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## **Civilian United States support for military and imperial state crime**

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### **Abstract**

This article theorizes United States civilian support for military and interventionist state crimes. It is an initial sketch of how micro and macro social forces, structures, and culture promote popular support for war by partly militarizing civilian selves. Civilian selves are inculcated from birth with military and imperial behavior, ideas, and emotions. This then results in large portions of the public advocating or at least accepting militarist and imperialist policies. Though they are not the cause of military state crime, public support or apathy contribute. Critical sociology and critical criminology can, drawing on other disciplines, help illuminate processes that make civilians accepting of aggressive war.

### **Keywords**

State crime, psychosocial, militarism, imperialism, ideology, socialization

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### **Introduction**

Militarism, war, and imperialism have changed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, but are still serious social problems. Despite this, two disciplines that can help us better understand such problems—criminology and sociology, have shown insufficient interest. This complaint about sociology's neglect dates back at least to Hooks and McLauchlan's (1992, pp. 1939–1989) work, while in criminology calls for more attention to war are fairly recent (Barak, 2008; S. Bonn, 2011; Friedrichs, 2008; Hagan & Greer, 2002; Hallett, 2009; Hogg, 2008; Kramer & Michalowski, 2005; Maier-Katkin, Mears, & Bernard, 2009; Michael & Adler, 2001; Rothe et al., 2009; Ruggiero, 2005). One area still almost untouched in the criminological literature is the domestic cultural and psychosocial role of civilians in their governments' war-making (Klein, In press).

A smaller portion of U.S. citizens serves in the military than at any time since World War II. Yet U.S. military spending and coercive global reach are massive, and reflect a long and continuing history of often unjust and illegal aggression (Blum, 1986; Chomsky, 1993; Churchill & Glenndinning, 2003). This history of U.S. violence is seldom critically examined in academic, policy, or popular

arenas (Gonzalez, 2010; Shalom, 1993; Solomon, 2005). . Political violence and its supporting culture are not just occasional problems of U.S. society. Furthermore, the U.S.' comparatively high rate of violent crime, unusual enthusiasm for the death penalty, and foreign policy unilateralism suggest connections between militarism abroad and crime and justice at home. Such connections seem recently more direct or more obvious, as the boundary between war and crime is blurring. It is a premise of this article that the blurring of war and crime is not so much the crossing of a bright shining line as it is an expression of the deep continuity. Class divided society, with its coercive institutions and culture, promotes criminal aggression and violence (Ven & Colvin, 2012).

Though Gottfredson and Hirschi might object to using their famous definition of crime this way, war may be defined as a massive instance of force and fraud for private gain (private referring here to an elite or upper class). This fits with Ruggiero's suggestions that theoretical tools in criminology may be useful for the criminalization of war (2005, p. 255). The argument of this article is that though seemingly indirect and remote, civilian involvement with war is part of the sociopolitical context of military aggression, and this involves very personal social forces, which influence individuals' selves.

Hooks and McLauchlan (1992, p. 757) note that U.S. war-making includes ongoing preparations for war. Civilian thoughts and feelings about defense, war, and threats are not causes of military aggression and U.S. civilians do not drive militarist policies. In fact, a more honest discussion in the U.S. of foreign policy and input that is more democratic would probably lead to less militarist policies. There is extensive public opinion evidence of majority support for more peaceful policies (Joseph, 2007). Furthermore, individual people and population segments can have very different responses to militaristic social pressures. The processes that militarize individual selves are complex. Individuals in similar circumstances end up with opposite views. Well-known examples are the peace activist parents whose children signed up to fight in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. So socialization is not an either/or process.

Yet, virtually ignored by scholars and others, civilian support for militarism makes them indirect participants in, and often enablers of, war politics. Civilians are part of the broader story of war and peace, imperialism and international cooperation (Klein, 2012). The most obvious connection between civilians and war politics is that, as elites know and populations occasionally discover, erosion of mass support for war can constrain policy and even bring down governments. (This article will focus on militarism, but will sometimes also refer to the closely related topic of imperialism.) This article focuses on how the civilian individual attitudes, dispositions, and indeed selves are socially constructed to be supportive of militarism and imperialism. Though this argument probably applies in many other times and places, I focus on the U.S. post-2001 war on terror, defined to include the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

### **Normalization of militarism**

War and crime seem to be changing and merging in popular imaginations as well as materially. Some social scientists argue that societal violence is decreasing (Pinker, 2011), others challenge this view (Herman & Peterson, 2012), or even argue that violence and uncertainty has become fundamental to neoliberalism as a particularly savage facet of capitalism (Evans & Giroux, 2015, p. 2). In any case, it continues to be urgent to examine how public attitudes may enable political violence, including war. A strength of some criminology and much sociology is their concern with connecting biography and society, micro and macro levels. This theoretical connection is part of better understanding the limited but important role of domestic mass publics in war.

War is "the organized use of force against another people or nation" (Young & Arrigo, 1999, p. 343). Not only can war be equated to state and corporate crime (Ruggiero, 2005, p. 251), late modern aggressive war is a form of state-corporate crime, defined by Kramer and Michalowski as

