

Chapter 5

A Woman's Place in Gun Advertisements

The American Rifleman, 1920–2019

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A full-page advertisement placed by the Peters Cartridge Division of Remington Arms Co. features a large photo of Esther Sichler holding her target revolver and a large trophy. From the text of the ad, we learn the trophy is the Championship Cup from the Southern California Revolver League Matches. Sichler won the cup in record-setting fashion, shooting nineteen out of twenty bulls-eyes. The headline of the ad emphasizes that this “Lady Champion RELIES ON PETERS .38 SPECIAL ‘TARGET’ WAD-CUTTER” cartridges.

Although the advertisement is unremarkable in many ways, it nevertheless caught our attention. Why? Because everything we had learned from reading the scholarly literatures on gun culture and gender in advertising left us unprepared to find an ad depicting a female shooting champion in a nongendered fashion, especially not while perusing an issue of the National Rifle Association's (NRA) *American Rifleman* magazine from January 1937.

In the resurgence of scholarly interest in guns, of which this book is a part, gender has been a dominant analytical framework. Gun culture has largely been depicted as embodying “hegemonic masculinity,” or, more specifically, “white hetero/cis-masculinity” (Light 2017, 15). Of course, gun culture is part of American culture, so to the extent it exists in gun culture, hegemonic masculinity is in part a reflection of American culture. This broader cultural influence is evident in the scholarly literature on gender in advertising which highlights the pervasiveness of negative stereotypical portrayals of women. Taken together, these led us to expect from gun magazines the worst possible gender advertisements. The Esther Sichler ad was far from that.

But is the 1937 Peters Cartridge advertisement merely the exception that proves the rule? To answer this question, we cannot turn to either the literature

on guns or on advertising. Although there is a growing body of research on guns in U.S. society, it has yet to take the place of women very seriously. And the rich tradition of studying the portrayal of women in advertising does not extend to gun ads (but see Blair and Hyatt 1995). In this chapter, therefore, we create a bridge between the existing research on gun culture and on the portrayal of women in advertisements by looking at gender advertisements in *The American Rifleman* over a 100-year time period, from 1920 to 2019. In examining a woman's place in gun advertising, we offer some first steps toward understanding a woman's place in gun culture more broadly.¹

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN GUN CULTURE

The renaissance of scholarship on guns in the U.S. has arguably been led by scholars of gender. And by gender, we mean masculinity. Perhaps, the purest example of the focus on hegemonic masculinity in gun culture is Angela Stroud's (2016) book, *Good Guys with Guns*. Stroud argues that guns are symbolic tools for socially privileged men to enact hegemonic masculinity. Two key components of Stroud's analysis of "manhood" are significant here. The first is the ideal of men being the primary protectors of their families. This discourse is nearly universally invoked by the gun owners Stroud interviewed, like Adam: "I think my role is that I have to protect my family. That's my number one duty as a dad: to provide . . . food, shelter, and protection for my wife and my child. I mean that's what being a dad is" (p. 46). The second is overcoming the fear of being dominated by others which is tantamount to being "symbolically turned into a woman" (p. 51). Stroud is not the first to make this latter argument. Michael Kimmel (2017) also argues that guns allow men to perform masculinity by helping them overcome the emasculating effects of fear.

The argument that guns prevent men from being emasculated raises the specter of the common dismissal of guns as mere "phallic symbols" and male gun owners as using guns as "penis substitutes." This sort of psycho-sexual analysis of masculinity and guns actually predates the current renaissance in gun studies. A quarter century ago, James William Gibson (1994) analyzed defensive handgun ammunition in these terms. Gibson explains that "hollow point" bullets are designed to expand upon impact, and that an expanded bullet "has its shaft intact, but the head is folded back into a mushroom." This leads him to conclude, "A perfectly expanded bullet bears some resemblance to an erect penis." From here, Gibson moves on to a discussion of gun magazines' stories about hollow point bullet testing. "Bullets are fired into a simulation of human flesh called 'ballistic gelatin.' Sophisticated magazines show graphs contrasting bullet expansion and penetration, often accompanied

by drawings of wound channels that look very much like vaginas" (Gibson 1994, 91–92).

Although the psycho-sexual approach never caught on in gun studies, analyses that place masculinity at the center abound. Scott Melzer's (2009) analysis of the NRA and its supporters provides an early example. He sees "the gun rights movement as a form of collective action in response to perceived challenges to conservative men's status and identities" (Melzer 2009, xii). Their response to this fear is to rally around the mythology of frontier masculinity. Jennifer Carlson's (2015) more recent analysis along these same lines highlights the roots of men's attraction to guns in their economic decline. In an "age of decline," carrying a gun allows men to engage in everyday political acts that reassert their masculinity and help them to "reclaim a sense of dignity" (Carlson 2015a, 24; see also Mencken and Froese 2019).

