

# 1 The rise of self-defense in gun advertising

*The American Rifleman*, 1918–2017

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## Introduction

This chapter examines changes in the core of American gun culture through a content analysis of advertisements in *The American Rifleman* magazine for every year from 1918 to 2017. We understand the changing themes represented in these ads as a specific measure of a change from what gun journalist Michael Bane calls Gun Culture 1.0, rooted in hunting and recreational target shooting, to Gun Culture 2.0, centering on personal protection through armed citizenship. Central to Gun Culture 2.0 is the legal carrying of concealed weapons, mostly handguns, in public by ordinary Americans.

By way of introduction, consider the differences in gun advertisements in a randomly selected issue of a gun magazine in 1918 and 2017. The February 2, 1918 issue of *Arms and the Man*, the fortnightly official publication of the National Rifle Association (NRA) of America, runs just 19 pages and includes 16 advertisements. The ads include familiar products, such as bore cleaning paste, shooting gallery targets, reloading tools, and .22 caliber cartridges. Gun industry household names (like DuPont, Remington, and Hoppe's) sell their powders, firearms, and solvents; and books are offered for sale by Edward C. McKay of Cleveland, Ohio. On the inside front cover – prized magazine advertising real estate – a half page ad placed by The Peters Cartridge Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, touts the 'exclusive and superior features' of Peters shotgun shells. The ad highlights the success of W.H. Heer of Guthrie, Oklahoma, and Woolfolk Henderson of Lexington, Kentucky, the amateur trapshooters with the highest averages in 1917. In fact, it was the 6th time in the past eight years that highest amateur honors were won with Peters shells. The back cover of the issue has four advertisements, the largest of which is a half-page ad placed by Colt's Patent Firearms Mfg. Co. of Hartford, Connecticut.

Drawings of soldiers carrying M1911 auto-pistols, one in a U.S. Navy uniform and one in an Army uniform, bookend the ad's large font declaration of Colt Firearms to be 'Ready for Duty.' The smaller ad copy in the right column elaborates:

On the Battlefield – In the Preservation of Law and Order – The Protection of Home and Country – Whenever and wherever armies or individuals

have to enforce right with might – COLT’S FIREARMS have been creating, building and maintaining a reputation for merit, efficiency and reliability that has resulted in a position of unquestioned superiority.

The ad concludes with the assertion: ‘You make no mistake when you follow the Government’s example and adopt COLT’S for YOUR Firearm needs.’

Examining this gun magazine 100 years later highlights some similarities and many differences. It remains the official journal of the NRA, though it was renamed *The American Rifleman* in 1923 and is now published monthly. It continues to have almost as many advertisements as pages, but it has swollen to 118 pages with 75 advertisements in the January 2017 issue. *The American Rifleman* continues to include ads for guns, ammunition, reloading equipment, and targets. Colt Firearms returns with its ad for the Combat Unit Rail Gun, a modern updating of its historic Government Model .45 Auto M1911 service pistol. Remington does not have an ad in this particular issue, but other brand-name gun manufacturers do, including Browning, Heckler & Koch, Sig Sauer, Sturm, Ruger & Co., Savage, Walther, and Smith & Wesson.

One of the biggest changes from 1918 to 2017, and the focus of this chapter, is in the ways companies try to motivate consumers to buy guns and related accessories. While the 1918 Colt Firearms ad includes a brief reference to ‘The Protection of Home,’ the January 2017 issue is full of advertisements for products specifically designed and sold for personal protection, especially through concealed carry. In an advertisement that covers the entire back page, the M&P Shield semi-auto pistol from Smith & Wesson is described as ‘slim, concealable and powerful,’ making it ‘comfortable to carry’ and ‘comfortable to shoot.’ Another full page ad in the same issue again shows the M&P Shield, this time equipped with a combination laser and flashlight to assist with target acquisition. Manufactured by Crimson Trace, a pioneer in selling laser sights in the civilian marketplace, the ‘Laserguard Pro offers the ultimate advantage in personal protection.’ The ad also includes a smaller picture of the M&P Shield in a holster specially designed to accommodate the gun with Crimson Trace’s aftermarket light/laser combo. This reminds us that carrying even a slim and concealable handgun requires some sort of holster.

Enter BUGBite Holsters. Their full page ad shows a man resting on his right knee and pulling up the left pant leg on his jeans to expose a neoprene calf sleeve, like those worn by ailing athletes, above his white sneaker and ankle sock. But this particular calf sleeve, with built-in pockets to hold a small pistol and spare ammunition magazine, is actually a ‘new holster concept.’ As the ad copy asserts: ‘Revolutionizing what it means to carry a firearm in comfort and concealment.’

These impressionistic observations of the differences in ads placed in a 1918 issue of *Arms and the Man* and a 2017 issue of *The American Rifleman* are suggestive of broader changes taking place in American gun culture over the past century. After briefly reviewing the history of American gun culture, we discuss our analytical approach to studying gun culture through advertising and explain the specific data and methods employed here. Our analysis of this

advertising data documents the pattern of decline of Gun Culture 1.0 over the past 100 years and the ongoing rise of Gun Culture 2.0. We also identify the point at which the two centers of gravity in gun culture cross paths.