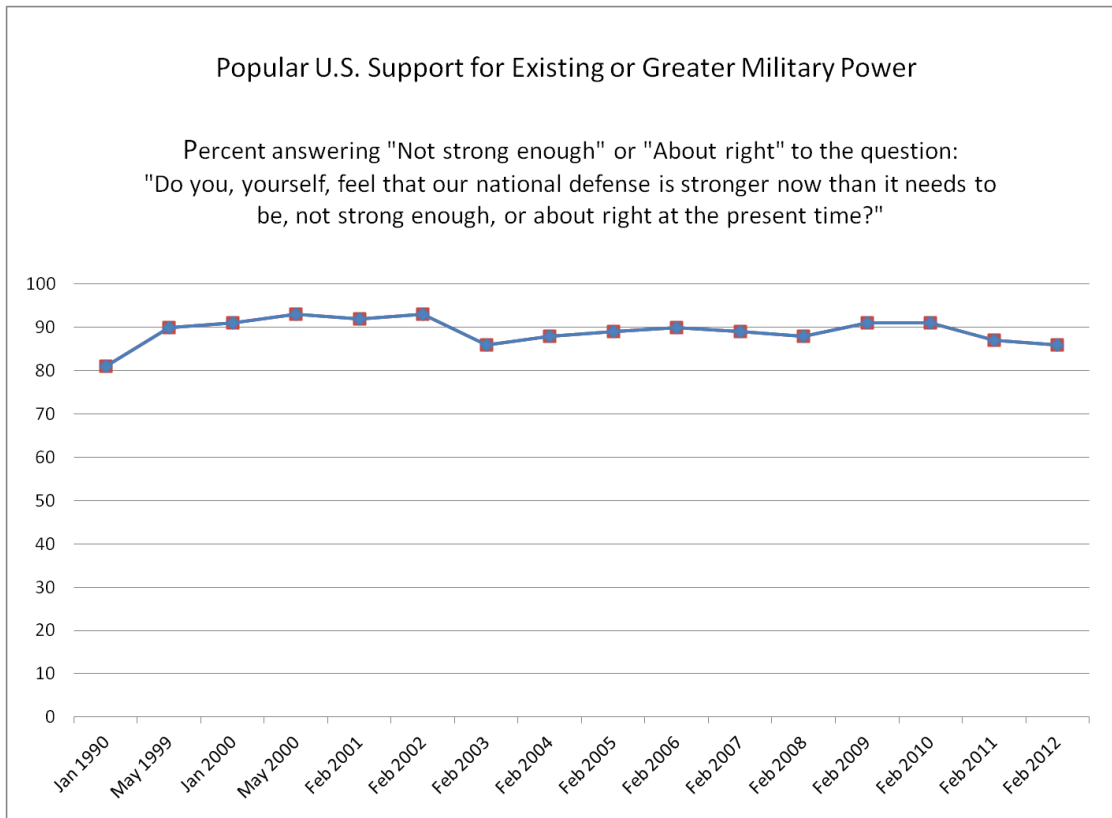
illegal or socially injurious action resulting from interaction between political and economic institutions (2006b). For convenience, I will often omit the adjective “aggressive” when referring to war, but I have in mind military action that can be reasonably categorized as unilateral or aggressive and therefore a violation of international law or basic standards of conduct. I will also simplify by referring to “state crime” rather the “state-corporate crime.” For the level of analysis here, the distinction is unimportant.

Militarism must be understood as having to do with more than, for example, advocating a large military budget. Current militarism involves for example eroding the difference between police and military forces, both in physical and cultural ways (Balko, 2013). The term militarism has been used most often as a pejorative, and to use it scientifically, it must have generality and be more than a negative label for out groups (Shaw 2003:106). I draw on Shaw’s definition of militarism as “...the tendency of... [military] relations, institutions and values to influence all relations, institutions and values” (2003, p. 106). Militarism varies with time and place, but the post-2001 intensification of U.S. repression, propaganda, and violence both abroad and at home are evidence that the war on terror is militaristic (Mahajan, 2002; Steuter & Wills, 2008; Welch, 2007; Whyte, 2007).

Popular war support has been almost a taboo topic among critical social scientists. This is probably because claiming that there is popular war support can be misinterpreted to mean that populations generally want war or that popular pressures are a cause of specific wars. Neither of these claims are in my view valid, though this is a matter of academic debate. A minimal position is that modern publics are historically neither inherently peaceful nor warlike (Gaubatz, 1999, p. 13). A recent example of the peacefulness of populations is Joseph’s (2007, p. 6) recent finding that, despite elite militarism some 75% of the U.S. population either rejects war in principle or is becoming more sensitive to its costs.

Despite the extensive public opinion and historical evidence that U.S. public opinion often leans toward peaceful policies (Joseph, 2007), there has been substantial public support for military power and aggression. An example of a policy preference that is objectively militaristic is the longstanding high level of public support for U.S. military power. For at least the past decade, more than eight in ten U.S. adults have wanted national defense to be as strong as it is or stronger (see Figure 1). The international geopolitical context helps clarify why this attitude amounts to support for militarism. From 1988 and 2011, with about 5% of the world’s population, the U.S. share of world military spending roughly ranged from 36% to 42% (Walker, 2012). Most in the U.S. population probably view their support as defensive. However, given U.S. military superiority and interventionism (Mann, 2003), favoring U.S. overweening power and global reach is objectively to favor a pattern of military aggression. Additional indications of militaristic policy support include many presidents’ historical “rally-round-the-flag” popularity increase when initiating military action (Brooks, Dodson, & Hotchkiss, 2010, p. 519), and the fact that, from 2002 through 2006, between 35% and 43% felt “the U.S. should be able to attack any country it thinks might attack the U.S.” (Gallup, Inc., 2013).

Figure 1



This article uses ideas from criminology and cognate fields to examine every day civilians in the context of their own governments' military state crimes. The ability of politicians and the media to often succeed in ideologically sanitizing U.S. aggression in the minds of civilians suggests that many civilians are predisposed by socialization and culture toward war, and more deeply, that individual selves are partly militarized. Cultural militarism, including promotion of unilateral aggression, is widespread and normalized (Boggs, 2003; Hossein-Zadeh, 2007; Steuter & Wills, 2008).

My claim is not that the U.S. population or even any large portion of it is bloodthirsty or warmongering. Today's militarism is best understood as what Mann (1988) calls spectator sport militarism. Present day U.S. militarist celebration of power and military glorification is sanitized or latent, usually framed and experienced as defensive. Furthermore, there is limited public knowledge of the ferociousness, destructiveness, and arbitrariness engaged in by the state.

