

Responsive Management



Executive Summary

Understanding the Impact of Peer Influence on Youth Participation in Hunting and Target Shooting

A project of the Hunting Heritage Trust in cooperation with the National Shooting Sports Foundation® Conducted by Responsive Management.

HUNTING HERITAGE TRUST



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF PEER INFLUENCE ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN HUNTING AND TARGET SHOOTING

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STUDY OVERVIEW

This study was conducted as a project of the Hunting Heritage Trust in cooperation with the National Shooting Sports Foundation® (NSSF®) to determine the impact of peer influence on youth participation in hunting and target shooting. The research entailed two focus groups and a nationwide scientific telephone survey of youth ages 8-17 years old. The focus groups and survey were conducted in January 2012.

While youth more commonly say they have a positive opinion of video games and mainstream sports like soccer, football, and baseball, considerable percentages also have a positive opinion of target shooting and, to a lesser extent, hunting. At the same time, hunting was the activity for which the largest percentage of youth respondents said they had a strongly or moderately *negative* opinion. Fortunately, approval of hunting and target shooting among youth is strong, particularly for the latter activity. Similarly, regarding the right of others to hunt and shoot, youth are largely accepting and tolerant, even if they personally disagree with the activities. Even more encouragingly, youth most commonly say that hunting is “perfectly acceptable,” although a substantial percentage express the reservation that hunting is “maybe a little inappropriate nowadays.” There is greater acceptance of target shooting, which a majority of youth describe as “perfectly acceptable” and only a little over a third say is “maybe a little inappropriate nowadays.”

More often than not, youth indicate that their friends mostly have positive feelings about hunting and target shooting. Faced with a situation in which their friends were going hunting or target shooting, the most likely reaction from youth is active encouragement (and potentially joining in). Apart from active encouragement, youth are more likely to be glad their friends are participating or to be neutral, rather than actively discouraging their friends’ participation or being quietly against their participation. While talk about hunting and target shooting in schools does not seem especially common among youth, such talk that *does* occur appears to be positive and perceived in a favorable light. Additionally, a little less than half of youth have been invited to go hunting at some point, with about half of this group actually going when invited. In terms of future invitations, about half of those who receive an invitation to go hunting are likely to go. Similarly, most youth have not been invited to go target shooting, but those who *are* invited are more likely to accept the invitation than are those invited to go hunting. As many as two-thirds of those invited to go shooting in the future are likely to accept the invitation.

In general, youth who are exposed to hunting and target shooting, either through active personal participation or through proximity to family members or friend who hunt and shoot, are more likely to approve of hunting and shooting, more likely to be interested in taking part in these activities, more likely to encourage friends to participate in them, and less likely to negatively influence or discourage their peers from supporting or participating in hunting and target shooting. The more familiar youth are with individuals their own age who participate in hunting and shooting, the more likely they will be to support and actively participate in these activities. Given this direct relationship, it is imperative that youth hunters and shooters recognize the weight and importance of their words and actions with regard to their peers’ perceptions of hunting and target shooting. Opportunities emerge with new data, one such opportunity suggests a “Youth Hunter and Shooter Ambassador Program” be initiated to capitalize on the current population of youth hunters and shooters who can positively influence their fellow peers’ attitudes toward the sports.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted as a project of the Hunting Heritage Trust in cooperation with the National Shooting Sports Foundation® (NSSF®) to determine the impact of peer influence on youth participation in hunting and target shooting. The research entailed two focus groups and a nationwide scientific survey of youth ages 8-17 years old.

The focus groups and survey were conducted in January 2012. For the survey, telephones were selected as the preferred sampling medium because of the almost universal ownership of telephones among households across the United States. Additionally, because the telephone survey was conducted using a random sample of U.S. households screened for youth ages 8 to 17 years old, the results of the study accurately represent and reflect all youth ages 8 to 17 years old nationwide. Telephone surveys, relative to mail or Internet surveys, allow for more scientific sampling and data collection, provide higher quality data, obtain higher response rates, are more timely, and are more cost-effective. The findings of the telephone survey are reported at the 95% confidence interval, with a sampling error of plus or minus 6.12 percentage points.

The focus groups were conducted in Columbia, SC and Meriden, CT, with youth ages 12-16. The groups contained 10-12 participants, all of whom were active in various indoor and outdoor forms of recreation. The groups lasted between one-and-a-half and two hours, and were moderated using a discussion guide that allowed for consistency in the data collection.

OPINIONS ON HUNTING AND TARGET SHOOTING AS RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

- **While youth more commonly say they have a positive opinion of video games and mainstream sports like soccer, football, and baseball, considerable percentages also have a positive opinion of target shooting and, to a lesser extent, hunting.**

Respondents to the survey were read a list of twelve indoor and outdoor recreational activities and asked whether they had a positive, neutral, or negative opinion about each. In looking at the ranking by the percentage of respondents who said they had a *strongly* or *moderately* positive opinion about each activity, the top activities include soccer (about which 66% of youth have a positive opinion), video games (62%), and football (61%). By comparison, target shooting and hunting rank lower: 52% of youth have a *strongly* or *moderately* positive opinion about target shooting, while over a third (38%) said they had a positive opinion about hunting. At the same time, it should be noted that hunting was the activity for which the largest percentage of youth respondents said they had a strongly or moderately *negative* opinion: 46% held a negative opinion about hunting (with 22% having a *strongly* negative opinion of it). The next highest items in the ranking by overall negative opinion were skateboarding (30% overall negative opinion) and dance (27%).

- **Opposition to hunting among youth comes primarily from a reluctance to cause pain to animals; opposition to target shooting, meanwhile, comes from a dislike of guns or from the perception that guns are dangerous.**

Respondents who said they had a negative opinion of hunting were asked why they felt this way, and 65% responded that they did not like killing animals (or the idea of killing animals). This was distantly followed by a further 16% who said they were simply against hunting in general.

Regarding target shooting, 44% of those with a negative opinion of the activity said they did not like guns or shooting in general, while another 19% based their negative opinion on the belief that guns are dangerous. Interestingly, 15% said they were unsure why they had a negative opinion of shooting.

- **The focus group discussions revealed that many youth perceive target shooting as a fun and challenging activity involving skills like concentration and accuracy. However, as in the survey results, opinion on hunting was decidedly mixed, with many participants opposing the idea of causing pain to animals.**

The majority of youth focus group participants had relatively positive reactions to most of the activities on the list—if a person did not participate in a certain activity, or did not care enough about it to participate, it was usually because he or she simply gravitated toward other activities, and not because of any major opposition.

Several participants in each group perked up at the mention of target shooting, with some saying they had experience shooting BB or pellet guns. One or two others mentioned “target shooting” paintball guns, thereby suggesting that some younger people may have a broader, more inclusive understanding of activities that constitute target shooting. In the South Carolina group, several female group members expressed interest in trying target shooting. With regard to hunting, four male participants in the South Carolina group had hunted previously, while two other female participants in the group said they would be interested in trying it. Two other female individuals mildly demurred at the thought of hunting, mainly due to their reluctance to cause pain to animals (one of these females identified herself as a vegetarian).

Connecticut group participants were generally less interested and less supportive of hunting, with a recurring comment being, “I like shooting but not killing.” Like the South Carolina group, a handful of youth in the Connecticut group had experience target shooting, although participants generally appeared to have had little exposure to hunting.

APPROVAL OF HUNTING AND TARGET SHOOTING AND ATTITUDES TOWARD VALUES ASSOCIATED WITH HUNTING AND TARGET SHOOTING

- **Approval of hunting and target shooting among youth is strong, particularly for the latter activity.**

Asked whether they approved or disapproved of hunting when it is legal to do so, 78% of respondents said they approved (49% *strongly* approved). An even greater majority (86%) said they approved of target shooting when it is legal to do so (50% *strongly* approved). Comments in the focus groups mirrored the results from the survey, with virtually all

individuals expressing strong approval of the two activities. However, many focus group participants applied the caveat that only responsible, safe individuals should engage in hunting and target shooting.

- **Regarding the right of others to hunt and shoot, youth are largely accepting and tolerant, even if they personally disagree with the activities.**

An overwhelming majority of youth (89%) agree that, regardless of their personal opinion, other people should be allowed to hunt. Similarly, 93% think that people should be allowed to target shoot, regardless of their personal opinion. In both cases, most agreement is *strong*, as opposed to *moderate*.

- **Youth most commonly believe that hunting is “perfectly acceptable,” although a substantial percentage express the reservation that hunting is “maybe a little inappropriate nowadays.” There is greater acceptance of target shooting, which a majority of youth describe as “perfectly acceptable” and only a little over a third say is “maybe a little inappropriate nowadays.”**

Youth respondents were read three statements and asked to choose the one that best described their opinions of hunting and target shooting (note that hunting and shooting were asked about in separate questions, but the structure of the statements remained the same, as shown below). The statements included the following:

- Hunting / target shooting is perfectly acceptable.
- Hunting / target shooting is okay, but maybe a little inappropriate nowadays.
- Hunting / target shooting is inappropriate nowadays.

