

# The Lives of Guns

EDITED BY JONATHAN OBERT

ANDREW POE

*and*

AUSTIN SARAT

OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

## The First Rule of Gunfighting Is *Have a Gun*

*Technologies of Concealed Carry in Gun Culture 2.0*

DAVID YAMANE

In April 2016, the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA) held its second annual Concealed Carry Expo (CCX) at the Georgia International Conventional Center near Hartsfield International Airport in Atlanta. The USCCA bills the CCX as “the nation’s only event dedicated to the CCW lifestyle.” Here CCW is short for “concealed carry weapon,” and although the idea of a “lifestyle” might seem to trivialize the practice of citizens carrying deadly weapons in public, the reality is quite the opposite. Over the course of three days, various seminars repeatedly stress the seriousness and importance of being a regular and responsible armed citizen.

A seminar on the laws governing the use of lethal force in self-defense by attorney Andrew Branca is free and open to the public. Although it begins at eight a.m., the audience is, literally, standing room as the overflow spills out from the combined German 1 and 2 suites into the hallway. Branca later signs copies of the third edition of his book, *The Law of Self-Defense*, which the USCCA has licensed and is giving away free of charge to Expo attendees. Other seminars presented throughout the weekend cover concealed-carry basics for beginners, hand-to-hand techniques to employ before using a firearm, mental preparation for self-defense, weapon retention, and gunshot wound treatment.

Like the National Rifle Association’s more well-known annual meeting, the heart of the CCX is the exhibition hall where vendors display and market their products and services. One might think a concealed-carry exposition would focus on guns, and guns are certainly present. Nine manufacturers have booths, including multinational giants Glock (Austria), Walther (Germany), and Taurus (Brazil), as well as American upstarts Bond Arms and Heizer Defense. In

contrast to the NRA annual meeting, the CCX also allows attendees to live fire some of the guns on the show floor inside a semi-trailer retrofitted with armor and sound proofing.

But standing in the middle of the nearly thirty-eight-thousand-square-foot show floor, it becomes abundantly clear that there is more to gun culture than just guns. For every gun manufacturer there are six companies exhibiting other products—holsters, packs and purses, clothing—designed to help armed citizens solve the riddle of carrying a lethal weapon concealed on or about their person in public safely, accessibly, and comfortably. This is what is meant by the concealed-carry *lifestyle*: making carrying a concealed firearm part of one's *everyday life*.

One of those companies exhibiting products other than guns is Elite Survival Systems (ESS). ESS is displaying such a wide range of products that, in fact, it has purchased a double booth on the end of one row. The company is known for its nylon rifle carrying cases, but has branched out more and more into the civilian concealed-carry market. Scanning the booth, a new product being introduced to the public at the Concealed Carry Expo stands out. It is a “fanny pack” called the Marathon GunPack. At first glance, it looks very similar to the popular running brand Nathan's, with its ubiquitous hydration belts. Both are adjustable nylon belts with quick-release buckles featuring center storage pouches and holsters on either side to hold flasks of water. But the pouch on the Nathan can only accommodate an iPod Classic. The Marathon GunPack's pouch is large enough to hold a pocket pistol like the Ruger LCP or Kahr P380, and comes with a Velcro holster to keep the gun secure in the pouch.

When asked how the gun show is going, one of the Elite Survival Systems reps replied, “It's been good so far—interesting and different,” compared to other more general gun shows that he usually works. In elaborating on his response, he gives the example of a customer who was at the booth looking at holsters. When the rep asked what gun he owned, the customer—a dues-paying member of the USCCA—said he did not own a gun yet. This seemed ass-backwards to the rep. Like many people contemplating “CCW”—carrying a concealed weapon—the rep thinks first about the *weapon* and only then proceeds to figuring out how to *conceal and carry* it. But the customer's approach reflects the reality that the concealed-carry lifestyle is as much about the “CC” as it is about the “W.” In fact, according to some experts, the carrying component of the CCW equation is by far the most important. Tom Givens is one such expert.

Givens is well known in the gun training community in no small part because over sixty of his students—that he knows of—have used their firearms in self-defense.<sup>1</sup> In a June 2014 accounting, based on post-encounter interviews he conducts, Givens reports his students' outcomes as you would a sports team's

results. In terms of “wins” and “losses,” his students had a record of 61-0-2 in their 63 incidents. “That's 61 clear victories, zero losses and 2 forfeits,” he writes. Forfeits? How do you forfeit in a gun fight? Givens explains:

The two forfeits were people who died as a result of not being armed on The Big Day. Both were killed in separate street robberies. Essentially, both were executed for the contents of their pockets. They were not able to defend themselves because they chose not to be armed that day. They made a poor choice. Of the 61 students who won, only 3 were injured, and all recovered from those injuries.<sup>2</sup>

What made the “clear victories” possible for so many of Givens' students? Although he makes his living as a gun trainer, like any good coach Givens doesn't take much credit for his students' wins. In his view, the most important factor in successful armed self-defense is “*having your damn gun on you when the event occurs.*”

In saying this, Givens acknowledges that he is just paraphrasing gun writer Mark Moritz who observed that “The First Rule of gunfighting is *have a gun.*” Although this would seem to be a common sense starting point, it is in fact easier said than done, especially for civilian concealed carriers. As a precondition of having a gun, the concealed carrier has to answer a number of questions: How to carry the gun safely? How to keep the gun hidden? How to carry the gun so that it is accessible? How to carry the gun comfortably in everyday life? The answers to these questions can be in tension with each other or even in direct opposition. Safety is at odds with speed of access; speed of access is at odds with concealment; concealment is at odds with comfort. The gun itself has a role in this puzzle, as well. A larger gun is more lethal but harder to carry than a smaller gun, and vice versa. Clint Smith, founder and director of the gun training center Thunder Ranch, famously declared that “carrying a gun is not supposed to be *comfortable*; it's supposed to be *comforting.*” But countless Americans who are permitted to carry a handgun in public do not do so because they cannot comfortably fit the gun into their everyday lives. As a result, a large part of the business of concealed carry is developing products that help people reconcile these competing demands so they can live the concealed-carry lifestyle promoted by the USCCA at the CCX.

Rangemaster in 1996, after a twenty-five-year career in law enforcement, and ran the indoor range, store, and training center until August 2014. During that time, he and his staff taught hundreds of students in Tennessee concealed carry, combative pistol, defensive revolver and shotgun, and vehicle defense classes.

<sup>1</sup> Most of these students he trained at Rangemaster in Memphis, Tennessee. Givens opened

<sup>2</sup> Tom Givens, “Carry Your Darned Gun!” *Rangemaster Digest* email newsletter, June 3, 2014.

The very existence of the United States Concealed Carry Association and its Concealed Carry Expo reflects a profound change that has taken place in American gun culture over the past half century, from a culture rooted in hunting and recreational shooting to one centered on armed citizenship and personal defense. As shorthand, I describe this as an evolution from Gun Culture 1.0 to Gun Culture 2.0. In what follows, I begin by giving a brief history of the rise of Gun Culture 2.0. I then propose a cultural approach to studying gun culture, based on a working definition of culture that emphasizes the ways in which it helps us to understand the world by defining problems and prospects, and helps us to act in the world by suggesting recipes and providing tools for action in relation to those problems and prospects. Here, objects of material culture like guns and gun-related accessories play an important role. Far from being static entities, in addressing the problems associated with carrying concealed weapons in everyday life, these technologies respond to and facilitate the cultural practice of gun carrying which is central to Gun Culture 2.0.<sup>3</sup> I apply this cultural approach to studying gun culture using ethnographic observation at the CCX to explore some of the many technologies that have been developed to help those who want to be armed citizens reconcile the competing demands of carrying a concealed handgun in public. These material culture technologies include guns and holsters, as well as products designed to address women's specific carry needs.

