12 Guns, intimacy, and the limits of militarized masculinity

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Introduction

Recent research has demonstrated the ways in which, for some men, guns take on a powerful meaning in a context where social changes have rendered precarious the meanings, privileges and means to achieve dominant conceptions of masculinity. Scott Melzer's (2009) work on the National Rifle Association (NRA), for instance, suggests that in a context of threatened privilege, for some American men, guns can be seen as a possessive investment in white masculinity, expressed thru a nostalgia for frontier masculinity. Similarly, drawing from Michael Kimmel's (2013) analysis of 'angry white men,' Tristan Bridges and Tara Leigh Tober (2017) argue convincingly that white men's sense of 'aggrieved entitlement' is a powerful driver in recent mass shootings in schools and other public venues. Angela Stroud's (2015) research illuminates how the rise of concealed gun carry mobilizes a dichotomous 'good guys' vs. 'bad guys' public discourse. And Jennifer Carlson's (2015) important work reveals contemporary gun carry as, in part, a symbolic mourning of what she calls 'the loss of Mayberry,' driven by a rise of male precarity that includes the decline of male breadwinning and the fear of crime. In this context, Carlson argues, guns 'protect against a gendered threat: the threat of falling down the masculine hierarchy.'

I believe these analyses are correct, but I want to suggest that, at least with some men, the connection to guns may also run even deeper. In this paper, I suggest an additional analytic dimension that sheds light on the deep psychological and symbolic power of guns, for some men, as mediating objects in establishing an otherwise precarious intimacy between men. Further, I will touch on the limits, costs and dangers – for men and for those around them – that are built in to a bounded intimacy formed through guns.

This chapter has two parts. First, I outline some personal reflections from a memoir I wrote about men, intimacy, and guns (Messner, 2011), drawing also from John Ibson's (2002) *Picturing Men*, a wonderful historical analysis of photographs of men. I will suggest that for many men in the latter half of the 20th century, the bounded intimacy they sought to achieve through guns can help to explain the depth of commitment many men have to guns. Second, I

will briefly reflect on the limits and dangers inherent in life projects that deploy guns as resources for establishing connection with others. Drawing from my recent book on war veterans who become peace activists (Messner, 2019), and from works by historians and clinical psychologists who work with veterans, I point to the emotional costs connected with having actually used guns to kill other people in times of war.

Guns, history, male intimacy

My analysis of boys, men, and intimacy emerges from the juncture of feminist psychoanalytic theory with a sociology and history of gender relations. To be clear, the psychoanalytic theory I find most useful is not a Lacanian symbolic analysis of guns as symbols of phallic power. Rather, I draw ideas from feminist object relations theories – in the tradition of Nancy Chodorow (1978), Lillian Rubin (1983), and more recently Christine Williams (2000) – theories that probe the depths of ambivalence, and in this case especially, the tensions built in to separation and attachment in the emotional lives of men, and the ways that the deeply gendered emotions are linked to social structure.

In her foundational 1978 work *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Nancy Chodorow points to the deep impact made in infants by virtue of the historical fact that it is women who do the 'mothering' – the moment-to-moment care of infants and children. A gendered public–domestic split – especially evident in the post-World War II middle class family – ensured that most children experienced some level of father absence in their lives. For boys, this gendered family structure tended to create firm masculine ego boundaries that helped to define the male self as opposite and different from the other, the mother, while attachment with fathers or other adult men was achieved abstractly, through symbolic attachments with men's activities in public life. This early developmental process prepared boys for later instrumental action in public life, however it was coupled with deep fears of intimacy, defined by Lillian Rubin (1983) as the ability and willingness to mutually share one's inner life with another. Subsequent immersion in a gendered culture tended to amplify boys' and young men's thwarted ability to experience intimacy, characterized by deep-seated fears of vulnerability and suppressed empathy for others.

But boys and men – however rigid their emotional boundaries might be – retain a deep human desire for connection, for intimacy. A problematic of much of my work has been this question: in a context that toughens and hardens boys for public life, how do men find ways to connect with other men? What does male-male intimacy look like in competitive, homophobic social contexts for which boys and men have been toughened. hardened, and punished for showing vulnerability (Messner, 1992)?

