



Pistolized Feminism and Beyond: Gendered Perspectives on Gun Possession and Control: interview to Peter Squires

By **Katherine Aguirre** in collaboration with **Natalie M Briggs (GENSAC)**

**This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity. Find below a [complete transcription here](#) and the [video here](#).*

This interview delves into the shifting narratives of gun control from a gender perspective, as part of the Women and Firearms newsletter by Amassuru, which compiles research and opinion pieces from women across Latin America. Moving beyond the traditional portrayal of women solely as victims of armed violence, the discussion highlights how firearm ownership has been reframed as a form of female empowerment—often as part of a broader market-driven and ideological strategy rather than a genuine path to safety.

This interview conducted by Katherine Aguirre, founder of the Amassuru Network and researcher at the Igarapé Institute, with Peter Squires, sociologist and criminologist, author of the book *Gender and Firearms: My Body, My Choice, My Gun*. In his work, Squires analyzes the role of women in the debate on gun ownership in the U.S., exploring their representation in advertising, media, and gun control policies. As a Professor of Criminology and Public Policy at the University of Brighton, his academic work has focused on the study of crime, poverty, and public security, with a special emphasis on gender and firearms. The conversation explores how the firearms industry and political discourse have manipulated notions of security, autonomy, and protection to expand the women's gun market. It also examines how this shift intersects with broader gender dynamics, from toxic masculinity fueling firearm demand to the legal and social contradictions that arise when women actually use guns—whether for self-defense, in security forces, or within criminal organizations.

Katherine Aguirre (KA): What was your initial motivation to start researching women and firearms, and why did you focus on the U.S.?

Peter Squires (PS): Even in my country, the UK—a country with low gun ownership and low gun crime—gun violence remains a problem, particularly in cases of domestic violence. Nevertheless, there is still this problem that the law takes a far too tolerant view of men as



gun owners. And even in a country like Britain where gun ownership is supposed to be a privilege, and not a right, the police are often reluctant to take appropriate action to remove guns from dangerous situations. Then, why is the gender perspective so important? the fact that something like more than 90% of the civilian owned guns in the world are in the hands of men. And that is a massive imbalance. Around the world, there are lots of unsuitable men with a kind of strange notion of masculinity who are perpetrating violence and rape against women, aided and abetted by the firearms they own.

At the same time, a cultural shift in the US has promoted armed women as icons of empowerment, with the NRA pushing the narrative of “refuse to be a victim” where women are becoming armed icons of femininity and somehow this is being represented as a good thing. We have seen a perverted form of feminism, being allied with a neoliberal individualism to promote the idea that women can set themselves free of all this sort of violence if only they carried a gun and were prepared to use it... now, I think that is gun industry marketing. I don't think it's a real social movement. The irony is that in many legal cases, when women use firearms in self-defense, particularly against abusive partners, they are often prosecuted rather than protected.

This contradiction reveals how the gun industry's marketing serves both as a marketing strategy and political agenda—expanding the women's market for guns to prevent meaningful gun control reforms. I wanted to challenge this false narrative of armed self-defense as a path to safety, exposing how it reinforces existing power structures rather than truly empowering women. More guns do not make a general sense, but at the same time make a gender argument that women were being conned. This sort of pistolized feminism is very much a blind alley.

KA: One of the most persistent myths in the gun debate is the idea that firearms deter crime when, in reality, data shows that having a gun in the home increases the risk of domestic violence and suicide. For women, carrying a gun does not necessarily provide greater protection than it does for men, and in many cases, women become victims of their own firearms. Do you think a woman's behavior with a firearm—whether in public or in an armed context—differs from that of a man?



PS: globally, women have often led the gun control debate, from Latin America to the U.S., with movements like the Million Mom March and Everytown. However, while nothing is being done to disarm men, the conversation is shifting toward arming women, which reminds me of the Cold War's "mutually assured destruction" logic. I don't believe that simply putting more guns in women's hands makes them safer, especially given societal assumptions about gender roles and security. Elizabeth Hinton's work on Black armed resistance highlights how arming marginalized groups often leads to even greater repression rather than protection. Instead of increasing the circulation of firearms, we need collective, community-based strategies to address the deeper social tensions and conflicts that drive people to arm themselves in the first place.

KA: Breaking down the firearms market into demand and supply components can help design more effective gun control intervention. Here, demand is shaped by motivations for firearm access and the supply side involving how firearms enter circulation. Considering these dynamics, how much of the demand for firearms is socially constructed rather than organic and gender-specific?