Most recently, Levi Gahman has written about *Settler Colonialism and Masculinity in the American Heartland*. When he discusses "the normalization of gun culture in the Heartland" (Gahman 2020, 34), the "normal" he is referring to is what he calls heteropatriarchal racist colonial-capitalism. He notes that the gun owners he spoke to highlighted the need for guns in rural areas where police are few and far between. Moreover, Gahman writes,

guns were a farm/country tool. That is, interviewees noted the necessity of having a firearm on ready given that outside threats including wild animals, stray vermin, or rabid predators may attack or spread disease amongst their livestock, garden, or crops. "They [guns] are a way to hold down the fort" and "help rid the place [farm] of pests," as Everett, 54 years old, and Ricky, 48 years old shared; which are statements connoting that gun use makes men empowered and active agents. (Gahman 2020, 135–136)

He predictably slides straight from this statement to noting that "recent literature on gun use and manhood suggests the reasons men sometimes own guns are because of disillusionment, powerlessness, despair, and alienation they are experiencing as a result of their social standing, economic situation, and/or just 'getting older'/less 'able'" (Gahman 2020, 136). So, guns are not normal tools that people in the Heartland use to have fun and/or to protect their lives and livelihoods. They are a normalized way that men compensate for their loss of masculinity. If Gahman were a psychoanalyst rather than a critical geographer, he might just come out and say that they are penis substitutes.

The idea that guns help privileged men compensate for lost heteropatriarchal dominance is accepted as conventional wisdom in gun studies today. On the one hand, this emphasis on masculinity makes sense considering the fact that men are much more likely to own guns than women (Wolfson et al. 2020) and therefore play a more central role in gun culture.

But what, then, is a woman's place in gun culture? As Wolfson et al. (2020, 49) observe, "Little is known about female gun owners in the USA." Nonetheless, a small social scientific literature attempting to understand contemporary women gun owners is beginning to emerge.² As with the existing scholarship on hegemonic masculinity in gun culture, this literature frequently seeks to understand how women negotiate gun culture as a masculine space (Carlson 2016) and how progun activism struggles to incorporate women, especially on equal terms (Carlson and Goss 2017; Goss 2017). Martha McCaughey (1997) sees female gun ownership as related to the rise of "physical feminism," France Winddance Twine (2013) argues that female gun ownership is antifeminist, and Jennifer Carlson (2015b) explores the "double-barreled" meaning of guns.

Examining the portrayal of gender in gun advertising provides a unique window onto the historical reality of women and guns and helps address the question of women's incorporation in gun culture. In simple terms: Is the 1937 Peters Cartridge advertisement featuring Esther Sichler the exception, the rule, or something else?

GENDER IN ADVERTISING

Scholarly interest in the portrayal of gender role stereotypes in advertising dates to Courtney and Lockeretz's (1971) pioneering study, "A Woman's Place." They examined 729 advertisements in seven general interest magazines (e.g., *Newsweek* and *Saturday Review*) published in April 1970. They found men were shown in working roles much more often than women: 45 percent vs. 9 percent. Women, by contrast, were more frequently depicted in domestic settings, unless they were accompanied by men. When women were portrayed outside the home, they were often "portrayed as decorations, as in one ad where an attractive and elaborately dressed woman was used to display an automobile" (Courtney and Lockeretz 1971, 93). These stereotypes of domesticity and passivity are consistently found in subsequent studies (e.g., Belkaoui and Belkaoui 1976; Conley and Ramsey 2011). In a meta-analysis of gender roles in advertising, Eisend (2010) found that women are much more likely than men to be occupationally stereotyped, set in a domestic environment, associated with domestic products, placed in a dependent role, and presented visually/not speaking.

Another major gendered stereotype found in advertising, often related to passivity, is the sexual objectification of women. In their pioneering study, Courtney and Lockeretz (1971, 95) found some indirect evidence that "men regard women primarily as sexual objects; they are not interested in women as people." Later work took up this stereotype more directly. In a study of

1,988 advertisements from fifty-eight popular magazines published in the U.S. in 2002, Stankiewicz and Rosselli (2008) found that slightly more than half of advertisements (51.8 percent) featured women as sexual objects. The feminist movement notwithstanding, the sexual objectification of women in advertising got worse through the 1970s and 1980s not better. For example, Kang looked specifically at "body-revealing clothes or nudity" and found it in 24.6 percent of the ads depicting women in 1979, increasing to 31.9 percent of the ads in 1991 (Kang 1997). Sullivan and O'Connor (1988) also find an increase in images of women in sexualized roles from 1958 to 1983.

Studies of the portrayal of women in advertising received a conceptual boost with the publication in 1979 of Erving Goffman's *Gender Advertisements*. Goffman (1979) introduced more subtle gendered characteristics found in advertising's visual imagery, such as relative size, feminine touch, function ranking, ritualization of subordination, and licensed withdrawal. Goffman's dramaturgical perspective suggested these "behavior displays" revealed ritualized forms through which gender is performed. For example, feminine touch directs attention to the ways in which women tend to be shown tracing or cradling objects in a delicate fashion, as opposed to the more masculine utilitarian touch in which objects are grasped and manipulated more forcefully.

