

**“ARMING THE GOOD GUYS?”: AN EXAMINATION OF RACIAL FRAMING
IN STUDENTS FOR CONCEALED CARRY ON CAMPUS**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Over the last several decades, issues relating to gun rights have received growing attention from the academic community. Much of this research focuses on the importance of masculinity and violence and shaping modern gun culture in the United States. While these studies are important, they fail to analyze the importance of race in development of the modern gun rights organization. Addressing this gap in the literature, I engaged in 30 in-depth interviews with members of the student-based gun rights organization Students for Concealed Carry on Campus (SCCC). Based on my conversations with the members of SCCC, I discovered a very intense pro-white/anti-other racial framing guiding much of SCCC membership.

DEDICATION

To Seth Nicholas Couch

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my research committee for guiding me, encouraging me, and believing in me through this process. Without your influence and guidance, this project would still merely be a brief essay written for a seminar.

I would also like to thank my family for their encouragement throughout the entirety of my graduate career. Though you did not always understand what exactly I was talking about, you humored me and pushed me to pursue my interests.

NOMENCLATURE

CHL	Concealed Handgun License
MTV	Music Television
NRA	National Rifle Association
SCCC	Students for Concealed Carry on Campus

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Any unarmed people are slaves, or are subject to slavery at any given moment. If the guns are taken out of the hands of the people and only the pigs have guns, then it's off to the concentration camps, the gas chambers, or whatever the fascists in America come up with. One of the democratic rights of the United States, the Second Amendment to the Constitution, gives the people the right to bear arms. However, there is a greater right; the right of human dignity that gives all men the right to defend themselves.

-Huey P. Newton

Produced by the crucible of white violence, blacks in America have long supported the Second Amendment as a means of protecting their communities. The above quotation, written by Huey P. Newton (1967) for *The Black Panther*, articulates an explicit support of the Second Amendment, characterizing the ideology of black self-defense. However, in the almost 40 years that have passed since Newton penned this thought, framing his treatise addressing the white-induced violence confronting the black community, U.S. gun rights rhetoric surrounding self-defenses has made a radical shift from its black, empirically-based, origins resulting from white violence to a co-opted white fantasy.

In the contemporary post-Civil Rights era, guns rights in relation to self-defense have largely become synonymous with the interests of white males (Schwaner et al. 1999). Firearms dealers and advertisers solicit almost exclusively white males and gun rights organizations are disproportionately comprised of white males (Carlson 2013). This seemingly benign phenomenon is one that is actually often racialized from within

the context of a broader gun rights framework. This is often done through the use of racially coded vulnerability narratives.

Vulnerability is theorized as the risk of exposure and loss of control as a construct through which to understand feelings of unsafety. Ignoring the insulation from crime granted by privilege, I argue white males construct a fantasy in which they exist in a state of constant vulnerability to violence which I term “engineered vulnerability.” The engineering vulnerability, as part of the large white worldview, explains not only the exponential increase in gun rights and self-defense rhetoric over the last three decades, but also the homogenous demographics of almost all gun rights organizations.

Importance of Studying the Modern Gun Rights Organization

The hyper-masculine bravado of U.S. gun politics is a recent phenomenon. Founded in 1871 by Col. William C. Church and Gen. George Wingate, Union officers disappointed by the marksmanship of their soldiers, America’s most famous gun rights organization, The National Rifle Association (NRA), was designed as a sportsmen’s club, not a political organization (Melzer 2012). The NRA did not become heavily involved in the political process until 1968 when it helped craft the Gun Control Act of 1968 largely designed to disarm the Black Panthers following their armed occupation of California Statehouse in 1967 (Sugarmann 2010). However, shortly after the Gun Control Act of 1968 was passed, libertarians took control of the NRA establishing its lobbying arm, the Institute for Legislative Action, in 1975, claiming all Americans must arm themselves in “numbers equal to ranks of the patriots who fought in the American Revolutions” (Davidson 1998b). It was at this moment that the NRA shifted from its

sportsmen origin into a political organization endorsing amassing large amounts of firearms. Despite this recent phenomenon, prior to the call of the Black Panthers for blacks to militarize against white oppression in the 1960s, Second Amendment organizations were largely unheard of outside of the context of sport.

The modern gun rights organization is a social phenomenon worthy of examination because it is constructed via a “white racial frame,” a centuries old pro-white/anti-black worldview (Feagin 2013). The terms of “race,” “racial,” and “people/communities of color” that are throughout this report are in reference to the social construction of the “other” within the U.S. social order. This grouping of people is the result of those with power deciding it is important to designate superior/inferior based on physical and/or cultural characteristics (Feagin 2010). Racialization is a paramount aspect of the modern gun rights organization, and refers to processes through which those in power implicate race into situations that do not inherently involve “race.” This process is manifest in the construction of narratives orienting the organizations. The social constructs of race and racialized narratives guide the dominant racial frame and structure the social world in meaning ways (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Feagin 2013).

Contemporary Second Amendment organizations warrant further analysis because they maintain “patriarchal oppression” (Echols 1989). Similar to racialization, patriarchal oppression can be understood as the structuring of society by those in power in ways that benefit (white) males and perpetuate hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The dominant tropes associated with white patriarchy, specifically

the “damsel in distress,” saturate the narratives of contemporary gun rights organizations.

The modern gun rights organization is both a racialized and gendered entity. Departing from its sport based origin, the contemporary Second Amendment association developed as a direct response to the Civil Rights Movement. Fearful of the Black Panthers exercising their right to bear arms, white gun rights groups endorsed gun control as a means of removing firearms from black hands. Shortly after, the modern gun rights organization emerged championing the militarization of the public and more importantly, the protection of (white) womanhood, a rallying cry white males have often used to justify taking up arms against men of color (Williams-Myers 1994; Melzer 2012).

The State of Gun Rights Organization Research

Social science has been slow to examine the foundational role that white supremacy plays in the construction of modern gun culture. To date, only a handful of recent articles and/or books have begun to explore this matter. Primarily, social science scholarship addressing the role of race in gun culture is embedded within an intersectionality discourse privileging gender and mentioning race in passing. The most cited discussion of race and gun culture is provided by Angela Stroud. Stroud (2012) argues modern gun culture allows men to enact hegemonic masculinity through fantasies of violence marked by race. However, Stroud does not position race as her primary level of analysis or explore the significance of racialized fantasy violence. Rather, she places an examination of race beneath a much broader conversation of gun culture and

hegemonic masculinity. This decision, while accentuating the importance of gender in gun culture, results in the equally important role of race being ignored.

Other recent social science research on race and gun culture focuses on the motivation fueling one's desire to own a firearm. Carlson (2012) explains the experiences of racism at the hand of police and other government officials results in blacks' desire to own firearms for protection not only from crime but also from police. In contrast, it was observed that when given the opportunity, whites were much more willing to deter action to police officials. While there is an evident dearth of literature examining the function of race in modern gun culture, the work of gender scholars provides a starting point.

A large body of social science research hones in on the patriarchal proclivities of American gun culture. Connell (2005) and O'Neill (2007) link modern U.S. gun culture with "violent heroism." NRA members also have been found to embrace a "frontier masculinity," which stresses a man's duty to defend traditional social order and a large scale endorsement of homophobia (Melzer 2012). The patriarchal tendencies of U.S. gun culture need not always be explicit. Carlson (2013) argues raw patriarchal domination is taboo. Thus, gun owners reproduce masculine privilege via the social construction of crime, which is based on patriarchal understandings of vulnerability and inequality.

Reframing the Research

It is difficult to explain why the serious social science literature on gun culture and Second Amendment organizations, after noting that race is an element of their homogeneous demographic, continues to minimize a race-based analysis in favor of a

more gender-focused approach. In other words, given that whiteness is a core element of modern gun culture, why turn to gender specific analysis instead of a more holistic approach examining race *and* gender in a white male-based phenomenon? To a large degree, the absence of an analysis race from most studies on gun rights in the U.S. can be attributed scope. Seeking to remedy this matter, I use an intersectional lens drawing, on the work of race and gender scholars.

One of the tools aiding my analysis is derived from Hudson-Weems' (1994) notion of *Africana Womanism*. Africana Womanism is a theoretical model for holistically explaining the experience of blacks in America without the gender politics inherent in the "waves" feminism. For the womanist, race and gender in the black community are interwoven and cannot be separated and solely examined from within the anti-patriarchy framework of feminism (Hudson-Weems 2000). Rather, the gender issues within the black community must be understood as fundamentally stemming from whiteness and the experience of white oppression. Applying this same logic to the gender-heavy framework guiding research on gun organizations, the centrality of whiteness in modern gun culture is obscured by gender politics. Thus, the general approach to studying gun rights organizations and gun culture, though not a conspired event by gender scholars, deflects attention away from the importance of white supremacy in modern gun culture.

As previously noted, my goal for this project is to examine the U.S. modern gun rights organization, an issue currently at the forefront public discourse, policymaking, and academic research, from a critical race perspective. This study focuses on the

student-based gun rights organization Students for Concealed Carry on Campus. Largely comprised of millennials, I wanted to understand how the members of SCCC interpret the social world. Specifically, I wanted to know *how the members of gun rights organizations utilized narratives of race to frame their desire to concealed carry*. This work is in large part a response to the current body of research and its limitations in addressing modern gun culture from a race-based approach. Rather, the more critical literature on Second Amendment organizations addresses the matter from an “anti-patriarchy” approach and, in general, only superficially touches on the racial element I argue is foundational to the arrangement of modern gun culture and gun rights organizations.

Outline of Remaining Chapters

Chapter II of this project outlines my theoretical framework for analysis. A large portion of this chapter centers on Feagin and Mills’ concepts of systemic racism and the epistemology of ignorance, respectively. This chapter also engages the broader research on vulnerability. The literature review of Chapter III provides a background on the firearms organization literature. Due to the lack of research on firearm organizations, this chapter is largely comprised of research related to firearm ownership. Because the current project is prompted by the current trends in the literature, utilizing a race critical framework, I offer a targeted criticism of the limitations I see in the current literature. Chapter IV details my methodological approach as well as the “nuts and bolts” of my interview process. Chapters V and VI are my data chapters where my respondents discuss their motivations via narratives for joining a firearms organization. I

contextualize Chapter V in response to the overarching racial framing dominant in my participants' narratives. Following this discussion, Chapter VI moves on to analyze the various means respondents frame their vulnerability to crime as justification for carrying firearms. Chapter VII then offers a discussion of the theoretical and practical significance of my finding. The final chapter offers a terse summation of the project, an acknowledgement of limitations, and ends with a call for public health professionals to address the threat firearms on campus pose for students of color. I now turn to my theoretical framework.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical basis for my overarching discussion of race, vulnerability, and the modern firearms organization. Specifically, I engage two frameworks addressing the structural nature of racism and one framework regarding the structural quality of vulnerability. Feagin's work on systemic racism and Mills' concept of the epistemology of ignorance provide components for understanding white supremacy via structure while Carlson's work on universal vulnerability and the misrecognition of vulnerability guides the analysis of structural vulnerability. Additionally, I will utilize Bonilla-Silva's work on color-blind racism as a key lens for interpreting racialized narratives in the color-blind era. Further, I engage Omi and Winant's work on racial projects briefly in this chapter, to be returned to in greater depth in Chapter V. While Omi and Winant's work is important to my project and examination of data because of their treatment of social movements as a means to redistributing/maintaining racial power and access to resources, I briefly engage other research on social movements, race, and power.

From an anti-colonial perspective, I am interested in the utilization of violent social movements by dominant groups in response to mythical threat narratives. As explained by Williams-Myers (1994), whites have long constructed fictitious threat narratives, ranging from economic competition to sexual assault, as justification for taking up arms against blacks and other people of color in the United States. An anti-colonial framework is useful for this project because it is concerned with the utilization

of social movements by dominant groups to maintain social control and the resulting decisions the oppressed must address, a focus very much at the heart of this study (Cesaire 2001). I primarily engage the anti-colonial framework in Chapter VII. Lastly, I end this chapter with a nod to critical race theory and Derrick Bell's work on racial realism. My three main frameworks, systemic racism, the epistemology of ignorance, and structural vulnerability, will now be addressed.

Systemic Racism

Racism has been defined as “a fundamental characteristic of social projects which create or reproduce structures of domination based on essentialist categories” (Omi and Winant 1994). However, racism is more than a mere characteristic of social projects. In its most basic form, racism is a white supremacist mechanism for colonization, exploitation, and overall subordination based on considerations of race (Feagin 2006). This definition of racism is superior to previous definitions and critical to this project because it situates whiteness and race-based domination at the core of society. As Feagin (2010) notes, racism is not just “...racial prejudice and individual bigotry...[but] a material, social, and ideological reality that is well embedded in all major U.S. institutions,” it is *systemic* in U.S. society. Therefore, all racial relationships must be contextualized from within a systemic understanding of racial domination (Feagin 2006).

Systemic racism “encompasses a broad range of racialized dimensions of American society: the racist framing, racist ideology, stereotyped attitudes, racist emotions, discriminatory habits and actions, and extensive racist institutions developed

over centuries by whites” (Feagin 2010). Thus, from this approach, white supremacy is imbedded in the very foundation and organization of American society. Regarding gun rights, discussions by the framers outlining the Second Amendment as a means of establishing militias to suppress slave revolts, kill enslaved Africans, and aid in massacring the indigenous population provides a good example of how white supremacy is ingrained in the foundation of U.S. society.

Feagin (2006) describes the U.S. as a system of complex networks and instructional practices guided by racial domination yet are open to change when social pressures and elite whites’ interests coincide. Specifically with the issue of gun rights, the transition from the Slave Codes explicitly prohibiting blacks from owning firearms to the NRA drafted Gun Control Act of 1968 disproportionately disarming black communities, though the language may change, the message is clear: Firearm ownership is a right reserved for whites. Though mechanisms of oppression may change, the social and material consequences of white supremacy remain the same.

The modern gun rights organization must be situated within a systemic racism framework because this theory argues that the recurrent use of coercive power, often in excess, is required for the operation and maintenance of white supremacy (Feagin 2006). The predictability of white calls to arms against the racialized “other,” often in the form of lynching, is well documented as discussed in Chapter V. Further, systemic racism is the best model to direct the project because of its emphasis on the social alexithymia, the well-institutionalized inability of whites to experience empathy for people of color, resulting from the alienating racial relations fundamental to the racial system. As

discussed in detail in the data chapters of this project, social alexithymia is evident in the many narratives provided by participants relative to racial framing (Chapter V) and vulnerability (Chapter VI). Critical to the systemic racism framework is the concept of the white racial frame.

The White Racial Frame

Since first contact with people of color, whites have socially, economically, and physically exploited and constructed groups of color from within this framework of racial oppression (Feagin 2010). The white racial frame is defined as “the centuries old worldview and racial construction of reality by whites which has rationalized racial oppression and inequality” (Feagin 2013). This racist frame is characterized by five important features: racial stereotypes; racial narratives and interpretations; racial images and language; racialized emotions; and inclinations to discriminate. More importantly, central to the white racial frame is the idea of white virtue and its counterpart, the inherent vice of the racialized “other” (Feagin 2006). The framing element of Feagin’s systemic racism model is critical to this project because it is the framing of people of color as vice-driven that characterizes the narratives dominating much of modern gun culture.

Another connection to the systemic racism framework is observed in Feagin’s (2012) recent work on the U.S. political process in which he asserts the framing of the Constitution and subsequent political movements have largely been focused, whether explicitly or implicitly, on maintaining the dominance of white males. White domination in the U.S. emerges and is solidified in the U.S. via political movements, large-scale

violence, and social movements such as the modern gun culture, which embrace militarizing against the racialized other. Thus, examining contemporary firearms organizations, virtually all of which are overwhelmingly comprised of white males, is critical for understanding contemporary manifestations of white supremacy due to firearms' intimate history with white domination.

Color-blind Racism

A key element of studying white supremacy in post-Civil Rights America is Bonilla-Silva's work on color-blind racism. Bonilla-Silva (2013) argues the social movements of the 1960s ushered in a new wave of racial ideology that made explicit racism taboo, while still striving to maintain white dominance via a more covert discourse of color-blindness. Explained in greater detail, Bonilla-Silva (2013) notes:

Colorblind racism became the dominant racial ideology as mechanisms and practices for keeping Blacks and other racial minorities "at the bottom" changed...In contrast to the Jim Crow era, where racial inequality was enforced through overt means (e.g., signs saying "No Niggers Welcomed Here" or shotgun diplomacy at the voting booth), today racial practices operate in "now you see it, now you don't" fashion.

Paramount to this study are the discursive maneuvers, or semantic moves, characteristic of color-blind racism because they permeate the narratives of contemporary gun culture. Bonilla-Silva and Foreman (2000) argue these movements are often expressed by whites speaking in code about issues related to race as a means of appearing to be non-racist. In terms of the modern firearms organization, discursive maneuvers are often observed in members' desire to discuss *bad neighbors* and *thugs* as justification for carrying firearms due to the abstract, yet implied racial, dimension of such language. The utilization of

semantic moves within the modern gun rights organization will be explored in greater depth in Chapter V.

For the time being, it should be noted that Bonilla-Silva's work on color-blind racism compliments the systemic racism model for understanding contemporary racism through the white racial frame. Color-blind racism is the latest manifestation of the dominant racist frame but it is not unique. The narratives and discursive moves characterizing color-blind racism are rooted in the overarching white cognitive framework justifying white dominance and can be observed in previous manifestations of the white racial frame (Feagin 2010). The dominant racial frame, while possessing a static pro-white/anti-other nucleus, is fluid and can be presented in various forms while still maintaining its core quality of guaranteeing white supremacy. Important to this discussion is Omi and Winant's concept of the *racial project*.

Racial Projects

While approaching race relations in the U.S. less systemically than Feagin, Omi and Winant's work on racial projects is particularly useful for this study. For Omi and Winant (1994) the significance of race in the U.S. is determined by a system of racial projects that simultaneously interpret, represent, and explain racial dynamic and seek to organize and distribute resources along particular racial lines. Therefore, these racial projects explain how the meaning of race in specific discursive practices fundamentally shape both structural and everyday experiences. The concept of the racial project is particularly useful for this study in that political movements surrounding firearms have historically, as well as in the contemporary, been attached to definitions of whiteness and

blackness, as exemplified in the establishment of the Black Codes.

In Chapter V of the current study, the political activity of firearms organization is a central topic of examination. In conjunction with Omi and Winant's work on racial projects, my examination of firearm groups' political activity follows Feagin's (2006) assertion that not all groups in society possess social power and racial projects are more often than not *white racist projects* justified via the white racial frame and are concerned with concentrating resources, rights, and even more power in the hands of whites while simultaneously syphoning resources, rights, and power away from communities of color. This idea that racial projects are actually white racist projects is fundamental to this study in that firearms groups have long utilized racialized narratives as a means of reserving Second Amendment rights for the white population and synchronously suppressing any large scale exercise of the Second Amendment rights by communities of color.

The act of carrying a firearm is not a lone act isolated from larger social realms. Carrying a firearm is directly tied to a sociohistoric context and has significance outside of the lone act. In other words, it is not merely the desire to carry a firearm that must be examined but also what carrying represents. Theoretically, while other frameworks are used in the project, Feagin's theoretical model is optimal for explaining my respondents' articulation of narratives justifying their *desire* to carry firearms while simultaneously characterizing a implicitly, and at times explicitly, racialized vice-driven "other" warranting a *need* to carry. In sum, Feagin's work is useful as a theoretical guide for this study because it addresses the fundamental nature of racial oppression as ingrained in the

very fabric of U.S. social reality. The systemic racism model places white supremacy as a specter permeating all elements of society and dictating social relations through social structures and cognition. Thus, systemic racism serves well to examine the cyclical race-driven narratives of gun rights pervasive in U.S. history and in the modern gun rights organization.

Vulnerability

What exactly is vulnerability? Vulnerability is best defined as “the risk of exposure and loss of control” (Killias 1990). Stated differently, vulnerability is the risk of finding oneself in a social situation outside of one’s control. Due to the important connection between social power and agency, within the criminological community, vulnerability is intrinsically linked to the structural issues of race, class, and gender because marginalized groups are much more likely to find themselves in situations beyond their control due to their lack of social power (Pantazis 2000). Regarding this study, a theoretical framework of vulnerability is essential because, while vulnerability is linked to structure, it can be appropriated by dominant groups and used through social projects as a means of reproducing privilege and the power structure.

Regressive social projects have long utilized vulnerability narratives as justification for mobilization. In these situations, rather than approaching vulnerability as a structural issue with specific marginalized victims, dominant groups members frame vulnerability as a fundamental aspect of human life thus granting them the option of claiming “victim status” (Dragiewicz 2008). Specifically regarding gun rights, the NRA’s gun control campaign of the 1960s seeking to disarm blacks taking up arms

against white oppression provides an excellent example of the dominant group appropriating vulnerability. Despite the social reality of white supremacy placing blacks in a state of vulnerability, the overwhelmingly white NRA constructed narratives framing blacks utilizing the Second Amendment as threats to social order.

An important element of my vulnerability framework emerges from Carlson's recent work on vulnerability politics and American gun culture. Carlson (2013) asserts, "by emphasizing the ever-present risk of crime, gun carriers are able to present their cause as a universal one, glossing over the ways in which race and gender structure who is most vulnerable to crime." As previously noted, the universal framing of vulnerability significantly downplays the importance of structure in determining a population's risk of being in a situation beyond its control. Carlson (2013) further explains:

As overt displays of sexism and racism become more increasingly taboo in American society, vulnerability politics – as a form of politics that recuperates and reproduces privilege and inequality through universalistic discourses – may prove to be an increasingly pertinent form of political discourse.

Thus, Carlson's work on the universal narrative of vulnerability in U.S. gun culture provides a nice framework for launching this project because the understanding that vulnerability discourse can be manipulated by the dominant group as a covert means of maintaining power. However, I differ from Carlson in that in terms of race, via my concept of *engineered vulnerability*, white appropriation of vulnerability is not a recent development. Rather, white threat narratives of vulnerability have been a central feature of the white ethos since its inception, emerging from white fears of Native American and African American revolts against oppression.

The Epistemology of Ignorance

Another guide I engage to theorize about race and vulnerability narratives in the modern gun rights organization is Mills' concept of the epistemology of ignorance. In the opening to *The Racial Contract*, Mills asserts there is an overarching social contract dictating social relations along racial lines. As with all contract theory, citizens within the Racial Contract dictate to the state which rights are to be reserved for the individual and which are surrendered. However, Mills notes that not all social actors are categorized as signatories of the contract. Under the Racial Contract, only whites are defined as contractual signatories (Mills 1997). Similar to Feagin's white racial frame, Mills proposes the concept of the epistemology of ignorance as a key cognitive element of the Racial Contract.

