Americanness, Masculinity, and Whiteness:
How Michigan Militia Men Navigate Evolving Social Norms

by

Amy B. Cooter

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Sociology)
in The University of Michigan
2013

Doctoral Committee:

      Associate Professor Geneviève Zubrzycki, chair
      Associate Professor Matthew J. Countryman
      Associate Professor Kiyoteru Tsutsui
      Professor Alford A. Young Jr.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I thank the many militia members and their families (in Michigan and elsewhere) who opened their meetings, trainings, homes, and families to me. I appreciate your willingness to share your experiences with me and answer my endless questions, despite unpleasant experiences with other researchers. I owe a special debt to the members of the Southeast Michigan Volunteer Militia who helped me form connections elsewhere and made my research much easier than it might have been. I have done my best to accurately represent the full range of the militia in Michigan while giving the most attention to what an "average" militia unit looks like, rather than only focusing only on the problematic groups most likely to end up on the evening news. I hope you find it a fair representation.

I will forever be grateful to my dissertation chair, Geneviève Zubrzycki, for her insightful comments that helped dramatically improve this manuscript, as well as for her tremendous support through both the degree completion and personal issues alike. I also appreciate the feedback and support of my other committee members: Kiyo Tsutsui, Al Young, and Matthew Countryman. I could not have asked for a better combination of expertise or a more supportive committee.

Thank you to my other mentors who, while not on my committee, generously gave their time to read drafts of chapters and papers to help improve my work. Although

thousands of documents; Seth Cooter, Leslie Rott, Mark Suchyta, Aaron Breider, and Amy Willett, you all made my research life just a little easier, for which I will always be grateful.

Finally, thank you to my family who have always supported my endeavors, even when they're not entirely sure what sociology is, or why I had to move to Michigan to do it. Everyone from my brother, mom, dad, uncle, aunt, and grandmothers all had a role in the completion of this manuscript. Last, but certainly not least, thanks to my husband Dustin Faeder for proofreading most of these pages, even though he thinks they're boring. You made it much easier to keep my priorities straight during all of grad school.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADL .... Anti-Defamation League

APFN .... American Patriot Fax Network

ATV .... All-Terrain Vehicle

CPL .... Concealed Pistol License

DHS.. Department of Homeland Security

FBI .... Federal Bureau of Investigation

JMC.. Junior Militia Corps

JCVM .... Jackson County Volunteer Militia

KKK.. Ku Klux Klan

LEO.. Law Enforcement Officers

MMCW .... Michigan Militia Corps of Wolverines

MPA... Michigan Patriot Alliance

MREs .... Meals Ready to Eat

NAACP.............................. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

SMVM .... Southeast Michigan Volunteer Militia

SPLC.. Southern Poverty Law Center

ABSTRACT

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Amy Cooter

Chair: Geneviève Zubrzycki

This dissertation is based on three years of ethnographic fieldwork and 40 in-depth interviews with members of the Michigan militia. Militia members are mostly white men who believe in an originalist interpretation of the Constitution. Armed with rifles, they practice paramilitary exercises and protest various government actions. Militia members see themselves as "super citizens" who embody national ideals of freedom and equality even as they face public criticism as being violent, socially regressive, and racist. My dissertation examines how members respond to changing ideas about equality and inclusion while belonging to a group that lauds a mythic vision of the nation where white men had exclusive social power.

I find that most militia members genuinely try to be egalitarian, and the ways in which they fail are instructive regarding white men's conceptualizations of other groups.

I argue that an idealized national identity, strongly influenced by mythical stories of the country's founding, shapes members' responses to a variety of issues. Specifically, I find that members use the militia space to test and expand constructions of what it means to be a man in contemporary U.S. society even as they reference themes of a traditional, hegemonic masculinity when explaining their militia participation. Regarding race, militia members tend to be accepting of African Americans, but make very little effort to accept Muslim Americans. I argue that members have largely integrated anti-racist norms about African Americans, but they fear physical harm and change to an idealized national identity from Muslims as a result of past violence and attendant political change. Militia members' relationship to authority, primarily embodied by law enforcement actors is similarly complex. Members are likely to comply with authoritative actions they understand to be legitimate and in accordance with Constitutional principles and defy those actions they understand to be illegitimate. This work challenges current understandings of masculinity and whiteness, particularly among lower-middle class, American men as it shows that men who strongly value a mythical American identity that is premised on the social power of white men nonetheless consciously grapple with issues of gendered and raced equality.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: In the Field with the Militia

> "They're great guys. I like sitting down and talking with them and hanging out. Bottom line, I like hanging out with them. […] They know that if they needed me, they could count on me. And I know that if I needed them, I could count on them. That's what matters."
>
> <div align="right">- 27 year old Hugo[1]</div>

Hugo is a member of the Michigan militia, which is a group of citizens who discuss their shared political perspectives, including a concern about the "direction" their country is going, and who arm themselves with rifles to participate in paramilitary training designed to prepare them to defend their country should the need arise. Most militia members, like Hugo, want to connect with people they can "count on" and with whom they can talk and "hang out." Members are searching for a sense comradery and support from others who share their interests as they ostensibly gather in defense of their nation.

Members see their militia participation as a civic duty and as something beneficial for their families and communities and for broader American society. Politicians and media commentators typically take a more skeptical view of militias and their activities, and some militia members have been arrested for allegedly participating in actions designed to harm other citizens. The purpose of this manuscript is not, however, to engage in this particular debate.

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[1] All names in this manuscript are pseudonyms. Throughout, I use double quotation marks to indicate exact quotes that were audio recorded or communicated via email or other written media. I use single quotes to indicate where I reconstructed the speaker's words from memory when writing fieldnotes soon after the interaction, doing my best to recreate both word choice and meaning.

Instead, I focus on how militia membership is a search for commonality among people—primarily white, lower-middle class men—trying to find their footing in an evolving society. Militia members have very strong ideas about what it means to take care of oneself and one's family, to be a man, and to be an American in today's increasingly globalized society where very few people grow their own food or repair their own cars, as many of our predecessors did.

Militia men idealize a mythic story of the U.S.'s founding, where early settlers rebelled against a patriarchal, oppressive British monarch and reclaimed the untamed land from the native peoples who occupied it. This story's main characters are strong, independent, and morally upright, white men who succeeded without women or other racial groups. Militia men are not always aware of the gendered and raced nuances of the story they invoke. On the contrary, most militia men would be deeply offended at the suggestion that they preference white men in any way, and most genuinely try to support contemporary American values of equality and inclusion. In other words, militia members navigate their identities as lower-middle class, white, American men whose understanding of the nation is synonymous with personal freedom, while belonging to a group that reinforces traditional, social power-laden understandings of these identities. This manuscript analyzes how militia men navigate this contradiction and, in so doing, reveals how lower middle class white men understand their Americanness, masculinity, and whiteness in contemporary U.S. society.

Specifically, I analyze two interconnected questions. First, how are different identities (e.g., male, white, lower-middle class, American) combined and navigated in the context of a society whose dominant public dialogue is evolving to be increasingly

inclusive of traditionally oppressed groups? That is, the American public has a growing

acceptance of issues ranging from amnesty for hard-working illegal immigrants to gay

marriage (Associated Press 2013; Connelly 2012); how do men who historically thrived

because of exclusion and repression of other groups understand themselves in this more

inclusive environment? Second, how does social movement participation, in this case,

participation in the militia, reinforce or change these identities? In other words, does

militia participation make men question these identities, invest in them more deeply, or

does it make men's masculinity and whiteness invisible to them?

The militia gives us a window into a contemporary American political culture that

is witnessing a strong conservative backlash against broader currents of inclusion (Ruiz

2012). Many states, for example, are enacting legislation that challenges the spirit, if not

the letter of *Roe v. Wade* while others have attempted to crack down on illegal

immigrants and their presence in the workforce. There is likewise concern from some

citizens over the nation's status as a world superpower in the wake of an ongoing global

recession; perhaps especially for baby boomers who grew up lauding heroes of WWII

and enjoying a thriving post-war economy, this is a jarring shift in both national and

personal identity.

Analyzing how people who are strongly invested in a mythic version of

Americanness understand their place in a changing world is therefore important for

understanding the broader American political culture and for understanding the lived

experiences and egalitarian efforts of lower-middle-class, white men[2]. This case has

implications for several theoretical areas: masculinity, social movements, social deviance,

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[2] There are some female militia members, but this manuscript largely analyzes the experiences of militia
men as they comprise the majority of the movement.

and nationalism. I introduce these literatures below and discuss them in greater detail in the following chapters. In short, I argue that idealized Americanness is the lens through which militia members make sense of a changing world and changing gendered and raced expectations of their behavior.

MASCULINITY, WHITENESS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

White, male citizens militias have a long history in the U.S. and historians consider them crucial in some early efforts of the American Revolution where groups of largely unorganized townspeople acted together to defend against British soldiers. Historian David Hackett Fischer (1995), for example, details how the strong leadership and organization of small, independent militias were instrumental in facilitating important communications between settlements and thus efficiently warning early settlers of British troops' movements. Stories of the Revolutionary War form the foundational myth of this country as being established by hard-working, independent, freedom-loving, white men. The theme of lone, white, male settlers extends through stories of the frontier—the vast West whose land and natives had to be tamed in the name of progress—all the way through the creative, entrepreneurial spirit of the Industrial Revolution; it is, in many ways, a "warrior dream" to use sociologist James Gibson's term (1994).

Modern militias understand themselves as acting within the lineage of these early colonists and settlers. They believe they are fulfilling a duty to the country and their forbearers, and believe they are fighting to maintain personal liberties and a national identity that aligns with an originalist understanding of the Constitution and their interpretation of the Founding Fathers' vision for the country. As historian Darren Mulloy

says, "People who join groups like militias are trying to assert their right to *define* Americanism, and in doing so they employ the myths, metaphors, and perceived historical lessons of the American experience (2008:30; *emphasis added*). Militia members are, in other words, trying to make sure that their story of independence, patriotism and individual success is not "repressed or obscured" by other, competing stories that are put forth as part of the national biography (Duara 1995: 164; Zubrzycki 2006). Militia members in this context have a nostalgia for the past and for supposedly simpler times, and believe that real Americans, especially men, are still responsible for themselves and their families, and should rely on the government for very little.

In this manuscript, I avoid terms like "extremist," "preservatist," "right-wing," "survivalists," or even "conservative" to categorize the militia. These terms carry strong emotive and ideological connotations that were not always present in militia members I encountered, and they imply a greater degree of commonality and consistency across certain groups than I observed in the field. Further, as Mulloy observes,

> "The argument here is more than that it is those with whom we disagree that are usually labeled 'extremists.' It is that the defining of extremists in this way actively prevents an examination of the shared characteristics of those doing the defining and those so defined" (2004:20).

In other words, if we categorize groups like militias as merely something on the fringe of society, rather than as a meaningful part of it, we underestimate how these groups are reflective of broader behavioral trends and political currents.

I use the term "nostalgic" group in this manuscript to avoid some of the negative and presumptive connotations of other terms while still acknowledging that militia ideology is shaped by a sincere reverence for the past and for the country's principles as members understand them. I suggest that the ideology of nostalgic groups appeals to

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some idealized and mythologized time frame, a kind of Golden Age, where economic or social circumstances were supposedly better than the contemporary time. The specific time frame that a given nostalgic group references may vary greatly from the idealized frames of other groups. What nostalgic groups have in common is not the specific content of their message, but rather a discursive strategy of idealizing a foregone era.

Militia members certainly have a nostalgic reverence for the country's past, but what is less clear is how members understand themselves, particularly their protective, masculine identities, in the context of a society that is increasingly globalized, technologized, and removed from their idealized frontier history. This case allows for a thorough investigation of the complex interplay between masculinity and whiteness in the contemporary U.S. because militia members are overwhelmingly male and white, and because militia ideology explicitly relies on a mythos driven by white men. Studying a group whose overt goal is to uphold a certain understanding of the Americanness also allows for an in-depth examination of how nationalism matters for these white, lower-middle class men.

Militia commentators often suggest that groups like militias are spurred by a sense of threat to white, male social and economic power (e.g., Frank 2005; Hardisty 2000; Lipset and Raab 1978; Parsons 1963). This explanation has been proffered, and to varying degrees supported, for groups in Europe (the most notable example being France's Front National; see Mayer 1998) and the U.S.: the Coughlin movement following the Great Depression (Lipset and Raab 1978), the second wave of the Ku Klux Klan following *Brown v. Board of Education* (McVeigh 2009), the John Birch Society (Cox 1992) and Willis Carto's Liberty Lobby (Diamond 1995) in the late 1950s, white

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opposition to legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Bennett 1988), male opposition to Feminism's second wave and women's increasing presence in the workplace (Diamond 1995; Faludi 2000; Rosen 2000), and the emergent Christian Right of the 1980s (Diamond 1995; Hardisty 2000; Himmelstein 1992). The implication is that militia involvement is a knee-jerk reaction against social progress and change and an attempt to maintain power rooted in whiteness or maleness.

Figure 1: A man finishes his Level 1 qualifying walk along the washed out, uneven road leading to the training ground. Photo courtesy of Jeff Kindy.

The most recent permutation of the status threat argument is sociologist Rory McVeigh's (2009) power-devaluation model. McVeigh notes that social power is most appropriately construed as an interaction among economic, political, and status-based powers. Individuals must experience threat in at least one of these three "exchange markets" to become a conservative movement participant (McVeigh 2011). However, McVeigh argues that threat is not the full story when explaining mobilization of conservative groups whose members often belong to demographic groups that nonetheless maintain a great deal of social and economic power.

McVeigh says, "The theory proposes that power devaluation, resulting from structural change, produces shifts in interpretive processes which, in turn, led to activation of organizational resources and exploitation of political opportunities" (2009:39). In other words, structural changes like increasing immigration or decreasing economic certainty make some people view their society with hostility, especially with regard to other competing demographic groups. Upon experiencing some new grievance, these individuals try to mobilize to protest and create an environment more conducive to their success. McVeigh says this is most likely to occur when these individuals believe that their ability to institutionally pursue their interests is in decline (McVeigh 2011).

The power-devaluation model has thus far not been widely applied beyond the Klan's second wave and currently leaves some questions unanswered. What exactly does the "interpretive process" entail? What constitutes or sparks a "shift" in this process? Why do some people of a given demographic experience this shift, while others do not, and why do some people experiencing this shift mobilize, while others do not?

This case allows for a greater examination of these questions because militia members are predominately white men, who are the demographic group most likely to perceive threats to social position due to their historical experiences of power (Garner 2007), and because theirs is a movement explicitly about preserving a vision of national identity. American culture scholar Matthew Countryman (2007) argues that the Civil Rights Movement was comprised of local, "indigenous" movements (Morris 1984) that responded to the specific needs of their local contexts. In the same way, there are limited linkages between militias across state lines, and often limited connections between militia units even within the same state. Militias understand themselves as community

organizations that work best within and respond to needs of their local communities. They nonetheless share a vision of national identity and a desire to preserve it, and can act collectively in the interest of national-level issues or legislation, such as when they collectively oppose increased gun control.

I suggest that, for the militia and perhaps other contemporary nostalgic groups, nationalism is the missing element that explains mobilization. It is true that militia members often feel societal change happens too quickly, but, in my observations, they are not indiscriminately responding to *all* social change or to increasing equity across social groups. As I show in this manuscript, most militia members become concerned when they believe specific political or other changes threaten their country or their understanding of the nation's identity. They are not, for example concerned with all immigration, but with illegal immigration from across the globe because they fear that people who subvert legal authority to enter the country will continue to do so once inside its borders.

Further, what status threat and power-devaluation theories overlook is that people in the militia, the Front National in France, or the Christian Right in the U.S. may not always be aware of the power structures that their belief systems reference. That is, militia members do have a nostalgia for a past era, but they do not always recognize how other groups would have been greatly disadvantaged during that time. Their desire for a literal interpretation to the Constitution, for example, is not always an expressed desire for more social power at the expense of another group.

Political scientist Tali Mendelberg explains how people may use racial code words, which are "deniable verbal reference[s] to race" (2001:21), to express racial

stereotypes and racism without overtly appealing to race. They may, for example, discuss problems with welfare or fears of crime that implicate racial themes without directly discussing any particular racial group. Mendelberg explains that this tactic is used, both consciously and unconsciously, to express racialized sentiments without violating social norms about equality and acceptance.

I argue that members' expressed nationalism cannot be dismissed as being merely language coded (either intentionally or unintentionally) to disguise more sinister sentiments of racism or other forms of repression. Rather, militia members have a coherent belief structure and worldview regarding their nationalistic sentiment and their understanding of who comprises a good American. In other words, members' sense of status threat is not necessarily individualized; it is experienced as a group threat to *national* identity. While there are some militia members who evince symbolic racism (e.g., Kinder and Sears 1981) or a strong adherence to an exclusionary, hegemonic vision of masculinity (e.g., Connell 2005; Nagel 1998), the majority of members genuinely try to live up to the egalitarian vision they understand the nation to have. Their level of success varies, and how and when they fail is instructive for understanding how lower-middle class, white, American men understand the interaction of race, gender, and Americanness[3].

I also suggest that it is useful to explicitly connect members' understanding of Americanness to theories of crime and social deviance when assessing how militias respond to authority. With a few exceptions, participation in private militia activity is not

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[3] Socioeconomic class is also an important identity category for these men. While the influence of class is evident throughout this manuscript's pages, I give it less analytical attention than other factors.

criminal[4]; however, spending one's free time dressing in camouflage, practicing military maneuvers, and shooting targets with rifles is an unusual and, in many ways, a socially deviant expression of strain resulting from a challenged, idealized national identity. Most militia men are not, on the whole, socially deviant. They normatively participate in society by voting and having jobs and families, and most fastidiously uphold all laws because they believe it is their duty as citizens to do so.

Militia participation is nonetheless a deviant form of political expression in the sense that it is uncommon, and that most people would reject it as a legitimate political activity. Just as some offenders resort to crime because they are unable to pursue socially valued goals through legitimate means (e.g., attaining wealth through a prestigious job; Agnew 1992; Merton 1938), some men participate in militias because their voting behavior or other normative political activity does not accomplish the social or political ends they desire. Militia activity is an embodied attempt to enforce an ideal national vision. This means it is important that law enforcement and others who are concerned about potential violence from militia groups be aware of how members' idealized nationalism shapes their behavior and understanding of law enforcement, and aware of how their own interactions with militia members have the potential to produce negative social outcome.

MICHIGAN AS THIS STUDY'S SITE

Michigan is an appropriate site for analyzing how white, lower-middle class, American men are responding to an evolving society for several reasons. First, Michigan is one of

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[4] West Virginia, for example, has a law against "unlawful military organizations" (West Virginia Code Chapter 15, Article 1F-7), and one militia group with whom I have contact conducts their training exercises just across the state's border with Ohio to avoid breaking that law.

the most racially segregated states in the country, and residential segregation is particularly high around Detroit (Farley et al. 2000; Sugrue 1993), near where many of the most committed militia members either live or work. Michigan's segregation makes race and racial animosity particularly salient: when Whites from nearly all-white neighborhoods do encounter African Americans (or other racial outgroups), their perceptions are likely heavily influenced by crime-based media stories, for example (Bjornstrom et al. 2010; Gist 1990; Mastro 2009). Race's salience means that talking about race and racial perceptions has less of a stigma, perhaps resulting in more honest answers than would be the case in other contexts.

Second, Michigan's economy has struggled for decades, even before the most recent global recession (Adelaja et al. 2010). These conditions make all workers, but especially those in the lower socioeconomic classes, acutely aware of their own class standing and economic struggles. Fleshing out details of the social power devaluation model is facilitated in a context where there are persistent real as well as perceived threats. Third and similarly, in an economically strained situation, it might be the case that both national and gender identities are pronounced. If, for example, a lower-middle class man is chronically unemployed in such an environment, it is probably also difficult for him to feel he has achieved the traditional role of provider for his family. It would certainly be difficult for him to claim achievement of the idealized American Dream of working hard for independence and unhindered material gain. When these shortcomings are regularly primed, meaning militia members are thinking about these issues on their own prior to researcher influence, it is likely that members' reaction to questions on these

issues are more genuine, experiential responses, rather than something created for the purpose of answering a researcher's questions.

Michigan is also an ideal site for studying militias for two primary reasons. First, Michigan's was one of the first two militias to form in 1994, meaning its patterns of behavior are relatively fixed; other states' militias have used Michigan's as a model for organization because of this longevity. Second, although ultimately a false connection (Duffy and Brantley 1997), the Michigan militia was accused of having links to 1995 Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh. Members have strong incentives as a result to reach out to the public to combat this negative image, even 15 years after the bombing and subsequent Congressional investigation into militias that cleared them of involvement.

Awareness of public perception means they are more careful to archive their activities and that data is more easily accessible than would be the case in some other states. This does not necessarily mean that this group is fundamentally different from militias in other states. Rather, at least some militia groups outside of Michigan that I have spoken with do not want media or researcher presence because they are afraid of having McVeigh-esque links falsely made to their groups. Michigan's militia, meanwhile, think they have nothing to lose since they have already weathered that experience and find it preferable to make their materials available. One SMVM leader in particular has told me that the wants as many documents about his group available as possible, 'so there's a record of who we are and what we did if the government ever does decide to round us all up.'

DATA

My data for this project are comprised of three facets: interviews, fieldwork, and archival materials. I conducted 40 in-depth, open-ended interviews with militia members from across the state of Michigan, usually in a public location like a coffee shop, but sometimes in a militia member's home as he prepared dinner with his family, or by the campfire after a long day of militia training. I had countless less-structured interviews and informal conversations with dozens of other members, their wives, and their children. I originally intended interviews to comprise a larger portion of my data, but around interview number 30 or so, reached a point where I could fairly easily predict the gist of respondents' answers to specific questions. I did not have new questions I wanted to formally integrate in an interview format and instead prioritized the data from in the field, at militia trainings, meetings, and camping events.

From March 2008 through the summer of 2011, I spent more than 300 hours at 63 separate events with Michigan militia units across the state. I watched how members interacted with each other, with their family members and close friends, and with the media at public meetings, at public and private trainings, and at private camping events. I listened to them talk about their firearms and preferred training techniques, about their families and their concerns for the future, and about personal traumas and triumphs. I watched many of them transition through marriages, parenthood, divorces, and deaths of family members or close friends. Throughout this manuscript, I seek to understand militia members' "lived experiences" (Eliasoph 1998) and let their stories and descriptions speak for them as much as possible.

Figure 2 is a map of Michigan with the approximate locations marked for militia units that were consistently active during my fieldwork, meaning they had regular meetings and trainings for at least 18 of my 40 months in the field; the majority of units represented on the map were active during my entire fieldwork. I had contact with at least one member in each of these units, and spoke with representatives of each unit about issues ranging from their personal beliefs and reasons for militia participation, to unit activities and characteristics. The size of the circles on the map reflects the groups' relative average sizes during their period of activity. The map does not include smaller

Figure 2. Map of Consistently Active Militia Units in Michigan
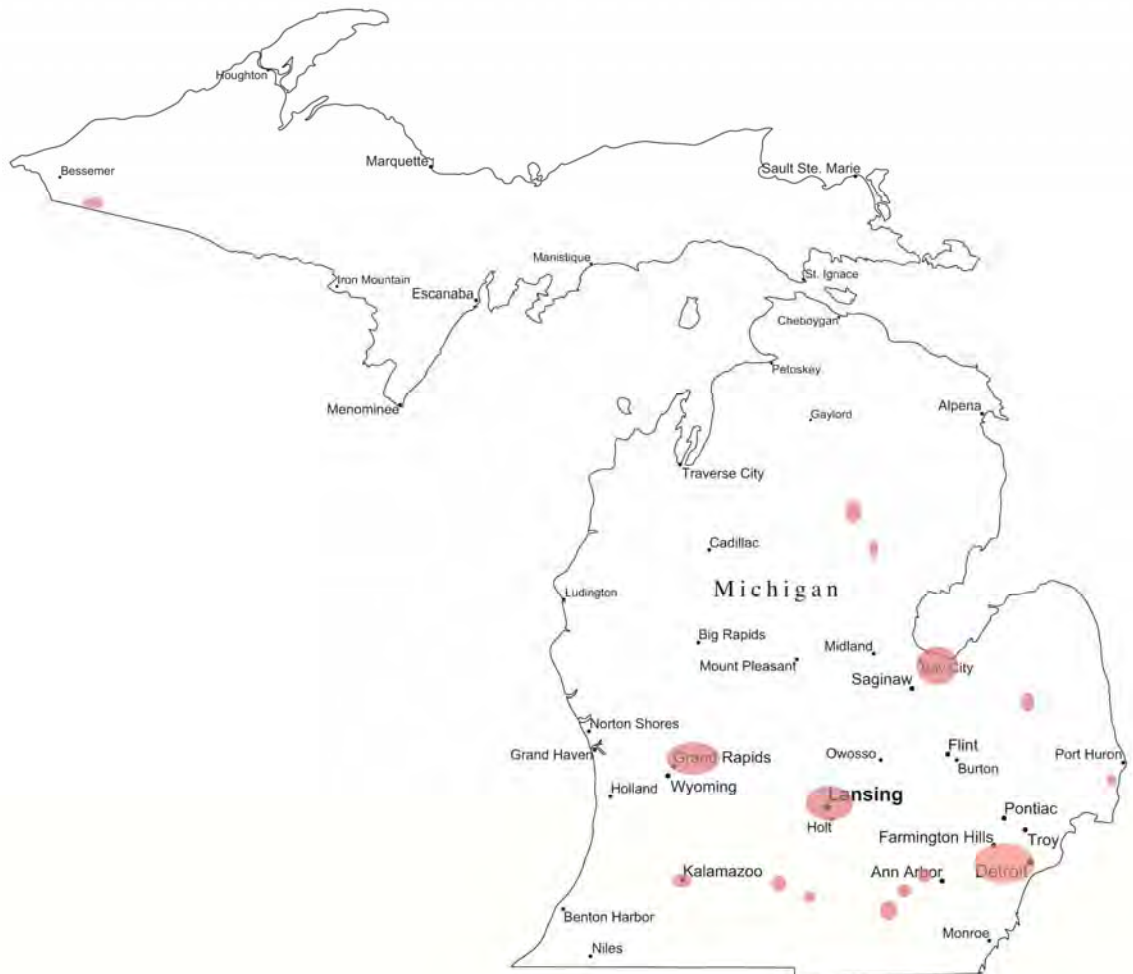
units of two to three people that were active only for very short amounts of time (usually two to eight months), many of which I also contacted.

I also analyzed thousands of pages[5] of militia newsletters, handouts, and pamphlets to further supplement my understanding of the group. The contents of these pages ranged from information about gear and militia training requirements, to reproductions of the Constitution, to ongoing news items of interest to members. I additionally have access to three different units' private internet forums and frequently read conversations and items of interest to militia members there. Finally, I am "friends" with many militia members from Michigan and other states on MySpace and Facebook, and occasionally drew supplemental material from information members posted to those sites.

My data over-represent the primary militia group in Michigan that has consistently been active since the 1990s—the Southeast Michigan Volunteer Militia (SMVM). This group sets the tone for others in the state because of its longevity and because it maintains the website michiganmilitia.com. Other militias in Michigan and militias in other states heavily rely on this group for training materials and other documentation, with many units copying word-for-word SMVM's prescribed training regimen. All Michigan units that were active during my fieldwork are represented in each aspect of my data: interviews, meetings, trainings, camping trips, and written communications. Characterizations I make regarding the militia should be understood as applicable only to Michigan militia units, rather than generalizable to all militias in the country, as militia ideology or activities may vary by region or other factors.

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[5] Approximately 300 pages are from meetings or trainings that I personally attended. Another 800 pages are from newsletters printed prior to the start of my fieldwork. More than 3000 additional pages are from Michigan militia founder Norm Olson's personal collection about the Michigan militia of the 1990s.

No researcher can ever be certain they have observed the "real" representation of any population of interest; the data they obtain are influenced by characteristics and desires of both the researcher and the participants. When I present my findings and note how militia members are remarkably normal people who care about their country, or when I talk about how they are less racist, sexist, or otherwise exclusionary than some audience members expect, I'm consistently asked whether I think they were merely hiding the "truth" from me.

I don't believe they were. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) taught us long ago that people rarely present their "true" selves. I am certain that militia members monitored the self-images they presented to me, and I did the same. However, I do not believe that members could have consistently, completely hidden underlying motives or proclivities given the length of time I spent with them, the diversity of contexts I observed them in, the variety of data sources I use to contextualize and triangulate my overall understanding of the militia, and the members who did reveal unflattering information in spite of pressures of social desirability.

DEMOGRAPHICS CHARACTERISTICS OF MICHIGAN MILITIA MEMBERS[6]

It is also important to have an accurate mental image of what current members of the Michigan militia are like to properly contextualize the remainder of this manuscript. White men comprise between 90% and 95% of the movement in Michigan, although precise numbers do vary over time, with women somewhat more likely to participate during warmer months. From what I have observed, only about 2% of regular militia

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[6] Percentages in this section may not add to 100% because of rounding.

attendees across the state are non-white. There are other people of color who attend militia events regularly and others who attend a particular public "Field Day" event once a year. Many of the white members are in interracial marriages, typically with Asian women, and several proudly reference their own racially mixed heritage—great grandparents who were Native American, or grandparents who were Asian—when the conversation overtly has little to do with race. Such was the case when one member said, "I tan easily because I'm one-fourth Asian," following another's remark about needing sunscreen during a summer training.

The average age of a militia member is about 38 years old, though they range from 18 to 60 years old. Twenty four (60%) of the 40 militia members I interviewed are married, another six (15%) are never married, while the remaining ten (25%) are divorced, separated or widowed. Two thirds of interviewees have at least one biological child, and about one fifth of those also help care for at least one child from their partners' previous relationships. Three interviewees (8%) are also grandparents. My interviewees are *more* educated than the average U.S. population (see Table 1), but while they do work in a variety of occupations, most have delivery, service, or trade jobs like carpenter or electrician, making "lower-middle" the best class descriptor of the Michigan members.

Michigan militia members are far from religiously uniform. Seventeen (43%) of my 40 interviewees identify as Christian, while another ten (25%) further specify as Catholic. Another twelve (30%) are Atheist or Agnostic, and the remaining interviewee is Muslim (2% of the interview sample). These percentages also roughly reflect militia members I did not interview but interacted with in the field. Although many militia functions begin with a pledge to the flag and a non-denominational prayer, typically

Table 1. Educational Attainment of U.S. Population and MI Militia Sample

	U.S. Population[*]		MI Militia Sample	
	% With Only	% With At Least	% With Only	% With At Least
High School	31.24%	87.14%	12.82%	97.37%
Some College	16.84%	55.90%	56.41%	84.62%
Associate's or Bachelor's	28.53%	39.06%	25.64%	28.21%

[*]Compiled from Census 2010 data

supplicating for a return to a Constitutional Republic, religious content is never the focus of meeting or training conversation in the majority of militia groups.

Unsurprisingly, no militia member I have encountered identifies with liberal politics, though many claim to have done so in the past, or claim that they would be open to liberal members. Two of the people I interviewed even admitted to voting for Barack Obama during the 2008 Presidential election, though they say they now regret that decision. Nine (23%) of my interviewees identify as Independent, five (13%) as broadly Conservative, two (5%) as Republican, fifteen (38%) as Libertarian, and nine (23%) as Constitutionalist. Libertarianism is a political position that is sometimes described as socially liberal but fiscally conservative. Militia members often interpret it to mean that people have a right to do whatever they want to do, so long as it does not interfere with anyone else's freedom, and that the government should have a minimal role in regulation and in people's lives. Constitutionalists are very similar, though their ideal role of government is even more limited to that which a literal interpretation of the U.S. Constitution explicitly provides.

Some Michigan members are strongly anti-abortion and anti-gay marriage. However, the majority do support the above interpretation of Libertarianism, meaning, as 45 year old truck driver Aaron framed it, even if they "don't agree with it personally, and no one in [their] family would ever do it," they would not oppose a woman's right to an abortion, for example. As with all my characterizations in this manuscript, it is my position that these are genuinely expressed beliefs[7].

MEETING THE MILITIA

In contrast to these relatively normative perspectives, militia members are often assumed to be dangerous or at least incredibly wary of outsiders. I've joked for some time that I need to come up with a better story about how I first crossed paths with the Michigan militia because it seems that many people expect to hear about a chance encounter in the woods or something equally dramatic. The truth is that in March 2008, I was in my Qualitative Methods course at the University of Michigan discussing ethnographies from Michael Burawoy (1982) and Teresa Gowan (1997), when I vaguely wondered whether the Michigan militia was still around. Later that evening, I discovered that the militia did indeed still exist, and they had a large internet presence including a recently updated webpage. Luckily, SMVM, was holding a public meeting at a diner just 20 minutes from my home a few days after my initial search, and I knew immediately that I had to attend.

I first heard of the militia the way most people did, in (ultimately false) association with the 1995 bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building, and probably would have forgotten they existed had it not been for their cameo appearance in

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[7] As any freshman political science student will learn, however, beliefs and attitudes may not necessarily correlate with action. I explore throughout the manuscript the extent to which members' beliefs translate into egalitarian action.

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documentary maker Michael Moore's film (2002) *Bowling for Columbine*. The only real

expectation I had going in to the meeting was that I would find a group of mostly men, all

white, who were very enthusiastic about firearms. I was admittedly nervous, primarily

from not knowing more of what to expect or how I would be perceived. I told three

people where I was going and what time they should expect me to hear from me, just in

case something happened. It was several months later that I discovered that many militia

members followed the exact same procedure the first time they attended a militia event

because they, too, were nervous about what they might find at the meetings and how they

would be received by the group.

     I arrived at the diner about 30 minutes prior to the meeting's published start time

to make sure I felt comfortable at the location and to have the chance to watch people as

they arrived. I tried to guess whether each arrival was there for the militia meeting, or just

eating dinner at the restaurant. As the meeting time approached, a green pickup truck

pulled into the space next to me, sat for a few minutes, backed out and re-parked in front

of me. At first I wondered if the driver had been watching me as I sat in the car, perhaps

thinking I was out of place and trying to determine what I was doing there; but, as the

truck pulled around, I noticed that its license plate read "FICKLE" and laughed. Two

large, white, balding men exited the truck simultaneously, and I followed them inside.

     The stereotypically small-town diner served little more than fried chicken fingers

and hamburgers, whose greasy smell lay heavy in the air when I entered. A group of four

white men were talking to each other from two different tables in the front corner. They

wore no camouflage or other obvious signs of militia membership. A handful of other

diners were in the restaurant and seemed to be either oblivious or indifferent to their

presence. Feeling unsure of my identifications in the parking lot, I quietly approached a waitress at the front of the restaurant to confirm my assumption of the four as militia members before approaching. She shot me a rather conspiratorial look, nodded, and equally quietly said "yes." Her confirmation only made me more nervous as I approached the group.

I asked whether they minded if I sat with them, and, wearing a University of Michigan sweatshirt, said I was a student who had recently moved to Michigan and wanted to know what the Michigan militia was all about. I had trouble participating in their conversation—more from their general social awkwardness than from wariness of me, I think—until two other, more talkative members arrived. These two answered all my questions that night, asked me a few in return, and generally made me feel welcome and at ease.

I told them I was from the rural South and was somewhat familiar with firearms. I explained that several guns were always present in my household growing up, and I was taught to respect and safely handle them at a young age. My family lived in an isolated area, and it was not uncommon that my father equipped a sidearm "just in case" when investigating disturbances on the property, such as when several loud, drunken men on horseback wandered into our yard late one summer night. The only occasion my father ever fired, or even revealed, the weapon in a defensive scenario was when he arrived home early from work one day and discovered an obviously rabid coyote trying to reach my pet rabbit.

At my father's behest, I obtained a concealed pistol license (CPL) when I graduated from college, and he gave me his trusted Smith and Wesson revolver. I never

really thought about it, nor removed it from its case, but I was admittedly glad to know it was there one night when my older neighbor and two of his male friends tested whether my door was locked, pretending they had confused it with their own. I mentioned these stories and my CPL to the militia members as an opportunity to demonstrate my familiarity with guns and gun culture.

From having read their website, I assumed the militia might enjoy the opportunity to help educate people about firearms and related legislation. I asked them for help figuring out whether Michigan had CPL reciprocity with my home state, and listened to them talk about Michigan's equivalent licensing procedure. This provided an opportunity for them to be in a position of relative authority, while still marking me as informed about issues of concern to them.

The two members I spoke with the most this night became important informants throughout my time with the group, and facilitated connections to other units in the state and beyond, especially in the early months of my fieldwork. After telling these members about my background, I casually asked what they might think of participating in a research project so I (and they) could tell the "real" story of the militia. They were both open to this suggestion and even seemed excited at the idea as they expressed frustration that many existing reports on militias were produced without directly contacting any members.

Casual conversation slowed as the meeting finally started and a leader asked everyone to stand, face the flag, and say the pledge. I had a flash of panic as I had not performed this ritual in years, probably since elementary school, and hoped I remembered it, since I was sure nearby members would be watching me. The words fortunately came

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back to me easily as the cadence of the pledge began. Afterward, another member said a brief prayer, asking for God to 'Return the country to a Constitutionally-limited Republic.'

Much of the meeting content this night was related to next month's Field Day—a large family function open to the public that units from around the state attend—and preparations that needed to be completed to successfully host the event. Leaders also discussed the *Heller* case, where the Supreme Court recently ruled that the Second Amendment applied to individuals in Washington, D.C.; militia members were, of course, pleased with this outcome. There was a rumor that President George Bush's administration might challenge the ruling, and SMVM's leader encouraged people to "contact your Congressmen and express your opinions about this." I wrote in my fieldnotes that he was very careful to say that people should avoid conveying anything that could remotely be construed as any kind of threat, and suggested they instead use language regarding the right to bear arms found on the National Rifle Association's website or elsewhere online.

SMVM leaders also discussed the then-frontrunners for the upcoming 2008 Presidential election. John McCain, one said, "Only pretends to be a conservative," and this remark surprised me a bit as I'd anticipated militia members would be likely to endorse McCain because of his military service and former prisoner of war status. Less surprisingly, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were respectively labeled "tweedle doofus and tweedle doofuser." Leaders were planning, regardless of the election's outcome, to have a large post-election public meeting in a central location so people from more units and more members of the public could easily attend. They indicated that

Second Amendment rights would be under threat no matter which of the contenders gained the Presidency. After these central points of discussion, the meeting became less formal and members continued to talk amongst themselves for another hour or so before heading home.

Upon leaving the diner, I almost laughed at myself for feeling the need to have notified multiple people of my whereabouts, but called my friends and reassured them just the same. I was struck by just how much the feel of this group resembled the feel of an informal SCUBA divers' club that my father belonged to when I was young: primarily men, all of about the same socioeconomic class and general background, who shared one overarching interest. In this case it was not viewing aquatic life in its natural habitat and pushing oneself to learn better, safer, and deeper diving techniques, but rather focusing on political events of interests and learning how to better shoot with a variety of firearms. I realized what an unexplored data source the militia might be on everything from white masculinity to contemporary nationalism to conservative social movements, and immediately began my Institutional Review Board application to formally study the Michigan militia.

The following month, I attended the Field Day event leaders spoke about at the first meeting. This event allowed me to see the space where many militia units trained without yet attending a training. Sociologists Raymond Lee and Claire Renzetti have observed that members of any population may engage the researcher in various "trust tests" (1990:520), attempting to determine how reliable and honest the researcher is. My first trust test came as SMVM leaders asked me to collect and keep up with the $5 entry fee for Field Day's major event, a competition to determine who could most quickly use a

handgun to shoot five bowling pins off a table 50 feet away. This was ostensibly a test to

see if I could be trusted to handle a small sum of money (about $250 total)[8], but also

served to test my basic math and interpersonal competencies as I interacted with each

contestant. Although I was initially somewhat uncomfortable to be put in this role, I

realized that I needed to demonstrate my worth, and that this was an easy opportunity to

interact with members from other areas I had not yet encountered in a way that made me

seem cooperative and unthreatening.

MILITIA TRAININGS

I passed this test, and at least one SMVM member who had been skeptical of me in prior

interactions noticeably warmed to me after this event. I continued attending SMVM's

public meetings through the summer of 2008 and gradually branched out to meetings

with units in other parts of the state, too. Although trainings were open to the public, they

were held on private land and felt more like a protected, private space. I waited until

SMVM leaders invited me to attend, in October 2008, before doing so.

Each militia unit in the state of Michigan has one or more locations—usually on

private land—where they conduct their training and camping exercises. When I started

my fieldwork, SMVM's trainings took place about 30 minutes south west of Flint on

private farmland belonging to a WWII veteran who strongly believed in the militia's

mission. He allowed groups from Michigan, Indiana and Ohio to practice there on their

own schedule, and had previously supported various militia precursor groups like the

Posse Comitatus, a group that gathered to discuss legal issues and that believed that

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[8] The collected money covered part of the cost of the bowling pins and prizes for the event; there were
about 30 total entrants, some of whom paid to shoot multiple times to improve their scores.

that county sheriffs held supreme local legal authority.

Most militia units in the state trained at the farm alongside SMVM several times a year, usually in February's winter survival training and a couple of the summer months. Most members had to drive at

Figure 3: The WWII veteran's farmhouse at the site of militia training at the beginning of my fieldwork. Photo by Amy Cooter.

least an hour to reach this location, with some traveling for closer to four hours. The site included two barns, a gorgeous but deteriorating two-story red-brick farm house (see Figure 3) that the farmer rented to tenants after his wife died, a small igloo-shaped hovel (see Figure 4) in which he then resided, and several parcels of land that were separated from each other by washed-out, uneven dirt paths just wide enough in most places to allow the passage of a pick-up truck or a small tractor. Most of the land was rented to a local man who used it to grow soybeans and corn, depending on the season. A large tract of wooded land that include a creek during the winter months but turned into unusable, smelly swampland in the summer and fall was separated from the fields by a strip of grassy expanse about 200 yards long by 50 feet wide. This grassy area was the primary SMVM training ground, though exercises occasionally took members into the swamp or fields.

Upon arrival at the farm, most people parked behind the white-washed barn in a grassy area under two gnarled apple trees. I always looked for provocative bumper

stickers or other markings on militia vehicles, but they were somehow never as interesting as I'd expected. There were many representations of the "Don't Tread on Me" Gadsden flag, and Ron Paul campaign stickers were common. Other than these and one sticker that read, "Be careful who you vote for, Hitler was

Figure 4: The building on the left is the igloo-shaped dwelling the WWII veteran built to reside in after his wife died. Photo by Amy Cooter.

picked in a free election," vehicles were largely unmarked. Additionally, fewer of them were American-made than I'd ever dreamed, especially being so close to Motor City and the legacy of the automotive industry. Even more surprisingly to me, many members had nothing but contempt for American auto manufacturers, whom they believed to be corrupted by lazy, entitled union workers who made poor quality goods. When my 11 year old Pontiac needed its first major repair, which prevented me from arriving on time to a summer 2009 training, for example, two members laughed and said, 'That's what you get for having a General Motors product!'

Members geared up in the parking area, putting on head-to-toe camouflage, sturdy boots, and gear vets holding around 50 pounds of ammunition, tools, first aid kits and other supplies. They then grabbed their rifles and walked to the training ground—diagonally across the uneven field when it was bare, or a trudging, muddy, half-mile walk around it when produce was still growing. A few members who had four-wheel drives (mostly Jeeps) braved the mushy, potholed, makeshift road and parked at the edge of the training ground. Nearly every month, someone got stuck trying to leave this area and had

to be assisted by another member with a bigger truck, which offered a sometimes comical display of both masculinity and comradery.

Just beyond the secondary parking point was a long-standing fire pit next to a picnic table where much of the day's social activity occurred. To the right of this, at the edge of the woods, men set up their tents for camping nearly every month, no matter the weather. A few men, usually those with military experience, slept completely out in the open, in nothing more than military surplus sleeping bags, even in deep snow. A huge green military tent, barely visible from this area, was permanently set up, hidden just behind the tree line, and held a wood stove and several stacked sleeping cots that were rusty, breaking, and did not appear to have been used for at least half a decade. According to militia lore, an associate of militia founder Norm Olson lived here with his wife for more than a year in the 1990s while evading police for some very minor misdemeanor. Farther away, a lean-to with a blue tarp covering the door concealed an outhouse, though its presence could not be disguised during hot summer events when its odor became unbearable on that side of the training ground.

