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**Response to Hsiao:
The Importance of Reliable Sources**

Official-looking—yet unreliable—information is more accessible than ever before. It is easy to assemble a misleading bibliography, even if we don't mean to. We need to ask three questions about the sources we encounter.

Q1: Is the source peer-reviewed?

An article passes peer-review when experts think it merits publication. Researchers send their work to a Journal; the Journal finds experts to review it; and if the experts think the research has sufficient merit, the Journal publishes it.

Hsiao leans on non-peer reviewed sources. Examples include studies published by John Lott's Crime Prevention Research Center (CPRC), which is not an academic journal but a conspicuously pro-gun non-profit organization. Hsiao also cites "Would Banning Firearms Reduce Murder and Suicide," published in the official-looking *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*. But as an independent fact-checking organization reports: the "paper in question was not peer-reviewed, it didn't constitute a study, and it misrepresented separate research to draw shaky, unsupported conclusions."ⁱ

Q2: Does the source come from an organization or researcher with a narrow and extreme ideological bent?

We all have biases. But Lott and the CPRC stand out. They have ties to the National Rifle Association,ⁱⁱ and some of those ties are especially damning.

Ted Nugent is on the CPRC Board of Directors and is famous for outbursts like this: “Obama, he’s a piece a shit. I told him to suck on my machine gun.”ⁱⁱⁱ David A. Clarke also serves on the CPRC Board. His twitter feed reads: “Visit MY website ... for UNFILTERED, UNAPOLOGETIC ... CONSERVATIVE COMMENTARY... Libs must be accompanied by an ADULT who must bring a change of diapers for the crybullies.”^{iv}

Organizations strongly affiliated with the worst partisan pundits deserve skepticism. Yet Hsiao cites Lott and the CPRC as authorities.^v

Q3: Is there a consensus opinion among experts, and, if so, does the source contradict it?

Even peer-reviewed studies by experts make mistakes. So rather than relying on a handful of articles, we need to read widely. Unfortunately, Hsiao’s citations are both narrow and one-sided.

Hsiao cites Kleck’s and Gertz’s infamous estimate that there 2.5 million cases of defensive gun use in America each year.^{vi} He largely ignores widely accepted criticisms—their study invites social desirability bias and probably overestimates by a large margin.^{vii} Hsiao cites a literature review by Kleck suggesting that gun prevalence has no significant effect on crime rates while ignoring a different, and similarly robust, literature review suggesting the opposite conclusion.^{viii}

So here's the score: alongside non-peer-reviewed works by questionable sources, Hsiao cites a handful of articles by Kleck and his associates. Kleck and associates say that gun prevalence is nothing to worry about; scientific consensus tells the opposite story. Only an estimated 5% of experts believe that guns make a household safer, only 12% believe that carrying a gun outside the home reduces one's chance of being killed, and 71% believe that strong gun laws help reduce homicide. A staggering 84% believe that the proliferation of guns in the U.S. has created a serious public health problem.^{ix}

Might Kleck be correct, despite swimming against such a substantial tide? He accuses his critics—in a non-peer-reviewed Journal financed by gun manufacturers—of distorting the evidence to fit their “political intentions.”^x But if we trust scientific consensus about the causes of global warming and the safety of vaccines, we should probably trust it about guns too. Even the National Rifle Association seems to believe the expert consensus: it has long suppressed research into gun violence, likely because it fears that more and better research will suggest more and better gun control.^{xi}

Even if we stifle worries about the reliability of Hsiao's sources, many of the studies he cites can't prove what he needs them to prove. High estimates of defensive gun use generally count it a success when armed people resist assailants by, e.g., merely brandishing guns they can't reliably use, or scaring off assailants by incompetently spraying bullets about. The studies Hsiao cites, in other words, are not designed to show that ordinary citizens reliably hit their target—and only their target—when they are terrified and fighting for their lives.

If scientific consensus changes, I will change my mind. If study after peer-reviewed study were to confirm that ordinary citizens are accurate when the pressure is

highest, I will concede that there is a right to use guns for self-defense.^{xii} But I don't expect that to happen. Trained professionals with experience—the police—hit the wrong thing between 70% and 85% of the time.^{xiii} Most of us will be even worse.

