

Survival of the Preppers: An Exploration into the Culture of Prepping

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate School
At the University of Missouri

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2017

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SURVIVAL OF THE PREPPERS: AN EXPLORATION INTO THE CULTURE OF
PREPPING

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Doctor of Philosophy

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the result of the collective efforts of many people. I am thankful for the preppers who shared their candid thoughts, perspectives and experiences with me. This research would have been impossible without their insights and I am indebted to them.

There are several other people who have been with me along the way and without them, this dissertation would have been impossible. I am incredibly grateful for the patience and steadfast encouragement of my advisor Dr. Mary Grigsby. Her curiosity about this culture and appreciation for my project was indispensable to me. Her conscientious edits and insightful comments were essential in shaping this work. I am forever grateful for the mentorship and friendship she has given me throughout my journey in graduate school. I would not be here today without her unwavering support.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Jere Giles, Dr. Stephen Jeanetta and Dr. Rebecca Scott. They have all been instrumental in the completion of this dissertation. I appreciate your enthusiasm and contributions you have offered throughout this process.

Beyond my informants and committee members, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues in the department of Rural Sociology. All of those conversations about being prepared and their encouragement to keep going throughout this demanding process has helped me along the way. I also want to thank my friends and family members who listened to me talk about my research

and helped me locate respondents. Heartfelt thanks to my mom and dad for supporting me throughout this long education. Their love and belief in my abilities was a critical element to my success. Lastly, I want to thank my husband Brandon for his steadfast love, encouragement and confidence in me. Without his support, none of what I have accomplished would have been possible. I thank him for helping me realizing my potential and being by my side along in this adventure.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an exploration of the culture of prepping in the Midwest. The research aims to provide a better understanding of why people engage in prepping and how they go about doing so. Thirteen preppers were interviewed during 2014 - 2016. Drawing upon Swidler's (1986) definition of the cultural toolkit, the research offers an insight into how preppers construct a unique prepper cultural toolkit aimed at meeting their needs and solving a variety of problems in their lives. Why people become preppers and how preppers put together a set of ideas and practices that help them meet their perceived needs are outlined. How they deal with feelings of insecurity and what they do to increase their chances of survival are also explored. The data revealed the different types of practices that preppers engage in, the range of values, beliefs and behaviors and also how preppers drew symbolic boundaries. The findings show that preppers are retreating to the private sphere to find solutions to their individual concerns and are averse to relying on public entities or institutions to meet their needs.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Living in contemporary times can be riddled with anxiety and fears concerning how the world as we currently know it may change in unpredictable and uncontrollable ways or may even come to an end. Fears of the apocalypse have been a staple in the human experience and different versions of doomsday have circulated through society throughout time. The book of Revelations in The Bible has a vivid description of the end of times. There are also countless representations of doomsday scenarios to be found in popular culture. Zombie movies and television shows are ever present in Hollywood, post-apocalyptic dystopian literature like *The Road* (McCarthy, 2006) and *The Hunger Games* series (Collins, 2008) have both been best-sellers. Television shows about prepping and survivalism, like *Doomsday Preppers*, have been some of the highest rated shows for the National Geographic Channel. (Zimmer, 2012)

Recent events which took place in the public sphere such as the American economic recession in 2008 and the election of President Barak Obama, the Fukushima Nuclear Reactor disaster in 2011 and natural disasters such as Hurricane Sandy in 2012 stirred up anxieties and fears for many Americans. In light of these events, I sought to better understand prepping through the eyes of my respondents. Were they engaging in a hobby or was it something more than that? Was prepping a particular pattern of behaviors that responded to what they perceived to be real and imminent threats?

In the United States efforts to be prepared for hardships extend back at least to the dawn of the nuclear age post-World War II. During the 1950's, under the threat of nuclear attack many suburban Americans felt compelled to take action to protect themselves by constructing fallout shelters and underground bunkers in their backyards. Dreading an atomic bomb motivated everyday citizens to make efforts to increase the odds of survival. Many of them collected provisions, stockpiled goods, and made plans to aid in the civil defense of the nation in the private sphere. (McEnaney, 2000; Rose, 2001; Garrison, 2006; Szasz, 2007) These actions of building an underground bunker and outfitting it to protect themselves if the nation ever fell under attack are in some ways akin to the practices in which modern preppers engage. Still, there is little sociological research or knowledge specifically on contemporary preppers, an area of knowledge this dissertation seeks to contribute to extending.

This study identifies themes that are “recurrent and distinctive features of participants’ accounts, characterizing particular perceptions and or experiences” (King and Horrocks, 2010, p.150) which were relevant to understanding the motivations, practices and world-views of preppers. These themes emerged from the analysis of the data. This research provides a thematic analysis about the culture of prepping and contributes to a small, but growing body of sociological literature on prepping and the understandings of people who identify as preppers. Going into the study I knew that some stigmatized preppers for the practices in which they engaged and I believed moving beyond that stigma was essential to

gaining a deeper understanding regarding what preppers believed about the world and how those beliefs influenced them.

Sociologists have conducted studies on survivalism (Peterson, 1984; Mitchell, 2002) but there remains to be a general lack of sociological research and knowledge about those who identify as preppers in contemporary society. In *Dancing at Armageddon* Richard G. Mitchell (2002) defines survivalism as being “centered on the continuing task of constructing ‘what if’ scenarios in which survival preparations will be at once necessary or sufficient.” (Mitchell, 2002, p.13) While survivalists construct scenarios about the looming disasters and hinge their plans on what-ifs, similar to what preppers are doing, the degree to which survivalists want to withdraw from society is greater than those who identify as preppers.

It has been argued that survivalism and prepping are the same thing and that preppers are really doing “survivalism lite” (Martin, 2000) and prepping is really “third wave survivalism.” (Bennett, 2009). It may be true that some people who adopt prepping are survivalists, but the people in this study identified as preppers and distained being survivalists. Preppers have distinguished themselves from survivalists in an attempt to “resist the stigma imposed by a dominant group” (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock, 1996, p. 141). Survivalists carry a greater stigma in the generalized culture in the view of respondents and it has been linked to political extremists and militia members like Timothy McVeigh, David Koresh and Ted Kaczynski. (Lamy, 2013) The preppers in this study wanted to distance themselves from the stigmatized survivalist identity and

identified as preppers as a way to claim an identity that was tied to self-sufficiency and self-reliance within the context of the generalized culture.

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to explore the culture of prepping. I investigated the experiences and ideas of individuals who identified themselves as preppers in the Midwest. The extent to which preppers define what they are doing as disaster preparedness was explored. The rationale for this study is to understand what preppers say about why they adopt prepping and those individuals make meaning of their reasons for doing so. What they say about why they prep offers a lens through which to see the generalized culture from their vantage point. I wanted to better understand why certain people fixate on being prepared and go to great lengths to increase levels of personal security when others do not have similar concerns and through this study I was able to gain a much better understanding of their motivations which include concerns about future disasters and also a reaction to feeling that structural supports are corroding.

I sought to learn what types of consumer goods constitute their preparations and how their beliefs informed their consumption practices. The study looks at the various other practices that preppers adopted to increase their chances of survival. It evaluates the different ways they are doing prepping identity work and how values contribute to their cultural repertoires, or toolkits “from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action” (Swidler, 1986, p. 277). The study explored how preppers constructed belonging and boundaries and how they delimited their primary commitments to others.

Overall, this research was designed to examine how preppers interpret the broader context in which this culture exists while seeking a better understanding regarding how preppers construct meaning making about their prepping activities. The real reason to understand them is because theirs is one response of many to cultural and social changes that are taking place. Thiers is a particular response to broad social changes that seek to gain control in the private sphere. Understanding prepper practices is potentially of value because they could have an impact on or make a contribution to a post-disaster society. We can learn from them ways to manage life after a catastrophe.

I initiated the study at the beginning of the summer in 2014 and conducted my last interview during the early months of 2016. Using snowball sampling, I compiled a sample of 13 individuals who agreed to be interviewed about prepping. In order to find respondents, I hung recruitment fliers in local places that sold firearms and sporting goods, local grocery stores and restaurants and any other public bulletin board I found. Three respondents were found through these recruitment fliers. I also put out a call for respondents on Facebook groups that focused on preparedness and self-sufficiency in the Midwest. I was able to locate five respondents using this recruitment method. The remaining five respondents were individuals who were located using snowball sampling and were referred to me from people already in mine or my respondents' social networks.

The data collection process incorporated in-depth interviews and participant observation with people who self-identify as preppers which was an

effort to better understand the cultural landscape of prepping that takes place in the Midwest. I attended two regional expos during my fieldwork. The Kansas Prepper Expo in Holton, Kansas drew in a crowd of around 200 people and the Franklin County Gun Show and Preparedness Expo in Washington, Missouri which also had around 200 people in attendance. The largest expo that I attended was the National Prepper Expo which was held in Tulsa, Oklahoma and had over 500 people in attendance over the weekend.

Though there are groups who do prepping collectively, I focused on studying individuals who are prepping independently. The respondents were located in the middle region of the United States. Respondents were from Missouri, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, and Wisconsin. This area experiences tornadic activity, ice storms, snow and flooding. These different types of weather events have been used to justify prepping as a reasonable activity to engage in for many of the respondents in this study. The respondents were all white Americans who come from families which have been in the country for generations. Five of them were located in rural areas, three were located in an urban area and the remaining five lived in a suburban setting. Ten respondents had some sort of college degree and four of them had military experience. There were five females and eight males. Ten of them were employed full time. One male was currently in college. One female was self-employed. One male was retired. See Appendix A for table displaying the demographics of the sample.

This study extends and refines knowledge of preppers' ideas and practices and how they make meaning of their prepping activities. No studies that

examine prepping through the eyes of preppers themselves had previously been undertaken.

There have been a few recent studies, but overall there was a gap in the literature pertaining to prepping. Aldousari (2015) examined the consumer behavior of preppers by analyzing the discussion posts in a popular prepper forum and the television show *Doomsday Preppers* and found that terror management theory cannot be used to predict consumer behavior of preppers. Imel-Harford (2013) interviewed preppers from an online forum to evaluate the evolution of the social movement of prepping and found that law-enforcement personnel needed to understand the subtle distinctions between survivalists and preppers in order to engage with them peacefully and effectively. Gonowon (2011) evaluated modern survivalists to understand how psychologists can understand them better. She interviewed four respondents and concluded that there was no need to diagnose them pathologically and their behavior is a coping mechanism. In contrast to these existing studies, my research is concerned with understanding how preppers make meaning of motivations, practices and why they are important. Prepping has also been an interest in recent popular media with a variety of articles investigating the characteristics of those who identify as preppers and why they do it (Bennett, 2009; Feuer, 2013; McGrath, 2017; O'Brien, 2012; Osnos, 2017).

I was drawn to prepping as an academic study because I had experience in feeling the need to be more self-sufficient in case of emergencies and wanted to use my personal experiences and interests in learning more about prepping.

Growing up in South Florida conditioned me to worry about a pending disaster, particularly hurricanes. As a sociologist, I was drawn to studying preppers because they represent a type of response to current social and cultural conditions. Also, they were focused on the types of concerns that I had some experience with and I connected to their feelings of insecurity. I wanted to know if those who called themselves preppers had comparable experiences or other types of reasons in their past that they drew upon in motivating them to prep.

This dissertation sought to understand prepping through the eyes of my respondents instead of simply using a generalized cultural lens to peer into it. It is a distinct study because it relied on in-depth interviews and participant observation with people across the Midwest using grounded theory methodology to gain a deeper understanding about what prepping means to these people as individuals. It is different from the studies (Gonowon, 2011; Imel-Hartford, 2013; Aldousari, 2015) that analyzed prepping because it relies on the explanations of their motivations and practices through the eyes of those committed to prepping unlike other studies that relied on a content analysis of message boards, television shows related to prepping and an empirical phenomenology of four individuals. Relying on the preppers own explanations of the culture provided me a rich and deep understanding of why and how people prep and I gained an understanding about this group which is distinct from the dominant culture.

Chapter 2, “Theory, Methods and Literature Review” describes the theory and methods employed in the research and provides literature reviews. Literature that is key to the analysis of culture, identity work, and symbolic boundaries is

included. A review of the existing scholarly literature on prepping and popular culture about prepping culture is also provided.

Chapter 3, “Prevention Rather than Reaction: Practices of Prepping” discusses the various types of practices preppers engage in. Preppers in this study use these practices as a way to build feelings of security in a world they perceive as unsettled and insecure. They also derive a sense of pleasure from engaging in these practices and use them as a way to enact the prepper identity. The chapter provides a detailed look into these practices and describes how preppers make meaning of these practices which include stockpiling provisions, defense tactics, acquiring knowledge related to being prepared and taking certain types of responsibilities. The different types of barriers to prepping are presented through the eyes of the preppers.

Chapter 4, “Makers not Takers: Prepper Worthy Identity Work” expands upon the values and beliefs and material concerns of preppers in this study. It examines the different ways preppers construct symbolic meanings and how these meanings convey the composition of prepper culture. The chapter will examine how preppers construct ideas about the world around them and what they do in order to feel more secure. It also examines the different kinds of motivations, which aren’t linked to past experiences but to economic insecurities, which they draw upon to engage in the constellation of behaviors linked to prepping.

Chapter 5, “You Can’t Feed Everyone: Boundaries and Belonging” discusses the ways in which preppers construct symbolic boundaries between

themselves and those they deem unworthy of their protection. The chapter also examines how preppers talk about community and who belongs in their self-constructed community. The emphasis and form of boundary work of respondents provided insight into their assumptions about the nature of human nature and reality. It also considers how a worthy identity is constructed through being a prepper and what is involved in this type of identity work. Popular culture depictions of prepping are analyzed through the eyes of the preppers and a discussion about how they would like to be represented is included.

Chapter 6, "Feeling Safe in this World": Retreating to the Private Sphere summarizes the themes and findings discussed in the earlier chapters locating them within the broader contemporary cultural context playing a role in shaping them. This chapter locates prepping as having some of the characteristics of lifestyle movements (Haenfler et al., 2012). At the same time, preppers in the study are found to diverge from behaviors and values, such as understanding that their individual action will contribute to a collective stride toward social change and viewing their personal identity as contributing to social change which are features associated with lifestyle movement participants. Prepping is found to be loosely bounded cultural movement (Neitz, 1994, p. 127). The form of the cultural movement of prepping is outlined by reviewing data on the extent to which and how respondents established group boundaries; acted as collective and/or individual agents and/or were carriers of patterned practices, beliefs and values (Grigsby 2004:9). Swidler's understanding of culture as a tool kit served as a resource in tracking the common and diverging patterns in cultural

repertoires and tool kits constructed by preppers. Another feature of prepping that is significant is consistent with Schwalbe's (1996) findings about the mythopoetic men's movement which he defined as a cultural movement. Preppers in this study "were not centrally coordinated, had no official leaders, did not proselytize for new members, imposed no doctrinal tests on participants and [their effort] was not aimed at changing policy" (Schwalbe, 1996, p. 5). They were not centrally concerned with reforming society but with changing themselves (Schwalbe, 1996, p.6) so that they could be self-sufficient in the event of need. Respondents did not organize collectively or seek to engage in collective action and they didn't view identity as a site of social change. They are concerned with their individual coping responses in the face of cultural changes. The political discourse that constructs the current culture as being in crisis influences their motivations to prep. The culture that they are constructing integrates the notion that these are unsettled times (Swidler, 1986) and they tend to draw from firmly rooted ideologies as Swidler (1986, p.278-80) theorized is a likely cultural response during periods perceived to be unsettled. While they were often influenced to engage in prepping as individuals in the private sphere of home and family by public political discourse that found the current cultural conditions unsettled they were not interested in engaging in formal organizations, politics, or other forms of public collective action. The conclusion explains how prepping is an individualistic, private response to feelings of insecurity that preppers are experiencing and offers an insight into the lessons we can learn from the people engaged in prepping

Chapter 2: Theory, Methods and Literature Review

This chapter describes the theory and methods used in the research and provides a literature review. It outlines four literatures that contribute to the theoretical and methodological approaches used and helped elaborate and extend understandings which emerged from data analyzed. The chapter begins with a discussion of grounded theory which formed the theoretical foundation for the research. Grounded theory supported my role as the researcher and enabled me to capture the emergent meanings found in the interview data. This chapter then outlines the methods used to identify people who claim to be engaged in prepping and how their ideas about prepping were captured and how they constructed meaning in regard to their practices. Existing literature that assisted in extending or refining already known features of preppers was elaborated against emergent themes when possible. Limitations of the existing literature on prepping curtailed the extent to which this process was employed. Other related literature that either theoretically or conceptually helped in understanding data more fully was drawn upon.

Methods

The research design of this qualitative study followed a grounded theory strategy based on my interest in studying why individuals engage in prepping and how they do so (Creswell, 1998). Grounded theory aims through inductive processes of data analysis to identify emergent patterns and produce observations and interpretations. Analytical induction is employed in data analysis and the constant comparative methods associated with grounded theory

are used. Grounded theorists attempt to approach data with an openness to gaining an understanding which emerges from the data rather than being guided by preexisting theoretical viewpoints. The goal is to build understandings and explanations in the form of concepts and small theories coming out of the data analysis process. Grounded theory guided this research and a collection of themes related to respondents' ideas, motivations and practices emerged in relation to concepts they introduced as important to them as preppers (Pascale, 2010).

The unit of analysis that I studied are people who identify themselves as preppers. Data collection proceeded through the process of identifying a sample of people who claimed to be preppers or interested in living self-reliant lives.

Reflexivity is a key component of grounded theory research. Charmaz (2006) recognizes that best practices for constructivist grounded theories are to include reflexivity as a strategic element of the research design. I recognize that my childhood spent in South Florida where I grew up preparing for hurricanes every summer made me sensitive to the lived experiences of the respondents in my study. I also wanted to explore the social locations of both myself and my respondents and how they influenced prepping.

Ontologically, I acknowledge that there are multiple realities that exist both for myself and my participants. I attempted to discover the various viewpoints found within each theme and describe the different outlooks held by my respondents (Creswell, 1998). Epistemologically, I learned about prepper culture by immersing myself in it whenever possible. I also gained knowledge about their

practices and belief-systems through in-depth interviews and interactions with preppers at expos and conventions.

My epistemological stance has foundations in constructivism and standpoint feminism. Feminist scholarship posits that studying marginalized or oppressed group can contribute to a more objective view of society and supports the idea of using the self as an instrument of data collection which allows us to locate ourselves within the work to collect data on what we hear, feel, see or experience. Standpoint feminist epistemology asserts that my position as a stranger or as an outsider within afforded me a privileged view into this seemingly male dominated and marginalized culture (Harding, 2004; Smith, 1998; Collins, 2002). This epistemological stance also suggests that reflexivity is a valuable tool in feminist research. Being that feminist scholarship seeks to understand a subjective understanding of the work and strives to honor situated knowledges and the standpoints of respondents, I sought to discover the ways in which social meanings are constructed within prepper culture. I considered how gender, social status, race/ethnicity and geographic location within the Midwest might act as fundamental ways in shaping the lives of those who identify as preppers. I also remained open to the possibility that other emergent categories of cultural location might be significant. Locating myself as a feminist allowed for me to look for the differentials of power while documenting and interpreting the ways that race, class and gender intersected and acted as a determining factor in the lives of preppers.

Sampling

I recruited a homogeneous sample of individuals through snowball sampling. I initially intended to construct a sample of self-identified preppers, but once I entered the field I found that people engaged in the activities of prepping defined themselves in a multitude of ways and some used different terms besides “prepper” to describe themselves and all agreed that the practices and motivations that they were concerned with were consistent with how prepping is understood culturally. Self-sufficient, self-reliant and homesteader were some of the terms used. In the end, I was able to gather a sample of 13 individuals ranging in age from 20 to over 60. These respondents lived in the Midwest and described patterns of behavior and motivations consistent with prepping.

I approached this purposive sampling strategy by designing a purposive sampling frame that included sampling from men and women, different ages, and different types of locations which drew in people from Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, Wisconsin and Illinois. I recruited respondents by hanging flyers locally at the army surplus store and gun ranges in town. I also hung flyers in the local grocery stores, restaurants, cafes, and any other place that had a community bulletin board. All of these efforts resulted in three respondents. I spoke about my research project to anyone who would listen with the hopes that someone would know somebody who prepped. I was able to gain two respondents from a friend recommending someone to me. I joined prepping message boards and wrote a short recruitment post on both the Missouri Preppers and Midwest Preppers Facebook pages which resulted in five respondents. I asked those respondents

to recommend people they knew and I gained three respondents using the snowball sampling technique. This sample of 13 preppers is not meant to be generalizable to the overall population, but is meant to accurately interpret the range of cultural ideas and practices of preppers in the Midwest as these individuals experience it as best as possible, considering the limitations.

The primary points of data were collected through semi-structured open ended interviews where I acted as the instrument of research. In some cases, face-to-face interviews were unable to be conducted due to distance. Six of the interviews were conducted over the phone and one was conducted using Skype. The other six were conducted face-to-face. I recorded all of these interviews on a digital voice recorder and transcribed them verbatim in an effort to achieve the most accurate and unbiased representation of the respondents as possible. I used pseudonyms to protect the identities of the respondents and I also stored the digital recordings, transcriptions and field notes on a password protected computer in a locked office to which I was the only one who had access. Consent was gained verbally for the phone interviews and those that I conducted in person allowed me to gain consent through a written consent form.

I also conducted participant observation through attending the National Prepper Expo which took place on April 5th and 6th, 2014 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I also attended the Franklin County Gun Show and Preparedness Expo on May 4th, 2014 in Washington, Missouri. I observed the interactions between preppers, perused the various items for consumption that were for sale and attended several of the informative sessions which helped familiarize myself better with

prepper culture. Though the expo in Tulsa was a national event which drew in preppers from all over the country, it took place in the Midwest thus drawing a good percentage of people from the Midwest to the event. The expo was full of people who were also attending the gun show taking place in the adjacent hall at the fairgrounds. It appeared that most of the attendees to the prepping expo were spillover from the gun show. The classes were informative and helped me learn more about the particular ideologies expressed by the participants.

I practiced reflexivity throughout the research. I was drawn to the topic of prepping because I had experienced natural disasters growing up in Florida and I felt that this was an emerging cultural response to concerns about surviving these kinds of events. Every summer at the start of the hurricane season, we would get our free tracker maps from the local grocery store and look over the remaining supplies from last year. We would replace batteries in the flashlights and replenish the stores of bottled water and canned food. We would check the condition of our boards which we placed over windows to make sure they were undamaged. The year we got hurricane shutters on the windows was a good year! This constant looming threat instilled in me the belief that it is better to be prepared than to be a victim of a catastrophe.

Hurricane Andrew came through in 1992 and devastated a majority of Dade County. The night the hurricane made landfall was absolutely terrifying. The days before that, the news was filled with warnings and advice for those who were staying put. Many were advised to evacuate. Those who stayed hunkered down for what was to be a horrifying night. Around 3 a.m. the power went out and

as I laid in my room that was rendered completely black by the plywood on the windows, I could hear the howls of the 100 mile per hour wind raising a fury outside. I went to lie down in my parents' room and they had the radio on. As the hurricane moved onto land and wreaked havoc, people called into to the radio station looking for advice. Brian Norcross, our local weatherman, was fielding calls from terrified Floridians and he did his best to keep us all calm and get us through this storm. As I reflect back upon this night, I remember feeling panicked and out of control even though we had done our best to prepare for this storm. But our fate was out of our hands and up to Mother Nature now. No one predicted that Andrew was going to be so powerful or so destructive. South Florida spent years recovering from that particular storm and that experience was critical in my self-development and influenced me to be sensitive to others who have been through similar events.

Through the practice of memo writing I tracked my reactions, feelings, ideas and new insights as I analyzed the transcriptions and field notes. Birks and Mills (2011) acknowledge that taking a systematic approach to reflexive memo writing means attending to this task regularly and working out a way to build upon and learn from your previous efforts. I often listened to interviews while returning from conducting them. I transcribed the interviews as quickly as possible after conducting them. I reviewed field notes and analyzed them immediately.

As the interviews proceeded, I reflected on the data to determine emerging themes and to evaluate my subjective position as the researcher. I am white, educated and female and that during my field work I reflected on my

intersectional position relative to my respondents. This was something that I reflected upon and self-consciously worked on remaining open to my respondents to be able to truly understand how they made meaning about what they were doing. I established reciprocity through using an open-ended interview style which allowed the participants to guide the conversation in directions they decided and gave me space to probe into responses that were interesting and illuminating but outside of the bounds provided by interview schedule. I scheduled interviews at my participant's convenience and was very open to revealing information about myself in the context of prepping which helped establish trust in the interaction between the participant and myself.

The data analysis proceeded from standards of grounded theory. Saturation was reached when new data provided no fresh insights (Charmaz, 2006). I read and reread the transcripts multiple times, and analyzed the data to create the initial literal categories used the participant's own words (Hesse-Biber, 2007). These initial codes stayed true to the main questions in the study. From there, I moved to focus coding which allowed me to use the "most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2006). This process allowed for a deeper analysis based on comparison of answers from respondents. As analysis progressed, existing literature on preppers and survivalists were elaborated against emerging findings. Survivalist literature was included because there was so little literature specific to preppers and some of the literature conflated prepping with survivalism. Through focused coding, I developed themes to interpret the culture of prepping.

Literature Review

The literature review for this study aims to identify the literature that may be relevant in helping explain the themes which emerged from the data. The review of literature prior to starting the research, informed me of what scholarly work had been written about prepping specifically and about topics which were potentially related or relevant, such as work on survivalists. Literature related to culture, symbolic boundaries and individual and collective identity work were used when they helped explain the findings.

Prepper Studies

A systematic literature review seeking scholarly literature on preppers was conducted. The literature review provided limited results and displayed a clear need for more academic research about the subject. No sociological literature specifically on prepping was identified. Some scholarly literature on prepping or related topics were identified as were several non-scholarly works specifically on prepping.

There have been sociological studies done on the survivalist movement which can be considered the predecessor of prepping. Richard G. Mitchell conducted an ethnographic study of the survivalism movement titled *Dancing at Armageddon* (Mitchell, 2002). Survivalism can be described as a specific reaction or response to a perceived external threat, whether it be impending ecological collapse or a rise in social disorder. Mitchell's lived ethnography sought to report on the lives of survivalists in a way that he calls full and fair. Peterson (1985) conducted a study based on participant observation into the

strategies and preparations used by survivalists, which he argues is a deviant movement. He found that survivalists exist on a continuum based on their levels of commitment and that they adopt different strategies on the macro and micro level.

Kabel and Chmidling (2014) working in the anthropology of health analyzed discussion board posts on popular prepping and survivalism blogs to determine how the prepper and survivalist identity impacts health related decisions and how online communities can be used in the identity building process. They found that preppers were empowered by their prepper identity and that reducing risks related to health are of interest to preppers.

Recently, there has been a budding academic interest which is displayed by three dissertations. Prepping consumption practices are explored by Aldousari (2015), a marketing researcher, whose primary interest was in assessing how perceived threat plays a role in consumer behavior. Gaining a better understanding of prepping as a social movement to inform law enforcement was the focus of business administration Ph.D. Imel-Hartford's (2013) dissertation. Using empirical phenomenology, Gonowon (2011) conducted four interviews with people she ultimately chose to call "modern survivalists" which she defined as people "having regular jobs, live in cities or suburbs, and enjoy the modern conveniences and comforts that other types of survivalists do not" (Gonowon, 2011, p. 1). In her keywords she included preparedness .Her definition was not specific to the type of survivalism that is described in much of the literature. This dissertation will add to the scholarly sociological literature which focuses on

preppers and adds a perspective that is lacking by offering an understanding of why and how respondents engage in prepping from their viewpoint.

Non-peer reviewed resources about prepping were identified and included (Bennett, 2009; Feuer, 2013; McGrath, 2017; O'Brien, 2012; Osnos, 2017; Zimmer; 2012). In an early article about prepping, Bennet (2009) describes preppers as regular people who are fearful about the future and are trying to avoid the stereotypes attached to the survivalist label. She states that prepping emerged largely in response to Y2K ¹and she describes it as soft in comparison to hard-core survivalism. She explains that prepping is seen as a reaction to the stresses of modern life and that preppers are all about self-reliance. Feuer (2013) offers a look into prepping in New York City and discusses the role that every day, ordinary people have in emergency preparedness and how having supplies on hand is a rational response to an array of insecurities that people experience. McGrath (2017), playing on the popularity of *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* (Kondo, 2014), a book focused on organizing and disposing of consumerist items in order to feel free and happy, explains how prepping can be therapeutic. The bug-out bag he created, he observes, offers him a way to organize his anxiety and preparing for disasters through the act of putting together a bug out bag is a way to soothe feelings of dread. His general tone is one that equates

¹ Y2K was the projected problem that all computers would experience a bug at the beginning of the year 2000. Many feared the consequences of this bug and began prepping for it.

concerns of preppers with concerns of those for whom tidying up is emotionally therapeutic.

O'Brien (2012) explains that the preparedness industry is growing and thriving and that people concerned with self-reliance are drawn to expos which showcase techniques and different vendors who sell products for prepping.

Osnos (2017) investigated the world of prepping for the highly affluent and evaluated the ways in which the wealthy are taking steps to protect themselves.

Zimmer (2012) described the jargon used by preppers to express a variety of ideas and practices they adopted. He wrote at a moment important for preppers when the Mayan calendar predicted an apocalypse. He defines the variety of acronyms and slang which constitute the prepper lexicon.

Culture

Using the concept of “cultural repertoires” while examining the practices of preppers led to a greater understanding of how they put together their “cultural toolkit” (Swidler, 1986). A cultural repertoire can be thought of as the ways in which individuals construct meaning of their worlds. These repertoires are composed of various habits, worldviews, ideas, routines, values and practices. How individuals come to make sense of their actions through the analysis of cultural repertoires helps us understand why their particular response to situations in their lives is a very different response from others who find themselves in similar situations (Lamont, 2000; Swidler, 1986). Preppers draw from a broad set of values, ideas and practices to construct a prepper repertoire

that is complex, multifaceted and dependent on the cultural context in which they exist.

Identity work and symbolic boundaries

Individual and collective identity work through the use of symbolic material in the forms of ideas, practices and boundary work are potentially important in understanding preppers. Some sources available for elaboration of data to understand how preppers make meaning of what they are doing and their identity work includes literature on symbolic boundaries, collective and individual identity work and worthy or moral identity construction.

The construction of symbolic boundaries was of interest for this study considering that those constructing individual and collective identity are often involved in defining cultural boundaries of in-group and out-group as part of their identity work. Using this concept allowed a greater understanding of how preppers make sense of themselves, their relationships with other people and their place in the greater social structure. "Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices and even time and space. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality" (Lamont & Molnar, 2002, p. 168). Lamont explored the ways in which white and Black working class men established identities in contrast to one another in terms of the cultural values they believed they possessed in comparison to the other group.

The study of symbolic boundaries allows us a better understanding of the ways in which people segment themselves into categories of "us" and "them"

through the process of identity work. Lamont's (2000) comparative analysis of working-class French and American men explores their methods of constructing their identity through the creation of symbolic boundaries drawn between themselves and others in their communities. She interviewed working class men to understand how they rank others in relation to themselves and discovers that morality is at the center of how the men compare themselves to and categorize others. "Morality is the structuring principle in the worldviews of American workers, black and white. Through it, they define who they are and, perhaps more important, who they are not." (Lamont, 2000, p. 51)

White American men place a high value on "disciplined selves"; those who are responsible, dependable and work hard. A close-knit family is of great significance to them and they place great importance on their duty to provide for their family. Black American men share these same family values but overall, they place a greater significance on "caring selves"; where solidarity, friendship and social obligation are valued the most. Comparatively, French working class men placed high value on their working class roots and solidarity, similar to the moral values of American black men.

Schwalbe's (1996) investigation into the mythopoetic movement explained how participation in the movement served as identity work. He defines identity work as those things that we all do which help us establish who we are through interactions with others. We do this identity work through behavior, signaling with symbols and language and how we expect others to treat us (Schwalbe, 1996, p.

105). Preppers are doing identity work through practices, values and beliefs and the ways in which they draw symbolic boundaries.

Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996) state that “identity work is...largely a matter of signifying, labeling and defining. It also includes that creation of the codes that enable self-signifying and the interpretation of others’ signifying behavior” (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock, 1996, p. 115). They go on to say that identities are “indexes of the self” (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock, 1996, p. 115) and that they relate to the characteristics of the person claiming the identity.

Using similar definitions of identity work to that of Schwalbe, Grigsby described features of worthy identity work of simple livers (2004) and noodlers (2012). Simple livers were relatively affluent and were redefining their identities through adopting voluntary simplicity and found self-fulfillment through reducing their consumption and living more frugally. The majority of noodlers are working class people and they use noodling as a way to redefine their social status and to construct a unique worthy identity that renounces the ways in which the dominant culture defines what is worthy through income level and occupation and instead define worthy identity through their collective participation in noodling.

The literature about prepping and related topics was reviewed. In conclusion, the literature review also identifies works which proved helpful in elaborating and explaining the themes which emerged from the data and findings.

CHAPTER 3: “PREVENTION RATHER THAN REACTION”: PRACTICES OF PREPPING

A prepper prepares for the day that the government agencies and all of that kind of stuff is nonexistent. You are preparing for long term independence. You are going to have to sustain yourself for a long period of time until they get things up and running again and you are going to need a lot of supplies to do that!–Alice

What are Preppers Doing?

Prepping is an activity that was intensely tied to certain types of skillfulness, knowledge acquisition and a set of distinct practical skills aimed at being prepared for emergency situations. The following chapter outlines the practices which respondents highlighted as significant to being prepared and addresses the ways in which these preppers constructed meanings about their prepping practices. The practices they engaged in are directly tied to their perceptions regarding how to survive a variety of catastrophic circumstances such as natural disasters, societal unrest or economic insecurity or depressions. These practices were designed to maintain a certain quality of life which they viewed as an adequate standard of living under the shadow of a crisis. Preppers in this study clearly stated that they considered their practices as a safeguard against being reliant on others or social institutions which they perceived to be unreliable in times of need. They constructed their skillfulness and knowledge acquisition as a protection counter to the various risks they may perceive.

Overall, prepping was about being proactive. Judith was a safety manager and mother of a pre-teen based in an urban location. She stated, “I focus on prevention rather than reaction. I am always looking for ways to prevent accidents and be prepared.”

As noted in chapter two, prepping can be thought of as a “cultural toolkit” which is derived from the various cultural repertoires found in the dominant culture (Swidler, 1986). These ideas, rituals, habits, practices and worldviews were used by people when constructing meaning about the world in which they lived and were also used by people to make sense of their actions (Lamont, 2000; Swidler, 1986). Preppers were drawing from a broad set of ideas and practices to create prepper repertoires that were complex, multifaceted and dependent on the cultural context in which they exist. Respondents tended to adopt multiple practices because these variety of practices weren’t mutually exclusive.

The following chapter employs analytical induction to elucidate the constellation of practices that the preppers in this study highlighted as an important part of their prepping repertoire. The most common mentioned practice, which was emphasized by all 13 preppers in this study, was the collection and storage of an emergency ration of food and water. There were variations throughout the sample related to the importance of various other practices, but ensuring that you have enough food and water for all of the people in your household was the foundation upon which all other prepping practices were built.

Appendix B identifies the practices that each prepper described. This table allowed me to determine if there were any significant patterns emerging from the data. The most striking finding which emerged is that the men in the sample reported greater numbers of practices which they focus on regarding their levels of preparedness than the women in the study. For example, Ned described 18 different practices in his toolkit of prepping which was the most mentioned for all of the men while Alice described 9 different practices which was the most for all of the women. The most prevalent practices mentioned are listed from most to least; stockpiling was mentioned by ten respondents. Canning and hunting were both mentioned by seven respondents each though not mentioned by all of the same people. Defense with the use of guns was mentioned by nine people. Making a plan was also mentioned by nine people. Practice and training was mentioned by eight people. Keeping it to yourself was mentioned by seven people and knowledge of the natural world was mentioned by seven people.

How are Preppers Doing It?

Food and Water

Prepping as a practice was largely centered on procuring food and water and stockpiling those items to be used in case of an emergency in the future. Placing food work at the forefront of prepping was based in the simple fact that food is essential to life. Food work allowed the preppers to engage in prepping on regular basis. Whether it is through working on their stockpile of food or through canning food from their garden, the preppers in this study used food and the

preservation of food for long-term storage as a fundamental way to engage in prepping. Procuring food and water was relatively easy compared to some of the more extensive actions one might have taken. Generally, respondents recognized that having at least three days' worth of non-perishable food and water for each member of their family was a fundamental trait of being prepared. Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) website regarding preparedness, Ready.gov echoed this suggestion. Having food and water on hand is seen as both the bare minimum and the most essential thing that you could do in order to be prepared. From their perspective, storing food and water is not seen as something that is a characteristic of a prepper, but seen as a practice that all people should engage in. Frank, a self-described urban prepper who is a full-time salesman highlighted his disbelief in the notion that the average person does not have stored food on hand. Frank believes that everyone should do it which is consistent with Feuer's (2013) claims that prepping is an activity that everyone should do. Frank stated:

If you start with something simple like the minimum recommendations from our government, go to the FEMA website Ready.gov and they say to have three days of non-perishable food and water. I have trouble believing that the average person doesn't have three days of non-perishable food because nobody that I know doesn't have three days of food in their pantry, PERIOD!

Frank related mostly to like-minded people who believed in the benefits of stockpiling food and water. Other preppers were not surrounded by likeminded

people were not as certain as Frank that everyone did have three days of food and water on hand.

Henry, a retired member of the armed services who lives in a suburban area, pointed out a critical aspect of food storage that is an element necessary to stockpiling food and water which is having adequate, excess space in your home at your disposal which would enable one to have the ability to put away additional food, water and supplies than what is necessary to run a household on an everyday basis. *"We always have food. There's never a reason for us not to have at least four or five days' worth of food on hand. I have a closet in another room that is full of food so we always have it on hand."* Having the excess space to dedicate solely to stockpiling is not something all people had.