In my family, the answer to this question was hunting. My grandfather, a working class guy who started in the mines and mills of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and fought in frigid Northern Russia in World War I, then brought his love of hunting and fishing with him after the war when he settled with

my grandmother in Northern California. A union man and the family breadwinner, my grandfather initiated his son, my father, early on to hunting trips, and this became a primary mode of their father–son bond. I elaborate on this much more in my memoir, but for here, let me share one piece of poignant evidence, two fragments from the letter my grandfather – whose formal education topped out at 8th grade – wrote longhand in pencil, dated 'Christmas Day, December 25, 1934,' to accompany his gift of a shotgun to his 14-year-old son. The letter begins,

> To My Son, This present to you my Son Represents the fullfullment of one of my dreams. I have always looked forward to the time when we could both go out to-gether in the mutual companionship of a good dog and a pair of guns which we both could appreciate and use inteligently.

Two paragraphs follow, detailing the importance of safety and 'common sense' in the use of a gun, which 'can be an instrument of terrible destruction if not used right.' The letter ends by underlining (literally) the two key rules of gun safety, and with a reiteration of the hope of loving companionship:

> Always remember two things: Never point it at anybody. Always make sure it is unloaded when not in use. May you enjoy it as much as you Dad always has. Your Pal & Dad, RJM, Dec. 25th, 1934.

For the rest of his life, my dad kept that letter in his top drawer, with his socks. When I read it after he died, it had a deep ring of familiarity to it, because my dad had delivered these same words to me, almost verbatim, the first time he handed me a .22 rifle to shoot at a tin can.

The rifle I started deer hunting with when I was perhaps ten years old was an M-1 Carbine that my father had brought home from World War II. This light semi-automatic rifle, designed for close-quarters combat, was illegal for deer hunting, but that is beside the larger point I seek to highlight here, which is how this rifle bonded three generations of men. In one of the many letters he wrote to my grandfather while he was deployed in the Pacific during the war, my dad lamented not being there to go hunting with his father. On September 28, 1943, knowing it was deer season back home, he wrote to his father,

> More than once I have thot of you this past week. In fact there hasn't been a day pass when I haven't thot of you & wished I was there...maybe with Italy down for the count it won't be too long before we can make it together again...Please write me a day-today account of your trip.

On April 23, 1944, the day he boarded a Navy LST to ship out of Eniwitok back to Pearl Harbor, my dad wrote to his father with a wink about the rifle he had 'obtained' to bring home for hunting [Fig. 12.1]:

> I've got a brand new Carbine put away for you back at the base, so if I can ever bring that back thru the customs office, we'll be set for Lake County...If I can get that home, it will really be something.

My father did get that Carbine home, and it stood alongside an array of rifles and shotguns in my grandfather's den for years until they placed it in my hands for my first deer hunt. Like his father, my dad was the family breadwinner – a high school coach who also frequently left home for

Figure 12.1 My father with the M-1 Carbine, 1944

weekends or summers as part of the Naval Reserve. My mother did nearly all of the day-to-day care with my sisters and I. My father's relative absence in our daily family life, coupled with my growing attraction to his manly worlds of the military, sports, and hunting added emotional depth and poignancy to those few weekend deer hunting trips with my dad and my grandfather [Fig. 12.2].

Here, I pull back from my story to look at the state of play of gender relations during the 20th century – and especially male intimacy – that shaped the ways my grandfather, father, and I related to each other. In *Picturing Men*,

Figure 12.2 With my father, holding the M-1 Carbine, circa 1962

John Ibson (2002) uses photographs to explore the early prevalence and then near-disappearance of what he calls 'homotactility' – a relaxed, warm, often playful form of physical intimacy seen in many of the first studio photographs, from Daguerreotypes – for which subjects would have to hold their poses for several minutes – to tintypes, to the rise of snapshots. Ibson's book features many late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century photos of men posing with bodies draped all over each other – holding hands, arms intertwined, hugging, cheek-to-cheek, sitting on each others' laps. Ibson interprets this homotactility as a then-common expression of relaxed male intimacy. By the 1920s and 1930s, however, this relaxed homotactility is showing strains and starting to disappear from photos. Men's posing conventions, instead, are characterized by increasing, and often awkward-appearing spaces between men's bodies. By mid-century, the space between men in posed photos is often mediated by objects, especially ones that are imbued with masculine meanings: cigars, booze bottles, sports equipment, guns, and dead animals.

