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HANDGUN CONTROL

ONE MILLION STRONG . . . working to
keep handguns out of the wrong hands.

F- Assault Wep

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NOTES/COMMENTS:

This is what I was able
to come up with right now. I think
we have some other studies which
I will dig up and get to you tomorrow.

FYI. Rahm asked for this some info!

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Weapon Involvement and Injury Outcomes in Family and Intimate Assaults

Linda E. Saltzman, PhD; James A. Mercy, PhD; Patrick W. O'Carroll, MD, MPH;
Mark L. Rosenberg, MD, MPP; Philip H. Rhodes, MS

Objective.—To compare the risk of death and the risk of nonfatal injury during firearm-associated family and intimate assaults (FIAs) with the risks during non-firearm-associated FIAs.

Design.—Records review of police incident reports of FIAs that occurred in 1984. Victim outcomes (death, nonfatal injury, no injury) and weapon involvement were examined for incidents involving only one perpetrator.

Setting.—City of Atlanta, Ga, within Fulton County.

Participants.—Stratified sample ($n=142$) of victims of nonfatal FIAs, drawn from seven nonfatal crime categories, plus all fatal victims ($n=23$) of FIAs.

Main Outcome Measures.—Risk of death (vs nonfatal injury or no injury) during FIAs involving firearms, relative to other types of weapons; risk of nonfatal injury (vs all other outcomes, including death) during FIAs involving firearms, relative to other types of weapons.

Results.—Firearm-associated FIAs were 3.0 times (95% confidence interval, 0.9 to 10.0) more likely to result in death than FIAs involving knives or other cutting instruments and 23.4 times (95% confidence interval, 7.0 to 78.6) more likely to result in death than FIAs involving other weapons or bodily force. Overall, firearm-associated FIAs were 12.0 times (95% confidence interval, 4.6 to 31.5) more likely to result in death than non-firearm-associated FIAs.

Conclusions.—Strategies for limiting the number of deaths and injuries resulting from FIAs include reducing the access of potential FIA assailants to firearms, modifying firearm lethality through redesign, and establishing programs for primary prevention of violence among intimates.

(JAMA. 1992;267:3043-3047)

injuries than are victims of robberies in which guns are not involved.^{4,5} No study to date has examined how the involvement of firearms or other weapons affects the risk of death or nonfatal injury during violence among intimates. Many investigators believe that family and intimate assaults (FIAs) are often the impulsive results of violent arguments rather than being premeditated acts. For such FIAs, access to lethal weapons may be an important determinant of the incident's outcome. We analyzed data from a study of FIAs in a large, urban community⁶ to estimate (1) the probability of death resulting from FIAs, given differences in the types of weapons involved in the incidents, and (2) the probability of nonfatal injury resulting from FIAs, given differences in weapon involvement.

METHODS

Incident reports from the Bureau of Police Services for the city of Atlanta, Ga, for 1984 were reviewed to identify fatal and nonfatal FIAs, as has been described in greater detail elsewhere.^{6,7} Cases had to meet all of the following criteria: (1) the incident was classified as a homicide or as a nonfatal incident involving one or more of the following: physical contact between parties, use of a weapon, threat with a weapon, or explicit verbal threat of bodily harm; (2) the victim's residence and the site of the incident were within the city of Atlanta and within Fulton County; (3) the incident involved only one perpetrator; or (4) the victim and perpetrator were emotionally intimate when the incident

THE PUBLIC health approach to violence prevention incorporates strategies not only for reducing the occurrence of violent events, but also for reducing the likelihood of death or nonfatal injury when such events do occur.¹ A critical

issue in the public debate over appropriate policies for preventing injuries in violent situations is the extent to which the involvement of particular weapon types alters the likelihood of injurious outcomes. Research on assault² has found that the involvement of firearms increases the likelihood that assault incidents will result in homicide. Research on robbery suggests, however, that although a gun's involvement in a robbery may increase the risk of homicide,³ victims of robberies committed with guns are less likely to sustain nonfatal

From the Division of Injury Control, National Center for Environmental Health and Injury Control, Centers for Disease Control, Atlanta, Ga.

Presented at the American Public Health Association meeting, Atlanta, Ga, on November 12, 1991.

Reprint requests to Centers for Disease Control, 1600 Clifton Rd, Mailstop F-36, Atlanta, GA 30333 (Dr Saltzman).

occurred or at a later time. Emotionally intimate relationships included, for example, marriage, boyfriend-girlfriend relationships, terminated nonspousal and spousal partnerships, and other relationships among family members and relatives.

All homicides that occurred during the study period and that met the above criteria ($n=23$) were included. These homicides represented nearly one fifth of all homicides that occurred in Atlanta during the study period. Nonfatal FIAs ($n=142$) were drawn from a stratified sample of incidents from seven nonfatal crime categories (rape, robbery, assault, disorderly conduct, family and children offenses, sex offenses, and other).

Outcomes for victims were coded as death, nonfatal injury, or no injury. Weapons were considered "involved" whether the perpetrator actually used them or only brandished them. Weapon involvement was coded "firearm," "knife or other cutting instrument," or "bodily force or noncutting/nonfirearm weapon." "Bodily force or noncutting/nonfirearm weapon" included involvement of objects other than firearms or knives (eg, a blunt object or rock) or use of bodily force in the absence of other weapons. (Bodily force alone was involved in 4% [$n=1$] of fatal incidents and 50% [$n=71$] of nonfatal incidents.) Three nonfatal incidents (2%) in which perpetrators made verbal threats of bodily harm but used no weapons are also included in this category.

When incidents involved weapons in combination with bodily force (17% [$n=4$] of fatal incidents and 13% [$n=19$] of nonfatal incidents), we coded for whichever weapons were involved, since bodily force was potentially present during all incidents. For three nonfatal incidents that involved more than one weapon plus bodily force, we coded only for the most lethal weapon involved (two firearms, one knife or other cutting instrument).

We used the weapon and injury outcome data to examine two specific questions: (1) What is the risk of death (vs nonfatal injury or no injury) during FIAs involving firearms relative to other types of weapons? (2) What is the risk of nonfatal injury (vs all other outcomes, including death) during FIAs involving firearms relative to other types of weapons?

To determine the risk of nonfatal injury or of death, all nonfatal incidents in a given crime category were weighted to reflect the estimated incidence for that crime category. The weights for nonfatal victims varied from about 20 to 40; all homicides were weighted 1. Estimated variances for the probability of death also took the weights into account.

Table 1.—Number of Deaths and Estimated Number of Nonfatal Outcomes,* by Weapon Type, Family and Intimate Assault, Atlanta, Ga, 1984

Weapon Type	Outcomes, % (No.)			
	Death	Nonfatal Injury	No Injury	Total
Firearm	3.9 (14)	45.2 (163)	50.9 (183)	100 (360)
Knife or other cutting instrument	1.3 (5)	62.7 (244)	36.0 (140)	100 (389)
Bodily force or noncutting/nonfirearm weapon	0.2 (4)	68.3 (1667)	30.5 (735)	100 (2406)

*The numbers of deaths for each weapon type are actual counts. The numbers of incidents with nonfatal injuries and the numbers of incidents with no injuries are estimates.

We then estimated the probabilities of death or of nonfatal injury given the involvement of different weapon types.⁸ For example, for incidents involving firearms:

$$p(\text{nonfatal injury, firearm incidents}) = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n w_i d_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n w_i}$$

where $d_i=1$ if person i suffered a nonfatal injury, $d_i=0$ if person i did not suffer a nonfatal injury (ie, death or no injury), and w_i = weight for person i .