Dana, a married hobby farmer, IT manager who lived near a large state university described how the community can be shut down or crippled by a snap of bad weather like an ice storm. Living in a place that experiences weather events such as an ice storm on a regular basis encouraged her to have the habit of keeping food on hand at all times, an approach she described as having a deep pantry. Dana said:

We do get ice storms. While I was up here for college, we had one that shut down the whole town for three solid days. No one could go anywhere. You should have enough food in your house so that's not a concern. And, that's also cheaper! If you eat non-perishable stuff like Wolf's chili or Campbell's soup, buying enough for a few weeks when it is on sale saves you money. And then the next week

when it's not on sale, you don't have to buy any. And it is convenient. Have a deep pantry so if you decide that you want to cook something, odds are that unless it is something perishable like cheese or milk or something along those lines, you will have the ingredients.

Preppers focused on finding ways to store food and water for long-term use. This required planning, space for storage and having knowledge of long-term storage techniques. Some preppers relied on market-based solutions and focused on purchasing freeze dried foods or Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) which were considered an expensive solution. Roger claimed:

I've purchased some freeze-dried food early on and I spent a fair amount of money on it. It is the 25 year lifetime stock and will last a long time which is why I spent a lot of money on it.

Christian, a college student who grew up on a farm, discusses the desire to have a multi-faceted approach to long-term food storage. He and his grandfather prep together. He has learned how to prep from his grandfather and they use the activity to bond. He describes how he relies on him to get his necessities, but also looks to his elder for new ways to prepare. Christian stated *"I mainly get MREs and other necessities like that from my grandpa. He buys a couple of cases every now and then. He didn't buy MREs the last time, but instead he bought those five gallon buckets that are sealed in Mylar."* Storing large quantities of food in Mylar bags sealed in five gallon buckets is one way preppers were able to stockpile large quantities of shelf stable food.

Stockpiling

Stockpiling food was a key component to prepping. Stockpiling could be considered as a type of hoarding behavior, but the preppers in this study were keen on distancing their stockpiling practices from hoarding, which was not uncommon with preppers in general. A deeper analysis on this differentiation will be discussed in Chapter Four. Ten of the respondents, four women and six men, mentioned stockpiling food as a practice they engage in. Respondents discussed the ways in which they approached the practice of stockpiling food and water and in some cases, such as Christian's, firearms and ammunition. Christian stated, *"We stockpile food and water. Water purification and the ways to get food are the essentials. Also, guns and ammo and things like that. [We also stockpile] seeds and stuff to grow food, that's another big one."*

Another component of stockpiling was the tendency to buy in bulk, especially when key items are on sale. Placing a focus on a single item is a common action amongst preppers who viewed prepping as an ongoing project which was never complete. Alice discussed the habitual practice of purchasing and keeping large amounts of food on hand at all times. She lived in a rural area and made special trips to Aldi to purchase large amounts of a specific item at one time, usually when it was on sale. This activity was one driven by economic insecurity. She was the primary breadwinner in her house and her husband was on disability. Her grown son also lived at home and financially contributed to the household. She used large purchasing to save time, gasoline and money. She

described that they are building a specific cellar dedicated to prepping related food storage in their new house. Alice stated:

We store a lot of food. We buy in bulk and store it and rotate through it. When we make purchases, we will go to Aldi's and buy 50 cans of beans. We will make big purchases of vegetables and stuff like that. We have one room that I call the pantry. It is about the size of a bedroom and it has shelves lined up all of the way up the wall. It is not connected to heat so it stays more of an even temperature in there. That's where we store it. We are moving to a new house and we actually built a root cellar that is going to be big enough for us to store stuff.

Sean lived in a college town and had a young son. He was going through a divorce during the time of our interview. He described his stockpile of food as consisting of shelf-stable goods which he rotated on a regular basis. He did this by keeping track of the expiration dates and consuming those items before they expired. He used a clever method to not only contribute to his cache of food he kept on hand in case of emergencies, but also as a way to “shop” his stash for items that he already consumed on a regular basis. Sean said:

I have a lot of granola bars and things that will last a long time. I keep an eye on the expiration dates so when something is close to expiration, that one comes out and goes into circulation. The next time that I go to the store, I will buy a new one and that one goes

into the back. I rotate it and I probably [have enough food] for two weeks.

Canning

Canning was another practice for preppers who placed a substantial focus on food preservation. Canning was a way to not only preserve a bountiful harvest but it acted as a way to supplement or add to a prepper's food stockpile. Canning was a practice which was fairly common in the generalized culture which became a popular way to preserve food around the turn of the twentieth century. Emily Matchar (2013) described canning as a practice which was being reclaimed by women ages eighteen to thirty-four. If people did not mention canning, I probed to learn if it was a practice they engaged in. Interestingly, in this sample of preppers, canning was a practice done by more of the men. Out of the seven people who discussed canning, only two of them were women. Alice was the only woman in the sample that claimed canning as part of her prepping practices. She described canning as the method of preserving not only dry foods but also the bounty of the hunt and the food for which she foraged. Alice said, *"We hunt and fish. I can the fish and venison. I do a lot of canning on dry goods, as well...I don't grow spinach in the garden anymore. I just can lamb's quarter."* Alice did not grow lamb's quarter, but foraged it because it grew wild in the state in which she lived.

Three men in the sample discussed canning as a practice they engaged in. These men were reclaiming practices which had been previously coded female. Roger, a retired software developer who lived in a rural area used

canning to increase the amount of food he was able to keep on hand. Roger stated *“I do a lot of canning and buy regular canned food and things like that which I can add to my supply.”*

Henry pointed out the fact that his wife viewed canning as dangerous and she did not particularly care for the taste of the final product. Henry explained, *“I can. I have canned meat and canned vegetables. My wife doesn’t want me to can because it’s under pressure, she isn’t here to watch me, and she doesn’t like eating canned stuff.”* Henry made clear that his wife wasn’t interested in prepping and this was reflected in her distaste for canned food.

Sean reflected back upon learning how to can from his grandmother. She moved in with his family after his father died when he was very young. He described how his grandmother quickly planted a garden and began teaching him how to grow and preserve food as a means of economic support and increasing their financial security. He laughed and remembered fondly learning how to can at his grandmother’s side as a little boy. *“My grandmother would say ‘get your little ass up here!’ and so at the age of six I learned how to can.”*

Ned also linked his canning practice to past economic insecurity and being taught to can as a skill which was passed down from his parents. Ned said:

I grew up in a small town in Oklahoma. Those people were an agricultural culture. I learned how to can my own food by watching my mom and dad. They were children of the Depression and their families went through hard times and they wanted to be prepared.

Overall, canning was a practice used by the preppers as a way to preserve food and increase the amount of food they were able to keep on hand.

Hunting and Fishing

Hunting and fishing is a practice not only for recreation, but was also used as a way to increase the amount of food kept on hand. Seven of the preppers expressed a love of the outdoors and mentioned that they considered hunting and fishing as a beloved pastime. In keeping with the noodlers (Grigsby, 2012) hunting and fishing was both a hobby and was used as a way to increase the amount of food on hand. Alice and her family were engaging in building family camaraderie and bolstering her food supply. Hunting and fishing allowed her family to procure food in a way that reduced economic strain and was a hobby that she and her family used as something to engage in outdoor recreation and bond over a common activity and offered her a way to express her rural identity. The tight linkage with practical provisioning and familial activities was consistently evident with some of the preppers. Alice preserved the game and fish by canning. Alice also raised chickens and canned the meat after butchering it. She was working on different methods of preserving the eggs and discussed a desire to make egg noodles. She was working out a recipe which would consume three eggs per pound of noodles, but was still in the process of perfecting it. Procuring meat and game in a way that does not depend on the mass market allowed Alice to maintain a sense of economic security while also engaging in an activity alongside her husband and son.

Dehydrating

Dehydrating food was another way to preserve fruits and vegetables which enhanced the nutritional value of the stockpile. Three of the men, who interestingly were all ex-service members, discussed dehydrating as a practice. Considering the armed services relies on MREs as a type of food, exposure to MREs may have influenced their choice in their practice of dehydrating food. Dehydrated food is somewhat different than MREs. Dehydrating food allowed fresh produce to be preserved in a form that is shelf stable and does not take up a lot of space, compared to a method such as canning. The downside to dehydrating was that it often relies on expensive equipment which placed a financial burden on preppers who used this method to preserve their own food.

Henry said:

I have dehydrated banana chips, dehydrated orange slices and dehydrated pineapples. They hold the most calcium. I already have all of those fruits I dehydrated split up into servings and I put them into little baggies. In fact, that's the most expensive equipment that I built is getting a vacuum sealer. I spent \$139 and I think that was the most expensive thing that I have purchased.

Henry was one of two respondents who talked about the nutritional value of the food they chose to preserve and stockpile. Overall, the majority did not discuss the nutritional content of the food, but were more concerned with caloric content.

Packing

Packing was an activity that utilized economies of scale to be efficient and cost-effective. Five preppers mentioned packing as a practice they engaged in. Frank described what he called “packing day” as a way to bring folks together for the common purpose of sharing large quantities of food and preserving the food utilizing methods that ensured their shelf stability for decades. Frank explained that this practice was designed to secure a cache of food that was designated for consumption in the far off future. Once this food is stored away, there was no need to revisit it until it is needed. Frank said:

It is a lot easier and cost effective to get some like-minded people to throw in 50 or 100 dollars, tackle those and everybody leaves with three buckets or whatever. So over the last ten years, the packing day method has been . . . and it goes very quickly when there is a bunch of people . . . you are putting down food that's permanent. You don't ever have to touch it again.

When I asked Frank to describe more details in the process of packing day, he described a process of placing Mylar bags into food-grade storage buckets and using oxygen absorbers to decrease the amount of moisture to reduce the likelihood of bacteria and mold growing in the food.

Defense Tactics

Prepping practices were largely related to storing food and water. But another practice that was mentioned by a majority of preppers was the need to defend with the use of guns. Defending loved ones, caches and one’s personal

property were considered a primary practice and essential to survival. Preppers felt it was very important to have ways to defend themselves in place. Developing skills and proficiency in defense methods were key forms of preparedness.

Guns

Guns played a primary role in the culture of prepping. Guns and the proclivity towards collecting firearms and shooting as a hobby was common in this sample. Shooting guns as a hobby went hand in hand with the propensity to prepare. Nine of the preppers mentioned firearms, including all four of the ex-military men. For those preppers who highlighted firearms as a component of their preps, they also focused in on the importance of being properly versed in firearm safety. Thomas, a married father of three boys who lived in a rural area who also served in the military spoke about his affinity towards guns and discussed how significant gun safety was to him. He felt compelled to educate those around him about gun safety and explained how he incentivized safety while teaching at the range. He said:

I am a shooter. I love going out to the shooting range whenever I have the money for extra ammo. I have taught my wife how to shoot. I have taught my 15 year old son how to shoot. I have worked with him extensively since 2010. Every time that he wants to be around firearms or when we go out to the range, before we leave the house I go over the four basic safety rules. When we get to the range I go over four basic safety rules. When we get on the shooting line I have him recite the four basic safety rules which are:

Rule number one treat every firearm as if it was loaded. Rule number two, keep it pointed in a safe direction at all times. Number three, keep your finger off of the trigger until you are ready to shoot. Rule number four, know your target and what lies behind your target. One of the things that I do, I have taught several people how to shoot; my wife, my sister, my brother, my mom and several people at our church I have taught how to shoot. One of the things that I say is 'bring a couple of extra \$20 bills.' If I catch somebody or somebody catches me breaking one of the safety rules, you fork over a \$20 bill. A good way to learn is to make it hurt and a safe way to make it hurt is to lose a couple of sawbucks.

Not all were comfortable with guns. Joanie and Graham, a couple who lived in a college town who were both employed and described themselves as being interested in self-sufficiency did not claim prepping to the degree of others in the sample. They were not gun owners and did not see the logic in owning one. Joanie spoke about her uneasiness with the idea that you had to have a gun to protect yourself. She expressed a sense of distaste regarding what type of society would be populated by those who survived merely because they had the power of a firearm. Joanie explained:

I am not going to buy a gun because I am afraid that if somebody attacks our town and there's no infrastructure anymore that....I know what to do with my garbage. I don't really feel like I need a gun to protect the food that I have. We are all going to be in the

same situation. If the people who have guns are going to be the ones who are going to survive, I am not interested in living beyond that because I seek beauty of nature and I don't want to live in fear.

Susan, a married, self-employed mother who lives in the suburbs described a certain apprehension concerning firearms which had less to do with the firearms themselves. Her concerns were concentrated on the government having a motivation to force gun-owners to relinquish their firearms in case of a national emergency. She discussed her desire to purchase a gun outside of the legal structures which track ownership as a form of protecting herself from unnecessary government intrusion into her life. Susan stated:

I am not against guns and I am not for guns. I am against control and I am for empowerment in my world. I would like my daughter and I, and my husband preferably, to learn how to use a gun. I am enough of a prepper in the sense that I don't want the government to know that I bought a gun. If I bought a gun, I would want it to be off of the market. If I buy a gun off of the market and I don't have a license for that gun, the only reason that I have that gun is that I am either a psychopath- which I think there are a lot less of them than there are of me, maybe 1 in every 100- but the only reason that I am hiding that gun is because I don't trust my government. Period!

Other Weaponry

Guns were not the only weapons mentioned during the course of the interviews. Frank explained that he took an early interest in arming himself. He found himself unable to procure a cultural object which to him, symbolized manhood, through the typical pathways towards consumption. Instead, he had to be clever and find another way to procure a large knife. Frank said:

I was 12 or 13 when I started (with prepping). In 1984, the Buckmasters [magazine] came out and I mail ordered a knife. Back then, this was before online ordering with a credit card. I could go to the store and get a money order to order stuff out of a catalog and I could get stuff that they wouldn't sell me at the store. So, I bought a large hunting knife. I can clearly say that when I was 15, I remember doing that. I felt like I should have a large hunting knife.

Frank recalled how he first began prepping as a young teenager. He remembered perusing magazines related to the outdoors and feeling as if he should buy a hunting knife. Skill in using knives was considered as an entry point into prepping. Knives were necessary tools to have on you at all times as Christian pointed out. Christian also mentioned the other armaments he gathered and learned how to use. *"I carry a pocketknife where ever I go. I have pocket knives and I bought paracords. I love paracords! I also learned how to shoot a bow."* Paracords as mentioned by Christian are parachute cords which many preppers used for a variety of reasons such as a replacement for rope, a snare trap, as a tourniquet but not usually a weapon.

Self-defense Skills

Preppers explained the process of building a set of skills as a key component to the assemblage of prepping practices. They explained that learning how to safely use handguns was seen as good judgment and helpful in times of crises. Preppers also considered learning self-defense techniques as a smart addition to any prepper's skillset. Christian, a Missouri resident, mentioned that he and his mother were interested in learning gun safety and going through the steps needed to become licensed to carry a concealed weapon. Since this interview was conducted, the state of Missouri passed legislation which allowed residents to carry a concealed weapon without a permit. Christian explained, *"I am going to take a concealed carry course with my mom....they also do a self-defense class which I think [taking it] would be pretty helpful."*

Overall, preppers in this study defined defense as a critical factor of prepping practices. Respondents felt that prepping required someone to think ahead to imagine a world which required you to be on the defensive. They believed that acquiring skills related to self-defense and firearm handling reinforced the ability to protect yourself and your loved ones. Generally, respondents described defense tactics as being a tool which afforded them the ability to safeguard their larder and cache of goods. This helped generate feelings of safety during times which they perceived as insecure and unsettled.

Knowledge Building

If gathering food and water is seen as primary practice, then knowledge building is a close second. Respondents stated that it is not enough to merely

have a stock of food and water on hand, but you also needed to know how to do things. Acquiring knowledge was a key process of prepping and merely having the material objects related to prepping is not enough to ensure one's survival. Henry stated, "fill your brain bucket before your backpack" which highlighted the importance of obtaining knowledge about survival before you focused on the procurement stage.

The preppers in this study claimed that the process of acquiring knowledge and skills was done in a methodical way. Interacting with others who had similar interests was a key way that these preppers developed their skillset and knowledge base. There was also the tendency to consume printed materials- manuals, magazines, books and internet sources related to preparedness to compile their toolkit. Preppers collected information from trusted sources that they determined useful which enabled them to compile a constellation of knowledge and skills which were determined by their own tastes and preferences. The landscape of preparedness inspired specialization. One can survey the breadth of information available for consumption and pick and choose what they find trustworthy and useful. This practice is guided by what they found enjoyable and this largely shaped the toolkit that they constructed.

Knowledge building was a practice that relied on a variety of resources. Roger explained that knowledge is often shared with other like-minded people who were interested in becoming more prepared. This activity was considered a sort of give-and-take. It was impossible to be an expert in all areas of survival

and prepping so one had to rely on the knowledge of others to create a more comprehensive set of knowledges. Roger said:

We are particularly willing to share experiences and get other people prepared for things. That's for anything like short-term natural disasters like a tornado or a hurricane or things along those lines to something more catastrophic.

The resources discussed by respondents in constructing prepping knowledge are detailed in chapter four "Makers not Takers: Prepper Worthy Identity Work."

Internet Sources

The Internet was an invaluable resource for those interested in learning about prepping and strengthening what skills they already have. There was a wealth of information ready to be consumed and five of the preppers mentioned learning about prepping via the Internet. Roger discussed beginning the process of learning all there is to know about the different skillsets and techniques he used to build up his prepping repertoire. He highlighted the role of YouTube in this learning process. Roger said:

I read a lot about different types of prepping to stay up on it . . . Interestingly enough, I think that the websites, blogs and those sorts of things that I find the most helpful regarding preparedness are the ones that refrain from political discussions. They don't like to talk about why you might be doing it. They just talk about what to do if something happens. They don't even define what that

something might be, so you tend to get through the noise when you run into groups like that. I occasionally go to websites and blogs not only because they are interesting, but if I want to know how to do something. That has played a huge role in my growth in this field because I had to learn first. It is an ever-growing process. I don't claim to be an expert prepper even though when I did begin, I jumped in with both feet. I went full on! I see a lot of YouTube videos with MacGyver type people and I wish I was one of them! I listen to quite a few podcasts.

Alice shied away from visiting prepping related websites because she viewed that as a risky endeavor. Preppers viewed surveillance technology critically and as a risk, generally speaking. Alice managed this fear by only consuming knowledge which focused on a single activity or practice. There was a sense of distrust aimed at “prepping” websites and Alice chose to stay away from those due to her husband’s career which she explained in further detail.

I am not going to start visiting [prepping websites] repetitively. That might be part of my paranoia, but they do track those kinds of things. I don't really want to be on their radar. I have to deal enough with the government because my husband has a FFL license (Federal Firearms License) so . . . we get scrutinized on a regular basis and I don't want to add anymore to that. So I do a lot of independent research on the internet. I look at the websites that teach you specific skills. If I want to know something about canning,

I go onto sites and look for canning information. I don't look up "prepping" specifically because I don't really trust those sites. I just really don't. I just look up specific things.

Susan was unique in the sense that she shied away from knowledge building in the traditional ways in which the other preppers approached it. She focused on her desire to feel safe in the world and framed the onslaught of negativity found on the Internet as being a source of darkness in her life. One of her coping techniques when it came to information gathering and knowledge building was to rely on trusted friends and used their Facebook postings as a vehicle for knowledge about the world. Susan shared:

I am uneducated about a lot of things because I am not willing to tap into the regular media to become informed. I get all of my education from Facebook because I have fabulous, well-versed friends that keep up on this stuff and post shit that's important. Otherwise, I wouldn't even know who the president is. You have to choose your bubble and for me, the bubble is about discernment. The bubble is not to protect myself because I am afraid of the world. The bubble is to protect myself because it is wise to have discernment.

Overall, respondents felt that the Internet is a valuable tool which allows the preppers to construct a set of knowledges relating to a multitude of categories. They reported that anything they wanted to know about preparedness can be found with a few keystrokes. The preppers felt it was important to have a

shrewdness concerning what is good knowledge and what is bad knowledge. They described this as a skill which can be developed over time the more one becomes familiar with all there is to be learned.

Printed Media

The following respondents highlighted their reading habits and how those habits encouraged and strengthened their practices as preppers. Five of the preppers discussed gaining knowledge through the consumption of various printed materials. Roger stated:

I do a lot of reading on different types of prepping techniques to try to stay current on it. I read a lot of fiction and non-fiction. I go from every possible genre that you can think of. I get into phases. In the last year or so, I have started reading post-apocalyptic fiction and you see these scenarios being played out in these books.

Ned, a married grant writer who served in the military and currently lived in a college town described himself as an avid reader and a lover of all things Sherlock Holmes. He cited Holmes as a main influencer of his curious nature. Ned was eager to share all things related to prepping with me. He and I spoke for over three hours and during this interview, he shared his collection of printed materials, books and his collection of e-books that he had on his e-reader. He expressed the burgeoning genre of prepping related reading material. Ned said:

The pop-culture relating to prepping has really exploded! For example, if you go to Barnes & Noble.com, the last time I checked,

there were 147 titles on prepping. If you looked up apocalyptic fiction, there were over 4,000! It's incredible!

Sean, on the other hand, expressed that he did not read printed materials related to prepping. He relied on his past experiences to inform his practices. He was a professor in the STEM field, so much of what he knew about prepping was comprised of skills relating to his field, but he also learned new information through trusted friends. *"I don't really read a whole lot of books about prepping. I learn from my trusted friends. It is also in my background, like common sense."*

Experts

Experts were somewhat regarded with suspicion by the respondents in this sample. Only two preppers highlighted experts as a source of knowledge. Most of the preppers discussed the vectors by which they gathered information in a non-specific manner with two exceptions. Frank pointed out FEMA's website as a source of trusted information delivered via an expert source. Frank said:

If someone asked me for what's a safe source and if they were a complete newbie on the topic, I would send them to Ready.gov. There is not a more comprehensive or more trustworthy site than your own government telling you that you need to have three days' worth of water and food and have some tools and duct tape laying around. I don't need an expert to tell me that.

Thomas discussed a book titled *Boston's Gun Bible* by Boston T. Party and excitedly explained how this book was pivotal in his development as a prepper. He described how Boston T. Party explained the erosion of gun rights

and Thomas had a visceral reaction to it which inspired him to take measures against the loss of freedoms. Thomas said:

Believe it or not, in 2005 I found a book. This book is called Boston's Gun Bible by Boston T. Party (pseudonym) the guy's real name is Kenneth W. Royce. It's basically a firearm book divided up into many different sections. The last section of the book talks about gun laws and what certain elements of our federal government are doing to take away our freedoms and our rights. So yes, I am a little bit of a gun nut. I don't really like that term, I like freedom nut! It was because of this book which got me started on the path of firearms which led into well ok, if a second American revolution happens, I will be able to fight, but what am I going to do with my family? That led onto the next step which slowly evolved into me becoming a prepper.

Passed Down

Prepping was also a set of practices which was handed down through the generations. Growing up poor, either yourself or your parents, could encourage one to adopt certain measures as a reaction towards the threat of economic instability. Eight of the respondents mentioned either currently experiencing economic insecurity or experiencing it in the past. None of the interview questions directly asked questions concerning this, but issues regarding the lived experience of economic insecurity emerged from the data. Three of the respondents described going through a divorce, either their parents' or their own.

Three of the respondents described experiencing a death of a parent which influenced their tendency towards preparedness. The influence of family history cannot be diminished when evaluating the personal motivations one has towards preparedness. Four of the respondents highlighted how they learned preparedness through the passing down of knowledge from others. Christian explained:

My granddad has told me to always be aware of what's around you all of the time no matter what. So, I have the prepper mindset. I have started collecting some items. I have grown up around it. I grew up on a farm and I played outdoors and hunted. As I got older and once I started getting into watching the news and paying attention to what was happening in the world, I knew prepping was a good idea because of what my grandpa taught me.

Judith described her parents' divorce and how she felt about inheriting certain qualities from her father and how those qualities influenced her as a prepper. Judith said:

My mom and dad split when I was six. I was mostly with my mom and I hated my father. My mom wasn't prepared for anything! I think that definitely it was instilled in me, even though we laughed at my father. My dad was an evangelical Christian and he was obsessed with Armageddon. I have this real problem separating myself from him in the fact that we have some of the same tendencies, but I feel like they are for completely different reasons. I was never into

Armageddon and I wasn't into the Y2K thing. I pretty much laughed at him. I feel like I came by it naturally and I have a hard time separating myself from that . . . I am always thinking about what if something big happens? How am I going to find my daughter? How am I going to survive and keep her alive?

As expressed by these preppers, knowledge building was a fundamental aspect to becoming a well-developed prepper. Knowledge came from many different sources. What was most important to respondents was that those sources were trust worthy and safe to use.

Relational Tactics

Prepping has become more open and not so secretive. But, you still have certain rules like you don't tell everybody because you don't want people showing up at your house and demanding all of your stuff. - Ned

Knowing Your Neighbors

One important factor in preparedness was the need to have knowledge about the people who surround you. There was a tension between informing other people about your prepping practices and keeping that information to yourself. Having neighbors who were unprepared essentially became a huge liability and a threat if something were to occur. Seven of the preppers mentioned knowing your neighbors, including all four of the ex-servicemen. Henry shared that he is a friendly neighbor who was interested in making sure that he and his surrounding neighbors knew each other. He highlighted the importance of

sharing practical tips and sharing essential goods as a safeguard against them descending upon his home in case of a catastrophic event. Henry said:

If you don't know your neighbors, somewhere down the line you will have a threat that totally surrounds you. I know my neighbors and all of my neighbors know me. They also know that if you come over, you better bring something to the table. I don't come straight out and say that I am a prepper because I have seen some stuff, so I am not going to put it out there and let them know what I have. It won't take a bunch of sticks and rocks to break through my glass. I share basic knowledge with them about food and water preparations, basically how to rotate a food stock. Water costs 90 cents at Wal-Mart and I've got extra. That's what I tell everyone around here. I say 'look, I've got extra. I forgot that I already had a bunch in stock. Here's an extra six gallons.' If they drink it, use it to water plants or do the dishes or even shoot it at the range I don't care! I handed it to them and I kind of planted the bug of you want to at least have six gallons of water. Everything has a dual purpose. I am teaching them but I am also giving them water so they don't have to come and get mine. Everything needs to have a dual purpose. Even your help needs to have a dual purpose.

Henry was not the only prepper to use this “dual purpose” tactic of being neighborly. Frank grew a garden every year and always had too much zucchini. He described how he uses the abundance of an undesired bounty in his garden

as a mechanism which allowed him an inside view into his neighbors' homes. This inside view acted as a form of surveillance. He quickly assessed whether or not these neighbors would be a threat or an asset in case of emergency.

Zucchini, I hate it! My mom likes it though and one plant produces 50 or 60 pounds so I have to give it away even though I only have one plant. I am always giving bags to my neighbors as an excuse to go over and say 'hi' and go into their house to get to know them. As part of my survivalist hobby, one of my inevitable conclusions was that I need to know who my neighbors are.

Protect Loved Ones

It is no surprise that a critical component of prepping was to protect the ones you love. Many of the preppers in this study spoke about prepping as an act of love and saw themselves as primary caretakers for their family because they did not believe that they could rely on anyone else to care for and protect their family as well as they could. Not only did they feel the need to shield their family from not having enough to eat or the realities of living during a state of emergency, but they believed that protecting themselves and their families from other unprepared people was essential. Interestingly, those that framed it in this specific way as protection were all men, three in the study specifically spoke about protecting loved ones. Henry explained that he preps to ensure his self-reliance and to safeguard against others who did not take measures to be prepared like he had which he clearly viewed as a threat. Henry said:

I would rather prep to take care of my own than rely on somebody else. I think that in an emergency situation, if you rely on somebody else to help you, you have already lost. I will be able to maintain for my wife and I indefinitely . . . One of the ugly sides of prepping is that I also have to protect. Like I said, I am former military so I've got no problem with guns. I've got no problems taking care of my wife and whoever is in my house. The guy that lives two doors down, I like him, but they are week to week people. They know I go to the grocery a lot so they will come down here and try to steal . . . You are just trying to protect yourself from those who haven't prepared.

Judith described the experience of being the only prepper among her loved ones and the responsibilities she felt to protect them. She framed this as an activity based in consumption and revealed how her friends and family viewed prepping as ridiculous while at the same time were appreciative for what she did for them. Judith shared that *"Nobody is prepared. They all have the shit that I buy for them and they don't laugh too hard but . . . they snicker a little bit. At the same time, I know they are going to drink my water!"*

Prepping was in one way an act of love and protection. Preppers in this sample made it clear that their actions were based in the desire to provide a sense of safety and security for their loved ones during vulnerable times. Respondents believed that prepping served the purpose of minimizing vulnerability and provided a precautionary measure to increase their security and

safety during unstable times. Generally, the preppers described having dealt with a sense of insecurity through the practice of prepping which provided them a greater sense of security, self-worth and self- efficacy in the face of times where their basic needs may not be met through the social structure and social institutions which were designed to do so.

Keeping it to Yourself

Five people described the need to keep their prepping activities to themselves. There were several reasons which were not mutually exclusive to why people were motivated to be secretive about it. First, prepping was something that was perceived as strange or fringe. Secondly, if one shared that they have a stockpile of food, water and artillery they became a target in times of turbulence. Keeping it a secret was a fundamental way to warrant the safekeeping of not only your goods, but also your family. Henry described the reasons why he kept his prepping a secret and even drew a boundary between those who have taken the necessary precautions and those who expected to be cared for by him in times of need. Henry said:

I am not going to talk about my supplies or what I am doing around people that I don't even know. I have to know you if I am going to tell you. Most of my family members don't even know that I prep. One of them does and they say that they are going to come to me in an emergency and I tell them that they better bring something to the table because I only have enough for my family! I tell them that they can do exactly what I am doing because they can't come over

*just because I have food. They aren't going to do that. I love them
but they are going to have to bring their own shit!*

Perceptions preppers believed were held by the general public about the culture of prepping acted as a preventive measure against sharing it with new people they met. Both Frank and Ned describe their reservations against letting people who were strangers or new acquaintances know that they prepped or were interested in firearms. Frank states, *"I typically don't mention [to new people I meet] my interest in firearms. I don't mention my interest in survivalism. [Only the] people who have been friends of mine for 20 or 30 years know that I am a survivalist."* Frank's conflation of survivalism and prepping was not common among respondents. Ned highlighted that even though prepping became more mainstream, it was still considered prudent to keep it a secret or be especially guarded about it around folks you didn't know very well due to unfair judgment and the potential risk they posed.

I always have fun being able to . . . well, I don't usually talk about [prepping] because people think that I am weird. Well, maybe so. But I am curious! And I like to watch how things are going to develop . . . prepping has become more open and not so secretive. But, you still have certain rules. Like, you don't tell everybody because you don't want people showing up at your house and demanding your stuff!

Thomas mentioned others in his circle who had potential to play a valuable role in the event of an emergency. When asked about groups he might

belong to, he shared the desire to focus on those people he knew who possessed a particular skillset. Though he may not have particularly discussed prepping with his extended family, he did express that he felt confident that he could bring them into the fold and rely on them in times of need. Thomas shared:

I don't necessarily talk about it to other people. My brother in law is a firefighter, he is actually a captain in Chicago. Even though I don't necessarily talk about it with him, he is someone that I would bring into the group because he has skills that he could offer.

Generally, it can be seen that prepping was considered a practice that needed to be kept from others due to the stereotypical casting it as a peculiar thing to do. Also, the preppers interviewed believed that they were in the vulnerable position of having to be on the defense in two ways. One must defend prepping as something that was a sensible and reasoned choice, not an activity for crazy people. Secondly, the stockpiles you have amassed became the thing that you had to defend against the horde who wanted to freeload off of your hard work and resources.

Letting Others Know You Do It

On the other hand, part of prepping was somewhat based sharing your knowledge base and skillset. Three of the respondents spoke about this. Thomas framed this in an interesting way. He discussed the need to form a community of like-minded people. He used political orientation as his primary litmus test to determine whether or not someone would be a good fit for his circle. He

searched for an indication that someone would be receptive to starting down the path towards preparedness. Thomas said:

The more people you have, the safer your community will be. If you know your neighbors, get to know them better. Get information.

Once you find out their political views- if they are conservative and they are firearm owners, then you have a basis to get them started on prepping.

Roger described the various measures he took to increase the preparedness of his daughters who were off at college. He also mentioned the need to keep it quiet while simultaneously engaging in a discourse with like-minded people. *“I don't want to make it a complete secret. It's just not something that I broadcast. Most of my friends in my community where I live, the ones that I am friends with, they probably know it too. But, I don't broadcast it.”*

Thomas and Roger both shared a similar need to engage in a dialogue with people who seem interested in and receptive to ideas around preparedness. Sharing knowledge was a venture in creating a community of people which could be reliant on themselves, thus reducing the potential threat they posed on people who made extensive efforts to be prepared.

Prepping Essentials

Situational Awareness

A basic foundation to preparedness is situational awareness. Being aware of your surroundings is something that everyone can do. Knowing what is going on in your environment is a critical practice that most of the preppers alluded to.

Four spoke about it in those specific terms. Joanie discussed situational awareness as something she engaged in which set her apart from others she knew. She resisted labelling herself a prepper, but over the course of our conversation, she came to articulate that her worldview and practices are components of preparedness. Joanie stated:

I don't feel like a prepper, but I know that I am in many ways because most of the people that I know are just so completely oblivious to any of the stuff going on around them in the natural world. I don't see how so many people can be oblivious!

Christian, the youngest member of my sample, described situational awareness as a basic action that was taught to him from a young age. He stated that it was critical to always be aware. *"My grandad has said to always be aware of what's around you all of the time, no matter what."* Ned explained to me that situational awareness was a main element of the prepper mindset. *"The other main thing is to learn how to pay attention to what is going on around you, situational awareness!"* Interestingly enough, our interview took place in the lobby of the local library which is usually a hubbub of activity. My vantage allowed me to see into the library while he faced the door. During the second hour of the interview, Ned noticed two police officers walk in. He wondered what was going on and why they were present. We watched them locate a young woman and interrogate her. Both of us tried to continue our discussion, but considering that we were in the midst of discussing being aware of one's surroundings we tried to eavesdrop in on the situation. Apparently, she was being charged with using

another person's identification and we struggled to hear how she was tracked down at the library. As we witnessed her being taken away in handcuffs, Ned reminded me of the importance of having keen observational skills. We chatted about the alternate scenarios which we could have just observed and how quickly that situation could have gone south. This experience reinforced the belief that situational awareness was a foundational component to prepping practices.

At the Ready for the Unexpected

Being prepared requires one to have a mentality which is mainly proactive. Considering that prepping requires planning, proactiveness was a strategy employed by preppers in general. Two of the preppers expressed a difference in how they approach things and related it to being ready for unexpected situations. Thomas shared, *"It could be as extensive as having 180 acres in Northern Wisconsin with an underground bunker to sleep 50 of your closest friends and family. But to me, it is planning for the unexpected."*

Prepping as a culture has a core belief which states that people need to be prepared for emergencies and unexpected events. The idea that being proactive versus being reactive was one espoused by the preppers in this study.

Making a Plan

Another foundational component of being prepared was making a plan represented by the nine respondents who discussed it. Prepping as an activity required planning and strategic action. Planning serves dual purposes in terms of the ways in which these preppers spoke about it. First, planning was something

which empowered the prepper to engage in fantastical thinking which ensured that they have walked through the myriad possibilities or risks they might encounter. Frank framed his propensity for making plans as part of his personality. He also pointed out the pitfall of not planning your preps ahead.

Frank said:

I've always been more of a prepared-type person. So having a 30 year plan, food that was bought and ended up getting thrown out, if I had had a 30 year plan then, I might have still bought some of the food I thought I would use and still not have used it. But, when I look at all of the stuff that I have stockpiled, if I bought that today, is that what I would have bought? The answer is obviously no. But, if I went about it a little bit more methodically, I would have a mix closer to what I would actually wanted to have stored than what I currently have stored.

Ned stressed the importance of making a plan. Planning ahead and running through scenarios were what allowed the prepper to be prepared for various situations. I asked him what he thought a good strategy for those new to prepping was and he encouraged those interested in prepping to access free resources of information. FEMA was one he cited as being a primary source of preparedness related materials. Ned also mentioned a critical step in plan making which was communicating the plan with your loved ones. He drove home the need to have a set plan and multiple backup plans in case the first plan fails.

Ned said:

You can also put aside supplies for a few days. Also, think about what would happen if? If we have a tornado come through, do we have a plan? How are we going to contact each other? Where is the best place to go? Develop the skills and practice them. Make some plans and gather a few supplies and just explore the 'what would happen if?' and take it from there....

Go get the free stuff. Go to FEMA.gov and order the online manuals and stuff on disaster preparation because they have a lot of good information there. Not only on emergency planning, but planning for your business, pets and kids. So it's free or extremely cheap. That's one place to start. Look up your local Red Cross chapter and get basic first aid training. Find out about making plans about where you would go if you had to leave. How would you shelter in place? Start writing things down and talking it over with your loved ones. What is plan A? What is plan B? What is plan C? A lot of people wonder what is best for me, especially in urban communities. If I try to leave, everyone else will try to leave. Is it better for me to shelter in place? Because this is my home, this is where I live. If I have to leave, where would I go, how would I get there? What is plan A? What is plan B? What is plan C? Again, the rule of three... This is your primary, this is your secondary, and this is your pocket plan.