What had happened in the gender order that contributed to the decline of relaxed homotactility among men? In the early to mid-20th century, as Michael Kimmel (1987) pointed out, social definitions of masculinity were destabilized by modernity, urbanization, the closing of the frontier, the decline of the practical relevance of physical strength in middle class professions, the rise of bureaucracy, and the first wave of the women's movement. Ibson points also to the historical significance of the 'emergence of the homosexual' as a stigmatized character type, and the concurrent rise of homophobia. Destabilized definitions of manhood and rising homophobia fueled fears of male connection and intimacy, evidenced in Ibson's many photos of men using masculine-coded objects to connect with one another without touching.

With that in mind, I return to my story, and to a photo of my father, grandfather and I taken in 1967, when I was fifteen. My father had saved this photo, penning 'Mike's first buck, 1967' on the back. The three of us are posing about two hours after I shot the buck whose dead head we are propping up for the photo. In my memoir, I describe this moment in great detail; suffice here to say that my father and grandfather most likely experienced this moment as a happy rite of passage, a moment of intergenerational connection. My feelings were an ambivalent muddle: a triumphant sense of accomplishment, mixed with a deep (and for me at the time, inexplicable) sense of guilt at having killed this animal – and an undercurrent of shame for feeling guilty during this moment of manly triumph [Fig. 12.3].

Opponents of hunting sometimes call these kinds of photos 'horn porn,' seeing them as crass moments of celebratory male bonding around the violent subjugation of nature. While I see some truth in such criticisms, especially those that tie in a historical analysis of patriarchy and the violent subjugation of women and nature (Luke, 2007), I also know that there are deeper meanings in these photos, beyond simply seeing them as violent pornographic money shots. In that 1967 photo, it is apparent that my dad, grandfather and I are kneeling in close proximity to one another, but we are not physically touching

Figure 12.3 'Mike's first buck,' 1967

each other. The dead buck lies between, mediating the space that otherwise separates us. I grip the left side of the buck's antler; my dad completes the symmetry by holding up the right. This is more than a moment of 'male bonding'; it is a photo of male intimacy, but one that reveals the cultural and deeply grounded psychological constraints on men's expressions of love for each other. When direct avenues of expressing intimacy are blocked — as they routinely are for boys and men — we sometimes find other, perhaps distorted ways that involve violence and domination to establish moments of meaningful connection with each other. Finding guns or other masculine objects to be a useful conduit of connection, I emphasize, is not the same as expressing intimacy of the sort defined by Lillian Rubin (1983), a form of connection that requires expressions of vulnerability characterized by mutual emotional openness and empathy. Instead, this is a *'bounded intimacy'* that at once connects men emotionally, while also literally separating them and thus insulating them from experiencing vulnerabilities that might call into question or threaten their masculine identities.

In the sort of historical contexts my father and I grew up in, I want to suggest, guns took on meanings related to men's thwarted yearnings for connection. This is not to romanticize the meanings of guns; in fact my intention is quite the opposite. Added to all of the other analyses of the links between guns, thwarted masculinities, investments in whiteness, and cultural fantasies of protective heroism, such deeply-grounded emotional connections

to guns can help to explain the religious fervor with which some men cling to their guns. In this light, the belief that someone might want to take their guns away is more than a fear of losing the privileges of manhood; it is also the fear of losing a thin, tenuous means through which men have created a bounded intimacy with fathers, sons, brothers, and other men.

Understanding guns as objects invested with meanings through which boys and men create bounded intimacy can also help to explain many boys' and young men's attraction to fantasy narratives of heroism, especially as warriors. In their study of a kindergarten classroom, Jordan and Cowan (1995, p. 728) identified 'warrior narratives. . .that assume that violence is legitimate and justified when it occurs within a struggle between good and evil,' to be a commonly currency for young boys' fantasy play. They observe that the boys seem commonly to adapt story lines that they have drawn from popular culture — film, video, computer games, television, and comic books — that provide them with a seemingly endless stream of good guys vs. bad guys characters and stories that are available for the boys to appropriate as the raw materials for the construction of their own warrior play.

