

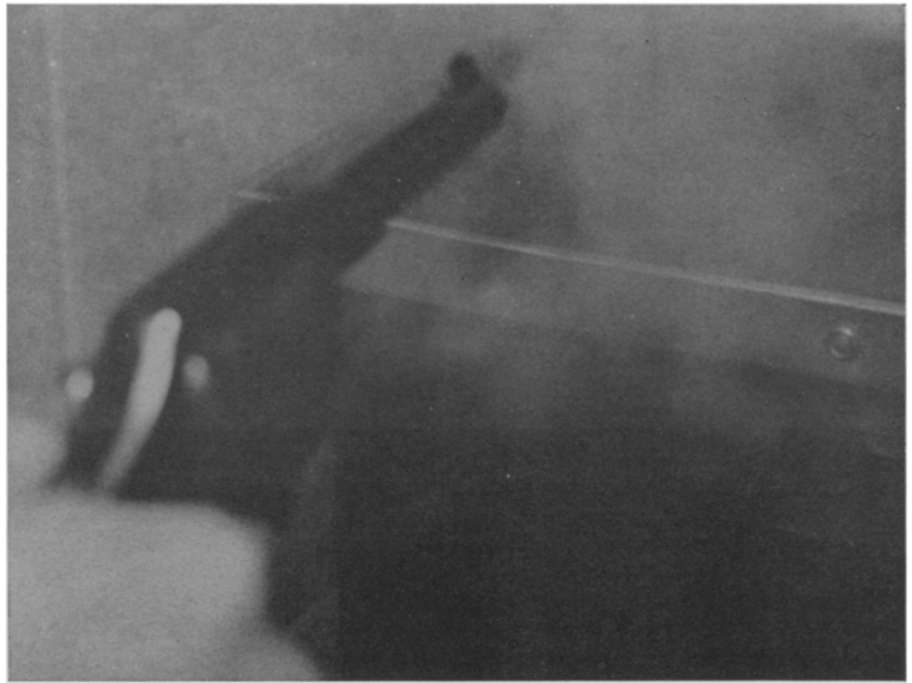
Gun toting: a fashion needing change

American men might end their romance with guns if women chose to make it absurd

America's recent pioneering past usually gets the blame for gun toting behavior in the United States.

On the morning following Senator Robert Kennedy's assassination, Senator Eugene McCarthy commented that Americans have not yet realized that they no longer live in a pioneering society.

Psychologists point to folk heroes like Shane and Destry whose film versions keep alive the frontier theme that a man of honor avoids shame by resorting to physical violence. "No matter how inhibited or opposed to violence at first, the folk hero must eventually use violence to maintain honor and rectify evil," notes Dr. Leonard Berkowitz, psychologist at the Univer-



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Some 50 million men in the United States average up to four guns apiece.

sity of Wisconsin and an authority on aggressive behavior.

The notion of preserving honor with violence seems to be particularly present in southern and southwestern regions of the United States, adds Dr. Berkowitz.

Along with ideals of physical valor go concepts of self-reliance and individualism which also supposedly stem from the frontier and run deeply in American character, keeping the United States one of the most heavily armed civilian populations in the world.

There is no way to refute these explanations. Evidence of their validity is abundant enough in the entertainment media.

But a case can be made that romantic notions about guns are not indelibly



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The Dillinger arsenal: A romantic ideal of physical valor preserves a masculine fashion turned ugly in American life.

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imprinted on the American psyche. If the shoot-out still flavors the masculine ideal in this country, it can perhaps be changed.

Gun ownership may be viewed as a masculine fashion comparable to gambling, heavy drinking, dueling and jousting, contends Dr. Humphrey Osmond, director of the bureau of research in neurology and psychiatry at the New Jersey Neuropsychiatric Institute. And, he says, like any other fashion, it can be changed by fashionable leaders.

Dr. Osmond rejects the Freudian notion that guns represent male virility and therefore would be difficult to uproot from society. If that were true, then, according to the psychoanalytic view that women suffer from penis-envy, they should also be very keen on guns. "But they are not," says Dr. Osmond.

Dr. Berkowitz can see no reason why American men should be more susceptible to the male symbol than men of other nations where guns are less prevalent.

"Rather than perceiving this oddity in terms of some gigantic flaw in the Republic," says Dr. Osmond, "I think we would be far better advised to see it as one of those peculiar and dangerous habits which many nations have developed from time to time."

Men have always been given to romantic notions about physical valor and bravery, he explains.

Byzantine youths during the time of Justinian instituted racing rivalries between two factions named the Blues and Greens. Over the years, the betting game took on political tones and before it ended it resulted in civil violence verging on war.