### **A brief history of and approach to studying changes in American gun culture**

As others have argued at great length, guns were part of the social reality of the United States well prior to its Declaration of Independence from the British crown and its Constitutional founding (Cramer, 2006; Winkler, 2011; Whitney, 2012). The reality of guns which began at Jamestown and Plymouth Rock continues in America today, confounding some critics of American gun culture. In 1970, two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Richard Hofstadter (1970) published an influential essay in *American Heritage Magazine* called 'America as a Gun Culture.' In it, he lamented the uniqueness of the United States 'as the only modern industrial urban nation that persists in maintaining a gun culture.' In Hofstadter's account, America's gun culture is rooted in the reality of widespread, lawful possession of firearms by a large segment of the population. One reliable estimate of gun ownership in early America found guns in 50–73% of male estates and 6–38% of female estates. These rates compare favorably to other common items listed in male estates like swords or edged weapons (14% of inventories), Bibles (25%), or cash (30%) (Lindgren and Heather, 2002). Today, at least 40% of American households still probably have a gun or guns in them (Yamane, 2017a).

Early on, a gun was a tool much like a shovel. According to historian Pamela Haag (2016, p. xii), 'in the key years of its diffusion, and for many years thereafter, it was like a buckle or a pin, an unexceptional object of commerce.' Today Oliver Winchester is a legendary name in the firearms industry, his namesake company having celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2016. But in Haag's (2016, p. xiv) account, Winchester 'went into the gun business the way his compatriots went into corsets or hammers.' She continues, 'In the Winchester company's early ads, the gun comes across as closer to a plow than a culturally charged object, more on the tool side of the equation than the totem side' (Haag, 2016, p. xvii).

Over time, the uses and meanings of guns have changed; which is to say, gun culture has changed. 'What began as a necessity of agriculture and the frontier,' Hofstadter (1970) observes, 'took hold as a sport and as an ingredient in the American imagination.' Fraternal shooting clubs in major American cities like New York, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and San Francisco predated the NRA's founding and promotion of long-range shooting competitions (Hummel, 1985; Gilmore, 1999). Hunting became not only a source of food, but a dominant form of recreation for many (Marks, 1991). Receiving a 'real' rifle came to be a rite of passage from boyhood into manhood (Littlefield and Ozanne, 2011). And the attachment to guns was soon routinely expressed in

popular culture, from Ernest Hemingway's novels to *High Noon* with Gary Cooper and Grace Kelly.

These examples highlight the diversity of American gun culture. Indeed, some go as far as to say that there is no such thing as gun culture (in the singular), but only gun cultures (plural). In her important book, *Shooters: Myths and Realities of America's Gun Cultures*, Abigail Kohn (2004, p. 4) defines a gun culture as 'one that uses a common language about guns and shares a set of signs and symbols pertaining to guns in everyday life.' Kohn observes several such cultures in the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 20th century: those who own guns because they like them and enjoy shooting them for sport, those who hunt, and those who have them for self and home defense. Among the sport shooters are a subgroup who are very involved in an organization called the Single Action Shooting Society (SASS). SASS sponsors 'cowboy action shooting' matches, which draw heavily on realities and myths of frontier life in the 19th century. The participants dress in period garb (Old West or Victorian) and shoot courses of fire using the kinds of firearms available at the time: single-action revolvers, pistol caliber lever-action rifles, and side-by-side (double-barreled) shot guns.

As noted in our introduction, while recognizing the existence of various subcultures of guns in America, this chapter focuses on the core of center of gravity of gun culture. What constitutes the core, has it shifted over time, and (if so) when did the shift take place? We hypothesize that there is indeed a center of gravity in U.S. gun culture, and that it has evolved over time from Gun Culture 1.0, the historic gun culture that Hofstadter described, to Gun Culture 2.0, America's contemporary gun culture. There are a number of differences between Gun Culture 1.0 and Gun Culture 2.0, but most significantly, Gun Culture 1.0 was grounded in sport shooting and hunting, and Gun Culture 2.0 is centered on personal/family/home defense and concealed carry (Yamane, 2017b).

We test our hypothesis using data drawn from gun advertising. Although not a perfect representation of gun culture, using advertising as one measure of culture has some distinct benefits. In *The Gunning of America*, Haag (2016) argues that the gun industry – companies like Winchester and Remington – manufactured not only firearms but American gun culture itself. Although this goes too far in our view, it does highlight the fact that, as with many cultures, gun culture has a material dimension based in humanly fabricated products and these products circulate as commodities in the consumer marketplace. A major way in which people participate in gun culture is through consumption of these products. Understanding the production and distribution of this material culture requires examining what the sociologist of culture Wendy Griswold (2012, p. 73) calls the 'complex apparatus which is interposed between cultural creators and consumers.' According to Griswold (2012, p. 73), 'This apparatus includes facilities for production and distribution; marketing techniques such as advertising, co-opting mass media, or targeting; and the creation of situations that bring potential cultural consumers in contact with cultural objects.' Of the

various aspects of the cultural apparatus Griswold highlights, advertising provides one of the most consistent sources of data over a long period of time. Her overreach on business and the making of American gun culture notwithstanding, Haag is exactly correct in observing the parallel between the rise of consumer capitalism in the 20th century and the gun industry's embrace of mass advertising. In the marketplace of commodities, 'the gun was no exception to the business trends of the day in a new consumer culture, whether the product was soap or a rifle' (Haag, 2016, p. xviii; see also Marchand, 1986; Lears, 1995).