Warrior narratives — embedded in personal fantasy and in boyhood play with friends — were powerfully evident in my youth. Fantasies of wartime heroism also connected organically with the meanings I derived from deer hunting with my father and my grandfather. I understood that the Carbine I carried when I went on my first deer hunts was a relic from my father's war; this added a delicious allure to what it meant to carry this rifle in a hunt. As a kid, I was also deeply immersed John Wayne movies, TV, and other popular culture that romanticized American soldiers' heroic and victorious actions in 'The Good War.' And this romanticized view of war provided ready-made scenarios — shared warrior narratives — that my friends and I played out in the suburban neighborhood, bedecked with U.S. Army helmets, plastic rifles, machine guns, and toy mortars.

Many of the military veterans I met in my recent research also spoke of watching war movies and TV in their childhoods, playing war with toy guns or bb guns with other boys, and dreaming of military heroism. I learned from experience the bloody mess a rifle makes when it blows a chunk of flesh and bone from the body of a deer, and I subsequently decided I did not want to hunt any more. I will turn next to my research with war veterans–turned-peace activists, some of whom carry the memory and moral impact of having pulled the trigger with another human being on the receiving end.

War, masculinity, and moral injury

Guns, of course, have more than symbolic meanings; they are also tools through which people project violence in the world. Warfare is a massively organized and culturally legitimized form of violence and, like most nations, the United States draws mostly very young men into the military to be trained to fight. Most men when they enter the military are barely beyond their

boyhood years, often with little understanding of world politics or the morality of war, but frequently romantically tethered to the glorious warrior narratives of their youth. I recall many years ago asking a soldier who was stationed at Ft. Ord, near Monterey, California, whether he liked being in the Army. He smiled and told me that the most exciting thing about being in the Army was that when you are a little kid, you fantasize about shooting really big guns. 'In the Army,' he gushed, 'you get to shoot the coolest and biggest guns, and it's *legal!*' He could not have been older than twenty.

Recently, I conducted participant observation research and life history interviews with a particular subset of U.S. war veterans – those who became lifelong advocates for peace (Messner, 2019). Here, I want to zero in on one fragment of that research, the emotional impact of fighting in a war and living with the knowledge that you killed others. These men's experiences offer a window, not just into the emotional limits, but also the deeply damaging outcomes of young men's seeking bounded intimacy through warrior narratives and guns. To illustrate my argument, I will focus briefly on two of my research subjects who fired some very big guns in times of war: Ernie Sanchez, a World War II Army veteran who, with his Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), killed somewhere between fifty and one hundred German soldiers during the Allied invasion of France, Belgium and Germany; and Daniel Craig, an Army veteran of the Gulf War, who in his role as an artillery battery fire directions officer killed an unknown number of Iraqi soldiers. Both of these men were eventually diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – Sanchez more than a half-century after World War II, and Craig roughly a decade after the Gulf War.

In the decades following World War II, Ernie Sanchez did his best to forget the war, rarely speaking about it, as he built his family and career. But as he sat in his living room and watched the televised 'shock and awe' of the 2003 U.S. bombing of Baghdad, Sanchez was blindsided with uncontrollable shaking and weeping. At the VA, Sanchez was diagnosed with PTSD, given medication and talk therapy that helped him to come to grips with the fact that he had killed 'sons, brothers, people who were loved.' For decades, Sanchez had pushed this knowledge aside as best he could. The story he had told himself – that he was firing his BAR just to 'keep 'em down,' not to kill German soldiers – is a twist on a common pattern in warfare, referred to by Dave Grossman (2009, p. 15) in his book *On Killing*, as a 'conspiracy to miss...firing over the enemy's head.' Sanchez's story that he had aimed not at the oncoming German soldiers, but at the dirt in front of the men seems to have partly held up as emotional insulation for much of his life. But like all insulation this story eventually wore thin and the truth began to leak through. The resulting avalanche of knowledge that Ernie Sanchez confronted in therapy – 'that I had killed between fifty and one hundred Germans' – crushed him under what Grossman (2009, p. 86) called 'the burden of killing.'

Ernie Sanchez's long-delayed bodily symptoms reflect what some clinicians call 'the return of the repressed,' a re-surfacing of trauma that had been partially and temporarily contained through psychological defense mechanisms,

but had lingered as embedded 'body memories,' available to be triggered by subsequent experiences (Kihlstrom, 2006). For Ernie Sanchez, the repressed knowledge that he had killed so many men hid out in his body and reemerged when, in his words, 'the goddamn Iraq War reminded me what a dirty SOB I was.'