Three Days on Hand

Throughout the course of the interviews I conducted, one congruent fact amongst all the preppers was the need to have at least three days of food and water on hand at all times for all people and pets in your house. This was a fact supported by the knowledge of our intercontinental food transportation system which also determined that there is only about 72 hours' worth of food in a grocery store at a time. If the transportation system shuts down so will deliveries to grocery stores. Therefore, it is imperative that one should have three days of food on hand. This practice was seen by preppers as fundamental to being prepared. Ned took his advice a step further and explained different techniques to access water in your home in unexpected places. Again, finding this water took prior knowledge of how to do this and required you to have items on hand to allow you to successfully obtain safe drinking water. Ned said:

Have the ability to take care of yourself for 3 days minimum. So that would be a couple of cases of water or easy access to your hot water tank with a filter. You can get little filters to put on the water tank. You put the hose on the bottom to drain it and you put this little water filter on there and it will filter out all of the gunk.

Repeatedly, I heard that having three days of food on hand was the place to start for someone beginning to prepare. Taking this action would decrease the inconvenience of an ice storm or a loss of power. Having stores of food and water also decreased your reliance on emergency relief organizations like FEMA and The Red Cross.

Communication

Having the ability to communicate with loved ones was a pivotal need in an emergency situation. Henry mentioned his interest in creating a network which would allow information to be shared within his group. Within this discussion he focused on the desire to construct a community of like-minded people in different places as a way to create an arrangement based on support. Henry stated:

One thing that I am trying to get through to is that there has to be a network where you share information and that's one of the things that I am trying to work on. [That's] trying to basically start a post-apocalyptic pony express. It is just something where I can share information back and forth. Right now, I am looking at CB radios. I don't have a HAM license and I am not interested in getting one. Just trying to get a way to triangulate some short bursts . . . that's what I am trying to figure out the most. I will have an open airway and I will do short bursts. I am not going to transmit anything. I would like to have some preppers that I know and have been around that can communicate information back across. That's the one thing that I am working on. I would like to have a network of preppers that are in different places but we are linked together so we can share information about what is going on there and share things. It's good for general knowledge, it's good for weather. It's good for threat assessments. That is the main thing. I want to know what's coming from big city centers.

Ned mentioned the danger in only having a cellular phone as your primary form of communication. He explained how critical land lines would be in an emergency situation and how one should have an emergency contact outside of state lines as a way to ensure communication gets transmitted effectively. Ned said:

Do we have an alternative form of communication? A lot of people don't realize that they should keep at least one land line. They don't realize that they may lose a cell tower, but those have their own power. Basically, you can call to say that you are ok or ask if they are ok. A lot of people don't realize that in an emergency, it's best to call someone out of state instead of in state so they could relate back because lines get filled up. You will need some sort of radio to maintain communication. The Epson radio that they make several versions of, one is a small AM/FM emergency radio with a hand crank that you can use to charge up your phone.

In an emergency situation, communication is needed not only to signal to your loved ones that you are okay, but also to stay up to date on what is going on during the emergency. Having a multitude of ways to pass on messages and learn about the events taking place would support efforts towards recovery in an emergency situation.

Shelter

Henry discussed the need to know how to obtain shelter in case of emergency. He had obtained quite a robust skillset, and shelter building had

been something he had practiced and refined over time. He focused on the need to have a shelter which could blend in with the environment as another component of self-defense. Henry said:

I can build a shelter that will hold myself, my wife and my son in an hour and a half. I have spent the better part of two years learning how to build shelters. It started out just going out there and seeing what would keep me warm and I put a sleeping bag in there. There was a lot of failures. They were getting a lot of rain at first, but now I've gotten to the point where I can build a shelter and you can't see it, you can build a fire and if you do see it, it is defensible.

Rule of Three

The rule of three was the general idea that the tools you used to prep should have multiple functions. There is another degree to which the rule of three functioned in prepping. Frank explained how he used an “n+three” model when he thought about his items for consumption. He saw this as the most practical way to conduct his life and that thinking ahead and stockpiling items was part of his well thought out plan and to him, was what made the most sense. Frank said:

I run an 'n+three' model. What that means is that if it is a non-perishable item, I have what I normally use and then I have three replacements for it. All of those replacements were bought on sale. The toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo and any single item that I use on a day-to-day basis was bought in quantity and on sale. The fact that I have extras laying around didn't mean that I needed to run out

and buy three deodorants. It just means that as a conscious decision for one specific reason is that I don't like running out of stuff. I don't like running to the store. I have made a conscious decision that running out of stuff is stupid.

Ned described his rule of three in a different fashion. He explained that the rule of three is centered on backups. He believed that one should have a primary way of achieving a goal, a backup and a backup for the backup. The idea of backups for your backup was a norm in prepping culture. Additionally, knowing how to use all of the items and having practice with them was essential to survival. Ned explained:

In survival, always have the rule of three- three methods of starting fire; a magnifying glass, a little flint to spark and also take a little book a paper matches that I took out of my MRE rations. I used to work at a surplus store and one of the managers were shorthanded and when I would go in, he would pick my brain because I know all of this trivia about stuff. Once in a while he would get in MREs and I would swipe all of the matches. Paper matches are allowed on planes and if you put them in a container they won't complain.

Everyday Carry (EDC) and Bug Out Bags (BOB)

Three of the respondents described having what they call an everyday carry or EDC. This was explained in better detail by the following quotes. Henry said:

I have what's called an everyday carry bag in my truck and my wife has one in her car. [We have them so] if we get stranded like when they had blackouts in 2003 in New York when people had to walk 15 or 20 miles to get home. My wife has one in her car so she has the basics to get home. She has a compass and I have taught her how to use it. She also has a Maglite [flashlight] and a little pistol, a pocket knife and water. There's also another set of shoes in there in case she's wearing high heels. I don't do that so I don't have to worry about another pair of shoes. I adjust for warm weather and I adjust it for ice. That's for my go-bag too. Some of them cross over. I have some stuff in there for fall that could also go for winter for layering. Some of the fall or spring stuff is for rain and wind. So it crosses over for that and it keeps into a tight little pouch. If I have to get home, my bug out bag is around 25 pounds. There will be four days' worth of food and water in that and a first aid kit. But everything will have a dual usage. Anything that I have in my vehicles to get me home must serve a dual purpose. You aren't wasting space and you are using it for a couple of different purposes.

Henry described the need for having portable preps. Being prepared while on the go was another strategy used by preppers to ensure their survival. Henry described the components of his bag and described how his wife's bag was

different. He described how the items in his bag had multiple uses which echoed the rule of three idea.

Ned took an approach for his everyday carry which seemed to be based in first aid. Being a former Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), he had formal training in first aid and tried to guarantee that he would always have tools on him to assist someone in need whenever and wherever as expressed through his description of how to get through security at an airport with these items. Ned shared:

I carry a small first aid kit with me that has small EMT shears. They are strong enough to cut a penny in half and they have blunt tips. They are not considered a weapon. I take a Leatherman tool, but I stick it in my check-on bag. I might take mini-pliers or something like that with me, but always it will be something that's not considered a weapon. What's really surprising is what you are allowed to get through security

Four of the respondents had what is called a bug-out bag or BOB for short. Alice told me about the bags she prepared for herself and her family which were always at the ready and within reach if one had to leave in a hurry. These bug-out bags were basically portable kits which held the various items one would need to survive for seventy-two hours. Other terms for BOBs are go bags and grab bags which expressed the portable nature of these bags. The necessary component of these bags was that they were prepared ahead of time to be ready

to go at a moment's notice echoed by Alice's statement. *"We have our three bug-out bags. They hang on the back porch on hooks."*

Roger compiled supplies into a bug-out bag for his daughters who were away at college. He gave them supplies to leave their homes if necessary like the BOB and also gave them get-home bags to keep in their cars. Being that they were away from him, this was a way he felt he could protect them from afar. Though Roger did not describe the act of compiling these bug out bags as a form of therapy as McGrath (2017) claimed, putting them together for his daughters did serve to make him feel as if he did something practical and tangible to keep them safe. *"I have done a lot of things to get my daughters prepared. They have go bags in their homes and cars. They know where they can come if something happens."*

Sean discussed his bug out bag as being less contained and more as a list of supplies which he had at the ready in case of an emergency. He said:

I have a backpack and a compass, canteens, a couple of handguns and ammo, a rifle, a couple of larger knives if it comes down to hunting.... I still have two sleeping bags, candles, a little cook stove, waterproof matches from the winter weather project I did that ended ten years ago.

Generally, bug out bags and every day carries could differ in their components and size. But, the preppers in this study discussed these in a more fluid nature. Some of the preppers had both in distinct forms. Others had an everyday carry which could also serve as a bug-out bag if necessary.

Practice and Training

“Develop the skills and practice them. Make some plans and gather a few supplies and just explore the ‘what would happen if?’ and take it from there.”

Ned’s quote explained one of the indispensable pieces of advice these preppers had to give was to develop skills and practice them until you were completely comfortable. Eight of the respondents, including all of the ex-service men discussed the need to train and practice with your techniques and gear. Ned’s quote above described a more casual, exploratory approach which beginners could follow. He went on to describe to me the extensive training he had undertaken via his professional development. Ned said:

I went to grad school and wound up doing a research project on the emergency management department of Oklahoma, civil defense of Oklahoma and FEMA. This was at the height of the nuclear freeze movement and when they found out that I was not there to do a hatchet job on them, they opened their doors and said ‘please, come in!’ And I got to see a lot of things that some people don’t. I was able to go through some training and actually became a volunteer instructor and was trained by FEMA and became a class 3 instructor in logical emergency shelter systems management. I would certify other instructors and I would provide continuing education credit for hospitals and EMTs and stuff like that. It was just because I was curious about something and I was good at it.

Several of the preppers were able to link their profession to prepping skill development. Judith tied her skillset to her profession as a safety manager. She described herself as a natural problem solver and believed that these traits would assist her in case of emergency. *“I am first aid trained. I am ready. I can use a defibrillator. I have that skill. And I am kind of a natural running to the problem type of person than a running away from the problem type of person.”* Judith wasn't the only one who drew from her profession as a way that added to their skillset. Thomas described the ways in which he used his knowledge as an electrician to bolster his preparedness. Thomas shared:

I am an electrician. I have been reading up on PG systems, solar and wind systems. I am in the process of getting the material on a piece by piece basis to have my own PG systems to run whatever I need to, like a refrigerator or freezer. I have stockpiled 140v LED lights so that I can at least light up more of the house than I could with a regular incandescent bulb.

Alice mentioned that she was working on obtaining a license to operate a HAM radio. She expressed that her job as a safety manager was what originally encouraged her to acquire the license, but her employers decided not to waste her experience by placing her behind the radio. She decided to pursue it on her own. Alice explained:

As far as skills are concerned, the only thing that I have been working on lately is getting my HAM radio operator license. You

have to take a class and then you get your license. You actually have to take a test. I am right in the middle of the training.

Henry focused on acquiring skills which would help him out in the wild if he found himself trying to survive away from his home. Henry framed learning these skills as a hobby and saw these skills as an ongoing project which he was always trying to refine through practice. Like developing any new skill, Henry expressed that he gained confidence through practice in the wilderness. He described practice as a necessary component which encouraged a prepper to become familiar with their tools, but also developed ways to survive if you found yourself without those tools. *"I am also working on my bush craft skills. Bush craft is where you have the minimal amount of tools or amenities available to you but you are able to build shelter, fire, secure water and food"* said Henry.

Joanie described herself as being interested in self-sufficiency. She explained how she grew up in New York City and had amenities and services available at all times. When she moved to the Midwest, she quickly realized that she was going to have to do a lot more for herself. She learned how to do new things by reading historic accounts of life on the prairie which she translated into a new skillset for herself. Joanie said:

I guess you can say I had to devolve a little bit, but I see it as having evolved quite a lot. So I learned how to do a lot of things. I learned how to do pioneer stuff and I identified with pioneer women and all of the things that they had to do. I got crazy and read every pioneer diary that I could find. This was during the late 60s and

early 70s when people were starting communes and so people were doing that kind of thing. People were pooling their money and buying land and living in basically huts or tents. I remember helping a friend make a tent out of canvas on a treadle sewing machine so that she and her boyfriend at the time could live in the woods somewhere and she was pregnant.

The discussion of skill building and practicing those skills highlighted the essential characteristic of knowing what to do with what you have.

Fundamentally, the point of practicing these skills was to reduce the risk you posed to yourself and to others around you. The prevalence of practicing skills in the discussions I had with the preppers displayed that merely obtaining objects to increase your survival did absolutely nothing for you if you did not know how to use them. Outside of that, having an array of practical skills such as first aid and knowledge of electricity could bolster your chances of subsisting, perhaps even helping others in a disaster or emergency situation.

Knowledge of the Natural World

Part of developing skills for survival was having a working knowledge of the natural world around you. Seven of the respondents, including three of the women discussed this. Considering that a disaster may require you to spend time wandering in the wilderness, it was a sensible skill to have under your belt.

Knowledge about the natural world was not just about knowing how to exist in nature, but it also contributed to successfully engaging in other skills like

foraging. Alice used foraging as a way to add to her stockpile of canned food.

Alice said:

We do a huge amount of asparagus foraging. You drive down the road and you will see these patches of asparagus. We usually mark those in the summertime and go back in the spring when our asparagus is coming in and we cut the asparagus there. I had 24 pints of asparagus that I canned this year from just the boys foraging from within a mile of our house.

Henry framed his knowledge of the natural world as part of the skillset he was working on. Bush craft skills encompass shelter, fire, food and water so having an idea about where to find novel sources of water would be an advantage. Henry described identification of water sources as a component of his skillset. *“Locating water, [for instance] what kind of trees have a lot of water in them? So how to identify a cottonwood tree that would have a lot of water in its base, how to identify a water maple tree that would have plenty of water.”*

Joanie mentioned a very useful application of having a working knowledge of plants. She linked plant identification skills with self-defense. She also described seed saving as way to reduce her contribution to commercialized seed industries. Saving seeds year to year allowed her to exert high levels of control over a system that she feared was becoming too technological and profit driven.

Joanie said:

Know the plants that grow in your front yard. Or intentionally grow plants that can help with stuff. Know that stuff because that is a

useful skill! Know what the weeds can do, knowing that serving pokeberry juice to the visiting thugs, they will probably not survive very long after that! I also save seeds. I save them and don't use them up every year. You can save seeds for a very long period of time. You don't have to buy new seeds every year. The seed companies take their old seeds and mix them with their new seeds and pack them to sell to you as new seeds. Packed for 2014 means who knows when they were grown? But we are packing them in 2014 so you can buy them in 2014.

Having a working knowledge of nature and how you can use nature to your advantage was a skillset that was described generally by some and specifically by those mentioned above. A common way preppers connected themselves to nature was through outdoor recreation activities like camping, hunting and fishing. Others related to the outdoors in deeper ways, like Henry and his bush skills or Alice and her foraging. Having a relationship with nature and knowledge of the environment improved the likelihood that one could be better prepared to withstand a catastrophic event.

Barriers to Prepping

One could take part in prepping in varying degrees. The depths to which one will dive into prepping depended on a variety of circumstances. The most important ones identified among respondents were financial resources, time available, and space to dedicate to stockpiling and the resistance from close others to prepping. Another important element in success was having a mindset

which encouraged a person to examine the possibilities of what could happen in the face of a disaster and decide that prepping was a good solution. Some of the preppers took umbrage with those folks who denied themselves the opportunity to be prepared and could not begin to understand why a person would not be inclined to think about possibilities. Prepping also required a commitment; a financial commitment, time spent learning and practicing and for some a commitment to continuously engage in prepping activities. Several respondents stated that they had to spend time convincing family who needed to engage in prepping with them to ensure success but who were resistant to the idea. Preppers in the study said that the barriers which prevented a person to be prepared were both material and psychological. Roger discussed how he was challenged by those who didn't prep and the potential consequences that could come from speaking about it to those who don't do it. Roger said:

It is hard for me to get inside of the mind of someone who doesn't think like me. It is frustrating when I try to share a little bit about prepping with people. I am pretty careful about how I do it because I don't want to be viewed as a nut among my community! So, you have to be careful about that.

Alice shared the everyday realities of dedicating space to goods for prepping. Much of the supplies and material goods dedicated to being prepared were not items that most people use in their daily lives. This meant that one had to have the space available to store items in a way that was accessible, yet out of

the way. *“I think that one of the things is that they have to have storage space so that they can adequately store stuff”* said Alice.

Henry described the ongoing project of prepping as one that took a lot of time and dedication. He also expressed that prepping was not an activity or a hobby that one can be completely finished with. Henry said:

It takes time to build these things up and thank God for vacuum sealing and everything else that can extend the shelf life of stuff, but it takes time to do this. It's not like 'oh, I have something on the shelf, now let's watch ESPN!' No, there's some stuff that you have to get involved in. You have to go out and train yourself. You have to go to a situation to find out how you are going to get out of it. You have to train yourself how to do it.

Graham shared that he and Joanie are somewhat isolated in their prepping activities. Considering that having a community of like-minded prepared people could increase your chances of survival, he saw this as a barrier to maximizing their levels of being prepared. They did not know others nearby who were also preppers. Graham also highlighted the tension which could potentially arise from living in the city and that could prevent those that they know from coming to join them. Graham shared:

We don't really know any other survival minded people. We just have acquaintances in [nearby small towns], but they are miles and miles away. Anybody that we could get support from, we would have to move to them or they would have to move to us. And they

probably wouldn't want to come here to the city because of the craziness that would probably happen.

Thomas remarked on the barriers that were present when the whole family was not on board with prepping. He explained that prepping was much easier when everyone could agree that it was a rational thing to do and that having people around who don't see the world in the ways in which you did could be a challenge at best and a potential threat. Thomas explained:

Being a prepper is a very personal decision. It is extremely hard if everybody is not on board. Especially in your immediate family. One of the best things that you can do is to network. There is a prepper group on Meetup.com. I joined but I haven't been to any meetings or events yet. There are prepper groups all over the country. This one is in northern Illinois and since I am in southern Wisconsin, they accepted me as a member. With friends and family, it is difficult to bring them around, especially if you are gung-ho about it all of the time and are like 'oh, I just found a great deal on cases of Hormel chili! They are good for 10 years! We are stocking up! We have like 10 pallets worth stacked up in the basement!' Stuff like that isn't going to really go over well.

By and large, prepping was an activity that did not have many barriers which could prevent someone from doing it. As told by the people above prepping required time, financial means, physical storage space, and ideological commitment and at best, a network of like-minded people. Not having all or any

of these abilities in no way means that someone couldn't successfully prep. It just meant that they may find the endeavor more challenging and have to approach it more creatively than someone who had different capabilities. The capability that was the greatest factor in supporting the ability to prep was financial means. Holding a particular class status increased the capacity to engage in the consumer market. Preppers who were more affluent had greater ease in consuming the goods they saw as necessary while those who were middle or working class were more restricted in acquiring the material goods they needed to prep.

Consumption

In *Shopping Our Way to Safety*, Andrew Szasz states, "Whenever a response to risk requires the outlay of money, a person's class position inevitably determines both the extent and the quality of that response" (Szasz, 2007, p. 46). Preppers were bound by their class position in the social structure and class could be a contributing factor to how and the extent to which they were able to prep. Frugality could be a reflection of their economic reality while others have the luxury of using their economic security to increase the amount and range of prepping related products which they consumed. Consumption was consistent with lifestyle movements and related to a constellation of specific items which they were going to consume (Haenfler et al., 2012). There were inconsistencies pertaining to the economic realities of some of the respondents in the study and their desires for certain items. Thomas mentioned how he stockpiles ammunition and purchases firearms, but was looking for full-time employment at the time of

our interview. He did link most of his purchasing to times of economic increases due to tax returns. But for him, his worthy identity of being a prepper, provider, and protector was directly linked to the protection of his family through the use of firearms. The very nature of prepping required one to invest more and more in the products related to prepping. The deeper you got into the practice, the more you bought. Judith described the first item she purchased that was unique to prepping and how she then purchased it for her loved ones as well. She went on to describe consuming these goods as a sort of domino effect. Judith said:

I think that the first thing that I really got was the tool for my car to break out the window and cut the seatbelt. I have it and I bought one for my ex too. I was like 'you have to be prepared!' Just recently I got my solar powered phone charger and it is pretty cool! It works! Some people said that it wouldn't work with Apple products, but it did. I also have a couple of 55 gallon drums of water in my garage. I bought a LifeStraw (an inexpensive, small water filtration device) and I got one of those for my ex to keep at her house . . . I've looked at what you need to have in case something does happen.

Christian listed the items he would purchase if he had the money to obtain them. These were items which were suggested by FEMA and he mentioned having plastic sheeting to have on hand. This need he described was echoed by FEMA after the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001. The government suggested that average citizens obtained plastic visqueen (plastic sheeting) to

have in case of a biological warfare attack. The efficacy of these suggestions was questionable, but Christian felt that it was a necessary addition to his gear. Christian also mentioned that his grandfather made a point to purchase seeds to include in his preps which was contrasted by Joanie's practice of saving seeds. Christian said:

If I had money to spend on prepping I would definitely get gas masks, for sure, because that can be used for a variety of things. But all kinds of sanitation things. If I were staying in one place like my house for a certain amount of time, but I would get plastics to cover the windows. It sounds crazy, but if something like that ever happened . . . My grandpa has some seed kits that he found online. They are basically a bunch of seed packages and everything that you would need to grow them.

Dana collected water and stored it in her home. She lived in an area where the power was likely to go out during a storm and her well was on an electric pump. Not only was she prepared to have water for herself and her husband in case of emergency, but she made sure that she had what was necessary to water her animals on her farm as well. *"We have a 200 gallon pressurized tank in our basement so we have at least 100 gallons of pressurized water if the power goes out."*

Ned described his consumption as being a well-thought out approach with an eye towards stabilizing a loss of power for his in-laws. Generators were an item that is high cost, but brought about a high value for these preppers.

Generators were a highly desired item which allowed preppers to generate energy and allowed them to carry on as usual in case of emergency. Ned said:

When I get down to half of a tank of gas, I always fill up. It is funny how things have evolved for me. Like, I have a little gas powered generator and then a few years ago we were always having to go pick up my wife's parents at their home in southern Missouri because they were always losing power in the winter. So I dropped a suggestion and she thought about it awhile, so we now have a natural gas-powered backup generator that automatically kicks in when the power goes out.

Henry also highlighted the generator's ability to allow him and his wife to carry on as usual. He discussed the generator's ability to position him as a caretaker and provider when the power goes out. Henry said:

We had our power go out for three days, we had propane lanterns and chemical lanterns laying around. I was able to pull out our little gas stove and we cooked meals on it. The generator started up. She looked around and said 'well, the rest of the neighborhood is still dark but we are fine.' And she patted me on the shoulder. That was her way of saying 'ok, I now see your purpose for this.' I don't have to rub it in her face. That's childish. You do that stuff in 3rd grade, you don't do it in a grownup world. It is my personal responsibility to make sure that she's fed, she's watered and she's safe, not to make her sound like a horse! But that's my job.

The range of prepper consumption was constrained by the purposes of prepping aimed at food preservation and stockpiling and consumption of foods that have a long shelf life, gear that is aimed at survival during disasters, and skills and plans that preppers believe provide for the security of themselves and their families. Prepping allowed the consumer to construct a meaning of their consumption as aimed at self-sufficiency, frugality, preparedness and away from consumerist pleasure. They emphasized self-restraint over self-fulfillment even though respondents did report that they did enjoy what they were doing. It was constructed as serious, not a self-indulgent activity.

Expos and Events

There are expos and events which draw in people interested in prepping culture as shown by O'Brien (2012) I attended an expo which was the National Prepper Expo held in Tulsa, Oklahoma over the first weekend in April 2014. It took place at the Tulsa fairgrounds and expo center right outside of Downtown Tulsa. The expo took place at the same time as the Wanenmacher's Gun show. It appeared as we approached the fair grounds that many of the vehicles in the lot were there for the gun show as well as the prepper expo. We arrived on Saturday, right around noon and drove around for about 20 minutes to find a spot to park. As my husband drove, I looked at the car tags to take note of where everyone was from. There were plates as far away as Florida, Alaska, New York, Minnesota, West Virginia, and Connecticut.

As we entered the expo, there was a drawing for prizes that totaled \$5,000. They were giving away a very expensive medical kit that was worth over

\$1,000 alone. Next to the entrance was Bob Gaskin's Black Dog Survival School's booth. Gaskin and his wife, Faith run a survival school and sell medical supplies. Their model is supplies a la carte and the booth across from them, Nurse Amy's Doom & Bloom sold pre-packaged kits. Nurse Amy and her husband Dr. Joe teach medical survival courses and sell medical kits that are targeted to specific needs. The trauma medical bag was the one that was over \$1,000. In this bag is all one needs to survive a medical emergency. Well, it is missing the medical degree. That's where Nurse Amy and Dr. Joe shine. They have written a field guide to emergency medicine. She's experienced in that field because she was an Army medic. They taught several seminars, one was a three hour course on suturing which cost \$160 per person.

We moved into the expo and began to walk around to get a feel for what was available. I was initially surprised at how small the expo was. Obviously, those cars in the lot belonged to the people in the gun show by the small amount of attendees that were present. We moved around the booths and wound up in the back of the hall. There was a speaker talking about how people needed to stop paying attention to conspiracies and sensationalism. He was calling for his audience to recognize that many of them would not survive a catastrophic event. This statement caused me to stop and listen.

I later found out that this was Bob of Black Dog and he held the 50 or so people in his audience captive. Bob is a former Marine and has quite the commanding presence. He spoke with intelligence and eloquence in a way that shied from hyperbole and terror speech. We only caught the tail end of his class,

but what he said in those few minutes intrigued me enough to seek him out and introduce myself. When the audience dispersed, we did as well and split up. Brandon went in one direction and I went in the other.

I found a booth that had a banner that said “Doomsday Tobacco” and he had an Aero-press which is a single cup coffee extractor and coffee beans on the table. My obsession with coffee paid off! Because I knew what his Aero-press was, I broke the ice with that. These two lovely, older ladies commented on how wise he was for choosing tobacco to sell. They referred to the Dirty Thirties and he didn’t know the reference. They explained that the barkeeps, tobacco sellers and hair-dressers were the ones that stayed in business during the Dust Bowl. After they moved on, he introduced himself and I asked him how he got the idea for selling tobacco and coffee to preppers. He described his recent past as coming across a lot of tobacco through family inheritance and loved coffee. He was also ex-military and he and his friends often discussed the things they would miss the most in a catastrophe. We had coffee in common. I was delighted by this and used it as a way to build rapport. My husband found me right as I began talking to this guy and he was talking mostly to him. Once I displayed my knowledge for the Aero press and began discussing coffee roasting techniques with him, he took me seriously and began talking more directly to me instead of my husband. It was strange though, he didn’t seem to be selling anything. He had these little corn-cob pipes that were on the table and my husband picked one up and we had mentioned that we were from Missouri. He said “Oh, those are from Missouri too!” My husband asked him how much they were and he said

something like “I don’t have a license to sell those yet.” I asked him what he meant and he told me to go to his website in a few weeks and they would be listed. It seemed as if his table was about letting people know about his website. The booths sold for over \$800, so that is a steep price. I just found his route into the market clever and incredibly useful. People were still going to want their vices! We chatted a little more and then a whole bunch of people descended upon his table so we moved on.

One thing that was apparent was that this expo wasn’t catering only to those who had interests in prepping or survivalism. This expo was also marketed as the sustainable living expo and the American life expo so there were booths that were selling windows and siding for a house, countertops, and other items for outfitting one’s home in a more sustainable fashion. There was also a Vitamix blender booth, a wine tasting booth and a booth that was selling all-natural pain relief lotion; like a really nicely scented Bengay. So, there was quite the variety. What I was disappointed to find is that there was a lack of little items of consumption that were affordable. There were two booths that held accoutrement of prepping, but one of these booths were selling back-packs that had a bunch of different components. This booth was right up front next to Black Dog.

There was a man there talking about American Spring 2014. He discussed the Arab Spring and spoke of how he and his confederates were going to go to Washington D.C. for a peaceful protest to impeach President Obama and his whole cabinet. He gave me cards which listed his website OAS2014.com and tried to get me to buy a tee-shirt but I politely demurred. He was the only person

there with a clearly defined political agenda. Other booths and the people who were selling items within them were not displaying a political affiliation like this particular booth or weren't vocal about their political agenda like this man was.

Before the expo, I came across a box-subscription service like those related to beauty like the Birch Box or Ipsy Boxes. These are where you pay a flat fee and get a box of different goodies delivered to your door every month. Someone decided to do a service like this related to prepping and he was there at the expo. A representative from S.E.R.E.-BOX was there signing up people for his boxes. Since I already knew what it was, I told him how excited I was that he was there and that I wanted to sign up. The next month a subscription box arrived at my door. I was excited to open it and see what was inside. Scott created a simple, effective way to introduce prepping to the average person. Each box had a theme. For example, my first box was "Water, water everywhere" and had a Hydro Straw, purification tablets and a small canteen among other hydration related items all sealed in a waterproof bag. The clever thing about his setup was that he included a sheet with all of the included items which you could then compile into a notebook so you would be able to find what you needed in a hurry. I now have 12 months of these kits piled in a durable tote at the ready if I ever need it.

I went to Bob's booth and met his wife Faith. Bob was talking to someone, so she and I began chatting. We discussed women's roles in prepping and how other people perceive it. She told me her daughter thinks they are crazy, but she still encourages her to do so anyway. We discussed the various things they had

for sale and I asked if they had kits. She showed me the one kit they did have, a childbirth kit which had a scalpel, gauze, sterile dressings and sutures. I must have blanched and she said “Let’s hope we never have to use this! Better safe than sorry!”

These expos were happening all over the country which drew in people who were becoming interested in the culture. They provided a meeting space for likeminded people and a place to buy things that you might need. Expos acted as a place to gather knowledge and share ideas with others. They were also a billion dollar industry. I asked if my respondents attended expos and Roger was the only prepper who had attended an expo dedicated to prepping. He explained that he had ulterior motives though. Roger said:

I have been to expos. I’ve been to a couple of them. I went to the one in Tulsa and they had one in Atlanta which was the first one that I did. I had ulterior motives. About six months before that expo occurred, I publish mobile apps and I am a software engineer by trade. About six months before that expo, I published an app for preppers for news. It aggregates all of the news from hundreds of sources and puts it all in one place. It puts it together in a nice little package. When I went to that expo, I was thinking about setting up a booth at one of those things sometime. Subsequently to that I did set one up and it was in Dayton, Ohio that I went to just as an experiment. I had more than one motive. My experience there though, I was disappointed. It was in the seedy part of town. They

rent these low-rent mall things that are pruned out and everything which didn't surprise me. That didn't bother me too much, but I would say that the majority of suppliers are mom and pop kinds of businesses. There are a handful of names that are into it on that scale. Wise Foods and some of those guys, Mountain House. But, for the most part they are niche businesses. So you saw a lot of mom and pop kind of stuff. I found a lot of it not to be useful, but I was fascinated and interested at the same time. So I made sure that I visited every single booth. I talked to everyone. I bought some stuff. I buy most of my stuff online. If I can find it locally, I will buy it that way. But it depends on what I am looking for. Food is one thing and other kinds of supplies are other things all together. It just depends on what I am looking for.

Roger mentioned that there was a cottage industry which promotes goods related to the prepping world. These were businesses run by individuals or small companies which had a niche in the market. Christian shared a warning about this up and coming niche market which was good advice for any newcomer to follow. Christian shared:

I could think of things that I would try to avoid and that would be the products that are really dressed up or jazzed out for zombie killing. Some of them can definitely be useful. But, I feel like a lot of them are strictly for selling, not selling a valuable item, but just trying to make money.

Conclusion

In conclusion, preppers were enacted through practices that established their identity and were aimed at making them feel secure, which was central to their motivations. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the degree to which they did it was influenced by their personal history, their jobs and their interests in hobbies related to prepping. Prepping was heavily reliant on practices in order to accomplish it. These practices focused on stockpiling, defense and repetitive scheduling which created predictability in a world full of the unexpected.

Food work was at the forefront to prepping which is not surprising considering the biological, human need for sustenance. As shown in Appendix B, all four preppers who live in a rural area claimed stockpiling food and water as a practice in which they engaged. The rural preppers were split evenly in terms of gender. Four out of the seven suburbanites and both of the urbanites also claimed stockpiling as a practice. Three out of four rural preppers engaged in hunting and fishing, canning and packing large amounts of food away for long-term storage. Four of the suburban preppers mentioned hunting and fishing and canning as practices they do.

Exploring different defense tactics are a key way to become familiar with different methods of protection. Significantly, all four of the rural preppers discussed guns and firearms as a primary source of protection. Only four of the suburban preppers and one of the urban preppers discussed firearms. None of the rural preppers discussed self-defense. One of the male suburban preppers

and the male urban prepper mentioned self-defense tactics which did not involve the use of firearms, but focused on learning fighting techniques.

Knowledge building was an ongoing process which could encourage preppers to delve into new realms of information and skillsets which they were not previously familiar with. Two of the rural preppers mentioned the internet and different printed materials that they used to learn about prepping. Neither of the urban preppers mentioned relying on internet resources or printed materials as a source of knowledge. Three of the seven suburban preppers discussed the internet, printed materials and the passing down of knowledge from their elders as the ways in which they learned about preparedness. Significantly, it was only the urban preppers that mentioned relying on experts in the field to build their knowledge in the field of prepping. None of the other preppers in the sample expressed that they relied on expert knowledge to inform them about prepping.

The people involved with prepping saw themselves as having particular responsibilities to which they were accountable. Making a plan was highlighted by both of the urban preppers, four of the suburban preppers mentioned plan making and three of the four rural preppers focused on the importance of making a plan. Prepping also requires practicing with the tools and skills that you have collected and cobbled together. One does not want to find that they amassed all of these goods and did not have the skills to use them. Three out of four of the rural preppers focused on the importance of practice and training. Significantly, both of the urban preppers discussed practice and training, as well. Prepping

required one to engage with the consumer market. There were myriad objects out there for one to source as a way to reinforce your chances of survival.

Overall, prepping is a construction of practices which were intended to increase the chances of survival. These practices required the prepper to engage in consumption in order to gather and collect the necessary materials to increase the chances of survival. Consumption could also be seen as a way to construct one's identity. Prepping was a process which allowed the people in this study to create a sense of security. Some of them were using prepping as a way to solve the problems of life and to get their basic needs met in an unstable world where social support is largely inadequate.

Prepping in itself could be seen as a series of checklists which contain items to gather and things to learn. It was also talked about as a hobby and a lifestyle interchangeably which allowed a sense of safety. The preppers gained enjoyment from piecing this puzzle together. They took pleasure in creating control and having agency over what they perceived as an insecure world. Prepping afforded them the opportunity to distance themselves from those they believe were taking advantage of the system but simultaneously at risk because they relied on it. It allowed them to draw a symbolic boundary between the "takers" and construct themselves as "makers" as Roger said. This was at the heart of their construction of an independent worthy identity which will be further elaborated on in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4- MAKERS NOT TAKERS: PREPPER WORTHY IDENTITY WORK

This chapter evaluates what constitutes the key beliefs, values and norms of preppers in this study. Respondents were guided by values and beliefs about the world in which they live. Values could be considered as their perceptions about what is moral, important and standards of behavior. Belief systems guided their perceptions about what is true, who and what to trust and how to make sense of the world. Preppers put together a cultural tool-kit of resources and strategies drawn from the cultural material available to them. They constructed worthy identities as preppers through this process. Values that guided them in constructing worthy prepper identity were creatively constructed integrating cultural material in ways that enabled them to help make sense of the world and accomplish things throughout their daily lives. What made prepper culture distinctive were the values, beliefs, norms and practices brought together as a constellation that defined prepping as something bounded from other types of responses to similar circumstances.

Culture was used to inform and justify behavior instead of just passively affecting us. Swidler stated “culture provides a repertoire of capacities from which varying strategies of action may be constructed. Thus culture appears to shape action only in that the cultural repertoire limits the available range of strategies of action” (Swidler, 1986, p. 284). This chapter will use Swidler’s concept of cultural repertoires to examine the ways respondents were drawing from culture to construct a dynamic tool-kit while simultaneously bound by structural constraints. The toolkit was comprised of the various cultural elements they found useful to

inform their decisions and make sense of the world all while trying to solve the problem of how to increase one's chances for survival, sense of agency and individual worthy identity.

Identity work is what we do when engaged in trying to indicate who we are as individuals. Identity work is done in relation to others and relies on establishing meanings about what we do, what is important to us, taking moral stances and what choices we make in our daily lives (Schwalbe, 1996, p. 105). Lamont described the identity work done by the men in her study as being a way to “distinguish between ‘people like us’ and others” based on moral criteria (Lamont, 2000, p. 241).

For the people in my study, prepping offered a way to construct a worthy identity which also used moral criteria to distinguish themselves from others who weren't making attempts to be prepared. The prepared self as a worthy identity was both an individual identity for preppers but also acted as a collective identity in that preppers claim a commonality of practices, values and worldviews with other preppers which made up the cultural toolkit (Grigsby, 2012, p. 20). These individual and collective prepper identities were formed in opposition to others in the mainstream culture.

I considered whether religious beliefs influenced preppers and described if and how religion informed their value system. How gender roles and relations of preppers are understood by respondents is outlined. This chapter evaluates the preppers' beliefs about gender in the culture of prepping. Various types of insecurities motivated respondents' desire to be prepared. The different types of

insecurities are analyzed to explain how these insecurities drove their actions. The key norms found among all respondents are described showing how respondents utilized these norms to inform how to conduct themselves in the world and provide general rules to live by as preppers. The norms that characterized behaviors of all respondents will be described.

The things that motivated individuals to engage in the behaviors of preparedness are described. Their motivations included perceived risks and experiences they had in their lives. The preppers in this study were asked about risks and worst case scenarios. The various risks that were perceived by these preppers are discussed thematically.

Self-sufficiency as a Value

The core values found in the culture of prepping heavily relied on the notion of self-sufficiency. Preppers strove to create a life that attempted to reduce their dependencies on others, whether that be individuals or state programs. Being able to rely on oneself or do for oneself was considered by those who prep to be the most important aspect of being prepared. Primarily, preppers took individual action to make efforts to protect and preserve the safety of their family to the best of their abilities. They considered taking responsibility for themselves and their families as a moral stance. They often characterized themselves as superior to others who do not strive to do things for themselves or feel entitled. This was demonstrated in the overall ways in which the preppers in this study discussed what prepping means to them, emphasizing responsibility, independence and autonomy.

