

'Firearming' Fairytales: NRA and Gun Culture in American Fan-Fiction

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Abstract. Gun issue becomes one of the most polemic issues in the United States alongside racism. Regardless, the last major gun control legislation to make it into law was the assault weapons ban in 1994 as part of a larger crime-related bill approved during Bill Clinton presidential period. After the assault weapons ban expired, American society is threatened by the increasing numbers of gun violence issue such as mass shooting and gun homicide. In this case, NRA (National Rifle Association) involvement is vital towards gun culture in the United States. As non-profit organization, NRA has influential lobbying for any policies towards gun policies. Thus, this paper discusses the dissemination of gun culture on NRA family website www.nrafamily.org. In 2016, Amelia Hamilton rewrote two Grimm's fairytales "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)" and "Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)". Since gun becomes commodity, these NRA versions of fairytales can be analyzed as part of consumer manipulation by using consumer capitalist theory. Thus, this analysis shows that those fan-fictionalized fairytales consist of two main aspects: gun as protector and gun culture as common culture in the United States. It embraces the rationalization of gun ownership' in the United States despite its lethal consequences.

Keywords: *Grimm's fairytales, fan-fiction, gun culture, gun violence, NRA*

INTRODUCTION

Mass shooting is one of the most tragic gun violence issues within in American society that has already killed many innocent victims almost each year. According to Gun Violence Archive, there are 152 mass shootings in the United States between 1967 and May 2018, averaging eight fatalities per incident when the perpetrator's death is included (Berkowitz & Alcantara, 2017). This statistic strengthens the United States' position as the highest mass shooting victims in the world (Christensen, 2017). There are many factors of mass shooting in the United States including higher accessibility and ownership of guns (Healy, 2015) and mental illness (Emanuella & Levenson, 2016). In this case, mass shooting and other gun violence are the result of gun culture which spread rapidly as an integral part of American societal development.

The legalization of gun issue itself creates many social problems within American modern society. Since the legalization of gun is part of the Second Amendment, gun control policy is not fully established by lawmakers until today (Sommerlad, 2018). Many attempts of establishing gun policy have been made since the 1960s when gun rights became a national political issue (Schuppe, 2018). The last major gun control legislation to make it into law was the assault weapons ban in 1994 as part of a larger crime-related bill approved during Bill Clinton presidential period. However, the ban was only applied to the manufacture of 19 specific models of semi-automatic firearms and other guns with similar features. Then, this ban was expired in 2004 without any repetition (West, 2018). After the assault weapons ban expired, American society is threatened by many gun violence issues. In this case, NRA, National Rifle Association, plays important role.

NRA is a non-profit organization that advocates for gun rights that have influential political lobbying for many decisions relate to gun control in the United States (Korte, 2013). Since founded in 1871, this non-profit organization has directly lobbied for and against firearms legislation and prohibition. Moreover, NRA becomes powerful in both political and economic aspects since many members of this organization are influential politicians such as George W. Bush, John McCain, Ronald Reagan, John F. Kennedy and Donald Trump (Gould, 2017). As a one of the most influential non-profit organizations in the United States, NRA launches its television channel, NRATV, official website and family website to promote the idea of the right to arming civilians which is written in Second Amendment.

Despite many gun violence issues such as mass shooting and gun homicide, in 2016, a NRA member, Amelia Hamilton rewrote two children stories "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)" and "Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)" with gun violence elements published by NRA family website. In this case, the main characters in both stories were illustrated using gun to protect them from the villains. The consequence of the alternate version of these old Grimm's fairy tale stories creates many critics from many political and social figures, which put the right of gun ownership in a question.

This research is under Post-Nationalist American Studies which utilizes capitalism as its approach and consumer capitalism as its theory. In this context, Post-Nationalist American Studies is a paradigm in American Studies which concerns with cross-cultural communication, race and gender, global and local identities, and the complex tensions between symbolic and political economies. The discussion of this paradigm is around the complex issues in American society which may deal with ethnic, race, gender and Women's Studies and other minor issues in the United States that criticize American exceptionalism (Rowe, 2000). Thus, under Post-Nationalist American Studies, this research no longer celebrates Americanization, but instead questioning and revising the underreported issues in American society. It includes American gun culture issue which has already emerged since American colonial period.