Despite these caveats, which lessen the public's responsibility, the acquiescence of the general population in U.S. military prioritization and interventionism is de-facto support for militarism. At least three of the four major conventional legal theories of liability arguably apply to this issue: recklessness, negligence, and strict liability. It is likely that much of the U.S. population is legally reckless in that it knows something about, or should know about, the predatory and coercive nature of U.S. foreign and military policies. It may be that citizens are negligent, particularly in a globalized era, in that they have a duty to be more aware of and considerate of, lives in other nations. Strict liability might apply in that regardless of mental state, U.S. persons can be liable for harm to which they contribute. Going further, there is a case to be made that some of the U.S. population, because of its participation in racist, chauvinist, and jingoist thinking, has a minimal but politically consequential mens rea (a guilty mind), and that, by paying taxes and favoring state violence in its name, it is involved indirectly in the actus reus (guilty act).

Consider the following quickly found and easily multiplied examples of militarist or imperialist thinking, remarkable for being unremarkable, striking in that they culturally normalize predation and unilateralism. The first is from a speech by President Obama, which advocates U.S. military supremacy. Obama's 2012 election night speech included liberal/progressive concerns such as global warming and inequality. He continues:

We want to pass on a country that's safe and respected and admired around the world, a nation that is defended by the strongest military on earth and the best troops this – this world has ever known – (cheers, applause) ... but also a country that moves... beyond this time of war to shape a peace..." (2012).

Presumably, it would have made the audience uncomfortable to point out how similar this is to World War I political rhetoric for example, and that it is contradictory to call for military superiority and peace at the same time.

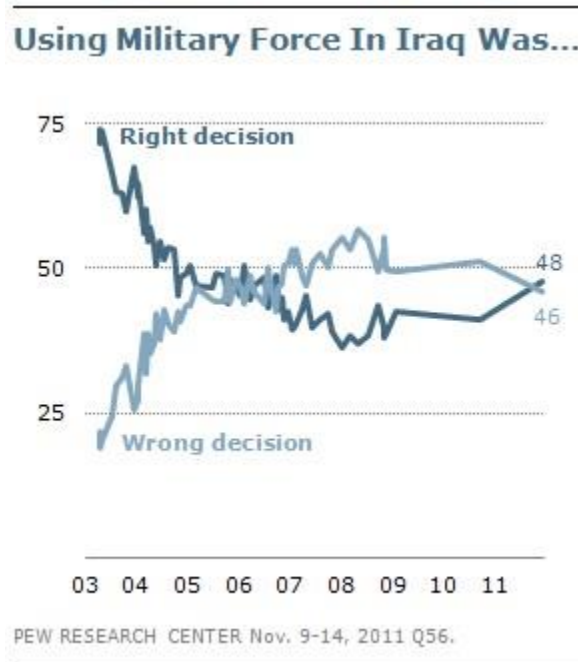
In a second example, a front-page New York Times article indicates limited concern with the killing of civilians, explaining that a Muslim U.S. soldier "resolve[d] to fight terrorism... was haunted by the possibility that he might end up killing innocent civilians" (Andrea Elliott, 2009). The article continues without further comment on this. More broadly on this theme, a major media message about Afghanistan and Pakistan civilian deaths is that "when you kill innocent people, the big problem is that it hurts your image," exemplified by a Washington Post headline: "Afghan Civilian Deaths Present U.S. With Strategic Problem" (Solomon, 2009).

Another example is from a 2007 blog entry by a U.S. soldier in Iraq criticizing another blogger for feeling "sick" about a video in which the soldier fires a machine gun at someone: Well maybe if the author had been in our Battalion two weeks earlier when we lost two soldiers... they would have felt sick then. Maybe if the author had conducted a Battle Damage Assessment of a crowded family restaurant that had just been hit with two car bombs, they would have felt sick. Moreover, maybe if the author had been with us when we were the target of mortars and bullets just moments before, they would not have felt so well (Miner, 2007).

The larger context of this situation changes the meaning of this soldier's argument. The U.S. occupation of Iraq is a state crime of the highest order (Kramer & Michalowski, 2006a, p. 199). This soldier's view, common in such "who started it" debates, discursively omits the occupation and related aggressive military policies. Regardless of who attacks first on a given day in Iraq, to support U.S. violence in Iraq, or any other illegal war/invasion, amounts to warlike and imperialist thinking and feeling.

Inquiring into the role of civilians in this context includes asking how a political and media culture saturated with such discourse affects individuals. Though the military may be "a separate tribe in the republic" with more extreme views, a majority of the U.S. public supported the invasion of Iraq for approximately two years, and though support has dropped to minority levels since, this illegal intervention has always had the support of over a third in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2011) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2



### Theorizing militarism and the self

Gerth and Mills offer a useful starting point for examining connections between self and society in their underappreciated *Character and Social Structure* (1953). Desires and their intensity result from the importation of social values (Gerth & Mills, 1953, p. 46). Gerth and Mills argue that socialization of individuals influences motivations and internalizes roles in ways that are functional for institutional orders. This strong view of socialization fits with my suggestion that militarism is socialized into people's very selves. However, like many theorizations of popular acceptance of violence, Gerth and Mills tend to underestimate the shared, normalized aspect of much aggression. For example, Gerth and Mills describe several personal and social orientations, in one of which people subscribe verbally to a code but deviate from it in their conduct (1953, p. 269). Despite that Gerth and Mills name this as both individual and social pattern, their discussion leaves the impression that this hypocritical orientation is deviant, or exists in only a limited portion of the population. It is simplistic dualism to claim that some individuals have this orientation and others do not. Most individuals, because they grow up in a hypocritical and oppressive society, are likely somewhere along a spectrum from more to less hypocritical. I think militarism involves a society-wide tacit real norm of hypocrisy – e.g., “my aggression is defensive, yours is offensive.” Individuals are socialized by ideal norms to verbalize the Golden Rule and other values of reciprocity, and at the same time, frequently witness double standards. This helps explain widespread cynicism, and de facto racism combined with anti-racist rhetoric. In his zeal to explain “evil” behavior by situational rather than dispositional factors, Zimbardo (2008, p. 324) omits the possibility of real norms of aggression and hypocrisy in his explanation of U.S. military and policy elite success getting subordinates to engage in illegal and unjust behavior in Iraq.