Roger emphasized how significant self-sufficiency is for him and how his character centers on a lack of entitlement. He stated:

I think that the lifestyle ties into the whole thing about self-sufficiency. That's a big deal for me. I don't believe in expecting others to take care of me. That, in a sense, is a lifestyle. I have always had that kind of feeling. I have never felt like I was entitled to anything.

Preppers in this study also expressed a general apprehension towards the myriad social changes they were experiencing. They alluded to prepping as a means of protection against those social changes whether they be an economic downturn or an unstable political climate. Alice mentioned how she was troubled by the current structure of elections and was frustrated by how self-serving politicians guarantee their status through campaign financing and a lack of term limits. She mentioned that politicians should place greater importance on other things instead of focusing on self-serving projects which keep them in office. Alice said:

I think that as far as term limits, and the answer to every problem is not to throw more money at it, but I don't think that there should be the amount of entitlement that there is. If you can work, you should work. Encourage more industry and more types of jobs within this country. Encourage education and it doesn't appear to me that they are doing that. The politicians are mostly . . . they are in it for themselves. If you limited their terms, they would be motivated to

do what they could while they were in there because they weren't going to get to stay.

Lastly, the people in this study generally believed that their individual practice of prepping had the potential to help the greater community in which they lived. Ned described how he and others defined prepping as a way to not be a victim or dependent on others. He also linked prepping to preserving cultural heritage. This connection was a unique perspective found in this sample. Ned said:

There are other definitions that I have heard other people express about survivalism or prepping as both being a method of protecting yourself from Big Brother or the other side or whatever you want to call it. It has also been a method of people from different cultural groups being able to protect their heritage, but also being able to intermingle. I've met people over the years from different cultures, different ethnic backgrounds and beliefs and stuff and who have similar ideas like 'all we want to do is to be able to . . . Like Joseph in the Old Testament, be prepared for emergencies so you won't be a victim but will be a help. Mainly, we want to be able to take care of our families too.

Values “are robust predictors of behavior” (Small et al., 2010). This research shows that the values of preppers actually shaped and informed their behaviors. Respondents drew from different cultural sources to support the value

of self-sufficiency. For instance, Roger believed that the value of self-sufficiency was inherent in his being. Alice supported her value for self-sufficiency by criticizing her perception that the political environment fosters dependency and a sense of entitlement. Ned considered prepping protection from “Big Brother”, protection of his heritage and consistent with his religious convictions as a Christian man. Preppers placed utmost importance on the value of self-sufficiency which was driven by the desire to not rely on other people or institutions for protection and resources. Placing the value of self-sufficiency at the center of prepping informed the subsequent behavior of those who did it and gave them the feeling that they were among the fittest for surviving.

Research Skills and Knowledge for Preparedness

For these preppers, the formation of a worthy identity was in stark contrast to those who they perceived were not self-sufficient and to be “takers”. They believed that the prepared self is not one who seeks to take from others, whether it be in the form of government benefits or directly from someone in the form of theft, but as “makers.” The prepared self is a worthy identity based on making; making a plan, making an effort to learn new skills, making a stockpile, but most importantly making the best attempt they can to become better prepared to withstand catastrophes and their aftermath.

The ways the preppers constructed worthy identities was revealed through the explanations of reasons they gave for doing it. The worthy identity of the prepper centered on self-sufficiency, taking care of loved ones and being ready for a range of events. The prepared self was constructed in contrast to the

unprepared self, or those who did not concern themselves with self-sufficiency or preparedness and had little concern over taking measures to decrease their reliance on entities like FEMA. All of the preppers identified the importance of prepping in their lives, but seven individuals strongly emphasized how prepping served as a way to construct an identity of a moral person.

For some individuals, prepping served as a way to react to changes in economic status or changes in social standing and often simultaneously was used to support a sense of worthy identity. The preppers I interviewed were disappointed in a variety of things that were considered valuable in the generalized culture and sought to react in ways that rejected the things they were critical of and constructed what they considered to be better alternatives.

The cultural norms of celebrity worship and the perceived dumbing down of fellow citizens were referenced as a negative aspect of the generalized culture in the United States by two men, Thomas and Frank. Frank described how part of his self-esteem was derived from his intelligence and his research abilities. He found that the average American did not possess the ability to find reputable information and had no discernment over what was trustworthy. Frank explained:

I have the ability myself to . . . without knowing me and having extensive conversations over multiple years, you probably won't get out of this conversation that I am one of the smartest people that you will talk to this weekend. I am not being boastful. Some of my example traits that I have, most Americans have the sum total of human knowledge in their phone, they can probably get Lady Gaga

concert tickets faster than I can on the phone. They are more phone literate in that sense. But I find that the majority of people can't fundamentally perform a proper search. It wasn't something that they learned in high school or in college or they have never had to do any type of research so they don't know how to look stuff up. They don't have a critical eye to be able to determine instantly what is bullshit and what is not. I have those skills. Do I have websites bookmarked? Absolutely, and I forward those on. But, if I am researching a topic, I am able to quickly separate all of that stuff out and get the answer to my question in a very short period of time myself. Researching is a skill that I have. In college, I worked at the engineering library and I have search based skills.

Frank devalued a popular culture interest in celebrity icons and defined himself in contrast to those who cared about celebrities as a person who was a serious and capable researcher of valuable knowledge about what is happening in the world and being prepared.

Thomas constructed his worthy identity by making a separation between those people who knew about geopolitical current events and those who chose to spend time watching reality television and keeping up with celebrity gossip.

Thomas said:

My dad is from Illinois and my mom is from hillbilly Virginia. It's not a hobby . . . and the worst thing about prepping is the fact that I have to do it! They say that ignorance is bliss. Here's the thing, how

many people do you know that care more about what's happening with the Kardashians than what is happening to those lost sailors that went missing this week?

Thomas mentioned his background as a way to signal that even though he originated from working-class roots, he still placed importance on being informed and taking responsibility for himself and his family. Thomas was among all preppers in linking his role as a prepper as one of responsibility for the care and support of his family. Like most male respondents, he linked worthy masculine identity to having skills and knowledge to protect and care for his family and himself.

Henry expressed that he believed that relying on others to care for him and his family was a mistake. He framed this self-reliance as his responsibility as a man. Henry said:

I am not relying on the government. There are certainly going to be people who rely on the government. I just know that realistically, they are not going to get here in time. If they do, hooray. If they don't, I am fine. It is my responsibility as a father and it is my responsibility as a husband, my responsibility as a man that to make sure that in case stuff does go down, I can still take care of you. I've always told them that on the same token I will keep the water off of them and I will take care of them. That is my job. My job is to protect my family, not make somebody else do it and wait for somebody else. That may make somebody else uncomfortable, but

to make sure that I have it here . . . It is my job as a husband, a father and a man to make sure that they don't go without. I don't want somebody else to be responsible for their nutrition, their water or their shelter. If it comes, fine. I don't want nobody . . . I don't want to wait. I don't want to depend on somebody else when they should be depending on me. So I am going to learn everything that I can. We might be a little dirty. We might be a little cold. But, we are not going to be in danger. I will make sure of that. I will make sure that we are not hungry and we will not go without food and water. We are going to look around and know that we are going to make it through this. We might have to live this way for a month, but we will make it through. They don't have to believe in it and I don't have to bring them on board. It's not my job . . . It is your responsibility as an adult man to care for your family. That's all you are doing is caring for your family. Buck up and be an adult and care for your family. If you vowed for better or for worse and you aren't prepared for worse then you are only doing a bad job.

Henry constructed a worthy identity by taking responsibility for those who depended on him in relation to those people who took marriage vows and did not follow through on them. Invoking the better or for worse line in most marriage vows gave Henry the ability to link being prepared to being a good father, a good husband and a good moral citizen who could fend for himself. Again, self-reliance was a key component Henry used to compare himself in contrast to others in the

generalized culture who did not do for themselves, individually provided for their families and expected to rely on the government to provide assistance in the case of an emergency.

Political Concerns as the Catalyst for Prepping

Roger, like most respondents, expressed concerns about the political climate and was critical of government. When I asked Roger about what got him into prepping his reply mentioned the political climate under the Obama presidency and how he perceived the generalized culture tending towards despondency and entitlement. The ways in which he constructed his worthy identity was as a “maker” which is opposed to the “takers.” This maker versus taker dichotomy was alluded to by two women and four other men in the sample as well. Roger set clear boundaries between himself and other people who sought to gain resources through no responsibility or action taken on their part. Roger said:

Politically, I saw . . . without getting into the actual politics themselves, but what I saw was an election in 2012 that came about as a result, I thought, of we have finally reached a tipping point where there are more takers than makers. That gets back to the self-sufficiency thing and the entitlement concept. And when we got to the point where there are more than those, I think that there's a point where it becomes hard to recover . . . What has caused what appears to be a sudden rise in interest level in prepping? I think that some of it comes from television shows that came on a

few years ago. I actually got started not much than before that. I have probably been doing it about five years. But without question, my assessment of why there is a sudden rise and interest is almost entirely political. I am sure you can find a thousand different motivations to why people are doing it. It is just my general perception after I started getting involved in it.

Alice discussed how she took a long view of history and saw an inevitable government failure on the horizon. Alice said:

It is just my observation of the way the political environment is right now that we can't go on like we are. At some point, the government is going to fail. At least, that's my opinion that it is going to fail. You can look at history and realized that it has happened repeatedly, over and over again. We are long overdue, unless we can make some serious changes. And my observation is that we are not even trying to make serious changes, so it is eventually going to happen.

Frugal Doers not Passive Consumers

Prepping was a way for preppers to enact values of frugality and taking action. Alice pointed out that practicality and frugality should inform the types of things which were important to focus on when thinking about what is important to prepping. Alice explains:

The core values of prepping is that you want to sustain yourself and you need to save and be prepared for the things that you need, not the things that you necessarily want. It's more for surviving and it's

not necessarily for comfort. We don't store luxury items and stuff like that . . . Any kind of non-nutritional food is a luxury item.

Judith described how she always felt predisposed to being a helper. Judith used an anecdote to define herself as a doer, a taker of action. In contrast to her mother who was trained as a medical professional, in times of need, Judith jumped at the chance to help someone in distress. She included this story to share how she believed her identity was constructed not in opposition to others who need assistance, but as a first responder type. She mentioned the various ways she was prepared to help others in health emergencies throughout our interview. She was trained in first aid and knew how to use a defibrillator. Her moral identity was drawing upon characteristics of caring, responsibility and leadership. Judith shared:

I am kind of a natural running to the problem instead of running away from the problem [person] . . . my mom was a registered nurse. When I was 14 years old, we were having dinner and the neighbor's sister called and said 'You need to come down here! Emily's cut off her finger with a hedge trimmer!' I took the call and I was like 'Mom! You have to go down there! Emily's cut her fingers off' My mom was like "Hell no! I don't have to go down there! I don't need to see that!!' I told her that she has to go because she was her best friend and neighbor. So I ran down there and she hadn't cut her fingers off. She had cut them pretty good though, but they weren't cut off. So, I was the one that ran down there as a kid. I

totally, definitely think that I am wired that way. It is something internal.

Christian, the youngest in the sample, explained how prepping helped formed his identity and aided in his personal development. He and his grandfather prepped together and he recounted how prepping has been part of his life as long as he can remember. Christian said:

[Prepping] has just helped . . . I don't know how to really explain it, but it has helped develop me as a person and it's what I have been doing my whole life. So it's how I think. It's my mindset . . . it has formed me as a person.

Joanie discussed her identity as it related to prepping in opposition to the generalized culture that placed great emphasis on consumerism. Joanie pointed out all of the practices that she engaged in to reduce her impact on the environment. She explained that certain practices which are currently trendy are things which she had been doing for many years. Joanie said:

It was an all at once kind of thing for me. I often think about it and question . . . it leads me to other sorts of spiritual kinds of questions like did I come from another planet? Or is this my second time around or did I do this in another life? My friends call me 'The Monk' because I do without. I need very little. I am not acquisitive although I have a lot of crap. I recycle everything, I compost, I garden. I hang my laundry out. I do not have a dryer, I have never had a dryer. I've been living this way since 1968, so all of this

media information about recycling and composting and taking your own bags, I remember back in the 70s I had my own bags that I used to take to Schnuck's to have my groceries packed in them and they used to get mad at me! I'd pull my bags out and say that 'I have my own bags' and they would moan and groan and say 'how am I supposed to do this?' They were used to either the paper or the plastic and a lot of the times they would just refuse and say you will have to take this back. And now 20 or 30 years later it's like on the door of Schnuck's, a sign that asks if you remembered to bring your reusable bags.

Overall, the worthy identities that preppers are constructing draw upon the greater American culture in which we live. In some ways, these preppers were resisting what they found as disturbing or unsettling and used prepping as a way to respond to those things. Ideas about what it meant to be a good person, a loving spouse, a parent who provided for their children were all components of the worthy identity these preppers are constructing. For five of them, the scope widens to include components of environmentalism or being a good neighbor. Preppers were reshaping for themselves what it meant to be a good American by what they associated with moral behavior, responsible actions and taking care of others close to them.

Norms and Beliefs

Beliefs are “conceptions that people accept, as true, concerning how the world operates and where the individual fits in relation to others.” (Ferrante,

2015, p. 366). Beliefs also guided who and what to trust. Beliefs are also what helped them make sense of the world. Preppers shared a fundamental core belief that the world they lived in was a dangerous place full of risk. This belief propelled them to take action and responsibility over their chances of survival in case of a catastrophe. The personal beliefs of the people I interviewed about prepping spanned a wide range. Preppers had beliefs about politics and religion that helped them explain that they felt that they are managing the risky and dangerous world they live in. Some preppers expressed feelings of insecurity and talked about generalized fears they had. Other preppers believed that being prepared was a way to reduce the vulnerability they felt and they believed prepping gave them a way to quell certain anxieties they had about living in an unstable world.

The sample of preppers in my study were by no means homogeneous. There was a socioeconomic range, a relatively even mix of men and women and a variance in education rates. What was consistent though was the belief that taking ownership over one's levels of preparedness was a personal responsibility. People in this study expressed an individualism which was supported by the ways in which they discussed who to trust. In short, the only person or people these preppers trusted to take care of themselves was themselves. There was a do it yourself mentality.

Susan discussed how prepping has evolved over time in her life and framed it as a sort of spiritual endeavor. She described the self-protective measures that she took in order to prepare herself mentally to become a mother and to feel safe to bring a child into this world. She believed that having a sense

of self-reliance combined with shielding herself from certain ideas that her friends were sharing with her was what allowed her to feel safe enough to bring a child into what she felt was an unstable world. Susan said:

I have my own evolution of what [preparedness] has looked like in my life. I am a healing intuitive, so keep that in mind because my life is based on my intuition all of the time. When I was pregnant with my daughter is when the whole Y2K thing was hitting the world. Everyone was afraid, basically. I was spending some time with friends who were preppers in ways that I didn't even know that word yet. I grew up in a hippie culture with Waldorf² parents. I grew up on 56 acres and I know how to live with no electricity and no running water and I think of myself as capable of being self-sufficient in a certain way. The world makes it difficult to live like that. We are not set up like that in this culture at all. So I have a certain sense of self-reliance in the first place. Then when I got pregnant and that Y2K thing came along and I didn't know anything about computers and I didn't understand potentially what the issues were. I just knew that there was a huge wave of fear going through the world. I had friends that were buying guns and prepackaged food and buying a lot of extra stuff and I just said that 'I can't have

² Waldorf schools are based on the philosophy of holistic learning using pedagogical methods which highlight creativity, immersion in nature and integration of intellect and artistry. They are usually private schools which encourage deep participation and volunteerism by the parents.

anything to do with you guys. I love you all but I can't be bringing a baby into this world right now and be listening to you guys talk about what's important to you. Not because it's not important, but because if I go there, I won't want to have this baby.

Susan talked about shielding herself from fear and ideas about the end of the world in order to feel safe. Shutting herself off from certain types of information was what she believed protected her from ideas and conversations which generated fear in her mind. Staying relatively uninformed was how Susan sought protection and safety.

Frank believed that arming himself with firearms was a primary way to enhance his personal safety. He talked about the generalized culture in America and explained in detail his personal beliefs about guns and how he viewed others who don't share the same type of beliefs. Frank said:

In society, again, what is it? God created man and Colt made them all equal? I am 6'2" and over 300 pounds. Ninety-nine percent of the women in the United States are physically no match for me. I could do whatever I wanted. That is a genetic fact of society. Firearms level the playing field between the smallest possible person and the largest possible person. It makes no difference. They are an equalizer for the purposes of someone accepting the responsibility for their own self-defense. I am saying that should be an inevitable conclusion for most people. That's how we fight wars. That's how the police operate. To that end, and on a similar topic

because we are talking about it . . . a lot of people not willing to accept their own security as their responsibility. I hate to get off on this tangent, but firearms are one of my things. Firearms are responsible for crime like pens are responsible for forging and penises are responsible for raping and alcohol is responsible for drunk driving. Why is it with firearms that we want to control the firearms mentally? There are clearly people in the United States like former mayor of New York Michael Bloomberg who physically believes that firearms are evil, that a physical object has a positive or negative quality and that firearms are evil. And that is evil is going to occur . . . and that it is that object's fault. I didn't want to go off on the tangent, but needed to mention my personal beliefs there. You will find a correlation between the people who aren't preppers and the people who are against firearms. The same type of people who don't want to think about those things, as part of their beliefs they have this nobody else should be doing this either. That somehow there is something wrong with you because you have thought of this. Obviously, gun control has now been a failure for essentially 20 years. The anti-gun people they are . . . 'why are pro-gun people against any anti-gun legislation?' It always starts with people using the critical key phrases like 'common sense gun control.' Like how can you be against common sense gun control? That's like saying 'how can you be against babies?' But, when you

do your own research and I would certainly not tell you to go look at any websites, but when you find people who are self-described in the anti-gun community and when you look at their writings, they have clearly indicated that the common sense gun control is one of the steps on the ladder to confiscation and elimination. They have physically said it and put it in writing. If they can't get to their other goals, this is one of the steps. These people have said this! So the people who are pro-gun are legitimately concerned about this as a step on the path to them losing rights. You've got 35,000 gun laws in the country. Is one more really going to make a difference? A criminal by definition is somebody who doesn't obey the law. So if they aren't obeying the other 35,000 laws, what makes you believe that they are going to obey this one? Firearms, for a variety of reasons, are a part of our culture. More so in our country than other countries. Comparisons of countries that are like "oh, they don't have this problem, they don't have that problem." Well yes, the country is like Nepal. They are always peaceful and loving and are monks, blah blah blah. They treat women like chattel! They may be advanced in some areas but are totally behind in others. You can't pick and choose to make comparisons in one individual area and say that these two societies are somehow equivalent. There are many people on the planet, many people on the planet who are a step above monkeys. They can't read and they can't write. They

treat women like garbage and they kill each other routinely for stupid stuff, usually religion. These are the facts of the world that we live in.

Clearly, Frank possessed very strong beliefs about individuals' rights to arm themselves with guns and expressed negative opinions about those who wanted to introduce formal measures to enhance gun safety in this country. His worldview was one where he viewed other people as threatening. He believed that people in the larger society were aggressive and dangerous. His personal beliefs were framed as based in an understanding of human nature as essentially the survival of the fittest. He believed the best way to equalize physical variations in strength is by using guns. Framing the issue in oppositional terms allowed him to make a moral judgement against those people who were what he calls anti-gun. He argued that anti-gun advocates had a faulty reasoning and that guns weren't to blame, but the evil nature of humans were to blame for killing. He allowed no room for a nuanced argument and made sweeping generalizations about people who sought greater restrictions on firearms in this country.

Religious Beliefs

Several of the preppers were inspired by their faith to be better prepared. Preppers used their individual faith and religious beliefs to inform how they made sense of the world on a greater scale, and in terms of prepping, faith is what supported the motivation to become more self-reliant. Four preppers directly mentioned religion and faith. Alice referenced religious belief as a guiding force in the general culture of prepping. She made the connection that religion is what

informed the code of conduct for many preppers. Most interestingly, religion is what she felt informed the overall values of prepping. Alice said:

I really think that there is [a core value that all preppers have]. A lot of preppers, it has been my observation that most of them are religious or they have a religious affiliation. So they have a bunch of core values. They are very independent thinking people, but they are not . . . I want to say that they are not destructive.

Thomas spoke of religion in similar terms. He described his personal taxonomy as placing God first and family second. Faith was essential to how he conceived of himself as a good man. He felt that his faith determined what is important and how to view his place in the world. Thomas said:

I am a man of faith. I don't preach my faith onto anybody because it's extremely personal. The things that I know that you aren't supposed to talk about with other people is sex, religion and politics. We have already talked a bit about politics. Faith, for me, is key. I am a Christian. I was raised Protestant, my wife is Catholic. Our boys are being raised Catholic until they decide which faith they want to follow. To me, faith is the cornerstone of family. Family, next to God, is the most important thing that me as an adult male has to protect. To me, family is not just my wife and my sons and my in-laws and whatnot. My family also includes my brothers that I served with in the service. I am closer to those guys than I ever was with my own brother, God rest his soul.

Susan had a different way of viewing faith and spirituality. She referred to how she used her religion as a support system and explained in detail how she felt self-love and self-care is at the center of her spirituality. She illuminated the shift in her perception she underwent as a way to achieve a sense of peace and as a way to reduce the fear she felt in the world. Susan said:

I've never been a priority in my world. I felt like June Cleaver, like if I took care of my friends and my husband, then that was taking care of me. That's not what was happening. So what I went from is my husband, my friends, myself to the divine, myself, my husband, my daughter and then my friends. So my priorities have completely shifted. The only place that I get stability is from, I don't care what you call God, the almighty biblical God or Buddha . . . I don't care what you call it. There is a whole world of support that is unseen to you that you can tap into. Start being aware of help. Start asking for support. Start calling in self-love and start living in that. I don't care what you call it. It's a lifetime practice and it's not built into us as Americans. The Dali Lama says this fear thing is horrible because you become controlled by fear. You have fear because you have isolation. We are a culture of human beings that need community. So when you isolate you get depression and anxiety and all of these weird things that are epidemics in our first world nations.

Judith did not share similar religious beliefs expressed by the other preppers. She discussed religion in rather negative terms and emphasized how

religion placed a wedge between herself and her father. In Judith's case, the topic of religion was contrary to her personal motivations to prep. She described the contention between her and her father while simultaneously acknowledging their similarities. Judith said:

My dad was an evangelical Christian and he was obsessed with Armageddon. I have this real problem separating myself from him in that we have some of the same tendencies. But, I feel like they are for completely different reasons. My dad was waiting for the rapture and he had a basement full of canned goods and MREs and weird shit like that. I am almost 52 and that was in the 70s and the 80s. By the 90s, he got really obsessed with Y2K . . . What's really interesting is that it was during the Clinton years because I feel like we had a lot more shit with that happening with Bush with people buying their plastic and their duct tape and everything. So I was like 'screw this!' I was never into Armageddon. I didn't go for that. And I wasn't into the Y2K thing. I pretty much laughed at him.

Overall, religious beliefs, or lack thereof, could inspire one to become more prepared. Thomas and Alice both spoke of ways religion acted to inform how one should conduct themselves in terms of prepping. Judith explained the differences between her and her father using religion as the basis of that fundamental difference. Susan invoked religion and prepping to encourage her to take better care of herself and put herself first.

Gender Values and Norms in Prepping Worthy Identity Work: Reproducing and Resisting Patriarchy within the Context of Prepping

Prepping is largely stereotyped in the generalized culture as an activity dominated by men. This sample had 13 respondents and five of the respondents are women. Eight of the respondents mentioned gender roles. Though this sample was not representative of the larger prepper culture, it displayed that we can't claim a male dominated prepping culture. When embarking on this study, I also believed the stereotype and assumed that prepper culture was male dominated and women were doing it if their male partners were. What I discovered over the course of the research was that my assumptions were wrong. Men and women both prepped and did so in similar ways. Though some respondents did not accept stereotyped beliefs about gender norms and believed that both genders had equal responsibility and requirements for participating in prepping, a number felt that other preppers did embrace stereotypical gender norms. Ned, a long-time prepper supported the claim that the culture has been male dominated in the past, but was changing to be more inclusive and honor the contributions of women. Ned said:

I do think that men and women come at it from a different way, but it's a way where the two can meet together. In the past, survivalism and prepping was more of a masculine thing but that has changed. What you are seeing now is more and more influence of women preppers because they come at things differently, like homeopathic medicine for example. That's the old [way]. There used to be a

balance to everything and they do provide a balance to things. One of the magazines that I have here does have an article about women preppers. But it has been really fascinating to me to watch the change in the culture over the past couple of decades. It's not as secretive as it used to be. People are curious, not just about survivalism in general, but also about survival skills.

I asked each of the respondents if they felt there was a difference in the roles of men and women in prepping. Overall, their answers surprised me. Joanie made me laugh when she described representations of gender that she remembers from the bomb shelter era of the 1950s. *"You made sure that you had your little lace apron in case you needed to serve lemonade in your bomb shelter and had enough bobby pins to keep your hairdo up."* Even in her humorous comment, Joanie highlighted how women were expected to do the food work for the family even under nuclear attack. Alice identified an interesting aspect of how responsibilities are divvied out between the genders and she used Christian ideology to explain why this was the way it is. Alice said:

I think the men think that there are separate roles in prepping. They are not so . . . (laughs) the women just have to put up with it and go on. My husband has encouraged me to teach my son how to can, but he's not going to learn how to do it himself. He thinks that all of the food preparation and stuff is my responsibility. The health care and stuff is a woman's [responsibility]. The protecting them and the hunter-gatherer type stuff is his responsibility. I think that ties back

to the whole Christian and Protestant philosophy that a lot of them have.

Alice mentioned how there are generational differences between what is appropriate behavior and practices for men to engage in. She explained that while her husband didn't engage in food work, which has been argued as women's responsibilities (Matchar, 2013), she was teaching her son some fundamental techniques of food preservation like canning, which saved the family money. Frugality was claimed by preppers in constructing a masculine prepper identity. The men in the sample were claiming frugal practices to enrich their stockpiles and improve their set of skills related to preparedness.

Though Roger had levels of economic security that others in the sample didn't have, he expressed a concern over spending money fairly in his relationship. He explained that he would feel very uncomfortable prepping and spending money on supplies and such if his wife did not approve. Roger said:

I have been married coming up on 30 years. It's different because [my wife and I] feel a lot more prepared now than we were when we first started. We both were getting into that sort of thing. We both came to the decision to do this at the same time for the same reasons. So we have been very supportive of each other. I have been very fortunate in that, I think. It would be a totally different story if my wife didn't support me on this because we have had to spend a lot of money that is just as much hers as it is mine.

Henry described the issues which can arise when both partners are not in agreeance to why prepping is necessary. He illustrated this point by explaining it through a space issue within your house. Sharing space, financial means and other resources like time can present challenges when there are different ideas about how to allocate those things. Henry described what he does as making effort to only do a little bit at a time and not to go overboard. If he was to go to extreme measures, that would pose a problem in his marriage. Henry said:

It is [something that can break a relationship] It is serious. I had to find a balance between my wife who doesn't believe in it and myself who believes in it fervently because when you bring stuff in, you have to have room. You both have so much stuff in the box that you call a house. That forced me to do the two or three uses in one item thing. I couldn't bring a whole bunch of stuff in here! I couldn't do it because it would cause problems. You get in that cycle where it can cost so much money! And it's not that the prepping did it {caused relationship problems}, I guarantee you that it was the amount of money that was spent on it. Finances will split up a marriage faster than anything else. If you are dipping into the pool that you shouldn't have your toe in and you are using it for prepping then that will cause a problem, not the prepping, but the money you spent on it or the energy that you gave it. My wife and I get along famously and she knows that I prep but I don't take anything from the house money. I don't take from the bill money. This is how I do

it. A little bit at a time. That stuff has a long shelf life and my brain bucket is full. I would rather have it and not need it than need it and not have it.

Henry did not have his wife's support in terms of prepping and he focused on what this type of tension can create if the partner who preps isn't careful about how they spent their money. Henry's quote displayed why having contention within a relationship over preparedness could create difficulties within the relationship and lead to greater issues. Instead of assuming a male dominated control over financial decision making, he assumed a shared model of responsibility over the finances.

Sean was going through a divorce and brought up the discord in worldviews between him and his ex-wife. He described the fundamental differences in how they each approached disaster scenarios. He conceived of himself as a proactive person who was intent on riding out the after effects of a potential disaster because he made an effort to increase his abilities to do so by storing extra water and food. He described the approach his ex-wife would take as reactive and dependent on others to take care of her which goes against the core value of self-sufficiency. He felt frustrated with her resistance to even talk about making a plan. Sean said:

I think that she's okay with me having a plan in place. It was one of those things that I just couldn't get a conversation started about. She absolutely doesn't want to go there. 'Everything has always been fine and everything will always be fine. We have nothing to

worry about because someone will always swoop in and take care of us.' I like to think that at some point a truck is going to roll up and I will be able to fill up my gallons of water, like after ten days. Thanks Uncle Sam! That's what I prepare for, that kind of scenario that eventually someone is going to show up. That eventually someone is going to show up so what do I do in the meantime? My plan is to survive in the meantime.

Thomas, on the other hand, described his relationship as a team and spoke about how he viewed his partnership in equitable terms. Thomas stated:
When it comes to my wife, I see it like ancient Norwegians did. The wife was by the husband's side holding the shield while the husband wielded the sword. To me, that's what a true prepper team should be when it comes to a husband and a wife.

Throughout our interview, he told me what he did to prep and then described how his wife enhanced what he did. One way their teamwork was apparent was how he talked about the delicious meals she created out of the staples he stockpiled. Thomas and his wife were replicating traditional gender roles in a prepper fashion. He hunted the food down at Sam's Club and she cooked it up in a delicious, creative way.

Christian also focused on teamwork and explained how his grandparents, his prepper role-models, did things together and possessed similar skills. He also confessed to initially believing that women should do what is considered traditional women's work when it came to prepping, but acknowledged that true

survival relied on both genders having the ability to do all of the types of skills and activities which might be needed in case of emergencies. Christian said:

I think that women are perfectly capable of doing anything that a man can do and vice versa. I think that in the prepping world that's kind of a key factor, is to make sure that you can both do what you need to do to survive. Especially if you are on your own, if something happens to somebody, you have to have the skills that that person had . . . I wanted to say that the women need to cook and do whatever at the house, [but] in my idealistic world, I would hope that it would be equal. I think of my grandma and grandpa and they are both pretty tough people and they both can pretty much do anything.

Judith expressed her views on gender and prepping in opposition to others in the sample. She was the only non-heterosexual member of the sample and discussed how being a lesbian contributed to her views on gender and prepping. Ultimately, she felt responsible for taking care of others and explained that her career has largely been one of being the person in charge. She used this as a component of her identity and felt capable as a cool headed leader that does not need to rely on a man to take charge in case of an emergency. Judith said:

Honestly, aside from my dad or the religious zealot people, I think dudes are kind of stupid! I am also a lesbian, so . . . I think that they are less engaged with what is going on. I think that they are more

reactionary, like I don't need to deal with that now, it hasn't happened . . . I have been supervisor/manager for the last 25 years and people rely on me to make things work all of the time. There's no man at work that is going to save us. There's not that many men at work, to be clear, but even when I did work with a more male population, I think that they would end up asking me what to do. Also, as a lesbian, I am not partnered with a man that thinks he knows anything. You know what I mean? I would never rely on a dude to make sure that I would survive . . . Guys want to be told what to do. They may go out and do the hunting and the gathering but somebody is telling them to do it! My personal experience is that I feel like I am going to end up taking care of a bunch of people if something happens.

Generally, prepping has been depicted as an activity for men. As shown through my respondents' statements, many believed that to increase the chances of surviving a catastrophe, men and women are going to have to work together. Most said that using traditional gender roles to inform expectations of behavior would not be an appropriate response to a catastrophic event. Some idealized heterosexual partnership and male/ female teamwork in prepping while others envisioned more equally held skillsets. Overall, gender stereotypes of the generalized culture were not fully embraced by preppers in this study.

Keeping it to Yourself: A Core Norm

In any given culture, norms are “written and unwritten rules that specify behaviors appropriate and inappropriate to a particular social situation” (Ferrante, 2015, p. 366). In prepping culture, there are core norms which inform conduct of those who engage in prepping. Norms of prepping are linked to the practices of prepping in a way which inform what and how you do it. For example, keeping it to yourself can be considered a core norm of the culture. This relates to the belief that humans are generally not to be trusted. Christian talked about this norm and pointed out that though the types of people who prep are varied, it is hard to know who does it because you aren’t supposed to talk about it with others.

Christian said:

For us preppers, it is going to be obvious. The obvious mindset is to survive whatever is going to happen. But I feel like the generalized culture isn’t really....I know there is one, but it’s like everyone wants to keep their mouth shut about it. Everybody wants to keep quiet about it. [There’s no specific type] I really think that it is a bunch of different types of people with the same idea. I know that there is something in common with everybody that does this. It’s the same idea, but I haven’t really noticed a common factor in the kind of people. I think that it’s all kinds of people who actually do it.

Many of the principle rules to live by were expanded on in Chapter Three about prepper practices. Respondents discussed things they felt were primary in

prepping culture or things that we can consider their standards of behavior. For instance, Thomas described how protecting yourself with a firearm is central to being a prepper. He places a firearm above life-sustaining food and water. Thomas' logic is echoed by nine of the respondents in terms of having and using guns, but only three of the respondents held views similar to his regarding placing defense through the use of guns as a primary response. Their view was that it will not matter how big your stockpile is if you are unable to defend it.

Thomas said:

First off, the bare minimum you want to have is a handgun. My recommendation is any handgun that fits your hand that you can comfortably shoot and you can go to the range on a repeated basis. It won't hurt your hand and you will actually enjoy shooting it. But, my only thing is that my recommendation is that it be a firearm that a military uses, not necessarily US military, but a military in general. Germany uses Glocks. US uses 1911's and Berettas currently. The Navy Seals are just transitioning to the Glock 19. Swiss uses Sig Sauers. Whatever has been adopted by the military, you know it is reliable. It has already been field tested so you know that it's reliable. On top of that, set up a bug-out bag with a minimum of 72 hours' worth of food. Food, fire starting, water supplies. It can be done. Aldi's has protein bars. Spend \$35 and get an Alice pack.

Another rule to live by voiced by five respondents was the need of having 72 hours of food and water on hand at all times. While Thomas

viewed this as secondary to having a gun, five in the sample viewed it as primary.

Henry approached the problem of defense from a different angle. Though this practice of being a good neighbor was discussed in length in the previous chapter, knowing your neighbors was also considered a norm in prepper culture, as described by seven respondents. Henry made efforts to be a good neighbor while simultaneously supplying them with provisions. He did this for several reasons to improve the chances that his neighbors would not become threatening people. Henry said:

Water, water sells for 90 cents a gallon at Wal-Mart. I've got extra. That's what I tell everybody around here. I say, 'look, I just have extra. I forgot that I already have a bunch in stock. Here's an extra six gallons.' If they forward it or water the plants or they use it for dishes or shoot it at the range, I don't care because I handed it to them and I kind of planted a bug. 'You want to have at least six gallons of water.' . . . Everything has a dual purpose. I am teaching them but also giving them water so they don't have to come and get mine. Everything needs to have a dual purpose. Even your help needs to have a dual purpose.

Frank described a norm of prepping as taking responsibility for yourself. He saw this as central to the prepper mentality. He claimed that taking personal responsibility for one's own survival as what separated the prepper from everyone else. He used other examples to express this idea and fell into blaming

the victim territory to make his point which irresponsibly misplaced blame. Frank stated:

Certainly there is some aspect where people need to accept responsibility for their own safety and security for themselves and their family. That is a basic tenant again, the difference between just having three days of food and being a prepper or survivalist is accepting that as a next step. If you are actually thinking about what could happen, if you are running through scenarios in your head. Maybe you work late and the parking lot at work isn't well lit and you are a small woman. In my mind, you're engaging in a risky activity. You are going out into a dark parking lot late at night. So how do you mitigate that risk? Can you not stay late? Can you talk to management about putting in some motion sensing lights? Can you take self-defense courses? Do you buy a firearm and get trained in its use? Do you carry mace? I am not giving anybody the answer to that question, but I am just saying that you are thinking about that scenario and your own responsibility for your security. I would never say that a woman asked to be raped. But you would also be stupid to not acknowledge that if a woman goes by herself to a college frat party and drinks too much, that rape is not one of the potential outcomes, that she wakes up in the morning (laughs) having had quasi-consensual sex. That's the potential outcome that

she put herself in. Again, there is not a judgement on the activity, but I am using it as an example.

While Frank said he was not being judgmental or prescribing proper actions, he was assuming that the world is a dangerous place and that individuals in his example, women, were responsible for anticipating any dangerous situation they may enter and for taking responsibility for their own survival.

Roger took a different view regarding those who do not take personal responsibility for their own safety and described what he felt as frustration. He discussed how imperative having a group could be in trying to increase the chances of survival. He talked about the need to have your greater community prepared for emergencies because if they were not, it would take some time to receive help and in the meantime, lives could be lost. Roger said:

There's a common phrase that we hear in the community, not one that you hear on the news, but the lone wolf concept. I fall in the category that if you are really in a bad situation, no matter what caused it, I couldn't imagine trying to do that on your own, even as a small family. People are going to have to work to get along and to share experiences and resources too. A common thread that I do find among the community is a frustration level with people that aren't interested in preparing. It bothers us that people don't understand that. What a lot of us are concerned about is if something bad happens, there are going to be more people that

don't have than people who do. The percentages of the population of people who have prepared for this sort of thing is very small. And so, practically what does one do for a situation like that?