## The Rise of Gun Culture 2.0

In his 1970 essay, "America as a Gun Culture," historian Richard Hofstadter remarked on—or, more accurately, 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, US gun culture is rooted in the reality of widespread, lawful possession of firearms by a large segment of the population. He recognizes that guns as material objects are central to the construction of any gun culture. Without guns there is no gun culture. But in itself this is a trivial statement. What is crucial to explain is how people understand and use guns, as well as how guns themselves change over time, both responding to and facilitating different understandings and uses.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> As I argue in my larger project on Gun Culture 2.0, these challenges are individually and collectively addressed in the developing culture of armed citizenship not only through the "hardware" of material culture like guns, accessories, and other products, but also through the "software" of ways of thinking, legal frameworks, and the development of relevant abilities.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Hofstadter, "America as a Gun Culture," *American Heritage* 21, no. 6 (October 1970), 7, <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/america-gun-culture>; in this section, I draw on my

"What began as a necessity of agriculture and the frontier," Hofstadter observed, "took hold as a sport and as an ingredient in the American imagination." Hunting became not only a source of food but a dominant form of recreation for many, and casual target shooting competitions were commonplace on the frontier in the nineteenth century. Into the twentieth century, hunting continued to be an important part of US gun culture, particularly in rural areas, but also among urban-dwellers looking for some escape from city life. Especially as part of socialization into hunting, receiving a "real" rifle became seen as a rite of passage from boyhood into manhood. The gun industry also increasingly promoted guns as objects of (typically masculine) desire through the mass advertising that was increasingly embraced by corporate America to fuel consumer capitalism. Gun collecting as an avocation and a business arose in the early twentieth century in conjunction with this evolution away from a purely utilitarian view of guns.

Hunting, target shooting, and collecting continue to be important aspects of US gun culture today. Like Abigail Kohn in her book *Shooters*, Timothy Luke's contribution to this volume highlights the reality of these and other subcultures within American gun culture.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the center of gravity of US gun culture has shifted over the course of the past half-century from various forms of recreational use of firearms to armed self-defense. To borrow terms from gun writer Michael Bane, we see an evolution from Gun Culture 1.0, America's historic gun culture, that Hofstadter described, to Gun Culture 2.0.<sup>6</sup>

Gun Culture 2.0 is centered on armed self-defense, or what I call the culture of armed citizenship. The concept of armed citizenship recognizes the large and growing number of people in the United States who are exercising their rights as citizens to carry firearms in public for self-defense. Although the motivations for gun ownership are complex, the majority of gun owners today—especially

article "The Sociology of U.S. Gun Culture." *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 7 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12497>.

<sup>5</sup> Abigail A. Kohn, *Shooters: Myths and Realities of America's Gun Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> In distinguishing between Gun Culture 1.0 and Gun Culture 2.0, Bane is drawing 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 the Gun Culture 1.0. Recognizing the centrality of the culture of armed citizenship today does not mean that self-defense was not a part of Gun Culture 1.0. Similarly, older elements of Gun Culture 1.0, like hunting and target shooting, survive, but they are less central to gun culture in general. Some individuals who were raised in Gun Culture 1.0 became leading figures in the development of Gun Culture 2.0, while others only partially transitioned (Gun Culture Version 1.5) or 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.

new gun owners—point to self-defense as the primary reason for owning a gun. In a 1999 ABC News/*Washington Post* poll, 26% of respondents cited protection as the primary reason for owning a gun; by 2013, that proportion had grown to 48%. Hunting, target/sport shooting, and gun collecting together declined by a roughly equal amount. More recently, the 2015 National Firearms Survey found 63% of respondents indicated “protection against people” to be a primary reason for owning a firearm. Significantly, a 2013 *Washington Post*/ABC News poll found more Americans saying that having a gun in the house makes it a safer place to be (51%) than a more dangerous place to be (29%). This view extends outside the home, as well. A 2015 Gallup Poll found a majority of Americans (56%)—including 50% of women and 48% of non-gun owners—believe that if more Americans carried concealed weapons, the country would be safer.<sup>7</sup> These statistics are reflective of the changing legal structure governing the carrying and use of firearms for self-defense. This dramatic liberalization of gun laws over the past four decades reflects and facilitates the development of Gun Culture 2.0.

In the early republic, no special licensing was required to bear arms, either openly or concealed. But beginning with Kentucky in 1813, there was a movement in several southern states to ban the carrying of concealed weapons in public. In time, these prohibitions spread from the south to the rest of the United States. This “restricted era” of gun carry continued through the 1970s, but over the last four decades there has been dramatic shift toward the liberalization of concealed-carry laws. The dominant movement in concealed-carry legislation has been toward state passage of what have come to be known as “shall issue” laws.<sup>8</sup> From 1980 to 2013, thirty-eight states passed these laws that require state or local authorities to issue a permit to any applicant that meets the

objective statutory criteria if no statutory reasons for denial exist. The issuing authority’s discretion over subjective criteria like the “good moral character” or “good cause” of the applicant is removed from the process. Two hundred years after Kentucky banned the carrying of concealed weapons in public, state or local governments in all fifty states must have (according to court decisions) some provision in place for issuing permits to citizens allowing them to carry concealed firearms in public. “Shall issue” laws prevail in forty of fifty states, and only nine states maintain more restrictive “may issue” laws. Vermont has never banned the practice of carrying a concealed weapon without a permit and so does not issue concealed-carry permits.<sup>9</sup>

As concealed-carry laws have been liberalized, the number of concealed-carry permit holders has grown considerably. Although there is no national database of concealed-carry permits, the Government Accountability Office estimated that there were at least 8 million active permits to carry concealed handguns in the United States at the end of 2011. This amounted to at least 3.5% of the eligible US population (adults who are legally allowed to possess guns). A report released in 2016 by John R. Lott, Jr. suggests the number of permits now exceeds 14.5 million, or some 6% of the total US adult population. The portion of individual state populations with a concealed-carry permit varies, but shall-issue states like Indiana (728,976 permits, 15% of the adult population), South Dakota (91,785 permits, 14.7%), and Alabama (513,209 permits, 14.1%) have the highest rates in the country. It would surely surprise many to know that one out of every seven adult citizens in these states is potentially legally armed in public, not to mention one out of every seventeen Americans overall.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Pew Research Center, “Why Own a Gun? Protection Is Now Top Reason,” 1999 ABC News/*Washington Post* poll, March 12, 2013, <http://www.people-press.org/2013/03/12/why-own-a-gun-protection-is-now-top-reason/>; Deborah Azrael et al., “The Stock and Flow of US Firearms: Results from the 2015 National Firearms Survey,” *Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 3, no. 5 (2017), 38–57, <https://www.rsfjournal.org/doi/full/10.7758/RSF.2017.3.5.02>; Scott Clement and Peyton Craighill, “Majority of Americans Say Guns Make Homes Safer,” *The Washington Post*, 2013 *Washington Post*/ABC News poll, April 18, 2013, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2013/04/18/majority-of-americans-say-guns-make-homes-safer/>; Frank Newport, “Majority Say More Concealed Weapons Would Make U.S. Safer,” 2015 Gallup Poll, October 20 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/186263/majority-say-concealed-weapons-safer.aspx>.

<sup>8</sup> On the early history of concealed weapon bans see Clayton Cramer, *Concealed Weapon Laws of the Early Republic: Dueling, Southern Violence, and Moral Reform* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999); on liberalization of carry laws, see Brian Anse Patrick, *Rise of the Anti-Media: In-Forming America’s Concealed Weapon Carry Movement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010); on the spread of “shall issue” permitting, see Richard S. Grossman and Stephen A. Lee, “May Issue Versus Shall Issue: Explaining the Pattern of Concealed-Carry Handgun Laws, 1960–2001,” *Contemporary Economic Policy* 26 (April 2008): 198–206.

