceived threat of crime. The fear and loathing hypothesis was more racially motivated. Fear was linked to ‘fear of crime, violence, and civil disorder’ and loathing to “general racial prejudice, perceptions that minorities are a dangerous population, and proximity to minorities” (p. 631). Bankston, Thompson, Jenkins, and Forsyth (1990) also discussed fear and loathing in terms of racism building on Young’s (1987) work. “His findings indicate that racial prejudice interacts with aggressive attitudes to produce higher levels of ownership” (p. 298).

Collective security extends the fear and loathing hypothesis and describes ownership based on lack of belief, once again real or perceived, in the criminal justice system. Gun ownership thus becomes a way to protect oneself against crime. Finally, conservative ideology was linked to gun ownership based on bivariate research which indicated gun ownership by political conservatives is more likely than gun ownership by liberals or moderates. However, when multivariate analysis was used “political ideology has been a weak predictor of gun ownership. There seems to be more support for a link between firearm possession and conservative crime ideology (that is, punitiveness toward offenders), but the studies are limited” (Cao et al, 1997 p. 632).

When discussing explanations of ownership, it is also important to distinguish between reasons for ownership. Most studies only consider two categories: owners versus non-owners. Cao et al., (1997) indicated that “in reality three categories are of theoretical interest: ownership for protection, ownership for sport use, and non-ownership” (p. 639). Among gun owners, both protective and sport, it appears that socialization is the key explanation for ownership. Sex plays a part as well. According to Cao et al., (1997), “households composed of males had higher levels of gun ownership” (p. 367). In addition, both sport and protective gun ownership are both positively related to being male. Women, in much of the gun research, are simply not considered.

Criminological theories take two divergent paths. The first path looks at gun ownership by women in terms of victimization, their own victimization that is. It is assumed that women who own firearms are increasing their chances of victimization by putting themselves in harm’s way (Branas, Richmond, Culhane, Have, and Wiebe, 2009; Cummings, Keopsell, Grossman, Savarino, and Thompson, 1997; Felson and Pare,

2010; Hemenway, 2011; Hill, Howell, and Driver, 1985; Marks and Stokes, 1976; Siegel, Ross, King III, 2013; Siegel, Negussie, Vanture, Pieskunas, Ross, and King III, 2014; Vacha and McLaughlin, 2004). This potential harm comes from two directions. Women will either harm themselves because they now possess deadly weapons that they do not know how to handle. Or, women will be harmed because the firearm will be taken away from them by the person trying to harm them, which will result in the firearm being used against them. These approaches assume that women are inept when it comes to the use of firearms; however, men could have a gun taken away from them just as easily as a gun could be taken from a woman. Research exists which also supports the risk for victimization by gun ownership in general, regardless of sex (Adams, 1996; Bangladore and Messerli, 2013; Black and Nagin, 1998; Branas et al, 2009; Cummings et al, 1997; Duggan, 2001; Hemenway, 2011; Miller and Hemenway, 2008; Sigel et al, 2013; Siegel et al, 2014; van Kesteren, 2013; Wallace, 2015; Whitehead and Langworthy, 1989). In addition, history does not necessarily support this argument. Both women and men on the plains and prairie often used firearms for a variety of reasons, including protection and food provisions. In this situation, firearms were simply another tool to be used (Riley and Etulain, 1997, 2003; Riley, 1981a, 1984b, 1988c).

Much of the gun ownership literature focuses on women becoming gun owners through fear of crime and victimization. One method used to measure fear of crime is by asking respondents if there are areas in their neighborhood where they are afraid to walk at night (Hill, Howell, and Driver, 1985). Hill et al., (1985) find that “females, residents of large cities, Southerners, older adults, and people of lower income report the greatest fear of walking alone at night in their neighborhood” (p. 545-549). Ironically, while this

may indicate fear of crime, it does not necessarily indicate protective handgun ownership. In fact, this study finds that protective handgun ownership is linked more to men who indicate fear of victimization, not women.

Overview of Methodology

This research uses fieldwork, participant observation, an historical analysis of iconic women shooters, and semi-structured, in-depth interviews to examine the pathways and experiences of women shooters. The fieldwork includes participant observation in National Rifle Association sponsored Women on Target events, as well as Concealed Carry Courses. Qualitative research is valuable for this type of research because it allows the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge of a hard to access population. Historical analysis is also very applicable since the lens through which women are viewed are grounded in historical connotations of perceptions of womanhood. The interviews consisted of a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit information regarding the participant's experiences with shooting. Chapter Three explains the two primary areas where interviews and field work were conducted.

Two basic questions guided this research:

- First, how do women specifically become gun owners? Do men and women become owners through different pathways? What makes them become shooters, versus just owners? How does this fit into their identity?
- Secondly, how do women shooters do gender?

Research indicates that when women transgress into male dominated activities they must perform gender in a specific fashion in order to be accepted (Ezell, 2009; George, 2005). Oftentimes, this is not a clear cut process. The same is often true for

women shooters. As long as they don't "cross the line" so to speak into the male world of shooting they are accepted. Barbara, for example, gave the example of shooting in the military. "...so often in the service, and I think in many things, it's alright if the women do as well as the men almost, but not better than them." She then goes on to say, "And in this [shooting] I could always do better. But you have to not make a big deal of it. What you do is train others" (Barbara).

The historical analysis examines woman shooters through the lens of time, space, and place. Using historic woman shooters, one can examine perceptions of womanhood and how these women either maintained or transgressed traditional perceptions of womanhood of the time.

Chapter two of this dissertation will explore the gun ownership literature, with a particular focus on the characteristics of the typical gun owners. The topic of gun control and regulation will be discussed briefly, as will other public health issues revolving around firearms such as homicide, suicide, and assault. Chapter three details the research methodology of this study. This section includes information on how respondents were located, the types of locations where data was collected, the two primary areas of data collection, the qualitative interview schedule, general demographic information of participants, as well as how the data was analyzed and coded.. Chapter four analyzes the interviews using doing gender and boundary maintenance as the primary theoretical frameworks. Chapter five incorporates discussion of the results and conclusions for future research.

Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

Few issues in America have the ability to divide the general public as that of gun ownership and gun control. Guns, often referred to as firearms or weapons depending on the perspective of the speaker, have sparked debate for decades. Debates range about who owns them, who should own them, who should not own them and whether or not gun control should be an issue. This chapter will focus on an overview of gun literature. A review of the gender literature regarding will begin in chapter three.

General Theories of Gun Ownership

In a 1975 article entitled *The Ownership of the Means of Destruction: Weapons in the United States*, Wright and Marston attempted to describe the characteristics of people who own guns. Using data from the 1973 General Social Survey they challenged the stereotype of the time that guns were primarily owned when the “white urban working class arms itself for battle with blacks, students or other dissident minority groups” (p. 95). Wright and Marston systematically reviewed the available data to determine who gun owners really are, and concluded that the evidence did not support the stereotype.

Comparing rural versus urban areas, Wright and Marston (1975) discovered that ‘weapons ownership’ was highest in rural areas versus big cities. The larger the city size, the smaller the rate of ownership. Comparing the South to the rest of the country, they also discovered a disproportionate rate of gun ownership in the South. One possibility for this was suggested by Killian (1970 as cited in Wright and Marston, 1975), “As the black revolution turned from non-violence to defensive violence, the black sections of Southern communities took on a new and menacing character for white southerners” (p.61). In other words, white fear of black violence may have been a motivation for gun

ownership. Wright and Marston agreed with this, they noted that whites are more likely to own a firearm than non-whites, but when looking at pistols only, this difference disappears.

In regards to religion, the differences between gun versus non-gun owners is again clear, more Protestants were likely to own firearms in 1973 than were Catholics or any other religious groups. Higher income and middle-educational groups were also more likely to own firearms. Wright and Marston developed two conclusions based on this information. First, most gun owners live in rural areas, not big cities. Second, more middle-class people are more likely to own a gun than members of the working class.

Politically, gun ownership is a hot topic; it is rare to see the right and the left coming together in any sort of consensus. Traditionally, right-wing politics have been perceived as supporting gun ownership and as resistant to any sort of control or regulation of firearms. On the other hand, left-wing politics are often seen as advocates of strict gun control and opposing the unrestricted sale of firearms. In essence, both groups take a single issue, crime, and approach it from dichotomous standpoints. The right promotes individual firearm ownership based on the ideology that an armed citizenship can better protect itself from crime. The left often arguing that limiting gun ownership will reduce crime since it will keep firearms out the hands of criminals.

Wright and Marston (1975) explained the relationship between status (class and income) and religion using a variety of cultural hypotheses. Their first step was to link gun ownership with an “American Ethos” or a way “the white Protestants and the upper-middle class affirm their commitment to the ‘American Way’” (p. 99). Kohn (2004) would agree with this statement since she related gun ownership, primarily among men,

as a sign of 'citizenship' in the United States. The second interpretation provided by Wright and Marston (1975) was that the upper-class is "insecure in their position and paranoid about their attacks upon it, and have armed themselves accordingly" (p. 99). Based on the stereotypes presented at the beginning of the article, it would not have been a huge leap to assume white fear of the lower class or racial minorities, which would have been consistent with that time period in the United States. The third and fourth interpretations presented by Wright and Marston were also related to Kohn's (2004) ideas of citizenship in that white Protestants may "see themselves as the true bearers of the 'Frontier tradition' and the 'spirit of the West' (Schrag, 1970:13ff as cited in Wright and Marston 1975); and, "may be uncommonly attached to the formal symbols of American democracy, in particular the 'right to keep and bear arms'" (p. 99). In this sense, upper-class, white, Protestant gun owners see themselves as true citizens of the United States who are simply arming themselves against those they perceive as less desirable.

Wright and Marston (1975) provided three social psychological theories of gun ownership by upper-middle class Protestants. First, gun ownership may simply be conspicuous consumption, a way to symbolize accomplishment or a 'rugged, manly, self-image" (p. 99). Second, it may also be a way to designate oneself as capable of defending self and family. Third, it may also be connected to a sense of "machismo" or what the authors consider the equivalent of 'tough talk' used in bars and taverns by the urban, working class (p. 99).

The final three interpretations of gun ownership by Wright and Marston revolved around income. More upper-class Protestants may own guns simply because they can afford it. Guns are fairly expensive items. In addition, recreational shooting sports,

(hunting, skeet, sporting clays, Cowboy Action Shooting, target) are often activities engaged in by those with the financial ability to support the hobby. Finally, those with more are more “likely to possess things thought worth ‘protecting,’ and therefore more likely to own the means of protection” (p. 99). This final interpretation implied protection of property; however, their earlier interpretation pointed to a fear of personal attack. Of course, this again varies with rural versus urban ownership.

Essentially, Wright and Marston were making the argument that people who are white, middle-class, southern, from a rural area and Protestant, were more likely to purchase firearms. Perhaps, too, this same subset of individuals was making a statement about citizenship and consumptive ability when purchasing guns. The glaring item missing here is the sex of the gun owner. They covered this very briefly by stating, “Most owners are men. . . Blacks are less likely to own guns than whites, in part because the black population is more urban. The likelihood of gun ownership increases with income and peaks in middle age” (Wright and Marston, 1975 p. 293). The fact that this is mentioned at the beginning of the statement, and very briefly, indicates that it is a common sense fact that most gun owners are men. Women, in essence, are being ignored.

Celinksa (2007) provided a slightly different explanation for ownership. Using a Durkheimian perspective, the author examined individualism and collectivism regarding attitudes towards gun ownership and control among American gun owners. In true Durkheimian fashion she, distinguished between societies characterized by mechanical solidarity, and those characterized by organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity, or “primitive” societies revolved around collectivity or cohesion among group members. The focus is not on the individual, but rather on the society as a whole. With the increase

of industrialization we began to see more a move towards organic solidarity, or a focus on the individual. Organic societies are characterized by independence and individualism, the needs of which often supersede those of the needs of the group. As Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) claimed, “Americans are deeply committed to individual rights and individual autonomy” (p. 63), nowhere is this more clear than the issue of gun ownership.

In addition to the notion of individualism, McDowell and Loftin (1983), and Young (1985) found an “inverse relationship between gun ownership and confidence in the ability of the police to provide protection” (Young, 1985 p. 476). This is linked to racial prejudice of whites towards blacks and “the crux of the theory that has been presented is that protective gun ownership is an aggressive response to crime that is conditioned by racial prejudice” (Young 1985 p. 476). In other words, those who are “highly prejudiced” and who “lack confidence in the police” are more likely to own guns than those who have faith in law enforcement and are less prejudiced.

Celinska (2007) used research by Wright and Marston (1975), Dixon and Lizotte (1987), and Lizotte and Bordua (1980) to describe the characteristics of gun owners. “Research suggests that legal gun owners are more likely to be white, male, and Protestant and from small towns and rural areas of the South” (p. 232). Gun owners are more likely to be married and Republican (Adams 1996), and ownership is highest among the middle-aged (T.W. Smith, 2001), and increases with age (Lizotte and Bordua, 1980). “The traits of the typical gun owner – White, male, Protestant, middle class, and Republican – are also associated with individualism” (Celinska, 2007 p. 232).

Perhaps one of the most used surveys researchers use to talk about ownership is the General Social Survey (GSS). The General Social Survey did not start asking if

respondents owned guns until 1980, and then skipped collecting information on gun ownership in both 1983 and 1986. General Social Survey data has a few limitations. First, it is difficult to determine specifically who in the household owns the firearm. Secondly, the GSS does not ask about reason for ownership, so it is unclear whether or not the firearm is owned for protective purposes or not. The GSS does allow “assessment of household gun ownership in general, household pistol ownership in particular, and personal gun ownership in general” (Sheley, Body, and Wright 1994 p. 222). At this point in time, it is not possible to specifically determine personal handgun ownership using GSS data alone.

A good portion of the available data still continues to be household data, rather than data on individual ownership. Household data simply indicates whether or not the respondents indicate that there is a gun in the household. One of the most comprehensive surveys conducted on gun ownership was by Cao, Cullen, and Link in 1997, which focused only on males and provided six explanations for ownership (economic resources, socialization, fear and victimization, fear and loathing, collective ownership, and conservative ideology). The majority of gun data about women focuses primarily on issues of protection, fear, and victimization, most often through readily available popular culture books such as: *Armed and Female in a Dangerous World*, and *See Sally Kick Ass*.

Gun Subcultures and Types of Shooting/Shooters

From an historical standpoint it is not easy to separate people who shoot, often referred to as shooters within the culture, into neat categories. Women and men on the American Frontier did not have separate guns used primarily for protection and other guns used primarily for hunting. Rather, the one to two firearms owned by the family were used

both for protection and hunting. In contemporary society it is very easy to differentiate between types of shooters. According to Lizotte and Bordua (1980) there are three basic reasons – sporting, protection, and criminal – for owning guns. Sport shooters encompass a wide variety of shooters including: target shooters, competitive shooters, historical reenactment groups, survivalists, and hunters. Protection can include self and/or home protection. Criminal shooters are not the subject of this study and will not be discussed.

Guns are purchased for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to: home protection, self-protection, hunting, competitive shooting, historical reenactment, and survival. These are typically lumped into two main categories: protection and sport. Specific types of firearms are also associated with these categories. In regards to home and self-protection, handguns are the typical firearm purchased. Hunting typically involves long-guns, rifles and shotguns. Regarding competitive, historical reenactment, and survival shooting, the guns are slightly more diverse; all three groups use both handguns and long guns with regularity. Historical reenactment shooters are more interested in the historical accuracy of their firearm, the pieces used must be authentic, or an authentic reproduction of a particular time period, usually the Old West. Survival shooters are often considered the most extreme. Not only do they use handguns, and long guns, they also often use automatic weapons.

Survivalist and Cowboy Action or Historical Reenactment shooters are unique subgroups of shooters. Survivalists take pleasure in militaristic type competitions in which ‘survival’ is a key element, this type of shooter is considered hardcore among the general shooting enthusiast. Historical Reenactment shooters often go to extremes in

terms of recreating the mythical “Old West.” Participants must dress the part, which means dresses and petticoats for women, and trousers and vests for men; and then compete in a variety of traditional shooting events. For example, one competition involves sitting on a ‘horse’ (imagine an adult-size rocking horse) and shooting at targets. Those who are actively involved even have outfits created that are hand-sewn so as to fit in with the time period being created, and adopt pseudonyms to reflect their status or desired persona. Abigail Kohn (2004), for example, took on the moniker of Abby Oakley.

Single Action Shooting Society (SASS) and Cowboy Action Shooting are accepted modes of shooting for women because they maintain historically normative traditional gender roles. “The Single Action Shooting Society is an international organization created to preserve and promote the sport of Cowboy Action Shooting” (<http://www.sassnet.com/About-What-is-SASS-001A.php>). Men and women both shoot, but ideals of masculinity and femininity still exist, particularly with regards to clothing. In fact, Kohn (2004) got involved because of the way male shooters made her “feel like a lady.” One can argue that shooters in SASS/CAS are bridging both worlds, but in reality they are still negotiating shooting according to proscribed gender norms.

More current researchers typically identify and focus on two basic types of gun owners: protection and sport. Or, what Celinska refers to as defensive and recreational purposes. In regards to defensive and protective owners, Adams (1996) “identifies two theoretical explanations of defensive gun ownership: acute fear of crime and past victimization experience as well as lack of faith in collective security” (Celinska, 2007 p. 233). Essentially, lack of faith in the police and a fear of crime are motivators for defensive gun ownership. McDowall and Loftin (1983) perhaps made this argument

specifically when they argued that people are arming themselves because they do not believe that the government will adequately protect them. In other words, the protection focus is more on individual security rather than collective security based on a lack of faith in the overall system.

In terms of recreational or sport purposes, Celinska (2007) found that “hunting status and gender demonstrate the greatest influence on gun ownership. Specifically, males were more than 5 times as likely as females to report gun ownership” (p.2 41).

To summarize, in the enlarged sample, private and household gun ownership is related to being Protestant, married, older, White, and male. Gun owners on average appear to have lower education and higher income net of the other factors. They are concentrated in the rural regions of the South or the Mountain West. Gun owners tend to hold individualist values and conservative political views. In these analyses, fear of crime is not statistically related to gun ownership. Similarly, being victimized (i.e. robbed or burglarized) is not significantly related to gun ownership. The odds ratios suggest that the most influential variables are gender and hunting status. (Celinska, 2007 p. 242)

Fear, Victimization and Likelihood of Ownership based on Gender

Much of the gun literature presumes that women become gun owners through fear of crime and victimization. Hill, Howell, and Driver (1985) examined this specifically in their article *Gender, Fear, and Protective Handgun Ownership*. Two of their primary research questions were “for whom does buying a handgun seem like a reasonable response to fear?” (p. 542) and “do the traditional predictors of male gun ownership also predict ownership for women?” (p. 543). Keep in mind that the traditional predictors of

male ownership are: white, rural, conservative, Protestant, and married. Hill et al., (1985) studied the “effects of fear on defensive ownership as well as gender differences in not only the effects of fear, but other traditional predictors” (p. 543).

Using data from the 1980 General Social Survey, Hill et al., identified their dependent variables as protective handgun ownership and fear of crime. They excluded hunters from the overall sample in order to focus only on handgun owners. Protective handgun owners for Hill et al., (1985) were operationalized as people who personally owned a handgun but did not hunt. One of the problems identified by the researchers was that their selection also included “gun collectors, target shooters, and private security personnel who own a gun for job-related reasons” (p. 545), which limited the ability to presume that handguns are only owned for protection.

For men, being married was statistically significant in terms of *reducing* fear; city size, age, and region were also statistically significant (p. 549). For both men and women only city size and age were statistically significant.

Handgun ownership was statistically significant based on sex, age, income, region of the country, religion, victimization, and city size. Interestingly, handgun ownership was not significantly correlated to fear of crime. The most interesting finding of this research is that “men who are fearful of being victimized are more likely to personally own a handgun, net of other variables in the equation” while “for women is that neither victimization nor fear is related to handgun ownership” (Hill et al., 1985, p. 549). Hill et al., (1985) concluded:

When using the personal handgun ownership variable, excluding hunters, and distinguishing by gender, one finds that (1) victimization is significantly related to

gun ownership for both the pooled sample and for males (but not for females); (2) fear is significantly related to gun ownership among males but not for females. (p. 550)

Marciniak and Lofton (1991) sought to refute Hill, Howell, and Driver's (1985) conclusions that fear of crime and prior victimization increase protective handgun ownership more for men than for women. In an attempt to replicate the Hill et al., (1985) research, Marciniak and Lofton (1991) discovered that the methodology used by Hill et al was flawed. In an attempt to focus in on female protective gun owners, Hill et al., (1985) identified three basic groups using GSS data. Group one were handgun owners who did not hunt, Group two were handgun owners who hunted; and Group three were respondents who did not own handguns (p. 535). Hill et al., assumed that all of the members of Group one were protective handguns owners, which ignores a wide variety of other types of shooters including, but not limited to, collectors, target, and cowboy action shooters. Secondly, Hill et al., (1985) *combined* the second two groups together, which skews the data. Marciniak and Lofton (1991) argue that rather than clarifying the data on women and protective handgun ownership that Hill et al (1985) actually confuse the analysis and should be avoided.

Young (1986) examined gun ownership by looking at gender, region of socialization, and ownership of protective firearms. He theorized that women in the South are much more comfortable with guns than women who are from the "non-South" and that this relates to growing up in an environment where guns were prevalent. Young argues that men, all men across the board, are much more likely to be socialized into gun culture than females, with the exception of Southern women. As such, Young believes

that women who own firearms for protective reasons are more likely to not be from the South, he posits a higher level of fear of crime for non-Southern women. Young used the 1982 General Social Survey to conduct his research, using two of the standard questions regarding gun ownership: 1) whether or not the person being interviewed personally owned any of the guns reported in their homes; and 2) whether or not they hunted. Interestingly enough, the way Young ascertained whether or not a female was afraid of crime was through the second question. If the person responding was female, and if she indicated that she did own a gun, but it was not for hunting, Young (1986) assumed that it was for protection. He justified this belief by stating that “since males are probably more likely to be collectors or target shooters, or to have inherited guns” (p. 175). Young (1986) finds a significant (.01) correlation between not living in the South and fearing crime, although the significance of this seems debatable based on how he drew his conclusions.

For those women who identified as gun owners, but did not grow up in the South, Young theorized that situational factors (i.e. marriage or fear of crime) were likely explanations. He states, “Women raised in the South are not only more likely to own firearms, but seem relatively unaffected by the situational factors that increase the likelihood of ownership among women from other parts of the United States” (p.178). In other words, it is ‘normal’ for women in the South to own guns, but women raised outside of the South become owners either through marriage or fear of crime.

Looking specifically at Southern culture, Bankston, Thompson, Jenkins, and Forsyth (1990) also found that Southern women are more likely to carry firearms than non-Southern women. The authors attribute this to socialization.