Daniel Craig grew up in the tiny town of Springer, New Mexico. As a boy, Craig orchestrated fantasy wars with 'a gigantic array of little green army men,' and then got into building models of 'World War II tanks, airplanes, ships.' With bb guns in hand, Daniel and his childhood friends utilized the 'hundreds of square miles of open land' surrounding Springer, to 'go out there and play war. That was what we called it – playing war.' The boys found ready-made storylines of wartime bravery and heroism in popular entertainment of the time. Daniel enjoyed watching *Combat* – a World War II TV series that ran on ABC from 1962–1967 – and movies like *Battle of the Bulge* and *A Bridge Too Far*, that 'implanted, really young, this patriotism flag waving stuff.'

Daniel was, he can see in retrospect, 'primed to go into the military.' After all, his father had served three years in the Air Force, and Daniel had been told that he had a cousin who had served in World War II at Pearl Harbor. Others in his town had fought in Korea and Vietnam. These men mostly did not talk about their war experiences, but young Daniel could see that other townsfolk respected these men for their service. 'I was raised with this whole duty, honor, country thing, just that mentality of serving your country.' By the time he was sixteen, Daniel had already decided to enlist in the Army.

Daniel Craig's experience in the military – especially his time in the 1991 Gulf War – was disillusioning. During the invasion, Craig was in charge of a mobile artillery unit that fired a 95.5 pound shell with great accuracy for up to 34 kilometers. Craig could never see the immediate outcome of his unit's shellings, but as his unit rolled forward he could see the blown Iraqi vehicles and the human carnage. He knew when he gave the order to fire that 'the other people on the other end are in a world of hurt.' Later, Craig became bitter about this war – in part because of the health problems he and his family suffered, caused he believes by the multiple toxic materials he was exposed to during the war; in part because as he learned more, he came to believe that the Gulf War was far from a 'noble cause.' 'My God,' he came to realize, 'I killed people for these Goddamned lies.'

In the years following the war, Daniel Craig found the re-entry into civilian life to be an emotional minefield. He dulled his anger as best he could with booze and marijuana. His marriage ended, in part because his wife could not deal with his brooding silence, anger, and 'partying.' Some fellow veterans who could see Craig's anger and perhaps intuited his suicidal thoughts pressed him to seek help at the VA. Eventually, Craig stopped drinking, committed himself to recovery, and found Veterans For Peace, an organization within which he is still active today.

Like the other veterans I interviewed, Ernie Sanchez and Daniel Craig eventually took on conscious life projects that included some combination of personal healing, peace advocacy, reconciliation with former 'enemies,' and

service to others as a way recovering from and confronting the sources of their personal wartime trauma. Here, I want to focus on the problem of silence that so plagued these two men for many years, before they could begin their own healing.

How do we understand so many men's silence about their actions in time of war? One common refrain among war veterans is that it makes no sense to talk of such things because nobody can truly understand unless they too have endured the same traumas, witnessed similar horrors, or committed comparable acts of brutality. This claim is repeated so often and so widely it has become a truism, the most profound function of which may lie in how, for the individual, it serves as a rationale for maintaining an emotionally self-protective boundary. The foundation for such emotional fortification rests on narrow definitions of masculinity, often internalized at an early age, and then enforced and celebrated in masculinist institutions like the military.

As I have already argued, boys often learn to create some level of connection with others through warrior narratives, masculinized symbols and objects like guns, that help them to achieve a kind of bounded intimacy that is at once emotionally gratifying while it simultaneously fortifies the rigid boundaries that preclude deeper forms of intimacy that require vulnerability. The results of this bounded intimacy, when we consider how men might respond to experiences of trauma, are profound. Research by psychologist Joseph Schwab (2016) and his colleagues concluded that men routinely respond to stressful life experiences by avoiding emotional disclosure that they fear might make them appear vulnerable. Silence, the researchers concluded, is the logical outcome of internalized rules of masculinity: a real man is admired and rewarded for staying strong and stoic during times of stress and adversity.