<sup>9</sup> The nine states in which the issuing authority is not required to grant a concealed-carry license but *may* issue one at its discretion are California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island. New Hampshire is difficult to classify because the term “shall issue” appears in its statute, but other language suggests discretion on the part of the issuing authority to determine that “the applicant is a suitable person to be licensed.” It may be best classified as *de facto* shall issue. Sometimes called Vermont carry, freedom to carry, or Constitutional carry (because “the Second Amendment is my carry permit”), permitless carry represents the next phase of this liberalization of gun laws. Including Vermont, eleven states now allow individuals to carry a concealed weapon in public without a permit, with certain restrictions and exceptions: Alaska, Arizona, Idaho (residents only), Kansas, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, West Virginia, and Wyoming (residents only). Other than Vermont, these ten permitless carry states still issue concealed carry permits, which offer additional benefits depending on the state. For example, only permit holders in Arizona can carry concealed in businesses that service alcohol (provided the business allows firearms in the first place and the concealed carrier does not drink). Concealed carry permits from permitless carry states also allow the permit holder to carry in others states that have reciprocity agreements with the issuing state.

<sup>10</sup> Government Accountability Office, “Gun Control: States’ Laws and Requirements for Concealed Carry Permits Vary across the Nation,” GAO-12-717 (Washington, DC: United States Government Accountability Office, 2012), <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-717>;

This lawful carrying of firearms for legal purposes has received very little attention from sociologists, who have largely ceded the study of guns to criminologists and epidemiologists. Among the few who have seriously studied legal concealed carry is Jennifer Carlson. In her landmark book, *Citizen-Protectors: The Everyday Politics of Guns in an Age of Decline*, Carlson observes, “Guns solve problems for the people who bear them.”<sup>11</sup> This problem-solving is facilitated by shall-issue permitting laws that have expanded the opportunity to carry guns concealed in public. In promoting the idea of a concealed-carry lifestyle, the USCCA’s Concealed Carry Expo is targeted at the increasing number of people who seek to solve problems by carrying guns. At the same time, the practice of CCW poses new problems for the potential armed citizen, as noted at the start of this chapter: How to carry a lethal weapon safely, comfortably, concealed, and accessibly in public? The CCX, therefore, showcases a myriad of products designed to reconcile the competing demands of CCW so as to optimize the likelihood that a person will, as Tom Givens put it, “carry your damn gun.” Thus understood, the CCX is both a response to the rise of Gun Culture 2.0 and a facilitator of its continued development.

## A Cultural Approach to Gun Culture 2.0

This chapter illuminates one aspect of the negotiation of the opportunity and challenge of concealed carry by adopting a cultural approach to studying gun culture. As the discussion of Hofstadter’s work makes clear, others have used the term “gun culture” to explain Americans’ unique relationship to firearms, historically or today. But, as the historian Pamela Haag observes, “The phrase ‘gun culture’ is used more than it is defined.”<sup>12</sup> Part of the reason gun culture often goes undefined is because culture itself can be difficult to define. In moving from a generic label to a specific definition of culture, we are immediately confronted with a problem: there are seemingly as many definitions of culture as there are people who study it.<sup>13</sup> Haag’s definition of gun culture is, nonetheless, in line with the way many implicitly understand it:

John R. Lott, “Concealed Carry Permit Holders across the United States: 2016,” July 26, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2814691>.

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Carlson, *Citizen-Protectors: The Everyday Politics of Guns in an Age of Decline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 178.

<sup>12</sup> Pamela Haag, *The Gunning of America: Business and the Making of American Gun Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), xvii.

<sup>13</sup> Marshall Battani, John R. Hall, and Mary Jo Neitz, *Sociology on Culture* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 7; for summaries, see Wendy Griswold, “The Sociology of Culture,” in *The Sage Handbook of Sociology*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Chris Rojek, and Bryan S. Turner (London: Sage, 2005),

A gun culture is a matter not only of quantity [i.e., the number of guns] but also of quality—in anthropologist Marshall Sahlins’s terms, of how cultures “give significance to their objects”—and of the “social life” of a commodity. These qualitative dimensions are difficult to gauge or generalize . . . but they include the place that the gun occupies culturally as a whole and for different groups—the degree of gun affinity, love, symbolism, charisma, and totemic force and the political resonance of the gun.<sup>14</sup>

The dominant approach to studying gun culture follows Haag in emphasizing the “symbolic” nature of guns and the emotions they inspire. What does the gun stand for and how does it make people feel?

To mention just a few prominent examples, in *Gun Show Nation: Gun Culture and American Democracy*, Joan Burbick explains the American obsession with guns (and hence gun culture) as driven by political conservatism and nationalist sentiments. Guns in her view stand for and inspire a traditional vision of America. Scott Melzer’s *Gun Crusaders: The NRA’s Culture War* also sees gun culture reflecting traditional values, specifically the myth of frontier masculinity. Guns stand for a time that never was that gun owners wish could be again. In *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America*, James William Gibson offers a Freudian psycho-sexual analysis of not only guns as phallic symbols but also of hollow point ammunition (“A perfectly expanded bullet bears some resemblance to an erect penis”) and wound cavities in ballistic gelatin (“drawings of wound channels . . . look very much like vaginas”). Angela Stroud’s *Good Guys with Guns: The Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry* highlights broader cultural ideals of what it means to be a man as driving gun culture, in addition to racialized cultural definitions of “good guys” and “bad guys.”<sup>15</sup>

To be sure, all of these symbolic and emotional aspects of guns exist to some extent. Listening to any speech by National Rifle Association Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre—for example, in the wake of the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre—makes this abundantly clear. But there is more to

254–266; Wendy Griswold, *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012); John R. Hall, Laura Grindstaff, and Ming-Cheng Lo, *Handbook of Cultural Sociology* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Haag, *The Gunning of America*, xvii.

<sup>15</sup> Joan Burbick, *Gun Show Nation: Gun Culture and American Democracy* (New York: The New Press, 2007); Scott Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA’s Culture War* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); James William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1994), 91–92; Angela Stroud, *Good Guys with Guns: The Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

understanding gun culture than just figuring out the *symbolic meanings* of guns; to look at guns as only representing *something else* does not tell the whole story. Although suggesting scholars adopt a cultural approach to guns is not novel, adopting a cultural approach which goes beyond the symbolic dimension of culture is.

Recognizing that definitions are tools we use to advance understanding, and not simply mirrors of reality, I propose a working definition of culture to apply in this case study. To begin with, a good working definition recognizes that culture has both ideal and material dimensions.

With respect to the ideal dimension, culture encompasses both “ideas, knowledge (correct, wrong, or unverifiable belief), and recipes for doing things.” Culture helps people to understand the world around them. But culture does more than simply help people interpret the world and their experiences in particular ways. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz famously phrased it, culture not only provides “models of reality” through which we render the world comprehensible; it provides “models for reality”: guidelines and strategies of action according to which we act in the world. Culture also includes material objects such as “humanly fabricated tools (such as shovels, sewing machines, cameras, and computers)” and “the products of social action that may be drawn upon in the further conduct of social life” (such as food, clothing, photographs, and emails). Like the ideal dimension of culture, these tools and products are made, disseminated, and used by various collectivities—groups, movements, associations, organizations, businesses.<sup>16</sup>

The active language used here to describe culture is significant because it shifts our attention from what culture *is* to what culture *does*. Culture helps us to understand the world by defining problems and prospects. It helps us to act in the world by suggesting recipes and providing tools for action in relation to those problems and prospects. As a result of our actions in the world we create new cultural products and ideas—that is, a new cultural environment—which often suggests new problems and prospects to be addressed. In this way, the ideal and material dimensions of culture are made real and dynamic in various cultural practices through which people do not just reproduce existing cultures but also modify, develop, and innovate. This approach helps us see American gun culture in all its complexity today, as well as the major ways in which it has evolved over time.