A seemingly random assortment of clutter lay between this point and the shooting range: the wooden skeleton of another small and apparently unused structure, the hull of a speedboat riddled with rust and old bullet holes, and a set of bleachers to allow spectators to more comfortably watch others who were shooting at the range. The range itself was a tall earthen berm safely angled away from distant neighbors. Plywood sheeting, to which paper targets could be tacked, was nailed to a scaffolding of 2x4s. Two tables, which were made of knob-less doors, stood about 50 feet back from the plywood and provided a surface where shooters could prepare their magazines and other

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equipment. Strangely, each front corner of the range also had a completely functioning

door and frame. These served no discernible purpose because people could easily walk

past the tables onto the range. The reason for the setup with doors had long been

forgotten by the time I began my fieldwork.

A tall flagpole stood to the left of the range, amidst a haphazard stack of

hundreds of old tires that comprised the left-hand safety "wall" for the range. During

trainings, the pole always supported an American flag, often with a Gadsden flag below

it. Each training started with the pledge to the flag, although members running more than

a few minutes late to the event missed it. The range always had a designated safety

officer—a member who wore a bright orange vest and announced when the range was

"hot" or "cold" and generally watched to make sure everyone was following standard

Figure 5: Two shooters prepare to compete in an event at an April 2008 Field Day as a safety officer
looks on. Photo courtesy of www.michiganmilitia.com.

safety procedures. Members took this role in shifts, so as to share responsibility and allow everyone a chance to target practice and participate in other events. People in attendance at shooting functions were always told that "Everyone is a range safety officer," meaning that anyone, even the children, could and should call "Cease fire!" if they observed anything that looked remotely unsafe.

Trainings also include a variety of non-shooting activities. Often, military veterans would share their knowledge of how to break down, clean, and reassemble different firearms. Others would conduct navigation classes, teaching people to follow a compass heading across different terrain. Members would also learn about moving together like a military unit, and would practice first-aid techniques, like using a makeshift stretcher to move someone out of harm's way. This was a skill they really used at least once when they assisted an overweight member who fell in deep snow and could not regain his footing during a winter training.

To become an SMVM member, an individual must attend at least one training session and pass a two-part test. Part one requires potential members to have certain gear[9] on their person while doing a two mile walk in less than 45 minutes, and part two requires them to be able to hit eight out of ten shots on an eight inch paper plate from 100 yards with their rifle. This is known as Level 1. Upon completion, members receive a laminated card with their picture and name (though no membership rosters are kept), and a uniform patch with their militia unit's name. These items are typically handed out during public meetings, and the members who have attained a new level of certification are very briefly recognized and applauded. Level 2 of certification requires more gear, a

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[9] The required gear weighs about 50 pounds and includes a gear vest, a first aid kit, 100 rounds of ammunition, and a pocket copy of the Constitution.

faster walk, and a tighter shot pattern. SMVM set the standards for both levels of

certification, and units around Michigan, as well as dozens of militias in other states

follow these protocols, often with no modification[10]. People who are physically unable to

complete one or both components of membership are still welcome to attend training, and

those who do so regularly typically attain honorary membership status as "support" staff,

who prepare meals and help with other tasks around camp.

MOVING FORWARD

To analyze how militia members understand themselves in contemporary society, the

majority of this manuscript is organized around three central components of members'

identities—Americanness, masculinity, and whiteness. However, I begin by clarifying the

militia movement's origins and political position in Chapter Two to contextualize the

movement both historically and politically and to provide the reader with context for

interpreting the empirical chapters. I discuss how militias today differ from their origins

in the 1990s, and how they differ from other groups with which they are commonly

conflated to more fully define the movement. I argue that a frequently-cited framework

for understanding militias—an "above ground" wing concealing an illegal and dangerous

"underground" component—is faulty, and advocate a different model for understanding

how militia units with varying orientations relate to each other.

Chapter Three begins the empirical assessment and analyzes how masculinity is

evoked in the militia movement and what it is that men get out of militia participation. At

first glance, the militia would appear to be a hypermasculine space, where men live up to

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[10] Examples of modifications include militia units that require all members to have a particular kind of
rifle, or units that require members to pass formal background checks prior to membership.

the archetype of a protective, independent man that is so embedded in this nation's mythos and that excludes women and feminized men. I show how the reasons men verbalize for their membership in the militia do correspond with this archetype, but the ways they *enact* masculinity in the militia is much more complicated that this superficial description would allow. In fact, many militia men use militia activity to test and expand what it means to be a man in contemporary American society.

Chapter Four analyzes race in the militia movement. The militia is an overwhelmingly white space, but prides itself on following American principles of equality and inclusion. I give special attention to the how the militia's reaction to African Americans and Muslim Americans, which are the two racialized outgroups that are most salient to members in Michigan. I focus on how racism is evidenced in the group and what implications this has both for the militia and for its members' relationship to modern U.S. society. I argue that the militia's valuation of nationalism often makes members unknowingly overlook instances of racism in other members and in society as a whole, even as they use nationalism as the framework for promoting equality.

Building on Chapter Three's and Chapter Four's findings regarding the role of members' idealized nationalism in shaping their understanding of masculinity and race, Chapter Five assesses the militia's relationship to authority and the effects of governmental social control on militia activity. I analyze members' responses to socio-political events that occurred during my fieldwork and argue that the perceived legitimacy of authoritative interventions in the militia movement determines members' responses to those interventions. Members define legitimacy through a lens of national identity, and I suggest that the risk of militias participating in violence or illegal behavior

may be *increased* when law enforcement treat members as criminals without evidence of criminal behavior, or when they act without a full understanding of militia members' nationalistic vision.

In the conclusion to this manuscript, I draw lessons gained across the previous chapters to assess what militia men can tell us about how lower to lower-middle class, white, American men are responding to evolving social norms related to equality and inclusion. I also return to power devaluation and suggest some further specifications to the model in light of the evidence presented in this manuscript. I then assess what it means to uniformly describe groups as "anti-government," and whether that is an analytically useful construction as applied to the militia movement.

Finally, I include an appendix to address previous scholarship on militias. I discuss how the findings in this study differ from those in past work and suggest reasons for these disparities. I discuss the limitations of assumptions and data sources commonly used in previous work, and give special attention to data generated by watch groups who remain a frequent source of data for other militia studies.

CHAPTER 2

Contextualizing the Militia: Origins and Principles

"Let me put it in a simple way if I can: we do not advocate overthrowing the government. We advocate taking the government back to what it was supposedly supposed to be under the Founding Fathers, which is a Constitutional government mainly made up of the people who tell the government [what to do] and not the government to tell us."

- 36 year old Curtis

Most people, even many current militia members I have met, first heard about the militia in the wake of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing when bomber Timothy McVeigh was described as a Michigan militia member in numerous media reports. Since then, the proffered image of militias has largely remained the same: middle-aged, white men dressed in camouflage, running around the woods spouting paranoid conspiracy theories while plotting vaguely against the government. Although there was likely at least some truth to this depiction in 1995, the overall militia picture today is more complex. This evolution in no small part occurred *because* of the negative attention McVeigh's action brought to the movement.

This chapter is intended to expand on the introduction's definition of militias and to provide the information necessary for fully contextualizing the empirical chapters of this manuscript. Militia men may share Libertarian principles or other commonalities with other nostalgic groups, but because this is not a comparative study, I hesitate to too strongly extend the claims I make about the militia other groups. I provide this chapter's

Background information to allow the reader to contextualize the empirical chapters. I discuss the origins of the militia movement—the historical context as well as the events and people instrumental in the founding of modern day militias—and how the contemporary movement differs from its 1990s instantiation as well as some other contemporary groups. I analyze how my observations fit with a relatively new typology for understanding different kinds of militia units.

ORIGINS OF THE MILITIA MOVEMENT

Historical Context

The contemporary militia started fairly recently in 1994, but nostalgic groups (those with a strong reverence for a mythologized past) have a long history in the U.S. They have been particularly active during the last century. Briefly considering their trajectory helps historicize and contextualize the contemporary militia movement.

One of the first major nostalgic groups of the last century was the second instantiation of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), which peaked in the early 1920s. KKK members were disproportionately Protestants who feared the encroachment of a greater number of Catholic immigrants to the U.S. (Lipset and Raab 1978). Members routinely participated in expressive violence to convey their belief that the increasing presence of Blacks and Catholic immigrants was denying white people economic opportunities, as well as preventing the advancement of "100 percent Americanism" (McVeigh 2009:21). The KKK also had a large impact on both state and national level politics in this decade as they elected numerous representatives to local and state legislatures across the country.

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Membership in the movement declined as the 1930s approached because, scholars believe, of its electoral successes (*ibid*.).

The turmoil of The Great Depression in the 1930s led to what is known as the Coughlin movement. Political sociologist Seymour Lipset and his associate Earl Raab referred to this movement as "America's most distinctively 'fascist' movement" (1978:167) to emphasize its centralized leadership and desired suppression of certain immigrant groups. Despite the previous decade's rejection for Catholic immigrants (Bennett 1988; Countryman 2010), Father Charles Coughlin of Michigan successfully used his then-famous radio program as a platform to lambast Communists, praise some of Hitler's and Mussolini's policies, and eventually label Jews as "international bankers" who were benefitting from Roosevelt's New Deal (Diamond 1995). The movement claimed, at its height, as many as five million members, who were encouraged to vote according to Coughlin's anti-Communist and anti-Capitalist beliefs. Coughlin's program continued until after U.S. involvement in WWII forced him to stop broadcasting anti-Jewish propaganda, on order of Catholic leadership (Lipset and Raab 1978).

Nostalgic groups were relatively silent during the 1940s, and historian David Bennett (1998) argues that this was in part because generous New Deal policies and general wartime solidarity made it difficult to have a sustained portrayal of any immigrant group as un-American. However, the nascent anti-Communist ideology of the era would amplify in the 1950s in the form of McCarthyism. While not a movement per se, McCarthyism can be understood as a backlash response to the idea that America was losing economic power relative to emerging Communist threats in Russia, China and North Korea, despite a general post-war prosperity (Lipset and Raab 1978). This

sentiment was especially true for people who were newly upwardly mobile following the war (Bennett 1988), and McCarthyism of course had very real consequences for people who were blacklisted or otherwise investigated as potential Communist traitors to the American way of life.

The Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 eliminated segregation in public schools and spurred another wave of KKK and other white-led protest activity and violence. The John Birch Society, for example, formed in 1958 as ostensibly as an anti-Communist, non-racist organization, and experienced much popular support (Cox 1992). However, the Society's version of supporting nationalism often faded into pure nativism, and leaders often proffered both anti-Semitic and anti-Black ramblings. These exclusionary speeches were guised, respectively, as now-familiar "Bilderberger" or "New World Order" conspiracy theories[11] and opposition to the need for civil rights legislation that sounded very similar to more recent anti-Affirmative Action statements (Diamond 1995; Lipset and Raab 1978). Willis Carto, a WWII veteran whose war experiences sparked an interest in foreign policy, started, also in the late 1950s, a less well-known organization called the Liberty Lobby that similarly relied on anti-Communism, anti-Semitism, and New World Order conspiracism to attract followers disenchanted with their changing society (Diamond 1995).

Birchers, Liberty Lobbyists, and a still-active KKK all supported Alabama Governor George Wallace's pro-segregation platform in the 1964 Presidential election (Diamond 1995). The catalyst for this support and for racialized violence more broadly in this time was, of course, the Civil Rights Movement and legislation like the Civil Rights

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[11] Both Bilderberger and New World Order conspiracy theories are still bandied about some nostalgic groups today. Both refer conspiracies to the idea that some mysterious group of wealthy, international elites is conspiring to remove individual and US rights in their own interests.

Act of 1964. Additionally, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 resulted in an increase in immigration from non-European countries (Bennett 1988). These changes collectively made many Whites feel that their place in the economic and racial hierarchy was threatened, and this threat was compounded for many men who felt further threatened by Feminism's second wave and women's increasing presence in the workplace (Diamond 1995; Faludi 2000; Rosen 2000); it was, according to journalist Barbara Ehrenreich (1990), a "fear of falling," or of losing social position relative to a past era.

In the 1970s, the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam, effectively losing the war. Similar to the response to the 1950s Communist threat, many Americans felt national power was slipping, and this feeling was only amplified by the 1973 oil embargo and subsequent shortage (Bennett 1988; Diamond 1995); as Bennett says, these new "limits on resources in the land of opportunity" (1988:342) threatened many people's belief in American Exceptionalism and their ability to attain the American Dream.

The proposed Equal Rights Amendment and increasing abortion rights further compounded this instability and destabilized traditional gender relations, according to sociologist Sarah Diamond (1995). The emergent Christian Right successfully harnessed these sentiments of alienation to become the dominant nostalgic force of the 1980s. It was also a major factor in the election of Republican President Ronald Reagan, a man revered by many politically conservative people as a kind of cowboy hero who knew the value of hard work and masculine individualism. The nostalgic element is most clear for the Christian Right in their attempt to fight the expansion of women's rights and particularly women's presence in the workplace (Diamond 1995; Himmelstein 1992).

Researcher Jean Hardisty (2000) notes how organizations within the Christian Right—the Promise Keepers, for example—advocated a continued stark, division of labor between the sexes as a way to maintain Christian principles.

Behavior motived by racial exclusion was also present in this decade in various racist groups who practiced violent, racially-motivated outbursts (Hamm 1993). For example, after several failed political attempts, known KKK member David Duke ran a successful bid for the Louisiana House of Representatives in 1989, indicating at least some degree of widespread tolerance for overt racist ideology (Ridgeway 1995). Duke remained in the public eye during the 1990s[12], winning enough votes to force a runoff in the primary election for Louisiana governor, and again pushing the KKK's ideology into the public spotlight.

Formative Events for the Militia Movement

Other nostalgic groups in the U.S. certainly had specific grievances, but most of these groups are understood to be backlash movements against broad social change that was more inclusive to women and non-whites. While early militia members may have been uncomfortable with some of these same broad social changes, there are three very specific events that sparked the start of the contemporary militia movement in 1994: separate government sieges in Ruby Ridge, Idaho and Waco, Texas, and firearms legislation in the form of the Brady Bill. Most militia authors (e.g., Chermak 2002;

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[12] Racist groups as a whole, however, suffered negative attention in this decade, largely as a result of a successful civil suit against one notable neo-Nazi group at the hands of the Southern Poverty Law Center (Ezekiel 1995). The Center sued Tom Metzger's White Aryan Resistance on behalf of the family of an Ethiopian immigrant who was brutally murdered by the group's adherents. The suit bankrupted Metzger and his organization, scared off many members and made remaining members operate largely covertly (Kaplan 2000).

Crothers 2003; Freilich 2003; George and Wilcox 1996; Levitas 2004; Mulloy 2008; Stern 1996) argue that these events were necessary conditions for the formation of the militia movement, meaning that militias should not be understood as merely a backlash against social progress. A fourth event, the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995 was equally important for shaping the course of the movement. I discuss each of these events in detail below.

Ruby Ridge

The first event was the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) siege of the Weaver family in Ruby Ridge, Idaho. Randy Weaver was ex-military, had at least superficial ties to neo-Nazi organizations, and had moved with his wife and three children to a remote cabin in Ruby Ridge to be distant from a society they saw as corrupt and likely headed for a Biblical apocalypse (Crothers 2003). Prior to the siege, Weaver had a decade-long involvement with the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) stemming from allegations a neighbor made following a land dispute as well as possible illegal firearms handling.

A grand jury indicted Weaver for making and possessing illegal firearms in December 1990, after the ATF initially made false statements about Weaver's criminal history; this happened after Weaver refused to act as an informant against a local neo-Nazi organization ("Raid" 1995). A series of procedural delays and miscommunications from the court resulted in a bench warrant being issued for Weaver in March 1991, but it was not until 1992 that U.S. Marshals started to stake out the Weaver home in an effort to apprehend him for a court appearance (Walter 2002).

Although the sequence of events at the beginning the siege is somewhat disputed, the results of day one were very clear: one federal agent was dead, Weaver's teenage son who had gone outside to retrieve the family dog was dead—shot in the back—and an adult male family friend, Kevin Harris, was wounded (Crothers 2003). FBI hostage rescue arrived following the agent's death, leading to more bloodshed on day two of the siege. This time, Weaver himself was shot by a single bullet while tending to the body of his dead son. As he fled back into the house, more FBI sniper bullets followed, and one went straight through the head of Weaver's wife, who was indoors and holding their ten month old daughter (*ibid.*). Weaver, his two young daughters, and family friend Harris all surrendered a week later. A jury eventually acquitted Weaver of all charges except failure to appear at his original court hearing and violating bail conditions.

Much of the nation was horrified as they watched these events unfold on the nightly news. Many people saw the events of Ruby Ridge as a sign that the government could not be trusted and might act violently toward its own citizens with little justification or provocation, as a sign of tyranny in what was supposed to be the land of the free (Walter 2002). People were specifically upset about three things. First, that charges leading to Weaver's interaction with federal authorities were exaggerated and, in part, likely retribution for his refusal to act as an informant. Second, that federal agents would surround and essentially hold hostage a private citizen and his family on his own land, especially when he was not accused of dangerous offenses. Finally, that, given these conditions, federal agents would use a "shoot on sight" directive and murder a teenager and mother, neither of whom was facing any charges (*ibid.*)

The Department of Justice performed an investigation of the siege, while the Senate held hearings and ultimately found that federal agents had in fact acted unconstitutionally and with excessive force. Several federal agents were professionally disciplined for their roles in the siege, but none were criminally prosecuted. Weaver, his daughters, and Harris all eventually received substantial civil damages from the federal government (Crothers 2003).

Waco

Well before the Department of Justice and Senate investigations of Ruby Ridge were complete, a second siege began in Waco, Texas in early 1993. This time, a religious sect known as the Branch Davidians, led by David Koresh, was suspected of child abuse and illegal weapons possession. Just as with Ruby Ridge, it later became clear that most the allegations used to justify an initial raid of the Davidian compound in February 1993 were exaggerated (Kopel and Blackman 1997). Additionally, news of the raid reached the media and eventually Koresh before it happened, allowing the Davidians to prepare by arming and securing themselves within the sect's compound, which the raid's blueprint could not accommodate. Four ATF agents were killed in the ensuing firefight, as were sixteen Branch Davidians. The FBI took control of the scene, and a fifty-one day siege followed while Koresh tried to bargain for time to finish his religious treatise (Crothers 2003). Some children were released from the compound during the siege, but little overall progress was made.

A second raid began April 19, 1993, resulting in fires throughout the compound and the deaths of at least seventy-five more Branch Davidians (*ibid.*). Once more, Senate

investigations concluded that the FBI had acted improperly, this time losing evidence and

not acting within clearly-defined hostage scenario protocols (Kopel and Blackman 1997).

Happening so soon after Ruby Ridge and only a week after Weaver's trial had begun,

many people's fears of a tyrannical government only increased. As politics and

government professor Lane Crothers notes:

> "Thus believers in the evil of the federal government not only had
> evidence of what government might do to anyone who deviated from its
> rules—especially regarding guns—but also had proof of who the primary
> actors in the coming oppression would be" (2003:99).

The Weavers and the Davidians became not heroes, as some have described (Levitas

2004), but rather martyrs for a burgeoning movement of people motivated by patriotism

and a sense of eroding national identity.

The Brady Bill

Just seven months after the Waco siege's violent end, the people who were most worried

about their ability to protect themselves from government tyranny felt even more

threatened when President Bill Clinton signed the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention

Act into law. The law went into effect in February 1994 and set certain limits on the sale

of handguns. Its major result was to implement required criminal and psychiatric

background checks for individuals purchasing firearms, and it also instituted a mandatory

five day waiting period between purchase and receipt of a handgun until background

checks were made instantaneous in 1998.

It is worth noting that most militia members with whom I have interacted would prefer that criminals and deranged individuals not have access to any type of firearm, but they, as well as other non-militia, pro-gun rights advocates, strongly believe that any restriction on the widest possible interpretation of the Second Amendment (the right to bear arms) is 1) unconstitutional and 2) likely to lead to

Figure 6: A portion of the weapons present at a summer training session; all are unloaded. Photo from http://s657.photobucket.com/profile/SMVM

other limitations on Second Amendment *as well as other "intrinsic" rights*. This was the same belief structure that undergirded opposition to the Brady Bill[13]. These concerns were only amplified by the impending Federal Assault Weapons Ban, which ultimately passed in September 1994 and made it illegal to possess a variety of semi-automatic weapons made after September 1994 without additional collectors' licensing (Churchill 2009).

Just after the Brady Bill passed into law and while the Assault Weapons Ban was still making its way through Congress, the Militia of Montana formed in February 1994. The Militia of Montana was the first of its kind, though the Michigan militia's future leadership—primarily Norman Olson and Ray Southwell—were already discussing starting their own group. Olson and Southwell held a planning meeting in March 1994. The official first militia meeting happened April 22, followed by the first training the last

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[13] Some people in the broad gun-rights community also interpret anti-gun rights legislation as potentially leading to United Nations' control over U.S. law, or even a state similar to Hitler's Nazi Germany.

weekend of April 1994, as original documents[14] from Olson indicate, and the Michigan

Militia Corps of Wolverines (MMCW) was born, (fax from Olson to several MI sheriffs,

April 7, 1995; fax from Kenneth Adams to "all Brigades," April 14, 1995; letter from

Olson to Bob Burns, Undated; handout from Olson of upcoming training dates, April 29,

1994).

Importantly, some authors place the emergence of the modern militia movement

prior to 1994. This is due to three factors. First, some authors (e.g., Stern 1996) imply

that the militia had to have an earlier start date because attorney Linda Thompson from

Indiana sent a fax in response to Waco over the American Patriot Fax Network (APFN)

asking that all members of the "Unorganized Militia" assemble at the Davidian

compound as a show of support. However, this was in fact an early, and ultimately failed,

attempt to *start* a national militia from the ranks of the APFN—a loosely organized group

of individuals who started corresponding during the Randy Weaver trial out of concern

over the government's actions at Ruby Ridge.

Thompson has been portrayed as a proverbial queen of the militia movement

(e.g., Kaplan 1995; Wright 2007), and while she did very publicly try to inject herself

into the movement, internal militia documents tell a slightly different story. Thompson

only connected with the APFN when Koresh apparently gave one of its leaders, Gary

Hunt, his power of attorney, and Thompson offered her assistance (Crothers 2003). Many

militia leaders were glad of the attention Thompson brought to early movement efforts

and some still praise the "true story" documentary she compiled of the Waco siege;

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[14] In this manuscript, I cite these documents as personal communications to give more detail as to their origin. After I finished my initial review of the documents I received from Mr. Olson, I put them in electronic format for my personal use, then donated them to the Bentley Historical Library in Ann Arbor, MI, per Mr. Olson's request, where they may be found in the collection titled, "Norm Olson Papers."

however, leaders were actually very wary of her motives and methods. Few of them seemed to know who she was in the early days, and faxes across on the APFN seem to indicate an acrimonious relationship with Thompson, at best (faxed copies of documents regarding a lawsuit between Thompson and a militia figure named Joseph Ditzhazy, February 4, 1995; a fax from Ditzhazy calling Thompson a "charlatan," and accusing her of "questionable or illegal activity," March 20, 1995; an email from Thompson to Olson accusing him of "being played like a violin," "doing damage to the movement," and "losing any and all credibility," May 5, 1995). Olson told me that, to his knowledge, Thompson was never affiliated with any militia group, but instead tried to insert herself into national debates of militia interest (personal communication, January 29, 2011).

A second source of a misidentified militia start date is a lack of access to original militia documentation, which Norm Olson gave me, that shows meaningful conversations to initiate militias did not occur until 1994. Third, and most importantly, there is frequently a conflation between the militia and various precursor groups. Specifically, many authors (e.g., Crothers 2003; Ferber 1999; Ferber and Kimmel 2004; Kimmel and Ferber 2000; Stern 1996; Wright 2007) do not adequately differentiate between militias and other so-called patriot groups, a problem I explain in more detail below.

Oklahoma City Bombing

The militia movement was extraordinarily successful during its first year of life in 1994, with militias active in at least thirty-six states (Stern 1996:96), and garnering membership in the thousands in Michigan alone (Churchill 2009). Just a year later, however, April 19, 1995—the anniversary of Ruby Ridge as well as the anniversary of Paul Revere's

midnight ride—brought the movement to its proverbial knees. On this date, Timothy

McVeigh, an Army veteran of the first Gulf War detonated a bomb in a federal building

in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people, many of them children. McVeigh was initially

linked to the MMCW, and though the FBI later cleared the militia of all involvement

(e.g., Duffy and Brantley 1997),[15] some academic and media reports alike continue to

make the connection. This was (and often continues to be) a major strain on the

movement.

Attorney and researcher Kenneth Stern notes that four different militia reactions

emerged following the Oklahoma City bombing: 1) complete group dissolution, 2) no

structural change but avoidance of the label "militia," 3) membership *growth*, and 4)

change from an open, public orientation to a secretive, underground status (1996:209).

While it is likely that all four reactions did distinctly occur in some militias around the

country, the MMCW—the militia at the center of negative attention—responded a bit

differently. A core group, concentrated in the south-eastern part of the state remained

largely intact, keeping "militia" in its name while disavowing the "Wolverines"

connection. As 47 year old, white collar worker Adam said,

> "Well, we coulda changed the name. But then I think, in that
> circumstance, I would be surrendering. That would be giving in. And I
> was not one to give in."

However, some members, including co-founder Olson, did leave after public

statements and televised Senate hearings on the militia created some embarrassment. In

short, Olson initially attributed the bombing to a terror attack by the Japanese, based on

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[15] Timothy McVeigh and his co-conspirator Terry Nichols did attend either one or two militia trainings.
However, two militia members I have talked with who claimed to be in attendance when McVeigh and
Nichols were present further claim that the two were quickly asked to leave after handing out racist
literature and espousing violent ideology.

information received through the APFN (fax from Debra von Trapp to Norm labeled "Re Japanese Bombing/Oklahoma," April 24, 1995; fax from von Trapp to APFN, titled "Oklahoma Bombing Linked to Japanese Retaliation for U.S. Gas Attack," April 24, 1995). Olson tried, without much success, to start other smaller militias independent from the remaining original members, before moving to Alaska in 2004. Other members who left the group in 1995 did quit altogether, while yet others operated in more exclusive, more secretive militias, including Mark Koernke, a former University of Michigan janitor who gained notoriety via short-wave "patriot" radio.

At this point, the Michigan militia became a movement in abeyance (Taylor 1989; Zwerman el al. 2000): although members' underlying belief structure largely stayed the same, the socio-political climate was not conducive to militia activity, and remaining activity became increasingly difficult to observe. There certainly were notable incidents of militia members in the news during this time where, for example, leaders very publicly protested government regulations of privately owned land or staged stand offs on behalf of individuals refusing to pay income taxes (for example, a "press release" from Olson titled "Feds Rule Against State in Manufactured Housing Feud: Homeowner's Defiance Has Town Zoning Board Crying Uncle," August 14, 1995). Incidents like these were largely headed by one or two former leaders (often Olson), trying to reinvigorate the movement.

There were also a few cases of self-identified militia members, including Koernke, evading police or being arrested for illegal weapons possessions (Chermak 2002). Again, however, these were actions taken by rogue individuals or small groups with only two to three members, rather than by the main thrust of the dormant movement.

At most a few hundred, and perhaps more likely a few dozen, people in Michigan would

have identified as militia members through most of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Current members who have been involved since the movement's inception

report[16] that the next major surge in militia activity happened as "Y2K" neared, when

mass chaos was predicted from computing systems that were not designed to identify the

year 2000. People apparently sought out the militias' knowledge about food storage and

other forms of self-reliance in the event of mass computing systems' shutdown.

Documentation from that time confirms that Y2K was a very popular topic of

conversation, and leaders were presumably discussing what attendees wanted to hear.

When January 1, 2000[17], arrived with none of the previously predicted dire consequences

to the world's computing or financial systems, these new members reportedly stopped

participating. As thirty-five year old Edward, who works in construction, observed:

> "They were I guess if you want to say 'disillusioned' with the fact that after
> 2000 when the world didn't explode, that people took their shit and went
> home basically. You know? They're like 'Aww, shit I stocked up for
> nothin' and the world didn't explode!' And people didn't stick with it [the
> militia]…they were starting to feel like it wasn't needed and nothin' was
> ever gonna happen…"

Members similarly report a temporary surge in attendance following the 9/11 attacks, as

people were upset that their country had been attacked and wanted to learn ways they

could defend themselves and their families.

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[16]Because of a lack of membership or attendance records, it is impossible to verify reports of participation that happened prior to my fieldwork. *Perceptions* of militia activity among long-term members are still important for how they understand their movement and its catalysts, even if their reports are not 100% accurate or verifiable in retrospect.

[17]Importantly, this bump in attendance occurred before the 2000 election cycle began. Leaders report that there was no subsequent membership increase in anticipation of the end of President Clinton's administration in the following year, and no documentation I have seen reflects a concern with the upcoming 2000 election—in contrast to the Presidential Elections during my fieldwork.

The period of movement abeyance did not truly end for the militia, however, until early 2009, following months of unrest over the Iraq War, the beginning of a global economic recession, the inauguration of the first black President, Barack Obama, and the release of a controversial Department of Homeland Security report on "right wing extremism." Summer 2009 brought attendance at militia events that was easily double that of the previous year and left one leader saying, 'This is what the militia should have looked like 15 years ago!' In my observations, attendance as of early 2011 decreased somewhat, but was still consistently higher than pre-2009 levels.

MILITIA PREVALENCE IN MICHIGAN

It is commonly accepted among militia scholars that Michigan has been a critical site of militia activity both in the '90s and today, but reasons why militia activity is so prevalent in this state relative to other states are less clear. Criminologist Joshua Freilich (2003) quantitatively assessed state-level covariates of militia participation in the '90s, finding that high rates of gun ownership, high presence of active and veteran military and of law enforcement positively correlated with states' militia activity. Freilich also found that female empowerment, defined as women's median income relative to men's, was negatively correlated with state's militia activity. These findings support qualitative claims, such as those made by sociologist James Gibson, that link militia activity to cultural valuation of a certain mythical, near "warrior," masculine identity (1994).

It is not my goal to reproduce Freilich's analysis for the 2000s or attempt to confirm his findings for the most recent version of the militia movement. Although Freilich's method for combining data on militia membership from two different watch

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agencies is the best possible approach to a quantitative, state-level analysis, watch group

data remains problematic, as I discuss in detail in the Appendix. A qualitative

understanding is more appropriate for the research questions here. It is still worth noting,

however, a few basic characteristics about Michigan that may influence militia

membership in that state.

In 2010, Michigan was the only state with negative population change from 2000,

according to the Census (2011), and was the state with the highest unemployment rate

from 2006 to 2009, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010). These data would

support Freilich's premise of militia members (and others in Michigan, of course) as

being particularly financially strained. Additionally, the latest report from the American

Community Survey on gendered earnings indicates that on women's earnings as a percent

of men's earnings, Michigan ranks the 9th lowest state (Semega 2009). This would fit with

Freilich's findings that low female empowerment is correlated with more militia

presence.

However, other data are problematic for generalizing Freilich's findings to the

modern Michigan militia. Estimates compiled from the Department of Veteran's Affairs

indicate that Michigan ranks 41st for the number of Gulf War veterans, and 45th for the

number of Vietnam veterans (2007); when controlling for state population size, Michigan

still only ranks 9th and 21st respectively. Using the number of hunters each state licenses

as an alternative proxy for gun ownership[18], Michigan sold the third most licenses in

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[18]Quantitative estimates of gun ownership typically use the number of FBI background checks conducted
by each state. This is a problematic measure of gun ownership, and I use the number of state hunting
licenses as an alternative proxy here. Each state reports the number of individual hunting license purchasers
each year to the Fish and Wildlife Service. These numbers reflect residents of the state in question, as well
as non-residents who may cross state lines to hunt. While not ideal, this alternative measure is more

2010, just behind Pennsylvania and Texas, according to data compiled from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2011). However, when controlling for state population sizes, Michigan ranks only 19th, behind several western and southern states. It would seem then, that state-level statistics are inadequate for explaining the current militia presence in Michigan.

Two factors that Freilich's (2003) study did not attempt to incorporate as possible determinants of state-level militia activity that I nonetheless believe may be important are crime levels and perceived government corruption[19]. Several Michigan cities are known for their high crime rates, and Detroit in particular is nearly synonymous with murder and other violent crime (Briscoe and Hunter 2013). Michigan also has a long history of political corruption, and The Center for Public Integrity, for example, gave Michigan an "F" and ranked it the 44th best state on a recent measure of state corruption derived from 330 different factors (2012). Michigan news stories commonly refer to corruption at all levels: a mayor removed from office and charged with numerous felony offenses (Thomas 2012), school board members charged with embezzling funds (Williams 2010), a police chief removed from office because of his involvement sex scandals (Yaccino 2012), police officers prosecuted for stealing items out of evidence (Wilczynski 2012), or an officer convicted of killing his pregnant girlfriend (Associated Press 2012).

In this context, it is unsurprising that Michigan militia members, who are already watchful of government action, feel the need to protect themselves and do not trust the

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reflective of an idealized and masculinized frontierism in which the militia believes than is the background check measure.

[19] Freilich does include a measure of "political turmoil," defined as the percent of each state's vote cast for a third party candidate in the 1992 Presidential Election, and finds that it is positively correlated with militia activity; however, I believe this measure suffers from a problem of endogeneity as is likely picking up the strong Libertarian political outlook among militia members and their sympathizers.

government or its agents to act in their best interest. This also fits with sociologist Jennifer Carlson's (2012) study of male gun owners. Carlson argues that part of what gun owning men are expressing through their possession of and practice with firearms is a desire to critique the State's police powers. Carlson's participants, who generally took care to distance themselves from any perceptions of militia involvement (personal communication, March 5, 2012) tended to either be concerned with the State's inability to protect them or with a need to be protected *from* the State. In other words, these non-militia gun-owning men reflected both concerns that militia men also seem to have regarding State ineptitude and corruption.

A final factor that I believe to be important in the prevalence of militias in Michigan is charismatic leadership. As much as sociologists have moved away from considering the role of charismatic leaders in social movements in recent work, strong personalities should not be ignored in either the origination or perpetuation of the militia movement. Other contributing factors aside, it is difficult to imagine that the militia would have taken root in Michigan specifically without the presence of outwardly warm and persuasive figures such as Norm Olson (or in Montana, John Trochman), or that would have continued without contemporary leaders with similar personalities.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CONTEMPORARY MILITIA AND THE MILITIA OF THE 1990s

Although in many ways a continuation of its 1990s instantiation, the militia movement today nonetheless has several important differences from those origins, all derived from lessons following both successes and failures in the '90s. First, in the words of a key leader who has been continuously involved in the militia since 1994, they are "less angry,

[…] smarter and calmer, less prone to knee-jerk reactions." In other words, they are better informed about both legal and political issues relevant to the movement, are less likely to become involved in altercations between the government and private citizens, and less likely to be confrontational with law enforcement than they were in the past. My interactions with past members, present members, and members involved in both time frames strongly support this claim, as does documentation from both periods.

A second difference between the militia movement of today and that of the '90s is that little remains of its previously strict hierarchical structure. In the '90s, it could be said that there was one unified Michigan Militia—MMCW. It had a state commander, a county commander for most of Michigan's 83 counties, and multiple brigades per county, the number of which was based on overall participation, with each having a brigade leader. Brigades operated relatively independently on a month-to-month basis, though the state leadership tried to set standards for general training procedures, and leaders met for both county- and state-wide meetings a few times yearly. As the language here suggests, all members held a "rank" parallel to that of military branches that reflected their position in the hierarchy, regardless of prior military involvement.

Today, the exact number of distinct militia groups at any given moment is difficult to establish. While there is no state-level structure, and much less adherence to rank labels, different militia groups still train with each other regularly. Additionally, if someone decides to start a militia in their own area, it is not uncommon that they receive attention from three or four members for several months before those newcomers lose interest or are simply too busy to participate; in that instance, the original founder of the start-up group often returns to a larger, more established militia. As a result, a count of

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active militias (by my definition, ones that host trainings and have at least three members who participate in most trainings) one month may dramatically vary from the count the following month.

However, there are twelve distinct groups that have experienced a high degree of stability and participation during my fieldwork, the largest and most stable of which is SMVM. This group has the most direct leadership ties to the earlier MMCW group and capitalizes on that legacy to maintain legitimacy within the overall movement[20]. SMVM's trainings are the most attended in the state of Michigan, and members from other units come to them for training and leadership input, not the other way around. Additionally, militias in other states are in frequent contact with SMVM; many used SMVM's training

Figure 7: Members from five different units chat and look at new gear during a break at a fall training. Photo by Amy Cooter.

[20] There are approximately two dozen individuals across the state trying to reinitiate the old MMCW and its hierarchical structure, but so far, the majority of these people primarily stay involved in distinct local militias. Only one group of about eight to twelve members is consistently training under the "Wolverines" banner, but this certainly is not the state-wide participation of the '90s, capable of maintaining an all-county presence. The state commander of this group was recently ousted after barely a year of service, further demonstrating a lack of group efficacy.

manuals, and, around once a year on average, a militia unit from another state will participate in an SMVM training after making a lengthy drive to do so.

Cross-training is in no small part catalyzed by the third major difference between the movement of today and that of the '90s: communication facilitation through the internet. Primary militia communication in the '90s happened among leaders over faxes or landline telephones, with county leaders passing important messages on to brigade leaders, who in turn passed them to brigade members. Information of interest to the entire movement could frequently be heard over shortwave radio stations, like Koernke's "Liberty Tree Radio" and at occasional gatherings during gun shows or similar events, which were the primary site for face-to-face member recruitment according to those active in the militia at that time (also see Gallaher 2003).

Today, leaders do communicate—though more informally—with each other about major issues at leadership meetings or via cell phones, and communication to all members in this less hierarchical structure happens instantaneously over the internet. Message boards, usually private, are the primary interface, supplemented with occasional emails or social networking messages as relevant. Attempts at in-person recruitment to the militia still happen, but now recruitment attempts are largely limited to members' existing networks of family and acquaintances. They are also largely unsuccessful in producing new members. Only one of my interviewees knew someone involved in the militia prior to joining himself.

There is also virtually no successful recruitment at gun shows or other non-militia public events in today's militia. Newcomers are instead attracted through webpages such as www.michiganmilitia.com and social media sites—MySpace, Facebook, and

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YouTube. Potential recruits then either contact leaders via email addresses listed on these sites, requesting more information, or simply show up to a local militia meeting in their area, information about which is listed on those sites.

A final crucial difference between the militia of today and its first iteration is its overall size. Instead of the thousands of members in its heyday in 1994-1995, I estimate that there are no more than 500 active militia participants in the entire state of Michigan today. I emphasize "estimate" here because no membership rosters are maintained and it is impossible to know with certainly how many militia members there are in any given state. I define a member as a person who attends meetings or training functions at least four times a year. Members, by my definition, need not necessarily have passed the Level 1 qualification. This is because some groups' most consistent attendees are people who are "support staff" who are physically unable to complete the Level 1 requirements, who nonetheless spend considerably more time than most members contributing to the group by, for example, preparing written materials for others' use or by planning and preparing meals for members who attend trainings.

Militia leaders provide a dramatically different answer to the question of overall militia size—anywhere from 2,000 to 10,000 members, depending on the respondent. However, they tend to count as members either all people who have *ever* met the qualifications for membership, or people who have met the qualifications in the last one to three years. It is not uncommon for people to show up to one or two trainings, meet the membership requirement and obtain their membership card, and then not return to future trainings. I find it much more reasonable to only count individuals who have been recently and consistently involved. It is important to keep in mind the larger number of

once-connected individuals, however, as people who sympathize with the militia's message and who could return to militia participation if political or other circumstances induce them to do so.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MILITIAS AND OTHER NOSTALGIC GROUPS

Some authors and militia members alike describe militias as being part of a larger "patriot movement," of likeminded individuals who express their love for the nation in slightly different ways. This term is most often used disparagingly, however, by watch organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center to refer to a cluster of nostalgic and politically conservative organizations (e.g., "Cross Talk" 2010). The common element across groups that fall under this term is that they all strongly believe the U.S. and its Constitution need to be protected from threats to their fundamental identities. The sources and severity of these threats, as well as desired solutions to them vary dramatically across different groups in the movement.

There is often little communication or political action, alongside large amounts of discord between groups described as being part of the patriot movement, such that unified movement status across groups is highly questionable. For example, some groups falling under this label claim strong religious motivations while others do not, and many groups have no firearms training whatsoever. Other authors have also recognized the distinction between groups of the patriot movement groups and suggested we need more nuanced labels for different groups with different behaviors and ideologies (e.g., Berlet 2004; Crothers 2003; George and Wilcox 1996; Wright 2007).

In Michigan, militia members have few ties to other groups that fall under the umbrella term "patriot movement," even relatively mainstream groups like the Tea Party. It is true that militia members and Tea Partiers alike may support Libertarian political perspectives, and that militia members tend to favor Tea Party candidates like Ron Paul. However, it is very rare that militia members participate in Tea Party events, or vice versa. They also only rarely participate in the Oath Keepers organization, which is a network of former and current law enforcement and military personnel who swear to uphold the Constitution, even if their superiors order them to violate it. Militia members likewise vow to support the Constitution, and many are former military, but only one member I encountered claimed to be a part of the organization—an act which requires no more than going to a website, signing up for free, and printing an instantly generated membership card.

Further, only one fifth of my interviewees are involved in the National Rifle Association. The majority of militia members see the organization as "too political," or as making too many political concessions rather than forcefully defending the Second Amendment. More members express a preference for a lesser-known, but harder-line organization called Gun Owners of America. Still others support Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership—a group that advocates gun ownership as a way to avoid a second Holocaust—even though no Michigan Member I encountered claims Jewish heritage.

The reason that most members are not involved in multiple political outlets with similar goals is often because they say they do not have the time or money to do so. Militia members typically take any opportunity to work overtime shifts that may arise at

work, attend two or three militia functions a month (ranging from 12 to more than 30 hours of participation a month, depending on the events), and spend their remaining free time with their families. Militia participation reflects, for them, the ideal expression of their political perspectives while offering physical activities that members find enjoyable and that most of the above organizations cannot offer. For most members, the physical enactment of their ideology is something they say they find essential, and something that is relatively unique to the militia among other ideologically similar groups.

The one exception to this lack of cross-participation in other groups is the Open Carry movement. This movement encourages law abiding gun owners to visibly carry their handguns in places they are legally allowed to do so. Their argument is, first, that if this right to open carry is not exercised, states may move to restrict it as well as other Second Amendment rights, and, second, that if other law abiding citizens see normal people with handguns, they may begin to be less fearful of them and recognize gun owners as reliable and trustworthy fellow citizens. Militia members uniformly support these positions and many routinely openly carry their handguns when conducting daily business. Participation in this "movement" notably requires no additional time commitment and thus allows militia members to be involved without compromising time spent on other activities or requiring additional financial expenditures.

There are two groups with which militias are most often conflated that merit further differentiation here. The first is white supremacist and other racist groups. Racist groups' major guiding principle is the belief that Whites are intellectually and culturally superior to all other races. These groups often advocate violence toward non-Whites and Whites who participate in race mixing because they believe that both threaten the very

future of the white "race," and of the nation itself. As Chapter Four shows, Michigan's militias are not racist at the group level, meaning that individual members may still harbor varying degrees of racism, but that racism is not a goal for militias as a group (also see Berlet 2004; Chermak 2002; Churchill 2009; George and Wilcox 1996). In fact, Detroit's sizable neo-Nazi population has derisively dismissed the Michigan militia as working against white interests by encouraging minority membership and as probably being aligned with their "Jewish enemies" ("Michigan Militia" 2008).

The second group with which militias are often conflated are the Minutemen who patrol the southern border of the U.S. and watch for illegal immigrants. Members of the Minutemen often wear camouflage and carry firearms while talking about illegal immigrants' negative impact on the economy and broader culture of the U.S. (Shapira 2011). It is understandable that, at first glance, Minutemen would be assumed to be the same as militia groups, but there are very important differences that set the groups apart.

First, Minutemen do not participate in any kind of paramilitary or weapons training. Sociologist Harel Shapira conducted an ethnography with several segments of the Minutemen in Arizona and reported that, contrary to public perceptions, firearms are almost never involved in Minutemen activities (*ibid*.). Individual Minutemen occasionally target shoot at nearby shooting ranges, but never practice as a group and do not routinely use their weapons to confront people they observe watching the border; instead, they use high tech night vision and other equipment to observe from a distance and alert border patrol and other law enforcement (*ibid*.). In contrast, training is crucial for militia members who believe they should use their shared time to keep their weapons and other skills honed and ready for use in the event of a disaster or some other situation

Figure 8: A militia member prepares to shoot at a target during a competition at a public range. Photo by Amy Cooter.

in which they are needed. Collective training is thus essential for militia status, in my definition.