Within the "fine print" of the Racial Contract, is the requirement that signatories embrace an inverted epistemology or way of knowing the world. Mills (1997) asserts, "On matters of race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an *epistemology of ignorance*, a particular pattern of cognitive dysfunctions, producing the ironic outcome that white will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made." This epistemic requirement of whiteness produces a model that inhibits self-transparency and the most basic understanding of social realities. Thus, to a significant extent, "whites live in an invented delusional world, a racial fantasyland, a *consensual hallucination*"(Mills 1997). Therefore, due to the epistemic component of the Racial Contract, misunderstanding, evasion, and general self-deception must be understood as the core of whiteness.

Mills' work on the Racial Contract is critical to this study because the way in which white males in modern gun rights organizations construct narratives of vulnerability are inherently tied to an inverted epistemology. As noted in the previous section, vulnerability is fundamentally linked to structurally marginalized populations. Stated differently, minorities, whether in terms of race, class, gender or sexuality, are vulnerable populations due to their lack of social power. In contrast, the privilege awarded to members of the modern gun rights organization, who are overwhelmingly white, heterosexual, middle-class males, insulates those individuals from the daily risks that characterize a vulnerable population. Yet, central to contemporary Second Amendment discourse is the narrative of hyper-vulnerability, despite its dearth of empirical grounding.

Mills' concept of the epistemology of ignorance provides a theoretical guide for examining a core belief of the modern gun organization and a springboard for my proposed concept of *engineered vulnerability*. Whiteness requires its signatories embrace an inverted worldview that denies empirical reality and constructs a fictitious world in which whites are under constant threat of being usurped by the mythical, barbarous, "dark masses." In similar vein, contemporary gun rights organizations engineer a style of vulnerability that places the possibility of threat as an ever-present danger warranting personal militarization. This threat is often described as a thug or member of a "bad part of town," which is code talk for a male of color. Due to this narrative of vulnerability being so pervasive among the responses of my participants, it is essential to analyze the construction and significance of said narrative and Mills' work

provides a framework for exploring this phenomena. I now turn to my review of the literature on gun rights organizations and, more generally, gun ownership.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current research on gun rights organizations, and firearms owners more broadly, primarily focuses on the motivations for gun owners to purchase a firearm (Carlson 2012; Stroud 2012; Bouffard, Nobles, et al. 2012b; Miller et al. 1999; Melzer 2012). These studies reveal a racial differential in terms of motivation for firearm ownership, with whites generally purchasing firearms for protections against crime and people of color purchasing gun for protections against the state and self-appointed vigilantes. As is evident in the public discourse of the NRA and other gun rights organizations, which happen to be overwhelmingly comprised of white males, the justification for gun ownerships centers on the ever-present threat of victimization. On the other hand, the firearms activism of groups like the Black Panthers was much less concerned with crime and focuses more on defending against agents of the state. Although issues surrounding firearms have assumed a major position in the criminological research over the last decade, there is a general consensus in the criminological community that there is still a large amount of work needed to understand the nuance of U.S. gun politics.

My purpose of this chapter is twofold. I will first begin by summarizing the current research on gun rights activism in America. To accomplish this goal, I will critically dissect each of the four explanations of gun ownership addressed in the literature beginning with the social construction of guns as crime-fighting tools and concluding with Carlson's (2012) recent work on gun ownership as a matter of policing

politics. Lastly, I will conclude this chapter but examining the research on the specific organization of interest to this study, Student for Concealed Carry on Campus (SCCC).

Gun Politics in the United States

Scholars offer four accounts of the guns that Americans legally own and carry for self-defense purposes: as a response to crime, as an expression of cultural worldviews and dispositions, as a redress of status anxieties, and as a matter of policing politics. However, none of these approaches addresses the central role that race plays, whether in a historical or contemporary context, in shaping gun rights and ownership.

The first explanation of gun ownership stresses the social construction of guns as crime-fighting tools. For those embracing this approach to gun rights, Black's (1980) self-help theory guides their understanding of the narratives of gun ownership. Arguing gun ownership results from citizens' lack of faith in the state for protection against crime, Smith and Uchida (1988) assert gun owners practice self-help via firearms. Other scholars using the collective security hypothesis argue that the fear of crime coupled with a general lack of faith in collective security apparatuses, specifically the police, fuel the individual's decision to purchase a firearms and engage in self-help as a means of enhancing private security (Gua 2008; McDowall and Loftin 1983; Young et al. 1987).

Strengthening this approach, a series of recent studies have explored how Americans specifically construct guns as tools for protection from within the larger American discourse surrounding the "War on Crime" (Garland 2002; Simon 2004, 2007). While these studies note post-1960s Americans express heightened anxiety about victimization, they tend to obscure the social actors through the language of

“Americans” and “U.S. citizens” thereby removing the specificity of the primarily white, and often male, social actors expressing heightened anxiety (Williams-Myers 1994; Feagin 2010). Further, these studies tend to emphasize the legal ramifications of constructing guns as crime-fighting tools than on the actual means ascribed to guns and the processes through which said meaning are constructed. Thus, while these early works present a launching point for understanding gun rights in American, their failure to analyze the ways in which guns are constructed in racial terms as well as the racialized emotions fostering increased gun ownerships post-1960s leaves much to be desired.

The second body of literature on gun ownership asserts cultural worldviews and dispositions drive Americans to carry guns. Pulling from Rayner’s (1992) cultural theory of risk, criminologists argue the individualist narrative permeating American society creates a culture in which individuals are more likely to arm themselves for defense against crime rather than being perceived as dependent on the state (Braman and Kahan 2006; Kahan and Black 2003; Downs 2002). Nesbitt and Cohen assert that this individualistic self-reliant culture is particularly strong in the American South. According to their culture of honor thesis, Nesbitt and Cohen (1996) claim the southern region of the U.S. experiences higher levels of extra-legal violence, compared to other regions of the country, resulting from the longstanding cultural ramifications from the economic and social development of southern states. Other research in this area attempts to culturally explain gun ownership simply in terms of liberal and conservative sentiment (Lakoff 2002).

While the cultural worldview approach to understanding gun ownership is useful in terms of linking cultural narratives to firearms ownership, it fails to unpack the longstanding cultural meanings ascribed to firearms and the chronic and consistent ways in which guns are utilized in American society despite cultural shifts. Namely, that firearm ownership has been recognized as a right reserved for white Americans. Dating back to passage of the Black Codes, prohibiting blacks from owning firearms, whites have often intentionally used politics as means of keeping guns out of black hands (Johnson 2014). Additionally, during the few eras in which blacks were allowed to own firearms, their communities were met with increased violence by both the state as well as ordinary whites (Williams 2013; Williams-Myers 1994). Therefore, while the cultural worldview approach to understanding gun ownership in the U.S. is useful in connecting cultural narratives and gun ownership, its universal treatment of American culture fails to acknowledge the dominance of whites in determining American culture, including the narratives about gun ownership. Thus, a critical analysis of power relations, a core element of sociological research, is lacking from this approach.

The third, and most critical approach, to the study of gun ownership situates gender and racial dynamics of gun ownership at the forefront. Through a systematic analysis of the greater Detroit metropolitan area, Young (1986) finds that white males who express explicitly racist views are much more likely than any other group of citizens to own firearms for self-protection against crime. Other studies note that white, male, and conservative gun owners deploy guns as a means of addressing their anxieties with a changing world. Based on this recent series of studies, gun ownership can be

understood as a means for a white, heterosexual conservative man to reclaim the masculine privilege threatened by progressive social movements (Burbick 2006; Connell 2005; Melzer 2012; O'Neill 2007; Ansell 2001; Berlet and Lyon 2000). Further, white conservative men, according to this approach, are more likely than other groups to construct crime in a racialized manner (Stroud 2012; Stabile 2006). Regarding gender, it has been observed that white male conservatives are more likely than other groups to naturalize women as victims in need of a male, or the masculine symbol of a gun, to protect themselves (Carlson 2013).

While this more critical approach is a step in the right direction in terms of emphasizing the dynamics of race and gender in gun ownership, it makes one fundamental flaw in that it is ahistorical for assuming firearms became gendered and racialized only after the various progressive movements of the 1960s. A critical analysis of drafting of The Constitution reveals that since its introduction, the Second Amendment has been racialized (Feagin 2010, 2012; Bell 2008). As Bogus (1998) notes, the militias described in The Constitution were often actually armed slave patrols which would “examine every plantation each month and search ‘all Negro Houses for offensive Weapons and Ammunition’ and apprehend and give twenty lashes to any slave found outside plantation ground.” Slavery could only exist in a police state and arming white Americans established just that, a police state controlled by the armed white masses. This trend white access and black prohibition to firearms continues throughout American history aside from a few brief eras in which blacks could legally own guns without repression (Johnson 2014). Thus, in the U.S. context, race has always been tied very

centrally to firearms, not just since the 1960s or as a type of backlash against New Deal politics as suggested by current research on gun ownership emphasizing gender and race.

The fourth, and most recent approach to understanding gun rights in the U.S. is proposed by Carlson. Carlson (2012) argues gun ownership is linked to political beliefs about the state's power to police and the War on Crime. Constructing a binary of citizen beliefs about police, it is proposed that neo-liberal gun politics are used by whites to justify a framing of guns as responsible tools for protection against black and Latino criminals. On the other hand, Carlson (2012) claims neo-radical politics, based largely out of black experience with state oppression, interpret firearms as both a means to protect from a raceless criminal as well as police and other official with the propensity to violate. While Carlson's work provides a much needed transition in the research embracing the nuance of gun ownership in terms of motivations by race, there is still work that needs to be done to better understand white male gun ownership. Being that white heterosexual males possess the largest amount of social power, it is essential that as researchers we continue to critically scrutinize the lived experience. Too often dominant groups, whether racial or sexual, become invisible in the research once an angle to study the subordinate group is presented.

Together, these four models for understanding why Americans own guns provide much needed insight. However, they cannot explain the meanings, and the cyclical nature of said meanings, my respondents attached to firearms because they fail to fully address the way white supremacy foundationally shapes U.S. gun politics. Further, these models do not account for the pervasiveness sense of vulnerability expressed by my

interviews. By unpacking how pro-gun Americans seeking to carry guns frame their vulnerability to crime and how carrying a firearms addresses this susceptibility, we can address the means by which race aids in gun owners' construction vulnerability to crime.

Students for Concealed Carry

Founded in 2007 as a result of Seung-Hui Cho's attack at Virginia Tech, Students for Concealed Carry (SCC) is a nationwide student-based organization boasting 43,000 members comprised of college students, parents, professors, and campus employees. Arguing "holders of state-issued concealed handgun licenses should be allowed the same measure of personal protection on college campuses that current laws afford them virtually everywhere else," SCC is at the center of the debate to allow handguns on college campuses. Notably recognized for challenging the University of Colorado in *Students for Concealed Carry on Campus vs. Regents of the University of Colorado*, finding the University of Colorado's ban on campus carry was illegal under state law, SCC continues to be the fastest growing student gun rights organization in the nation with chapters in all fifty states and the District of Columbia (Bouffard et al. 2012a). While the exponential increase in SCC's membership is noteworthy, it should be made clear that current work in the social sciences finds the majority of college students and faculty are highly opposed to allowing firearms on college campuses.

Given that college campuses are one of the safest places in communities, it is suggested that introducing firearms into a stressful environment may increase risk for violent crimes as well as self-inflicted injuries (Joffe 2008). Examining faculty perceptions of the impact of allowing concealed handguns on college campuses,

Thompson et al. (2013) found faculty to be highly concerned about a decrease in overall safety should firearms be permitted on campus. Of the 1,125 faculty members surveyed in their study, the authors noted 97% would not obtain to CHL for work purposes and 93% expressed great fear of a decline in campus safety should faculty, students, and visitors be allowed to carry concealed handguns on campus. College undergraduate echo this concern noting the university campus as a unique environment that does not require one to carry concealed handguns (Cavanaugh et al. 2012). In light of the larger college community's opposition to concealed carry on campus, the motivations of the minority supporting allowing CHL to bring firearms to campus must be scrutinized.

Due to its relatively recent nature, the research on SCC is sparse. However, work in the public health arena on undergraduate owning firearms reveals a possible glimpse into the membership of SCC. Research in public health has found student CHL holders to be a "high risk" population engaging in chronic risky behavior, in trouble with the police, and having a history of binge drinking and illegal drug use (Douglas et al. 1997; Miller et al. 1999, 2002). Further, Bouffard et al. (2012a) find the undergraduates most likely to possess a CHL or obtain a CHL in the next year largely display authoritarian or dogmatic personality types. This high risk behaviors observed by Douglas et al. (1997) and Miller et al. (1999) as well as the authoritarian personality documented by Bouffard et al. (2012a) are not evenly distributed across race and gender. Rates of high-risk behaviors and authoritarian personality are exponentially higher among white males, the overwhelming majority of concealed carry advocates (Cavanaugh et al. 2012; Bouffard, Nobles, and Wells 2012a; Douglas et al. 1997; Miller et al. 1999). This finding is critical

to understanding the significance of the SCC movement, but has been left unexplored by research on students endorsing concealed carry.

In conclusion, the above review of the literature on gun ownership provides the context for the thrust of this project. Because I engage gun rights from a systemic racism framework, it will be using race critical lens for analysis to challenge the traditional ways of examining white supremacy, thus the criticism-heavy approach of this chapter. Further, because the project was motivated by the current state of affairs in research on gun rights, I feel it essential to point out what I see are the limitations in the literature. All of this is in an effort to follow a fundamental tenet of critical work, that is, to engage in research that is transformative, even if only internally. The following chapter on methodology lays out my methodology approach to this current study.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

I began this project in order to better understand, in light of the highly polarizing nature of the topic, how college students advocating for concealed carry on campus frame their activism. In particular, I wanted to uncover the roles that race and gender play in constructing the threat narratives guiding the modern gun rights organization Students for Concealed Carry on Campus.

After completing the initial interviews for this project, I noticed my own status as a black male created a unique experience for both the participants and myself and required that I take special steps to develop rapport with my respondents. For this reason, it is critical that I outline the various methodological approaches I used in this project. First, I will outline the methodology used to recruit participants and collect data. Second, I will provide a synopsis of the college students participating in this study. Lastly, I will conclude with a discussion of the methods used to analyze my data.

The Interview Process

This project used semi-structured, qualitative interviews as the primary means of data collection. Thirty interviews were conducted to gain a more holistic understanding of the motivations of college students advocating for concealed carry on campus. The interviews opened with a brief discussion of the participant's involvement in Students for Concealed Carry on Campus. This portion of the interview asked respondents questions surrounding how they came to be involved with the organization and why their participation is important. The students were then asked to outline the foreseeable

advantages and consequences of permitting concealed carry campus. Portion one of the interview concluded with a brief vignette focusing on the desire to become involved in Students for Concealed Carry on Campus.

Next, the second phase of the interview focused on the students' carrying practices. This portion of the interview process was interested investigating the participants' personal history with firearms. This section of the interview concluded with a vignette addressing the desire to obtain a CHL.

Lastly, the interview concluded with questions about chapter demographics and recruitment. This portion of the interview was centered on questions asking students to describe the demographics of their respective chapters of SCCC and outline steps taken to recruit new members. Upon completing the interview, participants were asked to fill out a brief demographic form (see Appendix).

Respondents were recruited to participate via social networking sites, handing out fliers at organization meetings, leaving fliers at local firearms dealers, mass recruitment emails, and snowball sampling (Noy 2008). The fliers and other recruitment materials outlined a strict selection criterion for inclusion in this project. Potential participants needed to be members of a chapter of Students for Concealed Carry on Campus. Those individuals expressing interest in becoming involved in the project were given a detailed description of the project as well as what their part in the study would be before a semi-structured, in-depth interview was setup. Interviews were conducted at times and via mediums agreeable to the individual participant. Mediums for interviews included face-to-face, telephone, and Skype. Approximately 46% (14) of the interviews

were conducted in person. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 2 hours and were all conducted by this researcher. Prior to all interviews, informed consent was obtained from all respondents. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. This methodology and interview protocol was reviewed and approved by Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board.

Participants

Over a period of six months, I conducted interviews with a total of 30 students who were either currently members SCCC or who had graduated but were members of SCCC while enrolled at an institution of higher learning. Although their demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1, it is useful to review them here. Overall, participants' ages ranged from 18 to 30, with 22 being the average. The overwhelming majority of participants self identified as white (29) with one self-identified Hispanic male being the sole person of color in my sample. In terms of gender composition, the majority of my respondents were male (28). Two women were part of my sample.

At the time of this interview, the individuals involved in the study had been members of Students for Concealed Carry on Campus for between 1 to 4 years, with 2 years being the average. The majority of participants were undergraduates (27) and current members of a campus chapter of SCCC (26) with a minority of respondents being graduate students (2) or a young professional (1). Although participants had grown up in a myriad of locations (international countries, rural U.S. towns, large and medium sized U.S. cities), at the time of this study, my participants hailed from every region of the continental United States, with a majority being from the American southwest (14),

followed by the south (8), then the Midwest (6), and finally the American northeast (1) and west coast (1) tied for last.

Notably, the students were well advanced in the college career with more than half being in their last year of undergraduate studies (20) or in a graduate program (2). One man had recently finished law school. Most of the other students were either in the second (2) or third year (4) of undergraduate work. One college freshman was included in this sample. Overwhelmingly, the majority of respondents had majors in engineering (12) or a “hard” science (10). Other majors included military science (5), political science (2), and agriculture (1). Also, the majority of students reported living off-campus in either a house (14), apartment (7), or duplex (6). Only three participants lived in campus housing.

Table 1: Sample Demographics					
Name	Sex	Age	Race	Region	Current Member
Richard	M	23	White	S	Yes
Brad	M	19	White	SW	Yes
Dillion	M	22	White	NE	Yes
Roger	M	21	White	SW	Yes
Garrett	M	22	White	S	Yes
Grace	F	18	White	SW	Yes
Ben	M	24	White	SW	Yes
Bill	M	22	White	W	Yes
Brandon	M	20	White	S	Yes
David	M	24	White	MW	Yes
Aaron	M	23	White	S	Yes
Ryan	M	23	White	S	Yes
Walt	M	21	White	SW	Yes
James	M	22	White	SW	Yes
Jesse	M	27	White	MW	Yes
Thad	M	23	White	MW	Yes
Matt	M	22	White	S	Yes
Tyler	M	30	White	S	No

Table 1 (cont.)					
Name	Sex	Age	Race	Region	Current Member
Earl	M	26	White	SW	No
Wade	M	27	White	MW	No
Emma	F	23	White	SW	Yes
Boston	M	22	White	SW	Yes
Hunter	M	26	White	SW	Yes
Rod	M	28	White	SW	Yes
Curtis	M	24	White	SW	Yes
Othan	M	22	Hispanic	SW	Yes
Vince	M	24	White	SW	Yes
Grace	F	22	White	S	Yes
Danny	M	22	White	MW	Yes

Analysis

After completing each interview, I personally transcribed the data. I found transcribing myself, rather than hiring another party, allowed me to revisit the interview and observe information I originally may have missed while conducting the interview. This practice was critical to this study. Sections of the interview that offered insight in the motivations for joining a gun rights organization and the frames of reference used in understanding the social world were transcribed verbatim. To ensure that most data was expunged from the interview, each tape was reviewed twice.

In the interviews, all identifying information that could link the interview to the respondent was removed. A key element in this process is assigning pseudonyms for the individual as well as the university they were attending. Despite this being a common practice in qualitative research, several participants resisted the application of a pseudonym claiming they were proud of their stance and wanted everyone to know their beliefs. Ethically, I am required to omit personal information. Therefore, after several

respondents scoffed at the idea of my assigning them a pseudonym, I stopped mentioning the practice at the end of the interview and simply assigned a name while transcribing.

Treating my interviews of items of data, I began my analysis by utilizing a historical frame analysis to explore how the racialized and gendered deep frame that white males view, perceive, and act upon came to be. This method of analysis is centered on “problematizing how we have arrived at the present moment, seeking out those elements that each and all had to be in place for this present to ‘happen’” and allowed me “to make better sense of contemporary situations of interest” (Clarke 2005). Given that my theoretical framework is fundamentally grounded in the structural historicity white supremacy in the U.S., the methodology of historical frame analysis was a must. The development of the modern gun rights organization is not merely a recent event. Thus, to uncover the significance of contemporary Second Amendment groups like SCCC, it is pivotal that I place the narratives offered by my respondents into the larger historical conversation race, white supremacy, and gun rights in the United States.

Next, I used Wendy Griswold’s (1987) method of cultural analysis. Griswold’s method was particularly useful for this project because it is centered on the reciprocal relationship between the macro and micro. Specifically, this method focuses on the intentionality of social agents producing cultural objects -- expressions of social meaning that can be put into words, how these objects are received by other social agents, the consideration of the internal structures, patterns, and symbolic carrying capacities of the

object, and the connection between the cultural object and the external social world (Griswold 1987). Coupled with my systemic racism-driven theoretical framework, Griswold's method allowed for understanding the members of SCC in terms of interaction with the cultural object of the white racial frame. More specifically, this methodological approach allowed for understanding how the students in my sample, as social actors, received the white racial frame, how they understood its patterns and symbolic carrying capacity, and the connections they make between the white racial frame and the larger U.S. society.

Lastly, I analyze my data via Michael Burawoy's extended case methodology. The extended case method derives generalizations by constituting a given social situation anomalous regarding some preexisting theory (Burawoy 2009). In terms of this specific project, Burawoy's method is useful in addressing a critical part gap in Feagin's work on the white racial frame. To date, Feagin's (2013) work on racial framing largely centers around the pro-white/anti-black construction of reality and its material consequences. Part of the dominant frame places people of color as vice-driven beings that must be civilized by virtuous whites (Feagin 2006). Though Feagin is correct in making this observation, he misses that the construction of whites as vulnerable beings is critical to the dominant frame (Williams-Myers 1994). While constructing themselves as virtuous beings, whites often simultaneously engineer a style of vulnerability that places them in constant danger of being overtaken by the racial other. Using Burawoy's extending case method to strengthen systemic racism theory, specifically racial framing,

allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the reality whites have constructed and the precarious position they have designed for themselves.

Positionality

I would like to begin this section by stating upfront, I do not believe in objectivity. Lived experience always impacts our research and notions of objectivity are a mere bias against biases which contrast the ideology of the dominant group (Davidson 1998a). In Western society, white developed knowledge has been established as a normative and fashioned as the objective norm (Goar 2008). In this study, I reject his norm in exchange for a methodology that both celebrates and affirms of the ability of my lived experience to grant insight in social reality in ways the white norm of objectivity cannot (Madriz 2000).

While conducting this project, my own statuses and perspectives significantly shaped my study design, analysis, as well as outcomes. As a race scholar, my sociological training in structural racism, my own identity as a multiracial black man, my personal experiences with white supremacy, and my strong beliefs about the structural elements that have generated these experiences, often become intertwined in to the style of projects I undertake, the questions I ask, the methods I utilize, and the interpretations I gather from my conversations with participants. It is not possible for me to escape or ignore the influence of my lived experience. For this reason, I embrace feminist methodological practice of positionality, which views my social positionality as both a source of potential bias *and* insight in research. Thus, as a researcher I must be both aware and transparent about the ways in which my subjective experience as a

heterosexual multiracial black man impact the topics I research; my project designs; power and status negotiations while gathering data; and interpretations of data (Madriz 2000).

