

Wild West Campus: A Discussion on Concealed Weapons and the College Campus

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Abstract

This thesis reviews the recent history of gun-related violence on college campuses in relation to gun control laws and argues whether college campuses should allow students and teachers with Carrying a Concealed Weapon permits to carry these weapons on campus, or if such a policy would merely exacerbate the issue at hand. The purpose of this thesis is to show that such a policy is effective, safe, and overall a benefit to the campus atmosphere and experience. Important points considered include the legal history of carrying concealed weapons, the current policies of universities concerning students carrying concealed weapons, the opinions of students and faculty about concealed weapons carried on their campus, and the impact on gun-related violence made by the presence of persons carrying concealed weapons. A legal basis is necessary to establish the rights of colleges and universities to pass such legislation. Since the primary goal of allowing concealed weapons on a campus is the mental and physical well-being of the occupants, the opinions of the students and faculty who occupy the university are necessary to the discussion. The primary sources for this discussion will include current laws regarding concealed weapons in the United States, surveys on the opinions of college students and faculty about concealed weapons being carried on their campus, and statistics regarding the impact the presence of concealed weapons have on gun-related violence in a community.

Wild, Wild West Campus

On April 16, 2007, shock spread across the nation as the news broke of a horrifying shooting at Virginia Tech. At the end of the massacre, 33 people, including the shooter, were dead. While the nation and families mourned their losses, others began to allocate blame for the tragedy. Many people began to blame easy access to firearms and a lack of regulation for the violence caused that day, claiming that, if guns were harder to acquire, then the violence could have possibly been prevented (Fallahi, Austad, Fallon, & Leishman, 2009). However, another group began to argue that the lack of firearms present on campus led to the high number of victims, and that, if only someone had been allowed to have a weapon, perhaps the shooter could have been stopped sooner and the students could have been defended (Wiseman, 2011). The question presented by this tragedy is one of both civic right and of practicality: Whether permitting Carrying a Concealed Weapon permit holders to carry firearms on college campuses should be allowable under the law in the private sector; whether it is effective at deterring or stopping violent crimes; whether it is the best policy for deterring and preventing crime on college campuses; and, finally, whether it is a policy which promotes peace of mind and a sense of safety in both the students and faculty of a college campus.

History

Second Amendment Rights

An important step in this discussion is the establishment of a solid, undisputed foundation from which to compare the two sides of the issue. Since movements are often suggested for the abolition of firearms from the public and private sector altogether, the total removal of guns should be discussed as a solution to the gun-related violence on

college campuses. The right to possess firearms has been analyzed and upheld by the courts, but the question remains if whether this right applies to college campuses, which are private property.

The Second Amendment to the Constitution guarantees United States citizens the right to keep and bear arms (U.S. Const. amend. II.). While some regulations have been placed on the right by both federal and state governments without violating the Amendment, the right has been repeatedly upheld as secured for the individual by the Constitution. For example, the Supreme Court found that a ban on handgun possession violated the Second Amendment, because the right of an individual to possess and carry a firearm is guaranteed (*District of Columbia v. Heller*, 2008). The Supreme Court went on in a 2010 case to find that the state was restricted by the Second Amendment just like the federal government, and was therefore not permitted to pass unreasonable laws abridging the right to carry and bear arms, although some regulations were permitted (*McDonald v. Chicago*).

Both of the Supreme Court cases above support the right to possess and carry a weapon, albeit with some regulation permitted. An example of this regulation is the establishment of the Carrying a Concealed Weapon (CCW) permit, which allows holders to register a firearm and, after receiving training, acquire a permit to conceal and carry their firearm (Hood & Neeley, 2009). These permits are managed through the state and are not administered by the federal level of government. A permit administered to a citizen by the state to carry a concealed weapon, therefore, falls within a citizen's constitutional rights. However, this right only extends to the public sector, which the state has control over. Being allowed to carry a concealed weapon in the city surrounding a

college campus does not allow one to necessarily carry a weapon on that campus, as campuses are allowed to pass their own rules concerning handguns, unless they are restricted for doing so by a law passed by the state, which is the case in Utah, where no colleges are allowed to make rules restricting students with valid permits from concealing weapons on campus (Fennell, 2009).

Responses to and Consequences of Previous Shootings

It is important to understand both the causes and effects of the tragedy of a campus shooting when making a decision on whether or not CCW holders should be allowed to carry on campus. As was shown in the introduction of this paper, allocations of blame can often be bipolar on each component of the tragedy (the blame was entirely split on how to analyze the involvement of guns at all). In a campus setting, innumerable variables are at work, and any number of them can increase or lessen the damages during by a crisis (Davies, 2008; Cornell & Sheras, 1998).