Compared to cultures faced with a similar problem or motive (e.g. the desire to prevent criminal victimization), southern culture seems to provide a ‘tool kit’ of knowledge, experience, and definitions more favorable to the use of guns, which leads more of its members to a particular strategy of action—carrying firearms (p. 298).

Bankston et al (1990) did not equate carrying firearms with greater levels of fear, instead they argue that firearm behavior and carrying simply varies within cultural contexts. Those in the South are much more comfortable with carrying firearms than those in the non-South, which is consistent with Young’s (1986) research.

Aside from region, one of the topics most often studied is married versus single women. The majority of the research available specifically states that married women are much more likely to be gun owners than single women. In 1994, Arthur (1994) specifically examined *Gun Ownership Among Women Living in One Adult Households* using 1973-1991 GSS data. Arthur only used female respondents who indicated that there were no other adults in the household. His results indicated that “the proportion of women who acknowledged having a gun at home was 39.2” but, when looking at women who identified as the only adult in the household, “the number of female owners was reduced to 17.6 percent, a significant decrease” (Arthur, 1994 P. 255). Arthur (1994) also stated that the number of women who responded that they had a gun at home “has fluctuated between a high of 27.4 percent reached in 1977 and a low of 8.1 percent recorded in 1991” (p. 255), indicating that gun ownership was *declining*.

The three main conclusions Arthur (1994) reached were: First, gun ownership among women is declining. Second, findings support that males are the primary gun

owners. Women who own guns are more likely to be (or have been) married. Arthur suggests that “men may have some influence on the extent of female ownership by virtue of prior male ownership of the gun” (p. 261). Finally, Arthur found that fear of crime and victimization were not statistically significant factors predicting gun ownership for women.

Other findings of interest were that women with teenagers in the house were more likely to own firearms than those with a child (operationalized as twelve and under) in the house; that ownership is higher for older women, those 50-59; and that ownership is highest for women in two income brackets. The first being \$10,000 - \$14,999 range and the second being \$20,000 - \$24,999. Arthur (1994) does not offer an explanation for the income variable. The author also found that women who were opposed to gun control and supported the death penalty were more likely to be gun owners, which could also tie into the age and income variables. In essence, Arthur’s (1994) research supports the demographic information of women gun owners: those from “rural counties, predominantly Southern, married, and between 59-59” (p. 249).

Sheley, Brody, and Wright (1994) found similar results in their article *Women and Handguns: Evidence from national Surveys, 1973-1991*. During the past several decades, media reports of women owning guns has indicated an increasing trend in gun ownership for women, often attributing this rise in ownership to an increase in fear of criminal victimization. In fact, Kleck (1991) described a “virtual rush of women, especially in urban areas, to purchase guns to combat crime” (p. 23). In 1994, Sheley, et al., examined women and handguns using data from the 1973-1991 General Social Survey (GSS). The authors described how in April of 1993 the NBC nightly news produced a segment

describing “increased handgun purchases by educated, middle-class women who ‘want what many men have had for years – the power of the gun.’” (p. 220). Focusing on the need for self-defense of women, the news story also announced that there had been a 50% increase of firearms purchased by women in the past few years (Sheley et al., 1994), which is inconsistent with research conducted by Arthur (1994) the same year which indicated that women’s ownership was declining.

The data for this news report came from a Gallup poll that had been commissioned by Smith & Wesson, which stated a “53 percent rise in women’s gun ownership (of all kinds, not simply handguns) between 1983 and 1986 alone” (Sheley et al., 1994 p. 220; 1992; Quigley, 1989). Assuming this data is correct it indicated that “hundreds of thousands or even millions of American women have decided during the 1980s and early 1990s to arm themselves against an onslaught of crime” (Sheley et al., 1994 p. 220). Using this data, the NRA created a media campaign designed to recruit women shooters. The slogan, at this period in time, was “A Handgun is a Woman’s Best Friend.” Smith & Wesson also capitalized on this by creating firearms and other gun related paraphernalia focused specifically on the woman shooter. Sheley et al., (1994) had three primary research questions regarding the apparent explosion of women buyers as represented by the media. The first research question asked whether or not handgun ownership by women had actually increased significantly over the years. Second, “do the predictors of gun ownership among females differ from those among males”; and third, have there been any recent changes in those predictors. Relying on GSS data from 1973 – 1991, Sheley et al., looked at trends in gun ownership for the nation as a whole, and in

urban areas, based on media reports indicating higher trends of gun ownership by women in both of these.

At the time this research was conducted, gun ownership data indicated that The percentage of men reporting firearms in their homes has held quite constant between 1973 and 1991: a mean of 53% within a range of 50% (1988, 1991) to 56% (1980). The percentage of women with guns in the home seems to have *declined* somewhat in the same years: a mean of 39% within a range of 32% (1991) to 47% (1977). These findings tell us nothing about trends in urban areas.”(Sheley, et al., 1994, p. 222).

Based on this information it appears as if media reports of increased firearms ownership by women is less than accurate. Interestingly, several years previously, research by Hill, Howell, and Driver in 1985, Young in 1986 and Whitehead and Langworthy in 1989 pointed out that “the profile of women gun owners seems largely like that of men” (Sheley, et al., 1994, p. 223). Building on research by Bordua and Lizotte (1979), Marks and Stokes (1976), and Young (1986), Sheley et al., (1994) wrote that, “there is limited but suggestive evidence that women reared in the South, especially the rural South, are exposed to many of the same ‘gun socializations’ factors to which males are exposed, increasing their tendency to own firearms as adults” (p. 223).

Contrary to the Gallup poll, the results of the Sheley et al., (1994) study indicate that:

- (1) There is no compelling evidence in the literature or in the GSS data to suggest a trend toward increased gun ownership among women in the last two decades [’73-’91]. Duly allowing for normal sampling fluctuations, the proportion of

women – and men—owning guns was effectively constant throughout the years in question.

- (2) There is very little evidence in the GSS to suggest that women’s gun ownership is more closely related to fear of crime or experiences with crime than is men’s. Nor do the findings suggest that, for women, the relation between fear of crime and gun ownership changed during the period under study.
- (3) During the same period, the demographic predictors of gun ownership by females differed little from those of their male counterparts.
- (4) There is little evidence to indicate that, in recent years, the female gun owner has come more closely to approximate the portraiture of the upscale, affluent single ‘woman about town’ depicted in the popular media. (pp. 232-233)

Smith and Smith (1995) found similar results when comparing National Rifle Association (NRA) and media uses of data to GSS data in terms of explaining information about women shooters. Contradictory to media/NRA reports, more women are *not* buying guns, the gender gap between males and females owning guns is *not* closing, and unmarried women who fear victimization are *not* the primary women owning guns.

One of the biggest issues was with the findings of the poll commissioned by Smith and Wesson. According to Sheley et al., (1994) “Smith and Wesson will not release the survey data for secondary analysis” (p.220). Smith and Smith (1995) expand on this by looking at where the NRA was gathering its data. They found that the NRA was basing their information on

(1) the Smith and Wesson/Gallup polls, (2) industry sources, (3) information from the NRA's 33,000 certified instructors, (4) magazine surveys such as a 1992 readership survey by *Self* magazine which indicated that 16% of gun owners purchased a gun to protect themselves (p. 141).

Smith and Smith confirm the assertion by Sheley et al., (1994) that Smith and Wesson "has never presented any detailed analysis of the Gallup polls, has refused to allow scholars to examine the data, and has been corrected by Gallup for misusing data on potential gun purchase from these same surveys" (p. 141).

The 'data' distributed by the NRA, however, becomes even more questionable from a research standpoint.

Robert Hunnicutt, a NRA member writing in the NRA publication *American Rifleman*, claimed that an 'estimated 12 million women bought sidearms during 1986' – a number that exceeded the *total* number of handguns manufactured or imported in 1986 by a factor of eight. He apparently transformed the Smith and Wesson estimate that twelve million women *owned* guns in 1986 into a claim that twelve million women *bought* handguns in 1986 (Smith and Smith, 1995 P. 141).

Continuing further, the "Smith & Wesson claim, based on its Gallup surveys that 15.6 million women are potential buyers in 1989,' was refuted by Gallup itself" (Smith and Smith, 1995 p. 142). In addition,

the NRA has no consistent or reliable figure on how many of its members are women....The NRA also admitted that it does not even collect information on the gender of members and uses first names to estimate gender, a procedure that is

complicated by the fact that one-third of its members use only their initials (Smith and Smith, 1995, p. 142).

Another attempt by the NRA at the time to indicate that their membership of women was growing was to point to their *Women and Guns* magazine. “However, as of 1993, it had a circulation of only 18,000” (Smith and Smith, 1994, p. 142).

Ignoring gender as a variable, Duggan (2001) assumed that gun ownership in general increases victimization. Duggan, using a methodology similar to that of the NRA, looked at gun ownership in comparison to state and county level sales data of a national magazine, *Guns & Ammo*. He theorized that sales rates of this magazine correlate to number of guns owned by individuals. He found that, “...states with higher average rate of gun ownership...have significantly more magazines sold per state resident. The significant coefficient estimate suggests an approximate one-for-one relationship between the reported rate of gun ownership and the sales rate for this magazine” (Duggan, 2001 p. 1093).

By looking at homicide rates in particular Duggan (2001) concluded that increased gun ownership leads to increased homicide rates. He put an interesting spin on this argument in regards to gun crimes. He argued that fear of crime may increase gun ownership, which may increase gun theft, which may subsequently increase gun crime. Unfortunately, this creates a circular pattern whereby more crime leads to more fear, which leads to more crime.

Self-Defense: Defensive Gun Ownership and Defensive Gun Use

In 1995, David McDowell looked at *Firearms and Self-Defense*, primarily in terms of defensive gun ownership (DGO) and defensive gun use (DGU). McDowell

operationalized defensive gun owners as those more likely to fear crime and to have had violent experiences with crime. Similar to other researchers, McDowell also found that a lack of faith in the criminal justice system and lack of faith in community security increases defensive gun ownership. McDowell (1995) compared two sets of research that examine and report on defensive gun uses, neither of which agree with the others result. National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data reports low levels of defensive gun use. NCVS data is collected by the US Census Bureau for the U.S. Bureau of Justice Survey research. NCVS data complements the data obtained by the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) through law enforcement agencies to give a clearer picture of crime in the United States.

The second set of data which provides information on defensive gun use comes from public opinion polls asking respondents whether or not they have used a gun to defend themselves against crime. In these surveys, a large number of people indicate that they have done so. “In the 1993 Gallup poll, 3.6 percent of all adults and 11.8 percent of firearm owners said that they had used a gun for defense at least once during their lives” (McDowell, 1995, p. 137). Gary Kleck, a well-known criminologist who is a proponent of gun ownership, took similar poll data from three other polls and reported that “there were 999,068,783,000, and 2,454,683 incidents of defense per year” (p. 137).

As one might expect, NCVS says the poll data is wrong, Kleck argues that the NCVS is inaccurate. What it comes down to is the manner in which the data is collected and the operationalization of the word “defense.” The NCVS does not specifically ask about defensive gun use unless the respondent admits to being a victim of something that falls under the legal definition of a crime. The polls, on the other hand, allow the

respondent to *choose* his or her own definition of defensive gun use. For example, this question appeared on two of the polls Kleck used to come to his conclusions:

Within the last five years have you, yourself, or another member of your household used a handgun, even if it was not fired, for self-protection or for the protection of property at home, work, or elsewhere, excluding military service and police security work? (p. 137)

Not only is this long-winded, but it also allows the respondent to decide for themselves what constitutes self-protection. If someone carries a firearm while driving long-distances they could consider this self-protection and report it as defensive gun use. Brandishing or holding a gun during a situation they may deem dangerous could also be considered defensive use by the respondent. For example, a student once related a story about how his sister's husband was behaving aggressively and how he went to get his gun while he called the police. He never used the gun, just held it by his side until the police arrived. In his words, "who knew what would have happened if I hadn't had that gun" (personal communication). This situation was obviously defined by him as defensive gun use.

The truth of how prevalent defensive gun use is probably lies somewhere in the middle. In terms of the effectiveness of defensive gun use, McDowell (1995) writes that we must rely on the NCVS for this because this is the only source for detailed data. According to NCVS results, defensive gun use is effective, even though it rarely occurs. What is interesting about this result is that "Victims who defended themselves with guns were much less likely to say that the offenders were first to use or threaten force. This suggests that firearm resistors took the initiative, acting before the offenders could overpower them" (p. 139). This supports proponent's beliefs of gun ownership for

protection. Remember that NCVS data only asks about defensive gun use only after the respondents report being a victim of a crime that fits the legal definition.

Jens Ludwig (2000) also examined defensive gun use. Similar to McDowell (1995) he found that the NCVS underestimates defensive gun use and the one-time telephone surveys overestimate defensive gun use and concluded that both research methods have flaws. In addition to examining NCVS versus telephone data he looked at the research conducted around states with concealed carry laws. Ludwig (2000) reported that Lott and Mustard's (1997) research indicates that states with permissive right-to-carry concealed handgun laws (CCH) had lower crime rates. Black and Nagin (1998), however, argued that crimes rates are higher in states with right-to-carry laws. Similar to the NCVS/telephone surveys debate, Ludwig argued that both research methodologies have flaws. Since it is impossible to predict what the crime rate may have been with or without CCH laws in place, the two sets of researchers are looking at "might have beens."

One of the possible concerns about permissive CCH laws is that the 'victim' may actually be precipitating crime by "starting something" because they are carrying a firearm, or not avoiding risky situations as they possibly would without a gun in their possession. Ludwig (2000) also points out that CCH laws often pass in areas with low crimes rates to begin with. "Increases in gun carrying appear to be concentrated disproportionately in areas where crime rates are quite low, among people who are already at low risk of victimization" (p. 392).

The Gun Stock in the U.S. – Who Owns Guns?

Using a telephone survey, Hepburn, Miller, Azrael, and Hemenway (2007) examined the gun stock in the US using the 2004 national firearms survey. Typical of most studies, the authors found that middle-aged and older men, married, Southern, rural, and those who grew up with guns were more likely to own firearms. They also found that men were more likely to report more household guns than women (54% - 40%), which was similar to the finding of Cook/Ludwig and Hemenway/Azrael (Wyant and Taylor, 2007). Hepburn, et al. (2007) also found that the majority of guns seem to be owned by a smaller minority, with the average respondent owning four guns. The majority of guns owned by respondents were long guns (60%) which were primarily used for sport; and handguns (40%), which are used for self-protection.

In 1994, Cook and Ludwig reported 192 million working guns in the US; Hepburn, et al. (2007) reported 283 million. The authors attributed this to two possible reasons. First, they may have inadvertently captured more affluent gun owners. Secondly, gun owners may have overestimated how many guns they owned. Hepburn et al. (2007) pointed out that GSS data showed declining rates of ownership, from 50% in the 70s to 34% at the time this article was published. The authors argued that, “although the proportion of households with firearms is declining, the number of working firearms is increasing, not decreasing, and increasing among those who already own firearms” (p. 18). In other words, not many new people are buying firearms. Instead, those who already own are buying more and own many.

Wyant and Taylor (2007), in an attempt to explain size of household gun collection from a subcultural perspective re-examined two sets of data. The first data set was researched by Cook and Ludwig in 1995 using the National Study for the Private

Ownership of Firearms in the United States. The second data set was researched by Hemenway and Azrael in 1997 using the “Survey of Gun Ownership in the United States.” Wyant and Taylor (2007) argued that both sets of data failed to take size of household gun ownership (or gun stock) into account, and looked to examine this more closely. Unlike previous research, Wyant and Taylor suggested that subcultural explanations for ownership (protection, sport, and criminal) are not necessarily as intertwined as one might believe. They argued that sport minded owners are much more likely to have larger gun collections due to socialization, possible inheritance, and subcultural explanations (i.e. groups of people who identify with one another). They argued that protection minded owners, those who report owning at least one gun for protection were going to report having smaller gun collections since they most likely did not grow up in a household with guns, did not inherit firearms, and were less likely to identify with other protection owners in a subcultural fashion.

In the Hemenway/Azrael study, researchers found that protection minded owners were more likely to report smaller firearm collections than sporting minded owners. They also reported that males were more likely than females to report smaller collections. However, men were more likely to report having a gun in the household, they were just reluctant to indicate the number, and indicated smaller numbers of guns in the household. Finally, African Americans were more likely to report being in non-owning households, while Hispanics were more likely to report smaller collections (Wyant and Taylor, 2007 p. 534).

In the Cook/Ludwig study, researchers found that protective ownership had little to do with the amount of gun stock in a household. In other words, whether or not the

respondents reported they owned a gun for protection it did not influence the size of household collection significantly with the exception of long guns. If the respondent reported owning a long gun for protection their collection was smaller than if they reported a handgun for protection. Similar to Hemenway/Azrael, men were more likely to report having a gun in the household, but opposite of Hemenway/Azrael, males reported more guns than females. In other words, they were not hesitant about letting the researchers know the size of their gun stock.

Wyant and Taylor (2007) concluded that their subcultural hypothesis is partially supported, if one only takes long guns into account in the Cook/Ludwig data. Protection minded owners, in general, reported fewer guns in the household. However, they also concluded that the evidence supports the assertion that sporting and protective owners cannot necessarily be looked at as distinct groups. Similar to other researchers, they agreed that the groups overlap. The gender gap Ludwig et al., (1998) described was primarily found within men and reporting. Women, as a whole, were less likely than men to report a large number of firearms in the household. As previously stated, the group of men in the Hemenway/Azrael study were more likely to report more guns in the household; the authors presume this to be dependent on individual rather than subcultural characteristics.

In 2001, Catherine Ross looked at neighborhood characteristics, rather than individual characteristics, in terms of gun ownership. The author had two guiding theories: neighborhood norms, and neighborhood threat. In terms of norms, the author found the following characteristics. If someone lived in a neighborhood where guns are not prevalent then they are less likely to own a firearm. Well educated neighbors also

decrease the likelihood of gun ownership. Hispanics are less likely to own guns than other racial groups. Married women are four times more likely than single women, and people who have been previously victimized, to report ownership.

According to Ross (2001), normative standards more than personal threat appeared to influence ownership. Actual victimization, however, leads to more defensive gun ownership. Ross (2001) provided two explanations for this: the victimized person may have bought a gun after being victimized; or, gun owners were more likely to be victimized. Ross did not supply supporting research for either assumption, but McDowell (1995) referenced this several years prior by stating:

Unlike other forms of defense, such as locks, bars, and alarms, firearms may generate crime as well as protect against it. If crime increases with firearm ownership and firearm ownership increases with crime, guns and violence will be linked in the manner of an arms race. (p. 140).

Gun Ownership Rates in the United States

Bugg and Yang (2004) extended the data on women's gun ownership specifically with their article, *Trends in Women's Gun Ownership, 1973-2002*. Building on Sheley et al. (1994), Smith and Smith (1995) and Young et al (1996) Bugg and Yang outlined several critiques/limitations of these particular publications. Regarding Sheley et al., their first concern was that their GSS data was limited to the years that were available to them, 1973 – 1991. Bugg and Yang (2004) point out that several significant social changes have occurred since 1993 including “social movements on gun control, new gun control legislation, and the economic boom of the last decade” (p. 170). Secondly, Bugg and Yang had issues with Sheley et al. only using survey year and sex in their logistic

regression. Bugg and Yang (2004) argue that gun ownership cannot be looked at linearly, that social and economic changes need to be taken into account as well. Their final critique was that the data provided by Sheley et al. failed to provide any information about trends involved in gun ownership by males and females.

The primary critiques of Smith and Smith (1995) were that their research was also descriptive in nature and had only extended the Sheley et al. (1994) study by a few years while removing the pre-1980 years. Finally, their critique of Young et al (1996) was that their data was only descriptive and, similar to Sheley et al., had not identified trends in ownership.

Bugg and Yang (2004) sought to extend and update the work provided by the three previous publications. Using 1973-2002 General Social Survey data they hypothesized: “a general declining trend in women’s gun ownership because of the social movements towards tighter gun control, the introduction of gun control legislation, and economic changes” (Bugg and Yang, 2004, p. 170). Using both bivariate analysis and multivariate logistic regression they looked to answer questions not answered in previous research.

Theoretically speaking, the authors were interested in changes in women’s gun ownership over time. They proposed two hypotheses to be tested: “(1) Since 1973, the gun ownership of women has decreased, and (2) the probability of women’s gun ownership has decreased over time, holding all other variables constant” (Bugg and Yang, 2004 P. 171). Bugg and Yang believed that stricter gun control laws, such as the Brady Bill and the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act would lower women’s interest in purchasing guns. They stated, “the imposition of waiting periods and

background checks by these laws is expected to reduce women's gun ownership as it has become increasingly harder to obtain firearms" (p. 171). The authors did not explain why this would deter women, but not men. Second, Bugg and Yang (2004) stated that social events, such as the massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado would also limit women's purchasing of firearms. "Because of their socialization as the main caregivers of children, women are more likely to empathize with these tragedies. These events should have caused women to reevaluate the need for personal gun ownership and to forsake gun possession" (Bugg and Yang, 2004, p. 171).

Bugg and Yang (2004) then turned to economic prosperity as a reason for declining future firearms purchases. They argued that:

when the economy is good, crime rates drop and the need for guns for self-protection decreases. Hence, the declining trend in female (and male) gun ownership may be partly a result of the economic prosperity of the 1980s and 1990s (p. 172).

Similar to other researchers, Bugg and Yang expected to find the following correlations among their respondents: as education increases, gun ownership decreases; as income increases, gun ownership increases, whites, as a whole, are more likely to own firearms than minorities, the older an individual, the more likely he or she will own a firearm; married people; Republicans, those from the Southern states, and Protestants will be more likely to own firearms. It is important to expand on a few of their assertions. In terms of race, Bugg and Yang (2004) hypothesized that "blacks and other minorities will be less likely to own guns than whites because their lower average economic status reduced the necessity and affordability of gun ownership" (p. 172). In terms of marital

status, Bugg and Yang predicted that married individuals would be more likely to own guns “because they will have a greater need to protect their family and property” (p. 172). However, they countered their own argument by stating “Individuals who live alone are more likely to encounter danger and therefore to own guns for self-protection” (p. 172), which seems somewhat contradictory.

As previously stated, the authors used GSS data from 1973 – 2002 with the exception of the years 1979, 1981, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2001. The GSS was not conducted during these years. Not surprisingly, more men than women in their sample owned firearms, 51 percent to 36 percent. Similar to previous research, Bugg and Yang also found a declining trend in gun ownership for women with some fluctuations. The peak ownership appeared to be in 1977, with a rate of 47 percent; the rate plunged in 1998 to 29.3 percent and then continued to decline through 2002 (Bugg and Yang, 2004).