Regarding hunting, nearly half of youth respondents (48%) said that hunting is perfectly acceptable, while 40% answered that hunting is okay, but maybe a little inappropriate nowadays. Just 11% said that hunting is inappropriate nowadays. Regarding shooting, well over half of youth respondents (58%) say the activity is perfectly acceptable, compared to 36% who say it is okay, but maybe a little inappropriate nowadays. Only 4% express the view that target shooting is inappropriate nowadays.

- **The vast majority of youth agree that both males and females should be able to hunt and target shoot, while similarly high percentages agree with the concept of subsistence hunting, that people who target shoot respect other people’s property, and that people who hunt care about wildlife. More problematic, however, are the notable percentages of youth who agree that hunting and target shooting are dangerous sports, that hunters and target shooters don’t obey all the laws related to these activities, and that legal hunting as practiced today in the U.S. causes some species to become endangered.**

The survey asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements on hunting and target shooting, which included seven “positive” statements and five “negative” statements. The positive statements included the following:

- It is okay for boys to hunt.

- It is okay for boys to target shoot.
- It is okay for girls to hunt.
- It is okay for girls to target shoot.
- Hunting wild animals such as turkey or deer for food is okay.
- In general, people who hunt care about wildlife.
- In general, people who target shoot respect other people's property.

The negative statements included the following:

- Compared to other sports, hunting is a dangerous sport.
- Compared to other sports, target shooting is a dangerous sport.
- Most hunters don't obey all the hunting laws.
- Most target shooters don't obey all the laws related to target shooting.
- Legal hunting as practiced today in the United States causes some species to become endangered.

Looking first at the positive statements (i.e., statements that would ideally be met with agreement from youth respondents), the top ranked items refer to the basic acceptability of participation in hunting and target shooting, with male participation appearing to be the most acceptable among youth: large majorities agree that it is okay for boys to hunt (87% agree, with 61% *strongly* agreeing); that it is okay for boys to target shoot (86% agree, 57% *strongly*); that it is okay for girls to hunt (85% agree, 51% *strongly*); and that it is okay for girls to target shoot (84% agree, 50% *strongly*). Fortunately, majorities of respondents also agreed with the three other positive statements on the list: hunting wild animals such as turkey or deer for food is okay (77% agree, with 46% *strongly* agreeing); in general, people who target shoot respect other people's property (69% agree, 30% *strongly*); and in general, people who hunt care about wildlife (57% agree, 27% *strongly*).

At the same time, substantial percentages of youth respondents agreed with some of the negative statements on hunting and shooting (i.e., statements that would ideally have higher levels of *disagreement* than *agreement*): compared to other sports, hunting is a dangerous sport (77% agree, with 41% *strongly* agreeing); most hunters don't obey all the hunting laws (61% agree, 28% *strongly*); legal hunting as practiced today in the United States causes some species to become endangered (59% agree, 33% *strongly*); compared to other sports, target shooting is a dangerous sport (55% agree, 24% *strongly*); and most target shooters don't obey all the laws related to target shooting (45% agree, 13% *strongly*).

Note that respondents who agreed with the statement "Compared to other sports, hunting is a dangerous sport" were asked why they felt this way, and the most common reason, by far, was the general possibility of accidents (49%). This was followed by the intrinsic danger associated with guns (20%), danger due to hunter inexperience or carelessness (19%), and danger from animals (13%).

The focus groups allowed for open-ended discussion of the same list of statements:

- Most participants voiced support for the concept of subsistence hunting, with the only dissent being from individuals concerned about causing pain to animals.
- Despite that a few individuals in each group were unable to reconcile the concept of killing animals with caring about habitat and wildlife, others in the group commented that there is a “right way” to hunt animals (cleaning or dressing carcasses properly, putting the meat to use, selecting appropriate species to hunt, not killing gratuitously, etc.).
- Few participants knew enough target shooters personally to say whether target shooters as a group respect property, but most individuals assumed this to be the case, since they generally thought of target shooters as “regular people.”
- Virtually all individuals in the groups agreed that it was okay for both boys and girls to hunt and target shoot.

In discussing reactions to the “negative” statements on hunting and shooting, a few individuals appeared willing to agree or disagree with a statement based solely on an anecdotal example of something relevant to the topic (e.g., if a participant knew of a hunter who had once trespassed, they were likely to say that *most* hunters do not obey all laws). Despite this tendency, a few other individuals offered rather thoughtful counterexamples that occasionally prompted other group members to reconsider their initial answers:

- Many in the group were initially convinced that most types of hunting in the United States endanger wildlife species. However, at least one person disagreed, saying that deer and other commonly hunted species are in no danger of being depleted.
 - Hunting out of season and trespassing were two primary examples in support of the statement that most hunters do not obey all laws.
 - Most individuals were unable to say whether target shooters generally obey laws, due to the fact that very few people could think of target shooters they knew personally.
 - A substantial number of individuals said that hunting and target shooting were rather dangerous activities due to the involvement of firearms. However, others insisted that hunting and shooting were no more dangerous than many mainstream sports; one person suggested that although the *rate* of injuries in hunting and target shooting is generally lower, any accidents that do occur are more likely to be fatal.
- **The vast majority of youth believe that at least *some* hunters and shooters are intelligent, educated, and helpful to others (answer set options included *most, some, a few, or no* hunters and shooters). The majority of youth also believe that at least *some* hunters and shooters have strong family values, care about the environment, and care about other people.**
- **While generally less than half of youth respondents said that *most* hunters and shooters had each desirable quality, this may actually illustrate the reluctance of respondents to make assumptions about entire categories of people. Indeed, some youth participants in the focus groups appeared at a loss when asked to describe what shooters are generally like as people (hunters, as a group, were somewhat easier for youth to describe and apply characteristics to). Rather than reflecting any widespread generalization about hunters and shooters as specific groups with consistent**

characteristics and qualities, these ratings may simply suggest ambivalence about defining people solely on the basis of the activities in which they participate.

Respondents were read a list of qualities and asked whether they thought that the item in question applied to *most*, *some*, *a few*, or *no* hunters and shooters (note that the series was asked separately about hunters and shooters specifically). The list included the following:

- Having strong family values
- Caring about other people
- Being intelligent or smart
- Being educated
- Being helpful to other people
- Caring about the environment

In general, while substantial percentages of respondents said that *most* hunters and shooters had each quality, these figures expand to overwhelming majorities when the *most* and *some* categories are summed: regarding hunters, no less than three-quarters of respondents thought that *most* or *some* of them are intelligent or smart (91%), are educated (89%), care about other people (87%), have strong family values (87%), are helpful to other people (86%), and care about the environment (76%). The ratings are similarly encouraging for shooters, with no less than three-quarters of youth saying that *most* or *some* of them care about other people (90%), are educated (88%), have strong family values (85%), are intelligent or smart (84%), are helpful to other people (81%), and care about the environment (77%).

In the focus groups, participants were asked about their perceptions of hunters, how they had formed these opinions, and whether they separated hunting as an activity from those who participate in hunting. A few initial descriptions of hunters in the South Carolina group were slightly negative, although this likely had to do with the fact that the questions about hunters immediately followed a discussion about “cocky” and “arrogant” football players (in other words, the tone of the preceding discussion may have encouraged a mindset in which participants picked up on especially unsavory or exaggerated characteristics of the group in question). Additionally, many individuals in the South Carolina group appeared to be describing specific individuals from their schools who were members of a “hunting clique” of sorts, with members who wore camouflage, chewed tobacco, drove trucks, and hung out together in groups. At the same time, many focus group participants were able to separate their impressions of such individuals from their knowledge of hunting as an activity, with one person commenting that he knew of “real” hunters who took the activity seriously, and who stood apart from the hunters at his school described previously.

A few participants in each group suggested that hunting is a violent activity by nature, although this was countered by several others who indicated that hunting is a natural means of procuring food (one female participant pointed to the fact that hunting is one of the oldest activities practiced by human beings). There were also suggestions that hunting is only as violent as the hunter involved, and that danger is minimized when hunters are properly trained and engage in the sport safely and responsibly.

As previously mentioned, participants in both focus groups appeared to find it more difficult to describe a “typical” target shooter—this activity appeared to lend itself to fewer stereotypes and easily agreed upon characteristics. A few people had family members or other acquaintances who practiced target shooting, and some of these individuals suggested that they generally took notice of the concentration and precision of target shooters. In discussions in both focus groups, it became apparent that participants generally defined target shooting loosely, typically including BB and pellet guns and archery equipment with traditional handguns and rifles. One person commented that many sports incorporate aspects of “target shooting,” in that soccer, golf, basketball, football, and other activities all require participants to try to connect with or hit a target with a ball or other object.