Since I suspected a race was core element of modern gun rights organizations and I could not interview participants without revealing my racial background, I elected to openly use my statuses in useful ways. Given that I'm trained as a race scholar, I had to put in more effort to understand and capture the nuanced elements of gender and class in my participants' narratives. This required that I delve deep into gender and class literature to better understand my participants. As a result, I decided to interact with participants via the tropes of masculinity. This was a critical step in gaining access to this population.

Understanding gun rights advocates are hesitant about "liberals," "sissies," "cry babies," and other names associated with those falling outside of tradition hegemonic masculinity, I elected to present myself as a "man's man." This often entailed stiff handshakes, talking in a much lower voice than normal, showing awe at stories of violence against animals and other humans, stressing my familial connections to the military, as well as excitement about the recurrent offer to "go shoot sometime." This was a stressful process due to the fear of being exposed as not just "one of the bros." Overall, report development was successful and seemed to encourage participants to give me extraordinary access. The only issue that arose while establishing report was with one university in the southwest.

I was familiar with many of the campuses I engaged in this study prior to the project. In the past, my social position and beliefs often place on me various campuses combating right-wing hate groups. My previous activity confronting a right-wing extremist group on a particular campus in the southwest presented a major issue. Unbeknownst to me, my previous work on the campus resulted in an organization developing a webpage about me revealing many of my racial politics. Further complicating matters, the founder of the website was a newly appointed officer in that campus chapter of SCCC. Upon recognizing my name, this individual informed the chapter president and they refused my access to their chapter. Prior to this point, I was able to obtain four interviews from this chapter.

Collectively, my report development steps were successful, resulting in excellent in-depth data about the modern gun rights organization Students for Concealed Carry on Campus. After reviewing the data, I separated data into two categories: racial framing and vulnerability. I then scrutinized each category in two stages. First, I analyzed the transcripts for central themes, patterns, and tensions, noting the frequency with which respondents expressed certain ideas. Once the suspected categories of racial framing and vulnerability were confirmed, I reviewed the data a second time seeking to: (1) identify assumptions and presuppositions built into the discourse and (2) unpack underlying complexities.

The chapters that follow are comprised of my primary data findings resulting from my analysis. With a critical eye to the narratives used to justify involvement in modern gun rights organizations, I focus on two primary elements that emerged in my

interviews. First, Chapter V will examine the role traditional racial framing plays in the construction of narratives by my respondents. Following this discussion, Chapter VI will explore the ways in which respondents engineer in style of vulnerability which places them in constant threat of loss of control, despite their privilege insulating them from most forms of threat. Both data chapters are also more broadly contextualized within systemic racial and epistemology of ignorance framework established in Chapter II. I now turn to my discussion of the traditional racial framing within the narratives offered by my respondents.

CHAPTER V

RACIAL FRAMING

There has been a lot of talk now days about racial profiling and people want to get all pissed off about it. Listen, I know it's not politically correct to say, but I'm all for profiling people. You have to if you want to protect yourself. If I see someone who looks like they are up to no good with pants off their ass and looking like they are all fucked up on some shit, do you think I'm going to keep an eye on them? You're damn right! I never even owned a gun until I moved to Townsville and the area I lived in was...(long pause)...like Boyz n the Hood. You know...uh uh uh uh...loud music and dropped down cars and all that shit. Now some of those people just dress like that and they will probably get profiled for it. That sucks, but it's what we have to do to make sure the people we love are safe.

-Richard

The above excerpt is taken from a portion of my interview with Richard, a twenty-three year old white male. I will return to Richard's statement later in this chapter, but for the time being, it will serve as a point of departure. Richard's interview is not atypical of many of the responses offered by participants in this study. Embedded within the narratives surrounding my respondents' desire to concealed carry, as well as other Second Amendment issues, is a very traditional racial framing of society. References to "thugs," people with "pants off their ass," and the film *Boyz n the Hood* as terms to identify individuals arousing feelings of threat and the need to purchase and concealed carry a firearm is typical of the narratives offered by many of my respondents. Further, as exemplified in Richard's statement, the participants in this study frequently stammer and use long pauses around issues related to race, conveying a certain level of discomfort while searching for words they deem non-offensive. Ironically, the

statements offered by respondents following these incoherent episodes are often characterized by highly racialized language.

In this chapter, I address the racial framing expressed in my interviews with the members of SCCC. To allow for a more intelligible thought throughout the chapter, I have separated the racial framing I observed into four styles. I will begin this chapter by exploring the utilization of traditional “hard” racial framing – *explicit* expressions of white cultural, moral, biological superiority. Following my analysis of hard framing, I move to contemporary and socially acceptable “soft” racial framing – *implicit* expression of white superiority. Third, I examine the incoherent episodes characteristic of a specific style of soft framing referred to as color-blind racism. Lastly, I will discuss the members of SCCC who depart from the norm of traditional framing and express a counter-frame of anti-racist discourse due to what I term *the military effect* – an anti-racist discourse resulting from military service during war times. Collectively, hard framing, general soft framing, color-blind racism, and counter-framing resulting from military service encapsulate the racial framing pervasive throughout my interviews with the members of SCCC. Before moving into my analysis of hard framing, I would like to spend a moment discussing the four styles of framing addressed in this chapter.

Styles of Racial Framing

The traditional white racist framing of society encompasses both a positive orientation to whites and whiteness and a negative orientation to those racial “others” who are to be oppressed and victimized by whites. Simply put, this traditional racist frame is viciously negative and ethnocentric toward people of color (Feagin 2013). As

Du Bois (1999) plainly states, in the Western world, “The one value is to be white” and this value pushes whites’ to the inevitable conclusion “kill the nigger.” Thus, racist framing is not merely a matter of racist ideology. Rather, central to racist framing are material ramifications (Feagin 2012). Such consequences can be observed in the disparate experiences of whites and people of color in terms of education, life-time earning, and interactions with the criminal justice system (Alexander 2012; Shapiro 2005; Lipman 2011). To support this framing of society and justify the continued impoverishment of people of color, elite whites have constructed a myriad of racist elements that strengthen the traditional white racial frame. The components of this frame typically come in two variations that Harvey-Wingfield and Feagin (2013) refer to as “hard” and “soft” racial framing.

Hard Framing

Hard racial framing is characterized by *explicit* expressions of white supremacy. Historically, this frame has made the argument that races are biologically as well as culturally unequal with whites being superior (Harvey-Wingfield and Feagin 2013). Further, hard racial framing proclaims blacks as well as other people of color should “know their place” within the social order (Feagin 2013). Examples of such framing can be observed in the U.S. dating back to the “founding fathers.” In 1751, while addressing the potential for interracial sexual contact in the U.S., Benjamin Franklin (1972) stated “amalgamation with the other color [Africans] would produce a degradation to which no lover of his country, no lover of excellence in the human character can innocently consent.” Franklin’s reference to “excellence in the human character” is rather revealing

of much of the framing guiding his statement. Franklin implies the white European, viewed as the apex of creation, would be committing an abomination against country and creation by having sexual contact with “the other race.” Further evidence of hard framing expressed by the founders is observed in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* in which he argues Africans smell odd, are natural slaves, and are lazy, oversexed, ape-like beings (Jefferson 1998). Both Franklin and Jefferson assert a very hard pro-white/anti-black racial framing of society. This framing was embodied in the Constitution and continues to guide social relations in the U.S. to this day. However, hard framing is not confined to the tomes of history.

While perceived as “politically incorrect” in contemporary U.S. culture, hard racial continues to be an ever-present part of white culture. In their work looking at the racial attitudes of white in the U.S., Picca and Feagin (2007) argue explicitly white racist discourse continues among whites in the contemporary U.S., but it has moved from the public “front stage” to the privacy of the white space referred to as “back stage.” In this back stage white racist framing is commonplace whether in the form of jokes or general conversation (Picca and Feagin 2007). Overall, the hard method of framing argues whites are superior culturally, morally, and biologically (Harvey-Wingfield and Feagin 2013). However, in a given situation, the articulation of hard racial framing may be viewed as socially incorrect, generally inappropriate, or taboo. To account for such situations, whites have developed an alternative “soft,” yet equally racist framing of society.

Soft Framing

Soft racial framing can be described as more *implicit* expressions of white supremacy. Those speaking from a soft frame claim race and racism are no longer important and that the U.S. is now post-racial (Feagin 2013). An example of such framing is the commonplace race discourse among the political right following the election of Barack Obama as the first black President of the U.S. in 2008. Days after, then Senator Obama, gave a very moderate discussion of the racism in the U.S., right-wing political pundant Pat Buchanan fired back:

We hear the grievances. Where is the gratitude? America has been the best country on earth for black folks. It was here that 600,000 black people, brought from Africa in slave ships, grew into a community of 40 million, were introduced to Christian salvation, and reached the greatest levels of freedom and prosperity blacks have ever known... No people anywhere has done more to lift up blacks than white Americans. Untold trillions have been spent since the '60s on welfare, food stamps, rent supplements, Section 8 housing, Pell grants, student loans, legal services, Medicaid, Earned Income Tax Credits and poverty programs designed to bring the African-American community into the mainstream.¹

Embedded within Buchanan's statement is an implied, soft framed, message that blacks were not only doomed to a destitute existence in Africa had it not been for slavery, but also that the aid of white Christian culture and white Americans' tax dollars have given blacks a gift which they should celebrate. Framing the social experience of blacks in the U.S. in such a manner reaffirms the angelic virtue of whiteness paramount to the dominant racial frame. Furthermore, Buchanan's underlying assumption that blacks

¹ This statement was taken from a post written on March 21, 2008 on Pat Buchanan's personal website

would have been doomed in Africa had it not been for whites not only serves to perpetuate the racist framing of blacks as infant-like beings dependent on white paternalism, but it is also an a historic claim. Numerous critical historians have proven that had Europe not invaded and stripped resources from Africa, Africa would be one of the most prosperous continents in the world (Johnson and Bartholomew 2009; Pakenham 1992; Nardo 2010). Thus, while soft framing using more implied meanings than hard framing, its pro-white/anti-black core based in white mythology remains the same.

Soft racial framing also calls for people of color to “think white, look white and talk white” if they are to be acceptable and successful in the eyes of whites. Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal recently made a similar statement in an op-ed published by *Politico*. While discussing how to end racism in the United States, Governor Jindal explained:

We still place far too much emphasis on our ‘separateness,’ our heritage, ethnic background, skin color, etc. We live in the age of hyphenated Americans: Asian Americans, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, Indian-Americans, and Native Americans, to name just a few. Here’s an idea: How about just ‘Americans?’ That has a nice ring to it, if you ask me. Placing undue emphasis on our ‘separateness’ is a step backward. Bring back the melting pot. There is nothing wrong with people being proud of their different heritages. We have a long tradition of folks from all different backgrounds incorporating their traditions into the American experience, but we must resist the politically correct trend of changing the melting pot into a salad bowl. *E pluribus Unum.*²

² This statement was taken from Gov. Bobby Jindal’s op-ed in *Politico* entitled “The End of Race” written on August 25, 2013.

To translate Gov. Jindal’s statement, he appears to assert that if people of color – note he does not include any European ethnicities under the umbrella of “hyphenated Americans” – would forget about their culture and embrace the dominant white culture, racism in the U.S. would end. Thus, according Gov. Jindal, racism is the result of people of color not wanting to “fall in line” with white America. Exemplified in the framing expressed by Pat Buchanan and Gov. Jindal, the “soft” racial frame argues whites are culturally superior more so than biological superior (Harvey-Wingfield and Feagin 2013). To further explore soft racial framing, it is essential to examine the specific style of soft framing common throughout most contemporary public discourse surrounding racial issues – color-blind racism.

Color-blind Racism

After World War II turning whites’ hard framing of biological race against another group of whites, there came a need to re-articulate the dominant racial frame in a way that could not be used against fellow whites yet reflected the needs of white America (Mills 1997). However, it was not until the Civil Rights Movement, that whites fully replaced the hard racial framing seen in Jim Crow and slavery with a softer but equally oppressive rhetoric as the dominant and politically acceptable form of racial oppression. The result was the development of the color-blind lie as the best way to maintain white supremacy in the U.S. (Carr 1997). Noting the significance of the change in racial rhetoric, Bonilla-Silva (2013) explains:

Colorblind racism became the dominant racial ideology as mechanisms and practices for keeping Blacks and other racial minorities “at the bottom” changed...In contrast to the Jim Crow era, where racial inequality was enforced through overt means (e.g., signs saying “No Niggers

Welcomed Here” or shotgun diplomacy at the voting booth), today racial practices operate in “now you see it, now you don’t” fashion.

It should be made clear this was not a new method of racial oppression. Rather, it is a re-inscription of racial discourse dating back to Justice Harlan’s dissent in *Plessy v.*

Ferguson in which he argued:

In my view of the constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our constitution is colorblind and neither knows nor tolerates class among citizens. In respect to civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his civil rights are guaranteed by the supreme law of the land.³

The construction and maintenance of the color-blind lie has resulted in four distinctive sub-frames of the dominant racial frame, which constitute color-blind racism.

The four sub-frames characterizing color-blind racism are *abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and a minimization of racism*. Of the elements of color-blind racism, cultural racism is most important to this study. This frame relies on culturally based arguments to explain the social position and lived experiences of people of color in the U.S. (Bonilla-Silva 2013). Examples of culturally racist narratives include ideas that Mexicans are poor because they do not value education and that blacks are disproportionately incarcerated because hip-hop music glorifies criminal behavior. The flaw inherent in these styles of arguments is that they avoid mentioning institutional effects of discrimination in labor, housing, and educational markets and the well-documented impact that discrimination has on middle- and upper-middle-class people of

³ Justice Harlan’s dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163, U.S. 537 (1896)

color. Failing to acknowledge the institutional component of race and racism in the U.S. produces the flawed and reductionist explanations of race relation's characteristic of color-blind racism and serve to maintain the white dominated status quo in the United States.

To this point, attention has focused on the myriad of manifestation of the dominant racial frame. Whether presented as hard or soft framing, a pro-white/anti-other dichotomy remains central to the framing of race and race relations in the United States. Yet, I would be remiss to not include a critical element of racial framing presented by those denigrated by the white racial frame – counter-framing.

Counter-framing

Over the long centuries of racial oppression, blacks and other targets of white racism have frequently developed important counter or resistance frames designed to enable survival in an oppressive condition and fight back against white supremacy (Feagin 2013). This is not to suggest that the epistemologies of non-whites are dependent on white knowledge. African centered philosophy has demonstrated that non-whites have long understood the world from within their own frameworks prior to contact with whites (Nunn 1997; Asante 1998, 2000). However, the culturalogics of communities of color are often crafted into resistance frames designed to confront the oppressive white racial frame. Resistance frames are frequently crafted by leaders from among the oppressed as well as grassroots intellectuals honing elements of their culture into a set of theoretical and practical resistance strategies (Matsuda 1995). The Black Nationalist Movement exemplifies counter-framing.

The individuals within the Black Nationalist Movement completely rejected the white racist framing of society in exchange for their own black-derived frame which not only preserved their humanity in a dehumanizing racist society but also “understood their collective experience as Black as a central basis for comprehending the significance of various social relations as they are actually lived and experienced” (Peller 1995). Dr. Clarence Munford best articulated this counter-frame in 1970 before a group of students at Utah State University. According to Dr. Munford:

It [the Black nation] is different from other emergent nations only in that it consists of forcibly transplanted colonial subjects who have acquired cohesive identity in the course of centuries of struggle against enslavement, cultural alienation, and spiritual cannibalism of white racism. This common history which the Black people of America share is manifested in a concrete national culture with a peculiar “spiritual complexion,” or psychological temperament. Though the Black nation expresses its thoughts, emotions, and aspirations in the same tongue as American whites, the different conditions of existence...have, from generation to generation, welded the bonds of a national experience as different from that of white existence as day is from night. And what differentiate nations from one another are dissimilar conditions.⁴

Central to a counter-frame, as expressed Dr. Munford, is a reconceptualization of the oppressed’s social position as well as a rejection of elements of the dominant racial frame. These elements enable the targets of white racism to retain their personhood, mobilize against oppression, avoid despair, and ultimately imagine racial strategies that may produce fulfillment (Feagin 2013; Bell 1992). While counter-frames are always developed by groups of color, periodically individual whites will embrace a counter-frame and use it to combat the traditional racist frame guiding much of their cognitive

⁴ Dr. Clarence Munford, “Black National Revolution in America,” Utah State University (May 1970).

activity. We may refer to these individuals as white anti-racist (Feagin 2013). A notable example is the radical abolitionist John Brown who attempted to capture Harpers Ferry and start a slave revolt in 1859. While Brown's mission ended in failure and resulted in the massacre of multiple black communities, largely due to white arrogance, his example serves to illustrate both the possibility and problematic elements of white anti-racism. Having outlined the various elements/styles of racial framing, I now turn to my analysis of hard racial framing among the members of SCCC.

Hard Racial Framing

After reviewing the transcriptions of my interviews, I noticed hard racial framing was only observed in the responses offered by the individuals who participated in phone interviews or Skype interviews without a camera. I hypothesize this is likely due to the participant's inability to observe my race allowing them to feel more comfortable expressing hard frames. Theoretically, this is very significant in that it reveals somewhat of a norm of "back-stageness" among U.S. gun culture in which individuals assume they are interacting with other whites and thus allow the filters of political correctness to disappear. I will return to this conversation in greater detail in Chapter VI. For now, I will focus on the framing that emerged from these pseudo-back-stage interviews.

As previously noted in the earlier sections of this chapter, hard racial framing is the explicit assertions of white supremacy characteristic of the dominant racial frame. In terms of this study, the most pervasive expression of hard framing was centered on the idea that men of color, black and Latino men in particular, are inherently violent and seek to rape white women. This trope is as old as the dominant racial frame itself and

has historically been fundamental to white men's justification for amassing firearms.

While talking with Brad about why he recently joined SCCC, he explained:

Well just think about where I'm at...right on the [Mexico] border. Those fuckers are coming over here every day and you know they are up to no good. They are criminals! I don't care if you are coming here to work. Do it the right way. This is our country and we decide who gets in. You want in you do it our way! If these people are going to break these laws what's to stop them from breaking more? What's it going to take for us to stop allowing criminals in our country? Killing somebody? Raping somebody? I'll be damned if I allow those fuckers near my wife or kids. I know that was a bit of a tangent, but it is important to me and why I joined SCCC. If I can't be armed on campus, then that gives criminals the chance to attack me and if I have to pick my wife up after class and can't be armed criminals kill me or rape and kill her. Long story short, I joined SCCC so I can be armed at all times.

Reflecting on Brad's explanation for joining SCCC, it is evident that his motivations extend beyond simply the desire for self-defense. Rather, Brad operates out of a very nativist and hard-framed understanding of the world. Operating from this approach, Brad is not concerned with defense from crime in an abstract sense, but has constructed murder and rape as the specific types of crimes with which to be concerned and has attached said crimes to the bodies of Mexican immigrants. Making this association, Brad perceives Mexicans not as humans, but rather as threats. This is made explicit in Brad's references to Mexicans solely as "fuckers," "these people," and "criminals." This dehumanization via the dominant frame is rather significant in that dehumanization is the first step in the justification of violence against a given group (Berg 2009).

Removing their humanity, Brad constructs Mexican immigrants simply as threats and by extension targets. Thus, if we were to synthesize Brad's statement into one coherent

thought, it would appear as though he joined SCCC to work toward a means of remaining armed at all times so that if his perceived threat from Mexican murderers and rapists was to occur, he would be legally equipped with a tool for murder. Therefore, it is evident that Brad is not interested in general self-defense, but rather a specific and very targeted war-like defense against Mexican immigrants.

The nativist hard framing articulated by Brad was very common throughout my interviews, even with those individuals who did not live in states bordering Mexico. Take Dillon for example. Dillon is a college senior at a four year university in the northeast and was raised in a middle class suburb not far from the university. While discussing the social aspect of college gun culture in the U.S., Dillon and I had the following exchange:

Interviewer: Let's talk a bit about the social side of SCCC. What are some of the different things that y'all do socially?

Dillon: Shoot! Hahaha I mean we're not really the type of folks to do wine and cheese socials. There is nothing wrong with that, but that's just not who we are.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little about your time at the firing range?

Dillon: Well I mean we get there, decide what we want to shoot and go at it.

Interviewer: So you shoot paper targets?

Dillon: Yes, there are some pretty cool ones out there too. The place I like just got in some new targets that look like the Mexican army. We used to have some old Obama ones, but these new ones are pretty cool.

Interviewer: Oh yea? They sound interesting. What do they look like?

Dillon: You know, just some wetback. Haha That sounds fucking racist huh? Haha It's an "illegal immigrant." Some of them even have guns or drugs with them. Just basic shit like that.

Interviewer: Why do you think the owner of the range selected those specific targets over something else or just a silhouette? (I could tell asking this question was beginning to make Dillon uncomfortable)

Dillon: (Speaking much louder and more harshly) How the hell am I supposed to know? It's his business. He probably just thought it would be fun. But shit, you see what's going on down where you are. Mexicans are invading our country. They already have our jobs. Before you know it, we won't even be able to have a woman because they will take them too haha Seriously though, there is a lot of crime and shit that comes with them coming over here and we have to be prepared to protect ourselves and those we love. Actually, now that I think about it, I think the new targets make a lot of sense.

As I reviewed my transcripts, this conversation with Dillon was very intriguing for two reasons. First, Dillon systematically uses war metaphors while discussing Mexican immigrants as violent threats. Recent work in the social sciences has revealed that the metaphors an individual uses provide great insight into the cognitive frames they use to interpret the world (Feagin 2013; Santa Anna 2002). Describing Mexicans as an "army...invading our country," Dillon cognitively repositions immigrants from families desiring a better life in the United States into bands of marauders seeking to plunder U.S. society. Dillon further illustrates this point when referring to Mexicans as "wetbacks," catching the racial slur, and then sarcastically opting for the more politically correct, yet equally offensive language of "illegal immigrants." This type of dehumanizing cognitive

positioning of Mexican immigrants by Dillon is characteristic of nativist ideology/discourse in the United States, presenting immigrants as violent bands seeking to terrorize white America.

The second, and more alarming, feature of my conversation with Dillon is his assertion that Mexicans with guns and drugs is “just basic shit.” This is particularly troubling because it takes Dillon’s nativists framing to another level. Moving beyond simply viewing Mexican immigrants as a problem, Dillon’s claim that Mexicans with guns and drugs is “basic,” reveals that for Dillon, criminality and vice are at the heart of being Mexican. Therefore, Dillon problematizes not only immigrants, but also Mexicans in general. Thus, when he mentions being about to protect himself and those he loves, similar to Brad, Dillon is concerned with protection from a very specific body – the Mexican male – not crime in general. This style of targeted self-defense requires more attention and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter VI. For the moment being, it is worth noting that this style of targeting is not confined to anti-immigrant discourse. Many of my respondents made similar claims about black males.

