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**THESIS**

**UNSUSPECTED: THE U.S. MILITARY'S UNINTENDED  
CONTRIBUTION TO OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS**

by

S Nicholas King

December 2019

Co-Advisors:

David W. Brannan (contractor)  
Carolyn C. Halladay

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**UNSUSPECTED: THE U.S. MILITARY'S UNINTENDED CONTRIBUTION TO  
OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS**

S Nicholas King  
Lieutenant, California Highway Patrol  
BA, California State University San Bernardino, 2002

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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December 2019**

Approved by: David W. Brannan  
Co-Advisor

Carolyn C. Halladay  
Co-Advisor

Erik J. Dahl  
Associate Professor, Department of National Security Affairs

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## **ABSTRACT**

Active-duty military members and veterans (MIL/VETs) are joining, facilitating, and creating outlaw motorcycle gangs in search of a familiar social identity. MIL/VETs' advantageous skill sets, and their international deployments, are helping outlaw motorcycle gangs expand beyond law enforcement's ability to interdict them. In an effort to understand why some MIL/VETs join outlaw motorcycle gangs, this thesis analyzed publicly available information, and the author's personal experience as a gang investigator, through social identity theory and the social identity analytical method. The research found that outlaw motorcycle gang culture takes advantage of concepts such as patron-client relationships, challenge-response cycles, and honor challenges to provide MIL/VETs a limited good—a positive social identity—through its pseudo-warfare environment. The research also identified that MIL/VETs have specific motivations for seeking a positive identity through motorcycle gangs, including a desire to expand the criminal tradecraft, redeem regrets or missed opportunities from their military service, seek post-military employment, or address identity deficits. The findings in this thesis, along with additional research into these motivations, will contribute to the study of outlaw motorcycle gang culture and may help illuminate suitable alternatives to offer MIL/VETs.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AMA	American Motorcycle Association
LE	law enforcement
MC	motorcycle club
mil-MC	military-only motorcycle club
MIL/VET	active-duty military member and/or veteran
OMG	outlaw motorcycle gang
SIAM	social identity analytical method
SIT	social identity theory

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many active-duty U.S. military members and veterans (MIL/VETs) are members of outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMG), which have documented histories of violence and criminal activity.<sup>1</sup> While MIL/VETs adopt the protocols of OMG culture in the pursuit of a positive social identity, unfortunately, many have arrests for their participation in OMG-related criminal activity. The brotherhood OMGs provide is a fundamental component of their culture; this thesis sought to better understand this component to help explain why some MIL/VETs transfer their identity from national service to OMGs.<sup>2</sup>

To do so, this thesis provides an OMG-101-type framework to help readers understand the significance of the OMG culture that MIL/VETs must navigate. This culture creates a rigid environment in which OMGs exert control to maintain territory and protect their criminal enterprise. MIL/VETs and military motorcycle clubs (mil-MCs), despite their founding principles, have followed related protocols—which are sometimes violently enforced—and have been incarcerated for such behaviors. MIL/VETs and mil-MCs have contributed to OMG culture in turn: they have facilitated the expansion of criminal enterprises and have challenged the law enforcement entities that are charged with mitigating those crimes. Few MIL/VETs and mil-MCs are able to defy the rigid OMG culture, and those who are already entrenched in the culture value the positive identity it brings them more than they fear the risks of violence and incarceration. To demonstrate this, the thesis presents a case study that traces the evolution a MIL/VET motorcycle club that was originally formed to address veterans' issues but eventually became a court-recognized OMG.

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<sup>1</sup> Outlaw motorcycle gangs and outlaw motorcycle clubs (MC) are misunderstood—and distinctly different—organizations. In motorcycle culture, *outlaw* MCs are clubs that are not members of, and do not follow, the American Motorcycle Association's rules and regulations. MCs may or may not have criminal members and may or may not collectively engage in criminal behaviors; in contrast, OMGs are MCs whose individual or collective criminal behaviors meet the legal definition of a gang. Despite the behaviors and labels, both OMGs and MCs have non-criminal members.

<sup>2</sup> William Lee Dulaney, "Over the Edge and into the Abyss" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2006), 50, 51, <http://fsu.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fsu%3A168807/>.

The thesis also uses social identity theory and the social identity analytical method to look beyond the sometimes irresponsible and anecdotal reasons why MIL/VETs are said to join OMGs, such as PTSD.<sup>3</sup> The research found that OMG culture takes advantage of patron-client relationships, challenge-response cycles, and honor challenges to provide MIL/VETs a limited good—a positive social identity—through its pseudo-warfare environment.<sup>4</sup> For example, OMG members wear uniforms, which are as sacred to the members as the American flag is to MIL/VETs. What’s more, OMGs provide MIL/VETs with the familiar bonds of brotherhood and the never-leave-a-brother-behind attitude forged through armed conflict and turmoil. Being accepted into a similarly honor-bound band of brothers is a powerful attraction to OMGs for MIL/VETs.

The findings in this thesis contribute to the study of OMGs and MIL/VETs who are seeking a positive social identity. By addressing the OMG environment and the motivations described in the thesis, researchers studying MIL/VETs’ transition to post-military life might assist service members and society by identifying suitable alternatives to OMGs.

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<sup>3</sup> David Bowne Wood, *What Have We Done: The Moral Injury of Our Longest Wars* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2016), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5361937>.

<sup>4</sup> David Brannan, Kristin Darken, and Anders Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward: Terrorism Analysis* (Salinas, CA: Agile Press, 2014).

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To all active-duty and veteran service members, thank you for your service. Without your sacrifices none of us would have the opportunities we currently enjoy. When the United States needed warriors you ran toward the danger and protected our way of life. You experienced things most of us will never understand. You paid the highest price to assemble whenever, wherever, and with whomever. I hope you find the brotherhoods you deserve, in the clubs you choose, absent any negative consequences. The United States is the greatest country in the world because of you.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

For U.S. service members, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are not another Vietnam. Never again will U.S. soldiers deplane through angry, dissenting, spitting mobs, condemned as baby killers. No veteran today should end up like John Rambo from the 1982 movie *First Blood*, eating “things that would make a Billy goat puke” and being harassed out of small, uneasy towns.<sup>1</sup> Today, soldiers return from war zones as heroes, welcomed by the open arms of their families. Citizens are thankful to service members for fighting the nation’s wars. This time, the country cares.

On TV, commercials feature spontaneous applause from adoring citizens as uniformed men and women walk through airports; during national sporting events, veterans unfurl the flags; and in the government, Congress has secured armor for Humvees and overhauled the Veterans Affairs hospital system. Outreach programs in the public and private sectors employ veterans, and state laws give preference to veteran-owned small businesses for government purchases. Although the country’s war-fighters remain resourceful and capable killing machines, experienced in manufacturing and delivering violence to America’s enemies, the nation welcomes their integration back into civilian life—normal Americans, doing normal things.

For some veterans, however, the opposite is true.<sup>2</sup> Whether a matter of perspective or a breakdown in communication, the actual appreciation some veterans feel they are getting amounts to no more than societal mantra—empty words. Many were ill-equipped to contribute to society before they deployed, and many returned even less equipped, with no transferrable job skills or with criminal records, mental-health issues, and drug addictions.<sup>3</sup> Some veterans feel society has left them to fend for themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> *First Blood*, directed by Ted Kotcheff (Los Angeles, CA: Orion Pictures, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> David Bowne Wood, *What Have We Done: The Moral Injury of Our Longest Wars* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2016), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5361937>.

<sup>3</sup> Matt Kennard, *Irregular Army: How the U.S. Military Recruited Neo-Nazis, Gang Members and Criminals to Fight the War on Terror* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2012).

Outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) have opened their arms to these returning heroes. Veterans' unique skills, superior discipline, military training, combat experience, and commitment make them attractive to OMGs, and the groups are increasing their ranks with former war-fighters.<sup>4</sup> Veterans are familiar with operating as a structured unit and waging war with their rivals, and they can help expand OMGs' criminal enterprises by traveling to military bases situated around the world.<sup>5</sup> In exchange, the OMGs provide veterans with familiar bonds of brotherhood and the never-leave-a-brother-behind attitude forged through armed conflict and turmoil. OMGs offer a variety of other attractions for veterans: uniforms, known as *cuts* or *colors*, which are as sacred as the flag; an oath they swear to uphold above all else; rank, ribbons, and badges for honorable service to the gang; and a world that, for some veterans, feels normal. These OMGs, full of U.S. heroes, are expanding their criminal enterprises beyond the capabilities, scrutiny, and interdiction of law enforcement.

#### **A. RESEARCH QUESTION**

How can the transferred identity of some active-duty military members and veterans from national service to outlaw motorcycle gangs be better understood?

#### **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Society has a hazy image of outlaw motorcycle gangs, and few outside the culture understand them. Everyday citizens rely on what they see and hear—TV shows like *Sons of Anarchy* and *The Devil's Ride*—to fine-tune their stereotypes. To appear unbiased, the media sometimes counters negative stereotypes with OMGs' humanitarian side, for example, covering their Christmas toy-runs for impoverished children or featuring news

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<sup>4</sup> Carter F. Smith, *Gangs and the Military: Gangsters, Bikers, and Terrorists with Military Training* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); Carter F. Smith and Joshua Harms, "The Threat of Street Gangs, Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs, and Domestic Terrorist/Extremist Groups with Military-Trained Members," *Small Wars Journal*, March 23, 2018, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/threat-street-gangs-outlaw-motorcycle-gangs-and-domestic-terroristextremist-groups>; National Gang Intelligence Center, "National Gang Report 2015" (report, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2015, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/stats-services-publications-national-gang-report-2015.pdf/view>).

<sup>5</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*.

celebrities like Lisa Ling on an exclusive ride-along, commenting, “See, they’re not such bad guys.”<sup>6</sup> Those who do know the culture, however, whether they are OMG members or law enforcement investigators, can point to volumes of investigative reports and convictions showing the lineage of violent activity just under society’s nose. This literature review demonstrates how the military may be complicit in active-duty members and veterans (referred to hereafter as MIL/VETs) joining OMGs.

## 1. Coming Home

Combat veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are entering the motorcycle culture, a culture that dates back to the post–World War II era. MIL/VETs are creating military-only motorcycle clubs (mil-MCs), or are joining the ranks of existing OMGs, which are also referred to as *one-percenters*.<sup>7</sup> These clubs provide an outlet for combat veterans among what David Bowne Wood refers to as “a civilian public [that] ... fails to comprehend or acknowledge the experiences they have absorbed on our behalf.”<sup>8</sup> This separation of the soldier from the citizenry, according to Donald Abenheim and Carolyn Halladay, offers an alluring, if illusory, respite from the “ceaseless disorder” of civilians and their politics.<sup>9</sup> In one example of this separation, Scott Althaus, Brittany Bramlett, and James Gimpel reveal that soldiers gather information about the public’s support for war “from a bottom-up process through social networks more than ... traditional channels of national and local news coverage.”<sup>10</sup> These sources further highlight the disconnect between public perception and the soldiers’ actual experiences.

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<sup>6</sup> Lisa Ling, “Inside the Mongol Bikers,” CNN, video, 1:51, October 5, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2015/10/05/exp-mongol-bikers-01.cnn>.

<sup>7</sup> The term *one-percenter* is described in more detail in Chapter II.

<sup>8</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*, loc. 135.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Abenheim and Carolyn Halladay, “Professional Soldiers and Citizens in Uniform: Some Thoughts on Innere Führung from a Transatlantic Perspective” (faculty paper, Naval Postgraduate School, 2016), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Scott L. Althaus, Brittany H. Bramlett, and James G. Gimpel, “When War Hits Home: The Geography of Military Losses and Support for War in Time and Space,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 3 (2012): 28.

Once the men and women at arms return home, Abenheim and Halladay explain, society has an obligation to “support the soldier’s need for the sense that their service is not demonized ... or ignored.”<sup>11</sup> Andrew Bacevich and Matt Kennard explain that, without the draft, only one percent of Americans chose to serve in the military during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> For the other ninety-nine percent, their appreciation for those who did join the military, as Bacevich sees it, is shown in less significant ways, such as minor spectacles at public events; civilians fall into an automatic mantra of support for servicemembers out of understood obligation, whether or not they truly feel that support.<sup>13</sup> There is a vast ideological separation between MIL/VETs and civilians, which often manifests in awkward or inappropriate questions or treatment of veterans.<sup>14</sup> Wood and Bacevich note that U.S. soldiers who left to fight the War on Terror have returned to a public that no longer supports the cause these soldiers fought for.<sup>15</sup> They explain that although this rift is not as extreme as it was during the Vietnam War era, public support for the troops’ work has waned after eighteen exhausting years of war. Wood and Bacevich do not address, however, any of the myriad reasons why genuinely patriotic Americans do not volunteer to serve in the military, objective reasons why they are unable to serve, or the ways many support the war effort by other means.