Who benefits from this manly silence? Certainly the institutions like the military that train and then rely on men's private endurance of pain, fear, and trauma. But individual men rarely benefit from such taciturnity; trying to live up to this narrow ideal of masculinity comes with severe costs for men's physical health, emotional wellbeing, and relationships. Researchers and medical practitioners have compiled a long list of the costs that men pay for their adherence to narrow definitions of masculinity: high levels of undiagnosed depression (Real, 1998); dangerous rates of alcoholism, heart disease and risk-taking that translate into shorter lifespans than women's (Sabo and Gordon, 1995; Courtenay, 2011); and fear of emotional self disclosure and suppressed access to empathy, resulting in barriers to intimacy in relationships (Rubin, 1983). All of these common 'costs of masculinity' are amplified and multiplied for war veterans, a disproportionate number of whom – as with Ernie Sanchez and Daniel Craig, both Latino men – are young men of color.

The emotional predisposition for this stoic manly silence, I have argued, is created during the gendering processes of early development; then reinforced through routine experiences in families, schools, peer groups, and sports; and naturalized through values promoted in popular culture, together resulting in what psychologist William Pollack (1999) calls 'the hardening of boys.' Subsequently, young men's emotionally self-protective predispositions are amplified,

sharpened, and then exploited by masculinized institutions like combat sports, such as boxing or football, and even more so the military. These institutions shame young men to endure physical danger and pain, reward them for dishing out injurious or fatal violence to an 'enemy,' while promising them a profound and eternal connection with their fellow brothers-in-arms. In popular culture – consider Hollywood warrior masculinity from John Wayne to Clint Eastwood to James Bond to Arnold Schwarzenegger – men who embody narrow definitions of violent warrior masculinity on the big screen are elevated to mythic heroic status (Jeffords, 1989; Messner, 2007). But actual flesh-and-blood men – soldiers and war veterans who have internalized and perhaps even come to value these narrow definitions of masculinity – routinely become numbed, silently containing their anguish (Abraham, Cheney and Curran 2015).

Too often, war veterans' silence is deepened by self-medication with alcohol, pot, or harder drugs. These slow, self-destructive silences are characterized by ongoing health problems that for some are punctuated by suicide attempts and/ or by violent outbursts toward others, often those closest to them (Digby, 2014). A 2016 longitudinal study of nearly 77,000 veterans who had been deployed to combat zones in Iraq or Afghanistan showed that they suffered from much higher rates of 'multiple physical symptoms' (i.e., combinations of nausea; headaches; pain in the chest, back, or extremities; insomnia; shortness of breath; fainting spells) than reported by non-deployed veterans (McCutchan et al., 2016). A 2015 study of 1.3 million veterans of active duty service during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars revealed these veterans to have twice the suicide rate of non-veterans (Han et al., 2015). Anthropologist Hugh Gusterson (2016) argues that analyses of the recent rash of mass shootings in the U.S. have failed to point out a common feature of many of the shooters: disproportionately, they are military veterans. In 2009, the *New York Times* reported escalating rates of rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, and homicide committed by men who had returned from multiple deployments to the war in Iraq (Alvarez and Frosch, 2009). The Veterans Administration now targets domestic violence as a major problem on its web site, pointing especially to the finding that returning veterans with PTSD are two to three times more likely than other veterans to engage in intimate partner violence.

PTSD impedes – often severely, and sometimes for the rest of one's life – veterans' re-entry into civilian life, their development of healthy, productive, and happy post-war and post-military lives. Alluding to his own continuing medical challenges, a veteran of the American War in Vietnam told me: 'That PTSD? It don't ever go away.' Research supports his statement: A 1991 review of the research on PTSD among World War II and Korean War veterans concluded that the findings are '...troubling: PTSD currently exists in many veterans decades after their exposure to combat' (Schnurr, 1991). So what do war veterans *do* with their war memories, with embodied trauma that 'don't ever go away?' For the men I interviewed, PTSD was a lifelong challenge that – following in some cases, as with Ernie Sanchez's years of denial and with Daniel Craig's years of anger, struggle in relationships, alcoholism, and medical care – eventually served as an

impetus to do something healthy, positive, and peaceful with their lives. This was not, and still is not, an easy transition for these men to make.