Second, the Minutemen exist solely to combat and protest illegal immigration. Many militia members I encountered supported the Minutemen's goal of limiting illegal immigration, but none had illegal immigration as their sole concern[21]. Instead, militia members follow and are invested in a variety of socio-political issues. There is also evidence that the Minutemen's singular focus on illegal immigration gives them greater linkages to white supremacist populations than I have observed in the militia. Several notable figures involved in both the Minutemen and racist organizations have been in the news in the last few years, usually following a violent crime (e.g., Myers 2012).

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[21] No Michigan militia members ever became involved in the Minutemen effort, but a militia unit I have contact with in Florida spent a week with a Minutemen unit at the Arizona border in an effort to network and to express support for their actions. Members of that Florida unit told me the Minutemen were "doing good work," but confirmed the Minutemen never trained together and were less equipped than militia members to deal with other problems; one member said the time spent in Arizona was "pretty boring," and that militia unit has not returned for further activities with the Minutemen.

It is important to note that some Minutemen units, some white supremacist organizations, and other groups may occasionally use the term "militia" to describe themselves, even though they would not qualify as such under my definition. For example, the Militia of Montana obviously includes "militia" in its name, and has even been described as a "prototypical" militia (Kimmel and Ferber 2000:586). The Militia of Montana was incredibly prolific and ideologically influential in terms of producing training texts and video tapes that are of interest to nation-wide militia groups to this day. However, the Militia of Montana had no meaningful training component and no organized firearms proficiency requirements (personal communication, Norm Olson, January 29, 2011), making "militia" an inappropriate label for this group in my view.

THE CONTEMPORARY MILITIA AS A PATRIOTIC ORGANIZATION

Militia members nearly uniformly describe their role as that of citizen soldiers. They see themselves as the last line of domestic defense should military forces either 1) need assistance during times of disaster, or 2) themselves become an enemy through attacking American citizens or otherwise neglecting their duties. Few Michigan militia members I encountered believe the second role is truly feasible and realistically understand the sheer technological, man-power and other resource disadvantages militia units would face in any real conflict with any military.

Many do not believe this second role would ever happen, but want to be ready "just in case." As one leader frequently tells newcomers:

> 'You don't buy car insurance because you plan to drive into a wall! You don't buy a fire extinguisher because you plan to set your kitchen on fire! You don't join the militia because you expect trouble; you do it to be prepared for whatever happens!'

Similarly, few Michigan members express they *want* any kind of confrontation with the government to ever occur. To the contrary, many members (including 15 or 38% of my interviewees) are military veterans and believe they have an accurate understanding of the sheer military power of the U.S. government. Those who are not veterans, or those who have not seen direct combat, rely on the war stories told by veteran relatives to insist that war is terrible and that they never want to see anything approaching it within the borders of their country. I discuss this second goal further in Chapter Three, and argue that it should be understood as a symbolic defense of nationalistic ideals.

The first role, acting *with* the military in times of domestic disaster, is much more central to militia identity. Most do not expect foreign troops or black helicopters from the United Nations—a conspiracy theory traditionally attributed to militias—to encroach upon U.S. borders, though they would like to think they are to some degree prepared to help if that nonetheless happens. Instead, militias are much more focused on relatively mundane disasters: floods, snowstorms, and power blackouts, for example. Militia members say it is their role in the event of disasters like this to help take the pressure off National Guard and emergency responders so that they may better use their resources for people in serious need. Members who have enacted this philosophy proudly tell these stories as illustrative examples. For instance, one member speaks of using his generator to power an elderly neighbor's oxygen concentrator during a Detroit power blackout that lasted several days, saying this saved the woman a trip to the hospital and allowed one of Detroit's limited ambulances to instead make a call where it was truly needed. He says more neighbors used to do these kinds of things for each other, in "old fashioned communities that have gone by the wayside."

Militia members say these relatively mundane emergencies are events for which everyone should be prepared, but pride themselves on the fact that they actually make a concerted effort to do so, while believing that the average American does not. Most Michigan members do store extra water, non-perishable food and first aid supplies, but very few of them reach the near-hoarding levels that are sometimes associated with the militia. Most say they have adequate stores to sustain themselves, their immediate families, and possibly a few neighbors for five to ten days should a local disaster prevent their going to the grocery store; however, there are very few who say they store enough for a year or more, as is often the case with dedicated, self-proclaimed survivalists (Mitchell 2002).

Then, there are the guns. Militia members I formally interviewed had a median of three firearms *per person in their household*[22]. It is impossible to know how this number compares to that of the non-militia, "average" American because ownership statistics do not exist for any type of firearm. Even new dealer firearm sales are not reasonably tracked by any agency; the National Rifle Association, a pro-gun lobby, and the Brady Campaign, a strongly anti-gun lobby, both use FBI background checks as a proxy for gun sales ("Guns" 2010, "NICS" 2010). However, FBI background checks are used for a variety of other purposes, including some rental agreements and job applications, and many gun sales, including those between private individuals, do not require background checks. These checks also do not capture older firearms that may be passed down to family members across generations. Although background checks might be the best-available proxy, they remain an abysmal measure of firearms ownership.

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[22] I asked interviewees how many firearms were in their households, and, separately, how many people were currently living in their households. Only two of my forty interviewees declined to answer this question.

Regardless of how their gun ownership compares to that of other people, it is clear that firearms training is central to militia members' identities. Sociologist Geneviève Zubrzycki (2011) argues that mythologies, including those that form national identities, are visually

Figure 9: A member holds a metal target and a bullet of the same caliber to show the holes in the target during a snowy winter training. Photo courtesy of Jeff Kindy.

represented and embodied to make them real for their believers. Zubrzycki argues that the Polish people have used events like the "war of the crosses" at Auschwitz to visually and symbolically reclaim an historicized identity of Poles as Polish and as Catholic, rather than Jewish (2006). For militia members, firearms are a central part of the act of constantly defining and reclaiming a national story. Guns are sacred secular symbols of the militia's vision of the nation because they are tools and symbols that directly represent a mythic past and valued rights earned by the blood, sweat, and bullets of an ideal, mythic American man. As the front page of www.michiganmilitia.com states:

> "A well-armed citizenry is the best form of Homeland Security and can better deter crime, invasion, terrorism, and tyranny. Everyone is welcome, regardless of race, creed, color, religion or political affiliation, provided you do not wish to bring harm to our country or people. If you are a United States citizen (or have declared your intent to become such), who is capable of bearing arms, or supports the right to do so, then YOU ARE the MILITIA!"

The first sentence of this statement highlights the centrality of firearms. The second sentence proclaims that everyone is welcome, but the third qualifies this by again referencing firearms and saying that only citizens, or people who soon will be, who can

use[23] or support using firearms are militia-worthy. This is because militia members view it as the civic duty of all citizens to protect their country and believe there are times this might only be possible with the aid of firearms. Although this again perhaps harkens to images of foreign troop invasion, the underlying belief structure is more nuanced. Militia members believe that someone using a firearm in self-defense during a home invasion, for example, is in fact participating in the defense of their country, too, by defending its ideals and doing what is necessary to protect oneself, one's family, and the very principle of "the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Members' feeling of civic duty cannot be overstated. Although they do not use this term, members see themselves as super citizens[24] whose mission it is to uphold the essence of Americanism as they understand it. Their vision of the nation rests on individual liberty and self-determination, and on citizenship as a set of day-to-day practices that attest to one's commitment to the nation (Isin 2009; Billig 1995). Members strongly believe in the American Dream of having success in proportion to one's effort and labor, even though the Dream's promise has not come true for any of them. In his study of underemployed black men, sociologist Alford Young (2006) found that the men who had more experiences with racism and who traveled outside their immediate neighborhoods the most were least likely to believe in the Dream. Black men with the lowest incomes and the most limited economic opportunities most embraced the Dream. In a similar fashion, militia men have limited social circles and, overall, limited

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[23] Although not explicit here, "capable of bearing arms" means both someone who knows how to safely handle a firearm and someone who is legally allowed to do so.

[24] My usage of "super citizens" differs from that of Kate Nash's (2009) description of people who are granted extended or transnational human rights because of their economic or political power. Militias are super citizens in that they understand themselves to most ideally embody the principles that Americans are supposed to uphold.

experiences outside the state of Michigan; they certainly have very limited experiences with racism, either directly or witnessing others experience it. Members' relatively limited worldview resulting from these experiences allows them to attribute their failures in achieving the Dream to personal deficiencies, rather than seeing them as part of a broader structural discrepancy with the myth they so support.

Militia members pride themselves on being lawful citizens who carefully follow even those laws with which they disagree, such as laws banning certain grips or other accessories from being attached to certain firearms. Members vote at every opportunity, and understand their militia participation as a way to be prepared to serve their communities in the event of emergencies ranging from snowstorms to terror attacks. Militia members see themselves as more dedicated to the country and its principles than other Americans because of their militia involvement, but their version of super-citizen nationalism resonates with groups on the political right (e.g., Tea Partiers, Oath Keepers, etc.) who hold a similar "originalist" vision of a country that adheres to a literal interpretation of the Constitution; they reject the idea that the Constitution can legitimately be interpreted beyond its four corners without amendments or other legislation that go through proper legislative channels. "Americanness," for militia members, is best defined as the degree to which a person stands up for and embodies originalist Constitutional values. I found that the contemporary militia is best understood as a group of people who feel unrepresented by both major political parties and who see their militia involvement as a way to both protest the system and to remind the government about their particular interests.

A MILITIA TYPOLOGY

Some militia researchers have observed a distinction between what they term "underground" and "above ground" militia groups. Underground groups operate secretly and privately with a high degree of mistrust of outsiders. This is often because what they are doing is illegal or at least unpopular, and possibly subject to State repression (Zwerman et al. 2000). The implication is typically that groups are operating underground so that they may continue participating in illegal behavior while evading authorities. Above ground groups, in contrast, are considered to be less dangerous, largely legal, and relatively transparent in their motives as well as methods (*ibid*.).

Reality is not this clear cut, however. So-called above ground groups may indeed have websites and easily identifiable members but nonetheless be movement outliers in terms of their ideology. One of most recent militia groups to garner notoriety, the Hutaree in southern Michigan, had publicly accessible websites and YouTube videos that clearly showed members' faces and sometimes real names, but they were arrested and tried for allegedly plotted to kill police officers, which is an "underground" strategy. Additionally, above ground groups may have many members who do not come to public events, not because they do not want to publicly acknowledge militia affiliation, but because distance or work schedules prevent their participation. These people stay in touch via message boards or email, and would be, by the classical definition, "underground" members in an above ground group, which makes little contextual sense.

A final reason to view this model with skepticism is that, by definition, underground groups are impossible to count and accurately assess. It is very easy to claim that these groups are more numerous and more problematic than any existing data would

indicate for political and other reasons. Some reports on militias and other unpopular

groups may be exaggerated to garner financial support for watch organizations (see

Chermak 2002 for a discussion), and social scientists wanting an accurate assessment of

militias or other movements who are similarly labeled should be wary of relying on this

concept.

A more useful distinction, which corresponds with my empirical observations, is

made by historian Robert Churchill between "millenarian" and "constitutional" militias:

> "*Constitutionalists* began to organize militias on the basis of public
> meetings and open membership. They saw the growing threat of state-
> sponsored violence as a symptom of a corrupt and abusive government,
> and argued that the militia, if public, could act as a deterrent against
> further government abuse. *Millenarians* began to organize on the basis of
> a closed cell structure hidden from public view. Their vision was
> millennial and apocalyptic: they saw militia organization as the only way
> to survive an imminent invasion by the forces of the New World Order"
> (2009:188; *emphasis added*).

Millenarian militias, in other words, much more closely match the stereotypical image of

militias as secretive, dangerous, focused on paranoid conspiracy theories, possibly

religiously-motivated, and racially or otherwise exclusionary. These seem to have greater

potential for violence and more links to racist or other problematic groups. They may also

have less of a focus on political involvement than constitutional militias. Constitutionalist

militias more uniformly resemble the definition of militias I laid out above and represent

the majority of militias in Michigan.

Millenarian and constitutionalist militias should nonetheless be understood as

ideal types because constitutionalist militias may still have members who strongly

believe in a variety of conspiracy theories, and because millenarian militias may overtly

claim some constitutionalist principles as well. However, constitutionalist militias tend to

be more internally uniform and have more in common with each other than with millenarian militias, and vice versa. This distinction does not hold so clearly for the traditional above/below ground model.

Churchill's model also places focus on militia ideology, which is a major causal factor in how likely a given militia is to operate transparently, thus giving the model more explanatory power. To be clear, "millenarian" is not parallel to "underground," nor is "constitutionalist" parallel to "above ground." Returning to the example of the Hutaree, their ideology was very religiously- and conspiratorially-motivated, but was nonetheless readily and publicly available through the internet. This defies the above/below ground typology, but is explained perfectly under the millenarian label.

Importantly, Churchill's model implicitly contradicts a claim usually made by authors using the above/below ground model as broadly applied to nostalgic groups generally (e.g., Stern 1996): that above ground groups maintain a positive public face while nearly always having a below ground component to do their dirty work. By focusing on group ideology, it becomes clear that millenarian and constitutionalist groups frequently *cannot* cooperate because the rift is simply too large. Michigan's militias are a very clear example of this. The constitutionalist groups see themselves as proactive monitoring agencies for the millenarian groups. They maintain superficial contact with millenarian groups to know their upcoming plans, and may report these plans to law enforcement authorities when they perceive a possibility of threat.

Contrary to previous authors claiming that such "snitching" happens when above and below ground groups have a falling out (Stern 1996), the ideological component of Churchill's model brings a more accurate understanding. Not only do millenarian and

constitutionalist militias have fundamental disagreements that rarely lead to a cooperative situation that could be breached, but constitutionalist militias believe it is their civic and personal duty to help protect their communities. They accordingly think it is their responsibility to report information to authorities when they suspect there is a viable threat of dangerous or illegal action that could lead to someone being hurt. Contacts to the FBI from two different Michigan constitutionalist militias were major factors leading to the infiltration and eventual arrest and indictment of the millenarian Hutaree (Baldas 2012; Higgins 2010).

Understanding this ideological difference that separates millenarian from constitutionalist militias is critical for a complete picture of exactly what the modern militia movement is. This in turn, is important for understanding basic characteristics of who militia members are and what they hope to accomplish and how they interact with the changing social world around them. Some of my claims here regarding militia origins and demographics differ somewhat from previous militia researchers. I discuss these differences and reasons for them in the Appendix. My primary focus in remaining chapters is on constitutionalist groups and members because they represent the majority of the movement in Michigan. They are also the members most trying to adhere to evolving social norms.

In the next chapter, I show that the reasons men say they join the militia all fall into four broad categories, each of which may be understood through a lens of traditional, American masculinity that is informed by notions of masculine protectors. I contrast the masculinity implicit in men's stated motivations for joining the militia with non-traditionally masculine modes of interaction evident at trainings and other militia

functions. I argue that the militia is similar to historically all-male groups like the boy scouts in facilitating masculine bonding, but, in contrast to these earlier groups, the militia also provides a safe space for experimenting with masculinity and masculine expression in the context of evolving gendered expectations.

CHAPTER 3

Militia Masculinity: Protectors of Country, Family, and LGBT Populations?

> 'This is more than a group of guys who get together and play GI Joe. This is about family, it's about community, it's about people.'
>
>   - 47 year old Adam

U.S. history is replete with male-only organizations including the Boy Scouts that support the explicit goal of "fostering manly strength [while countering] corrupting and debilitating effects of urbanization and social change" (MacLeod 1982:3). Organizations like this continue to foster self-conceptions that conform to traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Denny 2011; Mechling 2001). At first glance, it would appear that contemporary citizens' militias, comprised largely of patriotic white men who want to return to an originalist interpretation of the Constitution, would be a successor to this lineage. Assessing masculinity in a predominately-male group that consciously references a protective "warrior," or "super citizen" image allows for an in-depth investigation into how American men understand masculinity in contemporary society. In this chapter, I analyze how militia men reference a hegemonic masculinity that values toughness and independence when asked to describe their reasons for joining the organization while *enacting* a much more emotive and untraditional masculinity in the field. This masculinity expresses acceptance of affection between men and even acceptance of transgendered individuals.

This chapter also analyzes the role of children and women in the militia. Militia men want both their children and their significant others to be more involved in militia activities, and are often disappointed when they are not. Despite being committed to egalitarianism and expanded masculinity, I argue that militia men are often unaware of how the gendered nature of their activities may prevent women's and children's full participation.

WHITE, AMERICAN MASCULINITY

There is a large body of scholarship on how masculinity, like femininity, is a fluid construct. It is time and context dependent (Gutmann 1996; Tomsen 1997), varies across socioeconomic classes (Messerschmidt 1993) and racial groups (Staples 1982), and, as sociologist R. W. Connell notes, "Different masculinities are produced in the same cultural or institutional setting" (Connell 2005:36). Most scholars nonetheless agree that in each time and place there is some version of hegemonic masculinity toward which men feel pressured to aspire (see Connell 2005; Mosse 1998; Nagel 2004). The degree to which men are successfully able to match this hegemonic model depends on their racial and class positions (Gutmann 1996).

Some authors (e.g., Connell 2005) are critical of attempts to define masculinity in essentialist or positivistic terms. They rightly note that with such variation in masculinity, it is difficult to claim that men truly "are" a certain way, or that their particular behaviors in one context are really masculinity's defining features. What is sometimes overlooked in these critiques, however, is that men often conceptualize themselves in these terms. In

this context, it becomes important to understand how men represent their masculinities and to understand and the foundational stories they reference in these representations.

The hegemonic masculinity that is prevalent in America's mythos is that of a physically and mentally tough, independent man who provides for his family. Early in this nation's history, the definition of "male" was rooted in property ownership—especially land ownership—and thus had substantial overlap with understandings of whiteness since only Whites could legally own property in many places (Garner 2007). Ownership was a real as well as symbolic indicator of independence and responsibility in an era where slavery, indentured servitude, and share cropping were common (*ibid.*). The taming and conquering of the land, as well as the native peoples who possessed it, using innate toughness and hard-earned resources was indicative of essential manhood, according to historian William Cronon (2003). Firearms become important characters in these stories as they helped men fulfill the roles of conquering the frontier and providing for their families.

The Revolutionary War was a break from England's paternalistic monarchy and a clear indication of early colonists' desire to demonstrate independence and self-sufficiency. Tales from this time period take on a mythic status, glorifying the role of men-as-warriors at the nation's founding (Gibson 1994; Kohn 2004; Mulloy 2008). As Susan Faludi notes, war is "federal masculinity insurance" (2000:25), and provides men with a model of what nationalized manhood looks like. Women are rarely mentioned at all in these tales, and when they are, they are supporting cast members to the men who are doing the "real" work.

The key marker for manliness shifted to economic success following the Industrial Revolution when many people moved to cities to participate in the nation's changing markets. Reminiscent of Max Weber's (1905) writings on the Protestant Work Ethic, sociologist Michael Kimmel says economic success as a goal in itself led to the notion of "self-made" (2005:9) men, whose personal success or failure was judged by their ability to climb the economic hierarchy. In the post-Civil War era, large factories were still the prevailing industrial force, but few owned their own means of production and upward mobility was increasingly difficult.

As Kimmel notes "masculinity was experienced as increasingly difficult to prove" (2005:100) as other groups entered what was supposed to be the white, male proving ground. These men experienced nostalgia for past, supposedly simpler times (Coontz 2000), and there was a return to activities in the "rugged outdoors" as a way to not only demonstrate, but relearn a traditional masculinity (Kimmel 2005:135). Private male-only clubs and other organizations including the Boy Scouts, founded in 1910, were started with the explicit goal of "fostering manly strength [while countering] corrupting and debilitating effects of urbanization and social change" (MacLeod 1982:3). American studies professor Jay Mechling's (2001) study of the modern Boy Scouts illustrates how these notions of instilling manliness are still central to this organization today.

Around the same time these male clubs were starting, enlistment in WWI provided a more conventional way to again enact a traditional masculinity, as did participation in new and enlarging job sectors that resulted from the war. WWII soon provided another chance for military participation, and in its wake came various GI Bills assisting men's economic reentry, which had a greater emphasis on higher education than

had decades past. Women, who had entered the workforce in great numbers during the war, were strongly encouraged to return to the kitchen so that men could retake their "proper place" in those jobs.

Most members today were born in the 1950s or later, but their collective memories uniformly include the events and repercussions of WWII. Almost all militia men—95% in my interview sample—have male relatives who fought during this war and remember hearing first-hand stories of its costs and victories. They share these tales at militia trainings as much to serve as a point of commonality over which to bond, as to keep the memories of those who fought alive. These mythical stories serve as lauded examples of just use of force as well as of America's supposed superior technological and moral advancement relative to other nations. WWII's few remaining living veterans, as well as those now deceased, are vaunted as paragons of patriotism and moral uprightness, and as true heroes fighting for freedom and basic human rights who should be models for modern citizenship.

White men's ability to participate in acceptable expressions of masculinity via the labor market remained relatively unthreatened until the Civil Rights and Women's Movements. Increasing competition on the labor market and changing gendered expectations in the home meant that there were fewer outlets for expressing traditional masculinity. The early stages of heavy U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War probably appeared to be a way to normatively participate in this arena again. As sociologist James Gibson notes, "America has always had a war culture" (1994:16), and the nation's historical record of military involvement implicates not only a traditional masculinity, but a "moral" one (Morgan 2004). That is, a masculinity that seeks to correct the world's

injustices and reflects a certain deservingness to win war through "the country's fundamental goodness and power" (Gibson 1994:10).

Losing Vietnam reflected not only the military's failure, but the impotence of the ideal warrior version of American masculinity that so undergirds the national paradigm. As sociologist Joane Nagel succinctly says, "…These men are not only defending tradition but also defending a particular racial, gendered, and sexual conception of self— a white, male, heterosexual notion of masculine identity" (2004:407). Relatively few militia members of today served in Vietnam[25] (though this number was likely higher in the militia of the 1990s) but members nonetheless revere Vietnam's veterans, too. Because Vietnam was essentially a loss for the powerful and resource-rich U.S. against a relatively small and distant Communist threat, the sentiment here is rather different. The militia views Vietnam veterans with more a sense of sympathy than of adulation, in that they see them as men trying to do their job, supporting their country, only to be betrayed by a lack of adequate resources to win the war, or to be reintegrated in society upon their return home (also see Gibson 1994; Schlatter 2006).

Little analytical work has been done on the more recent conflicts in the Middle East and their ambiguous outcomes, but the same theme of unfulfilled warriorhood is certainly reflected there as well. Some militia members, or their children, have participated in more recent military conflicts in the Middle East. Most, though not all, militia members see these wars as ultimately justified and honor their veterans, but view

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[25] Zero interviewees participated in Vietnam, but Vietnam veterans are active in militias in Michigan. I have interacted with half a dozen self-identified Vietnam veteran militia members during training sessions and public meetings across the state. It seems to be the case that Vietnam veterans are more likely to participate in militia units that are more newly-formed, but have greater ideological and interpersonal connections to the militia of the 90s. Their units may be more likely to be of the Millenarian type and may be less likely to participate in formal interviews with either researchers or the media.

the politics and governmental involvement as more parallel to that of Vietnam than of WWII. This was exemplified when one group in the western part of the state kicked out a new member who kept picking fights over the content of the trainings. As Roy, a veteran in his late 30s, explained:

> 'He had real problems getting along with people. Him and [the unit's leader] both have really strong opinions and always got into it. His Humvee took a direct hit in Iraq and pretty much all of his squad was killed. He was the one who had to drag their bodies outta there. That's what must have set off the PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]. We learned a lot from him, but just couldn't keep him around. It was too much. Too much goin' around in his head, still.'

Regardless of their personal opinions of particular wars, militia members nearly uniformly believe that part of the function of war more generally is to defend an idealized understanding of individual freedom and liberty, particularly within the borders U.S., even if that war is half a world away. They further believe it is a patriotic and moral duty of young men to participate in war as a defense of these principles and of the nation. Family histories of involvement in past wars heighten this belief among militia members, and their militia participation is in no small part an expression of this same patriotism for many members.

WHY MEN JOIN THE MICHIGAN MILITIA

I initially set out to understand why militia men professed to join the organization to understand their rationales for being part of this particular movement. However, I realized their expressed reasons could be better understood as a lesson on how they frame masculinity. All reasons fell within four complimentary categories: sense of duty,

personal preparedness, comradery, and political expression. All four reasons reference the hegemonic vision of a tough, independent man.

Reason 1: Sense of Duty to Country or to Family

Duty to Country

About one-third of the membership and two-thirds of the leadership of the militia have military experience, so it is unsurprising that the most commonly expressed reason (from 17 interviewees) for joining was a sense of duty to country. Walter, a 59 year-old retail worker, states this duty very clearly:

> "Part of it is a sense of duty. I was in the Navy for 10 years, and when I joined, I took an oath to protect and defend the Constitution. And there was no time limit on it. To me, this is just the next logical step."

Walter, as many other members, tells me he has "always" felt a duty to serve his country and the Constitution—the document he sees as protecting the country's values and Walter's way of life. Nearly all members had male relatives who served in the military in WWII. Family stories about this war and its global impact are frequent topics of conversation at militia events and help reinforce the image of the U.S. as a moral and technological superpower. Walter sees it not only as a duty to his country, but as part of his legacy, as a duty to his family, to help ensure the values that his forbearers fought for remain intact. For Walter, this is a life-long oath. Once he was honorably discharged, he continued to volunteer in his community in other ways before being drawn to militia membership.

Members like Walter think that militias help the country by providing a civilian supplement to the National Guard. Shortly after the 2010 election, a militia leader joked,

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'I heard a rumor the other day that the new Governor intends to cut back on funding to the National Guard. People really shouldn't be upset by this when we're out there, willing to do the same task for free!'

Members do not truly believe they could or should replace the National Guard, but rather that the organizations have two shared goals. The first is assisting local communities in times of disaster. The second is being prepared to assist if the country is ever invaded by foreign forces. Both goals reference the protector archetype, embedded in America's mythic masculinity.

The first goal of assisting communities, which I introduced in Chapter Two, is a practical and achievable one. Militia units around Michigan have assisted local law enforcement in various search and rescue efforts, have participated in clothing drives for underprivileged schools, and have more individually assisted neighbors during snowstorms and blackouts. Forty-seven year old member Calvin, a city worker, told me that he joined the militia because he wanted to share tactical knowledge from his military training with civilians so that they could be better adept at helping their own communities. He believes that military knowledge would help people help themselves during emergencies and would allow first responders to save their resources for more serious situations. Calvin's belief references the mythic masculinity of the independent protector, and he says he wants to instill the importance of that role in others.

The second goal of defending the country's borders against foreign invasion is unrealistic and, at first glance, excessively paranoid. However, it is more accurately understood as a *symbolic* defense of the nation. Most militia members in Michigan recognize that invasion is a remote possibility, and understand that, if it happened, they would be ill-equipped to engage with a real military force. Instead, members see the U.S.

as unique and nearly sacred, and they sometimes have difficulty articulating modern fears

regarding globalization and the supposed erosion of a "unique," elite national identity.

Members feel they have little ability to influence the political and technological

developments that increase the U.S.'s involvement with other nations, and thus revert to

something more familiar, to scripts that were effective in historical instances of national

tribulation. They phrase their angst in terms of a traditional, masculine model of war with

a concrete enemy who can be fended off through physical altercations.

The sense of duty to country is very similar for many members who did not have

military experience. Jessie noted:

> "I did go to college instead of joining the military, unlike most of my
> family. But I guess I always wanted to get involved in somethin' like this.
> So now, you know, now I'm 21, I can get all the equipment I need [to be
> involved in the militia], and so [it's the] best time to do it."

Jessie and two interviewees who could not join the military because of health issues seem

to exhibit a sense of guilt about their lack of military involvement. Much of this guilt

stems from their seeing military participation as a duty to country as well as family, but

Jessie's guilt is apparently amplified by the fact that he was a first-generation college

student. Just like many families in Michigan, most of Jessie's had always worked in the

auto industry. Historically, most of the auto industry jobs were relatively high-paying

with good security and benefits (Vinyard 2011). The industry has suffered in recent years

because of increased competition from international car companies and because of the

2008 recession. When Jessie's parents finished high school, there was little need for

higher education to obtain a steady job as part of this then-vast industry, and they may

still struggle to understand how drastically Michigan's economy and job prospects have

changed in recent years.

Anthropologist Kathryn Dudley's (1994) description of Wisconsin auto factory workers' valuation of manual labor over intellectual labor is applicable here; at least some working and lower-middle class workers seem to dismiss non-manual work as not being "real" or respectable labor. Jessie probably felt like he was not living up to his family's work ethic and prescribed masculinity by obtaining a degree and seeking a desk job, instead of one with a high degree of physical effort. During our interview, Jessie talked at length about his father's and paternal grandfather's military experiences, and it is likely that he felt he was not living up to the hegemonic, masculine ideal that their military experiences embodied. In other words, he may have felt like he was somehow less of a man, and may have even been ridiculed by male family members, for trying to enter a more intellectual career; Jessie spoke wistfully of sitting on the sidelines, unable to participate and be accepted, during his male relatives' holiday bonding sessions over their respective military experiences.

Less than a year after my interview with him, Jessie was laid off as the newest employee in a company that was strained under the continuing recession. He spent two months looking for other jobs before enlisting with the Air Force, despite having severance and unemployment benefits that could have sustained him for several more months. Militia leaders talked about his enlistment with pride, saying, "He's going on to bigger and much cooler things." Jessie's militia involvement did not alone push him to join the military, but it certainly legitimated and reinforced his family's valuing the military as a respectable job option.

Respectability and success are not defined by primarily by economic gain for militia members and their families. Nor are they defined by advancement in jobs that give

people authority or social power, as was the case in sociologist Alford Young's study of un- and under-employed African American men in Chicago (2006). Militia men are not trying to break into a normative economic system as Young's participants strived to do, but instead are in some ways trying to get out of it. Most militia men do not particularly enjoy their jobs and do not enjoy having strict work schedules or bosses to report to, as these interfere with members' ability to be wholly independent. Militia men work to obtain money to cover their expenses, and many dream of eventually saving enough money to purchase a large swath of property in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan that is removed from large populations and their attendant social obligations. Militia men are more similar to sociologist Michèle Lamont's (2002) working class, white, male participants who defined success and morality in terms of self-discipline, and who find dignity in performing work-related tasks well and with integrity. Jessie's military service is unlikely to make him wealthy, but it is respectable labor that pays the bills while allowing him to honor his country and his family.

Duty to Family

Duty to country is not the only sense of duty that draws members to the militia. Five interviewees said they joined the militia to learn how to better protect their families.

> "I feel it's my position to be the protector, the defender. I've always been
> concerned about you know, my family, making sure that we have what we
> need when we need it, blah, blah, blah. After we moved out of the city, the
> power was unreliable because there was a lot of building going on, and I
> decided, you know, maybe I should get a list together of what we have on
> hand, what we need on hand should something happen and we're out for
> an extended period of time. I looked at www.ready.gov, the American Red
> Cross site, I looked at a few other sites, and while everyone was real quick
> to suggest supplies, nobody was suggesting a way of protecting yourself or

your neighbor. So, I went to the one group that I remember from the media who probably knew about weapons [laughs]."

George, a lifelong Michigan resident, sought out the militia for their knowledge about firearms during a period when he was searching for information on how to protect his family from a variety of possible dangers. Extended power outages, natural disasters, accidents, terrorist attacks (in the wake of 9/11), and home invasion all were among his concerns in his new home. George's use of "blah, blah, blah" after explaining his desire to protect his family indicates his awareness of how deeply the protector role is embedded in the dominant masculine script; he did not need to elaborate the parameters of the script because he believed I was already familiar with.

Although a less common theme in interviews than duty to country, duty to family was a regular topic in the field. Militia leaders often discuss how the men who come to training need to think about whether they are prepared to take care of their wives and children—not just themselves—in the event of an emergency. In some ways, leaders are teaching, or at least reinforcing, how to be care-taking fathers and husbands. Members, in accordance with a mythic, American masculinity, feel part of their duty is to teach their family, and especially their kids, to think about preparedness for a variety of situations. Leaders often insist that advancing technology undermines peoples' self-sufficiency and ability to think for themselves, and much of their advice to other members regarding children's preparedness centers on this idea.

At first glance this attitude may seem to be reminiscent of the early literature on nostalgic groups, as regressive, and little more than a knee-jerk reaction to change and progress (for a discussion, see Bennett 1988:6). In actuality, the militia embraces various forms of technology and simply believes that, 'It shouldn't be a replacement for common

sense,' as 41 year old Lloyd likes to say. There is friendly competition among members for who has the newest gizmo: a new laser sight for a gun, a military-style sleeping hammock for use at the next campout, or walkie-talkie set for communicating with other members during trainings. Discussion of these tools and toys is strongly reminiscent of more accepted, masculine car shop discussions of who has the biggest rims or fastest engine. Trainings or meetings essentially stop while everyone gathers around so the new item can be demonstrated in every detail. There are always excited proclamations of, 'Oh man, that's sweet!' and more quiet consultations on where another member could purchase such an item, often followed by yet another's indicating where they saw similar, perhaps lower quality, but more affordable products.

Militia members also enjoy keeping up with computer and cell phone technology. Members who can afford them always have the newest models, much to the obvious envy of some who cannot. Many members around the state, including four of my interviewees, are employed as computer specialists, and SMVM was one of the first militias in the nation to have a presence on YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, and other websites. None of this seems to be the behavior of a group who opposes technological advancement. Their warnings about technology and preparedness instead have a practical and usually realistic goal, as exemplified in this quote where Lloyd encourages members to avoid overreliance on technology and think about their children's safety:

> 'Most of my kids have cell phones. Most of your kids probably have cell phones. Make sure they still memorize important phone numbers. With the way you program in everything these days, half the people out there probably don't even know their *own* number! You don't have to remember anything anymore! Be sure the kids at least know your cell number, your work number, in case something happens. Write it down on a piece of paper and make them keep it in their backpack.'

Reason 2: Personal Preparedness

The second reason interviewees said they joined the militia was for their own preparedness (from eight interviewees). This category is distinct from the first, most common reason for militia participation, where members feel a kind of altruistic or civic duty to be prepared on behalf of others. Members who say they were interested in their own preparedness do not invoke protecting the country or loved ones. Instead, they say they are motivated by their own safety, or by a desire to improve their own preparedness skill set.

Twenty-four year old Freddie, a cable TV technician, for example, remembers an armed robber breaking into his parents' home at Christmas when he was a toddler. He said this experience gave him a life-long desire to be prepared and study survival skills for a variety of scenarios.

> "I mean, I'm not living in fear and worried, but…I have just enough fear to be aware that these things happen, to want to be prepared."

Another member prioritizing personal preparedness is a widower, whose wife died from unexpected complications during surgery just a few months after giving birth to the couple's only child. Yet another stumbled upon his mother's gruesome murder scene—a case that is still unsolved ten years later. Regarding his militia participation, he said:

> "Well, I've always been an independent, self-sufficient person, and I thought that maybe I could learn how to be better towards that end, you know, from these guys."

None of the above three members indicated that their traumatic experiences led to their militia involvement. However, it is interesting that all three traumatic events involve threats to hegemonic masculinity. Each event represents an instance where the man in question was powerless to protect his family and prevent victimization. It is probably

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unreasonable to attribute their militia membership to these events alone, but militia

involvement does give these men a sense of personal security and masculine affirmation

that was denied in these traumas.

The remaining five interviewees who mentioned personal preparedness did not

reveal any similarly traumatic events in their life that might contribute to their militia

involvement, but notably, these members are among those most likely to espouse some of

the traditional conspiracy theories prevalent in the militias of the 1990s. This, too, seems

to indicate some individual insecurity that leaves these members searching for a source of

personal support. Fifty-two year old Daryl provides an example of this. His concern is

rooted in a sense of losing socioeconomic footing that seems, in his broader interview, to

reflect both a worry about his ability to continue to be a traditional, male provider for his

family, and a distrust of the government:

> "I would say they're all just on the same agenda. I mean if you look at it,
> you had President Clinton who set up executive orders for George Bush to
> give him plenty of power if he needed to shut down the air waves—
> [freedom of] speech—if he needed to declare Martial Law. And then you
> had George Bush. He just set everything up, executive orders for Obama
> so he can carry on the agenda, which is, to me, is the New World Order,
> which is globalization. They want to turn everything into a big
> corporation. And I think they wanna get rid of the middle class. And I
> don't care if they're rich and wanna be rich. Leave us alone and let us have
> a chance to, to prosper the way we want to, you know? I mean they've got
> all the money they want. Why do they have to have the rule to make
> everybody slaves? You know, we don't want to be slaves."

Daryl sees himself as speaking on behalf of a threatened middle-class, though it is

dubious whether he can claim that position in the class hierarchy with his low-level,

dangerous, automotive industry job. Sociologist David Halle (1984) argues that many

working-class men who do not know the intricacies of politics, only its stories of

corruption; just like Halle's participants, Daryl says he sees Democrat and Republican

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elites working toward the same "agenda" to engage in class warfare. A more accurate

description may be that Daryl, just as many other men in his position, feels threatened by

governmental policy he cannot control or influence, which in turn threatens his to provide

for his family and to choose the job he wants, and makes him into an economic "slave."

Reason 3: Comradery

The third stated reason for joining the militia is rooted in the search for a different kind of

support: a sense of belonging or comradery. Ten interviewees mentioned this reason. As

30 year old Mark very clearly said, "One day I realized that I always belonged here, I just

didn't know it." Those members who have been involved for five years or more, like

Lloyd, are especially likely to perceive substantial commonalities among other members.

> "These are just some interesting things I have noticed over the years. The
> percentage of people involved in the Militia that are left-handed, or
> ambidextrous is disproportionately higher than the general population. The
> people involved in the militia that have had to work with their hands on
> things that require attention to detail like models, or painting little war
> game miniatures, or electronics is very much disproportionately higher
> than the general population. I have been at several meetings, more staff
> type meetings we had, you know, 9 or 10 people there. The number, of
> those people at those staff type meetings that have blue eyes is far, grossly
> disproportionate to the rest of the population. Not all of us, but there is a
> large percentage of science fiction fans. We tend to be gadgety—you'll
> find we have a greater interest in high tech stuff. We're very technically
> addicted. I think a militia guy will read *Popular Science*, *Popular
> Mechanics* far much more than just about anything else. There of course is
> a big history interest but I mean, that's almost an automatic. You could get
> a paper out of that right there."

It is not uncommon that members of any social group feel connected to one another, but

some of these characterizations have a near-mystical quality that seems unusual. It is true,

however, that more than 10% (the estimated proportion of left-handed people in the

general population) of the SMVM leadership are left-handed and that many have blue

eyes. Some militia members interpret these commonalities to mean there is something intangible yet meaningful that bonds them together.

Other markers such as a common interest in history are, as Lloyd says, easier to explain. Militia men are nearly uniformly invested in the mythologized story of the nation's inception and its founders, and enjoy watching and comparing notes on History Channel shows regarding these topics. Many men similarly enjoy the

Figure 10: A militia member plays his harmonica as the group and one of their children takes a break near the end of a long day of training. Photo by Amy Cooter.

Military Channel and similar shows that detail large, risky, or cunning military maneuvers of past conflicts. Training leaders sometimes draws on these events for the elaborate back stories he creates to spark members' imaginations during training.

Richard, who is 42 years old, married, and perhaps more circumspect than the average member about his participation laughingly noted, "I want to be part of the militia because it's fun. I like to dress up!" As seriously as members profess to take training, the first time I attended training exercises, I could not help but note how most members seemed to enjoy the process of gearing up as much as the exercises themselves. The head-to-toe camo and gear certainly serve a practical function within the context of militia activity; camo material is the most protective against bug bites, thorn scratches,

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and poison ivy, all of which are found in the areas where militias train, and the gear vests keep compasses, rifle magazines, and first aid supplies close at hand.

However, no militia member I have encountered has only the minimum required equipment for their first level of certification. All go to elaborate efforts to have the newest gear, and, as with their other gadgets, the enjoyment they receive from obtaining and using the gear goes beyond the practical. For example, most members have multiple sets of camouflage, usually one in Army green and tan for summer training in the woods and grassy areas, one in white and grey for winter exercises, and sometimes a desert brown pattern, to match sandy training spots, or certain fall training locations. Men who show up in fatigues that do not match the seasonal environment receive a good deal of friendly ridicule, and generally return to next month's training more appropriately attired.

As another example, members qualified for Level 2 are required to carry several high-calorie military rations called Meals Ready to Eat (MREs). These are sold on Ebay, at Army Supply, and GI Surplus stores, and are quite expensive, ranging from $5 to $10 each, depending on the desirability of the contents. Each approximately 20 ounce packet is conspicuously stamped with, "U.S. GOVERNMENT PROPERTY, COMMERCIAL RESALE IS UNLAWFUL," although no law actually exists prohibiting their sale. A few members make their own MREs with home vacuum sealer units, but these expire much faster than the ones commissioned by the government.

The second level of militia certification ostensibly requires carrying several MREs so that the member will have access to food if there is a real emergency and they are stranded or are assisting with some disaster for a few days. Members often consume MREs for lunch during training, however, even though this is a terrible use of resourcesb

because of the cost and hassle of purchasing them. Additionally, as Calvin once explained to some members without military experience, MREs are designed to ensure that soldiers in the field do not need to use the bathroom frequently, to 'Plug you up,' as he gleefully proclaims.

Eating MREs in the field is thus not a pleasant experience and must therefore be another symbolic act of participation and bonding. Heating the plastic pouches in boiling water over an open fire and complaining about the taste of the macaroni and cheese meal or lime-flavored, powdered drink mix is part of the theater of militia training—part of "dressing up." It also allows men who ate MREs during military service to relive those days and to enact a certain authenticity necessary for bonding with each other, while extending the same sentimentality to younger members who were not enlisted. Zubrzycki observes that "images are agents of socialization" (2011:24) because they provide a concrete representation of an abstraction. "Dressing up" allows militia members to visually remind each other (as well as militia observers) of their idealized abstraction, the mythological representation of the nation to which they aspire, while instructing new members on the expected way to comport oneself while in the group.

"Dressing up" thus helps members bond with each other while making the

Figure 11: A member practices a shooting drill as another waits his turn during a frigid February training. Photo by Amy Cooter.

organization seem real and important, especially during times when members continue to meet and train without overt political threats to their ideology. Full militia regalia may look ridiculous or scary to outsiders, and may be part of the reason why militias remain small in size despite having numerous potential members in gun rights advocates or Tea Partiers who share their Libertarian perspectives. This would be a detriment under most theories of social movements; however, it also subtly helps militia members ensure that people who participate in their activities fully support the militia's goals and vision of the nation.

Historian Evelyn Schlatter (2006) and sociologist Richard Mitchell (2002) are two authors who have discussed comradery among members of nostalgic groups—those who reminisce about an idealized past. But one thing that has not been discussed in the previous literature is how many of militia activities are motivated by and oriented toward enjoyment. Camping and target practice are activities at the center of militia activity that are also inherently fun for members. People who have never shot a rifle may underestimate the degree of physical and mental acumen required to do so accurately. Practicing accuracy while making adjustments to the rifle and scope, or while experimenting with different brands of ammunition is not dissimilar from honing one's skills at a sport; indeed, there are dozens of competitive shooting organizations in the U.S., and international competitions including some events at the Olympics include shooting because of the skill required for accuracy and efficiency.

All these forms of fun from firearm proficiency, to camping, to the categories of shared interest that Lloyd mentioned—gadgets, working with your hands, and *Popular Mechanics*—are forms of masculine enactment that reference a "tough" hegemonic

masculinity and a mythic vision of national identity. Firearms were necessary for fighting

wars at the beginning of this nation, but also for wrangling the frontier and providing for

your family, all of which were traditionally men's jobs. This is reflected in anthropologist

Abigail Kohn's commentary on recreational shooters:

> "Baby boomers can reengage through ritual what they feel is lost through
> the over-civilizing processes of obtaining white-collar jobs, Winnebagos,
> and houses in wealthy neighborhoods. Guns are an integral part of this
> ritual because guns are the quintessential symbol of 'regeneration through
> violence'—the means to tame the wilderness and ensure a moral victory
> over decadence and over-civilization" (2004:99).