Still, this gap may present veterans with “the danger of blowback when the distant battlefield comes home to the detriment of society.”<sup>16</sup> Some veterans—like Canadian sniper Jody Mitic, author of *Unflinching: The Making of a Canadian Sniper*—feel they returned to “an alien planet” that lacks the structure, chain of command, and leadership to

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<sup>11</sup> Abenheim and Halladay, “Professional Soldiers and Citizens in Uniform,” 3.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2013); Kennard, *Irregular Army*.

<sup>13</sup> Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*.

<sup>14</sup> Bacevich; Wood, *What Have We Done*; Nick Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior: The 7 Stages of Transition* (Holly Ridge, NC: Alexander Industries, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*; Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*.

<sup>16</sup> Abenheim and Halladay, “Professional Soldiers and Citizens in Uniform,” 3.

which they committed their lives and service.<sup>17</sup> Some veterans cope with the difficulty of reintegrating into society by engaging in relationships that do not serve the greater public good. Specifically, as Wood explains, if society “fails to comprehend or acknowledge the experiences [veterans] have absorbed on our behalf” and does not prioritize the dignified and peaceful reintegration of its veterans, then it risks losing them to OMGs.<sup>18</sup> Peaceful society, for some, is not a suitable alternative to the soldier-comforts of war. William Lee Dulaney explains how the peaceful, civilian life that follows combat experience does little to satisfy the adrenaline rushes that returning soldiers became conditioned to during combat operations.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, for those like Nick Koumalatsos, who joined the U.S. Marine Corps right out of high school, the military may be all they know as adults.<sup>20</sup> Without training in adult civilian life, “life [outside the military] means zero infrastructure, zero job, zero medical. Now it’s on you, with no support structure and no tribe or team, to figure all this out.”<sup>21</sup> Alex Cain’s personal account of his return from Vietnam and subsequent infiltration of two OMGs is a testament to the way that veterans find reprieve in the company of other veterans or paramilitary organizations, including those inclined to engage in criminal activity.<sup>22</sup> Thus, as Anderson reports, “a new generation ... of veterans are pouring into old clubs,” and there is no indication that the problems that often accompany OMGs are going away.<sup>23</sup>

Some scholars contend that it is the admission of flawed soldiers into the military that accounts for the growth in OMGs—not the inherent fit between military culture and

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<sup>17</sup> Jody Mitic, *Unflinching: The Making of a Canadian Sniper* (Toronto, Canada: Simon & Schuster Canada, 2015), 1561.

<sup>18</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*, pt. 135; William Lee Dulaney, “Over the Edge and into the Abyss” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2006), <http://fsu.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fsu%3A168807/>.

<sup>19</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge.”

<sup>20</sup> Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Koumalatsos, 36.

<sup>22</sup> Alex Caine, *Befriend and Betray: Infiltrating the Hells Angels, Bandidos and Other Criminal Brotherhoods* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Jon R. Anderson, “A New Surge Is Fueling Membership in Military Motorcycle Clubs,” *Military Times*, August 8, 2017, <https://www.militarytimes.com/off-duty/2015/07/12/a-new-surge-is-fueling-membership-in-military-motorcycle-clubs/>.

criminal enterprises. Kennard, for example, argues that the U.S. military's efforts to recruit enough personnel to support two simultaneous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan led to a necessary lowering of entry standards.<sup>24</sup> By his account, absent the manpower, the military admitted soldiers who were unfit for service.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, he describes how the military's systematic use of moral waivers corresponds to an increase in active gang membership, gang crimes, and gang expansion on military bases and in active war zones.<sup>26</sup> Kennard's findings correspond with the findings of Carter Smith, who worked as an investigator in the U.S. Army's Criminal Investigation Division.<sup>27</sup> In addition, Wood's research on the significant number of moral injuries experienced by combat veterans may further help explain why otherwise law-abiding veterans would prefer the company of other veterans, even if they are criminals.<sup>28</sup>

## **2. Brotherhood and its Discontents**

Brotherhood is a fundamental part of motorcycle club ethos, which Dulaney explains is shared among "brothers born of warfare ... a kinship that runs deeper than blood relations"; after military service, these brothers "started seeking out one another just to be around kindred spirits and perhaps relive some of the better, wilder social aspects of their times during the war."<sup>29</sup> Andy Bain and Mark Lauchs describe brotherhood as "a high degree of in-group loyalty and commitment and the willingness to act on behalf of the group," and a willingness "to 'have the back' of fellow members."<sup>30</sup> Stig Grundvall explains how "brotherhood" grows out of the constant togetherness and the sharing of joys

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<sup>24</sup> Kennard, *Irregular Army*.

<sup>25</sup> Kennard.

<sup>26</sup> Kennard.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*.

<sup>28</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*.

<sup>29</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge," 50, 51.

<sup>30</sup> Andy Bain and Mark Lauchs, eds., *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs: International Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2017), xv.

as well as hardships.”<sup>31</sup> Soldiers’ sacrifices for the greater good, according to Bacevich, contrast with the experiences of civilians or those who dodge military service.<sup>32</sup>

Wood and Bacevich echo Cain’s findings about battle-hardened war-fighters who are not ready to let go of their warrior identity—and who return to a culture that does not understand their experiences.<sup>33</sup> MIL/VETs seeking to get along in slow civilian life form new relationships with others who can understand what they have been through. In the quiet civilian world, they find a new mechanism to achieve or maintain honor, and some form their identity around the OMG one-percenter designation. Their new civilian identity continues to separate them from everyone else. OMGs fill the identity void with a brotherhood that includes the business and warfare of the group’s criminal enterprises.

### 3. Divergent Discourse

To be sure, not all members of OMGs are criminals.<sup>34</sup> And not all MIL/VETs join OMGs to pursue criminal opportunities. Many who transition into the realm of illegality joined the OMG intending to enjoy the legitimacies of motorcycle club (MC) life, and only devolved to criminal behaviors as a consequence of their membership. Many MIL/VETs and mil-MC members who have immersed themselves in MC culture and OMG culture have done so to keep busy, and significant positive causes have emerged from both, such as organizations created to address veteran affairs.<sup>35</sup> Some might be more inclined to believe that MIL/VETs who join OMGs are searching for criminal opportunities, rather than as a response to PTSD or moral injuries. Bill Nash and Brett Litz explained to Wood that these types of broad-brush perspectives highlight the mental health community’s

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<sup>31</sup> Stig Grundvall, “Inside the Brotherhood: Some Theoretical Aspects of Group Dynamics in Biker Clubs,” in *Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs and Street Gangs: Scheming Legality, Resisting Criminalization*, eds. Tereza Kuldova and Martin Sanchez-Jankowski (London, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 207.

<sup>32</sup> Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*.

<sup>33</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*; Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*.

<sup>34</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge”; James F. Quinn and Craig J. Forsyth, “Leathers and Rolexes: The Symbolism and Values of the Motorcycle Club,” *Deviant Behavior* 30, no. 3 (April 2009): 235–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639620802168700>; Chris Richardson, “Motorcycle Clubs,” in *Encyclopedia of Street Crime in America*, ed. Jeffrey Ross (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452274461.n113>.

<sup>35</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge.”

“equipotentiality of trauma” approach: “treating all trauma as the same thing.”<sup>36</sup> This method fails to account for nuanced concerns that might apply to some MIL/VETS, which could potentially uncover motivations that, once addressed, can help them successfully transition to civilian life.

Research regarding OMGs is largely biased; the majority of OMG stories are told by the members themselves or by law enforcement (LE), groups that occupy opposite ends of a very long spectrum.<sup>37</sup> For example, Sonny Barger, arguably the most famous member of notorious OMG Hells Angels, wrote the book *Hell’s Angel: The Life and Times of Sonny Barger and the Hell’s Angels Motorcycle Club*. Other books have been written by LE who have infiltrated OMGs, such as Jay Dobyns and William Queen, agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), authors of *No Angel: My Harrowing Undercover Journey to the Inner Circle of the Hells Angels*, and *Under and Alone: The True Story of the Undercover Agent Who Infiltrated America’s Most Violent Outlaw Motorcycle Gang*, respectively. Books have also been written by LE informants such as Alex Caine, author of *Befriend and Betray: Infiltrating the Hells Angels, Bandidos and Other Criminal Brotherhoods*.<sup>38</sup> Media sometimes join the discussion on OMGs, but much of what they present is a regurgitation of LE accounts.<sup>39</sup> Both LE and OMGs—dedicated enemies—see themselves as fighting the good fight against each other.<sup>40</sup> Because of police reports and simplified or sensationalized media portrayals, outsiders have commonly

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<sup>36</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*, loc. 3386.

<sup>37</sup> James F. Quinn and Craig J. Forsyth, “The Tools, Tactics, and Mentality of Outlaw Biker Wars,” *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 36, no. 3 (September 2011): 216–30; Smith and Harms, “The Threat of Street Gangs.”

<sup>38</sup> Ralph Barger, Keith Zimmerman, and Kent Zimmerman, *Hell’s Angel: The Life and Times of Sonny Barger and the Hell’s Angels Motorcycle Club*, reprint edition (New York, NY: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2009); Jay Dobyns and Nils Johnson-Shelton, *No Angel: My Harrowing Undercover Journey to the Dark Inner Circle of the Hells Angels* (New York, NY: Crown, 2009); William Queen, *Under and Alone: The True Story of the Undercover Agent Who Infiltrated America’s Most Violent Outlaw Motorcycle Gang* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2007); Caine, *Befriend and Betray*.

<sup>39</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge.”

<sup>40</sup> Bill Hayes, *Greatest One-Percenter Myths, Mysteries, and Rumors Revealed* (Minneapolis, MN: Motorbooks, 2016); Quinn and Forsyth, “Leathers and Rolexes.”

stereotyped OMGs as violent and have cautiously feared them since their birth in 1947.<sup>41</sup> As a corollary, David Brannan, Kristin Darken and Anders Strindberg's caution about using the "terrorist" label applies equally to the labels *outlaw* and *gang* inasmuch as "the word itself is loaded with overwhelmingly negative assumptions ... and assumes guilt, therefore it contains its own built-in bias."<sup>42</sup>

Participant observations and ethnographic interviews of outlaw clubs are rare.<sup>43</sup> William L. Dulaney, author, researcher, sociology professor, and member of the Viet Nam Vets / Legacy Vets Motorcycle Club, presents an exception. His 2006 dissertation, "Over the Edge and into the Abyss: The Communication of Organizational Identity in an Outlaw Motorcycle Club," is a rare and comparatively objective view into an outlaw club, and is as close as one can get to a view of life inside an OMG without using LE tactics. The remainder of participant observations are about clubs that William Thompson calls "pseudo-deviants."<sup>44</sup> They impersonate the culture by talking the talk, but stay safely away from walking the walk of OMGs, which renders them unfit sources for analysis because of their inherent differences. As a whole, there is no discussion between OMGs and LE, making objective accounts of OMGs in short supply.<sup>45</sup> In an information vacuum, observers naturally analyze situations with the information available, however limited. Dulaney observes that the Hells Angels were not "innocent victims" of LE and media reports but that they had been complicit in crafting their antisocial image.<sup>46</sup> Tereza

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<sup>41</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge"; Matthew D. Hanley, "Killing Barney Fife: Law Enforcement's Socially Constructed Perception of Violence and its Influence on Police Militarization" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015), 134, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/47270>.

<sup>42</sup> David Brannan, Kristin Darken, and Anders Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward: Terrorism Analysis* (Salinas, CA: Agile Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>43</sup> Dulaney; Richardson, "Motorcycle Clubs"; Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*; Quinn and Forsyth, "Tools, Tactics, and Mentality."

<sup>44</sup> William E. Thompson, "Pseudo-deviance and the 'New Biker' Subculture: Hogs, Blogs, Leathers, and Lattes," *Deviant Behavior* 30, no. 1 (January 2009): 92; Quinn and Forsyth, "Leathers and Rolexes."

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Barker, *The Outlaw Biker Legacy of Violence* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018); Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*; Quinn and Forsyth, "Leathers and Rolexes"; Tereza Kuldova, "Outlaw Bikers between Identity Politics and Civil Rights," in *Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs and Street Gangs: Scheming Legality, Resisting Criminalization*, eds. Tereza Kuldova and Martin Sanchez-Jankowski, 199–203 (London, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 2018), 234.

<sup>46</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge," 58.