In his deep history of warfare and men, Leo Braudy (2003) argues that there is nothing new in recognizing how the emotional and physical trauma of battle produces what he calls 'mental illnesses in war.' What changed is how these symptoms are understood, how they are named, and how people respond to them. During World War I, military leaders and medical experts were concerned with the widespread problem of 'shell shock' among troops subjected to the horrors of trench warfare. Little understood at the time was the emotional impact of modern warfare's growing efficiency – with machine guns, extended volleys of artillery fire, or strafing from low-flying airplanes – in maiming and massacring hundreds, even thousands in a very short time. Braudy (2003, p. 373) argues that by World War I, technological war had 'obliterated' the ways that wars traditionally had elevated and celebrated a chivalrous ideal of heroic warrior masculinity. However eclipsed by the realities of modern warfare, in the first decades of the 20th century these outmoded ideas were still widely held, including the belief that 'War...would affirm national vitality and individual honor...and rescue the nation from moral decay.' Today, I have argued above, these ideas continue to permeate the culture of boyhood in ways that give guns and warfare a romantic allure as a source of heroic respect and bounded intimacy with others.

The belief that fighting a war would build, strengthen, and confirm strong manly citizens has plagued men's already terrible experiences on the battlefield. Army grunts like my grandfather experienced no glorious affirmation of their manhood in World War I; they were exposed instead to terror, vulnerability, and disillusion. For many, this experience of modern warfare accumulated to a suite of crippling somatic symptoms that came to be called 'shell shock.' In a fascinating analysis of the gendered meanings of shell shock, Historian George Mosse (2000) asserts that during World War I, shell shock was viewed as a kind of 'enfeebled manhood,' related to hysteria in women:

> Shattered nerves and lack of will-power were the enemies of settled society and because men so afflicted were thought to be effeminate, they endangered the clear distinction between genders which was generally regarded as an essential cement of society. ...The shock of war could only cripple those who were of a weak disposition, fearful and, above all, weak of will. ...War was the supreme test of manliness, and those who were the victims of shell-shock had failed this test.
>
> (Mosse 2000, pp.103–104)

Attitudes began to shift during World War II, as the U.S. eventually lost an estimated 504,000 troops from the war effort as a result of what Dave Grossman (2009, p. 44) calls 'psychiatric collapse.' General Dwight Eisenhower expressed dismay with General George Patton's denigration – and even physical abuse – of soldiers suffering from 'battle neurosis' as malingering cowards. Mosse (2000,

p. 107) explains that in 1943, General Omar Bradley issued an order 'that breakdown in combat be regarded as exhaustion, which helped to put to rest the idea that only those men who were mentally weak, "the unmanly men," collapsed under stress in combat.' Re-labeling such breakdowns as 'combat fatigue' shifted blame away from individual men, and began to shed light on the conditions that created the symptoms.

During the American War in Vietnam, the cluster of physical and emotional symptoms brought on by the trauma of war was given a medical label: Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, or PTSD. As we have seen, for many war veterans the symptoms of PTSD 'don't go away.' Indeed, a 2003 study by the National Center for PTSD concluded that 20–25 years after the end of the war, 'a large majority of Vietnam Veterans struggled with chronic PTSD symptoms, with four out of five reporting recent symptoms' (Price, 2003). The most common symptoms the study pointed to were alcohol abuse and dependence, generalized anxiety disorder, and anti-social personality disorder. Vietnam vets who had served 'in theatre' – that is, in war zones – suffered from these symptoms at much higher levels than Vietnam-era vets who did not serve in war zones. What caused these high rates of PTSD? A common view is that the sustained levels of fear that men in battle normally experience creates lasting psychological fears that impact one for years, perhaps for the rest of one's life. Others point to actual physical wounds as causing PTSD.

In his riveting book *On Killing*, Dave Grossman surveys research on PTSD to argue that the most powerful cause of the disorder is the shame and denial that follow the 'burden of killing' other human beings in war. Grossman points out that a fundamental problem of military leaders throughout history has involved training and motivating soldiers to overcome 'a simple demonstrable fact that there is within most men an intense resistance to killing their fellow man. A resistance so strong that, in many circumstances, soldiers on the battlefield will die before they can overcome it.' (Grossman, 2009, p. 4). During World War II, Grossman points out, military leaders were dismayed by their troops' frequent 'failure to fire': 80 to 85% of riflemen 'did not fire their weapon at an exposed enemy.' Many who did fire missed their targets purposefully. Subsequently, military trainers in future wars transformed training regimes in ways that dramatically increased the 'fire rate.' In Vietnam, U.S. soldiers with an opportunity to fire their weapon at an enemy soldier did so 95% of the time. If, as Grossman argues, knowledge of killing one or more other human beings contributes the most potent psychological fuel for PTSD, it should come as no surprise the huge numbers of U.S. veterans who returned home from the Vietnam War suffering from symptoms of PTSD. Absent the group absolution that returnees from previous wars received from public victory parades and other heroic post-war celebrations that may partly have mitigated feelings of guilt, Vietnam Veterans more often experienced their guilt as a private individual burden.

