ENJOYING MILITARISM: POLITICAL/ PERSONAL DILEMMAS IN STUDYING U.S. POLICE PARAMILITARY UNITS*

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This paper makes sense of an irony, experienced while conducting field research, by linking it to broader social, political, and cultural processes. The objectives in doing so are not exclusively theoretical, practical, or methodological, but all three. Explaining the irony necessitates a theoretical and epistemological discussion of the relationship between the dualities of agency/structure, micro/macro, and personal/political. The ethnographic description of a police paramilitary unit's "training session," and the author's reaction, provide a forum for exposing the practical implications of this micro research event: a strengthening of paramilitaristic policing, state tendencies to militarize social problems in the post-Cold War era, and a revitalization of *paramilitarism* in popular culture. Finally, the enactment of "self-reflexivity" as the methodological foundation of this study demonstrates its utility.

Traditionally, both positivistic and interpretive inquiry required researchers to bracket or suppress their own beliefs, values, or subjective reactions to the research experience (Bernstein 1983; Taylor and Bogden 1983). The researcher played the role of analytical empiricist, no matter how intimate he or she became with the social setting. Legitimate knowledge could be acquired only from research "subjects." Twenty-five years of scholarship in a variety of human science disciplines has called into question our empirical-analytical notions of what constitutes legitimate acquisition of knowledge, as well as the validity of the scientific belief in severing the objective from the subjective (Bernstein 1983). This critique has reached a crescendo in the last five years, sounding the death knell for the "objective" researcher and for some the distinction between researcher and subject.[1]

Reactions to this shift range from protectiveness among positivists to nihilistic euphoria among skeptical postmodernists (Rosenau 1992; Sayer 1992). Critically oriented qualitative researchers in sociology and cultural anthropology welcome certain aspects of the shift. Emerging methodological norms, for instance, now welcome researchers to apply their own critical analysis of personal experiences and reactions to those experiences, when appropriate, as a legitimate source of knowledge. This personally grounded approach is known as "self-reflexive" (Alasuutari 1995; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Ferrell 1995; Geertz 1988; Reason 1994). The term is slightly misleading, however; it gives the impression that researchers reflect only from the perspective of their own personal impressions. In actuality, the *shared experience* of the critical ethnographer and the subject allows dual insight into the subject's culture as well as the researcher's experience. In transcending the traditional objective/subjective ideal, this approach has the potential to link personal ironies and contradictions experienced during the research process with their larger theoretical, cultural, and political implications.

STUDYING MILITARISM: ENACTING SELF-REFLEXIVITY

The critical criminological ethnographer distrusts the state's definition of an activity as crime (Ferrell 1993; Thomas 1993). A central objective in researching crime violators, therefore, involves understanding, without legal or moral condemnation, the meaning of the activity for the subject from her or his perspective. *Verstehen* requires intimacy with the subjects and their activity (Weber 1949). In some cases the researcher actually becomes the subject by engaging in the "deviant" activity itself (Becker 1963; Ferrell 1993). Yet blurring the distinction between researcher and subject to the point of engaging in the deviance under study, as compelling as it may seem, obviously has somewhere certain moral limits. Smoking marijuana with jazz musicians or spray-painting murals with graffiti artists would be morally safe, compared with many other criminal activities such as rape, assault, burglary, or embezzlement. Is experientially based understanding in these examples desirable, or even possible?

A different moral dilemma for some ethnographers arises from researching subjects to whom the researcher cannot and does not want to relate—whose activity, at least on the surface, is morally or ideologically reprehensible. It may seem best to leave the subjects'

activity condemned instead of understanding it, let alone participating for the sake of research.[2]

For the researcher who disdains *militarism*—the glorification of the tools and bureaucracies that perpetuate organized state violence—few research activities could be as distressing as active participation in the collaboration between the military and the police in developing domestic police paramilitary units. This research does not examine criminal behavior or a fascinating slice of deviance; instead it focuses on a micro aspect of the construction of coercive state power. It pursues the same objective as Ferrell (1995) espouses— "confronting and exposing the law as the machinery of centralized authority." Yet it approaches this objective not by examining the recipients of law, as Ferrell emphasizes, but rather from examining the wielders of law. Paramilitary practitioners' activities, unlike conventional forms of criminality, include the creation and enforcement of governmental power with its crudest tools and methods—the threat and use of militarized violence.

Ironically, the struggle in conducting this research had little relation to any inability to develop an understanding of the subjects; the disturbing aspect was the ease with which I succeeded. The social and macro political implications of this micro event should alarm most readers. How could someone who had fully thought out and condemned these implications have enjoyed many aspects of the experience? Blurring the researcher/subject distinction illustrates the expansive and addictive powers, even in these "postmodern" times, of a deeply embedded ideology of violence—*militarism* and its accomplice, *hypermasculinity*.

First I examine the ethnographic experience and its enjoyment. Then I place the personal enjoyment into relation with the larger social, political, and cultural influences connected with the strengthening of police paramilitary units. Finally, I attempt to make sense of this irony of enjoying militarism by linking *personal* experience with broader political and cultural influences, drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice and Mead's symbolic interactionist concept of the *self*. The purpose of this paper is not exclusively methodological, theoretical, or practical, but all three. Explaining the irony of enjoying militarism necessitates a theoretical and epistemological discussion of the relationship between the unresolved dualities of agency/structure, micro/macro, and personal/political. Describing the irony provides a forum for exposing the practical

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2 For example, I have conducted *nonparticipatory* field research on "police sexual violence against women" (Kraska and Kappeler 1995). Although potentially valuable for feminist and policing studies, field-researching such highly offensive behaviors against women, as committed by state agents, is morally and professionally risky.

criminal justice implications of this micro research event: intensifying processes of militarism, hypermasculinity, and militarization in policing and in the crime control industry as a whole. Finally, the enactment of "self-reflexivity" as a methodological approach suggests its broader utility.