On the other hand, this (oversocialized?) view can be taken too far. Gerth and Mills argue that “[d]uring the enthusiastic phase of mass movements there may occur a mass transformation of character structure...[c]hanges in the objective social structure are paralleled by changes in what

psychic elements are accentuated in the character structures..." (1953, p. 77). This assumed uniformity of selves and their homology with society is similar to George H. Mead's assertion that "[t]he organization and unification of a social group is identical with the organization and unification of any one of the selves arising within the social process in which that group is engaged..." (1962, p. 144). These views overestimate the correspondence between self and society, but contain a truth - socialization does deeply inculcate dominant social values and beliefs into selves.

Another helpful theory comes from Fellman (1998), who argues that institutions and history promote two contrasting paradigms, adversarialism and mutualism. Both of these paradigms have a normative version, which is shared, conscious, and fairly prosocial, and a compulsive version, which is unconscious, addictive, irrational, and dangerous (Fellman, 1998, p. 41). Though society promotes adversarialism more than mutualism, they are both part of humanity. Adversarialism in politics and business subordinates justice and safety to victory, and most people "go along with all these forms of adversarialism because they are socialized into doing so" (Fellman, 1998, p. 28). As Fellman (1998, p. 41) argues, norms that define one group as automatically better than another abound, promoting compulsive destructiveness. Adversarialism has numerous origins (1998, p. 44), including psychological abuse (1998, p. 92), and media promotion of conflict benefiting elites (1998, p. 105). Both Gerth and Mills (1953) and Fellman (1998) contribute to our understanding of militarized selves by emphasizing the influence of cradle to grave saturation in societal aggression, coercion, and violence.

#### Denying endemic militarism

Two decades ago, Pepinsky accused criminologists of collective ignorance about the connection between crime and punishment on the one hand, and war on the other, noting the commonality that they are all violent (Pepinsky, 1991, p. 300,301). More recently, Friedrichs points out that criminologists can contribute to understanding war by attending to both parallels and differences between war as crime and other forms of crime (Friedrichs, 2008, p. 37).

Peacemaking and critical criminologists sometimes argue to the effect that, as Fuller and Wozniak (2009, p. 251) put it, "a war mentality drives the multibillion dollar industry of (in) justice". It is less often suggested that a criminal mentality may be part of the multibillion dollar national (in)security and military industries, what one scholar calls the military-industrial-media-entertainment network (Derian, 2001). Occasionally criminologists point to the problem of civilian support for military aggression, though typically without further developing the idea. Here is an example: Fighter pilots and other warriors in service of capitalist states, as well as the citizens who support them have been convinced that the only way to preserve their society is to push the button or pull the trigger that will turn civilians by the hundreds into dead "collateral damage" (Rothe et al., 2009, p. 6).

Sociology also insufficiently examines connections between individuals and militarism. Many sociologists examine the self, but rarely in relation to politics or crime. Despite critical criminologists occasionally examining psycho-social aspects of crime (Jefferson, 2008), or ideology and state crime (Alvarez, 2008), this has not involved systematic exploration of civilians in the context of state military crimes. One problem is that current criminological theorizing arguably ignores human subjectivity, neglecting in-depth explanation of the motivations of individuals (Jefferson, 2008).

The militarization of domestic society has occasionally engaged social scientists in the past (E.g.: Lasswell, 1941; Mills, 1985). Lasswell offered a prescient picture of a coming "garrison state" world. As in Lasswell's prediction, U.S. power is highly concentrated and elites' "...methods involve the management of propaganda, violence, goods, and practices," and they "... have an interest in multiplying gadgets specialized to acts of violence" (1941, pp. 462-465). Like most researchers, Lasswell viewed militarism and societal violence as deviations from normality. This implies that normality does not involve cultural and ideological "recruitment" for state violence. This kind of thinking dates back to Vagt's (1959) concept of civilian militarism. Though his theory elaborates on

domestic militarism, he still views it as extraordinary rather than as part of inherent social and political life. Vagts used the term civilian militarism to refer to the 1930s emergence of extreme “bellicose civilians,” political party leaders who showed an “enthusiasm for [military] action” (1959, p. 452), i.e., twentieth century fascists.

Today’s U.S. is not fascist, but glorification of the military and acceptance of hierarchy do coexist with values like fairness and individualism (Lutz, 2010). An analysis that comes closer to considering normalized domestic militarism is in Berghahn (1981, p. 116), who argues that the Cold War involved a new type of militarism characterized by a “civil-military symbiosis, operating within a predominantly civilian, mass-consumption society and relying on the deterrent value of a pushbutton nuclear armory.” As with Lasswell and others, this points to aspects of today’s situation, including the integration of military organizations and values with domestic society, and belief in the moral appropriateness of high technology war.

These different characterizations of militarism are helpful in that they address the normalization of military aggression in civilian society. However, they problematically view militarism as unusual or extreme. Such analyses conceive militarism as separate from, or external to, basic social structure and forces. The prevailing view among social scientists focuses on excess as a central characteristic of militarism. This neglects that, like other forms of conflict, militarism is endemic to class society (Skjelsbaek, 1980, p. 82).

Several recent discussions of militarism acknowledge that militarism exists throughout society and culture. Shaw (2003, p. 106) points out that “... militarism can be strong even when the glorification of military power is lacking.” He claims that with the ending of mass conscription, Western societies have become “post-military” societies, but that militarism, rather than disappearing, has taken new forms, including an armament culture (2003, p. 106). Enloe (2007) emphasizes the role of militarism in civilian life: “To become militarized is to adopt militaristic values (e.g., a belief in hierarchy, obedience, and the use of force) and priorities as one’s own, to see military solutions as particularly effective, to see the world as a dangerous place best approached with militaristic attitudes... [m]ost militarized people are civilians” (2007, p.p. 4-5). Joseph argues that militarism includes “...support for military values within the overall culture of a society...” (2007, p. 7).

