CHAPTER VI

CONSTUCTING 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 slight 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 though 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 long 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 Survey[7] (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

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[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

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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 counties 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 threating 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 once 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 eluded 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 wakeup 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

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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

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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 though 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

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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:

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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

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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 her 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

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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 campus[8].

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

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[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. society[9]. 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

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[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

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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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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