EXPERIENCING MILITARISM: WEEKEND WARRIORS AND THEIR WEAPONRY

Conducting field research, especially in criminology, requires the researcher to loosen inhibitions—to bump along the unpredictable and spontaneous path of social events. Working at the whim of natural social settings requires flexibility, patience, and a willingness to explore the unknown and the possibly dangerous. The research event described here required that I step out of my professional and personal comfort zone. I was invited to observe an ad hoc "training session" with police officers and military soldiers. This was an "ask no further questions" invitation; my attempt to gain further information resulted only in vague references to "tactical operations training." Despite my discomfort, I knew this was a good opportunity to meet police officers who were also soldiers in the National Guard or the military reserves. As part of my research into the emerging relationship between police and military forces in the post-Cold War era, I welcomed the chance to witness the overlap first hand. I must admit, however, that I did not feel these intellectual motivations at that time; I went along because this event "felt" as if it might turn into an important research occasion and because it would have been awkward to refuse.

I knew two of the participants well (I refer to them here as "Mike" and "Steve"). They approached me after hearing of my interest in the role of the military in policing the drug problem. Over the course of a year we developed a relationship that included numerous in-depth conversations and approximately 60 hours of fieldwork. The scenario described here was the first of my eight field experiences with Mike's and Steve's police-soldier acquaintances. They were excellent informants because of their amiable personalities and their awareness of the broader implications of what they were doing. They also filtered the world through a peculiar set of presuppositions. Both of these highly trained soldiers completely lacked respect for the military bureaucracy, disdained the government as an institution (although, as the bumper sticker says, they "loved their country"), and had an attitude of irreverence toward authority and mainstream society which would make any good leftist smile. At the same time, they were highly respected and trusted within the military, and revered military weaponry and tactics.

Both had served on active duty and were now in the military reserves. They planned to enter police work immediately after their "time served in college."

I arranged to meet my informants at a supermarket parking lot. They motioned me excitedly to the trunk of their car, removed several black canvas attaché-type cases, assured me that all of this was legal, and showed me several semi- and fully automatic military weapons. Most of the weapons were actually owned by the military and were lent to these soldiers over the weekend for "training." The men were eager to reach the "training site" and insisted, despite my protests, that I ride with them.

On the ride to the site, I asked Mike and Steve about their connection to training police officers. They explained that they worked regularly with several different departments interested in "tactical" operations.[3] These officers either served currently on a tactical operations team (commonly referred to as SWAT) or were attempting to create such a team. The group we were meeting, they continued, included two ex-military soldiers who were now in the reserves. They had just begun to organize an ERU (emergency response unit) that would include selected officers from several small police departments. These officers strongly believed that small municipalities and county police were being left behind by not having a special tactics team, even if only for contingencies. According to Mike,

> This shit (creation of ERUs) is going on all over. Why serve an arrest warrant to some crack dealer with a .38? With full armor, the right shit (pointing to a small case that contained a 9mm Glock), and training, you can kick ass and have fun.

True to their irreverent nature, Steve added, "Most of these guys just like to play war; they get a rush out of search and destroy missions instead of the bullshit they do normally."

The "training site" was an unregulated piece of land containing a vertical, eroded hillside, which made the ideal backdrop for stopping bullets. Casualties from previous shooting sessions were scattered everywhere—glass, water jugs, paper targets, shell cases, and household appliances. I knew this sort of setting well. As a youth who had lived all over the country, it seemed to me that almost every community had somewhere an abandoned piece of land where

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3 Like other subcultures, police paramilitarism has its own vernacular. Instead of describing their weapons and operations as "militaristic," for example, they say "tactical." The leading professional organization in this area is *National Tactical Officers Association*; their magazine is *The Tactical Edge*. The term is used mostly in a generic sense to identify personnel, operations, or equipment as a part of a paramilitary unit, which is often known as "special weapons and tactics" (SWAT). Thus *tactical* is simply a sanitized synonym for *militaristic* or *martial*.

the noise and destructiveness of guns were tolerated—although I suspect they have become less available over the last 15 years.

I followed my companions to a half-circle of trucks and cars, where seven police officers were laughing and talking. Our arrival silenced the conversation, and they met my escorts with smiles and outstretched hands. Mike introduced me as a professor of policing who believed in the Second Amendment. I could tell instinctively from their looks that I needed to take the lead in defining myself to them. Although these processes were not conscious at the time, I remembered that a tall, lean officer used profanity when I walked up; almost instantaneously the "f-word" came casually out of my mouth. When they inquired into my past, I managed to include my roots in Alaska and the fact that I had been a bush guide. These attempts at what Goffman (1959) calls "impression management" were only the beginning of a long performance that solidified my position in the group as "fitting in" with their normative system (conservative, adventurous, hypermasculine, militaristic)—a convincing performance that disturbs me to this day.

A quick semiotic analysis of these friendly men's clothes told volumes about their culture: several had lightweight retractable combat knives strapped to their belts; three wore authentic army fatigue pants with T-shirts; one wore a T-shirt that carried a picture of a burning city with gunship helicopters flying overhead, and the caption "Operation Ghetto Storm"; another wore a tight black T-shirt with the initials "NTOA" (National Tactical Officers Association). A few of the younger officers wore Oakley wraparound sunglasses on heads that sported either flattops or military-style crew cuts. As part of their full tactical uniforms, these officers sometimes wear Oakley brand goggles designed to fit inside their Kevlar™ helmets or over their Ninja-style hoods.[4]

Steve suggested that everyone line up their vehicles with tailgates or trunks facing the hillside. Once in position, each of the men laid out on mats or gun cases the various weapons and ammunition he had brought. I was awestruck, ceased to be a reflective observer, and entered the moment with fascination and alarm. Each weapon was unsheathed with care; some of the officers wiped down their already spotless weapons with silicone-impregnated

