

MISSING LINKS: AN EXAMINATION OF
COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND RITUAL IN THE
AMERICAN MILITIA MOVEMENT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Why Study the Militia?.....	1
What is the Militia Movement?	3
A History of Two Key Far-Right Groups in the United States.....	4
The Ku Klux Klan.....	5
The Klan's Contribution	8
The Posse Comitatus.....	8
II. THEORY	12
Smelser's Theory of Collective Behavior.....	13
Mythic/Ideological DNA	15
Structural Ritualization Theory.....	17
III. LITERATURE REVIEW	20
The Modern Militia Movement	21
Two Prolific M/I DNA Systems	25
Constitutionalists.....	26
Christian Identity	27
CONS Militia Use of History	30
CI Militia Use of History	32
CI, CONS Militias: Ideology, History, and The Second Amendment.....	33
A Demonstration of Theory	36
A Few Other Noteworthy Issues.....	39
IV. METHODOLOGY	41
Research Propositions and Coding Categories	47

V. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS	51
Research Proposition I Results	57
Research Proposition II Results	58
Research Proposition III, IV Results	66
Research Proposition V Results.....	74
Research Proposition a Results.....	77
VI. CONCLUSIONS	84
REFERENCES	88

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1.....	58
2.....	64
3.....	66
4.....	75
5.....	77
6.....	83

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1.....	53
2.....	55

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: WHY STUDY THE MILITIA?

Sociologists are in a unique position when it comes to studying terrorism. Terrorism, its consequences, and the groups associated with it are all social in nature. The news is frequently peppered with coverage of terrorist threats ranging from al Qaeda to Russian Separatists. Recently, a Senate hearing addressed the threat posed by Muslims in the United States being radicalized via the internet (Lubold, 2010). This same possibility was addressed by an earlier F.B.I. report (2006). The focus on Islamic and foreign terrorist groups may be missing the point; there is another set of groups that may be using the internet to train and radicalize people every day. They are responsible for at least 75 attacks and plots on U.S. soil in the last 16 years including a train derailment, bombing the Atlanta Olympics, killing law enforcement personnel, and an increasing number of other bombings and shootings (SPLC Special report 2009). Evidence suggests that some groups are in our military and law enforcement (Keller 2009). They are the United States militia movement.

The militia movement in the United States is not a new phenomenon and it is not unstudied. It does seem somewhat understudied, however when one takes into account its potential to produce individuals who later commit acts of domestic terrorism. This danger is exacerbated by the fact that militia members reside all over the country. Often, it seems as though militia groups are only noticed when they produce an act of violence. The inevitable, though short-sighted, result is that the focus of governmental research is drawn to the violent aspects of their behavior. The same is true of media coverage. This emphasis on their potential for violent behavior is emphasized in many F.B.I reports, law enforcement bulletins (1996, 1999, 2005), and the most recent publically declassified report from the department of homeland security (2009).

The militia movement does produce individuals who commit horrific atrocities against their fellow citizens, but that is not the only thing that they do. 75 incidents, many of which were deadly, should not be ignored but it does not seem to be an especially large number given the relative ease with which they could produce a much greater number. Accordingly, one might argue that militia groups spend the bulk to their time engaged in activities other than domestic terror attacks. Instead, they may be providing social control, a sense of identity, and an outlet for people who might otherwise be committing these highly destructive acts. At the same time, they may also be radicalizing their members by socializing them into a complex and highly threatening perception of the world that eventually inclines them to acting out violently.

The goal of this study was to evaluate whether or not there is empirical evidence supporting these claims. This work also sought to find evidence supporting the use of a new theory of militia behavior based on a mythic/ideological theory of terrorist identity

construction and Structural Ritualization. The basic research questions this paper seeks to answer are: Of the types of militia which seems most active? Is there support for utilizing the Mythic/Ideological DNA theory of identity in research with the militia? Does it appear that ritual plays a role in maintaining these identities? Does ritual play a role in social control within the militia movement? Is there evidence supporting the notion that militia members become radicalized over time?

What is the Militia Movement?

‘Militia Movement’ is very much an umbrella term, encapsulating a wide range of people and groups. Indeed, “The Militia movement is a loose collection of paramilitary groups that self-identify as ‘militias’ and individuals with strong sympathies for such groups” (Pitcavage 2001). One could argue that the modern ‘militia movement’ is at any given time comprised of some mixture of: white supremacists, “sovereign citizens”, tax protestors, conspiracy theorists, members of the KKK, neo-Nazis, holocaust deniers, radicalized evangelical Christians, anti-abortion extremists, anti-immigration radicals, extreme gun-rights advocates, members of the Christian Identity movement and similar groups. They add to this complexity by self-identifying in several ways including “Patriot”, “Militia”, “Minutemen” and “Defense” groups. The varied nomenclature is not surprising given that the movement is largely decentralized, with many competing viewpoints and modes of action. Nonetheless, groups possess similar enough characteristics that it is reasonable to consider them all to be part of a wider movement. Adopting this viewpoint, it is clear that these groups possess a discernable evolutionary path through American History. In order to more clearly understand where they are going and what they may do in the future it would be advantageous to know where they have

come from and what they have already done. Many such groups have an intense interest in their historic identity, so the history of such groups is an appropriate starting point.

A History of Two Key Far-Right Groups in the United States

There have been right-wing and paramilitary movements throughout American history and consequently, many of the characteristics and proclivities of the modern United States militia movement have been inherited from previous movements. According to a recent Department of Homeland Security report contemporary right-wing groups fall into two main camps: hate groups and anti-government groups (2009). This basic conclusion is mirrored in several other F.B.I. reports and law enforcement bulletins. Examining the ancestry of such groups can provide clues to understanding the ways in which contemporary militia groups operate. Right-wing militia ancestor groups include the earliest Ku Klux Klan groups and the ‘Know-Nothings’ and later, the Nazi-sympathizers of the 1930s and 1940s. Some of the more recent groups include the Cold War era anti-communism groups, the John Birch Society and the Posse Comitatus in the 1970s and 1980s (Pitcavage 2001). Some of these groups, such as the KKK and Nazi sympathizers, remain active in contemporary society and continue to exert an influence on the militia both in terms of ideological contributions as well as membership. The Posse Comitatus on the other hand has largely disintegrated. Its largest contribution—a conspiratorial worldview—has survived it and has become thoroughly embedded within the militia ranks. Understanding the behavior and ideologies of current paramilitary groups (regardless of their great variety) is made simpler by familiarization with the ideologies and practices of two of their most influential antecedents: the Ku Klux Klan and The Posse Comitatus. This is not to claim that the other historical rightist groups are

not important or have not had an influence on the modern militia. The Klan and The Posse simply have a much clearer influence on the two dominant ideologies of the modern militia.

The Ku Klux Klan

A complete or finely detailed history of the Ku Klux Klan would be excessively long and too complex to be included in this paper. The Klan's ideological and behavioral contributions to the current militia movement can be sufficiently detailed using only a brief history of the Klan's three major historical periods and the beliefs and practices characterized within each of them. Specifically, each of the iterations of the KKK possessed a collective identity related to the adoption of a specific worldview and supported their identity and worldview using ritualized behaviors. Their shared worldview and identity contain within them a propensity towards dualistic thinking, shared feelings of pride in membership, and a sense of victimization based on the perception of an immediate threat to their way of life. The way these components fit together in the modern militia will be addressed in the theory section of this paper.

There have been three basic iterations of the KKK. The first Klan was established shortly after the American Civil War. Its aim, generally, was to reconstruct and maintain the racial social order that had been present in the South prior to the war (Lewis and Serbu 1999). During this time the Klan's membership and activities were largely bound to the South. This relative geographic isolation was due in part to the immense influence of ex-confederates in the South as well as the prevalence of anti-federalist sentiment in ex-confederate states. As a consequence, the Klan is intimately connected to the 'lost

cause' mythos popular throughout the Southern United States even to this day. Simply stated,

This myth, which owed its existence primarily to the work of ex-Confederate organizations (e.g. United Confederate Veterans, United Daughters of the Confederacy), portrayed the South during the Civil War as valiant and chivalrous and its soldiers as men who fought against enormous odds to defend and maintain their way of life. Through this honorable cause, "all Confederates automatically became virtuous, all were defenders of the rights of states and individuals ... all steadfast, all patriotic" (Vandiver 1961, p. 200 as cited by Lewis and Serbu 1999).

In effect, this myth creates potential for enormous resentment towards the federal government as well as the people who benefited from its intervention. In other words, a sense of victimization and a dualistic notion of 'good' and 'bad' parties can be found in this myth. The myth also speaks to the 'pride in membership' sentiment. All of these characteristics and the style of thought supporting them have been carried forward into the modern militia.

It is important to note that this myth was (and remains) wound together with religion throughout the South (Lewis and Serbu 1999). Attaching the 'lost cause' mythology to religion likely provided a sense of legitimation to Klansmen; this claim of religious righteousness to justify their actions is also present in some parts of the modern militia. The first Klan did not persist for long. Most likely, this was a result of their Modus Operandi which included inciting fear, intimidation, cross-burning, as well as lynching and other forms of murder. These are, by contemporary standards, acts of domestic terrorism. Such methods drew the attention of both law enforcement and Congress. As a result the activities of the Klan were curtailed for many years by anti-Klan legislation and enhanced law enforcement.

The second iteration occurred around 1915 and was concerned with a wider array of issues including immigration, prohibition enforcement, and 'white protestant

Americanism' (Lewis and Serbu 1999); another author describing this Klan states that they were "...characterized by racism, nativism, religious bigotry, coercive moralism and economic conservatism" (McVeigh 2001). Thus, aside from their somewhat expanded repertoire of political and social rhetoric the Klan remained interested in pursuing many of their original goals as well. For example,

In addition to its drive for law and order, the 1920s Klan also devoted its energies toward fighting groups it believed were un-American. The most prominent of these were "negroes who... can not [sic] attain the Anglo-Saxon level... [due to] the low mentality of savage ancestors . . . the evil influence of Jews . . . , and the Catholics who bring with them . . . the illiteracy of Europe ("Klan's Challenge" 1923, p. 32 cited by Lewis and Serbu 1999).

During the 1920s, the KKK enjoyed unprecedented levels of public acceptance and political power. This may have been due to several factors including: their wider geographic and ideological appeal; more sophisticated and politicized rhetoric; and the resulting expansion of membership which included women and much of the middle class (McVeigh 2001). Regarding the sophistication of their rhetoric, the downplaying or rejection of overtly racist or inflammatory subjects in order to gain popular support is another trait the KKK has imparted to parts of the modern militia. Later in the decade this evolution of the Klan began to deteriorate due to a variety of scandals and the erosion of support which followed them (Lewis and Serbu 1999).

The most recent (and still surviving) iteration began during the civil rights era. The KKK is far less socially or politically popular than it has been in the past. Much of this has to do with the fact that its previous effort to achieve widespread appeal was difficult to do during the civil rights movement (Lewis and Serbu 1990). It seems reasonable to suggest that it likely maintains many, if not all, of the foci enumerated above. This Klan is far more decentralized than their predecessors and less concerned

with garnering popular support. Consequently its members seem to primarily communicate within their own groups both by meetings and via the internet. This lack of a prominent public activity may be due to a generally poor public perception and intense scrutiny (Kaplan 1995). This type of isolation, both self-imposed and as a result of poor perception by the general populace, is a characteristic of many modern militia groups.

The KKK's contribution to the modern militia movement

The modern militia movement shares the decentralization present here as well as their penchant for in-group communication and the internet. Some of the various component groups of the modern militia (including some who are part of the contemporary Klan) share the KKK's historical concern with racism, immigration, Christianity (specifically Protestantism), morality, and nativism—which all speak to the presence of a threatened identity or way of life. Attached to this is a sense of victimization. Furthermore, they demonstrate the propensity for dualistic thought found in all generations of the KKK, e.g., being white, protestant, and adhering to certain accompanying moral codes are traits of American superiority or 'goodness.' Anything else is fundamentally evil, inferior, or otherwise bad. Modern militia groups often express all of these components, but they benefit from a more organized framework for these concerns which was in large part developed by another more important antecedent group—the Posse Comitatus.

The Posse Comitatus

The Posse Comitatus is another influential ancestor/contemporary of the modern movement's predecessors. Despite its demise as an organization, the Posse's presentation of a conspiratorial explanation for social and cultural change has remained largely intact

and appears to provide much of the framework for the modern militia's worldview. The nature of this conspiracy is in some measure dependent upon the beliefs of the militia group using it. For example, some groups believe that the conspiracy is being perpetrated by secret socialists in the United States government while others believe it to be a worldwide Jewish plot. A significant part of this framework's durability stems from the ambiguous nature of the conspiracy.

The Posse Comitatus formed early in the 1970s. Most of its support and membership came from the Pacific Northwest and Plains states (Pitcavage 2001). Today, these areas remain hotbeds of militia activity (SPLC special report 2009). Its moniker may be related to the common definition of a 'posse' as a collection of people conscripted by the local sheriff. It may also be based on article 18 U.S.C. § 1385 which prohibits the deployment of federal troops for the purposes of domestic law enforcement (Bennet 2006). Though the Posse has adopted or supported a number of different rightist causes and beliefs, its primary contribution to the modern militia movements are found in its treatment and understanding of the federal government. Pitcavage accurately characterizes the Posse Comitatus' concern as:

[belief] that the American people had been misled as to the entire nature of their government; what most Americans perceived as the legitimate government was in fact an illegitimate body that had usurped the rightful one through conspiratorial means (P. 959 2001).

Instead of the authority of the existing government, the Posse subscribes to very strict notions of localism such that, in their view, there is no higher authority than the county sheriff. Again, this makes sense given that the name "Posse Comitatus" may be related to the limitation of federal power representing the statute, or the idea of a sheriff's posse. Regardless of the basis of the group's name, their promotion the idea of an illegitimate

federal government is important for virtually every group in the modern militia movement.

The claim that the federal government is illegitimate is a very attractive notion to many groups on the far right and for this reason it gained a great deal of acceptance throughout the right which still persists. The government's activities regarding the civil rights movement, gun control, taxation, abortion, etc...were (and are) disliked by a number of people on the far right. Therefore, this notion of governmental illegitimacy provided a tool for the militias for legitimizing their own views (Pitcavage 2001).

Basically, this notion permits its subscribers to feel as though their behavior—whether it be abortion clinic bombing, tax evasion, or buying automatic weapons—is not deviant.

On the contrary, such behaviors are only perceived as wrong because the nation and its government have become so corrupt. This perceived illegitimacy has another important consequence. If there is an on-going (or already successful) conspiracy to corrupt the United States people and their federal government then who or what is responsible? What end are the responsible parties pursuing? The open-ended nature of the accusation leaves fertile ground for any number of conspiracy theories to flourish in.

Regarding these conspiracy theories in their contemporary formulations, the exact nature of the plot and its perpetrators varies to some degree depending on the particular beliefs of the subscribing group. This is not surprising given both the variety of grievances on the right and the ambiguous nature of conspiracies. Every subscribing group can fill in the blanks with their own preferred enemies and fears as there is little evidence to contradict or support the claims. Supporting evidence, by and large, depends largely on the ideology of the group perceiving it. Related to this is the influence of the

Christian Identity movement on the Posse Comitatus and other modern groups. This matter will be discussed in greater detail later.