SOCIAL EXPOSURE TO HUNTING AND TARGET SHOOTING, OPINIONS ON PEER INVOLVEMENT, AND RELATED INVITATIONS TO HUNT AND TARGET SHOOT

- **More often than not, youth indicate that their friends mostly have positive feelings about hunting and target shooting.**

Half of the youth surveyed (50%) reported that at least 50 percent of their friends have positive feelings about hunting, while more than a third (37%) said at least 70 percent of their friends view hunting positively. The mean proportion of respondent friends with positive feelings about hunting was 57.20 percent, while the median was 60 percent.

Similarly, 50% of youth said that at least 50 percent of their friends have positive feelings about target shooting, with 40% saying that at least 70 percent of their friends felt this way. The mean proportion of respondent friends with positive feelings about target shooting was 58.80 percent, and the median was 60 percent.

- **Faced with a situation in which their friends were going hunting or target shooting, the most likely reaction from youth is active encouragement (and potentially joining in). Apart from active encouragement, youth are more likely to be glad their friends are participating or to be neutral, rather than actively discouraging their friends’ participation or being quietly against their participation.**

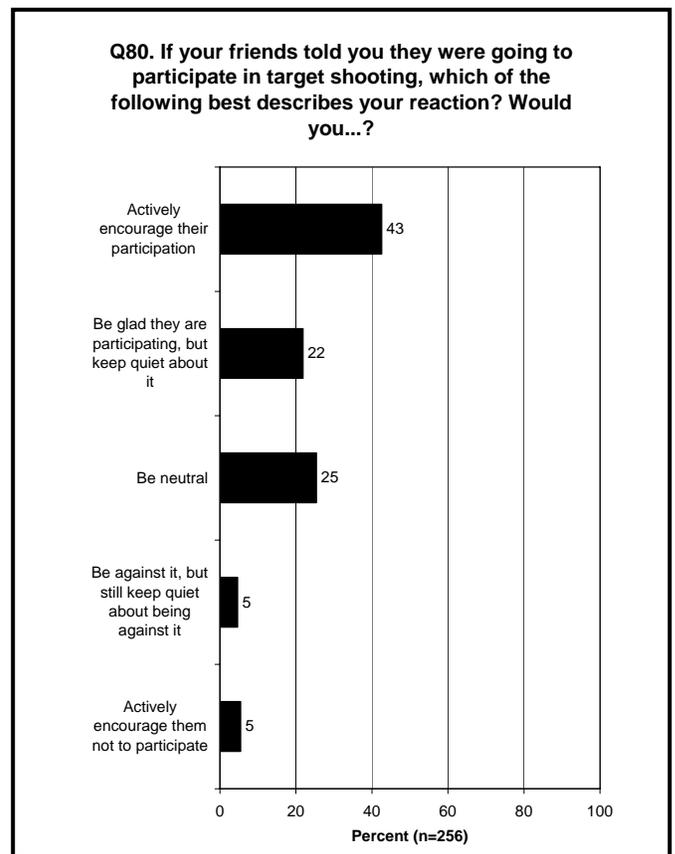
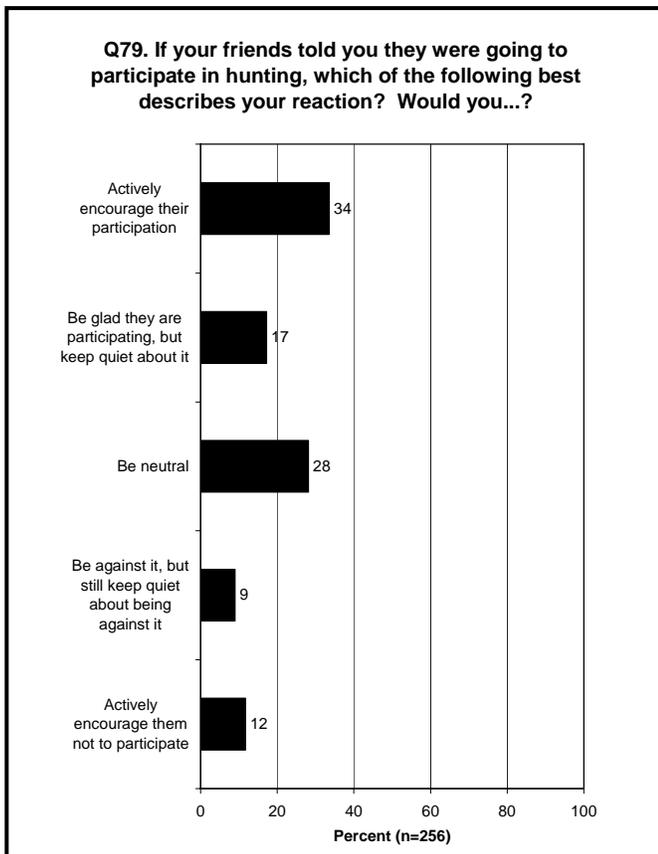
Asked to describe their likely reaction to a hypothetical scenario in which their friends were going hunting, the most common answer from youth is that they would actively encourage their friends’ participation and potentially want to join them (34% of respondents gave this response). The next most common reaction is being neutral (28%), followed by being glad the friends were participating but keeping quiet about it (17%). Smaller percentages of respondents would react negatively, either actively discouraging their friends *not* to participate (12%) or being against their friends’ decision to hunt but keeping quiet about it (9%).

The results are quite similar for the same hypothetical scenario involving shooting: 43% of youth would actively encourage their friends’ participation in target shooting activities, while a quarter (25%) would be neutral. A further 22% would be glad their friends were participating but keeping quiet about it, and no more than a tenth of all respondents would

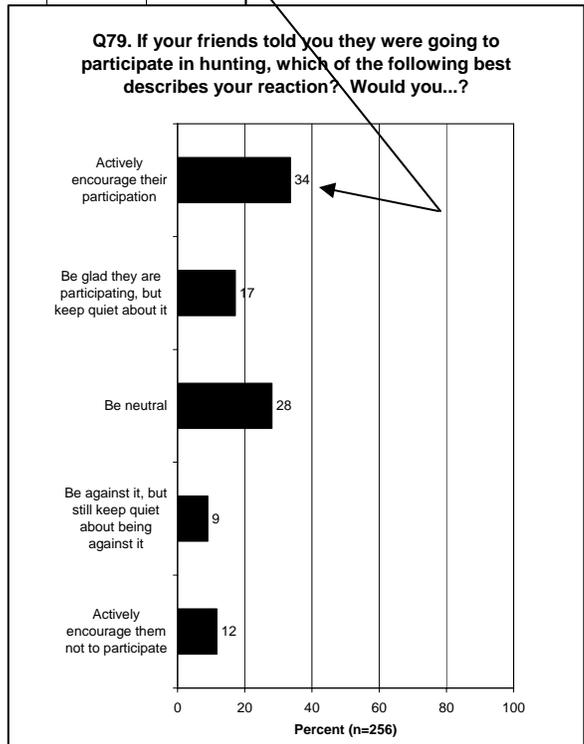
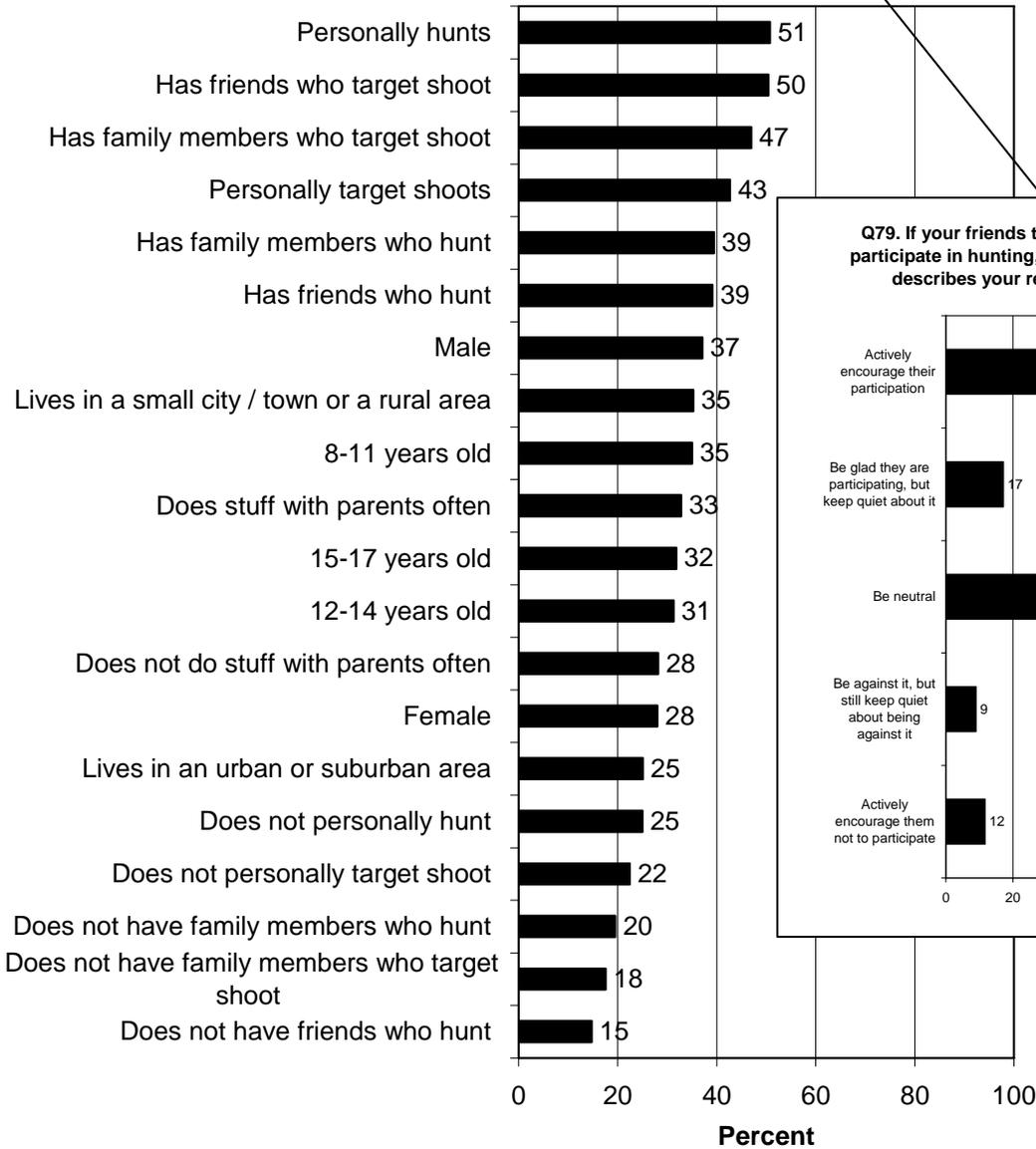
either be against their friends' decision to target shoot but keep quiet about it (5%) or actively encourage their friends *not* to participate in target shooting (5%).