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4 During previous fieldwork I observed the popularity of Oakley wrap around sunglasses among the younger and more paramilitary-minded officers. These police strive for a cold, fearless, "mechanistic" look; their image is part of a futuristic style that emphasizes very short haircuts and a full covering of the body, hands, and face with black or urban camouflage clothes and paraphernalia. The Oakley goggles, along with facial masks (referred to as "balaclavas") and/or helmets, are critical to this techno-warrior image. One company labels its tactical armor as the "Cyborg 21st" line.

rags. There were at least 50 firearms, including fully automatic urban warfare guns (H&K MP5, MP5/40), modified tactical semiautomatic shotguns, and numerous Glock and Barretta brand pistols. There were also a wide array of firearms paraphernalia including noise suppressors, special-use shotgun shells, laser sights, clip-on flashlights, and (Mike and Steve's pride) a newly issued night vision scope. I became anxious and looked around nervously, especially at the highway in our view, as if we were doing something illegal. Then I recalled a calming bit of western movie folklore: "Who would complain? And so what if they did? Hell, they were the law." Without reflecting on the broader implications, I felt at ease in the moment.

The men held a short discussion about how they would go about their "training." By now I knew that the term *training* was likely only the "frontstage talk" used to legitimate and professionalize this group's activities (Garfinkel 1967). One of the men (I'll call him "Mel") didn't participate in this discussion or the "presenting of the arms" ritual. He was aloof and dispassionate; initially I misinterpreted this attitude as apathy. Finally, once the group had reached consensus about how to proceed with the "training," Mel coolly unsheathed a Weatherby bolt-action rifle with an 3x9 power scope, walked diagonally another 150 yards from the vehicles, and set his weapon on a six-foot-long mat with a small bi-pod. I realized then that Mel, who had a great deal of experience in "tactical operations," was the *sniper*. I didn't recognize the high status of this position until I began to read about elite special forces units within the military.[5]

The group decided to begin with pistols. For the next 20 to 30 minutes they shot at silhouettes of "bad guys," employing an array of maneuvers and tactics that required speed and skill to perform. The group was particularly impressed with Steve: he was able to draw his 10mm Glock 20 handgun and rapidly fire four rounds each into three "bad guys" spaced about 25 feet apart. All 12 shots were deemed "kill shots"; the group found it remarkable that he managed, despite the speed with which he fired, to save his last three shots for the unseen "bad guy." Later I discovered that Steve had

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[5] Police paramilitary units are to policing what the Navy Seals or Army Rangers are to the military. These small cadres of warriors delineate each member by some special skill or expertise. Many police paramilitary units, for example, now include one member who is an expert in explosives, which allow quick entry into a fortified building or residence. The military and police special operations subculture holds the *sniper* in especially high reverence. The subculture glorifies the skill, discipline, endurance, and mind-set necessary to execute people from long distances in a variety of situations. Some of the most popular items available to the police in numerous police catalogs are the videos and manuals on "sniping," usually authored by ex-military special operations snipers.

special status among his paramilitary policing peers, aside from his superior weapons skills, because he had served in combat in Operation Desert Storm.[6]

Next came the Heckler and Koch (H&K) MP5s. My first exposure to this line of weapons came in an H&K advertisement in a policing magazine. The advertisement exploited the sense of hierarchy in militaristic thinking with regard to "elite" military special force units. The message was "This weaponry will distinguish you, just like the revered Navy Seals, as an elite soldier in the war on drugs."

> *From the Gulf War to the Drug War . . .* Winning the war against drugs requires some very special weapons. Weapons that law enforcement professionals can stake their lives on. The MP5 Navy model submachine gun was developed especially for one of America's elite special operations units. Battle proven in the Gulf War, this model is now available for sale to the police at a special low price.

The MP5 series is the pride and the staple of police tactical operations units, and holds a central place in the paramilitary police subculture. Its imposing, futuristic style overshadows its utility as a superior "urban warfare" weapon. Numerous pencil drawings, paintings, sculptures, and jewelry available for sale to paramilitary police officers depict the ultimate "tactical operations" officer; the weapon of choice is almost always some version of the MP5. The popularity of these weapons is enhanced by a multitude of accessories including laser aimers, sound suppressers ("silencers"), and training programs sponsored by H&K.[7] One of the police officers brought a newly issued MP5/40 with sound suppresser; this improved version of the traditional 9mm MP5 shoots more powerful 10mm cartridges. Everyone in the group (except Mel) was excited about firing this weapon.

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6 Steve embodied the ultimate warrior in that he had experienced war firsthand and, more important, had killed. Killing in combat is the ultimate mark of military bravado. Interestingly, Steve never discussed killing an Iraqi soldier, as far as I knew. Everyone simply assumed he had done so because of his combat role in the war and his silence on the matter.

7 For-profit training of police paramilitary officers and aspiring soldiers appears to be a lucrative and growing industry. Both paramilitary policing magazines—the *Tactical Edge* and *S.W.A.T.*— contain advertisements from numerous training organizations. Some are restricted to police and military personnel; others admit anyone with the $500-$3,000 tuition. One such paramilitary training facility operates under the auspices of Eastern Michigan University.

The Heckler and Koch "training division" not only trains the police in the use of their high-tech weapons and tactics, but also promotes the subculture. This company commissioned an artist who specializes in drawing military special operations teams, and now offers for sale 12 prints of highly detailed pencil drawings of police paramilitary forces in action. I have seen these drawings on display in three police departments.