Although conceptually rich, Goffman's methodology was criticized because he did not systematically operationalize his concepts so as to make them replicable (Kang 1997) and he sought out advertisements that exemplified his concepts rather than analyzing systematic samples of ads (Belknap and Leonard 1991). Still, many researchers use Goffman as a starting point for their studies. Belknap and Leonard (1991) analyzed over 1,000 advertisements from six magazines in 1985, comparing three each which they characterized as "traditional" (*Good Housekeeping*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Time*) versus "modern" (*Ms.*, *GQ*, *Rolling Stone*). Unexpectedly, they found that more of the advertisements in the modern magazines had stereotypical portrayals of women than in the traditional magazines, especially feminine touch and ritualization of subordination, and to a lesser extent licensed withdrawal.

Kang (1997) also used Goffman's categories to analyze a sample of 504 advertisements in popular women's magazines, half from 1979 and half from 1991. She found that feminine touch was common, both cradling and caressing objects (41.8 percent of ads in 1979 and 41.4 percent in 1991) and self-touching (38.2 percent in 1979 and 40.2 percent in 1991). Function ranking—men being depicted in a superior role—was found in 35.3 percent of ads in 1979 and 38.1 percent in 1991. Ritualization of subordination was operationalized several ways, but "bashful knee bend" was among the most frequent gender displays in Kang's study, found among women in 31.7 percent of ads in 1979 and 37.5 percent in 1991. Head or body cant was

also found in 31.7 percent of ads in 1979 and 37.5 percent in 1991. Last, Goffman's licensed withdrawal was seen in women covering their mouth or face with their hand in 6.3 percent of ads in 1979 and 8.7 percent of ads in 1991.

As Sullivan and O'Connor (1988) and Kang (1997) suggest, the stereotypical portrayal of women in advertising does not seem to be improving over time. Looking over an even longer time period, 1955 to 2002, Lindner (2004) examined gender displays in *Time* and *Vogue* magazines. Once again, she used the same coding scheme from Goffman, with the addition of body display, location, and objectification. She found that in *Vogue*, which is tailored more toward women, the stereotypical portrayal of women was more prevalent than *Time*, which is directed at the general public. Additionally, Lindner found that there was only a slight decrease in the stereotypical depiction of women across the studied period. Similarly, Mager and Helgeson (2011) examined nearly 8,000 portrayals of people from 1950 to 2000 and found women displaying feminine touch, suggestive poses, lower function ranking, ritualized subordination, and licensed withdrawal both more often than men and more frequently over time.

Still more recent studies have demonstrated similar results in the stereotypical portrayal of women in advertising. Tartaglia and Rollero (2015) studied gender differences in newspaper advertisements from two European countries. They found that women played more decorative roles than men, implying more passive behaviors, and were more sexualized. Taylor et al. (2019) analyzed the portrayal of women (and racial minorities) in Super Bowl advertisements. They found that ads with female main characters were more likely to feature home settings, sexual appeals, and emotional messages. Both of these studies lend further support to the idea that the stereotypical portrayal of women in advertisements has not changed considerably over time.

HYPOTHESES

Insofar as gun culture—like advertising—has been characterized as embodying the worst aspects of hegemonic masculinity, we expect to find all of these gender stereotypes in gun advertising over the entire 100-year period under study here. In this chapter, we analyze gender displays in gun advertising to test the following specific hypotheses:

1. Women will be *underrepresented* across the entire period under study and the gender gap will remain unchanged over time.
2. Women will be portrayed as *more passive* than men over the entire time period studied.

3. Women will be portrayed as *more submissive* than men over the entire time period studied.
4. Women will be shown in *lower function ranking* positions more often than men over the entire time period studied.
5. Women will be shown using *feminine touch* more than men, who will be shown using utilitarian touch more than women, over the entire time period studied.
6. Woman will be portrayed as *sexualized* more than men over the entire time period studied.
7. Women will be portrayed as *less determined* than men over the entire time period studied.

Overall, we expect there will be *no change in the stereotypical portrayal of women in gun advertisements across the entire time period studied.*

DATA AND METHODS

To test these hypotheses, this study analyzes advertising in the oldest and largest circulation general interest gun magazine in the U.S.: *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 upward as the NRA's membership has grown (Hardy 2012; Rajala 2012; Trefethen 1967).³

Among those magazines submitting to audits by the Alliance for Audited Media in the six months ending June 30, 2020, *The American Rifleman's* circulation of 1,706,688 ranked first in the "Fishing & Hunting" category, tripling the circulation of the popular outdoor magazine *Field & Stream* (572,879) and dwarfing the next highest circulation general interest gun magazine, *Guns & Ammo* (369,682). Considering consumer magazines as a whole, *The American Rifleman* has a smaller circulation than *Sports Illustrated* (1,866,026) and *National Geographic* (2,129,477) but a larger circulation than *Golf Digest* (1,627,353) or *Car and Driver* (1,113,121).⁴

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. Nevertheless, its broad audience and status as the official journal of the largest organization of gun owners in the U.S. (an estimated 4-million members) makes *The*

American Rifleman a good representation of American gun culture, if only one magazine is to be analyzed.

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 1920 through 2019. We used a random number generator set from 1 (January) to 12 (December) to determine which of the twelve monthly issues to examine for each year. We then acquired the specified issues either from the authors' collection (for more recent issues) or purchased them through eBay (for older issues).

