



Meet the Gay Libertarian Gun Nuts

By Cecilia D'Anastasio

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Tom Palmer, a gay libertarian, was walking to dinner with a co-worker in 1982 when he was told by a group of passing homophobes that [he would be killed](#) and nobody would ever find his body. Walking slowly away, and then running, Palmer was pursued by the gang for about a hundred feet until he turned to face them with the handgun his mother had given him. His aggressors [retreated](#) when they saw the gun, and Palmer was safe—the gun may very well have saved his life. Today, Palmer, now a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, is fighting to tear down Washington DC's prohibition against carrying handguns.

Palmer isn't the only gay pro-gun libertarian activist out there. In fact, there are thousands of LGBT individuals who are skeptical of the government and love shooting things—or are at least prepared to do so in self-defense. I wasn't aware of this subculture until [I attended LibertyFest NYC](#)—initially, I was taken aback when Marcel Fontaine, a speaker at the convention and creator of the "[LGBT for Gun Rights](#)" Facebook page told me that the "more guns, less crime" argument often referenced by opponents of gun control can apply to hate crimes, too. "Armed gays don't get bashed" is how they often put it.

"If you want to harm someone because they're an LGBT person," Fontaine told me, "they can defend themselves against that by open carrying."

If you find the "gay libertarian gun enthusiast" identity perplexing, you're not alone. Former Texas Republican Congressman Ron Paul, a demigod among liberty enthusiasts, [supported the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act](#). And while his son, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, seems to be resigned to the fact that the [debate over gay marriage is all but over](#), for now [he remains in the "one man, one woman" camp](#). Beyond that, the staunch libertarian belief in free market capitalism usually includes embracing the right of businesses to discriminate based on sexual orientation.

But since its first convention, the official Libertarian Party has affirmed LGBT rights—in fact, the party's [first presidential nominee, in 1972, was openly gay](#). Arguing against the idea of federally sanctioned marriage altogether, the [party platform](#) takes the position that individuals should be free to marry whomever they want, stating: "Sexual orientation, preference, gender, or gender identity should have no impact on the government's treatment of individuals, such as in current marriage, child custody, adoption, immigration or military service laws."

Like most libertarians, gay and lesbian members of the movement don't fuck around with gun rights. Mike Sibley, chair of the Libertarian Party's LGBT caucus Outright Libertarians, survived being assaulted by two homophobes with baseball bats, and although he wasn't armed at the time, he told me he firmly believes that self-defense is a natural right. Outright's outreach

brochure boldly asserts that the group “is unequivocal in its support of the natural right of self-defense for all LGBT youth.”

Sibley commends Palmer for successfully defending himself against a homophobic attack and then “using the experience to push back against hoplophobia” or fear of weapons. A startling [1,600 hate crimes](#) are committed against LGBT individuals each year.

“Pick on someone your own caliber,” reads the motto of the Pink Pistols, a gay libertarian-leaning gun rights organization. The group, which reaches out to gun-loving LGBT people and trains them in handling firearms was inspired by an [article](#) that ran in *Salon* in 2000 that argued that “if it became widely known that homosexuals carry guns and know how to use them, not many bullets would need to be fired.” The author, Jonathan Rauch of the Brookings Institute, added, “In fact, not all that many gay people would need to carry guns, as long as gay-bashers couldn’t tell which ones did.”

With 31 chapters and around 10,000 members, the Pink Pistols advocate for gay people to acquire concealed carry permits. The group brings in NRA-certified instructors to train LGBT individuals at [shooting ranges](#), and has even offered opinions in high-profile gun-rights cases like *Silviera v. Lockyer* and *Heller v. District of Columbia*.

Pink Pistols spokesperson Gwendolyn Patton, a registered member of the Libertarian Party, told me that members don’t join the Pink Pistols “for club perks and privileges. You’re joining an organization that shares a common ethical belief.”

Patton mentioned that a member of her own chapter in Philadelphia was followed by a group of people armed with pipes after leaving a gay club. When the Pink Pistols member displayed his gun, the attackers dropped their pipe and ran for it.

“You are the absolutely first responder to your own assault,” she said. And like many Second Amendment activists, [Patton takes issue](#) with the argument that 32,000 gun violence deaths in the US each year is linked to the country’s high rates of gun ownership.

But solidarity in sexual orientation hasn’t convinced the majority of the LGBT community that expanded gun ownership is the solution to the greater issues underlying homophobic hate crimes. So far, the larger LGBT community has been wary of the Pink Pistols and other gay libertarian gun-rights advocates. Patton has [said](#) that the Pink Pistols receives far more negativity from other LGBT organizations than from other gun-rights activists. According to the Pink Pistols manual, few LGBT community centers will host Pink Pistols meetings because “they will frequently have ‘no weapons’ policies that make concealed carry on the premises problematic.”

Shelby Chestnut, a media spokesperson at the [Anti-Violence Project](#), which targets LGBT community members, argues that guns are tools of hate crimes, not a way to prevent them. Citing the case of [Cece McDonald](#), a transgender woman who was sent to jail after defending herself against a homophobic attack, Chestnut noted that carrying a gun can often subject LGBT people to even greater violence.

"We need to look at the systemic inequalities that are causing people to be victims of violence," she said. "The solution to that is definitely not creating violence to end violence."