Being prepared required knowing how to handle yourself in times of an emergency. Roger discussed how we will have to work together to share our resources, which also included personal skills, to enhance our chances of survival. Both Henry and Ned talked about how important training is in prepping. Training was so important that it could be considered a norm of the culture. Ned mentioned that he would encourage someone new to prepping to take a first responder wilderness course because he believed that would give someone skills to increase their chances of survival or to help others. Henry also discussed training yourself for multiple scenarios and to teach others the same skills. The belief that everyone should possess basic survival skills is a departure from the generalized culture. Respondents believed that outside of prepping culture, people rely on specialists to complete their daily activities and achieve their goals. They maintained we no longer live in a culture which encourages people to have a broad skillset, instead we champion people who possess a specific set of skills and knowledges.

Responding to Insecurities

Furedi described fear as being what defined the mood of our culture in contemporary society. (Furedi, 2007). Other authors have also shown that fear is a mainstay in dominant culture and circulates through society (Glassner, 2010; Walker, 2013; Wuthnow, 2010). Preppers in this study were grappling with

feelings of fear and insecurity and they chose to manage their fear through their prepping practices. Susan described the desire to not be controlled by fear, but found that incredibly challenging to continue to do on a regular basis. Susan said:

What I had to deal with is how safe do I feel in the world? How much do I trust mankind? How willing am I to be brainwashed and controlled through fear? I am not willing to be brainwashed and controlled through fear. I have to defrag and reboot all of the time so I am not being brainwashed and controlled through fear. It's a whole life's journey to deprogram ourselves from the 'I'm not worthy and I have to prove something' in order to get love. A lot of people don't try for it because our country's based on Puritan beliefs. The entire population is programmed and controlled by fear.

Henry made a distinction between those he felt were just paranoid and those people who were fearful because they were paying attention to what was happening at the geopolitical level. He claimed that he used intuition to discern what was worthy of being afraid of and what does not garner a fearful response. He linked prepping to the ability to manage the fears which developed from paying attention to what was happening in the world. Henry said:

I am more intuitive. I am not more paranoid, but I am more intuitive. I know now that it's not one thing but a combination of things that will get me uneasy. I am not worried about it when it happens. I will learn about it when it happens, though. I am more intuitive. I will be able to see something and watch it. That's kind of like my definition

of intuitive, you aren't worried so much about being prepared because you are. You can't prepare any more, with the prepper porn, you can put a tank across your yard and be ready, but the problem is that everyone knows that you have a tank and what do you have in there? You just watch things and you rotate. You become more of a watcher. Your intuition starts kicking in on little things, it helps you keep out a watch. You watch stuff, like what was that little bump over in China? Why in the hell is ISIS in Germany? What is this going to do? Everything else is global. We are all connected so whatever happens over there will affect over here so you have to just watch.

Feelings of insecurity

Feelings of insecurity were a common feature amongst people in this sample. Prepping was a concrete way that people dealt directly with what they found fearful and their feelings of insecurity. Henry described in detail how developing his prepper skills offered comfort to both he and his wife. Henry said:

If it does go down and I do believe it will, if a natural disaster or the power grid goes down or whatever, I can with confidence, since I am trained, do all of this stuff. My wife will look at me and go 'alright, he seems to have it down.' That calms my wife down and when we are done, like when I am done building the shelter and I've started the fire, it is one more weight off of her shoulders. Your family or people that you have around you are going to want to

know that in this situation you know what you are doing. It is always better to be a leader than someone who just knee jerks. If you are a knee jerker, you are someone that no one wants around.

Developing skills and knowing how to manage yourself in times of crisis were ways to assuage fears, both of yourself and of others who relied on you. There were different types of insecurities mentioned by preppers. Some insecurities were openly discussed. Other insecurities were mentioned in a more indirect way. Several people in the study were dealing with personal situations which reduced their economic advantages, things like unemployment or divorce. Four respondents in the sample were divorced and were challenged by the breakup of their marriages in a way that encouraged them to become better prepared. Two of the respondents were currently underemployed or recently back to work after being unemployed. Eight of the respondents mentioned economic insecurity, either in the past or that they were currently going through it. The following section will delve deeper into the ways in which economic insecurities affect why and how people engaged in prepping.

Economic insecurity

Thomas was currently underemployed and seeking a better paying job during the time of our interview. He was a tradesman with military experience and had two young sons at home. His wife was gainfully employed and he described how hard they worked at paying off their debts and found ways to save money. Thomas talked about how they had to be economically savvy about how

they approached prepping and what sorts of techniques they used to bolster what they have. Thomas and his wife grew a vegetable garden. They dehydrated or froze much of the bounty to preserve it for the winter. He talked about shopping at Sam's Club to save money. Thomas shared:

Right now, my wife and I are struggling financially. I actually just got an offer letter for a new job that is paying a couple more dollars an hour with at least ten hours of overtime a week. We are hoping to get back on track and get caught up on our bills. A lot of things, preps that we have, we have bought typically around tax time when we have money.

He discussed packing away large quantities of staple foods like rice and dried beans. If it was required of them to rely on what Thomas has stockpiled to be able to eat, they did have that to draw from. He engaged in practices to improve his chances of enduring joblessness or an economic downturn.

Alice echoed similar sentiments and explained how the food she stored added to the food she ate regularly and wasn't just put away as a stockpile for prepping. *"I really don't [see it as a hobby]. The way I look at it is if I do all of this canning and all of this huge volume of stuff, and if nothing happens, I rotate the stock through and I eat it and it cuts back on the grocery bills."* For Alice, prepping actually served as a way to relieve some of her economic insecurities.

Alice said:

I am not going to give up any of my social . . . and any of the benefits that I get from the government until the government is no

longer there to supplement that. Because my husband is retired and he draws social security, so I am not willing to give up his social security check and all of his health benefits because I don't approve of the government. As long as they are going to give me something, I am going to take it!

Alice mentioned that her husband drew social security and she still wanted to receive those checks even if she largely disapproved of the government that wrote those checks and the idea of people receiving government financial support.

Political Insecurity

Six of the respondents described some sort of insecurity stemming from politics. In Roger's case, he evaluated our economy and was concerned with how the politicians in office were responsible for what could have potentially been a devastating economic collapse. Roger said:

I honestly believe that something will happen. When you hear the term economy, when you hear the term unsustainable being used, and you are hearing it more and more from established politicians on either side of the equation, more on one than the others. That word means something to me. And the path that we are headed down doesn't show any sign of slowing down or reversing directions. So to me, I think it is unsustainable and at some point the balloon is going to burst. I always have hope. I hope that things

will turn around. This world, and our country, has always overcome major obstacles before so hopefully we can do that. We will see.

The political arena in this country inspired many different feelings which generated insecurities. Several of the respondents focused on personal freedoms and how they were uncomfortable with the amount of distasteful things the government was responsible for doing. Dana touched on particular subcultures that she found alarming and described the various issues she had with the current political system in this country. Dana said:

For a long time, my mom taught at an inner-city Black school. Now the funny thing is now that my mom is retired, she has become a little bit of a rabid anti-Muslim. I don't know if she's listening to too much Fox News? With that being said, there's more extremism in the Muslim religion than there are in other religions. It's not the Muslim part, but the extremist part. You get into that far right wing Christian extremists and they are just as wackadoodle too! There's just a lot more on the wackadoodle side in some parts of the country. I don't know . . . I am not a big fan of those people . . . [We live in] a college town. There are people who are part of the college organization like professors and researchers. When the governor came out with things that were anti-gay . . . like nobody around here cares if people are gay! And it's the same in Indianapolis. But, maybe we are just . . . I don't see this whole anti-gay thing but here we go! You don't believe in same sex whatever, well don't do it

yourself! Mind your own business . . . Then on the fiscal side I am like look . . . there's a bunch of things that I believe in and I will totally support. I like paying people and paying people is good. When the government takes people's money in the form of taxes I do believe that it is a form of theft and forces somebody to give to somebody. Like, for example, if I thought that this couple next to me needed help, we would all say that it's wrong for me to break into someone else's house and steal their crap and give it to my neighbors. Right? I could give them my stuff. I just don't believe in government sufficiency in doing these things. I think that once they get that power they do tend to become [crutches]. Even if the current people have the best of intentions, the next people won't. It just becomes this big thing that I still think that the power elite, I think that 'let's make this the cherry. Please buy my crap!' If I had to pick a political party it would be Libertarian.

Susan used the polarizing topic of immunizations to talk about personal freedoms and how she desired more ability to choose what went into her and her child's body. Instead of focusing on the variety of mistruths that were floating in the generalized culture regarding the perceived dangers of vaccinations, she framed it as an issue of freedom and the right to make personal choices. Susan said:

It's like the immunization thing for me. I don't want to talk about the conspiracy theories that I believe that are happening in that. That is

one facet of this. If I want a leg to stand on in my community, then my leg is this, I have a right to make a choice as an American! You will get people on the same page. The fact that you and I have so much in common and you immunized your baby and I didn't immunize my baby, that's the thing that you and I can agree on about immunizations is that we have the freedom to make that choice.

Ned set up a dichotomy between the Tea Party and the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement as a way to challenge the portrayals of each movement. He problematized how the Tea Party was portrayed in the media while trying to claim that the portrayal of OWS was wholly inaccurate. He reduced the motivations of the Tea Party as a political movement as being a group of people who had complaints that wanted the chance to be heard. His quote signified the perceived political insecurity that he was experiencing. Ned claimed to be a "recovering Democrat" and switched parties during the Clinton administration. His dichotomous portrayal indicated how he viewed a protest movement which sought to change the dominant culture. Ned said:

There have always been disasters and people pull together and there have also been others who have taken advantage of the circumstances. It's also about how people are presented and how people are perceived. A couple of extreme examples, a lot of people look at the Tea Party and think they are nasty and racist. But, when they started, they had a complaint they wanted to be

heard. Then you had Occupy Wall Street and based on their intentions, they are different. The Tea Party people, you have never found a case online or in the news where they didn't clean the bathroom after themselves or made sure that things were ok. Occupy Wall Street protested and there was over \$100 million dollars of damage, there were physical and sexual assaults, drug use and weapons. They would raid their camps and find all sorts of illegal substances. There was a case where some of the OWS people in Portland got upset when the food vendors stopped giving out free food because they had to make a living and they destroyed their food carts. There are many people who would say that OWS are the good people and Tea Party are the bad. Why is that?

Lastly, Judith expressed utter disdain for those who are so against President Obama that they sought ways of visibly and harmfully displaying their disapproval. Judith spoke about the lengths to which she went to reduce her carbon footprint and was incredulous at those who sought to harm the environment as a form of protest. She also mentioned how she was socializing her daughter to problematize what those kinds of people were doing and to take issue with unnecessary waste. Judith said:

The thing that really bugs me is the people that are just so anti-Obama that they are driving around their big pick-up trucks with the smokestacks on them just to be a dick. It is super frustrating for me. A year ago it was time for a new car and I was mulling over what I

was going to get. I can't afford a hybrid or just a full-on electric car and I still have to be able to get my kid from here to there and I need something reliable. So I got a Mazda 2 which is about as small as I can go with a combustion engine. But, I love it! I am kind of getting my daughter to say 'why does that guy need that truck that is so huge?' Like its ok if he has a job that requires him to have a huge truck but he's just hurting the planet. Turn off the lights! You are hurting the planet. Take a shorter shower, you are hurting the planet! I think that I can be a bit of a dick about it. But, it's a big deal! It's like the global warming deniers are saying that it's not really real. But, why wouldn't you try to make the planet better? Even if you are right, why wouldn't you try to make it better? Like you have an opportunity here!

What was common across preppers was a sense of insecurity politically. Their views spanned the range from libertarian, conservative and liberal. There was a range of political perspectives represented in the sample. But what they had in common was their take on politics which made them feel insecure.

Relationships with Close Others

Six preppers spoke of feelings of insecurities in relationships they had with other people. Most of the time, these insecurities were found within the relationships with their spouse or romantic partner. In some cases, conflict about prepping was the source of the insecurity. Sean, in the midst of a divorce at the

time of our interview, told me about the struggles he had regarding his ex-wife's reluctance to entertain the idea of prepping. Sean spoke of his frustrations with not being able to get further in a conversation about doing things like growing a vegetable garden which to him was something that served lots of other purposes besides prepping. Sean said:

I'll start off by saying that I am in the process of getting divorced. And while none of these things that we are going to discuss are high on the list, they are out there bubbling under the surface. Her background was urban and mine was rural, so she totally doesn't get the idea of the garden. Not to get off on my personal stuff, but you want to save money and yet when we go looking at houses, having space somewhere on the property for a garden [would help save money]. Seeds cost almost nothing. You would have fresh vegetables all of the time. And with produce getting more expensive, this isn't even a prepper thing! Well, it kind of is, if you want to go the canning route or the freezing route. Even the little bit that I've done, not to go off on a tangent on prepper divorce, but how much does 24 bottles of water cost? Four dollars? So spend eight dollars and get another one and don't touch it and every six months we will rotate it out. 'Oh, what are you worried about?' Again, these reasons are way down on the list [for our divorce], there were other things, but it is a reason.

Henry reported similar issues with getting his wife to understand why prepping was necessary. He negotiated the tension which prepping brought to their relationship by explaining to her that it was a protective measure he did in efforts to protect them from not only catastrophes or disasters, but also economic insecurity. He spoke about how they both grew up poor and when he used that common experience to rationalize why it made sense to have a stockpile of provisions, she was more accepting of prepping, though she still didn't really approve. This was demonstrated more clearly when he explained how he would have to resort to brute force if they ever had to leave their house and abscond to safety under duress. Henry said:

My wife is not on board so that's still the part that I have to deal with. She will be if it ever goes down. She understands that if there is a disaster or an emergency, we will be ok. But, she thinks that I am just being foolish. Well, the thing is that there's no harm in knowing that I have food here. Both of us grew up poor so that's the advantage. We always have food. There's never a reason for us not to have at least four or five days of food on hand. I have a closet in another room that is full of food so we always have it on hand. She's gotten to the point where she doesn't get on me anymore and I tell her that I will just knock her out and take her with me when it's time to move. I will just throw her in the truck and we will go! She's like, 'I can't believe you spend all of this money on this stuff!' I say 'I can't believe that you don't believe in it!' I say that

'when it goes down, I am just going to knock you in the head, put you in the truck and then you'll know. When you wake up, you'll be pissed with a headache or thankful with a headache. Either way one thing's for sure, you'll have a headache!' And the thing of it is, I am 6'3" and 295 pounds and she is nowhere near that so yes, I will knock her out!

Henry's comment displayed a type of caveman mentality in regards to his wife's reluctance to participate in prepping or even willingly go along with him to what he felt would be a safer location. Henry explained that a component of his care and protection was to ensure her safety even if it was without her consent. He claimed to know what is best and expected her to follow along with his plans. His comments communicated domination and insecurity relating to the willingness of his wife to participate in prepping.

Frank was unmarried and not dating anyone at the time of our interview. He was generally free to spend his time and resources however he chose. While he explained how he liked to support his friends in their hobbies so they will reciprocate the interest in his hobbies, he brought up how wives can complicate how husbands spend their time. He described a situation where he and his friends wanted to go out of town for a gun show and how that created conflict with the friend's wife. Frank explained the advice he gave his friends regarding these types of conflicts and expressed how you had to sell it the right way. His advice rested on the broad assumptions he made about his friends' marriages

and interpersonal relationships between men and women, in general. Frank stated:

Some of my friends are like 'my wife won't let me.' It's probably three hours from my house. You have to figure that if it takes you three hours to get there and three hours to get back and you are going to spend six hours at the show, that's a 12 hour day. A lot of my friends were like 'my wife will never let me go and be gone for 12 hours for a weekend!' And I am like, 'you aren't selling this! First of all, the children's museum is like two blocks from where they hold the gun show so why doesn't your wife go with you? She can drop you off and take the kids to the museum and then you guys can meet up for dinner. You can make a day of it. It's only the time that you are physically away from them and then the rest of the time you can spend together.' I know of two couples that have successfully done that activity. Whether they are spouses or friends, it is the same approach of trying to solve a problem by going at it sideways. It helps move people along.

Susan described her perceptions of gender in a way which opposed Frank's ideas about gender roles within a marriage. She described the ways in which men and women were predisposed to particular states of being and explained that marriage was a way for men to develop into respectful humans with integrity. In contrast to how Frank viewed marriage as a transactional

relationship, Susan described it as a transformative partnership which had the potential to convert self-serving men into respectful partners. Susan said:

So you look back over the hundreds or thousands of years, I don't really know how long, but men have been a destructive force of nature forever. The 50s are my favorite example because it is so cut and dry. If you look at men's culture stereotypically, from my perspective, it has been about indulgence. You have certain things like mothering. Mothering means that you bring a caring environment into any given situation. Fathering means that you plant a seed and move on. You have the men who think that they are kind of controlled by their mothers and then they go out in the world and are footloose and fancy free and then they marry a woman who becomes the old ball and chain. It isn't even part of our vocabulary because men don't have to be held accountable and they don't have any integrity in our culture unless they are with a woman. What I mean is that men are not required to have integrity unless they are with a woman. And that you are not a man when you are losing your balls to your wife. You are a eunuch. So the definition of being a man in our culture is indulgent, put in a broad way and then you turn your balls over to a woman and you lose your freedom as a man. Then you get married and you have to hunker down and grow up and become responsible which they have never been trained or taught how to do. It's how we define

being a man, so men don't want to grow up because if they grow up then they have to have integrity and have to have responsibility.

Later in our interview, Susan explained that she and her husband have made strides in working on themselves individually through participation in groups like The Mankind Project. Similar to the mythopoetic men's movement of the 1980s (Schwalbe, 1996), The Mankind Project's mission statement is "to create a safer world by growing better men" (themankindproject.org) and Susan describes the ways in which her husband and their relationship was changed by participating in the group. Susan said:

Have you heard of The Mankind Project? That was the beginning of a new shift in our life. We just got invited to a gender reconciliation meeting. It was amazing. We get plopped down as sort of awake but not doing work on evolving in the ways that these people have been doing, just doing it differently and being by ourselves in it. But, in this community, all of the women were in a full moon circle and in community with each other and all of the men were in Mankind Project (MKP). My husband started checking out MKP because of it. I called my friend who invited us and asked her about it because I didn't want to support my husband in it if it was just the same kind of getting together and jacking each other off that men do all of the time. She said 'let me put it this way, I will never ever date a man again that is not in the MKP.' It was the first time that my husband started taking responsibility and self-

reflecting. Do you know what it is like to live with somebody who doesn't self-reflect? Oh my God! And I didn't know! It took me years to know that he wasn't self-reflecting. And MKP gave him the tools and invited him to self-reflect and gave him the opportunity to take responsibility for his own choices and his own behavior. It is just scratching the surface, but it was really, really helpful.

Graham and Joanie discussed insecurities about gender found in the generalized Western culture which they perceived. Joanie described how she thought men are drawn to prepping and survivalism because they were hardwired that way. Graham linked the insecurities that men felt to the loss of entitlements they believed they should receive. Michael Kimmel (2013) calls this state of being "aggrieved entitlement" which he argued is the source of much of the violent and anti-social behavior committed by American white men (Kimmel, 2013).

J: If you were to go back to the 1300s where the men had the spears and the swords and the women were in the main room with the fireplace, sewing and knitting. It's definitely a masculine thing. There is this definite testosterone kind of thing. Men always have insecurities, isn't that true?

G: Well, sure. But compared with the WWII generation, the Great Generation, where the women could not speak, they barely had [rights]. Well, they had legal rights, but they were repressed. From that position, the white man has come down to be either equal or

the last minority, so to speak. And they have their political problems too. They feel this sense of betrayal and loss of entitlements.

America's going to hell in a handbasket.

J: It's all behavioral because if you look at it.

G: it's media . . .

J: it's like being in a kitchen and having to cook for 20 people all by yourself and then some people come in and say 'I'll help you. You don't have to do it by yourself anymore!'

G: But they don't look at it like that.

J: They look at it like 'I am the only chef!'

G: Like my dad, he was the head of the household and there would be fights about why he was the head of the house and it was because he was the man. Well yeah, that's how it is defined so that the man is the head of the household, so I am the head of the household. Its circular logic and they've lost that.

Graham and Joanie expanded on ideas about insecurities in gendered relationships, but also touched on one explanation regarding why preppers do what they do, feelings of aggrieved entitlement, which was the rage felt when a person believed they are threatened by others making gains in areas in which they were losing. Some preppers felt that their social standing was threatened by others who have upward mobility. Some preppers were threatened by the other and viewed the other as a risk. The "other" could be the political other, the racial other, or the generalized other they believed is out to take advantage of their

preparedness in the event of a crisis. The following section will discuss the various ways preppers in this study perceived risk and the different ways they were motivated to prep.

Worldview Motivations to Prep

People came to prepping from different angles and they were motivated to prepare by an assortment of reasons. Preppers in this study described the various reasons they were motivated to prep. I asked questions about how they got started with prepping and what their worst case scenarios were. I went into the study expecting preppers to claim a worst case scenario, but quickly learned that preppers generally don't design their practices to address a specific worst case scenario. On the contrary, they attempted to address being prepared on the broadest scale possible, and used the philosophy that they strove to be prepared for all of the worst case scenarios they imagined. A variety of themes of motivations emerged from the data. The discussion begins with a focus on the different risks they perceived. Next will be a recount of how preppers were motivated politically and ends with a brief synopsis of the roles they enacted which encouraged prepping in their lives. Ned explained the multiple broad motivations of people to become preppers. Ned said:

For some groups it is religious, like the Mormon Church. For others well, for example all of the major church groups like the Southern Baptists have disaster recovery teams that they would send in to help. It's also political. A lot of people, especially when this first started out, were more conservative or middle of the road and

some were extreme. But now you see groups which are the other direction as well, like the hipsters. There are a lot of reasons why people would do it. It can encompass religious beliefs, personal beliefs, and political beliefs.

Risks perceived

Preppers had a wide range of things they perceived as risks. The range included natural disasters or hazards which accompanied living in certain places like near a fault line. Other people reported that they were concerned with the state of society and were worried about society's collapse. In sum, seven people openly discussed the various risks they perceived and others framed risk perception indirectly. The following section will elaborate on the diverse risks the preppers were concerned about.

Natural disasters were brought up by four of the preppers. Judith was concerned with environmental degradation and worried about climate change. She took issue with climate change deniers and worried about what is in store for our society if people don't take climate change seriously. Judith said:

I am kind of fascinated by the whole sociological experiment, like who's buying into global warming? Who is doing shit about global warming? Who believes that something is going to happen? They are talking about there might be an ice age hitting by the year 2030. I saw that in the news and was talking to my girlfriend about it and wondered if any of us were going to be here by then? She was like 'are you kidding me? That's only 15 years from now!' And I was

like, 'no, its 15 years from now, that's a long time yet, but so right around the corner.' Global warming is ramping up. I don't think that we [as a society] are prepared for anything!

Sean described how being a scientist increased his levels of risk perception considering he had extensive knowledge about the natural world and the potential dangers found within it. He lived in the Midwest, relatively near the New Madrid fault line and expressed a deep concern over the potential dangers living so close to something so precarious. He described how knowledge of the fault line motivated him to prepare. Sean said:

My worst nightmare is New Madrid . . . I know just enough geology to know that New Madrid is dangerous. I work with that in mind. I think I have at my house a couple of MREs. I don't have MREs for a month. Living where we live, having read far too much as a boy and certain more scientific things in college and now living here, it scares the living shit out of me!

Joanie also pointed to the New Madrid fault line as a potential risk she perceived. She talked about the scientists who brought that knowledge to the mainstream and what she did in response after learning about this potential disaster. Joanie said:

I remember back in 1993 or so, there was some scientist in New Mexico maybe who kept saying that the New Madrid fault was going to crack any day. So he was warning everybody that it was

going to go and it was going to be the big one. Everyone out here was prepared, so I started doing an earthquake kit. I went out and got canned foods and boxed food, like boxed tofu and stuff like that. You were supposed to go out and get rolls of plastic. I didn't do that. But, it's a good idea to have a pantry and I don't think that's an insane or prepper kind of thing to do.

The New Madrid fault line was not the only natural disaster Sean mentioned. He described the after effects of Hurricane Ivan in 2007 which his brother experienced. He called this a catalyst which motivated him to become more prepared. He pointed out the potential risks resulting from that type of disaster and the extensive lengths he went to in order to bring relief to his brother after the hurricane ripped through the area. Sean said:

One of the things that catalyzed me, it didn't even happen to me but my brother lives between Houston and Galveston and Hurricane Ivan in 2007 and hearing his stories after that. After the storm, my only way of communicating with him was via text. Everyone was trying to use the phone lines. I guess it is easier for the cell phone system to handle a million people texting because it's less data. So occasionally he was asking me what the news was saying and what I was hearing. For about 24 hours I had Hulk thumbs. I was trying to get a call through to him and he couldn't get a call out. Landlines were down. I ultimately wound up taking him a generator that I

bought here. You couldn't find any there. But I bought it here and we met in Oklahoma City. He loaded it up and he wrote me a check. He was telling me about things that I hadn't thought about. When things are that bad, you only have the gas that's in your vehicle. When the power goes out, the gas pumps don't work. He had already heard from people who had ventured out of their house. If you stay home you'll be fine. If you venture out, you might want to take a couple of bottles of water with you and take your gun. He said that he just kept moving. He did that on advice too. You approach stop signs and red lights fairly slowly. If you get pulled over, you pay the cost of the ticket and there's a cop there. If you don't get pulled over, awesome. But you don't stop. The only other place that I've ever heard this is in Johannesburg and it's every day. It's a different culture there. There's just roving bands. If your car stops, you're dead meat. So I was just listening to this and was like this is in Houston! The third or fourth largest city in the US and you've got roving bands of people, there's not enough cops. The power's out, you can't get gas.

Joanie and Graham lived near a nuclear reactor. Both of them identified a nuclear meltdown or accident at the reactor as their biggest fear. Joanie was highly disturbed by the lack of information or directive advice on what the local community should do in case of an emergency. We discussed the multitude of risks surrounding the reactor and how keeping this information under wraps is a

general threat to public safety. Graham mentioned how an episode related to a nuclear reactor would essentially eliminate any chance of survival being as close as they were to it. He also pointed out that even if he did survive something like that, he wasn't sure how much he would want to considering how difficult it would be to carve out an existence in the aftermath of something as devastating as a nuclear accident.

J: [My worst case scenario is] a nuclear meltdown happening less than a half of a mile from my house.

G: The thing that worries me the most is the reactor.

J: Yeah, it's like less than a quarter of a mile from where we live.

G: People here always ignore the fact that there is a nuclear device in the middle of town!

J: It's the largest experimental reactor. There's planes flying overhead every day and every night. There's a helicopter pad just about a hundred yards away from it and it's flipping its wings all over the place. It's there! I am surprised. I mean, I am shocked that nobody ever talks about it in terms of a crisis. Like what will we do if there is . . . how are we prepared to deal with it? I live very close to it and the city or the county hasn't given me any kind of information about what I should do if there is a crisis at the reactor.

G: Just jump in the Ford Explorer and go to Kansas City! Ameren has never said what people should do in case there's a meltdown at the Nuclear power plant.

J: There's not a lot that you can do when we are that close. We are left to our own devices to garner information from where? The internet? That's not reliable. I feel like people aren't doing their job if we're their neighbors and they aren't telling us. What happens to the power plant over there if there's no electricity coming into it? It's going to melt down.

G: It's the same as a regular power plant.

J: When there's no electricity coming into it, it's not able to function.

G: There's been accidents there, but they're not well published. If it was a terrorist situation, that's what I would worry about. If it was an accidental situation, there would be some assistance that would occur. So my worst case scenario would be that it was a terrorist act to mess with the reactor and the power plant simultaneously because that's what they do. Although, why would they do it here? I have no idea.

J: The hospitals are really basically a few feet from all of that. There would be no place for people to go for medical assistance and that to me is just a very, very unwise choice

G: [You can't prepare for it.] You'd just kiss it goodbye. My second threat would be political divisions in the US causing a civil war. That sounds far-fetched, but I am a gamer, so . . . But I don't definitely want it. That would be the other thing. That includes a whole new set of problems. That might lead to a nuclear meltdown eventually.

But anyway, it would be political motivated purges. Line them up against the wall and so on. And then I wouldn't have a gun, so I would be . . . I definitely don't want that to happen.

J: Somebody would give you a gun. Somebody would see you and they would say 'you can join my group' and they would give you one. That's what they do in Africa. They just pick people up off of the street. Just pull the trigger, right?

Joanie and Graham also brought up their discomfort with the ways in which food was produced in this country. Both of them took issue with the industrial food system's reliance on genetically modified organisms (GMOs). They were also apprehensive about the patenting of seeds and how corporations were highly involved in the daily act of eating. They believed that this will be the demise of our health and our environment. They took issue with the fact that there is no ability to consent to these practices and were upset that they are just foisted upon the American public. They placed the right to know what is in our food over the right to own a firearm. They framed this as an issue of freedom. These risks motivated them to grow a vegetable garden and save heirloom seeds that haven't been genetically modified as a way to mitigate or at least lessen these perceived risks.

G: We are concerned with genetically modified organisms and all of that stuff. We are not fanatics about it but . . .

J: I am very concerned with the ability to continue to grow food. If people can't grow food, I mean for me to take a seed and go out to

my yard and plant it and a tomato will grow and I can eat the tomatoes, that's very important to me. That's a freedom. If we don't have that freedom to feed ourselves, that's a way more important freedom than owning a gun! And to know that corporations are messing with the genetics with the stuff that we eat? They have pumped meat full of hormones and that has had a bad effect. There's all this autism and they are blaming it on all kinds of things that have been fed to us by corporations against our will. No opinion was asked for, just we are going to do this to you and we are going to do this to your kids. And that's another problem that I have with people. Don't get me started! They are messing with this and that also messes with the other species that help us grow our food like bees and butterflies and stuff like that. I am very concerned about that. I don't like that fact that they are messing with it and that they are trying to own all of the seeds and the food on the planet.

G: Copyrighting all of it!

J: That's what it boils down to. Why are they doing this? It's money!

G: They are patenting species.

J: They actually sue farmers who save seeds! That's how they get away with it. There's research, but they won't let it happen unless it follows their agenda. I am not a paranoid person, but I can see that it is something that's happening.

Susan described myriad risks that concerned her. Similar to Joanie and Graham's concerns about food, Susan expressed a general belief that we as a society cannot continue to operate and thrive with the current state of affairs. She pointed to several social ills, both racism and sexual assault and framed the issues which concern her as being the result of the dumbing down of society. She voiced her fears about risks she perceived about food production and what she considered an overuse of immunizations. She covered a lot of different types of risks, but was ultimately hopeful that these dark times she mentioned were a signal that change for the better was on the horizon. She believed that it was up to individuals to shift their consciousness to enable positive changes. Susan said:

The racism stuff that's going on and the rape in colleges that's going on and the fact that Monsanto is trying to cover up what they are doing with our food and has millions and millions and millions of dollars and each individual state including Hawaii is trying to cover up the GMO stuff. It's everywhere! And with all of the immunization stuff that's coming across and all of the conversation that has been going on with all of that, it just starts to make people actually think that usually don't want to think. That's what makes everybody feel like it's getting darker. The truth is that the darkness is just getting exposed and they are becoming a squeaker wheel. There's more access to love and light than ever before and the more energy that you put into this, it's like compound interest. The veils between the worlds are getting thinner and the access to help and support and

love is more accessible than ever. Everything points to this being the end of times. It's all happening and everything that has happened in history and what's going on. We need a shift and it is going to be hard and it might even get ugly. But, the future generations are going to be in a better place. My daughter is going to be 17 and she's more conscious. It is hysterical in some ways to think that with my parents it was free love and women not having to wear bras and all of that stuff. With my generation it was AIDS, and with my daughter's generation it is food and free the nipple! In the future, power is not going to be a problem. The toxicity from nuclear waste is not going to be an issue. In the future we will have found our power sources from other places. The ocean itself is a power source that we haven't figured out how to capitalize it. All of these things already exist and it's just a matter of being exposed and some of the old dogs dying. The thing is moving into a place where divine self-love is where we operate from and acceptance and empathy and all of that kind of stuff. The more we move into that as a culture, the more everything changes. It changes everything! So from my perspective, anything and everything that has ever existed is made out of energy, right? So if your consciousness shifts, the energy shifts which means that everything that exists in the world is going to shift. It doesn't have to but that's the direction we are going now. It could all end, but that's not what's happening.

At this point it's all changing and you can see it more and more.

There's very subtle signals like Ikea doesn't let you have bags unless you buy them.

The range of risks were not just related to natural disasters, the environment or methods of food production. Other preppers in the study focused on the political climate and claimed that the political system and administration were responsible for promoting policies which they did not agree with and bringing about social changes which they found alarming. Preppers who were concerned about politics were worried about the effects President Obama and his cabinet would have on their daily lives. They perceived his presidency as a major risk which served to motivate them to prepare for a range of events. The following section focuses on the ways in which preppers in this study viewed politics as a risk to their safety.

Politics

Six people in the study recounted fears or mentioned concerns about politics. Most of them did not directly come out and claim that President Obama was the target of their concern, rather they spoke in coded language and talked about the current administration, the economy and gun rights. The people who mentioned politics as a risk were not consistent in the levels of danger they observed. In Dana's case, she spoke about being affected by the reactions of other people in her community. She explained this through the lens of Obama's possible gun restrictions and the reactions gun owners had in light of facing new

restrictions on firearms and ammunition. She also discussed the risks of letting people know that they stockpile certain things. Dana said:

Of course, we have firearms in the house because we go shooting. Do I keep some extra ammo? Of course, because the next time that someone thinks that Obama is taking their guns, suddenly I can't get. Twenty-two ammo because it is all off the shelves and I can't go buy it. 22 ammo used to be the cheapest ammo in the world! You could buy a brick of it, 500 rounds and it used to be around twenty bucks. Now, it's crazy! Holy shit people! Really? I have to watch what I will say to people. All of my friends know that I have a hobby farm and they will go 'ha ha, preparing for the apocalypse?' and I roll my eyes and go 'ha ha!' But, you are a little more closed mouthed about things because you don't really want to be lumped into that category!

Dana pointed out that many people who weren't prepping were stockpiling particular ammunition under the premise that it would soon disappear. Alice mentioned that she feared a government shutdown as her worst case scenario because of the potential threats that would materialize after government benefit programs, what she called entitlements, were cut off. She used coded language to describe the racialized other as a danger, a potential risk. She also said that people who haven't made a survival plan posed the greatest threat. Alice said:

I guess the total government shutdown would be the worst case scenario, where one day it just started to snowball and then the

services weren't there. People who are dependent on the government for sustenance are going to have to get it by some other means. The only other means that they know is violence. We live out in a rural area and there's people piled on top of each other in the greater metropolitan areas [who] are going to start coming out. That would be my worst case scenario is that you are going to have to defend your holdings against people who have not made plans.

Roger feared an economic collapse and the repercussions which would span the globe. He cited this as his worst case scenario and had a hard time imagining the sorts of impacts that would result from a change in the United States' position as a global economic superpower. He also pointed out the lack of awareness that the average citizen had about this potential collapse, which spoke to a greater risk of being uninformed. Roger said:

In 2008, I told you I had some background in economics, but we came pretty close to a bad economic collapse. The more I read about that, the more convinced I became that it was true. We were far closer to that than people thought we were. That is probably the worst scenario that I could imagine. Absolutely. If the economy collapses, so does the government and so does everybody else. We are the country that everyone looks to. If we fail, so does everyone else, financially anyway.

Prepping served as a way to cope for these individuals who found the political structure to be problematic. Five of the respondents talked about prepping as a form of insurance. Some of them directly referred to prepping as homeowner's insurance while others actually included insurance policies into their array of preparations.

Insurance policy

One question I asked the interviewees was whether or not they thought prepping cost money or saved them money. Christian expanded on his thought by justifying the expense of prepping because he considered what he does as an insurance policy. Christian said:

I think it costs a lot, it does. The only thing that you are really saving is your insurance to survive basically. Because it's all kind of . . . you don't really know for sure if it is going to pay off. But, it's totally like an insurance policy.

Roger discussed how he wished more people took heed of the lessons that Hurricane Katrina should have taught us. He pointed out how he believed that the government and FEMA did all they could do to help, yet those efforts were not sufficient to protect people and save lives. He and others in the sample spoke about Hurricane Katrina as being a turning point or a catalyst which encouraged them to become better prepared. Roger also framed his efforts to become better prepared as having an insurance policy. Roger said:

For me the best example of a natural disaster that probably should have woken everyone up was New Orleans. That showed you how

on a larger scale, how ill-equipped the government is to help people. They tried. They did everything that they could. They might not have done it well. They tried, but the point is that they didn't. So there was some really bad situations going on. The thing that I worry about is if it is much more widespread than that . . . and longer lasting, that's why I prepare. It is very unlikely, I think, but at the same time, it's insurance!

Dana honed in on the fundamental importance of saving money and creating financial security in case you experience a job loss or an injury and are forced to be out of work for some time. She described some of her practices as giving her the opportunity to save money and called what she does an insurance policy which made her practices easy to justify doing. Dana said:

I believe in a certain level of self-sufficiency and preparation. First, it's financial. If you don't have your financial house in order you will be shit out of luck and buying all sorts of freeze dried food isn't going to save your ass if you lose your job. You have insurance for your house. Some of these little things I do is an insurance policy and is convenience and saves me money so why wouldn't I?

Sean talked about how he felt uncomfortable proselytizing to other people who didn't engage in prepping and how he felt more comfortable describing what he does and why others should do it too as having an insurance policy. He

believed that framing it this way made the ideas about prepping more attractive and a little easier to understand why it is important. Sean said:

I view it as more of being a personal choice. If you choose not to do it, I'm not [judging], like my friend never twisted my arm. We are like minded and the more he talked about it, the more I thought about how I needed to do it. So, it's easy. That homeowners insurance keeps coming up. I am not a preacher, I am not about that. I have no issues with that. I think that it is part of the spectrum where you can transition from mindset to lifestyle.

