



Women Shoot Back: Gun Marketing to Women in the Age of #MeToo

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ABSTRACT

Roughly 22% of American women own guns (Parker et al 2017). Recent trends show that the primary motivations for gun ownership are fear and a related desire to protect oneself (Cook and Goss 2014). Females have a unique relationship to these motivators, which may be especially distinct in the age of #MeToo. Through an analysis of three different gun magazines, *American Handgunner*, *American Rifleman* (The Official Journal of the NRA), and *Shooting Industry*, I compare the portrayal of women before the #MeToo movement to their portrayal after its start. I look at how the discussion of women has changed related to three distinct themes: (a) men protecting women, (b) female recreational hunters and sport shooters, and (c) women protecting themselves. I find that women appeared less in all three magazines in the period after the start of the #MeToo. Qualitative analysis of gun magazine content shows that mainstream gun culture is paying attention to female gun owners in the Trump era, however, and that female gun owners are creating their own gun culture parallel to their male counterparts.

Has the #MeToo movement impacted the way women are represented in mainstream gun culture?

Has gun marketing to women increased as a response to the “Trump slump” in gun sales?

HYPOTHESIS

- As the discussion of sexual assault increases in the media in general, women will appear more in gun publications during the post #MeToo period.
- The prevalence of female self-protection should especially increase during this period.

FINDINGS

I find that the number of times women appear in all 3 magazines decreased relative to the amount of pages that were in each magazine issue when comparing issues before and after the election of Donald Trump and the rise of the #MeToo movement.

Number of Times Women Would Appear in a 100-page Issue Pre and Post #MeToo

Magazine	Pre #MeToo	Post #MeToo
American Handgunner	5.7 appearances	5.2 appearances
American Rifleman	6.1 appearances	3.2 appearances
Shooting Industry	7.1 appearances	5.3 appearances

In spite of this null finding in regards to my first hypothesis that women will appear more in gun publications in the post #MeToo period, I found that the appearance of female self protection themes increased significantly in the NRA’s journal, *American Rifleman* in the post #MeToo period. This, along with the decrease in the number of times men were depicted protecting women in two out of three magazines (*American Rifleman* and *Shooting Industry*), speaks to how mainstream gun culture may be shifting in its view of women.

American Handgunner Appearances By Category Pre and Post #MeToo

Type of Appearance	Percentage of Total Appearances Pre #MeToo	Percentage of Total Appearances Post #MeToo
Men Protecting Women	5%	9%
Female Shooting Sports	37%	38%
Female Self-Protection	58%	53%

American Rifleman Appearances By Category Pre and Post #MeToo

Type of Appearance	Percentage of Total Appearances Pre #MeToo	Percentage of Total Appearances Post #MeToo
Men Protecting Women	14%	3%
Female Shooting Sports	64%	43%
Female Self-Protection	23%	54%

Shooting Industry Appearances By Category Pre and Post #MeToo

Type of Appearance	Percentage of Total Appearances Pre #MeToo	Percentage of Total Appearances Post #MeToo
Men Protecting Women	4%	0%
Female Shooting Sports	56%	69%
Female Self-Protection	40%	31%

CONCLUSION

- My null finding might speak more to the anomalous nature of being a female gun owner than a confirmation of my hypothesis would have.
- Gun magazines are not ignorant of the fact that women are an important subset of gun owners.
- In choosing not to appeal to women in their publications, gun magazines might also be aware of the fact that women do not identify with the mainstream masculine gun owners that comprise most of their readership.
- Women may identify distinctly enough to not want to read gun magazines, thus making these publications view portraying a large number of female gun owners as a futile effort.

ALTERNATIVE THEORY: THE FEEDBACK LOOP