Emphasizing the material aspect of culture reminds us that culture is not only grounded in interaction between people, but it also is formally produced

<sup>16</sup> Battani et al., *Sociology on Culture*, 7; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 92–93.

and disseminated. Understanding the production and distribution of culture requires examining the “complex apparatus which is interposed between cultural creators and consumers.” According to sociologist Wendy Griswold, “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.”<sup>17</sup> This is to say that some cultural products circulate as commodities in the consumer marketplace, and the Concealed Carry Expo can be understood as a key situation in which cultural producers make their products available to cultural consumers.

In the end, a real strength of this working definition is that it recalls the origins of the term culture, from the Medieval Latin *cultivare*—to tend or to cultivate. Put briefly, “Culture, in this sense, amounts to ways of taking care of things.”<sup>18</sup> This understanding of culture gives us analytical leverage in explaining the movement of armed citizenship to the center of American gun culture as a whole, a movement which has facilitated the practice of concealed carry by an increasing number of ordinary Americans, but which also creates certain challenges for those who wish to “take care of things” with guns.

The balance of this chapter complements Harel Shapira’s contribution to this volume. Where Shapira focuses on the individual and embodied aspects of gun carrying, this work highlights the business end of guns and gun-related accessories as objects of material culture. It focuses on technologies that are designed to solve the kinds of practical problems Shapira highlights, which are faced by those who would carry concealed firearms in public. These technologies are developed by “the gun industry”—companies small and large—into products like guns, holsters, clothing, and bags which are sold to the public as commodities in venues like the Concealed Carry Expo.

## Guns

A unique aspect of the CCX is the opportunity to live-fire handguns on site, inside the exhibition hall. This is made possible by the Mobile Tactics semi-trailer, an armor plated, sound insulated three lane gun range on wheels. Seven of the nine exhibiting firearms manufacturers have made their guns available to be shot. Surveying the row of tables displaying the options, the guns appear to be

<sup>17</sup> Richard A. Peterson, “The Production of Cultural Change: The Case of Contemporary Country Music,” *Social Forces* 45 (1978), 295; Griswold, *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Battani et al., *Sociology on Culture*, 7.

revolutionary. And in certain ways they are, especially in the lightweight alloys and polymers now routinely used in the manufacturing process.

But the use of handheld weapons for personal defense was not invented by Gun Culture 2.0. The handguns on display at the CCX are part of an unbroken thread of personal weaponry stretching back to rocks in the hands of Paleolithic humans.<sup>19</sup> As objects of material culture, personal weapons are tools created to address problems. In this case the main problem addressed is the need for a tool for fighting—animals or other human beings—that is sufficiently lethal yet allows the user to maintain distance from the intended target. At each stage of development, humans have sought to craft weapons that are more effective at accomplishing this end: larger and lighter axes, sharper knives, more aerodynamic spear points.

The ability to deliver a lethal blow from a distance was greatly advanced by the discovery and harnessing of the power of gunpowder, and its eventual application to handheld firearms. In his 1917 *Book of the Pistol & Revolver*, Hugh B. C. Pollard observes as follows:

From the earliest period of the invention of firearms, mankind has desired a short, easily portable, and easily concealed means of defence, and to this common desire we owe the pistol, the revolver, the “automatic,” and all their kindred. The pistol—by which term I include all pistols, revolvers, automatics, and repeating or single-shot weapons meant for use in one hand—was essentially designed as a weapon for quick use at close quarters.

Put more abstractly, as philosophers David DeGrazia and Lester Hunt do, “A gun is a tool, a product of human technology; and like any technological device, it exists to solve problems.”<sup>20</sup>

Although the desire for effective fighting tools has remained constant, the technologies developed by gun manufacturers for realizing this desire have evolved over time. This is driven not only by technological advances, but also the specific cultural conditions under which the guns will be used. As CCW is a dominant trend in Gun Culture 2.0, gun manufacturers are motivated to develop technologies into products that will help gun carriers solve the problem of armed self-defense in public. Here, however, the demands of concealed carry

<sup>19</sup> In her contribution to this volume, Joanna Bourke makes a similar observation about the parallels between dum-dum bullets and “stone throwing” as “innovations” in their own times.

<sup>20</sup> Hugh B. C. Pollard, *The Book of the Pistol and Revolver*, reprint (Pittsburgh, PA: Sportsman's Vintage Press, 2014 [1917]); David DeGrazia and Lester H. Hunt, *Debating Gun Control: How Much Regulation Do We Need?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 8.

are at odds with the ideals of the gun as a weapon. From the perspective of the weapon itself, lethality is key. A more lethal weapon is one that holds more rounds of ammunition in a larger caliber, and is more accurate due to a longer barrel and sight radius (for aiming) and heavier weight to absorb recoil (to get back on target more quickly). This sounds very much like a description of a rifle rather than a handgun, hence the common refrain in gun culture: “The only purpose of a pistol is to fight your way back to your rifle.” But of course you cannot conceal and carry a rifle, practically (for most) or legally (for all). Not only that, but in order to carry a handgun in public on a regular basis, portability, comfort, and concealability are essential attributes in a weapon. This is achieved primarily by reducing the gun's size and weight by chambering it for a smaller caliber, having fewer rounds in the magazine, reducing the length of the barrel and grip, and constructing the frame out of lighter materials. In a word, making the weapon less lethal.

Perhaps no gun manufacturer exhibiting at the CCX exemplifies these developments in gun technologies for concealed carry better than the Austrian firm Glock GmbH. On its black cloth covered table, in front of a large banner showing a picture of a woman receiving shooting instruction on a gun range, are five of its best-selling pistols. This includes the iconic Glock 17, the semi-automatic pistol which revolutionized the gun industry in the 1980s. Created in 1982 by Gaston Glock, a curtain-rod manufacturer in Austria with no background in firearms design or manufacturing, the Glock 17 is known for its polymer frame, absence of an external safety lever, and 17-round standard capacity magazines. A full-size duty weapon, it was first adopted by the Austrian army, and subsequently became the handgun of choice for many American police departments. Compared to the steel frame revolvers and semi-autos commonly issued at the time, the Glock was both lighter and had carried more rounds of ammunition.<sup>21</sup> It was so successful that for many today, “Glock” is to high-capacity, polymer frame semi-automatic handguns as “Kleenex” is to facial tissues.

The success of the Glock 17 notwithstanding, it was designed for military use, not concealed carry. This is obvious when compared to the other four, smaller pistols on the Glock table. One of these smaller pistols is the Glock 19. Released in 1988, it is a more compact version of the Glock 17, though not much more so. It was not until 1995 that Glock got into the concealed-carry market in earnest with the subcompact Glock 26, known as the “Baby Glock.” Just looking at the full size Glock 17 next to the compact Glock 19 and subcompact Glock 26 highlights the trade-offs necessary in designing firearms for concealed carry. To aid concealability, the Glock 26 is more than an inch shorter than the Glock 17

<sup>21</sup> Paul M. Barrett, *Glock: The Rise of America's Gun* (New York: Random House, 2012).



in both length and height. The Glock 26's weight also makes it easier to carry; it is 10% lighter unloaded and 20% lighter loaded than the Glock 17. But this concealability and carry-ability is achieved in large part by sacrificing magazine capacity and hence lethality or "stopping power." Although both guns are chambered in 9mm, the Glock 26 has a 10-round standard magazine capacity in comparison to the larger gun's 17 rounds—fully 40% fewer.

