Understanding ‘Gun Culture’

THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PEOPLE THAT OWN AND USE FIREARMS
About the author:

- Firearms Instructor at Bellevue Gun Club
- Member of the Firearms Subcommittee of the Safer Homes Task Force, a Washington state legislative suicide prevention coalition authorized by RCW 43.70.445
- Member of the Washington Firearms Tragedy Prevention Network (that’s us!)
- Sergeant in the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) of the U.S. Marine Corps
  - Honor Graduate, U.S. Marine Corps Military Police School (Class 05-07)
  - Served overseas in Latvia (BALTOPS-10), Kuwait (OIF/OND), Afghanistan (OEF), & Kyrgyzstan (OIF)
- Trained under:
  - Larry Vickers, Aztec Training Services (Advanced Pistol Operators' Course, 2016)
  - Daryl Holland, Aztec Training Services (assistant instructor, Advanced Pistol Operators' Course, 2016)
  - Dr. Mike Sheritz, MD, Insights Training Center (Traumatic Casualty Care, 2015)
  - Zack Harrison & David Sanders, Northern Red Training (Rifle & Pistol Gunfighter Course, 2017)
- ASHI certified Basic First Aid/CPR-AED Instructor
- NRA certified:
  - Range Safety Officer (RSO)
  - Chief Range Safety Officer (CRSO)
  - Pistol Instructor
  - Rifle Instructor
There is no one singular type of firearm-owner.

- As we will discuss, there are several ‘tribes’ of people who own firearms, many of whom overlap, many of whom do not.
- Regardless of the group one is addressing, most people who own firearms are detail-oriented.
- A lack of cultural knowledge makes it *nearly impossible* to convey safety-related messaging to those who own firearms.
Why Should I Care?
Because cultural ignorance will never work to positively affect behavioral changes amongst ‘people of the gun.’

- If our objective is to reduce firearm-related tragedies such as suicide and accidental death, the people that own and use firearms need to be welcome partners at the table.

- Focusing on areas in which any consensus is possible will be infinitely more productive than attacking firearm owners.

- There is widespread, gross ignorance amongst many in the public health, policy, and media fields about firearms usage, ownership, and technical detail; this immediately turns off people who own firearms to any sort of discussion surrounding best practices.
Firearms owners need to know about suicide prevention; 78% of "gun violence" deaths are suicides!

TEMPORARY TRANSFERS TO PREVENT SUICIDE ARE NOW LEGAL IN WASHINGTON STATE

SAFETY MESSAGING MATTERS AND WORKS FOR FIREARM-RELATED ACCIDENTS; IT CAN WORK FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION AS WELL
COLONEL COOPER’S UNIVERSAL FIREARMS
SAFE HANDLING RULES:

1. All guns are always loaded
2. Never point a gun at anything you’re not willing to shoot
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on target
4. Be sure of your target, and the backstop beyond
What are the different types of firearm owner/user?

- PROFESSIONALS
- DEFENSIVE SHOOTERS/CONCEALED CARRIERS
- COLLECTORS
- COMPETITORS
- HUNTERS/SPORTSMEN
- RECREATIONAL SHOOTERS
Professionals

THOSE WHO OWN, CARRY, OR USE FIREARMS IN THE COURSE OF THEIR EMPLOYMENT AND/OR OFFICIAL JOB DUTIES
Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs)
Private Investigators (PIs)
Firearms Instructors
Range Safety Officers (RSOs)
Firearms Manufacturers & Retailers
Armed Security Guards
Executive Protection Specialists/Contractors
Members of the Armed Forces
Notes:

- THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THOSE WHO PROFESSIONALLY CARRY/USE FIREARMS ARE NOT SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS; MANY ARE NOT EVEN PARTICULARLY WELL-EDUCATED ABOUT FIREARMS IN GENERAL.

- PROFICIENCY LEVELS VARY FROM LACKLUSTRE-AT-BEST TO EXTREMELY ADVANCED.

- PROFESSIONALS WITH AN INTEREST IN THE SUBJECT MATTER GENERALLY MAINTAIN FIREARMS FOR DEFENSIVE REASONS.

- SOME MAY SHOOT COMPETITIVELY, COLLECT, OR HUNT.

- OUTSIDE OF THE ARMED FORCES, THOSE IN THE BUSINESS OF CARRYING/USING/SELLING FIREARMS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY VETERANS THEREOF.
Defensive Shooters/Concealed Carriers

PEOPLE WHO EITHER CARRY FIREARMS OR OTHERWISE OWN THEM FOR DEFENSIVE USE
Home Defense
Concealed Carry
Notes:

- Skill levels among those who maintain firearms for defensive reasons vary drastically; some have minimal formal training, some are far more skillful and much better trained than the average police officer or service member.

- The serious student of defensive or “tactical” weaonscraft is typically very knowledgeable about the subject matter and is often a professional who may also compete, but often looks down on “gameboy” competitors and “Elmer Fudd” hunters.

- Personal protection/home defense is now the leading reason that people state for purchasing firearms, not hunting or sport shooting.

- The demographic trends amongst concealed carriers are grown in urban areas and particularly amongst non-whites and women under forty.