To better illustrate the types of respondents giving various answers to the hypothetical scenarios of friends hunting or target shooting (actively encourage their participation, be neutral, etc.), reactions were analyzed by the percentages of individual respondent characteristics.

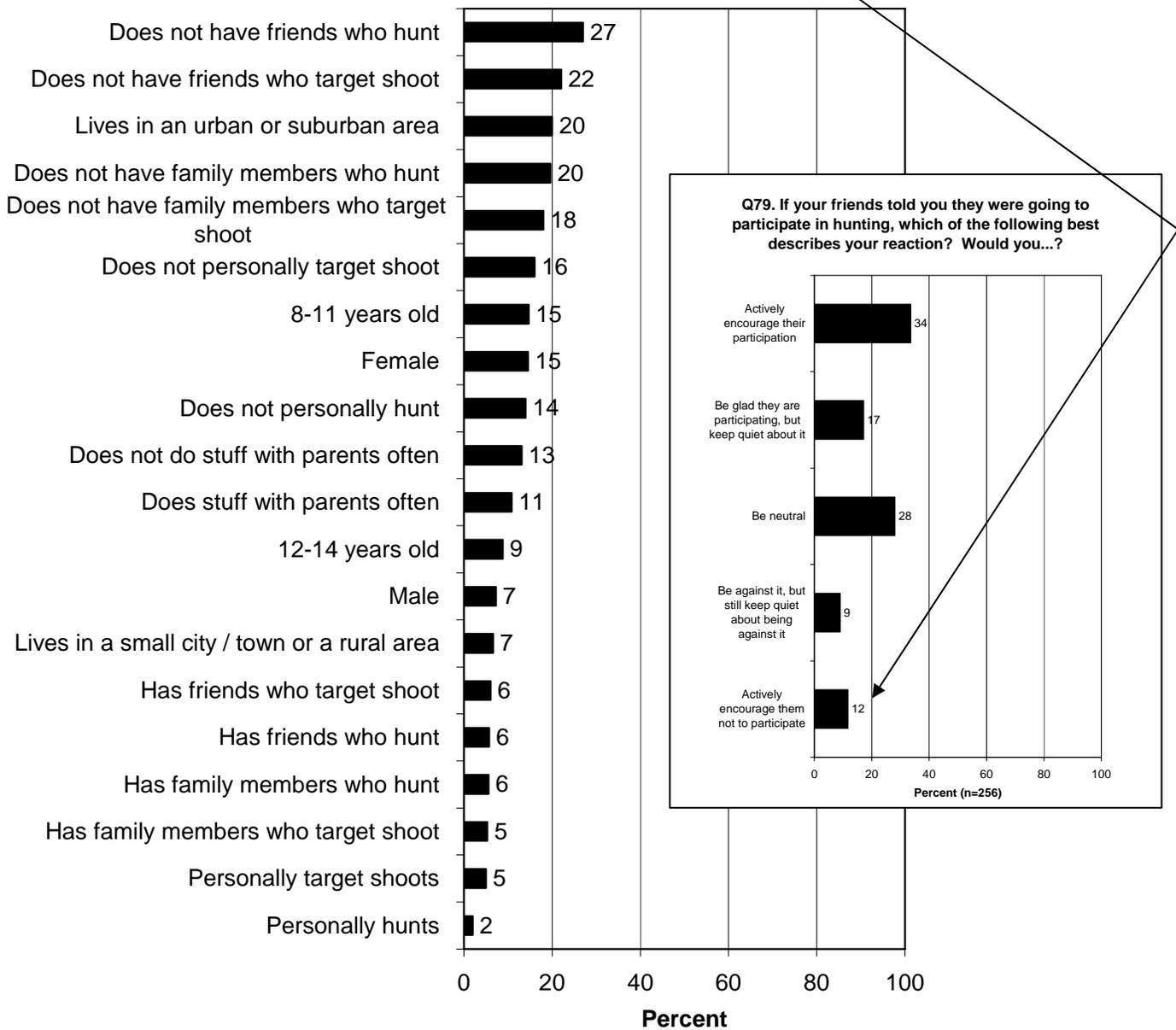
Graphs of the original questions are presented below. These are followed by two graphs for each activity showing the most approving and disapproving reactions (actively encourage friends to participate, and actively encourage friends *not* to participate), analyzed by individual respondent characteristics. (For context, the original graphs are shown in insets.)



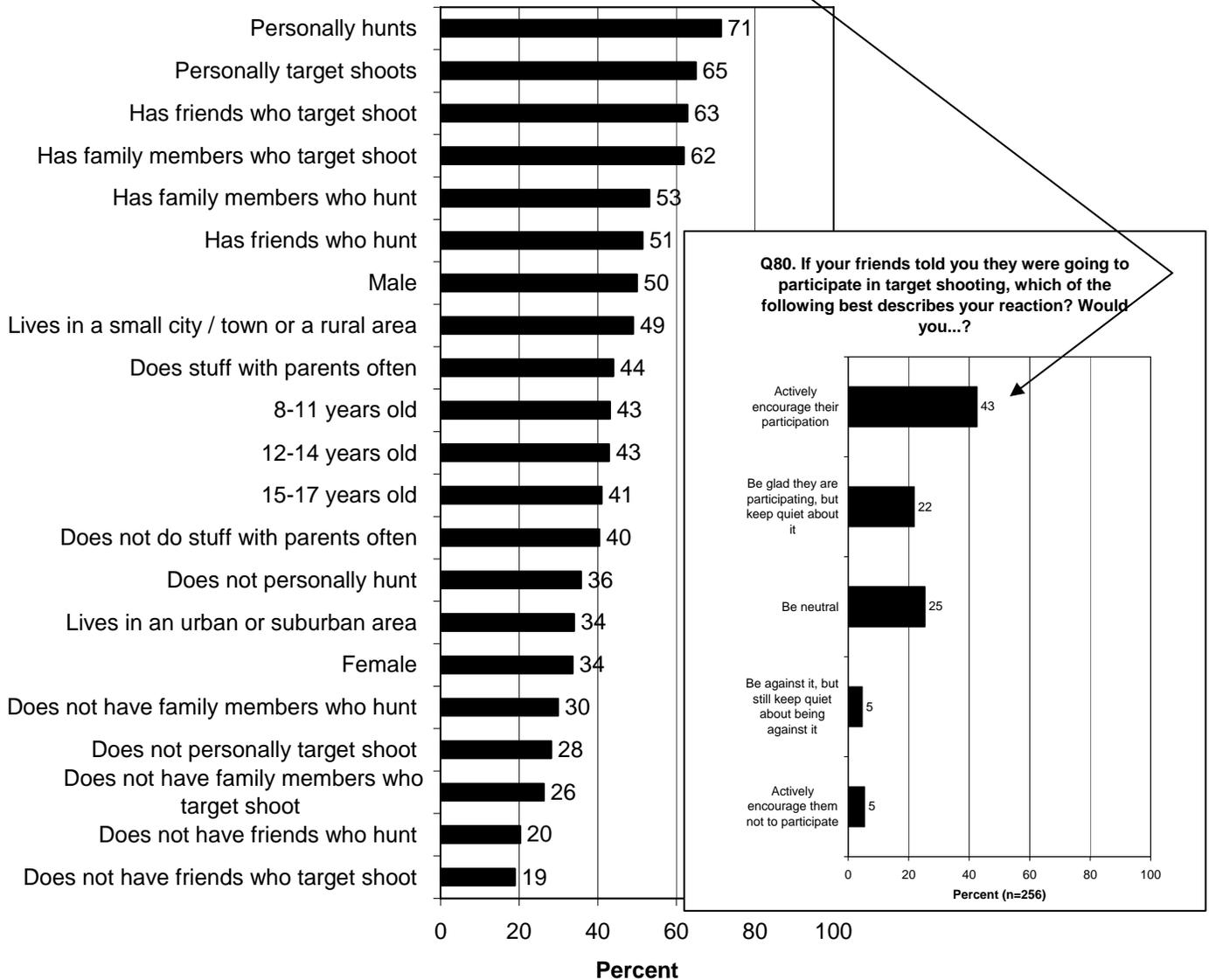
Among all youth who, if their friends told them they were going to participate in hunting, would actively encourage their participation (34% of youth gave this response; see inset):