Regardless of the variety of possible conspiracy theories they all share common traits. Of these common attributes the most important among them are: the theory furnishes subscribers with a sense of identity, threat, urgency, righteousness, and a dualistic perspective. These mirror the KKK's attributes and provide a more sophisticated way of framing them--another important contribution to the current collection of militias. Framing their concerns this way produces in militia members a sense of who is good or bad, what the 'bad' people are doing, why it important to do something about it, what to do, and how to do it.

To summarize, both the KKK and the Posse Comitatus have been influential in tilling the earth of the American far-right and fertilizing it with a number of components that have yielded the current crop of militia. They have both provided the basic dualistic framework of a good versus evil struggle, victimization, collective identity, and a vague conspiratorial worldview that is used to justify these perceptions. Many of these components have become more sophisticated, stable, and fleshed out over time. Prior to discussing the ways in which this framework is used in the two most popular modern militia ideologies it would be appropriate to discuss the theories that were used to analyze them.

CHAPTER II

THEORY

This work utilized Neil Smelser's theory of collective behavior (1962) as a basic framework for qualitatively examining the perceptions and behavior of the modern militia movement. The choice of Smelser's theory of collective behavior to the exclusion of more modern theories was made for a few reasons. First, there is precedent for using Smelser in the literature. Secondly, the underlying logic of strain may still have worth (Smelser 2007). As it is formulated, any kind of strain may lead to a collection behavior (1962), and the variety of possible strains is endless (2007). It seems reasonable then to suppose that strain felt as a result of one's perspective on the world could also lead to collective action. The relevance of this supposition will be clarified shortly. Last, though it is somewhat dated, the theory's relative simplicity provides a solid foundation to expand upon using other theories. Specifically, Smelser's theory was used here as a scaffold to build a more sophisticated explanation for militia beliefs and activity using a theory of the construction of terrorist identity and Structural Ritualization Theory.

Smelser's Theory of Collective Behavior

Smelser's theory of collective behavior has been used to examine the militia in the past to some success (Weeber and Rodeheaver 2003). Smelser's theory has a preliminary requirement that must be met. That is to say, the social structure must be conducive to certain kinds of collective behavior (Smelser 1962). As we will see in the literature, militia groups tend to hold an aggrieved viewpoint, and the social structure must provide channels for expressing grievances in order to be conducive to activity (1962 P. 251). In the case of the militia movement this condition is satisfied by the structure of freedom in the United States. These freedoms include the ability to own guns, practice one's religion of choice, internet access, and the freedoms of speech and assembly (Weeber and Rodeheaver 2003). These freedoms are required for the bulk of militia activities and all are permitted by the structure of U.S. society. The theory posits five major conditions that must be met for collective action to take place, assuming the preliminary condition explicated above is satisfied.

The first major condition for a social movement is that there must be some kind of strain present as a motivator for possible members of the movement. Strain may take many forms; ambiguities, deprivations, grievances, et cetera (Smelser 1962). Second, a generalized belief must be present which identifies the sources of strain(s); this belief must also possess solutions to the strain and a course of action related to pursuing the solutions. Third, there must be a precipitating event of some kind that confirms the belief in some meaningful way for those who hold it. Fourth, leaders of some type must galvanize members and provide direction. Last, there must be social control mechanism which will in one way or another control and direct the behavior of the movement.

Typically, control is external to the group and serves to impede the behavior (1962). In this study a different understanding of this social control component was utilized. Rather than examining external social control it seems useful to examine that forms of control exist within the group.

Weeber and Rodeheaver (2003) performed a content analysis of militia traffic in 2003 and found support for the presence of strain, a generalized belief, precipitating events, and mobilization. They also found support for Smelser's external social control, but it was not in the direction that they expected. Instead of directing behavior, the control caused some militia members to decry the overall lack of action and defect from their original group to join more radical ones. In their conclusion, Weeber and Rodeheaver suggest that this is not a reason to reject the theory. They also suggest that other models could be used to further our understanding of militias. This study sought to address both points by considering social control from the perspective in the previous paragraph—that of control internal to the group.

On a related note, this study suggests that some kind of collective identity is vital for a social movement's functioning. In order to pursue a goal as a group it is important that the members are invested in doing so. The ability to function as a unified whole is what gives a movement its strength—this is crucial enough that scholars have described social movements as 'collective identities in motion' (Kebede, Shriver and Knottnerus 2000). There appears to be no evidence to indicate that militia groups do not also engage in the construction and utilization of a collective identity.

Rather than use a competing model that may not yet have empirical support for its application to militias it makes more sense to simply modernize and expand Smelser's

theory in such a way that it can be more specifically applied to modern militias. As it has been used above, Smelser's theory does not account for the roles of perception or collective identity in militia activity. It also does not attend to the possibility that there are forms of social control that come from within militia groups.

Mythic/Ideological DNA

These issues can be accounted in part by using a theory developed to analyze the behavior of al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations (Rowland and Theye 2008). This addition can help flesh out the mechanisms present in the first four major points of Smelser's theory as they are connected to the roles of perception and collective identity in militia groups. In an examination of al-Qaeda, Rowland and Theye use a mythic/ideological frame work coupled with what they call the symbolic DNA of terror. A myth, in their view, "...is a fundamental story...touching not just the everyday but the sacred or specially marked topics..." (P. 58 2008). The purpose of this story in a social movement is to provide a kind of transcendental justification to the existence and purpose of the group. In other words, it is the basis for a group's mythic identity.

An ideology, on the other hand, is a basic set of symbolic beliefs regarding both the ideal state and current state of reality as well as the actions to be taken regarding them; in other words an ideology is a "logically coherent systems of symbols ... [that explain] one's social condition' and contain 'a program of collective action for the maintenance, alteration, or transformation of society'" (Mullins 1972 p. 510). Taken together myth and ideology provide a framework for believers to identify their place, purpose, and overall goals as well as the methods they ought to use to achieve them and the transcendental justifications for doing so. The DNA of terror is part of this mythic

worldview in which the existence or identity of the believers' group is being 'Denied' or threatened by some 'other'. This results in the 'Negation' of the identity of those 'others'—basically, dehumanizing, delegitimizing, or otherwise justifying action against them. Lastly, there is an 'Affirmation' of a new, oppositional identity in the believer. This new identity is attached to the group's foundational or mythic identity, it is also the terminal identity or end-state they seek as prescribed by their mythic/ideological system.

In terms of further specifying Smelser, these ideas address his conditions of strain, generalized belief, precipitating events, and mobilization in ways more specific to modern militias. What constitutes strain or a precipitating event for a group varies with their perception as based on their collective identity, so in the case of militias the strain and events required to motivate them are dependent on their mythic/ideological system. This mythic/ideological system itself is the generalized belief uniting them. The strains then would be the denial of militia members' mythic/ideological identities by some 'other'. Precipitating events would also be defined and understood according to this system, as would the ways in which militia leaders decide to mobilize. According to this line of thought, the mobilization would take place in such a way as to negate the 'others' responsible for the strain of denial, and affirm the new identity of the movement. Implicit in the mythic/ideological DNA theory is the assumption that group members internalize the group's mythic/ideological system and adopt the group's collective identity. Neither the mythic/ideological DNA theory nor Smelser's theory address the process through which this happens. Furthermore, Smelser's condition of social control mechanisms is not fully addressed by the addition of the mythic/ideological DNA concept. The mythic/ideological DNA construct can perhaps shed light on the specific

characteristics of social control within the groups, or the forms that it takes but it does little to explain how group members come to identify with it, maintain it, or internalize it. Structural Ritualization Theory (Knottnerus 1997, 2005, 2011) can be used to explore this missing link.

Structural Ritualization Theory

Structural Ritualization Theory (SRT hereafter) can be briefly characterized. SRT is focused on the roles that rituals, or routine acts that hold symbolic significance, play in daily life. The theory suggests these roles is significant and entails giving meaning to action and providing structure and direction for various social enterprises (Knottnerus 2011). The theory has been employed in examining many different subjects including: Rastafarianism (Kebede and Knottnerus 1998), the reproduction of social structures (Sell, Knottnerus, Ellison, and Mundt 2000), golf (Varner and Knottnerus 2002), disasters (Thornburg, Knottnerus, and Webb 2007), nursing homes Ulsperger and Knottnerus 2008), and parades (Edwards and Knottnerus 2010) among several other subjects.

There are five basic assumptions in SRT. Unlike some scholarly treatments of ritual which assume that rituals are largely confined to pre-modern society, SRT assumes that they are present in pre-modern and modern society. Additionally, rituals are assumed to be dynamic rather than static practices. Though often associated with religious practices, rituals can also be present in secular contexts. Being widespread as they are, rituals can also be of extreme importance in social life. Furthermore, it is assumed that rituals can explain many other aspects of social life that may otherwise be inaccessible. SRT can be used to examine how ritual plays a part in the formation, alteration, of social structures and culture. Part of this explanatory power comes from the fact that rituals are so deeply ingrained that they can be "... taken-for-granted actions

routinely performed in the wider social environment that acquire significance for the actor and then become part of the individual's script or his or her immediate world” (Sell et al. 2000).

Action repertoires are the basic component of ritualized symbolic practices or RSPs. They are a set of socially standardized practices (Sell et. al 2000). Consequently, RSPs are action repertoires which are bound to a schema and can be described as follows

RSPs refer to action repertoires that are schema-driven. They involve common forms of social behavior in which people engage in standardized and repetitious actions when interacting with others. RSPs are based on cognitive frameworks and involve being regularly engaged in actions that possess meaning and express symbolic themes. (Edwards and Knottnerus 2010).

Four components influence the strength and importance of RSPs. As noted by Edwards and Knottnerus (2010), RSPs possess varying levels of *salience*. That is to say, that they vary in terms of the performers’ awareness of them. They vary also in terms of how often they are enacted and how similar they are to other RSPs. These components are called *repetitiveness* and *homologousness* respectively. Finally, they also vary in terms of the availability of the *resources* need to perform them. Theoretically, the more important RSPs have higher levels of all of these traits.

RSPs, as they have been described here, can be used to address questions of the development and enunciation of symbolic meaning of the mythic/ideological systems. They can clarify how people (or groups) cope with disruption to their lives (Knotternus, 2005). Theoretically, SRT should provide an explanation for one way that the social control Smelser emphasizes as external may actually operate from *within* a militia group. SRT also address the mechanisms through which the mythic/ideological DNA of militia groups are expressed, maintained, and internalized. Attending gun shows and paramilitary drilling, for example, can be conceptualized as RSPs which allow the militia members to symbolically act against their concerns (such as governmental oppression) without having to perform real violence. Performing violence against targets draws

negative attention to the groups, which makes it harder for them to operate as was seen with the KKK. To phrase it another way, these RSPs may serve as an outlet, allowing members to affirm their new identities without having to suffer the negative consequences of lashing out. At the same time, these practices reinforce their attachment to the mythic/ideological beliefs of the group; repeated exposure serves to legitimize the beliefs and identity of group members. In summary, ritual practices appear to serve as internalized social control by both directing the aggression of group members towards symbolic targets rather than living ones and constantly affirming the mythic/ideological identity thereby reinforcing solidarity.

To summarize, Smelser's theory is useful as a general starting point for examining militia activity because it provides the basic building blocks of strain, beliefs regarding how to act towards the strain, events needed to spur action, how that the action is directed, and the social control must be present to maintain the group performing it. How these general ideas apply to the militia can be examined in a more nuanced, modern, and thorough manner by using the mythic/ideological DNA construction. Strains and precipitating events are viewed through the lens of the mythic/ideological system which serves as the generalized belief. To clarify, in this work strain is being operationalized in terms of the mythic identity—the source of strain for militia is the denial of the mythic identity, the lack of avenues to affirm their identity, and events which they perceive as threatening. This system also provides guidelines for mobilization and goals to strive for. Lastly, the possibility that there are rituals that play a part in the ways these constructions are formed, internalized, maintained, and made part of collective militia identity can be examined using SRT.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a variety of literature available pertaining to the modern militia movement, ranging from quantitative analysis of their geographic distribution and activities to qualitative interest in their social organization and identity formation (Adams and Roscigno 2005). Though the literature possesses many different viewpoints and findings—some of which are contradictory—one can create a sensible picture of the militia movement by utilizing these viewpoints in conjunction with the theoretical tools addressed above. Specifically, all modern militias possess the following general characteristics. They have a collective identity rooted in a certain understanding of their history (mythic/ideological DNA). This shared identity and history shapes the targets of their concern as well as the ways in which they foster group solidarity (mythic/ideological DNA and SRT). They also regulate their social structures using ritualized invocations of a mythic past and act against their target concerns using symbolic ritual activities (SRT).

The Modern Militia Movement

Generally, there are two decades in which the modern militia movement is thought to have arisen, in the 1980s or the 1970s. Some authors push the modern militia era back to the 1950s (Weber and Rodeheaver 2003). The source of this temporal confusion may be that the movement as a whole is decentralized and secretive, much like its ancestors the KKK and Posse Comitatus. Official genesis aside, modern militia activities are often considered a response to a series of social, cultural, and economic changes which started during the 1960s and 1970's and have continued for the last few decades. Again, this is in line with the reactionary characteristics of their forerunners. Generally accepted precipitating factors for the growth of the militia include: the rise of feminism, the civil rights movement, anti-Communist remnants of the red scare, the United States' loss of the Vietnam War, economic trouble, increased gun control, increased immigration, and a rise in the media glorifying combat and strong white males (MIAC report 2009, Simi 2010, Pitcavage 2001). Some of these are very similar to the concerns that were motivating factors for the earlier KKK and Posse Comitatus. It is of note that while Posse Comitatus activity peaked during the 1980s, it was active during the early 1970s when many of the events above were still salient (Pitcavage 2001). Their conspiratorial framework was therefore likely circulated throughout many of the militia groups responding to the events above.

One point the literature largely agrees on is the date on which the militia movement was brought to the attention of the American people en masse, April 19th, 1995 (Haider-Markel and O'Brien 1997, Van Dyke and Soule 2002, Freilich and Pridemore 2005, Vertigans 2007). This is the date on which the Alfred P. Murrah

building was destroyed with a truck bomb. One-hundred and sixty-eight people were killed, including children in a day care center on the building's premises. One of the main perpetrators, Timothy McVeigh, was quickly (and perhaps mistakenly) linked with various militia organizations (Van Dyke and Soule 2002). The parenthetical qualification above is relevant because McVeigh's ties to militia groups revolved around primarily a subset of militia--those influenced by the mythic/ideological system of the Christian Identity movement. This link will be more clearly demonstrated in a discussion of three major precipitating events attributed with inspiring the modern militia.