The response of faculty, both during and after a shooting, is crucial to how the situation plays out and to how matters will be handled during the fallout. Cornell and Sheras (1998) found that “plans are integral to successful crisis response, equally important is the process by which school professionals implement their plan” (p. 297). The way in which faculty follow guidelines for behavior during a crisis is as important as the guidelines themselves. Cornell and Sheras (1998) go on in their article to show examples in which weakness in leadership worsened school crises. While the autonomy held by students in institutions of higher learning shifts some control away from faculty in the environment, a faculty response can still exacerbate a crisis if handled poorly,

which means that faculty involvement when a shooting begins is critical to the ending results of the crisis.

For example, during the Virginia Tech massacre, administrative response was inadequate to say the least. Davies (2008) explains:

On the morning of April 16, the Policy Group, anxious to avoid a panicked reaction, acted slowly to alert the campus to a dangerous situation. In the emergency message it sent out almost two hours after the first shootings...the group said there had been a shooting but did not state explicitly that two people had been killed and that the killer had not been apprehended. (p. 12)

A letter to the editor signed by the Director of News and Information University Relations at Virginia Tech confirms that, while a couple members of the Policy Group passively discussed the presence of the early morning shooting, which preceded the larger shooting later in the morning, with family members, no official warning was given (Owczarski, 2010). Davies (2008) goes on in his article to explain the importance of colleges and universities establishing methods of communication for threats and crises, including the prevention of crises. Davies (2008) specifically points out that, due to a lack of communication, no one was ever in a position to “connect all the dots,” recognizing the threat of a shooter developing on their campus, and that, if someone was, he may have been given the mental help he needed (p. 12). Despite the fact that the shooter had received some court-ordered mental treatment, Virginia’s laws at the time were ambiguous on whether it should disallow him from acquiring a firearm (Davies, 2008). Explaining the rarity of shootings on America’s campuses (16 each year at the time of writing), Davies (2008) stresses the importance of this plan being efficient and including

local law enforcement. The shootings at Virginia Tech stress the importance of the human element in violent crises. While allocating blame to something inanimate such as a firearm or laws which allow citizens to easily acquire weapons is a natural reaction, the importance of administrative decisions during a crisis cannot be stressed enough.

While an objective standpoint can see the overarching variables which made the Virginia Tech shootings as tragic as they were, a survey of over 500 of the survivors of the Virginia Tech shooting, taken within three weeks of the event, provides a subjective view of the tragedy, the perspectives of students and faculty who did not have the luxury of being objective. Faculty and students varied from each other in their opinions, with faculty and staff attributing blame for the shooting to violent media, administrative errors, and a lack of gun control more so than the students (Fallahi, Austad, Fallon, & Leishman, 2009). Students blamed relationships with parents and the race of the shooter much more than the faculty and staff (Fallahi et al., 2009). The survey also found that the third most frequent response to a question about how to prevent such violence was “better gun control” (preceded by better mental support and the belief that no prevention was possible) (Fallahi et al., 2009, p. 125). Even on a subjective level, the errors of administration are noticed. However, the availability of weaponry is also considered a contributing factor, with the survey going on to say that student support for gun control was much higher after the shooting and that a majority of students supported gun control (Fallahi et al., 2009).

The next contributing variable in a shooting on a college campus is one which is inherent to a campus’ very nature. Sulkowski and Lazarus (2011) found that “[c]ollege campuses are prime locations for violent perpetrators to stage devastating multiple victim

attacks due to their dense populations, relatively low police presence, and open and welcoming nature” (p. 339). Considering these factors (especially the open nature of a campus), it must be noted that a ban on weapons on campus will do very little to prevent a determined individual from arriving on campus with a firearm (Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2001, p. 339). Sulkowski and Lazarus (2011) go on to say that, in a study, 86% of the students reported to carry a gun on campus lived off campus. Taking this factor into consideration, a ban on firearms cannot be guaranteed effective due to the difficulty of enforcing such a rule on a student who does not live in the dormitories; it is very possible that, even with a ban of weapons on campus, a student could carry a weapon from their off-campus residence without being discovered, as was the case with the shooter at Virginia Tech.