Camping includes the notion of "getting back to nature" or "roughing it, and

proving that you can still survive and be content away from the comforts and

conveniences of society. As one militia member regularly comments regarding camping

in bad weather, 'Yeah, it was cold. And rainy. Yeah, it sucked. But you can look back and

say, "I did that. I accomplished something."' Another observes, 'The only time I feel like

myself is out here.' Working with your hands and being interested in science and

technology are also stereotypically male traits. Undoubtedly then, part of the reason these

activities over which militia men bond are fun is because they again serve as mutual

expressions of hegemonic masculinity.

Reason 4: Political Expression

This masculinity is rooted in an idealized, mythologized version of national identity. By

participating in the fun, manly activities of a group whose stated goal is to defend the

nation, some militia men are trying to express that they still uphold the values present at

the founding of the country. Members (including eight interviewees) who say they join

because they want to make a political statement are then, in effect, trying to remind the

government that people remain invested in this particular conceptualization of national

identity.

Two interviewees, including 36 year old Curtis, a truck driver, were persuaded to

join after President Obama's inauguration:

> "I mean I've always had some kind of, you know, wanting to know for myself
> what the militia is. But this administration just kind of added to my curiosity. This
> administration's Socialist stance on everything. Communist, whatever you want to
> call it."

Chapter Four further discusses members' response to Obama, but it is worth noting here

that concerns of Socialism and Communism are replete in militia literature from

President Clinton's era. This particular commentary is a reflection of militia members'

displeasure with the Democratic Party, rather than merely a codeword (Mendelberg 2001)

for Obama's race.

Most of those members citing political motivations for joining the militia had a

general disdain for the government that was not directed toward any one political party,

as 34 year old Shaun, who works in health care, explains:

> "Well, my biggest thing was I felt the government was overstepping their
> bounds. When I lived in California…to put it bluntly, the *shit* I saw the
> government do pissed me the fuck off. And so when I moved here,
> Michigan wasn't as bad, but I saw them following California's lead, which
> a lot of states are doing. And that's just state governments, that doesn't
> even include the federal government. I don't think the government knows
> what the Constitution is anymore. If they followed the Constitution, I
> probably wouldn't be as active. But they don't, so."

Few of my interviewees identified with either major political party, and most members

feel these parties do not represent their nostalgia-driven interests. It is clear not only from

interviews but also dialogue at militia functions that most members are concerned about

the "direction" the country is going. They are worried that all politicians are increasingly

pushing the U.S. farther away from that idealized, originalist vision. Some profess a strong dislike for both major parties, using the derogatory term "Republicrat" to reflect this sentiment. As 50 year old William said, "It's the one-party-divided-into-two-shades political system, okay?" Daryl's quote in the last section regarding losing middle class status exemplifies this notion as well. Interestingly, ideas like William's and Daryl's may reflect an over-simplified or highly idealized view of American politics, but nonetheless challenge statements from sociologist Michelle Fine and her colleagues, who that say men like this "…refuse to look up and fetishistically only look 'down' to discover who stole their edge" (1997:1). Militia men do "look up" and at least partially attribute their economic problems to political leaders and policies, rather than to women or other racial groups.

Militia leaders say the very fact that the government knows people are out doing militia training on a regular basis reminds them that, "people are watching." Meaning, people are interested in new laws that impact them, and want to ensure that the government does not act beyond its authority. It is certainly true that law enforcement personnel are aware of the militia and its activities, and there is some evidence that the militia has just the impact here that leaders claim it does. The 2009 Department of Homeland Security (Department of Homeland Security 2009) report details a rise in "rightwing extremism," and urges local law enforcement to educate themselves on issues of ideological importance to militia members so that they are better equipped to handle interactions with them, ranging from regular traffic stops to real confrontations.

Only one interviewee referred to the events of Ruby Ridge and Waco as relevant factors in their desire to join the militia, though five others mentioned these events in

passing at some point during their interview. Literature that attributes great significance

to these events, as described in Chapter Two, is still correct, however. As mentioned in

that chapter, most members who are involved today were not involved in the 1990s.

Different events of social importance have occurred in the intervening time are likely

more salient to newcomers, yet have similar themes of lack of trust in the government

and feeling like the government does not represent militia members' political interests.

MILITIA MASCULINITY

Hegemonic Masculinity

All four stated reasons for joining the militia are rooted in traditional constructions of

masculinity. Men who evoke a sense of duty to country or family are resting on notions

of men as warriors and protectors. Those who reference personal preparedness seem to

experience some sort of insecurity in the form of a threat or devaluation to these

identities. Militia men who say they join because they want to find comradery with like-

minded individuals seem to want some affirmation of masculine identity. Men who see

their militia involvement as a form of political expression are acting in symbolic defiance

of a government they see as pushing the country away from its heritage, which is deeply

embedded in the mythos of the traditional, white, U.S. male.

Most militia men would be offended at the notion that they are involved in the

militia out of some search for masculine expression. Many nonetheless seem to be

referring to this archetype when they take up arms and talk about their responsibility to

protect their family and to learn about a variety of methods for doing so. This does not

mean that masculinity is identical for all militia men, nor that it is one-dimensional for

any of them. During my fieldwork, I certainly encountered a few male militia members

who clearly subscribed to traditional gender norms. For example, 45 year old Kyle, a

truck driver, said:

> "I believe that a woman's got a right to choose, and then on the other hand
> I feel that, you know, takin' a baby's life isn't right either. And you're
> probably goin' to get mad—my wife gets mad—but I think if women were
> more responsible with themselves and their bodies, we wouldn't have the
> problems we have in this world. And that makes a lot of women mad. I
> don't know how you feel, but it's just you know, it's like the game is, like
> the fox and the hound, the way I look at it. You know, you know the guy
> saw the fox, the girl, and some girls are just so *stupid*. You know, and I
> mean some girls are very respectable about themselves you know– I'm
> sorry but I do blame a lot of the problems in society on female behavior
> [laughs]."

Kyle took care to indicate that he thought I was "respectable," but his stance on

women and their sexual behavior was by far the most extreme I encountered in the

militia. Kyle's militia unit is the only one in the state with substantial membership and

longevity that thinks women should not be militia members, though more units with this

ideology existed in the 1990s. It is certainly possible that other men were more guarded

and trying to give more socially acceptable answers during our interviews. However, I

was often the only woman at a training event, and even within my first few months in the

field, the men were not afraid of engaging in scatological and sexual humor in front of

me (including one member's self-deprecating jokes about his own apparently small

penis). Overall, sexualized comments were rarely directed at me, as most male members

seemed to either accept me as "one of the guys," or to treat me more protectively and

paternalistically.

Many more militia men, especially SMVM leaders and others with military

experience, were much more protective, open and warm *with each other* than much of

existing literature on working to lower-middle class, white men might predict. Below, I include examples of this more emotive side of militia men that come from encounters at their trainings and other events. These selections demonstrate how masculinity in the Michigan militia is more complex than their reported motivations for membership would suggest.

Hegemonic Masculinity Challenged

Men in the Michigan militia typically find one to three other members with whom they develop particularly close friendships. These are almost always connections that did not exist before these men joined the militia. One component of militia organizational structure facilitates these connections by requiring county leaders to check in each month with each member in their area. They ask a variety of questions about preparedness supplies (ranging from, "How many rounds of ammunition do you have?" to "Do you have an iPod?"), but also leave time and ledger space for personal and family issues. Smaller friendship networks regularly call and text each other for occasional recreational activities beyond militia exercises, and they often carpool to training. At trainings, any militia man who is experiencing financial problems, issues with coworkers, or especially disagreements with significant others, finds many sympathetic ears.

Figure 12: A member shows his softer side as he holds the new family pet under his jacket for warmth during an April Field Day. Photo courtesy of www.michiganmilitia.com.

   The men are also attentive to each other's physical safety and health. Part of this, such as when

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Walter, a retail worker with military experience, consistently encourages everyone to stay hydrated during long hikes, is to be expected given the militia's focus on preparedness and physical activity during training. Other instances, like when one member drove an extra three hours after training had started to retrieve another man's forgotten diabetes medication, indicates a more personal and genuine concern for each other's well-being.

Other contemporary men's organizations promote an interest in more traditionally "feminine" care for one another. Gender studies professor Judith Newton (2004) and Jean Hardisty (2000), founder of Political Research Associates, both did field work with the Christian men's organization Promise Keepers. While these authors come to different conclusions about the social value of this organization, both observe that it provides a space for white, conservative men to embrace more traditionally feminine characteristics like vocalizing affection for each other and their families. Promise Keepers carefully frame their emotional expressions in ways that preserve their heterosexuality and their dominant place in the household even as they include an explicit appeal for men to express their feelings to one another and to their wives (Heath 2003).

The militia does not include emotional expressivity as an overt goal, and complete openness among members is rarer and less self-aware in the militia, perhaps as a result. A summer 2010 training day at a state park was one occasion, however, when such openness was evident, and it provides interesting insight into militia men's gendered and emotional lives. This day, around 30 people were in attendance, including representatives from three different militia units, five people from two different international news crews, the wife of an SMVM leader, and a few of their kids. It had been one of the hotter days of the summer, and everyone was resting in a semi-shaded picnic area after most in

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attendance had completed a two to six mile walk (depending on their gear, health, and what qualification level they were trying to attain). This area was adjacent to and in full view and hearing of a parking lot where two dozen non-militia campers, mountain bikers and hikers were preparing to use the nearby trails and other facilities.

Lloyd had been talking casually with Sam, a 42 year old married father of three, about the training as Sam stood at a table with his back turned to Lloyd. Sam was reorganizing his gear vest and Lloyd was making an adjustment to his rifle sling under a nearby tree. Without a change in cadence or inflection, Lloyd called to one of his young daughters, 'Could you bring me that multi-tool, baby?' Sam instantly responded, 'of course!' and took the tool to Lloyd before returning to his task at the table while Lloyd's daughter looked on and laughed.

Sam certainly knew that the affectionate label was not directed at him and intended to be amusing as he helped his friend. However, Sam's inflection did not change, as straight men sometimes do when they are mocking gay men. An hour or so later after I thought the exchange had been forgotten, I approached Sam as he was in the midst of explaining to Lloyd, Lloyd's wife, and six other male members that, 'Men in our society have a lot of trouble expressing their love for one another!'

Two of the nearby men looked slightly uncomfortable, or perhaps just unsure of Sam's meaning, but everyone else seemed to be completely unperturbed by Sam's statement. I chuckled a bit at this exchange because Sam's comment and the majority response to it were so unexpected and defied what most of the literature would predict regarding men's introspection about masculinity in a mix-gender, public space. Sam, misinterpreting my laugh as making light of his claim, turned to me and exclaimed, 'I'm

serious!' I quickly assured him that I knew he was serious, and that I completely agreed with him. I planned to elaborate, but at that point Lloyd interjected.

Lloyd said that he agreed, too, that the militia should serve to bring people closer together, and he mentioned SMVM's mission statement that proclaimed to accept everyone. Much to the surprise of those who had not been involved in the militia since its inception as Lloyd had, he added, 'We even used to have a transsexual! Bob is now Barbara.' At this point, another member, Adam, loudly called for Sam's attention from about five yards away. When Sam turned, Adam blew him a kiss. Everyone laughed about this and soon returned to more familiar topics of conversation.

Later that day when no one else was near, I asked Sam about when he first started to think that society unfairly constrained men's mutual expressions of affection. He told me that he had spent time in South Korea when he was younger, and it was part of the culture there for males who were really good friends to hold hands as they walked. Sam never thought much of it until a male friend grabbed his hand as they were strolling through town. Sam indicated his first reaction was to recoil, but the friend reminded him of the area's different cultural standards. Sam relaxed, and by the end of their walk, he said he realized it had been an enjoyable experience. He was able to have human contact in a foreign country without having 'to worry about being called gay.' He later reinforced this message in an email to me, after I emailed him to thank him for his insights and invited him to share more of his perspective. He noted that a lack of experience with other cultures led to many American men having a relatively limited repertoire for expressing affection:

> "I feel that our society has no outlet for 'brotherly love,' without being
> touted as being homosexual. I cry at my friends' funerals, because I loved

them and will miss them. Most people can't understand that, they find it as a weakness. I feel it's one of my strengths, to feel so strongly about another person, that I show it emotionally. I guess what I learned in Korea when I was still very young has molded my beliefs. 99.9% of Americans don't get to, or try to understand other cultures and why they do the things they do."

While Sam is somewhat unique in his willingness to openly discuss masculinity and affection to such a great extent, he is not alone in complicating what white, American masculinity looks like in the Michigan militia. Tad, for example, a happily married, 45 year old who works with computers, makes no effort to hide his love for the color pink— a stereotypically feminine color. He proudly showed off his new, bright pink iPhone case one night at a meeting and showed the rest of his table how it matched his Hello Kitty computer background. He later ordered a militia t-shirt, normally seen in black or Army green, in bright pink and wore it regularly to trainings.

A few of the members who attend infrequently, or who attend meetings but not trainings seemed unsure if Tad's behavior was sincere, or if he was trying to joke and evoke a reaction from them. Tad's wife confirmed his genuine interest in the color at the only meeting she attended when someone commented on his "bold fashion choices," and she indicated the color was plentiful in their home. The regular members accepted Tad's pink accoutrements with a shrug, with one commenting, 'That's awesome.'

Even so, it was very difficult for me to imagine what the reception must have been like for an openly LGBT person. With Lloyd's help, I contacted Barbara, who transitioned *after* becoming involved in the militia. She indicated that her reasons for eventually leaving the militia had nothing to do with her transsexual status or the militia's reaction to it. I asked how the militia responded when she first attended an event as a woman. Her emailed reply ostensibly indicates that she was at-ease with the encounter,

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but her vivid recall two and a half years later implies it was at least memorable, if not

uncomfortable for her.

> "Being transgender was not an issue. I showed up with my wife to help out
> just before their Tax Blast a couple years ago, and I had longer hair and
> they asked about it. So I showed them my driver's license (which I had
> gone down to the Secretary of State looking my female best to take my
> Driver License renewal picture for). I was also wearing my green
> MichiganMilitia.com T-shirt and you could make out my (at that time)
> size A breasts underneath, and I explained that I had been taking female
> hormones under a doctor's prescription for the past couple of years, and as
> a result I was wearing a sports bra under my t-shirt. Then, as I recall, they
> asked if I was still going to be married to my wife, and I said yes, and they
> asked if I could still shoot a gun, and I said yes, and they said they didn't
> care about the transgender stuff and would rather not hear any more about
> it. Typical guy's reaction..."

Militia members first questioned how Barbara's transition would impact her

marital status (a marker of adherence to traditional gender norms) before asking whether

it would impact her militia participation. The order here is important since the militia

mission statement welcomes any citizen as long as they are "capable of bearing arms,"

and members typically prioritize firearms familiarity above all else. Members may have

interpreted Barbara's maintaining her marriage as a signal that she was still "really" a

man, or at least fulfilling a masculine role. As long as she did not draw attention to her

transgender status in the field by continuing to talk about it, they were still accepting of

her presence. Had Barbara been single or in the midst of divorce, it is unclear what her

reception would have been.

Regardless, it is not convincing that this was a "typical guy's reaction." Friends

and family of transgendered individuals may, of course, ask similar questions (or

questions with similar implications) and at least superficially accept their transition.

However, numerous studies have shown that transgendered individuals are subject to a

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high rate of violence, and that their assailants are most often men (see Stotzer 2009 for an excellent review of this literature). It is not clear that "typical" men who are only loosely connected to transgendered individuals would have this relatively accepting attitude, and it is unlikely that Promise Keepers, for instance, even with their explicit premises of "male romance" (Newton 2004:38) would have tolerated Barbara's presence (see Heath 2003). Even minimal acceptance is not the expected behavior from a group like the militia that, at first glance, appears to be hypermasculine and resistant to evolving social norms regarding equality because of its all-male space that overtly references an historical timeframe where social power was incredibly limited for all groups except white men.

Most militia members genuinely attempt to adhere to values of equality and freedom of choice, defined by the national mythos they so admire. Members' reactions to Barbara, Sam and Tad are not isolated incidents, but instead are salient examples that demonstrate how militia members try to follow their stated Libertarian principles even on issues that may call into question central parts of their own identities. Although Michigan militia men express a strong adherence to a tough masculinity of yesteryear, their experimentation and openness with each other reveals a more complicated relationship to masculinity and masculine expression that challenges claims that men in all-male groups are consistently pressured to enact a single, hegemonic masculinity.

MILITIA FAMILIES

This relatively open masculinity is also evident in militia men's relationships with their families. Most of my observations of militia families happened at militia events that

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members' wives, girlfriends, and children attended, though some of my interactions with family members also occurred online, or in members' homes. In short, children are incorporated in militia training, with both boys and girls participating in target shooting, hikes through the woods, and overnight camping events with their fathers. Women have an overall *lack* of participation in the militia, and I suggest that women are often less comfortable in militia training environments because of both gendered and environmental factors. Women also frequently prioritize childcare or other concerns about training, even if they ideologically agree with the militia's goals.

Children in the Michigan Militia

Children who participate in militia functions are most often children of unit leaders, not regular members. They range in age from three to sixteen years old, with most being from nine to twelve years old. Children attend monthly meetings rarely, and are usually visibly bored (playing with handheld gaming devices or audibly sighing when a new person stands up to speak) when they do so. The adults talk for several hours at these events about

Figure 13: Kids often find the day's events either tiring or boring. This boy fell asleep amidst the adults' ongoing conversation at a summer training. Photo courtesy of Jeff Kindy.

plans for upcoming militia trainings and about political or other news stories. The children are expected to sit quietly and not disturb the adults during these conversations, which often proves to be a difficult task. Children who attend trainings often participate in the two mile hike without gear, but spend most of their time playing with each other

near the campsite. The younger ones find bugs, splash and swim in a creek, or play tag, while the older ones gossip about school friends or complain about missing their videogames or a phone call from a new boyfriend.

Militia parents typically let their children decide whether they want to attend a particular training, and it is often the case that some children from a given family attend, while their siblings stay home or participate in their own social activities. The children usually enjoy spending time with their parents in this environment and think it is "cool" to ride ATVs or to target practice under very close supervision. Several children described their parents' militia involvement as "important" to different media outlets, which suggests that militia members discuss and reinforce their militia involvement at home, and that some children have also come to believe it is important, even if they take the training events less seriously than their parents.

Junior Militia Corps

Figure 14: Several militia members and their children practice a military-style evacuation during a spring 2012 training. Photo courtesy of www.michiganmilitia.com.

Only legal adults 18 years of age are older are eligible for militia membership, but in 2011, SMVM started a "Junior Militia Corps" (JMC) to more formally integrate their children into their monthly training activities. Members from units across the state brought their children to the first JMC event in

symbolic support of the group, but no other unit has thus far established a children's-focused unit.

In practice, the JMC simply provides more organized activities for children to do when they attend militia training, rather than merely playing on the sidelines. For example, children were the focal point of the spring 2012 training with a faux-Muslim enemy "Farouk-Al-Salit," discussed further in Chapter Four; the set up story for this exercise was that the children were on a field trip and needed to be evacuated before being attacked by terrorists. The children participated in an evacuation drill, unsuccessfully suppressing giggles and occasional chatter but still having a good time, as militia members participated in a group maneuver that some had learned in the military. With unloaded rifles, one member watched from behind, while others watched from the front and sides as the group slowly advanced down a dirt road and away from the cabin rented for the weekend.

SMVM leaders have a more ambitious goal in mind with the group beyond fun, however. This goal is reflected on a webpage they have advocating the involvement of young people in the militia, encouraging them, among other things, to exercise, eat fruits and vegetables, to stay in shape, to not spend too much time playing video games, and instead "get out and play and live and think for yourselves" ("JMC" 2011). SMVM members see their children as the "next generation of militia members." The JMC is a symbolic as well as practical step toward this goal of future militia membership, even though most militia children I've informally spoken with acknowledge that they are not sure they would continue militia participation later in life, especially if their families were not involved.

This desired long-term mission is also undermined by the fact that most members do not purchase the requisite gear for their children. After a reporter asked one leader about his family's militia participation, he sensibly explained there was no point in purchasing camouflage clothing that his kids would outgrow in a few short months; however, these members also lack cold weather sleeping bags or other gear that members consider to be essential for basic disaster planning and could often be purchased in adult sizes for children to grow into. Despite to overt, primary objective of gaining skills toward general preparedness via their militia participation, most militia parents would be completely unprepared to support their families if their stated, hypothetical worst-case scenario occurred and they had to survive for a prolonged period in the winter without electricity or other resources as a result of societal breakdown.

The members I asked about this contradiction abandoned discussions of their role as the family protector and instead answered in terms of personal choice, saying that if their children exhibited a "real" commitment to militia involvement, they would then help them purchase the necessary equipment. While it may be true that militia parents would prefer that their children choose continued involvement in the militia, it remains an unsatisfactory resolution to the contradiction of lack of preparedness equipment for the whole family. Some men may certainly have financial difficulties in obtaining all the gear they would need to fully outfit all members of their families, but the near absence of personalized gear that most militia children have is, in my estimation, most clearly a reflection of how militia participation is primarily for the adult men and the activities that they mutually enjoy.

Women in the Michigan Militia

There are very few women who regularly participate in Michigan militia activities at all. Those who do participate tend to be wives or girlfriends of men who have been involved for quite a long time—usually at least a year. Women connected to the militia rarely have their own rifles or other gear unless they complete Level 1 qualification and become full members. Even then, most women do not purchase their own equipment, but instead use surplus materials—even camouflage clothing—that were already in their husbands' possession. It is most often the case that women who attend training stay near the campsite, chatting with each other and watching their children, rather than gearing up and target practicing or running through the woods with the men.

The women who do "get dirty" (those who fully participate in the training activities) receive a great deal of respect from the men. Lloyd still talks proudly about a woman who was a member around 2001, before she and her family moved out of state and started a militia unit of their own in the new location. She participated in every training event (along with her husband), eventually ended up as a training leader, and brought her two young children along to every event. The children played nearby for much of the day, but their mother incorporated them into training activities when possible. An SMVM leader emphasized that this woman, 'really did it. She was *really* in it instead of just participating because her husband was, like I think my own wife might do.' This leader worried that his own wife was not as invested in the militias' goals for their own sake, as he would prefer, but was instead merely supporting his interests.

In my time in the field, only one militia wife consistently attended at least half of the militia functions during my fieldwork. This woman, in her forties, attended militia

events for a little over a year before doing the necessary target shooting and two mile

hike to complete the Level 1 qualification[26]. Since qualifying and thus earning her place

in the group, I have not seen her participate in further shooting or other activity outside of

camp, implying that she perhaps completed the qualification only to satisfy her husband's

wishes. This woman says she attends because she genuinely enjoys spending time with

her husband in a relatively relaxed setting and letting their kids run around in the open

areas where camping takes place. She often helps prepare food for the men who are in

attendance, but the primary cooking duties rotate among three male members who do not

typically participate in trainings because of various physical ailments.

Other women were involved during the course of my fieldwork, but their militia

tenure was much more short-lived. One woman, for example, attended and participated

very consistently for over a year, until after her husband successfully ran for a local

political office. The couple consider themselves "homesteaders," which means they raise chickens, goats, cows, and a few small crops for their own use. She reported that it was an increase in these

Figure 15: "Chuckwagon" prepares lunch for militia members in attendance at a summer training, as another member's wife looks on. Photo courtesy of Jeff Kindy.

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[26] In contrast, most of the men who joined the militia during my fieldwork completed the Level 1 requirements by their third or fourth month of training, and many did so at the first training they attended.

responsibilities after her husband's win that made her not have time for the militia, rather than a concern about the public perception of their militia involvement. Another woman in her twenties became one of the more active members in her unit in the southern part of the state and cursed and bantered with the male members like a sibling, but abruptly stopped participating when she started a serious relationship with a non-militia member co-worker.

Despite many attempts over my three years in the field, I was only able to formally interview two women who were involved with the militia. Nearly all of my requests were very politely turned down when all the other women, even those who attended militia functions several times a year, said something similar to Sandra who remarked, 'Oh I just feel like I don't know enough about it. [My husband] can tell you everything you need to know!' I continued to receive valuable data through informal discussions with wives and other women at various militia functions, but none felt comfortable sitting for an interview or anything that felt formal or put them in a position of relative expertise. This indicated to me that these women understood the militia and its activities to be a very masculine (and perhaps intimidating) space, despite male members' attempts to include their wives and girlfriends.

Of the two women I formally interviewed, 42 year old professional Ashley forthrightly replied when I asked her about her level of participation at training:

> "I enjoy the participation. I mean a lot of it is the skill and the fitness part
> of the walks. I guess I like the challenge of keepin' up with the guys
> [laughs]. And just the rifle and pistol shooting, and just learning those
> skills and improving there."

The other female interviewee, 50 year old Carole, a computing specialist, similarly echoed the theme of personal preparedness:

"I think there's a lot of women that just don't shoot guns or do any, you know. They don't do a lot of the things I do [laughing]. They ask me, you know, 'Why do you bother growin' a garden when you can go to Wal-Mart and get all of the stuff?' So a lot of other girls that I do know that hunt and fish and do all of that, maybe they just never considered that they could actually come out."

Both women were among those who were accepted and respected as full members, as women who could banter with them, and fully participate in training. Both female interviewees reported that they felt completely accepted by these men, as Carole shows in an exchange with her 42 year old husband Phil who is also a member.

Carole: "I thought they were very, very cool and normal."

Phil: "And we were out there doing our two mile [hike], you know, and I said, 'Come on!' because I got there before her and Calvin wouldn't let me give her a hard time at all. She had infinite time left to go, you know. And I'm like, 'You're not going to make it!'"

Carole: "And it was funny."

Phil: "He wouldn't let me give you a hard time. I betcha if it was a guy he would have let me give you a hard time."

In this couple's understanding of this interaction, Calvin was not acting out of a sense of chivalry, because Phil, Carole's husband, would fulfill any presumed male protector role for her, and because Phil was clearly joking about Carole's need to hurry to successfully finish the qualification. Instead, the couple felt that Calvin was trying to ensure that Carole felt comfortable and welcome in the majority-male group, instead of feeling pressured to complete the hike at a pace on par with her physically larger and stronger husband.

Phil and Calvin both may have been more aware of trying to make Carole feel comfortable in the field than most of the men would have been. Most militia men seem genuinely mystified about why more women do not participate in the militia. A pamphlet

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distributed at a 2010 public meeting expressed this sentiment while using gendered

appeals regarding self-protection:

> "Ladies, I know you might think this is some kind of macho hobby, or
> 'gun phase' that your husbands, sons, brothers or fathers might be going
> through, but believe me, your welfare and protection are the most
> important thing to us, and it breaks our hearts when we fail to convince
> you of the serious need to get in some self-defense and home-defense
> training."

Many militia men become very frustrated that their wives and girlfriends do not become

involved, but eventually "give up" asking them to accompany them to militia events.

When I asked Sam whether his wife supported his militia involvement, he replied, "No. I

do what I wanna do and she does what she wants to do and, you know? We're both adults

so I go my way, she goes her way." Similarly, Harold noted that his wife is supportive of

his militia involvement, "[As] long as I leave [her] out of it. She doesn't want to be

bothered with all of my 'nonsense,' as she puts it." Some male members joke about

having "militia wives," who are in fact married to other members, but who more closely

fit their image of an ideal spouse who supports their militia involvement than do their real

partners. This means that the women who are most accepted in the group are often those

who act *least* stereotypically feminine[27].

    Female militia members and their partners' desired role for their partners within

the group challenges the gendered framework found in other majority male, nostalgic

groups. That is, researchers of groups similar to the militia have previously explained

how women in their groups similar to the militia are largely expected to follow traditional

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[27] When I was in the field, I was primarily viewed as "one of the guys," and very rarely received any flirtation or sexual innuendo. I believe this is, in part, because I often fully participated in training exercises and thereby downplayed my femininity. At the same time, I don't think my being accepted by militia men was solely responsible for making it difficult for other women to talk to me. They would often chat with me about non-militia issues, and several were comfortable enough with me to ask me to watch their children if they left the campsite, on occasion, even if their partner was available for that task.

gender roles. Survivalist women could participate in some exercises, but were largely expected to perform support functions like cooking, in sociologist Richard Mitchell's (2002) study. Similarly, women in the border-patrolling Minutemen organizations tend to be assigned the role of camp coordinator and cook, while the men are the ones who do the potentially dangerous and physically taxing work of watching for illegal immigrant crossings in sociologist Harel Shapira's (2011) study of such groups at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Acceptance of women who most blend into the group and violate stereotypical expectations of femininity is also the opposite of the "mascot" member role that sociologists like Laura Adams (1999) discuss, where unique members are put forward and heralded by the group because of their difference. In the case of the militia, the women who are most lauded are those who most blend in and who are most similar to male members in terms of their dedication to training. Women's militia participation also more subtly challenges Michael Kimmel's (2009) analysis in *Guyland*, which explains that in many male social circles, women must adhere to certain roles or play by certain social rules to be accepted. Although women are most accepted if they fully participate, non-participating women are still welcomed and encouraged to attend non-training activities and be present at the campsites; tangential involvement is better than none in militia men's opinion.

Perhaps ironically, however, an out of state female member named Elise, a 33 year old student, found exaggerating her femininity in certain ways useful for getting newcomers interested in the militia. This woman was, by far, more invested in the militia and participation in it than Michigan women I encountered. I met her as she was

traveling, apparently are her own expense, to make face-to-face connections with other

states' militia units in an ultimately failed effort to start a national-level militia structure.

When addressing the Michigan militia units at the meeting, Elise spoke very deferentially

and respectfully about the male leaders of her unit, and of the military experience they

had but she lacked, highlighting their masculinity as contrasting her feminine "puniness"

in the process. She nonetheless suggested that she tried to downplay her femininity in the

field as she explained that she believed the group had fully accepted her:

> "Members of my militia have become family. […] There are a few
> physical areas I have trouble with— most center around having the upper
> body strength of a girl, but none of them have ever mentioned it or made
> fun of me for not being able to do certain things. Mainly, I try as hard or
> harder than many of them so I am given a certain level of respect, just for
> being a hard ass. If I was at all whiny or weak my treatment may well be
> quite different. […] I tend to think it's more about [them] being supportive
> of everyone, than it is of being respectful of *me* because I'm female."

Elise told me that she had recently attended the meeting of a unit in another state

and had noticed how a female member with an infant seemed most effective at

communicating with non-members, especially women. She said that she thought the

mother-child relationship and the woman's talking about the militia while her infant was

present made the group look less intimidating, and like it really was about families and

not just men with guns. Nine months after this conversation, Elise had a baby—her first

child—with the leader of her militia unit.

Much more commonly, Michigan militia members' wives are simply disinterested

in the ideology or practices of the militia. They often described their partners' militia

activity as "important," but could rarely articulate why this was so. When I asked them to

clarify, most referenced their partners' beliefs, thus indicating militia involvement was

important to their men's sense of self, rather than expressing that militias are important

for preserving the country as their partners' would undoubtedly want to hear. Women's disinterest sharply contrasts the emotional and ideological investment that sociologist Kathleen Blee found in female members of the racist and nostalgic Ku Klux Klan (2003). Women in the Klan, who did not always join merely because of their male partner's involvement in the organization, nearly uniformly became increasingly invested in racist ideology throughout their tenure in the group. Many of Blee's participants expressed ambivalence about racial violence or discrimination, but nonetheless indicated that their involvement in the Klan had been important for showing them how the world "really" works, or the "truth" of white supremacy.

Militia women seem not to share their partners' sense of political urgency and generally do not internalize the militia's ideological perspectives, even after many years of sporadic involvement with the group. Militia women do not particularly enjoy campouts or the physical activities, including shooting, that their husbands enjoy. One wife, for example, very nearly fell asleep during the first monthly meeting she attended at the moment her husband was being applauded for qualifying Level 1 and receiving his membership card. She never returned, and her husband later sighed as he told me that she had not known what to expect going into the meeting, but was so bored that she would likely never attend any other militia function. Another wife who grudgingly attended the 2008 Field Day noted that she didn't usually come to militia functions because:

> 'It's just not my thing. Some men have poker games on the weekends. I wouldn't want to do that either. This is like his poker. I have other interests. Other things to do.'

I still find it somewhat startling that a wife, especially a disinterested one, could view militia activity and all it entails as equivalent to routine poker games. However, it is

understandable that many wives, especially those with young children, may feel unable to participate in anything with such a regular time commitment on weekends. Women's disinterest in the militia as a leisure activity may also be part of a broader trend where women participate in less dedicated leisure activity than men generally (Deem 1982).

Environmental Factors

Concerns rooted in physical comfort that may be more important barriers for some women's participation, too. It is easier and more comfortable for men to take care of bodily functions during a long camping weekend than it is for women. This is particularly true when the campsite is on remote private property in cold Michigan winters when many layers of clothing must be removed to perform these basic tasks. Militia leaders rented two porta-potties for the 2008 Field Day event as a result of this very concern. Some of their own wives had apparently complained about using the outhouse—a rickety lean-to with a blue tarp for a door—and the leaders thought this might make women more comfortable, and more likely to spend the day at the event. I heard several of the militia men express that they, too, were happy to have an option besides the outhouse that year, but, they all seemed to forget this the following year, as no apparent effort was made to rent them for 2009's Field Day.

The men, especially those who were in the military, routinely banter about bodily functions at militia events. The men apparently know this may be off putting to some of their family members, as scatological language is typically toned down when a member's

wife or kids are present[28], but they seem unaware that even jovially-intended messages

here may have implicitly excluded some women's participation. At a monthly public

meeting just prior to the primary winter training where the men practice survival skills

they would need if stranded outdoors during a snowy Michigan February, for example,

Calvin—the man who was previously attuned to Carole's potential discomfort in the all-

male group—discussed how to monitor hydration in the winter:

> 'When I was in the military, doing this stuff in the winter, they taught the
> guys to go pee as a group, and to watch the color of your buddy's urine to
> watch for potential problems, for someone in the process of getting
> dehydrated and didn't know it.'

Neither Calvin nor the other men present at the meeting seemed to recognize that this

strategy might not be applicable to the women in the audience, whom they had attempted

to recruit to the upcoming winter training earlier in the same meeting.

I asked both Carole and Ashley why they thought more women were not as

involved in the militia as they were, and both indicated that they believed there was an

element of intimidation or fear of an all-male environment that prevented many women

from participating. Ashley additionally believed that a lot of women felt uncomfortable

with their level of familiarity with guns or military culture and assumed one or both

would be required for real militia participation. She told me during our interview:

> "One, is there are a lot fewer women than men that are comfortable with
> guns. Number two, just the military fitness part of things, a lot of women
> aren't comfortable with. […] I think the other thing is, unless you're going
> with your husband or boyfriend or something, there's that intimidation of
> going on your own. You're awfully brave to do that."

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[28] Scatological language was *not* generally toned down in this way when I was the only woman present,
probably because I was one of the few women who would "get dirty" by fully participating in militia
training activities, thus implicitly indicating that I could handle their banter.

A lack of comfort with guns or physicality may have been underlying other women's resistance to sitting for a full interview with me; although they did not always articulate it, they probably felt a lack of expertise with militia-related tools and information and likely did not want to risk inadvertently misrepresenting something their husbands or boyfriends cared about so deeply.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AFTER TRAINING MOVED TO PUBLIC LAND

Twenty months into my fieldwork, in November 2009, women's participation in the Michigan militia changed. The WWII veteran who owned the farmland where militias across the state regularly trained died. Months prior, when the veteran was in ill-health, militia leaders had begun looking for alternate permanent locations. SMVM hosted one more training at this site shortly after the veteran's death, conducted a short memorial service including a 21 gun salute (an honor reserved for war

Figure 16: The flag at the range is set to half-staff during the training following the WWII veteran's funeral. Photo by Amy Cooter.

veterans), and helped clean up the property one final time before moving their trainings to a state park that is 30 minutes north of Ann Arbor.

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The state park location provides a much more expansive terrain for practicing group movements and allows for greater year-round participation from wives and children. During the cooler months, large cabins with bunk beds, a heater, and a detached but well-maintained outhouse are available for rental. This is a more attractive location for people who do not want to be out all weekend training in frigid Michigan winters. In the summer, the state park has nearby biking and hiking paths, canoe rentals, and swimming areas that provide diversions for family members uninterested in shooting or paramilitary exercises.

The new shooting range, however, is located several miles away at a different entrance to the state park. Militia members have much less flexibility over what shooting exercises they may conduct here because of various range rules. Most substantially, all activity at the range must stop as shooters move back ten feet from the firing line and the range officer examines every firearm to ensure that it is unloaded with the slide locked open (to show it is empty) before anyone is allowed downrange. It takes several minutes to walk to where the targets are posted (25, 50, or 100 yards, depending on which section of the range the shooter is using), check the targets, hang new ones, then walk back. The range officer then performs another safety check to ensure that everyone is behind the firing line before again opening the range for shooting. This procedure may take more than 20 minutes to complete, and can happen as often as every 15 minutes of shooting time, depending on the number of shooters. This makes it very difficult to run competitive shooting events or to efficiently sight in new weapons at this location.

Delays at the range also change how women participate in shooting events. Previously, on private land, all women in attendance, even those who did not typically

participate in other training activities, would regularly target shoot with a variety of firearms. In part, this allowed them to compare the grips and kickbacks of different firearms as the male members tried to talk their wives and girlfriends into getting their own guns[29]. Children occasionally participated in target shooting activities under close supervision, most often at the yearly Field Day event. If they became bored, they could safely go back on their own to the nearby picnic table or tents with other adults.

Now, women tend not to make the trip to the range, and instead stay at the campground. When they do go to the range, the rarely shoot, but instead spend their time managing children who have difficulty maintaining interest and patience during the lengthy safety checks. The public nature of the range and its distance from camping and other facilities means that children must wait nearby and have no other options for entertainment as they wait their turn to shoot. Although militia men capably supervise children when women do not participate in shooting events, men rarely attend the range without leaving time for their own target practice.

Figure 17: A militia father helps his son position ear plugs prior to going to the shooting range to watch others shoot. Photo by Amy Cooter.

The separation between the range and other facilities necessitated a shift in the focus of militia training toward non-

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[29] As I previously mentioned, most women who officially join the militia use weapons and other equipment belonging to their partners. Many of the men obviously used their wives' potential interest in joining the group as an excuse to purchase yet another firearm for their personal collection.

shooting activities such that there is now a greater focus on camping and survivalist skills. In the last few years, members have learned different techniques for making a fire, such as how to create a homemade burner with an empty tuna can, cardboard, and improvised igniter, how to plan a route over varied terrain, and how make different kinds of animal traps. These techniques often require advance planning and collecting materials at home prior to training, and they allow members who complete them to show off their skills at the next gathering.

Women do not typically participate in the activities that require such homework, but they are substantially more engaged in projects that can be completed on- site during training, including those where members learn how to make and use tools from the environment. For example, members learned how to carve bows and arrows out of saplings from a local man who is an expert in primitive weapons. This was a tedious and impractical task ostensibly meant to be used in a worst-case survival scenario, but was more genuinely just for fun. All three women present at this training eagerly participated in the task and received compliments about the quality of their work. Tasks like bow making require physical effort, but not a great deal of physical

Figure 18: A member from the west part of the state demonstrates the bow he just made by shaping a small sapling with a knife. Photo by Amy Cooter.

strength, and can be done around the camp site near the facilities and any playing children.

FLUID MASCULINITY

Despite militia men's desire to make the group inclusive of their whole families, it seems likely it will remain a strongly male-dominated space. Militia men genuinely want their partners and children to be more involved in their activities, but are not always aware of the factors—personal, ideological, and environmental—that may inhibit women's and children's participation. Even with full awareness, it is unlikely that militia men would be able to completely change the culture of the group, which is largely predicated on the military experiences of those members who have been in the armed forces; no militia women I have encountered have been in the military. Women in SMVM are more integrated into overall militia activity since the move to public land, but are less involved in shooting practice, which male members consider central to their identity, and women in other units continue to have a low level of involvement. It will be interesting to see whether militia children who enjoy training with their fathers today continue their involvement as adults, especially given the lessened level of commitment they witness from their mothers.

More generally, the militia superficially reflects a familiar story of traditional masculinity. It would appear to be yet another organization in a long lineage that includes the Boy Scouts and Promise Keepers that seeks to reaffirm a white, heterosexual masculinity with a focus on physical and mental toughness and traditional gender roles. It would appear to be an organization where men seek out informal social connections that

are less common than they were in an earlier era they idealize (e.g., Putnam 2000), and where men subscribe to masculine ideals "because they want to be positively evaluated by other men" (Kimmel 2009:47).

The militia nonetheless has two important differences from its predecessors. First, it is not exclusively a men's organization. Women and children are welcome, even encouraged, to attend the vast majority of militia units' events, though few regularly do so. Second, the militia provides a safe space for those men who want to innovate—to test or expand what it means to be a man in modernity. Militia men believe they have enough in common with each other to express their feelings in surprising ways without fear of ridicule or reprisal, and they may not have this kind of bond with many male coworkers or family members. It is difficult to estimate what proportion of members these innovating men comprise. However, men who are not innovators observe and accept men who are innovators during trainings and other militia functions across the state, as evidence by their continued participation in these events.

This fluidity and acceptance of masculine experimentation challenges notions that hegemonic masculinity is always strictly enforced, particularly in all-male groups, and that deviations from an hegemonic ideal are sharply sanctioned by other group members. Sociologist Sharon Bird, for example argues that all-male groups promote

> "clear distinctions between hegemonic masculinities and nonhegemonic masculinities" and "... contribute to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity norms by supporting meanings associated with identities that fit hegemonic ideals while suppressing meanings associated with nonhegemonic masculinity identities" (1996:121).

In contrast to this expectation, militia men encourage each other to violate the hegemonic expectations of constrained emotionality. They positively reinforce men who participate

in childrearing and other stereotypically feminine behaviors, and sometimes question strict expectations of heterosexual male sexuality.

There is also evidence that militia men who innovate or experiment with their masculinity challenge traditional gender relationships at home as well as in the field, and may be genuinely challenging the hegemonic masculinity presumed to pervade their lives. Lloyd, for instance, publicly expresses his affection and respect for his wife at militia events, and she, in turn, proudly talks about how much he helps her with cooking and cleaning at home. All innovators in the field serve as models to other militia men who are not. As men see each other challenging hegemony, they may eventually become more comfortable doing so themselves. Several members, for example, have become more involved in child care as a result of their militia participation. Before joining the organization, some men report that they rarely spent time with their children on weekends; now, they see militia activities as a family recreational space and bring both male and female children with them to the events.

This is not to say that militia men should be considered activists for the rights of women and other groups; few of them seem to have a full understanding of structural barriers to full equality for women and other groups. Members like Kyle, who blamed women's sexual behavior for all the world's problems, undoubtedly resist change in traditional gender roles and hegemony. Nonetheless, the militia is not merely a backlash against the women's movement, as seemed to be the case with Ferber's (1999) study. Their acceptance of female members, of transgendered Barbara, and their emotive, feminized expressions of masculinity alongside some members' increasing involvement in child and home care defy this categorization.

This case also shows us that masculinity as a construct may be more contentious and fluid in contemporary American, even among nostalgic, male-dominated groups, than we typically acknowledge. Sociologist R.W. Connell (2005) rightly notes that masculinity is a collective practice and that what constitutes hegemonic masculinity changes over time and space. There is not one agreed upon version of masculinity even within the limited context of the Michigan militia, a group of men who see themselves as having the same relatively narrow set of interests and motivations. Many are, instead, willingly engaging in Connell's version of masculinity politics and are actively and consciously negotiating what constitutes masculinity for them. Connell questions the utility in attempting to identify a "true" or "real" masculinity in a context of changing and competing masculinities; however, I think it is important to remember that both the hegemonic and fluid versions of masculinity that militia men evince are "real" for their lived experiences. Men know hegemonic tropes of emotional strength and protectionism, but find them constraining and use the militia as a space to fight against this constraint by experimenting "softer" (Heath 2003) forms of masculine expression.

This case shows how some lower-middle class, white, American men are grappling with concepts and social issues they are often accused of ignoring or exacerbating. This case also shows how masculinity and masculine expression cannot be fully studied through interview methods alone; members' verbal accounts of masculinity and the masculinity they enacted at trainings were often at odds with each other. Only careful observation can reveal such nuance. Chapter Four analyzes members' responses to their two most salient racial outgroups—Michigan's African American and Muslim

populations—to further examine whether militia members are consistently adhere to

principles of inclusion and fluidity in an evolving society.

