

JOHN LOTT: ABC's Shameful '20/20' Experiment

By John R. Lott, Jr. Fox News Blog Fox Forum April 15th, 2009

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Gun control advocates look desperate. Last Friday night, on April 10, ABC aired a heavily promoted, hour long "20/20" special called "If I Only Had a Gun." It is ABC's equivalent of NBC's infamous exploding gas tanks in General Motors pickups where NBC rigged the truck to explode. With legislation in Texas and Missouri advancing to eliminate gun-free zones at universities, perhaps this response isn't surprising.

The show started and ended by claiming that allowing potential victims to carry guns would not help keep them safe -- not even with hundreds of hours of practice firing guns.

No mention was made of the actual multiple victim public shootings stopped by people with concealed handguns nor did they describe who actually carried out such shootings. Instead, ABC presented a rigged experiment where one student in a classroom had a gun. But sometimes even the best editors can't hide everything the camera sees.

The experiment was set up to make the student fail. It did not resemble a real-world shooting. The same scenario is shown three times, but in each case the student with the gun is seated in the same seat -- the center seat in the front row. The attacker is not only a top-notch shooter -- a firearms expert who teaches firearms tactics and strategy to police -- but also obviously knows precisely where the student with the gun is sitting.

Each time the experiment is run, the attacker first fires two shots at the teacher in the front of the class and then turns his gun directly on the very student with the gun. The attacker wastes no time trying to gun down any of the unarmed students. Thus, very unrealistically, between the very first shot setting the armed student on notice and the shots at the armed student, there is at most 2 seconds. The armed student is allowed virtually no time to react and, unsurprisingly, fails under the same circumstances that would have led even experienced police officers to fare poorly.

But in the real world, a typical shooter is not a top-notch firearms expert and has no clue about whether or not anyone might be armed and, if so, where they are seated. If you have 50 people -- a pretty typical college classroom -- and he is unknown to the attacker, the armed student is given a tremendous advantage. Actually, if the experiment run by "20/20" seriously demonstrated anything, it highlighted the problem of relying on uniformed police or security guards for safety: the killer instantly knows whom to shoot first.

Yet, in the ABC experiment, the purposefully disadvantaged students are not just identified and facing (within less than 2 seconds) an attacker whose gun is already drawn. They are also forced to wear unfamiliar gloves, a helmet, and a holster. This only adds to the difficulties the students face in handling their guns.

Given this set-up the second student, Danielle, performed admirably well. She shot the firearms expert in his left leg near the groin. If real bullets had been used, that might well have disabled the attacker and cut short his shooting spree.

Nevertheless, even terrible shooters can often be quite effective. Despite all of ABC's references to the Columbine attack, the network never mention the armed guard at the school. He had an unusually poor target shooting record — indeed it is reported that he couldn't even hit a target. Yet, his bravery still saved many lives because his poorly aimed shots forced the two killers to engage in gunfire with him. This slowed down their killing spree and gave many students a chance to escape the building. The guard was only forced to retreat and leave the school himself because of the homemade grenades that the Columbine murderers had.

The Columbine murderers strongly and actively opposed passage of Colorado's right-to-carry law, particularly the part that would have allowed concealed handguns being legally carried on school campuses. What goes unnoticed is that the Columbine attack took place the very day that the state legislature scheduled final passage of the concealed handgun law.

Time after time the attackers in these multiple victim public shootings consciously avoid areas where people might be able to defend themselves. In the attack on the Jewish community center in Los Angeles in which five people were wounded, the attacker had apparently “scouted three of the West Coast's most prominent Jewish institutions—the Museum of Tolerance, the Skirball Cultural Center and the University of Judaism—but found security too tight.”

In the real world, even having a gun and pointing it at an attacker has often convinced the attacker to stop shooting and surrender. Examples include high schools in Pearl, Mississippi and Edinboro, Pennsylvania, as well as the Appalachian Law School in Virginia. Street attacks in Memphis to Detroit ended this way, too, without any more shots fired.

Even if the cases don't get much attention, gun permit holders stop these multiple victim attacks on a regular basis. Ironically, just this past Saturday, the day after ABC's broadcast, a permit holder in Columbia, Texas stopped a mass robbery by fatally shooting the criminal. Some Web sites have started collecting these and other defensive gun use cases . (**links to sites that track defensive use firearms** <http://www.keepandbeararms.com/opsd/default.asp> <http://johnrlott.blogspot.com/search/label/DefensiveGunUse> <http://claytoncramer.com/gundefenseblog/blogger.html>)

ABC'S “20/20” exaggerates “the danger of accidentally hitting a friend” when confronting an attacker. The show cites as an example is a man who mistook his wife for an intruder. Obviously that case is a tragedy, but those cases are exceedingly rare. But why didn't they present a single multiple victim attack as an example? Simple, because it has not happened.

ABC pushes the notion that gun show regulations, rather than arming potential victims, can stop these attacks. But very few criminals get their guns from gun shows: a U.S. Justice Department survey of 18,000 state prison inmates showed that less than one percent (0.7%) of prisoners had obtained their gun from a gun show. Even adding flea markets and gun shows together raises the number to just 1.7 percent. There is not a single academic study showing that regulating private

individuals selling their own guns — the so-called “gun show loophole” — reduces any type of violent crime. What the regulations have accomplished is cutting the number of gun shows by 25 percent.

The show ends with this claim:

“If you are wondering where are all the studies about the effectiveness of guns used by ordinary Americans for self-defense, well keep searching, we could not find one reliable study and the ones we found were contradictory.”

Yet, “contradictory” is an overstatement. **There have been 26 peer-reviewed studies published by criminologists and economists in academic journals and university presses. Most of these studies find large drops in crime. Some find no change, but not a single one shows an increase in crime.**

You would think that if gun control worked as well as ABC implies, there wouldn’t be these multiple victim public shootings in those European countries with gun laws much stricter than those being publicly discussed in the United States or by ABC. Yet, multiple victim public shootings are quite common in Europe. In just the last few days, there have been a shooting at a college in Greece and in a crowded café in Rotterdam. Of course, the worst K-12 public school shootings are in Europe.

Given the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been spent annually in the United States for police officers on campus and other programs, one would hope that this relatively inexpensive alternative, where people are willing to bear the costs themselves to protect others, would be taken more seriously.

ABC never mentions a simple fact: all multiple victim public shootings with more than 3 people killed have occurred where permitted concealed handguns are prohibited. Rather than studying what actually happens during these shootings, ABC conjured up rigged experiments aimed at convincing Americans that guns are ineffective. Unfortunately, ABC’s advice, rather than making victims safe, makes things safer for attackers.

John Lott is a senior research scientist at the University of Maryland and the author of *More Guns, Less Crime* (University of Chicago Press, second edition, 2000) and *The Bias Against Guns* (Regnery, 2003). Much of the discussion here is based on both books.