Kuldova believes that OMGs intentionally exaggerate their anti-social image by “[enacting] for the observers every primitivity they believe the observers would like to see.”<sup>47</sup> Such acts muddy the waters of objective analysis. Stephen La Macchia and Winnifred Louis explain that both groups, OMGs and LE, label themselves favorably, but the public’s narrative is often misled and shaped by the perceived power of the storyteller.<sup>48</sup>

OMGs also have incentive to keep their illegal activities secret in order to avoid legal penalties, including incarceration.<sup>49</sup> The gap between the two perspectives is exacerbated by OMG policies that prohibit LE membership or cooperation with LE investigations.<sup>50</sup> Finally, witness perspectives of OMG activity are often suppressed for fear of violent retaliation.<sup>51</sup> Because of the likelihood of bias when researching a culture whose story is told by outsiders, analysis of available data must address facts but also put the facts in perspective.

### C. RESEARCH DESIGN

An observer attending an OMG support party or an OMG’s Christmas toy-run for impoverished children might conclude that OMGs are a bunch of benevolent guys who are

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<sup>47</sup> Tereza Kuldova, “The Sublime Splendour of Intimidation,” *Visual Anthropology* 30, no. 5 (2017): 1.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen T. La Macchia and Winnifred R. Louis, “Crowd Behaviour and Collective Action,” in *Understanding Peace and Conflict Through Social Identity Theory: Contemporary Global Perspectives*, 89–104 (New York, NY: Springer, 2016).

<sup>49</sup> Grundvall, “Inside the Brotherhood”; Jerry Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers: Inside the Hidden World of Organized Crime* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2018); Barker, *Outlaw Biker Legacy*; Caine, *Befriend and Betray*; Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*.

<sup>50</sup> Ennio E. Piano, “Free Riders: The Economics and Organization of Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs,” *Public Choice* 171, no. 3–4 (June 2017): 283–301; Quinn and Forsyth, “Tools, Tactics, and Mentality”; Gustav Eyler, “Gangs in the Military,” *Yale Law Journal* 118, no. 4 (2009): 696–742; National Gang Intelligence Center, “National Gang Report 2015”; Dulaney, “Over the Edge”; Thomas Barker, *Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs as Organized Crime Groups* (New York, NY: Springer, 2014); Barker, *Outlaw Biker Legacy*; Langton, *Secret Life of Bikers*; Hayes, *Greatest One-Percenter Myths*.

<sup>51</sup> National Gang Intelligence Center, “National Gang Report 2015”; National Gang Intelligence Center, “National Gang Report 2013” (report, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013), <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/stats-services-publications-national-gang-report-2013/view>; Smith, *Gangs and the Military*; John Anderson, “Gang-Related Witness Intimidation,” *National Gang Center Bulletin*, no. 1 (February 2007): 9, <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Gang-Related-Witness-Intimidation.pdf>.

misunderstood because they have tattoos and loud parties. The same observer attending a law enforcement briefing or training can hear about the lineage of OMG crimes and arrests that led to the most recent OMG-on-OMG shooting—the breaking story on all the news channels. LE is taught to determine the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* of every investigation, but often the *why* is the most challenging. It is also the most important question for this thesis: Why are MIL/VETs drawn to OMGs? For the reader who truly wants to answer the question, it is important not to take sides, and there are fans on both sides. For this reason, I used the social identity analytical method (SIAM) to minimize bias while framing the available data.

This thesis uses social identity theory (SIT) and SIAM to analyze the benefits of OMG membership for active-duty military and veterans given existing information, and to identify additional benefits worthy of future exploration. I gathered publicly available information from books, news articles, blogs, a doctoral dissertation by a subject matter expert, arrest reports, court convictions, and press releases and bulletins from the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Department of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; and the Department of Justice websites. As a law enforcement officer and gang task force officer, I also used my personal training, experiences, and interactions with OMG members and associates. I focused on those who have either joined an OMG, joined OMG support clubs, or created their own MIL/VET motorcycle clubs.

The fundamental building block of OMGs is the group, and SIT, developed by Henri Tajfel, posits that individuals derive their identity from the groups they associate with.<sup>52</sup> People identify with groups in search of a positive identity, which has been shown to have a positive effect on self-esteem.<sup>53</sup> Groups can be as simple as male or female, cops or firefighters, Christian or Muslim, and military or civilian. People may identify with “a

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<sup>52</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*; Michael A. Hogg, “Social Identity Theory,” in *Understanding Peace and Conflict through Social Identity Theory: Contemporary Global Perspectives*, 3–17 (New York, NY: Springer, 2016); Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*; Sarah E. Martiny and Mark Rubin, “Towards a Clearer Understanding of Social Identity Theory’s Self-Esteem Hypothesis,” in *Understanding Peace and Conflict through Social Identity Theory: Contemporary Global Perspectives*, 19–32 (New York, NY: Springer, 2016).

<sup>53</sup> Martiny and Rubin, “Towards a Clearer Understanding”; Hogg, “Social Identity Theory.”

multiplicity of identities” simultaneously such as a male cop who is Christian and currently serves in the National Guard.<sup>54</sup> Rebekah Phillips DeZalia and Scott Moeschberger describe these as “I-positions,” which alternate in priority to accommodate a person’s present environment, such as an individual who identifies as a firefighter at work fighting a forest fire, but who identifies as a Little League coach when off-duty.<sup>55</sup> DeZalia and Moeschberger also explain that multiple I-positions can be active at the same time.<sup>56</sup>

The OMG cultural identity draws from many groups—the Hells Angels MC, Mongols MC, and Vagos MC, to name a few. The individual members of OMGs also have multiple identities, for example, those who have served in the military and those who have not, those who are self-employed and those who have minimum-wage day jobs, and those who have criminal records and those who do not.<sup>57</sup> Most OMGs have an organizational multiplicity of identities. For example, the Hells Angels MC is a worldwide organization with subgroups aligned by country (e.g., United States, Canada, Australia), state (e.g., California, Arizona, Washington), city (e.g., *RSide* for Riverside, *Berdoo* for San Bernardino, *Dago* for San Diego), and sometimes multiple chapters (charters) in the same city, organized by town (e.g., chapters within the city of San Francisco: Vallejo, Daly City, Altamont). The groups and chapters the members identify with are a window into how they see themselves personally, the emic perspective. They are also a window into how members expect those outside their group to see them and how they will behave, the etic perspective.<sup>58</sup> Evaluating the culture from a point of view consistent with the way its membership sees it affords researchers the opportunity to empathetically understand the situation from the MIL/VET’s point of view “without justifying or excusing [their]

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<sup>54</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*, 54; DeZalia and Moeschberger, “Symbolic Reminders of Identity.”

<sup>55</sup> Rebekah Phillips DeZalia and Scott L. Moeschberger, “Symbolic Reminders of Identity,” in *Understanding Peace and Conflict through Social Identity Theory: Contemporary Global Perspectives* (New York, NY: Springer, 2016), 122.

<sup>56</sup> DeZalia and Moeschberger.

<sup>57</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*, 54.

<sup>58</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg; Hogg, “Social Identity Theory.”

behaviors.”<sup>59</sup> This perspective is the challenge of an ascribed (emic) versus an appropriated (etic) identity.<sup>60</sup> In short, the group’s version of its identity is the version most important to them, and maintenance of that identity is the group’s highest priority.

Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg explain the importance of studying OMGs within the contextual frame the groups operate in. It is the difference between studying a fish out of water and making conclusions about how it behaves in the ocean, versus studying the fish in its natural habitat. Several accurate conclusions can be made about the out-of-water fish based on its physiology—such having gills to breathe, fins to steer, scales to protect. However, only by observing the fish in its own environment, the way the fish sees it, can an observer truly understand why its behaviors are relevant and necessary, and see the evolutionary adaptations at work. In comparison, LE, media, and other outsiders can draw conclusions about OMGs by evaluating police reports, witness testimonies, and headlines, but because they are forbidden from participating in the culture, they can never accurately account for the relevance and necessity of OMG behaviors.<sup>61</sup> SIAM uses four “analytical markers,” developed by Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg: “the patron-client relationship, the honor/shame paradigm, the challenge and response cycle, and the issue of ‘limited good.’”<sup>62</sup> These tools—which will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis—usefully explain the OMG story.

Finally, OMG culture today is bifurcated by the original outlaw philosophy and one-percenters.<sup>63</sup> In my training and experience, OMG culture has a social class system: one-percenters reign over motorcycle culture writ large. The activities and criminal enterprises of the one-percenters are the basis for the OMG label used by LE. However, because OMGs dominate the entirety of motorcycle culture, the differing terms *outlaw MC*

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<sup>59</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*, 49.

<sup>60</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*; Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*; Dulaney, “Over the Edge”; Piano, “Free Riders”; Hayes, *Greatest One-Percenter Myths*.

<sup>62</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*, 67.

<sup>63</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge”; Matthew D. Hanley, “Killing Barney Fife: Law Enforcement’s Socially Constructed Perception of Violence and its Influence on Police Militarization” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015), 134, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/47270>.

*culture* and *OMG culture* are used interchangeably in this thesis and, unless specified, referred to as the latter. The otherwise law-abiding outlaw MCs that operate within OMG culture are still presumed to subscribe to the original outlaw philosophy, unless their behaviors indicate otherwise.

#### **D. AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE**

In addition to the works cited, my perspective is based on knowledge, training, and experience gained during employment with the California Highway Patrol, and assignment to the Riverside County Gang Task Force between 2008 and 2013. Specific to OMGs, this experience includes attendance at briefings, trainings, and information-sharing events; review and preparation of numerous reports and safety bulletins regarding OMG incidents and crimes; participation in OMG investigations, search warrants, arrests, and court proceedings; and interviews with OMG members, including informants in good standing, prospective members, and supporters both in and out of custody; and interviews with other members of LE who investigate or have investigated OMGs. During the assignment, I also became recognized as a gang expert by the Riverside County and San Bernardino County superior courts. Furthermore, some of the information presented in this paper is common knowledge among the OMG investigator community.

#### **E. THESIS OVERVIEW**

It was not my intention for this thesis to be an OMGs 101 training, but I provided an overview in Chapter II to help readers understand that the OMG culture that MIL/VETs and mil-MCs must navigate is axiomatically more significant than just putting on a cool-looking vest, buying a motorcycle, and doing something they love. In Chapter III, I discuss how MIL/VETs and mil-MCs have been contributing to OMG culture and some of the corresponding societal concerns. In Chapter IV, I use SIAM to help the reader understand some of the most popular reasons why America's heroes are said to be attracted to OMG culture. In Chapter V, I use SIAM again to move beyond anecdotal assumptions about why MIL/VETs are drawn to OMGs, and suggest some new, below-the-surface, reasons that are worthy of future research.

## II. OVERVIEW OF OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS

The motorcycle community in the United States is a unique subculture with a vibrant history, traditions, language, etiquette, and protocols. Groups of riders who enjoyed the spirit, freedom, and camaraderie that accompanied the ride founded this community, but several events have caused it to evolve into a dim reflection of itself. Most MCs, however, including military motorcycle clubs (mil-MCs), adhere to norms of motorcycle culture that represent the OMG identity. Dominant OMGs use these norms as a mechanism to control the culture and facilitate their criminal enterprises. The dynamics that sometimes transform law-abiding MIL/VETs and mil-MCs into criminal members of OMGs sustain and are sustained by these norms.

### A. OUTLAWS AND EVERYONE ELSE: THE EMERGENCE OF ONE-PERCENTERS

OMGs began as a form of law-abiding sport and entertainment; they were devoid of the criminal identity they have today. The culture's lineage dates back to the early 1900s. The OMG phenomenon emerged during what Dulaney calls the "formative period" near the conclusion of World War II, and the "transformative period" that followed.<sup>64</sup> His dissertation identifies the Hollister riot of 1947 as the defining moment of OMG history, when new motorcycle culture identities emerged: *outlaw* and *one-percenter*.<sup>65</sup> The impact of the riot was later determined to be sensationalized, but not before it shaped public opinion that motorcycle riders were antisocial, and signified the evolution of motorcycle culture.<sup>66</sup> Despite their name, outlaws are not the villains of old films: they are not stealing cattle and stagecoaches, they are not bank robbers of the likes of Bonnie and Clyde, nor are they gangsters like Al Capone or Bugsy Malone. An outlaw—a term coined in the 1940s—is simply a nonconformist.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> William L. Dulaney, "A Brief History of 'Outlaw' Motorcycle Clubs," *International Journal of Motorcycle Studies* 1 (November 2005): 3, 6.

<sup>65</sup> Dulaney, 55, 56; Kuldova, "Sublime Splendor of Intimidation."

<sup>66</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge"; Kuldova, "Sublime Splendour of Intimidation," 26.

<sup>67</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge"; Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*.

The Hollister riot was the first evolutionary step in the OMG culture's new identity. Since the early 1900s, motorcycle events in the United States were sanctioned by the American Motorcycle Association (AMA), which hosted a series of races that moved around the country, similar to "modern-day NASCAR events."<sup>68</sup> After the Hollister riot, the AMA allegedly made a public statement in defense of its reputation, namely stating that it was only one percent of riders that caused the riot—the other ninety-nine percent were law-abiding citizens.<sup>69</sup> Although the AMA today cannot verify that it made this statement, two distinct subcultures emerged in the aftermath of the riot and its coverage: outlaws and everyone else.<sup>70</sup> The cultural division did not stop there, however. The outlaws divided further, creating three strata of motorcycle riders: regular, everyday riders; outlaws; and one-percenters.