Confidence intervals for the probabilities were computed first on a transformed scale, in this case the logit scale [$\log(p/(1-p))$], then transformed back to the original scale. This method provides more accurate confidence intervals than intervals computed on the original scale, especially when the estimated probability is small as was the case here for the probability of death.

When comparing two weapon categories, we estimated the relative risks by taking the ratio of the two estimated probabilities. We computed the confidence intervals for the relative risks on the log scale, that is, $\log[p(\text{firearm})/p(\text{knife or other cutting instrument})]$ and then transformed the result back to the ratio scale.

The estimated variance of the log relative risk for the two estimated probabilities p_1 and p_2 was obtained using the delta method or Taylor series⁹ with the following formula:

$$\text{Var}\left(\log \frac{\hat{p}_1}{\hat{p}_2}\right) = \frac{1}{\hat{p}_1^2} \text{Var}(\hat{p}_1) + \frac{1}{\hat{p}_2^2} \text{Var}(\hat{p}_2)$$

RESULTS

Weapon-specific victim outcomes are presented in Table 1. Less than 1% of all FIAs resulted in death. The percentage with fatal outcomes was greatest when firearms were involved. Death was least likely when neither firearms nor knives were involved. By contrast, nearly half the incidents involving firearms resulted

in nonfatal injury, whereas nearly two thirds of the FIAs involving knives or other cutting instruments and more than two thirds of those involving other weapons or bodily force resulted in nonfatal injuries. National Crime Survey data analysis^{10,11} indicates that armed offenders do not always use their weapons to injure their victims. For example, an offender with a firearm may push, hit, or kick the victim. However, in all but two incidents in this study, the injuries sustained were those expected from the types of weapons involved (eg, a gunshot wound when a firearm was involved). The two exceptions were a nonfatal incident involving a knife in which the victim was injured but suffered no cuts and another nonfatal incident in which the victim suffered cuts although a firearm was involved.

Table 2 shows risk of death (vs nonfatal injury or no injury) and risk of nonfatal injury (vs all other outcomes including death) expressed per 1000 weapon-specific incidents, with associated 95% confidence intervals. The FIAs that involve firearms have the highest risk of death (39.0 per 1000 incidents), whereas FIAs involving bodily force or noncutting/nonfirearm weapons have the lowest risk (1.7 per 1000 incidents). However, firearm-associated FIAs have the lowest risk of nonfatal injury (452.3 per 1000 incidents), whereas FIAs involving bodily force or noncutting/nonfirearm weapons have the highest risk (692.9 per 1000 incidents).

Table 3 shows the risk of death for FIAs involving firearms, relative to FIAs involving other types of weapons. The FIAs that involve firearms are three times more likely to result in death than FIAs involving knives or other cutting instruments, and they are 23 times more likely to result in death than FIAs involving bodily force or noncutting/nonfirearm weapons. Overall, FIAs involving firearms are 12 times more likely to result in death than all nonfirearm FIAs. The confidence interval for the estimated relative risk comparing firearm-associated FIAs with FIAs that involve knives

Table 2.—Risk of Death or Nonfatal Injury by Weapon Type, Family and Intimate Assault, Atlanta, Ga, 1984

Weapon Type	Risk per 1000 Weapon-Specific Incidents (95% Confidence Interval)	
	Death	Nonfatal Injury
Firearm	39.0 (19.0-76.0)	452.3 (247.3-676.1)
Knife or other cutting instrument	12.8 (5.0-34.0)	626.9 (402.4-807.8)
Bodily force or noncutting/nonfirearm weapon	1.7 (0.6-4.5)	692.9 (569.2-776.4)
Total nonfirearm weapons	3.2 (1.6-6.4)	693.8 (594.8-761.4)

Table 3.—Risk of Death or Nonfatal Injury During Firearm-Associated FIAs, Relative to Non-Firearm-Associated FIAs, Atlanta, Ga, 1984*

Weapon Types Compared	Relative Risk (95% Confidence Interval)	
	Death	Nonfatal Injury
Firearms vs knives or other cutting instruments	3.0 (0.9-10.0)	0.7 (0.4-1.3)
Firearms vs bodily force or noncutting/nonfirearm weapons	23.4 (7.0-78.6)	0.7 (0.4-1.1)
Firearms vs all nonfirearms	12.0 (4.6-31.5)	0.7 (0.4-1.1)

*FIA indicates family and intimate assault.

or other cutting instruments includes 1; the confidence intervals for the other relative risks do not.

The relative risk of nonfatal injury for firearm-associated FIAs relative to non-firearm-associated FIAs are also shown in Table 3. Regardless of the weapon category with which they are compared, firearm-associated FIAs have a lower risk of nonfatal injury (relative risk = 0.7). For each relative risk the confidence interval includes 1.

COMMENT

Weapon-Specific Differences in the Risk of Fatal FIAs

We found clear evidence that firearm-associated FIAs are much more likely to result in death than non-firearm-associated FIAs. This finding is consistent with results from studies of other types of violence: case fatality rates for assaults, robberies, and other violent altercations are much higher when the assailants use firearms than when such incidents involve cutting instruments, blunt objects, or body parts.^{2,22} Our analysis of National Crime Survey data¹³ and vital statistics mortality data¹⁴ also confirms that case fatality rates are higher when firearms are involved.

Two interpretations have been advanced to explain this weapon-specific difference in the risk of death during other types of violent altercations, and these interpretations may be applied to our consideration of FIAs. First, it has been suggested that violent altercations involving firearms will result in death more frequently than altercations without firearms simply because, all other

things being equal, firearms are more deadly than other weapons.^{2,12} Inherent in this interpretation is the assumption that most people who kill their family members or intimates with a firearm would be unable or unwilling to exert the greater physical or psychological effort required to kill with another, typically available weapon. The implication of this first interpretation is that limiting immediate access to firearms or redesigning firearms so that they are less lethal or less easily loaded and fired might have a substantial impact on reducing mortality from such incidents.

The second interpretation is that the higher case fatality rates for violent altercations involving firearms reflect the relatively higher prevalence of assailants with a clear and sustained intent to kill among those who use firearms.¹³ That is to say, people who intend to kill another person choose firearms because of their relatively greater deadliness compared with other weapons. Under this interpretation, it is conceivable that a determined assailant without a firearm but with a clear and sustained homicidal intent would exert whatever other greater efforts would be required to kill the intended victim. In contrast to the first interpretation, the implication of this interpretation is that reduced access to firearms during FIAs would not substantially reduce the number of homicides because assailants with clear and sustained intent to kill would substitute other weapons to achieve the same destructive goal.

Both interpretations grant that killing with a firearm is easier than killing with most other, typically available

weapons. Therefore, the magnitude of the preventive effect of limiting ready access to firearms will depend largely on the proportion of assailants who are involved in fatal firearm-associated FIAs and who (if no firearm were available) would have such a clear and sustained homicidal intent that they would use some other weapon and still succeed in killing their victim. Unfortunately, there are no data available with which to determine that proportion.