The concept, mentioned earlier, of “spectator-sport militarism,” illuminates its widespread appeal by emphasizing the morally cleansed enthusiasm of civilian militarism (Mann, 1988). Mann’s idea, though formulated during the Cold War, is relevant for examining the post-September 2001 U.S. climate of anger, anxiety, racism, and nationalism. The spectator-sport militarism concept is useful because it alerts us to the often passive, remote, and (partially) uninformed quality of civilian support for militarism. It seems that most people in the U.S. are spectators of the U.S. wars in Afghanistan (starting 2001) and Iraq (ignoring earlier U.S. intervention and starting 2003). Most are civilians who experience the war through the media, rather than more intimately, e.g. through a significant other in the military. Like sports spectators, there is widespread in-group pride and a tendency to focus on the heroism, the clash of wills, and the action. These spectators (whose taxes support war) often seem to extensively accept elite representations of threat, security, and the need for military action. In a more recent analysis, Solomon (2005, p. 236) echoes Mann, describing the “... spectator relationship to military actions being implemented in our names.”

Limitations in Mann’s use spectator-sport militarism show his inadequate appreciation of its cultural and material roots. For example, Mann writes that the elite secrecy of cold war U.S. militarism, resulting from the high technology nuclear arms race, was “problematic” for the U.S. with its “open system of government” (Mann, 1987, p. 45). Elite militarist secrecy must sometimes contend with popular democratic challenges, but Mann overestimates such challenges. We can see this by noting that despite differing logics, cold war state secrecy and war on terror state secrecy



have been widely accepted. In the cold war, military and policy secrecy were “needed” because the enemy was strong, organized, devious, and malicious. Now, war on terror secrecy is legitimated because the enemy is weak, unorganized, devious, and malicious. We must wonder at the ability of elites to substantially change the logic of legitimation without encountering broad popular resistance. (An anecdotal example of the deep tendency of individuals to participate in such irrationality is that about five years after 2001, during an undergraduate criminal justice class I was teaching, all of the twenty or so students seemed skeptical when I pointed out that, since September 2001, nobody in the U.S. had died from foreign terrorism. Some of them argued, provoking no disagreement from others that terrorists likely had killed people in the U.S. without it ever being made public, and that such state secrecy might be in order to keep information from terrorists.) Another problem with Mann’s use of spectator-sport militarism is that in emphasizing its indirect quality, he underestimates the material and political economic role of militarism, for example claiming incorrectly that “...militarism is not central to the social structure of the West” (Mann, 1987, p. 48),

Mann is correct that much of Western public support for elite high tech militarism is in the abstract and involves only indirect participation of citizens. However, Mann (1987, p. 49) argues that popular support for militarism is “shallow and volatile.” This seems a problematic account. Recent shifts in spectator-sport militarism’s popularity cannot be described as volatile, since support for military aggression remains substantial. In the year after the invasion, the portion of the public believing that the U.S. made the right decision to use military force in Iraq admittedly dropped from just under three quarters at the time of the invasion to 56% about a year later, in February 2014 (Doherty & Tyson, 2014, pp. 9–10). On the other hand, about three quarters of the public also viewed the 1991 U.S. military action in Iraq as the right decision, and the portion believing the 2003 aggression was the right decision has not dropped below 36% since the invasion (38% as of January 2014) (Doherty & Tyson, 2014, pp. 9–10). Furthermore, during the decade after 2003 the portion of the U.S. public feeling it is important that the U.S. be globally number one militarily stayed above sixty percent (Newport, 2016). Thus, limited disenchantment with military action coexists with widespread lasting support for military superiority and aggression.

All of these formulations fit with the theories of Gerth and Mills and Fellman. Gerth and Mills point out that role-taking in a society that expects people to choose roles “freely” results widely varying internationalization of roles, but it is still true that “institutions imprint their stamps upon the individual, modifying his (sic) external conduct as well as his (sic) inner life,” a mechanism that involves the individuals’ significant others (Gerth & Mills, 1953, p. 169,173). Similarly, Fellman (1998, p. 179) writes that the family is the primary site of mutuality and of adversarialism.

The remainder of this article presents a schematic theoretical model of how social structure, culture, and socialization promote militarist and imperial values and policies, and how this contributes to partial militarization of civilian identities and selves.

### **Political-economic and cultural militarism**

One might expect militarization of civilian selves in the U.S. given that crime and violence are “integral elements of American culture” (Warr 2007:579), that there is substantial domestic militarism (Boggs, 2003; Hossein-Zadeh, 2007; Joseph, 2007; Shaw, 2003) and that there is a long record of foreign policy interventionism (Shalom, 1993, p. 93). (These are characteristics of many other nations, though that is beyond the scope of this article.) As historian Michael Sherry states, “[w]ar created the United States. Although many Americans professed genuine hostility toward it, war was central to their history, the instrument by which they...often defined themselves” (1995, p. 1). Describing themes used repeatedly in U.S. history to legitimate wars, Solomon (2005, p. 9) writes: “When the president of the United States is determined to go to war, a vast array of leverage and public-relations acumen can and will be brought to bear.” Much of the support for militarist policies is

admittedly based on ignorance or confusion. Few in the U.S. are fully aware of the imperial and militaristic nature of U.S. foreign policy: the "...relative invisibility of U.S. imperialism to many people living at that empire's center is striking" (Steinmetz, 2005, p. 359). This ignorance is only part of the problem –selective attention and use of double standards appear to be widespread. These kinds of thinking and perception may well legitimate U.S. official violence as "our" violence, while automatically de-legitimizing "their" violence. Particularly since September 2001, civilian selves have arguably been subjected to ideological promotion of state criminality under the banner of the war on terror. Unfortunately, many commentators on post 2001 militarism make the mistake of forgetting that U.S. militarism has been a large part of U.S. history, for example understanding "militarization" as dating from the 1930s (Sherry, 1995, p. xi) or claiming that militarism emerged with the Cold War (Johnson, 2003, p. 119). In fact, U.S. crimes of war date back to the nineteenth century (Boggs, 2003, p. 191), and imperialism and war have been central to North America's history for five centuries (Anderson & Cayton, 2005, pp. xiii, xiv).