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The MP5s clearly altered the tone of the "training session." The controlled, methodical approach to firing the pistols vanished, and I realized that the pistol practice was only a prelude (or, for those who prefer a psychosexual link, the foreplay) to a less restrained form of "play." Targets filled with water and sand were placed in front of us, and for the next 30 minutes the officers fired almost nonstop except for brief moments for resetting targets and imagining new ways to prove their destructiveness. I could not help noticing how "playful" and unrestrained the men were while shooting these deadly projectiles. Sharing this activity, at least within the moment, also softened the barriers between them and fostered group solidarity. They even felt compelled to bring me into their experience.[8]

A young, small-town police officer ("Mitch"), who also served in the Army Reserves, walked over to where I was watching, presented his MP5 with outstretched arms, and said, in a subtly challenging manner, "Give it a try." I tried to avoid his provocation, but both Mike and Steve gave me covert sideways, jerks of their heads, urging me to go along. Once in position, Mitch insisted that I fire it on the fully automatic setting, stressing that I was a "big boy" and "should be able to handle it." I fired at a body-sized target, and, just as this officer surely had anticipated, I made all the mistakes of someone who had never fired an automatic. I held the trigger too long, and the muzzle rose after several rounds, causing me to shoot completely over the target. I emptied an entire 30-clip magazine in a virtual flash. Everyone enjoyed this process of affirming their own proficiency in weapons by setting up the academic "egghead" for failure.

My unreflective reaction came right out of a paramilitary movie script: "I've never shot this high-tech crap before. I prefer a good side-by-side" (a shotgun). I had spent a significant part of my youth in shooting and hunting with shotguns. Because Mitch had instigated this masculine game of one-upsmanship, he tested my assertion by loading and handing me a Remington 1187 tactical unit shotgun. I gave a personally satisfying demonstration of my shotgun skills, which more than proved my worth to these aspiring warriors. Tactically, as a researcher, participating in this status-legitimating contest furthered my research objectives. At the same time, however, the incident raised some troubling questions about

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[8] Male solidarity is an essential part of the police (Kappeler, Sluder and Alpert 1994) and militaristic subcultures. For a more complete discussion of the inner workings, see Gibson (1994).

the authenticity of my intellectual convictions, and about the powerful interplay between paramilitary culture and masculine ideology.

Next the group armed itself spontaneously with shotguns and several boxes of odd-looking shotgun ammunition. One of the officers fired a round into an old dryer. The explosion was unbelievably loud, despite ear protection; simultaneously a large flash was visible, even in the dwindling daylight.[9] The men also experimented with other "special event" shells, including a "shredder" round, which cuts the lock mechanism out of doors. After witnessing its effect on a metal file cabinet, a younger officer said jokingly that he might "load up" with only these shells on his next "crack raid."

The high-tech shotgun ammunition entertained these military and police personnel for almost an hour. During this pyrotechnics frenzy, even I ceased to connect the technology with its use on real people and their residences. The loud, bright explosions, the destructiveness, and the laughter took me back to a youth filled with bottle-rocket wars, imaginative uses of firecrackers, and a tacit belief that the bigger and more destructive the explosion, the better. As with these police and military personnel, however, that fun-filled activity often was not benign. Frequently my objectives as a youth were to destroy other people's property and to terrorize despised neighbors and school officials.

Later I mentioned to the group that I did not understand the utility of the high-tech weaponry aside from its recreational value. Several of the men explained that these new technologies, and tactical units in general, were mostly the result of the "out-of-control drug and crack problem." Serving arrest and search warrants and conducting drug raids in crack-infested neighborhoods, they explained, required a well-trained, well-equipped tactical operations unit. (Until quite recently, paramilitary policing units were limited to situations involving hostages or barricaded suspects.) They also pointed out that these neighborhoods were "powder kegs" ready to explode. Tactical operations personnel were the frontline defense against the inevitable emergence of civil disturbances.

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9 The most popular device used by paramilitary police units is known as a "percussion grenade." The general purpose is to distract, disorient, and administer "less-than-legal" pain to the occupants of a building. Most of these devices produce a very loud explosion and a flash; some incorporate rubber pellets or CS gas. The Department of Justice and the Department of Defense have entered into a joint venture to develop for the civilian police an entire line of what they call "less-than-legal technologies."

Mel concluded the "training" with an exhibition of his sniping skills. The group was awed, and mentioned instances of Mel's uncanny ability to remain calm and disciplined under pressure. I never asked whether Mel had actually killed anyone as a sniper; the group's admiration of his ability and willingness to do so was unsettling enough.

PERSONAL ENJOYMENT AND ITS DISTRESSING IMPLICATIONS

Mel as the sniper, and the accompanying status, coincide with long-running scripts rooted in militaristic thinking. His demeanor and his training—shooting "head-size" jugs of water behind plates of glass—reminded me poignantly of the potential danger represented, both symbolically and physically, by these civilian police acting as military soldiers. Thus my ethnographic experience is more complex than the characterization of "enjoying militarism" might suggest. In actuality I drifted back and forth between enjoyment and alarm. I felt enjoyment when I "forgot myself" and became fully immersed in the intensity of the moment, unintentionally bracketing my ideological filters. Schultz (1972) believed that in the realm of the experienced moment, meaning lies suspended for subsequent application. Discomfort and sometimes distress came at those times of broader consciousness when even split-second moments of reflection allowed for impositions of meaning. As discussed later, these tensions between the moment and consciousness, and between enjoyment and aversion, may be instructive as to the role of cultural/ideological influences in constructing our personal ideological frameworks, and to clarify the possibilities of reconstruction.

Several aspects of the research experience, then, were pleasurable or satisfying. The most difficult confession, in view of my profeminist orientation, is that I enjoyed gaining the acceptance of a male group of police/soldiers by using hypermasculine signifiers ("Alaskan," "bush guide," "shotgun warrior," "one-upsmanship," and "gun worshiper"). Many of these individuals were repulsive ideologically, but (outside my research objectives) I enjoyed their approval as filtered through their hypermasculine standards.

I also enjoyed observing and using the weapons, explosives, and associated technology. In my youth, two older brothers and I had searched continuously for more efficient ways to launch projectiles to destroy, vandalize, or inflict pain on someone or something. this quest ranged from hurling dirt clods, spears, and inner tubes to shooting "wrist rockets" (slingshots), blowguns, BB guns, pellet guns, bow and arrows, and, when available, fireworks rockets. We

routinely attempted to approximate the "war experience" by engaging in painful and often terrifying BB-gun and pellet-gun wars, complete with casualties. This quest for more powerful weapons peaked when we smuggled a .22 rifle out of the house and shot it in our suburban backyard with a homemade silencer. Twenty-five years later I found myself holding the ultimate projectile-hurling technology, fitted with a "sound suppresser" that actually worked. The quest was complete.