Even in an on-campus situation, a student’s behavior cannot be guaranteed to fall within the rules of the university. Considering the belief that shootings are caused by human relationships and can be prevented by advancing ways in which troubled individuals can be identified and helped, the FBI has released documents attempting to assist administrations in identifying these potential shooters before a threat is reached, (Fallahi et al., 2009, p. 125; O’Toole, 2000). The FBI document states:

Educators, law enforcement, mental health professionals and others must realize they cannot handle threats in the same “old” way. Those tasked with assessing threats must be trained in the basic concepts of threat assessment, personality assessment and risk assessment...and realize the importance of assessing all threats in a timely manner. (O’Toole, 2000, p. 10)

Throughout the guide on identifying and dealing with school shooters, the emphasis is placed on the individual and his situation in tandem with the school creating a method to respond to threats in such a manner that “first...students teachers and staff *are* safe; second...they will feel safe; and third...the person making the threat will be supervised and given the treatment...to avoid future danger to himself and others” (O’Toole, 2000, p. 25). Davies (2008) backs up the importance of threat assessment, “if no one is in a position to assess threats, plans are useless” (p. 14).

Despite many sources stressing the importance of the human element in these tragedies and many survivors pointing to the importance of relationships between people leading to the violence, there is still an overwhelming blaming of singular factors (such as gun control) for shootings. Frisby, Kim, and Wolfmeyer (2005) point out the source of this misconception:

Gun violence...particularly when it occurs within the context of schools, is an issue that tends to provoke visceral reactions and strong opinions. When public opinions are expressed in the media, they tend to focus on a single variable as the reason for the violence. This tendency to express a one-dimensional view...obscures the complexity of school violence. (p. 7)

Frisby et al. (2005) continue, saying that people tend to polarize their attitudes around the most noticeable contributing factor to the tragedy. Considering the involvement of media in shootings, the public is often given a distorted view of the topic, since no newscast can possibly inspect every contributing factor in a complex tragedy like a shooting. Frisby et al. (2005) states that a large number of people allocate blame to the media as a factor in shootings in addition to gun control and parental relations. Hawdon, Oksanen, & Rasanen

(2012) found that the media played a critical role in the community's response to the Virginia Tech shooting, determining how divisive the reports of the shootings would be. Considering that most analysis and interviews with people who experienced the horrors did not find guns to be a central factor, the fierce debate over control laws which erupted following the shootings may have very well been a result of misplaced blame (Frisby, et al., 2005, p. 7).

Current University Policies

In the wake of a shooting at a college campus like Virginia Tech, it is expected that universities who had thought little of the dangers of a potential shooting would now place the value of preparing for one much higher on their list of priorities. Davies (2008) states:

...members of our panel were assured that institutions do not plan for most of these disasters, although "active shooter" was not widely included among the dangers for which plans had been developed. Tech has an emergency plan; it was out of date last spring, but it is probably current now. (p. 14)

The high profile shooting sparked changes to rules across the country. The state of Utah declared that all college and universities must allow students with a CCW permit to carry a concealed weapon on their campuses and is currently the only state to have done so (Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2011; Fennell, 2009). In contrast to the decision made by the state of Utah, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) has stated their belief that colleges are safer with weapons banned, or at least safer when each university is permitted to make their own decisions on weapon policies, opposed to a state law which overrides university and college autonomy (Fennell, 2009). According to

the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) (2014) website, twenty states currently ban all concealed weapons on college campuses within the private sector, irrelevant of the laws in the surrounding public sector which is protected by the Second Amendment, and do not allow for colleges to pass their own laws on the matter, which also overrides college autonomy. However, the AASCU also has stated that a ban on college campuses of weapons overall makes the campus safer. Summarizing the position of the AASCU, colleges should be able to use their autonomy to make their own decisions on concealed weapons when a state passes a law requiring them to allow guns on campus, but the autonomy can be ignored when a state passes a law requiring them to ban guns on campus; this double standard shows that the AASCU's desire is to allow the state total control over college decisions on the matter when it is their favor, but to override the state's interests when it is not in their favor.

In states where autonomy is left with the school to deal with the policy on concealed weapons, rules can vary wildly from school to school. For example, Virginia Tech states in its *Policy and Procedures* (2012) that firearms are almost universally banned (with the exception of police officers and those required to carry a firearm for a school-approved event) from its campus, but at Liberty University, CCW holders are permitted to carry their weapons on campus (Allen, 2013). While Virginia law allows colleges to make their own decisions on allowing weapons on campus, these two universities are only one and a half hours apart from one another and fall on opposite sides of the debate. Considering the influence of the previous shooting at Virginia Tech, its rules are understandably stricter in regards to guns; the Governor of Virginia even changed state laws regarding acquiring guns in the state of Virginia soon after the April

16 shooting through an executive order, removing several ambiguities with national norms, including out-patient mental care being required on background checks for purchasing handguns (Davies, 2008). For a third point of view, the University of Virginia, one hour from Liberty University and two hours from Virginia Tech, states in its *Policy Directory* (2011) a set of rules almost identical to those presented in the Virginia Tech *Policy and Procedures*. While the University of Virginia is a public sector and, therefore, afforded Constitutional protections, its rules differ from Virginia statutes, which allow those with a CCW permit to carry their concealed weapons in public places (VAC § 18.2-308). This shows that even in a public sector, the campus is treated differently by the state law, just as the president of Students for Carry stated, “your college thinks that you turn incapable of executing sound judgment when you step onto a college campus” (Wiseman, 2011, para. 13).