To begin addressing the research in detail, the modern militia movement and its relation to the issues above has been examined quantitatively by a number of scholars with mixed success. Often cited in militia literature is an article authored by Van Dyke and Soule (2002). They analyzed militia organization on both the state level and on the county level using data obtained from the SPLC Intelligence project. In the state-level analysis they include all fifty states; the county level only uses counties in California, Georgia, and Michigan. Their justification for using counties in those states is that they vary significantly regionally and in terms of the independent variables the authors wanted to account for. Interestingly, those states also have a relatively large number of militia/Patriot plots (both planned and carried out) associated with them (SPLC special report 2009).

They chose negative binomial regression for this analysis based on the fact that they were forced to use count data but the assumption of over dispersion needed for Poisson regression may be violated (p 504 2002). Their dependent variable was the number of patriot/militia groups active in each state between 1994 and 1996 according to

SPLC data. Independent variables included: the political gains of women and minorities, economic hardship (measured by unemployment and changes in the manufacturing sector), the number of conservative organizations in each state, the percent of liberal voters, and the strength of the state's gun laws. The overall size of each state's population of whites was also included as a control variable. Hypothetically, militia organization should be higher in states with higher levels of all of these variables, and their findings indicate that this is the case with the exception of unemployment and increases in the non-white population at the state level.

Other quantitative studies have approached the problem in similar ways using negative binomial regression (Freilich and Pridemore 2005), discriminate analysis (Conover 1984) and OLS regression (O'Brian and Haider-Markel 1998). The independent variables used vary between the studies, as do their definitions of militia and militia activity. O'Brian and Haider-Markel for instance include measures of the general ideological climate of a state, as well as what they term "Rambo" (p. 460) factors. Conover (1984) on the other hand included psychological and symbolic measures in her analyses (p 637-638). Freilich and Pridemore's more recent findings (2005, 2006) do not fully support the findings previously discussed. They found that rural job loss was significant while many of the other variables used before [female/minority empowerment, gun culture, evangelical religious culture, etc... (p543 2005)] were not.

Freilich and Pridemore (2006) suggest a likely explanation; the fact of the matter is that it is difficult to attain direct information or data on militias for several reasons. First, militias are typically unwilling to provide information due to their distrust of the government. Second, it is extremely difficult to get accurate counts of their membership

or their characteristics due to the secretive nature of their activities. Third, the available data on each state's relative number of active groups typically comes from sources that are committed to stopping such groups, so the counts may be inaccurate due to over-generalization and not including groups who do not advertise their activities. Related to this is also the issue of how to define such ambiguous and secretive organizations.

Another area of concern is the nomenclature problem expressed in the introduction. Titles "Patriot," "Defense," and so on are usually bestowed by the group itself, regardless of its particular mythic/ideological background. In terms of research this ambiguity can render it difficult to meaningfully measure membership levels of the militia's various component groups as both survivalists (who do not often produce violence) and Christian Identity adherents and other hate groups (who do produce violence) may both call themselves 'Patriot' groups. For scholars attempting to create a stable and specific definition of a 'militia' this could prove especially troubling. This problem will be discussed in greater detail while addressing the two major ideologies of the current movements.

Although extremely useful in identifying some of the conditions that give rise to militia behavior these studies do not address exactly why or how this occurs. Given the overall difficulty of acquiring more quantitatively useful or accurate information regarding militia groups scholars may be better served (for now) by engaging the subject matter qualitatively. Qualitative findings derived from examining the way these groups perceive the world, and believe they are acting in it may provide the missing keys to developing better quantitative data sets in the future. Addressing or preempting the problems associated with militias requires an in-depth understanding of how these factors

play out in terms of actual militia behavior. For example, it would be very useful to discover why some groups appear to actively pursue violence while others shy from it. Why do some adopt more racial or religion based ideologies when others are content with expressing concern over the government ‘taking’ their guns? Consequently, the theory posited in the previous section will be employed in a qualitative methodology.

Two Prolific Mythic/Ideological DNA systems: Sources of Militia Collective Identity, Strain, and Generalized Beliefs in the Modern Militia

In many cases the historical components of far-right movements discussed in the introduction have been molded into a number of greater and lesser ideologies. As a result of their shared heritage they often seem to overlap in substantively relevant ways. This apparent overlap may be the source of some of the confusion in the literature. Furthermore, the degree to which militia members subscribe to any of these ideologies is likely to impact their actions, beliefs, and normative behaviors. This variation in ideology and behavior potential could produce a complex constellation of mythic/ideological DNA systems to account for. Fortunately, most of these possibilities appear to be permutations of two main mythic/ideological systems.

Although there is some overlap between these two major mythic/ideological systems, they produce different enough perceptions and behaviors to warrant separate descriptions. In the literature there is some disagreement over whether these groups are separate; but more recent work defines them as such so they will be regarded as separate in this work. Regardless, the two most prominent militia ideologies seem to be Constitutionalist militia groups and Christian Identity groups (Weber and Rodeheaver 2003). The former primarily concerns itself with the restoration of American politics,

culture, and social life to the ‘original intent’ of the Founding Fathers. Christian Identity groups, while also concerned with the secular affairs of the United States, are more deeply concerned with the threat they perceive from Jewish people, non-whites, and their anticipation of an ‘end of times’ race war (FBI report 1989). In both cases it appears analyzing them using the mythic/ideological DNA system and SRT is worthwhile. Like their antecedents, they both possess a set of mythic beliefs rooted in their interpretation of history, an ideology to direct their efforts, perceive the world in a dualistic way according to these systems, and use RSPs to both enhance their solidarity and symbolically deal with strains.

Constitutionalists

Constitutionalists (hereafter abbreviated as CONS) are the less complicated of the two. These groups have been known to call themselves ‘Patriot’ groups due to their emphasis on American exceptionalism and their perceived relationship with its history. They also typically utilize the conspiracy notion mentioned in conjunction with the Posse. Many of them believe that some organization is actively attempting to subvert the Constitution, though “they were reluctant to blame a definite ethnic, racial, or religious group” (Weber and Rodeheaver 2003). Often, the classical enemies of America, i.e., communists or fascists, are blamed for lack of any more specific targets. In many cases the New World Order is blamed. These concerns are very much based in their mythic/ideological system. One of the primary reasons these concerns are raised by Constitutionalists is based on their understanding of U.S. history and the sense of identity they derive from it. The importance behind this will be discussed in conjunction with the next group. Suffice it to say for now that because they believe, like the Posse, that the

federal government (and by extension all of its legal and educational apparatuses as well as the mass media) are invalid and have deviated too far from the ‘foundational’ principles of America. Constitutionalist believe in understanding the Constitution only through personal knowledge of the Founding Fathers’ ‘original intent’ which must be derived from personal study outside of the mainstream (Mulloy 2004).

Christian Identity

The Christian Identity movement (CI) bears mention as a separate ideological branch and a more detailed description due to its specificity and more aggressive outlook. Between militant neo-Nazis, the modern KKK, and the Posse Comitatus, Christian Identity theology or CI has a wide base of appeal. Christian Identity is a racialized theological system and addresses many of the concerns mentioned both in previous sections and yet-to be addressed concerns to follow. In addressing the concerns with race, religion, and history it uses the conspiracy notion to create a vast and threatening framework inexorably linking these components. This wide range of explanatory power is one reason that it has remained a vibrant ideological force in the movement.

Using Pitcavage again, “ Identity’s main tenets involve racism and anti-Semitism, but another important Identity belief is that one should follow God’s laws, not man’s laws, and that the government, clearly not following God’s laws, is therefore not legitimate” (p. 960, 2001). Though this is similar to the Constitutionalist use of conspiracy CI carries it a few steps further. More clearly, Identity theology neatly combines fundamentalist Christianity, antigovernment paramilitary notions, white supremacy, and a fear of the elimination of Whites (Sharpe 2000). This relates back to the ‘lost cause’ mythology and the use of religion observed in the KKK.

Identity theology stems from the Anglo-Israelism movement in England which basically asserts that the lost tribes of Israel were in fact Anglo-Saxons (Vertigans (2007). Attached to this is the notion that therefore, the Bible is the story of the Anglo-Saxons rather than the Jews:

We believe the White, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic and kindred people to be God's true, literal Children of Israel. Only this race fulfills every detail of Biblical Prophecy and World History concerning Israel and continues in these latter days to be heirs and possessors of the Covenants, Prophecies, Promises and Blessings of YHVH God made to Israel. This chosen seedline making up the "Christian Nations" (Gen. 35:11; Isa. 62:2; Acts 11:26) of the earth stands far superior to all other peoples in their call as God's servant race (Isa.41:8, 44:21; Luke 1:54). (Kingdom Identity Ministries Doctrinal Statement of Beliefs, 1999)

Linked closely to this first premise comes the second—that Jews, and basically all other people who are not WASPs are at the very least inferior to whites, if not evil. It is mentioned many times throughout the literature on the subject that Identity adherents believe Jews to be the offspring of a Union between Eve and the Serpent rendering them “children of Satan” and non-whites, especially blacks, are typically thought of as sub-human ‘mud-people’ predating the creation of Adam and Eve (Perry 1998, Sharpe 2000. Hamm 2004, MIAC Report 2009). Related to this is the Identity notion that non-whites (especially blacks) are nothing more than sub-human pawns of the Jews who are being manipulated towards the goal of destroying the white race (Perry 1998). This reading of scripture is interesting as it is not uncommon for Identity proponents to claim to be (and are cited as being) biblical literalists.

We believe the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments, as originally inspired, to be the inerrant, supreme, revealed Word of God. The history, covenants, and prophecy of this Holy Book were written for and about a specific elect family of people who are the children of YHVH God (Luke 3:38; Psalm 82:6) through the seedline of Adam... (Kingdom Identity Ministries Doctrinal Statement of Beliefs, 1999)

CI believers are of the opinion that the end-times are near. In their Biblical interpretation, Armageddon is a series of race wars culminating with the restoration of 'God's Order' via victory of the white race over the Jews and their allies (Perry 1998, Sharpe 2000). This style of thinking includes two very salient characteristics: once again, dualism and apocalypticism (Bertlet 2006). The good versus evil rhetoric addressing their anticipation of the end-of-times employed by CI groups comes to play a mighty and dangerous role in the interactions with the rest of the world.

As many members Posse Comitatus and adherents of Identity theology ran in similar circles these fears and beliefs have been merged with the 'illegitimate government conspiracy.' In some cases this conspiracy is called the 'New World Order' but the NWO conspiracy as a whole may not be specific to the Identity movement. Some preliminary research, as well as the findings of Weeber and Rodeheaver (2003), indicates that the idea of the NWO is also used by CONS groups. One part of CI interpretations of NWO-style theory is fairly specific; it is most often called the 'Zionist Occupational Government' (referring to the federal government) or 'ZOG' as believers frequently refer to it.

At its base, the ZOG is the illegitimate federal government. ZOG is a major part of CI's version of the NWO. For them, the ZOG is a conspiracy to undermine the biblically established power and rights of the 'white race' by use of the United Nations, US federal government, financial systems, media outlets, taxation, and gun-control (Sharpe 2000, Vertigans 2007). This conspiratorial reality is a significant part of the mythic/ideological system and has important implications insofar as everything that members experience is likely filtered through it—much like the CONS militias. When they use it to explain the cultural and social changes in the U.S. over the last few decades

a picture of reality emerges that is entirely foreign to us. For example, in this mythic/ideological system gun control legislation is an attempt on the part of an illegitimate, antagonistic government to disarm whites such that their later subjugation by non-whites and Jews will be easier. Affirmative action legislation becomes a way for the ZOG to ensure the redistribution of white economic and political power to what CI adherents see as 'inferior' people.

CONS Militia Use of history in the Formation of their Mythic/Ideological System.

The ways in which both the Christian Identity groups and the Constitutionalist groups use history in the mythic/ideological DNA systems must be understood if one is to grasp the way they look at the world and consequently interact with it. As David Mulloy puts it "The role the past plays in creating and sustaining both our individual and our collective sense of identity is a prominent part of the militia movement's engagement with American history" (p.443 2004). Each ideological branch has a different treatment of history which is consistent with their basic outlook described above. As far as the specifics are concerned they both utilize their understanding of history in the same way—as part of building and maintaining the collective identities established for them by history, as a way of interpreting how this identity is being denied, and who is to blame. It cannot be emphasized enough that the views and behaviors of these groups are regarded as absolutely normal within each group.

Regarding the constitutionalists' mythic/ideological system, they believe that today's society and the average American are ignorant of the 'true' history of the United States. Mulloy characterizes the Constitutionlists use of history in a two-pronged way: they seek to assert their view and understanding are more pure than the dominant or

mainstream understanding put forth by historians and elites; and second they want to ‘wake up’ their fellow Americans and make them aware of what has happened to their country (Mulloy 2004). They make this claim based on their understanding of ‘original intent’ behind the Constitution and other founding documents. At the same time, these groups want very much to honor the principles enshrined in the founding documents; which include the ideas of equality and freedom of religion. Among their major concerns is also the ‘correct’ interpretation of the second amendment. This concern for the second amendment is shared by CI groups. However, because CONS groups someday want popular support it seems less likely that they will engage in activities (such as terror attacks) that would harm their chances. It follows that it is less likely that CONS groups will be discriminatory. In the CONS system, their identity as Americans, as established by their understanding of the founding documents is being denied by both the illegitimate government and ‘other’ citizens.

Implicit in this system is the assumption that the movement’s members, by virtue of their independently developed understanding of the ‘original intent’ behind the founding documents, understand the truth of American history to the exclusion of everybody else. By extension they also then know how best to advance into the future. This is the new identity they seek—to be the harbingers of a future return to ‘real’ American principles. At the same time this negates the identity of the government as legitimate and the identity of other citizens as Americans. This sense of righteousness combined their lack of mainstream acceptance provide them with a sense of threat and urgency. Their strain according to their mythic/ideological system is the denial of ‘real’ American identity and principles by the ignorant masses and a corrupt government. Any

event which confirms these systems, like expansions of government power or ‘subversive’ history lessons in public schools could be a precipitating event. They must mobilize by speaking out, raising awareness, and preparing to defend themselves. The Constitutional limits on how they may pursue these goals, though very broad in their eyes, serve as social control. Any activities ranging from the act of invoking their version of history as a show of solidarity to practicing military drills to defend against the corrupt government, would constitute symbolic ritual practices.

CI Militia Use of History in the Formation of their Mythic/Ideological System.

CI groups utilize history in a fashion very similar to CONS groups. Because of the theological, apocalyptic form history takes here the consequences of this use can be immensely threatening. Because their mythic/ideological system indicates an intense risk of ‘extinction’ and therefore the need for violently defending themselves from a conspiracy of inferiors CI groups appear more likely to preemptively attack. Many of the 75 attacks mentioned in the introduction appear to be CI related (SPLC Special Report 2009). To make matters decidedly worse, their theological apocalypticism and conspiratorial beliefs also predict attacks from ZOG which take the form of disarming whites and using non-whites, legal entities, and even multi-national armies to subdue or kill them. In short, CI socializes its members into a world dominated by the omnipresent threat of catastrophic attack. Contrary to CONS groups, CI does not appear to care about garnering popular support, equality, or freedom. Combined with their apocalypticism this disinterest in being well-received produces a recipe for violent expression.