To be included in the sample, an advertisement had to meet four main criteria. First, the ad had to use one or more human models, and show enough of the model(s) to determine their gender. Second, the ad had to be at least one-quarter of a page in size. Third, the ad had to be placed by the manufacturer, licensed dealer, or importer of the product (i.e., not a retailer like Midway USA or Brownell's). Fourth, 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. These inclusion criteria yielded a total of 457 advertisements from 100 issues of *The American Rifleman*.

Coding

Following protocols established by previous studies of gender advertisements, basic characteristics of the models were recorded for each ad. These included the total number of models and total number of female models. Coders then identified the central model in the advertisement and recorded whether the central model was male or female. If there were multiple pictures but it was clear that it was the same model in each, this was coded as one model. If there were multiple models, the central model was determined using indicators such as: being located in the center of the ad or physically above other models, or playing the central or active role in the ad (e.g., holding or shooting a gun). If there was no clear central model, the ad was coded as "no central model." For example, when there were multiple pictures of different people, but they were all roughly the same size or doing roughly the same things. In these cases, we coded the first model from the left-hand side of the page (following Conley and Ramsey 2011).

If there were only male models in the advertisement, attributes of the central male model were coded. Because, we wanted to include as many female

models in our analysis as possible, any time a female model appeared we coded the attributes of that model, even when she was not identified as the central model in the ad. This was the case for 33 of 61 ads we analyzed. (In the interest of time, we coded the attributes of only one model per advertisement.) If there were multiple female models in the ad, we determined which female model was most central using indicators noted above.

With the exception of a category we call "determination" (following Waller et al. 2014), qualitative attributes of the model being coded were derived from the existing literature on gender advertisements reviewed above. The coding scheme employed by coders in this study is summarized in table 5.1, which gives the specific codes, code definitions, examples, explanatory notes, and intercoder reliability statistics (about which more below).

These data were analyzed to test the hypotheses specified above. Because, there were so few women in advertisements, especially in the early years of this analysis, we combined our data into 10-year increments from 1920 to 1999, and 5-year increments from 2000 to 2019 (when women appeared in gun advertisements more commonly).

Intercoder Reliability Tests

As a test of the reliability of the coding scheme and instructions that were developed, three researchers coded thirteen advertisements meeting the selection criteria from the May 2019 issue and eleven advertisements from the June 2018 issue of *The American Rifleman*, for a total of twenty-four advertisements. Researchers coded each ad for the presence (=1) or absence (=0) of the attributes of interest. Krippendorff's α (alpha) was used to assess intercoder reliability. According to Krippendorff (2013), it is customary to require $\alpha \geq .800$ to conclude that the coding scheme and instructions are reliable.⁵

As reported in table 5.1, all of the attributes coded resulted in satisfactory levels of intercoder reliability. Krippendorff's α for all variables collectively was 0.962.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 stated: Women will be *underrepresented* in gun advertisements across the entire period under study and the gender gap will remain unchanged. We find support for the first half of this hypothesis (underrepresentation) but not the second (consistent gender gap). Over a 100-year period, just 61 of 457 advertisements in *The American Rifleman* that used human models featured *any* female model (13.3 percent). Only thirty-three of those advertisements (7.2 percent of coded ads) presented the female model as the central model.

Table 5.1 Gender Advertisements Coding Scheme

CODE	CODE DEFINITION	EXAMPLES/NOTES	α (3 CODERS)
Active vs. Passive	Model is presented in an active pose, as if actively engaging in an activity, or not.	<i>Model is shooting a gun (active) vs. model is sitting on a chair (passive).</i> Active: If model is at any stage of drawing or firing a gun (e.g., clearing cover garment, hand on gun in holster). Passive: If model is standing at the ready but not doing anything, walking but not doing anything with the gun.	0.815
Submissiveness (Ritualization of Subordination)	"Posture" of the model's body is subordinated or submissive, such as tilting (canting) of the head or body, being embraced so that movement or mobility is restricted, leaning on others for support, or occupying a lower physical position relative to another (kneeling, bending forward).	<i>Model is leaning or laying backward, or model's head is tilted and is looking off as if into space</i>	1.00
Function Ranking	The model is in an authoritative/superior/executive role relative to other models depicted.	<i>Model is teaching another person how to shoot a gun.</i> Note: Code only if there is more than one model in the same picture in the ad.	0.885
Feminine vs. Utilitarian Touch	The model is touching self (e.g., hair, face, lips) or their clothing in a studied manner, or using fingers or hands to trace an object, cradle it, or caress its surface. This sort of touching is distinguished from a utilitarian kind that grasps, manipulates, and holds an object.	<i>Model is placing finger on gun instead of gripping it.</i> Note: Code only if model is touching self or object.	0.823

(Continued)

Table 5.1 Gender Advertisements Coding Scheme (Continued)

CODE	CODE DEFINITION	EXAMPLES/NOTES	α (3 CODERS)
Sexual Objectification	The model's sexuality is being used to sell the product, as evidenced by wearing revealing, hardly any, or no clothes at all; a sexualized posture or seductive facial expression; or being portrayed in such a way as to suggest that being looked at is their major purpose in the advertisement.	<i>Model is positioned with legs spread open</i>	1.00
Determination	Relates to being focused and actively involved in an activity (Waller et al. 2014). Facial expression shows determination, a high-approach-motivated positive emotion. Coded according to Facial Action Coding System (FACS) codes AU17: chin raiser and AU24: lip presser.	<i>Model is focused on aiming gun at target.</i> Note: Code only if enough of face is shown to assess.	0.895

(Recall our coding protocol which called for coding of the female model in any advertisement, even if the female model was not the central model.)