Nonetheless, Hsiao and I share important common ground: wariness of armed state forces. But we draw different conclusions. Hsiao thinks we should arm ourselves; I do not. Mutual armament of citizens and police in the U.S. has been a moral disaster. The worst police deliberately violate citizens' right against being wrongfully killed, injured, or intimidated; well-meaning officers can make costly mistakes because they are legitimately concerned about the gun-carrying public; and the harms of this whole arrangement fall disproportionately on Black and Native citizens. Further arming ourselves so we are even more threatening to police is probably not the key to defusing this situation. We need *de-escalation*.

So here, and in closing, is the policy that respects our right to recreation, our liberty to own guns, *and* our right against being wrongfully killed, injured, or intimidated by the forces sworn to protect us: Citizens may own, store, and use guns at certified ranges. If they pass screening, citizens may temporarily check out rifles or single-shot shotguns for hunting. But no one—ordinary citizens or police—may carry guns on their person or keep guns in their homes.

I don't know how to enact this policy. If the open-minded study America has thus far resisted shows that the costs of mutual disarmament would be too high, I don't know the second best option. But Hsiao's sources notwithstanding, *those* are the issues we should be debating.

ⁱ <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/harvard-flaw-review/>

ⁱⁱ Ted Nugent is a former rock star and a fixture on the board of directors for the NRA. Brad Thor is a controversial novelist and a “lifetime member of the NRA” (<https://www.facebook.com/BradThorOfficial/posts/10202509209910132>). David Clarke Jr. is an embattled former Sheriff who has received substantial gifts from the NRA (“Bice: As Sheriff Clarke’s Profile Soars, Gifts Roll In,” *Journal Sentinel*, accessed March 31, 2018, <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/investigations/daniel-bice/2016/09/18/bice-sheriff-clarke-profile-soars-gifts-roll/90429910/>). And Joyce Lee Malcolm is the Patrick Henry Professor of Constitutional Law and the Second Amendment at George Mason’s Law School, a position funded by the NRA.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/ted-nugent-threatens-to-kill-barack-obama-and-hillary-clinton-during-vicious-onstage-rant-94687/>

^{iv} https://twitter.com/SheriffClarke?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor. Emphasis in original.

^v Lott’s books loom large in Hsiao’s article. Hsiao cites *More Guns, Less Crime*, *The Bias Against Guns: Why Almost Everything You’ve Heard about Gun Control is Wrong*, and *The War on Guns: Arming Yourself Against Gun Control Lies*. It is also worth pointing out that Hsiao is not the only pro-gun philosopher to cite Lott. Even Michael Huemer—who wrote the philosophically best critique of gun control—makes that mistake. (Michael Huemer, “Is There a Right to Own a Gun?”, *Social Theory and Practice* 29, no. 2 (April 2003): 297-324.)

^{vi} Gary Kleck and Marc Gertz, “Armed Resistance to Crime: The Prevalence and Nature of Self-Defense with a Gun,” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 86, no. 1 (1995): 150-187.

^{vii} David Hemenway, “Survey Research and Self-Defense: An Explanation of Extreme Overestimates,” *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 87, no. 4 (1997): 1430-1445.

^{viii} A. Anglemyer, T. Horvath, and G. Rutherford, “The Accessibility of Firearms and Risk for Suicide and Homicide Victimization Among Household Members,” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 160, no. 2 (January 2014): 101-113.

^{ix} D. Hemenway and E.P. Nolan, “The Scientific Agreement on Firearm Issues,” *Injury Prevention* 23, no. 4 (August 2014): 221-225. This study also asks experts how strongly the evidence supports their answers. The survey asked fifteen different questions, and the answers cited above are, in the experts’ view, some of those most strongly supported by the available evidence. My point is not that this article is unassailable; my point is that expert consensus is our best guide to the truth, and that expert consensus does not appear friendly to Hsiao’s position.

^x Gary Kleck, “Degrading Scientific Standards to Get the Defensive Gun Use Estimate Down,” *Journal on Firearms and Public Policy* 77 (1999): 93.

^{xi} <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/politics/2018/03/25/nra-has-long-history-suppressing-data-gun-violence/ZryFdYf3WIAIIQkQRcwF9J/story.html>

^{xii} The right to keep a gun for self-defense would still have to be balanced against our right to an unarmed police force. But I admit that the gun control debate becomes much more complicated if ordinary citizens can reliably hit their target when the pressure is highest.

^{xiii} I provide citations in my article. See endnotes vii, viii, ix, x, and xi.