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POLITICAL ORIENTATION AND ATTITUDES TOWARD GUN OWNERSHIP:  
WHAT ROLE DOES MORALITY PLAY?

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study was conducted in order to better understand the relationship between political orientation and gun ownership. First, the relationship between political orientation and how comfortable one is with other people owning guns was assessed. Then the five moral foundations as conceptualized by Haidt and Joseph (2004) were introduced in order to better understand this relationship. To accomplish this, 304 undergraduate students completed the Gun Ownership Survey. The survey contained questions about gun opinions and behaviors, and questions of moral relevance and moral judgment as developed by Graham et al. (2011). The results of the study indicate that the more relevant an individual finds the values of harm and care, the less comfortable they are with other people owning guns. In opposition, the more that individuals find relevant the morals of fairness and reciprocity, the more comfortable they are with other people owning guns.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Gun ownership has been studied from a sociological standpoint in much depth. There have been studies revolving around the age, the geographical location, and the underlying idea of respect and honor that comes with owning a gun (Young 1989; Primm, Regoli, and Hewitt 2008; Felson and Pare 2010). However, there has not been any research in the area of people's ideas and beliefs about morality and the relationship those ideas and beliefs have concerning the ownership of a gun. In order to better understand the numerous political debates about guns in the United States it is important to determine the morals and values behind the thought process that goes into these often-unflinching opinions. Using Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt and Joseph 2004), a theory that describes five different systems of morality, the thoughts and ideas behind gun-related opinions, specifically ownership, will be analyzed. The review of the existing literature will be split up into three sections: the development of Moral Foundations Theory, gun data and the political debate, and the moralities that underlie political orientation.

#### **The Development of Moral Foundations Theory**

Morality has been a subject of study and interest for centuries and the influences of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle are still relevant even today (Haidt 2008). Humans have passed down ideas of morality by telling stories that transmit beliefs about how we ought to behave and about what is sacred. Modern morality has been evolved from these initial concepts (Haidt 2008). Moral intuitions are developed alongside cultural institutions and practices, and it is these innate, yet modifiable, mechanisms that are used by adults to teach virtues, vices, and

morality to children (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009). Haidt (2008) describes two types of perspectives on how morality has developed in society; the liberal narrative and the community lost narrative. The liberal narrative states that modern, democratic, capitalist societies can increase the freedom and the pleasure of its people. The community lost narrative argues that the end of the small, close neighborhood has caused people to become more selfish, and that as modern urbanization grows, the more hedonistic and the less moral individuals will become.

On the level of a single individual, the developmental story of morality starts with respecting one's parents, but becomes more sophisticated as experiences with rules, fairness, and reciprocity occur during interactions with peers (Haidt 2008). One of the most influential figures in moral psychology, Lawrence Kohlberg (1969), argued that the highest level of morality is the ability to go beyond the rules of society and identify universal ideas of fairness and justice. The ideas of harm and care have been the primary focus of study in moral psychology with three separate ideas about these rules that people have. There are moral rules that exist to keep people safe; social-conventional rules that do not necessarily involve the protection of people and can therefore be adjusted; and finally personal rules that include beliefs about morals and values on the individual level (Haidt 2008). This type of cognitive-developmental approach to morality, in which people organize morality into different domains, is what has led Haidt (2007) to a new synthesis of morality that provides the groundwork for Moral Foundations Theory.

Moral Foundations Theory was developed based on prior research conducted on morality and emotion in the 1980s and 1990s, which featured a variety of theories seeking to explain how human morality has been developed (Haidt 2007). Several traditional economic models of success suggest that striving for self-interested achievements is optimal, however, there are social motivations beyond self-interest that have led to the development of moral actions and moral decision-making. Haidt (2007) states that there are three principles behind moral development, the first being intuitive primacy. Intuitive primacy is based on the two kinds of cognitions that

occur in moral psychology, moral intuition and moral reasoning. Moral intuition refers to the fast, automatic, and emotionally driven reactions to events that a person will use to determine if something is morally good or bad without weighing any evidence involved in the event. Moral reasoning is the sustained mental activity a person is conscious of that evaluates the information associated with the event in order to reach a final moral judgment (Haidt 2007). For instance, given the case of child abuse, the first moral intuition a person will have is the negative feelings they will have toward the act and will then consciously consider the circumstances in making a complete moral judgment of the situation.