The two other guns on the table, the Glock 42 and 43, are visibly smaller than even the Baby Glock. Despite being very popular with the public and critics alike, Glock went into a sort of twenty-year hibernation relative to the civilian concealed-carry market after the introduction of the Glock 26. Its deep sleep was broken in 2014 by its introduction of the Glock 42. A baby "Baby Glock," the Model 42 is smaller than the Model 26 in every way. It is less than 6 inches long, barely 4 inches tall, only 0.94 inches wide, and weighs just over a pound (17.29 ounces) fully loaded. Its lightweight, "slimline" design makes it extremely convenient to carry, but at a cost. The Glock 42 is made slimmer and lighter by reducing magazine capacity another 40%, from 10 to just 6 rounds in a "single stack" magazine, and it is chambered for the lower-power .380 ACP (Automatic Colt Pistol or AUTO) cartridge.<sup>22</sup>

Although James Bond's legendary Walther PPK was chambered in .380 ACP, many in the self-defense firearms community historically looked down on .380 caliber guns, seeing them as "sub-caliber" (i.e., ineffective) for personal defense and disparaging them as mere "mouse guns."<sup>23</sup> Not surprisingly, the year after the Model 42 was introduced, Glock unveiled what it has called the "most highly desired and anticipated release" in the company's history: the Glock 43. Fractionally larger than the Glock 42, the Model 43 is also a single-stack micro-compact but is chambered for the more powerful 9mm cartridge. At just 1.02 inches wide, the Glock 43 weighs less than 23 ounces fully loaded, with 6 rounds in the magazine and one in the chamber. According to the Glock representative at the Concealed Carry Expo, the most popular choices among those shooting in the Mobile Tactics trailer are the Glock 42 and 43, reflecting the caption on the Glock banner: "Confidence. It's what you carry."

Although Glock has certainly not been on the cutting edge of concealed-carry weapon technologies—following the lead of more innovative manufacturers like Kahr Arms, Kel-Tec, and Sturm Ruger—the development of the Glock line

<sup>22</sup> In the slimmer "single stack" magazine, the cartridges sit on top of each other in a single row as opposed to being staggered in the wider "double stack" magazine. Another technological development that facilitated smaller pistol designs was the locked-breech system, which was used in place of a straight-blowback design that required larger pistols.

<sup>23</sup> Although many still favor the more powerful ballistics of the 9mm cartridge, technological improvements in bullet design have reduced the bias against the supposedly underpowered .380 ACP.

is still a microcosm of the rise of Gun Culture 2.0. As reported by *The Trace*, production of .380 ACP caliber pistols like the Glock 42 has increased in tandem with the increasing percentage of the American population with concealed-carry permits.<sup>24</sup> Microcompact guns the size of the Glock 42 and 43 are commonly called "pocket pistols" because they are small enough to be carried in most pants or jacket pockets. As such, they maximize the concealability and carry-ability components of the CCW equation. These benefits, however, come at the cost of the weapon part of the equation: 6 to 10 rounds of either 9mm or .380 ACP in a pocket pistol's magazine is less lethal than more rounds in the same caliber or the same number of rounds in a larger caliber, *ceteris paribus*. Even this trade-off, however, has been addressed by one gun manufacturer at the Concealed Carry Expo: Heizer Defense.

Heizer Defense, LLC, was founded in 2011 as an offshoot of Heizer Aerospace, a fifty-plus year old company founded by Charles K. Heizer and headquartered in Pevely, Missouri. The company is introducing its new PKO-45 to the public at the Concealed Carry Expo and allowing it to be test-fired in the Mobile Tactics trailer. Like other concealed-carry pistols on display, the PKO-45 is a subcompact, magazine-fed semi-automatic. But it is unique in being made not from the ubiquitous polymers but from airplane grade stainless steel. This results in a handgun that is comparatively heavy at twenty-eight ounces. But Heizer Defense also uses its parent company's expertise in machining components for the aerospace industry to make the PKO-45 just 0.8 inches wide—slimmer than even the Glock 42. This is particularly impressive considering, as the gun's name suggests, that the PKO-45 shoots the .45 ACP cartridge. Although the weight makes this gun slightly less carry-able, its slim design makes it quite concealable, and the .45 caliber amps up the potential stopping power of the gun.

Indeed, the .45 ACP is a venerable old cartridge invented by legendary gun designer John Moses Browning early in the twentieth century. Legend has it that during the Philippine-American War (1899–1902), and the Moro Rebellion which succeeded it (to 1913), US Army troops found their .38 Long Colt handguns and .30-40 Krag rifle cartridges inadequate to stop the Filipino and Moro warriors; only the .45 Colt cartridge was effective. This experience was reinforced by ammunition tests run by Colonel John T. Thompson and Major Louis Anatole LaGarde using live cattle and human cadavers. Thompson and LaGarde concluded that "a bullet, which will have the shock effect and stopping effect at short ranges necessary for a military pistol or revolver, should have a

<sup>24</sup> Alex Yablon, "Concealed Carriers Have Made a Tiny Pistol with a Sketchy Past a Big Seller for Gun Makers," *The Trace*, March 13, 2016, <https://www.thetrace.org/2016/03/380-pistol-big-seller-for-gun-manufacturers/>.

caliber not less than .45.<sup>25</sup> In response, Browning discontinued his work on a .41 caliber cartridge and developed the .45 Automatic Colt Pistol (ACP) cartridge instead in 1904. The .45 ACP was subsequently paired with the Colt M1911 pistol, which was adopted by the US Army in 1911 and remained the standard US service pistol until the late 1980s.

A government model 1911 pistol weighs in at three pounds loaded, is over eight inches long and five inches tall. Such a gun is easily worn in plain view but is extremely difficult to conceal. Thus, the remarkable potential of the PKO-45 is that it puts the power of the .45 caliber cartridge into the frame of a pocket pistol. Like other pocket pistols, the PKO-45's shorter height is achieved primarily by making the grip shorter, such that the pinky finger of the firing hand does not fit on the grip. This represents yet another trade-off in gun design as it compromises the accuracy (or "shootability") of the weapon, including the ability to aim, manage recoil, and put additional rounds on target quickly.

As Shapira also observes in his chapter in this volume, the inability to grip a semi-automatic pistol tightly enough can also lead to malfunctions if the gun does not "cycle" properly. In a magazine-fed pistol, the explosion which propels the bullet through the barrel also drives the slide of the gun backward, helping to eject the empty cartridge case. A recoil spring then brings the slide back forward and as it does it pulls an unspent cartridge from the magazine into the empty chamber. Now back "in battery," the gun can be fired again (and again, until the magazine is empty). This process, however, requires that the shooter provide enough resistance that the recoil spring takes up the energy from the explosion. If the shooter's body—hands, wrists, arms—absorb too much of the recoil energy, the slide will not cycle properly causing a malfunction known as a "failure to eject" (FTE). One such FTE is colloquially called a "stovepipe" because the spent case gets trapped in the ejection port by the slide and protrudes like a stovepipe from the gun. If the grip on the PKO-45 is so thin and short that a shooter cannot get an adequate handle on the gun, malfunctions are likely. In a self-defense situation, such a malfunction could be fatal.

These developments in handgun technology highlight the balancing act performed by manufacturers designing guns for the concealed-carry market as they attempt to meet the competing demands of concealability/carry-ability and lethality. But changing the technical attributes of guns themselves is just one way the gun industry attempts to strike a balance between these competing demands. As is abundantly clear to Concealed Carry Expo attendees, many other

<sup>25</sup> Louis Anatole LaGarde, *Gunshot Injuries: How They Are Inflicted, Their Complications and Treatment* (New York: William Wood, 1914), 72.

technologies are being developed by the gun industry to address the challenge of living the concealed-carry lifestyle.