The results were similar for men in their study, they found that gun ownership among males had been decreasing since 1990. Sheley et al. (1994) were not able to capture this trend in their study because their data only went until 1991. Bugg and Yang (2004) found that “the trend in gun ownership for women and men diverged before the 1990s, but have moved in the same direction since the 1990s” (p. 175). This showed a general decrease in gun ownership by both sexes, a fact that is a complete contradiction to media reports of the time.

The results of their study showed that women who were afraid to walk alone at night were less likely to own a firearm. Bugg and Yang (2004) also stated that the decreasing probability of gun ownership for women is “not due to variations in women’s individual characteristics, but due to larger social and economic changes (pp 182-183).

They supported this assertion by stating that their results supported their hypotheses regarding education, family income, race, region, Republican, Protestant and marital status. It is still unclear how they drew their conclusions based off of these results. As expected, and as shown in multiple research, people with the above characteristics are more likely to own firearms; how this connects to declining gun ownership for women is not clear.

One hypothesis not supported by the results was Bugg and Yang's (2004) prediction that individuals [women] who lived alone were more likely to own guns for self-protection. The results of their study did not support this. In a rather gendered manner, the authors state "These women certainly have the need to own guns. What explains their lower likelihood of gun ownership may be their ability to afford a gun" (Bugg and Yang, 2004 p. 183). Their explanation that "these women certainly have the need to own a gun" because they live alone is inconsistent with research which indicates that women are much more likely to be assaulted by a significant other than by some random stranger (Stanko, 1995).

Bugg and Yang (2004) concluded that in terms of declining trends towards gun ownership men and women are similar, social and economic explanations do not vary by sex. The authors also believe that if continued legislation is passed regarding gun control that we would continue to see a decline in gun ownership for both males and females. That being said, the most interesting facet of this particular research is their conclusion, which was also supported by the Sheley et al study published ten years previously. (1994): The profile of women gun owners is very much similar to the profile of men gun owners.

Despite research demonstrating that gun ownership rates are declining, in 2011 Lydia Saad reported in the Gallup Poll News Service that self-reported gun ownership was at its highest rate since 1993. According to the article, forty-seven percent of U.S. adults report that they have a gun in their home or on their property, which is the highest it has been since 1993. The last recorded number, according to Saad (2011) was forty-one percent. In terms of political party membership, Saad (2011) reports that fifty-five percent of Republicans and forty percent of Democrats reported owning firearms. Of the sample, forty-three percent of women reported household ownership, but only twenty-three percent indicated that they personally owned a gun; this was in contrast to forty-six percent of men who indicated that they personally owned a gun.

A clear societal change took place regarding gun ownership in the early 1990s, when the percent of Americans saying there was a gun in their home or on their property dropped from the low to mid-50s into the low to mid-40s and remained at that level for the next 15 years. Whether this reflected a true decline in gun ownership or a cultural shift in Americans' willingness to say they had guns is unclear. (p. 1)

The results, based on a telephone survey conducted over a three day period in the month of October 2011, consisting of a "random sample of 1,005 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia" (Saad, 2011, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/150353/self-reported-gun-ownership-highest-1993.aspx>). indicated that one in three Americans personally owns a gun.

The Gender Gap in Reporting Gun Ownership

Ludwig, Cook and Smith (1998) attempted to explain *The Gender Gap in Reporting Household Gun Ownership*. The authors looked at two previous research studies, the 1994 “National Study of the Private Ownership of Firearms” and the “July 1997 Gallup telephone survey.” The first study was a telephone survey of 2,568 adults, the second was a telephone survey of 1,008 adults. The authors use General Social Survey data from 1980 – 1996 and looked specifically at married respondents living in a household with two adults. Using GSS data from 1980 – 1996 the authors concluded that wives were considered proxy reports of household gun ownership because men were much more likely to own firearms. In fact, their research concluded that:

Husbands were 4 or 5 times as likely to personally own a gun as their wives.

Husbands were also more likely than wives to report household gun ownership, with gaps of approximately 12 percentage points. The median gender gap in the General Social Survey since 1988 is 7 percentage points. (Ludwig, Cook and Smith, 1998, p. 3)

In other words, in all three surveys husbands are more likely to be owners than wives.

Cook and Smith (1998) considered wives to be “unreliable reporters” of household gun ownership. Some of the possible explanations given by the authors were that because women are more likely to be anti-gun, and that guns are subject to a social desirability bias, that women are less likely to report to avoid bias presuming that women are more susceptible to social pressure and constraints. Secondly, they theorized that wives may be less likely to report because they may either not be aware of the firearm in the house or because they are less interested in the firearms.

The authors suggested that any research conducted on firearms focus specifically on the actual owner of the firearm. Because most guns in households are typically owned by one particular family member (Cook and Smith, 1998) the authors asserted that this would give a more accurate assessment of how many firearms are actually owned in US households.

Legault (2011) believes there is measurement error in the GSS for household gun ownership data. Similar to Kleck (1991) as reported in McDowell (1995) he believes that household gun ownership is actually much higher than reported. Legault, similar to Cook and Smith (1998) argues that married women do not report household firearms because of social undesirability and because they do not want to “tell” on the actual owners. As such, he believes that researchers should only use male responses regarding household ownership, which would change the percentages of household ownership from 32.9 to 35.2 percent, which would make the percentage higher than the 31 percent reported by women.

Gun Control and Regulation

Tom W. Smith in 2007 used GSS data from 1972 – 1996 and the National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS) 2001 to look at *Public Attitudes towards the Regulation of Firearms*. The sample size for the NGPS survey in 2001 was 1,176. Smith found that the general public is actually very interested in gun control and regulation of firearms:

Over two-thirds supported mandatory, gun-safety courses for gun buyers, requiring police permits to purchase a gun, criminal background checks for all gun sales, mandatory registration of handguns, and restricting criminal access to guns even if that made it harder for law-abiding individuals to obtain guns,

requiring that all new handguns be personalized, a mandatory, five-day waiting period to buy a handgun, regular re-registration of handguns, and limit of one handgun per month. (Smith, 2007, p.1)

Although these may have been supported by the general public in 2001, few of these requirements have been implemented into law. In fact, concealed carry has become more acceptable and is now legal throughout the United States.

Karimu (2015) in a literature review of all gun control articles, both pros and con argue for increased legislation of guns and better background checks. The bulk of his article consists of a review of the literature of opponents and proponents' views of gun control. Opponents of gun control say that legislation punishes the lawful gun owners and takes away their rights and ability for self-protection. Recent Supreme Court rulings seem to support this. Proponents of gun control say that gun homicides are out of control, and that guns should be limited for the overall protection of society. Recent academic literature seems to support this.

As Karimu (2015) states, homicides with guns have lowered dramatically for juveniles. Opponents argue that this has happened without more restrictions on guns. Proponents argue that many of the guns used in Columbine were purchased illegally through straw buyers and that tighter restrictions could have prevented it. On the other hand, the mass shootings in Newtown and Virginia Tech were committed with legal guns. To add to this, Wallace (2015), in an analysis of six mass shootings from 2000-2010 found that background checks increase dramatically after mass shootings. Wallace used this as an indicator of increased gun purchases, but concluded that it was highly

likely that individuals were getting background checks conducted to obtain a concealed carry permit.

Overall, Karimu (2015) identifies collectivist versus individualist counter arguments. On one side of the argument are those saying that they need to be able to protect themselves from crime and possibly a corrupt government. On the other side of the issue are those who claim that guns are dangerous and cause more crime than they prevent. Unfortunately, it does not appear as if either side will come to a consensus any time in the near future.

Suicide, Homicide, and Assault

“Among a long list of issues facing the American public, guns are third only to gay marriage and abortion in terms of people who report that they are ‘not willing to listen to the other side’” (Branas, Richmond, Culhane, ten Have, & Wiebe, 2009). Branas et al, concluded that possession of a gun did not protect those possessing them from being shot in an assault. Using Philadelphia as the study location, the authors stated that, “individuals in possession of a gun were 4.46 ($p < .05$) times more likely to be shot in an assault than those not in possession” (p. 2034). The authors argue that this could be because:

A gun may falsely empower its possessor to overreact, instigating and losing otherwise tractable conflicts with similarly armed persons. Along the same lines, individuals who are in possession of a gun may increase their risk of gun assault by entering dangerous environments that they would have normally avoided. (p. 2037)

The bottom line, according to Branas, et al, is that guns used for protection may actually be harmful to those carrying them, regardless of the sex of the carrier. However, however, much more attention appears to be focused specifically on women owners, rather than looking at gun owners in general

Looking at race and region in terms of homicide and assault, Felson and Pare (2010) found that Blacks and men were more likely to be assaulted with a gun, but “southern and western whites were much more likely than northern whites to carry guns for self-protection” (p. 273), something that was not found in regional variations among Blacks. Guns increase homicide rates, but lower property crimes. The authors argued that guns are used more for crime in the South because the assumption is that the victim is armed.

We suspect that the presence of a gun in the southern states ‘drives out’ unarmed violence and violence using less lethal weapons. More generally, serious forms of aggression tend to spread but act as a deterrent to less serious forms of aggression. Thus, the adversary effect may explain why southerners tend to be more polite than northerners. In places where individuals are quick to retaliate, others are careful not to offend, (p. 282)

The authors were using this as a tool to explain other types of minor violence. While guns may increase gun violence, Felson and Pare argued that guns actually deter other, more minor, types of violence and aggression. In this sense they were arguing that an armed society does lower crime rates for less serious crimes.

However, more current research is opposed to this conclusion. Siegel, Ross, and King (2013) found that “states with higher levels of gun ownership had

disproportionately large numbers of death from firearm related homicides” (p. 2103). The bottom line, according to Bangalore and Messerli (2013) is that more guns equal more homicides. The authors collected data for gun ownership by using the Small Arms Survey. They obtained firearm-related death data from a “European detailed mortality database (World Health Organization), the National Center for Health Statistics, and others” and crime rate data was obtained from the United Nations Surveys of Crime Trends (p. 873). Among the 27 developed countries analyzed for the study, the authors found that countries with higher rates of gun ownership do not have lower crime rates, thus debunking the more guns/less crime hypothesis.

One potential way to lower rates of homicide and suicide by gun is suggested by Sen and Panjamapirom. Sen and Panjamapirom (2012) examined different types of background checks conducted by states and compared them to homicide and suicide rates with a gun. The authors found that in states that look at criminal history, restraining orders, mental illness, fugitive status, and misdemeanors that there are lower levels of homicides and suicides. The results suggest that perhaps background checks should be made more inclusive in an effort to lower violent uses of legal firearms.

The National Rifle Association and Women

It is impossible to write about gun ownership without discussing the National Rifle Association (NRA). The NRA is considered ‘the’ expert on firearms training in the United States. In the early 1990s the National Rifle Association (NRA) began a concerted effort to get more women involved in the shooting sports. This led to the development of the Women on Target Program. The basic premise behind this effort was the belief that women have the primary responsibility for their children. If women,

mothers, did not allow their children to learn how to shoot the future of shooting sports was at risk.

In addition to the Women on Target program, the NRA, around this same time period, also developed a highly controversial program entitled, Refuse to Be a Victim. Refuse to Be a Victim, introduced in 1993, is a three hour seminar focused on ‘safety tips’ for women. These include personal safety tips on how to avoid dangerous situations, and how to avoid being a victim. The most glaring aspect of this program is the focus on crime by strangers against an unsuspecting, innocent, naïve, victim. This program fell under severe criticism by the general public, anti-gun groups and organizations. The general public accused the NRA of perpetuating fear in women. Anti-gun organizations were opposed to the program based on the belief that it was promoting gun ownership by women. Ironically, this belief was unfounded. In fact, the NRA made it a point to invite several leading anti-gun spokespeople to attend one of the events, none did.

Refuse to Be a Victim sustained some criticism for two primary reasons. First, the perpetuation of fear and the focus on stranger crime, vocal feminists criticized the lack of attention to intimate partner violence. In addition, there was a perception that the NRA was promoting gun ownership for women.

Those opposed to gun ownership by women often cite Audre Lorde (1983) who stated, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” This implicitly implies that firearms fall into the category of master’s tools, in other words, a masculine tool to be used by men. This belief was supported by Jean Grossholtz, “an emeritus professor at [Mount Holyoke] college and chair of the women’s studies program” who, in

Paxton Quigley's (2005) *Stayin' Alive: Armed and Female in an Unsafe World* was quoted as stating, "You can't achieve power by using guns...When women can take their rightful place in the world as who they are, not as little make believe men, that's women's liberation" (p. xvi). It is apparent that even within groups of women, how women are expected to behave varies greatly. While one set of women is arguing for gun ownership to empower themselves, another is arguing that guns do not empower women, but actually make women less empowered. As with many issues, this is most likely a debate that will not be resolved in the near future.

However, as discussed previously, the gun ownership data indicates that ownership by women has actually been decreasing steadily in the past several decades. As previously indicated, the peak ownership appeared to be in 1977, with a rate of 47 percent; the rate plunged in 1998 to 29.3 percent and then continued to decline through 2002 (Bugg and Yang, 2004). It is unclear where Quigley is obtaining her information. Quigley described women who become gun owners as 'mavericks.'

Millions of maverick women have learned how to free themselves and millions more need to do it. It's high time women took aim at their outdated behavior and realized they can seize the initiative and play a strong role in protecting themselves and their loved ones in an increasingly dangerous world." (Quigley, 2005 p. xviii)

The fact that she referred to women gun owners as mavericks speaks volumes to the extent that there is a perception that women are not expected to shoot, much less own, guns.

Women on Target

Women on Target, in direct opposition to Refuse to be a Victim, is all about getting women involved in the shooting sports. Each class typically lasts a full day; and, depending on the host site, gives women the opportunity to handle a variety of firearms, including handguns, rifles, shotguns, black powder, and archery. The cost to attend this program is minimal, often less than twenty dollars. Breakfast, lunch, unlimited ammunition, and door prizes are all part of the event. Each type of firearm is housed at a separate station; each station is hosted by an expert of that particular firearm, and safety precautions are strongly enforced. The goal is to create a fun, women only/less competitive environment where women could learn about firearms. Ideally, not only could women learn to shoot and enjoy firearms, but the perception was that they would also be the ones deciding whether or not their future (or current) children would be allowed to participate in the shooting sports.

Popular Culture, the Media, and Representations of Women's Fear

It is clear that the majority of the research points to men as primary gun owners in the United States. Why then is it important to look at women gun owners? As previously indicated, women have historically used firearms in practical ways, i.e., hunting and protection. That being said, there seems to be a shift occurring in the focus on women shooters. In the past several decades, the media, the National Rifle Association and gun manufacturers have made a concerted effort to get more women involved in the shooting sports. One of the ways this has occurred has been through marketing.

The first "female gun" was developed in the 1950s. "From 1955 to 1956, a company called High Standard targeted women buyers with its Sentinel model, a nine-

shot .22 revolver that came in pink, baby blue, nickel, or gold finishes” (Kelley, 2004, p. 61). Blair and Hyatt (1995) looked at the marketing of guns to women and whether or not this influenced gun-related attitudes or ownership. The authors assumed that women were a vulnerable population and that marketing should be careful about marketing to them. Typical of most other research, Blair and Hyatt found that more men than women own firearms; however, they did not find a statistical difference in their respondents in terms of region. Using students enrolled in business classes in a rural Appalachian college they attempted to compare Midwestern and Southern students, they did not find differences between Midwestern and Southern students. Compared to men, their female respondents were more likely to say they were afraid or do not like guns. Women were more confident than men in women’s ability to shoot, but were not as confident as men in their own ability to shoot. Of interest to this particular research, women were less likely than men to think that women should own a gun for protection, but do believe that women have been discouraged from owning guns for too long.

In terms of their marketing focus, Blair and Hyatt (1995) did not find that marketing affected gun attitudes in either men or women. However, they also expressed belief that it is still unethical for marketers to target a vulnerable population “using promises of empowerment and protection” (p. 120). The authors argued that gun ownership by women “is more likely to result in serious harm to women than it is to protect them” (p. 120).

Gun Magazines for Women

There are two main magazines marketed specifically for women interested in the shooting sports: *Women & Guns* and *Women’s Outlook*. *Women & Guns* has historically

had an agenda of normalizing gun ownership for women, “a stance that flies in the face of the long history of the public rhetoric that has linked women’s biological attributes to an incapacity for shooting, let alone owning, guns” (Browder, 2006, pp. 218-219). It is unfortunate that they were not able to maintain this stance. The editorial stance of *Women & Guns* is currently in line with the rhetoric of the NRA. It could be argued that the pages of *Women & Guns* have been domesticated. “Women’s rage and power, celebrated in the early days...have been tamed, and the armed woman has been made palatable for non-gun owners and conservatives alike” (Browder, 2006, p. 221). In this sense, the magazine portrays shooting for women, primarily white and suburban women, as a form of female bonding. The focus of *Women & Guns* is on danger and articles promote a variety of programs for women.

In direct opposition to *Women & Guns*, was *Women’s Outlook*, which is no longer in publication. Browder (2006) described *Women’s Outlook* as “Family Circle for the Armed Woman.” *Women’s Outlook*, an NRA publication, hit the stands in 2003. This magazine was so ‘wholesome’ that Wal-Mart stores decided to put it on their shelves. The only disappointment by the NRA with this was the decision by Wal-Mart to sell it in the sporting section

It’s hard to imagine a serious gun owner reading *Women’s Outlook*. In fact, it is hard to imagine a blander magazine, and perhaps that is the point: *Women’s Outlook* presents a gentle, wholesome image that seems designed to take the edge off the rhetoric of the NRA. By imitating mainstream magazines for middle-class women, *Women’s Outlook* works hard to normalize gun ownership as a choice no

more controversial than a woman's favorite shade of lipstick (Browder, 2006, p. 222).

In contrast to *Women & Guns*, which at one point walked the fine line between feminist ideology and conservative values, *Women's Outlook* took a domestic and maternal slant on gun ownership.

Where the women in *Women & Guns* are often slightly overweight, casually dressed, wear glasses, and do not look like models, the women of *Women's Outlook* have the appearance of professional models – not supermodels, but women who would be hired to represent outdoor or casual wear companies. Thus, women in the magazine are often depicted backlit, wearing pink lipstick while hunting in the woods (Browder, 2006, p. 225).

The primary focus of *Women's Outlook* was on family. Shooting is presented as a wholesome family activity, something the whole family can do together. In this aspect, family bonding is portrayed as a way to pass on gun culture to children, particularly by the mothers. “Many articles in *Women's Outlook* were devoted to the question of when and how to buy a child's first gun” (Browder, 2006 p. 225). The articles and images in *Women's Outlook* also portrayed a patriarchal theme. Whereas *Women & Guns* will often feature female instructors, *Women's Outlook* focused on male instructors.

The two magazines appear to appeal to two diverse audiences, while still promoting existing ideologies of danger and wholesome fun. *Women & Guns* assumes its readers have a familiarity with firearms and feature articles discussing the pros and cons of different firearms, as well as technical details of the firearms. *Women's Outlook* assumed its readers have little interest or knowledge in technical aspects of shooting.

Women's Outlook, in other words, is a gun magazine for women that manages not to talk about violence or personal danger, whose models never seem to get dirty, and in which shooting is entertainment and only mentioned in the context of good clean family fun (Browder, 2006, p. 229).

On one hand, it is a refreshing change to see a firearm publication that is not focused on fear of violence. On the other, *Women's Outlook* provided a clear example of how gender norms are directly tied into firearms ownership. "The female readers of this magazine are assumed to be ladylike and fashion oriented, or attracted to that image" (Browder, 2006, p.288). In this sense, firearms are simply viewed as either another fashion accessory or a way for family bonding.

Deconstructing Stayin' Alive: Armed and Female in an Unsafe World

Paxton Quigley, is one of several authors who focused on fear and self-defense as reasons why women should own firearms (Metaska, 1997; Quigley, 1995, 2005; Vogt 2007). The most concerning aspect about Quigley's work is that it is popular culture and readily available to the general public. Unlike empirical research, which is accountable to review by outside researchers, Quigley is under no such constraint. She cherry picks information to support her assertions, without much empirical support. In addition to this, her work is easy to obtain, easily readable, and may connect with well with certain audiences.

According to Quigley (2005), women should have guns because of their vulnerability. In her 2005 work, *Stayin' Alive: Armed and Female in an Unsafe World*, she described four scenarios in her first chapter to demonstrate her point. In the first scenario, Barbara, a single parent, bought a gun because of a rash of burglaries in her

neighborhood. The story continued with the burglar forcing his way into the home and her chasing him out with the firearm. Throughout the story, Quigley, described the man as leaving (while Barbara shot at him, which is considered illegal in many states) and how the perpetrator was out of prison after only four years.

The second scenario described a divorced mother of three who was out in the early morning hours alone when she saw another female running away from a man who was trying to kill her. The moral of this story is that both women were single, alone, and out late at night. The third scenario was about a woman whose estranged husband had threatened to kill her, and who apparently succeeded. Quigley (2005), pointed out that after making the 911 call it took officers almost 17 minutes to arrive only to find the victim dead on the floor. She asks, “Would [the victim] be alive today if she had a gun and knew how to use it? Probably” (pp. 8-9), portraying a lack of faith in collective security.

In the final scenario, Quigley described a domestic violence victim who used her gun to shoot her abusive husband after he beat her up. The woman, Sharon Peterson, was arrested for murder and the case went to trial. The conclusion to this story is that after being arrested for her abusive husband’s murder, the jury found her not guilty after minimal deliberation. In a related discussion, Quigley went on to describe a mother who was raped but ended up in jail because she was too afraid to testify. Throughout all these scenarios a certain pattern is evident, lack of confidence in the criminal justice system, which supports other researcher’s assertion of gun ownership for collective security (Cao et al, 1995; Celinksa, 2007). The chapter is a thinly veiled call to vigilantism. The author is smart, she appeals to all potentially vulnerable female groups: single, divorced,

separated, domestic violence victims, and mothers. Quigley dramatizes situations in her writing, playing on the fear of the extreme and fear in general by women, rape in particular.

Quigley (2005) believed that with the exception of sport shooting, the majority of women who own and use a gun do so for self-defense purposes (p. 6). Her accounts were often sensationalized and her methods of protecting oneself extreme, “I do recommend that you make it a habit while walking to carry your small canister [of pepper spray] in your strong hand in the ready position,” (pp. 16-17). The major improvement in this updated book, in comparison to her 1995 publication, *Not an Easy Target. Paxton Quigley’s Self-Protection for Women*, was her inclusion of the possibility of intimate partner violence. Even if it could be seen as promoting fear through sensationalized reporting of selective cases it appeared to be a step in the right direction.

In an attempt to ease fears about women and firearms, Quigley (2005), challenged what she perceived as myths about guns. “Myths about weapons can endanger women’s safety by scaring them and stopping them from using a highly effective way to protect themselves” (p. 27). She identified eight myths and justified why these are invalid or incorrect.