The second principle is that “moral thinking is for social doing” (Haidt 2007:999). In people’s moral reasoning they use whatever information is most useful to them, making the judged individual’s actions far less important than what the observer thinks that they saw. Because of this, people are able to fabricate and confidently justify their own behaviors on a moral basis, whether the explanation is true or not. In order to function effectively within the social world and avoid stigmatization, people need to be able to morally justify their actions about which others will make quick, self-serving, and sometimes, unsound decisions. The third principle covers both altruism toward kin and reciprocal altruism between people. This aspect of morality enables the construction of communities that have established values about how its members should behave, what costs there are for violators, and what benefits there are for cooperators (Haidt 2007).

In addition to the three principles of morality that have been shaped by past research, Haidt (2007) offers a fourth principle: that morality is about more than harm and fairness. Most research in moral psychology focuses on two foundations in describing the components that make up morality; the domain of harm and care, and the domain of altruism, fairness, justice, and reciprocity. However, Haidt (2007) argues that there are five moral foundations from which humans construct their communities: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty,

authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. These five value systems of morality are what make up the conceptualization of Moral Foundations Theory first developed by Haidt and Joseph (2004) and further expanded by Haidt and Graham (2007).

Moral Foundations Theory states that there are five systems, or foundations, of morality that are all available to learn, but may be developed in different proportions in people depending on their learning experiences (Haidt and Graham 2007). The first of these moral foundations is harm/care. This refers to the level of sensitivity a person has when observing a cruel or harmful act done to another and the feeling of approval that occurs when such an act is prevented, measuring in a sense their compassion and kindness. The second moral foundation is fairness/reciprocity, which corresponds most to the ideas of justice, equality, and individual rights. Another of the five domains of Moral Foundations Theory is in-group/loyalty. This domain deals with the ideas that are developed as a result of living in a social-based culture that values the cohesion of individuals and the sacrifice of personal needs for the good of the group. The moral domain of authority/respect is rooted in the idea that good leadership coupled with a source of legitimate authority is to be valued and traditions (whether they be societal, regional, family, etc.) that have been passed down through time should be respected. The fifth and last moral foundation is purity/sanctity. It revolves primarily around a feeling of disgust for various acts that may be considered, especially in a religious sense, to be harmful to the body and that degrade a person (Haidt and Graham 2007). These five foundations of morality will be the primary focus in assessing individuals' values and beliefs about gun ownership.

### **Gun Data and the Political Debate**

There has been a tremendous amount of research done on gun ownership from both a criminological and sociological standpoint. The breadth of this research has varied across the

different studies that have been conducted producing numerous findings. Beyond the research, however, is the much more widely known political debate concerning the ownership of firearms that has often been in the public spotlight. There are two parts to the gun debate: one involves the sociological study of the relationships between gun ownership and crimes, and the other revolves around political arguments in interpreting the Second Amendment (Cook 2013). Those who are pro-gun heavily promote the idea that owning a gun for the purposes of self-defense serves as a deterrent to many types of crimes, whether true or not. Scholarly research, however, indicates the opposite; that gun ownership can actually be harmful.

Azrael and Hemenway (2000) examined the relationship between gun ownership and the risks that come with keeping one in the home. Of the 1,906 respondents to their questionnaire, only 1% reported using a gun in self-defense and 5% reported that a hostile gun display had occurred in the home, indicating that gun use at home is more likely to be directed at a family member than an intruder. The results also indicated that other weapons are more commonly used than guns in self-defense and that when guns are used in self-defense, it overwhelmingly occurs outside of the home (Azrael and Hemenway, 2000).

Cook (2013) reported that in the last 30 years, about one million Americans have died from gunshot wounds whether by homicide, suicide, or accident. Additionally, in 2009, roughly 68% of the 18,361 homicides in the United States were committed with a gun and, 44,466 nonfatal gunshot wounds that occurred during criminal assaults were treated in emergency rooms. However, Cook (2013), states that taking away guns may not lead to the diminishment of the desire to commit crimes. In fact, research conducted by Kleck and Gertz (1998) suggests that carrying a gun can actually decrease the chance of an individual's victimization. They concluded that most gun carrying is done for self-defense and that doing so can deter offenders from taking criminal action. However, this assumes that an offender is aware that a person might be carrying a gun (Kleck and Gertz 1998).