Meanwhile, in capitalism approach, the consumers are seen as the important entity in the market system so that the consumption is taken as an important object of the economic and political study. Adam Smith (in Korkotsides, 2007) says "Consumption is the sole end and the purpose of all production". Keynes further adds that all production is for the purpose of the consumer. In consumption, the relation between the consumers and the producers are strong.

"Methodologically, consumption is restored on an equal footing and innovative footstep with production, abandoning their usual dichotomous treatment. Capitalism is not just a technological affair, but a waltz dance of production with consumption, its pace being determined by income distribution. When any of these trips, capitalism flounders. When the slaves fail to synchronize the oars, the ship jerks with no speed or direction" (in Korkotsides, 2007).

It emphasizes that without the costumers' demand, the meaning of all production would fail. In this case, both sides have to synchronize to make the production keeps working. Therefore, the role of consumer is undoubtedly important and also become an important key of all production.

In capitalist point of view, consumers are obviously active participants. They are not seen as the people who just consume the products. Regarding this issue, many capitalists try to manipulate the consumers by using many approaches. One of the approaches is consumer capitalism which refers to a theoretical economic and social political condition in which consumer's demand is manipulated. In this case, the consumers are seduced to buy and purchase product based on "what they want" rather than "what they need" (James & Scerri, 2012). Then, it creates many critics since it focuses on human's desire rather than human's need. The best example of consumer capitalism in history was when American government encouraged citizens to purchase food stuff not to satisfy their needs but to support their country during the World War I (Woods, 2015).

Furthermore, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* emphasizes consumer capitalism as the fundamental principles of capitalism. It takes place on a large scale level and involves a technique known as mass marketing. The beneficiaries of

the consumer capitalism are the sellers. In this case, there are some benefits of consumer capitalism. The first benefit of consumer capitalism is increased economic growth particularly in developed countries such as America. Secondly, sellers enjoy increased revenue from their sales. Thirdly, it increases competition which leads to better quality and variety of product. Meanwhile, it also promotes division of labor which in turn encourages specialization in industries such as automotive manufacturing (Hamilton, 2004).

Moreover, Stuart Hall defines representation as "an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of culture" (2003). It creates a produced meaning and is exchanged among members of certain society. This discourse is a way to produce meaning. Therefore, the process of representation needs the understanding of cultural background knowledge. This theory, combined with consumer capitalism, is to further analyze the discourses of gun consumption in U.S, through American fan-fiction.

Thus, dealing with this issue, the 'firearming' of children fairytale phenomenon becomes a pivotal aspect to discuss since it directly intertwines the gun issue and fan-fiction in American society. This research tries to answer a question of "how does NRA manipulate its children consumers by using their version of two fairytales "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)" and "Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)"?" In order to enlarge the analysis, the researcher uses consumer capitalism theory which mostly focuses on manipulating the consumers. In this case, this research further studies the manipulation of gun importance towards children inside those two fairytales.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative which is defined as "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2009). In conducting a qualitative research, it relies on qualitative data, which mean material things used by the researcher to investigate (Leedy, 2009). Moreover, technique data analysis is needed to classify and to arrange the data based on the research purposes and objectives (Mahsun, 2005), which include (1) data selection, (2) data interpretation, and (3) data conclusion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The discussion focuses on NRA's influence towards its consumers by focusing on two NRA versions of fairytales "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)" and "Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)" by Amelia Hamilton on NRA family website. Some aspects within these fairytales and other aspects which related to gun culture in America can be used as evidence to support the argumentations.