CI is not solely concerned with the past or present. While CONS militia groups limit their vision of the future to the return to idealized circumstances of the past, CI

militia groups have a different view of the future. Their future is discussed in great detail in a fictional work popular among members called *The Turner Diaries*. This book catalogs a series of events in the course of the protagonist's life which starts with the government banning firearms ownership, is followed by the enforcement of this ban using 'minority thugs' and culminates in an attack on a federal building using a truck bomb. This final attack sets in motion the predicted race wars which end in the domination of the planet by the white race. One can see here that in CI groups, their identity as God's race is being denied by the NWO, ZOG, and non-believers. All of these identities are theologically or conspiratorially negated, and CI seek to affirm their true identity by winning the upcoming end times race war. In this system any challenges to the idea of white authority are a strain, and anything resembling affirmative action, gun control, or governmental authority can be a precipitating event. They must mobilize by defending against this looming attack and lashing out at the ZOG and its 'minions' when they can. Their ritual practices may include stylized invocations of history and defensive practices similar to CONS groups. However, it seems possible that CI ritual practices may also include more aggressively-themed rituals as well.

CI, CONS Militias: Ideology, History, and The Second Amendment

The second amendment reads "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a Free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed" (Oder 1998). The basic trouble encountered in dealing with the interpretation of this amendment is in its wording. Basically, the two most prominent interpretations are that the amendment secures the right of states to maintain a militia or that it establishes the right of every citizen to own weapons (Oder 1998). In either case, the mainstream

view of this amendment's purpose (regardless of who specifically is bearing arms and what kind) was a political capitulation to Anti-Federalists during the framing that feared the federal government had been granted sufficient military power to dominate the states (Lund 2003). However, the ambiguity in the wording in conjunction with the militia movement's (both the CONS and CI) mythic/ideological systems have led to their own unique interpretation. To put it most simply, the 'original intent' in their view was that any private citizen could own firearms and be part of a militia to defend themselves against federal tyranny. Extending this need to defend against the professional armed forces of a federal government requires that private citizens be able to purchase military hardware. This holds true whether the defense against the federal government is because it is corrupt or part of a racial Armageddon (Vertigans 2007).

In summary, these are the two major mythic/ideological DNA systems in the modern militia. The CONS and CI groups' specific identities differ but the methods of creating and maintaining them seem to be nigh-identical. They both use a specific, mythic historical perspective that links their beliefs to a mythic past and an ideology that directs their current and future actions. Indeed, they may very well use this history in ritualized discourse and practices as a means of symbolically acting against their concerns, developing solidarity within the group, and maintaining an intense connection to their 'sacred' ideals.

SRT and mythic/ideological DNA together appear to create a useful extension of Smelser's theory for understanding the way the relationships between militia subscribers to these systems, their respective histories and the Second Amendment are played out. The collective identity of a shared mythic history that describes their strains, who is to

blame, and what to do about it appears in both groups. In the case of CONS militias the identity is based upon the mythic interpretation of the United History and the Founding Fathers as rugged, gun-toting, anti-government freedom fighters. Because CONS militias see themselves as the inheritors of this tradition (Vertigans 2007), the CONS groups feel strain over the apparent betrayal of this history due to cultural and social changes that have occurred. Their M/I identity is being denied by the government and other citizens whose identities are negated (CONS groups sometimes call non-Patriots 'sheeple'). As a result of this mythic past and its subsequent denial CONS militias perceive that they must prepare to defend American against this subversion and 'wake up' their fellow Americans in an affirmation of their new identity as America's defenders.

As America's defenders CONS militia likely feel the need to possess firearms for several reasons. They must be able to defend 'her' (generally they refer to America as a 'her') from domestic and foreign threats such as invading armies or civil unrest like riots. They also may feel that they require guns to protect themselves and their families from crime that the government can no longer curtail and perhaps even from the corrupt government itself. These themes are reflected in many of their activities such as paramilitary drilling, shooting practice, and gun show attendance. These activities and the symbols they are expressing may be thought of ritual behaviors that serve to reinforce the group's outlook on the world, its own solidarity, and as a way of symbolically acting against the strains they feel.

Again, in the case of CI militias their collective M/I identity would address their mythic role of the 'white race' as God's superior chosen people. Their identity as the one and only 'white'' children of God is being denied by the Jews and other non-whites.

Evolutionary theory as it stands, also denies this identity. The identity of these ‘others’ is preemptively negated by their positions in the theological framework of CI so very little else must be done other than subscribe to the belief. The government and its agents are also delegitimized by virtue of being proxies of the ZOG. CI members affirm their identity as the rightful children of God and their superiority through their prediction of victory in the approaching race wars.

This anticipation of the end-times makes the reasons that the CI militias are concerned with owning military firepower and explosives significantly more menacing their contemporaries. Matters are made worse because CI militias are more inclined to use violence in a preemptive way—again, many of the 75 planned or successful attacks in the SPLC 2009 documentation (including by some accounts the April 19th bombing) were carried out by CI believers in hopes of exposing the ZOG, NWO, or quickening the apocalyptic race wars. There is still the matter of precipitating events as they fit into these M/I systems to address.

Application of Theory to the Accepted Precipitating Events of the Modern

Movement: A Demonstration of Theory.

In the 1992 and 1993 there were a number of incidents which are often thought of as an impetus for modern militia activity and growth up to the April 19th bombing. These occurrences can help shed light on how the processes enumerated above work to create collective action. The incidents include a pair of standoffs between federal authorities and civilians who had stockpiled weapons as well as the passage of the Brady Bill (MIAC Report 2009). By examining these two events using the context established above one can

more clearly see how these ideologies and their accompanying behavioral traits might play out using real-world events.

The first standoff took place in Ruby Ridge, Idaho between the ATF and the Weaver Family. In short, Randy Weaver ended up under investigation after being pointed out to authorities as somebody who might be able to introduce an informant to an Aryan Nations leader. Weaver was also a subscriber to CI theology (Dobratz, Shanks-Meile, Hallenbeck 2003). During the course of this investigation Weaver agreed to do so and offered to sell the informant two shotguns of illegal length. He was later arrested and later released to await his court date which he declined to show up for. It is here that the story gets somewhat murky, but the important facts are: he found federal marshals reconnoitering his property and fired on them, at which point they returned fire and shot his 14 year-old son (Dobratz et al., 2003). After this, an F.B.I. SWAT team was called as back-up. The Weavers, having already fired on federal officers, were approached using aggressive rules of engagement which resulted in the wounding of Randy Weaver and the subsequent death of his wife.

The other standoff which occurred during this time took place near Waco, Texas beginning in February of 1993 and ended after 51 days on April 19th. The events leading up to this siege and the history of the compound that was destroyed are too lengthy to detail here. To be brief, the ATF had evidence suggesting that the residents of the Branch Davidian compound had been stockpiling weapons (automatic firearms and explosives), may be dangerous, and that their leader, David Koresh, may have been abusing children and others under their religious beliefs (Kerstetter 2004). A warrant was to be served using 'dynamic entry', which involves curtailing expected resistance with flash grenades.

This show of force prompted an attack on the serving agents. The following 51 days were a series of media firestorms, convoluted negotiations and a small battle which ultimately lead to the destruction of the compound by fire and the deaths of 86 people (Kerstetter 2004, Vertigans 2007). While the Branch Davidians were not CI believers (to this author's knowledge) they shared CI's preoccupation with impending Armageddon and may have been more willing to use and be subjected to violence as a result.

The last precipitating factor was the passage of the Brady Handgun prevention act. Again, to be brief, this bill represented a strengthening of gun restrictions. It created a five-day waiting period and background check for anyone purchasing a handgun (Vertigans 2007). Again, by applying the theoretical framework explicated above the ascribed meanings and power of these events as motivator for militia activity and membership become very clear.

The Brady Bill is the simplest to address. In both the CONS and CI mythic/ideological systems impairing their ability to own weapons is seen as a denial of their identity. In the case of CONS groups, it is because the Founding Fathers meant Americans to have the right to any and all arms so that they could protect themselves and their countrymen from tyranny. CI groups see the right to bear arms as crucial to defending themselves from ZOG and the NWO, so anything limiting that right is also limiting their ability to protect their race and identity.

Ruby Ridge served as a precipitating event for CI militias due to the Weaver's membership on the one hand, but also due to the government pursuing him on firearms charges. This was likely perceived in the mythic/ideology of CI believers to show how far the ZOG is willing to go to disarm and weaken them. The fact that Weaver was shot and his wife and child were killed was taken to show how violent the ZOG was willing to be and that it may soon act on

a large scale. To CONS groups it showed how over-powered the federal government has become, how willing it is to use force, and that it does not want citizens to be able to defend themselves using the same kinds of force—even from the government should the need arise. The Waco Siege plays out in very much the same way. One key difference between the two is in the consequences—the orders for the action of the government during Waco siege were alleged (by some in the militias) to have come from the Murrah Building. Because the Murrah building was a federal building it was thus a part of the ZOG. Hence, it became a target for retribution for Waco—which was one of McVeigh’s motivations in attacking it (Vertigans 2007). Furthermore, the use of a truck bomb to destroy a federal building should sound familiar, it is the final event in *The Turner Diaries*, which McVeigh had become very familiar with.

A Few Other Noteworthy Issues

The fact that neither of these mythological/ideological systems is accepted by the mainstream does not escape either set of groups. Rather than cause CONS or CI militia members to reevaluate their views or dissuade them from adopting them, this lack of popular acceptance may in fact further strengthen their devotion to them. Jetten (2001) investigated the effect of perceived discrimination from the mainstream on group identification using the practice of body piercing. Their findings, as well as the findings of others they cite, indicate “...when confronted by discrimination, disadvantaged group members disidentify with the normative standards of the dominant group and increase the relevance of dimensions on which the in-group is distinct.” (Jetten et al 2001). It follows that when combined with the notion that all ‘others’ are either ignorant of or co-opted by a conspiracy (in addition to being inferior) this effect could become even more pronounced. The data were examined with this in mind.

This disassociation with mainstream forms of communication may be one of the reasons that these groups have embraced the internet as much as they have. Adams and Roscigno (2005) suggest that “The internet represents one of the newest and most accessible media outlets. Websites can act as an introduction to a particular group in addition to providing legitimacy and access to extensive resources to those already involved.” (p.763) They go on to mention that the wide variety of communication options and the low social costs of utilizing them may foster a sense of belonging or community (solidarity) between members who would be otherwise unable to interact. During the course of analysis, this possibility was investigated although the study has no specific propositions regarding it.

Lastly, Vertigans (2007) suggests that throughout the process of socialization into a militia group the prospective member becomes more and more radicalized. This process of radicalization continues the longer a person participates in the activities of such groups. He hypothesizes that eventually, the worries attached to these ideologies become so intense that a person feels that they have no choice but to act against them in a violent way. In the theory described earlier, this would mean that a person can become so steeped in the mythic/ideological DNA of the group that the symbolic ritual practices the groups engage in stop acting as an outlet. As a consequence, because the person has been systematically cut off from all other interpretations of reality (due to the disassociation with and negation of all other viewpoints), there is no recourse remaining for them but to perform the rituals against an actual target. This possibility was investigated in this study. If the findings support it, the idea that the militia provides control and direction for aggression may be highly questionable.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

In evaluating the research questions and the theory from which they are derived, data were gathered from the internet forums of two active militia websites. The investigator did not interact with the members of the forum in any way nor become a member of said forums. The data were gathered via reading public messages or 'posts', and the responses to these posts. This sort analysis of internet traffic has a precedent in the literature (Weeber and Rodeheaver 2003) and in some ways this work is an extension of that line of research. It was, however, the goal of this investigator to improve upon such work by modernizing Smelser's theory in order to provide a more sophisticated look at militia identities, internet presence, and activities than the previous research.

Another key difference between this work and the work of Weeber and Rodeheaver is the use of internet forum posts as opposed to usenet. Though both are similar in form and function, the former was used on the basis of familiarity. The general construction of an internet forum (should a reader be unfamiliar with them) is as follows.

There is typically a main page on which users may log in, after which they are taken to an index of the various message boards the site is host to. Upon selecting a board the forum member (or guest) is taken to another index of discussion topics called threads. When a forum member selects one of these threads they can then view all of the posts made under it. These posts are, in the simplest sense, public messages authored by forum members regarding the topic of the thread. Such posts are the source of data used in this study.

Theory and data source choices notwithstanding, this work was subject to many of the same benefits and potential concerns as the previously mentioned investigation. Weeber and Rodeheaver (2003) enumerate a few of the benefits "...[it] has the advantage of allowing the researcher the opportunity to peruse the message an unlimited number of times... Additionally, an unobtrusive study of internet traffic avoids the problem of reactivity..." (p. 187). These are sound points. Another benefit was being able to see how militia members communicate with one another informally; this provided some insight regarding their normative behaviors as well as the 'real-life' salience of the ideologies discussed above. This can be thought of as somewhat akin to naturalistic observation. Some of this data would likely not have been otherwise unavailable as militia members are unlikely to respond to any 'official' sort of inquiry such as a survey or an interview.

Furthermore, this method of data collection avoided the danger present in infiltrating such groups. While the findings of this research suggest that relatively few militia members represented on these forums were violent, they have the potential to be, and the outing of a researcher associated with a state university would likely result in being perceived as a government spy or saboteur. Reactivity and risk to the investigator

were negated in this study by anonymously viewing the web-pages, not applying for membership to them nor posting on them as a 'guest', and not interacting with the forum members in any way.

There are also risks associated with using data of this nature. As with the previous research, there is the chance of misrepresentation. It might be difficult to tell if a poster is (or considered themselves to be) an actual militia member, a curious sympathizer, or perhaps even another scholar attempting to infiltrate the forum. Weeber and Rodeheaver address this concern by explaining that they could identify virtually all of their participants by name due to signatures on posts, or having been identified by watch groups. That was not necessarily the case with this study. It is the case that many forum members in the sample population posted a multitude of messages and that their style and personality remained fairly consistent throughout them. Assuming that such a people were not very dedicated imposters such stability was taken as a sign of the author's individual personality. No posters identified themselves by name in their posts, and although some did identify themselves in their public profiles these names were not recorded as per IRB arrangements for this study. There were 2 instances of posts by imposters but they were fairly easy to spot and remove from the data.

Another risk in using this type of data is that of the researcher misunderstanding the content of a post. There are many nuances in communication which can be lost in translation, such as sarcasm. This danger is relieved somewhat by the benefit of being able to re-read the posts repeatedly. It is further reduced by the use of certain techniques on the part of the posters to indicate their meaning more clearly, such as emoticons (text

or images based faces included in the post to represent meaning that may otherwise be misconstrued) and quotation marks around words meant to be taken in a certain context.

The data analyzed in this study came from the forums of two websites:

<https://unitedstatesmilitia.com> (USM) and <http://americanmilitiamovement.com>(ARM).