Although taking away guns may not affect the desire to commit crimes, it may greatly diminish the amount of homicides that take place during the commission of other crimes (Cook 2013). Zimring's (1968) study suggests that assailants often do not demonstrate a carefully calculated intent to kill, especially when they are drunk or enraged. In such cases, the death of the victim depends not on the intent of the offender, but on how dangerous the weapon is. In communities where the prevalence of guns is higher, the rates of homicides, and more importantly, the rates of homicides that took place over the course of a robbery are higher. Cook (2013) concludes that although limiting the amount of guns in an area would not effect the rate of violent crimes, it could reduce the rate of homicides that take place during the commission of those crimes.

Despite the amount of research that has been done regarding guns, the much more publically know debates have occurred in the realm of politics in interpreting the Second Amendment. These debates revolve around the requirements that should be in place for owning a gun and more importantly what rights individuals have regarding guns in the first place. In the *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008), it was held that the Second Amendment provides a personal right for individuals to keep a handgun in the home for protection. With the decision that this right extends to the states through the incorporation of the Second Amendment in *McDonald v. Chicago* (2010), many of the restrictions established by each state on gun ownership have been challenged. However, federal regulations are still in place that seek to restrict who is able to obtain a gun. Those with prior, serious criminal records as well as those who have a history of mental illness are blocked from buying weapons. This of course does not limit the secondary market or the obtainment of guns through friends or family members (Cook 2013).

The continuous political debates that surround regulations of gun ownership often take place between the two dominant political ideologies in the United States; conservative and liberal. In general, liberals are more supportive of stricter gun control and gun safety regulations

(Moorhouse and Wanner 2006; Smith 2002) while conservatives tend to defend the ownership of firearms with the Second Amendment and seek relaxed restriction on guns (Cook 2013). In researching the origins of these opposing opinions, Primm et al. (2008) has found several possible explanations. Rural Americans on average are more conservative and it is in these areas that people are more likely to be safely introduced to guns at younger ages for the purposes of hunting and farming. This is the opposite of what may be experienced by the more liberal, urban Americans whose first experience with guns would come later in life, and potentially through the exposure to crime. It may be through these experiences that a higher level of fear of guns is generated in liberals, therefore placing them on the side of stricter gun control (Primm et al. 2008). However these contending views on gun ownership may have emerged, a polarization between the two political ideologies is usually automatically identified without any further exploration into the moral values that underlie the opposing opinions.

### **The Morality of Political Orientation**

Generally, liberals are most concerned with individual liberty or being as free as possible, while conservatives are most inclined to believe in the idea that people need the constraints that come with authority, institution, and tradition in order to maintain peaceful relationships within society (Graham et al. 2009). In order to understand how liberal and conservative ideologies can emerge differently in people, it is important to emphasize that although the five moral foundations identified by Haidt (and described above) are believed to be innate to human psychological development, this does not mean that they cannot be shaped by culture just as personality traits are shaped in early stages of life. To acquire insight into what specific values liberals and conservatives have, Graham et al. (2009) conducted a study examining the relationship between individuals' political orientation and how much they rely on each of the five

moral foundations in making moral judgments, hypothesizing that liberals will rely most heavily on the individual focused foundations of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity while conservatives will rely on all five foundations equally in making moral decisions.

The first study, focusing on moral relevance, was comprised of participants recruited from the Harvard-operated, Project Implicit website. Participants were required to rate how relevant different concerns were to them when making moral judgments. They first read the question, “When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking?” (Graham et al. 2009:1032). Next they were asked to rate 15 items that measured each of the five moral foundations of harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, authority/respect, in-group/loyalty, and purity/sanctity. For example, an item measuring fairness/reciprocity was “Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights” (Graham et al. 2009:1044). The second study retained the moral relevance items from the first, but required participants to make moral judgments and to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements written to represent the five moral foundations.

The results from both studies indicated that liberals reported the individual focused foundations of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity to be more relevant than conservatives did. Conservatives also rated harm/care and fairness/reciprocity as the most relevant, but in comparison to liberals, rated the other three, more socially binding foundations, to be more relevant. Similar results were found for moral judgments. Liberals tended to show the greatest differentiation between their ratings of the individual focused and socially binding foundations. In summation, liberals found the foundations of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity to be the most relevant in making moral decisions, more so than conservatives. Conservatives, while still finding harm/care and fairness/reciprocity to be the most relevant in making decisions, found the other three foundations (in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, purity/sanctity) to be much more relevant than liberals (Graham et al. 2009).