There is no reason to believe, however, that even among people with determined homicidal intent, homicidal efforts will always be successful when other weapons must be substituted for firearms. Granting that some persons, in the absence of firearms, would commit homicide using alternate weapons, we find no evidence to suggest that a substantial proportion of fatal FIAs involve persons with such sustained, cold-blooded homicidal intent. Indeed, studies of male batterers and anecdotal reports suggest that many FIAs (fatal and nonfatal) are a spontaneous response to conflict or anger and frequently occur without premeditation or planning.¹⁶⁻¹⁸

In addition, some indirect evidence shows that assailants who use firearms are not more likely to have a clear intent to kill than those who use knives. Zimring² investigated a series of attacks involving guns or knives, using the location and number of wounds inflicted as a basis for judging the assailant's intent. In these attacks, which typically involved relatives and acquaintances, a greater percentage of attackers with knives than with guns appeared to be intent on killing.² Finally, to date, researchers have found no evidence of compensatory increases in homicides involving other weapons when firearm access is restricted.^{19,22}

Regardless of which of the two interpretations dominates in explaining weapon-related patterns in the risk of death, reduced access to firearms is likely to result in fewer homicides because killing is easier with firearms. However, the magnitude of the preventive effect of reduced access would be greater for homicides committed impulsively than for those marked by sustained homicidal intent. Given the available evidence, we interpret weapon-specific differences in the risk of death from FIAs as due primarily to the first interpretation—the greater lethality of firearms. This interpretation suggests two preventive approaches.

First, if access to loaded firearms were reduced, fatal FIAs might be prevented because assailants would be forced to substitute weapons less certain to kill. Many different strategies could be used

to reduce firearm access. Innovative strategies should be explored, such as police confiscation of firearms used during FIA incidents, restriction of firearm purchase or acquisition by persons subject to domestic violence restraining orders or protective orders (as is the case in California²⁵), or restriction of firearm acquisition or purchase by convicted spouse abusers—both misdemeanants and felons. Strict enforcement of existing laws prohibiting threats to kill or threats with weapons and of laws prohibiting firearm ownership by convicted felons should decrease firearm access for FIA perpetrators. In addition, educational interventions might be designed to disseminate information about concrete steps to reduce immediate access, such as separate locked storage for firearms and ammunition. Public information campaigns could be designed to communicate important research findings about the danger of keeping loaded firearms in the home,²⁴ so that the public can make more informed decisions about owning or purchasing firearms for protection.

Second, the design of firearms could be modified to decrease their lethality.²⁶ For example, handguns could be designed to be less easily loaded and fired. They could also be designed to shoot something other than bullets (eg, electricity, tranquilizers, or anesthetics). In 1986, the Attorney General of the United States held the Conference on Less Than Lethal Weapons²⁷ to lay the groundwork for developing useful, safe technology for less than lethal weapons; efforts are still under way in this regard.

Weapon-Specific Differences in the Risk of Nonfatal FIAs

In this study we found that the presence of a firearm lowered the risk of nonfatal injury relative to other weapons, although this effect was not statistically significant. Research on violent encounters indicates that the risk of nonfatal injury is significantly lower when firearms are involved, relative to other weapons.^{4,4,10} This finding has been interpreted to suggest that when firearms are involved in a violent incident, intimidated victims may minimize their risk of injury by avoiding physical altercations with their assailants. This finding also suggests that a strategy of reducing the access of potential FIA assailants to firearms may come at the cost of increased nonfatal injuries.

The Predominance of Nonfatal FIAs

Although intervening to reduce fatal injuries is highly desirable, expanded emphasis should also be placed on preventing FIAs from occurring in the first

place. More than 99% of FIAs do result in death, and in addition to injuries, nonfatal FIAs have other serious consequences. Battered women are at increased risk for psychosocial and other health problems, including depression, alcohol and other drug problems, suicide attempts, and child abuse.²⁷⁻³² In addition, FIAs may contribute to the intergenerational transmission of violence.^{33,34} Effective primary prevention strategies will reduce not only nonfatal injuries but also fatal injuries. Such strategies may need to emphasize attitude and behavior change by potential assailants, rather than relying on environmental modifications, since FIAs frequently involve the use of readily available household objects and bodily force.

Many different preventive strategies have been proposed for reducing the incidence of FIAs.³⁵ These include comprehensive community-based programs; teaching children and adolescents non-violent alternatives for dealing with stress and anger^{36,37}; devising ways to prevent dating violence, which is a possible precursor to adult violence among intimates^{38,39}; targeting the news and entertainment media's role in legitimizing violence⁴⁰; and increasing training for health care providers in identifying and referring women at risk of being abused (including the use of standardized protocols),^{41,42} because some researchers believe that a series of family violence incidents may eventually escalate to violence resulting in serious injury or death.⁴³ Early identification and referral of persons at risk may allow for an intervention before situations escalate.

The Impact of Biases in Risk Estimates

Risk estimates presented in this study could be biased by our reliance on data that relate only to incidents that come to police attention. It is well known that nonfatal FIAs are underreported to police.^{44,45} We have therefore overestimated, to some extent, the risk of death in both firearm and nonfirearm FIAs. Data from the National Crime Survey for the years 1979 to 1986 indicate, however, that FIA events that involve firearms are much more likely to be reported to police than those that involve other weapons, and that FIA events that involve nonfatal injuries are much more likely to be reported to police than those involving no injury.⁴⁶ These data suggest that we overestimated the risk of death to a greater extent for non-firearm-associated FIAs than for firearm-associated FIAs. Therefore, in Table 3, we have underestimated the relative risk of death comparing firearm-associated with non-firearm-associated FIAs. In

addition, these underreporting patterns do not appear to have introduced any substantial bias into our estimates of the risk of nonfatal injury in firearm-associated FIAs relative to non-firearm-associated FIAs.

CONCLUSION

We estimate that FIAs involving firearms are at least 12 times more likely to result in death than FIAs involving all other types of weapons. Reducing the access of potential FIA assailants to firearms and reducing firearm lethality through redesign represent potentially effective prevention strategies. Simultaneously, efforts to reduce the overall incidence of FIAs through primary prevention must be expanded. All three of these prevention strategies must be evaluated for efficacy.

For this report we used data from the study of Family and Intimate Assaults in Atlanta, Ga, supported under a collaborative agreement between the Centers for Disease Control and the Georgia Department of Human Resources (U50/CCU400831-01-1), with the additional collaboration of the Fulton County (Georgia) Health Department and the Atlanta Department of Public Safety. Additional support was provided through an interagency agreement (86-U-R-200) with the National Institute of Justice.

The following were members of the Collaborative Working Group for the Study of Family and Intimate Assaults in Atlanta: (1) Atlanta Department of Public Safety: George Napper, PhD, Ardith Peters, PhD, Guy O. Seymour, PhD, and Jack Mallory, MSW; (2) Fulton County Health Department: William R. Elisea, MD, MPH, Robert J. Pinton, MSPH, and Richard F. Lyles, PhD; (3) Georgia Department of Human Resources: R. Keith Sikes, DVM, MPH, Project Director; Jane C. Carr, RN, Assistant Project Director; Sandra S. Huguley, MA, Senior Research Associate; and Anne Becker, Lois Ellison, Steve Erickson, Theresa Irby, Debbie Lester, Kathy Marth, William D. Patterson, MA, Terrie Sterling, MA, MS, and Angela Wine, Research Associates; and (4) Centers for Disease Control: Linda E. Saltzman, PhD, Project Officer; James A. Mercy, PhD; Mark L. Rosenberg, MD, MPP; Richard J. Warweiler, PhD; and Harvey F. Davis, Jr, MPH.

We thank Karen J. Wintemute, MD, MPH, Colin Loftin, PhD, and Kenneth E. Powell, MD, MPH, for their helpful comments on a draft of this article.

