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Permission is granted to publish these articles as needed.

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### **The Pulse Tragedy Points the Way for the LGBT Community to Provide Leadership for Gun Control**

April 24, 2017

By Chuck Stewart, Ph.D.

The tragedy at Pulse gay nightclub in June 2016 cannot be forgotten. The fear LGBT people live under from a hostile and hateful society must be addressed. Gun violence is too real and a problem in the U.S.. Regardless of what conservatives, Republicans, FOX News, the NRA, and others claim, guns are a problem that cannot be ignored. The level of gun violence in the U.S. is unparalleled in the world (statistics will not be addressed in this short essay).

The LGBT community is in a unique position. Coming out gay gives us strength of character to stand up to bullies. The pro-gun lobby makes many claims about guns that are false. For example, they claim the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gives them the absolute right to own guns. It does not. The Second Amendment is the result of the South wanting to maintain control over its slave patrols. The Second Amendment defines the relationship between the federal government over state militias and says nothing about personal ownership of guns. Not until the 2008 *Heller* case did five conservative judges muddy that understanding; and that has opened the floodgate of litigation. If the pro-gun lobby was honest about wanting Constitutional protection for private gun ownership, they should have crafted their own amendment and sponsored it through the ratification process. Instead, after a 40-year effort by the NRA, they changed most people understanding of the Second Amendment. Gay people need to stand up to these bullies and reassert that the Second Amendment does not say anything about private ownership of guns.

Likewise, the claims that only a "good guy" with a gun can stop a "bad guy" with a gun or that dictators and authoritarian governments take guns away from the people

before seizing control are false. Pro-gun bullies will smear anyone who is against gun control as being weak or a sissy. Haven't we all heard that before? Openly gay people are exactly the kinds of people to stand up against pro-gun bullies. LGBT organizations have demonstrated amazing skill at organizing, presenting facts, building alliances, crafting antidiscrimination laws, coordinating political action, and standing up to bullies. The LGBT community needs to advocate for legitimate academic research into gun violence, advocate for rational gun control, and not allow pro-gun bullies to intimidate the rest of the country into accepting their extreme position. Americans want gun control. Stop the NRA bullies.

• Chuck Stewart, Ph.D. is an editor and writer for ABC-CLIO and other publisher. To read the entire 16,000 word academic essay, visit: [www.ChuckStewartPhD.net](http://www.ChuckStewartPhD.net). Stewart, Chuck. "Massacre at Pulse Gay Nightclub and LGBT Gun Control Leadership." In Vol. 3, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Americans at Risk: Problems and Solutions. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2018.

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Word count 704

## **Pulse Massacre and LGBT Leadership for Gun Control**

April 24, 2017

By Chuck Stewart, Ph.D.

The mass murder of forty-nine people along with the wounding of fifty-three others at the Orlando Florida gay nightclub—*Pulse*—was a terrible tragedy. The gay people (and some parents and friends) were killed for being at the gay club. Regardless that right-wing commentators, church leaders, Republican politicians, and talk-show opportunists reported that this was a terrorist Muslim attack and "straight-washed" the event, it was a gay hate crime originating in a country that promotes hatred toward gays.

Hatred toward gays is nothing new. Antigay hatred has its origins with religion. The LGBT community needs to continue its efforts to educate religious leaders to reduce or eliminate their antigay message and, most importantly, become strong advocates of separation of church and state. The U.S. was not founded as a Christian state and effort must be made to prevent radical Christians from transforming the U.S. into a theocratic state.

High-power weapons used by Omar Mateen facilitated the murders at Pulse. Some political analysts believe the LGBT rights movement is perfect for taking on the gun lobby and influence gun control policies. There are many challenges in discussing gun control in the U.S. First is the misconception that people have a Constitutional right to own and use weapons. The Second Amendment is often cited as the source of that unabridged right. For over 220 years, it was well understood by courts that the Second Amendment described the relationship between the federal government and state militias; and that the Amendment was a vestige of slavery. Not until 2008 was this understanding undermined by five conservative activist judges on the Supreme Court who gave a new

interpretation and ruled that the Second Amendment affirmed the right of individuals to possess handguns in their home. This new interpretation came after forty years of lobbying efforts by the National Rifle Association (NRA). If pro-gun advocates were honest, they would craft a new amendment to the Constitution to ensure private ownership of weapons and shepherd it through the approval process.

There has always been arms control in the U.S. History is replete with examples of cities, states, and the federal government enacting controls over weapons. Certain citizens are precluded from owning weapons. The types of weapons and ammunition citizens can own are also restricted. But by the directed efforts of gun manufacturers through the NRA and helped by conservatives and Republican politicians, America has been flooded with over 300 million handguns and rifles.

By any measure, gun violence is a problem in the U.S. There are many falsehoods perpetrated by the pro-gun lobby that the LGBT community needs to reveal and stand up against. Truths that need to be promoted include: gun violence is a real problem; a “good guy” with a gun is not an effective way to stop a “bad guy” with a gun; dictators have not used the confiscation of weapons as an effective means to consolidate power; and misinformation must be denounced. Activities the LGBT community should support include: encouraging science-based research into gun violence; enactment of comprehensive gun control legislation; and review of programs that are effective at reducing gun violence. Specific recommendations include: the purchase of all weapons to be registered with police and recorded in a national registry; national definitions about who can own what kinds of weapons and the requirements for ownership (such as training, insurance, storage, minimum age, etc.); make the weapon purchaser liable for any crime the weapon may be involved or misused by family and friends; and other effective measures.