While it is fortunate that shootings at college campuses are very rare, with only “16 killings each year at America’s colleges and universities” (Davies, 2008, p. 15), and even fewer of those being mass shootings like the one which took place at Virginia Tech, it makes it very difficult to see the impact allowing or disallowing weapons on campus has on overall safety, especially considering the many non-fatal violent crimes (such as rape) which also occur on campus in addition to the many crimes which may have never been reported. However, students have expressed that, even in a crime like rape, they feel that having a gun could have prevented the crime (Wiseman, 2011). Violent crime rates on college campuses have been found to be roughly 2%, with “ten homicides per year throughout the country on college campuses. The majority of these murders involved acquaintances or drug deals, not rampage or random shootings” (Patten, Thomas, &

Wada, 2013, p. 553). While, ideally, crime rates between different universities could be compared to determine the effect of polices, the small sample size of crimes makes a statistically significant deduction impossible. The closest data which can be compared to see the impact of allowing concealed weapons to be carried on college campuses must be taken from general public data, which has a far larger sample of data to discuss.

Two separate analytical studies based on crime data over the course of decades in relation to where the right to carry concealed weapons was upheld showed a decrease in the rates of violent crimes in those areas. But these two studies will be discussed in depth later in this thesis (Plassman and Whitley, 2003;La Valle, 2013). While the findings in these studies do not directly apply to a campus setting, similarities must be drawn in order to see the impact of allowing concealed weapons to be carried in a community, and, college campus can easily be considered to be a small community for the purpose of the comparison.

A related difficulty faced in observing the impact of allowing concealed weapons on campus is that, as was mentioned before, many crimes are not reported. Also, how many crimes are prevented cannot be measured because there is simply no way to tell how many crimes were deterred due to a perpetual criminal knowing of the potential of the victim or a nearby student carrying a weapon or how many would be attackers were fended off or frightened away through use of a firearm, but the incident was never reported by either party (Hood & Neeley, 2009). In a specific, publicized example of use of a firearm to deter a criminal, two students at Gonzaga University in Georgia encountered a recent convict who attempted to force his way into their apartment. Fortunately, one of the students in the apartment, which was off campus, but owned by

the university, retrieved a pistol, for which he had a permit to conceal and carry, and the intruder ran away (Holland, 2013). The students faced potential expulsion for the actions due to a university policy, although their lawyer did declare, “They had the right to defend themselves and others, regardless of what the policy says” (Holland, 2013). While this is obviously an isolated case, it brings to light the potential harm to these students which was avoided through use of the firearm and the potential for other students across the nation to protect themselves in similar manners.

Opinions on CCW Holders Carrying Weapons on Campus

As was stated earlier in the paper, a very important aspect of any prevention or response program is first “to make sure that students, teachers, and staff *are* safe (that is, that a threat will not be carried out); second, to assure that they will *feel* safe” (O’Toole, 2000, p. 25). Considering these goals, it becomes crucial to consider the opinions of the students, faculty, and staff at colleges and universities on allowing those with a CCW permit to carry their weapon on campus and to potential use it when a threat presents itself. Several surveys and studies have been conducted on the opinion of students and faculty about others on the campus being permitted to carry weapons. A culture of safety and peace of mind is essential to a successful CCW program on a college campus.

Student Opinions

Studies have been performed at all levels of education on various methods of preventing school violence, as it is a peril which plagues many age groups. Surveys and studies regarding high school students will be identified as such and be reviewed to identify what findings can relate to higher education levels. Booren and Handy (2009) introduce a survey using a measure known as “Indicators of Preferences for School

Safety [IPSS]” at the high school level to discuss how different methods of violence protection made students feel (p. 233). This study found that adding prevention measures such as metal detectors, security cameras, and guards “created an ineffective atmosphere of mistrust and uneasiness among the students. Although the increase is seen as a positive development, it does not get at the core of violence prevention” (Booren & Handy, 2009, p. 235). The main point to be drawn from this observation is that passive deterrents do not promote an ease of mind, although security guards in place were not found to cause as much unease (Booren & Handry, 2009). Booren and Handy (2009) reiterate the importance of crisis plans, a recurring theme in several studies on the subject of school violence. What this study adds to the discussion on whether students should be allowed to carry concealed weapons on campus is that visible protection (which may serve as a reminder of danger) does not promote a culture of peace of mind and causes students to feel as they are being watched. However, the fact that security guards were not found to have a similar effect shows that a human element can lessen the impact some visible protection measures have. Furthermore, a student carrying a concealed weapon is not visible to the naked eye, and less likely to serve as an active reminder that violence could happen at any time; as the old adage goes: “Out of sight, out of mind.”