Thomas put it more succinctly, *"I have found that prepping is like a condom. It is better to have it and not need it than need it and not have it."*

Overall, the idea that prepping served as insurance was used as a way to frame what they were doing in more palatable ways and to reduce the stigma attached to what they were doing. Four preppers mentioned that they often times felt that other people saw them as strange for being concerned about preparedness. Either they felt like they were going to be laughed at like Dana mentioned or made fun of for doing something which was regarded by the generalized culture as strange. Others described themselves as having interests outside of the realm of what is considered normal since their childhood.

Feeling Like an Outcast

Revealing yourself as a prepper could come with the risk of being laughed at, made fun of or even ostracized. Prepping is considered a fringe activity, at best, by the generalized culture and later in the chapter I will delve into the

various depictions of prepping by popular culture to reinforce the argument that prepping is a stigmatized activity. Thomas talked about how his wife did not believe the things he would tell her about things he heard about until she read it in a reputable newspaper. The New World Order he referred to is considered a conspiracy theory regarding a totalitarian global government. Thomas said:

My wife, girlfriend at the time, thought I was completely nuts. She was reading the newspaper on the train heading into work and I was living in downtown Chicago with her at that time and she read an article that had mentioned the New World Order. This was in the Chicago Sun Times, right there New World Order and that's when it snapped with her. She was like 'oh my God, he has been right this whole time! He's not crazy!'

Ned was interested in prepping and survivalism for much of his life and he described himself as a curious kid who was interested in different things than his peers were interested in. He described the ways he felt other people judged him incorrectly or assumed wrong things about him because of his background and his physical appearance. Prepping had been a mainstay in his life, but he also revealed that feeling like an outcast was also something he experienced for most of his life. Ned said:

My experience with prepping or survivalism goes back 45 years or more. I guess you could say that I have never been a normal kid. I have a strong curiosity about things and when I was a child I came across the US Civil Defense supplies in the basement of a local

library. This was a Cold War type thing. There was this curiosity [about] the little manuals and stuff that came with it. As a Boy Scout, I have always been interested in outdoor survival techniques. I was always curious how would I do this? So, that got me started. I have developed a curiosity about things that has gone on for 40 years . . . I've had people further left of politics than I am and when they find out where I am from, I am often classified as a rural redneck who is uneducated and a bigot. But I have two college degrees and I have done this, this and this and what have you done? The shock and response that I have seen from people when they discover and it's a little offensive, I will admit, but I am 6'5", ex-army and ex- college football lineman.

Judith did not speak at length about feeling like an outcast, but in an offhand comment when talking about storing large quantities of food, she revealed that she feared that she would be made fun of if she let people know that she prepped. Judith said:

I live across the street from the grocery store so I am going to be the first one there looting! I kind of feel like I can live a lot longer without food than without water. Maybe some of this not buying food is because I don't want to be made fun of, but I think mostly it is because I don't feel like I will be cut off from food for that long..... I wonder if I was still married, would I tell her because I would be like 'hey, by the way, I have 110 gallons of water stored in the

garage.’ We communicate more about it. We share custody of our daughter, but she’s usually at her house which is about two miles away. When we divorced, within a year I realized that we needed a meeting spot and that was eight years ago.

Lastly, Roger described other people perceiving him as a kook for doing what he does. Even close family members didn’t fully understand what he was doing and didn’t feel motivated to make preparations or believe that it is necessary to even think about potential risks. At the end of his quote, he drew a symbolic boundary between those who he believed felt the need to do something about becoming more prepared and informed and those who wanted to maintain their ignorance and take no action. He constructed this boundary by conveying his transformation into a prepper. Roger explained:

I would consider myself blissfully ignorant up until I started doing this just because I didn’t think about the next level. I think that it came about as a result of thinking that it could happen. That’s where you find a massive divide between preppers and non-preppers. I have an older brother with whom I have shared what I am doing. I have tried to get him to do the same thing and he thinks I am a kook. I asked him why he doesn’t make some preparations and he said ‘because I don’t think that anything is going to happen!’ So that’s what you find, the trust and belief in what we have today is always going to be available.

These quotes displayed the feelings that these preppers experienced and how they interpreted how others view prepping as strange and a weird activity to engage in. They constructed the idea that people who were not supportive of prepping viewed it as unnecessary and that they should be ashamed for doing. At the same time, they define prepping as a beneficial and a worthy practice.

Motivation to Prep by Personal Social Roles

Some of the preppers in the study talked about prepping as being inspired by other things they were interested in or other occupations they had over the course of their lives. The strongest link in terms of other roles these preppers might have is military service. There were four members of the armed services in the sample and each of them spoke about the different ways serving in the military complimented prepping. Military service trained these men to be at the ready and to be comfortable handling firearms.

Military

Henry described the ways the military prepared him for the role of prepper by giving him experience with firearms. He talked about the basic need to be a protector and what that meant to him. He also explained the ways the generalized culture perceived prepping and attempted to explain why some other preppers do what they did. Henry said:

One of the ugly sides of prepping is that I also have to protect. Like I said, I am former military so I've got no problems with guns. I've got no problems taking care of my wife. No problem with taking care of whoever is in my house. The guy that lives two doors down,

I like him, but they are week to week people. I know that if it comes down to it, they know that I go to the grocery a lot, but they will come down here and try to steal. It is a basic need. I think that's what gives a lot of preppers a bad name. You do have some obsessed people. A lot of people stockpile because you don't know how long the situation is going to stay. It's not because you want to be a rifleman or Chuck Norris, it's just that you don't know how long it's going to be out. I have all of these buddies who are law enforcement and they think that survivalists have all of these guns. Instead of having all of this food, they have all of these guns. That's the public perception, if you are a survivalist or if you are a prepper and you have four guns and thousands of rounds of ammo, you are not a threat. You are just protecting yourself from those who haven't prepared.

Ned talked about the collection of military memorabilia he collected over the years and how he lent this collection to the local university's ROTC office. He was happy to share his collection of gas masks and survival kits, but was disappointed that they did not protect it as well as he would have liked. His collection was amassed during his time in the service and in this way, the military connection supplemented his stash of gear. He was then able to share this gear for learning purposes instead of keeping it stashed away somewhere where it was not being used at all. Ned said:

When my wife and I got married, she knew that I had this odd assortment of surplus equipment. I was 40 and she was 42 and neither of us had ever been married. I had been in the reserves and I had this gas mask collection that went back to WWII. I was cleaning out the closets and gave the gas masks to the Army ROTC office and gave the Air Force ROTC office the survival kits for training purposes with the caveat that if they wanted to get rid of it, they had to contact me first. The colonel was amazed and said that he had only read about some of that stuff. Somebody stole the box with some of the stuff and the other is locked up in a case. I go to check on it from time to time. I'm pissed, but I still let them keep it.

Ned told me about the different activities besides prepping that he was interested in and spent time on. He credited these different interests to having the time to spend on learning new things when he was serving in the military. He went on to describe how he found joy in telling stories and connected what he did to how people throughout history did similar things for entertainment. He said:

When I was in the Army, I was the only bastion officer in my battalion so I kept weird hours. That's where I got the habits of doing stuff to keep from going crazy so that's where I learned skills. I learned how to fence using a foil and saber because they had a place there on post where I could learn. I became a member for the Society of Creative Anachronism which is a society that recreates

the middle ages, not so much as they happened historically but as we would romantically like to reimagine them. We have chapters in this area that take part in the renaissance fair that happens [nearby]. But, you would learn old skills and mine was as a travelling bard storyteller. I would go up to people and have them give me some elements and give myself a minute and start telling a tale. What was really fun was watching the young kids and their parents watch me and wonder what would happen next. Sometimes, they were like 'no, no, we don't want that to happen!' But it gave me insight into what it must have been like when the majority of the people couldn't read. That's why there were illustrations in church so they could tell the stories through panels and stained glass.

Ned had many interests which weren't related to prepping or his military experience. He went on to describe all of the things he was interested in and did as a hobby in his free time. Four of the preppers mentioned hobbies which related to prepping or inspired further investigation into prepping when they first got started.

Hobbies

Again, Ned described himself as weird for liking what he is interested in. He was aware that these interests are perceived as strange from other people. He described himself as being naturally curious and as a prolific reader who tries

to take in a variety of subjects. Having a broad spectrum of interests enhanced his practice of prepping. Ned shared:

Growing up, I loved art and my childhood heroes, besides John Wayne were Leonardo DiVinci and George Washington Carver, who I call the American Leonardo DiVinci and they look at me like I am weird. Oh well, so what. I blame Sherlock Holmes. I came across the Golden Book Edition of The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes when I was eight and I was fascinated by this person who seemed to know everything and I watched the movies on TV and it encouraged me to read everything that I could find in the library. I loved science and art. I had a big curiosity about things. When I clear off my bookcase and go to the used book store they say that they always like to see me because I have such a diverse interest. I read multiple books at the same time. I read mysteries, current events, history and science. When I get curious about something, I want to know something about it.

Roger explained how he liked his hobbies and tended to become fixated, or obsessed as he puts it, when he began to learn about something new. He said that he approached all new hobbies this way and prepping was no different. He took on the task of learning a wide variety of skills and a large range of information regarding preparedness. He credited his obsessive nature with his ability to learn a lot in a short time. Roger said:

When I first started, because I was so obsessed, I get like that when I start something. I fixate on things. Ten years ago, I took up fly fishing and it was all I could think about and do for two years. That's kind of the way I am. Once I got to the point where I felt reasonably comfortable with my preps it is no longer an obsession. It really isn't. However, yes it's a hobby and yes it's a lifestyle. I do think that you have to have it. I don't spend any specific amount of time everyday doing preps. I don't do that. I feel comfortable with what I have. I update things occasionally and add to it.

Frank explained that he viewed prepping as a hobby. He discussed the ways in which he went about sharing it with others who might be interested and how he attempted reciprocity when it came to caring about what his friends' hobbies are too. Frank said:

The whole topic is what I refer to as a hobby so any time I can engage in that hobby like me talking to you today, I get entertainment out of it. If it is packing day and we are talking about stuff, or if I am at my friends' house and they just smoked their first cheese for the first time, I will go out and talk to them about it. Or talk to them about how they learned to do a skill. Any time I can talk to or support someone in their activities, anytime I can support someone else's activity or talk to them about it, even if I am not the person who is physically doing it, I am entertained by that. I want my friends, my close associates to have a very broad renaissance

type skill-set. Most of my friends have that. Any time that I can support somebody getting that skill set, I will. There was no specific event [that led me to prepping]. I was a little league baseball kid. I was also in Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. When I got to high school I was on the swim team and science club and French club. I wasn't in a role playing game (RPG) club but I role-played with my grade school friends and other friends that I made in high school through other friends. Again, if you talk about shared interests which was one of my three things, I have met many people in my life that have been interested in gaming, movies, firearms or survivalism/prepping . . . I've met those people through other people who have like interests. So I continuously work slowly on the people who were already friends with me and I have met new people. . . I am not fundamentally a joiner but . . . I have certainly met with other people through other groups. I have been to Ohio, Tennessee and Kentucky to meet up with other people who were in other groups for training and idea sharing and whatnot. I don't do that on my own accord. One of the things of accepting that people being interested in your hobbies is that you have to be willing to help your friends pursue their hobbies and goals.

Although Frank said that he was not interested in joining prepping groups, he had attended prepping related group activities for his friends.

He explained that he supported his friends' interests and hobbies with the expectation that they in turn are supportive and interested in his hobbies.

Occupation

Another avenue into prepping was their occupations or job. Three of the five people who mentioned their job as an influence were not ex-military. How one spent their time at work influenced their propensity to prep at home. Jobs easily lent themselves to skill development or networking with others who were interested in similar activities. Dana, the hobby farmer, and her husband both worked in informational technologies. She described the farming they do as an extension of their careers as system analysts. They saw the self-sufficient farming activities they do as another system. She explained how the demographics of farming were changing and how there were potential risks associated with the greying of the occupation. She also pointed out that if they wanted to farm full time to make a living, they could do it successfully. She viewed the food she raised as a way to be self-reliant which was what linked to prepping. Dana said:

The average farmer is above 52 years old. There's going to be a huge issue. At this point, if we wanted to we could clear 30,000 dollars if we wanted to make a go at it. But, we're not because we still have day jobs that we are committed to that pay way more than that. But we could. If our house was paid off, we could live off of that. My husband came from a farming family, but to us it is all logic. It's all systems. We started doing the food thing more as an

interesting system. We call it lazy farming. Our chickens can follow around behind our pigs and our sheep and take care of the parasites. We have an automatic door on our chicken coop that opens in the morning and closes at night. Water is the next big one that we have to tackle for automation of some sort. The breed of sheep we got shed their wool themselves in the spring so we don't have to shear them. We don't have to take care of their feet. They are low in parasites and the chicken take care of the rest. They birth on their own, like one of my sheep had triplets yesterday!

Judith took a different, less direct approach when explaining how her job influenced her prepping. She was concerned with being marked as a go-to person and as someone who would always volunteer. But, as a manager, she found that people perceived her as a capable person who could lead them when needed. She alluded to the leadership role she believed she will be in during a crisis earlier in the chapter. Judith said:

When you volunteer, you are marked for life now. And me, if you want to get shit done, people are going to call me. Like just ridiculous things! Especially at work. Like at first when I started this job a year ago and it's been my MO at jobs I go to. I get there and I just start doing shit. Before long, people are saying 'who did this before? When did we get anything done? How is any of this handled before you got here?' And I'm like 'I don't know, people!' But if you want to get shit done, you are going to call me.

Ned made direct linkages to the ways in which his former training and occupations enhanced his prepping activities and skillset. He has worked in very different jobs that had all aided in his development as a prepper.

I was a volunteer EMT for four and a half years. I became the emergency management and civil defense manager for my hometown until I got tired of the politics. I actually had stuff published in the Journal of the American Civil Defense Association and in the American Survival Guide. I would get curious about something and read books, something like Nineteen Miles a Day on Beans and Hay which was about the Calvary during the American-Indian Wars during the 19th century and I got curious about their lifestyle so I learned how to make hard tack and beef jerky and stuff like that. There are so many skills out there. I have had many times where I have had to use my skills. I have been an EMT, a HAZMAT [hazardous materials] trainer. I have taught Red Cross classes here at Boone County when they had the place here. You never know. [I have used those skills] six times in the last two and a half years. People have collapsed because of epilepsy. My co-worker had a bad reaction to some medication. A young girl fainted right in front of me because of a heart condition that she didn't know she had and I just happened to be there. It was that training. Sometimes it's like what would [have] happened if [I wasn't there to help]?

In sum, preppers believed that the job one does had the ability to enrich the skillsets of preppers. Those who found themselves in management roles conceptualized themselves as leaders and believed that characteristic would help them assist others in times of need. Having a job which allowed you to develop a skillset based on medical knowledge like first aid would be really useful in catastrophes.

Popular Culture Motivations

Depictions of prepping and survivalism are present in many different forms in the popular culture. Post-apocalyptic and dystopian fiction is a popular genre which gives the reader the opportunity to imagine what they would do during the apocalypse. Seven of the respondents discussed popular culture as something which inspired them or acted as a form of motivation. Three of the respondents spoke directly about the particular examples found in popular culture and genres which motivated them to become more engaged with prepping or survivalism.

Graham explained that his interests in survivalism and prepping came from the tabletop games that he played and other forms of entertainment which he enjoyed. He also mentioned a best-selling Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Road*, by Cormac McCarthy (2006) which features a post-apocalyptic world in which a father is trying desperately to save his son and encounters many different dangerous scenarios along the way. Oprah Winfrey picked this as a book club selection which brought the book to the attention of many people who may have not have known about it otherwise. Here he described Gamma World which is a game that he really enjoyed playing. Graham said:

I am interested in survival because of gaming. I just have games and read novels about it like The Road. In The Road everything is kind of too depressing. There is really no hope, they are not trying to survive. They are just trying to get to one point to another for some reason. I just play games where people pretend they are apocalyptic. I play Gamma World or something like that. Gamma World has mutated monsters and big rats and stuff like that. [You play with] just a piece of paper and dice. You have this little piece of paper and you pretend that you are Sam Jones, the ranger, you roll the dice too see if you get . . . like if you want to pick up a refrigerator, you roll your strength and you try beat under it, either you do it or you don't.

Ned recounted the types of books that he enjoyed in his youth. He explained that while these books were within the post-apocalyptic genre, they had features of what it meant to preserve cultural heritage. He participated in a group that reenacted historical events and took keen interest in how societies of the past protected and propagated the cultural artifacts they created. Ned said:

Some of the fiction that I read when I was younger that I loved, it was post-apocalyptic fiction but people would discover libraries set up by people with books on history, how-to, medicine and art. It's kind of like the monasteries and convents did during the Middle and Dark Ages to preserve the data and preserve the information. Again, I never claimed to be normal.

Thomas talked about what sorts of resources he found in the popular culture that motivated him to contemplate the potential outcomes of a political revolt motivating him to learn more and develop his skills as a prepper. He mentioned printed material as well as online resources. He also pointed out that the quest for information is ongoing and that he felt compelled to consume as much information as he can. Thomas said:

It was because of this book [Boston T. Party's Gun Bible] which got me started on the path of firearms which led into well ok, if a second American revolution happens, I will be able to fight. But what am I going to do with my family? That led onto the next step which slowly evolved into me becoming a prepper. There's a website that has completely changed and it's not the same as it was a few years ago. It's called Captain Dave's Survival Network and he had a list on his website that was basically all about prepping. There was a section called 'The Big List' which was a list to 50 or 60 links dealing with building a bug-out bag which is an emergency go bag. This was where I got my start with prepping, just clicking links and getting information. My brain is like a sponge and I just have to keep getting more and more information. Because of that I started paying more attention to the news and everything.

Preppers were oriented towards popular culture and used it in a way that integrated their motivations and practices. Popular culture was

used not only as a form of entertainment, but also as an element of their identity construction. Prepping served as a core identity for some, others viewed prepping as another facet of their complex identity.

Conclusion

Preppers held a common core belief that relying on oneself was the key way to survive a catastrophe. Respondents used cultural repertoires constructed of a system of beliefs and values, a set of practices and distinct worldviews. A key component of their cultural repertoire was their conceptions regarding what it means to rely on oneself and be self-sufficient. Their value system was used to justify the boundaries they drew between those who didn't prep and those who did in the creation of their worthy identity of the prepared self.

The preppers I interviewed described a collective worthy prepper identity, even though they were doing it individually. Prepper culture was dynamically constructed using symbolic meanings to convey what prepper culture was comprised of. Preppers were putting together aspects of the generalized culture in which they live but in ways that were distinctive to preppers. These were strategies which were employed in a particular social context. These practices were ritualistic to a degree and had symbolic meanings which were held by some people within the culture. In this sense, the practices and symbolic meanings were organizing the lived reality of preppers along with their behaviors, the ideologies they used and practices they employed to attend to their needs.

The values, beliefs and norms of preppers helped construct their worthy identity. Four respondents spoke about religion in a way that displayed different

ways they drew upon their religious beliefs to inspire them to be self-sufficient, independent and people who protected their families. Eight respondents mentioned gender roles and norms found within prepping. For some, prepping was a site of resisting stereotypical gender norms and patriarchy, while others reproduced those stereotyped gender norms. The preppers in the sample also discussed the core norm which was informed by the belief that keeping prepping a secret was essential to success and survival of the prepper. Preppers felt that when other people outside their circle of belonging discovered that they prepped, those people became a potential threat to their survival.

Preppers expressed a variety of insecurities and became better prepared as a way to assuage those insecurities. This action gave them the perception that they were taking control over situations which may or may not have been able to be changed. Prepping also allowed them to deal with the multitude of risks they perceived out in the world. Their individual practice was motivated by these different risks becoming a distinct exercise in taking control over a risky world. Stein argues that during times of rapid social change symbolic boundaries become more important. (Stein, 2001) Preppers reacted to these rapid social changes by creating symbolic boundaries. The next chapter will deal with the types of boundaries the preppers symbolically construct. Which were another way preppers were constructing the worthy identity of the prepared self. The boundaries were a way to define who belongs within their protective circle and who was outside of their circle of belonging.

CHAPTER 5 “YOU CAN’T FEED EVERYONE”: BOUNDARIES AND BELONGING

The collective identity of preppers was expressed through the importance each of them placed on self-sufficiency. They each spoke about a desire to create safety and security for unstable times through the act of preparing. Another facet of the collective identity of preppers was the desire to draw boundaries between themselves and others who don't share the same values or worldview. In the context of this study, symbolic boundaries were constructed in ways that distance preppers from other people who are not prepared or who they determine as unworthy of their protection. Due to the sheer nature of a limit on what an individual prepper is able to provide in terms of material goods and personal safety, establishing limits on who is considered part of the in-group was absolutely essential to increasing the odds of survival long term. Otherwise, all of your meticulously prepared stockpiles would be consumed in a short amount of time.

This chapter describes who preppers felt they have commitment to beyond themselves in the case of catastrophe and how these ideas informed what community meant to them. Preppers in this study defined community rather narrowly as part of the private sphere and indicated that they saw community as being composed of family and friends who were like minded and amenable to prepping. They distanced themselves from people who didn't share similar worldviews, weren't concerned with being prepared and who expected to rely on others for their survival.

Food was part of the prepper cultural toolkit. Overall, food was something used by preppers as a way to construct and express a prepper identity in the private realm. The chapter describes the different practices relating to food work and how these practices linked to the symbolic meanings tied to self-sufficiency. It explains the various ways preppers used food as a way to define the worthy identity of the self-sufficient prepper. The chapter also examines how food is used in the construction of boundaries.

Finally, this chapter describes whether preppers' interpretations of media motivated them to prepare due to examples of catastrophes, dystopias and apocalypses in the popular culture. I discussed the various representations of prepping found in the popular culture through the lens of the various reality shows and discovered that the National Geographic reality show *Doomsday Preppers* was troubling for many of those I interviewed. I explored the representations of preppers depicted by that show due to how profoundly my respondents found it problematic. Preppers described their challenges with the media representations of prepping and described the ways in which they would like to be characterized. They also discussed how they distanced themselves from these problematic media depictions to construct worthy identities in ways that significantly contrasted against popular media portrayals of prepping.

Drawing Boundaries-Who is Worthy of Protection?

Deciding who is worthy of protection was something that preppers considered. The fundamental nature of stockpiling goods and learning survival skills involved meditation on the abilities you possess, both materially and

psychologically. Preppers grappled with the limits they have and what they are able to do. These are real limits determined by physical abilities, mental capacities and material possessions. They considered if they were able to take in a multitude of people, organize them and provide them with life sustaining goods or if they are only able to fend for themselves and their very close loved ones. The preppers in this study were bound by limits to what they were able to accomplish. Thomas states it simply, *“I have told my wife that there are certain people that I don’t want around should shit hit the fan because they have nothing to offer.”* Setting limits encompassed drawing boundaries around who they were willing to take in and provide protection for, and who brought skills or goods to the table. Overall, nine of the respondents mentioned something about how they drew boundaries. Frank expresses an aversion to taking the responsibility for people he did not really know, people he described as co-workers or friends of friends. Frank said:

The second an emergency happens they are like ‘Oh, Frank has stuff! I will go to his place!’ I have many friends. Some of them are prepared and some of them are not. If the ones who aren’t prepared show up, I am ok with that, but fundamentally do I want co-workers showing up? Do I want friends of friends showing up? Do I want relatives of friends? No!

The consequences of having undesired people know you prep was a common sentiment among those who mentioned boundaries. Taking care of only those closest to you was seen as an essential purpose to why you prepped.

Christian explained that his boundary was restricted to those he knew well and mentioned the limits to his stockpile. He linked the construction of his boundary to the need to keep one's preps a secret. Christian stated:

If it came down to it, it would be the people that I know well because it sounds harsh, but that's more people that you are going to have to care for and use your supplies on. Plus, if one person finds out then they are going to tell other people and you'll have a bunch of people wanting your stuff.

The potential threat of nefarious people descending upon one's domicile was very real to these respondents. Roger turned that feeling around by explaining that he felt conflicted about who was worthy of protection and extended his boundary to those people for whom he felt compassion. Roger's values determined that he would not turn his back on someone in need, especially if children were involved. Roger explained:

If we ever got into a situation where that occurred, I struggle with what I would do if everyone around me has nothing and I have enough to survive on. Knowing that if I gave it to everybody, it would last one day. My family will always come first before other people. At the same time, I ask myself the question of what I would do if some daddy walks up my driveway with two kids and says that they are starving? I am not going to turn them away. I am just not going to do it. But, at the same time you can't feed everyone. It's an interesting struggle.

While Roger's boundaries were seemingly permeable, Henry's were drawn with strong lines. Henry described the tension in his family regarding the symbolic boundaries he drew concerning who is worthy of his protection. Families can often be a source of contention regarding how to allocate resources. Henry expressed how he felt about having strong boundaries already established and how these boundaries could potentially protect himself and his wife from those who felt entitled to share his preps. He also highlighted how difficult contentious group dynamics can be in stressful times. Henry stated:

Right now, my in-laws were gullible as the day is long. This is where preppers get a bad name. 'Oh see, you're not going to help your family members?' No, I will help my family members, but they have to do what I am doing. I am not going to hand it to them. I can't prep, I can't buy enough to feed 30 people. And when the shit hits the fan, those 30 people have 30 different ideas about what I should do with my stuff? Now I have an occupying army in my camp! Because now everyone else has a gun. I can't afford to split what I got, so I low key myself a lot about what I have and what I can get by with. I try not to say even to my family and to my neighbors. I try not to tell anybody what I have. I have a location that I can go to if I need to. I can load up my truck in 35 minutes and have everything that I need and be on the road.

The conflicts that Henry found as a possibility in group dynamics were something that he believed posed a challenge to his survival. If one found

themselves surrounded by people who didn't see things similarly or had common goals, then day to day existence would become more difficult.

Thomas joked about the lengths to which he would go to for his friends, but his jokes revealed the reality of drawing boundaries. Do you want to be around people who added to your experience or took from it? Thomas described his friends as part of his family and he mentioned that he is very particular about who he lets into his inner circle. The ways in which he described these friendships display a desire to only have people he deeply trusted with him in desperate times. Thomas said:

Just tonight, my four year old's godfather, he's in the trucking business and he just happened to be in the area, stopped on by and I haven't seen him in five years and he hasn't seen his godson in four or five years and it's like no time had passed. He's more than a friend. To me, people like him are family. There's nothing that I won't do for my family. There's a joke that says a friend will help you move, but a good friend will help you move the body! Another one is that a friend will give you a shoulder to cry on but a good friend will stand shoulder to shoulder with you with a baseball bat singing 'somebody's going to get it!' I have very few friends, but those are the kinds of people that I associate with. There's nothing that I wouldn't do or nothing that they wouldn't do for me. Since we are likeminded people, this makes the job even better.

Overall, preppers used boundary work to differentiate themselves from others who didn't have the same worldview. Drawing symbolic boundaries required preppers to view themselves in opposition to others in the generalized culture. Preppers indicated that they had to decide who to include and who to exclude. Those in this sample judged on the basis of shared values and characteristics and the willingness to bring something to the table. The people who were deemed worthy of inclusion or protection are those people who belong in the individual's prepper in-group.

There is a dimension of superiority regarding how they became the ones who determined who is worthy of survival. Exerting control and the desire for security generated feelings of superiority. Instead of referring to the survival of the fittest, respondents described it as the survival of the prepper. At times it appeared that some respondents had experienced feelings as being defined as unworthy based on values of the generalized culture. In some ways, establishing themselves as being the ones who would survive was a way of asserting their worthy identity.

Thomas' account emphasized features of prepping that enabled a sense of control and influenced his sense of superiority. He even described a scenario where he got to decide who survived. Being that he exhibited an air of superiority over those who weren't prepared, he placed a certain value over the lives of a select few. Those that he deemed unworthy of belonging became victims during times of distress. Preppers got to decide whether they wanted to save others by offering protection and sharing resources. This superiority relied on an imaginary

construction of the able savior. Considering that the status structure in prepping culture was dependent on possessing both resources and skills, those that possess both were deemed worthy and had control over who will survive.

Community

I went about understanding the significance of what constitutes an in-group to my respondents similarly to the ways in which Lyn Macgregor (2013, p. 8) made sense of how her interviewees understood community. She analyzed the ways members of a small town create community. She stated that she did not rely on scholarly definitions of community, but instead relied on the descriptions used by the residents to inform how she defined community. Drawing upon ideas about the group with whom sharing would be the norm, I examined preppers' ideas about community by exploring their community making activities and how they decided who belonged to their in-group and who did not. The preppers in this study had several ways of constructing their in-group or community. Nine of the preppers mentioned some type of community they belonged to or framed community as a smaller nexus of people identified by their boundary work.

Bauman (2001) discusses digging cultural trenches as a protective measure against that which provokes fear. I argue that preppers are engaged in the process of digging cultural trenches as a sort of protective measure against the social changes they find troubling. Whether it be changing political regimes, economic destabilization, and demographic changes in American society, preppers saw a rapidly changing world which brings with it an existential anxiety. Bauman states that we “tend to seek a remedy for the discomforts of insecurity in

a care for safety, that is for the integrity of your body will all its extensions and frontline trenches- your home, your possessions, your neighborhood. As you do so you grow suspicious of the others around you, and particularly the strangers among them, those carriers and embodiments of the unpredicted and unpredictable” (Bauman, 2001, p. 145). The preppers in this study constructed community in a way which served to remedy the discomforts of insecurity as a way to safeguard themselves through the creation of boundaries.

Susan shared her ideas about prepper communities and how they sought to distance themselves from sources of control. She expressed a belief that fear is a controlling mechanism. She believed prepper groups are not trying to isolate themselves from each other, but from sources of control. She believed this is the reason why groups form. Susan stated:

Here’s the important thing about isolation. These preppers aren’t isolating themselves from each other. They are isolating themselves from fear-based control. You can have the white supremacy preppers- they are still doing it as a community. And you can have the hippie preppers and they are doing it as a community.

In her eyes, group belonging based on identity was not the key motivation to why these groups formed, rather they formed as a protective measure against social control generated by fear.

Thomas described belonging to a Libertarian community called the Free State Wyoming Project which is currently inactive. Generally speaking,

Libertarianism can be considered a rejection of pluralist ideas and the intrusion of big government in our daily lives. According to their now defunct website, the goals of this community were “to encourage, assist, and reward the migration of liberty-minded Americans to Wyoming in order to maintain and further its relative laissez-faire Western culture; to eventually create a haven for those Americans who desire not to live as, or under, government supremacists.”

(www.freestatewyoming.org). Thomas discovered prepping through a book written under the pseudonym Boston T. Party who is the organizer of the Free State Wyoming project. Thomas felt encouraged by these sources and was ultimately inspired by them to pursue other prepping related activities.

Thomas then described the people who he considered part of his close community and drew upon boundary work to justify their belonging. He discussed the common characteristics he shared and how the mutual experience of having served in the military solidified that relationship. Thomas mentioned the collective plan that he and his colleagues created so that everyone can potentially get to a safe haven. He then concluded by describing the stark political differences between he and his brother in law, though he placed high value on the skills he could offer to this community in times of need. Thomas said:

The only community that I belong to is the Free State Wyoming Project. It was founded by Boston T. Party and like I said that just got me on the path. I have four close friends and three of them I served with in the Navy and one of them I worked with as a commercial diver out on the east coast . . . I have been keeping in

contact with some of my buddies in the Navy and they think just like me and we are a little scattered across the country, but we have a plan of coming together and building a community should shit ever hit the fan. My friend and I that I dove with is ex-army. He's down in Arkansas. One of the guys is in South Carolina. Another lives in Florida, but he travels all over the country and the last one lives in Texas. With our individual families we would gather at a central point in the US. We would then go to wherever would be the safer area. We might come back up to me. I live up in the north in Wisconsin. We might head to North Carolina. We might stay in Arkansas. We might go down to Texas. But wherever will be the safest to rebuild our community and raise a family. As far as people who I would like to include in the community other than my four closest friends, my baby sister is a prepper. She's married into the Army. Her husband is Army, psychological operations and they are on board with everything too. My wife's sister and her husband, they think I am crazy. As far as my sister in law goes, I don't necessarily talk about it. My brother in law is a fire fighter. He's actually a captain with [the local] fire department. Even though I don't necessarily talk about it with him, he is someone that I would bring into the group because he has skills that he could offer. He's a paramedic and one hell of a carpenter. He's 6'4" and 490 pounds. The only bad thing about him is he's a diehard Democrat and he

votes the way the union tells him to vote. He's 100 percent German and stubborn as all hell. He basically said that there are 200 words listed in the second amendment and I'm like 'No! There's only 26 words in the second amendment.' He calls bullshit and I'm like okay, whatever. Believe what you want.

Family is often considered part of the core community one belongs to. In prepping, it was no different. Alice described her community as consisting of mostly family and stated that most of her family engaged in prepping. She mentioned her awareness of other communities in close proximity. She discussed how one particular group's membership was open to those who can bring their own resources, instead of assuming they would be taken care of by others. This particular characteristic of bringing one's resources drew from the larger value structure found common with preppers which focused on self-sufficiency. Alice said:

One of my stepdaughters and her husband are preppers. My son lives with us and he is definitely a prepper, and my husband. My sister and her husband are preppers, extreme, extreme preppers. I would say that 75% of my family is involved in it in some capacity. I know some [other] people and we have a small group. I have several associates that are members of large groups. And I am aware of just in our community of three or four groups. They have some medical people affiliated with them, they have some herbal healers that are involved in it. There are some people that have

their FFL license [federal firearms license] and so they have access to weapons. Those are large groups. We have one individual who actually does all of that himself. I taught him how to suture. But, his philosophy is that he will welcome anybody into the group but you have to bring all of your stuff with you. You have to pay to get into the group.

Henry spoke extensively about the possible hazards of having community members diverge from common values and the potential harms that could emerge. His group used a zombie apocalypse as a proxy for a potential catastrophe and he invoked a popular culture reference from *The Walking Dead* to drive his point home. Rick Grimes, the main protagonist, was a small town sheriff before the zombie outbreak occurred. Rick could be considered the moral compass of the story and Henry used this example to construct a set of values around which he saw himself standing with at the end of the world. Like Thomas, Henry included ex-service members in his group but found them increasingly problematic and wanted to distance himself from them. He made a clear distinction between preppers and survivalists and used this distinction to justify drawing stronger boundaries within his constructed community. Henry said:

I've got a few people that I can rely on. We use the zombie apocalypse because it is the end all, everything is down and it is the worst case scenario. Actually, the U.S. military uses what they call the zombie trials. Everything is gone. Humanity is gone. That's an interesting thing, because when you use a zombie type of

apocalypse, humanity is gone and there are groups that will thrive. There are groups that will either be evil or the Ricks of the world. So yeah, I have a small group and to tell you the truth, I am kind of wary of a few of them because they have gotten a little too militaristic. I have never had them in my house and they have never seen my stockpile. They were like-minded individuals that had served and then they just started going off of the deep end. The terror attacks is what launched it for them. Now they concentrate more on guns. I will tell you that a gun will take out anybody if you know how to use it. A bow will do the same thing. I don't need a \$14,000 gun to do the job. They started talking about that and I have slowly gotten away from them. Now I realize that they are more into survivalism. Survivalists are more, to me, about a militia. I think that the last thing that I need to be around is an uncontrolled militia. I've gotten to the point where I am actually looking for more groups to be involved with now.

Henry's issues with militias and preppers-turned-survivalists spoke to the uneasy nature of having members in your self-defined community that you did not trust. In this case, it would be difficult to enhance personal chances of survival if you felt threatened by members of your community. Henry's community was based on shared interests and then some in the community fractured off and started emphasizing guns and a militia. He described uncomfortable feelings with

how they moved in this direction and sought to come together with a group of people who were more interested in the prepping.

Brown and Schafft (2011) describe the social constructionist viewing of community as a series of social interactions. While preppers do not exist as a cohesive community, they resembled a community of social interactions. The people who prepped were prepping as individuals, privately and not within a public setting. With that being understood, those who did have relationships with others who also prepped built their networks through interactions. Most of the respondents relied on those who they knew well and relied on these face-to-face interactions while others formed networks via on-line interactions. These social interactions were what constituted the symbolic boundaries that preppers constructed between those who engaged in prepping and those who did not.

The ways in which individuals made meaning and found belonging has changed in an increasingly individualized society. In the past, community belonging or membership was based on participation in the public sphere and the type of work one did often determined community membership. But, in our individualized contemporary society this type of community was less likely. Drawing on Bauman's ideas, Delanty states that as these traditional ways of creating community are on the decline, identity based community is what will replace it (Delanty, 2003, p. 118). Preppers in this study did not discuss a concern with participation in the public sphere and generally felt a desire to retreat from it. No one in this sample linked prepping to the public sphere. Community was defined narrowly in the private sphere. Insiders were defined as

family members and friends who were open to prepping. All others were defined as outsiders.

Food as Boundary Work

The common thread which connected the preppers in this study is the desire to seek independence and security through independence from the market, another indicator that preppers were distancing themselves from the public realm. Though they largely relied on grocery stores to source their food, they did so in a way which decreased an overall need to engage in the public sphere in case of emergency.

Class status was not directly confronted by preppers in defining themselves, but identity work related to prepping aimed at redefining the status system to one in which people who were self-sufficient and able to survive were at the top rather than dominant culture status symbols of educational attainment, occupation, income and refined taste. Still, even though all respondents but one viewed having stockpiles of food as being core to being a good prepper, their educational statuses, occupations, employment levels all contributed to the different and varied ways in which they put together their toolkit. Those who come from different educational attainment levels, different class backgrounds and different occupations put together different prepper repertoires. There was a vast variety in the ways in which different people come at being prepared. There are different points of entry for everyone to participate in prepping.