Myth #1: “You’re more likely to shoot yourself or a family member than an attacker” (Quigley, 2005 p. 27). According to Quigley, the research supporting this claim was initially published in 1966 by Arthur Kellerman; a second study was conducted in 1992, and a third in 1993. The two 1990 studies were funded by the National Center for Policy Analysis (NPIC) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Quigley criticized

these by focusing on sample size, representativeness, and control groups. She supported her criticism by stating:

Through the years, peer-reviewers, medical doctors, and scholars asked the CDC and Kellerman for the research to evaluate the conclusions. Kellerman steadfastly refused to divulge the raw data for scientific inquiry...Kellerman's study was considered so flawed, the CDC was forced, finally, to rein in Kellerman."

(Quigley, 2005 pp. 29-30)

However, much more recently, Hemenway (2011) found that while guns in the home may be seen as a tool for protection, the research overwhelmingly shows that this is not the case. To the contrary, the availability of guns in the house increases the risk of suicide, particularly for kids and teenagers aged 5-14. A gun in the house also increases the risk for women. More women are intimidated or killed by guns from an intimate partner than protected by them. "Gun ownership was most strongly associated with homicide at the hands of a family member or intimate acquaintance; guns were not significantly linked to an increased risk of homicide by other friends, unidentified persons, or strangers" (p. 506). In other words, guns are being used to kill familiars, not strangers.

Myth #2: "Why should I own a gun since friends, acquaintances, and relatives are the most likely killers?" (Quigley, 2005 p. 30). She challenged this by focusing on the definition of acquaintance, or lack thereof, used by the FBI in their Uniform Crime Report. She concluded that this acquaintance rate can be minimized to "...people with criminal records, killed by other criminals" (pp. 30-31).

Siegel et al. (2014) looked at The Relationship Between Gun Ownership and Stranger and Nonstranger Firearm Homicide Rates in the United States, 1981-2001. Only one-fifth of gun homicides between 1981-2010 were between strangers. Siegel et al., found a robust significant (95%) correlation between firearm ownership and non-stranger homicide. “We found that higher gun ownership, although not associated with lower stranger homicide, was associated with higher nonstranger homicide rates” (p. 1917). While this does not entirely dispute myth #2, it also does not support Quigley’s conclusion that people with criminal records are being killed by other criminals.

Myth #3: “Guns are not effective in preventing crime against women.” She stated, “Of the 2.5 million annual self-defense cases using guns, more than 7.7% (192,500) are by women defending themselves against sexual abuse” (Quigley, 2005 p.31). Her use of statistics is interesting here. First, she is using data from a source that unashamedly supports gun ownership. Secondly, she’s also subtly focusing on women’s fear of sexual assault.

On one hand she is absolutely correct. According to May, Rader, & Goodrum (2010) women fear rape while men fear property crime. However, in this study, females who had been sexually victimized did not report higher fears of crime than those who had not been sexually victimized. They did have higher levels of perceived risk, but not higher levels of fear. Women in general, however, were more likely to engage in defensive behavior than men were. Defensive behaviors, as defined by May et al., (2010) did not just mean guns, it also included “burglar alarms, door bolts, extra door locks, window guards, police department identification stickers, guard dogs, outside security

lights, and automatic timers/electronic timers” (p. 177). The younger the respondent, the more likely they were to engage in defensive behaviors and report higher fear of crime.

Myth #4: “I don’t want a gun in the house. More children are hurt with guns than any other method” (2005:31). Quigley asserted that this is a complete fallacy since most people are unaware that very few children are actually involved in gun-related deaths. Children are more likely to die in a car accident than in a gun-related incident. She cited the National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics Report of 1997 to support her assertion.

Miller and Hemenway (2008) using data from 2005 found that states with higher rates of household firearm ownership have higher rates of suicide by gun and other suicides across the board. The authors asserted that higher risk of suicide by gun in a household not only applies to the gun owner, but also the spouse and children. The presence of a gun in the house, regardless of how it is stored, is a risk factor for completed suicide. Finally, adolescent suicide was four times as likely in homes with a loaded/unlocked firearm when compared with homes where guns were stored locked and unloaded.

The authors argued that the suicide risks hold true for men, women, and children. However, their chart does not include children and the numbers for non-gun suicides for women were actually higher than gun suicides (2,599 non-gun to 2,212 gun), which makes their conclusions somewhat unclear.

Myth #5: “Guns are safer when they’re locked up” (Quigley, 2005 p. 31). Her dislike of this myth is simple, if a gun is locked up it makes it difficult to use it defensively if the need arises.

Myth #6: “The U.S. has the highest homicide rate in the world because Americans own so many guns” (Quigley, 2005 p. 32). Quigley dispelled this myth by looking at countries with high gun ownership rates that also have low incidences of homicide. The top three named were: Switzerland, Finland, and New Zealand. She argued that all three have high rates of gun ownership. “Switzerland has extremely lenient control (more so than U.S.) and has the third lowest homicide rate of the top nine major European countries and the same per capita rate as England and Wales. New Zealand has a lower rate than Australia where guns have been banned. Finland and Sweden have very different gun ownership rates, but very similar homicide rates” (2005:32). What Quigley, was ignoring here were the vastly different population rates of each of these countries (Australia, 18,887,551; Finland 5,158,372; New Zealand, 3,662,265; Sweden, 8,911,296; Switzerland, 7,275,467; and the United States, 272,639,608)
http://www.photius.com/wfb1999/rankings/population_0.html.

Also looking internationally, van Kesteren (2014) found that in countries with more guns victimization rates are higher. The author examined both contact and property crimes and concluded that guns affect contact crimes, but not property crimes. Similar to Ludwig (2000), van Kesteren also pointed out that “ownership and especially the habit of carrying a concealed gun around may generate the ‘illusion of invincibility’. “This mental state could result in risk-taking or provocative behavior which enhances victimization risks” (p. 69). In other words, guns could increase rates of victimization if those carrying them engage in risky behavior. The author (2014) concludes:

At the individual level, the statistical facts are unambiguous. Contrary to what has been claimed by proponents of widespread gun ownership in the United States,

those households that own guns run higher risks of seeing their members criminally victimized, either by other household members or by outsiders who are not deterred from attacking. This correlational finding provides no proof that the higher risks are *caused* by ownership of a gun; ownership might also be a proxy for a high risk lifestyle. But this result certainly sheds serious doubt on the notion of gun ownership as a protective factor. (p. 69)

Myth #7: “If all law-abiding citizens are allowed to carry concealed handguns, people will end up shooting each other” (Quigley, 2005 p. 33). Quigley argued that out of all the concealed carry permits issued there is only one case where a permit holder used a firearm after a traffic accident. The court ruled the use as self-defense.

Duggan (2001) sought to destroy the belief that concealed carry legislation reduces crime. Interestingly, most researchers refer to concealed carry legislation as CCH (concealed carry handgun), Duggan referred to it as CCW (concealed carry weapon). Duggan argued that gun ownership did not increase in states that passed concealed carry legislation which indicates that this legislation did not, in fact, reduce crime rates. In arguing this point, he ignored the differences between reality and belief. The perception or belief that someone may be carrying a concealed firearm is very different from the reality of the situation. To date, there is still no reliable data one way or the other providing support for or against the effectiveness of concealed carry legislation and reduction of crime.

Myth: #8: “In the case something happens I can call 911. The police can protect me and people don’t need guns” (Quigley, 2005 p, 33). Quigley appeared to have little use for the police. She wrote in her 1995 book how rapists often pass themselves off as

police officers. In her 2005 book she made the point that, “The courts have continuously ruled that the police do not have an obligation to protect individuals” (pp. 33-34).

Throughout her books, she not so subtly plays on women’s fears. Fear that they’re going to be attacked by an intruder forcing his way into their home and fear that the police won’t be around to do anything about it. It is apparent from this reasoning that Quigley supports an individualist versus a collectivist view of gun ownership and community protection (Celinska, 2007).

Perhaps one of the most amusing (and frustrating) aspects of Quigley’s (2005) approach to firearm ownership by women were her blatant reminders that shooting can be a great way to meet men. “...if you like to sport-shoot and you’re single, you’ve got a built-in hobby where you could meet your soul-mate – remember girls, a lot of guys – doctors, lawyers, teachers, professionals, businessmen, you name it – enjoy going to a shooting range” (p. 71). In other words, if the fear factor doesn’t work perhaps women should still become shooters. She continues with this theme several pages later, “These group activities can provide you with a new social group and if you’re single there’s a good chance you could meet a new significant other” (p. 99). While this thought process may seem both humorous and outrageous at first glance, one of the female concealed carry instructors who was kind enough to let me sit in on several of her classes often remarked to me that she really enjoyed flirting with the single men in the class and hoped to find someone with whom to have a relationship.

Fear and Self-Protection in the Popular Literature

According to Quigley, (2005) “many women in American really are at a constant risk; they are victims of society’s disquieting inability to protect women from violence

and harm inside or outside their own homes” (p. xv). With this statement at the very beginning of her book, Quigley presented the foundation for her argument that women should arm themselves for their safety. By the same token, Quigley also focuses almost specifically on threats by strangers while conveniently ignoring the fact that the majority of women are victims of significant others.

Paxton Quigley, is probably one of the better known spokeswomen for the self-protection of women. In the early 1990s, she created a seminar called Women’s Empowerment (Quigley, 1995) which focused on techniques women could utilize to protect themselves. One of her students stated,

...learning how to protect myself changed me in the sense that I have a quiet powerful feeling that I can take care of myself, especially in my home. That’s a feeling of empowerment. My husband is especially happy that he doesn’t have to worry about me if he isn’t home. He even tells his friends that I’m empowered.” (Quigley, 1995 p. 16).

It is clear from the above quote that Quigley’s focus had little to do with intimate partner violence and more to do with fear of stranger violence. In her 1995 book, *Not an Easy Target: Paxton Quigley, 's Self-Protection for Women*, she focused on attacks by strangers and the ‘enemy,’ as described in chapter one, are muggers, burglars, carjackers and rapists. The muggers, burglars and carjackers are described as being “between the age of eighteen and twenty-four, employed and most likely on drugs” (Quigley, 1995 p. 21). She was careful to distinguish that individuals were most likely to be murdered by someone of the same race, but when we get to the section on rapists her students described to her their “nightmares about a ‘scummy’ man who rapes or tries to rape them.

He is a loner – unemployed, uneducated, and possibly homeless” (Quigley, 1995 p. 23), her writing does not make any attempt to clear up this stereotype. Instead, she continued on to discuss the three approaches to sexual assault – con, blitz, and surprise (p. 27) – which all promote the belief of stranger rape.

Rape, in fact, is a common theme throughout her books. She uses rape as a selling point for gun ownership. In her chapter on carrying concealed weapons she stated, “Regrettably, I’ve met a number of people, who would not have been raped if they were carrying a gun” (Quigley, 2005 p. 78). She supported this with a story of an off-duty security guard who, while walking her dog, was approached by a man who threatened her with a gun; she somehow scared him off. Then, when he approached her again later she used a small caliber weapon to shoot him. This man turned out to be a sexual predator. Like many of Quigley’s examples, the story is not as clear as one would like. How did the off-duty security guard scare him off? Why did he return? These details do not seem to be as important to Quigley, as the ever-present fear of sexual assault by women. Her claim that “most rapes occur at night while you’re sleeping (2005:91) was not referenced/supported by any data in her text, and there is no mention of any rape other than stranger rape in any of her work.

Women, according to Quigley, (1995) could protect themselves by developing a personal survival strategy. These strategies are covered in various chapters and include, “security in your home, security in your car, security in offices and other public places, and security while traveling.” She wrapped up by asking the question, “Can you handle a weapon?” Weapons to Quigley do not necessarily mean firearms; she includes non-lethal and improvised weapons in her suggestions.

Quigley (2005) discussed a variety of other tools for self-protection, including pepper-spray, stun-guns, mini-batons and knives and daggers. She recommended carrying a small canister of pepper spray “in your strong hand in a ready position” (pp. 16-17). Stun guns, she opines, were dangerous because they did not offer the buffer of distance that pepper spray has. Mini-batons were more of a deterrent, particularly if it’s black. As for knives and daggers, “forget about using knives and daggers unless you’ve taken a special course. If you are not well-trained the attacker can take the knife away from you and use it against you” (p. 22). It is apparent that she was much more critical of all these potential tools for self-protection than she was with guns.

Yet another common theme often addressed in the literature is the notion I refer to as ‘alone women.’ Alone women are those who become gun owners due to their single status, whether permanent or temporary. This includes single/non-married women, single-mothers, married women whose husbands are away, or simply women who are out alone, walking, using public transportation, or in a car by themselves. Kelly (2004) writes, “As the number of divorced women rose dramatically, some of those who wanted to feel safe in their homes alone, with or without children, began to acquire guns for self-protection” (p. 64). Kelley also addresses the issue of traveling by oneself, “Some women who travel alone—over great distances, at night, and through unfamiliar areas—carry a gun” (Kelly, 2004, p. 109). Interestingly, none of these authors suggest that alone men should take up a gun for self-protection. Essentially they are taking the same behavior but interpreting it differently.

Quigley, (2005) used another fear example to describe a mother who was home alone when a stranger forced his way into the house. Typical of most of her scenarios,

the woman is petite, “five-foot-two and 125 pounds” while the intruder was “a tall, husky man, who was over six feet tall and weighed 175 pounds” (p. 39). While the woman did call the police the man crashed into the house before they arrived, forcing her to defend herself with her firearm. It is clear that, for women, being alone apparently equals danger.

What is interesting is that Warr (1992) found that data from a random sample study of Houston residents supported the conclusion that although many more men than women keep guns for self-protection, women often do so, not because of personal fears, but because they fear their partners or children would be at a greater risk of criminal victimization if they did not do so. Warr found that men who expressed fear for others in the household were 5 times more likely to report having purchased a weapon for protection than those who did not express such fear” (Warr, 1992; as cited in Vacha and McLaughlin, 2004, p. 177). This appears to indicate that women are not necessarily fearful for their own safety, but fearful for the safety of others. Ironically, this seems to be when women gun owners are most accepted, “A woman shooter remains most sympathetic when...she’s carrying lethal force on behalf of others, especially when protecting the lives of children. Things get messier when a woman decides to stand up for herself” (Kelley, 2004, p. 66). In other words, it appears to be socially acceptable for a woman to protect others, but not necessarily to protect herself.

It is evident that Quigley’s research is not empirically grounded. Why then, has so much time been spent discussing and critiquing her work? One of the main reasons is because her work is so accessible to the general public. She has her own web page, where she states:

I've taken my message of women's empowerment to more than 300 TV and radio shows including The Today Show, Good Morning America, Oprah Winfrey, Jenny Jones, Larry King, Maury Povich, Regis and Kathy Lee, Hard Copy, The NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw, 60 Minutes, and the G.Gordon Liddy, Ken Hamblin and Steve Mason radio shows. I was interviewed and profiled in the Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Miami Herald, New York Times, Washington Post, Cleveland Plain Dealer, and Investors Business Daily, and featured in Glamour, Elle, Mirabella, Savvy and L.A. Style.

(http://www.paxtonquigley.com/whois_paxton.html)

It would be fair to say that in many ways Paxton Quigley is the modern version of Annie Oakley in the sense that she portrays a very feminized image of a woman shooter. She encourages women to get involved in the shooting sports not just for self-protection, but also as a way to meet men (Quigley, 2005). She presents an image of gun ownership that is appealing to the NRA and the general public. What she is not presenting is empirically tested academic research about women and guns. Her work is not scholarship, it is popular culture. It is *readily available* pop culture, which means that on any given day someone could read her work and take it as truth.

Chapter 3 - Research Methods

This research relied primarily on qualitative research which included participation observation and semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Qualitative research allows the researcher to gain insight into the lives of a particular group, within a particular social setting, and within a specific context (Esterberg, 2002). By participating and observing, researchers can attempt to understand how the participants themselves view the social setting of interest (Esterberg, 2002). In addition to observation and interviews with current women who shoot or own a firearm, an historical analysis of iconic women shooters was conducted to examine how gender has historically framed women's use and ownership of firearms.

A primary benefit of qualitative research is that it allows the research to gain in-depth knowledge about a specific segment or group in society. The information gathered from the participants can allow the researcher to create a detailed picture of this particular group. In the case of this research, qualitative analysis allows the researcher to ascertain the reasons women choose to become shooters and the experiences they have had along the way. As typical of most qualitative research, the small sample size makes it difficult to generalize the findings to the larger population. In addition, the geographical location of respondents (West and Midwest) and location demographics (rural and micropolitan) also limit the generalizability of results.

Using Reinharz and Davidman (1992) as a guide, the goal was to research women shooters, their experiences as shooters, explore these experiences from their point of view, and understand their behavior and actions as part of a larger social context of both the social world and the world of shooting sports. As someone who grew up shooting,

owns firearms, and shoots on a semi-regular basis, one of the main challenges was to avoid preconceptions and bias. However, until I began this research I had never actually gone shooting with another woman who was also shooting. I had always gone with my mom and dad, and my mom never fired a gun the entire time.

Interviews and Participant Observation

Sample Selection

Women who shoot can be viewed as a hard to reach population. As previously indicated, much of the available gun ownership data is based on household level information; which, for the most part, does not focus on women. As such, surveys and using existing data were not feasible options. The data for this study is drawn from 30 in-depth interviews with women who own or shoot any type of firearm, three Women on Target events, and six Concealed Carry courses. The interviews were obtained using a snowball sample. Snowball samples are “useful for hard-to-reach or hard-to-identify but interconnected populations” (Schutt, 1996). To utilize a snowball sample, the researcher identifies one member of a specific population who is willing to be interviewed, and then asks that individual to identify others in that population who may be willing to be interviewed as well. The original respondent may also provide introductions and ease the way of the researcher with subsequent respondents. Snowball sampling was appropriate for this research as women who shoot are both a hard-to-reach and hard to identify population.

A Kansas State University Anthropology professor, who had a strong interest in shooting, provided the introduction to the first respondent in this study. After emailing her to set up an interview she suggested we meet for dinner and she would invite two

other women who might be willing to talk to me. These three were the start of the snowball sample in Kansas.

The remaining respondents from the Manhattan, Kansas sample were obtained through personal introductions from women who had already agreed to be interviewed and participant observation at three Women on Target Events, which are sponsored by the National Rifle Association. In one case, the Women on Target event also included the Refuse to Be a Victim course. Entry to these events was also obtained through the initial respondent, who was an instructor for both.

The NRA Women on Target events were selected because it was an appropriate place to find a fairly large number of women who would be shooting at a single period in time. These events were attended with the hope of finding women who were willing to be interviewed one-on one. The challenge with Women on Target events were that women were separated into smaller groups to move through the various stations, these groups often became very close knit. As such, interaction was often limited to a small number of event participants at any given time. The only time the entire group came together was during the lunch hour.

Gaining access to these events was relatively easy. The initial respondent, who was an instructor at the handgun station, was more than willing to help locate other interview subjects. Developing relationships at these events was more difficult. None of these events lasted longer than eight hours, thus making the cultivation of research participants more difficult. Laura, the initial respondent, would often make an announcement at the beginning of the event letting everyone know who I was and what I was there for. While this was appreciated, it often made some of the event participants

less willing to be around me, or at least I perceived it in this manner. One possible limitation with being publicly identified as a researcher by one of the event instructors was the loss of invisibility. Often when people know they are being watched they will change their behavior (Esterberg, 2002). The last thing I was interested in as a researcher was making people feel uncomfortable, especially a group of people who may not be that comfortable in the first place. There was no subterfuge attempted; I did not attempt to come up with a cover story, but I did attempt to minimize the role as researcher by specifically not taking notes and by actively participating at each station. When the opportunity arose to have one-on-one conversations with any of the other event participants I would try to subtly ascertain whether or not they would be interested in being interviewed. Approximately six of the 15 interviews conducted in Kansas were obtained from attending Women on Target events. Most of the women at these events were hesitant to sit down for one-on-one conversations. The most common reason given was, "I'm not really a shooter, I'm just here to have fun."

The final 15 interviews were conducted in Colorado. Once again, respondents were located using a snowball sample. The Dean of Student Affairs at the time was someone who was a personal friend as well as someone who had access to a large number of people on campus. The Dean provided an introduction to the first Colorado respondent who then provided introductions to two others. Similar to the Kansas participants, these three initial respondents provided a gateway to other respondents through word of mouth and "vouching" for me as a researcher. At least three of the Colorado respondents were introduced to me by students, at least two by other faculty members. Again, the sample is not random and it representative of those who were willing to be interviewed.

Location Characteristics

Manhattan, KS is located in northwestern, Kansas and has a population of approximately 56,000. It “serves a three-country, 130,000-population regional area as a leader in education, trade, healthcare, entertainment, culture and communication” (<http://cityofmhk.com/2277/Explore-Manhattan>). Manhattan, KS is home to Kansas State University, a Division I institution with more than 24,000 students. It hosts 11 colleges, a graduate school offering “65 master’s degrees, 45 doctoral degrees, and 22 graduate certificates” (<http://www.k-state.edu/about/>). Twenty-seven miles away is Riley, Kansas, home to the 1st Infantry Division Army base. Manhattan, Kansas is a micropolitan statistical area; which, according to the US Census Bureau, “contains an urban core of at least 10,000 (but less than 50,000) population” (<http://www.census.gov/population/metro/>).

The remaining respondents lived in the San Luis Valley or attended Adams State University in southern, Colorado. The San Luis Valley is considered a high alpine valley, which is essentially the size of the state of Rhode Island. The population is roughly 48,000 with the majority of those living in the Alamosa area (<http://www.alamosa.org/community-information/demographics>). The San Luis Valley is home to Adams State University, a Division II, primarily Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with 28 undergraduate majors and 10 graduate programs. It currently does not offer any doctor programs. Adams State has a full time enrollment of approximately 3,500 students (<http://adams.edu/about/>).

The two locations, while different in scope are size are similar in the fact that they both have universities as the central hub.

The Interviews

Interviews were conducted over a two-year period from March of 2007 to December of 2008. The length of time for each interview ranged from thirty minutes to three hours. Interviews were conducted at private homes, coffee shops, gun ranges, and work offices. Respondents were given the opportunity to choose the location for the interview. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed by the researcher and an outside professional transcriptionist. Respondents signed an informed consent form, which was also signed by the researcher. A signed copy of this form with contact information for the researcher, the major professor guiding the research, and the IRB was given to the respondent. Respondents were given full access to the tape recorder and were told they had the right to turn it off at any time, as well as terminate the interview at any time. Only one of the respondents asked to have the tape recorder turned off and this was after she considered the interview to be complete.