PS: Breaking the demand is absolutely vital, and to some extent, that is already happening. In North America, for instance, education, urbanization, and socioeconomic improvements correlate with lower gun ownership rates. Gun ownership is already in decline in the U.S., and it would be decreasing at an even faster rate if not for the constant fear-mongering—this narrative that you need a gun to protect yourself from violent crime, from the supposed dangers of the "black underclass," and to reaffirm masculinity. It's a form of cultural brainwashing with global significance. We saw it in Brazil during the 1995 gun control referendum when the NRA played an influential role in framing gun ownership as a necessity for middle-class white protection.

The demand for firearms is largely manufactured. It's an artificial need, reinforced by cultural narratives about masculinity and power. Historic notions of masculinity portray men as protectors, as the guardians of their families and women. In this patriarchal framework, women are positioned as dependents—caretakers and homemakers—who require male protection. However, as gender roles evolve, gun culture is adapting as well. The firearms



industry has pivoted its marketing strategies to convince women that they must arm themselves because they can no longer rely on men for protection. But this, too, is a construct—it's a carefully crafted narrative by the gun industry itself, designed to expand the market by manipulating social insecurities. Instead of genuinely empowering women, it reinforces a cycle of fear, profit-driven gun proliferation, and a deepening of gendered power structures.

KA: Women are not only at risk but are also increasingly involved in firearm-related crimes, whether as active participants or in supporting roles within criminal organizations. While efforts in Europe and South Africa have examined gender and armed violence, the role of women in firearm-related crime in Latin America is still underdeveloped as a research field. Women are not only at risk in private spaces but are also increasingly involved in criminal structures, whether as direct actors in gun-related crimes, as partners of gang leaders, or even in leadership roles within organized groups. How do you see the differences between men's and women's involvement in armed crime? Do you think women are playing a more active role in firearm-related violence, or are they still largely instrumentalized by male-dominated structures?

PS: Women's involvement in crime has historically been different from men's, often shaped by survival and protection rather than personal power or dominance. Research in the UK has shown that while men frequently engage in violent crimes—such as armed robbery—as an assertion of masculinity, women's crimes tend to be linked to economic necessity, such as shoplifting or financial fraud to provide for their families. While there has been some discussion about the increasing presence of women in gangs and criminal organizations, I haven't come across strong evidence suggesting that women are significantly increasing their involvement in armed crime. That's not to say it isn't happening, but rather that it may still be under-researched or difficult to quantify.

A parallel that comes to mind is the use of women in suicide terrorism, where they have often been chosen as attackers because they are perceived as less likely to attract suspicion from security forces. If cartels, gangs, and organized crime groups are utilizing women in similar ways, then this raises concerns about coercion and exploitation rather than genuine leadership roles. In such cases, the presence of armed women could be as much a result of



grooming and manipulation as it is about personal agency. Women are instruments of the violence.

There is also a highly sexualized portrayal of armed women, particularly in media and pop culture. From historical depictions of female warriors to the modern hyper-sexualized imagery of women with guns, much of this serves the male gaze rather than reflecting an authentic representation of women's roles in armed violence.

KA: What do you think are the most effective gun control interventions that incorporate a gender perspective? Given the challenges of state-led enforcement, which can sometimes reinforce discrimination and violence, how can community-led approaches be strengthened to ensure firearm reduction without increasing risks for women? Could measures such as restricting firearm access for individuals with histories of domestic violence, involving women in firearm policy decisions, or social accountability mechanisms. Additionally, how can gender be integrated into disarmament campaigns and broader gun control strategies without reinforcing harmful stereotypes or exposing women to additional risks?

PS: This is a crucial and complex issue because gun control interventions must navigate between effective regulation and avoiding unintended consequences, such as reinforcing state-led repression or exposing vulnerable groups to greater risk. One of the biggest challenges is that many traditional gun control measures rely on empowering police and security forces, which, as we've seen in various cases, have a poor track record when it comes to issues like misogyny, racism, and selective enforcement.

That being said, there are promising approaches that integrate gender perspectives into firearm regulation. Restricting gun ownership for individuals with histories of domestic violence, gang affiliation, or substance abuse is one of the most logical and immediate steps. However, the challenge is enforcement—without strong community oversight, these restrictions can be ineffective.

In the UK, we are moving toward a model where gun applicants must obtain approval not only from licensing authorities but also from family members and, in some cases, neighbors, effectively making "the gun a community property." This introduces an additional layer of accountability and ensures that firearm access is not purely a personal decision but a matter



of community safety. It shifts the narrative beyond the individualistic notion of "my gun, my right to have it" and instead positions gun ownership as a responsibility that extends to those around the owner. In this framework, owning a firearm is not just a matter of individual freedom but a dynamic that fundamentally alters power relations between the gun owner and others who do not possess a firearm. Therefore, gun ownership must be accountable and regulated to prevent misuse and promote collective safety.