A study performed across fifteen Midwestern colleges and containing 1,649 undergraduate students sought to identify the opinion of students at the collegiate level about the presence of concealed firearms on campus and their comfort levels if CCW was allowed. The study found that 78% of the students across the universities were vehemently opposed to the carrying of handguns on their campuses and would not carry a concealed weapon if the school were to allow it (Doubleday, 2013). The massive

opposition shown in this study shows an overwhelming opinion that students do not want CCW on campus. The study went on to find that almost 80% of students would not feel safe if those on campus were allowed to carry concealed weapons, citing fears of increased rates of homicide and suicide on campus if weapons were allowed (Doubleday, 2013). However, Kurt Mueller, the director of public relations at Students for Concealed Carry brings up that students may not be aware of how often they are around concealed weapons when off campus, since campus rules often draw an imaginary line of separation from the laws of the community (Doubleday, 2013). It is very likely that the large presence of media coverage of gun laws in relation to school violence has caused students to forget that concealed weapons are present throughout the public sector without sudden surges in violence as a result. As Bouffard, Nobles, and Wells (2012a) say, “people frequently report they own and carry handguns out of a perceived need to protect either themselves or others” (p. 301). Most people do not acquire a CCW to propagate violence on campus, but to protect those around them and create a safer environment; this holds true both on college campuses and in the public sphere.

With similar results, Patten et al. (2013) surveyed about 2000 persons on two campuses. Their results did not distinguish between student and faculty, seeking to present a more generalized view of a campus population’s view on CCW (Patten et al., 2013, p. 552). Asking three main questions, Patten et al. (2013) found:

[73% of the college population] did not want qualified individuals to be able to carry a gun on campus, 70% did not feel safer with more concealed guns on campus, and 72% did not think armed faculty, students, and staff would promote a greater sense of campus safety... (p. 560)

This study merely propagates the ongoing issue that a CCW program on college campuses would not actively promote a peace of mind, which must be considered when discussing the overall effectiveness of instituting such a policy; if a campus does not feel safe, it cannot be said that the policy is 100% effective. However, Doubleday (2013) found that half of the respondents to their survey on student opinions of concealed weapons on college campuses were unaware if their college even had a policy about firearms, so it can be argued that instituting a policy to allow CCW may not create a culture of unease because many students may not even be aware of the fact that those near them are concealing weapons.

A study by Bouffard et al. (2012a) sought to find how many students would carry weapons if the CCW bans were lifted. The study used a combination of over 5000 students from a university in Texas and a university in Washington. While the core purpose of the study was a comparison of the desire of students in a Criminal Justice major to allow CCW on college campuses to the desire of students in other majors, the study also provides findings on the entire sample of respondents and the overall student population opinion on actually carrying a concealed weapon. Upon asking the students to express their levels of concern about violence on campus and their trust in the campus police to prevent violence on their campus, students at both universities expressed moderate concern about potential violence and “they generally reported relatively low levels of confidence that the police could prevent violence on campuses” (Bouffard et al., 2012a, p. 294). Bouffard et al. (2012a) go on to find that, in Texas, 35% of students said they would not obtain a CCW and carry a weapon, while 20% said they certain would obtain and carry. The Washington report differs, with 45% reporting opposition and only

9% expressing that they would definitely carry a weapon if allowed (Bouffard, et al., 2012a). As expected, the likelihood to acquire a CCW permit and carry a weapon on campus was significantly higher for those who were in a Criminal Justice major (53% of CJ majors would obtain a CCW and carry, opposed to less than 34% on average in other majors), were concerned about violence on campus, or found the police to be inadequate to prevent campus violence (Bouffard, 2012a). While only a minority expressed interest in obtaining a CCW permit outside of that field of study, the majority of students expressed a fear of violence on campus and concerns of the campus police force's ability to assist them in the case of violence. This study presents a slight paradox, as students recognize potential danger and see the institution as incapable of protecting them, but still more students are opposed to acquiring a weapon than those willing to carry.