## Holsters

Alongside the gun manufacturers, the Georgia International Convention Center exhibition hall is filled with booth after booth for companies like Fast Holsters, PDA Holsters, HolsterSmith.com, Sticky Holsters, Andre's Holsters, Clip Draw, Kinetic Concealment, Versa Carry, Smart Carry, Holster Partners, and Clinger Holsters. Because it is easier to get into the gun industry as an accessory maker than a gun manufacturer, these smaller companies have proliferated as people try to tap into the growing concealed-carry market. As important as the gun is in the CCW equation, no hardware is more important than the holster to being able to "carry your damn gun" every day as part of the concealed-carry lifestyle promoted by the USCCA. At some point every person who wants to carry a concealed weapon in public needs to figure out *how* to carry it. In the words of Oklahoma-based holster-maker Spencer Keepers, "If you're going to conceal [a gun] and carry it safely, then the holster is the thing you need to research most."<sup>26</sup>

In contrast to Hollywood depictions, carrying a gun every day is far from cool or sexy. The hand-tooled leather belt holster carrying a foot-long Colt "Peacemaker" revolver worn by Gary Cooper in *High Noon* is as impractical for the civilian concealed carrier of Gun Culture 2.0 today as it is iconic of the old Gun Culture 1.0. Equally impractical for most are the shoulder holsters worn by "Dirty Harry" Callahan for his Smith & Wesson Model 29 .44 Magnum revolver and Miami Vice's Sonny Crockett for his Bren Ten (10mm) semi-auto. The technology of a holster for armed citizens is very different than for law enforcement officers, who can carry guns openly in holsters on their sides or shoulders. The concealed-carry holster has to emphasize concealment. Even though accidentally displaying an inadequately concealed firearm is not a crime in most places, it can cause concern among other members of the public with potentially devastating consequences.

In 2010, Erik Scott was shopping at a Las Vegas area Costco when he inadvertently exposed the handgun he was carrying in a holster inside the waistband of his jeans. Scott identified himself as a Nevada concealed-weapons permit holder, and the store manager informed him of Costco's "no guns" policy. The manager allowed Scott to finish his shopping, but at the same time another

<sup>26</sup> Spencer Keepers, "The In's and Out's of Concealed Carry," The Polite Society Tactical Conference, Memphis, Tennessee, February 21, 2014.

store employee had called the police to report an armed individual acting erratically. The Las Vegas Metro Police Department reacted swiftly and in great strength. When the store was evacuated, Scott and his girlfriend exited with other shoppers, only to be pointed out and confronted by police officers who shot and killed him.

Consequently, many holster makers put a premium on technologies to keep the weapon being carried completely concealed. This includes avoiding “printing”—a situation in which the outline of the concealed gun shows (“prints”) through the gun carrier’s clothing. At the same time, a holster that conceals a gun completely but is uncomfortable to wear is an impediment to everyday gun carrying. Moreover, a gun that is so deeply concealed that it cannot be drawn quickly negates the main defensive purpose of carrying a gun. In response to these competing demands, a number of holster technologies have been developed specifically for concealed carry. Among the companies at the Concealed Carry Expo figuring out a way to “build a better mousetrap” and sell it to the concealed-carry consumer are N8<sup>2</sup> Tactical, CrossBreed Holsters, and Urban Carry. All three companies sell variants of the “inside-the-waistband” (IWB) holster. Rather than being secured on a belt “outside-the-waistband” (OWB), as military and police typically wear their holstered handguns, IWB holsters are made to conceal the majority of a firearm inside a person’s pants or shorts, with only enough of the grip exposed above the belt to allow the gun to be drawn.

Pronounced “Nate Squared,” N8<sup>2</sup> Tactical is named after the two Nates that founded the company back in 2009. Nate Beard and Nate Johnson were friends who shared, among other things, an interest in concealed carry. They also shared a frustration with finding a holster that was comfortable enough “to be worn all day, every day,” as their advertising puts it. A holster that would do the job would need to be worn inside-the-waistband but also shield the entire gun from contact with the body. At the same time, that shield could not be so stiff or rough that it could not come in direct contact with the wearer’s bare skin. Because it could be in direct contact with skin, the holster would also need to create a moisture barrier to protect the gun. A phone conversation between the two Nates led to a joking suggestion that they just make the holster they were looking for. The joke became a serious endeavor after they bought a sewing machine, took sewing lessons, and cobbled together some initial prototypes. The prototypes met their needs in testing and they brought their product to market. From the original design, N8<sup>2</sup> now sells six different versions of its IWB holster, which accommodate hundreds of guns from twenty-three different manufacturers.

Although the original N8<sup>2</sup> Tactical IWB holster is designed to be “comfortable enough to wear all day, every day,” the gun must still be concealed by some “cover garment” (in CCW parlance). That is, an untucked shirt or vest/jacket must be worn to cover the grip of the gun which needs to protrude above the

belt line in order for it to be accessible. For anyone who needs to keep their shirt tucked in or cannot wear a jacket all the time, this is an inadequate solution to the CCW puzzle. Enter CrossBreed Holsters.

While most exhibitors have just one or two people working at a time, CrossBreed has half-a-dozen reps on hand to help sell the dozens of products the company is displaying. This large presence suggests tremendous growth in the decade since its founding in the garage of Mark Craighead’s home near Springfield, Missouri. Craighead’s goal was to produce a holster for concealed carry that would maximize the benefits of existing designs and minimize the liabilities. The “cross” in the company name is a clear allusion to the cross of Christianity, as evidenced by the modified Celtic cross which is a central symbol in their company logo. But it also refers to the hybrid materials used in their flagship IWB holsters. While many holsters are made entirely of leather or plastic, the CrossBreed holster is a combination of a leather backing onto which is riveted a pocket for the gun itself made from a moldable plastic called kydex. The large piece of leather provides comfort for the wearer, and the kydex pocket is molded to fit the exact gun being carried for safety and security. But the major innovation that got my attention is captured in the name of its first and best known holster: the SuperTuck. The tucking here refers not only to “tucking” the holster into one’s pants, but also to the design of the belt clips. There is a space between the clips and the leather backing of the holster that allows the wearer to tuck in her or (more likely) his shirt over the gun so it is entirely covered.

An upstart challenger to now established companies like N8<sup>2</sup> Tactical and CrossBreed Holsters is Urban Carry. Although the bare wooden board displays seem at odds with the “urban” in the company name, its promise of “total concealment” fits seamlessly with the concealed-carry lifestyle. The concept of concealability through tuck-ability seen in the CrossBreed SuperTuck is central to the innovative design of the Urban Carry holster, and taken one step further. The Urban Carry is essentially a belt-mounted leather pouch that holds the firearm inside the gun carrier’s pants, behind the front pocket. A belt is looped through the top of the holster and a flap connected to the back of the pouch folds over the belt and secures to the loop with a magnet. To draw the gun, the carrier grabs the flap and pulls upward, which draws the entire pouch up out of the pants and reveals the gun.

Beyond just an inside-the-waistband holster, this is a “below-the-waistband” holster. The handle of the gun does not protrude above the beltline, as it does with the N8<sup>2</sup> or CrossBreed IWB holsters. Consequently, a shirt can be tucked completely in the pants without any need to fit the ends of the shirt behind the clips and blouse it around the handle for fear of the gun printing. David Foster, the holster’s designer and a self-described “serial inventor,” says, “I got sick of my gun digging into my waist when I was sitting at my desk.” He figured that

others probably did not carry their guns for this same reason. So, he spent about a year developing the product, going through 114 prototypes. When he finally settled on the Urban Carry design, Foster posted a video on YouTube in July 2015 demonstrating its use. The video went viral, and when he demonstrates the procedure at the CCX, it is easy to see why. Wearing a T-shirt tucked into tight-fitting jeans, in one swift movement he draws a very large gun—a full-size 1911, in fact—from his Urban Carry holster. Just as quickly he re-holsters and the gun disappears back into his pants, and then it is back out again. Like a street magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat, Foster repeats the action over and over to a growing and amazed audience.