There were four primary research questions guiding this research. First, who first got them involved in shooting? The idea was to identify a specific person who got them involved in shooting and use that as a springboard to other questions regarding experiences with shooting. Second, what experiences they have had with shooting. Third, how and why did they come to be gun owners or women who shoot. Finally, what kind of training, formal or informal, have they had. The questions were designed to elicit information regarding participant's experiences with shooting as well as the pathways regarding how and why they become gun owners. The original impetus for asking about ownership began with delinquency literature which examines gendered pathways to lawbreaking. "Drawing on insights from life-course theories of crime, feminist schools have examined the individual histories of female offenders and found that their pathways

to crime and delinquency are often very different than for males” (Fuller, 2009, p. 283). It seemed logical that this would also apply to women and shooting. However, grounded theory became much more applicable as interviews progressed. The aim of grounded theory is to “develop theory grounded in the empirical world” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 34; Charmaz, 2000; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). While the research began with one focus, gendered pathways, after several interviews it became obvious that more of their experiences were more much complex than originally anticipated. As such, the theoretical focus shifted slightly to include how doing gender and boundary maintenance are prevalent in the experiences of these respondents.

I began by asking the respondents to describe the first memory they have of shooting a gun, this led into other areas regarding training and progression.

The first question on the interview schedule asks, “What is your first memory of shooting a gun?” This is meant to do two things. First, it provides a timeline regarding age. If the respondent indicates that she was a child the first time she went shooting it’s likely that there will be more comfort and socialization into a gun culture. This question will typically prompt them to say with whom they first went shooting. If not, the second question on the interview schedule asks that question specifically.

I sought to gather information regarding experiences at two separate places in the interview schedule. First, at the beginning when respondents were asked about their background in shooting; the first question also provided information for the second. Respondents typically followed up with more information about their experiences in addition to their first memory. The third section of the interview schedule deals with the

progression of their interest. How did their interest progress? Was there anything in particular that encouraged them to own a gun? With whom do they go shooting?

Information on gun ownership was ascertained by asking, “How many guns do you currently own? What kind? Why did choose that particular gun?” This particular question was also asked in the section of the interview schedule on progression. The respondents were asked, “Describe to me how you came to be a gun owner.” In many ways, the answer to this question is more important than the sheer numbers and types of guns owned. Based on the answers to this question, are women more likely to buy a gun or receive one in another way such as a gift or inheritance? If it was a gift, what was the reason behind it?

Finally, respondents were asked questions regarding formal and informal training. The main purpose of this question is to not only establish the learning process which goes into shooting, but also to determine who is doing the training. Who are the experts? What are they teaching and how is the teaching being done?

Questions posed to the respondents during interviews were open ended. They explored participants’ training, formal and informal; reasons for pursuing involvement in the shooting sports (i.e. how they got involved); concerns about safety and harassment while at ranges and other shooting events; concerns about home safety and personal safety, coping responses to these concerns, and general experiences with shooting. These types of discussion questions were closely related to the study’s theoretic framework of gendered frameworks. Participants were encouraged to speak freely and expand on their responses through the use of probing questions.

Transcribing, Analyzing, and Coding

Once interviews were complete, they were transcribed verbatim using a foot pedal, earphones, and a word processor. Interview transcription was an ongoing process, with the transcription process beginning shortly after the first interview was complete. The first 18 interviews were transcribed by the researcher; the final 12 were transcribed by an outside professional transcriptionist.

After transcribing, the interviews were printed and open coding was utilized to identify themes and categories of interest (Esterberg, 2002). The transcripts were read line by line and comments were placed in the margins. As more interviews were transcribed more common themes emerged. Themes emerged concerning respondents' reasons for getting involved in the shooting sports, gendered issues of perceived vulnerability and the need to own a firearm (often influenced by a significant male in their lives), strategic ways they dealt with this vulnerability through firearms ownership, and ongoing negotiations with their femininity and their identity as a female shooter.

After identifying themes, clean copies of the interviews were printed and they were reread looking specifically for those particular themes. Esterberg (2002) identifies this as "focused coding." After all transcripts were coded into themes index cards were utilized to organize specific quotes from respondents into specific themes. While this is considered to me an "old school" method of organizing, the act of physically rewriting the quotes also helped with remembering them. In addition, once a quote was used, a line was drawn through the index card and it was set aside so that it would not be used more than once.

Demographics

Respondents were asked about education, occupation, and the “type” of shooter they believed themselves to be (hunter, target, protection, etc.). Shooter was loosely defined as “someone who shoots.” I specifically asked about occupation because I was interested in talking to the everyday woman about firearms, I was not interested in women who use firearms professionally or as part of their jobs as I presumed they would have a very different reason for becoming gun owners. While they may have had excellent information regarding gendered beliefs about shooting ability, I specifically wanted to focus on non-professional women who shoot. I did, however, inadvertently end up interviewing three women who worked in law enforcement.

Respondents ranged in age from 19 to late 60s. While there was a location on the demographic information sheet asking “age at last birthday” some of the respondents chose to just list “20s” or “30s” so this information has been left out of the analysis. Of those that responded, the majority of the respondents were either in their 20s or 50s.

Ten of the respondents were college students, six had undergraduate degrees, three had master’s degrees, one was working on a master’s degree, three had PhD’s, four were unknown, two were ABD, and two had only graduated from high school.

Table 3-1 Education

	High School	College Student	Undergraduate Degree	Master’s Degree/ In-Progress Master’s Degree	ABD	PhD	Unknown
N = 31	2	10	6	4	2	3	4
Percentage	6.5%	32.3%	19.4%	12.9%	6.5%	9.7%	12.9%

Using information ascertained from the interviews, nine of the shooters identified as owning guns for protection purposes, six were target shooters, six were hunters, two

used firearms for hunting and protection, two for protection and target shootings, one for hunting and target shooting, one for competition shooting and hunting, one for competition and target shootings, and one for competition, protection, and hunting (these last three categories have been merged together on Table 3-3). Two did not identify as any specific type of shooters, they had attended Women on Target events simply out of curiosity.

Table 3-2 Types of Shooters

	Hunter Only	Hunter/Protection	Hunter/Target	Protection Only	Protection/Target	Target Only	Competition/Hunter/Protection/Target	Unknown
N=31	6	2	1	9	2	6	3	2
Percentage	19.4%	6.5%	3.2%	29.0%	6.5%	19.4%	9.7%	6.5%

Occupations ranged from undergraduate students, elementary education teachers, government workers, retired military, masters and PhD students, and college professors. One respondent was a stay at home mom, the rest either worked outside of the home, were retired, or were students of some kind. The two retired personnel consisted of a college professor (who was former military) and former teacher.

Table 3-3 Occupations

	College Professor	Undergraduate Student	Elementary Teacher	Government Employee	Graduate Student	Police Officer	Retired	University Employee	Other	Unknown
N=31	3	7	2	4	2	3	2	2	4	2
Percentage	9.7%	22.6%	6.5%	12.9%	6.5%	9.7%	6.5%	6.5%	12.9%	6.5%

The majority of the participants were either undergraduate students or government employees. This is consistent with the two locations where interviews were conducted. Manhattan, Kansas is located 27 miles from Fort Riley Army Base. The four respondents who identified as government employees worked at Fort Riley, three as classified staff (civilian) and one as enlisted personnel who worked as a secretary. Several of the

respondents who identified as college students attended either Kansas State University or Adams State University in Alamosa, Colorado.

Historical Analysis of Women Shooters

According to Gardner (2006), “historical analysis is commonly used in social research as an introductory strategy for establishing a context or background against which a substantive contemporary study may be set” (Definition section, para. 1).

Historical analysis allows researchers to look at a particular subject in the past within the context of that time period and compare it to current conceptions of the same subject.

“The charting and assessment of currents of continuity, as well as change, is a major concern for the historical method, alongside other key conceptualizations such as chronology, periodization, causation, context and influence” (Gardner 2006, Distinctive Features section, para 3). In other words historical analysis can be used to identify how a topic, in this case women and guns, has changed chronologically through the years.

The following analysis profiles a handful of historical women who used firearms in one form or another. Some of them are famous, some infamous, most have never been heard of by the general public. What makes these women important? Women with guns historically and stereotypically have been fictionalized, immortalized, masculinized, feminized, or sexualized; they are never just shown as *women* who also happen to shoot. Sensationalized women shooters are sensationalized because a belief appears to exist that shooting is a masculine, hence male, domain. In essence, a woman shooter is often perceived of an anomaly. However, as demonstrated by the women highlighted below, guns have been used by women, in a variety of ways, for a very long time.

Women on the Frontier

Women on the frontier faced a particular dichotomy in regards to womanhood. The image of the 'Prairie Madonna' is often seen in images of the Old West. Sitting on the seat of a covered wagon, the Prairie Madonna is a vision of pure womanhood, wearing a long sleeved dress with a serene expression on her face. The back of the covered wagon almost looks like a halo or wings spreading out behind her (http://westbynorthwest.org/artman/publish/article_1530.shtml). This image of a genteel frontier woman is deceiving. While it is true that frontier women did work to present an idealized image of femininity, they also worked very hard in the traditional sense. In addition to daily chores within and around the house, such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, gardening, and preserving food, they were also expected to help with the 'outside' work if their husbands needed an extra pair of hands. On the trail as well, frontier women had little rest. During the daytime hours they were expected to watch over the children while the husband drove the wagon. At camp, women became responsible for caring and feeding the family while still taking care of the children. If needed, women also took up firearms to protect their family or home from real or perceived threat (Riley, and Etulain eds, 2003;1996; Riley, 1988;1984;1981).

On the frontier women often took up guns in the absence of men, which may or may not be so different than the current information on female gun ownership. "No matter where they went, American women could count on facing danger head-on, often alone. Men were often absent whether hunting, attending to matters in town or on the country seat, working in the fields, fighting Indians, or off in the military service or training" (Kelley, 2004, p. 52).

Many white frontier women were trying to perfect the idealized image of pure Victorian womanhood. To this end, they often did their daily chores while wearing the latest fashions, one of these being the wide hoop skirt which made the tending of the fire particularly hazardous. When women did use firearms they were not betraying their femininity, they were temporarily renegotiating gender norms consistent with the time period with the express understanding that the men would take up these responsibilities once again on their return to the homestead.

Annie Oakley and Lillian Smith

Ask anyone to name an iconic female shooter and invariably the name they choose is Annie Oakley. Ask for a second name and, after some thought, Calamity Jane comes to mind. Ask for a third and often silence ensues. In American history, Oakley is the quintessential woman shooter; very few, if any, women will ever live up to her standard. Oakley has had books written about her, movies made about her, and she's become immortalized as the feminine ideal of lady shooters. The most interesting aspect about Annie Oakley from a gendered perspective was her adamant insistence of being perceived in a feminine light.

Annie was born in 1860 in Ohio with the surname of Moses. Her father passed away in 1866, the year Annie turned six, and her mother was busy trying to take care of her other siblings, all six of them (Riley and Etulain, 1997). Annie began hunting at this time as a way to provide meat for her family. It is written that she always tried to kill her prey with one shot to the head so as not to spoil the meat. As she grew older she began shooting and selling the meat to businesses, known as market-shooting (Riley and Etulain, 1997; Stange and Oyster, 2000).

It is impossible to think of Annie Oakley without tying her to Frank Butler, her eventual husband and manager. Annie first met Frank at a shooting contest. Reports indicate that Frank, a sharpshooter in his own right, chuckled when he saw he would be competing against a mere girl. His laughter stopped when she beat him twenty-five to twenty-four (Riley and Etulain, 1996). Shortly afterwards Annie joined Frank on the road. They traveled and performed in several vaudeville acts until they finally joined Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show. Annie was not part of the show until Frank's regular partner was not able to perform one night. It was expected that Annie would simply hold or throw up targets for Frank. Instead, she shocked the audience, and presumably Buffalo Bill, when she insisted on taking every other shot. From that point forward, Annie took the last name Oakley and was a main attraction in the show (Riley and Etulain, 1996). As time wore on Frank actually began to take a back seat and functioned more as Annie's manager.

What made Annie such a treat to the public was not only her skill with the rifle, but her presentation of self and impression management. Unlike Calamity Jane, who was often accused of not "acting like a lady," Annie Oakley was a vision of Victorian femininity and the epitome of ladylike behavior, even when shooting a rifle while riding a horse. At five foot even and 110 pounds she dressed in long skirts, long-sleeved, high-necked shirts and allowed her long dark hair to fall down her back. It is said that she embroidered between acts and would often invite guests over for tea afterwards, she was the consummate hostess. Even though she was transgressing gender norms for the time period as a shooter she did so in such a way that neither her femininity, nor men's sense of masculinity, was threatened or challenged in any way.

Oakley's feminine appearance fit well with Cody's experiences. Buffalo Bill and his [business] partner...expressed the hope that the appearance of a woman shooter in the arena would reassure female viewers and calm their fears...Women and children see a harmless woman there, and they do not get worried." (Riley, 1996 p.103)

The fact that Annie was quoted in 1888 as saying that her "highest ambition was to be considered a lady" (p. 103) demonstrates her awareness of gendered ideals of the time.

Not only did Oakley successfully perfect an image of Victorian femininity, it was also an idealized image of white femininity, "none was more explicitly white than the iconic Annie Oakley of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show" (Browder, 2006 p. 85). In the late 1800s, Lillian Smith, another female performer joined the Wild West show. Unlike Oakley, Lillian Smith had mixed raced ancestry and was often billed as a "Wild Savage" or an "Indian Princess" wearing much more revealing clothing than Oakley (Browder, 2006).

A comparison of Oakley and her less remembered (and more racially ambiguous) rival, Lillian Smith, provides a perfect opportunity to explore the peculiar relationship between women, guns, and race, made manifest through performance. Oakley presented herself as a model of Anglo-American womanhood by sewing her own costumes and expressing her opposition to female suffrage." (Browder, 2006 p. 86)

Oakley criticized Smith "for her shoddy work, poor grammar, and what Oakley later called her ample figure" (Browder, 2006 p. 91). Whereas Annie embraced

traditional notions of womanhood, Lillian Smith, like Calamity Jane, did not. Annie often reminded people that she began using guns to provide for her family, not because she did not enjoy traditional girl activities. Lillian Smith, on the other hand, “seemed to take particular pleasure in competing directly with men” (Browder, 2006 pp. 90-91). Whereas Oakley epitomized femininity and ladylike behavior, Smith “boasted of her skills, dressed in a less-than-modest fashion, and fraternized with the men of the Wild West troupe” (Browder, 2006 p.91). In other words, Smith refused to adopt the model of Victorian womanhood embraced by Oakley as part of her identity and upon which she ultimately built her career. The refusal may, perhaps, be part of the reason why she is not remembered as well as Annie Oakley.

Current depictions of women shooters also seem grounded in femininity and domesticity. Consider the following descriptions of an Olympic gold medalist, a competitive trapshooter, an uncategorized competitive shooter, and a women who runs a hunting camp.

“Kim Rhode, the Olympic gold medalist at the 1996 games—the youngest winner ever—is a tiny blonde” Kelly, 2004, p. 165). “Kyndra Hogan, a slim, petite blond twenty-two year old from Springfield, Oregon, is the second-best trapshooter in the United States. Like many American women who take up the shooting sports, Hogan began hunting with her father” (p. 165). “Patricia Black, a trim sixty-three-year-old with short blond hair from Fairborn, Ohio, was competing in Vandalia wearing a floral T-shirt, aqua vest, white leather gloves and diamond studs” (p. 166). “Gwynne Lundgren...lean, elegantly lovely, red-haired, long-legged, she looks at forty-five like a Jane Austen character in gun boots...On the seat of her

truck sits a Coach purse, Revo sunglasses, and a .22 revolver in a tooled leather case” (Kelley 2004, p. 203).

Without exception all of these women are described in terms of their physical characteristics and their accoutrements. Kelly (2004) even compares Oakley to a much more current icon of domesticity, Martha Stewart. Kelly makes a connection between Oakley and Stewart’s abilities to be successful, competitive, businesswomen while also “smiling, gracious, domestic goddess[es]” (p.55). However, one could argue that, unlike Martha Stewart, Oakley relied on her husband, Frank Butler, to manage her finances. That being said, however, both Oakley and Stewart negotiated femininity successfully. While their actions could be viewed as examples of undoing gender, by challenging feminine stereotypes, their focus on femininity and domesticity seem to put them squarely in the realm of doing gender in ways accountable to traditional feminine stereotypes.

Calamity Jane

In direct opposition to Annie Oakley; Calamity Jane, born Martha Jane Cannary, did not flawlessly navigate feminine ideals with the masculine norm of shooting. Calamity Jane is famous not because of her flawless negotiation of gender ideals, but because of her decided lack of feminine ideals and behavior. Rather than wearing flowing skirts, embroidering, and serving tea, Calamity instead donned men’s pants, swore, and drank liquor, often to excess. She acted ‘more like a man’ than the Victorian ideal of femininity “Like many American women who gained notoriety for their gun use, Calamity Jane was less interested in breaking the rules of polite American society than in

writing her own” (Kelly, 2004, p. 53). One could argue that while Annie Oakley performed gender appropriately, based on her sex; Calamity Jane did not.

In 1936, Cecile B. DeMille directed *The Plainsman*, “the story of Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane, the hardest boiled pair of lovers who ever rode the plains...a glorious romance set against the whole flaming pageant of the Old West...” (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0028108/>). In the film, Calamity is seen as wild, masculine, and aggressive. She’s “too forward with Bill [Wild Bill Hickock], pushing at him, touching, and kissing him” (Riley and Etulain, 2003 p.189), yet at the same time there’s also a focus on her femininity. Her clothes, “form-fitting buckskins are clean and not unattractive, her hair nicely arranged and never much out of place despite the non-stop action” (p. 189). The film also portrays a decided sense of gender norms in that “Calamity plays a romantic, vernacular woman of the frontier who wishes to marry” (p. 189), who nurtures, cares for, and cleans up after the saloon patrons (Riley and Etulain, 2003). While this fictionalized portrayal of Calamity is appealing to the masses, there is very little truth to any of it. According to Browder, (2006) Calamity Jane utilized the intrigue and fascination with the Wild West to create an iconic image of “armed western womanhood” (p. 82), one which did not fit with prevailing views at the time of how women should behave. This image was not grounded in ideas of nurturing, romantic desires or interest in marriage.

Only one publication has actually looked beyond this less than ideal image. In their 2003 work, Riley, and Etulain produced an edited work about Wild Women of the Old West. They would have been remiss to not include Calamity Jane. The authors tell a story of a journalist who interviewed Calamity later on in her life,

Calamity told the journalist that her past was embarrassing and that, most of all, she wanted now to establish a home for her family. Few of her contemporaries understood what the journalist realized on that day in Deadwood: more than anything else, Calamity Jane wished to be a typical wife and mother, like other pioneer women. (Riley and Etulain, 2000 p. 187)

This leads one to wonder if Calamity had always desired this, or if she had finally given in to the pressure of ideal womanhood.

Osa Johnson

Osa Johnson is another historical figure known for being an armed woman. Browder (2006) refers to Osa Johnson as “Little Big Game Hunter.” Originally from Chanute, Kansas, “Osa grew up hunting rabbits with her father” (Browder, 2006 p. 94). She began her career as an armed woman after marrying and traveling for twenty-six years with her husband, a filmmaker. Johnson is similar to Oakley in that she created and built her public image around gendered norms of white femininity. In fact, Browder (2006) claims that “Osa Johnson has completed the task that Annie Oakley had begun in the 1880s: she gained acclaim as an armed woman who could reinforce, rather than threaten, established racial and gendered hierarchies” (p. 98). In her role as helpmate to her husband, Martin; Osa negotiates gender by assuming hunting as a wifely duty. To help her husband, who does not like to hunt, she takes on the role of provider but manages to frame it simply as being an extremely dutiful wife. “Thus, rather than challenging conventional gender roles, she gladly accepts them, standing by her man under any and all circumstances” (Browder, 2006, p. 95). In other words, she managed to frame hunting, big game hunting in particular, as another form of woman’s work.

Osa's hunting skills, particularly of big game animals, were often the focus of her husband's film-making and she was billed as a sharp-shooter. What the general public did not know was that off camera she had backup in case the shot didn't go as planned. A young American sharpshooter stood at the ready with a rifle, protecting both Osa and Martin from possible harm. He was purposely kept off camera to keep the image of Osa shooting at the big game animal as pure as possible. "Osa's image as the armed, cute, diminutive white woman was too marketable for the Johnsons to dilute" (Browder, 2006 p. 96). By maintaining this image, and presenting her shooting in the form of wifely duties, Osa managed to hold true to the notion that armed women were not a threat to the male sex or to gendered norms of masculinity and femininity.

Plinky Topperwein

Elizabeth 'Plinky' Topperwein was another lady shooter in the 1900s. Plinky traveled with her husband for the Winchester Repeating Arms Company as an exhibition shooter. In images, Plinky is dressed in a flowered, button-up dress, wearing a scarf, she's holding a rifle over her left shoulder. It is written that Plinky had never even picked up a gun prior marrying her husband, Ad.

The promotional materials for the Topperwein's always made it clear that Plinky's shooting developed only as a result of her marriage to Ad. As another Winchester Pamphlet noted, 'Mrs. Topperwein did not know the difference between a shotgun and a rifle before her marriage. She became interested in the sport watching her husband's fascinating shooting, and under his coaching developed into a star of the first magnitude' (Browder, 2006 p. 70).

Similar to Oakley, Plinky became a star through her husband and is always shown in feminine dress. Dissimilar to Oakley, Plinky had never picked up a gun prior to meeting her husband. This framing makes it very clear that while shooting may become a woman's forte it is not something that would occur without the careful tutelage of her husband.

Wartime Women

One particularly fascinating subgroup of women shooters are wartime women, particularly those who participated in wartime activities before women were accepted as soldiers. Pauline Cushman and Loretta Velasquez were two such women. Images of Pauline Cushman showed her dressed very manly in slacks, black boots, and a long jacket. Her waist was emphasized with a military sash, but she was not slender. In fact, she appeared to be a rather tall woman with large hips. Her brunette hair was curly under her cap. Her face was serious and without makeup. Loretta Velasquez, also known as Lieutenant Harry T. Buford, was one wartime woman who actually cross-dressed in order to make it into combat. Images of her showed what most of us would assume is a feminine man, wearing pants and a jacket, brandishing a bayonet. Her hair had been cut very short and she sported facial hair (Browder, 2006).

Two others include Elisabeth C. Smith and Jennie Hodgers. Smith dressed like a man and joined the military under the name of Bill Newcom, "in 1847 [she] volunteered for service in the Mexican War. She served as a private in a regiment of Missouri infantry for eight months before her true identity was discovered and she was discharged" (Riley, 1988 p.108). Smith later married and successfully petitioned the United States Congress for back pay. Jennie Hodgers, also dressed like a man and joined the Union

Army in 1862 under the name of Albert Cashier. Unlike Smith, Hodgers true identity was never revealed, she never married, and her true identity was not uncovered until a car accident in 1911. Her biological sex was a closely guarded secret until she passed away in 1915 (Riley, 1988).