Power was another enjoyable aspect of this experience. I had an intense sense of operating on the edge of legitimate and illegitimate behavior. Clearly much of the activity itself was illegal, although reporting it would never have resulted in it being defined as "criminal." As mentioned earlier, I felt at ease and in some ways defiant. I've had this experience in the past when field-researching police officers, and I realize that in a sense I am basking in the security of my temporary status as a beneficiary of state-sanctioned use of force. This is likely the same intoxicating feeling of autonomy from the law as experienced by an abusive police officer, a corrupt judge, or a politically wired corporate executive.

Other aspects of this research experience were not disturbing. In a society that lures us into depthless lifestyles (Rojek and Turner 1993), and in which a complex web of implicit regulations increasingly predetermines our choices (Agger 1992; Marcuse 1964; Ritzer 1993), stepping out of the safe halls of academe into unregulated, original experience was exhilarating (see Lyng's 1990 research on "edgework"). It was also instructive: I discovered in unmasked form the link between the police and the military, state's two primary entities for use of force. Mainstream police academics routinely reassure themselves about the recent turn toward "community service, accountability, and responsiveness" (Kelling and Moore 1995; PERF 1990; Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux 1990). This research constituted a first step in realizing that the coercive dimension of policing is probably expanding in the shadow of community policing rhetoric and imagery.

CULTURAL AND MACROPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

At this point I juxtapose my enjoyment of this experience with the more distressing social, cultural, and macropolitical implications. As Thomas (1993:9) states, "[C]ritical ethnography takes seemingly mundane events, even repulsive ones, and reproduces them in a way that exposes broader social processes of control, taming, [and] power imbalance. . . ." With proper substantiation, then, the study of paramilitary police activities can be used as a window from which to view larger societal trends, ideological influences,

and the nature of the state's construction and maintenance of power.

Strengthening Police Paramilitary Units

The most immediate trend, which has gone largely unnoticed despite the Waco and Ruby Ridge incidents, is the rise and the change in nature of U.S. police paramilitary units since the mid- and late 1980s. With little effort, my research for this paper uncovered six police departments in a small geographical area which, within the past four years, had established autonomous, fully staffed "tactical operations" units. Mike and Steve knew of five additional units in the process of forming. Only one other academic has noted this trend:

> ... by the mid-1980s SWAT teams had been established in virtually every local police, sheriff's department, and state police organization in the country. Even small towns had squads equipped with M16s and H&K 9mm submachine guns fitted with noise suppressers. ... (Gibson 1994:286)

The drug war fury of the 1980s and 1990s has generated not only an increase in paramilitary police units but also a significant change in their character. The present research, along with another national study (Kraska and Kappeler 1996), demonstrates that these paramilitary units are expanding their previously limited functions from the occasional barricaded suspect, or the even rarer hostage and terrorist situation, to include policing mainstays such as serving arrest and investigatory search warrants, conducting crack raids, and sometimes even patrolling "high-crime" areas in U.S. cities (Kraska and Paulsen 1996). The Fresno, California police, for example, have developed a militaristic form of "proactive policing." In a popular police magazine, the Fresno PD claimed that the streets had become a "war zone"; they responded by deploying their SWAT team, equipped with military fatigues and weaponry, as a full-time patrol unit to "suppress" the crime and drug problem (Smith 1995:36). The department deemed the experiment an unqualified success, deployed a permanent unit, and now is encouraging other police agencies to follow suit.

> The general consensus has been that SWAT teams working in a pro-active patrol-type setting does [sic] work. Police officers working in patrol vehicles, dressed in *urban tactical gear* and armed with automatic weapons are here—and they're here to stay. (Smith 1995:82); emphasis added)

As in this field study, the "epidemics" of crack and inner-city gangs justify a full militarization of police operations.[10] Research substantiates that this use of paramilitary police units is not limited to the Fresno Police Department (Kraska and Kappeler forthcoming). Agencies of varying sizes and types, perhaps as many as 20 percent of all departments serving communities of 50,000 or more, routinely deploy their units in similar fashion.

It seems inexplicable, in view of the long-standing fear of military control throughout U.S. history, that this trend has gone unnoticed. Even by mainstream standards, establishing "civilian" police and clearly delineating police and military activities have been unquestioned standards of democratic governance. The trend illustrates, first, just how effectively the police in the U.S. have been decoupled from their traditional link to political power, and, second, the growing acceptance of even overt militarization in contemporary crime control efforts.[11] It also raises questions about the current theoretical, or perhaps atheoretical, "gaze" of current police research and scholarship (Manning 1995).

The Military/Police Overlap: Toward Militarizing Social Problems

Restoring the inherent link between the military and the police exposes even larger processes of militarization. A central characteristic of this micro research event was the lack of delineation between the police and the military not only in culture but also in material hardware, technology, training, operations, and especially personnel. A clear feature of the post-Cold War era is the increasing overlap between the military and the police and, even more broadly, between the military-industrial complex (MIC) and the rapidly expanding "criminal justice industrial complex" (CJIC) (Kraska 1993; Quinney 1975).

My examination of police paramilitary units is actually only an appendage to earlier research on the "police-ization" of the military

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[10] The SWAT team in Chapel Hill, NC conducted a large-scale crack raid of an entire block in a predominantly African-American neighborhood. The raid, termed "Operation Redi-Rock," resulted in the detention and search of up to 100 people, all of whom were African-American. (Whites were allowed to leave the area.) No one was ever prosecuted for a crime (*Barnett v. Karpinos* 1995).