### **The Current Study**

Based on the previous findings and information, the current study examines the relationship between the five moral foundations and how comfortable someone is with other people owning guns. The goal is to ascertain whether the moral foundations explain the relationship that has long been observed between political orientation and attitudes toward gun ownership. In understanding the underlying beliefs and values that go into decisions about gun ownership, beyond or through one's political orientation, more accurate and effective policies and regulations can begin to be administered. Gun laws are often the focus of heated debate, and those debates are usually characterized by political polarization with liberals on one side and conservatives on the other. However, the intricacies of the morals and values that go into these opinions are rarely examined. In assessing how comfortable an individual is with other people owning guns, with political orientation and moral foundations in mind, a better picture can be developed of what people would find acceptable in terms of gun regulations, one that focuses on common ground rather than on ideological divisions.

This study will begin by first examining the relationship between political orientation and attitudes toward people owning guns. Next, the importance of each moral foundation will be factored into the relationship. The reason that level of comfort with others owning guns was chosen is because it is a question that captures how people feel about their social world, rather than their own individual desire to carry a gun. It is a better question than of simply asking whether or not the respondent owns a gun in that it allows the opportunity to capture both pro-gun attitudes and anti-gun attitudes in a more comprehensive way. For example, an individual who is anti-gun would most likely answer negatively to questions about gun owning and carrying. However, it is possible that a supporter of gun rights may not actually own a gun themselves, which would therefore render the question of personal gun ownership an ineffective measure in

terms of this study. Upon conducting this study, I hypothesize that liberals are less likely than conservatives to be comfortable with other people owning guns. My second hypothesis is that when factored in, the five moral foundations will have a significant effect on how comfortable a person is with other people owning guns, over and above the effect of their political orientation.

## Chapter 2

### Methods

This study was conducted with the approval of the Pennsylvania State University's Office of Research Protection (Protocol # 44132). The data was collected through the distribution of the Gun Ownership Survey (Appendix A) to 346 undergraduate students at the Pennsylvania State University. Using the Qualtrics survey software website, the survey was distributed to students by contacting the professors of the courses they were currently enrolled in. With the professors' permission, participants were offered one percentage point of extra credit in the course for completing the survey. Of the 346 surveys distributed, a total of 313 surveys were completed, and after disqualifying respondents who did not complete the survey in its entirety, the final sample size consisted of 304 participants (response rate = 85%).

The Gun Ownership Survey was comprised of four different sections. The first two sections contained statements from Graham's et al. (2011) Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ) that measured how much a respondent endorsed each of the five moral foundations. Section one asked the question: "When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking?" Respondents were then asked to indicate how relevant a series of 16 statements (3 for each of the 5 foundation and 1 control statement) were on a six point Likert scale (0=not at all relevant, 5=extremely relevant). Some examples of the statements include: "Whether or not someone suffered emotionally" for the foundation of harm/care and "Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights" for the foundation of fairness/reciprocity. The control statement was "Whether or not someone was good at math." Section two asked respondents to read a series of 16 statements and indicate how much they agreed with them on a six point Likert scale (0=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

Examples of the statements include: “Respect for authority is something all children need to learn” for the foundation of authority/respect and “It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself” for the foundation of in-group/loyalty. A complete version of the MFQ can be found in Appendix B.

The third section of the survey contained questions about gun ownership and gun carrying behaviors. Besides basic questions about whether or not someone owned a gun and for what purpose, or carried a gun with a concealed weapons permit, other questions were included such as: “How likely is it that you will own a gun in the future?” (rated on a five point Likert scale with 0=very unlikely and 5=very likely). The primary question that was examined in this study was: “How comfortable are you with other people owning guns?” rated on a five point Likert scale with 0=very uncomfortable and 5=very comfortable.

The final section of the survey was a demographics section asking about gender, importance of religion, race, and political orientation. For gender, males were coded as 1 and females as 2. The importance of religion was rated on a four point Likert scale (1=extremely important and 4=not at all important). Race was recoded from the six options available on the survey into two (0 = non-White and 1 = White). Political orientation was indicated on a seven point Likert scale (1=very conservative and 7=very liberal) with an additional eighth point allowing respondents to indicate an orientation other than liberal or conservative. The reason the demographics section was placed at the end of the survey was to avoid making respondents more aware of their political beliefs, and therefore avoiding “priming” in responses to the questions about guns.