The presence of black bodies in white spaces has long served as motivation for white violence and continues to shape firearm discourse in the United States – even among so-called millennials. Take Roger for example. Roger is a 21 year old white college senior in the American Southwest. In our conversations about SCCC, Roger frequently made references to “bad guys” and “good guys” with guns, but rarely clarified these terms without probing. After a long period of probing, Roger explained:

We’re not concerned so much about school shootings. The likelihood of that sort of thing is pretty slim. Those aren’t the people we’re really

concerned about. We're more interested in individual self-defense. When I'm walking home at night there are always these ... well just to be honest black guys outside the store by my house. *I guarantee you they have pistols at the least* and carrying allows me the chance to fight back *when* they try to rob me. There are a couple others that I see all hours of the night walking the street too. If I forget my backpack in the car and have to go get it, I'm not willing to let them rob me...I'm just not.
[Emphasis added]

Roger has clearly defined to himself who warrants the need to carry a firearm – black males. Ironically, Roger is involved with a campus group to get more firearms on campus, but he has little concern about actual campus-based emergencies requiring a firearm. For Roger, his need to carry arises from the black men in his community, not possible violence on campus. This is illustrated in his discussion about the “black guys” outside the store near his home.

Roger's claim that he can guarantee the black guys near the store have at least a pistol is rather interesting – but not surprising. Since the 1990s, media outlets have saturated the public with threatening images of black men with firearms and argued that a value on violence is central to black culture (Majors and Billson 1993). Having grown up in this era, Roger has internalized this narrative and used it as a means of framing the black men in his community. Given the language used when discussing these men, it is safe to assume Roger does not personally know these men yet, he has attached criminality to them based on their blackness. Further, he does not see a violent attack from these men as simply a possibility, but rather as an inevitable event. From Roger's perspective, a violent encounter with the black men in his community *will* happen.

Thus, he believes he must be armed to kill at all times and allowing concealed carry on campus would grant him the ability to be so.

Roger makes a similar connection with the “couple other [black men]” outside of his home. Similar to Dillon, Roger’s framing of men of color as inherently criminal causes him to view society in war-like terms, making even the mundane task of simply retrieving a book bag from his car a life-threatening experience. This type of framing, focused on innate criminality of men of color, is central to and characteristic of the dominant racial frame. The idea that men of color are at their core vice-driven beings has long guided much whites’ view of society.

Another example of the hard framing of black males within SCCC is Garrett. The Vice-President of his chapter, Garrett plays a pivotal role in SCCC in the American south. Conversations with Garrett were the most tense of all my interviews. His responses often trailed into explicit homophobic, racist, and sexist language, all heightened by a rough and hyper-masculine bravado. One example with Garrett comes from our conversation about why being involved in SCCC is important to him.

According to Garrett:

SCCC gives me a way to make sure they don’t take my “man card.” There are faggots everywhere today and this organization makes sure every guy is not turned into a pussy. Fucking wetbacks are taking our country and blacks are stealing our women. I mean really, look around any campus in this country and you’ll see it. We really don’t have anything anymore and now the government wants to take away our most basic rights. FUCK YOU OBAMA! This is our country, but if we lose our right to bear arms, we will completely lose it.

For Garrett, involvement in SCCC is not simply a matter of protection. Based on his statement, it is clear that SCCC plays a much larger role for Garrett. Concerned that the country is becoming too “soft,” Garrett views SCCC as a means to retain what it means to be a real man. This is critical because he believes that Latinos, blacks, and the LGBT community are robbing him of what this really means. Again, as observed in the statements of Brad, Roger, and Dillon, Garrett explicitly associates vice with people of color. For Garrett, black men are *stealing* white women from white men and Latinos are *taking* the country. From Garrett’s perspective, he is at war with blacks, Latinos, and homosexuals for the United States. Making this clear, later in our interview, Garrett exclaimed, “We have to fight for our country! We’re losing it every day!” Framing the changing social landscape in racialized and homophobic war-like terms has resulted in Garrett constructing a very specific target for his anger. Garrett does not appear to be concerned with self-defense from interpersonal violence, even when racialized, as was the case with many other respondents. Rather, Garrett seeks to arm himself as a means of defense from the much larger threat of “losing his country.”

While the motivations for involvement in SCCC tend to differ, the hard framing characterizing my phone interviews remained rather constant. Emphasizing a belief in the inherent violent criminality of people of color, many of my respondents came to believe arming themselves was the best means of protection. Grace, one of my few female respondents, explained, “I never wanted a pistol until this family of illegal immigrants moved in down the street. With everything going on down there, I knew I had to get one if I wanted to be safe.” Similarly, Ben noted, “For me, SCCC is not about

arming myself on campus. It's more about being armed when I have to walk past the Cholos on the way home. Haha." Both Grace and Ben connect Latinos to crime, violence, and general vice. Whether talking about undocumented immigrants or describing a group of Latino men as stereotypical gangsters, the perceived threat of violence pushes Grace and Ben to believe their only means of protecting themselves, if protection is actually needed, is the barrel of a gun.

Though the explicit anti-other element of hard framing was rather pervasive in my phone interviews, the pro-white or white virtue component was only expressed sporadically. Respondents utilizing pro-white rhetoric typically did so when comparing gun violence trends in the United States. For example, when asked about gun control laws and their ability to control gun violence, Bill explained:

Well you see gun control is only going to disarm those of us that actually care about doing things the right way. These kids in downtown won't be impacted at all. I mean really, these little black kids are going to keep killing each other with illegal guns no matter what. We [whites] don't do that. We get our guns the right way, lock them up, and just respect life. That's not the case with them. They just don't care.

In Bill's statements, he draws a clear contrast between law-abiding whites and criminal blacks. Claiming the black youth in downtown do not value life and embrace lawlessness, Bill characterizes these individuals as barbarous and savage – a central trope of the dominant racial frame. On the other hand, Bill contrasts the black kids in downtown with white college students, making a comparison along race and class lines. According to Bill, white college students are the antithesis of black youth. Where blacks are portrayed as savages, Bill characterizes white college students as law-abiding

individuals and moral citizens concerned with the value of life. Describing whites and blacks in such a manner explicitly constructs a racialized binary for virtue, situating whites as virtuous and people of color as corrupted deviants.

Generally, hard racial framing is the most sporadic form of framing present in this study. This is likely to do with the taboo nature of hard framing in contemporary U.S. society. However, as illustrated in this section, the anonymity of a phone interview allowed for interesting expressions of hard framing which otherwise would have been self-censored. Much of the hard framing centered on nativist beliefs and ideas about the inherent vice of people of color – specifically Latino and black males. This type of framing connected beliefs about criminality with a need to carry firearms against a specific threat, not general self-defense. Interestingly, the hard framing utilized by respondents often did not focus on white virtue. Rather, it opted for an emphasis on the criminality of people of color. However, there were instances in which white virtue was emphasized, but these are sporadic. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, hard framing often conflicts with contemporary political correctness. To examine racial framing in its contemporary style, I now turn my attention to soft racial framing within SCCC.

Soft Racial Framing

Developed to account for the changing American landscape, soft framing is a more implicit inscription of the dominant racial frame. Where the hard framing of the previous section explicitly evoked racial stereotypes and narratives, the soft framing of the post-Civil Rights era tends to remain loyal to the dominant white racial frame, but

expresses it via implied messages. Thus, the framing of pro-whiteness and anti-other continue to be the status quo of race relations in the contemporary United States. To begin my conversation of soft framing, I'd like to return to the excerpt from Richard that opened this chapter.

Richard is a twenty-three year old white male attending a private university in the American northwest. He is also the founder/chair of the SCCC chapter on his campus. Conversations with Richard were some of the most relaxed of all the respondents and I believe this allowed certain elements of the dominant frame to emerge that may have stayed secluded had the tone of the interview been tenser. The statement from Richard that opened this chapter was taken from a portion of the interview that was not predetermined. Toward the end of the interview, Richard asked me, given my research interests, what was my opinion on the Trayvon Martin murder. Seeing that my position as a black male had the opportunity to alter our interaction if I responded to his question from a critical approach, I simply replied, "I think the case was a bit complicated. Unless we were there we really don't know." Following my answer, Richard offered:

There has been a lot of talk now days about racial profiling and people want to get all pissed off about it. Listen, I know it's not politically correct to say, but *I'm all for profiling people*. You have to if you want to protect yourself. If I see someone who looks like they are up to no good with *pants off their ass* and looking like they are all fucked up on some shit, do you think I'm going to keep an eye on them? You're damn right! I never even owned a gun until I moved to Townsville and the area I lived in was...(long pause)...like *Boyz n the Hood*. You know...uh uh uh uh...*loud music and dropped down cars and all that shit*. Now some of those people just dress like that and they will probably get profiled for it. That sucks, but it's what we have to do to make sure the people we love are safe.

To really grasp the significance of Richard's response, we must walk through it piece by piece, unpacking the frames guiding his reasoning. Richard begins by noting the politically incorrectness of claiming his support for racial profiling. This leads me to believe he is familiar with the arguments opposing racial profiling as well as the logical fallacies supporting it. Yet, he contends profiling is required as a means of securing safety. Therefore, as with Dillon and the other individuals that hard framed, Richard's claim that he supports racial profiling reveals that he attaches the threat of violence to people of color. White people do not get racially profiled. Racial profiling is something that primarily only impacts people of color (Glover 2009). Thus, support for racial profiling as a policy shows the connection Richard makes between threat and the bodies of people of color.

The feeling of threat called up by people of color within Richard is further illustrated in his descriptions of the people he feels warrant the need to carry a firearm. According to Richard, people with "pants off their ass...looking like they are all fucked up on some shit" require him to carry a firearm for protection. This seemingly neutral statement is actually racially coded soft framing describing the image of black and Latino males in hip-hop culture as portrayed by the media (Stabile 2006). Males of color, specifically within hip-hop culture, have long been characterized as thugs, gangsters, hustlers, and pimps. Descriptions of such men often center around "sagging," marijuana use, malt liquor and in the American south, a combination of cough syrup and Sprite referred to as "lean" or "sizzurp" (Rose 2008). Such characterizations of black and Latino males by the media fall well within the "pants off their ass...looking like they

are all fucked up on some shit” determining factor in carrying a firearm offered by Richard. Interestingly, this type of argument is identical to much of the right wing media coverage of the Trayvon Martin case, arguing Martin was a “thug doped up on lean.” It is very likely that Richard’s framing of black and Latino men is heavily shaped by such media coverage. Further illustrating the impact of media on Richard’s framing of black men in particular is his reference to the film *Boyz n the Hood*.

Boyz n the Hood was a drama released in 1991 following the lives of four friends in a poor black community in South Central Los Angeles. Much of the film centers around gang violence, sexuality, and crime – all depicted by black men. Thus, Richard’s claim that he needed a firearm only after moving to an area “like *Boyz n The Hood*,” reveals the types of bodies that aroused feelings of threat within Richard. Like many of the respondents covered in this chapter, Richard does not desire to carry a firearm for a type of general self-defense. Rather, Richard’s longing to concealed carry everywhere is very much based on the feelings of threat he associates with the bodies of black and Latino males. Richard further illustrates this in claiming he needed a firearm only when he lived around people with “loud music and dropped down cars and all that shit.” Again, Richard is associating the need to carry a firearm with the stereotypical media portrayals of black and Latino hip-hop culture, connecting criminality with people of color. Embracing these images and narratives, Richard has come to the conclusion he must carry a firearm when around people of color if he is to be safe.

Richard then concludes his statement by claiming some people [of color] just dress like that and will be profiled for it, but that’s the price of making sure his family is

safe. This style of argument is worth exploring from a critical approach because it reveals a certain racial logic. In asserting people of color have to be racially profiled to ensure his safety, Richard makes an interesting claim in terms of the relationship of people of color, as well as whites, to the larger society. Echoing *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, it would appear as though from Richard's perspective, people of color do not have any real rights within the United States – at least any rights that might be perceived to infringe on the perceived safety of whites. In other words, Richard appears to be perfectly fine with people of color having their 4th Amendment rights violated as long as he believes doing so will in some way increase his safety.

Overall, though Richard does not use racial slurs or any explicitly racist language in his statement regarding racial profiling, he clearly connects narratives of criminality with people of color in many of the same ways as the individuals hard framing in the previous section. However, due to the political climate, which Richard addresses early on, he alters much of his language to account for the contemporary stigma of being perceived as a racist. Thus, Richard opts to use more soft framed language and meanings to convey the association he has made between black and Latino males, crime, and the resulting necessity he feels to carry a firearm at all times. Though much time has been devoted to analyzing Richard's statement, it should be made clear that he is not alone in his soft framing of people of color as threatening and requiring the taking up of arms.

Brandon provides another example of the soft framing pervasive throughout my interviews with the members of SCCC. A member of SCCC since his freshman year, Brandon is now an executive officer in his campus' chapter and is responsible for

making many of the decisions about the direction of the organization – an important part of the interviewing process. Noticing that Brandon’s chapter was almost exclusively comprised of white students and parents, I asked him to describe to me some of the different activities that the organization does to recruit new members. Brandon then explained:

Well, we mainly table. We will have our flyers out for anyone who wants to stop by and talk with us. I tried to help get a lot of different people involved, but it’s just hard. We would even try to set up our table by some of the gay and lesbian or African American or Hispanic groups to try to get them involved, but they just wouldn’t. They would stare at us. Kind of try to stare us down or something. It’s like they didn’t want us there or something. I think growing up in the ‘hood just make them a little afraid of guns, you know?

Brandon provides an interesting example. On the surface it appears as though he really wants to include the marginalized groups from around the university into his chapter of SCCC. However, a more in-depth look reveals he still operates out of soft-framed style of the dominant racial frame. This is made clear in his association that the black or Hispanic students grew up in the “hood.” This is a particularly interesting claim because Brandon attends a private school with the majority of its students, including its students of color, coming from suburban neighborhoods. Thus, where does he get the idea that the students of color are opposed to his organization on grounds that they grew up in a ghetto? After more conversations with Brandon, it became clear that he has received the ideas about people of color and their experiences, specifically blacks, from his consumption of popular hip-hop culture.

Throughout my multiple conversations with Brandon, he would frequently reference “turning up” – a term common in popular hip-hop music meaning to party with friends – and various Lil Wayne and Chief Keef lyrics. This is rather interesting because both of the artists Brandon is consuming come from very poor backgrounds and frequently talk about their experiences growing up in a poor community. It appears as though Brandon has taken this imagery, coupled it with the dominant frame’s assertion, as portrayed by the media, that people of color are savages constantly engaging in violent activity, and constructed an experience for black people at large. Thus, Brandon believes his black schoolmates, despite being from affluent backgrounds, are all products of the poor and impoverished ghettos who have come to fear the firearm activism of SCCC based on some violent experience in their past. Brandon’s example is different from Richard’s in that he does not necessarily define, at least in our interview, the reason he desires to concealed carry at all times. Rather, Brandon offers somewhat of a glimpse into the soft framing that can be present amongst younger progressive whites. It is likely that Brandon does not consider himself a racist and probably considers himself to be a progressive. However, he has constructed an image of blacks and their experiences that at its core is driven by the dominant framing of people of color as violent criminals who are threats to themselves as well as the larger society. David provides another example of the soft framing typical of my respondents.

In my ninety-minute interview with David, a 24-year-old engineering major, the conversation quickly moved away from the scripted questions of the interview schedule to pursue a direction first taken by David early in the interview – gun violence.

Specifically, David was very interested in talking about the street gangs in Chicago.

Similar to Bill, David argues:

They are just a bunch of thugs that don't value the life of another person. But you know, you can't really blame them. They don't have dads showing them how to be real men. Not to mention, the culture in those places is just so fucked. I mean really. Dropping out of school is seen as a rite of passage. The culture down there just doesn't help them at all. So, I guess you could say they are pretty much fucked from the start. We just need to gut the whole area.

In many ways, David's statement epitomizes the soft style of racial framing. Not once does he mention race, but it is very clear given the arguments and claims made that he is referring to blacks, specifically black men. As previously mentioned, the term "thug" that David uses to open his statement is heavily racially coded for black and Latino males. This is very similar to the language used by Richard while discussing people with "pants off their ass." It is a way of saying men of color without explicitly mentioning race. The framing used by David becomes even clearer when he begins to discuss the absentee father, a classic stereotype of the instability of families of color and the lack of commitment of men of color, and his role, in many ways, in creating the violence in downtown Chicago by not raising his kids. Contrary to the myths of black fatherlessness espoused by media outlets, a 2011 Pew Research Center study⁵ found 62% of black fathers not living with their kids regularly visited them. This is opposed to 59% of white fathers and 32% of Latino fathers. Thus, revealing much of the illogical nature of the dominant frame, David continues to believe black men are not raising their children,

⁵ Pew Research Centre. 2011. A Tale of Two Fathers: More are Active, but More are Absent <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/06/15/a-tale-of-two-fathers/2/>

even after being provided with the Pew Research study. It is this illogical basis for the white racial frame which makes combating it that much more difficult.

David further illustrates his belief in the cultural problem of blacks in his proclamation that “the culture in those places is just so fucked.” This one statement really embodies the soft framing in that it does not make any biological claims about the blacks, but rather relies on culture arguments to perpetuate white supremacy. This is demonstrated in the claim blacks do not value education and that “dropping out of school is seen as a rite of passage.” David assumes that for culturally based reasons blacks and the rest of society view the importance of education fundamentally different. While dropout rates do tend to be higher in downtown or “inner-city” areas, David accredits this solely to poor cultural values as opposed to considering structural issues which, in many ways, force students in these parts of town to remove themselves from the education pipeline (Lipman 2011). Thus, David’s framing of blacks as cultural “backwards” merely reflects the racialized civilized/uncivilized binary guiding the dominant white racial frame.

Lastly, it is worth noting David’s prescription for the issues of downtown Chicago. He suggests that the best means of handling impoverishment is to “gut the whole area.” This is a rather disturbing argument. When asked to clarify what this means, David replied, “To just get rid of it all. It doesn’t really serve anyone.” After asked to further clarify, David stated, “I’m not saying kill people. The culture is just so screwed up though. The only way to help people is to start over.” I could perceive David was growing annoyed with my probing so I backed off. However, the idea that the best

way to deal with a culture you believe is backward is to get rid of it is very perverse. Yet, historically, this type of reasoning is observed often. The dominant frame does not make allowances for deviant frames or cultures. If a culture is perceived as backwards, the white racial frame has always either made its adherents assimilate or face extermination. A social movement to arm individuals holding such beliefs must be heavily scrutinized.

Another individual expressing similar cultural beliefs is Aaron. Though he does not suggest, “gutting” a culture or area of town, Aaron holds very strong beliefs about the cultural values of the “inner-city” in relation to firearms. While discussing various models of gun control legislation, Aaron explained:

Gun control only hurts the law-abiding citizen. The people who want to hurt somebody don't care about a sign. God forbid, but if we were sitting here and somebody came in shooting the place up, I would be defenseless because the laws don't let me carry here so I don't. Or if we were downtown I can't carry some places because the laws says so. The music is nice down there...the people...not so much. The people there don't care what the laws are. They do whatever the hell they want. You can't open carry anywhere in our state, but they do down there all the time. Just walk down the street. You might lose your life if you're not protected, but these gun control folks down care about that...they are too emotional.

As was common for most of my respondents, David has a clear aversion for the downtown districts of the city. Framing the downtown of his city, an area which is 83% occupied by blacks and Latinos, as a more or less warzone, David in many ways expresses the idea that the people of color in his own city are lawless savages – a belief system very much at the core of the dominant white racial frame. Describing the residents of downtown as openly carrying firearms and walking up and down the street

looking for victims, David appears to believe that black and Latinos are nothing more than lawless barbarians and the only means to suppress their threat is to stay armed at all times.

As has been stressed throughout this chapter, the participants in this study claim to desire the right to conceal carry a firearm everywhere for self-defense. However, after examination, they do not appear to want to carry for a general style of self-defense. Rather, many of the members of SCCC that I spoke with have a very specific individual they believe they need protection from – the black and Latino male. Describing the perceived threat posed by Latinos, Ryan states:

This just isn't our [whites] country anymore. We have to take it back. You know they say this is going to be more or less a new New Mexico in the next hundred years? We can't let that happen to our country. We're Americans!

Similar sentiment is observed in Richard's declaration that "everywhere is bilingual now" and that "is not the America I grew up in." While not explicitly stating, "Latinos are a problem," my respondents clearly believe that if Latin American culture is fused with the dominant culture in the United States, the U.S. will no longer be "their country." This is very reminiscent of the explicit nativist discourse expressed by the hard framers detailed in the previous section. The narratives of defense offered by my respondents also take on a very gendered racial framing indicting males of color as the "greatest threat to the country."

The gendered soft racial framing expressed by my participants centers very much on the idea of rape – a central talking point that is addressed in greater depth in Chapter

VI. Dating back to the Reconstruction Era, white males have long expressed a fear men of color, black men in particular, raping their wives and daughters (Williams-Myers 1994). This fear of black men has often been at the heart of white men's desire to amass firearms and continues to be a key factor today. While discussing why he decided to obtain a concealed handgun license, Walt explained:

For me it was all about being able to protect my family. This country just isn't safe anymore. Especially for the girls. Every day you see a story about some thugs raping and killing some young girl. They even rap about it! It's a sick world I tell you. All I know is, I will not let my daughter become one of those girls. I will kill each and every last one of those fuckers before they touch my daughter.

Reviewing Walt's statement, he utilizes the common image of the "thug" as a means of discussing men of color. This is further confirmed by his reference to "them rapping about it." Thug imagery and reference to hip hop culture/music are common means of discussing black and Latino men without being blatantly racist. Recently, the trend was observed in conservative news pundit Bill O'Reilly's proclamation that kids that listen to hip hop and rap music are "coarsened" and "do pretty much whatever they want." While not explicitly talking about black kids, O'Reilly uses hip-hop as a means of questioning black culture. This was a common occurrence throughout my interviews. Responding to a question similar to Walt, James utilized the thug image to describe the men "sitting across from the school by the liquor store" and argued he wants to carry on campus because he fears one of them might "grab Tonya [his girlfriend]" as they walk home from campus. Going into more detail about this, James explained:

You know how those people are man. They don't have jobs. All they do is drink. Tonya has told me about them. She says they

look at her crossing the street and it makes her really uncomfortable. When I walk with her around Newton Street, I always have to pull her close in case one of those thugs grabs here. *You know they want to. I see it in their eyes.* If I were allowed to carry though, I'd have my pistol when we were around them so if they tried to touch her...that would be the last thing they did. [Emphasis added]

Though worded differently, the narratives offered by Walt and James are very similar. Both men express a desire to carry a firearm at all times out of fear that “thugs” will attack the women in their lives. The thing that is rather interesting in both cases is that the men my respondents are fearful of have not done anything to warrant a threat. Rather, the men I interviewed seem to express fear based largely on nothing else than phenotypic observations and as James’ puts it “a look in their eye.”