[11] In the U.K., when police or legislative officials move to bolster the paramilitary component of policing, the public and the press strongly connect their centralized policing system to the "government" and to potential state violence. Vigorous debate ensues (Reiner 1992). In the United States, militarized police generally are connected to the state when a federal police agency engages in blatant violence and repression (as in the Weaver and Waco incidents). Almost completely ignored, except by right-wing fringe groups, is the paramilitary tendency in the highly decentralized *state* and *local* police systems.

rather than the militarization of the police (Kraska 1993, forthcoming). The military, with strong urgings from Congress and from Presidents Reagan and Bush, have been attempting since about 1988-1990 to become more "socially useful" (Committee on Armed Services 1988). This usefulness includes international and domestic policing activities. The social and health problem of substance abuse, for example, was declared by presidential directive to be a "threat to national security." All branches of the military, including National Guard units, have engaged in a full range of policing activities both domestically and abroad.

Just as "Mike" and "Steve" train civilian police and hope to become police themselves, and just as the other tactical officers in their group work for the state as both military soldiers and police, recent events in national politics illustrate the overlapping connections between the CJIC and the MIC. Although the training, operations, intelligence, and material connections emerging between the military and the criminal justice apparatuses are too numerous to outline here, let us consider a few of the more overt. Attorney General Janet Reno, while speaking to a mixed crowd of military, law enforcement, intelligence, and defense industry officials, compared the monumental effort and will demonstrated during the Cold War to the war on crime, as follows:

> So let me welcome you to the kind of war our police fight every day. And let me challenge you to turn your skills that served us so well in the Cold War to helping us with the war we're now fighting daily in the streets of our towns and cities. (National Institute of Justice 1995:35)

Shortly after Reno issued this challenge, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of Defense (DOD) agreed on a five-year "partnership" to share intelligence gathering and "use of force technology." In addition to weaponry and technology, the military and the police are being encouraged to share personnel. Just as LEAA money was pumped into the CJIC at the end of the Vietnam War, military downsizing of personnel in the post-Cold War era has brought calls to hire more police officers. As part of the pledge to hire 100,000 new police officers, the Clinton Administration recently passed legislation termed "Troops to Cops." Under a grant from both the DOD and the DOJ, police agencies are encouraged to hire ex-military soldiers by providing them with $5,000 per "trooper" turned "cop."

Few people outside "tactical" circles realize that personnel also are shared through cooperative training arrangements between paramilitary police units and actual military special operations soldiers. The most elite units in the U.S. military, such as the Navy

Seals and the Army Rangers, currently provide military-style training to civilian police officers throughout the United States (Kraska and Kappeler 1996).

Perhaps what C. Wright Mills (1970) referred to as the "newly emerging means of violence" during his time, the military-industrial complex, is becoming partially transmuted into a more subtle but still threatening form of "para"militarized violence— the criminal justice-industrial complex.[12]

Militarism as a Contemporary Cultural Force

Enloe (1980:132) provides a useful definition of militarization: "militarization is occurring when any part of a society becomes controlled or dependent on the military or on military values." As illustrated by the highly militarized subculture of the police/soldiers in this research, the militaristic nature of the discourse on crime and drug control— wars on crime and on drugs—constitutes more than ineffectual media/political rhetoric. Filtering solutions to the complex social problems of crime and substance abuse through the "war" metaphor helps to structure our values in use, our theories, and, most important, our actions (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Morgan 1986). A metaphor and associated discourse materialized, for example, into urban police departments deploying paramilitary police groups to patrol U.S. neighborhoods.

The value and belief system that underpins the process of militarization is *militarism*. Ironically, criminology as a whole has not employed this concept to any appreciable extent despite the obvious militaristic presuppositions underlying the operations of the CJIC.[13] Militarism is defined as an "ideology which stresses aggressiveness and the use of force, and the glorification of military power, weaponry and technology, as the means to solve problems"

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[12] An issue haunting this paper, but not confronted except in the conclusion, is the use of traditional academic terms such as *militarism* and *state violence*. Militarism may seem to some readers a dated concept rather than a key element of a "post-" or "hyper"modern society. In actuality, however, the conception of militarism has evolved historically along with militarism and militarization themselves. Today's militarism may have the threat and use of violence as its core, but its periphery is sanitized, diffuse, and not always outwardly coercive (Kraska 1993). For instance, large-scale exercises in information gathering, information analysis, and surveillance are a significant aspect of the military's role in the drug war.

[13] The major exception is Richard Quinney (1975), who employed the military metaphor as an ideological referent for critiquing the criminal justice system. Quinney's original connection of military with criminal justice ideology continues today in "peacemaking" criminology (Pepinsky and Quinney 1991). One of the more perceptive and more direct discussions of militarized masculinity in a criminological context is found in Tift and Markham's (1991) article "Battering Women and Battering Central Americans: A Peacemaking synthesis."

(Kraska 1993:163). In short, militarism is an ideology of both symbolic and real violence. It underlies the tendency of states throughout history, even those preceding industrialization and capitalism, to approach perceived problems, either external or internal, with military violence or the threat thereof.

Militarism, however, does not remain encapsulated within militaries; militarization requires militarism to be an integral part of society's value and belief systems, to provide moral support, young people, and material resources. This militaristic dimension to culture is particularly acute in societies that place strong emphasis on military superiority, such as the United States. Gibson (1994) has developed an instructive thesis on the consequences of the pervasiveness and continued addictiveness of militarism in recent U.S. popular culture since the "loss" of the war in Vietnam (also see Hamm 1993). In referring to what he terms the "New War Culture," Gibson explains the resurrection of martial culture during the 1980s and 1990s as a reaction to losing the Vietnam War. He continues:

> It is hardly surprising, then, that American men—lacking the confidence in government and the economy, troubled by the changing relations between the sexes, uncertain of their identity or their future—began to *dream*, to fantasize about the powers and features of another kind of man who could retake and reorder the world. And the hero of all these dreams was the *paramilitary warrior*. (1994:11; emphasis added)

Gibson documents, through film, politics, media, and field research, how the "new culture of paramilitarism," which emphasizes the lone warrior or small elite groups of fellow warriors, pervaded young males' minds during the 1980s. This ideology of pramilitarism helps to explain the contemporaneous increase in police paramilitary units within federal and local law enforcement agencies, as well as the paramilitarism found in right-wing militia and hate groups and in violent urban gangs.[14]

As shown by my reaction to the MP5 scenario, another cultural force—hypermasculinity—provides the "seeds" and "fuel" that sustain militarism (Enloe 1993): "In most cultures that we know about, to be manly means to be a potential warrior" (Enloe 1993:52). The interwoven scripts of militarism and masculinity provide the cultural foundation for structural forms of violence by militaries to further state power, and furnish a more diffuse but still pervasive social network of threatened and real violence among individual men. In a sense, then, this research experience was a continuation

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14 Just as in war, these opposing forces only strengthen militarism further.

of thousands of years of prescripted masculine thinking and power building—a history of militarized praxis still vital in the 1990s, and one in which I unreflectively reemerged as a participant.