The forums were both thought to be fairly active during preliminary research (more than 18000 and 55000 posts respectively) but ARM turned out to be significantly less active during data collection. It is unknown whether not this inactivity was a result of some intervening variable during data collection or if the perception of activity had simply been a misunderstanding. Of the two sites USM was far better organized. Its forum index has boards dedicated to over 20 specific topics. Some of the boards are for regional discussion board such as the “Northwest 1st Rifle” page or the “Sons of the South”. Others pertain to general discussion, the founding documents, gun rights, specific types of firearms, buying and selling of equipment, first aid, and fitness. The general discussion board proved to be the most active. The USM site featured fairly good access to forum members’ demographic information. This website, based on examination of its rules, caters to CONS militia members.

The ASM site is somewhat less organized, and apparently less active overall. Its forum index included fewer than 20 topics, many of which are parsed out further on the USM site. Member demographics are not available unless one signs up for a membership and therefore had to be gathered by self-report alone. This resulted in a significantly reduced amount of information on each individual member. This forum also reports a record of recent activity although, as with the USM site, the general discussion board was

the most active. This website was thought to have CI ties based on an examination of their logo but this proved to be incorrect.

The representativeness of these data is somewhat problematic. Geographical information was not available for all of the members of the sample population; this was especially prominent in the ARM data. Demographic information for this site was restricted to what the members self-reported. This information was collected when available, but it could not be solicited. Weeber and Rodeheaver raise an interesting concern regarding the representativeness of internet data in that perhaps their sample represent only a sub-set of militia members with access to computers, the internet, and the knowledge to use them (p 189). By extension, this would also be a concern with the data gathered for this project. While it is a valid concern, it seems somewhat less problematic as such technology and knowledge are more common now than in 2003 when Weeber and Rodeheaver did their research. It remains true that this sample only contains militia members who believe that the internet is safe to use for communication. There are likely militia groups and members who would not do this as they may perceive it as too risky. Such people are not represented in this study. There is still a concern pertaining to whether or not the forum members could indeed be rightly called militia members.

For this study a militia member (or author or forum member as they are referred to throughout the results) was defined as somebody who self-identifies as such by virtue of being a member of the forum. This is a reasonable definition given that the monikers 'militia member,' 'patriot,' or any other labels these groups utilize in describing themselves are largely self-applied. Their membership and activity on these forums was,

for this work, considered indicative of a subject's adoption of the 'militia' identity and participation in the movement in general. This participation could theoretically range from mere sympathy, acceptance in total or part of militia identity and views, to complete dedication. The main criteria for sample inclusion were: that a post's author was a member of the forum, not suspected of being an imposter, and that the author had at least five posts in total for the duration of their membership which was taken to indicate a basic level of activity. All five posts did not need to be in the sample.

The units of analysis were the individual posts on each forum. Each post contained the forum member who authored it (identified by their avatar or 'screen name'), the date and time it was posted, and content the author wrote. In the case that a post contained references to more than one type of content it was cross-coded under each type. This was primarily the case with very long posts or posts with signatures of some kind. One possible problem that could have been encountered here was that the length of posts ranged anywhere from one line to several paragraphs. This variety could have caused problems: excessively long posts may be difficult to understand and code while especially short ones may have had no content germane to the propositions. Fortunately, very short posts typically had relevant content and the few exceptionally long ones were easy to grasp so this concern turned out not to be an issue. Another possible issue was that the writing style and usage of authors could vary immensely. Some posts were riddled with errors. In one case, the author was an imposter, and was chastised by other forum members for their inability to communicate. In general, the errors in most posts were minor and did not render the post incomprehensible.

The posts were selected for analysis on the basis of the most recent or daily activity of their parent thread. This was done to capture what the militia members were doing or most interested in discussing on a given day. This could theoretically represent their day-to-day activities and communication with one another. Once a thread was selected the top five post chains (in terms of recent daily traffic) were copied into a series of 12 word document (6 per site) for analysis. The demographics were recorded in four different Excel spreadsheets—two of which (one per site) were for record keeping purposes and included data for the entire sample population of authors. The other two documents included only the final sample population of authors after exclusions had been made. This information in these final spreadsheets included poster's screen names, demographics (when available), the author's total number of posts on their respective site, and the duration of their membership. The posts themselves were analyzed using NVIVO 9 according to various categories of content corresponding to parts of the theory and research propositions addressing them. The specific propositions examined in this project are enumerated below.

Research Propositions and Coding Categories

- I. CONS groups are more likely to be the most active as their Mythic/Ideological system encourages them to strive to appeal to a wider audience.
- II. Militia members will express the DNA aspects of their mythic ideological systems. Many posts with content indicating the presence of these constructs was taken as evidence that the addition of M/I DNA theory is useful in further specifying Smelser's components of strain and precipitating factors (as

expressed by denials of identity, and enunciated grievances or concerns based on the M/I system), generalized beliefs (indicated by the presence of the M/I system), mobilization (as indicated by forum activity by highly prolific members who provide direction for other members).

- III. Ritualized Symbolic Practices will serve as a means for group members to affirm or express the collective identity of their respective mythic/ideological systems. Posts with content suggesting or confirming that activities are being performed which invoke, affirm, or otherwise support their mythic/ideological systems indicated evidence for this research proposition.
- IV. RSPs will serve as a means for the group members to symbolically address their mythic/ideological concerns while avoiding the negative consequences of acting out violently.
- V. The most long-standing members of these groups, regardless of mythic/ideological background, will express discontent with the lack of 'real' action, suggesting the validity of the radicalization notion.

Below are propositions that were originally going to be examined, but the data did not provide sufficient evidence to do so.

- a. Members with ties to CI will be more likely to suggest violent action given the extent to which their mythic/ideological system promotes it. This would indicate that the mythic/ideologies should be viewed separately as they produce different outcomes.
- b. CI rituals will be more thoroughly imbued with symbolic aggression.

The following is a list of the major coding categories used to analyze this data:

Mythic/Ideological DNA-any posts regarding the denial of a mythic identity (an expression of strain), the negation of some other party's identity or the affirmation of a new identity were coded in categories representing these three components of the theory. These categories were sub-categories of a general category for mythic/ ideological information which also included any content which lent support to the assumption that there is a mythic/ideological system or a collective identity associated with one.

Violence- Posts which had content pertaining to violence were coded in this parent category. Included within this main set were the sub-categories support for violence, lack of support for violence, conditional support for violence, and the expectation of violence. Once a post was evaluated as having violent content it was categorized and placed in one of these categories according to the forum member's apparent perspective on violence. Large numbers of posts demonstrating such attitudes towards violence would have indicated a general support for violence. If there had been many 'support for violence' authored by people who appeared to be involved with Christian Identity this would have indicated support for research proposition a.

Frustration- Posts with content expressing frustration regarding ineffective militia activity or a lack of activity overall were coded here. If these posts had come from long-time members of the boards (as measured by duration of membership) this would have indicated support for research proposition V.

Ritual- Posts indicating the presence of RSPs were coded in this parent category. Included in this general category were sub-categories for ritual behaviors specific to the internet forums, evidence of non-internet rituals, and supporting evidence for non-

evidence rituals. Posts regarding paramilitary drills, shooting practice, gun show attendance, or survivalist training were coded in the latter category. Depending on their content, many such posts would have indicated support for propositions IV, V, and VI respectively.

Residual-This category was used to house content that during the course of analysis appeared as though it could be germane to the research questions. While some of it was used in analysis, much of it exists solely as an artifact of the content analysis process.

A series of emergent coding categories were also used to classify data throughout analysis until it could be coded into one of the above categories. Some content could not be transferred in to any of the other categories or were not used in analysis and therefore these emergent categories are considered to be relics of the analysis process. Examples of posts coded under each of the categories relevant to a specific research proposition are provided in the results and analysis section of this project. These examples will all be presented as they were written and published on the forums, for the sake of accurately presenting the content. The only exception to this will be the omission of information required to ensure confidentiality.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

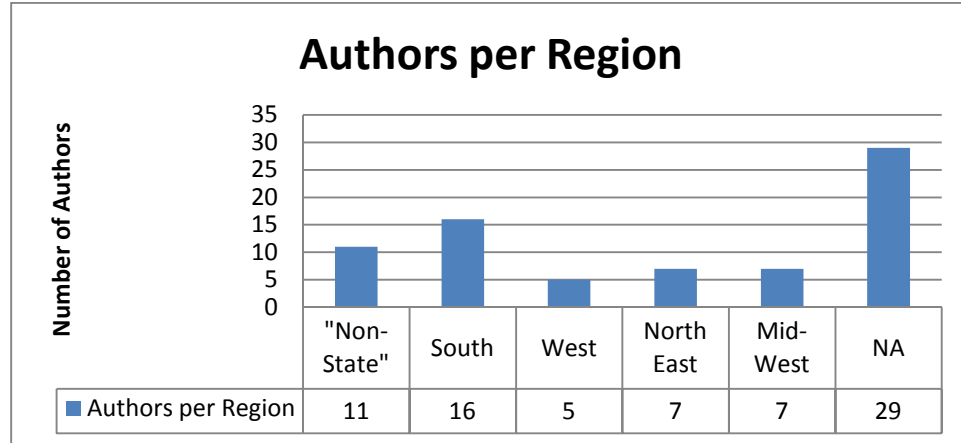
Between May 12th and May 22nd 1170 posts were gathered, although several had to be discounted from the data according to exclusion criteria. Several were authored by forum members with less than 5 total posts (indicating a distinct lack of participation in the forum); others had to be removed because the authors were younger than 18 (either by their admission or by the investigator's deductions based on reported birth year). Two others were evaluated as being authored by imposters. This decision was based both upon the posts' content and also the reactions they generated in the other forum members. This left 1139 posts for analysis. Of these, 817 were collected from the USM forum with the remaining 322 from the ARM forum. Post lengths were as predicted, varying between a less than a sentence to several pages long. Most had content relevant to the study.

The overrepresentation of the USM within these data occurred for several reasons but chief among them is that the site is simply more active than its counterpart. In preliminary investigation this did not appear to be the case, but as data collection progressed it became clear that the ARM site posted less overall.

Another factor influencing this discrepancy is an unpredicted effect of the forum organization on data collection. Put most simply, on both forums the most active threads (those to be gathered each day) were assessed based on the number of posts under a thread for a given day of collection. It was not known to the researcher that older threads with many posts become reactivated when a forum members posts on them. In effect, if a thread that is several months old and has a number of existing posts attached to it is posted on by an author, it will appear as highly active for that day because all of the previous posts are counted as part of that day's activity. Because of this, the posts' ages range from less than a month to a little less than two years old.

There were 75 individual authors represented in the ARM data and 111 represented in the USM data. Two authors in the USM data are known to also be members of the other site, although only one is represented in both sets of data. Counting this author only once yields a final total of 185 authors represented in this data. The availability of demographics for the authors of each site differed—as expected the ARM site produced far less demographic information than its counterpart. Only two authors' ages could be estimated at roughly 32 and 38 respectively. In terms of race, one author's posts indicated that they were of German/Dutch heritage (white) and another indicated that they were of Hispanic descent. There was little information regarding the race or ethnicity of the other authors. Information regarding the authors' locations was comparatively easier to come by as many chose to have it associated with their posts or as part of their account name. Figure 1 contains a breakdown of these locations by census region—although not all forum members published a location that could be classified as part of a census region.

Fig. 1 ARM Authors by Census Region



Location reporting in the ARM data was better than expected. Most authors reported a location, though some did so in unexpected ways. Authors listed as “NA” (39%) did not report their location nor did their posts or username provide enough evidence to deduce where they were from. One exception to this is the author represented in both sets of data. Their location was not listed on the ARM site but it was listed in the USM data. As such, it is not included in the “NA” category. Figure 1 indicates the distribution of the ARM authors by census region. The breakdown in the locations reported is as follows: 7% of authors were in the West, 9% were in the North East, 9% in the Mid-West, and 21% in the South census regions respectively. About 14% of the authors reported a non-state location. Examples of such non-state locations are “everywhere”, “in the shadows”, and “dressed up as Mexican [sic] gardner in your yard using a rake.”

The authors from the ARM site vary greatly in terms of the duration of their membership as well as their relative levels of forum activity. The average duration of membership is just over a year, reported membership ranges from 1 month to 19 months with most forum members being closer to the latter figure. The number of posts per

author ranges from 5 (the minimum allowed in this study) to 872 with a sample average of 98 posts. No ARM authors gave any indication that they were women. Virtually no information was available regarding the member's religious preferences or occupations. One author in particular made repeated references to Bible passages, but their denomination could not be ascertained.

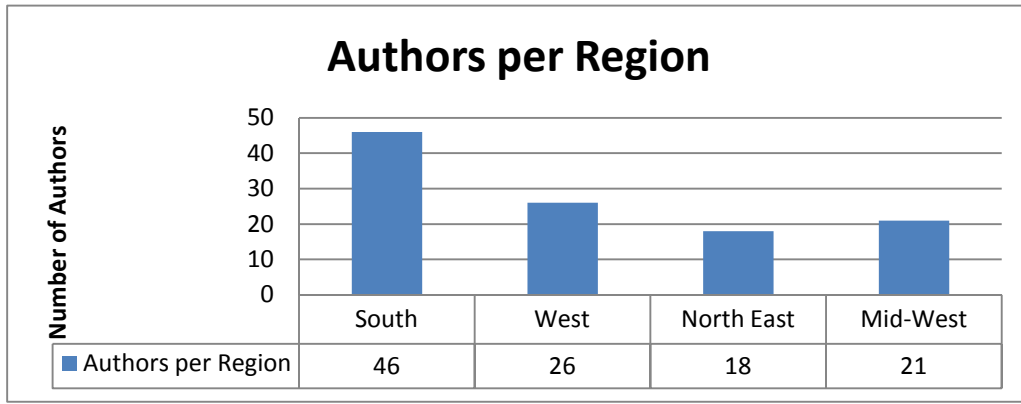
The ARM site was picked in part because it was suspected to have some active CI membership given the obvious NWO imagery used in its logo. Although the literature indicated that the NWO conspiracy may be most closely associated with CI militia this appears to be mistaken. Out of all of the ARM data only two authors posted content potentially related to CI. As mentioned earlier, one author repeatedly posted content related to a coming biblical battle (6 posts). All six were heavily inspired by biblical passages and the expectation a cataclysmic struggle; however race was not mentioned in any of these posts, and there was no indication that it should be implied. On the other hand, the author did make reference to the Constitution specifically in one post, and in conjunction with their other posts the investigator would place this forum member in the Constitutionalist camp. The other CI candidate posted an anti-Semitic remark but also made several other negative remarks about religion in general. Based on this evidence the investigator concluded that while perhaps anti-Semitic, the author was not CI given his apparent dislike for all religion. In short, the ARM data sample does not appear to have and CI membership. Instead, it is comprised of Constitutionlists or people with such leanings.

The demographics for the authors in the USM data were much better reported. Although 35 of the 111 authors did not report an age the majority did. Reported ages

ranged from 19 to 69 years old with an average age of 41. It is plausible that the average age for the ARM authors could be around 41 as well, given that the two reported ages for ARM members fall comfortably within the reported range for the USM data.

Unfortunately, there were no overt indicators of race in this data. There were a few comments made indicating that their authors may be white, but there was not enough information to justify claiming this as fact. Mostly, these comments had to do with boarder control issues. At the same time, no authors on this site gave any indication that their race was anything other than white. Two of the USM authors included in these data were women, there were more in the original data but each had less than 5 posts and they were excluded on that basis.