Food offered preppers another method of constructing symbolic boundaries and served as a way to reveal class status. Prepping is done by

people of all classes. People who are differently situated in terms of education level and occupational status do vary in the things that they emphasized about the food that they want to stockpile. Three respondents spoke about the elevated quality of food that they preferred to consume and integrated these elevated tastes into their own unique prepper identity as part of making food readily available while also enacting a type of class status identity. Most of the preppers in this study weren't necessarily interested in the quality of their food intended for their stockpile which signaled inconsistencies amongst preppers regarding what types of food could be considered prepper food.

Holt (1998) drew on Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction and habitus, arguing that objects of consumption and the ways in which we consume act as markers of social status (Holt, 1998). Holt argued that social classes are no longer structured by consumption patterns. Being that consumer goods remain at the center of culture, different classes have the ability to engage in consumption practices that are situated in the desire to show off one's status, a privilege which was formerly granted to only the elites. Holt posits that it is the possession of, or lack of cultural capital that is what defines one's status in the social hierarchy. Holt's goal of the study was to define whether "variation in cultural capital resources leads to systematic differences in tastes and consumption practices for mass cultural categories." He believes that it is no longer effective to view someone's objects of consumption as a way to define their status. He suggests that distinction between classes can be derived from consumption practices, but not necessarily the objects that are consumed.

Holt states that there are two classes of consumers; those that have high cultural capital or low cultural capital. As his argument develops, he describes the ways in which symbolic boundaries are constructed between classes. He states that those with high cultural capital do not seek materialism as a way to seek status, but they seek authentic experiences to convey their social position. They seek to escape the pedestrian methods of consumption of people with low cultural capital and strive for unique and artisan-produced objects instead of the mass-produced objects of consumption that are popular with those that have low cultural capital. Drawing on Holt's conception of high cultural capital and low cultural capital, I found representations of both categories displayed through the food choices and practices related to food work of the respondents in this sample.

Seven of the thirteen preppers discussed food in a way which displayed identity work using food. Three preppers used descriptions of food consistent with foodies where they focused on freshness, clean meat, non-GMO, organic and locally grown. Two of three ate meat and one was a vegetarian. They integrated those ideas about food into their prepper identity preserving taste and status identities somewhat keeping with Holt's ideas linking their food tastes with their constructions of high cultural capital.

For five preppers choices about food were based on preservability, nutritional content and shelf stableness. Some emphasized brands including Spam, Aldi brand canned foods, Campbell's canned soup as ideal food for their stockpiles by these five. Brand named food was less important than being able to

get large quantities and store them for a long time. But, brand names associated with the industrialized food system and considered “good food” in the generalized culture were featured in their discussions and reflected their food taste.

Additionally, they sourced food using traditional methods such as gardening, foraging, canning and raising your own animals.

If we assume as Holt does that mass produced objects of consumption such as industrialized food are popular with people who have low cultural capital and that artisan produced objects such as locally grown, organic foods are valued by people with high cultural capital are seen as distinct groups, then we can assume that preppers resemble two groups which include preppers who have high or low cultural capital. While this understanding is not completely inaccurate, it isn't at all how preppers make meaning of their own identities, status and position in our society.

Preppers redefine worthy identity and high status regardless of their food taste as resting upon being able to survive in catastrophic circumstances. Because they believed that they were able to do that, they refined themselves as the highest status group in our society. Differently situated people in terms of education, income and employment drew on their status tastes in constructing their prepper practices. It didn't define the meaning of those practices. Preppers were in a way dialectically acting back on a set of social structures that they felt were not working, on a status system that they felt valued the wrong things and they were trying to act in ways that they believed were better. Yet, at the same time they were shaped by their life circumstances. Income realities shaped the

consumption practices of preppers, but the identities they built as preppers supersede those determined by class. They were redefining what it is to be a worthy human being in our society and it wasn't determined by class status.

The symbolic meanings attached to prepper identity focused on self-sufficiency and independence. However, they constructed the prepper identity using independence as a key feature while relying on others in order to engage in the practice of prepping. For example, all of the preppers in this study utilized grocery stores to source food, to a large degree with the exception of the outlier in the sample, Dana, who raised much of what she and her husband ate. While the preppers sought to be independent and free from reliance on the market, they were constrained by their individual capacities to do things for themselves.

Thomas' ideas about food were a quintessential example of how food is used in prepping and most of the others held similar ideas. He chose food for affordability and how long it can remain shelf-stable. He sourced a majority of food for his stockpile from Sam's Club and other big box retailers. He took care to make sure he left no record of his purchases because he believed that will pose a potential threat. Thomas said:

I have done a couple of Sam's Club runs for cans of Spam, chicken, cans of ham, ramen noodles, big bags of rice, big bags of beans. And ammunition, when I buy that I always pay cash. The last thing that I want is any kind of paper trail with a debit card or credit card. Executive orders have been passed to allow government agencies, specifically FEMA, to confiscate anything

that might be of use to the government. Anything from gasoline to food to medicine to whatever. Even generators.

The food that Thomas chose to stockpile were processed foods produced by the industrial food system. He focused on food that was packaged to last, bought in bulk and was cheap. These are the characteristics of “good food” in prepping. Due to economic restraints, he found less expensive options at Sam’s Club and strove to get as much for his money as possible.

Another prepper in the sample mentioned economic restraints and discussed the various tactics she used to source food for her preps. Alice used foraging, a unique tactic not used by others in the sample, to reduce the economic impact buying food had on the finances of the household. She linked these practices to how she was raised and made great efforts to pass on this skill set and took pride in the skills her son possessed as a forager. Alice said:

When I started canning and we started foraging, this was just a throwback to my childhood. I can remember when I was a kid that we used to pick blackberries when they were ripe and we would do it for the six weeks that they were ripe every day. So when we would be done canning, it would be nothing to have 60 or 70 quarts of blackberries for the winter. We have always foraged, so it was not a big transition. I do [see it as a way of preserving my heritage] and my husband does too because I was the one who taught him how to cut up chickens. I was the one that taught him how to butcher chickens. He has been unwilling to learn how to can, so I

taught my son how to can. He is a really good canner . . . My son is a certified organic harvester. When you are driving down the road he can say 'this is this, that is that.' If I have a new symptom of my illness, he will bring something home for me to try. I do know that based on some of this stuff that he has started me on, I feel much better than I have in a long time as opposed to the commercial medicine that I have been on for decades. . . So there are a lot of skills that we learned as children and as young adults that I have passed on.

Dana, the hobby farmer, was an outlier in the sample because she combined the values of prepping and the desire to produce food in a way that was in a self-sustaining closed system. She discussed at length the measures she and her husband took to enhance the quality of what they ate. They grew much of what they consumed and she discussed how her personal preferences shifted in light of that. They took great care in the production of their meat and sought out instruction to add value to what they produced. She and her husband focused on growing food in a closed loop system and she saw farming as systems based work. She used farming in this way as a component of her worthy identity work, but also as a marker of status. Having knowledge about heritage breeds and knowing ways to produce food yourself related to a type of status work which uses food to claim high cultural capital. For example, Dana described the process of creating the perfect cider and how complicated finding the right varieties of apple trees was. Dana said:

We haven't bought meat in the grocery store in about three years. . . . A lot of what prompted the food was more of an interest in systems, a little bit of 'who doesn't want their own food?' My tongue is spoiled now. I find it hard to eat an egg somewhere else. I am like 'this isn't the right color! It is supposed to be bright orange!' I only want to eat my bacon and all of that. We even slaughtered our own pig and processed it ourselves. Right now, we have jowls hanging in the basement to make raninchelli which is a dried and cured really, really high end Italian jowl bacon thing. . . . There are a bunch [of learning opportunities] we want to do if we can ever become 'life of leisure' people! We would love to go to France and learn how to make cheese because wouldn't that be fun? I have gone to see friends who have done stuff who are basically holding mini-workshops. I have never canned food before but I have all these tomatoes and now I make my own tomato sauce. I went and learned how to do that. I went and helped the same people and learned how to butcher a chicken that way. We have done things like that and there's a lot more that we want to learn. We have done some charcuterie but we are going to learn more. But eventually we want to get to where we can make salamis and there's some of this amazing meat that if you buy the artisanal kind, it is extremely expensive! Like prosciutto, super expensive! . . . We put in a 17 tree apple orchard. Two are a wide variety and a couple of modern

hybrids. I like traditional old English ciders which are very dry. I don't like any of the sweet stuff. All of the trees that I have gotten are the right combination to make a really dry traditional cider, other than I don't have the bitter one. Believe it or not, trying to find the apple tree that was used for that flavor component is actually really hard because the only thing that it is good for is making cider because otherwise it is bitter. I should be able to substitute crabapples, but putting five percent crabapples to do it. . . this year might be the year that I get enough because this year the trees will be four years old this year. So, we will see. I got about 50 apples last year, so we will see.

Dana was not the only prepper in this study who used food to communicate taste preferences while also drawing boundaries. Judith used food in several ways to distinguish herself from those who make different choices about what they consume and how they do so. Judith said:

I enjoy eating . . . I eat out a lot but I don't ever take any to-go boxes. Like whatever I am eating needs to stay there. The grocery store across the street is like an organic food store and I will take to-go stuff from there because it is all recyclable . . . The thing for me is eating factory farmed meat. I am a long-time vegetarian but yeah, people that eat at McDonald's and stuff, like oh my God, do you know what you are doing?

Sean focused on the different ways he and his ex-wife viewed food and nutrition. His son pointed out these differences to him and he used it as a moment to consider why the differences are there in the first place. Sean said:

I think, not every vegetable and fruit that you consume needs to come from a can. The moment it goes into a can it's going to be preserved. I fought that battle for about a year. I can't say that his behavior is different when he's with me, but he eats differently when he's with me. He asked me at one point, 'why is there always a salad at dinner?' I had to restrain myself from saying why wasn't there always a salad with dinner when I was living with your mom?

Food is often a source of contention in families, but in Sean's case, divorce complicated and added to the contention. Sean constructed a boundary between fresh and processed food. He believed that fresh food has more nutrition and attempted to create meals packed with nutrition as a way to enhance the quality of food his child consumed. Sean was the only prepper who highlighted the challenges of considering children and their nutritional needs in food storage and prepping planning.

Thomas explains that in his household, food was a joint effort. He and his wife worked together within each of their skill sets to produce delicious prepper food. Thomas stated:

My wife is from Italian and Polish stock and she grew up in a gourmet kitchen. She knows how to cook! She can take the bland prepper food that I have stocked and turn it into one edible feast!

Judith chose to source food from an alternative market which focused on high quality offerings which were grown organically. Dana took the most drastic steps in ensuring the quality of her food by choosing to operate a hobby farm and learning a particular skillset that allowed her to produce value-added items which catered to a sophisticated palate. The choices a person made about the food they ate offered a way to locate them in relation to the generalized culture and sent a signal about their own cultural tastes.

Thomas sourced bulk items from large scale retailers, but he did so because it was a cheaper place to acquire large quantities of commodities. Thomas' choices are in stark contrast to Dana and Judith who placed high value on the aesthetic quality and taste of food. Dana produced her own high-quality food and Judith ate a vegetarian diet that largely came from the small organic grocer very near to her home. She maintained that having close proximity to one's food reduced the environmental impact that the food production and delivery structure contributed to considering the long distances food has to travel to get to the consumer. In addition, many preppers discussed the reality of relying on a food delivery system which has about 72 hours' worth of food in a grocery store at any given time. Many of them pointed out the runs people make to the store to stock up on milk and bread during a local weather emergency. Overall, food was another way preppers constructed a boundary between those who have made plans to stockpile food and those who didn't.

Popular Culture

Using popular culture as an entry way into prepping was one way that people came to the realization that becoming better prepared was a good idea. Popular culture representations of prepping and survivalism are becoming more and more frequent as the practice becomes noticed by the generalized culture. Though prepping isn't quite yet an activity which large quantities of people are doing, media has picked up on the fact that people are interested in watching shows and reading materials about what prepping is like. Ned described the large increase in media related to prepping he has seen take place recently. Ned said:

The pop culture has really exploded! For example, if you go to Barnes & Noble.com, the last time that I checked there was 147 titles on prepping. If you looked up apocalyptic fiction, there were over 4,000. It's incredible! They take certain themes and repeat them. Here's an example, The Hood of Man, this is a retelling of the Robin Hood legend in the post-plague world in England! This has three novels, I just started it and it's a lot of fun. The growth of apocalyptic fiction has become its own genre. In fact, it has crossed over to fantasy and sci-fi. Let me get out my Kindle and I will share a few with you. Think of the different media programs, The Walking Dead, Defiance, Revolution, which was based on a trilogy by Roger Sterling and the first book was called When the Fire Dies and now it's grown into nine other novels. He wrote three of them and his

main protagonist dies fighting the evil person at the end, but then his children take it up and now his grandkids are going to take it up. For me, I always had fun being able to, I don't talk about this because people think that I am kind of weird. Well maybe so, but I am curious! And I like to watch how things are going to develop. [We've been doing this] since biblical times! It is growing because . . . part of it's due to the media, kind of a worst case scenario kind of thing. And part of it is just people saying that I value my independence and I want to be independent.

Ned brought his e-reader to our interview along with a large stack of different magazines and showed me how many publications were out there about prepping. He knew so much about the various representations of prepping in popular culture and described the history. Ned was very in tune with what was out there to be found for someone who wanted more information about prepping. He described the various publications that have pervaded the prepper/survivalist media in the past 50 years. Ned showed me the different issues as he described them. Ned explained:

During the 60s there were articles on civil defense that would be in the mainstream magazines like Popular Science and Popular Mechanics, things like that. During the late 70s and early 80s three magazines came out. One was called Survive published by the Soldier of Fortune magazine. One was called Survival but it didn't last long and then another called Survival Guide which became the

American Survival Guide. I still have this copy because one of my published pieces came out in this magazine. This magazine stuck around for a number of years. In the 90s, The Backwoods Survivor came along. This is what I consider the conservative version of Mother Earth News. Around 2002, the owner of this magazine passed away and either his wife or niece and she was very anti-gun and said that no articles regarding firearms would be published. She fired the long time editor and the magazine guide. So for the majority of the time, this was the one. There were others out there that were a mix of things. This one is a combination of simple skills and is outdoor and prepping kind of stuff. These were the primary ones. Then every once and a while, Popular Mechanics, once a year puts out a survival issue, survival tech and survival skills. This one had an issue on the myths of Hurricane Katrina or what to do if type of thing . . . it made suggestions on the type of skills you would need. And this is a mainstream magazine! A couple of years ago, this one came out and buy these every now and then and this came out as a quarterly but now it's monthly. The Survival Guide is a new version of the old survival guide. The thing that I liked about the old one is that it would include stories of people that went through survival situations and what they did. In the last two years there have been at least six new titles. Living Ready, it comes out quarterly. Then there's another one, Be Ready. Then you have

special ones that come out. . . . Some are quarterly, some nine months a year and some are monthly. I buy them from Barnes and Noble. Apparently, they have a demand for prepper books. Just in the last couple of years you have had at least ten come out. And this doesn't include the once or twice a year issues by Handgunner Magazine, this just proves to you that there's growing interest.

Thomas described similar publications that he was familiar with. These were magazines that you can find at big box retailers, grocery stores and bookstores. The presence of these types of magazines signaled the mainstreaming of prepping culture into the generalized popular culture. These magazines and publications were not found in some back alley bookstore or fringe website, but in places where everyone can go, have access to and are readily available on the magazine rack. Thomas said:

Off Grid is actually a sister publication to a magazine called Recoil. It is a quarterly publication that you can pick up once a quarter at Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart carries them. Yes, there's a lot of pretty high-tech stuff that they do and showcase. But there's also a lot of good, solid information. Everything from healthy eating, exercises and things like exercising when you are in a confined space like your bunker type thing to food, to what the benefits or the pros and cons of different types of long term storage, and food like which is the most economical, which will give you the most bang for your buck type thing.

Prepping in popular culture has exploded evidenced by the amount of publications Ned alone identified. Print media was not the only type of media which experienced growth. Television became a site of representation where viewers could become familiarized with prepping. Networks which focused on informational programming were largely the site of this burgeoning genre.

***Doomsday Preppers* and Other Related Shows**

One of the inspirations I had for embarking on this research was National Geographic's show *Doomsday Preppers*. I watched the first episode and was absolutely transfixed. This was a depiction of a culture that I was completely unfamiliar with and wanted to investigate further. I did wonder how accurate the depiction was and wanted to ask my respondents about how they felt about the show. I was also interested in the various other shows that sprouted up around the same time. The shows of main interest were those depicting men in nature attempting to survive being stranded in a desolate area. I was also interested in the types of shows that were showing representations of people making strides towards self-sufficiency or doing things to increase their self-reliance.

The preppers in this study were familiar with these shows and seven of the preppers had something to say in regards to *Doomsday Preppers* or similar shows. Ned recounted the various shows that have emerged in the popular culture and pointed out the opportunities these shows offered in terms of allowing the viewer to explore how they would approach and handle themselves in these types of situations. Ned stated:

You had what started out as Survivor Man with Les Stroud. Then you had Man vs. Wild. Then Man, Woman vs. Wild. Now there's Naked and Afraid. Then you have Mountain Man and National Geographic's Doomsday Preppers. I think they show a lot of extremes, but at the same time it's interesting. What would you do if? What is your viewpoint? Like some of the first episodes that came out there was a guy who was a primitive skills [expert] that was living in the city. There was another one with a young lady who lived in Houston and was trying to get out. She had her backpack and she was trying to get to where she and her boyfriend had a Jeep. Did she have to leave the cats behind? Come on! {laughs}

Christian enjoyed watching these types of shows and discussed how he preferred shows that felt more authentic. He described how he felt Doomsday Preppers was a fairly accurate portrayal of the culture because it showed a range of people engaged in the practice, but he did feel they were representing the extreme cases. He also mentioned another show which was produced around the same time called *Doomsday Castle* about a family working on building a fortress to attempt to safeguard themselves in case of a catastrophe. Christian said:

I watch survivalist shows all of the time so I have seen a lot of things but I haven't tried them in real life. I don't really like Bear Grylls. I do, but he's not . . . There's Survorman and Man vs. Wild. I prefer Survorman because he gets the bare essentials and he

survives for a week whereas Bear Grylls only survives for a couple of days and is always on the move. [It's more authentic] for sure, and he's his own camera man too. I watch a lot of car shows, a lot of stuff that's on the Discovery Channel. Alaskan Bush People, they grew up there. [I watched Doomsday Preppers] whenever it was on. I like it. I feel like those are the people that are going to extremes, well, not all of them, but it isn't a bad thing by any means, that's just not in my . . . there's no way I could do that right now. I think they did a pretty good job [depicting the culture accurately] because it was a variety of people who were doing it. There's just an average couple that was canning and wiring batteries together in their basement. Then you had people who were living on a ranch that were building a castle.

Christian was fairly neutral in terms of his feeling about *Doomsday Preppers*, while many of the other respondents had strong negative feelings towards the people they featured on the show or the types of scenarios the people were preparing for. Alice pointed out the unrealistic nature of some of these scenarios and highlighted the fact that in some cases, survival will be downright impossible. Alice explained:

Those people are crazy! Those people are prepping for things that are unrealistic. You are not going to prep and build a whole big basement and storage area for a series of tornados that are going to destroy the Midwest. So their goals are unrealistic. I don't think

that those are their real goals, I think that is what they want to portray on TV. I don't think that anybody preps for the zombie apocalypse. That's one of the biggest things . . . Or a nuclear thing. So many of them prepare for nuclear event. If it happens you might as well sit on your front porch and drink a beer because you are going to die because you can't stay down there for decades.

Graham pointed out the political extremism present on the show and how he found that distasteful. He also acknowledged that the loss of the ability to use technology due to a power outage and losing services like the internet will be something that he will miss. Graham said:

I've watched that show, Doomsday Preppers, they were radically political so I just tuned it out. But I have Netflix streaming and that's probably what I am going to miss the most is Netflix streaming and entertainment. Anything internet based is going to be gone.

Thomas framed the *Doomsday Prepper* show as entertaining, but a bit problematic. He called it a form of propaganda. He explained that he felt a group featured in the show was horribly misled if they believed that being welcoming and willing to share was the way to survive in a catastrophic event. He drew a symbolic boundary between him, an ardent supporter of firearm use for personal protection, and those people who believed in a pacifist type approach. His feelings about this particular group of people strengthened the perception that preppers are a highly individualistic culture focused on protecting only

themselves and the people who they deem worthy of being included in their circle of protection. Thomas said:

It does seem like propaganda but the program itself was very entertaining. I actually got a laugh on the very first episode of season one. I don't know if it was the pilot or test episode, but it was one little New England couple and the lady was known as the Doris Day of doom. They did it all and believed in community and everything. I am assuming that you believe in firearms, correct? This community that she is in, if you watch it again you will laugh your ass off, especially at one of her friends, a bearded hipster with no shirt who is like 'if a bunch of marauders come by, we will show them our beautiful bounty and everything and invite them down to a feast and invite them in to be a part of the group and ask them to lay down their arms because they really aren't necessary. But if they decide to get us, we will kill them in their sleep or poison them or something.'

Thomas focused on the pacifist nature of these people and derided them for seeking peace instead of taking an aggressive approach like he would in the same situation. Henry also believed the show was comical to a degree. He explained in detail the issues he took with the show and what he described as an inaccurate portrayal. He also highlighted how disillusioned some of the people featured on the show were to believe that

they were going to be able to survive and overpower others in times of crisis. Henry expressed:

I think that it is over-glorified and actually I think that it is inaccurately portrayed. Like on Doomsday Preppers, the people that they are showing . . . every time they show somebody I watch and say 'there's a mistake!' They aren't showing food preparation. They aren't showing the quality of life stuff. What they are showing are people who bury Conex boxes and everybody has a 9 millimeter gun on them. So what they are showing and portraying are people who are going to eventually be moles and live like rats and they all have guns. That's the most inaccurate portrayal of anything that I have ever seen. I look at preppers more like the Alaskan shows where they are going out and doing subsistence living. That is a more accurate portrayal of a prepper. The ones where they are living in a fortified structure and they have a place to go out to, anybody that is a real prepper and anybody who is actually putting a lot of work into it is not going to go on to TV and show you all of their shit. They are not going to do that. This here is not actually portrayed. Because if that same producer and that same director actually came to a prepper rally, they would see a totally different outcome . . . For me, it was like comedy. I was like 'yup, everybody here knows what you have!' They have one show on now where this young kid was easily 450 pounds. He had a

skinny guy with him and they said 'if you had a .308 and a 30 aught six and other guns, we are going to come and take them from you.' I was like, 'whoa! Wait a minute, this is supposed to be about preppers and this guy is talking about coming to take our shit!' He was some stupid redneck that really couldn't run to get away. He was saying that you will have no choice and I am coming to take it! He wasn't a guy who was a prepper where he had some guns and he had some chickens, but if you have enough where somebody came into your compound, because he is a threat and he is putting himself out there as a threat, that they would get killed in the crossfire. That's what got me. They actually had this guy on the show making his own armor. He had tiles and a tarp . . . that fat guy? That's what you think a prepper is? That's when I lost all interest in the show. This is not what preppers are!

Henry touched on something that Frank said directly about what is depicted in these types of shows which is that the greatest threat to one's survival is other people. He explained that other people who haven't made extensive plans to be self-reliant in times of a catastrophe were what threatened him the most. He also mentioned how place plays into the different, varied ways one needs to prepare. He mentions that if you live in an arid region, your needs are different than someone who lives in a place that can grow food easier. Frank said:

The people that I know that watch that show that are themselves preppers or survivalists watched it for its pure entertainment value for how stupid what many of the people did. One of my basic tenants for survivalism is that there is really only one threat to my survival and it has two legs. My main threat to survival is other people. If everyone was nice and everyone worked together to solve problems and if there weren't criminals in our midst . . . my main threat to my survival has two legs. If it is just having enough supplies to outlast a situation, I have that. I have met that minimum requirement. Most people who have made a conscious decision to have a limited amount of supplies . . . if people have three days' worth of food and there is an average of three days' worth of food sitting in the US transportation system, unless you are in a farming community or in a state like Indiana where food is rather common, if you live in say Arizona or New Mexico or California, which are all essentially desert states with 60 million people living there, the second the water stops pumping the large amounts of agriculture in California is gone. You will have a huge number of people fighting over a small amount of resources. Those people are fighting for their families and their kids and their own survival and they are going to do anything.

Frank accounted for the distaste he had for the ways in which prepping was depicted in these types of shows. Several of the preppers explained that the

people they chose to focus on were either unstable, strange, crazy or doing things motivated by conspiracy theories. After learning about how preppers felt about the depictions of prepping in *Doomsday Preppers*, I discovered that many of them were dissatisfied with how prepping and survivalism was depicted in the generalized popular culture. So I asked them how they would like to be depicted. The following section discusses the ways in which preppers in this study would like to be represented.

Struggling with Stereotypes about Prepping in Popular Culture

Roger made sure to explain that he wanted preppers to be separated from conspiracy theorists because he felt those people were extreme. He elaborated on this point by displaying an uneasiness about Alex Jones³ and expressed that prepping was an activity for ordinary people to do. Roger said:

[I would like us to be portrayed] as practical people who are trying to go about their daily lives just like everyone else but making preparations for events that others don't think are going to happen. I am just an average guy. I don't have a tin-foil hat⁴. . . I don't like labels very much but when you get labeled as a conservative or a liberal, people just throw you into a box saying that you believe all of these things which is nonsense, I think. I am guilty of it too. I

³ Alex Jones is the American radio host of a show called InfoWars. He is an active proponent of all sorts of different conspiracy theories and promotes belief in these amongst his listeners.

⁴ Wearing a tin-foil hat is believed by some to protect the brain from mind reading or electromagnetic waves. People who believe this to be true are considered paranoid and are stereotyped to be conspiracy theorists.

throw terms around too. The label prepper conjures up all of these images of people who think that GMOs and vaccinations and all that other stuff is going to . . . it's all a conspiracy that someone is actively trying to hurt us. I don't buy into any of that. I think Alex Jones is crazy . . . I think that there are a lot of stereotypes that people might make assumptions about that . . . I will start with probably the most obvious, that preppers are, these are ones that I would consider a negative stereotype that I don't agree with. These are ones that I think are not all that uncommon. Preppers are tin-foil hat wearing people. They are into vast conspiracy theories. They are greedy. They like to hoard supplies. They are not planning for charity when it comes time. Those are probably the more traditional stereotypes that I hear about prepping.

Alice, a rural prepper, was uncomfortable with how prepping was portrayed as a lower class, rural activity. Alice explained:

The biggest misunderstanding is that others think that it is a hillbilly mentality . . . I know some very educated and sophisticated preppers. I think that is the biggest misconception, that it is a bunch of southern hillbillies that are doing it.

This comment expressed the struggle of defending her participation in prepping as something that was a worthy activity, something that the educated and well-off people could find value in too. Christian explained that he felt

disappointed that preppers were depicted as mentally unstable. He also pointed out that he felt participation in the culture was on the rise. He also dispelled one of the preconceptions that I had going into this study which was that preppers were actively preparing for a worst case scenario. Christian said:

[The biggest misunderstanding about prepping is] that we are crazy. Honestly, I feel like so many people are beginning to prep now. But I think that a lot of people just look at us like we are crazy. And a lot of people think that we are prepping for one certain event. I don't think that a lot of people realize that we are prepping for a thousand different scenarios, really.

Sean discussed how newcomers could manage the negative perceptions of prepping and how building a network of trusted friends could help destigmatize the practice. He explained it as a normal activity, one not to be afraid of doing. He also expressed the need to consume multiple sources of information to receive a multifaceted view of the practices and skills found within the culture. Sean said:

[I would tell new preppers to] not be afraid of doing it. Don't be afraid of the name. Talk with someone that you can trust. My situation is unique. I had the mindset and then my friend talked to me about the whole gun thing. I get that a lot from him. It could be a website that you visit, one that you trust. Reading one website or book on anything, you are never going to get the complete picture.

You could be interested in water color painting, but if you read one book on it or watched one DVD, you only get one person's take on it.

Lastly, Henry made connections between media depictions and normalizing prepping via government entities like FEMA. He explained that if the government encouraged people to be better prepared on a larger scale than what it is now, prepping could become a normalized activity in the generalized culture. It would destigmatize the practice allowing it to move into the realm of a common sense, everyday activity. He stated that this was the only way to reduce negative stereotypes and to bring these skills to more people. Henry said:

The one way that the media can coexist with prepping is go back to the FEMA website that tells you to keep three days of food and water and what your emergency kit should look like. Tie that into prepping. FEMA can add in some extra information tied into prepping. The government is telling you to do this and we are adding in a few more directives. The American Red Cross tells you to have this much so maybe you should have a few more. We are just a little bit above what the government is telling us to do. Preppers automatically know that you are doing it not because the government is telling you to, but you saw the government guidelines and know that going above it is the right way. You are doing what is being advised. That's the only way to keep the negative stereotype off of preppers. Look, the government is telling

us to do this, I need you to do it! Why don't you have it? The government says to do it and they are the ones that will try to save you! Preppers on the other hand know that no, we are not going to wait on the government. We want to make sure that everything is done and kept local. So it is good to tie that in and make it seamless. Preppers will be seen as less a survivalist and more in line with what the government wants. It's all about how the story unfolds.

Seven preppers in the study spoke about how they were displeased with the ways in which prepping was portrayed in the mass media and gave suggestions to the various ways we could destigmatize it. Prepping was what many of these respondents viewed to be common sense, not a behavior motivated by conspiracy theories. It was a practice that they wanted to bring to more people because they deeply believed that the more people who were prepared reduced the threat others have to their chances of survival. Like Frank said, the greatest threat is on two legs.

Generally, the respondents distanced themselves from hoarders and conspiracy theorists and strove to describe what they were doing as a relatively normal thing to do. I did not ask questions directly regarding conspiracy theories, but found that these preppers were either trying to distance themselves from conspiracy theories or they subscribed to a variety of conspiracy theories which had the potential to motivate them to prep.

Distancing From or Relating to Conspiracy Theorists

During our interview, Alice wanted to make it clear that what she was doing was not based on beliefs in the zombie apocalypse or another type of unlikely scenario, but grounded in real possibilities. Her rationale to prep was derived from the belief that the ways in which the government was functioning was unsustainable. She spoke in ways which signaled that she didn't want to be linked to those who believed conspiracy theories. Alice explained:

[My associates] aren't like the doomsday preppers, they don't think that it is going to . . . or it is my understanding that they don't think that it is going to be a zombie apocalypse or a tornado or a hurricane that will end all resources. They are just of the same philosophy that we are [which is] that things cannot continue like they are.

Roger also did not want to be associated with conspiracy theorists. He mentioned a key figure in the circulation of conspiracy theories in this country, Alex Jones, and how he thinks he is disturbed. He pointed out the dangers he perceived in labeling people and how the label of "prepper" carried negative connotations like being a tin-foil hat wearer who is concerned with the government reading your thoughts. Roger said:

I don't like the conspiracy theory thing. I get kind of creeped out by some of that stuff. Some of it is really off the wall. My friend tried to get me to start listening to Alex Jones' radio show and I listened to

it for about a week and I came away with the conclusion that that man is severely disturbed. He has millions of listeners and those are people who you might put on the extreme side who really buy into every possible conspiracy theory there is. Like there is one world order government who is deliberately poisoning us for mind control. I couldn't take it for more than a week. It is almost nuts!

Judith and I discussed different ideas about why people were afraid and what ways the media generated these fears. She mentioned the discomfort she felt when thinking about what motivated her father to prepare for the apocalypse and how she didn't want to be lumped in with the conspiracy theorists like her dad.

I guess we wouldn't be prepared if we weren't afraid, right? . . . I think that it is interesting that you've really maybe defined why I don't like that the apple didn't fall far from the tree with me. But, I don't really like being defined by him because I think that my father was basing his fears on mythology instead of science. And to me, his fears were ridiculous.

Frank described the types of beliefs that he thought were ludicrous and how he had a hard time understanding the rationale of the people who believed these certain things. He highlighted a certain distrust of science and reasoning that is gaining popularity in the generalized culture. Vaccines was one thing that he focused on to communicate these ideas. Frank said:

Like I mentioned before, there are plenty of people who believe in [a conspiracy theory of] the black helicopters⁵ . . . The thing that you might find out is that they are the majority! Those people do not understand math and science and research! The only source linking serious medical issues like autism to vaccines have been totally debunked as actual fraud . . . people in our parents' generation who had witnessed people die from rubella, polio and measles have faith in the science whereas this generation of parents haven't seen that stuff. They want to cherry-pick what they think is fact.

Susan, a self-described anti-vaccinator, a belief based in the conspiracy theory Frank mentioned, described to me how she had to protect herself from information her friends were sharing that were conspiracy theories, things like the New World Order and concentration camps within the borders of the United States. She expressed a certain tendency to believe these types of things as true while also sharing that she made great effort to protect herself from these types of ideas. She explained that she needed to do so to stay mentally healthy because the logical conclusion was to move off-grid and that was something she was not willing to do. Susan said:

⁵ The black helicopter conspiracy theory is based on the belief that some people have which claims that the US government is planning a military takeover and will employ black helicopters to do so.

That introduced me to New World Order (NWO), my friends did. The first time I heard of NWO was when I was pregnant. I was home by myself with a brand new baby on New Year's Eve in the middle of town. When I started to realize what Y2K actually meant, I realized that I could watch the time zones and continue seeing them on TV, I was like 'this is just stupid!' So I dropped it that day. If China is fine, we are fine. We are fine. I stopped listening to Talk 650, there's some really scary conversations that happen in the evening. I stopped listening to that stuff. I was listening to that stuff when my daughter was a tiny baby. And I stopped listening to that. There were some predictions about some major stuff that was going to go down and I said that if this doesn't happen the way that how passionately people felt about this I am not risking this shit anymore. These kinds of predictions have been happening my whole life and probably since mankind existed. I was not getting on that crazy wagon. I know those things exist as possibilities, but I am not putting my energy here because I can't take it . . . When my daughter started getting older, things would start coming up because I have a lot of way out there friends. So things would come up about the government buying huge landfill type things to be able to bury bodies, stuff with hiding concentration camp kinds of things in the U.S., just way out there stuff. I know this stuff is happening. I am not one of those people who think that this can't be true. I know

it's true. It would take me like three days to recalibrate so I could cope with the fact that these things are happening. It took me years to not be post-partum. The fears are so pronounced when you are a mom. . . The only way that I could wrap my brain around feeling safe in the world is if I bought property and got off of the grid completely and faked our death. I couldn't come up with any other way. I just couldn't figure it out. I can't afford to do that. It would take a lifestyle that I couldn't . . . I am not willing to give up the world to live in that fear.

Thomas was the only one in the study who described himself as a believer of conspiracy theories, though he pointed out that he does not wear a tin-foil hat. He explained that learning about these theories was a function of becoming more knowledgeable. Thomas said:

I became a little bit of a conspiracy nut, but nothing where I would line my ball cap with tin-foil. Nothing too severe, it just made me a little bit more aware of what's happening in the world . . . like keeping an eye on pieces of legislation that was coming up.

Overall, conspiracy theories were not something that a majority of the preppers in this study claimed to believe in. One reason for this denial could be that in the generalized culture, believing in these types of ideas is stigmatized as crazy or unreasonable, at best. It is not culturally accepted to express these types of ideas without seeming to be on the fringe or mentally disturbed. Prepping culture does tend to promote these sorts of ideas through media and

websites within the realm of prepping. In the following section, hoarding will be explored as another aspect of prepping culture and how preppers either claim or distance themselves from hoarding behavior.

Hoarding/ Non-hoarding

Oftentimes, prepping is compared to hoarding under the premise that stockpiling goods is a key practice of the culture. Four of the respondents mentioned or alluded to hoarding. Prepping is something that could easily slip into the territory of hoarding. The distinction between hoarding and prepping relied on the intention behind the action. Ned described himself as a hoarder of useful things. The things he hoarded supported his practice of prepping. Ned said:

I am kind of a hoarder. If I see something that has a usage, I will put it aside. I have books on blacksmithing and swinging an ax. Most of the things I keep are my books. I still have old manual tools that I have from my father because that's what I learned how to use as a kid. I have a power drill and stuff, but I have the manual ones too. There are all sorts of things. Someplace I have old fletching tools when I learned how to fletch my own arrows. When I get curious about something, I trip over things. I guess it's because I know what to look for.

Ned explained that once he was primed to look for useful objects, it became something that inspired the need for more. Roger, someone of economic means, described the challenge of knowing when to stop gathering supplies.

Though he felt like he had an adequate stash, he was still in the process of obtaining goods. Roger explained:

You never have enough! Never! You could be just so unbelievably rich and never have enough. Do I think that I have an adequate supply of things? Yes, I do. Probably enough to get by with a family of four for a year or more with food and the other necessary things . . . When I first started, it was such an overwhelming thing to do. I am a very analytical person. I was researching and finding out what I needed. Before long, I realized that I would never be in a position where I feel comfortable. But, I was wrong. I do feel much more comfortable now. I am still doing prepping. I still buy things and put things away little by little. I have more things. Honestly, I hope that I never have to use any of it!

Christian didn't describe what he does as hoarding, but said that he enjoyed gathering things. He justified this as feeling the need to be prepared for whatever he may face. He linked other hobbies to the practice of gathering things and complemented his prepping activities with those other hobbies he enjoys.

Christian said:

It's kind of weird but I like gathering things. I like being prepared for anything, really. I just like the fact of prepping. It really is [like a hobby]. Plus, they are all things that are interesting to me. I like hunting and fishing. I like all of that kind of stuff.