A new identity emerged based on the AMA's one-percent designation. Some of the outlaws adopted this new identity as a badge of honor and became known as one-percenters, the cream of the crop as far as the bad boy image goes.<sup>71</sup> To this day, one-percenters distinguish themselves by wearing a diamond-shaped patch, which in my experience is one of the most significant symbols in OMG culture. As Dulaney states, "All one-percent clubs are outlaw motorcycle clubs, but not all outlaw motorcycle clubs are one-percent clubs."<sup>72</sup> Even after the Riverside riots in 1948, which included a repeat of the yellow journalism from the Hollister riots the year before, one-percenters were still not the organized criminal enterprises they have become, by legal definition, today.<sup>73</sup> Not until the 1960s did the next evolution of motorcycle culture in-group identity emerge: the villain kind of outlaw.

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<sup>68</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge," 51.

<sup>69</sup> Dulaney; Thompson, "Pseudo-deviance"; Piano, "Free Riders"; Smith, *Gangs and the Military*.

<sup>70</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge."

<sup>71</sup> Dulaney, "Brief History of 'Outlaw' Motorcycle Clubs," 6; Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*.

<sup>72</sup> Dulaney, "Brief History of 'Outlaw' Motorcycle Clubs," 8.

<sup>73</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge."

Dulaney discusses two incidents involving the Oakland chapter of the Hells Angels that contributed to the new meaning of one-percenter.<sup>74</sup> The first was the alleged rape of two underage girls attending a Hells Angels party in Monterey, California, in 1964. In the second, a Hells Angels member performing stage security stabbed a concertgoer at a Rolling Stones concert in Livermore, California, in 1969. After these events, the public became aware that one-percenters were a threat to public safety. Beyond the public's view, however, there was more. Illicit drugs changed the way the Hells Angels made money. As Jerry Langston explains, while the Hells Angels were on trial for rape, they made the decision to "sell methamphetamine to cover the defendants' legal costs."<sup>75</sup> This use of illicit drug money to address financial needs, Langton asserts, marked the MC's transition to the organized crime definition of the one-percenter that exists today: the outlaw motorcycle gang kind. This model has endured and has been replicated by numerous OMGs since. Caine explains that the activities from the early days of motorcycle clubs—riding, drinking, and hell-raising—took a back seat to business and money once motorcycle culture began to profit from drugs.<sup>76</sup> Although MCs and OMGs were founded on the principle of brotherhood, large elements have since evolved into criminal enterprises.<sup>77</sup> Now, motorcycle culture's cream-of-the-crop designation means being the best at being society's worst.

## **B. US VERSUS THEM: BROTHERS AND OTHERS**

Motorcycle culture was founded upon the idea of brotherhood; today brotherhood is also a necessary component of a successful criminal enterprise. OMGs have always distinguished themselves from society by filling their ranks with likeminded people who embrace their nonconformity. OMGs always have the members' backs, and each member backs the group in kind; Bain and Lauchs found that brotherhood is more significant among

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<sup>74</sup> Dulaney, "Brief History of 'Outlaw' Motorcycle Clubs."

<sup>75</sup> Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*, 16.

<sup>76</sup> Caine, *Befriend and Betray*; Alex Caine, *The Fat Mexican: The Bloody Rise of the Bandidos Motorcycle Club* (Toronto, Canada: Vintage Canada, 2010).

<sup>77</sup> Kira J. Harris, "The Fierce Commitment to 1% Motorcycle Clubs," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 11, no. 1 (2016): 78–83, <https://doi.org/1080/18335330.2016.1161221>.

OMG members than among members of non-OMG gangs.<sup>78</sup> According to Grundvall, brotherhood is fundamental to an OMG's strength, which "is not counted by the number of its members but by how dense and coherent the group is."<sup>79</sup> In other words, an OMG's strength is derived from the tightness of its bonds. Brotherhood is especially important when a common reason for depending on one another is for strength in numbers against rivals. Grundvall further notes that the strength of the relationships among members facilitates lifelong membership in the group. The internal relationships of the brotherhood completely wall group members off from the OMG's emotional effects on outsiders, family, and especially rivals. This mechanical process dehumanizes everything that is not a of value to the club.<sup>80</sup> Not all members of OMGs joined to become criminals, but their commitment to the gang is responsible for the success, internally defined, that the gang enjoys.

### C. STICKS AND STONES: SEMANTIC USE OF THE TERM GANG

Two important clarifications regarding OMGs come to bear at this point. First, my experience supports the assertions of Dulaney, James Quinn and Craig Forsyth, and Chris Richardson that not all OMG members are criminals.<sup>81</sup> I have found this to be true in many cases, especially for newer clubs, even for those under the tutelage of OMGs. For that reason, Bill Hayes, Dulaney, and most OMGs insist that OMGs are mislabeled or unfairly critiqued for the illegal actions of an unrepresentative few of their members.<sup>82</sup> Langton loans some support to this the assertion by explaining how OMGs may have "conservative members."<sup>83</sup> These conservatives emphasize the pre-criminal ideals of a motorcycle culture centered around the joys of riding. However, OMGs more often have radical members who, as Langton describes, enjoy the criminal opportunities afforded by OMGs—

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<sup>78</sup> Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*.

<sup>79</sup> Grundvall, "Inside the Brotherhood."

<sup>80</sup> Harris, "The Fierce Commitment."

<sup>81</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge"; Quinn and Forsyth, "Leathers and Rolexes"; Richardson, "Motorcycle Clubs."

<sup>82</sup> Hayes, *Greatest One-Percenter Myths*; Dulaney, "Over the Edge."

<sup>83</sup> Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*, 254.

including the supportive environment of the conservative members.<sup>84</sup> Thomas Barker, as well as Pat Matter and Chris Omodt, explain that there is enough evidence to demonstrate that OMG crimes continue today as a staple of their culture.<sup>85</sup> This discussion is important because MIL/VETs who join OMGs without any intention of engaging in criminal activity are still joining a criminal organization and associating with criminals, which may ultimately have a negative effect on them legally.

Second, the term *gang* is controversial, and a source of contention between OMGs and LE. Most, if not all, OMGs refer to themselves as MCs. The gang designation applies to the largest OMGs, identified by the FBI as, but not limited to, the Hells Angels, Pagans, Vagos, Sons of Silence, Outlaws, Bandidos, and Mongols.<sup>86</sup> Although some OMGs use quotes or mottos consistent with a layman’s understanding of gang culture—for example, “Snitches gets stitches” and “Three can keep a secret if two are dead”—as a rule, OMGs resent being called gangs because it signifies the “criminal street gang” term used by LE.<sup>87</sup> In my experience, OMGs argue the term represents nothing more than name-calling by LE, and they assiduously avoid this label because of the enhanced penalties that accompany convictions for gang crimes.

More broadly, *gang* is a legal term, and has strict definitions in state and federal courts. The exact definition may vary slightly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but in my experience each definition usually specifies that the group must have a minimum number of members; specific identifiers such as names, clothing, or tattoos; and patterns of criminal activity by one or all members, such as drug distribution (or murder at the extreme end). Consistent with Dulaney’s and Quinn’s and Forsyth’s findings, the law also recognizes the

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<sup>84</sup> Langton, 254.

<sup>85</sup> Langton; Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*; Pat Matter and Chris Omodt, *Breaking the Code: A True Story by a Hells Angel President and the Cop Who Pursued Him*, 1st edition (New York, NY: The Real Deal, 2014); Tereza Kuldova and Martin Sanchez-Jankowski, eds., *Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs and Street Gangs: Scheming Legality, Resisting Criminalization*, 1st edition (London, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Barker, *Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*; Barker, *Outlaw Biker Legacy*.

<sup>86</sup> National Gang Intelligence Center, “National Gang Report 2015,” 24.

<sup>87</sup> Yves Lavigne, *Hell’s Angels: “Three Can Keep a Secret if Two Are Dead”* (New York, NY: Lyle Stuart, 1989); Quinn and Forsyth, “Leathers and Rolexes.”

presence of non-criminal members of OMGs. The legal consequences of the gang label often include enhanced penalties for crimes committed by OMG members, in addition to the regular penalties. Hence, OMGs are at pains to refer to themselves as outlaw motorcycle clubs, which matters most when they are being judged by a jury that is not familiar with the culture and may think outlaw motorcycle *club* and outlaw motorcycle *gang* are synonymous terms.<sup>88</sup>

In my experience, most OMG and support club members do not fit the layman stereotype of a gang member. Many have had jobs or owned businesses; they are married; they own homes and multiple cars and can afford expensive Harleys; they have children in private schools and in expensive club sports.<sup>89</sup> They are not the twenty-four-year-old neighborhood gang member riding a spray-painted BMX bicycle and slinging dope while everyone else is at work. OMG members often are “normal people.” OMGs focus on the business of being an OMG and criminal enterprise and, like any chain of command, they sometimes delegate their grunt work to the bottom of the food chain vis-à-vis puppet clubs or to street-level gangsters.<sup>90</sup> These findings are easily disguised by biases and inaccurate reporting, and can be unfairly applied to law-abiding members of the culture.

To be clear, LE’s decision to refer to one-percenters or outlaws as OMGs (gangs) is solely dependent on the group’s actions and behaviors.<sup>91</sup> Without the requisite behaviors, the label cannot be applied in court. As explained by Barker and Matter and Omodt, despite having a contingent of noncriminal members, OMGs are, as a whole, criminal organizations.

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<sup>88</sup> Kuldova and Sanchez-Jankowski, *Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs and Street Gangs*.

<sup>89</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*, 101; Stephen Monterosso, “From Bikers to Savvy Criminals. Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs in Australia: Implications for Legislators and Law Enforcement,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 69, no. 5 (July 2018): 681–701, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-018-9771-1>.

<sup>90</sup> Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*.

<sup>91</sup> Quinn and Forsyth, “Leathers and Rolexes.”

#### D. BEWARE OF OMG: OMG SYMBOLS AND THEIR MEANINGS

An OMG affiliation can be hard to miss because the symbols OMGs use often capture the senses and curiosity. The loud and grumbling roar of an American-made motorcycle engine draws attention to the bigger-than-life, carefree riders as they make their way past the oceans of observers. The patches on members' backs resemble the colorful battle standards of medieval armies about to charge headlong into war. And, to the OMG members, that is exactly what they are doing. The patches are hierarchical symbols and territory markers that define OMG culture.

In the hierarchical OMG culture, one-percenters, the dominant OMGs in a particular territory, are at the top. Next in the hierarchy are the outlaws, who may or may not be OMGs, followed by MCs, riding clubs or independent clubs, and, lastly, everyone else. The clubs' uniforms primarily identify the cultural hierarchy. Most OMGs, one-percenters, and outlaws wear a three-piece patch on the back of their vests, referred to as a *cut* or *colors*. Cuts are either made of denim, like for the Vagos and Pagans, or leather, like for the Hells Angels and Mongols. The three-piece patch consists of two rockers (curved banners) at the top and bottom of the vest, and a center patch. The top rocker contains the name of the club and the center patch contains the logo or symbol of the club. As Ennio E. Piano describes, the Hells Angels use the Death's Head on the center patch, consisting of "a winged helmet on a white skull."<sup>92</sup> The bottom rocker names the territory the club claims, such as the designation of "California" on the Hells Angels bottom rocker. There are exceptions to this format. For example, the Vagos and Sons of Silence have the top rocker incorporated into the center patch, making it two pieces instead of three, and the Pagan's MC cut has no bottom rocker. Among those familiar with OMG culture, the status is perfectly understood: they are one-percenters and therefore outlaws...the gang kind.

An OMG's cuts are as sacred to them as the American flag, and just like the flag they are synonymous with the OMG's claimed territory, which it will feverishly defend from invaders.<sup>93</sup> Wherever the public observes an OMG's cuts, they are also observing the

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<sup>92</sup> Piano, "Free Riders," 287.

<sup>93</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge."