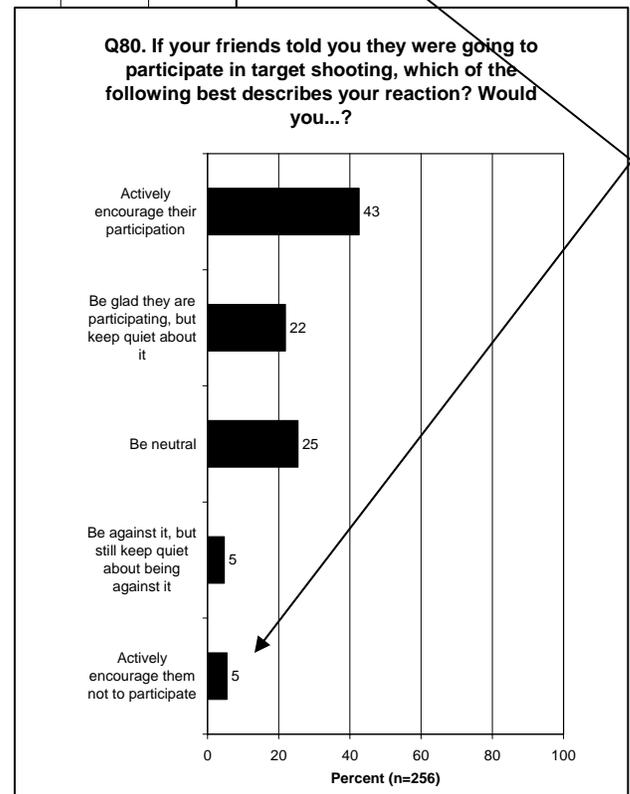
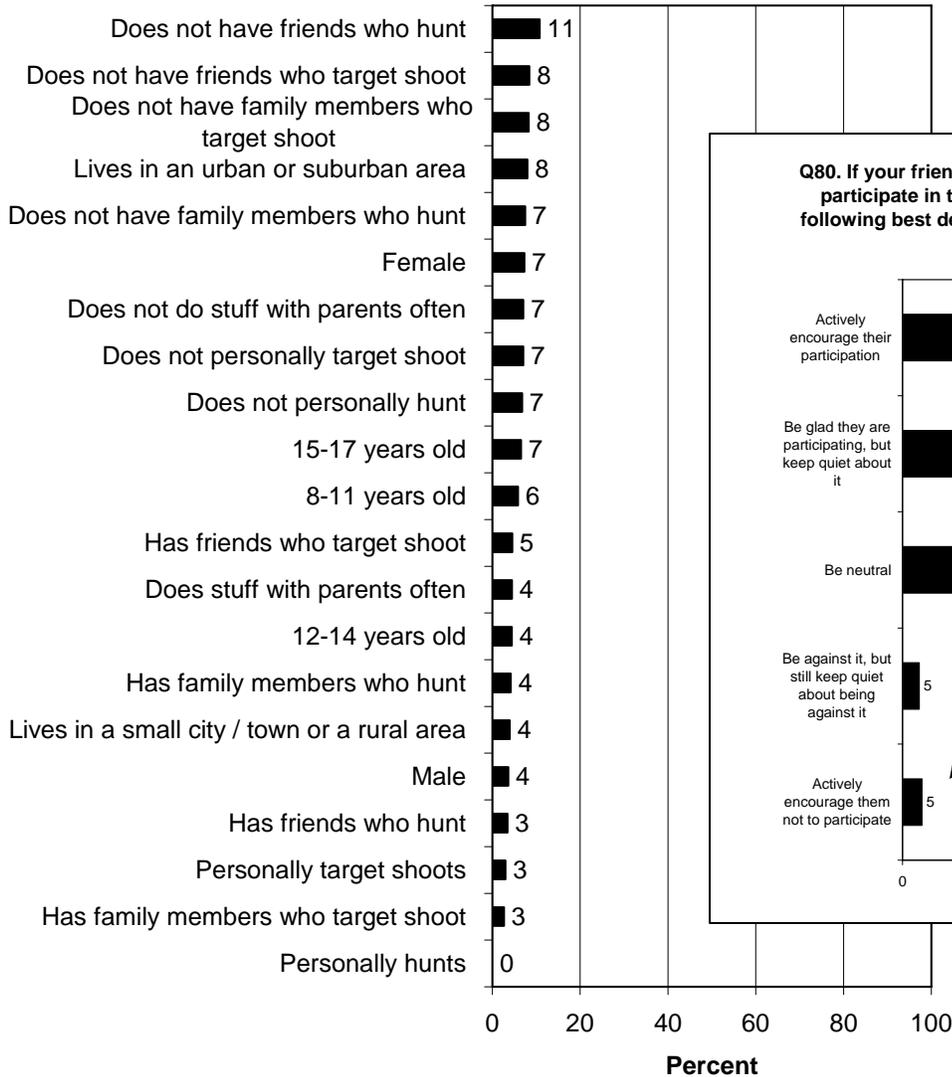
Among all youth who, if their friends told them they were going to participate in hunting, would actively encourage them not to participate (12% of youth gave this response; see inset):



Among all youth who, if their friends told them they were going to participate in target shooting, would actively encourage their participation (43% of youth gave this response; see inset):



Among all youth who, if their friends told them they were going to participate in target shooting, would actively encourage them not to participate (5% of youth gave this response; see inset):



As shown in the graph of individual characteristics, the top characteristic categories among those who said they would *actively encourage* their friends' participation in **hunting** are as follows:

- 51% of those who personally hunt would actively encourage their friends' participation in hunting;
- 50% of those who have friends who target shoot would actively encourage their friends' participation in hunting;
- 47% of those who have family members who target shoot would actively encourage their friends' participation in hunting;
- 43% of those who personally target shoot would actively encourage their friends' participation in hunting.

By comparison, the top characteristic categories for those who said they would actively encourage their friends' *not to participate* in **hunting** are as follows:

- 27% of those who do not have friends who hunt would actively encourage their friends *not to participate* in hunting;
- 22% of those who do not have friends who target shoot would actively encourage their friends *not to participate* in hunting;
- 20% of those who live in an urban or suburban area would actively encourage their friends *not to participate* in hunting;
- 20% of those who do not have family members who hunt would actively encourage their friends *not to participate* in hunting.

As shown in the graph of individual characteristics, the top characteristic categories among those who said they would *actively encourage* their friends' participation in **target shooting** are as follows:

- 71% of those who personally hunt would actively encourage their friends' participation in target shooting;
- 65% of those who personally target shoot would actively encourage their friends' participation in target shooting;
- 63% of those with friends who target shoot would actively encourage their friends' participation in target shooting;
- 62% of those with family members who target shoot would actively encourage their friends' participation in target shooting.

In the graph showing respondents who would actively encourage their friends *not to participate* in **target shooting**, only one characteristic category applies to at least a tenth of respondents: 11% of those who do not have friends who hunt would actively encourage their friends *not to participate* in target shooting.