Figure 2. USM Authors by Census Region



All of the USM authors included in the final data set had reported a location, none of which could be classified as ‘non-state.’ Figure 2 indicates that 46 (roughly 41%) of USM authors were in the South, followed shortly by 23%, 19%, and 16%, in the West, Midwest and Northeast census regions respectively.

The USM authors’ durations of membership and numbers of posts are higher than the ARM data but are distributed very similarly. Membership ranges from 1 month to 59 months. An administrator is responsible for the 59 month outlier. The average duration of

membership for the USM site is nearly 16 months—regardless of the presence of the outlier. The number of posts ranges from 5 to 2545 (again, an administrator is responsible for the high end) with an average of 345 posts per author.

Contrary to the preliminary understanding of site activity, the USM is much more active than the ARM site. Preliminary investigation of the site indicated that it was populated primarily with CONS membership. The sites rules specifically prohibit inflammatory remarks being made on the basis of race or religious preference. This CONS orientation is also indicated by the data. There were 3 posts dealing containing anti-Israel comments but they were not enough to indicate CI membership. In all three cases the author did not appear opposed to religion but rather expressed a disinterest in the U.S. acting of the behalf of any other country. The USM data does not appear to have any CI membership either. There was little information regarding the occupations of USM authors. Nine claim to be current or ex-military and two claim to be or have been police officers in the past.

Overall, the membership of both sites appears to consist of various types of Constitutionlists. This was problematic for evaluating propositions I, a, and b. There was content pertaining to the CONS perspective on violence throughout the data. This content, while not related to the CI M/I system is still related to violence and is therefore presented under the heading of research proposition a. These data do indicate that there is far more variety within the Constitutionlist militia identity and its associated viewpoints than is represented in the literature. This is a significant finding in and of itself. It will be addressed in detail in the following pages.

Research Proposition I Results

This research proposition assumed that there would be some level of CI membership represented on the sites. As there were not, this research proposition is not directly supported by the data. This lack of support in the data may be misleading. Information was gathered during the preliminary investigation that offers indirect support for this research proposition. Both sites were originally located using the search engine Google which ranks the sites returned during a search by relevancy and quality. While the USM site clearly caters to a CONS membership the ARM site indicates a blend of both CONS elements and what were considered CI concerns in the literature. Knowing this, the USM site appears as the top three search results (above even Wikipedia) when one runs a search for “United States Militia” and if the search term is “Militia Movement” the ARM site is the third listed site after Wikipedia and Anti-Defamation league. This indicates that their traffic is relatively substantial, and given their overall Constitutionalist outlook could suggest such a viewpoint has more active internet presence.

Admittedly, there are dozens of different search terms a person seeking a militia website could enter. It does seem likely though that a person searching for a militia to join or for more information about militias might enter at least one of the two search terms listed above. To be clear, this information is not conclusive or even especially substantial but it does lend suggestive evidence that CONS groups are still more active online than CI groups. This evidence is consistent with the findings of Weeber and Rodeheaver in 2003.

Research Proposition II

Table 1. Posts with DNA Related Content

Component of DNA Expressed	#of Relevant Posts (approx. %)
Denial Of Mythic Identity	63(38.2)
Negation of Other's Identities	70(42.4)
Affirmation of Mythic Identity	32(19.4)
Total Number of Relevant Posts	165(100)

Table 1 shows that there were 165 (roughly 14.5%) of the 1139 posts with content directly related to the one of the Denial, Negation, and Affirmation components of the mythic ideological system. Although there was no CI membership in this data, the data did produce many references to the all three DNA aspects of a CONS mythic ideological system. Many of these posts had content indicating the presence of the Constitutionalist mythic identity and ideology system specifically described in the literature. While the presence of the M/I system (independently of the DNA aspects that this research proposition was to evaluate) was assumed, it is useful to show that this assumption was not incorrect. The data also indicate a substantial amount of variety within the CONS perspective. These findings will be discussed at the conclusion of this section as they are not directly related to the research proposition being looked at.

Examples of the content that was coded under the Denial of Mythic Identity category include the following three excerpts:

You don't prevent violence and injury by stealing and denying peoples rights! Anyone notice that the 4Th Amendment has been taking an even bigger beating than the 2ND Amendment lately? (ARM Data 3)

Where and why did we ever allow people to begin ignoring the one thing that made the United States of America different? To restore our freedoms and country, we must restore our Constitution... (USM Data 3)

This is honestly the first time I recall hearing about 'domestic terrorism' in an [military] class, and it was kinda scary just how 'bad' he made the Hutaree look...If soldiers get used to hearing that American Militias are a threat, it will be much easier for them to use lethal force. (USM data 6)

In the first post, the author was writing in response to a news story another forum member had posted. The story included an interview with a police officer who was explaining why a warrantless property search had been conducted. It is evidenced in the author's writing (which is presented above as it was written) that he is feeling strain over this denial of Constitutional rights. In M/I DNA terminology, the identities of Americans who feel as that author does about the Constitution are being denied. This same sentiment is expressed in the second post, though with an added explicit expression of the 'one-of-a-kind' nature the forum member associates with the document. He also expresses that it must be restored. That author did not go on to specify how this end might be achieved, but he did conclude his post (as with all of his others) with a photo image of the Constitution. Both authors express the belief that distinctly American freedoms are being lost due to a lack of knowledge, interest, or respect for the Constitution.

In the third example, the author is upset at the fact that the Hutaree—a small militia group arrested earlier this year—are being presented to the public and the military as domestic terrorists. His fear is that the military will eventually be used to fight the militia rather than 'wake up' and join them. Such a presentation is denying the CONS militia identity as America's defenders and as those who will help wake the country up or perhaps even 'take it back.' As one can see in the examples above there is concern on both sites regarding the denial of the Constitutionalist mythic identity. For them, the disregard for the 'correct' understanding of Constitutional rights on the parts of the government and general population is a denial of the Constitutionalist Mythic Identity as guardians of America, and as the protectors of the Constitution. This is also true of the perception of militia groups as potential domestic terrorists.

Negation of others' identities also occurred regularly throughout the data. Some examples of negation are as follows:

First it was obviously done so that you would get all these idiots cheering for Obama. (ARM data 1)

I for one think a Constitutional quiz should be a requirement for membership on the site. It would be a great way to weed out the posers and kids. On the plus side it would educate all the fence-sitters. (USM data 3)

Very good idea [other member], that would go along way to showing the 'people' that we are just regular folks like them, except we have chosen to honor our duty as American citizens. (USM data 5)

In the first case, the author was remarking upon the public reaction to the killing of Osama Bin Laden. The remainder of that post goes on to explain that this killing will enable the government to later commit an act of terrorism and claim that it carried out by Islamic terrorists as retribution for Bin Laden's death. The implication of the post being that only 'idiots' do not understand or believe that the events described above are the truth of the matter. Evidently, only such people would cheer for the president. Here, the author is negating the identities of people who believe the government and news media, those who are part of either organization, as well as those who may support or approve of the president as a consequence of Bin Laden's death.

The second excerpt is in response to a long thread premised on the suggestion that the USM forums require prospective members to take a constitutional quiz. It was eventually decided that the resulting quiz scores would be part of the public profile each member has on the site. Members would be expected to pass the quiz and thereby prove their knowledge of the document and dedication to the movement. The author's writing implies that people who are unwilling or unable to pass such a quiz are inauthentic or children and are not welcome. This is followed by the suggestion that people who are aware of the movement and have yet to formally join, referred to here as 'fence-sitters', do not know enough about the Constitution—the assumption being that if they knew

more, they would certainly join the militia. The identities being negated here include anyone with comparable knowledge of the Constitution who is unwilling to join the militia, and people (including fellow militia members) who do not care as much or know enough about the Constitution.

The last example serves as a useful connection to the next section. It was written in regard to the suggestion that the forum members produce public relations videos in an effort to improve their image. The quotation marks around the word ‘people’ indicate two possibilities. The first is that the personhood of non-militia individuals requires some qualification, at least for that author. The author’s next sentence gives some insight regarding the nature of this qualification, to be a person sans quotation marks appears to require that one be militia and therefore be fulfilling one’s American duty. Another possibility is that the author was making a reference to the Constitutional phrase “We The People” which is peppered throughout the data. Perhaps in order to be part of the “People” as opposed to “people” requires the dedication expressed above. In either case this is directly related to the Negation of others’ identities and the Affirmation component of the Constitutionalist identity.

Of the three DNA components the affirmation of mythic identity was the least present in the data with only 32 posts containing relevant content. Some of these posts were explicit in their description of the conditions which would yield the complete or final affirmation of CONS militia identity. Others were less explicit or even implied that such conditions were already present or that affirmation was already taking place. The following are examples of posts containing these elements:

I imagine, Hope, Pray to God they say to their selves 'Wait a minute this don't sound right, I don't think im going to comply sir' & they wake up & call US Militia Men & say 'hey We're glad you guys have been around, you all have been right, we need your back they're setting up an invasion against US!' (ARM data 1)

History, for good or ill, is made by determined minorities. We are one such minority. So too are the current enemies of the Founders' Republic. What remains, then, is the test of will and skill to determine who shall shape the future of our nation. (ARM data5)

The gear in itself would be great for outfitting the kids for survival, or, that member of the family that thinks you are nuts when he comes begging for help after SHTF! (USM data 2)

When I joined the Militia a couple of years ago I joined to help defend the United states constitution. In that document is a rule of law...Until it is no longer the law I have to believe it still works. (USM data 6)

The first and third examples of these posts are clear examples of an affirmation of the CONS mythic identity as it was presented in the literature review. Recall, it was supposed in the literature that affirmation was to take place at some undetermined point in the future. The first details the belief that other citizens, specifically the armed forces of the United States, will 'wake up' and call upon the militia to defend the U.S. In the case of this first post, however, there is an important difference from the literature. Though only referred to as a 'they' in the example, the author was writing from the perspective that the militia would be defending the U.S. from an invading force. Examining that forum member's other posts indicates that he believe this force will likely be the NWO by proxy of the United Nations.

The third post follows the future oriented construction indicated in both the literature and the first example. Here, the author is expressing a similar situation, in which they render aid to a family member who did not take them seriously until a "SHTF" event. The acronym "SHTF" stands for the phrase "Shit Hits The Fan" and shows up repeatedly throughout the data (11 times) as a theme represented some undetermined event expected to either elicit a full blown militia response and/or the 'awakening' of the American populace at large. Coming back to the examples, both of

the first and third demonstrate a future oriented affirmation of a mythic identity represented in the literature. This author and the relevance of their differing perspective will be discussed again later.

The second and fourth examples both adopt the perspective that their CONS militia identities are already being affirmed. In the case of the second post, the author appears to be saying that the militia is already defending America from its enemies. This implies that the author believes their mythic identity is already being affirmed. His composition speaks to the mythic proportions of this ideation. A nearly identical construction is present in the fourth post, although it is more latent than manifest. That particular post was part of a thread dealing with the arrest of the Hutaree militia group in Michigan. Up until that post the thread had largely been an argument between various forum members, including the author of the example, regarding whether or not the Hutaree's first and second amendment rights had been violated. The author's argument prior to this had been that the other forum members were being hasty in their condemnation of the treatment of the Hutaree given that the group was accused of conspiring to kill a law enforcement official. Specifically, if the Hutaree had actually been planned to do this, by his reasoning, then it was correct that they were arrested as such things are against the law and as a Constitutionalist he is obligated to support the laws of the land even in the face of anger from other militia members. In defending the rule of law, he is affirming his Mythic Identity as a defender of the Constitution.

Overall the data support the research proposition that the DNA aspects of militia identity would be expressed in the data. It does appear that the respecifying Smelser's concepts of strain, generalized beliefs, precipitating events, and mobilization using the

Mythic/Ideological DNA theory of identity construction is a useful advancement in studying the modern militia. At the same time it is not without limitations, it was mentioned at the beginning of this section that there is more variety in the CONS identity than was predicted. Recall the ways that the first and fourth examples of identity affirmation differed in a temporal sense from the expected ideas of CONS members. The former believed the NWO was the most likely party to attack to U.S. and the content of the latter author's posts differed from expected CONS beliefs as it suggests the rule of law is still in effect and therefore that the government is not yet totally corrupt. Taken together with the temporal variety one can see that there is more variety in the affirmation of CONS identities than was indicated in the literature review or previously predicted by the investigator. Continued investigation indicated that this variation appears throughout the entire M/I system.

In the data there were many references to expected aspects of the Constitutionalist mythic identity system. A breakdown of these references is available below.

Table 2. General Mythic Identity References

Type of Reference	Number of References in the Data
Anti-Government	119
Recruitment	29
Expression of Camaraderie	27
Distrust in Organizations/Conspiracy	27
Concern with Presentation to Public	16
Waco/ Ruby Ridge	12
People 'Waking up'	12
Firearm Ownership	11
Other	75
Total	328

All of the references not coded as 'other' (253) expressed some expected part of the Constitutionalist mythic identity system. Anti-government statements were popular and usually centered on corruption, conspiracy, or incompetence. Almost as popular were

declarations that organizations such as FEMA and Universities could not be trusted or were part of a global conspiracy. Expressed interests in recruiting others, feelings of camaraderie, and concerns with public perception of the militia were also expected and fairly common. References to Waco and Ruby ridge as precipitating events were also not unexpected, though fewer in number than was expected.

Not included in Table 2 were several sets of references to the phrase “We the People” and a concept known as the Three Percent. The former is not especially surprising, given the origin of the phrase. What was surprising is that it did not appear in the ARM data and was utilized in a number of ways:

Hey, if this system was use, and yeah there are some bugs to work out, but it would really help to; 1. Power away from the central overlord in the beltway. 2 Remind the people and the local and state gubermeints that ‘we the people are in charge’ 3. Bring civility and accountability back into law enforcement. (USM data 2)

what do you mean ‘we’..‘we the people’ or ‘we’ the militia? i don’t have a prepared answer for we the people...and i’m not sure my we the people answer is militia material. (USM data 1)

The Three Percent concept, according to forum members, appears to be a reference to the percentage of the population that actively fought in the Revolutionary War. This makes it another appeal to the CONS mythic identity.

There are 75 other instances which may represent sub-components of a more complex CONS identity or perhaps even the presence of sub-identities. References included in the category ‘other’ refer to extraterrestrials, biblical battles (having nothing to do with race), marijuana, and the NWO. Of these the references to the NWO are the least surprising. It is not difficult to believe that CONS groups would readily make use of this concept and incorporate it into their explanation for the various concerns that they have. One author in particular, who was earlier brought up in relation to his frequent citations of Biblical passages, went a step further and combined it with a belief that

extraterrestrials were in part of the NWO conspiracy. By his reasoning, the situation would be rectified at the end of time. Though few other authors approached this forum member’s level of creativity in combing various ideas, the overall variety demonstrated indicates that future work may benefit by accounting for the possibility of permutations in the beliefs of the main identity. It may even be wise to suggest the possibilities of sub-identities.