Faculty Opinions

As was discussed by Patten et al. (2013), it is important to consider not only the opinions of students in the debate on the allowance of concealed weapons on college campuses, but of the campus population as a whole. Specifically, the opinions of college faculty and staff must be considered as well. Bennett, Kraft, and Grubb (2012) sought to find the opinion of college faculty in a study of a Georgia university. Of all faculty members petitioned, 158 (rough 60% of the total faculty) responded to the survey (p. 339). The study asked faculty opinions on a Georgia law which allowed those with a concealed weapon permit to carry their weapons in a variety of institutions where they were previously prohibited, such as public parks and restaurants, with plans to expand the laws to cover institutions such as churches and, eventually, schools (Bennett et al., 2012). The study found that a "majority of respondents opposed Georgia's new gun

legislation...almost 56% of those respondents answering this question “strongly opposed”...another 14% opposed this law” (Bennett et al., 2012, p. 341). Going on, the study found 78% of those who responded opposed the legislation being expanded to allow CCW on college campuses (Bennett, et al., 2012).

Many of the aforementioned studies showed small reports on faculty opinions which closely mirrored the opinions shown in Bennett et al. (2012). This all ties well into the point made by Patten et al. (2013), that the entire population of a college campus should be surveyed and taken account of when a decision is being made. The opinion of faculty is especially important because there is a chance they could be the target of student aggression, and they come in contact with a large volume of students each day. As one respondent to the study issued by Bennett et al. (2012) wrote, “This is all guised in a form that suggests increased protection. However, I would feel far less safe wondering who in the room is ‘packing’” (p. 349). Several of the aforementioned studies have shown that, on the whole, both students and faculty oppose allowing CCW holders to carry their weapons on campus and find the idea of weapons on campus to be frightening or to at least to cause nervousness (Doubleday, 2013; Patten et al., 2013).

A Campus with CCW

As has been mentioned throughout this thesis, it is difficult to see the impact of allowing CCW on campus because cases of extreme violence on college campuses are very rare (Davies, 2008; Patten et al., 2013). As was shown in the previous section, people fear what a college campus with concealed weapons could be like, expressing concerns of increased violence and, in general, an environment that feels less safe.

Fennell (2009) observes:

One argument is that students...are not mature enough to handle the stressors of college and emerging adulthood and may resort to using their weapons to resolve differences. This is clearly a hypothesis based on fear...how many students (faculty and staff) have Concealed Carry Weapon (CCW) permits? How many students with permits would carry weapons on campus, if they had the...right to do so? How often do students with CCW permits carry their firearms? (p. 100)

Essentially, Fennell asks what a campus with CCW would actually look like. While people in all surveys have expressed their fears at the prospect of such a campus, Bouffard, Nobles, Wells, & Cavanaugh (2012b) sought to discover what sort of place this campus would actually be.

Focusing on one university in Texas, Bouffard et al. (2012b), distributed a survey to determine whether lifting the ban on CCW would increase the number of guns being carried on that campus (p. 322). The purpose of this study is to determine if, in the case of a shooter, there is a significant probability of someone with a CCW permit being present to deal with the threat (Bouffard et al., 2012b). Bouffard et al. (2012b) surveyed almost 1400 students at varied times throughout each day, and on different days of the week, asking students if they had a CCW permit; the survey also asked students if the ban was lifted, if they would carry a weapon in class, and, if they did not have a permit, the likelihood they would acquire one and carry a weapon during class hours upon the hypothetical lifting of the ban. The study found that over 80% of all classes during a given day of school would have at least one person in them carrying a concealed handgun if the bans were to be lifted (Bouffard et al., 2012b). However, after applying the projected "daily carry rate" of 40% determined by national statistics on those who have a

valid permit to carry a concealed weapon, the number drops to about one third of classes having at least one person in them who is carrying a handgun (Bouffard et al., 2012b).

This is still a significant number of students available to intervene in a crisis

The difficulty with the study is that it is impossible to know how many people will behave as they stated, whether more people would carry firearms, fewer would carry, not all who claimed they would acquire a permit and then carry would, etc. This same roadblock is faced by all surveys when attempting to make predictions about how a decision will impact future statistics. What can be taken away from the study is that the number of weapons on the campus would not be overwhelming. Bouffard et al. (2012b) go on to find that the likelihood of more than one legally concealed gun being present in the classroom is not very high. Considering the fact that there will be a number of guns spread throughout the student population during normal class hours, a new question arises.

The important question is not simply how many guns will be present on a campus, but what impact will they have on the campus? Since Bouffard et al. (2012b) determined that there will indeed be guns present on campus, and that decent proportions of students would carry firearms, it must be determined whether or not these firearms will have a negative impact on campus safety. La Valle (2013) provides a study which views raw data in an attempt to find the unbiased facts about gun laws and their effects on crime rates. While this study was not done on college campuses, the data shows the effects of gun control laws in comparison to CCW in a community and their effectiveness on curbing gun violence.