OMG's territorial claim or the opening salvo of a challenge for that territory. Territory is one of the requirements on the criminal empire checklist, an exclusive area for an OMG to conduct its criminal activities. Control of the territory articulates an OMG's dominance, and the actions it has taken or will take to preserve that dominance.<sup>94</sup> In my experience, an OMG's control of territory achieves two functions. First, it symbolizes the dominance of the controlling OMG over the motorcycle culture in the region. Second, it minimizes competition from rival OMGs engaged in the same criminal enterprises. One-percenters claim entire states as territories, which is indicated on their bottom rocker, like a statewide clubhouse with exclusive access and membership. As with any clubhouse, only members and invited guests may enter a rival's claimed territory, and OMGs respond violently against trespassers.<sup>95</sup> In 1984, Caine explains, the four major OMGs at the time—the HAMC, Outlaws, Bandidos and Pagan's—divided the country.<sup>96</sup> Non-OMGs occupied the remaining unclaimed states and created a virtual demilitarized zone between the dominant OMGs.<sup>97</sup> Currently, a dominant OMG claims each state, or the state is contested by multiple dominant OMGs.<sup>98</sup>

Some MCs have started in territories already controlled by established OMGs, which has resulted in deadly rivalries.<sup>99</sup> The most famous example is the Mongols encroaching on Hells Angels territory in California.<sup>100</sup> The Hells Angels, like many one-percenters, started as a whites-only club, but the club and motorcycle culture appealed to many outsiders who were eager to join. In the American spirit of capitalism, a need existed:

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<sup>94</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 79.

<sup>95</sup> National Gang Intelligence Center, "National Gang Report 2015"; "National Gang Report 2013"; "2011 National Gang Threat Assessment—Emerging Trends," Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed June 24, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/2011-national-gang-threat-assessment>; National Gang Intelligence Center, "National Gang Threat Assessment—2009" (report, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2009), <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/stats-services-publications-national-gang-threat-assessment-2009-pdf/view>.

<sup>96</sup> Caine, *Befriend and Betray*.

<sup>97</sup> Barker, *Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*; Tom Barker, "One Percent Bikers Clubs: A Description," *Trends in Organized Crime* 9, no. 1 (September 2005): 101–12, doi.org/10.1007/s12117-005-1005-0.

<sup>98</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, "2011 National Gang Threat Assessment."

<sup>99</sup> National Gang Intelligence Center, "National Gang Report 2015."

<sup>100</sup> Barker, *Outlaw Biker Legacy*; "One Percent Bikers Clubs."

a motorcycle club for everyone else. Some enterprising Hispanic motorcycle enthusiasts created the Mongols MC in 1969 in Montebello, California. The Mongols had “California” on their bottom rocker, which claimed California as their territory—a territory already claimed by the Hells Angels. This conflicting claim became the first volley of a war that continues to this day. Had the Hells Angels failed to respond to the Mongols’ challenge, it would have damaged their dominance in the entire motorcycle culture and possibly resulted in their wholesale destruction.<sup>101</sup> The California bottom rocker compelled the Hells Angels to protect their territory from the new rival. In the world of bad boy reputations, the Hells Angels needed to defend, and ultimately exert control over, its territory.<sup>102</sup>

Some claim that the bottom rocker is no longer a point of contention, as several one-percenters now wear a California bottom rocker or a derivative.<sup>103</sup> The war, however, has not ended, and many territory-inspired attacks fail to make headlines. More often, the war resembles a World War I–style trench warfare deadlock, with occasional attacks from snipers making opportune (or lucky) kills. Some significant confrontations have taken place, such as the Laughlin shootout between the Hells Angels and Mongols in Nevada in 2002, and the Prescott shootout between the Hells Angels and Vagos in Arizona in 2010. Another recent example is the 2015 Waco shootout between the Bandidos (the dominant OMG in Texas), and the Cossacks. The Cossacks began wearing a Texas bottom rocker, a territorial challenge to the Bandidos, which allegedly sparked the shootout that left nine dead and twenty wounded. Incidents like these span the country and demonstrate the importance of territory—and the need to protect it—to OMG culture.

Rivalries are created, too, when outside OMGs breach a controlling OMG’s barriers, as well as when a controlling OMG expands into other OMGs’ territories in search of new markets, including many overseas.<sup>104</sup> The main criminal market is drug distribution. As Langton points out, “The name on the bottom rocker is meaningless unless

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<sup>101</sup> Barker, *Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*; Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*.

<sup>102</sup> Barker, *Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*; Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*.

<sup>103</sup> Barker, *Outlaw Biker Legacy*.

<sup>104</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*; National Gang Intelligence Center, “National Gang Report 2015.”

it's attached to the exclusive right to sell drugs in the area it represents.”<sup>105</sup> Economically, territory means protecting the financial interests of the clubs and not having to share the proceeds with rivals. The goal for any sales organization is the maximization of profits through supply and demand, and the proceeds are greater for a sole OMG supplier. The practice of maintaining “territorial exclusivity” is not unique to OMGs; it is a staple of the drug market.<sup>106</sup> Territory, represented on an OMG's cuts, is beneficial for OMGs to protect their image and economy, and many have demonstrated no hesitation to man the ramparts and enforce their boundaries.

#### **E. MEMBERS ONLY: OMG RECRUITING**

To maintain their status or to expand, one-percenters need a healthy pool of recruits; otherwise they risk being spread too thin to be successful. They expand through recruiting and adoption, whether the recruits are individual members, or whole chapters or clubs. Most often, recruiting involves small numbers of candidates, also known as prospects, who undergo the club's indoctrination process, called prospecting.<sup>107</sup> The prospecting period for many OMGs lasts for about a year. The prospect wears a modified uniform; for instance, the cut may have only a bottom rocker (no top rocker or center patch). Indoctrination may include hazing, and the recruit may perform housekeeping and security duties, and engage in violent confrontations with the OMG's enemies, just as any full member would. Upon completion of the prospecting period, prospects gain membership usually by unanimous decision of the membership.<sup>108</sup> This is the most common method of maintaining the viability of the club.

OMGs sometimes, though less commonly, expand their ranks by adopting smaller or subordinate clubs in a process called patching-over. This method is most often used by U.S.-based OMGs overseas. Although the patched-over subordinates are often the OMG's existing support clubs, they sometimes patch-over their rivals' members and support clubs.

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<sup>105</sup> Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*, 139.

<sup>106</sup> Piano, “Free Riders,” 13.

<sup>107</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge”; Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*.

<sup>108</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge.”

This appropriation allows the OMG to quickly increase its numbers by expediting the vetting process. Patching-over is necessary because of the minimum personnel requirements for establishing a new subunit of the club, known as a chapter or charter (usually a minimum of four members), and for survival against the retaliatory onslaught from the native OMGs. When an OMG's members desert to the enemy, such a territory honor challenge adds insult to injury and an immeasurable betrayal to the losing OMG. The patched-over club is usually well-established in the conquest regions, and likely already meets the vetting criteria (no cops) of the parent OMG.

OMGs also expand via the adoption of new or inferior clubs. Sponsorship by the dominant OMG requires the new club to become what is known as a support club or puppet club, which they do by paying dues or homages, and sometimes declaring their support for the dominant OMG by wearing a small patch on their vests, called a support cookie, which is a symbol of submission to the dominant OMG.<sup>109</sup> For example, several support clubs wear an *Amigos de Vagos* patch on their vests, representing the Vagos, an established OMG with a documented history of violence.<sup>110</sup> The relationship is mutually beneficial: the support club's alignment under the dominant OMG prevents unnecessary territorial friction, and simultaneously exaggerates the dominant OMG's perceived size and combat capabilities, and creates the appearance of a coalition of clubs operating under one flag.<sup>111</sup> This method of recruitment facilitates rapid growth for the dominant OMG, and immediate license to operate for the support club. As a condition of sponsorship, OMG expect support clubs to attend such mandatory events as support or memorial rides, barbecues, fundraisers, and toy drives. The support club can also be delegated responsibilities on behalf of the dominant OMG so the latter can focus its attention elsewhere.<sup>112</sup> The support club must also answer the OMG's call to arms and perpetuation of violence, which presents a three-fold opportunity, again benefitting both sides.<sup>113</sup> First, answering the call will enhance the

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<sup>109</sup> National Gang Intelligence Center, "National Gang Report 2015," 23.

<sup>110</sup> National Gang Intelligence Center.

<sup>111</sup> This standalone term does not represent the "coalition" or "confederation of clubs" entities.

<sup>112</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge," 133.

<sup>113</sup> Quinn and Forsyth, "Tools, Tactics, and Mentality."

OMG's violent reputation, which is sustained through the use of fear and intimidation.<sup>114</sup> Second, it proves the support club's value to the OMG and earns it the right to operate under the OMG's authority and protection; this minimizes the impact to the OMG by turning the spotlight on the support club, especially when faced with LE intervention.<sup>115</sup> For law enforcement officers who must mitigate OMGs' unlawful activities, the increased numbers through the addition of support clubs saturates the environment, which lessens the dominant OMG's likelihood of being contacted. Finally, support clubs are often used as a recruiting tool for the dominant OMG, which is necessary for growth or maintenance of their existing position in the cultural hierarchy.<sup>116</sup>

OMGs' expansion plans serve another duty as well: they are succession plans that ensure the group does not age beyond its ability to protect its legacy or interests. The lineage of the Hells Angels, for example, demonstrates the direct relationship between recruiting and continued dominance. Without a mechanism to acquire fresh recruits, dominant OMGs will eventually suffer a Darwinian loss to an able-bodied contender.

#### **F. CULTURAL MANAGEMENT: OMG VIOLENCE,**

OMGs live in an insulated world over which they have significant control. OMGs manage the culture through a distinct set of rules or protocols, and there are significant penalties when they are violated. Motorcycle club etiquette dictates the rules motorcyclists must live by, and the rules apply to everyone, whether or not everyone agrees with the cultural norms.<sup>117</sup> While adherence to these rules makes stronger OMGs appear "morally questionable" compared to the weaker clubs, the rules are intended to be universal for any rider who operates in any type of club.<sup>118</sup> Those who offend the culture, and even some

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<sup>114</sup> Charles Falco and Kerrie Droban, *Vagos, Mongols, and Outlaws: My Infiltration of America's Deadliest Biker Gangs*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Thomas Dunne Books, 2013).

<sup>115</sup> Quinn and Forsyth, "Tools, Tactics, and Mentality."

<sup>116</sup> Quinn and Forsyth, "Leathers and Rolexes."

<sup>117</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge"; Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*, 122.

<sup>118</sup> Orla T. Muldoon, Robert D. Lowe, and Katharina Schmid, "Identity and Psychological Health," in *Understanding Peace and Conflict through Social Identity Theory: Contemporary Global Perspectives* (New York, NY: Springer, 2016), 140.

who enter the culture, may find the unwritten OMG rules to be alien and unclear; criminal organizations avoid documenting such rules in writing for fear of their use as evidence in law enforcement investigations.<sup>119</sup>

Beyond existing rivalries, in my experience, many acts of OMG violence involve confrontations between dominant clubs and clubs that fail to follow cultural norms—such as newer clubs that are unfamiliar with intricacies of OMG culture. If riders want to start a new MC, they are required to obtain permission from the dominant OMG of the territory, even if they have no expectation of living the OMG lifestyle.<sup>120</sup> OMGs are the highest authority in the culture, and if they even approve the request from a startup MC, the new club will become a support club for them. The OMG will dictate requirements regarding the new club’s name, patches, logo, color schemes, and, most importantly, the bottom rocker. The decision regarding which OMG to ask for this permission gets complicated because one OMG’s blessing is an affront to rival OMGs. As such, the new club faces being targeted as an extension of its host OMG.<sup>121</sup>

New clubs that attempt to form after being denied permission violate cultural norms, which is met with violence.<sup>122</sup> Failure to follow the cultural protocols for creating a new club is disrespectful—not only to the dominant OMG but to the OMG culture as a whole—and requires immediate redress, usually through physical violence, up to and including murder.<sup>123</sup> Tony Thompson, in his article “Hells Angels, Outlaws and the Politics of the Patch,” demonstrates rare candor describing the realistic consequences that are consistent with numerous incidents documented in police and news reports across the

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<sup>119</sup> Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*.

<sup>120</sup> Hayes, *Greatest One-Percenter Myths*; Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*.

<sup>121</sup> National Gang Intelligence Center, “National Gang Report 2015.”

<sup>122</sup> L.J. James, “Why Speak to the Motorcycle Clubs in Your Area before Starting a New MC?” *Easy Clairvoyance*, January 2010, <http://easy-clairvoyance.blogspot.com/2010/01/why-speak-to-motorcycle-clubs-in-your.html>; Tony Thompson, “Hells Angels, Outlaws and the Politics of the Patch,” *Sabotage Times*, April 14, 2015, accessed June 9, 2018, <https://sabotagetimes.com/life/the-hells-angels-as-youve-never-seen-them-before>; Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*.