There is, however, fluctuation over the study period. In two decades (the 1920s and 1970s), women appeared in no coded advertisements, while in the 2010s, they appeared in nearly 30 percent of the coded ads (29 of 104). Indeed, almost half of the coded advertisements that included women (29 of 61, or 47.5 percent) were from 2010 to 2019. Figure 5.1 represents the overall pattern for the study period, with the best fitting trend lines shown for men (solid black line) and women (dashed black line). From the 1980s forward, the gender gap in gun advertising—though still substantial—shrinks, which we expect may continue as women become more involved in gun ownership and culture.

Our data support Hypothesis 2, that women will be portrayed as *more passive* than men over the entire time period studied. This conclusion needs to be cautiously interpreted, though. Figure 5.2 gives the trends lines for men and women, with both becoming more active/less passive over time. This likely reflects trends in advertising aesthetics, not limited to the firearms industry. Although, the best fitting trend lines show men (solid black) as more active than women (dashed black) over the entire 100 years covered, there are

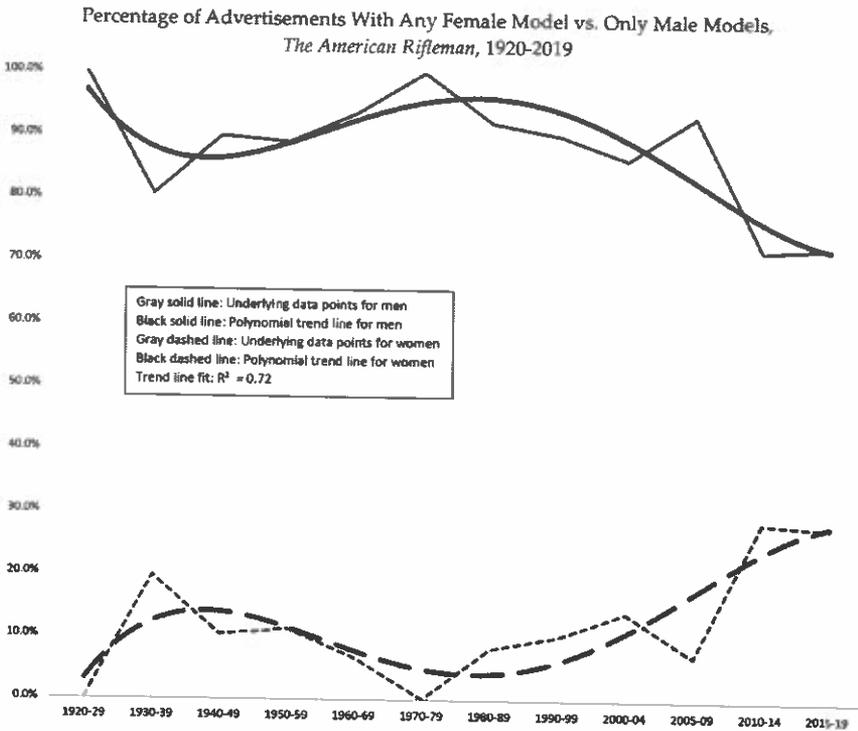


Figure 5.1 Percentage of Advertisements With Any Female Model vs. Only Male Models, *The American Rifleman*, 1920-2019.

dramatic fluctuations in the activity/passivity of women from time period to time period. In four time periods (1920–1929, 1940–1949, 1970–1979, and 2005–2009), no advertisements in our sample depict women as active, and in three time periods (1980–1989, 1990–1999, and 2000–2004) women are portrayed as equally or more active than men. This explains why the trend line for women (black dashes) captures only 40 percent of the variance in the underlying data (R -square = 0.40), while the trend line for men (solid black) captures nearly three-quarters of the variance (R -square = 0.725).