Findings from a study of 2002 elite newspaper op-eds about the U.S. invasion of Iraq (Nikolaev & Douglas V. Porpora, 2011) suggest the importance of latent militarized selfhood: 34% of op-eds were pro-war, 36% anti-war (in limited ways), and 30% neutral. This is likely an underestimate of the extent of pro-war propaganda overall, but it points up a typical mechanism promoting militarism. Despite some criticism of militaristic policy in the media, partially militarized individuals are repeatedly influenced to accept or support such policies. This is partly because their selves have been previously oriented to such aggressive politics.

### **Selfless militarism?**

Bonn's (2010) excellent study of the mass deception used to gain support for the 2003 U.S. war in Iraq exemplifies the kind of analysis that is missing from most accounts of U.S. militarist culture. Bonn integrates critical theory, critical criminology, sociology, and communication studies into an elegant framework for explaining why "many in society drink the Kool-Aid served in a moral panic" over the supposed military threat from Iraq. This elite-engineered social construction, he argues, succeeds because it involves agenda-setting and media and politicians' framing and priming. What Bonn leaves unexamined is the role of individual civilians' life experience prior to the creation of a moral panic in enhancing war legitimation. A key point missed by most analyses is that prior life experience, and the at least partial inculcating of militaristic predispositions, identities, and selves likely increases individual acquiescence to political and media war promotion.

Regarding the relationship between civilians and war, critical criminologists and others commit an analogous mistake to what Currie calls the "fallacy of autonomy," the illusory belief that what goes on inside the family can be usefully separated from the forces that affect it from the outside, from the larger social context in which families are embedded (Currie, 1985, p. 185). In the case of critical analyses of military and interventionist state crime, criminologists seem to assume that civilians, because they neither initiate nor generally gain from interventionism, are culturally and psychologically immune from militarism and imperialism. One way to expand on current criminological research is to improve our understanding of how the public develops images of state crime, and how political actors both influence, and are influenced by, those images (Rothe et al., 2009, p. 9).

Surprisingly given sociology's focus on theorizing micro/macro social connections, sociologists who consider the connection between militarism or imperialism and the domestic society (Joseph, 2007; Shaw, 2003; Steinmetz, 2005) tend to stay on a macro-social level, neglecting to examine the individual level. Micro-sociology connects social forces to the making of individuals, but this is rarely used to examine militarism or imperialism. An example from early sociology is Mead, whose few comments on the relation between self and war aptly emphasize ways individuals are

made into supporters of war. Mead argued that the self can be tied more closely to a generalized other through defining an “other” as enemy, and that unity against an enemy can be manipulated by those in power (Deegan, 2008, p. 21). Mead alludes to the emotional aspect of this process: “in wartime we identify ourselves with the nation and its interests are the interests of our primal selves” (Mead, 1981, p. 355). Jumping to recent sociology, the new postmodern influenced sociology of the self suggests the importance of power (Callero, 2003), which is central to militarism and imperialism, but has yet to examine the self in relation to militarism and imperialism.

Again, social scientists’ relative neglect of the micro/macro connection in the context of militarism highlights the value of Gerth and Mills and Fellman. Gerth and Mills (1953, p. 83,84) write that a person is composed of “an internalization of organized social roles” and that others’ expectations often become self-expectations. Similarly, Fellman’s (1998) emphasis on the enculturation of young people in the adversarialist paradigm reminds us of the power of socialization to influence, even form, individuals’ selves.

### **Militarism inside the self**

There are many possible ways to conceptualize the effect of militarism and imperialism on the individual. As Martinot explains, two aspects of the legitimation of war are the rhetorical patterns used by state officials, and the cultural structures that those rhetorical patterns rely on and express (2003). These might be thought of as levels, the top one being the state officials’ rhetoric. A second level down are cultural structures such as racism, nationalism, and legalist discourses. A third level down consists of ideation, feeling, imagery, and other mental traits in citizens that promote acceptance or support for aggressive war. Possible aspects of the individual, listing them from surface to the deepest, include knowledge, public opinion, value, worldview, identity, character, personality, or self. All of these need examination. To suggest the intensity of militarization of individuals, I examine the deepest level, that of the self. If the self is militaristic and imperialist, then less stable, less psychodynamically intense and less permanent aspects of individuals are no doubt affected as well. The self is a “psychic process wherein signs and other forms of imagery answer to biologically rooted impulses” (Schwalbe quoted in Callero, 2003, p. 120). It is beyond the scope of this article to engage the several-decade long sociological debate about the self, but my postmodern-influenced definition acknowledges that the self is partly biological and partly symbolic, emphasizing that the self is a matter of power, reflexivity, and social construction (Callero, 2003, p. 117). As discussed in more detail later, the self is in some ways stable and resistant to change. This view of course contradicts postmodern thinking on the self which emphasizes its fluidity and fragmentation. Processes that influence selves have lasting effects, helping to explain militaristic influences on individuals. Finally, the self is always a cultural, emotional, and cognitive process. Chodorow points out that “People create and experience social processes and cultural meanings psychodynamically – in unconscious, affect-laden, non-linguistic, immediately felt images and fantasies...” (2004, p. 26).

Typical selves are deeply infiltrated by what Eckhardt calls a militarist attitude: “...the readiness or willingness to engage in behaviours which have been authorized and institutionalized by a government for the purpose of using or threatening to use destructive weapons against the people and property of another nation, or even against the people (but seldom the property) of one’s own nation” (1980, p. 324). Eckhardt elaborates: “[t]he military mind is part of a society in conflict with itself and other societies, so that there is an isomorphism between personality and society which is mutually reinforcing and rewarding...” (Eckhardt, 1980, p. 340). The primary cause of militarist conformity is early individual socialization to what Shaw calls “more general belief systems in society... through which war...is ...legitimated” (Shaw, 2003, p. 101).