CHAPTER 4

Race and Racism in the Militia:
Members' Responses to Michigan's African American and Muslim Populations

> "Yeah! It's not surprising [that there are some racist militia members].
> We're a cross-section of society. So that cross section is going to be
> represented in our group."
>
> - 35 year old George

This chapter analyzes how "super citizens" in a predominately white, male group think

about race and do or do not act racially. I focus on militia members' responses to

Michigan's African American and Muslim populations, which are the two racialized

groups that are most salient to them. I first analyze the militia's group-level orientation

toward these issues and argue that Michigan militia units are not racist *at the group level*.

By this I mean that the militia as a group does not have racism as either a goal or a

guiding principle because members reject any form of identity-based exclusion as

antithetical to their stated mission of upholding Constitutional principles of equality and

freedom. I analyze two racialized interactions to clarify this point: a meeting where the

militia's only consistent non-white member was clearly put forth at a large public meeting

as a token of racial acceptance, and a meeting where local NAACP members planned to

protest a militia gathering but instead became involved in the meeting.

Despite the egalitarian group-level outlook, members may not always recognize

or ideally respond to individually-evinced racism at their gatherings. Additionally, there

are some members who do not conform in practice to the group's ideology, and I suggest

that strongly racist individuals have the potential to harm the group's egalitarian viewpoint over time. I analyze an incident where a new militia member consciously tested how much tolerance the group had for his increasingly racist expressions in an apparent attempt to see how much racism he could show before being sanctioned. This case demonstrates the point at which coded language (Mendelberg 2001) becomes recognizable and objectionable as racism to militia members. I suggest that most members who do exhibit racism are best understood as symbolic racists, but that non-racist militia members may mistake racist statements for a shared investment in nationalism. I show that nationalistic sentiment also undergirds a more common disdain for illegal immigrants among militia members.

I then analyze an issue that arose in early 2011 that initially posed a challenge to my categorization of the Michigan militia as a non-racist group. On several occasions, members coordinated involvement in several anti-Muslim events in the state, despite having a respected militia leader who is Muslim. It became clear that many members were viewing Muslims as a racial, not just religious, outgroup. I show that militia members' anti-Muslim sentiment is not a form of symbolic racism, but rather a form of cultural threat to their national ideal, combined with a real fear of physical harm of future terror attacks.

THEORIES OF RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

"Jim Crow" or Old Fashioned Racism

"Jim Crow" racism is perhaps the version of racism that most people think of when hearing the term. Also known as old fashioned racism, it is the belief that there are

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inherent and immutable biological differences across races, such that whites are intellectually and morally superior to other races. Historian George Fredrickson says the concept became firmly embedded in U.S. discourse in the 1830s in an effort to continue justifying black slavery even as greater numbers of white men were granted the right to vote (2002). Old fashioned racism started falling out of favor in the U.S. in the decades prior to the start of the Civil Rights Movement as various biological theories were discredited (e.g., Countryman 2006; Schuman et al. 1997). It was replaced with more subtle, but still deleterious forms of racism.

Symbolic Racism

As defined by political scientists Donald Kinder and David Sears (1981), symbolic racism is "a blend of antiblack affect and the kind of traditional American moral values embodied in the Protestant [Work] Ethic." Symbolic racism has at its core a general racial resentment or negative emotionality toward nonwhites, and is often framed as a "cultural," rather than inherent difference between racial groups[30].

I suggest that symbolic racism is the theory of racism that is most applicable to understanding militia members' exclusionary responses to African Americans. The understanding that militia members (and many U.S. whites more generally) have of what it means to be a good American or a good citizen also heavily relies on the Work Ethic's valuation of individualism, hard work, and having only what one earns; these themes are embedded in the mythic tales about the country's founding. Symbolic racists believe that

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[30] Symbolic racism differs from" laissez faire racism," which typically assumes Whites are *consciously* acting to protect a privileged position (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997); it also differs, from group threat or realistic group conflict theories (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Sears 1981), and from theories of individual self-interest (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Kinder and Sanders 1996), all of which similarly emphasize economic competition.

African Americans do not subscribe to these American ideals (Brown et al. 2003) and

may therefore see African Americans as un-American. For example, they believe that

African Americans do not value hard work, that they could succeed if they only tried

harder, and that discrimination is no longer a stumbling block in economic advancement

(Henry and Sears 2002; Kluegel and Smith 1983).

Racialization and Cultural Threat: A Combined Perspective

Little of the public discourse around Muslims seems to implicate perceived cultural

deficiency regarding work ethic, and political scientists John Sides and Kimberly Gross

(forthcoming) found that Americans understand Muslims as violent and untrustworthy

but not as lazy or unintelligent. Instead, I suggest that a combination of racialization and

group threat theories explains militia members' continuing skepticism of and hostility

toward Muslim Americans.

Racialization

Racialization occurs when racial meaning is attributed to a group that previously

possessed no such attribution (Blalock 1973; Omi and Winant 1994). It is an

essentializing process; as John Hartigan says, racialization is a process that "reduces

individuality to the point that only racialness matters" (1999:13). All other aspects of

individual identity become lost from the perspective of the person or group making the

racialized classification. Racialization means that phenotypical differences are reified

across groups that are perceived to be distinct, and skin color or the shape of the nose, for

example, are considered to be reliable markers of a person's racial classification.

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Racialization may also incorporate cultural factors in addition to traditional, physical markers of race and ethnicity. Importantly, these perceived cultural differences are still understood to be *embodied*. Cultural racialization often happens via religion, such that religion is understood as a marker of race, and vice versa. Race scholar Khyati Joshi, for instance, notes that the racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism has "rendered [all three religions] theologically, morally, and socially illegitimate" in a U.S. context (2006:212) because most Americans are unable to differentiate them and reject all three. Junaid Rana (2011), a professor of Asian American Studies, discusses the State's involvement in the racialization of Muslims, which occurs, in part, to promote the War on Terror and to uphold clear ingroup/outgroup boundaries during the time of national crisis following the 2001 terror attacks[31]. Sociologist Sherene Razack (2008) goes a step further and theorizes that once Islam is racialized, terrorism also becomes racialized, such that Arabs are not only perceived as Muslims, but they are also uniformly perceived as likely terrorists. The reverse is also true; for many Americans, the term "terrorist" harkens a mental image of a traditionally dressed Muslim (*ibid*).

More explicitly, many Americans believe that women wearing veils or burkas, or men wearing turbans or long beards must be Muslims, though similar clothing may mark people of several faiths (Joshi 2006; Shaheen 2000; Joseph et al. 2008). This confusion has been at the root of several incidents where followers of Sikhism were targeted for violence because their attackers believed they were Muslims (e.g., Romney 2011). Studies have also shown that many Americans believe Muslim Americans are somehow

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[31] Naber (2007) discusses the history of Arab immigrants in the U.S. and argues that the racialization of Muslims happened long before the 9/11 attacks, but that the attacks changed the tenor and acceptability of expressed anti-Muslim sentiment.

culturally deficient and less committed to the nation than they should be (e.g., Condon 2011; Sides and Gross 2010).

Group Threat

I suggest that integrating racialization with a version of group threat theory emphasizing nationalism allows for a more complete specification of what precisely it is that some people believe is "wrong" with Islam. Traditional group threat theories sometimes implicate cultural themes including nationalism, but most typically reference political threats due to the outgroup's population size, or economic threats due to outgroup members' increasing presence in jobs traditionally dominated by whites (e.g., Blalock 1973; Olzak 1994). When considering Muslim Americans, there is little realistic political threat because Arab Americans[32] comprise less than 1% of the overall U.S. population (Brittingham and de la Cruz 2005).

There is also little evidence that economic conflict plays a role in anti-Muslim sentiment in the U.S. Although Arab Americans have a higher mean household income than Americans as a whole ($56,331 versus $51,369), they also are more likely to have more education (45% with at least a bachelor's degree compared to 28%), and to be in managerial, professional, technical, sales or administrative jobs (73% compared to 59%) (Quick Facts"; data compiled from Census 2000 EEO Data tool). These factors together mean that most Americans are unlikely to view Arabs as direct competition or threats to their economic interests.

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[32] Similar data are not available for self-identified Muslims; using Arab Americans is a reasonable proxy given the racialization of Muslims and given that group threat depends on *perceptions* of threat and population prevalence.

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A Combined Approach: Nationalistic Threat

Militia members engage in racialization of Muslims Americans, such that they

understand Muslims to have certain shared (and typically, essential) physical and cultural

traits, but their disdain goes beyond race. I argue below that members discriminate

against and exclude Muslims—not only from the militia but also from their construction

of full U.S. citizenship—because they believe Islam ubiquitously contrasts American

values of equality and individual liberty. Notably, this fear is not the same as a

generalized sense of cultural incompatibility; instead, these are the values that militia

members see as central principles of the nation, the very values upon which the country

was founded, and the values that they, as self-described super citizens have vowed to

uphold.

Sociologist Nadine Naber (2008) took a similar approach to this as she

convincingly argued that an interaction of cultural and nation-based racisms[33] account for

Muslim Americans' experiences of discrimination after the 9/11 terror attacks. My work

expands on Naber's in two respects. First, Naber's insights were built from Muslim

Americans' accounts of their experiences of exclusion, while this analysis is based on

non-Muslims who are justifying their own acts of exclusion. This angle provides

additional information about how such action may be undertaken with limited social

sanction and plays into actors' broader nationalistic schemas.

Second, my data show how discussions of "racism" as it is often construed may

be an unnecessarily limiting framework. Sociologist Robert Miles (1993) suggests that

racism and nationalism are simultaneously distinct and overlapping. In this context, a

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[33] Cultural racism excludes groups based on cultural, rather than biological factors, while nation-based racism is directed toward immigrants or populations otherwise defined as "foreign" (Naber 2008).

focus on racism alone may miss an important part of how Muslim Americans are excluded from full citizenship. That is, some non-Muslims may reject Muslims solely for racist reasons, but others may reject them for purely nationalistic reasons, and yet others may reject them out of a combination of racism and nationalism. Framing the totality of this exclusion as *racism* may distract from how individuals with different motives for exclusion use and respond to the same rhetoric and participate in the same discriminatory behavior. I suggest that the term "legitimate *discrimination*" (e.g., Scambler and Hopkins 1986) better captures how people who exclude Muslims from citizenship similarly justify their exclusion as being in their or the nation's best interest, regardless of their underlying motives for doing so.

THE MILITIA'S ANTI-RACIST ORIENTATION

The front page of www.michiganmilitia.com states:

> "A well-armed citizenry is the best form of Homeland Security and can better deter crime, invasion, terrorism, and tyranny. Everyone is welcome, regardless of race, creed, color, religion or political affiliation, provided you do not wish to bring harm to our country or people. If you are a United States citizen (or have declared your intent to become such), who is capable of bearing arms, or supports the right to do so, then YOU ARE the MILITIA!"

When I first read these words just prior to attending my first militia event, I could not help but wonder how true they were. Did their author genuinely mean that people from a variety of backgrounds would be welcome, or was the intent merely to minimize overt claims of racism and exclusion against the group?

Over time, I witnessed interactions in the field that indicated the message was indeed a genuine reflection of the group's intended ideology. I observed, for example,

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different militia leaders tell first-time meeting attendees that they had no patience for

racism or any "Nazi crap" on at least half a dozen occasions (usually directed toward

white men with numerous visible tattoos), including times when they did not know I was

observing. I also saw many members regularly act welcomingly toward black couples

who were in earshot of public militia events and seemed to be listening to the

proceedings, inviting them (usually unsuccessfully) to join the discussion. Members

almost never approached white onlookers in this manner, and it became clear from my

discussion with leaders that the militia both wanted to ensure the black couples did not

feel uncomfortable or threatened by the militia's presence, and also wanted to increase the

racial diversity of the group in an effort to combat accusations of racism. Some members

genuinely want to increase the diversity of the militia because they believe people of all

backgrounds should be prepared, while others are guided more by concerns of social

perceptions; they believe they might face less public criticism if they are seen as racially

inclusive in media reports, for example.

Many male militia members were involved in interracial relationships, often with

Asian women they had met while stationed abroad during military service, but these

women almost never attended militia functions. Some members proudly and

spontaneously described their own mixed racial heritages during our interviews when

they sensed that I was interested in the racial dynamics of the group. Several

interviewees, to my surprise, even responded similarly to 30 year old Mark, who has

some college education, when I asked why he thought more people of color were not

involved in the militia:

> "I know plenty of black folks that would like to go shoot guns and stuff
> and, you know, be more involved in defending their country. I don't think

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it's an awareness thing. I think if anything they're *more* aware than most white people. Because they've been *through* it. I mean they've already been manipulated and exploited more so than most white people have. It's just, I think it's a proximity issue. You can't train at Six Mile [in the middle of Detroit]."

Mark says he understands that non-white Americans have a different relationship with the government and the country's history than he does. He says he thinks non-whites may have a greater awareness of the need for something like a militia to protect citizens' rights because of a history of race-based mistreatment in the U.S., but are unable to participate in training.

Marks' reference to the unavailability of militia training sites in large cities alludes to ongoing socioeconomic disadvantages of people of color relative to white Americans. That is, many white militia members live in or just outside of Michigan's larger cities. They are nonetheless able to travel to militia events in more rural areas, but Mark thinks a higher proportion of people of color are unable to do so. Mark believes that if more people of color would participate in regular militia activity if such opportunities were more readily available. Mark's perspective is informed by his living in Detroit for many years and talking with his black neighbors. Whether his assumptions are correct, it is clear that Mark thinks about race in his community and about at least some of the privileges his whiteness affords him.

Racialized Interactions

Tokenism

Kevin, an African American man in his thirties, is the only person of color who regularly participated in the militia during my fieldwork. During my interview with Kevin in early

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Figure 19: Militia members try to demonstrate their open-mindedness in a variety of ways. At a recent Field Day, they provided Kosher and vegan meal options. Photos from http://s657.photobucket.com/profile/SMVM

2010, I asked him how he felt about being asked to sit with militia leadership at a large

meeting just after the 2008 Presidential Election. The meeting was open to the public and

had drawn a larger crowd than usual. At the start of the meeting, one of the leaders loudly

asked Kevin, who works in information technology, to help them set up the computer to

show the crowd some of their YouTube videos. The leader in question was quite familiar

with computers and had been responsible for creating and uploading the video. It seemed

obvious to me that the leader's real motive was to make sure that the new people

attending their first militia function could see their token black member.

At the time, Kevin came across as happy enough to take this role, but, afterward,

his participation in militia events became much less consistent. He elaborated on the

experience during our interview several months later:

> "I was okay with it [being shown off] but it was still a little…daunting. […T]hey put me up front as a way of saying, you know, 'This is our stance on the whole [race] thing.' […] So I thought that was a good statement but at the same time, too, I was just like, 'Wow.' So. And then I started going back—like I have been going back sporadically now. And, you know, for the most part it's pretty cool. But I'm actually thinking about going next month and taking my son just so he can see everybody."

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Kevin did not take his son to the next militia meeting; rather, he stopped participating in the militia altogether. I do not know for certain whether my questioning Kevin about the militia's using him to promote an egalitarian group image influenced his decision to end his militia participation, but it is difficult to imagine the timing of his disengagement was purely coincidental. Kevin's statement and the rest of his interview demonstrate that he believes that militia members really do strive to be racially inclusive, but do not always know how to be racially sensitive. At least in retrospect, Kevin was uncomfortable being shown off as a token non-white militia member and presumably did not want to be pushed into that role again.

NAACP

Another unique yet instructive encounter occurred when the militia gathered for a joint post-election meeting in November 2010. Militia members from four different units across the state were confronted by six members of the local NAACP who mistakenly believed[34] that the militia was gathering with some kind of racial agenda, and they planned to protest the meeting. The militia meeting had been underway for five or ten minutes when one attendee noticed that a woman was standing outside the restaurant, taking pictures through a large plate glass window at the side of the meeting room. Leaders paused and exchanged glances with one another, and normally well-spoken Lloyd uncharacteristically had to stop speaking, collect his thoughts and regain his

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[34] One NAACP representative told me that a local pastor had notified them that 300 armed people had recently been in a nearby Detroit neighborhood somehow causing anxiety. I wondered whether local Neo-Nazis or the Open Carry movement had been mistaken for the militia in this scenario, but could find no information on any large gathering having recently been in the area.

composure before warmly saying, 'Tell her to come in! Welcome! Why not?' and motioned for her to come inside.

Only when she entered the room did the woman's "NAACP" baseball cap become visible. Behind her, five men who had previously remained out of sight also entered, some of them wearing jackets with the NAACP emblem. The feel of the room became rather tense as neither militia members nor NAACP members seemed to know the other group's motives for being there, and militia members cautiously watched as the woman pulled out a laptop and began taking notes. Lloyd continued speaking for a few minutes about the militia's mission and an upcoming training. He jokingly noted that, 'This is the wrong place if you were interested in the secret Nazi moon base. My van just does not get the kind of gas mileage it would take to drive to a secret Nazi moon base, so you should just forget it.' Comments like this were not unusual for Lloyd, and this one in particular was intended to subtly convey the non-racist intent of the militia without directly referencing white racism toward African Americans. With the new visitors, however, the comment only added to the awkwardness in the room.

One of the male NAACP members eventually asked a question regarding sources of information for concealed carry permits for handguns. Militia members struggled to put together a coherent answer, with at least five eager members inadvertently talking over each other and providing different information. I had never before seen such a muddled response to a straightforward firearms question that many of the members take great pride in being able to answer. I had to assume they were made nervous by the NAACP presence and were trying too hard to appear knowledgeable and cooperative. The man who asked the question quickly became frustrated, interrupted the cacophony,

and clarified that he already had a permit and just wanted to know the best source for keeping up with changes in the laws that would affect his rights and responsibilities. This clarification very visibly made several of the militia members relax and act less warily toward the man, whom they could now view as a fellow gun owner, rather than as someone who was potentially hostile to gun ownership or who needed to be persuaded of their utility. A sole militia member then quickly provided a succinct and clear response to his question.

This interaction apparently made a couple of the other NAACP members comfortable enough to also begin asking questions including, "What exactly are you preparing for?" "Why are you armed?" and "Do you see yourselves as law abiding citizens?" Militia members from all four units took turns providing calm, clear responses to every question. Some discussed their military service, as did one NAACP member—a WWII veteran who received a, "Thank you, sir!" and a standing ovation from militia members when he announced his service record. After this, everyone seemed more at ease and militia leaders soon returned to their planned talking agenda for the night.

Once the meeting was over, I asked Jamal, the NAACP member sitting closest to me, if the meeting had been what he expected. He laughed and vehemently shook his head, saying, 'These guys aren't *at all* what I expected, in a good way!' Jamal mentioned that he was heavily involved in his community and it seemed like the militia was, too. He said, 'It sounds like they have some good ideas. I feel like there needs to be more conversation across different groups with the same interests.' At that point, he exchanged phone numbers with militia member George who had joined our conversation before continuing:

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'I'm really interested in reaching out to the youth. You know, I live in the suburbs, but I work regularly with the youth in the city. I try to help get them on the right track. In part, I try to get them on the right track so they won't come to my house and *I'll* be in a position to defend myself! You know? I'm a gun owner, and I'll gladly defend myself if I need to, but I really don't wanna be responsible for perpetuating a cycle of violence and death of young black men.'

George and other militia members could strongly identify with Jamal's interest in his community and with his gun ownership, even if they could not quite empathize with particular needs of the black community that Jamal referenced. Along with the other man who had acknowledged his concealed carry permit earlier in the meeting, this interaction helped militia members see NAACP members' interests and concerns as parallel to their own and helped reaffirm their anti-racist self-image. To my knowledge, no long-term interactions between militia and NAACP members happened after this night, though George reported at least one positive follow up phone call with Jamal.

Militia members' overall response to race, as shown in the above scenarios, reflects a more insightful perspective than I had anticipated prior to starting my fieldwork with this group of white men who idealize a national identity set in an era of exclusion. These interactions demonstrate members' attempts to reenact a super-citizen vision of themselves and of an egalitarian America. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva investigated contemporary forms of racism in the U.S. and found that many of his white respondents said or implied that they, "don't like to think about" race (2001:145) as a way to avoid confronting ongoing racial problems. Militia men, in contrast, do think about race and how their group is perceived in the context of members' whiteness. Perhaps members' racial insights are, in part, a product of their proximity to racial problems in Michigan cities, their efforts to be "super citizens" who seek out opportunities to evince patriotic

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inclusion in line with their national vision, or even the past criticisms the militia has faced about being racially exclusive.

Militia members' introspection does not, however, mean that they have full empathetic understanding or knowledge of continuing discrimination, and their awareness of institutional racism may be particularly limited. Members' principled focus on individualism and individual achievement almost certainly contributes to a certain degree of blindness regarding how institutional practices and social structures are infused with discriminatory practices. In spring 2010, militia member Billy had a lengthy phone call with a man who identified himself as a Black Panther member who was doing a newsletter story on the militia. Billy told me that he had a very enjoyable conversation with the man, and he was particularly excited to tell me that the man had taught him a new way of thinking about Affirmative Action. The man explained that Billy could think about economic achievement as a foot race, and that African Americans had a 400-year difference in the starting line, due to slavery. Billy exclaimed, 'I never thought about it that way before! It makes a lot of sense!' as he told me the story. This interaction exemplifies how militia men may not think about how historical contexts may influence people differently without some outside impetus.

It is also the case that members do not always recognize more overt forms of racism, including from other members, despite their attempts at racial introspection. In the rest of this chapter, I focus on interactions where racism goes largely unrecognized by a majority of militia members. These interactions are instructive for understanding how and against whom racism continues within this group of lower and lower-middle class, white American men.

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RACISTS IN THE MILITIA

Edmond, a utilities worker in his early 40s who is married with young-adult children, joined the militia in early 2010 and was by far the most racist member I encountered. His feelings became evident when he intentionally tested other members' tolerance for racism at the first camping event he attended. As Edmond, four other male members, and I sat around the campfire on a cool May night, Edmond remarked that 'the natives' were out that evening as he complained about the loudly croaking frogs in the distance. The men made small talk about new weapons and other gadgets for a few minutes before one started talking about the deteriorating state of Detroit after having recently driven through the city for the first time in several years. Edmond, who lives near the city, assented and noted that he enjoyed going to the 'ghetto' and acting as an election monitor—someone tasked with observing a particular polling location and watching for signs of fraud or other problems. It became clear that Edmond envisioned all of black Detroit as the 'ghetto' as he continued. He explained that he had monitored a poll location for the 2008 Presidential Election 'during Obama's run,' and found it funny when a woman approached him after seeing his "Republican" badge, supposedly saying, 'I thought we got rid of all of you four years ago!' He said, 'But by the middle of the day, they were all glad to have the Republicans there because they couldn't keep track of what they were supposed to keep track of on their own.'

Edmond's story implies several things. First, that the 'ghetto' of Detroit needs particular assistance in avoiding voter fraud and other problems; Edmond did not live in that area and specifically chose to be an election monitor there. Edmond perceived incompetence or increased illegitimate behavior from black voters in Detroit relative to

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his own neighborhood. Second, Edmond's reference to Obama indicated that he believed the 2008 election was even more likely to provoke problematic behavior from Detroit's black voters who, he assumed, might have particular incentive to rig the election in black Presidential candidate, Barack Obama's favor. Third, when Edmond reported the woman said she thought they had gotten rid of "all of you," his inflections indicated that he thought she meant not only Republicans, but also Whites (or perhaps white *men*) more broadly. Edmond interpreted the woman as also having an us-versus-them racialized mentality and as not wanting "them" in her neighborhood. Fourth, Edmond indicates that if he as a white, male, Republican had not been present, the black, female, Democrat poll administrator and her assistants would have been incapable of completing their jobs because of incompetence.

The other militia members listened to Edmond's story in silence, with several exchanging uncomfortable glances, but neither affirming nor challenging Edmond's implications. It seemed to me as though some of the members were trying to discern whether Edmond's statements might be racist, but were uncertain and did not want to risk accusing him without being able to more concretely identify a problematic statement. A slight pause ensued, to which Edmond added, 'They just have no clue what's going on. All over the country. Those people vote based on skin color and nothing else.'

More uncomfortable glances followed, and one member tried to shift the topic of conversation slightly by saying he thought people often voted for the wrong reason, or without adequately understanding the candidate they were supporting; this was a general statement that did not apply to any particular racial group, and is a common conversational point at militia gatherings. Edmond, however, was not finished with his

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rant as he then turned to discussing the high crime rates in Detroit, eventually exclaiming, 'The natives are out of control!' "Natives" often refers to a group of supposedly primitive, uncivilized people, which should be offensive enough in this context, but Edmond had just used the term a few minutes prior to refer to annoying animals at the campsite, making the connotation even worse.

One member raised his eyebrows and loudly cleared his throat at this comment, another jumped up to unnecessarily stoke the still-roaring campfire, but no one yet said anything to challenge Edmond's statements. At this point, I was unsure whether the other militia members still retained uncertainty about Edmond's racism, or whether they just felt uncomfortable confronting him about it. I knew that I was struggling to remain silent, but—just like Edmond—wanted to see exactly what kind of comment would be necessary to evoke a reprimand, and to identify the point at which racism became undeniable for other members.

I did not have to wait long. Another member tried, again, to shift the subject and discuss Michigan's failing economy, saying that the auto industry in particular had left Detroit in 'a terrible state.' Another mused aloud if anything could ever be done to repair the city's economy. Edmond, still riled up from this rant, glibly responded, 'I wonder if you can grow cotton this far north?'—a clear reference to the legacy of slavery from the southern states. Most other members loudly and simultaneously exclaimed "Woah!" at this comment, unable to deny the racism in Edmond's statements any longer. Several members angrily talked over each other for a few moments, and the only response I could clearly make out was, 'That was *not* cool.' Those who did not speak sat in slack-jawed silence and stared at Edmond for a moment; I did not see any member who appeared

unphased by his last offensive comment. Edmond's reference to the slavery-based

economy was finally overt enough to make the other members recognize his racism for

what it was.

None took the opportunity, however, to confront Edmond. He did not receive a

version of the almost innoculatory anti-racist statements that first-time meeting attendees

often heard. Instead, members quickly put out the campfire and went to their respective

tents, in near silence. Edmond looked a bit uncomfortable after being admonished, but

did not apologize or try to soften his previous statements. The next morning, no one

spoke of the incident and militia training proceeded, though Edmond was much less

assertive and vocal than he had been the night before.

Edmond undeniably possesses at least some degree of "Jim Crow" or "old

fashioned" racism, which claims there is a biologically-rooted, inherent racial hierarchy.

Most militia members who evinced racism did not reference biological notions, but were

more like 45 year old delivery driver Aaron who told me in our interview:

> "I'm racist to a point. Um, but not outright, I mean you know it's—how do
> I explain it. I've got Mexican friends, very good Mexican friends that I—
> buddies of mine. I got black buddies. It's the, I guess when you see a
> group of 'em dressed up or somethin' and they're hippin' and hoppin' at a
> corner, you know, and whatever you wanna call it. It's just that—I don't
> know, I guess it's just because I don't know them. The place that I work at
> in Detroit, they have a whole bunch working at that factory, and the thing
> that frustrates us at work is they don't care about their job. And they just
> do it any way to get it out of the warehouse, and then we hafta to put up
> with what crap work they've done, which angers us."

Aaron's acknowledgement of his racism is unusual, but other members referenced similar

themes. Like Aaron, they do not recognize these characterizations—congregated black

youth as othered and possibly dangerous and his black coworkers as lazy, incapable

workers, and similarly othered—as epitomizing symbolic racists' stereotypes of African

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Americans. What Aaron's quote and Edmond's early statements have in common is a vague sense of a racial "other" whose values are incompatible with their own.

Illegal Immigrants

Some militia members exhibit similar culture-based attitudes toward illegal immigrants. These militia members recognize the U.S. as a "nation of immigrants," but insist that people who are dedicated to the nation's values should now immigrate legally. People who enter the country illegally, in these members' opinions, demonstrate that they cannot play by the rules and be law abiding citizens who support freedom and equality for everyone. As retiree Walter explains:

> "Immigration, I have no trouble with it as long as it's legal. You know, just the fact that—'illegal,' illegal immigration, okay, that means you broke a law. That means you shouldn't be here."

> A selection from 52 year old Daryl's interview elaborates on this theme:

> "I think that if you're goin' to come into America, I think it should be done legally and properly and that if you're coming in, the reason *why* you want to come in here is because you believe in what the U.S. stood for, and you've read the history enough to know that that's what you wanna be. But to come in here just to start hollerin' and try to change the United States, I don't believe that's fair. I mean that's—I don't think it should be that way. I have no problem with any race, color, you know, comin' in here. There's no problem with that."

John, in his late 40s, made the point even more strongly in an email he wrote to me after I asked for more information about his family's immigration:

> "…and I [also] have current family members who I am assisting to immigrate to this country. Do you realize the hoops my family and myself have had to jump through to come to this country? Many. […] I do not fear Mexican immigration, I do not fear the 'browning of America' as some say, I have contributed to it. But open border immigration is a free ride. No hoops to jump through and no reason to adapt to a new culture or a desire to. [It's supposed to be] 'Out of many one,' not 'out of one many.'

This adds to divisions and ultimately conflict. All immigrants have to earn citizenship! Or it has no value."

John references *E Pluribus Unum*, which is stamped on U.S. currency, to reflect his belief that immigrants should want to adapt to American culture. In his opinion, going through legal immigration and its requirements means that a person wants to conform to American ideals and values, while illegal immigration means they do not. Just as many other militia members who disdain illegal immigration, John does not see it as a race-based issue; John's wife is a non-white immigrant, and John has expressed great frustration over his granddaughter dealing with bullying in school over her "brown" skin because, as he says, 'Who *cares* what color you are? That has nothing to do with what kind of person you are.' In other words, members maintain that their sentiments about illegal immigration do not apply only to Mexican immigrants, but to immigrants from any country. They believe in an ideal type of a civic nation (Brubaker 1992), whereby citizenship is earned through being born in the nation, or through following legal procedures to signify citizenship and support of national values.

It is no coincidence that scholars have found that whites who identify as just "American" tend to score higher on symbolic racism measures than do whites who identify with ethnic groups like "Italian-American." People who identify as just "American" are likely more invested in the national mythos, undergirded by the Work Ethic (Bafumi and Herron 2009; Coverdill 1997). Some militia members for example, talk about how they do not understand the need for "hyphenated identities," and that everyone should want to be "just plain American." They believe that loyalty to some other identity category prevents a person's full integration as American citizens and

means they might be intentionally maintaining "cultural differences" that are somehow problematic or set them apart from "real" Americans.

THE MILITIA'S EXCLUSION OF MUSLIM AMERICANS

Theories of symbolic racism or broad cultural differences fall short of explaining why many militia members, including Daryl and John, make no effort to accept and welcome Muslim Americans[35]. Early in my fieldwork, 35 year old George, a truck driver, told me that several members left SMVM and joined another group when he wanted to bring a close Muslim friend to trainings and SMVM leadership supported his decision. One of the objectors, Kyle, told me:

> "Last April, the SMVM was contacted by some Muslims, and they wanted
> to train. And they [SMVM] said, 'well we can't discriminate [based on]
> their religion and their race.' And we basically said, 'the hell we can't.'
> […] Ok, you let these guys in, they come out and train with us, they come
> to all our meetings, they do everything. They're there for a year or two,
> next thing you know, they disappear. They're not around. You can't find
> them. Their email address doesn't work, there's no contact. But, one of
> their carcasses just turns up in the Sears tower that just got bombed, with
> an SMVM membership card. […] What do you think is gonna happen?
> They are gonna round up every member, anybody that ever inquired in
> conversation or email [about the militia], they're gonna come through
> these and hunt everybody up, [saying] 'You trained a terrorist.'"

Kyle believes Muslims would only want to train with the militia to learn skills to harm American citizens, and believes it is perfectly appropriate to exclude Muslims from the group. He does not see this as contradicting the militia's egalitarian, super-citizen vision because he believes that Muslims do not comply with the militia mission statement of allowing the participation of people who do not want to "bring harm to our country or

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[35] As explained above, militia members tend to reject all "hyphenated identities" in accordance with their assimilationist, anti-illegal immigrant selections above. Members tend to view Muslims as not being Americans, but I use the term here to emphasize their understanding of Muslims specifically living in the U.S.

people." A quote from Trevor, a retiree in his 60s, further exemplifies how many militia members understand the term "Muslim Americans" to be oxymoron:

> "And [the Constitution] is for all people. All people of all races, all creeds and all religions. But one thing you gots to understand: the Muslim religion and our Constitution and our way of life cannot co-exist. They can't do it."

Trevor believes that Islam is incompatible with American values and implies that its practitioners are in a category of their own, excluded from other belief systems, other races, and even other human beings. Trevor buys into the racialization of terrorism and believes that all Muslims are terrorists who want to harm U.S. citizens, a trait that dehumanizes them, in Trevor's view.

Militia members like the men quoted above feel that Muslims threaten the physical safety of the nation and its citizens, in addition to threatening the nation's cultural values. Other authors have shown that many Americans similarly believe Muslim Americans are less committed to the nation and its principles than they should be (Braiker 2007; Condon 2011; Sides and Gross 2010). They assume that there is something wrong with Islam or Islamic culture that promotes violence and makes Muslims fundamentally opposed to American values, and this may in turn play into assumptions that Muslims have the potential to be uniformly terroristic (Murphy 2002; Perry 2003; Razack 2008; Joseph et al. 2008). The case of the militia helps identify what precisely it is that is "wrong" with Muslims for some people.

Fear Management

It is sometimes overlooked that white, gun owning men are expressing real fear with statements like these, rather than merely using rhetoric to spur mobilization (e.g.,

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Oliviero 2011) or to disguise racism or other underlying motives. Part of the reason that

militia men feel such a strong need to prepare for unknown disasters is because they are

afraid of what might happen; for some of them, owning guns and other equipment is itself

a way to manage this fear as much as it is a real preparation for danger. For example,

whenever legislation is considered that might restrict access to firearms or ammunition

(such as discussions of banning online ammunition sales in the wake of the summer 2012

shooting at an Aurora, Colorado theater), many militia members stock up on the exact

model of firearm or type of ammunition that is being considered for restriction. This

action is a symbolic act of defiance and protest against the proposed legislation, and a

symbolic reassertion of members' threatened national identity (Hobsbawm and Ranger

1983), but it is also a concrete way to manage fear of losing access to certain weapons, a

loss which represents restricted gun rights more broadly.

Fear management is also the reason that my interviewees had an average of 4.6

guns *per person in their household*—a much higher number than is realistically needed to

effectively defend, for example, against a home invasion. This attitude can be seen as

Kurt, in his late 50s, discussed his distrust of both major political parties just prior to the

2008 Presidential Election, before adding:

> "But I am more in fear of the Left trying to take away my rights [than I am
> of the Right]. They are more or less trying to censor people they don't like
> Rush Limbaugh and they try to take him off the air […]. I said, "Well, that
> doesn't sound like you want to protect the First Amendment, does it?" But
> I tell 'em, it's like, "But if you don't want to protect the Second
> Amendment, I see why you wouldn't want to protect the First or probably
> any of the other ones."

Kurt is referencing a popular notion among militia members that Second Amendment gun

rights are needed to ensure First Amendment rights to free speech. This is the idea that

privately held arms prevent government agents from infringing on other fundamental

rights. Kurt believes that people on the political left who oppose the Second Amendment

also devalue the right to free speech and possibly other rights. Kurt's ownership of

firearms is a way to both defy this un-American attitude as he sees it, and to manage the

fear of what might happen if such liberals were to gain increased political power.

Members' fear of Muslims is also rooted in a feeling that core American

principles are being threatened, which is a feeling initiated by the terror attacks of 9/11.

George, who invited Muslim friends to training, called the attacks "the biggest disaster

this country has ever seen," while Adam said:

> "I, as a citizen, do not feel our nation is safe, and weaknesses are being
> opened up for our enemies to exploit. If there are any failures here, I feel
> they will cost us many American lives."

Daryl, now in his early 50s told me he tried to sign up with military recruiters shortly

after the terror attacks but was told he was "too old." Other members, like Bert, a father

of three teenagers, try to be vigilant against future attacks as they remember being

traumatized from 9/11:

> "I recall where I was and who I was with, pretty much most details around
> those hours leading up to and after the planes crashed. We were all in
> shock - this couldn't be real - it must be an accident—is this a bad dream!
> […] It was only months ago, another terrorist came close to blowing up a
> plane as it approached Detroit. […] I've researched what experts are
> predicting, there are still many terrorists attempting to attack Americans
> and cause catastrophic damage to us. I would recommend we map out
> where the nuclear power plants are located and try to have maps ready on
> hand so it would be quicker to plan a route to get family away from the
> radiation and/or violence that could occur. Had those planes on 9/11
> crashed into nuclear reactor towers, it would have been WAY worse for us
> to recover! Terrorism is only one of many areas that militia training could
> help with."

In other words, the terror attacks of 2001 presented a real and symbolic threat to members' senses of safety and identity. No other groups had previously perpetrated an act that impacted white Americans in quite this way.

Militia members also fear change that could happen to the country's government and legal system as a result of terrorism. Militia members despise increasing restrictions on private citizens through legislation like the Patriot Act because these changes undermine what American culture represents to these self-described super citizens. Members like 27 year old Hugo, who works in customer service, describe this act as allowing the police to have entirely too much power:

> "Now with the Patriot Act, with the other rules and regulations they have, [there's] no warrant, no knocking, the door gets busted down and they seize everything."

This Act exemplifies the increase in governmental power over individual lives that militia members despise and sometimes fear.

Involvement in Anti-Muslim Events

Militia members' verbal disdain for Muslims and their purported effect on American society was evident early in my fieldwork, but their disdain only shifted to action in spring 2011 when they became involved in two anti-Muslim events. Oddly, the same leaders who supported George's desire to bring a Muslim friend to training became some of the biggest proponents of involvement in these events. Understanding the militia's involvement in these events is useful for delving further into how they understand Muslims to be a threat to the nation and its values.

The first anti-Muslim event that members became involved in occurred in April 2011, when Koran burning Florida pastor Terry Jones made a trip to Dearborn, Michigan to rant about Sharia law[36] and Islam's supposedly negative effect on the Constitution and freedom of speech. The city briefly denied Jones' right to protest by ordering a hearing to determine the likelihood that his presence might incite violence, jailed him over his refusal to pay a "peace bond" to cover the cost of protest security, and charged him a symbolic $1 bond to be freed from jail (Langton 2011).

Militia members often stated that they believe First Amendment rights to be the most important rights that Americans have. Because if any other rights are infringed, they say, 'We can complain about it, but if they take away the right to complain, to fight, we're in real trouble.' Dearborn's treatment of Jones certainly played into members' decision to be involved in this particular protest, as Elias' note on the forum indicates:

> "A 1st Amendment precedent is being set here, that is the side we should
> all be on. Ignoring such things over the years, no matter how small, is why
> our Constitution keeps slipping away. If a local government decides my
> "Freedom of Speech" is beneath them, they order me to post a "PEACE
> BOND" of let's say $200,000 before I can speak, sorry but that is
> censorship by fine."

Although none said so explicitly, some members seemed to believe that the city of Dearborn was attempting to protect its Muslim residents from Jones' message at the expense of his fundamental right to free speech—a clear betrayal of American values members claim to support above all else.

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[36] Sharia law is a version of traditional Islamic Law that includes harsh sanctions for adultery and other behavior that has largely been decriminalized in the U.S. Its opponents claim to fear that courts will begin to use Sharia law to evaluate cases in the U.S., rather than judiciary law, in defiance of the Constitution.

Members were divided on their opinion of Jones himself. One person called him an "ass," while another noted, "In militia terms, pastor Jones is a few rounds short of a full mag," but both still wanted to support his freedom of speech. A few members expressed concern about sending the 'wrong message' by supporting Jones, and some said they were uncomfortable attending what might prove to be a violent event. To this Rodney, a student in his 20s, responded:

> "He [Jones] is not the first man or woman to step into the powder keg to make his point! I think about what it would had been like to be a black man in the 1960's when Dr. Martin Luther King was holding meetings and pleading his rights, for the things he believed in."

Likening Jones to the Civil Rights leader indicates that Rodney believes Islamic doctrine and values to be oppressive, and the fight against its perceived spread is just as noble and necessary as the fight for equal rights.

Given their divided sentiment, it is unsurprising that only eight militia members from two different units attended Jones' rally, although several more expressed frustration that they were unable to miss work to do so. Those who did attend the event did not wear their usual camouflage, deciding to avoid being overtly

Figure 20: Some militia members hold signs that read, "I will not submit!" in both English and Arabic as they listen to Terry Jones speaking from the podium. Another man, to Jones' right, holds a sign reading, "Ban Sharia law in the U.S.". Photo from http://s657.photobucket.com/profile/SMVM

identified as members of the

militia[37]. Based on their self-reports

as well as pictures and videos they

took of the event and posted to an

online photo-sharing account,

militia members stood as a group

on Terry Jones' side[38] of the street

along with around two dozen or so

Jones supporters. Two members in

Figure 21: Police and SWAT team members line Jones' side of the rally. Photo from http://s657.photobucket.com/profile/SMVM

attendance held signs, pointed toward counter-protestors, that read "I will not submit" in

both English and Arabic. This message, which apparently originated from a blog post by

conservative commentator Michelle Malkin on the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, is

intended to defy perceived attempts to repress anti-Muslim dialogue, as well as to defy

oppressive Islamic doctrines, particularly those related to notions of holy wars against

non-believers (Malkin 2006). Jones supporters were separated from a loud-counter

protest crowd, which must have numbered in the hundreds, by two sets of temporary

barriers on either side of a four-lane road, police officers, and, when the counter-

protestors tried to rush the barriers, a line of SWAT officers.

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[37] A police officer noticed the attendee's radios and other communication equipment and asked who they were. When they told her they were with the militia, she reportedly responded, "Oh, you're the good guys," and radioed other police officers in the area so they would not "hassle" the militia members. No member speculated that she may have had other motives for alerting other officers, such as making sure militia members were being watched for signs of trouble making.

[38] One video of the event includes a text overlay that says militia members were on both sides of the protest in an effort to bolster their claim of being present to support everyone's right to free speech. They do have a few photos taken from the counter-protest side of the street; however, given the crowd placement and other details in the photos, I suspect these were taken by a single member who later switched to Jones' side of the event.

Importantly, some militia members who participated (including George who brought Muslim friends to militia training) did genuinely feel they were merely demonstrating on behalf of the First Amendment. However, at this point, Jones' freedom of speech was no longer threatened—he was speaking with a microphone from behind a podium on the steps of City Hall. Well-intentioned members were really protesting that Jones' freedom of speech had been impeded at all.

A more problematic motivation for protest soon surfaced for at least three of the members who participated in the event. The most telling response came at the next militia meeting when Edmond—the same member who offensively spoke about "natives" and cotton during his first camping excursion—told me that a local media crew could not air the second part of his interview about his presence at the protest when they asked what he thought of Jones' message. He had responded that he thought Jones would just stir up trouble "because we already know they [Muslims] are animals." Edmond meant that he believes Muslim Americans would respond violently in response to Jones' speech because they are "animals" who have inferior cultural standards regarding tolerance for violence and free expression.

Militia members did not attend Jones' rallies when he made two later trips to Michigan. There was some debate over this on the forums, as a few members wanted to go and support Jones' message. Leadership indicated that people were of course free to attend on their own but that the militia as a group wanted no part of it because there were no threats to anyone's freedom of speech during Jones' return visits. At the same time, however, members continued to make disparaging remarks about Muslim Americans that

show how they view that culture as uniform, more primitive, and socially problematic.

Vincent, a proudly atheist leader, said for example:

> "Any social structure that tolerates rape and fails to punish rapists[39] is not acceptable to me. Period. Any structure which denies the basic dignity and self-ownership of human beings is wrong. Period. Any idea, concept, teaching, or thought that requires violence or threats thereof to spread is not just wrong, it is weak. Weak, weak, weak. That's why it needs force, because it cannot stand on its own."

Spoken concerns like this about Muslims threatening America or its culture are reflected through some members' discussion of Jones and participation in his first rally. These members viewed Jones' hampered ability to speak out against Muslims as a threat to First Amendment rights even after he was provided with a space to speak at City Hall. Other members, like Edmond, were clearly participating to support Jones' anti-Muslim message, rather than his right to speak. These competing motivations for participation in the protest allowed members like Edmond to engage in exclusionary action without sanction.