We are not the first to conduct content analysis of gun magazines or advertising in gun-related magazines. Philip Lamy (1992) analyzed eight years of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine (1983–1990) to document the presence of apocalyptic millennialism in the text, and Elizabeth Hirschman (2003) examined the expression of the core American value of rugged individualism in the editorial content and advertising in nine different magazines for one year, including *Guns & Ammo* and *Rifleshooter*.<sup>1</sup> Although interesting, these studies examine how wider cultural values and beliefs get expressed in gun magazines as opposed to what themes are internal to gun culture itself. James Jacobs and Domingo Villaronga (2004) begin to fill this gap by providing a 'map' of American gun culture by examining the overall focus, editorial content, and advertising for 77 different gun magazines they identified in 2001 and 2002. Broadly speaking, they identify 39% of magazines as focusing on hunting, 18% on sport shooting, and 8% on military and law enforcement. Nine percent are trade publications and 26% are what they called general interest magazines, like *The American Rifleman* and *Guns & Ammo*.<sup>2</sup> Although the most comprehensive in terms of the number and different types of magazines covered, Jacobs and Villaronga's study is cross-sectional and gives equal weight to magazines with vastly different levels of circulation, creating a static and distorted map of gun culture.

The article that most directly inspired the research presented in this chapter examined firearms advertisements in all 27 currently publishing, ad-accepting magazines listed in the 'guns and shooting' category in the 2002 edition of Bacon's Magazine Directory. Elizabeth Saylor, Katherine Vittes and Susan Sorenson (2004) identified all advertisements for guns placed by firearms manufacturers in a single 2002 issue of each of the 27 magazines and used a systematic content analysis coding protocol to identify the themes depicted in those advertisements. Considering just the dominant overall theme in each ad, the most common attributes of firearms used to sell the products were 'attributes of the gun' (38.1%), 'hunting/outdoors' (20.4%), 'patriotism' (15.0%), and 'combat/military' (7.1%). 'Self-protection' (2.7%) is the 11th most common theme of the 14 themes coded. Despite its virtues, this article misrepresents the core of American gun culture by giving equal weight to the advertisements in magazines that target smaller, more particular market niches – such as *Accurate Rifle* (circulation in 2001 of 8,000) and *Shotgun Sports* (2001 circulation 15,500) – and magazines that have broader circulations by virtue of their more general interest – such as *Guns & Ammo* (2001 circulation 607,971) and *The American*

*Rifleman* (2001 circulation 1,366,073). In addition, like Jacobs and Villaronga's (2004) work, Saylor, Vittes and Sorenson (2004) also cannot speak to changes in gun advertising over time.

We go beyond these other more empirically limited studies by systematically analyzing the content of gun advertising in *The American Rifleman* magazine over the past century, from 1918 to 2017. In the following section we describe our data and methods at some length.

## Data and methods

This study analyzes advertising in the oldest and largest circulation general interest gun magazine in the United States: *The American Rifleman*. The magazine has been continuously published since 1885, as *The Rifle* until 1888, *Shooting and Fishing* to 1906, and *Arms and the Man* to 1923. In 1916, then-owner and former NRA president James A. Drain sold *Arms and the Man* to the NRA for \$1. It has been published by the NRA since then, and given as a membership benefit since the 1920s, driving its circulation ever upward (Serven, 1967; Hardy, 2012; Rajala, 2012).<sup>3</sup>

Among those magazines that submit to audits by the Alliance for Audited media, *The American Rifleman's* circulation of 2,056,368 ranks first in the 'Fishing & Hunting' category, doubling the circulation of the popular outdoor magazine *Field & Stream* (1,005,811) and dwarfing the next highest circulation general interest gun magazine, *Guns & Ammo* (377,584). Considering consumer magazines as a whole, *The American Rifleman* has a smaller circulation than *Sports Illustrated* (2,759,243) and *ESPN The Magazine* (2,137,290) but a larger circulation than *Golf* (1,412,093) or *Car and Driver* (1,207,714).<sup>4</sup>

Just as America's sporting culture cannot be reduced to what appears in and who subscribes to *Sports Illustrated*, so too is American gun culture not reducible to *The American Rifleman* and its subscribers. The same can be said for the publisher of *The Rifleman* – the National Rifle Association. Although it is the most prominent association of gun owners, only a small proportion of the 60–70 million gun owners in the U.S. today are members of the NRA. The NRA itself has claimed over 5 million members, though some analysts maintain the number is closer to 4 million. That said, in an interesting recent survey, the Pew Research Center found that nearly one in five gun owners (19%) claim membership in the NRA (Parker et al., 2017), suggesting the possibility of a strong sense of affiliation among gun owners with the NRA even when they do not send in annual dues.

Because of its official journal status and broad audience, *The American Rifleman* must be inclusive of all aspects of gun culture in its editorial content and advertising. Therefore, analyzing the content of advertising in this magazine provides a conservative test of our hypothesis about changes in American gun culture overall.<sup>5</sup>

### Sampling

The sample of advertisements analyzed in this study comes from a single randomly selected issue of *The American Rifleman* for each of the 100 years from 1918 through 2017. We used a random number generator set from 1 (January) to 12 (December) to determine which of the 12 monthly issues to examine for each year. We then acquired the specified issues either from the first author's collection (for more recent issues) or purchased them through eBay (for older issues).