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**Special Report:
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Alice Walker
On Sex,
Grits, and
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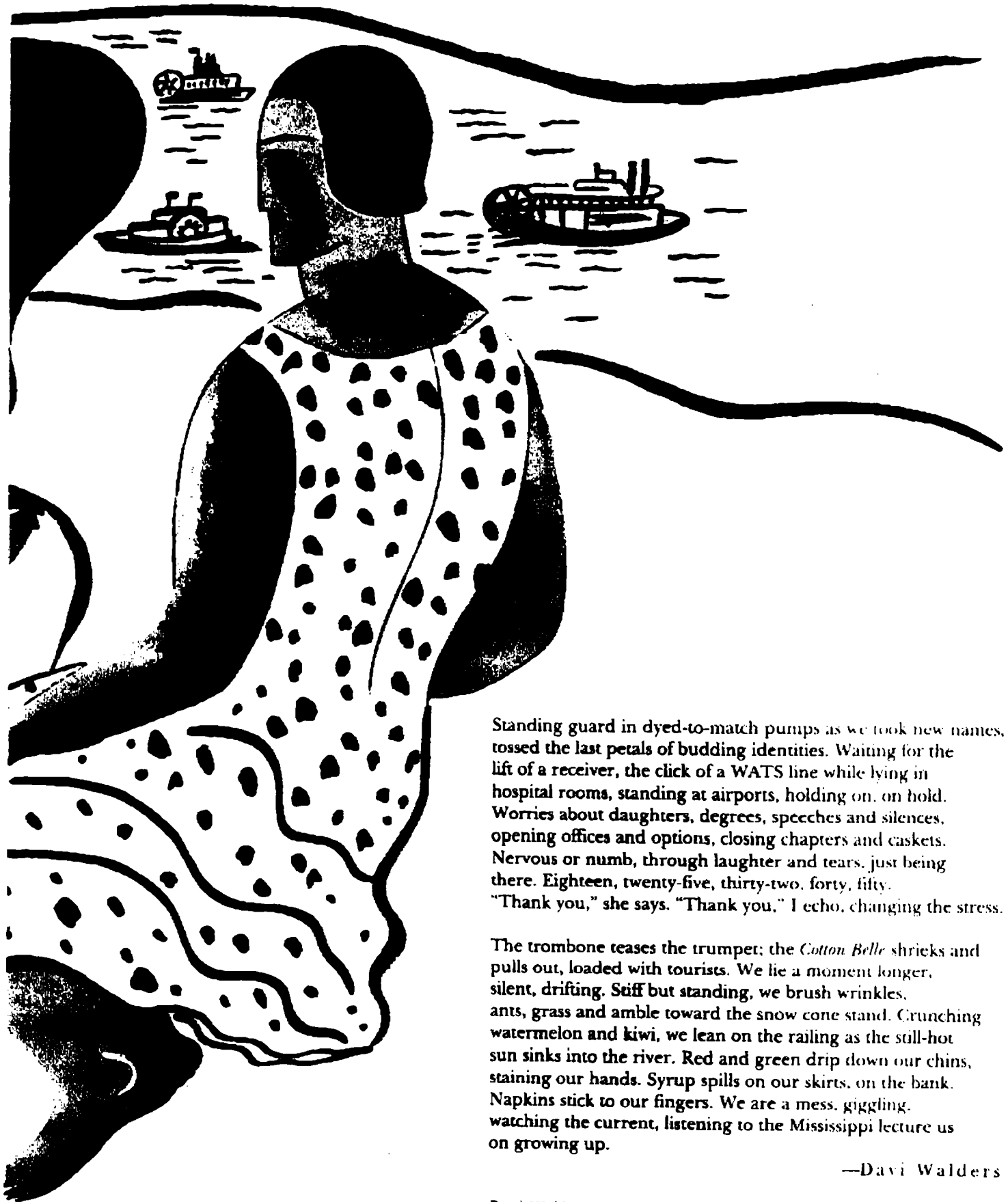
Is This Power Feminism?

**The Push
To Get Women
Hooked on Guns**





Is This Power



Standing guard in dyed-to-match pumps as we took new names, tossed the last petals of budding identities. Waiting for the lift of a receiver, the click of a WATS line while lying in hospital rooms, standing at airports, holding on, on hold. Worries about daughters, degrees, speeches and silences, opening offices and options, closing chapters and caskets. Nervous or numb, through laughter and tears, just being there. Eighteen, twenty-five, thirty-two, forty, fifty. "Thank you," she says. "Thank you," I echo, changing the stress.

The trombone teases the trumpet; the *Cotton Belle* shrieks and pulls out, loaded with tourists. We lie a moment longer, silent, drifting. Stiff but standing, we brush wrinkles, ants, grass and amble toward the snow cone stand. Crunching watermelon and kiwi, we lean on the railing as the still-hot sun sinks into the river. Red and green drip down our chins, staining our hands. Syrup spills on our skirts, on the bank. Napkins stick to our fingers. We are a mess, giggling, watching the current, listening to the Mississippi lecture us on growing up.

—Davi Walders

Davi Walders, an educational consultant, has published poems in numerous journals and literary magazines. She has been a Fulbright scholar and a National Endowment for the Humanities grant recipient.

YOU KNOW YOU'RE GOING TO GET THEM WHEN YOUR IDEAS

get copied by other people. Take the feminist discussion about “choice”—in reproductive rights, health care, work, or any number of areas of our lives. Most times we're glad to know that our message is out there in the public arena. But what happens when we start hearing our words flung back at us by groups like the National Rifle Association? Just when we thought we were beginning to turn the tide in favor of gun control, along comes the NRA with a campaign that encourages women to exercise our right to “choose to refuse to be a victim.” The new focus on women comes not because this organization supports our right to be free from rape and battery, harassment and discrimination, but because these sharpshooters are trying to seduce women into becoming dues-paying, gun-toting NRA members with promises of power from the barrel of a gun.

The NRA's campaign is cynically designed to sell guns by preying on women's fear of violence. But it touches a deeper nerve than just fear; it's at the heart of a debate about who we are. The NRA isn't the only one telling women to refuse to be victims. This past year, there have been numerous calls for the same thing from women who either claim we're whiners—when we point out how often women are attacked and abused by men they know—or who say we've got the power to get tough, to buy guns if it makes us feel strong, to fight fire with fire, as the phrase of the moment goes. Who hasn't looked at the numbers on rape, violence,

Feminism?

and street crime and thought for a panicked instant, “I need some protection”? But that skirts the real issue. Yes, we have every right to protect ourselves, but do we want to buy into age-old patriarchal notions of an eye for an eye? Does owning a gun guarantee safety or simply up the stakes? ■

Living With Guns

DECEMBER 23, 1993. I OPEN A COPY OF *USA TODAY* TO THE HEADLINE "HOLIDAY RUSH ON FIREARMS." I read that "legions of Americans" are buying guns for Christmas, spurred by "a fear of crime and a dread of gun control." Afraid that passage of the Brady Bill is only the first step toward gun-control legislation that will leave them unarmed in a nation of gunslingers, the legions are giving gun dealers what one calls their best sales year in two decades. Santa Claus, on the other hand, is having a hard time. On the same day, the *New York Times* reports that Santa has been recalled from the malls of Denver because a mysterious letter writer threatens to blow "that Fatso"

Playing With Fire

by Ann Jones

away. Christmas-spirited cops dress up in Santa suits, safely within the walls of police stations, and listen to the wish lists of kids who probably hope for Uzis of their own.

It's all there, in a single day's news, even during the season officially dedicated to peace on earth. Pick up any paper and read the daily dispatches from the domestic war zone. You'll find the record of violent acts that threaten everything we once thought precious or safe. And these days you'll find as well the stories of gun shoppers, male and female, who share the desperate conviction that only our own readiness to do violence can protect us from violence.

Interviewed in *People*, President Clinton says: "Nearly everybody who lives in any kind of an urban area today, and increasingly in medium-size and small towns, feels a significantly higher level of personal insecurity than they did a few years ago. They look over their shoulders more, they worry more about who they speak to on the street. There is a level of anxiety there that didn't exist, because nearly everybody knows somebody who has been victimized."