Collectively, the soft framing observed in my interviews with the member of SCCC focused on three key areas. First, respondents often utilized racially framed thug and gangster narratives as a means of justifying their desire to concealed carry. Many of these stories focused on the idea that people of color, black and Latino males in particular, pose a direct threat to the safety of white Americans. Either making references to hip hop culture or explicitly stating that thugs, hustlers, and pimps are the subjects for concern, my respondents appear to have a very clear idea about who requires them to carry firearms.

Second, when not making claims about “thugs,” the participants in this study frequently make racially based cultural assumptions. This type of framing often emphasized the pathology of “inner-city” or “downtown” culture – code talk for black and Latino culture. Those individuals expressing this style of soft framing tended to

assert that people of color do not value life or education as whites do and that men of color have no interest in raising their children or holding down a job. In making these arguments, my respondents implicitly construct a binary for virtue – situating whites as the virtuous norm and people of color are vice driven deviants. This style of thought is very much at the heart of the dominant racial frame. As Feagin (2013) notes, systemic racism is guided by the dominant pro-white/anti-black frame.

Lastly, the individuals in the study often provide narratives that hyper-sexualize males of color and present them as a threat to white womanhood. This is observed in stories discussing sinister looks from men, often described as thugs, toward white women. The men interviewed interpret these alleged looks as threatening and causes for remaining armed at all times. I will now turn my attention to the incoherent episodes of color-blind racism observed throughout my interviews.

Color-blind Racism

Developed to address a change in racial etiquette following the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, similar to soft framing, colorblind racism seeks to maintain white racial domination without explicitly racist rhetoric. Color blind racism often occurs through racialized cultural arguments and white victimization narratives (Bonilla-Silva 2013). Additionally, setting itself apart from soft framing and warranting inclusion in this study, color blind racism also emerges in episodes of cognitive dysfunction by otherwise coherent whites when questioned about issues related specifically to racial matters (Bonilla-Silva and Foreman 2000). This trend was most commonly observed in

my respondents' answers to questions surrounding the homogeneous demographics of SCCC and why more people of color do not join.

The first case of cognitive dysfunction is Jesse, a 27-year-old biomedical science major at a university in the American Midwest. When asked why his chapter of SCCC was overwhelmingly comprised of white males, Jesse stated:

Well I think it just reflects the rest of the university. If you look around our school, you'll see that Midwest University has a lot of Caucasian guys. So it kind of makes sense for our group to be a little heavy on that side.

Jesse argues the demographics of his SCCC chapter merely reflect the larger demographics of his university, which is "a little heavy" on white males. However, when looking into the demographics of Midwest University prior to the interview I discovered, whites only make up 40 percent of the entire student body and white males are only 17 percent. When compared to the fact that Jesse's chapter of SCCC is 94 percent white males, it is evident that his chapter does not reflect the larger university. When provided with this evidence and asked to describe what his chapter does to reach out to the larger university body, Jesse, who had been rather articulate in other sections of the interview, began to stutter heavily and frequently shift in his seat. When asked this question, Jesse explained:

Uh uh...well, hmm, I've never heard that. Uh uh...well you know... uh you know... I mean it's not like we... uh... it's not like we don't let them [people of color] in... I mean...uh... we would if they wanted in ...uh I mean ... you know... anyone can ... you know ... we let anyone join ... we table and if they don't want to come up to us what can we do? Wow ... really we're only 17 percent? It just seems like more. It's just ... I mean...you know... uh... I just really I see. Really? Come on man ...

That's...that's not right. You should... I mean I'm not saying you're lying... just check that again.

As is evident from Jesse's statement, he does not believe that his chapter of SCCC is disproportionately white males – let alone views this as an issue. Furthermore, based on his statement, in theory his organization will “let anyone join” but does not have a real program to diversity. Most significant, Jesse appears to be completely unaware of how problematic his inability to perceive reality is and implies that I'm making up the information. The idea that he as a white man could have a false understanding of the world, let alone be corrected by a black man about it, violates the dominant frame's assertion that white reality is normative and leads Jesse to encourage me to “check that again.”

The next example is Thad, a 23-year-old criminal justice major. When asked about the demographics of his chapter, the following conversation emerged:

Interviewer: Can you tell me about the demographics of your campus chapter? This can include things such as political affiliation, major, race, sex. How would you describe your members?

Thad: Well I'd say we're primarily conservative because republicans tend to be much more into protecting the 2nd Amendment. We do have some democrats though. We have people from all over campus so that's a lot of majors haha We tend to be more males than females, but that just makes sense. Was there another one?

Interviewer: How would you describe the racial demographics of your chapter?

Thad: Well...it's really diverse... I mean... I think most of us are ... uh... Caucasian. There are a couple of ... African Americans. A few

Hispanics. We don't really have any Asian Americans though. It's pretty diverse. I mean... uh ... our group looks like our campus.

Interviewer: Cool. Your school is an HIS [Hispanic Serving Institution] though. I would just imagine you would have a pretty nice Latino population in your chapter.

Thad: uh...well you know... it's like... well... hmm... I mean you ... you know... we... we tried but...uh... I mean ... we try to get more Hispanics... or Latinos... or whatever you want to call them ... I mean ... we tried ... we accept all student and faculty ... it's just... you know ...

Thad's answer, though handled slightly different, is very similar to Jesse. Thad appears to believe that race plays no role in his organization and that the chapter of SCCC on his campus is "really diverse." Yet, as he begins to describe the demographics of his chapter, we begin to see it is not nearly as diverse as Thad purports. Just like Jesse, Thad fails to see the overwhelming white representation in the organization, choosing to believe his organization looks like that larger campus. When faced with the reality that his university is a Hispanic Serving Institution, means at least 25 percent of enrolled undergraduates are Latino, Thad began to fumble around on words to try to makes sense of low Latino representation in his organization. Ultimately, this section of my interview with Thad demonstrates the peculiar response of white college students when faced with racial facts that contrast their framing of society.

Lastly, I would like to draw on my interview with Matt to further emphasize the pervasive nature of cognitive incoherence among the members of SCCC when questioned about diversity in the organization. Matt is a chemical engineering student at a university in the American south and is an executive officer in one of the largest SCCC

chapters in the country. As with my other interviews, I was particularly interested in the homogeneous nature of SCCC chapters and wanted to understand how my respondents explained this trend. When questioned about the diversity of his chapter, Matt explained:

I think we are a very diverse group of students. We have students from all over campus which means we have a lot of different majors represented in our organization. We have several different racial minorities represented in our group and lots of women. We even have a good number of foreign students in our chapter. I don't know what other chapters look like because I've never been to any other the national meetings and stuff, but I think ours looks damn good.

Based on Matt's description, it would seem as though his chapter holds true to the "looks like the rest of the campus" narrative provided by many of my respondents. Yet, prior to our interview, I discovered that Matt's perception about the diversity of his chapter is not grounded in reality. The SCCC chapter at Matt's school is one of the more diverse SCCC chapters boasting only 83 percent white males compared to the 90 plus percent typical of SCCC chapters. However, though Matt's chapter falls outside of the 90 plus percent white male norm, it is still disproportionately composed of white males when compared to the larger student body in which white males comprise only 29 percent of the entire student population. After providing Matt with this information, I asked him what about the mission of SCCC does he think attracts so many white males and so few other groups. Matt responded:

Uh...uh... I mean... I don't know... We like ... uh... we don't do anything.... You know... you know...it's like ... uh... it's like they [people of color and women] ...uh ... judge us ... I think white guys may just... I don't know... they may just relate more to it...I don't know...we don't discriminate you know...they uh... they just don't want to join... they uh ... uh... they think we don't like them maybe ... I don't know...

you know... it's kind of ... uh ... like reverse racism or something ... they are uh ... yea... I think they may be racist and sexist against us because we're white guys ... you know... I mean ... yea ... I think that might be it.

Matt's response is rather interesting for two key reasons. First, paralleling the explanations offered by other respondents to similar questions, Matt, who had previously just described the demographics of his chapter of SCCC very eloquently, now, after being provided with information contrasting his perception of reality, displays a level of cognitive incoherence. Scavenging the corners of the brain for a possible explanation for the homogenous nature of his SCCC chapter without indicting the racialized threat narratives, Matt proceeds to stumble over himself, failing to express a clear thought which brings me to the second important feature of Matt's response. Matt avoids the first part of my question about what attracts white men to SCCC and opts only to address why women and people of color are not eager to join the organization. Ultimately, Matt arrives at the conclusion that the reason women and people of color are not attracted to SCCC is because of "reverse racism" and "reverse sexism."

The "reverse" style of argument emerged in the early 1970s and established a central place in the white psyche during the neo-conservative backlash against the Civil Rights and Women's' Movements of the 1960s (Feagin 2012; Bonilla-Silva 2013). Matt's decision to opt to accredit the disproportionate white male representation in his SCCC chapter to reverse discrimination from people of color and women is very much in line with the premise of color blind ideology and the unconscious self- deception of the dominant white racial frame. Whites embracing color blindness believe all people possess

the structural power to be racist and to identify and act on race makes a given individual racist (Bonilla-Silva and Foreman 2000; Bonilla-Silva 2013) – making Matt’s argument. He asserts that students of color see a group of “white guys” and decide to not engage the group based solely on the grounds that they are white guys. Based on Matt’s statement, this argument is more attractive than exploring the racial narratives offered by the members of SCCC, firearms history in the U.S., and firearms as a means of racial oppression as possible reasons why students of color have an aversion from SCCC. Similar arguments can be made for the role of firearms in women’s oppression (Carlson 2013). Thus, Matt’s response addressing the skewed representation of students within SCCC chapters and his avoidance about it in the organization attracts so many white men leaves one wondering about the role of reflexivity within Students for Concealed Carry on Campus.

Collectively, the men discussed in the portion of this chapter demonstrate the colorblind style of soft racial framing. Specifically, the men detailed here exhibit the cognitive incoherence typical of those embracing colorblind ideology after being confronted with evidence suggesting racial bias. Rhetorical rambling, stuttering, and fumbling of words is frequently observed within the responses of my participants after being provided with statistics revealing the disproportionate homogeneity of their respective chapters and asked for an explanation. After sifting through their incoherent episodes, I discovered my respondents typically explained the overwhelming white male members of SCCC chapters in one of three ways. First, as illustrated with Jesse, respondents often suggested that many facts about their chapter or the university at large

were incorrect and need to be “checked again.” Second, participants frequently avoided the question all together and opted to make the claims about failed attempts to attract students of color and women. Third, the individuals I spoke with would dodge specific parts of the question. Specifically, the members of SCCC I spoke with would not address why so many white men were attracted to the organization and so few students of color and women. Instead of addressing the part of the question, respondents would tend to assert that they were being judged because they were “white guys.”⁶ I would now like to turn my attention to those few individuals who resisted the dominant framing of people of color so common within SCCC and opted to express racial counter-frames indicting the racism guiding many campus carry advocates.

Counter- framing

As I reviewed the transcripts from my interviews with the members of SCCC, the most common theme was traditional racial framing. Whether presented in hard or soft styles, the dominant racial frame characterized the overwhelming majority of my interviews. However, while transcribing, I noticed a trend developing among the members of SCCC who had served in the U.S. military *and* been deployed to either Iraq and/or Afghanistan. Amongst this group of participants, and only this group, I noticed an unapologetic counter-frame focused on identifying the racial bias motivating many of the members of SCCC. Given that respondents with military service only express this

⁶ The only members of SCCC that avoided and outright contradicted this model were Grace and Emma who accredited the white male homogeneity of SCCC chapters to the “good ol’ boy vibe.” According to both women, sexist and racist jokes are commonplace in SCCC and it took a “special kind of person” to be able to handle “being around the boys.”

counter-frame, I term these phenomena the “military effect.” Recent work on the U.S. military challenges the notion that the U.S. military is the ideal model of racial progress asserting racial bias still exists in promotion trends, health care if wounded, and risk of death (Burk and Espinoza 2012). Yet, other work assert that those serving during war times tend to express more racially egalitarian attitudes (Lundquist 2004). Though supporting Burk and Espinoza’s structural account of racial relations in the U.S. military, I find Lundquist’s research provides a possible means of explaining the counter-frame expressed by the veterans in my study.

The first expression of a counter-frame was observed early in the project during my interview with Tyler. A scout sniper in the United States Marine Corp turned political science major, Tyler was very vocal about the race-based narratives he observed while active in SCCC. After reading Tyler a vignette from the interview schedule dealing with racial profiling that other respondents supported on grounds of self-defense, Tyler exclaimed:

That dude is a fuckin’ racist! He knows what he’s out looking for. He’s not doing all this for self-defense. He is looking for blacks. You can tell he tried to not say that, but you can really tell if you just think about what he is saying. You know what I mean? That’s the bullshit that makes those of us actually interested in gun rights look bad.

I followed up Tyler’s statement by asking if he had heard members of the SCCC chapter he was a member of saying things like the guy in the vignette. He responded, “Of course. That shit happens all the time. Honestly, it’s a big part of why I stopped going to meetings and stuff. These kids say they want to protect themselves but honestly, for the

most part, they are just looking for trouble.” Later in the interview, Tyler discussed discouraging a fellow Marine from joining SCCC. Tyler explained:

One of my buddies from the Marine Corp started here last year and wanted to get involved in SCCC. He told him, “Cortez, you don’t want any part of that fuck shit.” He knew what I meant...Cortez is Guatemalan and with all the ranting the kids in SCCC do here about immigration, you know they would not have wanted him there. They even dress their targets up sombreros sometimes! What the fuck is that?! I would even discourage you from joining. You seem like you’re really interested and knowledgeable about concealed carry and stuff; but honestly, they wouldn’t really want you there. I mean, they would never say anything to you or anything like that, but when they are by themselves I’m sure they would call you the “N word” ... To be real man, if you don’t look like me, they don’t want you there.

As I reviewed my conversation with Tyler, in light of racial framing discussed throughout this chapter, I find that in many ways Tyler raises many of the same issues just using different language. Beginning with his response to the vignette, Tyler identifies that the members of SCCC are not really interested in self-defense, but rather in arming themselves against men of color. He even goes so far as to assert that the individual in the vignette consciously tries not to sound racist because being labeled a racist is taboo in contemporary society. Tyler is not familiar with the academic language, but in essence he describes the usage of soft colorblind framing. Tyler’s warning to Cortez and myself about joining SCCC is also rather intriguing.

Again, in many ways, Tyler’s reflection on his time involved with SCCC is presented almost like an amateur sociologist. He discourages his friend Cortez from joining SCCC on the account of “all the ranting the kids in SCCC do here about immigration.” Thus, Tyler argues there is a very nativist undertone to the chapter of

SCCC on his campus. A key point, which I had observed in my interview with Dillon – a member of the chapter Tyler is discussing. One thing that caught my attention when compared to Dillon’s interview is that in Tyler’s explanation of the nativism displayed in SCCC he notes the members of SCCC would at times place sombreros on the targets while Dillon claimed it was simply a shop owner displaying anti-immigrant firing targets. Further, Tyler notes that the whites in the organization would on the surface welcome me into the organization, but would very likely use racial slurs when not in my presence. What Tyler is describing here is essentially Picca and Feagin’s (2007) concept of the backstage racism, the idea that when whites are outside of the company of people of color they are more lax in practicing political correctness and are more likely to engage in explicitly hard racial framing. Tyler then moves on to summarize the white-framed ideology of SCCC in one simple and honest sentence “...If you don’t look like me, they don’t want you there.”

Another respondent expressing a racial counter-frame is Earl, a 26-year-old soldier studying computer science in the American Northwest. Responding to the same vignette as Tyler, Earl noted:

I just can’t relate to his guy. Something isn’t right with him. He sounds like a George Zimmerman want to be...somebody out looking for reasons to use their weapon. People like that shouldn’t even be able to own firearms if you ask me. You know? It’s like, if you go around looking for somebody that makes you feel threatened to justify using lethal force, you don’t need a firearm. The goal of a firearm is to not use it. That’s not the case with a lot of these kids here though.

I suspected I understood what Earl was trying to say, but I asked him to elaborate on what he means by “looking for somebody that makes you feel threatened to justify using lethal force.” Earl further explained:

I know you see it. Let’s be real. When you hear about these types of things, it’s always a white person killing a minority. Every time. Honestly, most of the time when you see this kind of things it’s a white person pursuing a minority. It just seems like that’s always the case. I know you see it man.

Following this explanation, which I find very useful for discussion in Chapter VII, I wanted to know if Earl attached the same time of predator/prey discourse to the students in SCCC. After asking, “Do you think the member of SCCC act or think this way,” Earl stated:

Uh, yes. It’s a little subtler, but I think the same beliefs are there. Let me explain it this way. If you look at the webpage for our group, what do you see? A bunch of talk about self-defense. What does that really mean though? It means something different to a lot of people. The kids in the group here are, honestly, a bunch of spoiled rich kids. All they know about the world outside of their little gated community is what they see on television or Facebook. When you look at that kind of stuff what do you see people being afraid of? One thing: racial minorities. They might call them terrorists, gangsters, or illegal immigrants, but they all have one thing in common. They are not white. So yea, I think you see the same type of stuff in SCCC. I’m not sure if the kids even know that’s what they are doing. They have been programmed to think that way.

Looking over Earl’s series of statements, it is evident he has put much thought into the issues surrounding gun violence and SCCC. He clearly identifies a trend he has observed of whites seeking to own firearms not for protection from home intruders or general assaults. Rather, similar to Tyler, Earl argues that much of the motivation for gun

ownership stems from fear and media portrayals of those people warranting fear – people of color. Thus, according to Earl, whites are programmed from a young age to fear people of color and believe that they must possess firearms if they are to be safe. It is this socialized fear that Earl argues is the motivation for many of the members of SCCC, even if the members do not realize it.

Earl's claims are rather profound in that he upends the narratives of the SCCC to uncover that at their heart they are largely based in a sense of fear that they have been taught from media outlets. In making this argument, Earl proposed that not only is the amassment of arms advocated by SCCC members not needed, but also further, and most significant, he reveals the dominant white racial frame that guides the belief systems of many of the members of the SCCC chapter at his school. Having uncovered this, Earl reveals that the fear motivating campus carry is based largely on racial hysteria and not grounded in empirical reality. I would now like to turn to Wade, a former member of Richard's SCCC chapter. Wade unleashed the most scathing and unapologetic indictment of the white racist narratives pervasive throughout most of SCCC.

Wade is a 27-year-old college senior studying botany at a major university in the American northwest. Of all the interviews I conducted, in my time with Wade I observed very intense counter framing. Wade's expression of a counter-frame began very early in the interview when I asked, "What about the SCCC chapter at your campus attracted you to the point of becoming a member?" Wade responded:

Honestly man, there was nothing they said or did that really got me. All they talked about was how things aren't safe anymore and how we need to all be armed. That's just a bullshit cover though. You're a sociologists

right? Have you ever read Jackson Katz? I really like him. He explains all these kids wanting weapons really good. He says there is this thing called “retreat” that happens when white men feel threatened about changes in the world. Now I don’t think that explains all of SCCC, but I can say it explains most of the chapter here. I’m sure you can tell that there is nothing but a bunch of conservative white guys here. They are just pissed off they aren’t on top anymore.

I was rather intrigued with the argument Wade appeared to be making. Hesitant to rush to a conclusion, I asked Wade to clarify his statement because though I’m familiar with Katz’s work, I wanted to understand the connection Wade had drawn between gendered violence and what he observed in SCCC. Answering my follow up question, Wade further explained:

Well, Jackson Katz says that when things change, the people who were on top get upset and start to get angry about losing their position. Makes sense right? I think that is what is happening here. I was learning in my political science about how white people would prevent minorities from voting. I think that’s another example of this kind of retreat he talks about. It’s kind of like their way of fighting back against the change because they don’t want to lose their position. I think that is what is going on in SCCC. Most of these kids come from upper class families and are afraid that minorities and women are threatening their position on top. They want firearms to show they are real men you know? ... They talk a lot about self-defense, but I think that is just a way of not showing it is a retreat like Jackson Katz says.

I must admit, I was rather impressed by Wade’s argument. According to Wade, the narratives of guiding SCCC are largely the result of a cultural backlash against people of color and women. The majority of individuals within SCCC, as Wade states, are afraid of losing their dominant position as white heterosexual men within society and are using campus carry as a means of regaining the “man card.” Wade even goes as far as to make

a social class argument about the upper class nature of SCCC's members and suggests fear of losing a class position fosters the fear which motivates the members of SCCC.

While this argument does not account for the working class white males in the organization, Wade's assertion is worth noting. As I noted the extreme distaste many of the veterans in my study had for SCCC after being members, I wanted to know one last question, "why did you finally leave the organization?"

When I asked my respondents with a background in military service why they left SCCC, they all had a similar reason – the organization professes to be about self-defense and safety, yet it is not. According to the individuals in my study, SCCC is more of a racialized and gendered fear – motivated organization than an actually social group for firearms safety and self-defense. Tyler explained:

I originally joined SCCC because I didn't like that the U.S. government trusted me with firearms while I was doing its dirty work overseas, but once I got back they couldn't even trust me with a pistol. That just didn't make any sense to me... Once I was more involved in the organization, I came to find that the issues important to me just were not on their agenda. Well, they were, but they were really far down on the list. I came to see that the kids here were just concerned about not getting robbed by minorities. That's all they would talk about. They would even call special meetings anytime a minority did a crime on campus and use it to get people all fired up about "how important the cause is." It's a joke honestly. That's why I left.

Tyler's explanation for leaving SCCC is very typical of the veterans involved in my study. Many of them took issue with the fact that they were trusted with high power weapons, including tanks in one instance, but were not allowed to carry a basic pistol once they left the military. The apparent contradiction confused my respondents and led

them to join SCCC. Yet, after extended time with the organization, they came to find SCCC was not what it advertised itself as. As Ryland explained:

They lie to get people to pay dues. Once you're in there you see that. I mean, most of the kids in the group don't even have CHLs yet they are bitching about not being able to carry. It's not about gun rights...it's just not.

Generally, Ryland's statement represents the conclusion many of the members of SCCC with a background in the military came to. According to the veterans in this study, SCCC as a gun rights group is "a joke" and is simply a cover for a group of white male students who have been socialized to fear racial minorities and view firearms as the only acceptable means of protecting themselves. Further, it is suggested the members of SCCC, representing many intersections of privilege, find an organization in SCCC that nurtures a type of social backlash or retreat against the United States' shifting social landscape. Ultimately, the veterans I interviewed, most of which have since left the organization, find SCCC to be less about self-defense and more about a larger social project of resistance to progress.

Summary

This chapter has illustrated the myriad of ways the members of SCCC in my study expressed racial frames of reference. The least common illustrated was the explicit language of hard framing. Those exhibiting this style of racial framing often spoke through nativist language and narratives describing the sexual threat of black and Latino males to white women. The most common style of framing observed was soft framing. Due to its implicit nature, soft framing allowed my participants to express racist

narratives and beliefs without needing to be explicit. Much of the soft framing observed in this study focused on the deficient cultural values of people of color and narratives about ever threatening “thugs” seeking to attack whites. Third, I noted the cognitive dysfunction characteristic of those embracing colorblind ideology when confronted with evidence of racial bias. When the respondents in this study were confronted with evidence about the overwhelming white male homogeneity of their chapters, many went from articulate speakers into stuttering and rambling episodes of incoherence. Arising from these episodes were beliefs about reverse racism and sexism against white males as well as claims that I need to “check my facts again.” Lastly, I noted an anti-racist counter-frame among those members of SCCC who had served in the U.S. military during war times. These individuals were quick to indict the racist narratives motivating many of the members of SCCC and ultimately arrived at the conclusion that SCCC is less about actual gun rights and more about white males resisting social change.