La Valle's (2013) study estimates the impact of four separate types of "gun control" measures and related laws on the homicide rates over 31 years in over 50 United States cities (p. 6). Unfortunately, La Valle's (2013) study is restricted to only measuring homicide rates because "[h]omicide is the most reliably identified and reported of all index crimes; whereas other violent crimes such as, say, rape, assault or even burglary are frequently subject to various situational ambiguities or investigational contingencies..." (p. 13). The study also admits that a menagerie of factors play into the homicide rate of a given city, such as socioeconomic status of the area, religious influence, racial concerns in the community, and alcohol consumption, so gun presence is not the only deciding element in the number of murders (La Valle, 2013). La Valle (2013) also discusses that guns laws are more likely to affect specific sorts of homicide over others since the relationship between the murderer and victim cannot be shown in the statistics, however, "the larger question is whether the net effect of these laws are lives saved, people killed, or neither" (p. 14).

The study found overall that communities with CCW laws in place showed a "statistically significant reduction in homicide of approximately seventeen percent for gun homicide and roughly fourteen percent for total homicide" (p. 20). On the other side of the debate, communities with stricter gun control laws showed no significant change in their homicide rates (La Valle, 2013). La Valle (2013) concludes that his study suggests "that "personal protection" approaches probably do serve some sort of deterrent or preventative function, whereas "gun-control" measures most likely have not exerted the desired effect" (p. 20).

Plassman and Whitley (2003) provide a similar study to La Valle, looking at county data from the whole of the United States from an over twenty-year-long period to see the relation between CCW laws and the murder rates of these counties (p. 1313). The study observes the crime rates before and after the adoption of conceal and carry laws to determine if the passing of the laws had any impact on the crime rates. Plassman and Whitley (2003) found:

The first six years during which the right-to-carry law is in effect are associated with about ten percent declines in murder and rape and an eight percent decline in robbery rates...by the second full year of the law, all four violent crime categories have experienced large drops, with murder falling by 5% and robbery 8.7%. (p. 1337)

Despite allegations by opposition that the falling of the crime rates was a mere coincidence, Plassman and Whitley (2003) insist that all decreases were a direct result of the passing of the laws. The article continues to provide data showing that, even when two counties are bordering one another, the county with CCW laws experiences drops in crime rates, even if the other is experiencing increases (Plassman & Whitley, 2003). Considering the combined data of Plassman and Whitley's study and La Valle's study, it is very difficult to argue that allowing CCW on a college campus will not decrease the crime rates on the campus. Granted, both studies were done in regards to communities outside of the college spectrum, but the comparison is easy to make, and the data is applicable to the college campus scenario. As was stated earlier, colleges can be considered to be like small communities.

For and Against

Those who stand for personal protection via firearms and those who blame the firearms for the violence share almost no common ground in the argument and refuse to budge even an inch on the subject (La Valle, 2013). While both sides present studies and evidence to support their views, they are often biased and warped by “the ideologically charged nature of the debate” (La Valle, 2013, p. 3). La Valle provides a study which looks at raw data in an attempt to find the unbiased facts about gun laws and their effects on crime rates and possibly a starting point at which actual progress in the debate can be made. This practice should be encouraged because facts do not take a side, so they should be heavily considered when analyzing both sides of a debate.

Those Opposed

Those opposed to CCW on campus (which is the majority at most universities) believe more weapons would result in a dangerous environment, often prone to suicides and murders. Many against CCW point out the potential dangers of weapons on campuses, such as Siebel’s (2008) concern that allowing CCW would result in students bringing “their AK-47 assault rifles with them to show off while guzzling beer” (p. 321). Fennell (2009) also states that “our greatest fear is that in an outburst of anger one of these individuals with a concealed weapon would use it against an innocent person(s) on campus” (p. 100). Even La Valle (2013), in his study on gun control laws and their effects on homicide rates in communities, points out that his study was unable (like all similar studies) to:

- ...link [CCW] laws directly to (a) crimes committed with actual permit holders,
- (b) overall patterns of gun carrying, (c) guns owned by permit holders, (d) guns

stolen from permit holders, or (e) actual incidents of permit holders defending themselves with guns. (p. 20)

Therefore, statistical evidence must be taken under the consideration that not every variable can be measured. However, Plassman and Whitley (2003) do offer a response to this, finding that “[after the adoption of CCW laws,] overall homicides declined by 6.5%, firearm homicides fell by twenty-one percent” (p. 1358). Therefore, it is highly unlikely that an increase in gun-carrying permit holders would lead to them being the ones to commit more crimes.