Armed Women Criminals: Belle Starr, And Bonnie Parker

Belle Starr was born on February 5, 1848, as Myra Belle Shirley. Starr is often perceived as a notorious woman with a gun. What made Belle Starr most notorious was not necessarily the fact that she wore six-shooters at her side but that she had been common-law married eight times, losing each husband to murder. She also had a habit of providing shelter to outlaws on the run from the law. Starr herself was murdered on February 3, 1889; she was shot in the back with a double-barreled shotgun (Kelly, 2004). Her murderer was never caught.

To some extent Starr followed established gender norms in regards to her dress, in other ways she often went over the top:

Starr almost always dressed in a long, dark velvet gown, carried six-shooters at her side, and rode sidesaddle with a high collar chiffon waist, and black leather boots, often drowning the effect with a cream-colored Stetson with an ostrich plume (Kelly, 2004, p. 54).

Armed women criminals of the 1920s and 1930s were fascinating to the general public. Browder (2006) wrote:

...by looking at the careers of some of the most famous female criminals of the day, most notably Bonnie Parker, one can learn how these women were able to

skillfully manage their own public images, presenting themselves not as eugenic disasters but as star-cross lovers or even would-be mothers.” (p. 102)

Typical of the time period in which they lived, these armed women criminals were seen as an anomaly, something so far outside the norm that law enforcement, and the general public weren't quite sure what to make of them. The general public found them fascinating; their stories became the grist of newspaper stories and tabloid articles. Law enforcement, most notably J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI, had a completely different perspective.

J. Edgar Hoover did his best to “lay the blame for American social decay at the feet of female gangsters” (Browder, 2006 p.135). In Hoover's view, women were to blame for the disintegration of America's moral values. By attacking women criminals, particularly mothers, Hoover painted women criminals as “the cause of crime in America, either through bad motherhood or through unnatural domination of her man” (Browder, 2006, pp. 100-101). Hoover wanted to make women criminals the image of what was wrong with America. The public view of crime in America in the 1930s was shifting from “the urban, ethnic gangster to a rural, all-American type of criminality” (p. 101). Browder, (2006) argues that “racial fears focused on ethnic gangsters were now displaced onto female gangsters: gender, in effect, became racialized, and Hoover and others on the right saw criminality as deeply intertwined with the breakdown in gender roles” (p.101)

Popular fiction often supported this belief. Female criminals in the media were often portrayed as eugenics mistakes or grieving mothers. Marriage, in this popular fiction, typically equated to reform. In other words, all it took was the love of a good

man to bring women back into the fold of American womanhood where she could perform her proper duties as wife and mother.

Perhaps two of the more romantic figures in American history are Bonnie and Clyde. Prior to becoming involved with Bonnie Parker, Clyde Barrows was considered little more than a “two-bit crook.” It was only after becoming involved with each other that Bonnie and Clyde went on their crime spree. “Between 1932 and 1934, they went on a crime spree through Texas, Louisiana, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Arkansas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, committing twelve murders and scores of robberies and engaging in nearly a dozen incidents of hostage-taking” (Browder, 2006, p. 131). Bonnie and Clyde played a vital part in shaping their own image, by providing photographs and poems to the press. One of the images published in the press showed Bonnie pointing a gun at Clyde. It was written that Bonnie was furious over the publication of this photo since it tainted her feminine image. The importance of Bonnie as an armed woman was that she was able to create herself as a heroine in the eyes of the public, something typically and historically only available to men (Browder, 2006).

Chapter 4 - Analysis

Interviews with respondents made up the bulk of this research. In total, 30 women who identified as either gun owners or someone who shoots were interviewed. Respondents chose their identity based upon their perceived involvement with firearms. Some participants considered themselves owners if there was a firearm in the house or if their significant other owned a firearm, others considered themselves owners only if the firearm was theirs and theirs alone. A similar theme was found with the identity of shooter. Very few of the participants self-identified themselves as shooters, they perceived that as an identity for someone who went shooting on a very regular basis or went shooting by themselves. Since many of the participants did not shoot outside of the company of significant men in their lives, they simply considered themselves someone who shoots. As interviews progressed several themes were identified. A few of the main themes identified in the analysis include: first contact/first time shooting, protection, men as experts, gendered experiences, and women as unique and special.

First Contact/First Time Shooting

After introductions and informed consent forms were taken care of, the first question asked of the respondents was, "So tell me about your first experience shooting a gun." Respondents reported coming into contact with guns at very different times in their lives. But, without exception, all of their memories involved an interaction with a significant male in their lives.

Barbara was four years old the first time she shot a gun, a .22 rifle. She fondly describes a picnic-like atmosphere where after eating, and then shooting, they dug for sassafras tea. As a military child, Barbara experienced guns at a young age and her

interest in guns was encouraged and cultivated as she aged. She went shooting while her family was overseas as well as at numerous army bases. Her father got her involved with the National Rifle Association while overseas and it was through this program that she achieved Sharp Shooter and Pro-Marksman status. In addition, while overseas she achieved a prestigious Post award, which was awarded by the post commander; she was a sophomore in high school at the time. As Barbara states, “I *only* got to expert. We were working, my brother and I were both working on distinguished...but we left before we could complete [it].” Her comfort level with guns is apparent in her confidence.

Charlie also grew up in a household where guns were common. As a young girl from Kansas she spent time with her father who was an NRA member and an avid hunter.

So a lot of it was....lifestyle just being around it um...living on a farm my-my dad is a member of the NRA, he’s...he’s a big hunter...and I kinda became a part of it. I, I mean I’ve got pictures of when I was little holding little wooden guns (both laugh) standing beside him and his hunting dog while he was all dressed in camo and everything and I was just standin’ there with my little wooden gun. Um...and then I think the first time I was really interested in it was....somewhere around my 3rd or 4th grade year in grade school.

Charlie

In addition to spending time with her father it was also the culture of her hometown to get involved in shooting sports. Her father, and several of the other fathers in the town, also acted as the program directors for her 4-H shooting club. She was eight years old when she and a group of girls she “ran around with, they were also kinda the farm kids” began

shooting with their fathers as a group activity. She saw shooting competitively as a natural progression.

And so I naturally just got involved in it. Started shooting BB gun. Um...started doing competition BB gun then went to air rifle and started shooting competition air rifle to the point where (pause) about my 7th grade 8th grade year in middle school I was at the level where I was shooting at nationals.

Charlie is one of the few respondents who mentioned shooting competitively; and, as shall be discussed later, struggled with that decision when she entered high school.

Thelma and Louise were two sisters who were interviewed together. Thelma literally burst out laughing when asked about her first experience shooting:

Mine is easy it was my father...um my dad... in fact the very first time I ever tried to hit the literally the broad side of a barn... *Literally?* Literally. I was 12. I mean daddy-my father had always had guns but never we never saw them but we knew he had them, uh, because he'd talk about shooting this and that and whatever but anyway, uh, decided that my brothers, I have two brothers that are next to me, and I needed to learn how to shoot. So he had a handgun. We went out with a handgun...And he made a target on the barn with a little bull's-eye and it wasn't a very big target....And he said okay I just wanna see if you can hit first the barn and second the target and if you can hit the bull's-eye that's even better. Well I remember shooting the gun then falling down on the ground afterwards. Which was not as bad as my brothers (both laugh) Charlie wouldn't touch the gun, my brother next to me, wouldn't touch the gun. But uh that's my first recollection of having a gun in my hand.

Thelma

Louise, interestingly enough, indicated that she hadn't gone shooting for the first time until she was an adult. It was unclear why one sister learned to shoot as a child while the other did not shoot for the first time until she was an adult. While Thelma was shooting at the broad side of a barn with her father, Louise was convinced to fire a rifle by the man she was dating.

Shooting a gun.....um.....gosh I was an adult. It's been probably 8...8 years ago. 8 or 9. We were with some friends camping and well it was during turkey season and the man I was dating, avid hunter, and he coaxed me into firing his gun. That was, that was...aside from a BB gun I might've shot a BB gun as a...as a child but I don't remember. Really I don't and having four brothers you'd think I'd remember firing BB guns.

Louise

The sisters at this point began to laugh and talk about running away from their brothers who would shoot at them with BB guns. While they shared different experiences with shooting, one with their father, one with a man friend, they shared a memory of being shot at with BB guns by their brothers. The common theme through their story-telling was that guns were a part of their lives. While they may have had different experiences they were in the household where they grew up and continued to be a part of their experience, for the most part, as adults.

Laura also grew up with guns in the household, but unlike Barbara, Charlie, and Thelma and Louise her experiences are diametrically different. As a child, Laura was

aware that were father owned a gun, but she and her three sisters were not allowed to touch it; that privilege was only awarded to her father and brother.

The first time I had the opportunity to hold it I was 45. You know, he had turned around to hand it to me and I was trying to get away from it because I wasn't supposed to touch it. And he goes, no, it's OK, you're old enough, you can handle it now.

Laura

Two years prior to this Laura had gone shooting with her husband for the first time. Her gun socialization is evident in her description; she was trained to believe that women were not supposed to shoot guns, at least not until a certain age.

Denise was also introduced to guns by her father and grandfather, primarily her grandfather. She grew up with guns in the household so they were not an anomaly to her. When asked what her first memory was of shooting a gun she relayed a rather shocking narrative:

Um my first memory they wouldn't let me shoot my gun they wouldn't let me shoot any guns until I had my hunter safety card. And um I got that and my grandpa wanted me to try out his 30.06 and a 25.06 and....all of the bigger rifles because I they wanted me to be a hunter with em so we went up to a shooting range and....*You shot a 30.06 when you were 7 years old?* I shot a 30.06 when I was 7 years old. (laughs)

Denise

Joyce was in her late 30s the first time she came into contact with a gun. She was unexpectedly presented with a gift from her husband:

It was a rifle, he was...he got this rifle, it came in the mail and he didn't tell me about it beforehand. And I was just stunned because [pause], my family, in my family you didn't have guns, it was the wrong thing to do to have a gun.

Joyce

Joyce expanded on this by saying that "back on the farm everybody had varmint guns, but if you lived in town you had no excuse for a gun." She sees a clear difference between country folk and city folk and who should or should not own guns. To her way of thinking, guns are something that belong in the country. The fact that one showed up unexpectedly in her home disturbed her sense of the way things worked. She was also disturbed by the fact that she did not ask for, nor want, any type of firearm. In fact, the manner in which she described the gifting of the gun came across as more of an ambush rather than a welcome gift.

Sydney and Phoebe also got into shooting because of their husbands. "And that's actually how I got more into it, he's a hunter. And I was like, 'oh, I'd love to do that even though I don't do very good at it, but really like to...'" *So you like to go out and hunt?* "Oh, no. I don't like to hunt, I just like to shoot." (Phoebe). She does not have any objections at all to other people hunting; she just does not want it to be her. She is also minimizing her skill level.

[T]hat's just how it is. The boys go out with their rifles and shotguns, kill the deer, blah, blah, blah. I'm not up for...I don't have a problem with it. I don't have to pay beef prices, so you know, we keep our fingers crossed that he gets the deer each year, so I don't have to go out and pay three whatever-it-is a pound for food. Plus with all the tornadoes and crop damage and what not, and livestock floating

off in rivers, probably not such a bad thing. And you know, if you could hunt at a reasonable hour and have a good conversation I might. But I told him I'm not a morning person, I'm not getting up before the sun does, trucking out in the cold, sitting by a tree, and I can't do anything other than.. *And it's wet and cold?* He's like, "Oh well there's been times I've been out there and it's snowed on me!" I was like, (sarcastically) "Yeah that sounds like fun. Way to encourage me to go."

Phoebe

The theme of needing someone to get them involved became more and more prevalent as the research progressed. It was becoming very clear that women did not, for the most part, feel comfortable simply picking up shooting as a hobby on their own. All of the respondents started shooting because of their relationship with a significant male, whether it was their father, a boyfriend, or a husband.

Becoming Owners

Without exception, all but one of the respondents initially became gun owners through a man. Barbara received her first gun from her father. It was a rite of passage when, at the age of 12, she was given the .22 rifle she first shot when she was four. When asked about guns she's bought for herself, she replied:

I've only bought two, three, in my life, that's what I've bought. That's what I've bought outright. In San Antonio was my first one; I went in with a vet[eran], a male vet. So we went in and I got a cold cup match pistol. *Did they talk to you or did they talk to the gentleman with you?* "Me! Me! Because I was buying! I was buying. I guess I have enough presence and enough knowing what I'm doing."

Barbara

It was clear from her response that the question was considered offensive. Had the salesclerk had the misfortune to treat her differently she would have taken her business elsewhere, “So if I’m the one purchasing it...it’s no problem to deal with me. And if they have a problem, I won’t deal with them!” Barbara attributes her confidence and skill in guns to her ability to deal with men who treat her differently as a woman shooter. As she states,

If you’re unsure at one thing, you’re going to be unsure at others. And if you’ve got a man. See, of course I’ve never been married. That makes a difference; I’ve never had anyone tell me I couldn’t! I think that’s a very important point frankly. Thank heavens I don’t have someone telling me what I can’t do, because men are so good at telling you what you can’t do

Barbara

It is intriguing that Barbara perceives men as people who tell women things they can’t do, particularly since her father was instrumental in her learning to shoot. On the other hand, it could be that she perceived her father as including her in something he enjoyed, not as something she was being told to do. Another possible explanation could be her experience in the military or as a female in a male-dominated educational field.

Laura received her first gun from a boyfriend [after her divorce] as a means of protection. After experiencing a traumatic victimization by a coworker, Laura embraced guns and shooting. At the time this research was conducted, Laura owned 18 guns. Five of the guns had been given as either gifts or as inheritance; she purchased the remaining guns.

Laura has unique views on safety and storage, which could be connected to her being a victim. She keeps two loaded guns in the house at all times, two shotguns. One she keeps by the front door, the other by the closet. However, she is adamant about not keeping a loaded gun in the house. "I don't even consider them loaded because they are. OK, the NRA thing, you do not have loaded guns unless they are in use. OK? Those two guns are in use 24 hours a day." It is clear that Laura views these two weapons as necessary tools for her survival.

Laura and Barbara both claim agency and ownership regarding guns and ownership. Laura, however, got her first firearms as gifts from a boyfriend. As stated previously, Laura was not allowed to touch firearms as a child; and, when her father tried to hand her a .45 to shoot when she was adult she shied away from it. The boyfriend who gave Laura guns was doing so for her protection.

(A)nd he taught me how to load it and, revolver, .357 revolver, and taught me how to shoot it and, uh, when he gave me that revolver he shot it a .38 special round into the barn board and it just cut a nice little hole, yeah, 3/8 of an inch. And, uh, he goes. If you didn't hit something vital, they could get to the hospital. He goes, now watch this. And he took a shotgun and shot the same board from the same distance and blew the board in half. He goes, they're not going to make it to the hospital Laura. So, I want you to keep this pistol handy and he gave me a shotgun. But this one is the one that you're going to use to defend yourself if you have the time to get to it. So that's when I got interested in shooting. And then we dated for two years, two and a half years, and uh, broke up.

Laura

For Laura, this experience sparked a life-long interest in shooting. She went on to become a firearms instructor for the NRA as well as a Concealed Carry Instructor in the State of Kansas.

Joyce has a different story. Joyce became an owner in a similar manner to which a gun first came into the household, her husband randomly brought one home and informed her it was hers.

They are all [her husband's] guns except for this one little .22 short that he says is *mine*. And you know, he just brought it home one day and I don't, I don't follow guns, I don't know enough to know all the different kinds there are, and everything. But he saw that, and thought it was interesting and cute, and that will be Joyce's gun.

Joyce

When asked about establishing rules for guns in the house she replied, "I mentioned to him at one point that I was concerned about storing guns *and* ammunition in the house because if somebody got in the house they could load a gun...and um, I think he does that." Joyce also does not have access to the gun safe; it is something that only her husband gets into. Guns are very much the man's domain in Joyce's case. Her husband buys and sells them according to his whim with little consideration for her desires. In fact, she describes the .22 pistol he bought her as 'clinky;' she prefers to use his .45 pistol. The fact that he bought her, what he described as a "cute" gun rather than one she prefers indicates that he has certain ideas about the type of a gun a woman should own. As a side note, Joyce was very clear that her family did not approve of her shooting guns

in any way, shape, or form. It was fine for her husband to shoot, but not her. At one time during the interview I asked her, “So what do you think your mother would do if she found out you owned a gun?” She replied:

Well, uh, I think she'd be upset [very matter of fact]. And I know she'd try to talk me into getting rid of it or she'd say, maybe she'd say, well, this isn't really Joyce's gun, it's really [her husband's]. And, he's a gadget guy so that's OK. And, but it would be, it would take her awhile to get used to the idea of it. To get used to thinking that it's OK. And, there was one time when she found out that we had been out shooting clays so we had to confess to that, but, uh, I tried to make it sound like it was a thing to just see if you could hit the target, that it was just, it was just, it was just for sport.

Joyce

Reggie got her first gun as a child. Growing up with brothers they all got BB guns for Christmas. “So it all just started I mean at Christmas time we all got BB guns. And since I was...it didn't matter if I was the only girl – I got a BB gun and a doll.” As an adult, she married a man who was a gun enthusiast. He bought her a Bersa .380 so she could practice before taking a concealed carry course. “(L)ook, I'm a girl and I wanna know, I want them to think I know what I'm doing so...so um we practiced and I loaded and unloaded it and got really comfortable with it and then took the class.” It is interesting that this was a common theme with many of the respondents, many of them who took Women on Target or concealed carry courses asked a man in their lives to take them shooting beforehand so they wouldn't look as if they didn't know what they were doing. This will be discussed in more detail later.

When asked if she had ever purchased a firearm of her own she replied that she had not. She expanded on this by saying:

Um...[my husband] knows every caliber, every thing and you know and so before I took the class he um...I think there were five different pistols that he wanted-he wants me he so wants me to be comfortable with guns and just want to shoot all the time and join this cowboy thing. I'm like not oh no, no, no. And I think it'd be okay but um he went out and got five different ones and wanted me to you know...see what they felt like and you know and the recoil and all of that and I shot em.... and then he bought the Bersa. Cause he thought he had done some research and it's a woman's gun it's you know...

Reggie

Reggie continues the story by describing how her husband likes to go into gun places and how it "takes him forever" to look at guns. As she succinctly put it, "Just give me a gun that doesn't, that I can hit the target with and fits my hand and I'm good." She has no desire to spend hours shopping for guns or choosing one of her own, she is more than happy to defer to the superior knowledge of her spouse. It is also interesting that he brought her a "woman's gun" which, by design are typically lighter, have more recoil, and are less accurate.

Thelma and Louise both grew up with firearms in the home, but neither of them became owners until they were adults. When Thelma moved out of the house their dad gifted her with a shotgun. Later in life she purchased a .22 rifle.

I got a .22 yeah and I sold it after a while actually when my son was big enough to walk around and I was afraid he might find it so I ended up selling that and I didn't have another gun until 1995...94 and then I bought a Glock and that's the one I have right now.

Thelma

Louise never really owned a firearm in the true sense until after husband passed away. "Well, you know that if it wasn't for the fact that [my husband] bought the .380 I don't know that I would keep it. But it, my husband passed away that's just...There's sentiment to it, yeah." When asked if she was interested in purchasing any other firearm she indicated she was, and stated: "Um, the security, the head of the university I work at is going to buy my gun for me. Cause you know there are no dealers but he has a friend that could get one for me" (Louise, late 40s). Louise, like many of the respondents, is very comfortable allowing others to make her purchases for her.

Phoebe, on the other hand, was excited about "buying" her own firearm. She describes the trip to Kansas City she and her husband took to purchase the Walter P22 hand gun she wanted for her birthday.

We went up and I got a Walter P22 hand gun. It's just a little bitty thing but it fits my hand and that's like at the women on target event...Actually I'd been kind of planning on going to that. I wasn't sure. I don't like to go do things by myself. *So tell me about buying your gun. Where'd you go?* We decided to trip up to Kansas City...he bought it for me. It was my birthday present. I don't know anything...I don't know anything about

buying them, so whatever. Um, he went with, and we were looking at some different things.

Phoebe

In addition to her discomfort about doing things alone and not knowing much about firearms, she also expressed discomfort with certain types of guns.

Until this last Women on Target event, I hate big guns. I don't feel like I can lift them up, I don't feel like I can hold them. *The rifles?* No I like those, it's the 45 hand guns, 9mm, that sort of thing. I hate his 9mm. He has a... They don't fit my hand, I feel like a little girl trying to pretend that she's impressing the boy with the gun, you know that sort of thing. I want something that'll fit my hand, that I can pull easy, and conceal.

Phoebe

The buying process was a bit frustrating for her, she related it to the process of buying a car.

The biggest thing is they would mostly like to talk to him. "Oh what are you going to get the little lady?" And he's like, "it's up to her. It's her gun." *They really asked him that?* Mmmhmm. It's just short of saying that, because you know, it's the same thing as buying the car. They would turn and talk to him. And he's like, "it's hers, she's paying for it." And he would still be like, "her car, you talk to her." (A)nd the guy was pretty neat, uh, wasn't too bad once you get through all of that. Pretty helpful. He didn't try and steer me one way of the other. He was really into what I wanted.

Phoebe

A few things appear to be going on here. First, a large gun makes her feel like a little girl. This could be a product of not being socialized into guns at an earlier age, it could also be a product of marketing. Either way, it is clear that she prefers a smaller gun. In addition, she is also looking forward to using the firearm as a concealed weapon, perhaps indicating some level of fear.

Phoebe technically did not purchase her own firearm; but, unlike many of the other respondents she was very interested in being present when the firearm was being purchased. She had a very clear idea of what she wanted and what she did not like and was perfectly comfortable making the salesperson aware of that.

Charlie is unique in the sense that she got her first firearm in a roundabout way through a raffle drawing, as a seventh grader. Charlie grew up in rural Kansas as part of a large family.

Um....we didn't have as much money as a lot of things. The way I got my first gun was at a competition for the um....for the 4-H groups there are some guns that were donated for use and so I was using one of them at a competition and they had a raffle drawing for a....shotgun shell reloader. It was an automatic one so it was like....I think....I think it was like a \$500 or \$600 reloader....and I won it and so I won that and one of my coaches came up to me who was also one of my best friends' dad and he said if you give me that reloader (laughs) I'll buy you this gun. So that was the first time and that was when I was doing air rifle. *So you traded the reloader for the gun.* I traded the reloader for an air rifle plus

some money. But yeah so that's the first time I actually owned my own gun. And that was the coolest thing ever.