While the race-based narratives of SCCC are readily identifiable, there is an overarching theme that permeates all of the narratives offered by my respondents. This trend is based on illogical conclusions and is devoid of empiricism. I now turn to my analysis of this critical phenomenon I term “engineered vulnerability.”

CHAPTER VI

CONSTRUCTING VULNERABILITY

You can be attacked anywhere. Criminals don't take lunch breaks. It can be walking to class, walking home from work, or even just walking from your car to your apartment. Our country is not safe like it used to be. Obama has ruined everything America was. Violence can happen anywhere now. It didn't use to be that way, but it's what we have now. That may sound a little paranoid, but I like to think of it as prepared. Our opponents like to say we are paranoid, but it's not like we're running around with tin foil hats. You're not paranoid when you take a knife into the woods in case you find a snake. It's the same principle. Having a firearm is just like having an insurance policy. You don't want bad things to happen, but you know the odds are that they will at some point. That's what "Prepared Not Paranoid" means. We aren't looking for trouble, we're just realistic enough to know that it is out there and you must be armed against it unless you want to make yourself a victim. Being a victim is a choice. We've made the decision to not be.

-Garrett

If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.

-W.I. Thomas

The above statement from Garrett is taken from a portion of our interview in which I asked him to explain the organization's motto "Prepared Not Paranoid." I decided to open this chapter with his explanation because after further reviewing my transcripts, I have found that his statement represents the common belief in an ever-present state of vulnerability pervasive throughout my conversations with the members of SCCC – despite most of the individuals in the study possessing privilege insulting them from a vulnerable status. Respondents often provided very dynamic and grandiose descriptions of the threat they feel by social change, often associated with the Obama Administration, and argued amassing firearms is the only means to protect themselves

from the looming threat of violence. I will return to Garrett's statement for further analysis later in this chapter, but for now it is useful to make clear that his claims may be stated slightly differently than some of the members of SCCC, but they are by no means unique. Similar narratives are offered by many of the respondents in this study. Before moving into an overview to this chapter, it should be emphasized that the vulnerability narratives provided by my participants are not removed from the racial framing addressed in the previous chapter. Rather, as will be made evident through my analysis, it is the same intense racial framing identified in the previous chapter that in many ways is paramount to the construction of vulnerability by my participants.

In this chapter, I will address the vulnerability narratives expressed in my interviews with the members of SCCC. Guiding this chapter is the central question, "how are my respondents constructing narratives of vulnerability." After scrutinizing my transcripts, I find that feelings of vulnerability expressed by most of the members of SCCC emerge as a result of a process I call "engineering vulnerability" – the construction of reality based on an inverted epistemology in which one believes themselves to be in a constant state of danger despite being empirically well-insulated from threat. Similar to W.I. Thomas' the definition of a situation, the members of SCCC have created a world in which they are at high risk of violence attacks and choose to interact with that world by amassing firearms and carrying at all times. To allow for a better understanding of this process, I have segmented engineered vulnerability into three sub-processes. The first step is an *identification of loss of control*. Much in line with the foundational definition of vulnerability, during this stage, my participants

express feelings of no longer being in control of their lives and environment.

Specifically, my respondents assert that the U.S. has declined into a war-like society or military state in which the rules of civilized society no longer apply.

Second, following their identification of a loss of control, participants move on to *identify threats*. Threats of interest can include a myriad of elements ranging from a macro-economic decline to shifting social demographics. In terms of this study, participants almost always identified people of color, males more than females, as the primary threat warranting amassing arms and carrying on campus. More often than not, this identification took place through the traditional racial framing of men of color posing a violent threat to white society.

Third, once threats had been identified, individuals will *identify a means of addressing the threat*. In the case of SCCC, the participants in this study arrive at the conclusion that amassing firearms and carrying them at all times is the only means of guaranteeing their safety. Whether at home, a shopping center, or merely sitting in a university course, the members of SCCC assert their identified threat can violently attack “consensual victims” – those individuals deciding not to arm themselves – at any moment.

Lastly, solidifying the vulnerability narrative guiding SCCC and making the inverted epistemology directing the organization evident is a *rejection of empiricism*. After being provided with empirical evidence debunking the decline of society and exponential increase of violent deviants, respondents reject said evidence as “liberal propaganda” and “cry baby politics.” Rather than engaging the data, the members of

SCCC almost instantaneously categorize academic evidence as part of a “liberal agenda.” Ultimately, I found this process of engineering vulnerability to be common among many of my white male participants, less so with the women and one Latino male participating in this study. Before moving into my data and detailed analysis of my interviews, I’d like to devote space to clearly outlining vulnerability, its connection of racial framing, and how these two phenomena converge in an inverted epistemology.

Merging Vulnerability and Racial Framing

As noted in Chapter II, in its most basic definition, vulnerability is theorized as the risk of exposure to loss of control. It must be emphasized that this definition is not based on perceptions of risk, but rather on actual empirical risk of loss of control. The lack of interest in defining vulnerability based on perceptions of risk is largely due to vulnerability being understood as inherently linked to social structure and social positionality (Carlson 2013). As defined by the criminological tradition, vulnerability is intrinsically linked to the structural issues of racism, classism, and sexism because marginalized groups are much more likely to find themselves in situations beyond their control due to their lack of social power (Hollander 2001; Killias 1990; Pantazis 2000). Thus, to engage in an honest discourse of vulnerability, the intersections of race, class, and gender must be engaged because ultimately, the likelihood of one being at risk to factors outside of one’s control is inherently tied to social position. An intersectional lens provides insight into these connections.

The theory of intersectionality claims to fully understand the experience of social actors, including their vulnerability to crime, all angles of their social positionality in

relation to systems of oppression must be examined (Walby et al. 2012). Stated differently, the application of the intersectional lens allows for insight into understanding the myriad of different ways systems of privilege/oppression intersect to shape the lived experience of various groups within society. In terms of this study, emphasis will be placed on the importance of white supremacy and patriarchy in shaping the experiences and narratives of the members of SCCC as well as their defined “threats.” The concept of multiple inequalities will prove useful for hashing out these intersections.

Black feminist scholars seeking to understand the importance of multiple inequalities have largely advanced the intersectionality theoretical approach (Walby et al. 2012). One example of this tradition is the work of Kimberle Crenshaw. Crenshaw (1989, 1991) utilizes the concept of intersectionality to examine how the intersection of race and gender limits black women’s access to the U.S. labor market and makes them invisible within larger domestic violence projects illustrating that the experience of black women cannot be understood within the traditional scholarly boundaries of race and gender. Addressing this issue and seeking to understand how intersecting oppressions are actually organized, Collins (2000) synthesizes multiple inequalities into what she calls “the matrix of domination.” For Collins (2000), regardless of the particular intersection, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across different forms of oppression. Thus, according to the matrix of domination, it is possible to be oppressed in one realm of society, but oppress in another. This is evident in Crenshaw (1995) and Collins’ (2000) discussions of domestic violence in which they assert black males seek to exercise patriarchal control over black women.

While this specific argument has been heavily contested by African-center scholarship (Hudson-Weems 2004; Bambara and Taylor 2005; Ani 1994), the intersectional lens still remains a useful tool for gaining insight into social phenomena when properly applied. In terms of this study, the intersectional lens is useful for identifying structural privilege and the insulation it grants its recipients from vulnerability.

While understanding the experience of the oppressed within any system of domination is important, it is also critical to turn an eye toward the experiences of the dominant group because many of the experiences faced by dominated groups is a direct product of the benefits afforded to oppressors. Criminologically speaking, privilege is often observed victimization rates. According to the latest 2012 National Crime Victimization Survey⁷ (NCVS), people of color experience victimization across a wide range of contexts exponentially higher than whites in the United States. Furthermore, though males are more likely to be victims of all types of crime aside from rape, white middle class males – the majority of SCCC members – *are much less likely than poor whites or men of color to experience victimization*. The trends pertaining to overwhelming majority of members of SCCC observed in the 2012 NCVS can be largely accredited to material privileges, often thought of as resources, associated with being white and middle class in the United States (Carlson 2013; Glover 2009; Barak et al. 2010; Britton 2011; Alexander 2012; Rothenberg 2011; Feagin 2010). Thus, it is rather curious why an organization comprised largely of white middle class males would be so

⁷ 2012 National Crime Victimization Survey. *Hate Crime Victimization 2004 – 2012; Intimate Partner Violence: Attribution of Victimization 1993 – 2011; Criminal Victimization 2012; Police Behavior during Traffic and Street Stops 2011; Indicators of School Crime and Safety 2012*. Reports can be found at http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=245#Publications_and_products

concerned about experiencing victimization when based on the data, such an experience is very unlikely. I argue, perhaps the reason this population is so fearful of being victimized, despite its unlikely nature, largely stems from their intensive indoctrination with the dominant white racial frame.

Demonstrated in the previous chapter, the members of SCCC generally operate very heavily from out of the dominant white racial frame. Whether presented as in a hard or soft style, the pro-white/anti-other binary guiding the white racial frame is confirmed as a central feature of SCCC. Paramount to this framing of society are racial stereotypes, racial narratives and interpretations, racial images and language, and racialized emotions (Feagin 2013). In terms of criminality, the dominant frame asserts that people of color are vice-driven beings constantly looking to make victims of white Americans (Feagin 2010). This ideology can be readily observed in the racial framing illustrated by the members of SCCC participating in this study. It is very common for them to frame their need to carry a firearm at all times in racialized language claiming, explicitly and implicitly, that people of color are savage and pose a threat to whites. Ultimately, this style of pervasive racial framing and its accompanying narratives and stereotypes converge in a racialized fear of being victimized. Yet, how can this fear be justified when it completely runs against all empirical data? This phenomenon can only be explained via an inverse epistemology.

A central feature of whiteness is the inability to accurately perceive social reality on issues related to race. Mills' (1997) work on the Racial Contract makes the point very clear. He notes all whites within societies grounded in white supremacy are required to

embrace an “epistemology of ignorance” and contribute to a “consensual hallucination” if they are to partake of the contractor benefits afforded whites. Further, it is argued that whites are then unable to perceive the social world they themselves have constructed and opt to live in a “racial fantasyland” in which their beliefs, no matter how illogical or unfounded, are accepted as social facts (Mills 1997). Interestingly, when challenged with hard empirical evidence, the beliefs guiding the “white world” are often only further entrenched into the white mind. This does not suggest that whites are helplessly confined to their dream, but research has shown it takes years of intense racial education to get a *small minority* of whites to *begin* to think critically about race and question their long held beliefs (Feagin 2010). Thus, the deep entrenchment of the white inverse epistemology is normative for most whites in societies founded on white-on-“other” oppression.

Reflecting on my interviews with the members of SCCC, there appears to be a unique marriage of the dominant white racial frame and a deeply embedded inverse epistemology guiding a large majority of the “self-defense” narratives provided. Many of said narratives are grounded very much so in a deep racialized sense of fear of victimization resulting from a combination of various elements of the white racial frame. Further, the respondents in this study expressed a deep resentment for empirical evidence debunking this racialized fear. Once provided with evidence to the contrary, my participants only held more firmly to their beliefs about the impending and ever present threat of victimization at the hands of people of color, black and Latino males in particular. It is this unique merging of elements of the white racial frame into racialized

fear of victimization coupled with a deeply entrenched inverse epistemology that I refer to as the process of engineering vulnerability -- the construction of reality based on an inverted epistemology in which one believes themselves to be in a constant state of risk of victimization despite being empirically well-insulated from threat. I will now begin to walk through the sub-processes of engineering vulnerability beginning with an identification of loss of control.

Identification of Loss of Control

The first step in the engineering of vulnerability observed by my respondents is the identification of loss of control – a matter at the heart of vulnerability. A loss of control may be presented in social, economic, or a myriad of other discourses. However, the foundational element of losing control in some area of one’s life is the determining factor in most definitions of vulnerability. For the respondents in this study, loss of control was often described in color-blind, yet very racialized terms. Frequently centering on ideas about the decreased safety of whites in America on and off campus, my respondents’ identification of loss of control is presented heavily from out of the dominant white racial frame. To begin the analysis of the trend, I would like to turn to Boston’s discussion of the loss of control he is experiencing off-campus.

Loss of Control in the Larger Society

Boston is a 22-year-old white male who attended a university in the American southwest. When I first met Boston, I could not help but read the large message and examine the picture on the back of his Tea Party Movement t-shirt. In large red letters were the words “GIVE ME MY COUNTRY BACK!” Below this overtly hostile

statement was an image of President Obama in a cage with the words “The Thief.” It’s worth noting that President Obama was not standing in a prison cell, but an animal cage with the title “The Thief” embossed on a bracket at the top as though he was on display at a zoo – very explicit racial framing. Next to the animalistic caricature of President Obama was an image of a white family having a picnic at what seemed to be a park or some kind of hillside. Below this image was the message “VOTE TEA PARTY.” Thus, it would appear as though Boston’s shirt is suggesting not only that President Obama is a monkey, but that if voters would support the Tea Party Movement, the lives of white Americans could return to the “good old” days of picnics with the family. Based on Boston’s attire, it was fairly evident what motivated him to join SCCC.

After returning from a phone call of some sort, Boston was prepared to begin the interview. Once the initial question about his involvement in SCCC had been answered, I began to probe a bit deeper by asking, “Would you mind telling me what exactly made you want to start carrying firearms in the first place?” Boston responded:

It just seems to me that our government wants to take away our most basic right so they can take control of us. Just look at all that has happened since Obama got elected. We have foreign countries threatening to bomb us and the ones that aren’t doing that are invading us by jumping across the border and Obama is just fine with that. He has really fucked things up man. He has ruined all of the stuff President Bush did to help build our country up. I mean it’s all gone. I mean really, how do we go from being one of the safest nations in the world under Bush into a country where our own military is shooting up citizens and we reward criminals. Obama is just a weak leader, man and it shows in what’s going on in our country. The reality is that if you want to be safe today, you have to carry. If you don’t, you’re asking to be a victim. That’s the thing about anti-gun people. They want to be victims. They pretend we still live in a safe society, but the truth is we don’t...we just don’t.

Boston's statement is rather interesting for two key reasons. First, he offers a narrative about "foreign invaders" that is characteristic of the nativist framing identified within the interviews with many of the members of SCCC. According to Boston, the U.S. is now in a war-like state in which other countries consistently seek to terrorize U.S. citizens with weapons of mass destruction. Further, Boston asserts that those individuals living outside the U.S. not threatening large-scale violence are invading by "jumping across the border." Thus, based on Boston's statement, he decided to start carrying firearms to address the potential terrorist attacks and undocumented immigration.

Second, the above excerpt from my interview with Boston was interesting because of the binary he has constructed between President Bush 43 and President Obama. Despite 15 mass shootings, an economic collapse, the horrors of the attack on the World Trade Centers in New York City, Boston describes the Bush years as safe and argued the U.S. was "one of the safest nations in the world." He contrasts this period with Presidents Obama's time in office by arguing Obama has "ruined all the stuff President Bush did to help build up the country" and has more generally just "really fucked things up." Boston goes on to claim that President Obama rewards criminals and turns a blind eye to threats, both domestic and foreign. This binary he has constructed is rather interesting because on all counts the years President Bush was in office illustrated more counts of immediate threat on Boston's life than the Obama years, yet he defines it as a safe period in American history. Given what was observed on Boston's Tea Party Movement shirt, I believe it is safe to hypothesize that much of his resentment toward President Obama is founded in the fact that he is a black man. Given the interesting

dynamics of Boston's statement, we can argue he has identified a loss of control of what he feels is "his country" to people of color. Boston believes that under the Obama Administration, the U.S. is no longer safe. Thus, he must arm himself if he is to ensure his safety against perceived threats from foreign and domestic entities. Specifically, Boston tends to express great concern about losing his country to Latinos he believes are invading. My respondents also identified blacks in the U.S. as threatening to the security of whites and presenting about a loss of control.

Another example is Rod. Throughout our interview Rod made frequent references to the state of social decay he believed described the contemporary United States. During one such statement, Rod explained:

Well look around the country, hell the whole world; we see that violence is everywhere. It seems like every day somebody is getting killed over something. It's just a different world than when we were kids. I mean, you didn't have to worry about Dairy Queen and the candy store when we were little, but now somebody could walk into one of those places and kill everyone. It's like nothing is sacred anymore. It's just not the same man. You don't even have to look for trouble, it will find you now days. My dad tells me about when he was a kid and everyone respected each other, but he say's today it's like those rules don't apply. Now days it's like you have to always watch your back.

In Rod's statement, he describes the U.S. as a society in which all social order has dissolved, forcing you to "always watch your back." This idea was similar to Boston's explanation for carrying, but I was interested in the contrast Rod drew between his childhood and his current life. After a bit more conversation, Rod provided me with great insight into why he separated the world as such.

During the middle of his teenage years, his father was laid off and the family was forced to uproot their suburban lifestyle and move into what Rod calls "the hood." While

living in this area, Rod frequently observed “gangs jumping in new members” and “drug deals.” Throughout his detailing of the change experienced during his childhood, Rod often emphasizes that his family was not like “the people there.” For example, while describing the poverty of the community, Rod explained:

There was all kinds of shit down there. Drugs. Gangs. Prostitutes. If it was fucked up then it was there haha. We never really fit in down there. I still don't really understand that part of my life. I guess my family was just different than the other people there. We saw the world differently. We understood hard work and respect. Our neighbors in the hood didn't get that stuff though. They didn't respect anything. Hell, they didn't respect anyone.

Given Rod's description of his childhood in “the hood,” it is rather clear that at an early age he had come to associate people of color with crime and found them to be culturally lacking. This idea is made evident in his assertion that his neighbors didn't respect anything or anyone, a clear contrast to the values he claims were exhibited by his displaced suburban family. Taking in conjunction with Rod's statement about the social decay of the U.S., it would appear as though his arguments about the dissolving social order are more of a reflection of being removed from white suburban lifestyle and placed into a community populated with more people of color. Being placed into such a situation likely traumatized Rod's entire family. This experience then manifested in an intense feeling of losing control of life and being at the mercy of the individuals in Rob's surrounding.

A third case of expressing feelings of loss of control in the larger society can be observed in my conversation with Dillon. Dillon's chapter of SCCC frequently engaged in anti-immigrant discourse and embraced nativist ideology. While describing the

various changes that are taking place in the U.S. and how they impact campus carry,

Dillon brought up concerns about “losing the border.” He explained:

One thing a lot of Americans don't understand is that if we're not careful, we will lose this country in the next decade or so. Obama is already taking steps to make sure that happens. I mean he is taking away the very rights that make us Americans. He is even trying to change the actual borders of our country so that illegal aliens from Mexico can walk right in, no problem. We also have enough of that now. If you go to any store now you will see Spanish labels on things. That's not America. It's like he's trying to change the country into “North Mexico” and with that change comes the cartels. You see all that shit they are doing along the border. Obama is just asking for them to bring that up here. He doesn't love this country.

As I reviewed my interview with Dillon, I found this portion to be particularly interesting due to the grandiose claims he makes about President Obama seeking to change the country. According to Dillon, the president is attempting to uproot the very foundations of the U.S. and alter the national border simply because he has engaged in conversations about immigration reform. To Dillon, this symbolizes a longing to embrace criminal behavior on behalf of the president. Further, it is asserted that an increase of Latinos in the U.S. accompanies the rise of the Mexican cartels in the United States. Thus, for Dillon, immigrants are a vice-driven homogenous group being aided by President Obama in their quest to take over the United States. Dillon even goes as far as to take issue with Spanish labels being placed on groceries. Therefore, Dillon defines not only himself as being in a state of lost control, but the country itself is at risk if the ideas he has about social policy play out as they do in his head.

In many ways the narratives offered by Boston, Rod, and Dillon encapsulate the feelings of losing control within society expressed by the members of SCCC interviewed

in this study. Whether displayed through hostile anti-Obama discourse, nativist rhetoric, or describing the social “backwardness” of “the hood,” the participants in the study tended to emphasize their lack of control of their lives without being armed. Aside from concerns of losing control in the larger society, being a student based organization; the members of SCCC also focus on feelings of losing control on the university campus.

Loss of Control on Campus

In my interview with Hunter, a 26-year-old senior at a private university in the American southwest, he frequently alluded to the feelings of loss of control when placed on the college campus. Many of the feelings emerged when he observed black students – though he frequently uses soft framing and color-blind rhetoric to avoid being perceived as a racist. When asked about his feelings of safety, Hunter explained:

For me it all changed when I got to college. I can remember coming to freshman orientation and thinking college was going to be great. There were so many girls haha Once classes got started and everyone was here it was different though. There were these guys down the hall and they would have parties all night with loud rap music. Don't get me wrong, I like that stuff, but not every night. They would even be out in the hall rapping and smoking weed too. After a few weeks my stuff started coming up missing and I knew it was them. I mean, it had to be them. Having my stuff come up missing really made me wake up to the way the world really works. That world where everyone gets along just doesn't exist. If people don't like you or think you are weak they fuck you over. Bottom line.

Based on Hunter's statement, it would seem as though he begins to experience feelings of loss of control once his belongings come up missing. While these types of feelings make sense given that his things had been stolen, what's interesting is that he automatically assumes the perpetrators were the men down the hall. Worth noting is the way he describes these men as weed smoking rappers. While neutral on its face, this

language is heavily associated with black males (Rose 2008). Thus, I suspected that Hunter's allegation against the men in his hall was closely associated with the dominant racial framing of men of color as criminal. Cautious to not jump to this conclusion though, I asked Hunter, "Why do you think it was the guys down the hall?" He replied, "Everyone knows those guys are just a bunch of gangbangers. If you could see them you'd know what I mean. Let's just say they don't look like they have ever actually attended a class. Haha." Based on his response, it is evident Hunter is associating his neighbors with criminality based on nothing more than their appearance. The question then becomes did Hunter's things really need to be stolen for him to feel threatened by the men in his hall and feel as though he had lost control?

Another case of using soft framing and colorblind language to describe situations in which my respondents feel they have lost control is Garrett. As noted in Chapter V, Garrett frequently utilized extremely explicit hard racial framing. However, periodically he would adopt a more implicit soft framing as he did while outlining the changes he had observed at his university. Garrett explained:

This used to be a nice campus. I mean you could walk to The Cafe anytime and it was never a problem. We didn't even really have police or anything on campus. It changed though two years ago. As soon as we started having sports on our campus, things got all fucked. Now people get robbed every day. You hear of women getting raped at least once a week. I mean in my dorm this last week, I heard that five guys got beat up by the basketball players. Of course you know the school isn't going to do anything about it because they love the athletes. I'm not going to be a victim though. If the school isn't going to do anything, I will. The Second Amendment is my God-given right and I will use it.