To be included in the sample, an advertisement had to meet three main criteria. First, the ad had to be at least one-quarter of a page in size. Second, the ad had to be placed by the manufacturer, licensed dealer, or importer of the product (e.g., Firearms International Corporation, Remington, Charter Arms). Ads placed by comprehensive sporting goods stores (e.g., Gander Mountain, Warhsal's Sporting Goods, Hudson Sporting Goods) or gun stores (Midway USA, Brownell's, United Arms Company) were not coded unless the store was selling their own brand of product. These store advertisements tended to be too extensive and comprehensive in the number and type of products being sold to make coding them reliable and sensible. Third, the ad had to be for firearms (handguns, rifles, shotguns, or a variety of gun types), ammunition (but not separate parts of ammunition or reloading equipment), gun accessories (products designed to be attached to or affect the utility of a firearm in some way), or some combination of these products. As described in this chapter's introduction, firearms themselves are just one of many commodities circulating within gun culture.<sup>6</sup> These inclusion criteria resulted in a total of 1,708 advertisements from 100 issues of *The American Rifleman*.

### Coding

Adapting the work of Saylor, Vittes and Sorenson (2004), our content analysis began with nine themes: technical superiority, hunting, collecting, military, law enforcement, sport/recreation, tactical, personal protection/self-defense/home or family defense, and concealed carry. After dropping advertisements that had none of these nine themes, we were left with 1,456 advertisements.

Because our interest in this chapter is in examining the shift from Gun Culture 1.0 to Gun Culture 2.0, we focus here on just four of these themes, described in Table 1.1. Of these four themes, hunting and sport shooting are reflective of the older Gun Culture 1.0; and personal protection/self-defense/home or family defense, and concealed carry are reflective of the newer Gun Culture 2.0.

Unlike Saylor, Vittes, and Sorenson who coded the 'main' theme of an advertisement, we coded all themes present in each advertisement as many reflected multiple themes. Hunting and sport shooting are often found together, though are not identical. Likewise, many products coded for

Table 1.1 Gun Magazine Advertisement Coding Scheme

CODE	CODE DEFINITION
<b>Hunting</b>	Product is associated with hunting, through images (e.g., owner in hunting-related camo, animals in crosshairs) or text (e.g., 'small game')
<b>Sport/Recreation</b>	Product is promoted for informal recreational shooting (except hunting), or linked to any of the various traditional (precision rifle, clay target shooting) or action shooting sports (3-gun, USPSA, IPSC, IDPA, Olympic shooting, etc.), through images (e.g., a shot timer, clay pigeons) or text (e.g., 'competition,' 'plinking').
<b>Personal Protection/ Self-Defense/Home or Family Defense</b>	Product is portrayed as an effective and/or important means of home, family, and/or self-defense; through images (e.g., confronting an assailant in a parking lot or alley, hiding behind bed with gun) or text (e.g., 'engineered to defend,' 'comfort runs in our family, so you can protect yours').
<b>Concealed Carry</b>	Product is portrayed as designed to facilitate the carrying of a concealed firearm, through images (e.g., an inside the waistband holster) or text (e.g., 'IWB,' 'carry more comfortably').

concealed carry are also coded for personal protection/self-defense, but they too are distinct categories.

Extensive tests were undertaken to ensure that researchers applied the coding scheme identically. Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  (alpha) was used to assess inter-coder reliability. According to Krippendorff (2013), it is customary to require  $\alpha \geq .800$  to conclude that the coding scheme and instructions are reliable.<sup>7</sup> By the fourth round of coding, each specific attribute coded had Krippendorff's  $\alpha > 0.80$ , and all attributes collectively had  $\alpha = 0.87$ . At that point, trained researchers coded advertisements independently, with the lead investigator spot-checking the results.

### Analysis

Later issues of *The American Rifleman* contain more advertisements than earlier issues. The average number of ads for the last five years (2013–2017) is 32.6 per issue, while the average number for the first five years (1918–1922) is 4.8 per issue. Therefore, we normalize our results for each individual year. Rather than giving each advertisement equal weight and calculating the percentage of advertisements in each issue that reflect a particular theme, we normalize the advertising content by looking at the proportion of all coded advertising space as the denominator. We do this by recording and adding together the size of each ad that meets our selection criteria for each issue (two, full, half, third, or quarter



page). The total coded advertising space ranges from 2.0 pages in February 1918 to 26.82 pages in October 2017. (The general trend is upward, but there are anomalies along the way, like the 22.16 pages of advertising coded in October 1936 and 4.33 pages in May 1999.)

We then multiply the presence of each coding theme in each advertisement by the size of the ad. For example, a half page ad for a hunting rifle is 0.5, a one-third page ad for a concealed-carry holster is 0.33, and so on. Combing those products for each advertisement in each issue then dividing them by the total coded advertising space produces the percentage of total advertising space with that particular attribute. For example, 2.5 advertising pages in the October 1920 issue included hunting as a theme, out of 5.0 total advertising pages coded in that issue. So, 50% of all coded advertising space in that issue of *The American Rifleman* included hunting as a theme. By contrast, 9.25 advertising pages in the October 2010 issue had the hunting theme, out of 28.08 total coded advertising pages, for a 33% proportion of all coded advertising space in that issue.

This procedure not only controls for the increasing number of advertisements over time, but also captures the reality that a full-page advertisement matters more than a half-, third-, or quarter-page advertisement.

## Results

Examining Gun Culture 1.0 themes of hunting and sport/recreational shooting first, we see that these themes are present throughout the 100 years of advertising in *The American Rifleman* we analyzed. However, the relative proportion of all advertising space coded that reflected these themes declined by 2017. The two themes did show different patterns over the century. The black trend line in Figure 1.1 shows the pattern for hunting. Hunting as a theme in gun advertising *increased* through the 1960s, and only then began to decline quite precipitously in the most recent decade.