Our data also offer qualified support for Hypothesis 3, that women will be portrayed as *more submissive* than men over the entire time period studied. Collectively, women were over four times more likely to be portrayed as submissive. Women are submissive in 9 of 61 advertisements (14.8 percent) and men in only 13 of 396 ads (3.3 percent). It is hard to see a clear trend in this portrayal, however, since there are many years in which no models, male (seven time periods) or female (eight time periods), are portrayed as submissive. The more submissive portrayal of women overall is driven by higher proportions of female submissive advertisements in the 1940s (3 of

Percentage of Advertisements that Depict Central Model as Active, By Gender, *The American Rifleman*, 1920-2019

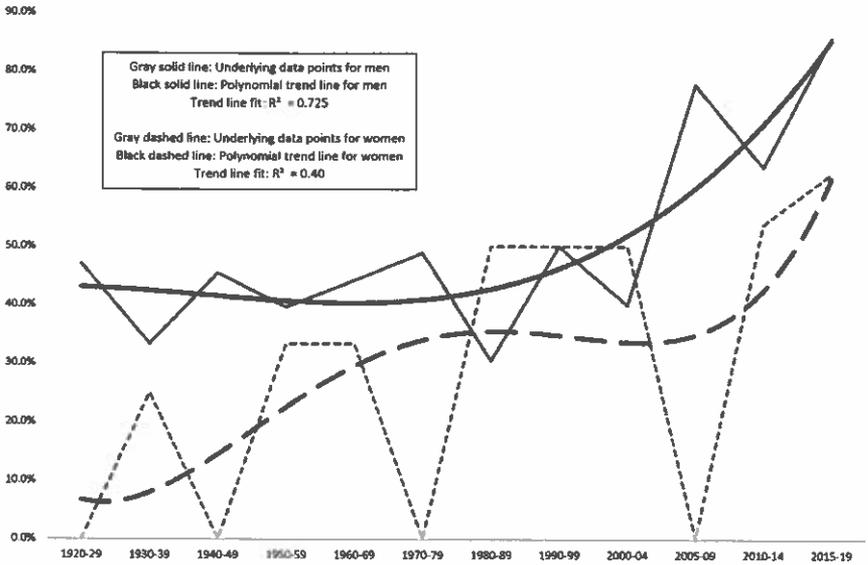


Figure 5.2 Percentage of Advertisements that Depict Central Model as Active, By Gender, *The American Rifleman*, 1920-2019.

5, or 60 percent), 1950s (2 of 6, or 33 percent), and 2010s (4 of 29, or 14 percent).

Our data generally support Hypothesis 4—women will be shown in positions of *lower function ranking* more than men over the entire time period studied—but again with some important caveats. Figure 5.3 shows the gender gap in portrayal of men vs. women as superior in function ranking. When the solid black line is above the horizontal dashed line (set at 0.0 percent gap), then the gender gap favors men, and when it is below the horizontal line, the gender gap favors women. For 12 of 16 data points, men are more commonly shown as superior than women; in 2 of 16 data points (interestingly, 1940–1949 and 1950–1959) women are more commonly shown as superior than men; and in 2 of 16 data points (1990–1999 and 2015–2019) the proportions are the same.

Our data do not support Hypothesis 5 that women will be shown using *feminine touch* more than men over the entire time period studied. This is in part because very few ads employ feminine touch as a gender display. In our sample, 375 ads show models touching products. Almost all of them employ utilitarian touch (364, or 97 percent). Of the eleven ads showing feminine

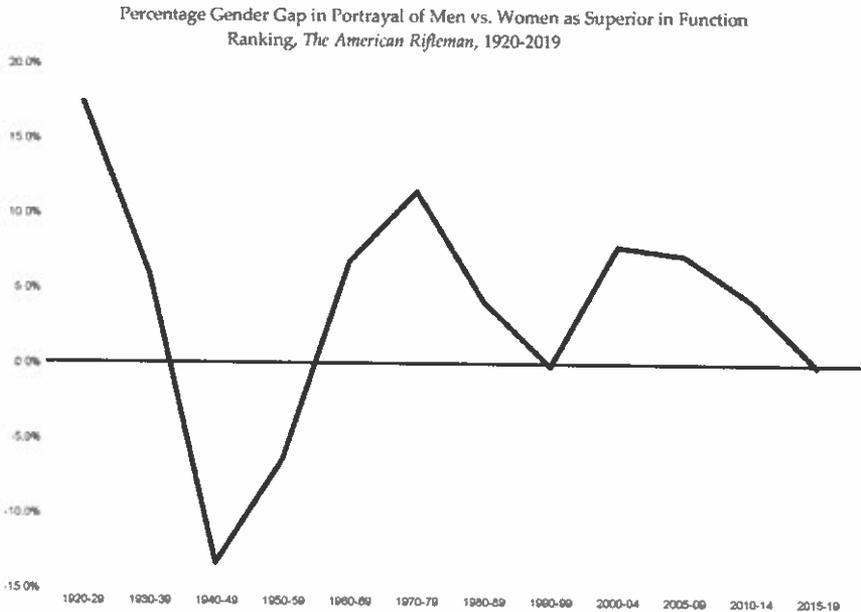


Figure 5.3 Percentage Gender Gap in Portrayal of Men vs. Women as Superior in Function Ranking, *The American Rifleman*, 1920-2019.

touch, only five (45.5 percent) involved female models, and almost all of these appeared in the 20 years from 1946 to 1967.

Hypothesis 6 stated that women will be portrayed as *more sexualized* than men over the entire time period studied. Sexual objectification of models as a form of gender display is so uncommon in gun advertising, at least in *The American Rifleman*, that we cannot claim support for this hypothesis. Of 457 advertisements coded over the 100-year period, only four advertisements in total were coded as sexually objectifying the model. To be sure, in three of those four advertisements women rather than men were sexualized. But, just 5 percent of all ads involving female models (3 of 61) is a smaller proportion of sexual objectification than scholars have found in other magazines, as discussed above.