Garrett's identification of sports teams as the primary cause of safety issues on campus is rather interesting. After looking at the various teams on campus, I found that they are

collectively 73% students of color. Thus, in this statement, we see Garrett utilizing the race neutral language of color-blindness to construct a college campus into a pre and post-sports binary. In doing so, Garrett more or less creates a narrative about how the university changed after the enrollment of black and Latino students increased. This increase in students of color came to be viewed as a tipping point. Specifically, a point where perceptions of university safety declined based on the increase of students of color unacceptable to whites. Thus, for Garrett, feelings of losing control in the collegiate context began once more students of color entered his university. This is very much in line with his earlier arguments that “Fucking wetbacks are taking our country and blacks are stealing our women. I mean really, look around any campus in this country and you’ll see it. We really don’t have anything anymore.”

Garrett’s narrative about declining safety on campus is very similar to the sentiment expressed by Emma. One of the two women in this study, Emma often fell outside of the patriarchal entitlement common among many of the male participants. However, though resisted the oppressive narratives of patriarchy, she often provided racially framed narratives about the decline of areas of campus that were heavily populated with students of color. Describing feelings of unease while walking home from her afternoon classes, Emma explained:

Having morning classes is better. People are much friendlier then. Once the afternoon comes and the people that live in Lindsey Hall wake up, things really change. I avoid that whole part of campus if I can after about 1 or 2. I’ve heard there are fights everyday over there. I’ve even been told about a few girls who were walking home and were raped in broad daylight. A couple of the guys I know warned me about that place, so I just stay away. I’ll take the long way home to avoid going near Lindsey.

Common of many of the respondents in the study, in the above statement, Emma uses race neutral language to explain her feelings of being out of control in certain areas of campus. Specifically, she is concerned about the residents in Lindsey Hall. Noticing that several of the students at the same university made reference to this set of dorms, I became a bit interested in what exactly is going on in Lindsey. For example, in a portion of the interview, Roger referred to the Lindsey as the “ghetto on campus.” In another interview, Ben made several references to the “ratchets” on the north side of campus – the area where Lindsey is located. After a bit of research, I came to discover that Lindsey Hall is a low-income set of co-ed dorms and is heavily occupied by students of color. Many of its residents are honor students, but due to financial difficulties are forced to live in this sub-par hall. Further, from 2011 to 2013, Lindsey Hall experienced less crime than all the other dorms on campus combined. Once being provided with this information, the claims of vulnerability to violence in the area made by my respondents began to make more sense. Once placed in an area of campus occupied by students of color, many of the members of the Sowest University chapter of SCCC began to express feelings of being out of control of their environment whether or not any actual threat is posed.

Whether on or off campus, the members of SCCC I spoke with during this study collectively expressed narratives of feeling as though they have lost control in some area of their life. Their narratives of loss of control are often accompanied with hard and soft racial framing of people of color. Often describing a changing social demographic or area heavily populated with people of color as situations in which loss of control is

experienced the most, the respondents in this study reveal a central connection between the bodies of people of color and losing control and feeling vulnerable to crime. This connection is further identified in the second sub-process of engineering – identification of threat.

Identification of Threat

As I scrutinized my transcripts, seeking to understand how my respondents were constructing narratives in which they are vulnerable subjects, I found that embedded within their stories of a loss of control was a common theme of identifying a group or singular individual they believed posed a threat of violence. As one would guess, given that the majority of their loss of control narratives were characterized by intense racial framing, the individuals arousing the suspicion and heightened feeling of threat from the members of SCCC I interviewed were most often black and Latino men. Keeping with the trends observed earlier in this project, the respondents in this study generally offered two sets of racial framed individuals as those persons arousing the most feeling of threat -- the black thug/gangster and the illegal Mexican criminal. To begin my analysis of the threat narratives offered by my participants, I would like to start by looking at “The Thug/ Gangster.”

The Black Thug/Gangster

The first racialized individual arousing feelings of threat among my respondents was the black male often described as a thug or gangster. The members of SCCC I spoke with during this study made frequent references to this individual when describing situations in day-to-day life that require them to carry a firearm. Typically existing along

the periphery of campus, the black thug/gangster as described by my respondents is a menacing figure constantly looking for opportunities to victimize whites via robbery, assault, and rape. This narrative emerged very early in the data collection process in my interview with Ben.

During my conversations with Ben, he frequently stressed that being involved in SCCC was not about being armed on-campus. Rather for Ben, concealed carry was more a matter of making sure that he was armed while he was walking home from classes in the late afternoon and evening. Seeking to understand why walking home was such a dangerous process for Ben, I asked him to describe an average day walking home from classes. Obliging my request, Ben explained:

Well, I normally finish everything and head home around 3:30 so it's still light outside. Once I get off the bus, I have a good 10 – 15 minute walk to my house. There is a group of guys that live two, no three houses down from the bus stop and I have to walk past their place while going home. They are always outside on their porch being loud with their rap music turned up. I think they play cards or something. Sometimes they even have the trunks of their cars open so the music can be even louder. It's just weird. Kind of like "Hey look at me" ... They never say hi or anything. When I walk by they just look at me. Kind of like they are waiting for a chance...to catch me not paying attention. I even think I saw a gun once out on their card table. I know they are up to no good. You can tell with those people...there are a couple of other houses like that on the street so I just want to carry in case they were to ever try something I wouldn't have to be a victim. I will not let myself be a victim.

Reviewing Ben's description of walking home from school, it is evident that he has identified the men living near the bus stop as possible threats to his life. Based on the emphasis he places on the music the men are listening to as well as the speakers in their trunks, it is fairly safe to assume these men are black, but Ben wants to avoid being perceived as a racist. He arrives at the conclusion that because his neighbors do not

actively engage him that they must be waiting for an opportunity to attack and victimize him in some way. Thus, he believes allowing concealed carry on campus would allow him to remain armed while walking home in case the men he describes were to attack him. This narrative Ben offers of the black men living near him is a typical utilization of the white racial frame's stereotypical criminal black gangster. Without knowing anything about the men in his community, the dominant frame embedded deep within Ben causes him to arrive at the conclusion that these men must be violent criminals so he must amass firearms if his life is to be protected. Curtis offers a similar narrative.

Curtis is a 24-year-old senior at a major university in the American southwest. He is also the president of the university's chapter of SCCC. Paralleling much of Ben's interview, while Curtis believes being armed on campus is a constitutional right, much of his involvement in SCCC arises from his desire to be armed while leaving campus and traveling through other parts of town. Specifically, Curtis is concerned about not being armed on his drive to and from campus every day. While explaining why he became involved in SCCC, Curtis noted:

I typically drive about 40 minutes to campus every day. I have a family and a lot of the apartments closer to campus are designed for single folks looking to party every night. My duplex is in a nice neighborhood, but I have to go through some shady places on my way to class. No joke, at least once a week I see police pinning somebody down on their car or the ground on my way to work. That's just what those places are like. There is this one light on Meridian that I swear is the longest light in town. It wouldn't be so bad, but that's one fucked up part of town. All the guys around there are gang members and if you are at the light for a while, they can see everything you have in your car. If I could carry, I'd have my pistol setting right on my seat when I get to that light. I want them to know. I want them to try me.

In typical color-blind rhetoric, Curtis justifies his need to carry a firearm at all times based on his drive through “shady” and “fucked up” parts of town. This style of language almost always means its user is referencing communities of color. Curtis even goes as far as claiming, “all the guys around there are gang members” – another common color-blind method of describing men of color. Based on these descriptions, Curtis asserts that when these men cross the street, they are systematically scoping out all of the vehicles in search of an owner they can attack. This is similar to Ben’s belief that the men living on his street are eagerly waiting for an opportunity to victimize him. Ultimately, Curtis arrives at the same conclusion as Ben, that the only means of preventing their impending victimization at the hands of these men of color is to be armed. In a rather perverse way, Curtis even seems eager for the opportunity to use his pistol against the men on Meridian.

Another case of identifying black men via thug and gangster narratives as those persons arousing feelings of threat is Thad. While describing why he initially purchased a firearm, Thad stated:

I never grew up with firearms. My parents actually used to be hippies. I never even saw a pistol until I was 18. I eventually purchased one after a friend I mine suggested I get one to protect myself. My car had been stolen and I was just sick of people getting away with stuff. I knew the guys that had stolen my car, but the cops said they couldn’t do anything because I couldn’t prove it. I had a really nice brand new Ford Fusion Limited Edition and there was a group of guys, fucking thugs, who would hang around the garage I parked in. They were always checking out my car saying things like “nice car man.” I would even catch them checking it out sometimes when I would be walking up to leave. Then one morning it was just gone. I know they took it. It had to be them. That afternoon is when my friend convinced me to get a little Glock. I bet I don’t get my stuff stolen again. I promise.

The thing that sets Thad's story apart from most of the other members of SCCC I spoke with is that he was not the one to originally think to get a firearm. Rather, it was a friend of his who is also a member of SCCC that suggested Thad take up arms. Despite this unique element of his story, Thad approaches the subject of threat in the same way many of the members of SCCC do – from inside a white racist framing of society. He assumes that the compliments he received from the men in the garage about his vehicle means that they were waiting for the right time to steal it. I later asked that if he personally knew any of the men he suspected stole his car and he said no. Based on this information, it seems as though Thad attributed criminality to the black men near the garage by labeling them as “thugs” – a common label given to black men believed to be deviants by whites. Thus, drawing on his story, it would appear as though the “thugs” near the garage allegedly getting away with stealing his car that pushed him to accept his friend's idea of purchasing a firearm.

Using the threat narratives offered by Ben, Curtis, and Thad to illustrate identification of black men as figures of threat by the members of SCCC involved in this study, it is rather apparent that crime in general is not much of a motivator of the members of SCCC to take up arms. Rather, fear and threat seems to be attached to specific bodies. Thinking from within the dominant racial frame's narratives of black criminality, the respondents in this study find the mere presence of black bodies to pose a threat to their safety and thus believe they must carry firearms at all times if they are to be protected. In addition to black males, the members of SCCC I spoke with also identified Latino males as persons arousing feelings of threat.

The Illegal Mexican Criminal

Accompanying the threat narrative focused on black men framed as thugs and gangers, the members of SCCC interviewed for this study often made references to “illegal immigrants” and claimed that immigration from Mexico decreased the safety of citizens in the United States. Describing the social decay of U.S. states bordering Mexico, Othan, the only Latino member of SCCC involved in this study stated:

I grew up in Venezuela but I moved to the U.S. when I was in third grade. My dad was in the military and let me tell shit down there was ridiculous. There are people getting their head chopped off and shit every day in the street. They will break into your house and kidnap your sisters and make them sex slaves. You can't even go to school there without one of the cartels kidnaping one of the other kids. They run everything. Drugs are everywhere. Seriously bro, my mom told once she would go to the store and people would be selling shit in the open by the food... Now with all the illegals coming over here that shit's coming too. Just look at it. Crime in this state has gone crazy since they started coming here. It just follows them... Sometimes people try to get me involved in that shit because I'm Hispanic, but I'm not no wetback. I'm a U.S. citizen and I don't do that shit. They will fuck everything up here if we're not careful bro. I'm just being honest.

Of all the interviews I conducted, my conversations with Othan proved to be some of the most intriguing. This is largely due to the anti-immigrant discourse pervasive throughout our interviews despite Othan being a Latino immigrant himself. As evident in the latter lines of the above except, he draws a clear contrast between “wetbacks” and himself, a U.S. citizen. Even more interesting is the way in which he problematizes Venezuelans despite his mother being a native Venezuelan. Having clearly adopted the dominant racist framing foundational to U.S. culture, Othan describes Venezuelans as fundamentally vice-driven and criminal at their core. He goes on to assert the most grotesque types of violence are the norm in their Venezuelan culture. Othan then

proceeds to generalize his racist caricature of Venezuelans to all Latinos, specifically Mexican immigrants, arguing their immigration to the U.S. will “fuck everything up.” Thus, based on his description of the issues facing U.S. Border States with Mexico, Othan has constructed Latinos as the great threat facing not only Border States, but also the U.S. at large.

Another example of defining Mexican immigrants as inherently criminal is found in my conversation with Bill. As previously noted, the anonymity granted via using a phone for my interview with Bill allowed for some rather intense hard racial framing to be displayed. While describing to me the reasons he became involved in SCCC, Bill explained:

Well for me it had a bit to do with growing up. You start to see the world isn't such a nice place, as you get older. One of my buddies was walking to his car one day after class and one of those Mexicans tried to steal his car. When he fought back, he was cut from his ass to his ankles. Had he been able to carry, that would not have happened. When that Mexican fucker pulled out his knife, Brent could have shot him dead. Bottom line. No questions asked. With the country changing like it is with all the illegals coming in, stuff like that is going to become more common because they can't buy cars and things like that. They are going to need them and they are going to steal them. The only way we can make sure what happened to Brent doesn't happen to us is by arming ourselves. Right now, the [university] administration would rather us be a campus of victims than people capable of protecting themselves.

Reviewing this statement from Bill, it is rather clear that he draws a connection between immigration and crime. According to Bill, undocumented immigrants will have basic needs that are denied to them based on their immigration status. Due to this, he believes immigrants will result to criminal activity to obtain these goods. One thing that struck me as interesting or should I say odd about this statement from Bill is his reference to

“one of those Mexicans.” In many ways, using this style of language allows Bill to establish social distance between himself as civilized and the barbaric “other.” Creating this distance also allows Bill to be more comfortable and even callous when reaching more radical conclusions about Mexican immigrants. This is observed in his suggestion that if his friend Brent had been carrying a firearm and had an attempted robbery, he could have “shot him dead. Bottom line. No questions asked.” Therefore, based on Bill’s statement, he constructs Mexican immigrants as fundamentally criminal and posing a threat to civilized society, thus requiring U.S. citizens to arm themselves to protect the social order.

Lastly, I would like to look at my conversation with David, who rejects the hard racial framing of Latinos in exchange for a more subtle and soft-framed anti-Latino discourse. While discussing the impact allowing concealed carry on campus David and I had the following exchange:

Interviewer: What do you foresee as being the largest benefit of allowing concealed carry on campus?

David: Well safety would be the big one. Honesty though, and I can only speak for my campus, I think campus is pretty safe. The likelihood of a Virginia Tech is very slim. I think most people are concerned about having a firearm with them when they are off campus. Things are changing and people just don’t feel safe.

Interviewer: Can you explain what you mean about things changing people not feeling safe?

David: Sure...uh...Well I think the thing is, more so with places along the [Mexico] border, people don’t feel safe with the amount of illegal immigration taking place. They think that if these people are willing to break a very basic law that they will be break more serious one’s too.

Interviewer: What do you think about that? The idea that people are concerned about immigration?

David: Well, I think it makes sense. They are criminals. There is no way around that. I mean, I know if I lived along the border, I would probably be a bit more concerned about having illegal immigrants coming into my city. There are issues that come with that that can really hurt neighborhoods, you know? I mean you sure as hell don't want any of those Mexican drug lords coming in. I think it's really dangerous for the people living down there. Not so much for me.

This conversation with David departs in many ways from the previous anti-immigrant/Latino narratives observed in this chapter. Rather than expressing a hard framed anti-Latino narrative grounded in beliefs about Latino criminality, David manages to present a similar narrative using different language. Largely resulting from living in the American Midwest, David frames immigration as an issue he has not thought much about but believes impacts states bordering Mexico. He arrives at the conclusion that undocumented immigration poses a great threat to border states because in many ways crime is connected with immigration from Mexico. Thus, though having no direct contact with issues related to immigration, David finds himself sympathetic with nativists in the American south and southwest.

The men detailed in this portion of the chapter draw heavy connections between men of color and crime. In terms of constructing vulnerability narratives, the members of SCCC in this study strongly associate men of color, specifically black and Latino men, with threat. Many times black and Latino men need not even interact with the individuals in this study to arouse feelings of danger and threat. Rather, the mere presence of people of color appears to be enough to make the participants in this study feel threatened. Thus, in terms of the process of engineering vulnerability, we find that

not only do the members of SCCC define their loss of control in racialized terms, but also the narratives about the individuals or social phenomena arousing feelings of threat requiring mobilization are presented from within a white-framed view of society associating threat and criminality with bodies of color.

Identification of Means of Addressing Threat

Having outlined the areas in life in which they feel a loss of control and identified the individuals or groups posing the most threat, the members of SCCC I interviewed proceeded to prescribe, in their opinion, the best means of addressing their perceived threats. Given the nature and subject matter of SCCC, one would expect the members of the organization to believe carrying firearms would be an appropriate response to feelings of threat. However, as I came to notice early in the interviewing process, in many ways the members of SCCC are less concerned about concealed carrying pistols and other self-defense style weapons. Rather, the respondents in this study tend to emphasize amassing large amounts of firearms for protection. Thus, instead of focusing on their “right to bear arms,” the members of SCCC I spoke with are more interested in gaining a “right to militarize” against the individuals they believe are posing threats in their lives.

The idea of the right to militarize is a very recent development. Prior to the neo-conservative resurgence of the 1980s, ownership of military grade automatic weapons and silencers was virtually unheard of (Melzer 2012). Prior to this point, gun rights advocates were largely concerned with the ability of Americans to own hunting rifles, handguns, and shotguns (Burbick 2006). However, the crisis in white male masculinity

characterizing the majority neo-conservative politics merged with the capitalistic interests of firearm manufactures and dealers to produce the Firearms Owners Protection Act of 1986, more or less removing all regulations on firearms ownership in the United States. Embracing this right to militarize oneself against perceived threats was a very common trend through many of my interviews with the members of SCCC. Vince provides a great example of this belief system.

A college senior in the American southwest, Vince is the president of his university's chapter of SCCC. Though not a veteran, Vince is a big military enthusiast and makes frequent use of military jargon throughout our interview. When asked why he became involved with SCCC, Vince explained:

I don't believe the government has the right to tell me what I can and cannot do with my money. I work for it so I can do what I want with it. The most basic right of man is to be able to take up weapons and I don't want the government telling me when I can and cannot protect myself. There is fucked up shit in the world now and I should be able to protect myself anyway I choose any time I choose. Hell, I don't believe the government even has the right to make certain types of guns legal or not like they are trying to do with fully automatics now. They like to call them "assault rifles" though. If I want to walk down the street with a rocket launcher on my back, I believe I should be able to. I have that right! Who cares if you don't like it, it's in The Constitution!

In the above excerpt, Vince is expressing a clear disdain for any type of gun control. Going as far as suggesting citizens should be able to carry rocket launchers for self-defense, Vince believe that U.S. citizens should be just as armed as the military and have the same weapons readily available for addressing personal self-defense. Later in the interview, Vince went on to explain citizens should be arming themselves and forming street patrols to guarantee the safety of neighborhoods. He noted:

When seconds count, the police are minutes away. I used to be a cop and the truth is cops can't show up to the scene of a crime until a crime has been committed. Cops don't prevent crime. They can only deal with things after they happen. The only thing that can stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. That's it. That's why we need more people taking up arms and making sure the places we live are safe from thugs and rapists. If you look back at America, right after the 2nd Amendment passed, crime dropped...I mean a lot! That wasn't because of police. It was because you had people out walking streets with firearms making sure crime didn't happen. That's what we need today. We need people out in streets.

This second statement from Vince is rather interesting. He argues the streets of America should be filled with armed men and women actively looking for potential criminals. He then goes on to suggest the armed groups roving the streets of early America provide a model for this type of community self-help. What Vince fails to note is that these armed groups were actually slave patrols looking specifically for runaway Africans.

Periodically, these groups would target European ethnicities not yet accepted as white, but generally focused their attention on Africans. Suggesting armed neighborhood watches modeled after slave patrols are the key to preventing crime is rather extreme given that the members of SCCC I interviewed in this study, including Vince, typically frame men of color as the individuals arousing the highest levels of threat and suspicion.

Another example of the endorsement of militarizing against perceived threats is Walt. Noted earlier in this study, Walt is often concerned about the safety of his daughters from black rapists "rapping about it." Determined to make sure his daughters are not sexually assaulted by black men he believes are merely waiting for an opportunity to strike, Walt finds collecting large amounts of fire power is the only way

he can guarantee his child's safety. Describing the importance of owning firearms and his new love for silencers, Walt explains:

I'll be honest with you man; I own a lot of firearms. It's kind of a little arsenal haha. I've really lost count haha. My latest thing has been silencers. I just got this really badass one the other day. I don't want 'em to know I'm coming. That's important when you're dealing with a lot of targets at once. Any noise will set them off to your location and you can't afford that when they have your family. Just think of the [Navy] SEALs. When they go in they always have silencers because you have to remain invisible to targets. It's the same when it comes to your family. If a group was to break in, they would never know I'm taking their buddies out haha
Where did he go haha

Reviewing Walt's statement, it is rather interesting that he places himself into the same position as Navy SEALs military operatives. He even goes as far as using the military style language of "your location" and "targets." Similar to Vince, and many of the other members of SCCC I spoke with, Walt seems almost eager for the chance to use his latest weapon. He has constructed a fictional narrative in his mind in which he is the hero, saving his family from a group of home invaders likely seeking to sexually assault his daughter. Using the military precision, Walt believes he will be able to kill off the intruders without anyone knowing. Looking at his statement collectively, it is almost as if Walt looks to himself as the hyper-masculine hero displayed in most summer blockbusters glorifying vigilante style justice.

Lastly, I'd like to look at Jesse's endorsement of militarization as a means of addressing perceived threats. An adherent to the ideology that the government is overstepping its bounds with gun control, Jesse believes he has the right to own every weapon available for his self-defense. Describing the gun ownership as a "natural right," Jesse notes:

The most basic right we were given by God is our right to defend ourselves. Whether with a rock back when there were cave men, rocks were the first “assault weapon” you know, or a M-16 with a reflex scope, you have the right to defend yourself. There is no way around that. “Weapons” are nothing more than tools for defense. So it is important to have a wide range of tools because you never know which one you will need. Sometimes you need a screwdriver. Sometimes you need a hammer. It’s the same with tools for self-defense. That’s the problem with gun control is that it prevents us from having the tools we need. A small handgun might work in some situations, but would be useless in others. Sometimes you need a tool that allows you to do more work faster. We don’t get upset about people having a large Stanley toolbox so we shouldn’t get upset about somebody with a large gun safe. They are just tools.

Looking over my transcripts, I found this statement by Jesse to be rather interesting.

While not unique in his comparison of firearms to various home improvement tools, what struck me as intriguing was Jesse’s belief that gun control would prevent him from having all the tools he needs for self-defense. Specifically, Jesse believes that there are times when a handgun is useful, but in other situations you *need* a high-powered automatic tool to perform the job. What struck me as interesting about Jesse’s claim is that he completely removes the humanity from the “job” that requires his tools. He does not see perceived threats as people but rather as objects needing to be addressed, no different than a leaking faucet or crooked bookshelf. This is rather troubling because the respondents in this study largely associate threat with specific groups of people and as noted in the last chapter, removing the humanity from a group of people and framing them merely as objects is the first step in justifying large-scale mistreatment.