In the focus groups, most individuals suggested a neutral reaction to the scenario of learning that a friend would be going hunting, with a few participants expressing mild disapproval at the idea of killing animals. At the same time, a few others said they would actively encourage the individual and even consider joining them. Although a few members in each group said they would be against their friend's decision, no one suggested that they would actively attempt to dissuade a friend from going hunting. There was more approval and encouragement in response to the hypothetical scenario involving target shooting, with group participants moderately more likely to actively encourage a friend's participation in the activity. About half of each group said they would consider joining the target shooting friend, with others indicating that they would be neutral.

- **While talk about hunting and target shooting in schools does not seem especially common among youth, such talk that *does* occur appears to be positive and perceived in a favorable light.**

When asked how much people in their school talk about hunting, youth most commonly said either *a little* (24%) or *hardly at all* (46%); smaller percentages said either *a lot* (17%) or *a moderate amount* (12%). Fortunately, any conversation about hunting in school tends to be perceived as largely positive: 54% of those who indicated that people in their school talk about hunting said that such people tend to say mostly good things, while less than half (45%) indicate that hunting talk in school includes some good and some bad things.

Target shooting talk in school appears less common than talk about hunting: 58% of respondents said that people in their school talk about target shooting *hardly at all*, with over a quarter more (29%) saying people talk about it only *a little*. Just 9% of respondents indicated hearing talk about target shooting in their school *a moderate amount*, with 2% saying it came up *a lot*. However, as with hunting, talk about target shooting is more often than not positive: 61% of those who indicated that people in their school talk about target shooting said that it mostly involves good things, with a little more than a third (36%) answering that such shooting talk involves some good and some bad things.

In the focus groups, several participants said they had a few friends who either talked positively about hunting or who went hunting themselves, but many others in the groups suggested that they could not recall many people in their schools discussing hunting. However, the majority of group participants either had a positive or neutral view of hunting, with only a small number being mildly opposed. Discussing their friends' feelings on target shooting, most individuals in the group suggested a generally neutral view: while a few had friends or siblings who participated in or talked about the activity, most said that target shooting rarely if ever came up in conversations with their friends.

Focus group participants were also asked how they thought their friends perceived activities or subjects that they didn't talk about, and most individuals agreed that the absence of conversation or commentary about something usually indicated neutrality. In other words, a person's failure to talk about something was not necessarily indicative of strongly negative feelings—in most cases, it simply meant that the person wasn't interested enough to discuss the topic.

Discussing instances in which participants disagreed with their friends about something, a few participants mentioned sports preferences, musical tastes, or people their friends dated. In general, most individuals suggested that while they were usually not shy about disagreeing with their friends about various things, they tended to do so in a tactful, respectful way. A few people commented that everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion and preference, and barring some extreme examples, differences of opinion are natural and expected. In discussing instances in which their friends had disagreed with them about a certain issue, several people mentioned activities in which they participated but which their friends had lightly ridiculed or disagreed with. Some of these individuals said they invited friends to participate or observe the activities in question as a way of introducing them through direct experience. In general, instances of peer disagreement were referred to and discussed in a rather lighthearted manner.

- **A little less than half of youth have been invited to go hunting at some point, with about half of this figure actually going when invited. Fortunately, in looking at reasons why youth do not accept invitations to go hunting, time constraints and other obligations are more often responsible than is outright opposition to hunting. In terms of future invitations, about half of those who receive an invitation to go hunting are likely to go.**

More than half of the youth surveyed (55%) had *never* been invited in hunting, while about a fifth (22%) had been invited *once or twice*. Less commonly, youth had been invited hunting *a few times* (11%) or *many times* (11%). Among those who were invited to go hunting at some point, half (49%) *never* went; a further 30% went *some of the times*, and only 20% went *every time*.

Those who never went hunting when invited were asked their reasons for not going, and the top response was simply having other obligations that conflicted (49% of those invited who never went gave this response). Meanwhile, 19% said they had no interest in hunting, with smaller percentages mentioning being opposed to killing animals (9%) or being inexperienced or not old enough (9%).

Another question in this section measured the respondent's likelihood of going hunting if invited within the next 12 months: over half of the youth surveyed (57%) said they were likely to go, with 25% being *very* likely; however, another 42% said they were *not at all* likely to go hunting if invited.

An additional analysis looked at the total percentages of *non-hunters* (i.e., those who did not indicate that they personally hunted) by various categories within the survey (e.g., gender, residence type, participation in hunting and shooting activities) who would be either *very* or *somewhat* likely to go hunting if invited in the next 12 months. In this ranking, the top categories for being likely to go hunting if invited within the next 12 months are as follows:

- 74% of non-hunters with family members who target shoot would be likely to go hunting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 65% of non-hunters who personally shoot would be likely to go hunting in the next 12 months, if invited;

- 64% of non-hunters with family members who hunt would be likely to go hunting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 63% of non-hunters living in small cities/towns or rural areas would be likely to go hunting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 58% of non-hunting 15-17-year-olds would be likely to go hunting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 57% of non-hunters with friends who hunt would be likely to go hunting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 57% of non-hunters with friends who target shoot would be likely to go hunting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 56% of non-hunting males would be likely to go hunting in the next 12 months, if invited.

In actual numbers based on U.S. Census population estimates, the percentages above translate into 23,669,139 youth ages 8 to 17 years old who would be likely to go hunting if invited in the next 12 months. Among this group are 16,860,209 *non-hunter youth* who would be likely to hunt if invited in the next 12 months.

- **Similar to hunting, most youth have not been invited to go target shooting, but those who *are* invited are more likely to accept the invitation than are those invited to go hunting. Once again, time constraints and conflicting obligations are more to blame for not going shooting when invited than opposition to or discomfort around guns and shooting. As many as two-thirds of those invited to go shooting in the future are likely to accept the invitation.**

Responses concerning shooting invitations followed the pattern of answers on hunting: more than half of the sample (52%) had *never* been invited to go target shooting, while slightly less than a quarter (23%) had been invited *once or twice*. Just 16% had been invited to go shooting *a few times*, with 8% being invited *many times*. However, youth appeared to show a greater willingness to accept invitations to go shooting than invitations to go hunting: among those who were invited to go target shooting at some point, 43% went *every time*, 41% went *some of the times*, and only 16% *never* went. The most common reasons for never accepting an invitation to go target shooting were having other obligations or time conflicts (62% of those invited who never went gave this response). Meanwhile, 20% said they simply had no interest in shooting.

As before, a later question measured likelihood of going target shooting if invited within the next 12 months: in an even breakdown of responses, a third of respondents (33%) are *very* likely, a third (33%) are *somewhat* likely, and a final third (33%) are *not at all* likely to go target shooting if invited.

An additional analysis looked at the total percentages of *non-shooters* (i.e., those who did not indicate that they personally participated in target shooting) by various categories within the survey (e.g., gender, residence type, participation in hunting and shooting activities) who would be either *very* or *somewhat* likely to go target shooting if invited in the next 12

months. In this ranking, the top categories for being likely to go target shooting if invited within the next 12 months are as follows:

- 75% of non-shooters who personally hunt would be likely to go target shooting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 67% of non-shooters with family members who target shoot would be likely to go target shooting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 63% of non-shooters who do not do stuff with their parents often would be likely to go target shooting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 57% of non-shooting 15-17-year-olds would be likely to go target shooting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 54% of non-shooters with friends who hunt would be likely to go target shooting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 53% of non-shooters who live in small cities/towns or rural areas would be likely to go target shooting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 52% of non-shooters who do not have friends who target shoot would be likely to go target shooting in the next 12 months, if invited;
- 51% of non-shooting females would be likely to go target shooting in the next 12 months, if invited.

In actual numbers based on U.S. Census population estimates, the percentages above translate into 27,559,957 youth ages 8 to 17 years old who would be likely to target shoot if invited in the next 12 months. Among this group are 12,645,157 non-shooter youth who would be likely to target shoot if invited in the next 12 months.

Note that those already involved in the sports are much more likely to be invited to go hunting or shooting; non-hunters and non-shooters, by comparison, most often said they had *never* been invited to go.

In the focus groups, virtually all group members said they knew of a friend or classmate at school who hunted, and several people in the two groups had either previously gone hunting or target shooting or had been invited, although no participants considered themselves to be regular hunters or shooters. Discussing instances in which they had been invited to go hunting but had ended up not going, a few people mentioned having to decline because of cold weather or a parent disapproving of firearms or hunting. Several people reported seeing pictures or other personal information about hunting or shooting posted on Facebook pages (e.g., photos of an animal harvested), and a few of these people said that such postings made them slightly more interested or likely to take part in the activity with a friend.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN AND EXPOSURE TO HUNTING AND TARGET SHOOTING, AND PEER REACTIONS

- **Participation in target shooting among youth is more common than participation in hunting. However, substantial percentages of youth have friends and family members who hunt and/or target shoot. In general, youth hunters are more likely than are youth shooters to tell their friends about their participation in their respective activity. In any**

case, when told of a friend's hunting or shooting participation, reactions from peers tend to be largely positive.