That anxiety about random violence currently inspires yet another crackdown on crime in the United States. Both Republicans and Democrats rant about law and order. They team up to throw good money after bad, opting to build "boot camps" and jails and still more prisons,

though already, in the ones we have, we lock up more of our citizenry per capita than any other nation on earth. On television, in between violent entertainment programs, news programs examine our violent society, interviewing cops and convicts and drug pushers and teenage gang members and even children who are shooting and being shot at in unprecedented numbers. Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala reports that if current trends continue, gunshots will replace car crashes as the leading cause of death by injury in the U.S. by the year 2003. "Among young adults ages 25 to 34," she says, "the crossover has [already] occurred on a nationwide basis." And "Americans," as the president says, "look over their shoulders."

Missing from this national debate on crime is any mention of the crime that poses the greatest danger to women: rape and/or assault by a current or former boyfriend or husband. Battering is now the single leading cause of injury to U.S. women between the ages of 15 and 44, sending more than a million women every year to doctors' offices or emergency rooms for treatment. It drives women into the streets, too: 50 percent of homeless women and kids across the U.S. are fleeing from male violence. It figures in one quarter of all suicide attempts by women and in one half of all suicide attempts by African American women. It also accounts for untold damage to

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fetuses in utero; 25 to 30 percent of pregnant women are battered, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. And every day in the U.S. four women are murdered by men who say they love them.

Generally, battering does not count as "crime." As recently as 1991, only 17 states recorded incidents of male

violence against women in the home, and most confined reporting to "serious" bodily injury, rape, and murder. Officially, battering does not even count as "violence." In the "family violence" establishment, academics (mostly male) have applied innocuous labels such as "spouse abuse" or "partner abuse" to obscure both the severity of violent acts performed at home and the gender of the perpetrators. What we've learned to call "domestic violence" has come to seem but a pale imitation of the real thing. This is hardly what we expected when in 1970 feminists began one of the most dramatic social reform efforts in the nation's history: we brought the issue of battering out of the private home and into public consciousness. Yet in just two decades, male violence has been so thoroughly "domesticated" once again that even some feminists say they've had enough of cringing victims. They want to talk about *power*.

Enter the National Rifle Association (NRA). With deficits deepening, membership declining, and no pal in the White House, the NRA spent almost \$29 million in 1992 but couldn't shoot down the Brady Bill. Undoubtedly depressed at the result, the NRA turns for comfort—where else?—to women (see page 46). It finds feminist leaders preoccupied with an in-house argument—Are we *for* victims or *against* them?—and cleverly launches an appeal to both sides. Always adept at marketing, the NRA taps into the sentiments of those women who extol women's power and reject what they call "victim feminism." At the same time, it plays to the real terror of millions of U.S. women who are still victimized by men who are their partners or lovers. "Refuse To Be a Victim," the NRA says glibly, couching its ad campaign in the feminist language of choice, cynically co-opted from the campaign for reproductive rights. Appealing at once to women's empowerment and to women's fear, the NRA's ad campaign could not be more timely or better planned.

Don't think for a minute they have our best interests at heart. During recent campaigns in several states for legislation authorizing police to confiscate guns from men who assault women or violate restraining orders, the

distinguish a toy gun from a real one.

Women are fearful, yes. With good reason. But we're also beyond fear. We're fed up. That's what the cheering is about, and the high fives, and the laughter. Sweet revenge. Women's interest in guns—such as it is—isn't just about fear. It's about fighting back.

I know something about fighting back myself—and about the consolations of a gun. In 1969 I took a job teaching at an African American college in the South, a job some local white citizens thought unsuitable for a white woman. They encouraged me to go back home. They drove down my street at all hours, shouting and waving a Confederate flag. They beat my dog nearly to death. They fired buckshot at my house. A black friend of mine, a former marine, gave me a handgun, a .38 spe-

A long time after that, life gave me a second chance, and I failed again. While I was investigating a murder for one of my books, a man whispered death threats into my answering machine. Similar threats, cut and pasted together from newspapers, arrived unstamped in the mailbox, apparently delivered by hand. Someone broke into the house when I was away and, as a calling card, left all the doors and windows open wide. I searched through my things for that old .38 special, loaded it, and kept it on my desk while I wrote. At night I put it under my pillow. When I left the house, I took it along to have it handy when I came home again and searched every corner, every closet, every cubbyhole before sitting down once more at my desk. For six months, that pistol made

Teenager commits suicide with a gun.

cial, and he and I made conspicuous trips to the public shooting range for target practice.

After that, the racists left me alone. But they left me diminished, too. I'd grown up with guns and knew how to handle them, but for complicated reasons—personal and political—I'd promised myself not to use them anymore. Then, in the face of the white citizens' welcome, my principles had simply vanished.

As a kid, I'd hunted with my dad from the time I was big enough to fire a shotgun without being flattened by the recoil. It was a great pleasure during those growing-up years, walking the damp brown autumn woods and cornfields of northern Wisconsin with a .20 gauge under my arm, watching for the sudden thunder of partridge or pheasant on the rise. But at 18 I shot my first deer, and as I watched it die in the snow, the deadly and irrevocable consequence of what I was doing came home to me. I couldn't stop weeping. (Yes, I know, "just like a girl.") I never went hunting again, but because the shotgun had been a gift from my father, I kept it.

Many years later, on April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., was gunned down in Memphis. I borrowed a canoe, paddled to the middle of a lake near my home, and dropped my old shotgun over the side. It was a ridiculous gesture, I suppose, impelled by grief and fury at the slaughter of Dr. King and the collective dream he had inspired. But I wanted to rid the world of guns and all the violence and death they seemed to represent; at least I could get rid of mine. The nonviolent path of Dr. King would be my own. Only a year later, I went South and lost my resolution to a bunch of hopped-up racists waving a Confederate flag.

it possible for me to go through the motions of life and to go on working. But this time I understood the lesson I'd only half-learned in that southern town: the threat of violence, if it makes you play by its rules, is just as deadly to the spirit as violence itself. It wasn't a gun I needed. It was courage.

Now when I read of women buying guns to gain a sense of power and control it makes me sad, for I imagine them afflicted with the same incapacitating fear and the same profound anger at being made to feel afraid. I think of all the survivors of battering and stalking and attempted murder I've talked to over the years. And some I never had a chance to meet, women like April LaSalata. In February 1988, her ex-husband, Anthony, broke into her home on Long Island, New York, armed with a sawed-off rifle and a knife, and stabbed her several times in the chest. She survived, and he was charged with attempted murder—then released on \$25,000 bail. The county prosecutor begged the judge to increase the bail and hold LaSalata in jail. Request denied. April LaSalata applied for a permit to carry a gun to protect herself. Permit denied. In January 1989, Anthony waited for April to return from work, then shot her twice in the head on her own doorstep. She was 34.

If April LaSalata had been granted that gun permit, could she have saved herself? Maybe so. Maybe not.

As a practical matter, leaving the human drama aside and looking at the studies and the numbers, it doesn't make much sense to own a gun. Having a gun in your home makes it three times as likely that someone will be killed there. And that someone may be you or your child. With children in the house, the only way to keep a gun

safely is to break it down, hide it, and hide the bullets elsewhere—and in that condition it's of no use in an emergency. On the other hand, having a gun at the ready endangers children who may play with it or use it as a weapon. Between 1979 and 1991, nearly 50,000 children under the age of 20 were killed, by accident or design, with firearms, reports the Children's Defense Fund. Having a gun at the ready may also be fatal for you, if you're on the losing end of a struggle with an intruder. But a woman is much less likely to be attacked by an intruder or by a stranger in a public area than by the man she lives with. Bring a gun into the house, and he might use it on you. Any family member might use it to attempt suicide; unlike sleeping pills, a gun is a virtually faultless suicide weapon, offering no second chance. About 48 percent of deaths caused by firearms are suicides.