This increase in the presence of the hunting theme in *The American Rifleman* through the 1960s is reflective of the increasing identification of hunting with the nuclear family – particularly socialization of sons by their fathers through hunting (Littlefield and Ozanne, 2011) – and the strong interest in outdoor recreation more generally during this time period, including fishing, visiting National Parks, and RV camping (Wright, Rossi and Daly, 1983, pp. 53–55; Pergams and Zaradic, 2008). But even as these outdoor recreation activities continued to grow through the 1970s, the representation of hunting in gun advertising began declining, signaling a shift in the core of gun culture away from hunting.

It is important to consider that the National Rifle Association introduced a magazine dedicated to hunters, *American Hunter*, in 1973. It is possible that part of the decline in hunting-themed advertisements in *The American Rifleman* is due to advertisers shifting hunting ads to *American Hunter*. The specific data points (the jagged line in Figure 1.1) do not strongly support this alternative hypothesis. The proportion of total coded advertising space with the hunting theme was 38.6% in 1972, then jumped up to 46.1% in 1973 – the year *American Hunter*

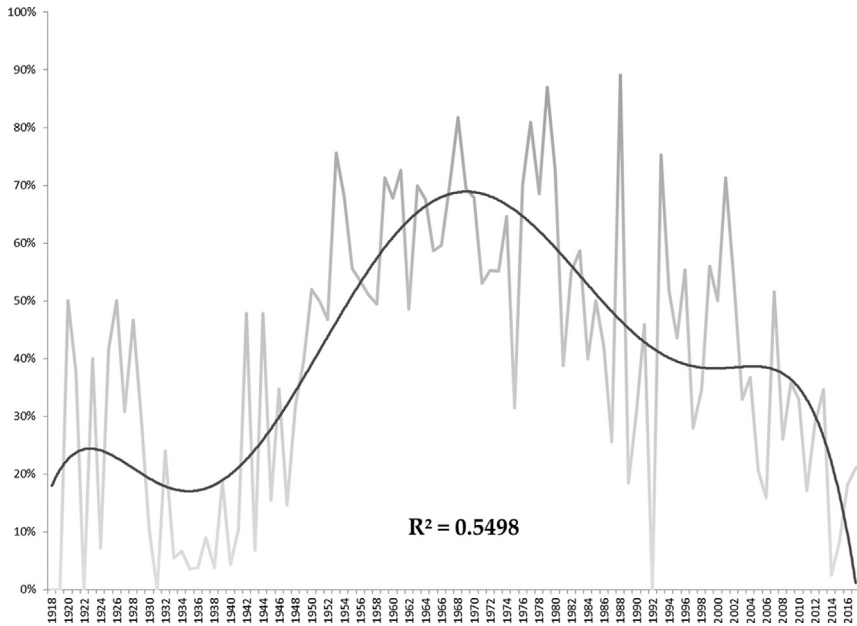


Figure 1.1 Presence of Hunting Theme as Percentage of Total Coded Advertising Space, *The American Rifleman*, 1918–2017

debuted. It jumped again to 57.4% in 1974. Although the hunting theme dropped precipitously to 24.9% in 1975, it rebounded dramatically to 75.8% in 1976. These fluctuations also remind us of the importance of looking at the overall trend (in black), and remembering that these trend lines only capture part of all of the change (e.g., in Figure 1.1,  $R$ -square = 0.55).

In Figure 1.2, we see a different pattern initially for the sport and recreational shooting theme compared to the hunting theme, with advertisements drawing on this theme declining steadily through the period studied. The contrast is especially evident in the middle decades of the 20th century (1948–1968) when hunting was peaking as an advertising theme – essentially displacing part of the dominant sport and recreational shooting theme. That said, sport and recreational shooting continued to be an important part of American gun culture even as it declined as a proportion of advertising we coded. Taken together, hunting and sport and recreational shooting accounted for the majority of advertising space coded through the end of the 20th century, even as the overall pattern for both from the 1970s forward is one of decline.

As noted in the introduction, home defense was a theme in some gun advertising even in 1918. But ads drawing on any of the themes in the broad category of personal protection/self-/home or family defense were exceptional for most of the 20th century. As shown in Figure 1.3, Gun Culture 2.0 began

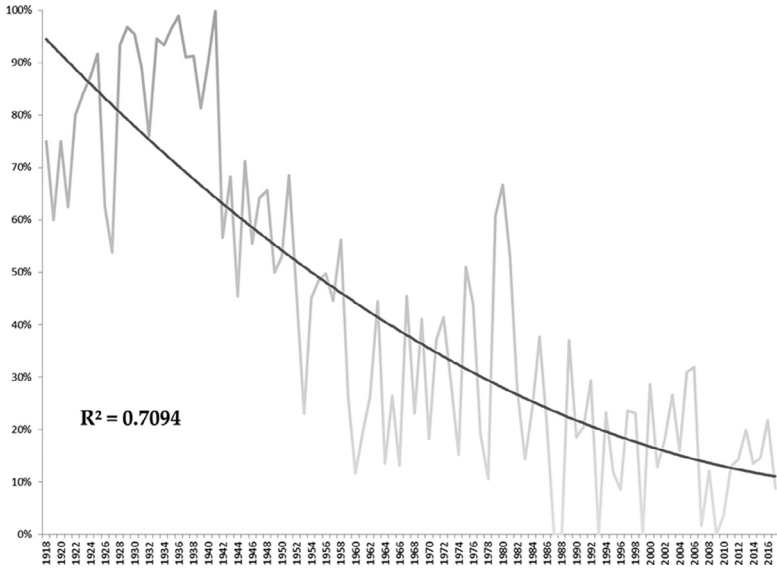


Figure 1.2 Presence of Sport/Recreational Shooting Theme as Percentage of Total Coded Advertising Space, *The American Rifleman*, 1918–2017