It is not hard to observe college students and wholeheartedly believe them to be unfit to carry firearms. Alcohol, according to Siebel (2008), is related to 95% of violent crimes which take place on campuses and almost 66% of college suicides (p. 325). It is not a far stretch to imagine these conflicts to become fatal if firearms were introduced into such an atmosphere. As Siebel (2008) states, “Drinking alcohol can make even a police officer “unfit for duty.” What does it make a gun-carrying college student?” (p. 326). He goes on to state:

Two studies of college students found that those who owned guns were more likely than the average student to: (1) engage in binge drinking, (2) need an alcoholic drink first thing in the morning, (3) use cocaine or crack, (4) be arrested for a DUI, (4) vandalize property, and (5) get in trouble with police. (p. 326)

Obviously, Siebel does not say how much more likely these students were to engage in these activities, and it is not known if the amount is statistically significant. Furthermore, most of Siebel’s allegations stem from assumption that the person with the gun will be irresponsible, which further stems from the assumption that college students are

irresponsible. This is shown in his assertion that guns on a college campus would increase the chance of an accidental death due to the event of “a careless gun owner might empty a firearm but not notice that a round remains in the chamber” (Siebel, 2008, p. 330). Siebel’s central assumption is that weapons make an environment unsafe, which directly contradicts Plassman and Whitley’s (2003) observation, “As for accidental gun deaths and gun suicides...the passage of right-to-carry laws does not affect either death rate. That result holds when examining all people as well those under age twenty” (p. 1359). It is important that it does not affect the rates for those under twenty, as that is the target group which many would fear might engage in reckless and self-endangering behavior when introduced to handguns.

Those in Favor

Those in favor of allowing those with permits to carry a concealed weapon believe in the right of a citizen to protect themselves from dangers, pointing out that “traditional “gun control” policies have variously failed to prevent gun killings of all sorts...they only prevent law-abiding citizens from protecting themselves...” (La Valle, 2013, p. 2). While their view is not held by the majority of citizens in the United States, nor by most students and faculty, as was shown in the aforementioned studies, the argument is sound; at the time of the Virginia Tech shootings, the school had a policy banning handguns, but it did very little to prevent a man from entering the campus with two handguns and murdering thirty-two people who were unable to defend themselves.

Citing an article on guns and violence in America, La Valle (2013) says, “Both “guns” and “crime” are emotionally laden symbols that evoke strongly held and not always rational feelings, emotions and concerns...” (p. 3). Both sides of the debate over

gun control are subject to irrationality and strong emotions. Unfortunately, as was mentioned before, neither side wishes to concede ground and admit that compromise might be necessary. For example, some gun control laws could be passed which would prevent many dangers without violating the right of someone to carry a weapon and defend themselves, such as requiring mental background checks for purchasing handguns and closing the loopholes in the law provided by gun shows (La Valle, 2013).

However, those who wish to allow students the option to defend themselves rally behind the statement made by Students for Concealed Carry on Campus:

What is worse than allowing an execution-style massacre to continue uncontested? How could any action with the potential to stop or slow a deranged killer intent on slaughtering victim after victim be considered “worse” than allowing that killer to continue undeterred? (Bouffard et al., 2012b, p. 320)

A student’s right to protect himself cannot be overstated. As was shown at the beginning of this thesis, it is a basic Constitutional right which has been upheld in the public sector multiple times. Both Doubleday (2013) and Fennell (2009) state that a fear of being around someone who might be carrying a firearm is not rational, because United States citizens are carrying concealed weapons and have been for years, so any time a student is off campus, there is a chance they are near a concealed weapon. Allowing CCW in a community has never shown to cause an increase in crime, suicide, or accidental shootings, and it will not cause such an increase on a college campus either. While a college campus may fall under the private sector and not be afforded the constitutional protections of the public sector, evidence from the public sector shows that the college

campus, which is much like a self-contained community will be safer if afforded those protections.

Conclusion

The college campus is a complex environment with innumerable variables at work in all situations. Considering this, the likelihood of a single factor, such as the presence of firearms, being to blame for a school shooting is not likely. While blind fear over the availability of firearms will always be present, it should not hamper the movement toward a practice which will allow students to protect themselves when the school is unable to. Students acquire CCW permits to protect themselves and those around them, because the student population does not believe the school is capable doing so. Although many fear it will be like pouring oil on a fire, there has never been any evidence that introducing concealed weapons to an environment has had this effect. Students have a legal right to carry firearms; concealed weapons are an effective measure in the prevention of violent crimes; concealed weapons promote a safe environment and will be able to protect students better than the current campus security is able to; and it is unlikely to promote a culture of unease on campus, as most people are unaware of the presence of firearms around them on a daily basis or of their own schools policy on such a matter. In conclusion, a policy allowing students to carry a concealed weapon on campus with a valid permit should be enacted on college campuses as a deterrent to potential campus shooters.

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