But suppose you actually manage to use your gun to wound or kill an attacker in self-defense. If you've shot an unknown intruder with a legally licensed gun, you may or may not have to stand trial. But if you've shot the man you live with, or used to live with, your troubles have only just begun. I've spent too much time in too many prisons talking to too many women who say they killed batterers in self-defense, and who are now locked up for 15 or 20 years or life without parole, to think that "justifiable" homicide is easily justified when a woman pulls the trigger on a man. Consider the anguish these women go through, and their terrible

loss of freedom. Still, it's better than being dead.

But if we want to talk about power, and having it, and

using it for the safety and protection and greater empowerment of women, should we be talking about guns

number of U.S. battle casualties in Vietnam.

at all? I remember a conversation years ago with a group of women in an Indiana prison. Each had killed a husband or boyfriend and was serving a long sentence. One said, "When I get out of here, I'll never have a gun around the house again." Said another: "If I ever get out of here, I'll never have a man around the house," tracing her problem to its source.

How do we arm women with awareness and the courage to live free of violence? And more to the point, how do we stop violent men? That's not a job to be done piecemeal by lone women, armed with pearl-handled pistols, picking off batterers and rapists one by one. It's a job for the collective power of women and men.

It should never have to be up to the April LaSalatas of the world to arm themselves and shoot it out with men who are trying to kill them. The law could have saved April, and should have, and would have, if women mattered. Men continue to rape and batter and assault and kill—in a word, to victimize—women. But if those women don't matter in our society, then why should women matter to the courts or the cops or all those congressmen so diligently building prisons to lock up everybody but batterers?

I'm all for empowering victims, and after the relentless crime wave that men have waged undeterred against women all these years—even, and especially, in the so-called safety of home—I'd sure like to see us get our own back. Still, I think it's fair to say that when we took up the fight for women's rights, the right to bear arms was not what we had in mind. We imagined a just country in which cops and courts would defend, if need be, a woman's constitutional right to be free from bodily harm. We imagined an egalitarian world where people of all races and backgrounds and ages and both sexes could live together in harmony and cooperation, a world where class- es and gender conflict would disappear, where there would be no cause for warfare and violence. Idealistic? Yes. But it seemed to me, and still does, the only kind of world worth struggling for.

Instead we live now in a country where every two minutes somebody gets shot. Where every 14 minutes some-

body dies from a gunshot wound. Where every 2 hours a child is killed by someone with a gun. We live in a country where in 1991 guns killed 38,317 people. Where every day

four men track down and kill the women they claim to love. A world where popular, state-of-the-art, so-called feminist Naomi Wolf cites pistol-packing ma- mas in NRA publications as splendid examples of "pioneer feminism."

Maybe I'd be safer if I bought another handgun and practiced up. Maybe I'd be safer still with an Uzi. But safer for what? That's not the world I want to live in. Remember that old peace slogan from the days of war in Vietnam: "Someday they'll give a war and nobody will come." I'm still working on that. And in the meantime, if you want to pack a piece in the gunslinger society, please don't mistake your hardware for power. **ANN**

Ann Jones's books on violence include "Women Who Kill" (Fawcett) and the recently published "Next Time, She'll Be Dead: Battering and How to Stop It" (Beacon).

Cashing In on

The NRA Targets Women • by Ellen Neuborne

MARY RYBKA, A HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR IN MESA, ARIZONA, CARRIES A .38 SPECIAL WITH HER TO work, to the shopping mall, even, she says, to the bathroom in her own home. "You can't know for certain where an assailant might be waiting for you," she says. "I am ready. I will shoot if necessary." She is so ready that when she goes to an ATM for cash, she holds the gun openly in front of her. Rybka used to think handguns were dangerous. Because she has a daughter, she would not allow her husband to keep one in the house. What made Rybka change her mind about guns? She was never attacked. She has no close friends who have been victims of violence. If you

ask Rybka, she'll tell you all it takes to be a gun convert is to read the papers and watch TV news; the world is not a safe place, she'll say. Soon after reading a book that plays on women's sense of vulnerability, Paxton Quigley's *Armed and Female*, Rybka decided to learn to shoot. "Women are learning that no one can protect us but ourselves," she says. "I refuse to ignore what goes on."

She sounds a lot like Quigley, who conducts a personal protection course dubbed "Women's Empowerment in the '90s." "I make a strong feminist statement about the real psychological and philosophical changes going on with women and guns in society today," claims Quigley. "Women fear guns. That's a cultural thing. But

to 2.6 million members in the early Reagan years, the NRA's muscles have begun to sag, say some observers. By 1991 nearly 300,000 people had dropped their membership; in 1992 the overwhelming majority of the congressional incumbents targeted by the NRA for defeat were reelected; and last year, the Brady Bill was passed. In addition, the NRA's close ties to the law enforcement community have deteriorated because of its uncompromising resistance to bans on "cop killer" bullets and assault weapons and its battles with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms over enforcing the 1968 Gun Control Act. The organization has been trying to rebuild its ranks through direct mail campaigns. It is an expensive game plan.

when a woman learns to shoot a gun, it changes her psychologically. She sees that, as a woman, she can control this lethal force.

When you learn

to shoot, your fear falls away from you."

The National Rifle Association is betting millions of

dollars that there are women like Mary Rybka all across the country, who are ready for some "lethal force," who are uneasy about crime and can be convinced to commit an act they once deemed unthinkable: purchasing a gun. Women's safety may be the NRA's public pitch, but bolstering its flagging membership and building its coffers is at the top of the organization's agenda. After years of bullying down gun control legislation, its lobbying power strengthened by a growth surge from about 1 million

estimated at \$30 million in 1992 on top of \$9 million the year before—have NRA state affiliates worried.

Not surprisingly, the NRA has been casting about for a new approach. One is CrimeStrike, a \$2 million attack on the criminal justice system, created in the

hope of winning back friends in the police community. CrimeStrike rolls out a laundry list of get-tough measures of questionable effectiveness, including pretrial detention, increased use of mandatory sentences and the death penalty, and the latest popular favorite, three-strikes-you're-out lifetime sentencing of repeat felons. The campaign has already been credited with helping win a ballot initiative in Washington State for three-strikes-you're-out sentencing and one in Texas for building more prisons.

Fear

The other effort is the NRA campaign for women. Osha Gray Davidson, author of *Under Fire: The NRA and the Battle for Gun Control*, attended the 1991 annual convention in San Antonio, Texas, where boosting membership was the top priority. "Speaker after speaker pointed out that the NRA had pretty much exhausted its traditional members—white men," Davidson says. "The conclusion was that they needed to attract more women and more minorities."

"The idea that women are a huge untapped market is not new," says Esta Soler, executive director of the Family Violence Prevention Fund, in San Francisco. "Smith & Wesson conducted a poll in the eighties and found 29 percent of men were interested in owning a gun, but 28 percent already did. Now look at the same question asked of women: 19 percent were interested. Only 9 percent [said they] already own a gun."

In its first national marketing effort directed at women, the organization has launched what it describes as a safety program: "Refuse To Be a Victim." In reality the campaign is part of the NRA's strategy to gain new members, money, and political support. Critics call it a sophisticated attempt to frighten women into buying guns.

"Refuse To Be a Victim" comes in three parts that work together to persuade women that the NRA has a product to help them feel safe again. Step one is a scare-tactic advertising campaign targeted for mainstream television, radio, and magazines. The ads, featuring a woman and child alone in a deserted parking garage, lead to the next level by offering a brochure of safety tips, including, as tip number 42, "making an informed choice about firearm ownership." The final level, touted in the brochure, is a three-hour, \$20 course on personal safety strategies taught by NRA-certified instructors.