Our data also do not support Hypothesis 7, that women will be portrayed as *less determined* than men over the entire time period studied. To the contrary, in our sample of advertisements women are portrayed as determined 37.7 percent of the time (23 of 61 advertisements) and men 33.8 percent of the time (134 of 396 advertisements). As in figure 5.3, when the solid black line in figure 5.4 is above the horizontal dashed line (set at 0.0 percent gap), then the gender gap favors men, and when it is below the horizontal line the gender gap favors women. Figure 5.4 does not show a clear trend over the years,

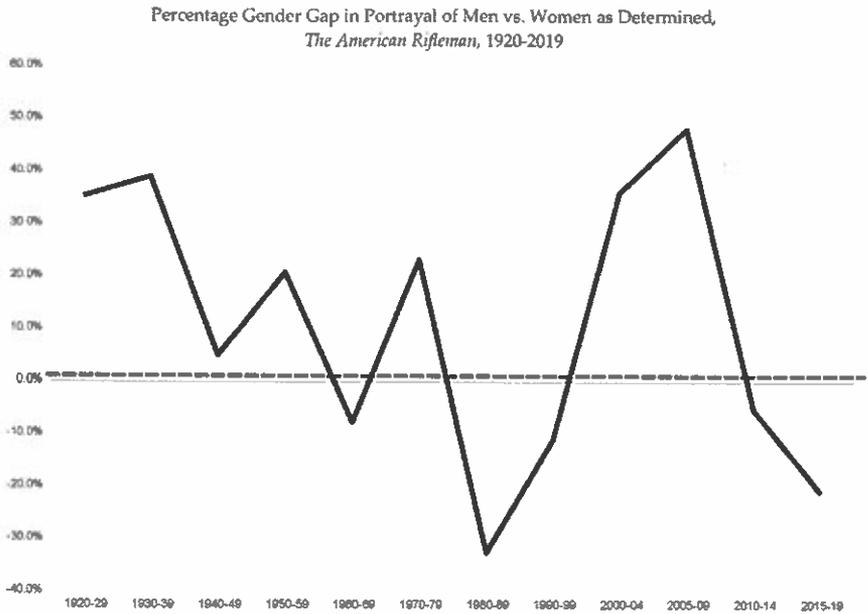


Figure 5.4 Percentage Gender Gap in Portrayal of Men vs. Women as Determined, *The American Rifleman*, 1920-2019.

as the gender gap fluctuates from the 1950s forward, with men portrayed as determined more commonly than women in four time periods (1950–1959, 1970–1979, 2000–2004, and 2005–2009) and women as determined more commonly than men in five time periods (1960–1969, 1980–1989, 1990–1999, 2010–2014, and 2015–2019).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although, no one had systematically studied the portrayal of gender in gun advertising when we began this work, based on the existing literatures on American gun culture and gender in advertising, we expected to see a consistently stereotypical portrayal of women in gun advertising in *The American Rifleman* magazine over the entire 100-year time period we examined. What we found was substantially more complex.

Reflecting gun culture itself, gun advertising as a whole is largely the domain of men, though the gap in gender representation is shrinking, especially from the 1980s forward (half support for Hypothesis 1). Moreover, when women do appear in gun advertising, at least in *The American Rifleman*, some of the most stereotypical gender displays we find in the world of

print advertising more broadly are more muted or absent altogether. We find qualified support for the portrayal of women as more passive than men (Hypothesis 2), more submissive than men (Hypothesis 3), and inferior to men in function ranking (Hypothesis 4). Our data do not support our hypotheses that women would use feminine touch more often than men (Hypothesis 5), that they would be sexualized (Hypothesis 6), and that they would appear less determined than men (Hypothesis 7). In fact, women appear as more determined than men overall, especially in recent decades.

We conclude here with some further reflections on the issue and caveats. We began our analysis with the question of the representation of women in gun advertising. To say that women are “underrepresented” raises the question, “Relative to what?” Relative to men in the general population, women are definitely underrepresented. But are women underrepresented relative to their proportion of the gun owning population? Here, the lack of historical gun ownership statistics by gender makes it impossible to answer this question definitively. But, Parker et al. (2017) find about 22 percent of women report personally owning a gun. As Yamane (2019) has argued that surveys underestimate gun ownership rates in the U.S., the rate of representation of women in gun advertising in the most recent period (27.6 percent in 2015–19) may actually be very close to the rate of female gun ownership during this time. Moreover, the inclusion of women in 28 percent of advertisements in the 2010s overrepresents women relative to the readership of *The American Rifleman*. According to the 2021 media kit prepared by the NRA (2021) for potential advertisers, 85.3 percent of the magazine’s readers are men.