In this case, the element of gun in these fan-fictions echoes the pivotal aspects of gun in American society, especially to the NRA gun community. In these fan-fictions, which are essentially part of children's literature, gun is strongly emphasized within the narratives. To ease the comprehension, this discussion about the meaning of gun in these fan-fiction narratives is divided into two: gun as protector and gun culture as 'normal' culture in American society.

a. Gun as a Symbol of Protection

In both fairytales entitled "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)" and "Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)" on NRA Family website, the writer, Amelia Hamilton creates a unique twist in both Grimm's stories by adding guns to the main characters. In this case, they use guns in order to protect themselves from threats and to save the others. For instance, in Amelia Hamilton's "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)", Grandmother is given gun to protect herself and her home from the antagonist character, the wolf.

"The wolf leaned in, jaws open wide, then stopped suddenly. Those big ears heard the unmistakable sound of a shotgun's safety being clicked off. Those big eyes looked down and saw that grandma had a scattergun aimed right at him. He realized that Grandmother hadn't been backing away from him; she had been moving towards her shotgun to protect herself and her home" (Hamilton, 2016).

It shows that Amelia Hamilton as a member of NRA tries to disseminate and strengthen the idea that gun is an essential part of human protection. In this case, the old grandmother character also has a right to protect herself with a shotgun. This provocative narrative, in a sense, shapes American perception towards the social meaning of gun. Therefore, the emphasis of this narrative seems to strengthen the idea of having gun as a fundamental part of American society since it is supported by the constitution itself.

The implementation of gun in this Grimm's fairytale represents how significant the impact of gun culture through literary works such as film, music and prose. Gun violence, for instance, has been long associated with hip-hop music. As a Mississippi senator, Chris McDaniel stated "It has everything to do with a culture that is morally bankrupt. What kind of culture is that? It's called hip-hop." (Murphy 2014). Hip-hop, in this case, is viewed as a representation of 'gangster' culture often depicts homicides and other gang violence. However, the discussion surrounding this issue in literary works has never dived deep into the gun legalization. Having a gun further symbolizes an act of self-protection instead of a threat for the society.

Furthermore, in another story entitled "Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)", Amelia Hamilton describes both main protagonist characters Hansel and Gretel, as hunter rather than just ordinary children. In this version of story, they save other children who had been kidnaped by The Witch with their guns. In fact, both characters seem to be expert with gun,

"The boys directed Hansel to the key that would unlock their cage while Gretel stood at the ready with her firearm just in case, for she was a better shot than her brother. Hansel unlocked the cage and opened the door. The hinges gave a groan and the sound of the witch's snoring stopped, the silence filling the room as they looked at each other in panic" (Hamilton, 2016).

By saving life of others, it shows that the implication of using gun in "Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)" is used as protector from threat and savior for other. Since these fairytales are aimed for children. It can be an indication that NRA as pro-gun organization want to disseminate gun culture to younger consumers. In this case, NRA manipulates their younger consumers to believe that gun is part of human protection and it can also be used to save others.

In any case dealing with gun violence in the United States, NRA never blames the usage of gun in the middle of American society. In fact, National Rifle Association chief, Wayne LaPierre's always echoes a long-touted notion that "the only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is with a good guy with a gun (Kennelly, 2018)". This theory is always sounded by pro-gun activists based on Second Amendment which is shortly about freedom of protecting themselves with firearm. Thus, gun control or gun prohibition is not considered as right solution for pro-gun supporters to stop gun violence issues.

Thus, by creating an alternative version of "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)" and "Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)", pro-gun activists such as Amelia Hamilton, try to embrace the idea of gun rights that has been fundamentally implemented in American society. The fact that pro-gun activist using children's short story can be categorized as part of 'rationalization of gun ownership' which brings many benefits to weapon industry in the United States even though it has a lethal consequence for the society.