Whether the Urban Carry holster in practice lives up to its motto, “SAFE • HIDDEN • READY,” who knows? But like the N8<sup>2</sup> Tactical, CrossBreed, and other holsters being exhibited at the Concealed Carry Expo, it represents a technology developed to solve part of the challenge of concealed carry. Each of these holster designs attempts to incorporate technological innovations that strike a better balance between the need for safe accessibility, concealability, and comfort in a concealed-carry holster. This is especially true for those in Gun Culture 2.0 who want to carry something larger than a pocket pistol. Those who solve the riddle of concealed carry with more emphasis on the lethality found in larger guns like the Springfield Armory EMP4 or FN FNS-9 Compact, or even a full-size duty weapon like the Glock 17. For those who emphasize lethality, Stephen Sharp provides a cautionary tale. Attempting to stop a co-worker’s rampage at a St. Louis power plant in 2010, Sharp fired all seven rounds from his .380 caliber Walther PPK/S and missed seven times, only to be fatally injured by return fire from the homicidal maniac’s AK-47 rifle. Even though the first rule of gunfighting is have a gun, the ability to put rounds on target matters too. Sharp might have been better served by a larger, more shootable handgun than by his compact Walther.

David Foster’s performance highlights the fact that the Urban Carry holster, like the N8<sup>2</sup> Tactical and CrossBreed holsters, are designed by men, for men. They work well with a man’s typical body type and attire. This, of course, makes sense at one level. American gun culture, old and new, has been heavily identified with men and masculinity.<sup>27</sup> Still, it is impossible not to notice the large number of vendors at the Concealed Carry Expo selling products specifically designed by women for women. Although the problems to be addressed by those who

<sup>27</sup> Carlson, *Citizen-Protectors*; Stroud, *Good Guys with Guns*; and Melzer, *Gun Crusaders*; but see Laura Browder, *Her Best Shot: Women and Guns in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); and Martha McCaughey, *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Self-Defense* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

want to live the CCW lifestyle are gender-neutral, the specific technologies for addressing those problems often differ between men and women.

## Women’s Specific Carry Needs

Sociologist Jennifer Carlson begins a very interesting essay on the complexity of women’s involvement in gun culture recounting her first day carrying a concealed handgun in public:

I remember looking at myself in the mirror that first morning, the familiar feminine ritual of checking my looks before heading out for the day disrupted by a new concern. I examined my hip for an unsightly bulge, hoping I had adequately concealed the handgun holstered on my right side.<sup>28</sup>

This scene highlights two significant realities of Gun Culture 2.0: the growing number of women who are arming themselves for self-defense and the special challenges women face when they decide to carry concealed firearms.

Although data on who has concealed-carry permits are scarce, Carlson notes that 20% of the 400,000+ Michigan Concealed Pistol License holders are women. In Florida, as the number of concealed weapon licenses has grown, so too has the percentage of women with them. In February 2014, women held 23% of the 1.237 million valid state concealed weapon licenses, according to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. This is up from 15% in 2004. In Texas, for calendar year 2014, 27% of the 246,000 concealed handgun licenses issued by the Department of Public Safety were to women. Ten years earlier, just 17% of the licenses issued went to women. The place of women in the gun culture is actively promoted by organizations like the National Rifle Association, from their 1990s “Refuse to be a Victim” seminars to today’s online NRA Women’s Channel. The Concealed Carry Expo also has two seminars on women in the gun culture, including “Why Women Hate Guns: Encouraging Women to Accept, Own, Use & Carry Firearms.” Of the seventy-five attendees at this seminar, about 40% are women.

As women become a larger part of the concealed-carry story, the practical challenges they face are increasingly noticeable. The leading female gun trainer today, Kathy Jackson (aka, “The Cornered Cat”) observes, “As many women have discovered, the curvier you are, the more painful it can be to hold an

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer Dawn Carlson, “Carrying Guns, Contesting Gender,” *Contexts* 14:1 (2015): 21.

unyielding chunk of metal firmly against your waistline. Faced with this simple biological fact, a lot of women simply give up on the idea of carrying a concealed handgun on the belt.<sup>29</sup> The common practice of “pocket carry” facilitated by the miniaturizing of handguns discussed earlier is also not an ideal option for many women. Take Kristen Zeh-Franke, for example. After having her Florida concealed-carry permit for two months, her husband asked her why she was not carrying her gun. Zeh-Franke replied with a question of her own for her husband: How do *you* carry? Which she answered for herself. “In your pocket! Look at my pocket—I can’t even get a credit card in there!” So Zeh-Franke looked at the various purses available for women who want to carry guns. Concealed-carry purses typically look like any other purse but have a special compartment built in designed to hold a gun.

A purse aficionado herself, Zeh-Franke was not satisfied with any of the existing options. “Give me a little time and I can fix this. It will only take a long weekend,” she told herself. “Well, it went from a long weekend to 18 months developing it.” Zeh-Franke did not like that the existing concealed-carry purses require you to abandon your existing purses and that the typical horizontal placement of the gun in one of the purse’s pockets forces you to “muzzle” people (i.e., point the muzzle end of the gun at people). She solved her own carry problem and created a product to sell to others by inventing a purse insert that gives the owner flexibility to use as many of their current purses as they want. At the Concealed Carry Expo, Zeh-Franke demonstrates her invention in one of her own Coach purses, but she also has one of her Louis Vuitton and two Michael Kors handbags on display for those interested. The insert also keeps the gun pointing down to prevent the owner from inadvertently muzzling people as they walk around, and the gun pocket sits above the side of the insert so the gun is always the highest thing in the purse for easy access. The “Packin’ Neat” purse holster system was developed in late 2012 and Zeh-Franke’s company, Packin’ Neat by Kristen, was online by the fourth quarter of 2013. To protect her invention, Zeh-Franke has a utility patent pending on any bag inserts with pockets and a holster.

Packin’ Neat by Kristen is just one of four exhibitors in Atlanta selling purse-carry options for women. Although purse carry maximizes comfort and concealability, these benefits can come at the cost of safety and security due to too much accessibility. It is easier to lose control of one’s firearms when it is carried “off body” as opposed to “on body.” Someone who has their purse stolen or simply loses track of it also loses their firearm. In the worst case scenario, that

firearm can then be used against the person who was carrying it for personal protection in the first place. Although not a common scenario, the case of Veronica Rutledge serves as a cautionary tale for women considering this option.<sup>30</sup> A twenty-nine-year-old research chemist and concealed-carry permit holder, Rutledge received a concealed-carry handbag from her husband as a Christmas gift in December 2014. Like the typical concealed-carry purse, it had a separate, dedicated pocket for a gun with a zippered closure. A few days after Christmas, Rutledge took four children with her to a Walmart in Hayden, Idaho. One of the children was her two-year-old son, who was sitting in the shopping cart with her handbag, an unremarkable sight in grocery stores all over the world. But in this case, the two-year-old somehow managed not only to retrieve Rutledge’s Smith & Wesson M&P Shield 9mm handgun from the purse, but he also was able to fire a round that struck Rutledge in the head, killing her.

Janet Sheriff was living in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, a mile from the Hayden Walmart when Veronica Rutledge was killed. In that moment, Sheriff got the idea for a concealed-carry purse with some locking mechanism. A Canadian by birth, Sheriff’s professional background is in government relations and private business in the mining industry. She had no real experience with firearms until she “married a guy with lots of guns.” Even then, it took her three years to pick up a gun, and once she obtained her concealed-carry permit she took another year trying various carry options. Here Sheriff’s story dovetails with Kristen Zeh-Franke’s. A slight woman, on-body carry did not work for Sheriff. She needed to find a way to carry off body—safely. Like Zeh-Franke, she wanted a concealed-carry purse that was both fashionable and functional and was unable to find one that she was willing to carry publicly. As Sheriff puts it, “Like so many products in our lives, necessity is the mother of invention.” So, she spent a year developing the ShePax organizer insert, and had been in business just a month when she debuted the product at the Concealed Carry Expo. The ShePax functions exactly like the Packin’ Neat insert, with one small but significant difference: the pocket designed to hold the gun is zippered and lockable. Here, the peace of mind that comes from having a gun quickly accessible in a moment of need is traded off against the peace of mind that comes from knowing the gun is safe and secure, particularly from children.