Returning to psychodynamics, recent empirical research on emotions and politics indicates the importance of unconscious and emotional mental processes in the formation of political attitudes. Emotion systems in the brain have access to the sensory stream well before the brain systems that generate conscious awareness can complete their work (Marcus, 2005, p. 197). One of these brain systems, the “disposition system,” is implicated in the power of learned attachments, such as symbols, to control political judgment. This means that emotionally familiar symbols are a non-rational influence on political judgment. Since primary socialization installs emotionally charged values and beliefs that influence later adult political thinking, this suggests that childhood experience can promote lasting militarist meanings.

### **Socialization and ideology**

An account of the militarist self must start from the fact that politics, power, and discourse are fundamental to the self. (I discuss discourse later in the context of family and individual forces.) Current cultural struggles over the self indicate “... the contested, tensional, critical and, above all political nature of the process of identity-building” (Anthony Elliott, 2008, p. 167). Individual selves come into being through social interaction (Mead, 1962, p. 135), and this includes socialization and ideology, which are operative throughout the self’s development, and at all social levels, from presidential speeches to intimate interaction.

Several academic traditions close to sociology offer additional tools for examining the warlike self. Broadly speaking, criminology thinks about the criminal subject’s self in three ways: rational actor, Freudian, and social constructionist (Jefferson, 2008, p. 150). The latter two can be helpful for theorizing because they allow a role for ideology and socialization.

As mentioned earlier, the self is partly a stable aspect of individuals. This helps explain how early life experience might influence adult policy views. Early life experiences can have lasting effects on individuals (Jefferson, 2008, p. 152), and this includes political and military values. Political psychology offers empirical evidence that early political socialization is important and lasting for individuals. For example, research finds that adult racial tolerance levels are more strongly related to childhood environment than to adult environment, and early-acquired sociopolitical attitudes appear little affected by adult self-interest concerns (Sears & Levy, 2003, p. 83).

An important aspect of the militarization of selves is that obedience and support for aggression can go together. The best way to illustrate this is draw on Bauman’s still pertinent argument, made long ago, about the inadequate sociological appreciation of Milgram and Zimbardo’s experiments in obedience and aggression. Bauman argues that Milgram’s evidence that obedience could make normal people cruel has not changed mainstream sociological reasoning (1989, p. 152), and neither has Zimbardo’s “prison” experiment (1989, p. 166). Sociologists trivialize the important fact that normal and obedient selves can also be destructive. We see obedience, irrationality, and aggression in non-elites and elites. Fromm calls this combination of passivity and aggression “conformist aggression,” and refers to the fact that aggression can result from obedience to authorities or conformity to peer pressure (1973, p. 234): “In all hierarchically structured societies obedience is perhaps the most deeply ingrained trait” (1973, p. 234). He further points out that soldiers may not be driven to kill out of a cruel impulse, but simply by obedience to orders. Research shows that this is true of most soldiers, but again, passivity or cooperation in militarist state policy is objectively militaristic.

The cultural pressure to conform to militarism may also be thought of as an upside down version of criminogenic strain. Instead of a strain or stressor promoting deviance, militarist culture is a unifying and encouraging pressure for conformity with state criminality. This usually includes nationalism and othering. Consider nationalism, which is intimately linked with war (Howard, 1994), and is often exploited by elites for imperialist purposes (Lieven, 2004, p. 24). Despite the power of

nationalism to promote warlike attitudes, it is contradictory. U.S. nationalism, though supportive of military aggression, is on the other hand a history of unwillingness of the masses to make serious military sacrifices (Lieven, 2004, p. 25). To make things more complex, the military, the sports industry, and macho Hollywood movies have been key proponents of a multicultural “liberal absolutism” that contains an anti-racist thrust alongside a “...bitter hostility and contempt toward culturally different ‘barbarians’ and religious infidels” (Lieven, 2004, p. 44,46,47). In the context of war-making, social pressure promotes support for state violence rather than for peace. In this context, an individual would experience strain not because of lack of opportunity or marginalization, but as a result of diverging from the call to arms. Those who question the need for war are viewed as deviant or treasonous. We can push this a bit further by an upside down use of Agnew’s (2006) idea of vicarious strain, real-life strains experienced by others around the individual. Not only does the individual experience pressure to support state violence, but he or she is indirectly, vicariously, pressured by emotionally important others who are similarly pressured.

Another mechanism through which individual selves are inculcated with militarism is ideology. Socialization involves the inculcation of ideology, which assists in normalizing and naturalizing aggression and war. Therborn highlights the role of ideology in normalizing power and policy: “The power of ideology operates not only in conjunctures of high drama, but in slow, gradual processes as well” (1980, p. 125). The ideological process, writes Brown, involves “centering myths of self and other,” which work at key points of “propaganda’s greatest fluency” such as “exchanges,” “decisions,” “policies,” and “national security interests,” to paper over capitalism’s “moral vacuum” (1986, p. 103). The “centering” here refers to stable aspects of self and identity that support state power and militarism. Take one example of a centering myth: the popular notion of the self as individual. Narratives of freedom and individuality permeate popular and scholarly thinking about the self. This is also true of military-influenced culture. For example, individualistic Army recruiting slogans like “Be All You Can Be” (the 1980s) and “An Army of One” (the 2000s) help recruit people to one of the most de-individualized institutions. One way this contradiction is made ideologically and psychologically invisible is by rhetoric and symbols constantly asserting the individuality of society’s members, despite the de-individuation in many institutions.

Another way that ideology influences the self is by a psychosocial payoff, which helps explain its attraction even if the ideas are destructive. For example, sharing a “gung-ho” attitude or fervent nationalism with others is a way of bonding. As Warren puts it:

... [i]deologies must, in fact, maximize something for individuals. The problem is to get away from limited conceptions of motivation to see what this “something” might be (1990, p. 609)...No ideology is devoid of internal coherence: effective ideologies always have some kind of inner logic, some kind of narrative structure that “makes sense,” and carries a motivational force of its own... (Warren, 1990, p. 611).