Just under a fifth of the sample (19%) said that they personally hunted. Meanwhile, over two-thirds (68%) said they had friends who hunted, and more than half (56%) said they had family members who hunted. Asked whether they told *most*, *some*, *just a few*, or *none* of their friends that they hunted, the most common response among youth hunters was that they told *most* of their friends (45%), followed by *some* (31%), and *just a few* (16%). Fortunately, 33% of those who told their friends that they hunted say their friends reacted *very* positively, with 40% saying the reaction among friends was *somewhat* positive, and 27% saying they received a reaction that was neither positive nor negative.

More than a third of youth surveyed (39%) said that they personally participated in target shooting. Over half (52%) indicated having friends who participated in target shooting, while just under half (44%) said they had family members who took part in the activity. Interestingly, youth who target shoot appear much less likely to share this information with their friends than youth who hunt: asked whether they told *most*, *some*, *just a few*, or *none* of their friends that they engaged in target shooting, the most common responses among youth shooters was that they told *just a few* (31%) or *some* of their friends (28%). A quarter of those who participated in target shooting (25%) said they told *none of their friends* about their involvement in the activity, while just 15% said they told *most* of their friends. However, as with hunting, peer reactions are usually positive, with 32% of those who told their friends that they went target shooting saying their friends reacted *very* positively, 34% saying their friends reacted *somewhat* positively, and 30% saying the reaction from their friends was neither positive nor negative.

OVERVIEW OF OPPORTUNITIES

Initiate a Communications Campaign Centered on Youth Hunter and Shooter Ambassadors of the Sports:

- The results of this study are clear: youth who are exposed to hunting and target shooting, either through active personal participation or through proximity to family members or friend who hunt and shoot, are more likely to approve of hunting and shooting, more likely to be interested in taking part in these activities, more likely to encourage friends to participate in them, and less likely to negatively influence or discourage their peers from supporting or participating in hunting and target shooting. As importantly, the opposite is also true: youth who do *not* participate in hunting or shooting, or who lack family or friends that are involved in these activities, are *more* likely to discourage their friends from participating and *more* likely to exert a negative influence on others regarding their involvement in hunting and target shooting.

The most important elements of peer influence concerning attitudes toward and participation in hunting and shooting are exposure to and interaction with friends, classmates, and others who participate in these activities. The more familiar youth are with individuals their own age who participate in hunting and shooting, the more likely they will be to support and actively participate in these activities. In this sense, youth hunters and shooters are the key to

their fellow friends' and students' acceptance of these activities. Given this direct relationship, it is imperative that youth hunters and shooters recognize the weight and importance of their words and actions with regard to their peers' perceptions of hunting and target shooting.

Based on this overall finding, an opportunity exists for a "Youth Hunter and Shooter Ambassador Program" to be initiated to capitalize on the current population of youth hunters and shooters who can positively influence their fellow peers' attitudes toward the sports. If non-hunting and non-shooting students talk with, befriend, and interact with youth who are actively involved in hunting and shooting, the positive aspects of these activities will increasingly be thought of as acceptable, appealing, and inviting recreational activities. In this sense, youth hunter and shooter ambassadors will be performing a major service for the hunting and shooting sport communities.

Findings from the current study as well as indications from past literature both make clear that the impact of peers increases during periods of uncertainty (Griskevicius, Cialdini, Goldstein, 2008). When youth have little or no experience with a topic or activity, they tend to fill in the gaps in their understanding with whatever information is available, including anecdotal or simply inaccurate information based on myth or misperception. Considering that not all youth can be born into the ideal environment for creating a lifelong hunter or shooter (i.e., as a male within a hunting or shooting family in a rural environment), many individuals will necessarily come to hunting and shooting later on in life, especially during their adolescence or formative, pre-teenage years. These are the individuals likely to be the least experienced and equipped with the least amount of accurate information about hunting and shooting. These are the individuals among the nearly half of all youth who have a strongly or moderately negative opinion of hunting, who report being against hunting for nonspecific reasons, who think that hunting and shooting are dangerous sports, who are unsure of why they have a negative opinion about shooting, who believe that most hunters and shooters do not obey all the laws related to these sports, and who think that legal hunting as practiced in the U.S. causes some species to become endangered.

For these individuals, the influence of peer hunting and shooting ambassadors will be critical to overcoming their initial misperceptions and encouraging them to try hunting and shooting. As good as parents, agency personnel, and celebrity spokespersons are, peer ambassadors of hunting and shooting differ from them in the most important way—they can relate to other individuals their own age through social interaction. Friends, classmates, neighbors, significant others, and siblings—these are the individuals most likely to be influenced by hunters and shooters their own age. In this sense, all of the recommendations and communications strategies listed here should be heeded by future youth ambassadors of hunting and target shooting.

The development of the proposed Ambassador Program should incorporate the support and participation of major sportsman and conservation organizations—because these groups have considerable reach and membership, their involvement could help the program to gain national prominence and visibility. Further, because the suggested Ambassador Program represents a way to capitalize on the influence of young hunters and shooters, their efforts

should concentrate as much as possible on correcting misperceptions and to their sport. Some of the most important “talking points” for youth ambassadors include the following:

- That hunting and shooting are in fact *safer* than many other sports. While accident and fatality statistics provide empirical evidence of this, comfort and confidence through hands-on experience and participation is preferable.
- That legal, regulated hunting *does not* cause wildlife populations to become endangered, as is the perception among many individuals unfamiliar with the sport (recall that 59% of respondents to the survey thought that legal hunting in the U.S. causes some species to become endangered).
- That most hunters and shooters *do* obey laws related to these sports, and that anecdotal examples to the contrary amount to the exception and not the rule.
- That hunters and shooters *do*, in fact, care about wildlife, especially through Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act contributions from their purchases of ammunition and firearms. Ideally, potential new hunters and shooters can learn precisely how hunters and shooters provide support for conservation efforts.

Many of the communications strategies recommended here follow the general findings of de Guzman and Tate, whose earlier research cited in the introductory literature review establishes childhood peer interactions as opportunities for gaining new resources for decision-making, thinking, and analysis of situations. In this sense, youth ambassadors will help to perform this function.

Finally, the availability of programmatic infrastructure focused on instruction and teaching is essential for attracting newcomers, and should be a major feature of the proposed Ambassador Program. Those willing to follow their peers into hunting and shooting should be afforded convenient opportunities to increase their knowledge, learn and engage in a hands-on manner, and progress through natural levels of experience and competition. This will fulfill one of the most important obligations of those hoping to improve support for and participation in hunting and target shooting: make the activities fun.

Encourage Invitations to Hunt and Shoot:

- The most important obligation for youth hunting and shooting ambassadors is to invite their friends to go hunting and shooting. While more than half of the youth surveyed had *never* been invited to go hunting or target shooting, similar percentages of youth said they would be very or somewhat likely to go if invited in the next 12 months.

In actual numbers based on U.S. Census population estimates, the percentages translate into the following real-life opportunities in terms of individuals open to initiation by youth ambassadors: **23,669,139 youth ages 8 to 17 years old would be likely to go hunting if invited in the next 12 months. Among this group are 16,860,209 non-hunters who would be likely to hunt if invited in the next 12 months. Similarly, 27,559,957 youth ages 8 to 17 years old would be likely to target shoot if invited in the next 12 months. Among them are 12,645,157 non-shooters who would be likely to target shoot if invited in the next 12 months.**

The focus groups also revealed substantial willingness among youth to introduce their friends and peers to activities that they themselves participate in and enjoy (not necessarily hunting and shooting, but recreational activities in general). This tendency must be encouraged among youth hunting and shooting ambassadors, as introduction through direct involvement and experience represents the most effective recruitment strategy. Although it may also go without saying, youth ambassadors must branch out by extending invitations to newcomers, and not just to friend who already participate in these sports. Remember that while many individuals are likely to actively encourage participation in hunting or target shooting, a number of others (who otherwise support these sports) are likely to remain neutral. Youth ambassadors should concentrate on converting this passive acceptance into active encouragement and participation.

Encourage Talk About Hunting and Shooting:

- As a way of dispelling myths or misperceptions, youth hunting and shooting ambassadors should be encouraged to talk to their friends, classmates, and peers about their hunting and shooting experiences. Again, myth and misperception thrive in the absence of reliable, accurate information; it is the obligation of youth ambassadors to provide such information in a trustworthy, relatable manner. In doing so, they will reinforce the perception of hunters and shooters as normal, relatable people—recall that in the focus groups, several participants had moderately negative perceptions of hunters, while others had little to no perceptions about target shooters. In the same way, many respondents to the survey reported that a majority of their friends had positive feelings about hunting and shooting, but such feelings may not be discussed or exploited in any way.