The greater inclusion of women in advertising (in the later time periods especially) in ways that are not grossly stereotypical reflects the gun community’s and industry’s conscious effort to better incorporate women into gun culture. One study of this is Noah Schwartz’s “Called to Arms: The NRA, the Gun Culture and Women.” Schwartz (2019) examines three online television series that the NRA has produced under the label of NRA Women: *Armed & Fabulous*, *Love at First Shot*, and *New Energy*. Despite the overall failure of NRATV, these particular shows consciously sought to overcome social barriers to women’s involvement in gun culture created by masculinist norms. They did so by framing participation in gun culture as enjoyable and empowering for women, highlighting role models, and providing practical advice specifically for women.

Other examples of the effort to build a more inclusive gun culture abound. Among the women who play prominent roles in gun culture are Julie Golob, who serves as Captain of Team Smith & Wesson (the gun company’s professional shooting team), and Jessie Harrison, who does the same for Brazilian gun manufacturer Taurus. Tamara Keel is the handgun

editor for *Shooting Illustrated* magazine and Lara Cullinan Smith is the national spokesperson for the Liberal Gun Club. Prominent women in the civilian gun training industry include Kathy Jackson (The Cornered Cat, retired), Annette Evans (On Her Own Life), Tiffany Johnson (Citizens Safety Academy), and Melody Lauer (Citizens Defense Research). These few examples highlight the fact that female representation in gun culture is increasing.

Although some, like Goss (2017), question whether these efforts at inclusion have been successful at expanding female gun ownership, we do see an increasing proportion of women getting concealed carry permits (Lott and Wang 2020), and a recent national survey found no difference in the proportion of male and female respondents who say they have them (Wolfson et al. 2020). Organizations such as *A Girl and a Gun Women's Shooting League* (144 chapters in thirty-six states) and *The Well Armed Woman* (345 chapters in forty-seven states) also continue to expand, suggesting that women's involvement in gun culture is growing. Whether these examples will or should lead to the development of alternatives to the dominant scholarly narrative of hegemonic masculinity in gun culture remains to be seen.

Some important caveats apply to this study as well. Although it is the only study of gender advertisements in gun magazines to date, this work is certainly not definitive. For one, it looks only at arguably the most mainstream of all gun magazines, of which there are many (Jacobs and Villaronga 2004; Saylor et al. 2004). The gender displays in advertisements placed in newer magazines like *Recoil*—which characterizes itself as a “firearms lifestyle publication for the modern shooting enthusiast”—may differ. Also, our study looks only at “dead tree” media. It may, therefore, overlook some more stereotypical depictions of gender in social media advertising, which can tend toward the lowest common denominator. This would include “gun bunny” social media influencers on Instagram like American Gun Chic, Lea “Speed6,” and Tactical Yoga Girl, as well as companies that lean heavily on the sexual objectification of women like Taran Tactical Innovations, We the People Holsters, and Weapon Outfitters.

Also, this study did not make any comparisons between ads based on product type. It would be interesting to compare gender displays in advertisements targeted toward different subcultures within the larger gun culture. For instance, advertisements for products associated with Gun Culture 1.0 (especially hunting) could be different than those associated with Gun Culture 2.0 (self-defense), which according to Yamane (2017) has the potential to be more demographically inclusive.

This content analysis of *The American Rifleman* from 1920 to 2019 highlights some seemingly unique aspects of gun advertising in comparison to previous studies of gender in nongun media advertising. In highlighting a

woman's place in gun advertising, it also takes some first steps toward a broader understanding of the place of women in gun culture. We hope it inspires other scholars to develop this work further.

NOTES

1. One challenge in trying to understand the place of women in American gun culture is having systematic data over a long period of time. Two of the authors of this chapter have elsewhere shown the utility of using gun advertising as a consistent source of data representing different priorities in gun culture over time (Yamane et al. 2019, 2020).

We recognize this project embodies cisnormativity, the assumption that people conform to a gender binary: "The social and biological classification of sex and gender into two distinct oppositional forms of masculine and feminine selfhood" (Sumerau et al. 2016, 294). However, with trans* people representing just 0.6 percent of the U.S. population today (Flores et al. 2016), we did not judge it to be the best use of our time to include gender nonconformity in our study, especially in gun advertising and especially when looking over a 100 year time period.

2. Much of what has been written about women and guns actually comes from outside the social sciences proper, including book-length works by Religious Studies professor Mary Zeiss Stange and Carol K. Oyster (2000), writer and English professor Deborah Homsher (2001), freelance journalist Caitlin Kelly (2004), English professor Laura Browder (2006), and photography professor Nancy Floyd (2008).

3. Today, NRA members can opt to receive *American Hunter* (published since 1973, current circulation 873,444), *America's First Freedom* (published since the 1990s, current circulation 595,522), or *Shooting Illustrated* (official NRA publication since, 2016, current circulation 582,260), instead of *The American Rifleman*.

4. Circulation data is the Alliance for Audited Media average for the six months ended 30 June 2020, retrieved from <https://abcas3.auditedmedia.com/ecirc/magtitlresearch.asp> on 20 January 2021.

5. We used the free reliability calculator, ReCal3: Reliability for 3+ Coders, on Deen Freelon's web page: <http://dfreelon.org/utlils/recalfront/recal3/>.

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