After a successful test run in Houston, Texas; Miami, Florida; and the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, the NRA has doubled the campaign budget to \$2 million and is taking its pitch national.

How To Choose

To Refuse To Be A Victim.

What You'll Get When You Call.

- 1. A woman will answer your call. She can provide information about the NRA Refuse To Be A Victim Course conducted by women in your area, or put you directly in touch with a female NRA certified instructor.
- 2. If you'd just like more information, we'll send you our booklet "42 Strategies for Personal Safety" free of charge and without obligation.
- 3. You may join thousands of women in the



"Tell me, I'm full the fear of being female in a society where violence against women has become commonplace. That's why I decided that I refuse to be a victim, and why I'm active in the NRA."

volunteer ranks of CrimeStrike, the NRA's grassroots movement to restore tough justice in our criminal justice system. Through CrimeStrike, you'll help pressure lawmakers to pursue an agenda of real criminal justice, and a future in which our daughters may live free from fear. You will not be encouraged to own a gun, or asked to join the NRA, to get you the help you need.

Refuse To Be A Victim.
Call 1-800-881-1188 Now.

Straight Answers to Common Concerns About Firearms. The NRA does not advocate firearm ownership. We do advocate your constitutional right to choose whether to transfer your gun. And if you choose to exercise that right, to help you do so safely and responsibly, we provide for personal protection. If you're among them, to the past decade, an estimated 12 to 20 million Americans have. If you're not, you can still benefit from the NRA's gun safety education. For more information, call 1-800-881-1188.

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just as fear of crime has become the number one issue on the country's political agenda.

It is no surprise that the NRA has created an apparently effective ad campaign to attract new members. "I'm the NRA," its campaign from the glory days of the early 1980s, when membership took off and Congress buckled under, was so successful it appears in college advertising textbooks as an example of top-notch image-marketing. "I'm the NRA" tried to erase the organization's reputation as a bunch of gun nuts by featuring gun owners such as a fresh-faced second-grader with his BB gun and the U.S. Olympic shooting team.

"Refuse To Be a Victim" is not so sunny in its approach. The NRA insists the campaign is not designed to sell guns or even NRA membership, but this is no neutral public safety announcement. Working with its longtime ad agency, Oklahoma-based Ackerman McQueen, NRA pollsters first interviewed 400 women in focus groups in ten cities across the country. One of their findings, a prevalent fear of deserted parking garages, provides the setting for the ads.

In a shadowy garage, a mother—a white woman in her mid-thirties—makes her way with her young daughter

There are 200 million firearms in the U.S., more than

The second grassroots movement in the country, Dennis DeLoach, a former top aide to President Richard Nixon, persuaded Congress to pass a ban on semi-automatic weapons, the National Rifle Association's office in the state capital, tests, and in gun shops. In his seat, Charles E. Schumer, the hassle of the press took focus on the leading the House, reports gun ended up defending

toward a solitary minivan. The woman glances nervously over her shoulder. The child looks wary. Both seem like helpless prey in the semidarkness. "How To Choose To Refuse To Be a Victim," reads the copy, which goes on to provide an 800 number to call for the NRA brochure. The ad's tagline, "From the Women of the NRA," had been smaller and less prominent in earlier versions, until pollsters reported that women were not impressed with safety campaigns pitched by men.

If you call for the brochure, you receive a pamphlet of innocuous safety tips such as "Do not broadcast your plans in public" and "Maintain your personal space." These tips are "just a fraction" of the material in the three-hour course, promises the pamphlet. The NRA insists that guns will be just one of the many options discussed in the course, and they're telling the truth. While the course does not hype gun ownership, it also fails to address specific issues of crime against women. At the start of a session in January in College Park, Maryland, the instructor announced that she would deal only with "garden variety bad guys"—strangers who commit acts of violence. Stalking, domestic violence, and workplace violence—all major crime problems for women—were ignored. The course leaned heavily on home security tips,

discussing the pros and cons of different locks and peepholes, and did not address street safety. Self-defense techniques were barely mentioned; instead, "weapons" such as Mace, pepper spray, and personal alarms were extolled as ways to ward off violence. Guns came up at the very end.

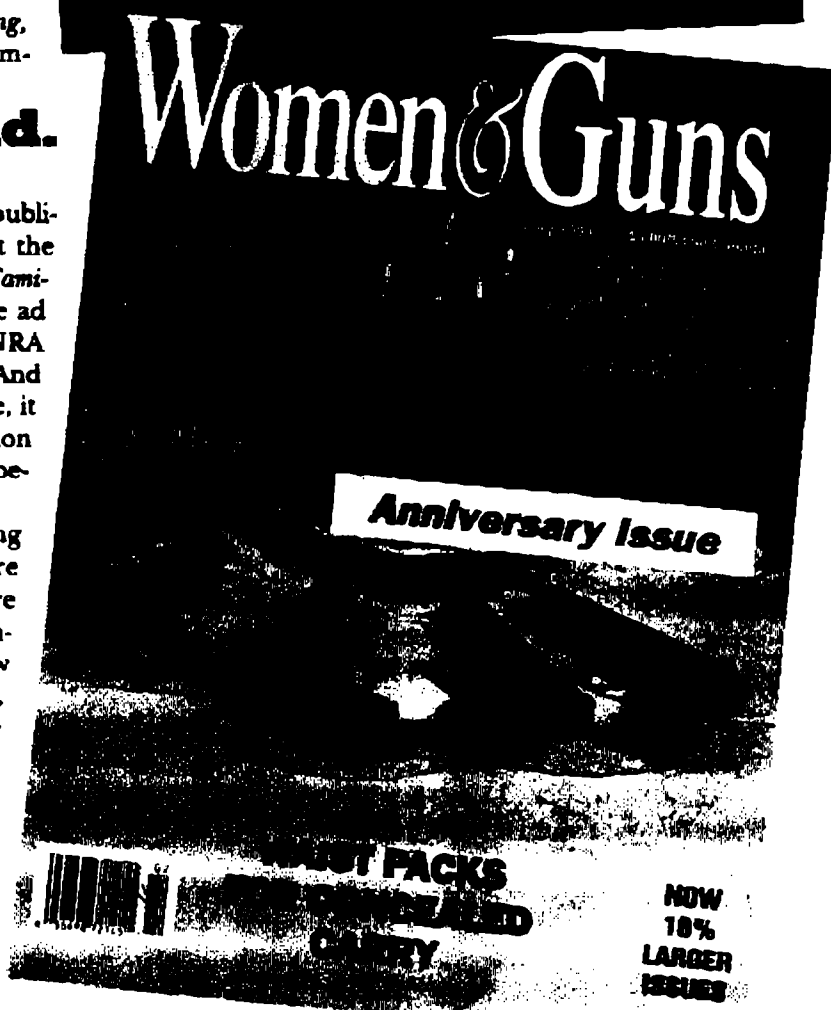
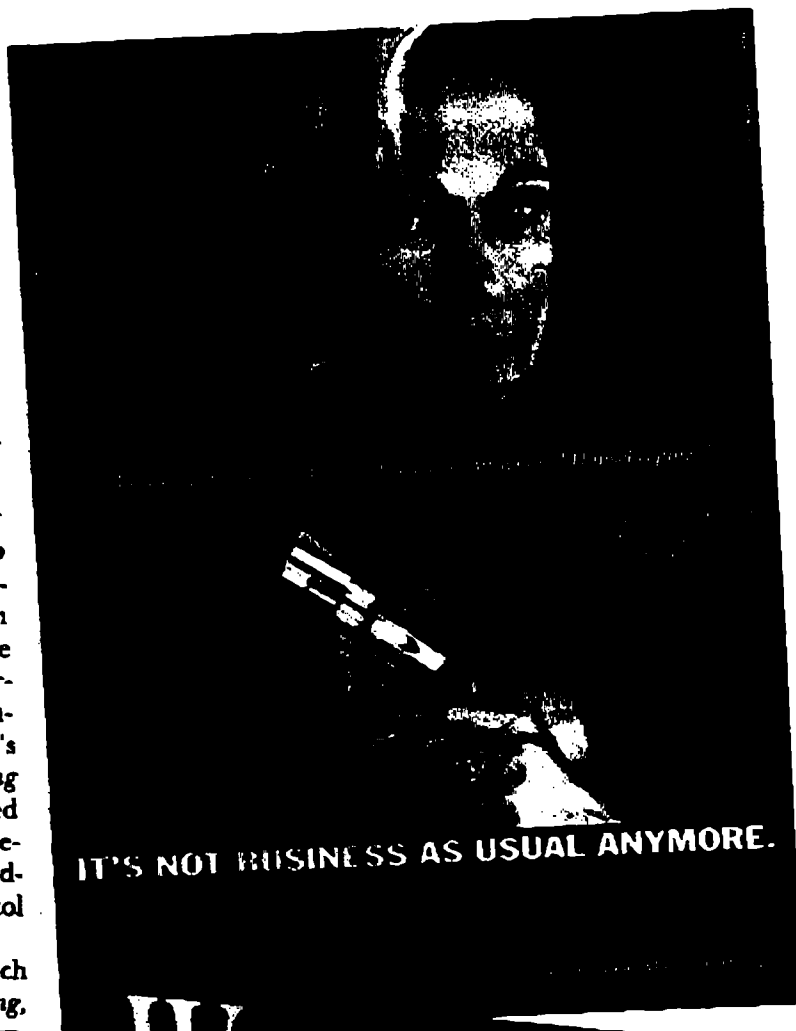
Women's magazines are the primary outlet for "Refuse To Be a Victim." "You don't market ice to the Eskimos," says Tanya Metaksa, executive director of the NRA's Institute for Legislative Action (its lobbying arm) and the former head of the group's women's policies committee. "We are marketing to women, and we need to go where that audience is." This is not the first time women's magazines and guns have joined forces: *Working Woman* magazine featured Paxton Quigley, armed with a silver pistol, in a short-lived ad campaign designed to herald the magazine's remake into a hard-edged publication, with Quigley and her pistol embodying the get-tough image.