<sup>123</sup> James, “Why Speak to the Motorcycle Clubs”; Dulaney, “Over the Edge”; Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*.

country.<sup>124</sup> Such incidents include having the offenders' cuts forcefully removed from their person by the OMG or its support clubs, and sometimes forcing the club to disband. A severe beating or worse is the means by which OMGs normally exact their sense of justice.<sup>125</sup> Even Dulaney supports this claim stating, "Motorcycle club etiquette dictates that another dominant club (or clubs) in the area would see to the disbanding of the offending club."<sup>126</sup> OMGs may also take violent actions against clubs that create a new patch without first obtaining the permission of a dominant OMG, clubs that wear "'protected' color combinations" (e.g., red and white, the colors claimed by the Hells Angels), and club members who accidentally touch the vest of an OMG member.<sup>127</sup>

In addition to violence within the MC community, OMGs have racked up a list of international criminal charges. Crimes involving drugs and violence are staples of OMGs around the world. Often the violence spills outside the OMG arena, at a heavy cost to innocent civilians and public safety. Ultimately, OMG violence is indistinguishable from the violence of other criminal organizations whose economies are based upon the expansion of illegal drug markets.<sup>128</sup>

For OMGs, violence punishes all forms of disrespect; this makes sure that rivals—and anyone who is not a member of the offended OMG, including civilians—will not want to commit an act of disrespect again. The reputation for unabashed violence for any slight is at the heart of the "power of the patch."<sup>129</sup> This power is one of the most important mechanisms members use to further their OMG's goals.<sup>130</sup> The power and dominance an

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<sup>124</sup> Thompson, "Hells Angels."

<sup>125</sup> Thompson; Quinn and Forsyth, "Tools, Tactics, and Mentality"; Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*.

<sup>126</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge," 132.

<sup>127</sup> Barker, *Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*; Dulaney, "Over the Edge"; Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*.

<sup>128</sup> Barker, *Outlaw Biker Legacy*; Eyler, "Gangs in the Military."

<sup>129</sup> Mark Lauchs, "Are Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs Organized Crime Groups? An Analysis of the Finks MC," *Deviant Behavior* 40, no. 3 (2019): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2017.1421128>.

<sup>130</sup> Quinn and Forsyth, "Tools, Tactics, and Mentality," 228; Harris, "The Fierce Commitment."

OMG enjoys because violators fear the “total annihilative retribution for which [OMGs] are famous” has established violence as a “normative response to any affront.”<sup>131</sup>

OMG culture’s traditions, etiquette, and protocols have allowed it to endure since the 1940s. As time passed, those founding principles began to serve another purpose: they provided a convenient mechanism for some of the original, law-abiding outlaws to transition into the OMGs of today. OMGs show no signs of waning; protocols help maintain the culture, and they are expected to be adopted and revered by all new members, including MIL/VETs. Unfortunately, MIL/VETs who join OMGs for the pure outlaw traditions founded in the 1940s must navigate and participate in a culture that sometimes leads to incarceration.

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<sup>131</sup> Quinn and Forsyth, “Leathers and Rolexes,” 247, 250.

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### III. MILITARY MEMBERSHIP IN OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS

I have heard from many along the years that there is no way that someone could be a member of a group that formed to commit crimes and be a member of the military.<sup>132</sup>

—Carter Smith



*A horrific pounding tears through the night's calm. He's awake, but he's not scared. He begins mobilizing. Waking to this type of alarm is something he's used to. As a decorated special forces operator with numerous combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, he's received millions of dollars' worth of training to ensure he'd always be ready to switch on when it's go-time.*

*The pounding repeats. He prepares to head to the source to face his enemy...*

*...but he realizes he's not in a forward operating base. The alarm clock by his side—reading 3:30 a.m.—sits on the nightstand next to his bed. His own bed, in his own home.*

*Yet the enemy is real, and has breached the front door. The yelling becomes suddenly clear.*

*"Sheriff's department! We have a search warrant! Get on the ground!"*



The subject of the above vignette is a U.S. veteran with years of sophisticated military training and self-sacrifice in defense of his country and the Constitution. He is also a member of an outlaw motorcycle gang suspected of being involved in the murder of a rival OMG member. A national hero to be sure, he, and many like him who are active-duty military members, reservists, national guardsmen, and veterans, have joined OMGs

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<sup>132</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*, 78.

following every major war since World War II.<sup>133</sup> Some have directly joined the dominant OMGs, each with a documented history of violence and criminal activity. Others have started brand new military motorcycle clubs (mil-MCs) based on their active-duty or veteran (MIL/VET) status, with the goal of maintaining the bonds forged from shared military experience. MIL/VETs have earned the right to seek brotherhood and join MCs; they can only be faulted if they support or engage in criminal behavior, like the behavior of OMGs.

#### **A. THE SCOPE OF INVOLVEMENT**

Currently, OMG members operate in almost every facet of military life. They work for all five branches; in active-duty, national guard, and reserve units; they are Department of Defense contractors; and they are spouses of military members. They occupy various ranks in OMGs, including key leadership roles, and transcend race and color lines. Many OMG members are special forces operators and supporting personnel assigned to the U.S. Army Special Forces, Army Rangers, and U.S. Marine Corps Special Operations Command.<sup>134</sup> The motorcycle culture has continued to flourish, and MIL/VETs have always had membership in OMGs in some capacity. Military members expand an OMGs' criminal enterprises and reach into foreign financial markets, thanks to their reliability, shared vision, and frequent relocations to military duty stations worldwide.<sup>135</sup> The commitment and skills MIL/VETs use to defend the country serve OMGs just as well.

The involvement of the military in OMGs threatens the military and enhances the gangs. The U.S. military was largely unaware of the scale of its gang threat until military investigators began collaborating with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies following a series of events that included the Oklahoma City bombing.<sup>136</sup> Kennard argues,

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<sup>133</sup> Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*; Smith, *Gangs and the Military*.

<sup>134</sup> Smith; National Gang Intelligence Center, "National Gang Report 2015"; Dulaney, "Over the Edge."

<sup>135</sup> Smith and Harms, "The Threat of Street Gangs"; Natasha Bertrand, "There's a Strange Link between Violent Motorcycle Gangs and the U.S. Military," *Business Insider*, May 26, 2015, <https://www.businessinsider.com/theres-a-strange-link-between-violent-motorcycle-gangs-and-the-us-military-2015-5>.

<sup>136</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*, 51–62.

however, that the military was not innocently unaware of gang membership, claiming that recruiters and chains of command ignored gang activity to avoid losing able-bodied personnel during a period of severe shortages.<sup>137</sup> For the U.S. to execute the War on Terror with an all-volunteer military, Kennard explains, recruiting standards had to be lowered.<sup>138</sup> Absent the draft, the military did not have enough personnel to fight wars on two fronts and solved the problem with recruiting waivers.<sup>139</sup> Recruits who would not have met the previously high standards were allowed, and even encouraged, to join the military. Kennard found that the use of the moral waivers accounted for 17 percent of military members recruited in 2005.<sup>140</sup> These types of individuals might be at risk for violating rules of engagement—rules prescribed to military members that dictate when and how they can offensively attack the enemy, among other things.<sup>141</sup> Kennard found that almost 14,000 of these moral waiver recruits were members of gangs while on active duty, 4,230 were convicted felons (between 2004 and 2006), 43,977 were “found guilty of a serious misdemeanor, which includes assault,” 58,561 “had drug related convictions,” and many were returning from combat zones with “daunting and growing” mental health issues.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, assaults and drug-related convictions are staple crimes among OMGs.<sup>143</sup>

The military attempted to minimize the significance of the gang membership problem, stating that the 14,000 gang members only represented one percent of the military; Kennard rebuts, however, that the total number of gang members in the military outnumbered the largest contingent of soldiers that the military deployed during combat

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<sup>137</sup> Kennard, *Irregular Army*.

<sup>138</sup> Kennard.

<sup>139</sup> Kennard; Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*.

<sup>140</sup> Kennard, *Irregular Army*.

<sup>141</sup> Kennard.

<sup>142</sup> Kennard, 8, 14, 34.

<sup>143</sup> Rudy Negron, “Motorcycle Clubs and the Outlaw Biker Culture” (presented at the 2019 Inland Empire Gang Conference, Temecula, CA, March 14, 2019); National Gang Intelligence Center, “National Gang Report 2015”; “National Gang Report 2013”; “National Gang Threat Assessment—2009”; Federal Bureau of Investigation, “2011 National Gang Threat Assessment.”

training exercises.<sup>144</sup> Smith asserts that the impact of gang membership in the U.S. military is underrepresented, and OMGs are often lumped in with typical street gangs, making their size within the military more difficult to discern.<sup>145</sup> Some of the MIL/VETs who were looking for a new identity in OMGs may have been beneficiaries of waivers, which might explain the criminal-military-criminal path they followed. Additionally, as Kennard reports, “The DoD has told [the military] to leave the [OMGs] alone, which are some of the most dangerous [gangs] and fly full colors and are involved in white power groups.”<sup>146</sup>

OMGs are now deemed a significant threat to military operations; they have the potential to erode the intragroup dynamics responsible for the precision and success of military units.<sup>147</sup> Despite this, military members continue to fill the ranks of OMGs and their support clubs, or create mil-MCs, as they have throughout previous wartime periods.<sup>148</sup> This expansion will make it increasingly difficult for LE to mitigate the damage from such groups’ criminal enterprises, and the harmful effects they bring on the community. LE will be threatened, as well, by the OMGs’ domestic expansion into rival territories and international markets when military members transfer to new duty stations. The expansion will potentially bring OMGs’ criminal enterprises beyond the jurisdiction and effectiveness of LE, who will need to adapt to the changing landscape and modify existing strategies on the go.

## **B. PUBLIC SAFETY**

OMG members with military training pose a significant threat to public safety. The FBI identified some such concerns when they began receiving reports that some mil-MCs had begun adopting behaviors that mirrored the behaviors of OMGs.<sup>149</sup> Such methods of operation are enhanced by MIL/VETs, who present a danger to LE and communities due

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<sup>144</sup> Kennard, *Irregular Army*.

<sup>145</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*.

<sup>146</sup> Kennard, *Irregular Army*, 59.

<sup>147</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*; National Gang Intelligence Center, “National Gang Report 2015.”

<sup>148</sup> Anderson, “A New Surge.”

<sup>149</sup> Anderson.

to their familiarity with weapons and tactics, and their willingness to train fellow gang members.<sup>150</sup> “LE officials in 38 jurisdictions report that ... OMG groups such as the Bandidos, HAMC [Hells Angels], Pagans, Untamed Rebels, Vagos, Warlocks, and Wolf Pack MCs are encouraging members without criminal records to enlist in the military to obtain weapons expertise, combat training, or access to sensitive information.”<sup>151</sup> Kennard reports that there is almost no military interdiction for weapons being brought back by soldiers from combat zones.<sup>152</sup> During my time as a gang investigator, I became familiar with a former member of a special operations unit who joined the 801 MC and was later recruited into the Hells Angels. In 2015, while LE was acting on a search warrant on multiple Hells Angels residences, he was arrested for possession of illegally possessed U.S. military equipment, including a handgun, body armor, flash-bang grenades, and optics, some of which were assigned to him while he was on activity duty in the U.S. Marine Corps. MIL/VETs’ skills, and their ability to employ military tactics, make them significantly more dangerous for LE.

In another example, during my assignment to the Riverside County Gang Task Force in September 2010, three members of the Brotherhood MC shot and killed a Vagos MC member in Hemet, California. The incident started as a bar fight earlier in the evening between two Brotherhood members and a Vagos member. Later that evening, three Brotherhood members located the lone Vagos member, who was driving in town, and killed him using a hasty ambush technique.<sup>153</sup> The two shooters were non-military and wore civilian-style body armor. The third Brotherhood member was an active-duty Marine Corps machine gunner stationed at the Twentynine Palms Marine Corps base in southern California. He wore military-issued body armor.<sup>154</sup> He was convicted for aiding and

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<sup>150</sup> Carter F. Smith, “Gangs and the Military Note 2: Military-Trained Gang Members as Criminal Insurgents,” *Small Wars Journal*, June 1, 2018, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/gangs-and-military-note-2-military-trained-gang-members-criminal-insurgents>; National Gang Intelligence Center, “National Gang Report 2015”; Federal Bureau of Investigation, “2011 National Gang Threat Assessment.”

<sup>151</sup> National Gang Intelligence Center, “National Gang Report 2015,” 29.

<sup>152</sup> Kennard, *Irregular Army*.

<sup>153</sup> *People v. Spicher, Schlig, and Young*, Cal. Ct. App. Dist. Div. 2, No. SWF10001755 (2017).

<sup>154</sup> *People v. Spicher, Schlig, and Young*.

abetting, and his discharge from the Marine Corps subsequently indicated other-than-honorable conditions. During the investigation, a search warrant of his home resulted in his conviction for possessing military blasting caps that can ignite C-4 plastic explosives. This incident validates Smith's warning about military members bringing their training and tactics back to their gang. Their training and weapons experience increases the lethality of gang fights and drive-by shootings.