Frank was the only respondent who mentioned hoarding as something he unequivocally does not do. He compared his practice of prepping to other people in his life who focused on collecting large amounts of specific objects like containers. He drew a boundary by displaying how what he did was different from their practice. In his perspective, collecting things for the sake of collecting them was fundamentally different from gathering supplies, dating them and storing them for a particular purpose. Frank said:

I don't hoard. I don't stockpile containers. I don't save newspapers. I don't keep rubber bands. I am not like one of my grandparents who lived through the depression. If I put something in my stockpile, it has a date on it and it is there for a specific reason. I am not saving needles or buying needles to trade or any of that other goopy stuff . . . My friend referred to his dad as Container Man and he was Bag Boy. His dad has some kind of container fetish. I don't know how else to describe it. Like my own dad before he passed, one of his favorite sayings was 'a place for everything and everything in its place.' My friend's dad, that place was always a box. Whether he was going to the Container Store or ordering stuff online or whatever, he liked containers. He liked the feel of them. I don't know what his attraction to them was. My friend jokes about liking bags. He likes containers to put stuff in. But it is something that interests them. If they see a new container or a

novel way to store something, it is intriguing to them. To me, it's a box. It's a means to an end. It is to protect something. I don't have any particular interest in the actual box though.

Overall, from an outside perspective, prepping could appear to be an activity which encouraged people to hoard. Hoarding has been defined as a distinct psychological issue that can destroy the lives and relationships of those who do it. In this sample of preppers, hoarding was used to describe collecting things in mass and was distinguished from a psychological malady. The majority of interviewees didn't claim hoarding as what they were doing even though they were stockpiling large quantities of goods. In their eyes, what distinguished hoarding from what preppers claim they are doing, was the motivation behind their behavior. In the case of preppers, hoarding-like behavior was a way that assisted them to describe how to manage the various insecurities they felt and attended to the needs these insecurities created by collecting and saving large amounts of provisions.

Conclusion

As preppers defined who belonged to the prepper in-group, the worthy identity work was what constructed both the individual and group worthy identity. Sherman explains how "as individuals, our senses of self are crafted around the concerns that are most salient to us. We tend to feel the most allegiance with those whose sources of distinction are similar to our own whether the basis of our similarity is wealth, education, religion, or ethnic background" (Sherman, 2009, p. 5). Seeking safety in the company of others who are similar to

themselves was one way the preppers I interviewed drew symbolic boundaries and found belonging. Prepper boundaries were drawn between those who were prepared and those who were not. They created an in-group which was comprised of like-minded family, close friends and trusted associates who were also engaged in prepping. People in the out-group were not on the same wavelength and did not share a similar worldview. Those in the out-group were also people who were not considered worthy of their protection and were seen as suspicious, or in extreme cases, were considered mentally defective.

In a broad sense, community is thought of as groups of people who have common circumstances, interests or goals. Affinity communities, or those based on common interests are what prepper communities most resemble (Levinson, 2003). The common interest found in preppers' communities was the desire to improve the chances of survival. A benefit of having a prepping affinity community was the comradery found among the members. As Thomas explained, having like-minded people around you made the work of survival even better considering that you were in the midst of your trusted friends. The imaginary communities that they constructed were composed of those who were like them. Geographical proximity mattered less than having similar desires and worldviews. These communities were constructed in contrast to those who they deemed as less savvy and unprepared.

Preppers were largely dealing with their feelings of insecurity in the private realm which they turned to in order to strengthen their feelings of personal security. They were retreating from the public sphere due to a general lack of

trust in public institutions. They did not invest in the public sphere and tended to place energy and resources on bolstering their abilities within their own private realm. Bauman explained how we seek out a way to manage discomforts and become suspicious of those around us, prepping became a private action people did in order to gain some stability in an uncontrollable world. Thomas described belonging to the Free State Wyoming Project which symbolized a retreat of some sort. Though he doesn't live in Wyoming, he had deep desires to escape to a place that embodied his desires to live free from government control and have the ability to create a life that is more self-sufficient. Others in the sample expressed different types of longings, yet these variety of desires were all based in the wish to be less dependent on others.

Through prepping, they are redefining low cost, industrialized food as a high status symbol. Knowing how to acquire these foods, how store them long-term and how to put them together in delicious ways was one component of constructing the prepper worthy identity. Food that was shelf-stable and fit for long term storage was classified as good food in prepping culture. For most, these definitions of good versus bad food were used to define the worthy identity of the self-sufficient prepper. Frank's discussion about having a pantry and having at least three days' worth of food stockpiled at any given time was a form of boundary work. In this sense, using food as a way to create a boundary defines those who don't have access to stockpiled food as less than and as the other.

The depictions of prepping in the popular culture were troublesome to the preppers I interviewed. Though some of them claimed to enjoy watching the shows on a certain level, they still found them generally problematic in their representations of the people who were prepping and of the general culture of prepping. This type of media was a component of popular culture and some respondents spoke about the content as being ridiculous and entertaining to some degree. Christian expressed that he was able to garner information from these types of shows to further develop himself as a prepper.

At the same time, some respondents established their prepper identities as distinct from several dimensions of prepping found in these popular cultural accounts. They largely distanced themselves from images of preppers as hoarders, conspiracy theorists or those that depict preppers as being mentally unstable. What they perceived to be an inaccurate depiction was something they wanted to change. They were interested in altering the ways in which prepping is understood by those who don't engage in prepping culture. They also sought to normalize the practice and believed that if the generalized culture picked up on the practice as a routine thing to do, this normalizing process could be another way to protect themselves from the onslaught of people who would jeopardize their safety in the aftermath of a catastrophe.

CHAPTER 6: “FEELING SAFE IN THIS WORLD”: RETREATING TO THE PRIVATE SPHERE

This chapter summarizes the themes analyzed in earlier chapters and places them into the larger context of cultural interpretations about prepping. The type of cultural analysis that I conducted was done by focusing on respondents as carriers, interpreters, negotiators and agents in crafting prepper culture. This involved bringing together cultural practices, ideas, values and rituals. Prepping may be understood as a cultural repertoire that they constructed which enabled them to enact facets of their identity the most important of which was establishing a sense of self-sufficiency. This goal harmonized with other aspects of identity such as being a caring husband, an ex-service member, a quick learner, a helper, good parent and being committed to family even as they believed they lived in a culture that was one of dependency and lack of commitment to close others which they were resisting. Many defined themselves as being a devoted spouse, a caring parent, an independent citizen or a patriot.

Prepping identity was more central for some respondents than others, but all claimed it. The roles claimed by respondents were supported by prepping in their view. The cultural repertoire included practices aimed at self-sufficiency, being prepared to survive and caring for one's own and values of independence, self-sufficiency and the ability to survive in difficult circumstances including economic downturns, political unrest, natural disasters and other types of

catastrophes. Respondents were revealed to view prepping as a central element in a constellation of identities.

The practices described in chapter three were included in the cultural toolkit used by these preppers which were constructed to encourage feelings of security. The respondents in this study reported that these practices were components of a larger constellation of behaviors designed as a measure to increase their chances of survival during a catastrophic event. The primary practice reported by respondents involved having adequate access to food and water through their planning and practices. Most used stockpiling shelf-stable food and water for long-term storage as methods. A few grew their own food and animals and preserved foods themselves. Some preppers in this study reported using food preservation techniques like canning, dehydrating and packing for the long term as a way to increase their stockpile. The idea that food can be stored for 25 years by doing the storage a certain way is something taken as fact by many preppers. While there may be questions about the viability of the long term food storage techniques used to actually be able to ensure security and increase their chances of survival, their belief that it will provide a sense of security is at the heart of their commitment to prepping.

Interpreting the current society in the ways the respondents did, these practices are acts that show agency in an effort to exert some control over their lives and to do something positive that is aligned with their values and worldviews like being self-reliant and not reliant on the state or even their neighbors.

Preppers also emphasized the need for personal protection and highlighted firearms as a key component of their personal defense tactics. Self-defense was a critical factor for the survival of many in this sample because they explained that regardless of the amount of provisions you had, if you were unable to defend them, it is all for naught. Being able to make these claims and being able to believe that having guns, having paracord, having all of the accoutrement of prepping and having long term food storage provides feelings of security and the belief that they are more likely to survive than non-preppers.

Knowledge was a fundamental component of the prepper's toolkit. Knowing how to provide for yourself and preserve food, knowing defense tactics and knowing how to do things like build fires and shelters were all mentioned by these preppers as things they felt were important to know. They also explained that with prepping came certain responsibilities and viewed these as part of the practice of prepping. Knowing your neighbors, protecting your loved ones and keeping your prepping practice to yourself were key responsibilities found in prepping culture.

Essential practices of prepping spanned the range of having situational awareness at all times, being ready for the unexpected and having a plan to handle emergency situations. These were considered fundamental components of the constellation of prepping behaviors. Having three days' worth of supplies on hand at any given time was also highlighted as an important part of being prepared. Having three ways to execute a task, like purifying water or starting a fire was also something these preppers felt was important to know in case one of

your ways failed. Having a bag prepared with adequate supplies for 72 hours of survival was another element of their practices. Practicing and training and having knowledge of the natural world were all considered a part of being prepared for these respondents. They largely felt that having items to use in the case of emergency was basically useless unless you knew how to use them. Preppers didn't believe that the ability to spend money and buy things was adequate to being a true prepper. Being a true prepper meant that having knowledge and skills to do all kinds of things including using things like guns, water purifiers and generators was necessary.

As described in chapter three, people are interpreters and are actively engaged in making meaning of and constructing practices. The symbolic meanings behind this variety of practices is the notion that they contribute to one's self-sufficiency, reduce the reliance on others and the social safety nets in which they have lost faith and act to increase their chances of survival.

Chapter four focused on values and summarized the dimensions of culture, identity and the different ways the respondents were doing identity work as preppers. The values they described contributed to their cultural repertoires which centered on their ideas about what it meant to be self-sufficient. They constructed the prepper worthy identity using these values, ideas, and practices which aimed to build themselves up as self-sufficient, independent and a maker of their own destiny. This certain type of person is constructed in contrast to those who were seen as takers, people who were dependent and unable to fend for themselves.

Prepping was something they did as a reaction to their feelings of insecurity. Prepping was used as a way to express a worthy identity that defined themselves in opposition to others in the generalized culture who they felt made no effort to become more self-reliant and were reliant on others. To these respondents, a worthy identity included a spirit of independence and also a responsibility for those who depended on them, like their spouses and children. Being a good provider for your loved ones in catastrophic times was something that preppers placed great importance on and was a large component of their worthy identity.

More generally, this dissertation offers an understanding of the current society in the US through the eyes of these people. They used prepping to cope with their perceptions of what society is like. Preppers held beliefs that being prepared is how people should be. They felt that people should be more like them and that they shouldn't rely on others unless it is family. They conveyed that we should not rely on government for survival. The individual should rely on only themselves for their own survival. They articulated that the government is full of politicians who are in it for themselves and only have personal gain in mind and that the larger culture is made up of many people who feel entitled and are dependent on the government and who don't believe that they needed to be self-sufficient. These types of entitled people were characterized by two of the preppers as takers.

Preppers saw the political leaders of the country as those they felt responsible for the creation of jobs and educational opportunities rather than

industry leaders. They were critical of the effectiveness of government and other institutions to be relied upon to meet society's needs adequately. Thiers was a worldview that was somewhat upset with the world because it wasn't operating on the grounds of survival of the fittest, but operated on grounds that were dictated by self-serving politicians and people conditioned to believe they would be taken care of. Though details of ideal practices of prepping and even aspects of what were most important varied somewhat across preppers, they consistently constructed a worldview in which being in the generalized culture or not being self-sufficient was inferior to being a self-sufficient prepper. They felt that they were actually the fittest to survive because they were preppers.

Their worldviews offer us a different lens on the world through the eyes of preppers' ideas, feelings and practices. These worldviews come with certain contradictions though. One example of this was Alice's husband being the recipient of disability payments yet she expressed disdain for those who rely on government benefits like SNAP and welfare. Their sense of self-worth is attached to security. Preppers focused on basic needs, a sense of security, enough food and water and protection. Though the respondents expressed a variety of worldviews, most of them mentioned how much they believed in the personal rights of individuals to choose to live a life free from government intrusion. Many in the study expressed a worldview that saw a downfall of society on the horizon due to Obama's presidency and the social changes that accompanied his election. Others were fearful of what they perceived as

conservative and elitist trends in society. Respondents overall were feeling insecure in the face of changes and sought safety and security through prepping.

Chapter five discussed boundaries and belonging and conveyed that the preppers felt their primary commitments were strongly bounded. The respondents expressed a distrust of others outside of their in-group and shared that their community is constructed of those in the in-group which included close others in the private sphere such as family and like-minded friends. Preppers were doing identity work through practices, values and beliefs and the ways in which they drew symbolic boundaries. The boundaries that preppers described were very constricted, constructed homogeneously and to the effect of excluding those who do not share similar worldviews. These boundaries were constructed to also express who they do not want to be dependent on. They perceived themselves as not being takers and not being dependent. They claimed a certain moral superiority over those who they deemed as needy. They viewed themselves as capable, rational and as being able to care for their own.

Preppers expressed a general lack of trust in the government and non-government entities in times of distress. Through adopting prepping practices, they constructed themselves as independent though they are dependent to an extent on these entities in their everyday lives. They invoked a variety of reasons for this belief about the government. Some cited a distrust of the political structure and those in office. Some respondents explained that Hurricane Katrina and the response from FEMA displayed to them that relying on government agencies to rescue you would be unwise considering how poor the outcome was

in New Orleans and the surrounding area. They also expressed a general unease regarding the social changes we are experiencing as a society and saw these changes as a harbinger of bad things happening to their social and economic standing.

In her alternative view of culture, Swidler (1986) argued that instead of imagining culture as a switchman which directs practices and informs beliefs and behavior as previously conceptualized by Weber, we should instead consider that “culture provides a repertoire of capacities from which varying strategies of action may be constructed” (Swidler, 1986, 284). Preppers used a cultural toolkit when constructing their strategies of action by adopting already established practices that were cobbled together in a way that was most useful in prepping and was counter to the generalized culture even as it drew from it.

Swidler also examined the role of culture and how it operated in settled and unsettled times. In settled times, culture and action are intertwined in a way that it becomes difficult to separate the effect that culture and social structures have on action. In unsettled times, ideology becomes a determining factor in developing people’s strategies of action. “Coherent ideologies emerge when new ways of organizing action are being developed. Such ideologies, often carried by social movements, model new ways to organize action and to structure human communities. These ideological movements, however, are in active competition with other cultural frameworks—at the least in competitions with common sense and usually with alternative traditions and ideologies as well” (Swidler, 1986, p 280). Conflicting ideologies that are found in the generalized culture are adopted.

Prepping is one cultural response to broader ideological conflict in our society as evidenced by the number of respondents who took issue with Obama's administration, the government itself and fellow Americans who aren't seemingly pulling their weight. In times of social change, people depended on ideology to inform how they should live their lives which then take root and became tradition and eventually evolved into common sense.

Preppers constructed the present as unsettled times due to their perception that we are living during times of great social change, cultural and economic instability. But, they adopted practices that allowed them to retreat into the private sphere where they felt they could assert control over their destiny and have greater ability to survive in unsettled times. Though there were differences in the ways in which they interpreted these social changes, they all were concerned with the instability change was creating. However, most people expressed a conservative political ideology while a few had a progressive agenda, all of them were concerned with the extremism in politics the current moment entailed and viewed the present as very unsettled in terms of the future structures of society which will be propped up. Their prepping ideas and practices offer us an example of one response to insecurities that may be felt more broadly in society.

There was variation in political views, personal backgrounds and geographic locations represented in the sample. Both men and women were preppers and all respondents were white. Class was a central element in the form that prepping took. Gender was discussed by all respondents and their

prepper identities were constructed by integrating efforts to enact and sometimes redefine stereotypical gender roles. Race was not overtly discussed by respondents but racial coded language was used by a few respondents.

Preppers viewed contemporary times as unsettled (Swidler, 1986, p. 278). There did seem to be a variation in how prepping was done. Different social classes did it differently through materially enacting it with consumer goods. People of more affluent means like Roger and Dana were able to acquire water purification systems and stockpile large amounts of commercially produced freeze-dried food, for example, but also have a wider range of things they were able to accomplish. People who were working class relied on different methods of acquiring goods. Foraging, hunting and gardening were ways that those who were economically insecure shored up their stockpile and for some of these folks, they were required to prioritize what they viewed as most important in terms of prepping and focus on certain areas, things like acquiring firearms and ammunition during heartier financial times. Education played a role. Class based differences became readily apparent when discussing the priorities preppers placed on certain practices and consumer goods. Those who were better off had more freedom and flexibility to explore new innovations in prepper related consumer goods. Preppers who were economically disadvantaged framed prepping as a common sense activity that increased their abilities to provide for their loved ones, while those who were economically advantaged spoke about using prepping as a way to preserve their financial well-being and as a way of maintaining their current lifestyle.

Swidler defines ideology as being a “highly articulated, self-conscious belief and ritual system, aspiring to offer a unified answer to problems of social action. Ideology may be thought of as a phase in the development of a system of cultural meaning” (Swidler, 1986, p. 279). In keeping with Swidler’s contention that during unsettled times people adopt ideological repertoires, respondents drew heavily from culturally available ideologies. Overall, the ideologies which these preppers used were highly individualistic, advocated privatization and privileged neoliberal ideals. Harvey (2005) states that “neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.” The ideals conveyed by most of the respondents viewed the election of President Barack Obama with concern. Not all respondents in the study were threatened with Obama’s presidency and administration and three respondents spoke about how pleased they were with the outcomes of both the 2008 and 2012 election. Seven of the respondents viewed themselves as Libertarians and three of them did not outwardly identify a political leaning. There was a sort of ideological conflict where preppers were identifying with the right or the left and this conflict was based on political and economic differences.

They were not motivated to change social structures through political action or community engagement to make them more responsive to the needs of the people. This group of people is projecting a dwindling of governmental

structural support which was a commonly held idea. They don't see government as a useful or trustworthy institution in terms of serving the well-being of the people. In terms of solutions to this problem, they don't offer an alternative to prepping which is largely a private-sphere response which was highly individualistic. Preppers have actually crafted a material response which are their particular practices, habits and rituals which all coalesce in the act of prepping. Their response is consistent with neo-liberal ideals and the contemporary trend toward privatization.

Gender roles and gender inequality was reproduced and in some cases renegotiated in their practices. The men in the sample who were working class and married reported doing practices which align with the traditional norms of masculinity which informed their behaviors and beliefs about how men should treat others they care for. Three of the men are reproducing gender roles as caretakers, but have also subscribed to more negotiated ideas about gender roles in terms of how to allocate finances. Henry and Roger both expressed the tendency to negotiate with their wives in terms of how to allocate the household financial resources. Protecting loved ones and providing for them were both key ways in which these men exhibited traditional gender roles. They also tweaked these roles in interesting ways by doing food work that has been traditionally coded female, for example, canning. Five men in the sample reported that they canned food as a way of preserving it for their stockpile. In contrast, only two women reported that they canned. It should be noted that for the married men in the sample, their wives were doing a majority of the cooking while the men were

doing a majority of the buying of the food. Thomas explained this when describing how he procures the food and his wife cooks it up into delicious meals.

Some respondents were working on gender roles in more nuanced ways. The women in the study were challenged by the reproduction of stereotypical gender norms. Dana, a married middle class manager expressed how before being promoted to a managerial role, she appeared more gender neutral in her self-presentation. After being promoted, she felt social pressure to adopt a more feminine appearance to garner respect from her mostly male workforce. She and her husband worked as a team on their farm and she explained how their labor was not distributed along traditional gendered divisions of labor, but by who enjoyed doing a particular job. Judith, a single middle class mother who is also a lesbian, flat out rejected stereotypical gender roles stating that she would not rely on a man for protection and provisions. She constructed herself as a leader, a provider and someone who could take action in a crisis. She draws upon more masculine traits and distances herself from stereotypical feminine traits. She stated that she does not feel compelled to subsume her leadership role to a man, feeling that men are basically inept at getting things done.

The men in the sample talk about themselves by drawing upon traditional masculine ways of describing their physical stature, their strength, their intelligence and their superiority over others. Two in the study distinctly described their bodies as a way to establish themselves as capable and threatening, if need be. None of the women in the sample emphasized femininity as central to their

identity. Though most women in the study did not describe their physicality in the same way as the men, drew upon masculine characteristics that are culturally defined to describe themselves as strong doers, rational and smart in terms of how they envision their place in society, but also in terms of survival.

Susan expressed how she struggled with stereotypical gender norms in terms of expectations placed upon her by her family and the generalized culture. Susan embraced traditional feminine gender roles as her core identity. She discussed how she felt about placing her husband and her child first and often denied herself care. She talked about how she is now making efforts to place herself first and work on loving herself as a way to be a better woman, a better wife and mother. Still, her discussion of putting herself first drew upon traditional masculine norms in our generalized culture which expect men to be dominant while women are subordinate. She was trying to make efforts to give herself primacy in her relationships by not being completely defined as only a caretaker of her husband and child.

Though no respondents directly discussed racist views, racially coded language was used by two of the respondents to describe their perceptions of risk. Alice, a working class rural resident explained how she was concerned with people from greater metropolitan areas who have not prepped for crises and how she feared an onslaught of those folks descending upon rural areas. Alice expressed these concerns using coded language to describe the racialized other, in this case urban residents in the metropolitan area closest to her where there is a high percentage of black population who she believed would potentially migrate

to rural areas seeking food and resources and would lead to a hostile takeover of her holdings.

Frank discussed the transitory nature of his suburban neighborhood and also used coded language when describing this change. He spoke about there being a lack of homeownership and that most of the neighboring households are now renters. At the time of the interview, he was living in his childhood home with his mother and he shifts his class status to that of his mother, the homeowner. This coded language is about transiency and change in the neighborhood demographics in terms of who lives there and shifting into a neighborhood of renters could lower property values due to less investment in the homes by those renting it. This diminishing of property values affects homeowners long-term. Overall, the preppers in this sample were mostly in proximity to those like themselves in terms of race and class. Shifts and changes in demographics bring a certain uneasiness and they seek to assuage this anxiety through prepping as a solution which represents their extreme individuality and allows them to construct boundaries.

Preppers engaged in boundary construction when they distinguished themselves from those who they consider unprepared for crises and irresponsible. A key boundary was the exclusion of people who were not in their inner circle from being cared for by them should a catastrophe occur. Preppers constructed boundaries which were displayed through the great importance they placed on being responsible for their family's safety and the great worth they gave to working hard and being disciplined in their prepping practices. Similar to

how the white men in Lamont's (2000) study categorized black men as criminal and lazy, preppers viewed those who are not making an effort to plan for a disaster as free-loading dangerous people who were lazy and served as a threat to the prepper's well-being, and more generally to society. Preppers positioned themselves above people who were unprepared and reliant on others in the same ways in which the white working class men positioned themselves above black men in Lamont's study.

Accounts of respondents in this study were consistent with participation in a "loosely bounded" cultural movement (Neitz, 1994, p. 127) which integrates values, ideas and practices. Understanding cultural movements invites asking "to what extent it is able to establish group boundaries and collectively held ideas and practices and whether people act as carriers of the values" (Grigsby 2004, p. 9). The unbounded cultural movement of prepping establishes boundaries of belonging based on ties with close others in the private sphere, constructs a repertoire of a few values and practices shared across respondents but also includes some diverse ideas and practices that respondents interpret as being part of prepping culture. Prepping is consistently defined against the generalized culture, particularly the entitled culture. The values that preppers carry and espouse include self-sufficiency, self-reliance, independence and self-directed learning about skills and techniques related to survival.

While Imel-Hartford (2012) argued that prepping is a social movement, findings of this research suggested people interviewed didn't describe participation that conformed to those characteristics associated with social

movements. For instance, Schwalbe who studied the mythopoetic men's movement claimed that it wasn't a social movement and explained that it was not "centrally coordinated, had no official leaders, did not proselytize new members, imposed no doctrinal tests on participants and was not aimed at changing public policy" unlike social movements (Schwalbe, 1996, p. 5). The meaning making and experiences described by the preppers I studied didn't bear a resemblance to a social movement in that they didn't belong to centrally coordinated groups nor did they want to. They did not proselytize for new members for their group though some were willing to share with people who expressed an interest. They were secretive about what they were doing and felt that they should not tell other people. There were no set doctrines or tests, instead they were actively engaged in putting together what prepping meant to them. They withdrew into the private sphere and was not interested in engaging in the public sphere in efforts to change public policy. As a cultural movement, prepping has implications consistent with broader trends in society with a withdrawal into the private sphere and a sense that individuals need to be self-sufficient which is consistent with neoliberal ideals.

Considering that most preppers viewed what they did as bringing together personal values with daily practice, prepping is best described as a loosely bounded cultural movement that resembles a lifestyle movement (Grigsby, 2004; Haenfler et al., 2012; Schwalbe, 1986). Lifestyle movements are about individual action instead of collective action and relies on private ongoing action that is intertwined with daily life. Adherents of lifestyle movements are often doing

meaningful identity work (Haenfler et al., 2012, p. 5). Most of the preppers in this study were highly individualistic, claiming belonging to virtually no formal organization other than their work if employed. Nor did they claim to be part of a tight social network of preppers. Like participants in other types of lifestyle movements, many of them learned about prepping from likeminded friends or family, trusted sources in the media and literature on prepping. Some of them gathered together occasionally to work on prepping activities such as packing buckets of food for long term storage or to engage in knowledge building activities like learning different ways of fire building. But sustained engagement didn't take place.

Prepping does not have formal leaders, but instead there are "cultural entrepreneurs" (Haenfler et al., 2012, p. 11) who are considered experts in the field. These are authors of books like the one Thomas mentioned, Boston T. Party, who have gained a readership and a following. Survival experts like Bear Grylls and Les Stroud, as mentioned by Christian can also be considered as key players in diffusing prepping and survivalism in the generalized culture. We can see that the ideas of preppers are diffusing into the generalized culture which we can observe in places like Costco and Sam's Club where buckets of freeze dried food are for sale every day. Michael's Crafts offers materials to make paracord bracelets and offers classes to teach you how to do it. Considering that there are many different ways to come at prepping signals the ease in which it could be diffused into the generalized culture.

Prepping related books and magazines are growing in popularity. Popular television programs like *Bones* and *The Simpsons* have featured plots lines which centered on prepping though the shows themselves were totally unrelated to prepping. All of these examples signal the lifestyle movement's diffusion in the greater culture and connect to the broader recent trends of nationalism and individualism and a reluctance to acknowledge dependence on government social safety nets (DeIReal & Clement, 2017; Sherman, 2009; Hochschild, 2016; Vance, 2016).

The emergent unbounded cultural lifestyle movement of prepping is distinct from any other cultural lifestyle movements such as survivalism. Where Bennett (2009) said preppers, like survivalists, were fearful about the future but were trying to avoid the stereotype attached to the survivalist label, my research data shows that respondents in the Midwest in 2015 were most concerned about responding to risk society (Beck, 1992) ideas in the generalized culture including ideas offered by survivalism to construct a cultural toolkit for a lifestyle that they believed contrasted significantly from adopting the ideas or practices of survivalism. The core ideas and practices of survivalism such as withdrawing from participation in the generalized culture, being combative with the generalized culture, organizing collective militias or adopting like what Roger said a "lone wolf" persona were cited as features of survivalism. These particular ideas that respondents who claimed to be preppers held as tenets of survivalism rejected those ideas and practices.

Between 2009 when Bennett wrote her article appearing in Newsweek and this study conducted in 2015, it is possible that preppers have gained clarity and prepping has evolved into a cultural lifestyle of its own. The conflation between prepping and survivalism wasn't found to exist in interviews with any but one respondent who used the terms interchangeably, but did not describe ideas and practices that other respondents described as survivalism, instead describing practices consistent with prepping. Bennett's assertion that prepping was a reaction to the stresses of modern life and that preppers are concerned with being self-reliant is confirmed by my study. But my study offers the access to the specific stresses and concerns that respondents describe and offers a much more detailed access to the specific kinds of risks that are the catalyst for people to adopt prepping.

Zimmer (2012) described the acronyms and language used in prepper culture. He didn't recognize a divergent path in lifestyle movements. My respondents made clear to me that survivalists want to leave their homes for a remote location that they consider safe and secure. Preppers were more concerned with focusing on establishing self-reliance and security in their existing locations. They desired to stay in place, described by Zimmer (2012) as "bugging in." For the most part respondents didn't use the acronyms that Zimmer identified as prepper jargon. They did say in full statements the things that his acronyms stand for. One term that he identified as prepper jargon, the bug out bag, was used by the respondents in the study.

McGrath (2017) focused on bug-out bags as centrally important as a therapeutic solution for preppers. Creating bug out bags for some preppers in the study was viewed as a very basic necessity for being prepared that was one of many practices they felt were necessary. Just having a bug out bag was not described as therapeutic by any respondents in the study. Many of the respondents held very realist views of their practices. Creating a bug out bag was viewed as a practical activity rather than a therapeutic one and as somewhat minor in the constellation of practices that they view as important for being prepared and feeling secure in their ability to deal with potential risk. Additionally the contents of bug out bags varied based on respondents and on the locations where respondents lived. McGrath (2017) also implied bug out bags was one practice associated with prepping that serves the emotional needs of more affluent people. His perceptions were not inaccurate considering he highlights Goop's ⁶2016 gift guide including a \$399 bug out bag, along with the array of prepping subscription boxes which are now available. On the other hand, there are working class people in this sample who have bug out bags.

Osnos (2017) also emphasized prepping as a practice for the affluent. This research found that creating bug out bags and prepping more generally was adopted by people of low, middle and high income and of varied social statuses and with different cultural orientations. The majority of respondents were not

⁶ Goop.com is a lifestyle website which was started as a weekly newsletter by Gwyneth Paltrow. The products featured are usually luxurious, exclusive and expensive.

affluent and a number were under or unemployed and prepping was of central importance to them in establishing a sense of security and of redefining their identities from low status due to unemployment and low income to high status because they were prepared and could be self-sufficient in time of need.

Prepping, in one way, served respondents as a cultural tool for enhancing their worthy identities.

Several authors argued that fear is a mainstay in dominant culture and circulates through society. (Glassner, 2010; Walker 2013; Wuthnow 2010) I argue that preppers are reacting to this fear in a way that manages and helps them cope by prepping. Prepping ideas and practices were shown by this research to be a response to risk society as perceived by respondents, ideas generally available in the dominant culture (like the guidelines offered by FEMA that everyone should have three days' worth of food and drink available at any given time) and ideas drawn from other cultural lifestyle movements.

I have learned from this research that preppers are not prepping for one worst case scenario. Preppers strive to be ready for any given situation that might call for a response. They may worry about something particular, but see the value in being prepared for a broad spectrum of possible catastrophes. Going into this research, I assumed that all preppers would be gun-rights advocates who prepped because they were afraid of other people taking what they felt was theirs. I assumed that this was an activity for white men to do and that women were largely doing it because their male partners were. I have learned that prepping is done by a whole spectrum of people and that women are just as

active in the culture as men are. I did not have the chance to interview anyone other than white people, but a more intersectional approach in future research could analyze prepping to a greater depth.

What I have learned reveals that these respondents have experienced instability, insecurity relative to institutional structures and perceive rapid social change taking place. Using prepping as a way to respond to these things was their way of managing and coping with feeling a lack of control. Their response was individualistic. This response was connected to what was happening politically during the presidency of Obama. Five respondents held political views which were intertwined with and informed the insecurity which motivated them to construct practices to strengthen their ability to survive. These people did not mention that they were involved publically in party politics to change the situation. Instead, they chose to retreat to the private sphere to address their insecurities.

By looking at ideas that preppers have and by bringing them into discourse in the dominant culture, it offers insight into the power of their ideas in the cultural and economic context of early 21st century capitalist America. The emotional and material struggles faced by those who defined themselves as preppers from social forces felt broadly in society offer us a lens through which to see one group's response to conditions that many are experiencing.

This particular type of response is focused on private realms, individualistic, clannish, neighbors, and empathy for those within the boundary with little for those outside of it. The private sphere response mirrored and echoed the public sphere response and discourse which was displayed in the

2016 presidential elections. These narrowing boundaries placed great focus on their own and expressed a fear of takers. The fears about people outside of their circle taking from them mirrors the larger public discourse currently found in American culture. This particular type of discourse concentrates on nationalism and expresses a greater concern about the survival of white, multigenerational populations of which a majority were working or middle class in the United States.

Overall, this individualistic response expressed a lack of dependence on others and focused on the private sphere instead of addressing and changing public policy. Some of their practices were very basic and pulled directly from publically available directives from FEMA. These were actually advised by government which is ironic considering how much some of them emphasized their desire to not rely on the government for survival. In this case, survival of the fittest means that those who are self-sufficient, properly prepared and at the ready for any scenario on an individual basis will be better off in case of an emergency. Only those who are fit enough by adhering to these kinds of standards will be the ones who survive.

The reasoning why they prep may differ among individuals, but these practices were claimed by preppers as common sense for everyone to do. These common sense constructions helped preppers construct symbolic boundaries against others who don't prepare. These practices were advised and suggested by FEMA. How preppers in this study made meaning of these directives was what was different and unique and was characterized by a rugged, individualist

mentality displayed by prepping. Seeing themselves as able and ready to survive in situations where others can't or won't bolstered preppers' self-perception of being a worthy individual. In times where white, working class men are downwardly mobile, having a way to feel like you are providing for your family gave preppers self-esteem in a world that is rapidly changing in ways they were not comfortable with. For some their job security has declined or they are underemployed and interpret their situation as one that caused by unworthy dependents taking their rightful places in the workforce and their rightful entitlements from government. They perceived that the social safety nets have failed and their personal experiences drew them into prepping. This is what the survival of the preppers is all about. They focused on survival as a way to assuage their existential anxieties. These practices gave them an opportunity to engage in a hobby or relive experiences that they may have had in their past where they felt that life was predictable, like when serving in the military. Prepping gave them a chance to be active in doing something to address their anxieties in the private sphere in ways that made them feel in control.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Demographics of Preppers

	name	Age Range	M/ F	Race	SES	Employment	Education	Location	Military Service ?
1	Alice	55-65	F	W	LM	FT	College	Rural	No
2	Graham	55-65	M	W	MM	FT	College	Suburbs	No
3	Joanie	55-65	F	W	MM	FT	College	Suburbs	No
4	Ned	55-65	M	W	MM	FT	Advanced degree	Suburbs	Yes
5	Sean	35-44	M	W	MM	FT	Advanced degree	Suburbs	No
6	Judith	45-54	F	W	LM	FT	High School	Urban	No
7	Susan	45-54	F	W	LM	Self-employed	High School	Urban	No
8	Roger	55-65	M	W	UM	Retired	Advanced degree	Rural	Yes
9	Christian	15-24	M	W	MM	Student	College	Suburbs	No
10	Thomas	35-44	M	W	LM	FT	High school	Rural	Yes
11	Henry	45-54	M	W	MM	FT	College	Rural	Yes
12	Dana	35-44	F	W	UM	FT	College	Rural	No
13	Frank	45-54	M	W	MM	FT	College	Urban	no

Appendix B: Practices of Preppers sorted by location and gender

PRACTICES	RURAL	SUBURBAN	URBAN	Male	Female
FOOD & WATER					
Stockpiling	4	4	2	6	4
Hunting and Fishing	3	4	0	6	1
Canning	3	4	0	5	2
Packing	3	1	1	4	1
Dehydrating	2	1	0	3	0
DEFENSE					
Guns	4	4	1	7	2
Other weaponry	0	1	1	2	0
Self-defense	0	1	1	2	0
KNOWLEDGE					
Internet resources	2	3	0	3	2
Printed Materials	2	3	0	5	0
Passed Down	0	3	1	3	1
Experts	0	0	2	1	1
RESPONSIBILITIES					
Know your neighbors	2	4	1	6	1
Keeping it to yourself	2	2	1	4	1
Letting others know	2	0	1	2	1
Protect your loves ones	2	2	2	5	1
ESSENTIALS					
Making a plan	3	4	2	7	3
Practice and training	3	3	2	6	2
Knowledge of the natural world	2	4	1	5	2
BOB	2	2	0	3	1
EDC	1	2	0	3	0
3 days' on hand	2	2	1	5	0
Rule of 3	0	3	1	4	0
Situational awareness	0	3	1	3	1
Always at the ready	0	2	2	3	1
Shelter	0	3	1	4	0
Communication	1	0	1	1	1
TOTAL # OF PRACTICES BY LOC	19	24	23	30	22

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

1. How do you define prepping?
2. What are the major differences between a prepper and a survivalist?
3. What do you consider the core values of prepping?
4. Is there a generalized culture of prepping?
5. What makes you a prepper?
6. What has led you to prepping?
7. What types of things/events have motivated you to prep?
8. What is your worst case scenario?
9. What type of preparations do you make? How do you go about it?
10. Does prepping cost a lot of money or does it save money?
11. Have you acquired any skills specifically to aid in preparing?
12. Do men and women have different roles in prepping?
13. What types of skills do you lack?
14. Where do you find information about preparing?
15. Who do you consider an expert in the prepping culture?
 - a. What makes them an expert?
16. What kinds of sources are trustworthy?
17. What types of things should everyone do to prepare?
18. What kind of prepper communities or groups do you belong to?
 - a. Are the preppers in your group similar or different from you?
19. Who else is part of your plan? On what criteria is this based?
20. What do your loved ones think about prepping? How do they participate?
21. Can you describe the differences in how the others in your group prep?
22. Have you attended any expos or workshops related to prepping?
23. What types of things have you purchased for prepping? Where did you get them?
24. What types of things are essential for any prepper?
25. What are your long term prepping goals?
26. What do you like most about prepping? What do you like least?
27. What advice would you give to new preppers?
28. Do you feel like the culture of prepping is accurately depicted in popular culture?
29. What do you think is the biggest misunderstanding about prepping?
30. What would you want everyone to know about prepping?
31. How would you like to be portrayed?
32. How do you experience being around other preppers?
33. What is it like to be around others who don't prep?
34. What types of things do you enjoy besides prepping?
35. How has your life changed since you became a prepper?
36. Are there any other things that you would like to add about your life as a prepper? Are there any questions that I might have missed? Has anything come up about prepping as a result of this interview?

VITA

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