Edmond's anti-Muslim bias was essentially hidden behind a dialogue of First Amendment support until he revealed his true feelings to a reporter on site. After he and other members participated in the rally, he became more vocal about his anti-Muslim attitudes and expressed frustration when militia leadership declined to involved the group in Jones' future Michigan events. Perhaps as a result of a lack of responsiveness to Jones'

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[39] Several other members mentioned objecting to Islam because of its treatment of women. More than "white men seeking to save brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1999:303), critical race theorist and philosopher Alia Al-Saji (2010) has suggested that Muslim women serve as a "negative mirror" that allows white men to view their own culture as more positive and egalitarian in contrast to Islamic culture (and in contrast to how it truly is). This is a compelling claim that needs further investigation, but nonetheless has some relevance to understanding militia men who express anti-Muslim sentiment. Many of them, like Edmond, also oppose abortion rights and health care policies that would ensure easy access to birth control. These restrictive beliefs nonetheless seem more egalitarian, to them, than their understanding of how Muslim women are treated.

future visits, Edmond again appealed to the notion of a threatened First Amendment when trying to spark militia involvement in another protest opportunity.

All American Muslim *Protest*

The next protest event happened in December 2011, when home improvement store Lowe's pulled advertising from the short-lived television show *All American Muslim*. The show followed several Muslim families in Michigan as it highlighted the Muslim community as well as the challenges some family members faced in their jobs or other venues as a result of their religion. Lowe's Allen Park, Michigan location (the store nearest where the show was filmed) found itself hosting around 100 protestors—many of them dressed in traditional Muslim garb—and around 25 counter-protestors. Only a

Figure 22: A reporter interviews a small crowd of counter protestors supporting Lowe's Hardware near Dearborn. The counter protestors hold an American flag and have signs and apparel that reads "infidel" in both English and Arabic. Photo from http://s657.photobucket.com/profile/SMVM

couple militia members, including Edmond, attended this event as counter-protestors, but several more expressed regret that they could not.

Edmond claimed that people did not understand that Lowe's had the right to spend money as they chose, and said he wanted to show support for Lowe's free-market decision. Counter-protestors, however, can be heard in video taken at the event repeatedly saying "God Bless America," "'Kill the infidel right where you find him,' [it's] right out of the Koran," and obnoxiously singing "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." These comments do not reflect a concern about protecting a corporation's rights to speech or spending. If anything, Edmond and others involved seemed not to recognize that people protesting Lowe's also had the free speech rights to express their opinion. What the counter-protestors' comments demonstrate a belief that Islam is fundamentally opposed to both Christian[40] and American values. Counter-protesters were supporting and enacting Lowe's *lack* of support for the local Muslim American population.

Just as with his efforts to involve other militia members in Jones' subsequent Michigan events, Edmond failed to produce a militia strong showing when supporting Lowe's. Militia leaders nonetheless allowed him to post photos and videos of his protest activities on their forum and photo sharing sites, and other members expressed support of Edmond's actions. Billy, in his 30s, for example, remarked:

> "We need to keep doing little things like this [protest]. Some may worry about negative backlash, but... as long as we make sure to stick to a constitutionally sound position on whatever we do, we should weather any storms."

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[40] Unsurprisingly, militia members who attended this protest identify as Christian. It may also be that many people understand the nation to be founded on Christian principles, even if they are not Christians themselves. Islamic traditions may seem foreign to this heritage. A similar situation is seen in France, which strives to be a secular society and denies traditional headscarves in schools and other locations.

Faux Muslim Terrorist Training

It became clear that Edmond's persistent influence was having a behavioral impact on other members who had previously only verbalized anti-Muslim discomfort when anti-Muslim activities began to enter militia trainings. SMVM conducted a training in April 2012 where the motivating scenario involved evading an imaginary terrorist group named Farouk-Al-Salit. A careful reader will notice that this is a play on the name of a Willy Wonka movie character that can serve as a tongue-in-cheek denial that the name has a Muslim connotation

In my time in the field, no other unit used a named figure as a fictive enemy in their training sessions. On the contrary, units usually are careful to completely avoid referencing real people in their training scenarios, with the exception of using Osama Bin Laden shooting targets; he is a person they assume everyone would recognize as an undisputable enemy. Notably, he was also recognizably Muslim in these pictures, with a long beard and turban. These targets occasionally had small packs of strawberry jelly or ketchup taped to their backs, so that good shots would result in a large blob of red staining the surrounding paper—simulating blood and allowing members to symbolically kill Bin Laden and prevent future harm to the country's safety. Members also used pictures of anonymous, but clearly Muslim, male figures who were dressed and armed for battle

Figure 23: A used shooting target depicting a man in a turban and battleground clothing. Photo courtesy of www.michiganmilitia.com.

(see Figure 23), and who thus visually represented what members assumed most Muslims

to be—ready to engage in warfare with Americans; I never saw any other group of real

human used as pictures for targets. The introduction of the new training scenario

indicates that Muslim-sounding names are increasingly acceptable as outgroup identifiers

to militia members. Combined with their participation in and support of anti-Muslim

demonstrations, this means that militia members are increasingly marking Muslims as

problematic others, an act that reinforces lingering fear and perceived cultural difference.

RESPONSE TO SALIENT MUSLIM INDIVIDUALS

Members' marking of Muslims as othered is complexified by two men who were salient

to militia members during my fieldwork. One man was a Muslim militia leader, and the

other was the newly elected President of the United States, whom many people on the

political right believe to be a Muslim despite his own profession of Christianity.

Analyzing members' very different responses to both men helps more clearly delineate

the threat members believe Muslims pose to American culture and security.

Muslim Militia Member

Militia member Chad is white, grew up in a Christian military family, and lived in nearly

a dozen states before he moved to Michigan a decade ago with several extended family

members. Chad converted to Islam after joining the Navy and encountering people who

believed in the Muslim faith, although, curiously, Chad was stationed not in the Middle

East, but in Mississippi. Regarding his decision to convert to Islam, Chad notes:

> "I didn't like how the Lutheran religion—the churches anyway that we
> went to—they didn't all practice what they preached. You know,

everything's fine on Sunday but come Monday morning, they're a whole new person."

Chad believed there was less hypocrisy among the Muslims he knew than among the Christians he grew up with. It was important to him to be in a community of faith that enacted the principles and behavioral standards they advocated behind the pulpit. All the same, Chad explains that he is not strongly religious:

> "I don't follow it [Islam] religiously per se. Most Christians don't either, you know, they don't go to church all the time. They don't follow *all* of the rules that you're supposed to, you know, and stuff like this. I don't. [With] Islam, you're supposed to pray five times a day. I don't. Do I have a prayer rug? Yes. Have I used it? Not in the last six years [laughs]. You know? I don't do that. I haven't been to a mosque since I have converted and when I lived in North Carolina. I have not been to a single one since I've lived here. So I mean in 10-11 years now I haven't been to a single mosque."

Chad nonetheless adheres to the relatively strict dietary standards laid out in the Koran; he doesn't eat pork despite, he laughingly notes, his rich Italian heritage, and only rarely drinks alcohol after abstaining from it altogether for many years. In his view, he takes his faith as seriously as "most Christians."

At the time of our interview, Chad had been involved with the militia for three years after starting his own militia unit along with his Christian brother. The brothers started their own unit after feeling the government was "overstepping their bounds" and realizing that there was not already a local unit with whom they could train. Chad and his brother followed SMVM model for training guidelines and required gear, which they found on www.michiganmilitia.com, soon made contact with SMVM and other units in the state, and began attending other groups' trainings as well as continuing to structure their own trainings and other events.

Militia members who did not already know that Chad is a converted Muslim became aware of Chad's religion in spring 2010, when he discussed both his faith and his militia activity on several news reports. Reporters spoke with Chad after learning he called the FBI rather than harboring members of the nearby Hutaree militia who were trying to avoid arrest following law enforcement raids of that unit. Other militia units continue to welcome Chad and other members of his unit (who are all Christian or non-religious) to shared training events and other functions, and Chad is included on messages that pertain to leadership concerns or disaster planning.

Chad attended the Terry Jones protest in Dearborn, and must have done so at least in part to demonstrate that his loyalty rested with national values including freedom of speech that the militia supports, more so than with his religion. His participation did not stop another militia leader from only partially joking about whether other members in attendance at that event 'asked to see the contents of his backpack,' to make sure there were no explosives in it to injure Jones and his supporters. Chad recognizes that his acceptance by at least some militia members is tenuous as he talks about members who left SMVM because they allowed Muslims (including Chad, in his view) at their trainings:

> "Okay, I am a Muslim, I have an AK-47, but I'm white so that helps a little bit, you know? If I was Arabic, they would have just totally stereotyped the hell—the crap out of it."

Importantly, Chad remarks that his skin tone only helps him "a little bit," meaning that he is aware that his whiteness does not fully absolve some members' suspicions of his loyalties. Keith, for instance, called Chad a 'fashionable Muslim' and told me that he would not accept Chad if he took things 'too seriously.' He meant that

Chad would be "too serious" if he talked extensively about his beliefs, wore turbans or other religious clothing, or interrupted trainings to participate in daily prayers. Another man even emailed me to ask my "professional" opinion on Chad's dedication to the nation after he first learned of Chad's Muslim faith. Thus, skin tone alone does not nullify concerns about Chad's commitment to the nation for members who do not know him well. Assumptions they hold about violence and exclusion being fundamental attributes of Islamic faith outweigh the possibility of accepting Chad based on his skin color and militia participation alone.

At the same time, other members indicate that race alone is not enough to *reject* someone as a Muslim. Thirty-six year old Curtis, for example, advocates acceptance as long as people are in some way demonstrating their commitment to the nation. Curtis became a little frustrated and animated as he tried to convey that Americanness matters more than race or other factors:

> "I mean an American's an American no matter what color you are: black, white, Arab, Mexican, whatever. I mean if you're an American, you're an American. You know, you've got Arabs fighting for the U.S. [in the Middle East], too, you know, you got Mexicans and whatever. You know, as long as you're an American, you're an American!"

Members who know Chad well follow this logic and believe that Chad demonstrates his commitment to their shared national values in several ways: his militia participation, which is reinforced by his Christian family members' militia involvement, his prior military experience, and a large "We the People" tattoo on his back. Further, Chad's militia unit has participated in multiple community events, including search and rescue efforts, that have garnered positive media attention for the militia, and Chad worked with the FBI to ensure that members of a different local group did not engage in

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Figure 24: Chad's tattoo, which references the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, as well as the notion that the American people are collectively more powerful and more important than the government. Photo courtesy of Claire Schneider.

unlawful behavior. These factors allow members who know Chad to view him as a fellow super citizen who is firmly committed to their shared values of security and individual liberty.

President Obama

In contrast, militia members remain skeptical of the national loyalty of President Barack Obama, assumed by many as 17% of Americans to be a Muslim ("One in Six" 2012). Atheist Vincent, a government employee, said he believed Islam denies "basic dignity and self-ownership of humans," and that it is inherently terroristic and antithetical to the American way of life such that all of its adherents are incapable of understanding and adopting American values—that they are incapable of being American. Grady, a man who only attended meetings, not trainings, announced just prior to the 2008 election that he believed that Obama had connections to terrorists like those involved in the 9/11 attacks and that 'being a Muslim should be enough to disqualify someone for running for

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the highest office.' Another member added that he would be able to get a higher security

clearance than Obama because of Obama's supposed ties to the Middle East. When I

asked 23 year old Stewart, who worked in construction before joining the military, about

his opinion on Obama's administration during our interview, he haltingly responded,

"Clearly he had some kind of Muslim or Arabic background. So that was a concern. For

our nation's security."

Presumed support for Islam is not, of course, the only factor that plays into

members' distrust of the President[41]. Other factors include Obama's political affiliation

and legislative history. Obama is a Democrat, whom most members see as straying more

from an idealized interpretation of the Constitution than Republicans (despite members'

overall dislike of both major parties) because Democrats tend to be more in favor of

larger government, more government spending, and greater gun rights restrictions than do

Republicans. Further, Obama was a Senator from Chicago prior to entering the

Presidential race, Chicago has some of the toughest gun laws in the country, and Obama

has made clear his preferences for greater gun restrictions, which militia members see as

a threat to the Second Amendment and other rights.

I have found that accusations in popular discourse that conservative actors'

references to Obama as a socialist are really coded language for racism are overstated as

applies to militia members. Members genuinely fear socialism will undermine the

American Dream and citizens' sense of hard work and self-determination. References to

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[41] Notably, two interviewees reported voting for President Obama prior to joining the militia. Both said they regretted their decision to do so and said that they felt they had not done enough research into his politics before voting. Neither of these interviewees felt comfortable revealing this information to other militia members, and one re-confirmed the confidentiality of his interview content before telling me. Both members now consider themselves to be more politically conservative than they were before joining the militia, seemingly indicating that militia membership has increased their conservatism, though the interviewees would say membership has increased their political 'awareness.'

socialism are replete in militia writing from the 1990s during President Bill Clinton's

tenure. An article titled "Socialism in Amerika" by Joseph Gallup in a September 1996

issue of a militia newsletter reads, for example:

> "The recent FDA/Clinton venture that enables our government to regulate
> and essentially control the tobacco industry is one more example of a
> government that is actively seeking such a Socialist state. […] While
> many politicians are calling for a smaller government they appear to be
> moving us into a society where virtually every aspect of our lives as some
> kind of government controls or regulations. […] We must take advantage
> of the freedoms we currently possess and become involved in the political
> process and hold our so called representatives accountable for their
> actions. We must do it now while we still have the liberties which allow us
> to express our opinions, our influence without fear of retribution. Wake up
> American, for Socialism is waging its war against us and we are on our
> way to becoming its latest casualty."

Most members' references to Obama as a socialist thus cannot always be attributed to

only his race. His status as a Democrat alone is important for at least some members'

perception of him and his administration.

It is nonetheless true that Obama was also the most salient non-white in a power

during my fieldwork due to his status and frequent present on TV and in political

commentary. For members like Edmond, Obama's race may have alone caused doubt

regarding Obama's commitment to national identity and values as members see them.

However, Edmond's strong racism is by and large an exception in the militia. So-called

"birthers"—people who believe Obama is not even an American citizen and deny the

veracity of his Hawaiian birth certificate—are surprisingly rare within the militia, with

only half a dozen of all the members I have contact with embracing this perspective.

President Obama's assumed Muslim status is not the sole driving factor behind

militia members' concerns that he does not represent their idealized nationalistic interests.

Some members may believe his race or his political affiliations, rather than his religion,

are enough to cause doubt about his loyalty to the nation. However, what remains clear is that members' concerns about Obama's commitment to the nation and its security drive much of their resistance to him.

EQUALITY AND EXCLUSION VIA NATIONALISM

Militia members who exhibit symbolic racism toward African Americans or illegal immigrants have two common threads with members who feel culturally and physically threatened by Muslims. First, they all believe in certain stereotypes about the groups they do not fully accept. Symbolic racists may believe that all African Americans fail to live up to the Protestant Work Ethic or that illegal immigrants have no desire to work hard and live up to other cultural standards. Members who feel threatened by Muslims believe that they may support further terrorism and violence like that perpetrated on 9/11, and that they want to enact Sharia or other law that undermines the freedom and equality of some citizens.

The second commonality that militia members who exhibit symbolic racism and fear of Muslims have is a belief in the national mythos laid out in Chapter Three: a country founded on hard work and individual determination where the American Dream still holds true. Symbolic racists genuinely believe hard work is required to be a good American and that some groups just do not want to work as hard as others. Members who feel threatened by Muslims genuinely believe that Muslims want to subvert the country's values and that Muslims' supposed support of women's subjugation, for example, is antithetical to American values of freedom and equality.

All militia members I encountered invest strongly in this same super-citizen version of national identity, including those members from whom I witnessed no evidence of racism or anti-Muslim sentiment. Members like George (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) recognize there are racists in the militia. Militia members' shared investment in nationalism means, however, that non-racist members often do not identify or address racism and stereotyping from other members because they charitably interpret those members as merely referencing their shared national ideal instead of having a deeper, racist meaning. This was seen when Edmond was allowed to make increasingly racist statements until he reached a point where his claims could no longer be dismissed as only referencing an individual (rather than a whole racial group) or as referencing the Work Ethic ideal. When Edmond's statements finally became too overtly racist to be ignored, members became incredibly uncomfortable, nearly silently went to their respective tents, and did not address the situation the following day. Edmond was allowed to remain in the group and had increasing influence regarding the anti-Muslim protest activities in which several militia units at least considered participating.

Members' inability to identify racism extends to other areas of social life. When black teenager Trayvon Martin was gunned down in February 2012 by an apparently overly-zealous neighborhood watch captain, for example, many members could not understand how the shooter's and media commentators' references to "hoodies" and "thugs" could be informed by racial stereotypes. Instead, several members posted inflammatory news articles or pictures on Facebook that insinuated news coverage was racist against Martin's shooter.

It seems that militia members can cope with racists in the abstract. They do not like the idea of racism because it violates their understanding of Constitutionally-advocated equality. They reject explicit, biologically-rooted racism on its face because it is easily recognizable as racism. To militia members, racists are neo-Nazis with visible tattoos or other people whose racism is overt and undeniable.

What members do not always know how to recognize (or address) are more subtle forms of racism like coded references to culture and notions of deservingness. Indeed, it may be the case that militia members have a subtle incentive to *not* recognize this form of racism when they witness it. I do not think this is best explained from either a conflict theory or white male privilege perspective. Overt, continuing prejudice and discrimination seriously threaten the mythos of nationalism and Americanness in which members are heavily invested. Stories like Trayvon Martin's or Edmond's characterization of Detroit and its black citizens threaten members' worldview of a just, equal America, and they may look for any possible reason to reject an explanation of racism as a result. Members may even be less willing to recognize this kind of racism in other militia members than they would in a stranger because they want to believe that other members, even those new to the group, are as devoted to equality and inclusion as they are.

I want to emphasize that members' inability to identify racism is certainly not unique, but rather is emblematic of a problem in American society more generally regarding recognition of continuing racial problems. The widespread public skepticism of Trayvon Martin and his family exemplifies this problem. Increased education is needed regarding continuing racial disparities and institutional racism in particular. Normative

examples of Muslims acting in accordance with national values, rather than being terrorists, as they are often portrayed in fictional stories, are also needed to combat the racialized image of all Muslims as terrorists.

The case of the militia additionally suggests that we should expand the boundaries of what constitutes group threat to more explicitly encompass nationalism. The 9/11 attacks represented a new kind of threat: a group threat combined with a concrete act of mass violence that uniquely made Americans insecure about their safety and identity. Although discrimination is generally considered un-American, discrimination against people who supposedly want to harm the nation is not only legitimate and acceptable in this frame, it is seen as *necessary* to uphold the identity and security of the nation, as well as the safety of its "true" citizens. This protectionist framing has the possibility to resonate with other politically conservative groups who also profess a certain nationalistic vision, including those who may be excluding Muslim Americans solely on the basis of race or religion, rather than perceived national threats, or those who exclude based on a combination of factors (Miles 1993). That is, nationalistic framing of anti-Muslim sentiment may have the potential to mobilize a variety of groups with differing underlying motives for discrimination.

Militia members believe that individual liberty and national identity were threatened as a result of increased the security and monitoring of citizens that was implement in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, and some still feel uncertain about their own physical safety from future terror attacks. Militia members and other Americans' ongoing resistance to accepting their Muslim neighbors may, in other words, reflect a continuing insecurity, even a decade after the attacks. President George Bush and others spoke at the

time about how the attacks would not undermine American culture and identity, but they did apparently undermine the historicized sense of invincibility possessed by some American whites, including militia members.

A few militia members like George are relatively open and express no objection to Muslim Americans so long as they exhibit an acceptable level of loyalty to the militia's super-citizen understanding of the nation. Other members like Edmond believe all Muslims are "animals" and potential killers whom he prefers not to have in his country. The majority of members fall somewhere in between these extremes, but tend more toward hostility and suspicion than even partial acceptance. Returning to Miles' (1993) construction of nationalism and racism as simultaneously distinct and overlapping, George and Edmond most represent the pure nationalism-racism poles of the spectrum, respectively, while the majority of members in between likely have anti-Muslim sentiment because of a combination of nationalism and racism. My claim is not that nationalism and racism operate independently; as philosopher Étienne Balibar (1991) argued, the constructions of race and nation are both similar acts of exclusion and are not easily separated into distinct entities. Instead, my aim here was to more clearly delineate how nationalism functions as a tool for exclusion in contemporary U.S. society.

An integration of group-threat and racialization process helps explain why militia members did not shift from anti-Muslim rhetoric to anti-Muslim protest involvement and training activities until recently. Racialization of Muslims was undoubtedly an ongoing process that was revealed early in my fieldwork in various anti-Muslim comments, but group-threat only became salient later, before resulting in action in spring 2011. Late 2010 brought much media attention to the controversy surrounding an Islamic center

being built near Ground Zero (Jia et al. 2011), and Osama Bin Laden's death in spring

2011 returned media dialogue to the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror. The withdrawal

of U.S. troops from Iraq (begun in August 2010 and completed in December 2011) was

another contentious issue during this time. Further, media attention has also kept anti-

Sharia state legislation in the public during this time frame, including Michigan (Raftery

2012). These events, collectively, helped inflame militia members' relatively dormant

anti-Muslim passions and reignite perceived nationalistic group threat, with the Jones and

Lowes protests in 2011 providing timely outlets for these anxieties.

This framework combining group threat with racialization also fits with other

scholar's findings regarding nationalism and discrimination. Psychologists Kumar

Yogeeswaran and Nilanjana Dasgupt (2010) found that their white participants' feelings

of nationalistic sentiment, was intensified when judging other ethnic groups' ability to

work in national security jobs—in other words, when they understood national security to

be potentially threatened by another group. More specifically, Debra Oswald (2005)

found that the greater association her respondents had with national identity, the greater

their anti-Arab sentiment. Lile Jia et al. (2011) argue that nationalism played a strong role

in opposition to building a mosque at Ground Zero, while Sides and Gross (forthcoming)

found that people who viewed Muslims as violent and untrustworthy were more likely to

support the War on Terror. These authors' findings all confirm that a feeling of threat

against national identity may play a strong role in anti-Muslim sentiment and violence in

a variety of contexts. Qualitatively examining the militia's response to their Muslim

neighbors helps elucidate that threats to security and individual liberty specifically

activate anti-Muslim sentiment for at least some lower-middle class, white men.

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Other work (e.g., Naber 2008; Nagel 2003) suggests that white men like militia members are more likely than other groups to believe in a strong nationalistic vision. If this is true, we would expect to see other studies confirming that white men in particular exhibit anti-Muslim animus when their nationalistic vision is threatened. Indeed, psychologist Hakim Zainiddinov (2012) recently found that white men are significantly more likely than other groups to exhibit anti-Muslim sentiment. The case of the militia reminds us how the mythic story of America's founding is one of white men individualistically taming a rugged frontier and fending off Native Americans and various European interests to form a strong, unique nation. In this story's lineage, men are supposed to be competent protectors not only of their families, but also of their country. Militia men and others who internalize this story as a personal duty may more personally feel threats to the nation and its security than do women, or men of color who do not have this same heritage.

Finally, I want to return to Edmond and his influence on the militia. Over time, I observed how he had a slow, yet consistent influence on the group. His attitudes toward African Americans did not seem to transfer to other members, likely because anti-black racism is more recognizable to them, but I do wonder how involved the militia may have been in anti-Muslim activities if it were not for his presence. Edmond often wore t-shirts or baseball caps with "Infidel" written in both English and Arabic on them, and eventually helped procure similar clothing for other members. Edmond's son was fighting overseas during much of my fieldwork, and he often told stories about his son's experiences in the war. Many of these stories revolved around his son having trouble with local militants in a way that portrayed Muslim culture as primitive and uniformly violent.

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Edmond's stories consistently received sympathetic nods from members in earshot, particularly those with military experience. Further, the Terry Jones protest was the first protest in which militia members became involved despite the frequent discussion of instances where free speech or property rights were being threatened, such as when an elderly Michigan woman painted her porch in a color that her neighbors found objectionable and reported it as violating township procedures. However, members' talk on these issues never resulted in action, while they did become involved in the first Jones protest, at Edmond's urging.

It seems that Edmond's presence and frequent anti-Muslim discussions had an influence on the militia's involvement in protests and other anti-Militia events. As legal scholar Cass Sunstein (2009) notes, members of a group that have the same general belief—in this case, a version of Americanness—become more extreme in that belief over time. In other words, an individual's extreme ideology may go unrecognized, and over time, make the group more extreme on this dimension. As a result, the militia may face the possibility of becoming more racist over time if it does not adequately recognize and address individually racist members like Edmond.

In the next chapter of this manuscript, I analyze a different influence on militia activity: authoritative attempts to control the movement. Law enforcement is the primary source of authority that attempts to define the militia movement, though the media and researchers may also take this role. I observed law enforcement characterize militia members in four different ways in my fieldwork: as confidants, suspects, criminals, and terrorists. I argue that militia members interpret the legitimacy of these framings through

a lens of ideal Americanness, and respond to what they understand to be illegitimate

action through increased militia activity.

CHAPTER 5

"Don't Tread on Me":
Defiance and Compliance as Supporting American Values

> "You know, I had briefly considered being a law enforcement officer, but as a Libertarian, I'm not willing to trade my Constitutional beliefs for a paycheck. And I don't agree with a lot of the laws that they are sworn to enforce."
>
> - 30 year old Mark

Mark is one of the relatively few militia members who does not have military experience and who did not express a desire to serve his country in a more formal manner during our interview. He is more skeptical than some members about the role of law enforcement in our society, and worries that too many of them will "brainlessly" follow orders that violate the Constitution and infringe upon individual rights in the event of a major emergency or government crackdown on Second Amendment rights specifically. Mark pointed to examples like police illegally confiscating private firearms in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Kunzelman 2008), which, in Mark's view, left law abiding citizens unable to protect themselves and their families at the worst possible moment, during widespread societal break down.

Militia members are not overtly opposed to authority, nor are they anarchists; even Mark does not fear law enforcement, except in circumstances where he believes they are acting illegally. Members want a well-defined social structure headed by a strong (but limited and Constitutional) government. Militia members' support of authority is not

uniform, however, and is strongly shaped by their understanding of Americanism, as Mark's example shows. Militia members generally believe citizens should be able to rely on authority in times of need, but should otherwise be left alone to pursue their interests without undue surveillance, interference, or persecution. They also believe that government must be constantly monitored and critiqued to ensure that it operates within the boundaries of the Constitution and this idealized understanding of the role of authority.

To better understand the militia's relationship to authority, this chapter analyzes Michigan members' responses to several efforts to monitor or control the militia movement that occurred during my fieldwork. These interventions occurred in a context of increased national security that resulted from the terror attacks of 2001. Understanding how "super citizens" who ideally embody American principles interpret the legitimacy of authorities who represent the U.S. yields a window into how lower-middle class, white, American men interpret government constraints.

I analyze the militia's relationship to authority through theories of crime and social deviance. I argue that Lawrence Sherman's Defiance Theory (1993) is especially useful for understanding members' response to perceived government control because it explains why authorities' attempts to suppress militia activity may sometimes *increase* it. Members defy authority when they believe its agents to be acting illegitimately, but comply when they believe authority to be legitimate. Moving beyond Sherman's theory, I argue that militia members define legitimacy in nationalistic terms, and understand acts of both compliance and defiance as affirming their sense of national identity.

UNDERSTANDING THE MILITIA'S RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION:
FROM SOCIAL MOVEMENTS TO SOCIAL DEVIANCE

Social Movements Perspectives

Social movement scholars have mixed perspectives regarding the impact of government

intervention on the behavior of social movement groups. Some authors argue that state

repression leads to a suppressive effect on social movements. Jules Boykoff (2006), a

scholar in politics and government for example, argues that there are twelve distinct

techniques of suppression that state actors have successfully used to squelch a variety of

movements in the U.S. Other scholars suggest that repression may not halt movement

activity, but can shift movement actors' violent behavior into non-violent protest

(Lichbach 1987), thus making the movement much easier to manage or ignore.

Another set of social movement scholars argues the opposite perspective, that

repressive efforts uniformly increase mobilization or even radicalize moderate movement

actors into action. Sociologists Karl-Dieter Opp and Wolfgang Roehl (1990) suggest that

radicalization often happens after the State applies repressive efforts that are perceived as

"unjustified," but how movements determine whether State action is justified is not

always clear. Political scientists James Walsh and James Piazza (2010) aim for greater

specificity as they argue that a State will face greater terrorist action when it infringes on

"physical integrity rights," which are those related to preventing government torture or

political imprisonment. Sociologist Kiyoteru Tsutsui (2004) has argued that attention to

the global context is important for understanding activity of ethnic movements striving

for civil rights because they can use successes in other nations as models or political

leverage for human rights actions in their home States. It may also be the case that

movement actors choose to radicalize based not only on their direct experiences in their

own nations, but also on how compatriot movements or issues of importance to them are handled on the world stage. That is, although global issues can empower social movements to achieve positive human rights outcomes because of the models and leverage they provide (Tsutsui and Shin 2008), global issues may also incite backlash politics and radicalization if a movement wants to oppose or discourage similar actions in their own nation.

A third set of researchers suggests that the relationship between repression and movement behavior depends on a complex interplay of individual and societal level factors. Sociologist Rudd Koopmans (1997), for instance, differentiates between two different kinds of government repression in his study of the extreme right in Germany: situational and institutional. He finds that when law enforcement officers (LEOs) act to contain a protest through force, the protest activity tends to escalate, meaning that situational repression tends to enhance mobilization. In contrast, when institutional constraints such as bans of certain groups or activities, or legal actions including trials take place, movement action is suppressed. It might thus be argued that Koopmans' groups of interest perceived a certain legitimacy or at least authority in legislative action, but not in forcible police action.

How determinations of "legitimacy" or "authority" happen within a movement are left relatively unanswered in the social movements literature. Particularly given the contradictory findings in that literature, I suggest it is useful to turn to criminological theories of behavior. These theories typically address social deviance of individuals as they defy authority but can offer insights into group-level processes as well.

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Theories of Crime and Deviance

Militia participation is a non-normative form of political activity in the U.S. in the sense that it is rare and involves unusual, embodied enactment of belief, and people who are not involved in militias might be prone to reject it as a legitimate form political expression. Militia participation may thus be considered a socially deviant behavior or expression of threatened ideals. It is understandable in a post-9/11 State with increased security that law enforcement would at least want to monitor militia activity in light of other acts of violence allegedly committed by militia members in the past (e.g., Williams 2011). Theories drawn from the criminology literature help explain why efforts to monitor and control militia members may nonetheless backfire in some circumstances.

Control Theory

Traditional criminological Social Control Theories argue that efforts to control criminal or deviant behavior through threats of punishment (e.g., incarceration or other sanctions) should typically reduce the likelihood of the behavior (Matza 1969; Reckless 1973). This would seem to be the principle under which law enforcement agencies have generally interacted with militia units and other similar groups. The 1992 conflict at Ruby Ridge, Idaho and the stand-off a year later in Waco, Texas, for example, clearly show law enforcement actors who took an aggressive, controlling, and punitive stance over an initially small conflict that then ballooned into national headlines and multiple civilian deaths. More recent events where various militia units have been infiltrated and observed by undercover officers (e.g., Karoub and Householder 2010) show a slightly different approach, but nonetheless reflect a government agency assessing a group to determine

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what level of control might be necessary or appropriate to constrain potentially deviant

behavior[42].

Labeling Theory

In contrast to the social control approach, traditional Labeling Theories suggest that once

a person is labeled as a social deviant by society or one of its agents, that person may

internalize that deviant identity and thus participate in more, or amplified, deviant

behaviors (Lemert 1951; Paternoster and Iovanni 1989). Labeling theory would suggest

that the more law enforcement agents act in a controlling way toward militia members—

through increased firearms legislation, perhaps—the more deviant behaviors we would

expect from members. That is, the more law enforcement treats militia members like

deviants or criminals, the more likely militia members may be to participate in future

problematic activities. This is not to say that law enforcement should not take action if

they suspect militia members of criminal activity. Rather, the labeling scenario becomes

problematic in instances where militia members are acting lawfully but nonetheless

perceive law enforcement agents as treating them criminally.

Situations where militia members responded negatively to such perceived labeling

were surprisingly common in the 1990s, and often occurred during what should have

been routine traffic stops. On these occasions, reactionary individuals within the militia

movement understood the traffic stop as a labeling act because they believed they were in

accordance with the law, or denied the authority of the law to set regulations regarding

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[42] It is worth noting that this law enforcement tactic is certainly not limited to the militia movement or even groups on the political right. The FBI is known to have infiltrated various segments of the Civil Rights Movement through the program known as COINTELPRO (Earl 2003), and is suspected to have similarly investigated environmental groups and Occupy Wall Street (Associated Press 2011; CBS News 2009b).

license plates or safety belt usage, for example. Reactionary individuals interpreted the

interaction with law enforcement as confrontational, and, in some cases, resisted arrest,

assaulted the officer, or fled the scene and led officers to caches of illegal weapons or

explosives that might have been used in a dangerous standoff scenario (Pitcavage 1997).

Defiance Theory

Criminologist Lawrence Sherman's (1993) Defiance Theory bridges this gap between the

approaches of control and labeling theories and provides an explanation of both

compliance with and rebellion against authority. Sherman suggested that defiance occurs

following four necessary conditions:

1. The offender defines a criminal sanction as unfair under one of two independently sufficient conditions:

    a. The sanctioning agent behaves with disrespect for the offender, or for the group to which the offender belongs, regardless of how fair the sanction is on substantive grounds.

    b. The sanction is substantively arbitrary, discriminatory, excessive, undeserved, or otherwise objectively unjust.

2. The offender is poorly bonded to or alienated from the sanctioning agent or the community the agent represents.

3. The offender defines the sanction as stigmatizing and rejecting a person, not a lawbreaking act.

4. The offender denies or refuses to acknowledge the shame the sanction has actually caused him to suffer (*ibid*.: 460-461).

In other words, when an individual who does not feel integrated into a society believes they have been unfairly sanctioned by that society, they understand the sanction as a rejection of them as a person, rather than a rejection of some particular act they committed. Instead of experiencing shame and changing their subsequent

Figure 25. A "Don't Tread on Me" Gadsden flag blows in the wind at a November 2009 training as militia members prepare for their next activity. Photo by Amy Cooter.

behavior to match societal standards, the person denies they have experienced shame as a result of sanctioning and then acts in defiance of the societal standard instead.

Sherman correctly observes that the idea of defiance is embedded in the American mythos. The American Revolution is the story of colonists defying a burdensome monarch. The "Don't Tread on Me" Gadsden flag was a Revolutionary-era symbol of defiance and has experienced renewed interest in recent years for the same purpose, including among militia members.

Similar sentiments are still seen in high school sports teams (particularly in the South) that still use "rebel" mascots and Confederate flags to represent individuality and rebellion, despite facing extensive criticism for referencing systems of racial oppression.

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The ideas are reminiscent of the "culture of honor" (Nisbett and Cohen 1996) that dictates how a certain segment of American men understand their masculinity, national identity, and personal integrity to be interrelated. More broadly, ideas of individualism and defying authority are synonymous with constructions of Americans as entrepreneurs and self-sustaining world-leaders, however mythological those constructions may be.

THE MILITIA AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Since the 9/11 terror attacks, law enforcement in the United States has changed. Police are more militarized, with local police agencies having increasingly more (and more deadly) equipment previously reserved for military or rare SWAT units (Kraska and Kappeler 1997; Moomaw 2010). At the national level, the FBI tripled the number of intelligence analysts (FBI 2011), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was formed to assist different intelligence agencies in sharing information, and these agencies have vastly increased the monitoring of various private communications (Brasch 2005). The Patriot Act was similarly implemented following the attacks with the overt goal of expanding law enforcement power in the War on Terror. Both DHS and the Patriot Act have faced criticism in the intervening years for various encroachments on individual citizens' liberties because the Act has been used to commit widespread wiretapping of citizens' telephone conversations, to monitor individuals' internet activity, and even to request library patrons' records (Graves 2010; Lichtblau 2008; Ryan 2008).

Despite ongoing public conversations about problems with the Act, there is evidence that Americans' tolerance of government intrusion in their personal lives in the name of national security has increased. Research from the Pew Center (2011), for

example, indicates that 42% of Americans believed the Patriot Act was "necessary" for security in 2011, which is an increase from 33% in 2004. The same study revealed that slightly fewer Americans saw the Act as a threat to civil liberties in 2011 than in 2004 (34% vs. 39%).

Militia members understand national security and individual liberty to be intimately connected, and perhaps believe this more strongly than most Americans. Without unfailing protection of individual liberty, they believe the national character of the U.S. would be changed such that concerns about physical security would be pointless. When authoritative agents push the boundaries of individual liberty with attempts to monitor or control the militia movement, militia members' response is shaped by the perceived legitimacy of those actions. They evaluate legitimacy by the degree to which authoritative actions conform to their vision of Americanism.

During my fieldwork, I observed that LEOs variously treated militia members (and others) in four distinct ways: as confidants, suspects, criminals, and terrorists, each of which I analyze below. Each subsequent category holds a greater degree of suspicion, hostility, criminality, and perceived threat than the previous category. Confidants are people with whom information may be shared; suspects are people who cannot be trusted, but who have not yet been tied to a crime; criminals are people who have committed an illegal and socially problematic act; terrorists are a specific and more dangerous kind of criminal.

Treating Militia Members Like Confidants

Militia members have a hyper-awareness of LEOs' interest in their activities. After some casual chatting at the very first militia meeting I attended in March 2008, 47 year old Adam told me, 'I don't care that the FBI watches us. I don't.' I had not asked him a question about law enforcement or any related topic, and took his statement as revealing an assumption that I might be an undercover officer, in which case he wanted to make it clear to me that he was unperturbed by my presence. Vincent, a government employee who was listening in, agreed and said that several months back he had trouble getting one of his children, Clay, to regularly do his homework. He jokingly posted a reference to "Agent Clay: Operation Homework " on the front page of www.michiganmilitia.com as he dealt with this parenting issue. Vincent said it still made him laugh to fantasize about LEOs reading that line and trying to discern whether the message meant something secret or sinister.

SMVM leaders occasionally left other messages to LEOs through the website, such as, "Nothing down here, Jim!"—an FBI agent with whom some leaders frequently spoke—to demonstrate they knew they were being monitored. Vincent said that Jim had indicated he appreciated how much information SMVM listed on the website and wished all groups were so easy to monitor. Vincent believed that Jim was not opposed to the militia, but was just trying to do his job. In return, Vincent said that Jim notified different militia units about concerns the FBI had that might be of interest to them. Jim had reportedly told Vincent just recently that the FBI expected to 'See a large rise in racist groups attempting to infiltrate groups like the militia.'

Regardless of Jim's real feelings for the militia, or motives for communicating with leaders, what is important is how militia members perceived these interactions. Members clearly saw themselves as cooperating with law enforcement and were understanding of, if bemused by, LEOs' desire to monitor their activities. They joked about being watched even while appreciating information that Jim gave them. They believed themselves to be partners, to some extent, with law enforcement efforts to maintain civilian safety.

Notably, one of the few publicly available articles on militias that was written by law enforcement officers, rather than academic researchers, encourages officers to engage in open and respectful conversations with militias who are not overtly criminal or dangerous. FBI agents James Duffy and Alan Brantley somewhat irritably ask,

> "How can law enforcement agencies determine which groups represent more of a threat than others? How can agency commanders assess the specific beliefs and philosophies of the groups they may encounter in their own jurisdictions? In many cases, all they need to do is ask" (1997:2).

Duffy and Brantley suggest that officers engage in respectful, mutually agreed upon, in-person, "proactive contacts" with militias so that both militia members and LEOs can discuss issues of concern. They suggest this allows LEOs to have a more accurate representation of militia members who have not been agitated by hostile interaction and to set up relationships for the future exchange of information should a problem arise.

This tactic worked with Michigan militia members who cooperated with LEOs in other circumstances after feeling like Jim and other officers had openly communicated with them. One member claims he drove on his own time to the Detroit FBI field office to go through pictures of members in various units around the state so agents might know which individuals were most likely to be 'trouble;' he proudly pulled out an FBI agent's

business card and showed it to me during my interview with him. Other members routinely contacted law enforcement officials in their areas if new visitors at meetings raised suspicions. I was present at one meeting where leaders had received a 12 page letter from an obviously disturbed individual who requested that the militia help defend her from Tom Cruise and other Hollywood figures that she believed were somehow planning to harm her. I witnessed leaders use Google to find the sheriff's station nearest the letter sender's return address and prepare an envelope to send the sheriff a copy of the letter, 'Just so he knows what's going on in his neighborhood.'

This relatively positive relationship with LEOs also carried over to in-person interactions, particularly when undercover officers attended public meetings. When the undercover officers were particularly poor at being undercover, leaders openly said things like:

> 'And to law enforcement present tonight, welcome! Thank you for your service. We're glad to have you. Come talk to us after the meeting, we have some materials 'specially for you.'

Statements like this were not paranoia, nor mere speculation. When it was eventually revealed that an FBI informant who was in part responsible for initiating the arrests of some militia members in another unit first did undercover work within SMVM, leaders identified him on their forum more than a year before his name was released to the public[43].

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[43] After some time, I too became able to identify likely undercover officers at militia events. They were usually two middle-aged, white men whom no one remembered seeing previously and who did not return to future events. In contrast to members' work clothes or casual tee-shirts, they wore plain, dark tee-shirts, khakis or dark slacks, waist-length jackets even when the weather was not cool enough to merit one (presumably to cover a sidearm tucked at the small of their back, or carried in an over-the shoulder holster), and radios exposed at their belts. They typically arrived 20 minutes after the function's published start time and thereby avoided small-talk interactions with members. They never ordered any food or drink if the meeting was held at a restaurant and never asked questions, while almost all other first-time attendees did

Despite the welcoming message leaders gave them, I never saw a suspected

undercover officer stay to speak with militia members after the meetings. Instead, they

routinely left quite early, well before the end of the meeting, as if to avoid one-on-one

interactions. Militia leaders were never surprised by this, but sometimes expressed

disappointment at not having the opportunity to try convincing the officers of the

common goals about protecting the community and nation they believed they shared with

law enforcement. In these specific circumstances, members were not coopting or

replacing law enforcement authority as sociologist Jennifer Carlson (2012) argued her

gun owning male participants were, but were instead attempting to compliment and

strengthen officers' authority.

Militia members actively sought out opportunities to interact and share

information with LEOs when they were operating under what they perceived to be a

mutually cooperative framework. Militia members understood law enforcement

interactions to be legitimate in these scenarios in that LEOs treated militia members

respectfully and as sources of information, rather than as a source of suspicion. In this

context, militia members had little against which to rebel. They neither felt they were

being controlled, nor felt they were being labeled by the government, and thus continued

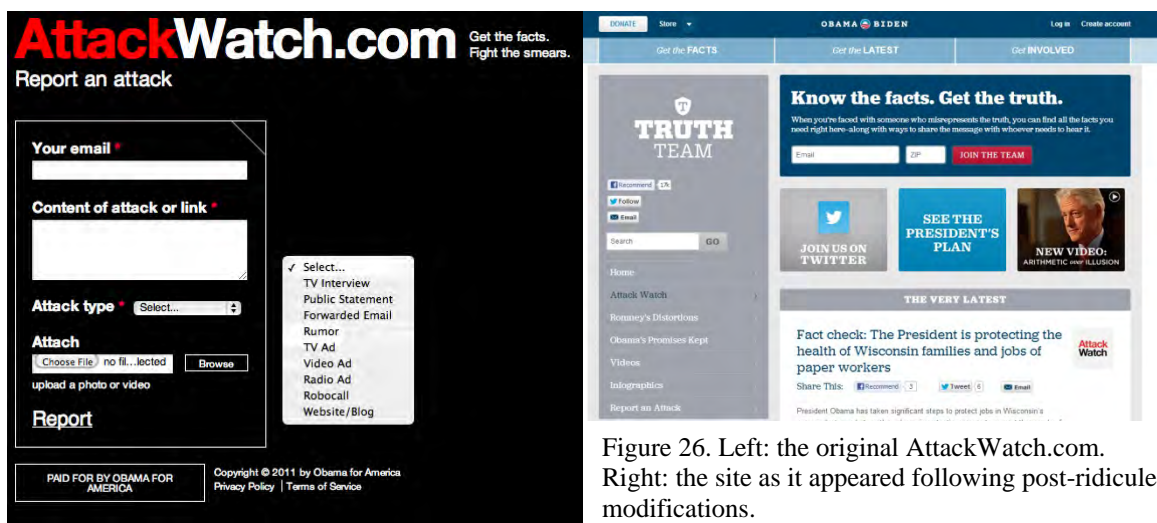to act cooperatively.