Janet Sheriff’s innovation notwithstanding, a woman carrying off body in a purse or purse insert still runs the risk of losing control of her firearm. Consequently, there are several exhibitors at the Concealed Carry Expo who address the challenge of concealed carry for women with various technologies for on-body carry. But rather than simply modifying traditional holster designs,

<sup>29</sup> Kathy Jackson, “Straight Talk about Curves,” n.d., <http://www.corneredcat.com/article/practical-issues/straight-talk-about-curves/>.

<sup>30</sup> And men, too, though “off body” carry is not as common for men as women.

which are separate from and attach to the body—as we have seen, typically to a belt worn on the waist—these female-centric products modify the types of clothing typically worn by women to integrate gun carry. Like Kristen Zeh-Franke and Janet Sheriff, the women who developed these technologies typically got their impetus from their own struggles to address the challenge of concealed carry in their own lives.

A fashionably dressed woman with short, styled blonde hair and a statement necklace energetically greets visitors to the Dene Adams booth. She is not Dene Adams. She is Anna Taylor, the founder and CEO of Dene Adams LLC, which is named after Taylor's grandfather who was her role model especially when it came to guns. In the fall of 2012, Taylor received her Missouri concealed-carry permit and was immediately confronted with the challenge of integrating gun carrying into her everyday life. She says it only took one trip to Walmart with her four young children to decide that one common option, a concealed-carry purse, was too heavy and impractical to use. So, Taylor says, "I ended up not carrying." She tried six or seven other carry options and none worked. "It pissed me off that I couldn't carry my gun and I wanted to solve the problem." Like many women, especially after she had given birth several times, Taylor appreciated products designed with compression, like Spanx undergarments. Some thought and time at her sewing machine led to the creation of a concealed-carry corset. It is specifically designed to allow women like her to carry a gun safely, comfortably, and accessibly—without having to change her wardrobe. Like David Foster's YouTube video for his Urban Carry holster for men, a twelve-second video of Taylor demonstrating her design went viral and her concealed-carry corset business was off and running.

Although their solution differs from Taylor's, Julene Franklin and Patty McConnell's story of founding Silver State Apparel does not. As Franklin says a bit sheepishly when asked how they got started in the concealed-carry clothing business, "It's cliché, but necessity is the mother of invention." When McConnell received her Nevada concealed-carry permit in 2009, the only clothing she could find for concealed carry were tactical pants. The kind of concealed-carry clothing she envisioned, by contrast, would be "stylish," she says. "Boutique, not Cabela's"—referring to the big box outdoor recreation store. The clothes she would produce with her business partner would be tactical in the sense of allowing the wearer to carry a firearm covertly, but at the same time would embody "three Fs: feminine, fashionable, and functional." While McConnell is a shooter, her friend Franklin has a background in clothing design, not guns. Her unfamiliarity with guns became an advantage of sorts, she claims, because she had no preconceptions about what concealed-carry clothing for women should look like. McConnell just advised her that the garment needed to be able to fit a compact gun and that the gun needed to be readily accessible. Luckily,

the fit model that Franklin used while testing various designs happened to be a concealed-carry permit holder, so the model was able to give practical input as they went along. In the end, McConnell and Franklin brought to market a concealed-carry shirt for women that allows for on-body carry of a pocket size pistol with no holster.

Silver State Apparel was founded in 2012, but McConnell observes that since then she has seen the rise of more companies started by women designing concealed-carry clothing for women. One such company made its debut at the Concealed Carry Expo: Incognito Wear IX. The company's founder, Jan Wolbrecht, describes its origin on the company's website:

It was around 2013 when my husband bought me my first pistol. I began training and learning about gun safety and concealed carry. As I learned, I became very conscious of how to dress. I felt as if my firearm plainly showed through whatever I was wearing. It seemed to me that "concealed" carry wasn't an effective form of protection when it was so obvious that I was carrying. My mind began to seek a solution—a discreet way to carry protection with clothing that was functional, fashionable, and would camouflage a weapon.<sup>31</sup>

Using language identical to McConnell, Wolbrecht explains to me that she "didn't want to be tactical," telling herself, "There has to be a way to make a dress that is professional and allows me to carry." She "spent a lot of time thinking about the problem and how to solve it" and came up with her line of dress casual wear for women. At the CCX, Wolbrecht is wearing one of her designs, "The Boardwalk." As befits the company's Georgia roots, the full-length dress is available in khaki or grey seersucker, and ties at the waist to gather the fabric at the midsection. The gathering is a key functional element as it allows the wearer to conceal a firearm in the ambidextrous pockets just above the waist.

Without downplaying the importance of large, multinational corporations in today's global gun industry, the smaller scale of the Concealed Carry Expo allows upstart companies like Packin' Neat by Kristen, ShePax, Dene Adams, Silver State Apparel, and Incognito Wear IX a more prominent place. Here, the "who" of the gun industry really stands out, as do the particular technologies they have developed for other women who face the same challenge of living the concealed-carry lifestyle they did.

<sup>31</sup> Incognito Wear IX, <http://incognitowearix.com/my-story/>.

## Conclusion

Although it runs through Sunday, the Concealed Carry Expo actually culminates on Saturday night with a “Concealed Carry Fashion Show.” It is the brain child of Marilyn Smolenski, founder of Chicago-based concealed-carry clothier Nickel & Lace. Smolenski and Karen Bartuch, a former police officer and founder of Alpha Girls LLC, teamed up to host the first annual Firearms and Fashion show in Chicago in 2013. After two years in Chicago, they joined forces with the USCCA at the first Concealed Carry Expo in 2015, and that partnership was reprised in 2016 in Atlanta. The spectacle is emceed by Mark Walters, the host of the USCCA’s weekly radio program “Armed American Radio.” The runway itself, lighting, two large projection screens, and loud but clear music all give the show a very professional feel.

The runway models are both male and female, professional and amateur. Among the female models are Beth Alcazar, the USCCA staff writer who earlier in the day led the aforementioned seminar on “Why Women Hate Guns,” and the wife of one of the holster makers whose products are featured in the show. Seven companies in all participate: three clothing companies (Nickel and Lace, Silver State Apparel, and UnderTech UnderCover), two holster makers (CrossBreed and MTR Custom Leather), and two bag companies (ShePax and Man-PACK). Suggestive of the mainstreaming of concealed carry, the fashion show is co-sponsored by the publicly-traded retail men’s apparel giant Men’s Warehouse (founded by George “You’re gonna like the way you look, I guarantee it” Zimmer), which supplied the male models’ attire.

The Concealed Carry Fashion Show emphasizes the *lifestyle* element of concealed carry, to be sure. But what is enacted on the runway is anything but frivolous. It is a glamorized presentation of addressing a practical challenge: How to make carrying a concealed firearm part of one’s *everyday life*—while wearing a suit or a skirt, carrying a purse or a purse, going to the office or grocery store. To hybridize the words of Mark Moritz and Tom Givens, the fashion show, like the Concealed Carry Expo in general, show potential gun carriers in attendance how to ensure they obey the first rule of gunfighting by having their damn guns on them when they need it.

The very existence of the United States Concealed Carry Association and its Concealed Carry Expo reflects a profound change that has taken place in American gun culture over the past half century, from Gun Culture 1.0 to Gun Culture 2.0. Led by scholars such as Jennifer Carlson and Angela Stroud, and continued by Elisabeth Anker and Harel Shapira (in this volume), social scientists have begun to explain this emerging culture of armed citizenship, facilitated by a dramatic liberalization of concealed-carry laws and embodied in the growing

number of Americans with concealed-carry permits. By focusing not on the problems that gun carry solves for those Anker calls “mobile sovereigns,” but on the technologies that seek to address the problems that carrying a concealed weapon creates, this chapter builds on their work. In focusing on “the gun industry”—companies large and small that seek to develop products to meet the competing demands of carrying a lethal weapon in public safely, accessibly, comfortably, and concealed—it highlights the dynamic, creative, problem-solving nature of culture itself, including Gun Culture 2.0.