## Chapter 3

### Results

As shown in Table 1, the sample consisted of an almost equal amount of males and females ( $M = 1.57$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) and more Whites than non-Whites ( $M = 0.75$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ ). Overall, religion was less important ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) and respondents' political orientations were almost equally split across the spectrum ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ). The respondents rated the moral foundations of harm/care ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) and fairness/reciprocity ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) to be the most important. Both in-group/loyalty ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) and authority/respect ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ) were rated only somewhat more important than average, while respondents were split in their rating of how important the foundation of purity/sanctity was ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ). Finally, only slightly more respondents indicated that they are comfortable with other people owning guns ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics			
Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Political Orientation	4.36	1.59	1-7
Gender	1.57	0.49	1-2
Race	0.75	0.42	0-1
Importance of Religion	3.00	0.86	1-4
Harm/Care	4.42	0.70	1-6
Fairness/Reciprocity	4.50	0.65	1-6
In-Group/Loyalty	3.95	0.79	1-6
Authority/Respect	4.06	0.73	1-6
Purity/Sanctity	3.55	0.89	1-6
Comfort with Other People Owning Guns	2.98	1.22	0-5
n=304			

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

The first relationship that was examined was between political orientation and how comfortable one is with other people owning guns, controlling for gender, race, and importance of religion using a multiple linear regression model. As shown in Table 2, Model 1, a negative correlation of -0.120 between political orientation and comfort with gun ownership was found,  $r = 0.324$ ,  $n = 304$ ,  $p = .008$ , controlling for gender, race, and importance of religion. This relationship between political orientation and comfort level is significant at the 0.01 level. It indicates that the more liberal a person is, the less comfortable they are with other people owning guns, supporting the first hypothesis of this study.

The next relationship that was analyzed, as shown in Table 2, Model 2, was between ratings of the five moral foundations and how comfortable one is with other people owning guns, controlling for gender, race, and importance of religion, and taking into consideration the initial predictor variable of political orientation. When factoring in ratings of the moral foundations, the correlation between political orientation and comfort level weakens, from -0.120 to -0.079, and no longer retains statistical significance ( $p > 0.05$ ). The three socially binding foundations of in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity do not have statistically significant relationships with how comfortable one is with other people owning guns. The remaining foundations of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, while being statistically significant predictors of comfort level, do so in opposite directions. The foundation of harm/care is negatively correlated (-0.543) with comfort level and is significant at the 0.001 level. The more someone cares about the values associated with the moral foundation of harm/care, the less comfortable they feel with other people owning guns. Conversely, the foundation of fairness/reciprocity is positively associated (0.281) with comfort level, albeit weaker statistical significant ( $p < 0.05$  level). This indicates that the more someone cares about the values pertaining to the moral foundation of fairness/reciprocity, the more comfortable they are with other people owning guns.

Table 2. Comfort with Gun Ownership and Moral Foundations				
	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	Significance	B	Significance
Political Orientation	-0.120	**	-0.079	
Gender	-0.621	***	-0.472	**
Race	0.048		0.000	
Importance of Religion	0.017		-0.049	
Harm/Care	-		-0.543	***
Fairness/Reciprocity	-		0.281	*
In-Group/Loyalty	-		0.087	
Authority/Respect	-		0.060	
Purity/Sanctity	-		-0.114	
Constant	4.401	***	5.178	***
R-squared	0.105		0.166	
* p < 0.05				
** p < 0.01				
*** p < 0.001				

**Table 2. Comfort with Gun Ownership and Moral Foundations**

## Chapter 4

### Discussion and Conclusion

Given the previous literature it is not surprising that the more liberal a respondent's political orientation the less comfortable they are with other people owning guns. However, the results that were produced when factoring in the moral foundations provide a much more interesting picture about the values that are behind opinions on guns. The second hypothesis was supported in that the moral foundations have a significant effect on comfort with gun ownership, but there are notable differences between the foundations individually. It was found that the more relevant a person finds the moral foundation of harm/care, the less comfortable they are with other people owning guns, but the more they find the foundation of fairness/reciprocity relevant, the more comfortable they are.

The correlation between harm/care and comfort level could have multiple interpretations. People, especially those who believe that gun control can reduce crime and violence, have likely come to visualize guns as symbolizing violence, crime, murder, and war (Olmstead 1988; Kleck 2009). It is an easy connection to make. A gun, unlike many other weapons that can be used in various alternative manners, is a device that is specifically designed to cause harm and potentially death. In the case of hunting animals, where concerns of morality may be different than humans and where a gun may be considered to be more of a tool than a weapon, its original intention is still to inflict harm. Additionally, even though collectible guns are rarely used in crimes, those not involved in the gun-collecting community, largely view the hobby as morally questionable (Olmstead 1988). The thought of other people owning guns may be tapping into people's automatic, emotionally driven moral intuitions about harm.