A more recent example of the threat occurred in 2015, when I was involved in the arrest of an active-duty Marine stationed at Twentynine Palms.<sup>155</sup> The Marine was a prospect for the Wheels of Soul MC, an established OMG with a violent history, including a 2015 shootout at an Albuquerque restaurant with a rival OMG and a 2013 RICO conviction for crimes "including murder, attempted murder, and conspiracy to commit murder, and tampering with evidence."<sup>156</sup> Wheels of Soul also has a reputation for recruiting military members.<sup>157</sup> The Marine had served multiple tours in Iraq and was a platoon sergeant responsible for the training and leadership of thirty Marines in the fight against al-Qaeda. He was also a Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) instructor.<sup>158</sup> After his arrest for carrying a concealed firearm, he admitted to traveling to meet with other members of his OMG to conduct firearms training. He also admitted that the two plastic training knives and a replica handgun he transported were intended to train the other members in knife handling, disarming techniques, wrist restraints, wrist locks, and joint locks, among other techniques the group had been interested in.<sup>159</sup> He intended to bring his copy of the Marine Corps' MCMAP syllabus to use as a training reference but forgot it on that occasion.<sup>160</sup> These incidents highlight the potential for a deadly conflict

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<sup>155</sup> California Highway Patrol Morongo Basin Area, arrest report, case number M2015-00005 (2015).

<sup>156</sup> RICO refers to the Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act. National Gang Intelligence Center, "National Gang Report 2015"; "National Gang Report 2013," 20.

<sup>157</sup> National Gang Intelligence Center, "National Gang Report 2015."

<sup>158</sup> California Highway Patrol Morongo Basin Area, arrest report M2015-00005.

<sup>159</sup> California Highway Patrol Morongo Basin Area.

<sup>160</sup> California Highway Patrol Morongo Basin Area.

if officers must fight for control of their firearms against an assailant who employs these military tactics: a fight for life from an LE perspective.

OMGs view military members as ready troops. Smith describes how military members are actively sought by OMGs as plug-and-play additions, and Gustav Eyster points out how their induction into OMG culture introduces them to the requisite violence and smuggling, a staple of drug markets.<sup>161</sup> He cites the importance of their discipline, military training, combat experience, and experience operating in small units along with their respect, adherence to a chain of command, and their willingness to face their enemies head-on. Charles Falco and Kerrie Droban describe, for example, how MIL/VETs were desirable recruits when the Hells Angels were mobilizing for war with the Outlaws MC: “Soldiers already, the Hells Angels dispense with further ‘training’ and simply recruited them.”<sup>162</sup> Military training immediately enhances an OMG’s capability, a kind of lethality-upon-arrival unavailable from civilian recruits. For active-duty military members of OMGs and mil-MCs, gang membership is a double-edged sword. On the one end, gang members are potentially subject to state and federal laws and penalties. On the other, the Uniform Code of Military Justice (military law) and Department of Defense Instruction 1325.06—*Handling of Dissident and Protest Activities among Members of the Armed Forces*—prohibit gang membership for military members.<sup>163</sup> But they join anyway. Some are oblivious to the underground activities; others are aware, but are attracted to the positive identity they associate with membership. I have interviewed MIL/VETs and mil-MC support club members who admitted they joined an OMG despite knowing that the Department of Justice considered the group a criminal organization and that the support expected from the dominant OMG could get them in trouble with the law.

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<sup>161</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*; Eyster, “Gangs in the Military.”

<sup>162</sup> Falco and Droban, *Vagos, Mongols, and Outlaws*, 185.

<sup>163</sup> Department of Defense, *Handling Dissident Protest Activities among Members of the Armed Forces*, DODI 1325.06 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2012), <http://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/132506p.pdf>; Smith, *Gangs and the Military*.

### C. FROM MIL-MC TO GANG: A CASE STUDY

Bain and Lauchs warn that “most ‘clubs’ will evolve into criminal organizations unless the members or law enforcement take some action,” and Dulaney’s dissertation demonstrates how one such mil-MC evolved into an OMG.<sup>164</sup> Dulaney, who published his dissertation in 2006, used a pseudonym for his club’s name but provided enough clues (members’ military service, detailed descriptions of patches, geography, and the club motto) to suggest he was a member of the Viet Nam Vets MC. He spoke about recruiting prospective members and wrote that his club “want [ed] to verify whether the [prospective member] has ever been a police officer or held arresting powers of any kind. If so, the person is ineligible for membership.... A background investigation will reveal at a later time if he is telling the truth.”<sup>165</sup> Dulaney does not explain why cops are prohibited from membership, nor does he clarify whether a prospective member’s criminal history similarly prohibits membership. The OMG’s secrecy about preventing police membership and its silence on prohibiting members with criminal records leads one to conclude that the club has criminal inclinations. This reasoning, alone, however, is insufficient for Viet Nam Vets to meet the legal definition of a gang. Assumptions aside, the Viet Nam Vets’ membership rules are only significant if they accompany illegal behavior.

Dulaney also recounts an event during his membership with the mil-MC chapter—whose membership included twelve former special forces members—in which a military-type tactic was employed, though it did not escalate to violence.<sup>166</sup> At a biking event, a non-member, a sport-bike rider, dropped his bike and appeared nonchalant about it. As Dulaney explains, disrespecting a motorcycle, even one’s own, is tantamount in OMG culture to desecrating a flag.<sup>167</sup> Bear, a member of Dulaney’s chapter, approached the sport-bikers to discuss the issue, and cautioned them that any future disrespect would result

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<sup>164</sup> Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*, 25.

<sup>165</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge,” 78.

<sup>166</sup> Dulaney.

<sup>167</sup> Dulaney.

in him “[dropping] them right there by their bikes,’ which meant that Bear would physically assault the person.”<sup>168</sup> As Bear was explaining the situation to the sport-bikers,

other members of [Dulaney’s club] silently placed themselves at strategic locations around the sportbikers. These locations were chosen according to an analysis of the sportbikers, specifically who was most likely and able to attack Bear. The sportbikers had not noticed [Dulaney’s] Club members doing so...<sup>169</sup>

A tenet of warfare is to seize the element of surprise and the position of greatest advantage, and Dulaney’s club did exactly that.<sup>170</sup>

Mil-MCs’ and MIL/VETs’ founding ideals sometimes change without them noticing the incremental moves toward OMG behaviors. Dulaney’s club, which was founded to address veterans’ issues, later fined Bear for “unnecessarily [placing] his Brothers in a potentially hazardous situation over a personal matter,” and because his “actions damaged the good reputation of the Club.”<sup>171</sup> Bear’s actions went against the club’s written bylaws; trivial acts of violence can bring unnecessary LE attention, which OMGs want to avoid. Some behaviors by group members are internally more acceptable than others, despite being consistent with OMG behavior and unacceptable by society’s standards.

Dulaney gives another example, too, of his mil-MC’s commitment to OMG culture, and its ascendance into OMG-type behavior and violence: members who exhibit such behaviors are given an award for their cuts, the “taking care of business” or “TCB” patch.<sup>172</sup> It is awarded to members who “have distinguished themselves by performing some violent form of group norm enforcement.”<sup>173</sup> Members of Dulaney’s chapter, Echo

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<sup>168</sup> Dulaney, 126.

<sup>169</sup> Dulaney, 126.

<sup>170</sup> Department of the Army, *Infantry Platoon Squad*, ATP 3-21.8 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2016), [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/pdf/web/ARN13842\\_ATP%203-21x8%20FINAL%20WEB%20INCL%20C1.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN13842_ATP%203-21x8%20FINAL%20WEB%20INCL%20C1.pdf).

<sup>171</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge,” 127.

<sup>172</sup> Dulaney, 108.

<sup>173</sup> Dulaney, 108.

Chapter, learned of a member who was “manufacturing [and] distributing methamphetamine.”<sup>174</sup> The MC knew that LE had knowledge of this criminal behavior but lacked the probable cause required to obtain a search warrant. Although Dulaney admitted that some members of the MC used illegal drugs, the leadership decided to remove anything that identified the offender as a member of the club. Rather than assist LE with what the reader can infer the MC knew was a crime, Dulaney explains how

four members of Echo Chapter ... forcibly entered the offending member’s home, searched for, and removed, all organizational symbols and paraphernalia. The offending member’s club colors were also taken, and he was given an order to report to the club leadership with evidence of having scheduled himself for drug rehabilitation program...<sup>175</sup>

Beyond the apparent benevolence of requiring the member to seek help for a drug problem and inferring the member was present in the house to receive the rehabilitation order, the four members of the club committed a home invasion robbery by forcibly entering the home and taking property. Dulaney’s club is an example of a mil-MC that evolved into an OMG, as Bain and Lauchs caution will happen.

Under California Penal Code section 186.22(f), Dulaney’s club is beginning to meet the legal criteria for a gang: the club has three or more members, the club has a common identifying sign or symbol (patches, organizational symbols, paraphernalia), and members individually (the one accused member) or collectively (the four responding members together) engage in, or have engaged in, a pattern of criminal activity (manufacturing and distributing methamphetamine, and committing a home invasion robbery). Assuming Dulaney’s MC is, indeed, the Viet Nam Vets, the MC later completed the evolution to a legally defined gang by performing support functions delegated to them by the Outlaws MC, and by using culturally acceptable violence to manage their responsibilities.

On March 14, 2009, three years after Dulaney’s dissertation was published, members of the Viet Nam Vets MC demonstrated OMG behavior against another mil-MC. The Viet Nam Vets cornered eleven members of the mil-MC Warrior Brotherhood in a bar

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<sup>174</sup> Dulaney, 108.

<sup>175</sup> Dulaney, 108, 109.

in Georgia, which is territory for the Outlaws MC. In a review of the video shown during an LE training session, the Viet Nam Vets can be seen taking strategic positions around the bar, just as Dulaney described when his MC confronted the sport-bike club.<sup>176</sup> In the video, the Viet Nam Vet members can be seen robbing Warrior Brotherhood members of their cuts, a process Dulaney calls “yanking their shit.”<sup>177</sup> Just before and during the robbery, Viet Nam Vets members can be seen preventing members of the Warrior Brotherhood from interfering. During the attack, at least one knife, at least one gun, and a pair of metal knuckles, commonly referred to as brass knuckles, were used.<sup>178</sup> Viet Nam Vets members also ordered Warrior Brotherhood to cease operating as a motorcycle club because they did not have permission to exist in the territory—the territory’s management was delegated to the Viet Nam Vets by the Outlaws.<sup>179</sup> The gradual movement toward the gang end of the continuum has nothing to do with the Viet Nam Vets’ founding ideals, but it is a familiar story of MIL/VETs and mil-MCs behaving like OMGs in an environment controlled by OMGs.

In 2010, seven of the Viet Nam Vets defendants in the case, all MIL/VETs, pled guilty in a Georgia court to violating the Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act for “being associated with the Outlaws Motorcycle Club,” the dominant OMG, and the Viet Nam Vets Motorcycle Club, the puppet or support club; both of which are described as criminal street gangs which “did unlawfully participate in criminal street gang activity through the commission of the offense of” activities such as armed robbery, aggravated assault, false imprisonment, unlawful acquisition of property, “possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony ... [and] possession of a knife during the commission

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<sup>176</sup> Negron, “Motorcycle Clubs.”

<sup>177</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge,” 154.

<sup>178</sup> General Bill of Indictment: Michael Joseph Grogan et al., Superior Court Cobb County, April 16, 2018, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://ctsearch.cobbssuperiorcourtclerk.com/Document/SUCR/20100050719>.

<sup>179</sup> General Bill of Indictment: Michael Joseph Grogan et al.; Negron, “Motorcycle Clubs; Dulaney, “Over the Edge,” 133.

of a felony.”<sup>180</sup> One of the members also plead guilty to possessing brass knuckles, and aggravated assault on a peace officer.<sup>181</sup>

This Viet Nam Vets demonstrates a club’s evolution from a law-abiding mil-MC created for the benefit of MIL/VETs to an OMG. There are additional cases around the United States of similar attacks by Viet Nam Vets members against Warrior Brotherhood members using similar methods. Although some members of Viet Nam Vets likely have not committed crimes and will likely continue to address issues important to MIL/VETs, they have been nonetheless recognized as belonging to a criminal organization.

Warrior Brotherhood, however, offers a contrasting example of a mil-MC that intend to remain on the law-abiding end of the MC spectrum. According to the Warrior Brotherhood website, dated December 16, 2008, their cuts feature campaign ribbons as the centerpiece.<sup>182</sup> The 2008 version of the website also states, “We earned those ribbons by serving our nation proudly and honorably, and will not surrender those colors to anyone.”<sup>183</sup> The current version of the website, dated July 12, 2019, states, “We seek no territory and we have no hidden agendas. We check in and are granted the right to fly by the predominate MC in states where we have chapters.”<sup>184</sup> Although there can be discussion about one’s inalienable right to form an MC whenever, wherever, and however members choose, as discussed earlier, MCs operate in a culture in which the blessing of the dominant club is needed—and the dominant club is always an OMG. Unfortunately for some mil-MCs, their existence becomes easier if they emulate the OMG culture.