Treating Members Like Suspects

A slightly greater degree of suspicion from law enforcement was evident in two internet-

related events. Neither event was overtly directed at militia members, but members

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both. They sat where they could observe the entire room, and made frequent eye contact with each other, but rarely with anyone else.

believed *all* American citizens were being treated like suspects who must be watched for possible criminal action in both incidents. They responded to both incidents as "super citizens" who were concerned about everyone's right to free speech, and understood themselves to be acting on behalf of people who were perhaps less informed about possible government encroachment than they are.

First, in the fall of 2011, President Obama's administration started a website called AttackWatch.com, where people could "report" attacks or "smears" about Obama and his administration. The website was intended to be a source of information for the administration, so they could engage in fact checking and better fight public misinformation regarding various proposed policies (see Figure 26). However, the site was widely ridiculed by conservative commentators. The campaign soon changed the image of the site to be less mysterious, and changed its content to be a place where people could sign up to receive more information about the administration.

The second event occurred in early 2012, when DHS released a list of more than two hundred words whose usage they monitored on the internet. If used, especially in combination, DHS might monitor the writer, or even place them on a watch list

Figure 26. Left: the original AttackWatch.com. Right: the site as it appeared following post-ridicule modifications.

(Department of Homeland Security 2011). The words covered several categories and included things ranging from "militia," "nationalist," and "terrorism," to "cloud," "ice," and "vaccine."

Militia members had a strong negative response to both the Attack Watch website and the list of keywords. Some members described the website a "*Stazi*-style snitch link," and understood it as a "socialist" attempt to control the populous as well as free speech. Their acts of speaking out against the site and Obama's perceived intent behind it were in direct contrast to what they believed the site was intended to accomplish. Members similarly understood the broad list of DHS keywords to be an ineffective attempt to control free speech, and many of them immediately wrote a dozen or more words from the list on their Facebook pages or unit websites. "Militia" was, of course, always their first entry. Members believed they and other Americans were being treated like people who might engage in criminal behavior if only given the opportunity, and who must accordingly be closely monitored.

Militia members engaged in *more* of the behavior that government officials were monitoring and apparently trying to discourage, rather than less. If the government really was trying to control or constrain this type of behavior, the effort failed, as would Control Theory's applicability to this scenario. Militia members were not directly labeled or targeted by these government actions, so Labeling Theory similarly fails to explain their behavior. Defiance Theory, however, allows us to understand how members directly defy perceived efforts to control free speech by engaging in the very behavior they believed the government was trying to control. In accordance with their understanding of American identity, members rejected government behavior as illegitimate in these

scenarios because they believed it to be an infringement on the fundamental right of free speech. Members understood themselves to be acting in the spirit of the Founding Fathers and following Thomas Jefferson's famous instruction, "If a law is unjust, a man is not only right to disobey it, he is obligated to do so."

Treating Militia Members Like Criminals

The next framework for LEOs' interactions with militias was the most common one during my fieldwork. Instead of people who might become criminals, militia members were sometimes treated as though they had already broken a law or participated in dangerous behavior. I first observed militia members being treated like criminals as the 2008 Presidential Election approached. Much was at stake during this election for political conservatives. Republican George Bush was ending his second term in office, and there was general disapproval among the American public regarding his performance on many issues, especially the war in the Middle East. President Bush's final approval rating was 22%, according to a CBS News poll (2009a). This was the lowest ever for a President, and many people seemed to expect a Democrat with very different policy views to be elected as a result of this general dissatisfaction.

This expectation made political conservatives rather anxious, and militia members were no exception. At the first meeting I attended in March 2008, SMVM discussed plans for a "Post-Election Public Readiness Meeting" for November 5th, the day following the Presidential Election. This was to be a special meeting, the first of its kind, according to leaders. It was held instead of their usual monthly meeting, though both types of meeting are open to the public. The purpose, according to 41 year old Lloyd, was to 'Talk about

things that threaten your right to bear arms, and as a result of that, your right to live and

exist as a free American.'

In mid-October 2008, leaders began to heavily advertise the event to other militia

units, to friends and family, and to interested people visiting their websites. One leader

managed to post an advertisement in some low-circulation, local newspapers. Leaders

reserved a meeting hall in a more central location than their usual space, and made sure

they had enough room to accommodate up to 100 people. Their main flier read:

> "On November 4th a decision will be made on the future of this nation.
> Are we still a Republic? A socialist welfare State? Or a militarized police
> State? How stands the Republic? How stands this State? What are you
> prepared for on November 5th?"

Representatives from several different law enforcement agencies visited militia

members around the state, nearly simultaneously, a few days before the election. Thirty-

six year old Edward, a member from the western part of the state claimed that officers

from three different agencies collectively pulled him over on the interstate to have a

conversation with him. He understood this interaction as follows.

> "Yeah, they wanted to see if we were planning anything and if we were
> pissed off if Obama got elected and stuff. You know, it's not that.
> Obviously, I think a *lot* of people are pissed off, but I don't think it's like,
> you know, those yahoos down South plannin' on killin' Obama. Yeah. Ok.
> That's gonna happen [rolls eyes]. I think people are still in fear that that's
> what we wanna do, [that] we're anti-government, like we wanna
> assassinate people."

Edward is referring to the highly publicized arrest, just days prior to the 2008 election, of

two young men with neo-Nazi affiliations who apparently made a plan to assassinate

Barack Obama and kill other African Americans (Associated Press 2008). Law

enforcement was undoubtedly on high alert after this and other similar threats, and

wanted to ensure there were no similar plans from Michigan militia members. They also

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perhaps wanted to intimidate any members who were particularly upset by Obama's expected election victory into either revealing their feelings or suppressing any violent urges, in accordance with control theory's predictions.

Some members reported having been visited by LEOs at work. Vincent, for example, joked that he had a 'Nice, 45 minute, paid break' as FBI agents took a hostile tone with him. Agents reportedly said, 'We know you're involved in the militia,' to which Vincent said he laughed and replied, 'You'd better know that! I'm all over the [michiganmilitia.com] website, and I have a militia sign hung up in the elevator [that we just rode in]!' Vincent thus reports having used humor to downplay the potential aggressiveness in the interaction and try to maintain power in the conversation.

Thirty-nine year old Cliff similarly tried to maintain control of the interaction that a different law enforcement agency initiated with him. They called him, saying they had been unable to find him at his home. Cliff said he replied, 'That's the way I like it!' before giving the caller a specific time and place outside his home they could meet if they were still interested in speaking with him. In other words, Cliff did not appreciate LEOs showing up at his home unannounced and was glad their efforts to find him had been temporarily frustrated. Rather than mutually establishing an alternate meet-up location, Cliff gave a single time and place as the only option for an in-person conversation, which was again intended to maintain a degree of control in the interaction.

Several days later at the post-election meeting, one of the members who believed he had a cooperative relationship with the FBI before these interactions was still visibly irritated and told me that he had called his primary FBI contact and angrily asked why she was 'Stirring up a hornet's nest.' He and other members were clearly offended that

agents did not trust them as much as they had previously believed when LEOs were treating them like confidants. Despite past openness and cooperation with law enforcement, it is clear that these members felt that law enforcement had mishandled pre-election concerns and trespassed on personal boundaries that were important to militia members. They did not appreciate being treated like criminals, rather than as responsible citizens who would willingly cooperate with law enforcement. They responded with hostility as a result of this perceived betrayal.

Militia members retained this resentment for the next Presidential Election in 2012[44]. Members again planned a large, public, post-election meeting and widely advertised it. Members did not experience direct efforts at government intervention during this election cycle, but some were very clearly still upset regarding LEOs' interactions with them prior to the 2008 election. Elias, the member who served as the primary organizer of the event, told me he was still 'Annoyed at how [law enforcement] handled the last election,' as he sarcastically said that LEOs, 'Had done so well to discover information we publicly posted all over the internet.'

In 2012, Elias christened the post-election meeting "MilitiApocalypse" and designed a flyer with that read, "311 MiLiTiApocalypse: The Day America Will Change Forever". Smaller text notes that "311" refers to November 7, 2012, which is the day of the meeting, as well as the 311th day of the year. Instead of listing the meeting location on the flyer or website as is typical, the flyer includes instructions to contact the group or watch the website for more details.

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[44] Several units similarly hosed a 2010 midterm election meeting, but this one had fewer first-time attendees, and topics of conversation revolved around militia training and activities, rather than political themes as was the case with both Presidential Election meetings.

Figure 27. "MiLiTiApocalypse" flyer for the 2012 post-election meeting. From michiganmilitia.com.

Elias gleefully noted that the yellow-orange picture he chose for the background

was ambiguous,

> 'Is it a sunrise? Is it a sunset? Is it an atomic bomb going off? Who knows?
> And what about "311?" It sounds like it should mean something, right?
> Like 911 or 411?'

Elias was sure that at least one FBI agent would be assigned the task of deciphering the

message to discern the meeting's "real" purpose, and said he wished he could know how

long it would take them to realize what the "311" meant, despite being printed on the

page. Other SMVM leaders were at first resistant to the plan of using such a potentially

scary-looking flyer, but Elias' articulation of his annoyance with LEOs' previous

interactions with the group quickly won them over. In this case, the flyer and its

intentionally mysterious message were a blatant attempt to waste LEOs' time and

resources because of the perceived disrespect they had given members in the days prior to the previous Presidential Election.

Members of another group took a somewhat more direct approach to defying law enforcement categorizations of militia members as criminals. In June 2012, LEOs detained and questioned members of a Michigan militia unit that had just experienced renewed interest after a period of relative inactivity. The group's leader, who goes by the codename Blackjack, was detained as he was getting off a flight, while other members were simultaneously approached at home or at work. Blackjack wrote an account of his interaction with law enforcement that was widely posted to militia forums and a few blogs of sympathetic groups around the country.

Blackjack said the FBI "Wanted to know if I wanted to talk about my group." The forced nature of the conversation belied this casual inquiry, as the interaction took place in a secluded area of the airport with several armed officers. According to his account, Blackjack spoke briefly with those officials and merely attested to his commitment to the militia, but later expressed frustration with how LEOs had approached the situation:

> "All that said, for those federals reading this, should you decide to arrest us or 'NDAA[45]' us, for the charge of loving our Constitution and country, have the decency to leave the neighborhoods we live in alone. Leave our wives, children and other family members alone. Approach us calmly, reasonably, and without dynamic raid teams. They are unnecessary. Doing so might just help you start to rebuild the older, more honorable title of 'peace officer' and heal the scars the last 40 years of 'law enforcement' have wrought among us ('us' meaning the citizenry). All dynamic raids do is provide a testosterone 'buzz' for those 'tactical types' [in law enforcement] that see all of us, and I mean every single one of us, as 'the enemy.'"

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[45] This refers to the National Defense Authorization Act which allows for individuals to be indefinitely detained without being charged with a crime or put on trial.

Other militia members similarly expressed frustration that LEOs had again simultaneously detained members of Blackjack's group in a way that felt hostile, that communicated suspicion of the group, and that felt almost like a military operation. They did not object to LEOs' desire to speak with this group's members, merely the manner in which they had approached members as suspects rather than law abiding citizens. The forced nature of this interaction made Blackjack and others believe that law enforcement was likely to be hostile to them in the future, to the extent of arresting them merely for their militia participation.

In each of the above three scenarios where LEOs treated militia members like criminals, members responded defiantly. The government's efforts to exert authority and control on the movement failed as members engaged in more militia activity. Members certainly believed they had been labeled "criminal," in accordance with Labeling Theory, but rejected the label, rather than internalizing it, because of the legality of their behavior and the perceived illegitimacy of law enforcement actions.

In accordance with Defiance Theory, members instead acted in ways that reinforced their militia identities. Members confronted by LEOs prior to the 2008 election used sarcastic humor and constrained meeting opportunities to maintain control in interactions with law enforcement, while insisting on the value of their militia participation. Members who were still frustrated about their treatment during that election planned a meeting to look intentionally dangerous and scary, with the overt goal of creating a hassle and spitefully wasting law enforcement resources—a clear enactment of the "Don't Tread on Me" version of patriotic defiance. Blackjack took a more direct approach to communicating his displeasure with being treated like a criminal, and tried to

educate LEOs on how to better interact with militia units in the future. Blackjack's taking the role of instructor defies the position of authority that law enforcement established in their interaction with him, while reinforcing the validity of his militia participation.

Treating Militia Members (and Veterans) Like Terrorists

The most hostile framework LEOs applied to militia members during my time in the field was that of militias as terrorists. This framework is more hostile than assuming militia members are mere criminals because it implies that they are involved in especially violent and dangerous behavior intended to harm the country and its citizens, rather than vaguely criminal activity that may or may not be targeting private individuals instead of government agents or institutions. Predictably (through the lens of Defiance Theory), militia members responded very poorly to this categorization.

The "terrorist" categorization was made evident in a ten-page report on "rightwing extremism" from DHS in April 2009. The report's introduction says it is intended for law enforcement, "So they may effectively deter, prevent, preempt, or respond to terrorist attacks" (Department of Homeland Security 2009:2), and is marked "For official use only." It was leaked to the media, however, and soon found its way across the internet. The report compared the contemporary socio-political climate to that of the 1990s, and suggested that increases in so-called extremist activity during both time frames could be attributed to an economic decline alongside increasing global competition and proposed firearms legislation.

Although the report differentiated between groups that are primarily "hate-oriented" like white supremacist groups and those that are primarily "anti-government

groups" in its early pages, there is slippage throughout the document between these categories. In most places, militias seem to be categorized as anti-government groups, but some passages specifically reference only "violent," "extreme," or "radical" militia groups, while other passages seem to refer to all militia groups without differentiating among them.

There was one primary predictive claim in the report that militias understood to apply to them:

> "The possible passage of new restrictions on firearms and the return of military veterans facing significant challenges reintegrating into their communities could lead to the potential emergence of terrorist groups or lone wolf extremists capable of carrying out violent attacks. [… Returning veterans] possess combat skills and experience that are attractive to rightwing extremists. [DHS] is concerned that rightwing extremists will attempt to recruit and radicalize returning veterans in order to boost their violent capabilities" (*ibid*.:2, 3-4).

The implications of this claim are rather vague: returning veterans may join rightwing groups, some of which have the potential to be violent. Several Republican Congresspersons called for an official withdrawal of the report, or even for Homeland Security secretary Janet Napolitano's resignation or dismissal (Fox News 2009). They noted that a DHS report on leftwing extremism released three months prior included information on specific groups and specific threats, while the rightwing acknowledged that DHS, "Has no specific information that domestic rightwing terrorists are currently planning acts of violence" (DHS 2003:3)

This claims about veterans in the report deeply offended many militia members and returning veterans alike. Pete Hegseth, chairman of the organization called Vets for Freedom, for example, was widely quoted as saying:

"If anything, veterans have an allegiance to this country greater than the average citizen. Veterans have learned where their allegiances lie and are less prone to extremism. Something's wrong with the editing process, or [DHS officials] just don't understand veterans. The report demonstrates a true lack of understanding of who veterans are" (Fox News 2009).

Militia members, many of whom have military experience themselves, and all of whom honor combat veterans as national heroes, described the report as calling veterans 'suspected terrorists.' Militia members prioritize serving their country, uphold a traditional view of national identity that lauds service and honor, and see themselves as super citizens who work more diligently than most Americans to uphold the country's values and security. Members found it incredibly offensive to be labeled as the very problem they see themselves as fighting, and respond accordingly. As Emmet, a recent returning veteran in his twenties who joined the militia after the report's release, told me at his second training in June 2009,

'I mean, here I am, I *honorably* served my country. I risked my life in the sand over there! I come back home and those fuckers call *me* a terrorist? I was *fighting* terrorism. It was "The War on Terror!" You bet I'm pissed!'

Emmet and other veterans returning from the War on Terror, as well as veterans from earlier skirmishes, sought out the Michigan militia[46] after feeling betrayed by the DHS report. They most often took very active roles and used their military knowledge to dramatically expand the number of available activities during trainings. Trainings were no longer dominated by target practice alone; members engaged much more in varied activities like navigating advanced compass courses across different terrains, self-defense training, and technical lessons on different firearms.

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[46] Militias in other states with whom I and Michigan leaders had contacts reported their own increases in returning veteran attendance following the report's release.

The presence of more veterans also meant that militia membership and attendance experienced substantial growth in the immediate aftermath of the DHS report. Figure 28 shows non-media adult attendance at SMVM events (both meetings and trainings) I attended from March 2008 to March 2010[47]. Units around the state experienced a very similar pattern; SMVM's attendance is generally larger and more consistent than other units', and thus is the best to explore graphically. The vertical lines on the graph (at March 2009 and March 2010) separate the 12 month periods surrounding the DHS report's release.

The first SMVM event following the report in April 2009 shows an immediate, large jump in attendance relative to all other events in the preceding 12 months. Attendance at events in the 12 months following the report was elevated relative to the preceding time frame, with all events having more attendance than all but three (21%) of the preceding year's events[48]. The November 2009 training had an especially high attendance because this was the event immediately following the death of the WWII veteran on whose property many militia units trained; more units than usual attended to participate in his memorial service.

Observing this increase in participation during 2009, Vincent, who has been an active member since the militia's inception in the early 90s remarked, "Man, this is what

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[47] I do not include myself in the attendance counts. The graph does not include attendance at special election meetings SMVM hosted in November 2008 and November 2010 on this graph. While these two meetings were similar to each other, they are both anomalous relative to all other SMVM gatherings during my fieldwork. Attendance at both these events was abnormally large because of the greater publicity SMVM leaders raised for this events, and because several other militia units participated in each event to express their solidarity. Neither election meeting resulted in a single new member for SMVM or other units in attendance.

[48] It is also worth noting that no substantial bump in attendance happened following either the November 2008 Presidential Election, or the January 2009 inauguration of Barack Obama.

Figure 28. SMVM Attendance Before and After DHS Report
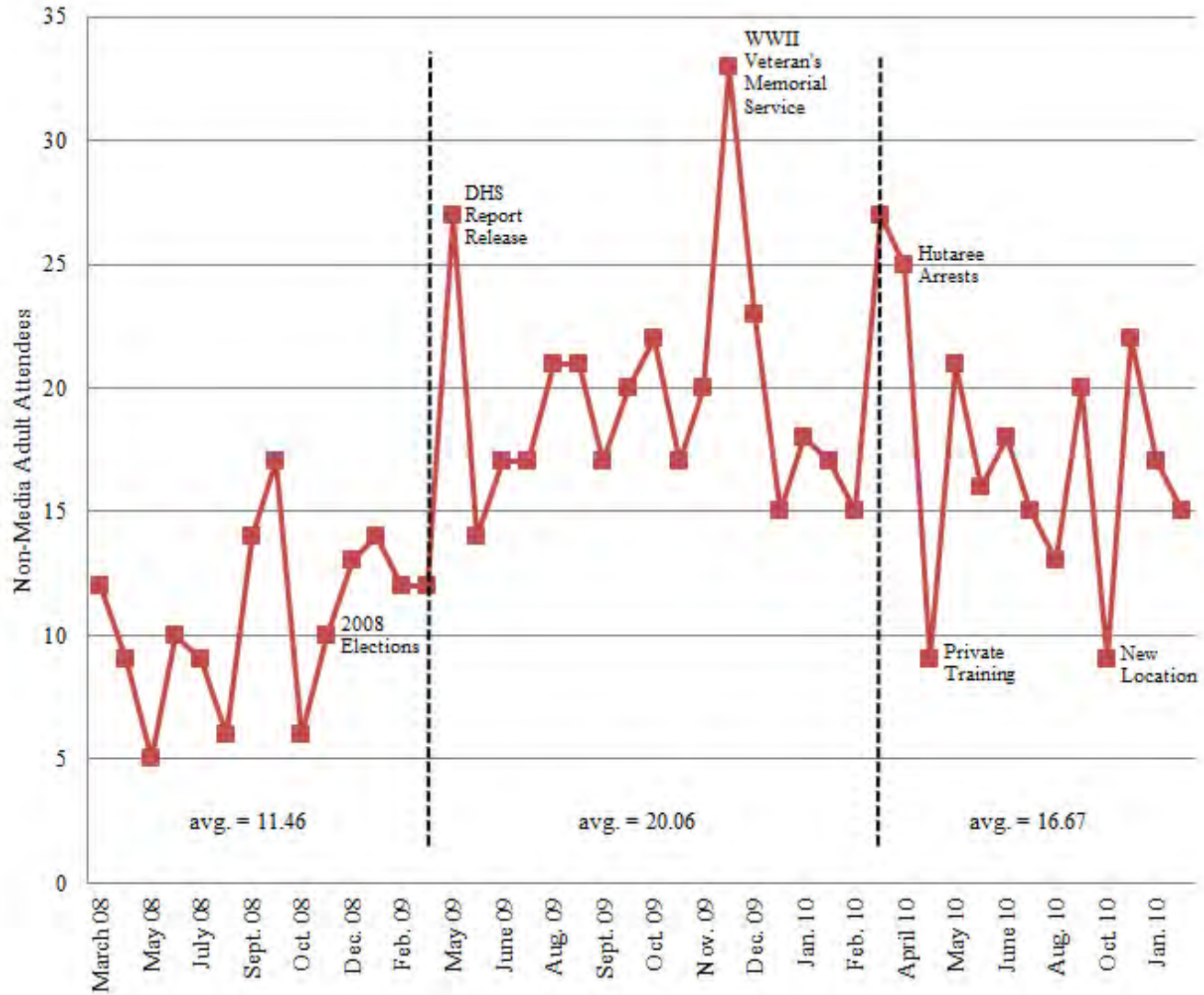
the militia should have looked like 15 years ago!" Vincent's remark is particularly

compelling since militia membership in the 1990s is estimated to have been between

10,000 and 20,000 people in Michigan alone (Churchill 2009). Vincent has witnessed the

fluctuations in militia attendance since 1994, and for him to be impressed by this surge is

striking. Vincent believed that interest and participation in the militia finally matched his

vision of what it should have been at its inception. He later joked on the forum that

another member should change the name of one of their information brochures to, "How

to Recruit National Guardsmen," thus referring to the notion that militia participation had

increased as a direct result of the DHS report. He continued:

> "Oh, wait Jan Napolitano has already done that for us....The tighter they
> [government officials] squeeze, the more patriots will slip through their
> fingers."

In Vincent's view, the more the government treats veterans and other people who are

loyal to an originalist understanding of the nation like terrorists, the more likely those

people are to seek out groups like the militia with the intention of undermining the

government's efforts. Attendance increases after the DHS report indicate that there is at

least some truth to this claim.

The authors of the 2009 DHS report explicitly referred to a control theory

approach when explaining the decrease in militia prevalence in the late 1990s.

> "Following the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in
> Oklahoma City, the militia movement declined in total membership and in
> the number of organized groups because many members distanced
> themselves from the movement *as a result of the intense scrutiny militias
> received after the bombing*. Militia membership continued to decline after
> the turn of the millennium *as a result of law enforcement disruptions of
> multiple terrorist plots linked to violent rightwing extremists, new
> legislation banning paramilitary training*, and militia frustration that the
> 'revolution' never materialized" (9; *emphasis added*).

DHS credits law enforcement attention and new legislation with undermining the militia

movement by essentially scaring off its membership through threats of legal action.

The control approach fails to explain why militias might grow stronger as a result

of law enforcement interactions, such as the DHS report itself. Additionally, despite

attributing some of the decrease in militia activity in the 1990s to firearms legislation, the

report also warns that such legislation now may result in backlash. It says:

> "The possible passage of new restrictions on firearms and the return of
> military veterans facing significant challenges reintegrating into their
> communities could lead to the potential emergence of terrorist groups or
> lone wolf extremists capable of carrying out violent attacks" (*ibid.*:2).

Control theory cannot account for these contradictory expectations resulting from

firearms legislation.

Labeling Theory helps explain the resentment that members like Bruce felt after

the report. Bruce said:

> "So when it comes out that the Department of Homeland Security lumps
> us as 'terrorists' or 'prone to [being] terrorists' because of being veterans,
> combat veterans, or police, or anything else, let me just say this: my oath
> stands just as well today as it did when I was 17 in 1962 and took it [while
> in the military] to protect and defend the Constitution."

Bruce did not say that annoyance at being called a potential terrorist redoubled his

interest in the militia, but did say that he planned to continue his militia activity until he

was physically unable to do so. Labeling Theory does not, however, adequately address

the *new* militia sympathizers and participants who developed an interest in the group only

after the DHS report.

It is again most useful to understand militia members and returning veterans with

shared ideological perspectives as acting in defiance of the DHS report. They understood

the report as trying to limit their involvement in the militia, and as misrepresenting the

militia and its goals. Instead of internalizing a label or being afraid of government

monitoring, new members joined the group to spite the report and its authors. Members'

understanding of what it means to be a good citizen again shaped their interpretation of

authoritative action and shaped their behavioral response.

When Militia Members Really Are Criminals: The Hutaree Arrests

Militia members took defiant action in response to being treated like suspects, criminals,

and terrorists when there was no evidence they were engaged in illegal or dangerous

behavior. In contrast, members supported law enforcement intervention when members

of the Hutaree militia in southern Michigan were arrested in March 2010. In this case,

members judged there to be sufficient evidence to justify the arrests.

"Hutaree" is a word that members of that militia made up to mean "Christian

Warriors;" unlike other units in the state, this one had explicit religious overtones.

Members understood their unit leader to also be their spiritual leader, and all of them

attended the same church. The Hutaree should be considered a millenarian group in

historian Robert Churchill's (2009) typology, relative to other Michigan groups' being

more solidly located on the constitutionalist end of the spectrum. Members from several

other militia units told me early in my fieldwork that they found the Hutaree's emphasis

on a particular understanding of religion off-putting.

They additionally warned me that the Hutaree could be dangerous, as different

groups had independently witnessed members practicing unsafe firearms practices. For

example, Hutaree members who attended SMVM trainings reportedly needed to be

repeatedly told to observe the safety rule of always treating a firearm as though it is

loaded as they carelessly swung their empty rifles' barrels in trajectories that crossed other people's bodies. One Hutaree member did this to such an extent that a Vietnam veteran at the training told the man he was only allowed to participate in training exercises with a stick, rather than a rifle, as he took the rifle from the man's hands. This story has been told to much ridicule and laughter (e.g., "What caliber was the stick?!") during various militia gatherings at least half a dozen times during my fieldwork, including several times before the Hutaree arrests occurred.

Militia members from at least two different units, including SMVM, contacted the FBI over their concerns about the Hutaree (Baldas 2012; Higgins 2010). The FBI placed an informant and, later, an undercover officer within the ranks of the Hutaree. It is unclear what the undercover officer witnessed in March 2010 to trigger the arrests. Militia rumor has it that the Hutaree leader showed the agent an assembled bomb in the woods near their training area, but this was never confirmed in media reports of the trial.

Nine Hutaree members were charged with a variety of offenses including plotting to use "weapons of mass destruction" and "seditious conspiracy"—a very serious charge of planning to overthrow the government. The State alleged that Hutaree members were planning to murder a police officer, then murder and injure other officers, perhaps with an improvised explosive device, at the first officer's funeral. The defendants' lawyers argued that Hutaree members discussed violent action, but said that it was protected speech under the First Amendment. They further insisted that there was no evidence members were really planning to harm anyone.

On March 26, 2012, exactly two years after the Hutaree members were arrested, the judge ordered the immediate release of the defendants. She ruled that the prosecution

had failed to support the State's charges, and that there was not enough evidence to demonstrate Hutaree members had a specific plan for harm. Two defendants who pled guilty to weapons charges and one defendant who pled guilty at the beginning of the proceedings were sentenced to time served.

Upon first glance at Figure 28, it might be tempting to conclude that the Hutaree arrests had a suppressant effect on militia activity. However, I argue that this is not the case. The April 2010 SMVM event immediately following the arrests had only slightly lower attendance than the previous month, with more attendees than were present at all but three (17%) of the events during the time frame of the DHS report's release. Further, the two events with low attendance following the arrests were both trainings that occurred under unusual circumstances. The first, in May 2010, became the first and only training that SMVM made entirely private: they explicitly disallowed the media and did not publicly post the training location. Only members on the private forum were made aware that this training was taking place on private property three hours north of their usual location. The driving distance also created difficulties for some members who wanted to attend, but were unable to make the trip on relatively short notice.

The second unusual training in October 2010 also occurred at a different location. This time, SMVM leaders were unable to book the campground at their usual state park due to a large gathering of Boy Scouts who reserved the entire area. Leaders instead reserved a camping area at a different state park, which was again a farther distance to travel for many members. Additionally, this particular training was intended to be the start of the Junior Militia Corps, which is designed to more fully integrate members' children in militia activities. All of this training's planned events revolved around things

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in which children could be involved. This may not have been something that members without children wanted to travel the additional distance to do.

The relevant characteristic of the graph is that attendance following the arrests is still elevated compared to the time frame prior to the DHS report. Thus, it would seem that the Hutaree arrests had no impact on militia attendance. Although the arrests could be understood as a form of government crackdown on the militia as a whole—a form of government control—members were not intimidated into decreasing their activity as Control Theory would predict. The arrests specifically targeted a group from whom other units in the state separated themselves, long before the arrests occurred. Members who were not breaking the law did not generalize the government's response onto their own militia activity, nor did they internalize a "criminal" label because of the behavior of another group.

In the case of the Hutaree, *supporting* law enforcement action amounted to supporting the militia's vision of American identity. The authorities' actions were justified and in accordance with militia members' understanding of law enforcement powers to protect citizens and prevent harm. Militias also want law enforcement to prevent rogue militias from engaging in dangerous activity to avoid a further disparaging of the public image of militias that would happen following a successful violent event. Members thus had no reason to act defiantly because they endorsed this effort. Just as was the case when law enforcement treated militia members like confidants, members could interpret the actions of law enforcement as conforming to their understanding of how authority should interact with the U.S. citizenry and thus supported their actions.

PATRIOTISM, DEFIANCE AND COMPLIANCE

Militia members' understanding of nationalism premised on individual liberty and their

understanding of militia participation as a duty of citizenship certainly make ideas of a

righteous, patriotic defiance resonate with them. In terms of the rest of Sherman's (1993)

typology of defiance, members do not always feel alienated from society as a whole, but

do feel alienated from the government (as the sanctioning agent), and from LEOs as

official extensions of the government. Members believe certain government interventions

with them to be a form of sanction because the interactions indicate that the government

either assumes militia members are criminal or at least socially deviant, or that the

government uses such interactions to label the militia as deviant in the public eye.

Members reject sanctions for both of Sherman's suggested reasons. In some

circumstances, members believe government interactions to be completely unwarranted,

as they did with the DHS report. In other circumstances, members understand the

government's interest in interacting with the militia movement, but feel disrespected by

the process, as they did when LEOs behaved hostilely toward them prior to the 2008

Presidential Election. As 36 year old Dale said when Blackjack and his group were

detained and questioned in the summer of 2012:

> "[LEOs] should leave us alone because we aren't doing shit! If they have
> cause for alarm, in the sense that there are illegal things being done, by all
> means, do what you have to do. We shouldn't have to be subject to
> questioning at the behest of the federal government. We're private citizens
> exercising our 1st and 2nd Amendment rights by being in the militia, it's not
> subject to the blessings and permissions of the FBI or any other
> bureaucracy. Let's not forget that."

Dale aruges that if there is evidence of illegal behavior within the movement or a specific

group, forced, formal questioning might be appropriate, but with a lack of evidence, he

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wants to be left alone to enact his rights. Dale and other members see hostile interactions as an effort to mark the militia as a whole as socially problematic, rather than as an effort to explore a particular suspected act.

When militia members are sanctioned via hostile interactions or reports that label them suspects, criminals, terrorists without evidence, members do not experience shame; they instead become angry and uncooperative. Members defiantly reinvest in their militia member identity as they invoke both the legality of their actions and their loyalty to the nation. Members participate in additional militia activities, and become less open with law enforcement. In some circumstances, members, like Elias, intentionally make the group's activities look more threatening than they are with the goal of wasting LEOs' time, thus possibly distracting from real threats within the movement or elsewhere. In other circumstances, people who sympathize with militia ideology join the movement in droves out of frustration. The more hostile law enforcements' categorization of militias is, the more defiant their reaction.

In contrast, in scenarios where members perceived government interventions to be justified, as was the case with the Hutaree arrests, members do not become defiant. They do not understand the legitimate arrest of a particular group as an assault on the militia movement as a whole because they believe that any person or group who desires to act violently defies the core principles related to individual freedom that the militia is supposed to uphold and protect. This is why the Hutaree arrests had no overall impact on militia participation.

Social movement theories of repression do not capture these behavioral outcomes. The militia showed a mixture of increased and decreased activity in response to similar

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authoritative actions. Their pattern of response is exactly the opposite of what Koopman's observed regarding situational (police) repression's increasing movement activity, but institutional (legal) repression's lessening activity. When LEOs directly interacted with militia members in a hostile manner just prior to the 2008 elections, members were annoyed, but their activity did not escalate. In contrast, when legalistic efforts were applied in an attempt to control the movement with a 2009 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) report, the militia grew dramatically in size. After the 2010 arrests of Hutaree militia members—another legal intervention with potentially hostile overtones— there was no effect on militia size.

Defiance Theory, through a lens of ideal nationalism explains these trends and also helps explain why militia members respond negatively to exaggerated media and other reports of their activities. Journalists or researchers may, alongside law enforcement actors, take Sherman's (1993) role of "sanctioning agents" who represent a community that is hostile to the movement when they negatively report on militia activities. Members become frustrated when they feel that reporters or others inaccurately represent their activities, as was the case following an inflammatory report of an international film crew who was very friendly and relaxed while on site at a training. Similarly, SMVM's training where media representatives were explicitly banned was intended to give members a break from being interviewed so they could better focus on desired training activities, and also helped members avoid negative coverage linked to their group in the immediate aftermath of the news of the arrests. Other units continued the trend of disallowing media for varying periods of time. The negative coverage, which did not clearly differentiate between the arrested unit and other militia units, had the effect of making Michigan units

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more closed to outsiders and more difficult to monitor as members once again embraced their militia identities and acted in defiance of the media reports.

Perhaps even more strikingly, members from several different units sent Mark Potok, director of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC),
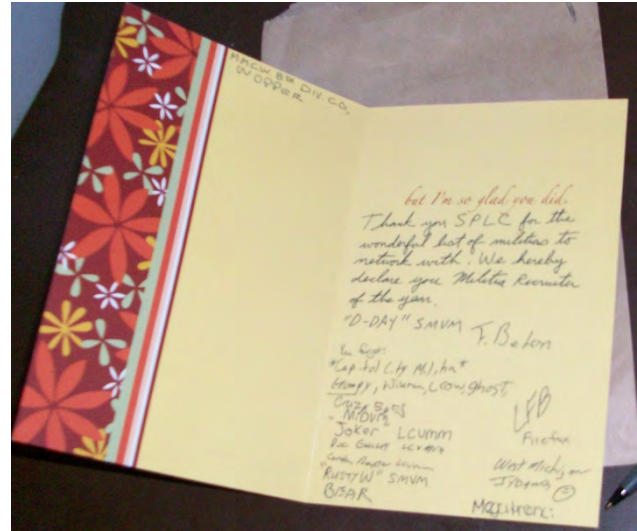
Figure 29: The "Thank You" card to the SPLC. Photo by Amy Cooter.

a "Thank You" card in March 2010 following the SPLC's release of the newest list of active militias. The yearly list is intended to undermine militia activity by drawing attention to it; alongside ongoing militia reports on their "Hatewatch" list, the SPLC strongly implies that militias are uniformly involved in dangerous and socially problematic behavior. Michigan militia members reject that public knowledge of their activities is a shame-inducing act, however, because they insist on its legality and, in their view, necessity, for maintaining a free America. They acted defiantly once again by sending the card.

The outside of the card read "You really shouldn't have,…," while the inside read "but I'm so glad you did." Members added a handwritten note that read, "Thank you SPLC for the wonderful list of militias to network with. We hereby declare you militia recruiter of the year." It was signed by more than two dozen members by the end of the day, most of whom used their real name instead of a code name. Each signer saw the card

as an opportunity to reframe what was intended to be a shame-inducing act into something positive for the group that contradicted the SPLC's intent.

In the scenarios with the media and with the SPLC, militia members were frustrated by public portrayals of their group as criminal and dangerous, and once again reinforced their militia identities as they defied attempts to control their behavior and their image. Members banned outsiders for varying lengths of time, depending on the unit, in response to the media reports, and thus became more difficult to access and monitor, as the reports suggested was necessary. In response to the newest SPLC list, members thanked its authors for a useful tool to help grow the movement, and thus directly defied the list's intent to undermine the movement.

What Sherman's Theory of Defiance does not capture is how members interpret the legitimacy of authorities' actions through the lens of Americanness. Militia members' express their commitment to the nation through acts of both defiance and compliance. Their response depends on the degree to which authorities' actions conform to members' vision of authorities serving the needs of the people and upholding the law.

When authorities treat militia members like confidants or when they engage in investigations that are justified based on evidence of dangerous behavior, members are compliant and support those actions. When authorities treat members like suspects, criminals, or terrorists with no concrete evidence of problematic behavior, members are likely to become defiant, with their degree of defiance increasing as the hostility of the label increases. That is, when members were treated like suspects with no direct confrontation, they post more material online in defiance of a perceived attempt to control Free Speech on the internet, for example. When members were treated like

criminals, they created hassles to waste law enforcement resources. When members were treated like terrorists, their reaction was most extreme; in the wake of the DHS report, members not only became uncooperative, but doubled the size of the militia in Michigan.

In the context of increased attention to legitimacy as defined by commitment to national identity, Defiance Theory would predict that we would see greater militia activity during times when the political environment is hostile to such groups. Although most militia members dislike both major political parties, Democrats tend to be further from their ideal Libertarian standard than are Republicans, particularly on the issue gun control. Militias experienced substantial growth during the last two Democratic administrations of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama and were relatively quiet during the intervening Republican administration of George W. Bush. The rise of administrations is intimately tied with a variety of national and global socioeconomic and political changes, so it is overly simplistic to attribute militia activity to having a Democrat in the Presidential seat alone. However, those administrations represent a collective of policies and political attitudes that are hostile to political conservatism.

We might also expect to see an increase in militia activity when public discussions concern specific proposed restrictions to gun rights or firearms availability. Conversations like this happen periodically, particularly following mass shooting incidents, of which there have been several in the last few years. I did not witness membership surges that corresponded to such public discourse during my

Figure 30. A sign reading "NO FEDS Allowed" is nailed to a tree at the entrance to an event, hosted by friends, intended to assist Hutaree members cover their legal expenses. Photo by Amy Cooter.

fieldwork, but that could be because such discourse is typically short-lived and without any real political backing.

Existing members do discuss such news coverage amongst themselves and renew promises to fight firearms legislation through protests, contacting their representatives, and purchasing more firearms. In the event that such legislation becomes likely (during President Obama's second term[49], for example), I would not, however, be surprised to see protests alongside a growth in membership. Militia members do not oppose firearms restrictions for the mentally ill or felons, but believe that new legislation typically only impacts law-abiding citizens, rather than criminals who obtain and possess weapons illegally. Members worry they would be unable to protect themselves and their families if legislative efforts left firearms only in the hands of criminals.

Militia members understand their militia participation as a concrete way to learn how to protect themselves, their families, and their communities in the event of a disaster. They understand themselves to be super citizen patriots who should be working alongside LEOs to protect the nation and individual freedoms as laid out in the Constitution. They greatly resent any implication that they instead work to undermine the safety of the country or its citizens. Members enjoy feeling like trusted informants and are more likely to cooperate with LEOs when they are approached in this manner. Members become hostile, uncooperative, and even disruptive when they are treated like suspects without cause, as Defiance Theory with a lens of Americanness predicts. Sometimes members

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[49] I have not been attending militia functions since the shooting incidents in Aurora, Colorado or Newtown, Connecticut. A militia leader from the west part of Michigan reports, however, that recent conversations about gun control in the wake of these tragedies, including President Obama's executive orders, has brought many new prospective members to his unit.

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like Trevor, in his late 60s, anticipate unwarranted law enforcement harassment based on previous control-based interventions the government has directed at the movement:

> "And do not send an innocent cop, male or female, to come and try to confinscate [*sic.*] my gun. If you want to confinscate it, I'm puttin' you on notice, Obama, *you* come to my door and *you* try to do it! Because that's the day you and I will meet our maker."

Seemingly cooperative interactions can, in contrast, dispel these tensions, as Blackjack noted following his detention at the airport. Militia members welcome contacts from LEOs that are cooperative, or at least respectful, and that do not immediately treat militias like criminal organizations. Members want to believe that the government and its agents act justly, legally, and in accordance with their nationalistic value of freedom and equality. They believe that respectful interactions with law enforcement can rebuild trust that has been destroyed in past interactions, and are hopeful that LEOs have learned lessons from this past, which left civilians dead and law enforcement agencies reprimanded by Congressional panels.

In a post-9/11 world, many Americans might find that compliance with authority and with all law enforcement actions—no matter how intrusive—are necessary for a secure nation (Pew Research Center 2011). For militia members, however, *defiance* of law enforcement action that is seemingly unwarranted or hostile is necessary to maintain a national character that is worth fighting for and that conforms to the mythologized history of the country. Militia members understand hostile interactions not just as a threat to individual members or the militia as a whole, but also to the essence of the rights included with U.S. citizenship. In this context, it is members' perceived *duty* to be defiant of what they understand to be improper law enforcement actions, and members will continue to act in the spirit of the independent, defiant message of the Gadsden flag.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion: Lessons from the Militia

In the first part of this manuscript, I explained how militia members understand themselves to be super citizens who are part of a patriotic organization that they believe helps preserve the nation's identity and original values. I discussed the origins of the militia movement, including the formative events of Ruby Ridge, Waco, the Brady Bill and the Oklahoma City Bombing, and I discussed how the movement of today differs from the militia of the 1990s in terms of membership, ideology, and communication strategies. Contemporary militias in Michigan have few overlaps with other contemporary nostalgic groups active in the state, including white supremacist groups, Minutemen or even the relatively mainstream Tea Party. I argue this is because of ideological differences militia members have with these groups, and because of constraints on members' free time when ideological similarities do exist.

I suggested that a combination of state-level and individual factors, including a depressed state economy, high levels of crime and government corruption, and charismatic leaders, contribute to the militia's continued strong presence in Michigan. I also suggest that historian Robert Churchill's (2009) militia typology, which differentiates between militias based primarily on their ideology, is analytically useful for understanding militias in Michigan. Most Michigan militias are Constitutional militias, which operate publicly and believe it is their duty to uphold the U.S. Constitution and to

ensure that the government acts within its legally defined authority. The Hutaree militia, arrested in 2010, provides an example of millenarian militias, which are more secretive and more invested in traditional conspiracy theories of a New World Order, and in apocalyptical, religious ideology.

In Chapter Three, I found that militia men explain their reasons for joining the militia in terms of a traditional, hegemonic masculinity. That is, men say they join because of a sense of duty to the country or to their families, because of a desire to enhance their personal preparedness, because of a need for comradery, or because of a desire for political expression. These four stated reasons directly reference notions of a strong, independent man who values being able to defend oneself, one's family, and one's country from a variety of threats, and who wants to spend time with other men who share those interests.

Men's verbalized reasons for militia participation echo past organizations, like the Boy Scouts, that have emphasized the role of "manly strength" (MacLeod 1982:30) or other stereotypical male traits as being necessary for preserving our social structure. This attitude relies on and references a mythic past of the U.S. as being founded by solely by the efforts of white men who engaged in hard physical labor, and wars fought with morality as much as muscle to conquer the land (Cronon 2003; Garner 2007). Traditionally masculine themes from these stories extend through major events in the country's history, including the Industrial Revolution, the Great Wars, backlashes to the Civil Rights and Women's Movements, and recent military conflicts in the Middle East.