In examining this association deeper, the moral foundation of harm/care has a connection to Celinska's (2007) work that involves the examination of the relationship of gun ownership to the concepts of individualism and collectivism. An individualist person would be one who values such attributes as independence, self-reliance, and autonomy and places importance on personal achievement. A collectivist would favor policies and behaviors that benefit the group, or society, as a whole. Although the foundation of harm/care is considered by Haidt and colleagues to be an individualistic concern, the values associated with it fit into Celinska's (2007) definition of a collectivist in that it places a high level of importance on the well being of others, in addition to the self. Concerning guns, a collectivist would more than likely support the idea of stricter gun control and be less comfortable with other people owning guns due to the belief that reducing the number of guns would be beneficial to society as a whole.

However, the results of this study also indicate that the more a person endorses the values within the foundation of fairness/reciprocity, the more comfortable they are with other people owning guns. Fairness/reciprocity, representing the values of equality and justice, could be positively associated with comfort level because respondents, although uncomfortable with other people owning guns from a safety standpoint, do not believe in obstructing the lives of others. Stricter gun control regulations could interfere with the lives of people who own guns for hunting, target shooting, and for self-protection (Kleck, 2009). This may be the case of Smith's (2002) examination of the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey data from 1996-1999 in which he found that support for safety related gun control measures was stronger than support for gun sale related measures. It was within this data that more respondents supported the idea of implementing required safety courses for both current and prospective gun owners. However, only 13% of the sample indicated that they believed a total ban on handguns was the best option. Essentially, from a harm/care moral standpoint, the idea of other people owning guns may cause a negative reaction due a gun's primary purpose of harming others and its associations

with crime. However, from a fairness/reciprocity moral point of view, the thought of other people owning guns may produce a positive reaction since respondents may condemn restricting the rights of others.

Additionally, no significant association was found in the relationships between comfort level and the other three moral foundations, but there are various possibilities as to why this occurred. For example, in examining the moral foundation of authority/respect, it seems plausible that a relationship with this domain and comfort level could have been found. Ownership of a gun may be more prevalent among those individuals who value such traditions that have been passed down to them. In these cases, ownership of a gun may be more based around traditions that involve hunting or recreation. Therefore, it is plausible to think that one who places a high value on tradition may be more comfortable with other people owning guns. However, given the limitation that the study's sample consisted of students from a northeastern university, such traditions may not have been fully captured. Furthermore, the moral foundation of authority/respect contains much more than respect for tradition. The other aspects that it is intended to represent, such as good leadership with legitimate authority, may not have much connection to people's opinions about guns.

The moral domain of purity/sanctity does not have any obvious association with a person's level of comfort with others owning guns. Nothing is indicative of a relationship beyond the most basic sense that purity and sanctity are somewhat related to the idea of feelings toward harm and care. This moral domain is tied to the valuation of religious beliefs and ideas about what distinguishes behaviors from being considered pure or disgusting. In terms of guns, Young (1989) found that although Protestants above other groups were more likely to own guns, it was due more to the individual's cultural background and regional location, rather than their religion itself.

Even though this study has raised some interesting points about morality and guns, it

does have its limitations. The results that were produced cannot be considered generalizable to populations beyond the sample. Although college students can be a culturally representative group, the relatively small sample size combined with its single location do not allow for conclusions to be made beyond its scope. In addition, there is potential for bias within the sample. There has been research (Kleck 2009) suggesting that better educated individuals are less likely to see a need for self-protection at home, therefore increasing the likelihood that they will favor gun regulation, resulting in the stronger correlation between harm/care and comfort level.