It is both self-affirming and self-limiting to join with others celebrating military superiority or aggression. Conversations about how best to win a war or expressions of pride in defending one’s country may be personally meaningful interactions that increase solidarity or relieve frustration. Yet, these same militaristic characteristics are self-limiting by precluding alternative thinking about security and by trapping the individual in social structures that reproduce insecurity and violence. In this sense, the aggression associated with militarist support is obedient. Warren explains how ideology sets limits on psychic structure and promotes status quo power relations:

Ideologies feed on desires for non-precariousness, but in so doing they undermine cognitive competencies...Personalities that come to depend on such cognitive

structures become rigid; they define themselves through the internal consistency of a set of identities, suppressing new and inconsistent information, ideas, and experiences...[S]olutions to problems of self-identity...are “ideological” if, as a consequence of solving problems of personality formation, relations of domination are cognitively justified, reified, or dissimulated (Warren, 1990, p. 618).

The desire for non-precariousness, i.e., wanting security, is a pivotal ideological aspect of power legitimation. Such legitimation is often based on a kind of protection racket. A numerical minority dominates the non-elite partly by guaranteeing safety and/or stability supposedly for all. (This is an insight in Tilly’s (1985) argument that governments start as criminal organizations.) To the extent that the population is mentally and socially militaristic, state power and criminality are easier to legitimate. The massive and widespread repressive and unconstitutional policy trend since September 2001 (P. S. Bonn, 2010; Welch, 2007) has occurred with limited challenge from the public, most of whose members seem to accept many of its false premises. This has not involved outright dictatorship, but has been a process of increasing the arbitrary and repressive aspects of the U.S. state. The fascist “dictatorships” of the early twentieth century created states of exception (suspension of law) by creating “dual states” in which constitutional law coexisted with often informal power structures, with the result that for analysts “...the clean opposition of democracy and dictatorship is misleading” (Agamben, 2005, p. 48). This is analogous to the Western war on terror. Like classical fascism, the war on terror mixes limited constitutionality and respect for rights with repression and elite illegality. To the extent, the public believes that national security is best attained through coercion and secrecy, and that diplomacy and compromise are “pipe dreams,” repression at home and criminal violence abroad will be easier to legitimate.

### **Family and individual**

There are numerous reminders that micro-social violence is widespread in the U.S. Family corporal punishment is common, and approximately a quarter of adolescents commit at least one act of predatory violence (Tolan, 2007, p. 12,14). This happens in large part because structural and cultural forces socially construct the self to include some level of what Fromm called “malignant aggression” (meaning biologically non-adaptive, non-defensive, and harmful to both attacker and attacked) (1973, p. 212). Part of this process is narcissism, defined as a state in which only the person and everything pertaining to him or her are fully and emotionally real (Fromm, 1973, p. 227). Narcissism, like nationalism and militarism, is generally considered absent from the normal self, yet some amount of narcissism becomes part of the self in late capitalist society. As mentioned earlier, making individuals amenable to “us v. them” thinking starts early in life. For example, “oppressive othering” and “implicit othering by the creation of powerful virtual selves” (Schwalbe et al., 2000) are psychosocial processes that lay a foundation for mental militarism. An aspect of this is emotion management (Schwalbe et al., 2000), which has a role in legitimating many aggressive behaviors, from child bullying to adult killing. Emotion management starts in the family.

These socialization forces in the family help explain the power of discourse to manipulate grown-up selves. Elite regulation of discourse underpins mental militarism, but such discursive power requires sympathetic primary socialization. It is in early childhood that emotionally structured values are formed, which later provide the cognitive premises legitimating militaristic logic. Youthful socialization to the values that underlie militaristic messages makes such messages more persuasive. Ross makes a similar claim:

...our evidence is that gross differences between societies in their socialization practices on such questions as affection, warmth, punishment, aggression and

gender role conflict are especially crucial for understanding [internal and external] conflict behavior...socialization provides individuals with a lens through which they see themselves and others, and...these perceptions are crucial in shaping their actions as adults (1985, p. 564).

Particularly harsh childhood experiences increase the chance of individual militarism through inconsistent or punitive parental discipline (Eckhardt, 1980, p. 331). To the extent that the normal family contains inconsistency or punitive treatment of children, individual dispositions are molded toward a harshness that contributes to militarism. We know for example, that childhood experience or witnessing of aggression increases the likelihood of later aggressiveness (Frank, 1982). Militaristic thinking is partly based in hypocritically restrictive childhood training, and "...is at least partly a function of a hypocritically restrictive culture" (Eckhardt, 1980, p. 328).

### **Summary and conclusions**

One direction for expanding the criminology and sociology of aggressive criminal war is to examine the role of civilians. Past work on sociology and criminology of the self, though insufficiently attentive to power, war, or politics, offers tools for theorizing this problem, partly because the processes that make civilians accepting of aggressive war are similar to those that make traditional criminality reasonable to perpetrators. These involve psycho-dynamics, social learning, ideology, socialization, and the family. Because of militarist and imperialist structure and culture in the U.S., many civilian selves and identities are substantially, if latently, inculcated with ideas and emotions supportive or accepting of military and imperial aggression. Anecdotal evidence and public opinion studies support this conclusion. Without widespread militarist inculcation into civilian selves, elites would have a much harder time making war.

Popular support for militarism is not eternal. Though still a powerful force, militarism seems increasingly challenged today. Critics question the exaggeration of threats, anti-war groups decry the costly militarization of society, and writers point to wars' failures and destructiveness. As I write, one presidential candidate, Bernie Sanders' cautious advocacy of reducing military spending (FeelTheBern.org, 2016) seems to have provoked little mainstream media retaliation. Better understanding the popularity of war will make it easier to combat (pun intended).

A U.S. soldier's December 2003 letter home from Iraq conveys the conflicted militaristic and peaceful thinking on all sides of armed conflict:

...most Iraqis told me... they do not want occupation. They want the U.S. troops out ... Our troops... shoot before thinking and innocent people are hurt or die including children... Amazingly most of the people to whom I talked are not angry with the individual soldier. They are angry with our government... One person stated that Iraqis hurt every time a U.S. soldier is harmed and they hurt when a soldier abuses one of them (Quoted in Ensign, 2004, p. 87).

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