I found, however, that the masculinity militia men *enact* with each other at trainings and other functions belied a limited, protectionist, and traditional outlook. Even

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as men engage in the theater of gearing up for militia training and thus symbolically embody the national story they want to invoke, they allow and even encourage deviations from the traditional gender roles on which this image relies. Men accept other men who love the color pink, who talk openly about their emotions, including their fondness of each other, while in front of other members, their families, and non-militia strangers at public functions. They even accepted a male-to-female transsexual who transitioned after becoming a militia member until she decided to leave the group for reasons she said were unrelated to the militia.

Past research has argued that masculinity is a fluid construct that varies across time and context, but says there is nonetheless a hegemonic version of masculinity in any given society toward which men are socially pressured to aspire (Connell 2005; Nagel 2004). This pressure is generally assumed to be greatest in all-male groups (Bird 1996), and the degree to which men may successfully match the hegemonic model is influenced by their race and class (Gutmann 1996). I argue that the case of the militia shows that at least some white men have a greater conscious awareness of the pressures and constraints of hegemonic masculinity than much of the literature would suggest.

Militia men actively grapple with what it means to be a man in modern society, even as they honor an archetypical, protective, independent, mythical man of yesteryear. Rather than stubbornly clinging to this narrow construction of manhood in their own lives, militia men welcome the challenge, enjoy the process, and sometimes take these masculinity lessons back home with them as they assist with childcare or other traditionally female tasks after seeing other members do the same. In contrast to some past findings regarding all male groups that use harsh sanctions to encourage members to

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live up to a hegemonic version of masculinity (Bird 1996), the militia welcomes and even encourages men who innovate toward a more fluid and open masculinity.

Although some authors resist the notion of describing a "true" or "real" masculinity because of its variance across time and context (Connell 2005), I suggest that it is important to remember that, *both* the innovating, flexible masculinity, and the more traditional, protective masculinity are real for the lived experiences of the men in question. They are simultaneously trying to honor the past they revere, as well as the social expectations for manhood with which they were raised, and trying to adapt to a changing society that allows for "softer" (Heath 2003) masculine expression.

Militia men's expanded masculinity does not, however, mean that militia men understand why their children and especially their wives or girlfriends typically have only a limited interest in militia participation. Militia members' children describe the militia as "important," but are unsure of their own role in it as they grow older. Most see militia activities as fun weekend diversions, but do not have their own gear to full participation and usually become bored before the end of the event.

Women seldom become militia members, and rarely seem as concerned about the political climate as their male partners. They say they support their partners' involvement in the militia as both a political and leisure activity. I suggest that women's full participation is limited by a general lack of strong political feeling, harsh outside conditions, particularly during the winter, and a sense of intimidation about the all-male space and the physical expectations for participation.

Despite their relative passivity within the movement, militia men would prefer that their wives and girlfriends fully embrace militia participation. This challenges

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findings in other studies of male-dominated groups, which expect women to play up their femininity in order to be accepted (Kimmel 2009; Mitchell 2002; Shapira 2011). Militia men most accept women who "get dirty" and fully participate in training exercises. Rather than being "mascot" members (Adams 1999) because they are different from the group, I suggest that these women are heralded because they mirror the men's behavior and evinced level of commitment when they fully participate in militia activities. This difference between the militia and some other male-dominated groups may be a product of militia members' belief that it is the duty of every citizen, regardless of sex, to be attentive to and able to protect both national identity and security

In Chapter Four, I turned to analysis of how these men with "super citizen" self-concepts understand race and act racially. I found that militia units in Michigan do not have racial agendas at the group level. Most members genuinely try to be accepting of other racial and ethnic group and showed a surprising degree of awareness of how their group's overwhelming whiteness influences public perceptions of the militia. They try to mitigate this image by attempting to recruit more non-white members and by making sure newcomers saw how they valued non-white attendees. Members were not always racially sensitive in this process, however. They did not, for example, understand that Kevin, the most consistent non-white member, would be uncomfortable being made into a token example of racial inclusiveness for new attendees.

Outright "Jim Crow" or "old fashioned" racists are rare in the militia, and Edmond, who referred to African American Detroiters as "natives" and who suggested a return to a slave-based economy as a way to save the city, was the only militia member I encountered who seemed to truly earn this label. Some other members are caught in

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symbolic racist thinking, such that they believe some groups have cultural (rather than biological) barriers to financial and other success (Kinder & Sears 1981). A few members commented on African Americans whose work ethic they questioned, but symbolic racism was most evident when members discussed illegal immigration. Members argued that people who are not respectful or dedicated enough to enter the country legally must have cultural deficiencies, such as a proclivity toward laziness or criminal activity, that make them undesirable citizens.

Symbolic racism does not explain why militia members tend to largely exclude Muslim Americans, in defiance of their message of overall acceptance and egalitarianism. That is, there is no indication that militia members believe Muslim Americans are not hard workers (Sides and Gross forthcoming), which is the usual marker of symbolic racist thinking. Previous authors have instead suggested that white Americans reject Muslims through a process of racialization, whereby they believe all Arabs to be Muslims, and all Muslims to be terrorists (Joshi 2006; Razack 2008).

I argue that using racialization alone to understand anti-Muslim sentiment may overstate the role of biological race and give insufficient attention to how at least some Americans are genuinely fearful of Islam and its adherents (Sides and Gross forthcoming). I suggest that theories of group threat, where people believe their ethnic or racial group is being threatened by another group are useful here; however, I argue that greater attention to nationalism as a source of threat is needed, compared to a past emphasis on economic threat (Olazk 1994). I suggest the term "nationalistic threat" to reflect a combination of racialized beliefs about Muslim Americans alongside feelings of physical, group-based threat. Militia men largely buy into stereotypes of Muslims as

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terrorists (a form of racialization) and are genuinely fearful of further terror attacks or socio-political changes that result from terror (a form of group threat with an emphasis on nationalism).

Militia members' overall rejection of Muslim Americans is complicated by militia leader, Chad, a white man who converted to Islam after time in the military. Other members evaluate Chad through a lens of Americanness to determine their level of acceptance toward him. Members who know Chad well value his military and militia participation and know that his Christian family members are also involved in the militia; these factors mean they can accept Chad as genuinely committed to their shared national values. Members who do not know these facts about Chad worry that his religion might mean he is not truly committed to the country and its security.

Some members similarly worry that President Obama's rumored status as Muslim is a threat to national security. They believe he may have loyalties to the Middle East instead of to American principles. Other members may be wary of Obama's race, but I argue that neither race nor supposed religion wholly explains militia member's distrust of the President because similar distrust and "anti-Socialist" language is common in the militia's literature of the 1990s when the last Democrat, Bill Clinton, held the Presidency.

I argue that members' responses to Michigan's African American and Muslim populations—members' two most salient racialized outgroups—show how their understanding of Americanness simultaneously incentivizes them to be accepting of other groups while limiting their enacted acceptance of some groups who do not conform to their vision of the nation. Members may similarly charitably interpret racist and exclusionary action from some members, like Edmond, to really be expressions of

nationalism, rather than of racism because they want to believe that all militia members share their vision of egalitarianism and inclusion. In this way, strongly racist individuals might have a long-term detrimental impact on the militia's intended egalitarian outlook.

In Chapter Five, I analyzed how militia members who see themselves as dutiful, patriotic monitors of government behavior respond to authority, particularly authority represented by law enforcement interactions with the militia. The social movement literature has sharply conflicting predictions regarding the effect of authoritative repression on movement behavior, with relatively little guidance about movement characteristics that might result in compliant versus defiant behavior. Some scholars suggest that government control will suppress social movements (Boykoff 2006), or reduce violent action to protest behavior (Lichbach 1987). Others argue that government efforts at movement repression will instead increase (Opp and Roehl 1990) or radicalize (Walsh and Piazza 2010) movement actors.

I suggest that it is thus useful to consider theories of crime and social deviance when analyzing how militia groups are likely to respond to attempts at authoritative control. Militia involvement is a form of deviant political expression, and theories of crime and deviance are particularly relevant to explaining law enforcement efforts to control militia behavior they perceive to be deviant. Theories of social control and labeling do not adequately capture how militia member sometimes comply with and sometimes defy authoritative action. Control theories suggest that authoritative control of behavior through monitoring or legal action should result in lower levels of the behavior in question (Matza 1969; Reckless 1973). Labeling theories, in contrast, suggest that once society labels a person criminal, they will internalize that label and engage in future

criminal or deviant acts than they might have without being labeled (Lemert 1951; Paternoster and Iovanni 1989).

I instead suggest that Defiance Theory (Sherman 1993) better captures this mixed response. Sherman's theory says that an individual who is suspected of deviant behavior may understand authoritative action as illegitimate if authorities act disrespectfully, arbitrarily, or unjustly toward that person. When militia members accept authoritative action as legitimate, they act in compliance with that action. When they understand authoritative action to be illegitimate, they instead defy authority. I expand on Sherman's framework and argue that militia members evaluate the legitimacy of authoritative action through the lens of their idealized Americanness and national identity. Authorities who act in accordance with the Constitution and the legal structure are met with respect and compliance, while those who betray militia members' expectations of legal or just government action are met with defiance.

This mixed outcome was evident in how militia members responded to four different law enforcement characterizations of the militia during my fieldwork as confidants, suspects, criminals, or terrorists. Each subsequent category entailed a higher degree of suspicion and deviation from ideal Americanness on the part of law enforcement, and a higher degree of defiance from militia members. Members who were treated like confidants willingly shared information with law enforcement. Members also complied with and supported law enforcement actions when there was evidence of problematic behavior within the Hutaree militia group.

In contrast, members who were treated like suspects without any evidence of problematic behavior engaged in defiance online, while members treated like criminals

with no evidence engaged in defiant in-person behavior that was designed to annoy law enforcement officers and waste their time and resources. Members, along with their sympathizers, who were treated like terrorists with no supporting evidence effectively doubled the size of the militia movement in defiance of a perceived government effort to label and limit the movement. I also found that media and research representatives could take authoritative roles—as actors publicly defining the militia movement—with similar results.

Americanness is thus the common thread across members' attitudes on masculinity, race, and government control. It is also the element that helps militia men make sense of and navigate their gendered, raced, and classed identity categories. Members are highly invested in a mythologized version of national identity that upholds notions of equality and individual liberty even as it references the historical time frame of the American frontier and the Revolutionary War, where white men had a monopoly of socio-political power.

Militia men embody this contradiction. They are nostalgic for simpler times when the Constitution might be literally enacted, rather than interpreted and applied beyond its original meaning to fit evolving societal and technological advancements; yet, they genuinely strive to be accepting of other groups so long as they believe those groups are dedicated to upholding national security and identity. This case affirms previous scholars who have argued that the nation and its character are symbols that are defined, contested, and reaffirmed through daily enactments, images, and storytelling (Billig 1995; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Zubrzycki 2011). In this context, it is an interesting, if unsurprising, paradox that members' investment in nationalism motivates them to accept

people from many walks of life, but simultaneously becomes the mechanism by which people (like Muslim Americans) are excluded from members' construction of citizenship and national belonging.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The case of the militia can also inform our understanding of some questions related to social movements and politics in the U.S. that I do not explicitly engage with in the empirical chapters. Below, I address several areas where my findings about the militia challenge or expand conventional thinking about politics in the U.S. I suggest that this case should be the starting point for further dialogue about the motivations and trajectory of nostalgic movements in this county, and about how we should categorize nostalgic groups and their actors within the political landscape.

The Power-Devaluation Model

Sociologist Rory McVeigh (2009) recently proposed a theory known as the power-devaluation model to explain why relatively advantaged people, like white men in the U.S., become involved in social movements. This model is updated version of the status-threat explanation for so-called right-wing mobilizations. McVeigh suggests that a feeling that one's group is losing social power to another group is essential, but that mobilization only occurs after some event creates a "shift" in their "interpretive processes" (*ibid*. 39). He additionally notes that social power should be construed as a combination of three facets—economic, political, and status-based power—in contrast to most status threat theories' emphasis on economic power alone.

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The model is still new, and the case of the militia serves as a qualitative test of its parameters, which have predominately been thus far applied quantitatively to the second wave of the Ku Klux Klan. While militia members often struggle financially, their status as white men does mean they are relatively privileged relative to other demographic groups in Michigan. The reasons that men say the join the militia reference an underlying sense of threat to traditional American masculinity, and many joined following some event—the death of a loved one, a move to an isolated area, or the publication of a report that called their patriotism into question—that brought attention to their vulnerability.

For militia members, Rory McVeigh's "interpretive process" entails an assessment of whether the government is acting in accordance with their idealized national identity. If the government is not, the event becomes a cognitive tipping point that leads to mobilization. This suggests that future applications of the model should be attentive to the dynamics between social movement actors, their values, and State behavior (rather than to more individual-level processes alone) to elaborate on the members' interpretive process and how it leads to mobilization.

Historically, militia activity has increased following events that were national in scope, highly publicized, and unique (meaning not merely cyclical with political administrations): government raids on private citizens (Ruby Ridge and Waco), threatened economic collapse (Y2K), and attacks on national values (9/11 and the 2009 DHS report). This pattern suggests that "shifts" in movement actors' interpretive processes are likely to occur only after threats to their particular movement's geographical level of reference. For the militia, the nation, rather than the state or local community, is the unit of analysis they observe for assessing threats to their rights or the danger of their

government. Other movements may have different units of analysis, based on their interests. Environmental movements might, for example, be more likely to focus on local issues and to mobilize following a local threat, while human rights organizations might be more likely to mobilize following an issue understood to be operating at a global scale (Tsutsui 2004), such as recent discussions about women's rights in India.

Nostalgic Groups and Self-Interest

The case of the militia can contribute to another aspect of the social movements literature: the question of why people vote against their economic self-interest. It has long been a mystery as to why people who would benefit from increased welfare accessibility or from certain tax structures, nonetheless vote for a political party that opposes those policies. The case of the militia helps explain that, at least for some voters, a desire to support a certain understanding of national identity may be of greater importance than personal benefit. That is, supporting policies or political parties that nostalgic group members believe to uphold notions of individual effort and achievement (rather than government "handouts") may be a symbolic vote for a perceived greater good that is more important to them than possible personal gain.

Political scientist David Sears and his colleagues (1980) have previously argued that short-term self-interests (during the tenure of a particular political candidate) may be outweighed by ideological issues, and the case of the militia confirms that long-term self-interest may be at risk for these voters, too. Militias understand their commitment to Americanness to be life-long, and the trajectory that many members have taken from the military to the militia, as well as members' intensity of commitment to the militia all

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support this claim. Militia members are unlikely, in my estimation, to ever vote for a candidate whose ideological viewpoints contrast their own, even if the candidate's economic platform would benefit them. Militia members are not quite so-called "value voters" who vote exclusively on a very narrow set of social issues, but they may refuse to vote for a candidate regardless of his or her other policies if they understand that candidate to be undermining their vision for America and its values. Votes have great symbolic power and militia members use them to endorse and try to maintain a certain national story and identity. Members of other nostalgic groups may take a similar tack.

A Linear Political Spectrum?

A thorough understanding of the militia's complex ideology also necessitates a reassessment of the traditionally linear political model of American politics, which may be construed with Communism at the furthest left point and Fascism at the furthest right, with subsequent divisions fading rather smoothly into the next (Eatwell 1989). Groups charted to the conservative end of the spectrum are often associated with "preservatism" (Lipset and Raab 1978:19)—a backward-looking idealization of the past—and understood to have continuing resistance to granting rights and power to groups that have traditionally not held them (e.g., Mudde 2007).

Militia members are certainly nostalgic for a past they perceive to have been simpler. They desire limited government authority, and want to preserve access to firearms, both of which are typically associated with the conservative end of the linear spectrum. I nonetheless saw no evidence that militia members were opposed to ensuring rights for other groups, with the possible exception of Muslim Americans, whom they

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perceived to be opposed to national security. Most members openly welcome interested women and non-whites into their units, rather than trying to preserve a male-dominated space or power structure.

Most members support abortion rights and gay rights, in accordance with their Libertarian ideology. For example, 36 year old Edward, a construction worker, expressed his view on abortion by saying, "I don't think as a *man*, personally I could tell a woman, or vote for a man who would pass legislation to tell a woman, what she can and cannot do with her body." As an example regarding gay rights, I observed that some militia leaders became visibly angry when a Michigan-based, gay-rights reporter told them a story of having been excluded from covering a nearby Tea Party event because of his sexuality. One militia leader huffed, 'That's not very Libertarian! And *we're* supposed to be the bad guys!'

Members certainly do not have a full empathetic understanding of ongoing racism, sexism, homophobia, or other social problems, but their open perspective on a variety of issues fails to match an image of a consciously exclusionary or preservatist group. "Right wing" becomes a misnomer for the militia, given their mix of political standpoints and general lack of overlap with other contemporary nostalgic groups, which is why I have avoided the term in this manuscript. The label of "conservative" may also be questionable, given members' acceptance of rights that tend to be opposed even by many mainstream Republicans.

It is not my goal to advocate an alternate political model that better captures militia activity, but rather to suggest that researchers reevaluate previously proposed models and assess whether any provide greater explanatory power to the full spectrum of

contemporary political action in the U.S. Other models have been suggested, for instance, using a horseshoe shape to illustrate that extremists of both the right and the left may have more in common with each other than with some components of their respective halves of the traditional linear spectrum (George and Wilcox 1996). Other authors have attempted to take into account different ideological components such as valuation of economic and personal freedom or opposition to government intervention, by imposing those axes over the traditional linear model (Christie 1970). Additional work, especially comparing ideological standpoints of groups formerly described as right-wing, to those formerly described as left-wing, is needed to achieve a more accurate and complete model of the contemporary U.S. political landscape.

"Anti-Government" Groups?

Finally, the case of the militia helps clarify a term that has loosely been used to help explain things ranging from the U.S.'s lack of full participation in international markets (Tolchin 1996), to labor movement activism in Korea (Suh 2001), to anti-U.S. mobilization in Bolivia (Cott 2003). Within the U.S. alone, the term "anti-government group" has been applied to militias (SPLC 2011), mentally-ill, lone shooters (Montopoli 2011), Tea Partiers (Fetner 2012), and eco-terrorists (ADL n.d.) alike. However, none of these studies or reports offer any attempt to define "anti-government." Political scientists Cheryl King and Camilla Stivers build on Evan Berman's (1997) earlier typology of citizen discontent to say that,

> "...[W]hen citizens voice anti-government feelings what they mean is one
> or more of three things: Government has too much power and does not use
> it in the interest of most of its citizens; government is inefficient and

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wastes taxpayers' money; government is remote and disconnected from ordinary life" (1998:12).

In this otherwise excellent exploration of the *conditions* under which people may experience anti-government sentiment, the authors never define what they mean by "anti-government." A more colloquial understanding seems to be that "anti-government" actors have a uniform disdain for the party in power.

The findings in this manuscript complicate this assumption. Michigan militia members are opposed to big government, but supported law enforcement investigations into the Hutaree militia, which verbalized a desire to harm police officers, as Chapter Five discusses. Most members are not overly angry with the government, though they do believe both major political parties deviate from what the Constitution allows. Members are not even particularly hostile toward President Obama, whom they believe wants to increase government size and decrease gun rights. In November 2009, a CNN reporter asked one militia leader—a federal employee—about the President, and the leader responded, "That's my boss. I'm not gonna let anybody mess with my boss. […] He should come out and have some barbeque with us [at a militia training]." The leader was publicly recognizing Obama's legitimacy as President while expressing subtle frustration that the government did not really understand the aims of his movement.

Militias have certainly gained traction under the last two Democratic presidencies (Bill Clinton and Barack Obama) compared to the last two Republic presidencies (George Bush Sr. and Jr.). Militia members feel more at odds with Democrats' stances on illegal immigration, foreign aid, social welfare, and gun control, compared to Republicans' relatively conservative perspectives on those same issues. However, in the same way that the militia does not neatly conform to the "right-wing" label, they do not have a polarized

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disdain for only Democratic administrations and acceptance of Republican administrations. As I mentioned, militia members tend to support abortion and gay rights, and correspondingly tend to disapprove of Republican efforts to restrict these rights.

"Anti-government" is, in the case of the militia, better defined as opposition to political *policies*, rather than political parties, or a broad feeling of disconnect from average citizens (King and Stivers 1998), that threatens one's understanding of national identity, or that threatens values and definitions understood to comprise Americanism as defined by individualism, personal responsibility. This is an important clarification. If researchers label a group "anti-government" without analyzing which particular policies or political constructs the group opposes, the term has little analytical purchase and does not advance our understanding of our political landscape. Similarly, politicians cannot win seats or effect policy by trying to please all constituencies; but, especially in times of war, economic turbulence, or other social disturbance, it is nonetheless important to avoid fundamentally alienating any large voting bloc if there is any aspiration for meaningful and harmonious social progress.

CENTRAL QUESTIONS

In concluding, I now return more explicitly to the two over-arching, interrelated questions of this manuscript. First, how are different identities (e.g., male, white, lower-middle class, American) combined and navigated in the context of a society whose dominant public dialogue is evolving to be increasingly inclusive of traditionally oppressed groups? Second, how does social movement participation, in this case, participation in the militia, reinforce or change these identities?

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For the men in this study, Americanness becomes the medium through which they navigate their masculinity, whiteness, and class position. Militia men honor a time where white men had exclusive social power, but they look to the guiding principles of ideal Americanness—equality and liberty—to guide their interactions with others. Militia men understand that masculinity and whiteness are changing in U.S. society, such that men can be more expressive and emotive without social sanctions, for example, and such that Whites are expected to lose their status as the racial majority in a few short years.

Militia men are not fearful of these changes. They are not just stubbornly clinging to the past, nor are they consciously looking to return to a time that was more favorable toward white men. Instead, they make an effort to evolve alongside a changing society. They embrace the possibility of a less constrictive masculinity even as they still try to be the primary protectors of their families. They assess how their experiences differ from those of their African American neighbors, and consider how the public perceives the militia in the context of its whiteness, even though they are not aware of the full range of privileges that both their masculinity and whiteness afford them.

In contrast, militia men do fear and symbolically fight against changes to national identity, to their doctrine of idealized Americanness. Americanness is, for them, a stable doctrine, a sacred secular guidepost that allows them to understand other identities whose normative expressions may change over time. Said another way, militia men do not feel threats to their masculinity or their whiteness as a result of increasing equality for women and non-white racial groups, but they do feel threats to their American identity as a result of legislation like the Patriot Act or discussions of widespread gun control.

As part of their identity navigation, militia men's focus on Americanness also gives them incentive to be attentive to issues of gender and racial equality, especially within their own movement. Their experiences as white men, however, limit their ability to fully engage with these issues or to have an empathetic understanding of the lived experiences of others. Members' idolization of the American Dream similarly limits their understanding of how structural barriers limit their own economic advancement, as well as the advancement of non-white racial groups.

Turning to the second question, men's participation in the militia reinforces and intensifies their dedication to the nation as they share political perspectives and embodied activities with other men who share their concerns. Militia participation also reinforces their self-concepts as strong, protective fathers and citizens, but allows them to expand the expressive elements of masculinity and be affectionate toward each other and their families without fear of sanction. Members' whiteness may be largely invisible to them as they participate in trainings with a racially homogenous group, but it nonetheless encourages them to think about the dimensions of whiteness when the group weathers criticism for that homogeneity. Members' class position is similarly concealed within the militia. Some members are able to afford new gadgets more easily than others, but they all generally struggle to be consistently financially stable. Their shared class position and shared belief in the American Dream prevent class divisions from being salient to them within the context of the militia. For these "super citizens," militia activity and Americanness are thus intimately and inextricably intertwined and combine to shape other aspects of their identities and their responses to a changing society.

APPENDIX

Previous Militia Studies: Discrepant Findings and Methodological Problems

This appendix includes information about previous militia studies, many of whose claims differ from mine regarding militia origins and characteristics. Here I discuss these differences and reasons behind them. I argue that most disparities result from various data problems in many past studies.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH: MILITIA ORIGINS

Previous militia authors have a variety of explanations for member involvement. Many do reference Waco, Ruby Ridge, and the Brady Bill and Assault Weapons Ban as the primary causes (Chermak 2002; Crothers 2003; George and Wilcox 1996; Levitas 2004; Stern 1996). Others identify the proximate cause not as the events themselves, but the sense of alienation experienced after them and brought on by a feeling of betrayal via the government (Churchill 2009). This explanation would fit with the theory of power devaluation, though no previous militia author uses this term or its implications explicitly.

Still more authors have focused on class-based concerns as initiating the movement, especially concerns rooted in the decline of the farming industry in the 1980s (Dyer 1998; Gallaher 2003; Kimmel and Ferber 2000; Levitas 2004; Wright 2007). This

literature claims that individuals become involved in militias because of a diminished ability to maintain an independent livelihood through agriculture and subsequent shared economic and identity frustration. In Michigan, however, there is no evidence to support this particular farming-based explanation.

Among my 40 interviewees, 11 (28%) had at least one grandparent whose primary income was from farming. No interviewees' parents relied on farming for this purpose, nor do interviewees themselves. Three (8%) of interviewees do maintain a few animals for their own eggs and milk, but again, this is not a source of income. I have no reason to expect that militia members I did not interview differ dramatically on this variable from interviewees. Few militia members in Michigan seem to have strong feelings about the farming industry, as I have never heard farming mentioned as a concern at any militia gathering. Most members live in the suburbs, rather than near rural farmland. When I asked and explained the farming connection, some members respond angrily, like Adam who sarcastically said, "Oh yeah we didn't have the Industrial Revolution, [or] anything like that!" This interviewee's response reveals his belief that the farming explanation implies militia members are "backward," or behind the times, and his annoyance is not entirely unfounded.

When explaining why people join militias, some researchers have also noted that many militia members have military experience prior to their militia membership (e.g., Ferber and Kimmel 2004; Kimmel and Ferber 2000; O'Brien and Haider- Markel 1998; Stern 1996). Few overtly made the connection that militia involvement might be an attempt to recapture the experience and comradery of military tenure, but a generous interpretation of these pieces might yet make the claim. This motive for joining would be

consistent with a desire to reinforce or participate in a normative expression of masculinity in U.S. culture—military participation—especially during war time. Militaristic participation might also be a way to enact a traditional understanding of national identity, which again relies on masculinity and shows of military strength. Both possibilities are consistent with the power-devaluation model.

It is worth noting here that a few authors have stated that status loss (the pre-cursor to the power-devaluation model) is *not* the cause of right-wing involvement. Social scientist Martin Durham (2001) for instance says that some right wing actors become involved even in times of economic growth; his formulation, however, fails to account for *perception* of threat, which is accounted for in the power-devaluation model. Similarly, James Aho's (1995) work on an Idaho group, considered foundational in the militia literature, charts economic growth and recession since 1900 to show that there is no correlation with religious right-wing extremism and status loss. Aho's findings challenging status loss can be questioned on another level because true militias should not be considered religious movements, and religion is the guiding force behind Aho's group of interest. Finally, historian Darren Mulloy questions the applicability of Lipset and Raab's (1978) status preservatism to militias, but nonetheless attributes militia formation to people "trying to assert their right to define Americanism, and in doing so [employing] the myths, metaphors, and perceived historical lessons of the American experience" (2008:30). My usage of the power-devaluation model takes into account nostalgia for the country's foundational myth, which in turn relies so heavily on an understanding of traditional masculinity, and there should be no conflict with Mulloy's claim.

Table 2. Past Militia Research: Characterizations and Data Sources (*Wright's interviews were with Timothy McVeigh)

Author(s)	Watch group Affiliation?	Militias as Uniformly:				Primary Sources								
		Racist	Religious	Farming-Centric and/or Rural	Connected to McVeigh	Interviews	Constitutional Materials	Millenarian Materials	Other Scholarship	Media	Patriot Radio Data	Internet Posts	Non-Militia Newsletters	Watch group Data
Abanes 1996		•	•	•	•			‡		‡				
Chaloupka 1996		•	•	•	•				‡					
Ferber 1999		•	•	•	•								‡	
Ferber & Kimmel 2004		•	•	•	•								‡	
Kelly & Villaire 2002		•	•	•	•					‡				
Kimmel & Ferber 2000		•	•	•	•								‡	
Levitas 2004	•	•	•	•	•					‡				
Barkun 1997		•	•		•				‡					
Dyer 1998			•	•	•					‡				
Katz & Bailey 2000		•	•	•					‡					
Stern 1996	•	•	•		•				‡	‡				
Wright 2007		•		•	•	‡*								
Aho 1995		•	•			‡								
Crothers 2003		•			•			‡	‡	‡				
Dees & Corcoran 1999	•	•			•					‡				
Freilich 2003			•		•									‡
Gallaher 2003		•		•		‡								
Kaplan 2000		•	•						‡					
Pitcavage 2001	•	•			•				‡	‡				‡

Author(s)	Watch group Affiliation?	Militias as Uniformly:				Primary Sources								
		Racist	Religious	Farming-Centric and/or Rural	Connected to McVeigh	Interviews	Constitutional Materials	Millenarian Materials	Other Scholarship	Media	Patriot Radio Data	Internet Posts	Non-Militia Newsletters	Watch group Data
Swain 2004		•		•					‡					
Barkun 1997			•						‡					
Diamond 1995					•					‡				
Freilich et al. 2005					•				‡					
O'Brien & Haider-Markel 1998			•											‡
Van Dyke & Soule 2002			•											‡
Berlet & Lyons 1995	•									‡				
Berlet 2004	•								‡		‡			
Chermak 2002						‡								
Churchill 2009						‡	‡							
Duffy & Brantley 1997						‡	‡	‡						
Durham 2001									‡	‡				
George & Wilcox 1996									‡	‡				
Karl 1995						‡	‡				‡	‡		
Lo 1982									‡					
Mariani 1996									‡					
Mulloy 2008							‡							
Schlatter 2006	•						‡	‡	‡	‡				
Vinyard 2011							‡	‡	‡	‡	‡			
Weeber & Rodeheaver 2003												‡		

PREVIOUS RESEARCH: MILITIA CHARACTERISTICS

My findings differ in several respects from those in previous studies. In this section, I briefly discuss the areas where this manuscript has major discrepancies from multiple past militia studies. Following this section, I consider methodological differences between my study and others as a likely source for these disparate findings.

Education

As summarized in Table 2, much of the previous militia picture paints a different picture than that I have outlined in this dissertation, and here I present an account of their conflicting findings before offering an explanation for the discrepancy. Whereas I note that my interviewees are slightly more educated relative to the average American, many previous authors state or at least strongly imply that militia members are undereducated relative to the average population (e.g., Kimmel and Ferber 2000; Levitas 2004; O'Brien and Haider-Markel 1998). Their evidence for this claim is based on statistics from non-militia groups, and most do not justify generalizing the statistics to militia groups.

Religion

Many past studies often describe militia members as uniformly and strongly invested in their Christian faith. Other studies indicate that militia members follow a religious system called Christian Identity (e.g., Aho 1995; Ferber 1999; Kimmel and Ferber 2000), which holds that only Whites are descendants of the biblical Adam, while Jews were spawned from a liaison between Eve and Satan, and outgroup animosity extends to all nonwhites (Walters 2000). This sharply conflicts with my findings that while some Michigan

members are Christians, there are also many who are areligious, religion is not an

organizing principle for group activity, and there are none I have encountered in

Michigan who subscribe to the racist and cult-like Christian Identity philosophy or

anything like it. Although it is possible that other religion trends are present in militias in

other states, previous data is based on looking at singular groups (e.g., Aho 1995), or on

unverified rumors from watch groups (e.g., Kimmel and Ferber 2000), so it is not clear

that the data support claims of religious orientations in militia groups. The only militia

group in Michigan with a strong religious affiliation was the Hutaree militia, whose

members were arrested for allegedly plotting to kill police officers in 2010, and other

militias in the state rejected this group.

Racism

Many researchers similarly state that militias are necessarily racist (e.g., Crothers 2003;

Pitcavage 2001; Swain 2004). One goes so far as to say it would be "nearly impossible"

to not encounter anti-Semitic or other white supremacist literature at militia events (Stern

1996:246). As Chapter Four of this manuscript explicates, it is my claim that most

Michigan militias should not be considered racist at the group level, and that the

prevalence of individual racism does not exceed what would likely be found in other

gatherings of the same demographic. Past studies offer little evidence that clearly shows

racism in militia groups, as opposed to in groups with which militias may be conflated.

One exception to this is political geographer Carolyn Gallaher's (2003) study of a militia

group in Kentucky, which I discuss further below.

Relationship to the Government

The existing literature also tends to agree that militias do not recognize the legitimacy of the federal government and plot to take it over, or at least commit acts of terror in protest of it. The general consensus seems to be that militias are uniformly involved in anti-government plots or illegal weapons stockpiling (e.g., Barkun 1997; Crothers 2003; Kimmel and Ferber 2000; Levitas 2004; Stern 1996). Some work that does not invoke a violent portrait of members still maintains that militia members refuse to vote, or otherwise participate normatively in the existing governmental-political system (e.g., Ferber and Kimmel 2004; O'Brien and Haider-Markel 1998). In fact, every militia member I have encountered proudly says they have voted in every election since they were old enough to do so; it is their civic duty, and they look with disgust at fellow citizens who have not exercised this right.

The Hutaree militia, discussed in Chapter Five, certainly serves as an example of a problematic militia unit that did discuss violence against the government. This group is an exception and was ostracized from the main thrust of the movement long before the law enforcement investigation became public knowledge. Other groups' distrust toward the Hutaree makes sense when working with an accurate understanding of the militia's ideological framework.

METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN PAST RESEARCH

I suggest that the discrepancies between my work and previous militia studies are largely due to methodological differences with earlier pieces. Most of the previous studies sought

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to understand the militia as it was in the 1990s. As Chapter Two argues, the contemporary militia differs substantially from its 1990s form.

Additionally, there may be a variety of methodological problems in the past academic work. A major shortfall is that many past militia studies include no interviews or other direct interactions with militia members. Perhaps this is because of fear, or because of difficulties accessing members, but primary data from one's population of interest in a qualitative, ethnographic study is essential to have an accurate and nuanced understanding of the group in question.

Other methodological hindrances more broadly relate to the sources that many previous studies use. For instance, some previous militia authors conflate militias with other groups: patriot groups, white supremacist groups, and the Posse Comitatus. As discussed in Chapter Two, these groups should not be considered identical with militia groups who have different ideological and behavioral orientations. Examples of work that conflate militias with other groups on the right include Michael Kimmel and Abby Ferber (2000) as well as Ferber's earlier work (1999) that uses white supremacist literature in all their examples of written "militia" ideology. As Robert Churchill says, "The authors thus published what purports to be a gendered analysis of the militia movement without examining a single militia-generated text" (2009:10). More to the point, if militias are completely racist as these authors claim, why not use their own materials to demonstrate this fact?

Taking care to use primary texts may not always be sufficient, however. It has been my experience that militia members allow a variety of loosely connected individuals to hand out texts at some functions. Michigan leaders are typically careful to look over

such material to ensure it is not racist or otherwise problematic before they allow it, but other groups may not be so fastidious. This could easily explain discrepancies some authors have noted between relatively egalitarian verbal messages and anti-Semitic or other printed materials at large gatherings (e.g., Gallaher 2003). This is echoed in observations Richard Mitchell made in his work on survivalists:

> "Advertisements for products and services must not be read as destinations, only signposts, not as evidence of survivalists' interests, only of survivalist-oriented marketeering. Speeches and handouts must not be judged without attention to their dramaturgic intent and subsequent interpretations. [...] Those who disregard these cautions may miss survivalism altogether" (2002:16).

Additionally, determining the date of archived materials that are actually generated by militia groups can be difficult, since these texts were not generated with archival or research purposes in mind, and militia materials printed in 1994 are likely to have a very different message than something printed in 2004, or 2011.

Another potential methodological problem is that even some researchers who acknowledge Timothy McVeigh was never a militia member very often begin their books and articles with a full treatise on the horror of the Oklahoma City bombing. Violent and unpredictable assumptions about militias are thereby solidified in readers' minds as a result. This framework also seems to frequently guide the assumptions and tone of the writers as well (e.g., Crothers 2003; Wright 2007).

Other past militia researchers have relied only on online forums or old and undated website posts (e.g., Karl 1995; Weeber and Rodeheaver 2003). This is a substantial methodological problem since many forums, especially older ones, are public and there is no way to distinguish active militia members from non-militia students, law enforcement, or general rabble rousers. There is also rarely any effort made to distinguish

between real group webpages, and webpages likely made by a lone, angsty teenager from his mother's basement. Even materials posted on official group websites are suspect; www.michiganmilitia.com, for example, maintains links to dozens of un-updated pages from many years ago. Despite several attempts to clean up and update the site in the past few years, group coordinators still urge people to alert them to outdated links that may be lingering from nearly a decade ago.

An Extended Note on Watch Group Data

Researchers who do not rely on internet materials often use data from watch groups such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) or especially the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). There has been much written about the political and financial motivations watch groups may have for the positions they publish. In other words, the higher the perception of militia and other right wing danger among the general population, the more media attention and financial donations these agencies receive (Chermak 2002; J. Freilich and Pridemore 2005; Silverstein 2000). As Churchill notes, many of these watch groups have explicit goals of legally limiting the militia movement, and to use them as sources "is to allow the movement's opponents to define it" (2009:9). While this approach is certainly an option, it just as certainly leads to only a partial understanding of the movement.

Part of what these watch groups do is to continue conflating militias with other groups, or at least, to very strongly imply that more connections exist among them than actually do. Additionally, to call the quantitative data compiled by these watch groups is questionable. The SPLC webpage with their most recent list of active militias states, "The list was compiled from field reports, Patriot publications, the Internet, law enforcement

sources and news reports" (SPLC 2010a). Law enforcement sources and news reports alike may only be aware of a biased sample of militia members—those who are prone to violence or illegal behavior and only represent a small portion of the movement. Although the term "field reports" strongly implies SPLC members conduct first-hand research "in the field," this term in fact refers to reports militias themselves generate and post online following their training sessions "in the field" that summarize the events of the day[50]. The SPLC's primary source certainly seems to be webpages, and these are methodologically problematic.

Starting in 2010, the front page of the SPLC's online "Hate Map" (SPLC 2010b) claims they no longer use wepages appearing to be the work of a single individual as sources, and presumably this rule would apply for their listing of militia groups as well. However, the 2010 list continued to include sites that most certainly were individual pages: sites exclusively using "I" instead of "we" and showing only pictures of just one person instead of groups. There are also other sites that are likely to be individual pages but are better disguised as group pages: sites hosted on free servers (paid for by ads), sites with no pictures and no apparent change in writing style across very limited content, and pages that have not been updated in two years or more.

Looking more closely, the list for 2010 (SPLC 2011b) includes three sites that are not militia sites, even under the most generous understanding of the term. Excluding those, 22.6% of the remaining 106 sites were inactive as of the report's release date in February 2011. Excluding these, another 9.3% are duplicates or subpages of sites already

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[50] The SPLC has declined to directly define "field report," stating only, "Our research analysts use several methods to get information on the various groups we list, including the patriots. We use Facebook, MySpace, Google Alerts, monitor their websites, read their magazines and other periodicals, listen to their radio shows, watch YouTube, and read field reports,' which we receive from law enforcement agencies from all over the country" (personal communication, November 15, 2010).

included in the list; for example, michiganmilitia.com and michiganmilitia.com/SMVM were listed as distinct sites even though they reflect the same entity. Yet another 9%[51] do not reflect anything "beyond the mere publishing of [the groups'] Internet material," (SPLC 2011b, 62), meaning these sites do not reflect organizations that meet or train in person, and thus may not be militias at all, and should not be included on the list per the SPLC's own definitions. This leaves 70 sites, or slightly less than two-thirds of the original list for consideration. Of these, 24, or 34.3% are hosted on free, unreliable sites paid for by advertisements, and another 10, or 14.3%, are hosted on very cheap sites ($2.75-$19.99 a month, according to the host sites), which may not be any less temporary or any more reliable than the free sites. This leaves only 36 sites (one-third of the original list) that are likely on dedicated servers and supported by a functioning group.

Regardless of whether individual or group sites are included, other methodological problems with using the internet as a primary or sole source remain. Looking at the SPLC listing of 2010 Michigan militias (SPLC 2011a), which is evidently drawn from web searches, there is at least one group that does not exist at all, another that exists solely online, several that are missing, and a couple that do not have trainings or events separate from those of a larger group. The SPLC listing also has the names of militia groups are given alongside counties where they are located, implying that if a county is listed, the group has a presence there. This is incredibly misleading. To take an example, twenty counties are subsumed under the Michigan Patriot Alliance (MPA) on the SPLC list. During my three years of field work, the MPA had at most twenty regular *members* during its peak, and more typically had five to ten. The SPLC takes the county

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[51] This includes six sites that the SPLC says do not correspond to in-person groups and an additional two sites that are unflagged, but clearly meet these criteria—they are online forums with no mention of training or group unity—but are not indicated as such on the SPLC list.

listings from the group webpages, and the group themselves list counties which they "cover," meaning counties to which they have any kind of connection—a lone member, or even a friend in an entirely different group.

Websites also rarely reflect internal divisions and disagreements that are critical for understanding group delineations. One of the MPA's covered counties on the SPLC list is Jackson. However, prior to this list's creation, the two MPA members who lived in Jackson County formed their own group because the distance to MPA events was too far and they wanted to operate more independently of MPA leadership. This new group, the Jackson County Volunteer Militia (JCVM), disbanded from lack of local interest within just a few months of the split, and the former JCVM leaders now occasionally train with SMVM. However, the JCVM is also on the SPLC list (though with an incorrect name), despite its short life span, and despite its redundancy on the list with the MPA's county coverage.

Militia members take it as a badge of honor if their group makes the list each year, even as they laugh about its inaccuracies and low standards for including a group as a militia. One exchange on a national forum in which Michigan members participate read, for example:

> Person 1: "Heck, they declared me a one man militia. […] I set up a web page with just myself as a member. [...] So these boneheads didn't check anything more than Google. I will have to send them a note thanking them for putting me on the map."

> Person 2: "This summer I am considering making my dogs militia commanders and giving them their own command and website. When they list them next year we will have grown even more."

> Person 3: "[…] I will promote my rabbits and a couple of the neighborhood cats and it call it the Humane Society Militia, lol."

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CONTEXTUALIZING DATA

Reliance on watch group and other problematic data sources likely accounts for discrepancies between previous studies' characterizations of militias and my study's findings. However, it is also possible that earlier studies, particularly those conducted before 2000, are more accurate descriptions of the overall militia movement of the 1990s. As Chapter Two explains, there are important differences between the movement of today and its original instantiation, and prior studies may be accurate reflections of the movement's past. Moving forward to discussing the movement of today, however, it is important to avoid over-generalization of findings from the 1990s to the present.

Researchers studying nostalgic groups and militias in particular must further carefully consider their data sources. As Table 2 indicates, most studies that use interviews with militia members have fewer discrepancies with my findings. There are nonetheless two interview-based studies that have some notable differences from my findings here and are worth considering briefly.

First, Aho's (1995) group of interest were proud adherents of Christian Identity, an exclusionary, racist, belief system. I question whether groups with any religious ideology as their *primary* focus should be considered militias at all. Millenarian groups may be more likely to include religious discussion as part of their gatherings, but most still seem to preference political- or government-based concerns and conspiracy theories above religious ones (see Chapter Two, Churchill 2009). Most millenarian groups also engage in some degree paramilitary training (e.g., target practice, imitating military unit movements through the woods). Those who do not, such as the Militia of Montana, who has a reputation among modern groups for encouraging others to train while not doing so

themselves, perhaps deserve a different label than "militia." Groups that are singularly focused on religion, such as Aho's group, seem most in need of separation from that moniker—regardless of whether they adopt it themselves—and perhaps are best considered little more than religious sects or even cults.

Second and similarly, is Gallaher's (2003) study of a Kentucky group active in the 1990s. This group was comprised primarily of farmers who resented what they perceived to be the state government's disinterest in their economic wellbeing. Although they did express concerns about United Nations actions and other political events, their actions seemed to primarily coalesce around an effort to legalize local hemp farming that would presumably increase the farmers' involvement in the agricultural market. It is not clear that these farmers ever participated in paramilitary training. They did lobby for various gun rights legislation, but this is substantively different from the kind of training most militias do, and political support for gun rights is itself not sufficient to constitute militia membership or support. As a result, perhaps another label besides "militia" is most appropriate for this group, too

Interviews, ideally, should also be supplemented by observations from militia meetings and trainings, in order to understand whether interview responses are largely rhetoric, or enacted belief. Access to nostalgic groups can be difficult and time consuming, but Table 2 supports my claim that methods are very important for accurately contextualizing findings from these groups.

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