This study also only makes a small contribution to answering the question of what is socially and morally acceptable concerning guns. It indicates people's moral values about harm and fairness are linked to their opinions about guns. However, these attitudes are only measured in terms of how comfortable they are with other people owning guns. Debates over gun control contain many more arguments than this particular of concern. In order to get a more inclusive examination of opinions about guns, future research is necessary that not only asks questions of morality and guns, but specific questions that target opinions about gun control legislation. For example, the fact that the foundation of in-group/loyalty was not found to have any significance may be due to differences in what the respondents are loyal to in terms of gun regulation. To better illustrate this, an individual who is highly loyal to the greater good of society could feel uncomfortable with other people owning guns. They may feel that more guns are only going to lead to more crime and that a higher level of gun ownership will only hurt society. On the other hand, a different individual may have the same dedication to the greater good, yet their belief may be that more gun ownership leads to a more protected and safe society. Although it is unlikely, this same kind of problem may exist within the relationship between harm/care and comfort level. Without directly asking about their opinions on gun control, the meaning behind the relationship

could be open to different interpretations. Only in answering such questions on a nationally representative level would it be proper to infer widespread social opinion and policy implication.

Nevertheless, the results do suggest that opinions on guns are more than just politically driven. Relying simply on which political party one identifies does not seem sufficient in making decisions about guns, a subject that involves not only the question of personal rights, but of danger and safety as well. Much more research is needed in this area, but in assessing the foundational moral values that guide people's decisions about guns, an important, however small, first step is taken in reaching an acceptable, agreed upon answer to the gun debate.

## Appendix A

### Gun Ownership Survey

Part 1. When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking? Please rate each statement using this scale:

0 = not at all relevant (This consideration has nothing to do with my judgments of right and wrong)

1 = not very relevant

2 = slightly relevant

3 = somewhat relevant

4 = very relevant

5 = extremely relevant (This is one of the most important factors when I judge right and wrong)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone suffered emotionally
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not some people were treated differently than others
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone's action showed love for his or her country
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone was good at math
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone acted unfairly
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society
11. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone did something disgusting

12. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone was cruel
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights
14. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty
15. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not an action caused chaos or disorder
16. \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone acted in a way that God would approve of

Part 2. Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement:

0 = Strongly disagree

1 = Moderately disagree

2 = Slightly disagree

3 = Slightly agree

4 = Moderately agree

5 = Strongly agree

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I am proud of my country's history.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ It is better to do good than to do bad.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Justice is the most important requirement for a society.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.

10. \_\_\_\_\_ Men and women each have different roles to play in society.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ It can never be right to kill a human being.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ I think it's morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ Chastity is an important and valuable virtue.

Part 3. Please answer the following questions about guns.

1. Do you own a gun?
  1. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ No
  
2. What is your primary purpose for owning a gun? Check all that apply.
  1. \_\_\_\_\_ Protection
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ Hunting
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ Target Shooting
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ Collecting
  
3. How many of each kind of gun do you own?
  1. \_\_\_\_\_ Handgun
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ Long Gun
  
4. If you do not own a gun, have you ever considered owning one?
  1. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ No

5. How likely is it that you will own a gun in the future?
1.  Very unlikely
  2.  Somewhat unlikely
  3.  Unsure
  4.  Somewhat likely
  5.  Very likely
6. How comfortable are you with other people owning guns?
1.  Very uncomfortable
  2.  Somewhat uncomfortable
  3.  Neutral
  4.  Somewhat comfortable
  5.  Very comfortable
7. Do you carry a gun with a concealed weapons permit?
1.  Yes
  2.  No
8. If you own a gun, have you ever considered carrying it with a concealed weapons permit?
1.  Yes
  2.  No
9. How likely is it that you will carry a gun in the future?
1.  Very unlikely
  2.  Somewhat unlikely
  3.  Unsure
  4.  Somewhat likely
  5.  Very likely
10. How comfortable are you with other people carrying guns?
1.  Very uncomfortable
  2.  Somewhat uncomfortable
  3.  Neutral
  4.  Somewhat comfortable
  5.  Very comfortable

Part 4. Please answer the following questions about yourself.

1. What is your gender?
  1.  Male
  2.  Female
  
2. What is your race?
  1.  White
  2.  Black
  3.  Asian
  4.  Middle Eastern
  5.  Native American
  6.  Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What is your political orientation?
  1.  Very conservative
  2.  Moderately conservative
  3.  Slightly conservative
  4.  Moderate (middle of the road)
  5.  Slightly liberal
  6.  Moderately liberal
  7.  Very liberal
  8.  Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How important is religion in your daily life?
  1.  Extremely important
  2.  Very important
  3.  Somewhat important
  4.  Not at all important

## Appendix B

### Moral Foundations Questionnaire

Part 1. When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking? Please rate each statement using this scale:

[0] = not at all relevant (This has nothing to do with my judgments of right and wrong)

[1] = not very relevant

[2] = slightly relevant

[3] = somewhat relevant

[4] = very relevant

[5] = extremely relevant (This is one of the most important factors when I judge right and wrong)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone suffered emotionally
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not some people were treated differently than others
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone's action showed love for his or her country
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone was good at math
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone acted unfairly
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone did something disgusting
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone was cruel
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not an action caused chaos or disorder
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone acted in a way that God would approve of

Part 2. Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement:

[0]	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree

\_\_\_\_\_ Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.