The LGBT community is unique in facing the “coming out” process. This takes years of reflection and deep strength of character. Ultimately, LGBT people learn not to be bullied by pejorative terms that imply weakness— such as a gay man being called “sissy” or lesbian called “dyke.” From this strength comes the ability to talk about guns without worrying about looking weak or maintain a “macho” persona. This holds true for any discussion about weapons. Taunts and stereotyping no longer work against open LGBT people and, instead, real issues can be discussed. The shooting at Pulse was a terrible tragedy and the LGBT community could use this discussion to springboard a national effort to consolidate and advance rational gun control.

• Chuck Stewart, Ph.D. is an editor and writer for ABC-CLIO and other publisher. To read the entire 16,000 word academic essay, visit: [www.ChuckStewartPhD.net](http://www.ChuckStewartPhD.net). Stewart, Chuck. “Massacre at Pulse Gay Nightclub and LGBT Gun Control Leadership.” In Vol. 3, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Americans at Risk: Problems and Solutions. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2018.

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Word count: 1016

### **The Tragedy at Pulse Gay Nightclub and the LGBT Community Leadership for Gun Control**

April 23, 2017

By Chuck Stewart, Ph.D.

I will never forget the morning of June 12, 2016. I was up early eager to drive to the Los Angeles Pride parade when I heard the terrible news of the shooting at *Pulse* gay nightclub in Orlando. The contrast between my exuberance for the parade and the shock of so many deaths in Florida seemed otherworldly. I was in a daze wanting to speak to friends but it was too early to call or text anyone. Not until I arrived at the festival and experienced the increased security did the reality of the situation set in. Cops were everywhere. Everyone was on edge. It was surreal.

Over the next few weeks I read endless articles and news reports about the massacre. When dancing with friends that week, I was aware how we all looked around our favorite bar with an eye for something being out of place. Anxiety set in. It was unnerving; looking over our shoulders anticipating a gun shot or worse.

One of the articles I read suggested that the LGBT community could be leaders in the call for gun control. I had been indifferent about guns. I knew the U.S. had too many guns and tragedies at Sandy Hook and elsewhere occurred too often but progress was stymied. I personally never owned a gun nor ever shot one. I had no interest in guns.

The deaths of so many gay people and families and friends hit my consciousness. I educated myself about guns and the incident at Pulse. What an education!

There was much speculation about the shooter—Omar Mateen. Was he a terrorist? Was he a self-loathing gay? The FBI investigation was ultimately inconclusive and motive was not established. What is known is that he entered a gay nightclub with the intention to specifically kill the people in the bar. This was an antigay hate crime. Yet, much of the media, especially from conservative outlets, began to “straight-wash” the event and continued to claim that it was an Islamic “terrorist” attack—regardless that there was no direct evidence to support that claim. Even the Republican National Committee used the term “terrorist” but failed to use the word gay in describing the nightclub in their press releases. Groups were cashing in the event to promote their own agenda. A couple of Christian pastors applauded the shooting and called for more gays to be killed. They even recorded their sermons on YouTube to spread their hate.

LGBT people are very aware how much antigay hate permeates our culture. Religious and political conservatives, the Republican Party, Fox News, NRA, televangelists, and others continue to spew their antigay hate. I made a quick online search and found direct quotes from fourteen “leaders” either denying our existence, keeping us as second-class citizens, or outright advocating of our deaths. There is nothing new here but it is disconcerting to see so many quotes wanting us dead in 2017.

Unfortunately, hate crimes are on a rise with crimes against transgender leading the way. Gay suicides are up. Guns play a major deadly part in this violence. It is common to hear about gun rights being expressed as “second amendment” rights. Even President Trump used the coded language to predict that Hillary Clinton could be killed by Second Amendment zealots to stop her from gutting the law. But what does the Second Amendment say?

“A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

After reviewing many legal articles, court documents, and legal histories, this is what I learned: the Second Amendment has nothing to say about personal ownership of guns but rather defines the relationship between the federal government and state militias. For over 220 years the court were very clear about this understanding with no dissention. The Second Amendment is a vestige of slavery. That may seem an odd statement but here’s why. If runaway slaves made it to the North and joined a militia, they were often granted freedom. The newly constructed Constitution of 1789 gave federal control over state militias. The southern states feared that if that happened, the north would simply make the militia’s ineffective (in the south, militia were known as “slave patrols”) and declare slaves to be free. By including the Second Amendment, states maintained control over their slave patrols.

A policy decision made by the NRA in the 1970s targeted changing the understanding of the Second Amendment to advocate for unfettered access to all kinds of weapons. By 2008, a conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court expanded the Second Amendment to include personal ownership of guns; but within limits. This confusion spawned thousands of lawsuits across the country. If pro-gun people were honest, they would have crafted their own Constitutional amendment and processed it through the steps necessary to ratify the amendment. Instead, they maligned the Second Amendment to meet their goals. Unfortunately, that is now the common understanding of the law and utterly confusing.

There has always been gun control in the U.S. at local, state, and federal levels. It is important to have a rational discussion about gun ownership that dispels all the myths and misinformation. And this is where the LGBT community can have an impact. Coming out gay gives us strength to stand up to bullies. Also, the LGBT community has shown great ability at organizing. As gay people, we need to stand up against all the falsehoods perpetrated by the pro-gun lobby. For example, gun violence is a real problem; a “good guy” with a gun is not an effective way to stop a “bad guy” with a gun; dictators have not used the confiscation of weapons as an effective means to consolidate power; and more. Don’t let the gun bullies push us around. Our LGBT support organizations need to encourage academic research into gun violence and enact comprehensive gun control legislation that reflect programs that are effective at reducing gun violence. LGBT people have the temperament and organizational skill to lead the way for ending gun violence.

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