Also note that while many survey respondents said that hunting and target shooting are rarely discussed in their schools, such talk that *does* occur tends to be quite positive. It cannot be overemphasized that the influence of peers increases during periods of uncertainty: by maintaining a social presence and encouraging talk about their sports, peer ambassadors of hunting and shooting will be able to correct misunderstandings and inaccuracies (e.g., most hunters and target shooters do not obey all the laws, hunting endangers certain species of wildlife, hunting and shooting are dangerous).

Promote Talk About Hunting and Shooting in a Variety of Ways:

- As a continuation of the above opportunity, talk and communication about hunting and shooting should be encouraged and promoted in as many ways as possible, especially through social media. One individual from the focus groups mentioned photos a hunting classmate had posted on Facebook—as with this individual, such photos tend to encourage questions, invite curiosity, increase interest, and place hunting and shooting activities in the foreground of the social atmosphere. Youth, in particular, are uniquely positioned to take advantage of the most prominent and effective means of social media and other communication tools—hunting and shooting sponsoring agencies and organizations should encourage this tendency wherever possible. In promoting the use of images, remember that pictures are often worth a thousand words: images promoting hunting and shooting should reinforce a positive atmosphere that emphasizes the environment, nature, the outdoors, nice weather, exercise, natural resources, wildlife, a social atmosphere among friends and peer groups, etc.

Embrace a Broad Definition of Target Shooting:

- The focus groups revealed that many youth have a broad understanding of the activities that constitute target shooting: at various points, youth mentioned BB and pellet guns, paintball guns, and archery equipment. Although such a loose conceptualization of target shooting was initially thought to be detrimental to participants' understanding of the subject matter, it is actually a positive finding: the more inclusive the sport of target shooting is viewed, the better. In this sense, youth ambassadors and others should focus on getting newcomers to take a first step into target shooting through any means, whether a BB or pellet gun, paintball gun, or archery bow. The point should be to get newcomers started shooting *something*, with the natural next step being a move toward actual firearms. Initial interest, however, should be embraced in whatever form it presents itself.

Market the Multiple Appeals of Target Shooting:

- The data suggest that youth tend to be interested in target shooting for various reasons, each highly important in its own way and a potential centerpiece of a specific marketing initiative. Many motivations have to do with the skills intrinsic to the sport, such as concentration, accuracy, precision, and calmness—many individuals admire these qualities and seek ways of improving their own personal abilities in these areas. Others find appeal in the competition aspect of target shooting and derive pleasure from competing with friends in a scored environment. The concept of acquiring skills and knowledge for home-/self-protection is also not to be discounted, as many youth are highly motivated by this reason as well. Finally, target shooting holds interest for many females as well, particularly in terms of personal defense. Participation in target shooting will be increased through savvy marketing of the various appeals and attractions of the sport.

Contextualize Hunting as Part of a Larger Picture:

- For many individuals, hunting needs to be contextualized as part of a larger overall picture. These are individuals who most object to the idea of causing pain to animals, who view hunting as endangering wildlife populations, and who assume that hunting constitutes the needless, gratuitous killing of wildlife. The contextualization of hunting can occur in two ways: first, hunting can be contextualized within other outdoor activities. Second, hunting can be contextualized by defining it and convincing the opposition that it represents a practical solution.

In the first example, overall attitudes toward hunting are likely to benefit from an introductory approach that surrounds the sport with other activities involving outdoor topics and skills. For example, many successful recruitment and retention programs introduce newcomers to hunting through camps that include opportunities to participate in or learn about fishing, target shooting, camping, ethics, biology and ecology, archery, survival techniques, photojournalism, and other topics, in addition to hunting.

The second example depends on getting individuals to understand hunting within the wider context of conservation and wildlife management. A study examining support for trapping in Connecticut, Indiana and Wisconsin found that support for trapping was likely to increase if the concept was explained as a *Sanctioned, Scientific Solution* (RM, 2001). Through this

model, negative connotations associated with the activity in question (trapping in the previous research; hunting in this case) were overcome by providing concrete, positive reasons: first, that trapping was *sanctioned* (by the state); second, that the practice was scientific (i.e., based on population estimates set by biologists); and third, that the practice amounted to a solution (i.e., to a problem).

A similar communications strategy or talking point could be incorporated into appeals aimed at youth who disapprove of hunting. This approach may help to broaden support for hunting among the youth population and overcome resistance on the basis of emotional appeals to animal welfare. Finally, it is instructive to view this recommendation in light of the 1980 research by Kellert and Westervelt cited in the introductory literature review: emotional concern and affection for animals begins in early youth, while cognitive understanding of animals follows in pre-teen and early teenage years; finally, youth develop increased ethical and ecological concerns for animals and the natural environment, as well as an increased interest in wildlife and outdoor recreation. These patterns, along with the finding from the survey data that approval of hunting and shooting tends to increase with age, suggest that understanding of hunting as a management tool will also become more prevalent as youth grow up.

Differentiate Between Poaching and Hunting:

- Related to the above, it is important to remember that a majority of youth in the survey (59%) agreed that legal hunting as practiced in the United States causes some species to become endangered. This perception turned up again in the focus groups, where at least a few participants conflated hunting with poaching (one individual commented that hunting is responsible for species like “elephants, lions, and tigers” becoming endangered). In general, the research suggests that many youth who are unfamiliar with hunting have a tendency to assume that hunting is as harmful an activity as poaching—essentially, that *all* forms of hunting endanger wildlife populations. As previously mentioned, a major concept for youth hunters to impart on their friends is the idea of hunters as the original conservationists. A concerted effort focusing on the involvement of teachers and the media, particularly one spearheaded by national sportsman and conservation organizations, could help to correct this troubling misperception and improve overall attitudes.

De-Emphasize Trophy and Sport Hunting When Appropriate:

- The most common reason that youth hold a negative opinion of hunting is their distaste in causing pain to animals. While the quantitative data from this study provide an encouraging picture of overall levels of approval of hunting, the qualitative data suggest that while most youth are broadly supportive of subsistence hunting and hunting for wildlife population control, they are less approving of hunting for the sport, for a trophy, or for a challenge. Indeed, these findings are in line with the attitudes of all U.S. residents, not just youth: a survey of American adults found overwhelming approval of hunting for the meat (85%), to protect humans from harm (85%), for animal population control (83%), for wildlife management (81%), and to protect property (71%), but diminished support when it came to hunting for the sport (53% approved), to supplement income (44%), for the challenge (40%), or for a trophy (28%) (RM, 2006).

It follows that many youth tend to be standoffish about hunting when the activity is presented as a sport or something engaged in as means of obtaining trophies. This attitude tends to be most pronounced among females, but other segments of the youth population show similar hesitation. In any case, appeals to newcomers to try hunting may be most effective if they concentrate on the activity as a venerated pastime of human culture (or as a way of obtaining tasty game meat, experiencing the outdoors, or engaging in wildlife management and conservation). Also, the role and involvement of youth ambassadors is crucial to this aspect of the social acceptance of hunting. Note that several youth in the South Carolina focus group who were initially somewhat opposed to hunting later deferred to a fellow group member with actual hunting experience; this individual emphasized that most responsible hunters are far from careless and instead attempt to minimize the suffering of animals at all times while hunting.

Provide and Encourage a Social Atmosphere:

- Hunting and target shooting must be viewed as fun, enjoyable activities if youth are to gravitate toward them. To this end, opportunities to participate in hunting and target shooting should center not just on the activities themselves, but as opportunities to socialize with peers and friends, meet new people, cultivate relationships, and have a good time in a social setting. Field days, hands-on demonstrations, camps, and other events with a social component are the types of initiatives that will always be the most effective and enjoy the greatest participation. The desire to have fun and enjoy oneself is not unique to hunting and target shooting, but consistent with participants of any sport or activity.

Promote the Concept of Trying Something New:

- Although this may seem obvious, the data highlight the importance of emphasizing this concept, as it is likely to resonate with youth audiences in particular. Adolescent, pre-teen, and teenage years are the most important periods for developing personal interests and exposing oneself to various ideas, concepts, and activities. The focus group findings in particular suggest the potential effectiveness of marketing strategies that challenge youth to try something new, in particular something with which they are unfamiliar, or that may yield benefits and personal growth in the future (such as an appreciation of wildlife and conservation through hunting, or a sense of personal protection and firearm knowledge associated with target shooting). These suggestions relate to previous research cited in the introduction of this report concerning Cognitive Evaluation Theory and Competence Motivation Theory, particularly in terms of the development and recognition of new achievements and abilities among youth. Indeed, the research suggests that many youth may react quite favorably to opportunities or invitations to try something new.