STRUCTURE VS. AGENCY: OVERCOMING THE HABITUS

By any account, even mainstream thinkers should be troubled by the three macropolitical implications of this research: the strengthening of police paramilitary units, the militarization of social problems, and the enduring ideology of militarism. In this section I attempt to make sense of how I embraced aspects of this research event, and how this enjoyment derived from grounded experience, links with larger processes of militarism and militarization.

Readers accustomed to the conventional forms and formalities of scholarly discourse may misinterpret the reasons for my attempt as self-involvement, or even as an attempt at self-therapy. On the contrary, the purpose of this "self-reflexive" endeavor is to examine, from a personal level of analysis, some fundamental dilemmas facing the social sciences. These include matters such as the possibilities of agency overcoming structure, the micro dynamics involved in the theory-practice dialectic, the deep-rooted nature of militarized masculinity, and the possibilities for academic research to be politically relevant. A personal struggle, grounded in ethnographic research, contains, then, broader theoretical, political, and cultural elements (Agger 1991; Thomas 1993). Despite the "positivistic" emphasis in the social sciences, the foundation of the sociological enterprise still includes personally grounded theorizing that examines the dialectic between the individual and society— exemplified most clearly, for instance, by Mead's symbolic interactionism and Weber's notion of *verstehen*.

Therefore I am attempting an explanation of my "practice," as it relates to larger social processes. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1991) provides a compelling and instructive "theory of social practices" whose relevance for these analyses lies in its ability to wed individual practices (enjoying militarism) with social structure (macropolitical/cultural implications).

The central concept used by Bourdieu in forming his approach is the *habitus*, "a set of *dispositions* which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are 'regular' without being consciously coordinated or governed by any 'rule'" (Bourdieu 1991:12). These dispositions develop throughout a person's biographical history; they are formed from and contain the effects of social structure. In referring to the habitus as a "set of dispositions" Bourdieu views them

only as "orienting" an individual's thoughts and practices rather than being deterministic.

> The habitus is a product of conditionings which tends to reproduce the objective logic of those conditionings while transforming it. It's a kind of transforming machine that leads us to reproduce the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way. It's adjustable and adaptable to new and unforeseen situations, not a destiny pre-determined. (1993:16)

Bourdieu identifies some *features* of these dispositions that are germane for understanding the irony of enjoying militarism. First, the habitus is more than an unconnected conceptual framework from which to interpret the world. It imbues the physical body and becomes an unconscious part of the way we carry ourselves, react to others, and employ language. The habitus actually "molds the body" and becomes second nature. Second, given that the habitus "reflects the social conditions within which it is acquired," a feature Bourdieu terms *structured*, social structure itself becomes *corporealized* within individuals (Bourdieu 1993:59). Third, it would follow that these structured dispositions are also *durable*:

> [T]hey are ingrained in the body in such a way that they endure through the life history of the individual, operating in a way that is pre-conscious and hence not readily amenable to conscious reflection and modification. (Bourdieu 1991:12)

The fourth and final feature of the habitus concerns its ability to generate a multiplicity of practices and ways of thinking in social settings other than those in which the habitus is formed. Bourdieu (1993:14) refers to these varying social settings as *fields*: "Hence particular practices or perceptions should be seen, not as the product of the habitus, as such, but as the *relation between* the habitus, on the one hand, and the specific social contexts or 'fields' within which individuals act, on the other." My own ethnographic event obviously took place in an extremely militarized *field*.

Although Bourdieu uses his theory to explain class differences in linguistic practices (the "habitus of class"), it seems equally well suited for understanding militarized masculinity. Given the *durable* and *structured* nature of militarism on both a personal and a structural level, we might think, for instance, of the "habitus of hypermasculinity," the "habitus of militarism," or, more generally, the "habitus of violence." In other words, the culture of militarism and paramilitarism is manifested not only in macropolitical form (the MIC and the CJIC) but also in micropersonal form; each form

transforms and generates the other (i.e., the politics of the personal). The power of militarized masculinity would lie in this dialectic between agency and structure, the personal and the political. Because Bourdieu's conception of the habitus is corporealized and hence is "not readily amenable to conscious reflection," it tacitly privileges militarism and its macropolitical forms over personal agency—a proposition substantiated by the enduring nature of militarism.

Although Bourdieu's theory illuminates the depth and resilience of social structure, it does not provide a complete account of this dialectic. It clearly addresses the enjoyment that attended my full immersion in the moment, but not "those times of broader consciousness" when I questioned and then imposed macro meanings on the experience. With slight modification, Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism provides for this "self-reflexive" dimension (Mead 1934; Rock 1979).