- For obvious reasons, handguns (pistols and revolvers) are favored for concealed carry; shotguns are waning in prevalence for home defense use as autoloading rifles supplant them.
Collectors

PEOPLE WHO ARE ENTHUSIASTS IN PARTICULAR GENRES OF FIREARM AND COLLECT THEM
Antique Collectors
Historical Military Collectors
Old West Collectors
Specific Firearm Enthusiasts
Notes:

- MANY COLLECTORS—AMAZINGLY—HARDLY SHOOT; SOME DON’T SHOOT AT ALL!

- COLLECTORS TEND TO BE RETIRED (AS FIREARMS, ESPECIALLY SOUGHT-AFTER COLLECTIBLE ONES, TEND TO BE EXPENSIVE)

- FIREARMS TEND TO BE A RELIABLE LONG-TERM INVESTMENT, AS THEY RARELY—IF EVER—DEPRECIATE IN VALUE

- SOME FIREARM COLLECTIONS ARE ASTONISHINGLY VALUABLE

- ANTIQUE FIREARMS HAVE A SPECIFIC DEFINITION UNDER 18 U.S.C. § 921(A)(16) AND CAN BE PURCHASED BY PERSONS WITH A CURIO & RELICS (C&R) LICENSE INSTEAD OF A FEDERAL FIREARMS LICENSE (FFL)
Competitors

PEOPLE WHO OWN AND USE FIREARMS FOR COMPETITIVE RECREATIONAL SHOOTING
High-Power Shooters
Small-Bore Shooters
Sporting Clays Competitors
Skeet Shooters
Trap Shooters
IDPA Shooters
IPSC/USPSA Shooters
Three-Gun Shooters
Cowboy Action Shooting/SASS
Notes:

-FOR OBVIOUS REASONS, COMPETITION SHOOTERS ARE THE MOST PROFICIENT WITH THE USE OF FIREARMS

-COMPETITION FIREARMS TEND TO BE HIGHLY SPECIALIZED AND ARE OFTEN BOTH EXCEPTIONALLY EXPENSIVE AND HIGHLY IMPRACTICAL OUTSIDE OF THE SPECIFIC SPORT FOR WHICH THEY ARE INTENDED

-DEFENSIVE SHOOTERS TEND TO MOCK THE ACTION SHOOTING COMPETITORS (IDPA, USPSA/IPSC, THREE-GUN, ETC.) AS “GAMEBOYS” & MANY ACTION SPORT SHOOTING COMPETITORS SIMILARLY MOCK DEFENSIVE SHOOTERS AS BEING “TACTI-COOL”

-MANY ACTION SHOOTING COMPETITORS CARRY OR MAINTAIN FIREARMS FOR DEFENSIVE USE; INCREASINGLY FEW HUNT

-MOST HIGH-END COMPETITORS HAVE NO PRIOR SERVICE BACKGROUND; FEW PRIOR-SERVICE INDIVIDUALS EVER REACH THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF COMPETITIVE SHOOTING
Hunters & Sportsmen

PEOPLE WHO USE FIREARMS TO TAKE GAME FOR FOOD AND SPORT
Waterfowl Hunters
Game Hunters
Predator/Invasive Species Control
Notes:

-HUNTING IS WANING IN POPULARITY IN THE UNITED STATES OUTSIDE OF SPECIFIC TYPES (I.E. PREDATOR & INVASIVE ANIMAL CONTROL); APPROXIMATELY TWO MILLION FEWER AMERICANS IDENTIFIED AS HUNTERS IN THE SPRING OF 2017 AS COMPARED TO THE SPRING OF 2008.

-HUNTERS AND SPORTSMEN DISPROPORTIONATELY SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY CAUSES THROUGH LICENSING FEES, TAGS, ETC.

-MOST HUNTERS/SPORTSMEN DO NOT CARRY OR MAINTAIN FIREARMS FOR DEFENSIVE PURPOSES OR COMPETE; SURPRISINGLY LARGE NUMBERS HAVE NEVER SHOT A HANDGUN.

-HUNTERS’ EDUCATION MATERIAL CONSISTS OF LARGE AMOUNTS OF IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION, YET HUNTERS HAVE MORE FIREARMS-RELATED ACCIDENTS THAN ANY OTHER GROUP OF FIREARM OWNERS.

-HUNTING HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN A GENERATIONAL TRADITION AND OFTEN A LEISURE ACTIVITY OF THE WEALTHY; THIS TREND IS RETURNING AS HUNTING EXPEDITIONS & RETREATS ARE INCREASINGLY COSTLY AND LAVISH.
Recreational Shooters

FOLKS THAT OWN FIREARMS FOR INFORMAL ENJOYMENT
“Plinkers”
- People from all walks of life shoot recreationally.

- Many are novices, but hunters, collectors, competitors, defensive shooters, and professionals all shoot recreationally from time to time.

- Even many taking firearms training classes are doing so more out of novelty than out of a specific desire to improve a particular marksmanship-related skill.
Common recommendations:

- Universal Rules of Safe Firearms Handling & what to do if you encounter a firearm
- Safe firearms storage options
- Suicide prevention planning
- Seek formal training, regardless of discipline (you can’t learn it all on YouTube!)
Closing Thoughts:

• Questions?
• Comments?
• Concerns?

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  • Available for instruction by appointment.