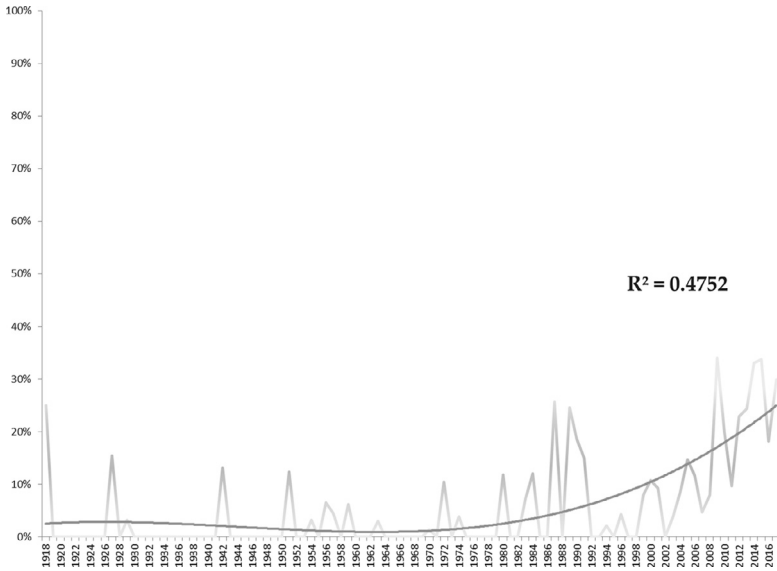


Figure 1.3 Presence of Personal Protection/Self-Defense/Home or Family Defense Theme as Percentage of Total Coded Advertising Space, *The American Rifleman*, 1918–2017

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to gain strength in the 1970s, indicated by the trendline for personal protection/defense edging upward from that point forward. The social turbulence of the 1960s and the rising fear of crime in the 1970s certainly stimulated interest in armed self-defense. This interest was reflected, for example, in the establishment of the first civilian gun training school by Col. Jeff Cooper at Gunsite Ranch in 1976 (Gibson, 1994). It was made still more concrete in the movement for liberalization of concealed-carry laws beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Patrick, 2009).

Figure 1.4 shows the trend in advertising drawing on the concealed-carry theme and reveals a pattern similar to that of personal protection/defense, but with a delayed onset and steeper increase in the trend. Although Florida did not create 'shall-issue' concealed carry in 1987, it did open the floodgates for a massive expansion in the number of states with liberalized concealed-carry laws. By 1990, a dozen states had laws favoring the right to carry concealed weapons by ordinary citizens (Cramer and Kopel, 1994), and over the next six years, that number more than doubled as another 16 states passed shall-issue laws. This dramatic liberalization of concealed-carry laws has led to a growing number of Americans with concealed-carry permits (Lott, 2017). As Yamane (2018) argues at length, these gun carriers are hungry consumers of commodities – guns,

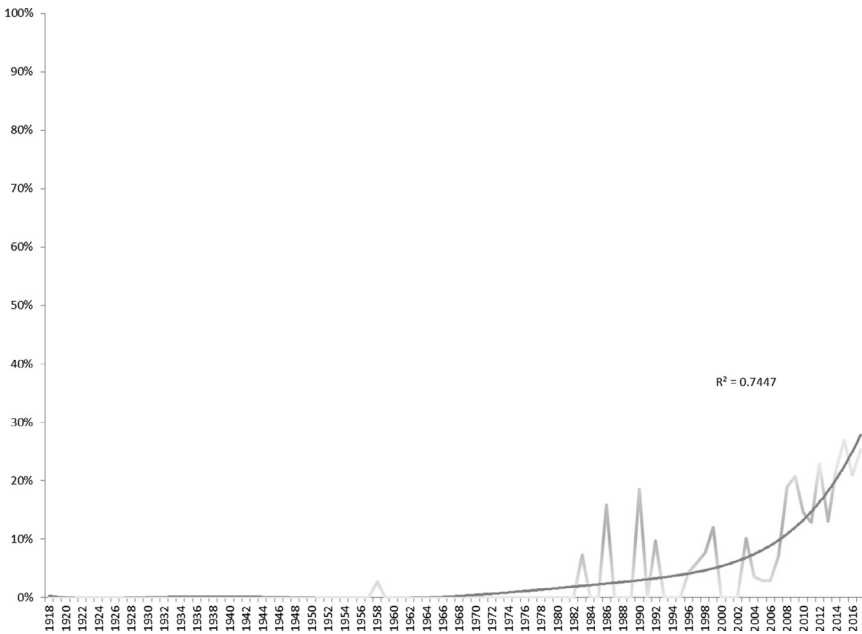


Figure 1.4 Presence of Concealed-Carry Theme as percentage of Total Coded Advertising Space, *The American Rifleman*, 1918–2017

holsters, clothing, and bags – that promise to address the challenges of carrying a sufficiently lethal weapon in public in a manner that is safe, accessible, comfortable, and concealed. Advertisements like the previously discussed BUGBite Holster seek to tap into this burgeoning market, at the same time they also foster the market for concealed-carry products.

To return to the questions posed at the outset, then, has the core of American gun culture shifted from hunting and sport shooting to concealed carry and self-, home, and family defense? As measured through gun advertising, it is safe to conclude yes. Gun Culture 1.0 themes are found in a declining proportion of advertisements in *The American Rifleman* over the past 100 years, and Gun Culture 2.0 themes are increasing.