Using Mead's concept of "self," we could interpret this research dialectic as the internal conversation in which we all engage, between the "I" and the "me." Mead theorized that the "me" is the objective self; the self that the subjective "I" reflects on, critiques, and helps create. The "me," then, is constructed from outside influences, especially the perceptions of others (the "looking-glass self"). In this way, societal structure streams through the filters of the conscious "I" to construct the objective "me." Therefore we can make further sense of the irony of enjoying militarism through Mead's framework if we interpret the "I" as an *intellectual* filter, created by emancipatory education. Juxtaposed to this intellectual filter of broader social consciousness is what we might call the "habitus of origin," or (as Mead would term it) the objective "me." Unlike Bourdieu, Mead's approach would conceptualize this tension between the intellectual "I" and the corporealized "me" as a conscious process, providing a clearer avenue for self-reflexivity and for agency overcoming structure. Applied here, the reflective "I" provides the emancipatory potential to overcome the subtle, taken-for-granted osmosis of structures of militarized masculinity into the habitus. The theoretical and the personal thus merge with the political.

WHERE ARE THE BRAKES?

In sum, my enjoyment of militarism while immersed in a militarized "field" can be viewed as the temporary educement of my incorporated, biographical history of masculinity and violence. Critical ethnography, particularly that which blurs the distinction between researcher and subject, provided me with the professional

license to experience what the extant intellectual "I" would avoid and scorn under any other circumstances. This license also created conditions enabling me to self-reflexively recognize the interplay and tension between my response to immersion in a paramilitarized field (the micropersonal) and the larger processes of militarism and militarization occurring in the post-Cold War era (the macropolitical). The research experience illustrates how engaging the social fabric of crime and criminal justice—as uncomfortable, difficult, and ethically problematic as it may seem—can reveal volumes about the intertextuality of theoretical, political, and personal fields.

On the practical level, this research demonstrates the vitality of militarism and the potential for increased militarization in the criminal justice apparatus, although in more diffuse and opaque forms. The identities of these paramilitary police officers are clearly a product of a cultural environment, idealized during the Reagan-Bush era, which actively promotes the notion that a "man's" worth increases in proportion to his ability to be a warrior. This influential spirit of militarism during the 1980s, and now in the 1990s, is unmistakable in "boy's" video and computer games, toys, television shows, and home videos. The appeal of these pedagogical devices derives from their *recreational* nature. As in this ethnography, militarism is enjoyed and embraced, as well as imposed. Through learning, enjoying, and internalizing the tenets of militarism, the habitus for many of our youths as they approach "manhood" is preconstructed for violence and war— whether with other nations, other gangs, drug law violators, or the police. Growing older, for many, only changes and amplifies the organization, the hardware, and the consequences.

The increasing collaboration of the military-industrial complex with the criminal justice-industrial complex indicates not only the durable yet flexible nature of militarism, but also what Vila (1993) terms "runaway" social, cultural, and political processes. As Christie asserts, "the brakes are gone" on the "crime control industry":

> The ground has been prepared. The media prepare it every day and night. Politicians join ranks with the media. It is impossible politically to not be against sin. This is a competition won by the highest bidder. To protect people from crime is a cause more just than any. At the same time, the producers of control are eagerly pushing for orders. they have the capacity. *There are no natural limits.* (1994:169; emphasis added)[15]

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15 Although Christie (1994) does not specifically link militarism with processes of militarization in his analysis—he focuses on softer forms of control—he makes a compelling argument that the rise of Nazism and the crime control industry share important features. A recently released color poster portrays a lone DEA officer

"Missing brakes" leaves only the possibility for runaway accelera-
tion. The mutually reinforcing elements of "industry" and "war"
unite in a historically proven scenario for unrestrained growth. In
light of the emphasis on the emancipatory potential of the
micropersonal to affect the macropolitical, where might we find lim-
its? An obvious practical implication stems from feminist theory,
one of the few bright spots within a growing nihilism in academics.
The consciousness raising and the resulting political-personal ac-
tion in the women's movement demonstrate the emancipatory po-
tential of what the Frankfort School termed the "subjective
individual" (Agger 1991; Caufield and Wonders 1994; Enloe 1993;
Fay 1987).[16] If traditionally constructed forms of masculinity are
the seeds and the fuel of militarism, redefining masculinity in a
way that deemphasizes the tenets of militarism may expose the
seeds and restrict the fuel on which the industry depends.

To conclude on a more pessimistic note, however, the "subjec-
tive individual" is awakened and enacted in a social context more
ambiguous than this analysis might suggest. Christie (1994) ar-
gues that conditions of heightened modernity— formal rationality,
corporate interest, scientific authority, managerialism, and espe-
cially moral indifference—mask and decouple from its source the
offensiveness of the policies and consequences of the crime control
industry. This genre of critique is also discussed in the policing
literature. Manning (1977, 1988, 1992) has clarified how police im-
agery, symbolism, and rhetoric, particularly within the "community
policing" movement, mask the historical and political realities of po-
licing in the United States. According to both Christie and Man-
ning, then, overt state coercion, violence, militarization, and
repression become subsumed, reformulated in symbolic form, and
sanitized by a hypermodern veil.[17] Christie and Manning focus on
the veil; in this paper I peer at the undeniable police activity occur-
ring behind the veil: an expanded reversion to an aggressive, mili-
tary-style presence in economically deprived areas, both rural and
urban. I also glimpse at the state's growing inclination to quietly
(and sometimes not so quietly) slice through the veil, employ the

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dressed completely in black, wearing a face mask and a black helmet that extends
below the ears, and clamping an MP5 tightly under his arm; the officer looks strik-
ingly similar to a Nazi SS officer.

[16] Marcuse's (1972) "subjective individual" embodies the emancipatory poten-
tial of all individuals. Agger (1991) draws from Marcuse's work in developing what
he terms a "dialectical sensibility." He calls for a repoliticization of critical theory—
one which avoids the academic tradition of "disengaged intellectuality" (Agger
1991:271). He would replace the latter with dialectical sensibility, which "does not
separate theory and practice, envisaging instead a radical intellectuality that itself
contributes to social change" (Agger 1991:265).

[17] This injection of "hypermodernity" is actually an extrapolation of what
Christie does not make explicit in his analysis.

state's prerogative to use or threaten militarized violence, and then to shrewdly repair the incision. Future criminological/criminal justice research might focus on the processes of *militarism* and *militarization* as they exist in these evasive conditions of heightened modernity.

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