It can be said that Amelia Hamilton's "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)" and "Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)" are made by pro-gun activist to manipulate children as future consumers to purchase gun or weapon in the United States. It further strengthens the importance of gun ownership in American society. Since this fairytales were posted on NRA family website, it embraces the idea of "gun as a symbol of protection" to children and family. It is obviously evidence of consumer manipulation which shapes American people's perspective about the existence of Second Amendment, gun ownership and gun industry.

b. Gun Culture as 'Common' Culture in American Society

Furthermore, gun which is reflected in both stories can be part of gun culture in the United States. As being said, the freedom of firearming the civilians leads the development of gun culture in the middle of American society. Gun culture is a term for encompassing the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs about firearms and their usage by civilians. Since the civilians are allowed to have gun, it is considered unique culture among developed countries in terms of the large number of firearms owned by civilians, generally permissive regulations, and high levels of gun violence (Fisher, 2012). It further becomes part of American popular culture because firearms are often used in American literature such as TV shows and Hollywood movies.

In both fairytales entitled "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)" and "Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)", gun is added as part of the main characters' life. In "Little Red

Riding Hood (Has Gun)”, for instance, Red character was given a rifle as her birthday gift and has been trained to use it,

“One birthday not long ago, Red was given her very own rifle and lessons on how to use it—just in case—to be sure that she would always be safe. So, with a kiss from her mother, rifle over her shoulder and a basket for her Grandmother in her hands, Red took a deep breath and entered the woods” (Hamilton, 2016).

Red as a child can be also trained to use a gun in her early age. It strengthens that gun is part of “common culture” in American society. In this case, gun training becomes common lessons for any individual including children to protect themselves. In fact, in the United States, there are few classes that offer children how to shoot. In Texas, for instance, according to *ABC 7 News* (2018), kids are trained to use pistol during gun training lessons. It is debatable issue since it is considered as unusual playdate for children (Chang et al. 2014). It becomes national issue that many children accidentally hurt and kill themselves or others in the United States.

This emphasis can also be seen in “Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)” when the main protagonist characters Hansel and Gretel are described as a hunter which hunts the Witch. In this story, Gretel was described as an expert in using her rifle, in fact, better than her elder brother. It can be seen in the line saying,

“They heard a rustling in the leaves, and slowly turned to see a magnificent 10-point buck drinking from a stream. Gretel readied her rifle and fired. Her training had paid off, for she was able to bring the buck down instantly with a single shot” (Hamilton, 2016).

It shows that in both stories, gun training is taught to the main characters who are still children. It further emphasizes that gun is part of common culture in the middle of American society which can be practiced and used for any individual including children. It seems like Amelia Hamilton is showing an image that gun is not a dangerous and threatening stuff. In fact, it is a common “tool” to play with and can be used to protect themselves and saving other people’s life.

In consumer capitalism theory, this manipulation is used in order to create and convince the market. NRA and other gun industry-sponsored organizations pour millions of dollars into youth shooting programs nationwide. Nearly four million youths attended a training program that followed the NRA’s guidelines in 2012, up two million from 2008 (Chang et al. 2014). By looking at this fact, Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)” and “Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)” on NRA Family website are contained by a purpose of selling gun and developing future consumers in order to support gun industry. Those stories can be considered as tool for manipulating consumers. It is intended to reach younger consumers. Thus, it can be concluded that both stories by pro-gun, Amelia Hamilton, are used as a tool to manipulate younger gun consumer that gun is part of “common” culture in the United States.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, NRA version of "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)" and "Hansel and Gretel (Have Guns)" which rewritten by Amelia Hamilton contain manipulation of gun towards any individuals including children. Both stories are added with gun elements that reimagine that gun can be a protector for human. In this case, the main characters, Red and Grandmother, in "Little Red Riding Hood (Has a Gun)", are armed with gun in order to protect themselves from the Wolf. Then, Hansel and Gretel are described as hunters who hunt the Witch with their guns. They save other children's life from Witch. It emphasizes that gun is a protector or even savior inside those stories. Furthermore, both stories represent that gun training is a common lesson for children. It is part of gun culture in the United States that is reflected within these NRA versions of these stories. Thus, those stories can be considered as tool for manipulating consumers because it is contained by many good images of gun. It is obviously intended to reach younger consumers and develop future consumers. In fact, it is about selling gun and supporting gun industry in the United States.

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