Although their trajectories are converging, have Gun Culture 2.0 themes overtaken Gun Culture 1.0 themes in advertising? To begin to answer this question, we combined the proportion of ads with the hunting and sport/recreational shooting themes, and the proportion of ads with the concealed carry and self-, home, and family defense themes, and plotted those two trends together on the same graph. Figure 1.5 shows the convergence of the trend lines for these two themes from the 1970s forward, their meeting in 2014, and divergence thereafter, with Gun Culture 2.0 themes superseding

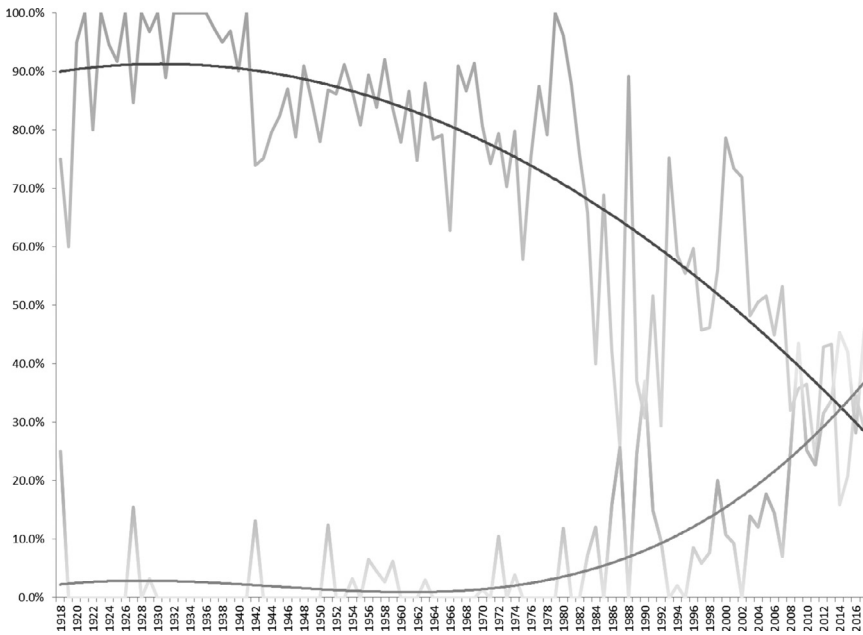


Figure 1.5 Change in Hunting and Sport/Recreational Shooting Compared to Personal Protection/Self-Defense and Concealed Carry as Percentage of Total Coded Advertising Space, *The American Rifleman*, 1918–2017

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Gun Culture 1.0 themes. Looking at the underlying data, in 2014, 45.3% of all advertising space coded reflected Gun Culture 2.0 themes, while only 15.9% reflected Gun Culture 1.0 themes. Although hunting and sport/recreational shooting themes rebounded to 28.6% of all advertising space in 2017, personal protection/defense and concealed carry remained higher, with 46% of all advertising space reflecting these themes.

## Conclusion

This systematic content analysis of gun advertising in *Arms and the Man/The American Rifleman* has two primary aims. First, to expand and improve studies of gun-related media, specifically advertising. Second, to offer preliminary documentation of a shift in the core emphasis of U.S. gun culture from hunting and recreational shooting to armed self-defense. The data show that the predominance of Gun Culture 1.0 themes in advertising persists through the 1970s and into the 1980s, when the center of gravity of gun culture begins to shift decisively toward the Gun Culture 2.0 themes of personal protection/defense and concealed carry. This trend continues through the 1990s and 2000s, with the two emphases crossing-over in just the past few years. Gun Culture 2.0 is now America's dominant and still expanding core gun culture today.

As a first take on this material, our study is not without shortcomings. By identifying them here, we hope to encourage other interested scholars to expand and improve on our work. First, we use the content of gun advertising as an indicator of cultural change over time. We cannot answer the question of whether the change in the content of advertising we observe merely reflects or also constructs more fundamental social changes. Indeed, the question of whether advertising is a 'mirror' reflecting social practices or a 'mold' influencing them is one that advertising scholars continue to confront with no obvious answers (Eisend, 2010). The most likely answer is that the causal arrow is two-headed and the process is iterative, but to conclude this with certainty requires an independent measure of social change.

A second and related limitation of this work is that a comprehensive understanding of culture – including advertising – requires understanding not only the production or 'encoding' of culture as analyzed here. It also requires understanding the reception or 'decoding' of culture (Hall, 1980). Although it is not a reception study, per se, Bernard Harcourt's (2006) *Language of the Gun* explores the ways in which youths detained at the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections' Catalina Mountain School assign meanings to guns. As part of his interviews, Harcourt showed interviewees pictures of guns to elicit not just their views but also their emotional reactions. This methodology could be applied in broader studies of gun advertising to assess the extent to which the encoding and decoding of meanings articulate.

Third, we argue that there is a core of U.S. gun culture that has been changing over time, as reflected, in part, in advertising placed in a core cultural organ of gun culture. An alternative perspective is that gun culture has simply

become more differentiated and specialized, as have many cultural activities. To be sure, from the beginning U.S. gun culture has been differentiated. Even in the early 20th century, at the beginning of our period of study, self-defense was part of gun culture alongside hunting, recreational shooting, and collecting. It was simply a smaller, less central part of gun culture than it is today, in the same way that hunting and recreational shooting remain a part of gun culture today, although smaller and less central than before. Here 'Gun Culture 2.0' is not merely a catchy phrase, but intentionally draws on the language of 'versions' or 'generations' of the World Wide Web shifting from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 (and beyond). Just as Web 2.0 grew out of, but did not simply replace, Web 1.0, Gun Culture 2.0 developed out of and added new elements to Gun Culture 1.0.