The members of SCCC involved in this study typically prescribe militarization as the proper response to perceived threats in a changing world. Whether presented as calls

from armed neighborhood watch groups or simply described as expanding one's toolbox, the members of SCCC I interviewed tend to believe the *only* way of addressing perceived threats is via gun violence. This finding is extremely troubling because as has been noted throughout this project; my respondents heavily associate people of color, specifically black and Latino males, with criminality and threat. Thus, based on the prescription of my participants, it would appear as though the members of SCCC believe the best way to handle black and Latino males is through militarization and callus displays of violence derived from racialized hero fantasies. Another element even further troubling about my finding is that the members of SCCC are deeply embedded in the white racial frame and its inverted epistemology that they tirelessly resist any empirical evidence contrary to their illogical and fictitious threat narratives.

Rejection of Empiricism

Perhaps the most significant characteristic of the process of engineering vulnerability is that it completely defies empirical reality. After detailing their feelings of loss of control and identifying those persons they defined as threatening, the members of SCCC I interviewed adamantly resisted any evidence that pointed to the illogical basis for their arguments. Rather, empirical evidence calling their beliefs into question only strengthened their resolve, further embedding the dominant white racist frame and its inverse epistemology. This pattern was most often observed toward the end of conversations surrounding the immigration.

Roger was one of the first individuals I noticed engaging in the process of rejecting empiricism in exchange for his own constructed reality. Given that Roger's

interview took place over the phone, it allowed for the presentation of hard racial framing of Latinos that may have otherwise been disguised via color-blind discourse.

While discussing the changing social demographic of the U.S., Roger explained:

It's kind of like our country is getting a makeover. It's not really the same as it was fifty years ago. Sure, different things have changed in our country, but a big part of what's going on is now the illegal immigration coming from Mexico. They are flooding into this country like crazy and we have to stop it or things are going to get really bad. I mean, most of those people are criminals so if we have a surge of criminals coming into this country, we know the safety is going to go down. Why do you think so many people along the [Mexican] border are starting to buy firearms? They know they have to if they want to keep what is theirs. They want to protect their property. You can't blame them for that.

Noticing the nativist framing guiding much of Roger's statement, I wanted to push him a bit on these issues and see how he responded to requests to defend his position.

Following his discussion of immigration; I explained to Roger:

You know, I've never really thought of it that way. I was actually teaching about immigration the other day and was reading that most of the people coming to this country come to work and generally avoid criminal activity out of fear of being deported.

As soon as I finished my last sentence, Roger brashly exclaimed:

That's bullshit! Let me let you in on something. The professors doing those studies are all bias against America. You seem like a good guy so you're probably not familiar with it, but there is a big liberal bias with most professors. They hate guns. They hate Christians. They hate America. But they love illegals. The fucked up thing is that if you take their classes and disagree with them you will fail. It's just bullshit man...the illegals coming here are criminals and crime follows criminals. There is no way to get around that. Liberals like to lie and say illegals are good people, but they are not. They are hurting this country.

Roger's harsh rejection and inability to engage my suggestion that most undocumented immigrants are not the vice-driven people he defines them as is rather interesting.

Rather, than actually engaging my comment, Roger opts to dismiss my statement and offer a critique of college professors, claiming they are biased against America. Further, after going on a tirade against university faculty, Roger returns to his denunciation of undocumented immigrants arguing they are fundamentally criminally and "hurting this country." Want to see if this trend of rejecting narratives counting their arguments persisted throughout my interviews, I decided to make a point during every interview to offer evidence contradicting the claims made by my respondents. I came to find that this was a common theme across interviews.

Another example of this harsh rejection of empirical evidence is observed in my conversation with Aaron. Noting that throughout his interview Aaron frequently made references to the south side of campus as being particularly dangerous. During once such description, Aaron informed me:

I don't really hang around Anders anymore. It's like everyday somebody is having their stuff stolen over there. You just really can't trust the people. I've even seen a couple fights go on over there. It's just a part of campus you should really avoid while you're here.

Rather surprised by Aaron's description of the south side of his campus, I informed him that I had looked at the university reports and noticed that the area near Anders Hall had very similar safety numbers as the rest of the school. Aaron responded:

Yea right bro! The motherfuckers over there don't even go to class. You can't even really call them students. Whatever numbers you're looking at are wrong. That place is like the ghetto haha you know what I mean? You

can go over there if you want, but I wouldn't. Word of advice, if you do, stop by The Cafe and get a plastic knife or something haha.

Paralleling Roger's statement, Aaron quickly rejects the information I provide and decides to degrade the students living in Anders Hall as not real students and describes the area of campus in which it is located as "the ghetto." Aaron continues on to encourage me "get a plastic" knife if I decide to venture to the area of campus where Anders is located. Similar to Lindsey Hall on another campus I interviewed at, Anders is largely a low-income style dorm building populated primarily by black students. Thus, despite the actual safety rating of the dorm being equitable to the dorm on campus, the concentration of black students within one space creates feelings of threat and danger that cannot be overridden by empirical evidence.

Lastly, I'd like to examine a portion from my interview with Ryan. Ryan often liked to cite various anonymous statistics as a means of stressing the importance of SCCC and frequently painted university administrators as the only reason campus carry has not been allowed at his university. For example, while explaining that the majority of students in the U.S. want concealed carry on campus, Ryan explained:

SCCC is doing a very important job. Would you believe that over 70 percent of college students support allowing concealed handguns on campus? That's the majority so we should have it. This is a democracy. The problem is always administration. They are liberal and they don't believe in gun rights. They would rather us all be helpless.

Questioning the source of his data, I explained to Ryan that I recently read an article explaining 73 percent of college students actually oppose concealed carry on campus⁸. Ryan then exclaimed, “That’s wrong!” He then proceeded to stare at me with a blank expression for approximately 1 minute until I moved on to the next question. Ryan’s inability to actually engage in discourse about the information he provides was rather alarming in that it illustrates how deeply the anti-intellectual framing is embedded within a leader of SCCC. If the leadership of the organization is deeply invested in an inverted way of interpreting the world, how is the organization supposed to have any meaningful direction?

Overall, the members of SCCC involved in this study express a strong resistance to empirical evidence contrasting their inverted view of the world. Many of the narratives provided by respondents are fixated on abstract ideas that when called into question cannot be upheld and are rather rejected in exchange for counter-narratives supporting the deeply embedded world view guiding the generation of vulnerability narratives.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have detailed the various steps I observed my respondents taking while engineering for themselves a type of irrational vulnerability. The members of SCCC I spoke with often first identified feelings of losing control. These narratives frequently focused on white racially framed ideas about black and

⁸ “Concealed Carry Handguns Should Not Be on College Campuses, Students Say”
http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2013/09/concealed_carry_handguns_shoul.html

Latino men described as thugs and invaders seeking to usurp white civilized society. Regardless if respondents identified feelings of loss of control on or off campus, the individuals most often perceived as benefitting from said loss of control and threatening the safety of the members of SCCC I interviewed were almost all described in hard and/or soft racialized language identifying men of color. Upon marking certain bodies as threatening, the individuals I spoke with prescribed militarization of the public as the only real means of establishing social order. Much of the belief is guided by the idea that police are incapable of protecting the public and that citizens have “God-given” rights to possess as many tools for protection as possible. Finally, and not always applying to ideas about militarization against threats, my respondents generally express a hard rejection of empirical data contrasting their belief systems. Not only that, but following an introduction to said data, my participants’ previously held, and deeply racially framed, beliefs become even more deeply embedded in the way they interpret the world.

Reflecting the processes through which I find most of the members of SCCC developing narratives of vulnerability, I find that my respondents heavily in play in the various narratives offer the dominant racial frame. Thus, it is critical to explore the significance to students of color of allowing concealed carry on campus since they are the group/individuals framed by most of the members of SCCC as threatening and warranting the loosening of gun control to allow for firearms on campus. I will address the critical topic in the next chapter, my discussion and conclusion.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Throughout the entirety of this study, a common theme has remained central to the narratives offered by the members of Students for Concealed Carry on Campus – concern about violence at the hands of men of color. While the members of SCCC I spoke with will likely refute this claim, the in-depth analysis I offer in Chapters V and VI supports my argument and illustrate that general claims for self-defense are not at the foundation of calls to allow the concealed carry of firearms on college campuses. Rather, based on my data, there is a very specific type of target my respondents are concerned about – black and Latino males. Highlighting this critical point, this chapter’s goal is twofold. First, I will engage in a discussion about the implications of this study which I separate into two categories: theoretical and practical/policy considerations. Following an examination of these key points, I will provide a summary of this study and propose directions for future studies on race, racial framing, and gun rights organizations in the United States.

Theoretical Considerations

As addressed in Chapter III, much of the theoretical work on gun rights organizations in the U.S. is focused on the role of masculinity and violence in shaping modern gun culture. While these contributions are important to the understanding of gun culture in the U.S., they fail to account for the foundational role of racial framing in the narratives offered by the members of SCCC involved in this study. My respondents, while often utilizing hyper masculine jargon, almost always frame their desire to carry a

firearm in a highly racialized manner. Whether expressed via explicit hard framing or a more implied soft framing, the participants in this study almost exclusively believe they must carry a firearm at all times if they are to be safe from a perceived threat from black and Latino males. Therefore, the findings in this study offer a point of departure for a more nuanced and dynamic understanding of gun rights organizations by offering a means of grasping the underlying racial framing guiding gun rights organizations and its connection to larger white racial projects.

The contemporary gun rights organization in the U.S. cannot be separated from larger social projects, specifically racial projects focused on concentrating resources, whether physical or psychological, into white communities as a means of maintaining white dominance. A critical survey of U.S. history reveals that whenever whites collectively feel threatened by people of color, gun rights organizations and calls to arms are almost always sure to follow (Melzer 2012; Williams 2013; Williams-Myers 1994). Examples of this trend include the New York Draft Riots of 1863, the Fort Pillow Massacre of 1864, the Chicago Riot of 1919 as well as the contemporary example of Eugene “Bull” Connor’s plan for white males to arm themselves against blacks during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Whether discussing militias entrusted by elite whites to patrol for enslaved Africans or the Ku Klux Klan encouraging white males to protect “their women and country” from men of color, whites have historically linked gun rights to whiteness – even goes as far as explicitly preventing people of color from owning firearms. Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider the intimate relationship between white supremacy and gun rights organizations in the United States.

Beginning this dialogue, based on my data, I propose that the modern gun rights organization remains true to its pro-white/ anti-other foundations and continues to be largely directed by the dominant white racial framing of society. As evident throughout my conversations with the members of SCCC, a central fear of men of color and the violence whites have associated with their bodies guides desires to carry concealed firearms at all times. Whether referencing thugs, gangbangers, and “illegal immigrants,” much of the justifications for concealed carry offered in this study stem from a very racialized cognitive framework. The individuals involved in this study did not express a want to concealed carry based on a generic criminal, but rather on a racialized criminal threatening white women and the “real United States.” Thus, I believe it can be argued that the modern gun rights organization and its accompanying racial framing present merely another element of white supremacy by seeking to amass firearms in the hands of whites for the purpose of using them against people of color – specifically black and Latino males. While most members of gun rights organizations will refute this claim, critically examining the narratives of concealed carry reveals a very central connection to white supremacy. This is a large departure from much of the current theoretical work on gun rights organization focusing on gender dynamics, but I believe that given my data, it is a conversation that must be critically engaged if the modern gun rights organization is to be understood holistically.

Another consideration to be taken away from this study pertains to contemporary race theory. Aside from race critical work and the majority of race crits, much of the mainstream theoretical work on race in the U.S. purports we exist along a progressive

trajectory and that with enough time and education racism and white supremacy will be things of the past (Daniel 2001). While such arguments may inspire optimism about race relations in the U.S., such claims cannot explain the pervasive white racist framing expressed by the individuals involved in this study. Likely to assert the members of SCCC are a small minority of whites in the contemporary U.S., mainstreams race theory fails to account for the foundational nature of white supremacy to the cognitive functioning of U.S. citizens. Therefore, this study is particularly important for revealing how deeply entrenched the white framing of society is and illustrates persistence of white supremacy in contemporary U.S. culture.

One of the primary theoretical considerations to take away from this study is whether or not the notions of post-racialism celebrated by millennials actually exist. In a recent groundbreaking marketing survey, Music Television (MTV) partnered with David Binder Research in an attempt to better understand the racial attitudes of its viewers. Findings of this study include: millennials believe their generation is post-racial, that racism is a thing of the past, and that color-blindness should be the end goal for a healthy U.S. society⁹. However, these survey findings directly contradict the information provided the by millennials I interviewed in this study.

Based on my data, college students today, just as a decade ago and a decade before that, continue to operate out of a very entrenched white racial framing of society. Though not likely to define themselves as racists or white supremacists, many of the members of SCCC I spoke with throughout this study often refer to people of color in

⁹ MTV 2014 Survey on Millennials and Race.

animalistic, hypersexual, and crude terms. They even go as far as sporadically utilizing racial slurs under the guise of jokes – echoing much styles of color-blind racism. Further, and perhaps more importantly, the students I interviewed often associate whiteness with a sense of virtue. Therefore, this study forces one to consider the continued importance of race and racial framing in light of its pervasive nature in the narratives offered the participants involved in this study.

Lastly, I would like to briefly raise a question about the significance of this study to methodological theory. How to best measure racial attitudes has long been a topic of consideration for race scholars. In attempts to appeal to dominant beliefs about science, race scholars have opted to find statistical measures and surgery methods as a means of gathering information about racial relations in the United States. Yet, as Bonilla-Silva and Foreman (2000) note, survey methods cannot truly grasp racial attitudes and beliefs because respondents will alter this responses to appear racial progressive due to the stigma associated with being labeled a “racist.” Therefore, qualitative methodology is preferred. Comparing this study to the MTV study previously mentioned reveals a very similar trend. Quantitatively millennials appear to be very racial progressive, yet once interviewed, much of the pro-white/anti-other white racial framing dominating U.S. history confirmed. Thus, without being methodologically polemic, I believe this study, when compared to contemporary quantitative work on race in the U.S., forces researchers to further interrogate the methodological decisions guiding their projects in an attempt to find the method best suited for their subject matter. I now turn to what I believe are the practical takeaways from this study.

Policy Considerations

The larger policy debate surrounding concealed firearms on campus focuses primarily on the likelihood of students using firearms to attack a generic student. Much of this research focuses on the demographics of gun owners in the U.S. in an attempt to better understand who would be most likely to concealed carry on campus. While many of these studies report the high alcohol consumption of individuals with CHLs and their increased likelihood to engage in risky behaviors, many of the current studies fail to connect this trend with the demographic most likely to obtain a CHL – white males. Having made this connection, this study reveals a critical aspect of concealed handgun owners – most desire to carry a firearm out of fear of black and Latino males. Therefore, this fact must be taken into account when policy makers are deliberating decisions to allow concealed carry on college campuses.

Based on the intense racial framing guiding my respondents desire to carry firearms on campus, I propose that college administrators must consider whether or not allowing concealed firearms on campus would pose a heightened threat for violence against students of color. The participants involved in this study possess a very clear fear of men of color and believe that they must carry firearms if they are to be safe. This results in a paranoia grounded in an inverse epistemology that requires whites to believe they are always vulnerable to violence. Thus, the slightest look from a male of color is perceived as a threat on their lives and justification for the utilization of lethal force.

Arming a group of individuals heavily operating out of the dominant racial frame has never gone well for people of color and granting groups like SCCC the ability to

carry concealed firearms at all times allows for the opportunity for more violent hate based crimes on campus. To date, hate crimes on campus resulting in death are uncommon, but not unheard of. Yet, based on trends throughout the rest of society, I believe that allowing firearms on campus would cause such occurrence to drastically increase. The subject nature of threat further encourages such types of crime. For this reason, I urge administrators to be carefully considering the findings of this study in their decision whether or not to allow concealed firearms on their campus.

Summary

Seeking to examine the importance of race in modern gun rights organizations, this study carefully analyzed the narrative of members of Students for Concealed Carry on Campus. After scrutinizing the responses offered by my participants, I found that most of the members of SCCC frame their desire to carry firearms in very racialized terms. Whether expressed explicitly or merely implied, the respondents in this study riddle their self-defense narratives with white racially framed language. Rather than describe their desire to carry a firearm in a generic manner, the members of SCCC involved in this study often opt to describe their need to carry in racialized terms indicting black and Latino men as their greatest threats and motivating reason to carry. Seeking to understand the trend, I propose the concept of engineered vulnerability.

True to the criminological definition of vulnerability, I inherently link vulnerability to social structure. That being said, most of the members of SCCC I spoke with do not fit into the category of structurally vulnerable. Yet, they believe themselves to be in a constant state of vulnerability. I term this inverted sense of threat “engineered

vulnerability.” Using this term, I highlight the manner in which the members of SCCC involved in this study construct a sense of vulnerability in very racialized terms.

While this project provides a point of departure for understanding the relationship of race to U.S. gun culture, it is not exhaustive. Future work on this race, racial framing, gun rights should focus on the importance of gun manufactures and providing much of the imagery ingested by gun owners and fueling racial fears. Further, additional work should also provide a comparison between student-based gun rights organizations like SCCC and non-student organizations like the NRA.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

This interview will consist of four sections. The first section of the interview will consist of questions covering general issues related to the debates around concealed carry on college campuses. The second section portion of the interview will address the general carrying practices of respondents. The third section of the interview will consist of questions about SCC demographics. The final portion of the interview will cover general demographic information. Sections one and two of the interview will conclude with brief vignettes focusing on issues related to the topics addressed in each portion of the interview schedule.

Part I: Concealed Carry on College Campus

How did you become involved in SCC?

Can you explain that more?

Why is being involved in SCC important to you?

Can you explain that more?

Why do you believe concealed carry on campus remains a contested idea?

Can you explain that more?

What do you believe would be the advantages of allowing concealed carry on campus?

Why?

Can you explain that more?

Do you believe there would be any negative consequences of allowing concealed carry on campus?

Why?

Can you explain that more?

How do you believe allowing concealed carry on campus would impact the college climate?

Can you explain that more?

If concealed carry was allowed on your campus, where would you be most likely to carry your firearm?

Why?

Can you explain that more?

If concealed carry was allowed on your campus, where would you be less likely to carry your firearm?

Why?

Can you explain that more?

If concealed carry was allowed on your campus, would you carry your firearm every day?

Why/Why not?

Can you explain that more?

Are there any situations in which you believe concealed carry should not be allowed on campuses?

Why?

Can you explain that more?

What do you do in terms of security and your firearms?

Why?

Can you explain that more?

I noticed one of the mottos of SCC is “Prepared, not Paranoid,” could you explain this to me?

Where did this motto come from?

Why do you think some people believe members of SCC are paranoid?

If you had a friend who was opposed to concealed carry on campus, how would you stress its importance to them?

Are there any specific examples or statistics you would use?

Vignette 1: Vignettes serve to help get one thinking. This vignette focuses on one man's motivations for obtaining a CHL and joining his local chapter of SCC. Please read through this story carefully and answer the questions that follow. The purpose of this vignette is to illuminate any similarities, experiences, or thoughts you may have not considered in answering prior questions.

I got involved with SCC because I simply wanted to be able to protect myself. You know? With all the crazy things happening these days, you never know man. I just want to be ready in case something were to happen at ****. It's like what I do in ****. There are bad parts of town and when I have to go there, there are like you know like some gangbangers around and you just don't know so you want to be ready and carrying really makes me feel safe. I'm not a really big guy and would probably get my ass kicked by some big guy, but carrying actually gives me a chance, you know?

Can you relate to this man's statement?

How so?

Can you explain that more?

Have any of your friends or other members of SCC said anything like this?

What did they say?

How did this conversation come up?

Part II: Carrying Practices

Please tell me about your history with firearms?

Who socialized you into firearm culture?

How was this done?

What were you taught?

Did your parents/guardians own a firearm?

Why do you believe they owned/ did not own a firearm?

What did they teach you about firearms?

How long have you had a CHL?

Why did you pursue a CHL?

Can you explain that more?

Why was obtaining a CHL important to you?

Can you explain that more?

Where do you currently carry your firearm?

Why?

Can you explain that more?

Where do you currently NOT carry your firearm?

Why?

Can you explain that more?

Are there are places you feel individuals with CHLs should not carry their firearm?

Why?

Can you explain that more?

Vignette 2: Vignettes serve to help get one thinking. This vignette focuses on one man's motivations for obtaining a CHL as well as his introduction into U.S. gun culture. Please read through this story carefully and answer the questions that follow. The purpose of this vignette is to illuminate any similarities, experiences, or thoughts you may have not considered in answering prior questions.

Growing up, guns were always around us. My dad was a hunter and my brother and I would always be out there with him. For us guns never meant anything bad. They were just a part of who we are you know. I decided to get my CHL when I moved **** after college and had to live in a somewhat poorer area of town. There were always people walking around the street all night long and it just didn't feel safe. After my girlfriend got pregnant, I had to do something to protect her and my son so I got a CHL. If any of the thugs tried something, I'd have something for'em. For me it was all about protection.

Can you relate to this man's statement?

How so?

Have any of your friends or other members of SCC said anything like this?

What did they say?

How did this conversation come up?

Part III: SCC Demographics & Recruitment

What are the demographics of your campus' SCC chapter?

Why do you think these are the demographics?

Can you explain this more?

How would you describe the demographics of SCC nationally?

Why do you believe this is so?

Can you explain this more?

During your time with your chapter of SCC have you seen a change in membership size or demographics?

Can you tell me more about this?

How does your chapter of SCC recruit new members?

Can you explain this more?

Are there any issues you would like to address before completing this interview?

Part IV: Personal Demographics

1. Sex:

- A) Male
- B) Female
- C) Transgender
- D) Other

2. Age:

- A) 18-20
- B) 21-23
- C) 24-26
- D) 27-29
- E) 30-32

F) 33-35

G) 36+

3. Racial Identification:

A) Asian American

B) Hispanic American

C) White

D) African American

E) Multiracial

F) Native American

G) Other _____

4. How would you describe your hometown?

A) Metro

B) Suburban

C) Rural

5. Education:

A) High School

B) Some College

C) Two-Year Degree

D) Bachelors Degree

E) Graduate/Professional Degree

6a. Are you a member of a fraternity/sorority?

A) Yes

B) No

6b. If YES, do you live in a fraternity/sorority house?

A) Yes

B) No

7. Do you live on campus?

A) Yes

B) No

8. Which of the following best describes your living location?

- A) Dorm
- B) Apartment
- C) Duplex
- D) House
- E) Other _____

9. Which of the following best describes your living situation?

- A) Living alone
- B) With roommates
- C) With significant other
- D) With parents

10. How many firearms do you own?

- A) 0
- B) 1
- C) 2
- D) 3
- E) 4
- F) 5+

11. Have you ever had to use your firearm(s) in a defensive situation?

- A) Yes
- B) No