Only 200 years ago Englishmen felt compelled to go about armed in readiness for a duel. Political figures were in danger of assassination not by a lone gunman, says English-born Dr. Osmond, but by hired swordsmen posing as duelists. "Today the man who goes dueling in either Britain or the United States would be considered not brave or honorable but silly, irresponsible and barbarous," he says.

Gambling, once a sign of masculinity, has met a similar fate, as has heavy drinking. Cigarette smoking is fast losing status as a sign of sophistication. Researchers studying the prevalence of smoking have found the habit in decline among the educated, upper middle classes.

The point is that all these habits, whether rooted in fashion or not, represent quite serious medical and social hazards. The same is true of widespread gun ownership.

Dr. Berkowitz has found that the very presence of a gun serves to pull out aggression in the angry individual. In his well-known experiments on col-

lege students (SN: 10/14/67, p. 381), Dr. Berkowitz first made them angry, then offered them the chance to administer electric shocks to each other. The students gave stronger jolts when rifles were in the room than when they were not, though they denied the difference.

This effect does not work on adults who aren't angry, says Dr. Berkowitz, but research indicates that children may be more susceptible. A child given a toy gun later displays stronger aggression whether or not he is angry, says the psychologist.

A cause-and-effect relationship between the availability of guns and high homicide rates cannot be established. But the correlations are strong. Compared to other countries, the United States has a very high homicide rate—10,000 a year, of which 6,500 are committed with guns. By contrast, England, with a quarter the population of the U.S. and with strong gun controls, has about 200 murders a year, 30 or so with guns.

Gun measures now under consideration by Congress would not disarm the American people who currently own an estimated 50 million to 200 million private firearms. Assuming that few women own guns, this means that some 50 million adult men own an average of one to four guns apiece.

"This is simply beastly behavior," says Dr. Osmond, and he suggests a means of speeding a transformation in cultural fashion.

Women, preferably high status, fashionable women, are the key. They can redefine masculinity and make the American gun toting male appear "not merely unheroic but impotent and absurd," says Dr. Osmond. "He can be apologized for, made fun of and encouraged to put his energy in other directions." Substitutions, such as non-violent games requiring dexterity, "can and must be found," says Dr. Osmond.

Though women have not often taken a direct hand in changing men's violent,

valorous behavior, there is some precedent for it not only in "Lysistrata," but in the better documented case of Eleanor of Aquitaine, queen of a medieval duchy in southwestern France.

Returning from the Crusades with a new appreciation for civilized manners, Eleanor set about changing standards among the smelly, quarrelsome men of the court. "She insisted that these overgrown stable boys and brawlers smarten up. They were forced to wash, clean their nails, comb their hair, eat decently and be less quarrelsome," says Dr. Osmond. In a very brief time, the woman wrought a "remarkable" transformation in male fashion.

More recently, the British in Malaya substituted boar hunting for head hunting through the prestigious influence of the colony's King and Queen. The secret is "using high status figures who set up new standards of excellence," according to the psychiatrist.

Women in the United States have so far abdicated their responsibility in helping to change the dangerous games and habits of American men, he contends. If they do not choose to remain silent, they have two alternatives: "They can join men in warlike acts and help annihilate the human race or they can exert a very great influence on men's warlike behavior."

In regard to gun toting, says Dr. Osmond, "I suspect that few people have realized that this relatively small matter could have so great and damaging effects."

Europeans who have lived through periodic bloody convulsions now point the finger at the United States. But Dr. Osmond believes their greater caution with guns may be attributed to the painful shocks of two world wars on their own home ground. "Violence is maintained by great romantic ideals," he says. "You've got to be a glutton for punishment to maintain the glamor after picking up pieces of bodies in the streets."

PHARMACOLOGY

Wobbly myth of the standard dose

The development of a new drug, from first conception to the pill bottle on the druggist's shelf, is supported by the most refined theory and best laboratory techniques available. But the whole exact structure rests on a wobbly myth: the myth of an average human being, for whom a standard dosage of any drug can be prescribed.

The fact is that the same dose of the same drug given to individuals of the same build, sex, age, and a dozen other characteristics can produce wildly different levels of the drug in the patient's blood.

That's why one of the sorest needs in medicine today is for new techniques to monitor and measure the effect of a drug on an individual.

There are indications that the need may soon be met. A conference of scientists from universities, Government research agencies, and the drug industry, at the National Bureau of Standards in Gaithersburg, Md., has laid out a wide range of esoteric physical techniques to study the metabolism of drugs—what happens to drugs when they enter the body.

Out of these techniques could come