Charlie

Charlie shot competitively for many years and sees firearms as much more than just a tool for protection. As a hunter and a former competitor she sees guns as a tool for sport. She has also been judged by others for seeing them in such a way.

Um...but I think, I think the more inner city I get, cause I lived in Kansas City for a summer-the more inner city I get the less approval there is of it. And I think a lot of it is just because a lot of people don't see guns as a sport. *OK* They see 'em as a weapon and that's it and I, I don't see them as a weapon. *Uh-huh* Um...I see 'em as the only reason that you should have a gun is 1) yeah you can have it for self-protection that's one thing. The only other reason to have any other kind of gun is for sports and I mean you have the hunting sports, you have the shooting sports, you have the competition sports, whatever. Um...there are a lot of guns on the market that I don't think there's a purpose for at all.

Charlie

Charlie is distinguishing between different types of gun ownership. She is also unintentionally reiterating what the data indicate, that the majority of gun owners are in rural areas (Cao et al, 1997; Celinksa, 2007; Wright and Marston, 1975). She sees a clear distinction between what city people think guns are used for and what rural people think guns are used for. Charlie also sees different types of guns having different uses, and some firearms as having no use at all. When asked specifically which types of guns had no purpose she mentioned semi-automatic rifles.

Protection and Alone Women

EV: ISO SHOT GUN: 12 or 20. Prefer a shorty, but may be interested in others! Thanks!

CE: what for?

EB: Gun room has one for 275! 20 gauge! Little short thing!

EV: Yeah. I tried the gun room. They are closed till Monday. It's for Cathy. Peace of mind!

CE: I have one she can borrow while you are gone

The above post appeared on a social networking site a few months ago. A few key words and phrases stand out: “shorty”, “little short thing”, “peace of mind”, and “while you are gone.” The notion of “Alone Women” became a common, if unexpected, theme during the course of this research. Alone women are those who become gun owners due to their single status, whether permanent or temporary. This includes single/non-married women, single-mothers, married women whose husbands are away, or simply women who are out alone, walking, using public transportation, or in a car by themselves. In other words, they do not have someone else, often a male, around to protect them. Quigley (2005, p.39) uses another fear example to describe a mother who was home alone when a stranger forced his way into the house. Typical of most of her scenarios, the woman is petite, “five-foot-two and 125 pounds” while the intruder was “a tall, husky man, who was over six feet tall and weighed 175 pounds.” While the woman did call the police the man crashed into the house before they arrived, forcing her to defend herself with her firearm. Alone women are often at risk because they are engaged in activities that are deemed unsafe for females, such as being home alone, driving alone or walking by oneself after dark. Finally, it describes women who become armed because they are alone, or going to be alone. This can be a voluntary choice, but more often than not the

respondents indicated that they became armed through a significant male in their lives; or, on a darker note, *because* of a significant male in their lives. It is clear that for women, being alone apparently equals danger.

Abused Women – Protection from Others

Although it probably should not have been surprising, many of the respondents reported obtaining a firearm as protection from an abusive spouse, boyfriend, or other significant other. Phoebe, for example, described a scenario where her grandmother and great-grandmother stood at the front door with loaded shotguns and threatened to shoot her father if he decided to try to come back into the house. “So there’s like an abusive history there. Her [her mother’s] end of it is to, for protection, personal protection. My end of it is that I think it’s fun.” Phoebe considers herself a protection/target shooter who shoots for the fun of it. While she recognizes that firearms can be used for protection, and have been used in such a matter in her family’s past, she does not necessarily see that as a genuine concern for her. In fact, she jokes about someone breaking into their house and how she would have to say, “Hold on mad shooter, let me go get it while I work the combination!”

Dawn on the other hand became a gun owner for protection from her abusive husband. “Yep. Um...he was a drinker...and you know with the alcohol and all that...he would get like an animal and he’d pull guns on me....so that’s one reason, one of the reasons. Mainly to protect myself” (Dawn, 50s). Although she had been divorced for close to 30 years Dawn still had a healthy fear of violence. She recently acquired her concealed carry permit after a church shooting made the news. She stated, “you know, people are out to hurt people and I can’t understand it. You know ‘cause we’re all

human.” In this sense, Dawn had embraced an individualist view of protection, she did not trust law enforcement of the criminal justice system to protect her.

Of all the respondents, Laura probably described the most horrific story of abuse. As an employee at a government agency, Laura worked with a man who showed interest in her. She did not return the interest and rejected his advances, shortly thereafter she started to get frequent flat tires on her vehicle. At first she thought it was an accident, but then became more suspicious. The incidents escalated until she finally reported her concerns about her coworker to local law enforcement. Several weeks later her coworker announced he was taking a vacation to a small town in southern Colorado. Laura was thrilled because she would finally be able to relax and let down her defenses.

Unfortunately, the coworker drove to Colorado (a 9 hour one-way trip), checked into the hotel, and immediately turned around and drove back to Kansas. The next day when Laura came home from work, he was waiting for her in her home. He hog tied her, threatened her with her own gun, knocked out her two front teeth with the barrel, and told her he was going to make her disappear. Through a series of events, Laura was finally able to call 911 and law enforcement arrived. She survived the event, but still has emotional, mental, and physical scars from it. One of her coping mechanisms is to be incredibly proficient with firearms. She is a certified NRA instructor, teaching both at Women on Target events and Refuse To Be A Victim courses. She is also a certified Concealed Carry Instructor. She says it best,

Yeah, I would have preferred the incident not happen, but, there’s a reason that it did happen and uh, I think, I think, it’s, I’m where I need to be. Because I can

teach Refuse to be a Victim because I was there. You know I can teach concealed carry and the need for self-protection because I was there (Laura).

Laura firmly believes in having firearms as a method of protection, and just as firmly advocates for *all* women to be similarly armed. Ironically, Laura focuses on stranger violence in both her Refuse to be a Victim and Concealed Carry courses.

Alone Women – Armed by Others

As previously stated, an Alone Woman can be categorized in any number of ways. In several interviews, Alone Women were those who were involved in committed relationships, but were alone at home, or while traveling, without access to their significant others. Reggie, for example, talks about how her husband bought her a firearm to keep while he was out of the country for work.

And I think it's, he thinks of it as security when he leaves. He's gone a lot. He just got back from China, he leaves for Russia so I am out in the country way out there by myself and I'm not scared but it is nice to know that and there-there have been people that out there that have had people knock, we have a bar right down below and if you get lost leavin the bar drunk....And there has been one of the ladies there was a guy that came into her house. It scared her to death. Yeah. So you know I've got, I've got protection and I think it's security for Joe too knowing that.

Reggie

In this case, her spouse is more comfortable leaving her alone in his absence knowing that she is armed. This is consistent with researchers who argue that women are more likely to get a firearm for protection (Bugg and Yang, 2004; Kelly, 2004; Vacha and

McLaughlin, 2004; Quigley 1989, 1995, 2005). Reggie confirms this later on when she states,

So um...and you know getting my concealed well I do a lot of traveling by myself, I'm by myself a lot, we live out in the country, and but a lot of it I think-I wouldn't tell my husband this – but it was really for him and for my dad.

Reggie

Again, consistent with the research, Reggie does not seem to show increased levels of fear or victimization. She is willing to carry a firearm to make them feel better about her being alone, but she doesn't want to tell them that she is really do it for them, not herself. She appears to be deferring to significant males in her life (her husband and father) and arming herself to ease their fears.

Sydney has a similar story to tell about her husband. In her case her spouse is in law enforcement. He bought her a firearm for safety reasons because she was traveling long distances (over two hours) fairly frequently to drop kids off to her ex-husband. She was quick to point out that oftentimes she was driving at night and that she always kept a firearm in the car. In some ways it seemed as if Sydney considered it a necessary evil, she accepted that she had it in the car, but didn't necessarily consider it otherwise.

Lucy obtained her firearm because her husband was going to go overseas for seven months as part of his job and he wanted her to know how to shoot if she had to. Like Sydney, Lucy travels long distances by herself with a child in the car. In Lucy's case, however, she embraced the idea of carrying a firearm with her. She talks about "Ruger" as if her firearm were a living person, giving it agency.

You know if you have to pee and there's not the McDonald's that there's just your local travel stop or rest area whatever you wanna call it....Uh-uh am I gonna go in one of those at night by myself. Uh-uh. Nope me and Ruger went in together all the time. Yes and I made it just blatantly obvious that I had Ruger with me. *So you just kind of swung it by your side, or...* Absolutely. Locked and loaded and ready to go.

Lucy

Lucy takes great pride in the fact that she is more than ready to use “Ruger” if necessary. During our phone conversation I got the impression that she was actually looking forward to possibly having to use it at some point.

In a similar fashion, Thelma became armed because she was living alone and her father thought she needed something for protection. He bought her a .22 rifle and registered it in her name, she was thrilled. Ironically, a firearm was not the first instrument of protection Thelma's father provided her. When Thelma had children she sold her first rifle, as she did not want to have a gun in the house with a child around. “Well when I sold the, the shot—not the shotgun the rifle my dad said you have to have something to protect yourself. So he had this big long....and it's black machete. And he said put this beside your bed.” *He bought you a machete to keep next to your bed?* “Yeah, I kept it in the bed frame for years.”

Training: Men as Experts

The respondents in this study often describe feeling awkward and uncomfortable in the presence of male shooters with whom they were not attached in some way. During the course of this research I invited a friend to attend a Women on Target event with me.

Prior to attending she contacted her father and asked him to take her shooting. When asked why she did that she said, “because I didn’t want to look stupid in front of everyone.” Because shooting is often considered a male dominated activity women often seem hesitant to get involved without some sort of previous instruction or a significant other by their side. As such, many of the women in this study deferred to male shooters and considered them experts or more competent. In fact, Laura, the NRA and CCH instructor, was very critical of herself as a shooter. This is consistent with Ridgeway and Correll’s theory of social relations. As Ridgeway and Correll (2004) state: men and women enter most social relational contexts expecting that others believe that men are generally more competent than women” (p. 514). In the following passage Laura is defining herself in comparison to others, and being hyper critical of herself.

Because of the concealed carry law being passed I wanted somebody in this area teaching. You know, and I couldn’t get the guys to commit to anything, you know? And I felt so inadequate because I was so new at everything, you know? Um, who are you to teach a class? You know? *They told you that?* No, that’s what I was telling myself. *Oh, ok. That’s what you were thinking.* You were scared to death of a pistol until two years ago [still self-talk]. You’re not qualified, you can’t teach. When I realized that ability and passion are two different things. If you have the passion, you will get the ability. You will get the experience.

It was here where her voice grew stronger and she just lit up with excitement. Remember that Laura was the victim of her coworkers obsession several years previously. Firearms

helped her regain confidence in herself. However, regardless of her proficiency and her ability, she still continually deferred to the male shooters with whom she worked closely.

Joyce very much defers to her spouse in all things gun related. Joyce became a gun owner through a gift from her husband. When asked whether or not she owned a firearm of her own she stated:

They are all Joe's guns except for this one little .22 short that he says is mine [incredulous tone of voice]. And you know, he just brought that home one day and I don't, I don't follow guns, I don't know enough to know all the different kinds there are, and everything. But he saw that and thought it was interesting and cute and that will be Joyce's gun. *So it that how it typically works, he just randomly shows up with a gun? Yeah!* (Joyce)

Joyce made several self-deprecating comments throughout the interview when comparing her level of competency with her spouse. She views what *he* does as instinctual and what *she* does as something she has had to learn. At one point, when talking about shooting she said, "He knew enough about it that he could hit the target pretty well [both laugh]. It wasn't just luck for him." I found it fascinating that, from her perspective, what she did was lucky, and what he did was skill; particularly since she took such an academic interest in shooting; she wanted to be *taught* how to do things in a semi-formal way. For example, she was frustrated with her husband because he wouldn't explain how to clean her gun after shooting.

cw: um, so this is your gun, you shoot it, do you clean it? No. He does that, he likes it, you know. I think he would like to teach me to do that. Just because it would be fun, and he likes to handle the guns, take them apart, put them back

together. He likes to clean them because it's fiddling with the guns, and he'd like to...and I think that he'd like to teach me if I asked him to, but the thing is, is that he does all that by instinct and he doesn't know how to explain it. And that's frustrating to me. "Well why do you do that?" "Just because!" Well, no, that's not how I work. I want somebody to... *You want to know why.* Yeah! "You left out that stuff." Oh well, he leaves out every other step because it's instinct, you know. And, so, I don't really want him to teach me.

Joyce

Joyce made the observation that her husband skipped steps because cleaning a gun was instinct to him, it also annoyed her because she felt as if she wasn't being taught appropriately. Scott (1986; as cited in Acker 1990) defines gender in terms of power. "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (p. 145). By leaving out steps and not teaching her how to clean a gun, her husband could be seen as maintaining power over control of the gun. However, she was also deferring to what she perceived as his greater innate skill with guns. "When hegemonic gender beliefs are effectively salient in a situation, hierarchical presumptions about men's greater status and competence become salient for participants, along with assumptions about men's and women's different traits and skills" (Ridgeway and Correll, 2014, p. 517). Joyce believes that she needs to learn about guns, while for her spouse it is simply something he possesses.

On the other hand, she also felt much more comfortable with him around when she was at the range. While describing her experiences at a Women on Target event she explained how the male instructors at these events were different than men at the range.

I felt like that was really the point of it, it was to, uh, so that you go there when there weren't going to be a lot of guys there, um who [long pause] who would be [clears throat] oh, [long pause] oh, looking down on you for not being able to do well or that very purposefully ignoring you that, you know. There's just ignoring because somebody is focused on what they are doing, and then there's purposeful ignoring. And, since I had only even gone with my husband before, um, I could deflect anything like that you know, "I'm with him, Deal with him." If you have a problem, deal with him. And, um, so, [pause] it didn't seem like there were. There were plenty of guys there who thought it was kind of neat for a woman to be out there shooting.

Joyce

Her use of the phrase 'purposeful ignoring' was interesting. It demonstrated, very clearly, how she felt at the range as a female. Based on the rest of the conversation it was clear that she would never go to the range by herself because she did not feel as if she would be welcomed or accepted.

Barbara had a much different impression about men and their training/teaching techniques. It is fair to say that Barbara was one of the most unique participants in this study. Barbara was raised in a military family, had joined and retired from the military, and had achieved a PhD and retired as a college professor. To say her experiences were unique would be putting it mildly. Barbara was, by far, the most confident participant in

this study. In fact, at one point during the interview I described the site on the barrel of the gun in such a way that she rolled her eyes. I had apparently not met her standards when it came to knowledge about guns.

Barbara described training from two different perspectives, her military background, and her experience participating in the Women on Target events. Regarding the military she had this to say: “..so often in the service, and I think in many things, it’s alright if the women do as well as the men almost, but not better than them.” She then goes on to say, “And in this [shooting] I could always do better. But you have to not make a big deal of it. What you do is train others.” Training was where Barbara drew a firm line in the sand. In direct contrast to Joyce, she had zero respect for the men who taught at the Women on Target events.

Because the only thing I saw was the Woman on Target and then the other they just, they all watch, kinda, they watch. *What do you mean they watch?* They just stand back and watch or else they are extremely, you’re a curiosity. Like if you wore your purple feather and your yellow scarf you know people would watch you. These watch you. They don’t know enough to ignore you. I mean, they kind of, they really, you’re a curiosity. It’s like you’re a pink elephant. *That would bother me.* Yeah. well it’s just ignorant. And then what was the joke was when they did Women on Target and they gave the bad information. . . . But see, that’s where you undermine your education, you give bad information. And that is, that is, it’s a different, it’s a different kind of put down. It’s more a calculated put down.

Barbara

In her view, the men working these events are purposefully *trying* to keep women from becoming better shooters, which is also consistent with Ezell's (2009) notion of boundary maintenance. Barbara describes how the male instructors not only watch the female participants as if they are pink elephants, but she also describes how they give misinformation. Giving misinformation can be seen as a pattern that enacts dominance among the information givers and subsequently presumes submission by those seeking to learn. Interestingly, Barbara was not the only one with this perception. Phoebe had a similar point of view about some of the instructors:

There were a couple of other guys and I was like (pauses) you know that just kind of seem...and like, okay we're going to let the little ladies have their fun and their day. We'll let them shoot their guns. And there were other ones that were really encouraging, really nice. So like Burt, he's very helpful. He wants you to know how to do it and how to use it right. It doesn't feel like he's humoring you and treating you like the little lady who wants to play guns...

Phoebe

Shooting with Men

It seems apparent that guns are traditionally associated with men. Whether true or not, shooting is often considered a 'guy thing,' it's something that 'guys do,' and men are the experts. (Correll and Ridgeway, 2004; Acker, 1990) There are two primary assumptions that can be made here. First, men are always supposed to be better shooters than women. As men, it's something instinctual or natural that should come to them easily. Second, because of this embedded knowledge it is up to men to pass along and teach their

expertise to those less knowledgeable. The question then becomes, what happens when the pupil equals or surpasses the expert? Consider this experience described by Laura.

The first time I went [hunting with my husband] I'd never even shot a shotgun before. You know, and this little .410, there was no recoil, you know, it was easy, didn't hit squat you know. But the second time we went he told me, 'since you're carrying the .410 I'll always give you the first shot' because he could reach further with that 12 gauge, you know, more pellets, more power. So that trip, I got to bring home a pheasant and two quail. And he brought home nothing. I was never invited to go hunting with him again.

Laura

This demonstrates the expectations of men, gun prowess, and status hierarchy. A .410 shotgun is one of the lightest shotguns available; it has little recoil because of the amount of shot in the shell. Shot refers to the amount of pellets in the shell, the more shot (pellets) in a shell, the greater the spread when fired. Because the .410 shotgun has fewer pellets it is one of the more difficult guns with which to shoot birds. The fact that her husband had given her this particular gun while he used a 12 gauge could be interpreted as handicapping her. It was apparent from his reaction that he did not appreciate her outshooting them. In certain occupations or activities deemed as masculine pursuits, it is often acceptable to do "as well as" a man, but never better (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004).

Barbara, confident with her skill, describes an event that occurred while she was in the army. During her basic training in the Medical Services Corp her tactical officer

offered to buy a pitcher of beer to anyone who could shoot a pattern that he could cover up with the bottom of the pitcher.

So we went out there to the pistol range and I just happened, you know it was luck of the draw when you got a pistol and I got a good pistol. So when I got up there, I put in one and it was only like 15 feet away, it wasn't far, and you could see. So I put the others right on top of it. I had a pattern of 15 shots that were within an area like this [holds her hands in a circle about the size of the bottom of a beer bottle]

Barbara

Barbara follows this up with her own analysis of the event, "I think in many ways it's alright for a woman to do as well as the men almost, but not better than them. And in this I could always do better. But, you have to not make a big deal out of it. What you do is train others." It is also important to note that Barbara is also giving credit to the pistol she picked up; she acknowledges that the type of gun being used also plays a part in the skill level of the shooters. In Laura's case, her husband had given her a firearm that was lighter, less powerful, and did not shoot as far as the gun he was carrying. In a sense he was maintaining his position as expert, or attempting to, by giving her a less 'capable' gun. The fact that she was still able to shoot it proficiently was obviously something he did not expect nor appreciate.

Technique, Skill and Expertise

Barbara and Laura firmly believe in sharing their skill with others. While in the Army, Barbara trained her unit to shoot, which resulted in the unit winning a prestigious award. Of all the respondents, Barbara was the most adamant about demonstrating her

skill and denigrating those who refused to share their skills or who gave bad information. She separates herself from her perceptions of other women by saying, “I’ve done it all my life, and it’s a good thing to do, and I’m good, which is not the usual.” It seems clear that she believes women in general are not good shooters. In fact, she stated several times during the interview that she probably wasn’t helping much since her background was so different. This could be seen as a form of defensive othering, which is essentially a way of seeing oneself as unique, special or different (Ezzell, 2009). Ezzell describes this in terms of wanting to be part of the dominant group, but also expecting approval from the oppressor class. Barbara does not do this; she does however “identify with dominants” (Ezzell, 2009) in the sense that she is an incredibly proficient shooter. She sees herself as different from other women.

Barbara also takes sharing information about technique seriously. She relates the following example which occurred during a Women on Target class.

They gave bad information. Yes, he says, ‘now when you jerk the trigger, it’s like, this is, you know the thing you should be looking at when you *jerk the trigger*. [Interviewer: You don’t jerk the trigger]. That’s right. But see, that’s where you undermine your education, you give bad information. And that is, that is, it’s a different kind of put down. It’s more a calculated putdown. But I also think the man didn’t know what he was talking about.

Barbara

Barbara viewed this as a way for the men to make themselves feel superior. “You see, what you’ve done is not only made yourself *feel* superior you’ve *made* yourself superior by making the other people act inferior because you have provided inferior information.

In other words, you've really undercut the person by giving them bad info." Ezzell (2009) refers to this as "boundary maintenance", which allows members of dominant groups to hoard resources. In this case the information being hoarded is accurate information.

Laura's philosophy is simple, "I love shooting sports. I have gained a confidence I've never had, you know. And I want to give that to other women." Similar to Barbara, Laura sees herself in a role where she has the ability to share her skill with others. In a unique fashion, and most likely a result of her past victimization, Laura also sees herself as a protector of women.

[T]here's a reason it did happen [the victimization], and I think I'm where I need to be. Because I can teach Refuse to be a Victim because I was there. You know I can teach concealed carry and the need for self-protection because I was there. There's some things that if I had known then that I knew now, it wouldn't have gotten that far, you know? And that's where I can help other women to stay out of that situation. And if they find themselves in it, how to get out of it. So that's why I'm here.

Laura

Laura sees it as essential that women get involved in teaching other women to shoot. She also sees a pattern in men/women shooting relationships where the man always has to be the expert. She describes a scenario where husbands and wives will take the class together, but do not want to be on the range together.

Because the husband doesn't have the patience and the wife doesn't want the husband teaching her. Prime example, I separated a couple because they were on

the range together and he kept telling her, ‘you need to do this, you need to do that’ and the more he was telling her the more rebellious she got. So the next relay I moved him down to the other end and I worked with her down here. We had a ball! Her shot groups improved so much. *So do you get that a lot, where you see the guy try to be the teacher or expert regardless of the level of expertise?* Exactly. *Even with two brand new shooters?* Two experienced shooters even. Of course he can teach her better! *Why is that?* Hormones. Testosterone has the incredible ability to make people believe they’re better than they are.