Perhaps leery of that image, some magazines, such as *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Good Housekeeping*, would not carry the "Refuse To Be a Victim" cam-

wo for each household.

paign. But because no actual gun appears, many publications accepted it. The glossy, four-page ad hit the newsstands in October issues of *Cosmopolitan* and *Family Circle* in the three test cities. In the capital, the ad appeared only in magazines. But in Miami, the NRA used radio commercials along with the print ads. And in Houston, where the ads drew the best response, it used a mix of print and television, the combination chosen for the larger rollout of the campaign that began earlier this year.

"Refuse To Be a Victim" has gotten off to a strong start. Metaksa says 1,500 to 1,700 calls a week are coming into the program's 800 number. There were 6,000 requests for brochures in the campaign's first four weeks. The NRA won't say how many women have taken the three-hour course, for which they recruited and trained 50 female self-defense instructors in the three market cities. "We really didn't have a clue as to what would happen," says Metaksa. "We just threw the bait out there and waited to see what would come after it. But I'm pleased with the response. It shows we are on target." Not that the NRA is pushing gun ownership, insists Metaksa: "We are not say-



ing to women you have got to have a weapon. We are saying we can give you some information and some education about ways you can be safe."

In fact, most statistics show having a gun is the opposite of being safe. Just the presence of guns in a community is enough to increase the risk of death. A study that compared crime data in Seattle, where handguns are easily available, to Vancouver, Canada, a city with similar social and economic characteristics where guns are restricted, showed that over a seven-year period, levels of burglary, robbery, and assault were similar, but the risk of homicide was 60 percent higher in Seattle. The difference was due almost entirely to a higher rate of firearm homicides.

Guns in the home don't seem to provide protection either. For every one time a gun in the home is used to kill in self-defense, it is used 43 times to cause an accidental death, a suicide, or a criminal homicide, according to Dr. Arthur Kellermann, director of Emory University's Center for Injury Control. In an October 1993 article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* titled "Gun Ownership as a Risk Factor for Homicide in the Home," Kellermann stated that having a gun in your home nearly triples your likelihood of being killed there. He also confirmed something domestic violence experts have known for years: most homicides are not committed by a stranger. In the homes Kellermann studied, more than 75 percent of homicides were committed by a [REDACTED]

spouse, a family member, or someone known to the victim. In examining which families were most at risk, he

found that homes where previous domestic violence had occurred were five times more likely to be the scene of

a homicide. "All of this misinformation put out by the NRA deters the efforts of people who are really trying to educate women about violence," says Susan Glick of the Violence Policy Center based in Washington, D.C. "They tell women that their best self-defense is a gun because no one else will help, so women who are already in a battering situation and feeling isolated are further alienated."

In the U. S., where 330,000 people died by guns in the 1980s, some groups are more at risk than others. Among African American girls ages 10 to 14, the percentage who died of gunshot wounds doubled between 1987 and 1988. Patterns of suicide are also changing because of guns. Women attempt suicide more often than men, but

men have traditionally been more likely to succeed because they often use guns. Now women, like men, most often kill themselves with firearms. And the suicide rate is increasing.

Guns are dangerous even to those who handle them professionally. Sixteen percent of all police officers who are murdered are shot with their own guns. "That statistic shows that even with all the training in gun handling that a police officer has, that gun can still be taken away and used on that officer," says Osha Gray Davidson. Representative Pat Schroeder (D.-Colo.) makes a similar point: "They are trying to say, 'This is how you deal with the fear of being a victim.' But I always say to folks, 'Do you know how long we train marines before we give them guns?'" Schroeder was among the 25 women legislators organized by her colleague Nita Lowey (D.-N.Y.) to protest NRA scare tactics in the days following the debut of the "Refuse To Be a Victim" drive. Lowey and the other congresswomen pointed to the hypocrisy of a campaign designed to improve women's "safety," given the NRA's long-standing opposition to any type of gun control.

So far, efforts to stop the campaign have been unsuccessful. As it moves forward into more and more U.S. cities, some observers predict it will be very effective. "I think this is brilliant," says Gary Nordlinger, a Democratic media analyst in Washington, D.C. "It takes the

NRA, an organization that is taking a tremendous amount of heat for opposing the Brady Bill and other gun control measures, and it says to women, 'The NRA is your friend.' It's very clever."

If the campaign succeeds, legislators sympathetic to the NRA would have a new, "politically correct" reason to support the gun lobby. Behind a

shield of warm, fuzzy public relations, the NRA could gain new strength and its supporters in Congress could have a new excuse to ignore violence against women. "This is a propaganda war and the NRA is a veteran," says Hilary Shelton, a director of the United Methodist Church's General Board of Church and Society and a gun control advocate. "We need to get the real numbers out, about women and guns and what the dangers are." Pat Schroeder suggests that women police officers be enlisted to persuade women that guns are not the answer. Of the gun lobby, she says: "You can't let them define the universe. You can't be afraid to take them on." [REDACTED] Ellen Neuborne, based in Arlington, Virginia, is a reporter for "USA Today."