In recent years, some clinicians who work with combat veterans have argued that the PTSD diagnosis is imprecise, focusing as it does mostly on

fear memories and internalized trauma from having been harmed by others or by circumstances beyond one's control, like Ernie Sanchez's memories of the terror he felt during combat, and the injuries he sustained during artillery attacks. Too often ignored in discussions of PTSD is the impact of what some clinicians have come to call the 'moral injury' that results when a person has to live, as Ernie Sanchez did, with the memory of having killed other people, and as Daniel Craig did, for 'having killed people for these damned lies.' As Brett T. Litz (2009 pp. 696–697) and his colleagues argue, clinicians who work with combat veterans need to attend more 'to the impact of events with moral and ethical implications,' especially killing other people. 'Moral injury,' they conclude, 'involves an act of transgression that creates dissonance and conflict because it violates assumptions and beliefs about right and wrong and personal goodness.' The common result, they argue, is deep anxiety and shame, such as Ernie Sanchez's tears and shaking hands, and his self condemnation as 'a dirty SOB.'

Guns as lies

I have argued in this essay that for many boys and young men, guns come to symbolize more than a means of projecting masculine power and control in the world. More deeply, guns promise boys and young men a means of connection with others – a bounded intimacy – that coalesces in homosocial spheres like hunting, the military and warfare. The promise of respect and bounded intimacy that is built into the common warrior narratives with which many boys are raised is ultimately a lie. Guns are designed to kill other people – of course, we all know that. What is less known is the fact that the warrior who fires a gun in times of war – even if he is convinced at the time that his action is legitimate, even noble – commonly suffers deep and lasting moral injuries. Veterans normally deal with the shame at the center of this moral injury with manly silence, often maintained with alcohol. Brooding silences are too often turned inward to self-destructive behaviors like alcoholism or suicide, or they turn outward in sudden bursts of anger and interpersonal violence. The boyhood promise of guns – that their use will bring a kind of closeness, a bounded intimacy achieved through the playing out of warrior narratives with brothers in arms – is revealed to be a lie. Guns not only kill those on the receiving end; they also deeply and permanently damage the emotional lives of those who pull the trigger.

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13   Lawfully armed citizens and police

A proposal for reducing armed encounters with agents of the state

Nicholas J. Johnson

Introduction

There is a long history of concern that police interact with people differently based on race. That concern is heightened in the era of lawful concealed carry of firearms. The Philando Castille case is emblematic. There, a simple traffic stop over a tail light quickly escalated into a police officer shooting a black man who was licensed to carry a concealed firearm. Philando Castile did everything right, but still was shot, sitting in his car, while his wife and child looked on.[1]

The dynamics of the Castile case provoke deeper thinking about episodes where police contact over some trivial regulation ends up with police drawing and pointing guns. Sometimes this escalates into shooting and killing citizens. These cases are jarring because the violence is so disproportionate to the starting offence. The violence is often unrelated to the starting infraction, and instead grows out of weak compliance or refusal to comply with a variety of *ad hoc* rules designed by officers on the spot to facilitate an interview, detention, or arrest: 'Stay in the car, get out of the car, stand here, move there, hands up, hand me your license, reach, don't reach, sit, kneel, stop resisting, etc.' Slow, weak, or non-compliance with these commands is subject to the police adage of ATM (ask, tell, make). This is a recipe for escalation that in the worst cases results in guns drawn, pointed, and fired.[2] This dynamic is particularly hazardous in cases where a citizen is carrying a firearm. And the danger seems to increase when the armed citizen is black or brown.

Existing interventions have focused on police training and incentives. But existing critiques fail to engage a more fundamental question. Why are we sending armed agents of the state to enforce these niggling rules in the first place? The modern regulatory state imposes countless trivial rules. And for most of them, we would find it shocking if the first line of enforcement involved guns. From the Environmental Protection Agency to the Interstate Commerce Commission, to state and local authorities, most modern organs of the state enforce their rules without using guns.

So again, why is it that for street enforcement of trivial rules of the regulatory state we face a continuing parade of incidents where some minor