Laura

It appears as if two things are occurring simultaneously. First, Laura is describing the traditional ‘man as expert,’ and how, regardless of his skill he assumes he has more skill than his female partner and can teach her. Second, Laura is doing two things as well. She’s recognizing the ‘man as expert’ theory, and then she’s dismissing it and establishing herself as the expert. By separating the man and wife she believes she was able to make the woman a better shooter. Laura also consistently deferred to men during Women on Target events and Concealed Carry Courses where she was the instructor, which is reflective of stereotypical gender arrangements, particularly in a masculine identified sport such as shooting. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) argue that “belief’s about men’s greater status and competence implicitly shape the expectations that participants form for their own competence and performance in the setting compared to others in the setting” (p. 518). On one hand, Laura was deferring to what she perceived as men’s greater status and competence; on the other she was recognizing her own status and competence compared to the participants in the class. However, had the male instructor

intervened in her teaching, she would have deferred to him as well. Ezzell (2009) refers to this as “propping up dominants.”

Belle, a police officer, described the reactions she gets by the general public for having an expert marksmanship pin on her uniform.

We get marksmanship awards at work based on our qualification scores. I wear an expert pin on my uniform and a lot of the people that I run into in the community they're like what's the expert for? And when I tell them it's for marksmanship they're like really? They just seem really shocked you know but the guy next to me also has an expert pin and they don't say anything to him

Belle

She expresses irritation that the general public acts as if they are surprised that she can shoot. She firmly believes that in her police department they treat everyone the same, regardless of sex. She does, however, describe an incident where a female instructor attempted to change her shooting style. She was told that she was “shooting like a man” and that she should change her shooting stance to shoot “like a woman because that is how women shoot better.” The instructor apparently wanted her to stand straight on to the target when Belle was used to gripping the gun with her right hand while using her left for support. In this case, the instructor is attempting to force Belle to use a different style of shooting simply because of her sex category, the fact that she did not do what she was expected to was disconcerting to the trainer. As Belle states, “I'm like, I got a perfect down there you know and they tried to get me to change my stance just because I'm a woman, and that was kinda hard for me.” Apparently there are even stereotypically

perceptions about how men and women should hold a gun differently. Experiences
Shooting: Women on Target

As previously described, Women on Target events were set up to get women involved in the shooting sports. The basic premise behind this belief was that women have the primary responsibility for their children. If women, mothers, did not allow their children to learn how to shoot, the future of the shooting sports was at risk. As such, Women on Target events were designed to create a fun, welcoming, non-intimidating atmosphere where women could experience and learn about a variety of weapons from experts. Women at these events rotate through different stations where they can shoot shotguns, rifles, handguns, bows and arrows, and (in some cases) black powder rifles. The atmosphere at these is almost party like, food is prevalent, and breaks are frequent. Breakfast and lunch are provided and are served by the males who also run each shooting station. Women are encouraged to handle each and every firearm as much as they like (time permitting) in a supportive environment.

Every once in a while this does not quite happen the way it is supposed to. For example, at the first Women on Target events one of the instructors held up a 30.06 and told the group: “here are the rifles, now I know they look scary.” This immediately made several of the women lean back a bit and look at each other apprehensively. Phoebe, did not necessarily appreciate that all of the stations were run by men.

Like the Women on Target events is because there aren't too many and even at the one we were at there were a couple of other guys and I was like (pauses) you know that just kind of seem...and like, okay we're going to let the little ladies have their fun and their day. We'll let them shoot their guns. And there were other ones that

were really encouraging, really nice. *Like it's no big deal?* Exactly (pauses) so like Bert, he's very helpful. He wants you to know how to do it and how to use it right. It doesn't feel like he's humoring you and treating you like the little lady who wants to play guns...

Phoebe

Phoebe recognized that not all of the men at the event were going to treat us like "little ladies," but she also expressed a desire to have more female instructors.

I'm just more like (pauses) not so much on the feministic empowerment part but you know it's what we want to do. You got the knowledge, give me the knowledge. So I think maybe it would have been better if there had been more women actually like Laura running it versus all the guys and a couple of women.

Phoebe

Joyce, on the other hand, thought the male instructors were doing just fine. When asked about a Women on Target event she had attended a few months previously she stated:

Um, um, I thought that the guys that were teaching the different sections were really patient. *So it's both males and females teaching?* Yeah, yeah. It may have been all males teaching the shooting parts. Um, the black powder was two guys who do, um, frontier reenactments, so they had the whole, you know, buckskins on and everything. So that was very interesting. And they talked about how they make, they make their bullets, they do everything as authentically as possible. And, um, it was very interesting.

Joyce

Recall that Joyce is the woman who became a gun owner because her husband brought one home and declared it “hers.” She is used to males being the primary experts when it comes to guns and shooting.

Experiences Shooting: Women on the Shooting Range

The shooting range is a very interesting, and often intimidating, place to be for women shooters. Regardless of level of expertise, all of the women interviewed expressed discomfort on the range. During my interview with Joyce I asked her about how women were treated on the range. I specifically asked this because Laura had commented that I needed to come out to the range to see how women were treated. I was curious if other women would have the same experience. Joyce had already commented on feeling “purposefully ignored” at the range, so the question was not unexpected or out of the blue.

I'd be interested to know how women are treated on the range. “Yeah, um, [pause] well I never, I couldn't say I ever experienced any really open disdain or anything like that but then again you almost. I mean because [my husband] was right there they could hardly do that.”

Joyce

Joyce felt protected on the range because she was in the company of her spouse. It was apparent from her responses that she would never venture out to the range without being in his company.

Of all the respondents Barbara has the most obvious confidence level. She also gets very annoyed when women shooters are seen as anomalies or different.

When I went to Women on Target and when I could see what dipsticks you had running it. There's some really nice guys there, and people who are interested in firing, just professionally. See the others, it's really hard to describe how unprofessional they are...they're just, they're just, they're just stupid, really country people. They're just ignorant, they're ignorant and backward. They get a real curiosity about women and one of the things is when I took this little Ruger out. This pistol, it's kind of innocuous, it's a little revolver, and it's a .357 and it looks nice. So I put it down and this guy kinda scuttles over like a crab when I go down to check my target. I mean, I would have shown him the pistol. I mean, it's not like a big deal. But they get this funny thing about they don't know how to treat women. They treat women as though they're different from other people.

Barbara

Barbara had absolutely no problem going to the range by herself. Again, as someone with a military background, who grew up shooting, she is very self-confident in her ability to shoot and sees herself as different than other women shooters.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion

The goal at the beginning of this research was not to conduct a gendered analysis of the shooting sports. The original focus was to examine the gendered pathways that women became gun owners. The research questions were straightforward questions designed to garner open-ended responses. After transcribing, coding, and organizing the data thematically, the responses by the participants were so grounded in gender that an additional theoretical framework was added. *Doing Gender*, by West and Zimmerman (1987) and Ezell's (2009) work on othering, defensive othering, and boundary maintenance were added to the analysis. The research presented here supports the theories outlined above. Overall, gun ownership in general occurs through socialization. Women, based on the participants in this research, were socialized into shooting through significant men in their lives, primary fathers and significant others.

Perceptions of gender norms seemed salient based on the participants in this research. The respondents in this study performed gender in such a way while shooting that it did not negatively affect their perceived gender identity. How did this occur? With the exception of one outlier (Barbara), even the most 'hard core' shooters among the participants deferred to the men who originally introduced them to shooting, as well as to men in general. For example, one participant who identified as a hunter responded, "Oh, I don't know, whatever my dad buys me" when asked where she buys her ammo. Keep in mind that this is a female who emailed a picture of a six point elk she had taken down with one shot.

It seems as if the legitimacy of themselves as women shooters depends, in many ways, on allowing the significant men in their lives to continue to be experts. Or, perhaps they see their expertise and skill in the sport as a threat to their partner's beliefs. In this sense the respondents are propping up dominants, essentially reaffirming that the dominant should continue to be dominant (Ezell, 2009)

Who are gun owners? Consistent with Wright and Marston (1975), and Celinksa (2007) the respondents in this study were white and lived in rural or mountain areas, relatively speaking. Alamosa, Colorado would be considered rural by any definition; Manhattan, Kansas is a micropolitan statistical area; which, according to the US Census Bureau, "contains an urban core of at least 10,000 (but less than 50,000) population" (<http://www.census.gov/population/metro/>). A good portion of the respondents were middle and upper-middle class. The majority of the respondents had completed or were in the process of completing college. All of them were also married or in committed relationships.

Why are they owners? Cao et al (1997) provided six explanations for gun ownership: economic resources, socialization, fear and victimization, fear and loathing, collective ownership, and conservative ideology. The participants in this study could afford to buy guns. In fact, several of them had several guns that either they had purchased or had purchased for them. They had all been socialized into firearms ownership through significant men in their lives, albeit often at much later times in their lives than men. The largest percentage (29%) of them indicated fear and victimization as a reason why they became owners, but it was not necessarily *their* fear that led them to become owners. The majority of the women were given guns *by* their significant others to

protect themselves during periods of alone time (i.e. in the absence of their significant other). This would be an interesting theme to study more in-depth at a later time.

None of the participants mentioned any sort of fear or loathing or racially motivated reasons to own guns and data was not collected to examine collective security and conservative ideology. What was available was a plethora of information about gender, and how women shooters negotiated gender expectations.

Based on the respondents in this study, female shooters still appear to be perceived as entering male territory. Entering this territory with a significant male as a mentor/guide was perceived as an acceptable way for women to join the shooting sports, at least for the participants in this study. Anderson and Taylor (2005) discuss how sports are activities where gender norms and ideologies are reified and normalized, this is no different in the shooting sports. In addition, the majority of the women in this study also recognized that shooting was a masculine, and therefore gendered, social activity. The women recognized that they did not necessarily fit in and utilized available tools at their disposal, typically significant others who could grant them access.

An interesting aspect of this research is how shooting is reflexive of the unspoken gender arrangements in society. As with other male dominant occupations or activities, women shooters in this study, with the exception of one, deferred to those whom were perceived as having more status in particular social situations: on the range, at Women and Target events, and even shooting one-on-one with significant others. While this is reflective in most male dominated environments, what makes this interesting is that this deference occurs solely based on the status of maleness, not on the skill set of the shooter. Laura was a classic example of this. As a certified NRA handgun instructor as well as a

Concealed Carry instructor Laura *knew* guns. However, that did not matter when in the presence of other male instructors, she routinely and consistently deferred to them. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) examine gender in terms of social relational contexts and state that “social relational contexts comprise any situation in which individuals define themselves in relation to others in order to act” (p. 511). As players on an unfamiliar field, women are defining themselves in relation to those who have already claimed the field as theirs, men. While this may make sense for novice shooters, the fact that practiced and extremely competent women shooters still practice deference simply based on sex is fascinating. History indicates that women on the frontier used guns as an everyday tool. Women historically, and currently, have competed in professional shooting competitions and done quite well. Unfortunately, there still appear to be some stereotypical gendered assumptions about the sexes.

Ezzell (2009) posits that women compensate for participation in a masculine sport (rugby) by focusing on their femininity. With the exception of Charlie who, at one point during the interview, told me how she got out of shooting right around high school because it was “time to be a girl,” none of the other participants in this study discussed doing this. The research however, was full of women who did this. Annie Oakley, Kohn, and Quigley are just a few of the examples.

Defensive Othering is the process by which members of the subordinate group want to be part of the dominant group, but realize that is not possible. In response, subordinate group members set themselves apart from other subordinated members by self-identifying as unique, special, or different. In other words, “I am not like those other women.” A few of the participants in this study utilized defensive othering, often in terms

of the size of the gun they wanted to carry or the ‘special’ training they received from a significant other.

Propping up Dominants (Ezzell, 2009) was also prevalent in this study. Men were perceived as experts and were treated with the appropriate deference. Laura was a prime example of this. Some of the respondents, however, perceived men as doing what Ezzell describes as Boundary Maintenance. Boundary maintenance, “allows members of the dominant group to hoard resources” (p. 123). In this study, Joyce expressed frustrated with her husband for buying her the “cute” and small gun when she really enjoyed shooting the larger gun. While I did not get the impression that Joyce necessary wanted to be part of the dominant group, (she frequently stated throughout the interview that her husband was much more proficient than she was) she did express frustration with the limitations of the smaller gun. She *wanted* the larger gun; but, as the provider of guns in the household her husband decided which guns were ‘hers.’

Another method of boundary maintenance found in this study as the in terms of information dissemination and, in one case, the type of gun provided. By giving wrong, or incomplete, information the males were able to maintain hegemonic status as shooters (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). Barbara was particularly frustrated with this. In Laura’s case, her partner provided her with a smaller, lighter, .410 shotgun. When she proceeded to shoot as well as he did she was never again invited to go hunting with him. This is consistent with Acker (1990) who, in discussing Cockburn’s work, also indicates that “men workers’ images of masculinity linked their gender with their technical skills; the possibility that women might also obtain such skills represents a threat to masculinity” (p. 146).

Women do monitor themselves in terms of gender performance. Cooky (2009) wrote about the perception of others that “Girls Just aren’t Interested” in sports, which really has less to do with interest and more to do with “limited opportunities, structural barriers, and gender ideologies” (Messner, 2000, as cited in Cooky, 2009 p. 260). This is true in the shooting sports as well.

It is clear that this research has barely touched the tip of the iceberg in terms of gender dynamics. Historically we see differences in how gender was accomplished differently by Annie Oakley and Calamity Jane, and how one was lauded while the other was not. More currently, we see Paxton Quigley arguing that women should shoot to protect themselves and to find a mate, and men writing books about how women need to learn to protect themselves from strangers. It is clear that gun ownership in general is a complex issue, when women are considered as a factor it becomes even more so.

One aspect to consider is the notion of Undoing Gender. In 2007, Francine Deutsch argued that the theory of “doing gender has become a theory of gender persistence and the inevitability of inequality” (p. 106). Deutsch argues that research on doing gender has become more about the futility of gender resistance. Essentially, regardless of how we would like to act, we are still held accountable to our perceived sex category. Deutsch (2007) makes a plea “that we shift our inquiry about ongoing social interactions to focus on change” (p. 114). She argues that we should examine how “even if difference is maintained, how is it reduced” and that we should “look over time” (p. 115) to see if changes in the gender structure have occurred.

It became clear through this research that boys and girls are being socialized into guns in essentially the same way, through significant men in their lives. They typically

have the *same* pathways, but appear to have very different experiences after the fact. Something to consider for future research is whether or not fathers who teach both male and female children to shoot are, in fact, *undoing* rather than *doing* gender? If this process is examined through a gender lens it would make sense that children, both male and female, who are socialized into guns and shooting through fathers should experience similar pathways to ownership. However, based on the respondents in this study that does not appear to be the case. Several of the participants in this study, who indicated that their fathers taught them how to shoot, did not continue with the activity until they were older and involved with a male significant other. One has to wonder what factors into this.

There are several limitations in this study, one of which is the amount of time it took to complete. Much of the data here represents a snapshot in time that occurred seven years ago. It would be interesting to re-interview the participants in this research and see if they still have the same views about shooting and ownership. Another limitation was my background as a shooter. As someone who came from a background of comfort and competence I had to focus on letting the data speak for itself, not on what I wanted it to say. I entered this process thinking that I would be interviewing “bad-ass women shooters”, which was not what I found at all, for the most part. I also had to make sure that my presence did not disrupt the natural flow of things at the Women on Target/Refuse to Be a Victim events I attended. My initial reaction during the Refuse to Be a Victim segment was to roll my eyes and dispute the information being disseminated, which I did not do. When one of the instructors at the rifle station picked up a rifle and said, “Now ladies, I know this looks scary” I could not respond as I would have liked.

Being familiar with a research setting has advantages, but there are also disadvantages that must be taken into consideration.

Other limitations include the sample size and demographics of the participants. It is impossible to generalize much of the information here because of the relatively small sample of 30 participants. In addition, a good portion of the interviews were obtained from individuals who had some sort of contact with an NRA sponsored Women on Target Event. The remaining interviews were through word of mouth. As such, random sampling was not possible. The location of the two interview sites could also be considered an issue. Both Kansas and Colorado are considered part of the Midwest and West, often perceived of as gun friendly, “wild-west” sort of areas. In fact, a sociologist moving to Kansas several years ago was excited at the possibility of seeing cowboys. It would be interesting and useful to conduct this research in other regions of the country.

It is glaringly apparent that much more research needs to be conducted regarding women and gun ownership. Two areas are of particular interest. First, an analysis of women who carry concealed firearms would be current and applicable to the current climate of gun ownership in the United States. In 2012, Stroud published an article examining male concealed carry holders. The author argues that “by having a [concealed carry] license, economically privileged white men are able to define themselves in contrast to femininity and to alternate versions of masculinity that are vilified or ridiculed” (p. 217). Stroud also suggests that her respondents “see their gun carrying as central to what it means to be a good husband and father who is able to protect his wife and child from danger” (p. 217). If men in this study are carrying concealed firearms as a way to separate themselves from femininity and display their ability to protect their

family, how would one frame women concealed carry holders? As a participant observer in several concealed carry courses, it is fair to say that the majority of those attending were male. If women were present they were always in the presence of a spouse or significant other.

Another avenue of interest would be to focus specifically on women's view of the marketing directed specifically towards them in terms of firearms ownership. Much of the current marketing is fear-based or 'cute' based. What is meant by cute is that there is a surge in guns being made that are pink, zebra striped, and small. Many gun manufacturers have targeted women by making smaller guns for protection that will fit in purses. What is ironic about this is that typically the more lightweight the gun the less accurate the shot. Is this focus on smaller guns simply meant to appeal to women shoppers, or is it perhaps another attempt at boundary maintenance? Barbara made sure to point out that she had been lucky enough to get a good gun when she fired the tight pattern. Having a pistol that shoots accurately goes a long way in boosting confidence in shooting ability, which could correlate to a comfort level on the range as a solo shooter.

In conclusion, there is still ample research to be conducted about women gun owners, research beyond the fear and protection based literature. While a doing gender analysis is a decent beginning, future research could also examine how women shooters, and the men who are teaching them to shoot, may be undoing gender, rather than perpetuating existing traditional gender norms (Deutsch, 2007). Much more research also needs to be conducted on boundary maintenance. Women on Target and Refuse to Be a Victim were formed because the National Rifle Association perceived that they were being attacked due to large scale gun legislation in the 1990s. A possible interpretation of

this may be that the NRA, and the mostly male members of it, was willing to lower the boundaries of a male-dominated institution and allow women to enter, thus making a stance against the boundary of more gun control that was perceived as being imposed upon them from an outside source. In other words, the NRA may be practicing some boundary maintenance of their own against the perceived threat of increased gun legislation through lowering their boundaries by allowing women shooters into the fold. After all, if more women become shooters and gun owners, there are fewer people available to vote for increased gun legislation and gun control.

The research into women and gun ownership has just scratched the surface. This research contributes to the literature in that it not only examines how women become owners or shooters, but how they negotiate this process. It is this negotiation process that seems to be the most complex, based on the participants in this study. The fact that the majority of men and women enter the world of shooting in similar ways, through significant men in their lives, yet appear to have different experiences once they enter their world needs to be explored in much more detail.

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Appendix A - Informed Consent

A. General Information

1. **Name of Researcher:** Cindy Whitney, Graduate Studies, Department of Sociology, Kansas State University
2. **Title of Study:** Women and Gun Ownership
3. **Objective of Study:** To investigate how and why women come to be gun owners
4. **Description and purpose of procedures:** This part of the research consists of interviews with women who currently own a gun. The interview will last approximately 30 – 45 minutes and will include questions about introductions to shooting, views of gun ownership in comparison to men, motivating factors to gun ownership, the new Concealed Carry Permit (CCP) law, and what type of weapon (handgun, rifle, or shotgun) the respondent's own.
5. **Use of results:** Data collected in this project will be used in a class project and for a dissertation proposal.
6. **The risks and discomforts are minimal. They may include:** Strictly the use of your time if required. No physical risk is involved, and your behavior or responses will not be manipulated in any way.
7. **Possible benefits to you or to others from participating in the study:** Interview subjects in this type of research typically express some subjective benefit from being able to express their opinions on gun ownership.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may refuse participation at any time without penalty or prejudice. All research information will be handled in the strictest confidence and your participation will not be individually identifiable in any reports. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the above items. If you have any questions about the research that arise after this interview, feel free to contact me at 785-532-4962. Questions about the role of the university or your rights as a participant in this research should be directed to Rick Scheidt, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Kansas State University, 785-532-3224.

B. Signed Consent Portion

I understand the study entitled, "Women and Gun Ownership" as explained to me on page 1 and I consent to participate in the study. My participation is completely voluntary. I understand that all research information will be handled in the strictest confidence and that my participation will not be individually identifiable in any reports. I understand that there is no penalty or prejudice of any kind for withdrawing or not participating in the study.

(Signature)

(Date)

Appendix B - Interview Schedule

Background:

1. What is your first memory of shooting a gun? How old were you? Where were you at? Who was with you at the time? What kind of gun was it? How did it feel? Can you describe any of the emotional or physical sensations you felt?
2. Who was the first person to take you out shooting?
3. If you first learned to shoot as a kid, what were the rules for handling a gun? Were loaded guns kept in the house? If so, were they locked up? Were you allowed to use guns on your own?

Training:

1. Did you have any other experience with guns before shooting for the first time? Had you seen them, handled them, or received any training or instruction?
2. What kind of official training have you had? (Hunter's safety, formal or informal instruction).
3. Who taught the class? What was the ratio of men to women? Did you feel as if the training was focused towards you?

Progression:

1. How did your interest in guns progress? Is this something you've always been interested in? Have you always taken the time to go shooting?
2. Is there anything in particular that encouraged you to own a gun? (i.e. any particular event)
3. What kind of shooting do you do? Do you go hunting? Do you shoot for sport or competition? Do you rarely go shooting at all? Can you describe an event that involves one of these scenarios (i.e. a hunting trip or competition)
4. When you go shooting who do you go with? Why do you go with that particular person? Where do you go to shoot and why that particular location?

5. Describe to me how you came to be a gun owner. Did you buy a gun or did you receive one some other way? (Inheritance, gift) If bought, tell me what it was like when you went the store. How were you treated? Did you have any problems?

Current:

1. How many guns do you currently own? What kind? Why did you choose that particular gun?
2. Do you currently keep a loaded gun in the house? Why? What precautions do you take to keep the gun out of the reach of others?
3. How do people react when they find out you're a gun owner? Can you give me an example of a time when someone has responded either very favorably or very negatively?
4. Can you think of anything else you would like to add that I haven't asked?

Appendix C - Respondent sheet for Demographic Information
(to be filled out by Interviewer)

Interview Code# _____

1. Are you:

_____ Black _____ White _____ Other (please specify _____)

2. Are you of Hispanic Origin?

_____ No _____ Yes

3. What is your sex?

_____ Female _____ Male

4. What is the age as of your last birthday? _____

5. What is the highest level of education you have attained?

_____ Some high school (did not graduate)

_____ High school (graduated)

_____ Some graduate work

_____ Technical training

_____ Master's degree

_____ Some college

_____ Ph.D Degree

_____ Bachelor's degree

_____ Professional Degree (M.D., J.D)