\_\_\_\_\_ When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am proud of my country's history.

\_\_\_\_\_ Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.

\_\_\_\_\_ People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.

\_\_\_\_\_ It is better to do good than to do bad.

\_\_\_\_\_ One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.

\_\_\_\_\_ Justice is the most important requirement for a society.

\_\_\_\_\_ People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.

\_\_\_\_\_ Men and women each have different roles to play in society.

\_\_\_\_\_ I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.

\_\_\_\_\_ It can never be right to kill a human being.

\_\_\_\_\_ I think it's morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing.

\_\_\_\_\_ It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself.

\_\_\_\_\_ If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty.

\_\_\_\_\_ Chastity is an important and valuable virtue.

The Moral Foundations Questionnaire (full version, July 2008) by Jesse Graham, Jonathan Haidt, and Brian Nosek. For more information about Moral Foundations Theory and scoring this form, see: [www.MoralFoundations.org](http://www.MoralFoundations.org)

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## ACADEMIC VITA

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### EDUCATION:

The Pennsylvania State University – University Park, PA  
Schreyer Honors College  
Bachelor of Arts Expected: May 2014  
Major: Crime, Law, and Justice Minor: Psychology

Relevant Courses: Race, Crime, and Justice; Violent Crime; Crime and the American Court System; Sentencing; Research Methods in Criminal Justice; European Criminal Justice  
Teaching Assistant for course: Criminology

### EXPERIENCE:

#### United States Marine Corps

2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Expedition Force; Fires Section – Camp Lejuene, NC  
May 2008-April 2010

*Position: Fires Watch Noncommissioned Officer (NCO)*

*Rank: Sergeant (E-5)*

- Honorable Discharge from Marine Corps in April 2010
- Received Certificate of Commendation for actions in Afghanistan
- Assisted with and coordinated 15 HIMARS High Mobility Artillery Rocket System missions
- Wrote the Desktop Operational Procedures for the Fires Watch NCO position
- Gave both the morning and evening Fires Watch Section brief to section leaders
- Deployed to Afghanistan: Operation Enduring Freedom from May 2009 – January 2010
- Promoted to Sergeant (E-5)

5<sup>th</sup> Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company – Okinawa, JP  
May 2006-May 2008

*Position: Fire Support Man*

*Rank: Corporal (E-4)*

- Received Certificate of Commendation for actions in Iraq
- Promoted to Corporal
- Assisted with providing close air support in 4 combat operations
- Assisted with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance in 10 combat operations
- Conducted over 20 foot patrols in the area of operations
- Deployed to Iraq: Operation Iraqi Freedom from March 2007 – September 2007
- Promoted to Lance Corporal

Marine Artillery Scout Observer Course – Fort Sill, OK  
Naval Gunfire School – San Diego, CA  
February 2006-April 2006

*Rank: Private First Class (E-2)*

- Successfully completed Naval Gunfire School
- Successfully completed the Marine Artillery Scout Observer Course
- Promoted to Private First Class

Marine Combat Training – Camp Geiger, NC  
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*Rank: Private (E-1)*

- Successfully completed weapons and tactics training
- Successfully completed urban combat training

Marine Corps Recruit Training – Parris Island, SC  
September 2005-December 2005

*Rank: Recruit*

- Obtained a First Class Physical Fitness Test score
- Successfully completed Marine Corps Boot Camp

#### SPECIAL SKILLS:

Computer Skills – Proficient in Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint; Knowledge in SPSS Statistics software

Foreign Travel – Okinawa, 2 years; Australia, 1 month; Iraq; 7 months; Afghanistan, 9 months; The Netherlands, 1 month

Certifications – CPR

Combat Training – Extensive knowledge of US Military aircraft and artillery ordinance; Extensive knowledge of basic US Military small arms weapons; Extensive knowledge of combat patrol tactics; Gray Belt in Marine Corps Martial Arts Program