Research Propositions III, IV

Propositions three and four were successfully evaluated using this data. A general summary of the results is presented in Table 3. Content was coded as a RSP if it was or represented an act which expressed or affirmed some aspect of the M/I system, indicated the repeated performance of some specific activity in a certain way, implied some relief from the concerns of the M/I system, or expressed some combination of all of the above. Interestingly, there were what could be called ‘forum rituals’ present throughout the data—in fact they make up the bulk of evidence supporting propositions related to RSPs.

Table 3. References to Ritual Practices

Type of Ritual	Number of References in data (%)
Forum Rituals	
Signature	809(69.1)
Use of History in Signature	146(12.5)
Posting a Story	111(9.5)
Proof of Dedication	11(.9)
Possible Non-Forum Rituals	58(4.9)
Support for Non-forum Rituals	
Acquiring Gear	15(1.3)
Event Prep.	9(.8)
Weapons Practice	9(.8)
Search for non-internet Groups	3(.2)
Total	1171(100)

It was mentioned above that throughout the course of analysis it became apparent that aside from references to non-internet militia activities there were also practices specific to forum interaction that could be considered RSPs. That is to say forum or internet-specific ritual symbolic practices. The most frequently occurring RSP was the use of a signature at the bottom of posts. A forum signature is different from a normal written signature in form but the function is similar—it is a personal mark which the author uses to represent themselves to anybody reading their post. In this data, these signatures were considered RSPs for several reasons. Chief among them is that fact that such a personal mark is optional. In other words, the forum member must actively decide to take this action. Assuming that the process for creating and using such a signature on these sites is similar to the process used on other sites, then the forum member must take the time to create such a signature and in so doing indicates to the website that they would like it associated with all of their posts. Symbolically, it could be thought of as representing what the owner of the signature would like the rest of the forum members to associate with him or her— it is a presentation done in a deliberate, repetitive way. The second reason signatures were considered an RSP is because the bulk of them were presenting some expected aspect of the CONS identity. This serves the purposes of invoking that group’s identity, expressing a commitment to it, and symbolically showing that the author would like to be considered (or indeed considers themselves to be) a member of the group in question. Below are some examples of these signatures:

“Stand your ground. Don’t Fire unless fired upon, but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here.”-John Parker...commanded the Lexington militia at the Battle of Lexington on April 19, 1775

“Let me say, at the risk of seeming ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love” Ernest ‘Che’ Guevara

Watchmen of Alabama 3% Oath Keepers

“Give me Liberty or Give me something to aim at!”

Of the 809 instances of signature use, it is important to clarify that many of the references are tied to repeated instances of certain prolific authors' signatures. This stands to reason keeping in mind that there were 185 individual authors yet 809 instances of signature use. Regardless, this data provides some indication as to the salience and repetition of this forum ritual. This ritual appears to possess relatively high salience as the author utilizing it must actively choose to do so in the understanding that it will be presented on each of their posts. Although repetition is in dependent on the number of posts the author makes, it seems a fair assumption that the poster wants it repeated at least as many times as they may post; furthermore, it is unlikely that they would join a forum and write a signature without the intention to post regularly. On the audience end of the spectrum, salience is less obvious as the other authors may or may not actually read the signatures of their fellows. Those who produce them seem to hope that at least some of other authors do. In terms of repetition, given the number of signatures in this data it is likely that they often appear throughout the websites and on many different threads—if not actively reading them, the other forum members are regularly exposed to signatures. There are resources associated with this ritual. In order to produce a signature of this type the writer must have knowledge of, or at least access to, information regarding American history, quotations made by Founding Fathers, or the general structure of the CONS mythic identity or ideology.

These signatures use historical quotes 146 times, as seen in the examples above. In this data the historical quotes are from revolutionary war figures, the Founding Fathers, and famous soldiers or politicians. If these signatures are indeed rituals then it follows that such presentations of history are ritual in nature as well. The use of these

specific revolutionary or historical figures speaks to the invocation of the CONS M/I system and its emphasis on a historical identity.

The signatures also had links to other websites in them from time to time. Some of these web-sites were other militia forums, personal blogs, or new sites; others were selling tactical gear or weapons. The need to get information or gear from outside the mainstream also invokes the CONS M/I insofar as it expresses the need for such items and distrust in official sources of information. This lends support to the notion of disidentification put forth by Jetten (2001) and that its consequences are also present in the militia. The investigator is aware of only a few signatures that did not express some aspect of the Constitutionalist Identity. In addition to the signatures there were several less common RSPs as well as another major one that accomplish this form of identity expression throughout the data.

The second major RSP in the data was the posting of a news story. Here, an author posts a news story or personal anecdote that is germane to one of the concerns raised by the M/I system of the forum members. This type of posting occurred 111 times in this data set. Such presentations were considered a ritual symbolic practice. First, all of them follow the same general pattern of presentation. The author gives a summary of the story (sometimes explicitly indicating why it is important) and then will typically post a web link to the story. The content of these stories typically invoke, affirm, or otherwise reinforce the collective mythic identity of the forum members. Additionally, they are often responded to in an affirmative way by other forum members, indicating that they also believe that the story validates the group's concerns. Out of the 111 posts, 85 of them were posted by a particular author who was deeply concerned with a recent A.T.F

gun trafficking scandal. This concern makes sense given the militia's negative perception of the A.T.F.'s role in the Waco standoff. Other news stories revolved around various other examples of corruption, lies told by the media, and the general denial of militia identity. Below is an example of one such post:

"An example of pure propaganda in favor of government tyranny:

The Threat Next Door

<http://abclocal.go.com/wls/story?sec...eam&id=7630423>

A heavily armed revolution in the making? Who is the media fooling? And how about this distortion:

"The Hutaree is not alone. A recent report on hate groups shows that the number of U.S. militia groups like the Hutaree have increased from 42 in 2008 to 127 last year."

So militia groups are hate groups? Nice. I didn't even know that the Hutaree were a "hate group."

The media is owned by the enemies of liberty." (USM data 6, 2010)

This post is a consummate example of the construction described above. Not all of the posts displayed it so clearly, but they typically followed this outline. Expressed in this post are the denial of militia identity (by virtue of being considered hate groups), the Mythic Identity notion of the government being tyrannical and corrupt.

Given that the data for this project consisted of internet forum posts it would be too much to claim that concrete evidence of what might be called 'real-life' rituals was obtained. Even when such activities were described or implied to they could not be directly observed and as such the evidence is only strongly suggestive. With that said, there were 58 references containing references to possible non-forum militia rituals, and an additional 39 supporting references containing information that supports the notion that these rituals actually take place. Throughout these 58 references various kinds of training were mentioned repeatedly, as were recruiting, the study of foundational documents, and (somewhat surprisingly) a series of militia-oriented concerts. Below are some examples of the posts containing evidence of non-internet militia RSPs:

I've read the Constitution numerous times and continue to do so, so I can get a good grasp of it.

We should have a page for that also....a download page where people can d/l copies of the Constitution.

(USM data3)

at the end they can get comiled into a mosaic that will show the militia in a true mosaic. And show who we are by showing many of us, and what comprises a militia outside of guns and close order field drill,

(USM data 5)

Yep. If you want to play a game for 'preparedness', then a war game like airsoft or paintball could be a good training aid. You'd need to wear the gear you plan on using in the event of SHTF, and have airsoft/paintball gun mocked up to look, feel, and act similar to your real weapon. (USM data 6)



3" patches, WAY TO SMALL FOR YOUR SHOULDER!!!

Operating on the assumption that the authors are to be taken at their word, each of these posts suggests the presence of RSPs outside of the forum. The first post's author indicates that he repeatedly reads the Constitution in the hopes of understanding it better. This action is symbolic as it demonstrates his dedication or interest in understanding the 'original internet' of the document. The assertion that the web-site should provide these documents indicates that the author of that post believes that others ought to study these documents or may wish to do so but lack access to them. This post was not the only example of this kind of behavior. As mentioned in a previous section, there were 11 other references present in which several authors agreed that that any prospective forum members should be forced to take a quiz on the Constitution. It was also decided that they ought to have their scores associated with their accounts in such a way as to be available

to other members of the forum. It may be assumed that lower scores would be associated with a lack of dedication to the ideals or identity of the group, with the inverse being true for higher scores.

The second post was located in a thread pertaining to militia public relations. Another author suggested that the militia produce public-friendly videos of themselves in non-militia garb (referred to as 'civvies') in which they explain that the militia is comprised of ordinary people. It was also recommended that they conclude these video presentations by swearing an oath to the Constitution. Though not included in the example, there were many requests and suggestions in that thread pertaining to guidelines for self-presentation. Two specific suggestions were that people interested in making these presentations ought to be wearing certain clothing (as specified above) and be sure not to display any kind of weapons. This suggests that forum members are concerned with being viewed by the public as illegitimate. By performing this kind of presentation ritual it appears they want to be more appealing to non-militia and thereby gain membership and affirm their identity as the recognized protectors of America. The oath is also a ritual, by the same token as the quizzes discussed in the previous paragraph.

Although, both the act of producing these videos and swearing an oath to the Constitution could both be considered non-internet RSPs, the last line of the example post is the most interesting. The author's expressed need to show non-militia members that there is more to the movement than firearms ownership and drill is evidence that militia members participate in drill which, according to the theory, is a way of acting against their concerns and affirming their identities' symbolically.

The third and fourth posts add some weight to this line of reasoning. In the former it appears as though the author has some knowledge of what constitutes an acceptable way to accomplish preparedness training, which implies that he has engaged in such things. If nothing else it indicates that some militia members have at least enough of an interest in such training as to reason out the best ways to engage in it. The manufacture and sale of patches strongly suggests the existence of uniforms and the need to identify one another in some official capacity. This assertion is supported by later posts in thread that picture appearing in which make statements to this effect. This is fairly strong evidence that militia ritual practices are not restricted to the internet.

The posts coded as support for non-forum rituals address three types of content. 15 of them have to do with purchasing different kinds of gear, 9 pertain to preparation for various scenarios, and another 9 have to do with procuring weaponry. These were considered supporting evidence for the suspicion that rituals exist outside of the forum as some of the gear and weapons are quite expensive--\$1800 or more for a coveted type of rifle for example (USM data 1). It seems unlikely that such sums of money would be spent on gear or firearms without the intention to utilize them in the training exercises described above. They may also be status symbols. In both cases they would indicate the presence of an RSP. Training exercises could be thought of as RSPs in the sense that they are described in the literature review—as a means of preparing to defend themselves against their targets of concern without having to draw negative attention to themselves. Taking such training seriously very likely requires the purchase of gear and weapons. These purchases and training would, theoretically, affirm their commitment to this M/I system as well as reinforce its validity for them. Even if the gear and weapons

are merely status symbols, to be effective they would have to be presented to other members. Their symbolic power would likely come from the amount of dedication to these beliefs demonstrated by spending such large sums of money on them.

Overall the data support the research proposition that RSPs serve as a way for the militia members to express and affirm their mythic identities. In the case of signatures, they are often presenting or affirming their commitment to the group's identity and accompanying concerns. The posting of stories accomplishes similar goals. The evidence presented in favor of the existence of non-internet rituals is also reasonably strong, so the data also lends support to the research proposition that these rituals reinforce and affirm their identities as well as symbolically address their concerns.

Research Proposition V

The last research proposition to be checked against these data was concerned with radicalization. It was predicted that the longest standing members of either site (as measured by the duration of their membership) would express discontent with the lack of 'real' action against their target concerns. This could not be tested in an ideal manner, as the temporal aspect of the radicalization notion could only be assessed retroactively. That is to say that rather than being able to see how the content of an author's posts changed over time instead the investigator only evaluated the content of collected posts versus the author's duration of membership. Any post containing a call for action was scrutinized for evidence of frustration or disappointment with the militia activity. Following is an example post from each site:

...If you don't see an opportunity then make one. Hell get on the 'adopt a highway' program and pick up trash in full militia uniform...There is a peace side and a war side of this movement, but neither side does much more than play dressup, myself included. (ARM data 4)

Months and months of BS and nothing done. How much time do you think we have? (USM data 3)

Both of these posts very clearly express frustration with the overall lack of activity that the authors perceive. In the first case the author indicates that regardless of their peace or war emphasis, most militia members are simply playing dress up. It is implied that he regard this activity as ineffectual, as the time militia members spend playing dress up is not time spent pursuing opportunities to take action. The frustration in the second post largely speaks for itself. The overall results for this research proposition are found in the Table 4.

Table 4. Expressions of Frustration and Months of Membership

Site and Author	(# of Expressions)	Duration of Membership (in Months)
ARM		
1	4	19
2	1	19
3	3	15
4	1	2
ARM Average Membership		13.75
USM		
1	1	14
2	1	14
3	1	12
4	1	4
5	4	1
USM Average Membership		7.83
Total	17	11.11

There were only 17 expressions of frustration with the lack of militia activity were present in the data. The average membership of the authors who expressed such frustration was calculated and broken down by web-site. For the frustrated ARM members the average duration of membership was slightly higher than that of the site overall (12.02 months) indicating support for radicalization. However, the opposite is true for the frustrated USM membership, whose average was only 7.83 months as compared to the site's average of 15.72. Given the larger amount of data for the USM it appears that there is little support for the radicalization research proposition.

To further investigate this question the total number of posts each frustrated forum member had (including those outside of this data set) was compared to the average number of posts from the sample population. In every case save two (one for each site) the frustrated author had fewer posts than the sample average. Most of them had far fewer. This suggests that these frustrated members are less active than others. In continuing to investigate this question the investigator searched for instances in which one or several authors attempted to clam or otherwise ‘talk down’ another author. This occurred only on the USM site, for a total of 8 times. The eight posts were authored by five separate authors. The authors who took it upon themselves to talk down an aggravated forum member all had membership durations above the average. Their average duration was 20 months—greater than the 15.72 for the USM sample. For four of the five authors their number of posts was far above the sample average of 345. The last (and author of half of these posts) was slightly below the average.

In short, there was little support for the radicalization research proposition. The overall trend in these data was that authors expressing frustration were less active and had shorter membership durations while authors imploring others to calm down had longer memberships and were more active. Knowing this, it appears that members with higher levels of activity and longer durations of membership may personify the sort of internal social control theorized to be present. Though radicalization was not evaluated in an ideal way, the evidence presented here suggests that the militia, the opportunities for socialization it provides, and its accompanying RSPs, may serve to control the membership rather than to radicalize it. This is in very much in line with the logic presented in the literature review. To thoroughly investigate the radicalization versus

social control question would require a massive time commitment, but the evidence presented here suggests that such a commitment could be a worthwhile endeavor.

Research Proposition a

Because the data contains no CI members the original research proposition (a) that militia members with ties to CI would be more likely to suggest violent action could not be examined. These findings were included here as they are germane to the study, regardless of lack of CI membership there were 95 references to violence in these data. The content of these posts reinforces the notion that the CONS M/I system produces a wider variety of perspectives than previously thought. Table 5 shows the distribution of posts containing content relevant to the CONS militia’s perspective on violent activity.