Some individuals raised in Gun Culture 1.0 became leading figures in the development of Gun Culture 2.0, while others only partially transitioned. Those who have begun to move out of the historic gun culture but have not yet firmly settled into contemporary gun culture can be thought of as Gun Culture Version 1.2, 1.6, etc., depending on how far they have transitioned. And, of course, there are some who have remained steadfastly at home in Gun Culture 1.0. The newer gun culture even has a name for these throwbacks to the old gun culture: 'Fudds,' after the Looney Tunes cartoon character Elmer Fudd, the hapless hunter who can never bag his prey, Bugs Bunny. Highlighting the dynamism of gun culture, efforts are being made to combine the historic interest in shooting sports with the contemporary interest in personal protection and concealed carry in competitions sponsored by organizations like the International Defensive Pistol Association (IDPA). In IDPA events, competitors shoot courses of fire designed to replicate possible defensive shooting situations, like home invasions or parking lot robberies.

Fourth, more subtle, qualitative analyses of these changing themes would add flesh to the skeleton of trend data we have constructed here. For example, Jennifer Carlson (2015), William Gibson (1994), and Angela Stroud (2016) all highlight the importance of class, race, and/or gender dynamics in contemporary gun culture. The existing literature on images of race and gender in advertising (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000), therefore, could be profitably applied to gun advertising. In fact, the senior author of this paper is currently applying Erving Goffman's (1979) gender advertisements perspective to this same dataset of gun advertisements to assess the extent to which gender displays in advertising have changed over the past 100 years (cf. Belknap and Leonard, 1991; Kang, 1997).

Finally, it is important to recognize that being a part of gun culture is not simply about holding a particular set of beliefs. According to Stebbins (2001, p. 54), 'Serious leisure participants typically become members of a vast social world, a complex mosaic of groups, events, networks, organizations, and social relationships.' The same is true for participants in both recreational and self-defense gun culture. America is not just a 'Gun Show Nation,' to use Burbick's (2007) famous phrase; it is a nation of gun clubs, training classes, shooting events, network meet-ups, gun collectors and shooters associations. Kohn (2004) approaches gun culture

this way in *Shooters*, but more solidly ethnographic work like hers is necessary. Going forward, further attention should be paid especially to the social organization of armed citizenship and concealed carry, building on Carlson's (2015) fine work, as well as the complex personal dynamics of becoming a gun carrier, following in Stroud's (2016) and Shapira and Simon's (2018) footsteps.

As Yamane (2017b) has argued, social institutions – including the legal system, economy, and technology – shape American gun culture. These institutions require greater attention, as well. In the larger project of which this chapter is a part, Yamane applies this perspective to Gun Culture 2.0. For example, the passage of shall-issue concealed-carry laws facilitate the widespread practice of legally carrying guns in public. The growing practice of concealed carry also creates a number of new challenges for the individuals who do so, as well as for the broader social worlds (other people, spaces, places) in which they do so. The developing culture of armed citizenship addresses these challenges both through the 'hardware' of material culture (like guns, accessories, and other products) and the 'software' of ways of thinking, legal frameworks, and the development of relevant abilities. Gun studies scholars have not adequately studied these aspects of Gun Culture 2.0 to date.

## Notes

- 1 Although not a content analysis, Blair and Hyatt (1995) conducted an experimental study to examine whether exposure to gun advertising affects gun-related attitudes.
- 2 There are also errors in the article which cast some doubt on its findings. Although they claim in the text to have identified 84 U.S. gun magazines (Jacobs and Villaronga, 2004, p. 136), the Appendix lists only 77 (Jacobs and Villaronga, 2004, pp. 151–53). Also, in the text they claim there are 16 sport shooting magazines, including *Shooting Times*, but in the Appendix they list only 14 sport shooting magazines not including *Shooting Times*, which is instead listed under the trade category. In fact, *Shooting Times* is a general interest gun magazine. Last, the December 2001 issue of *Concealed Carry Handguns* magazine is quoted in the text under the general interest category (Jacobs and Villaronga, 2004, p. 146) but is not included in any of the categories in the Appendix.
- 3 Today, NRA members can opt to receive *American Hunter* (published since 1973, current circulation 931,314) or *America's First Freedom* (published since the 1990s, current circulation 651,966) instead of *The American Rifleman*.
- 4 Circulation data is the Alliance for Audited Media average for the six months ended 30 June 2017.
- 5 Our confidence that what is portrayed in *American Rifleman* advertising reflects broader trends, and is not unduly affected by its status as an official NRA journal, is reinforced by an ongoing related analysis of *Guns* magazine from 1955 to 2018 which shows the same pattern of change as we report here (Yamane, Ivory and Yamane, in progress).
- 6 Without ammunition, for example, a gun is just a paperweight. And the increasing number of advertisements for holsters is among the strongest indicators of the increasing centrality of self-defense in gun culture (Yamane, 2018).
- 7 We used the free reliability calculator, ReCal3: Reliability for 3+ Coders, on Deen Freelon's web page: <http://dfreelon.org/utills/recalfront/recal3/>. See Yamane, Ivory and Yamane (in progress) for more details on the tests for inter-coder reliability.



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