Table 5. Posts containing Violence

<u>Perspective on Violence</u>	<u>Number of Relevant Posts (%)</u>
Expectation of Violence	46(47.9)
Conditional Support for Violence	27(28.1)
Against Violent Activity	12(12.5)
Support for Violent Activity	9(9.4)
Other	2(2.1)
Total Number of Posts	96(100)

The expectation that there will be violence was by far the most popular perspective in this data. It is important to note that some posts expressing this expectation also contained a reference to one of the other understandings of violence. Generally the expectation was that violence would be directed at militia members by an outside force or that it would be required by the militia to fulfill their duties. The following are examples of content coded under this category:

Once we are on the battlefield, it will be difficult to locate and recognize our militia allies from the dissidents. (ARM data 6)

Others like to believe that the US military will be on our side. They ignore the fact that every time the government stands against the people, it's the military and police with their boots on our face...And i understand that we will have to get bloody if any thing is going to change. (ARM data 4)

eventually they will raid a militia or patriots home and there will be shots fired. Just sayin' (USM data 6)

The last example is by far the simplest. It was written in response to another post detailing the perspectives of the mass media and watchdog groups on militias. Here, the author's implication appears to be that continued media attention to militias will result in police or military action which will be met with violence and that this should be no surprise. Many of the expectation of violence posts were not quite as simple as this one.

The first two posts suggest that the authors believe that a war between the militia and various other factions will occur. This expectation of violence against militia members was a popular theme throughout the data and more or less consistent with the conspiratorial aspects of their ideological system. Usually these other groups are the U.N., the federal government, law enforcement officers, the military, or some communist/fascist invading force. The first post appeared in a thread discussing the design, use, and purchase of arm patches for forum members to purchase and apply to their uniforms. It seems evident from the post that the author believes—or wants the other forum members to perceive that he believes—that it is a worthy endeavor to create these patches so that militia members can identify each other during the coming conflict. So, even if the author does not really expect violence in the future he at least believes that the others do and also expect him to.

The second post strongly suggests that the author does not hold with the perspective that those in the armed forces will 'wake up' en masse and side with the militia, instead the militia will have to engage them in violent conflict. It also appears that

the author does not believe any substantial change can be affected without violence, but does not appear ready to call for it. The distinction between what the author of this post has written and support for violence is that this author does not indicate any positive regard for violence—he simply expects it will be the state of affairs. This is also the case for the author of the third post. Violence is simply the logical outcome should law enforcement raid a militia member or patriot’s house. He does not specify who will fire the shots, though it is possible he expects that the militia member would fire first.

Though the expectation of violence was more prolific by far, the data reflect surprising variation in terms of support for violence or the lack thereof. The suspicion that most references would fall into one of these categories appears to have been incorrect. Instead of clearly indicating one or the other, most authors offered what has been coded as *Conditional Support* for violence. This differed from the expectation of violence in that posts coded here tended enunciate a target for the violence.

no they don’t and level IV wont protect them in my home (ARM data 3)

“I AM ARMED, & HAVE HOSTAGES!!” If they continued to breach.....I open up...These mothers have crossed the line....i aint going out like that. (USM data 2)

When every last possible legal form of redress has been tried, then, and only then will we grab our gear and do something. (USM data 3)

The first two examples, though they are from different sites and by two different authors, were written in response to the similar news stories. In the first case a previous author posted a news story which represented a threat to 4th amendment rights. In short, the accusation was that police now had the authority to search a home without a warrant. The author’s post demonstrates conditional support for violence insofar as he implies that police, if they were to search his home without a warrant, would not be safe even if they were wearing level four body armor. This investigator’s knowledge of body armor is not

sufficient to explain exactly what type of armor this is, but it is assumed that it is supposed to offer substantial protection. There is no indication that harm would come to the officers unless the ‘warrantless’ criteria is met.

In the second case a thread was started about a former marine who was killed by a SWAT team in his Arizona home. At its outset, the thread was filled with various conspiratorial explanations for the circumstances surrounding the death, this quickly changed into a discussion between members as to what they would have done had they been the victim. Again the violence is conditional; in this case it is conditional upon being attacked by a SWAT team. The point of telling the intruding officers that hostages were present, the author of the post would later explain was that if they were just police officers they would be forced to negotiate. If they did not then they were not police or at least not on official business. Thus, if the intruding party did not negotiate the conditions for violent action would be satisfied. The last post is very clearly conditional in its support for violence. Although the phrasing “grab our gear and do something” is somewhat more ambiguous than other references, the post that the author was responding to was urging the use of violence. As such, it stands to reason that violent action is included under the more general category of “doing something.”

There were relatively few posts (12) with content suggesting entirely non-violent means of addressing their concerns. There were even fewer posts (9) advocating unconditional violence. Two remaining posts were coded a category called ‘other.’ They did not specifically indicate an expectation of violence, support (conditional or otherwise), or a lack of support for it. Instead they merely implied the possibility. The few posts advocating unconditional violence possess a few significant characteristics. All

of the posts were from the ARM site, a fact made more interesting by the underrepresentation of ARM posts in this data. It may be that the ARM site membership is slightly more inclined to support violence. Perhaps it is the case that on the USM site such posts were buried under the volume of other activity. It also may be the case that posts advocating unconditional violence were taken down by administrators and were thus excluded from data collection.

Also interesting is that five of these unconditional violence posts were authored by only two members, with the remaining four each having their own individual author. This suggests that at least some of the variety in support for violence occurs at the individual level within a given M/I system. Four posts made mentions of religion such as donning the “armor of God” (ARM data 1) or quoting Psalms and Revelations. Religious references were not expected in the CONS M/I system but may simply be a result of further variation within the group than previous considered as indicated in a previous sections of this project. The following example posts demonstrate, in order, support for violence, a lack of support of violence, and one of the posts coded under ‘other’:

I'd give my left nut to ventilate the 'Blue Helmets.' (ARM data 5)

Are we willing to continue being governed by a government displaying such naked corruption and rank incompetence, or are you fed up with their attacks on your liberty and are now refusing to support them and are actively opposing them whenever possible. I don't mean violently but passively. Make them work to get ever nickel out of you. (USM data 1)

1776 at some point. Tyrants have a habit of pushing until they are pushed back. However, with the financial situation of the U.S. being what it is, the oligarchy will most likely collapse under its own weight. One way or another a reset is likely. (USM data 3)

The first post was authored in response to a thread regarding the invasion of the U.S. by the U.N. Now, this content could be thought of as conditional support for violence, as it implies that the U.N. must invade. An event such as that seems a far cry

from a realistic possibility. However, this thread and the posts associated with it are operating within a ‘when the U.N. invades’ as opposed to the if/then construction generally found in the conditional support for violence. So the content is not conditional, for the author of this post sees the invasion as inevitable and is expressing his enthusiasm regarding the coming conflict and the attending opportunities for ‘ventilation.’

The second example demonstrates a distinct lack of support for the active pursuit of violence, advocating a passive resistance instead. The thread that this post appeared in was primarily concerned with using U.S. land as repayment of debt to the Chinese. For the forum members this indicated that the federal government is in league with global communists. Of the varied reactions, the author of this particular post indicates that he holds many of the same concerns as the other forum members but enunciates support for a passive aggressive approach. Exactly what this resistance would entail is not clear. It may imply civil disobedience.

The last example did not fit into any of the other categories. It does not indicate that the author necessarily expects violence to be performed or will be required to change things. At the same time he does not rule it out either. Again, this data could not be used to analyze the original research proposition but, again, the data suggest that there is more variety within the CONS militia membership than expected. Alternatively it may hint at the possibility that the CI and CONS M/I systems are not as distinct as they are depicted earlier in this paper or in the literature in general. A summary of findings is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Summary

Research Proposition	Support?	Comment
I. Cons Groups will be More Active	Only Suggestive Evidence	Given there was not CI membership in these data this research proposition could not be formally examined
II. Militia members express the DNA aspects of their mythic ideological system.	Yes. Support was found for the presence of Denial, Negation, and Affirmation of identities.	Support was also found for the M/I system as it was generally described in the literature review. However, it appears to have much greater variety than previously considered.
III. Ritualized Symbolic Practices will serve as a means for group members to affirm or express the mythic/ideological systems.	Yes. Support was found that both the forum-specific rituals as well as the possible non-forum rituals serve to reinforce the CONS M/I system.	The presence of internet-specific RSPs came as a surprise. In the future, investigators should develop a better way of accounting for non-internet RSPs.
IV. RSPs will serve as a means for the group members to symbolically address their mythic/ideological concerns.	Partial. The only evidence pertaining to non-internet RSPs was suggestive in nature. It does generally support the research proposition. Internet rituals appear to support this as well.	Again, future research using this theory will need to find a way to better account for non-internet rituals.
V. Long-standing members will express discontent with the lack of 'real' action.	Little. The average duration of membership for frustrated members was only substantially different from the average of the sample for one site.	Comparing the relative number of posts each frustrated author had to the average for the sample indicated that these authors are far less active than others. As a result, they may have undergone less socialization than others.
a. Members with ties to CI will be more likely to suggest violent action.	Not Formally Examined	There was a variety of violent content present in the CONS data used in this study.
b. CI RSPs will have a more violent orientation.	Could not be addressed.	There was no CI membership and therefore no basis for comparison.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

It is a strength of this work that the data collected for it were rich. It stands to reason that future data collected by similar means would also be rich. The findings based on this data largely support this more social psychological respecification of Smelser's theory. The research proposition that the DNA aspects of the M/I system would be present in these data was supported. Support was also found for the propositions that RSPs serve as a means of affirmation or expression of the M/I system and that RSPs are used by these groups to symbolically address their concerns. The research proposition regarding the process of radicalization found little support, which is in line with the general theoretical predications of this project. Granted, this proposition was only tested in a retroactive way but the evidence suggests a future commitment to thoroughly examining it may be worthwhile. These are all key findings and support future applications of the framework used in this study. Although the lack of Christian Identity membership on either site made formally examining proposition b impossible there were still important findings regarding violence in the CONS perspective. Specifically, there is

a variety of perspectives regarding violence in CONS militias, and generally they appear to support conditional application of violence.

The evidence suggests that evaluating Smelser's conditions of strain, generalized beliefs, precipitating events, and mobilization are still relevant to studying the militia and can be evaluated more explicitly using the M/I DNA system. It provides a more nuanced understanding which is preferable to using Smelser's theory in an unmodified state. Indeed, an additional look at the extant literature revealed a book that Smelser wrote in 2007 which, among many other topics, addresses the importance of ideologies to extremist movements. He writes that all such ideologies have the following elements: some aspect of the world is unjust or oppressive, there is some identifiable party held responsible, a vision of the world ought to be, and how believers ought to proceed (p. 87 2007). He continued to add that such ideologies are not automatically internalized (p. 89). One of the primary contributions of this work, utilizing the M/I DNA system, has been to begin integrating a more detailed version of this perspective into his theory. Using SRT, the study has additionally provided a more nuanced frame work for understanding the construction, internalization, and maintenance of the identity associated with such an ideology.

Another contribution of this work to the general study of the militia is the suggestive evidence it provides for the idea of examining Smelser's condition of social control (via internet and non-internet RSPs) from within the movement rather than without. Though only suggestive, the evidence here indicates that this may be useful re-conceptualization for future work to utilize. While the people represented in this study indicate some interest in how they are perceived by non-militia, it does not appear to be

more significant than their concern that their fellows perceive them as ‘true patriots’ and contributors to the movement. The amount of money, time, and energy spent on the forums, the rituals described on them, and the resources required for them indicates that this perception may be of paramount importance.

Although the literature depicts the militia and its members as a significant danger, the findings regarding violence in this study suggest that this may not be the case by and large. This work contributes suggestive evidence that rather than radicalizing its membership, the groups provide an outlet for members to vent their concerns and frustrations with others. The evidence also suggests that the longer people spend in the movement the more dedicated they become to maintaining it and discouraging those who want to take action that would damage the group. The internal social control posited in this paper and the suggestive support for it in the data appears to challenge the assumption or fear that these forums are solely a venue for unconditional radicalization. The approach taken here allows us to peer into the relatively informal communication between militia members, discover more about their collective identity, and pursue an understanding of such groups that may be otherwise unattainable.

Richness of data and theoretical contributions aside, any future research using this theory or data should improve upon the shortcomings of this project. There may be a way to get more representative samples both in terms of demographics and the militia population at large. This would provide more generalizable results. Future work might consider employing more stringent exclusion criteria as this may reduce the complexity of future data. The loss of this complexity may simplify analysis enough to make up for the lack or richness. Another improvement future work should consider is developing a

better way to record and compare the relative activity levels of forum members. This would enable more rigorous investigation of the socialization processes at work.

It may also be useful for future projects to find better evidence for non-internet based ritual behaviors, such that the SRT component of the theory can be subjected to more stringent analysis. The quality of such evidence in this study was sufficient, but may have been lacking somewhat as a result of the sampling procedure. It may also be the case that future investigators should find a safe way to directly observe or even participate in such activities.

It would also be advisable that future efforts take better account of possible variation in the identities and regard them as more dynamic and fluid than as a simple set of discrete groups. Another possible direction for future work could be to hone in on only one mythic identity and explore it in more depth. Other work should also investigate the possibility of sub-identities. Using a greater number of web-sites or perhaps even becoming a member of them may assist in this endeavor and should be considered in the future. Membership to a forum would open the door for running more specific research propositions, getting better demographic information, and perhaps learning more about the rituals present in these groups.

Given the history of militia groups thus far it does not appear that these groups will disappear. This, in conjunction with the increasing amount of attention being paid to them by sociologists and the successful application of the theory posited in this paper may lead to many of the improvements detailed above and others yet unimagined.

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Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, May 10, 2011
IRB Application No AS1153
Proposal Title: Missing Links: A New Perspective on the Militia Movement in the United States

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 5/9/2012

Principal Investigator(s):

Daniel Thomas Petrin 218 1/2 N. Husband #1 Stillwater, OK 74075	David Knottnerus 413 Murray Stillwater, OK 74078
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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

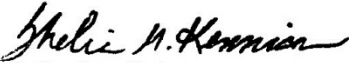
The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Daniel Thomas Petrin

Candidate for the Degree of

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Thesis: MISSING LINKS: AN EXAMINATION OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND RITUAL IN THE AMERICAN MILITIA MOVEMENT

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Experience:

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Delivered a Lecture on School Shooters for an Undergraduate
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Institution: Oklahoma State University

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Title of Study: MISSING LINKS: AN EXAMINATION OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY
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Pages in Study: 92

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: Sociology

Scope and Method of Study: Qualitative Analysis of Militia Forum Members' internet postings over the course of one month in a search for empirical evidence support a new theory of collective identity construction, rituals, and behavior. The theory expands Niel Smelser's theory of collective behavior by adding a mythic/ideological identity system that includes the denial, negation, and affirmation of identities. The socialization into this identity system and its maintenance were investigated using Structural Ritualization Theory.

Findings and Conclusions: Support was found for all aspects of new theory. Evidence indicated the presence of the mythic/ideological systems and its DNA components Evidence was also found indicating the existence of Symbolic Ritual Practices that serve to socialize members into the identity and maintain it.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. David Knottnerus