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<sup>180</sup> General Bill of Indictment: Michael Joseph Grogan et al., 3–9.

<sup>181</sup> General Bill of Indictment: Michael Joseph Grogan et al., 27, 28.

<sup>182</sup> “Warrior Brotherhood Veterans Motorcycle Club,” Wayback Machine, December 16, 2008, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081216032053/http://www.warriorbrotherhood.com/>.

<sup>183</sup> Wayback Machine.

<sup>184</sup> Warrior Brotherhood Veterans MC, accessed July 12, 2019, <http://warriorbrotherhoodvmc.com/>.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The military has had a presence in outlaw clubs and—by virtue of the cultural norms and protocols—OMGs since their inception. As this chapter demonstrates, OMG culture is rigid and makes no concessions for MIL/VETs and mil-MCs. Everyone in the culture is expected to follow the rules, and some MIL/VETs and mil-MCs may become involved in criminal activity. Most MIL/VETs join OMGs or support clubs seeking the belonging common to their positive military identity—an identity that civil society cannot replicate. However, membership involve risks that MIL/VETs may not have wanted, but the overall value of membership makes the risks worth it.

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#### IV. TIP OF THE ICEBERG: SOCIAL IDENTITY FACTORS AND MILITARY MEMBERSHIP IN OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS

The life we left eighteen months ago is the life most are hoping to return to, but each soldier has been forever changed by the war; the person who now returns is not the same one who left, and all you about-to-be veterans will have to absorb the good and bad of your war experiences, figure out who you are now, and how your new selves fit into civilian life. All that is something we will all have to take day by day.<sup>185</sup>

—Command Sergeant Major Paul Walker

MIL/VETs who seek the socially acceptable benefits of OMG culture sometimes find they must accept socially unacceptable requirements to participate in and enjoy the comradery. This chapter discusses some of the MIL/VET issues that can also feed the antisocial OMG stereotypes and demonstrates how social identity theory (SIT) and the social identity analytical method (SIAM) can be used to counteract them. SIT and SIAM can also help us understand why MIL/VETs choose to participate in OMG culture without being blinded by moral judgement.<sup>186</sup> Specifically, this chapter evaluates the patron-client relationship between MIL/VETs and OMGs, and the maintenance of this relationship through positive and negative honor challenges in the challenge-response cycle. It also identifies a number of relevant limited-good issues that MIL/VETs seek through association with, and finding new social identity in, the OMG lifestyle. The SIT and SIAM analytical framework helps explain why veterans take socially unacceptable and sometimes criminal risks, as viewed from outside their shared experiences and perceived identity losses, to gain greater social in-group benefits.

Kennard's research offers some evidence that bad, or undesirable, people have been allowed to join the military.<sup>187</sup> Some may presume, then, that it is those "bad" MIL/VETs who are naturally gravitating toward OMGs: the birds-of-a-feather argument. Also,

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<sup>185</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*, loc. 2972.

<sup>186</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*.

<sup>187</sup> Kennard, *Irregular Army*.

Bacevich and Koumalatsos suggest that combat experience may lead veterans to feel ostracized from society, and they may find it difficult to grasp both the horrors they have experienced and the challenges they face to reintegrate into society.<sup>188</sup> One might conclude, then, that such MIL/VETs find comfort in the ranks of like-minded and structured OMGs, regardless of the group’s criminal propensities.<sup>189</sup>

As it turns out, MIL/VETs, just like the rest of humanity, reflect both good and bad characteristics. Identity-affecting experiences—for example, the military’s involvement in conflict, or tragic deviations from recognized standards—do not define the military any more than isolated incidents of criminality define any broad category of people or vocation. SIT explains that individuals identify themselves socially through their group memberships, and the identity of the group is adopted by the individual members.<sup>190</sup> What is important here is that a shared group experience—the group cohesion and shared identity military service and combat foster—may lead MIL/VETs to seek new in-group associations. Antisocial associations might otherwise not be expected of MIL/VETs returning home from their previously shared, positively evaluated military in-group. The positive social benefits MIL/VETs gain by identifying with OMGs may not be readily visible to outsiders, but the four tools of SIAM—patron-client relationship, challenge-response cycle, honor-shame paradigm, and limited good—can provide some unbiased clarity of SIT from the MIL/VET’s perspective.

#### **A. THE PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP: INTERDEPENDENCE**

OMG culture is dominated by patron-client relationships—for instance, the mutually beneficial social contract between dominant OMGs and support clubs, including mil-MCs. Patron-client relationships involve a powerful group (the patron—such as an OMG) providing a positive social identity to a less powerful group (the client—such as MIL/VETs and mil-MCs) in exchange for supporting behaviors that “sustain the patron’s

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<sup>188</sup> Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*; Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*.

<sup>189</sup> Quinn and Forsyth, “Tools, Tactics, and Mentality,” 216–30.

<sup>190</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*; Hogg, “Social Identity Theory”; Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*; Martiny and Rubin, “Towards a Clearer Understanding.”

status and standing.”<sup>191</sup> By means of this relationship the OMG provides MIL/VETs with a social reward in exchange for their commitment to the patron and in-group.<sup>192</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg explain that a patron “is a person or group who protects and assists less powerful entities.”<sup>193</sup> Dominant OMGs sit atop the hierarchy of motorcycle culture and enforce the cultural rules that everyone riding a motorcycle is expected to follow. As such, they assume the role of the patron even for those who do not wish to identify with them or live as an outlaw.

It is important to recognize that the OMG lifestyle is sometimes imposed rather than mindfully sought or willingly accepted. Subordinating one’s group to the dominant group helps to maintain peace.<sup>194</sup> Most clients, or less powerful clubs, subjugate themselves to the patron clubs lest they be violently rehabilitated or eliminated, and subordinate clubs create mutually beneficial relationships under the leadership or demands of the dominant OMGs.<sup>195</sup> For some, the patron OMG simply bestows permission for the client to exist, and other clients assume the role of support or puppet clubs. There are some exceptions to this rule—for example, law enforcement “cop” clubs that operate in the MC culture independent of, and not beholden to, dominant OMGs. Cop clubs are wildly different in their own relationships to the broader OMG culture and often face hatred from traditional OMGs and suspicion from within law enforcement more generally.<sup>196</sup> MIL/VET and mil-MC clients, however, enhance a patron OMG’s status as a recruiting

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<sup>191</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*, 75.

<sup>192</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, 74.

<sup>193</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, 75.

<sup>194</sup> DeZalia and Moeschberger, “Symbolic Reminders of Identity.”

<sup>195</sup> Michael W. Sedam, “Team Communication: The Social Identity Approach to Collaboration” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015), <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/47871>; Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*.

<sup>196</sup> Cop clubs mostly operate in the MC culture organized under the post-Hollister, anti-AMA-rules, philosophy of “outlaw.” However, many have adopted, identify with, and emulate OMG culture, usually in organization and symbols such as the three-piece patch. Unfortunately, there are also documented cases of cop clubs emulating OMG behaviors, including as acts of violence against other MCs. Based on my training, experience, and discussions with OMG members, the contentious relationship between OMGs and cop clubs is caused by these acts, their refusal to follow established protocols, and the appearance of escaping accountability because of their profession. By OMG accounts, cop clubs are a lesson in hypocrisy and a subject worthy of future study.

pool for well-trained soldiers for the ongoing wars between rival OMGs, for patsies to insulate the OMG from LE intervention, and as avenues for expansion into new territories and criminal markets.

For the patron-client relationship to work, the patron OMG must reciprocate by providing the MIL/VET client with a positive social identity.<sup>197</sup> MIL/VETs will gauge the quality of the relationship based on the positive identity value provided by the OMG, independent of societal labels such as good or bad, or law-abiding or criminal. If the relationship results in a positive social value to the MIL/VET, then the corresponding criminal actions to maintain that relationship are of little or no consequence.<sup>198</sup> Dulaney describes the positive social identity attached to the prospecting period in the gang. Prospects for Dulaney's MC are taught where they fit within the club, and recruits enjoy the hierarchical privilege compared to members of subordinate clubs and civilians (non-motorcycle riders).<sup>199</sup> One of the most important features of the prospecting process is educating the recruit about expected behaviors and explaining why membership in *this* club is superior to membership anywhere else.<sup>200</sup> Those new to OMG culture may find the sudden elevation in social status intoxicating, and worth some character sacrifices.

Prospects of dominant OMGs learn that their liminal rank between civilian and full-patch member is superior to a president (the highest-ranking member) of a support club. This ranking is believed true even over the dominant OMG's most favored support clubs. For example, a prospect for the Outlaws MC holds a higher social status than the president of the Viet Nam Vets MC. If a member of the Viet Nam Vets calls an Outlaws prospect a *prospect*, the former may be attacked for such a violation, with the full support of the Outlaws; the prospect is expected to establish his dominance. Prospects also learn that their decisions and behavior will affect the entire organization.<sup>201</sup> The obvious patronage

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<sup>197</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 57.

<sup>198</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg; Quinn and Forsyth, "Tools, Tactics, and Mentality."

<sup>199</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge"; Quinn and Forsyth, "Tools, Tactics, and Mentality."

<sup>200</sup> Martiny and Rubin, "Towards a Clearer Understanding," 8.

<sup>201</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge."

identification marks bikers wear on their backs further reinforce the hierarchy. For instance, a one-percenter patch always assumes dominance in the presence of other bikers. Three-piece and two-piece patch MCs dominate over one-piece patch riding clubs. LE clubs often seek to operate outside of these structures, but that usually provokes conflict as well.

Support clubs also enjoy positive identity under the umbrella of a patron OMG. Dulaney explains that the Outlaws delegated all mil-MC matters to the Viet Nam Vets MC.<sup>202</sup> In my experience, OMGs measure their positive identity by the level of respect they receive from other clubs. When the Viet Nam Vets enforced motorcycle culture norms against the Warrior Brotherhood, they did so out of the privilege of their social identity, which is linked to the Outlaws. These evaluations are publicly mediated and dynamic, meaning that groups are in constant competition for the limited good (resource) of public honor, access to recruits, or control of a defined space.<sup>203</sup>

The patron-client relationship also facilitates MIL/VETs' transition from their positive social identity as members of the U.S. military to their new identity in civil society. Just as the military served as patron in their lives as service members, OMGs assume the patron role as a pseudo-military surrogate whose identity and culture closely resemble the familiar military structure. As OMGs evolve, however, members may find the culture less attractive, resulting in a negative social value. If the patron-client relationship does not provide a positive value to the client (the MIL/VET), other options are available to the client: social change and social mobility.<sup>204</sup> But these options can be dangerous for both sides. Although in the dominant role, the patron OMG may choose to modify existing practices or provide concessions to keep from losing members or prospects, a process called social creativity.<sup>205</sup> In the case of the prospect described by Dulaney, as time passes, social change often occurs and the patron OMG promotes the prospect to a full-patch

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<sup>202</sup> Dulaney.

<sup>203</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*.

<sup>204</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, 59, 61; Martiny and Rubin, "Towards a Clearer Understanding."

<sup>205</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*.

member with all the benefits. Failing to promote a prospect after an arduous recruiting period, which is between six months and a year in many cases, could result in the loss of a prospect.

Sometimes social change involves elevating a riding club or social club to OMG status. An example is the Military Misfits MC, a Marine Corps mil-MC support club for the Vagos MC, later elevated by its dominant one-percenter patron. As discussed in Chapter II, non-outlaw clubs generally wear a one- or two-piece patch, and outlaw MCs typically wear a three-piece patch—but only with the permission of the dominant OMG. For example, the Military Misfits MC was established by the Vagos MC, and was subordinate to another Vagos support club, the Green Machine MC.<sup>206</sup> If the Military Misfits had expressed that they were no longer happy with the social identity previously enjoyed from associating with the Vagos, the Vagos would risk losing their support club. The Vagos's relationship with the Military Misfits was mutually beneficial because of the benefits of MIL/VET membership. To prevent dissatisfaction, in 2011 the Military Misfits changed from a one-piece patch to a three-piece, a serious elevation in the OMG culture's public hierarchy. Although no information substantiates a pending separation between the two, this model demonstrates how changes and favors can strengthen a relationship by elevating a client's social status. In my experience, the failure or absence of social change can cause OMG members or clients to defect to rival out-group OMGs or to leave the culture completely.<sup>207</sup>

Dulaney's example of social creativity involving the Viet Nam Vets is instructive.<sup>208</sup> Without growth, the Viet Nam Vets risked losing its identity as members eventually died. Some of the earliest members intended for the club to “die off with the last of its original Brothers,” a message that was communicated as a matter of course to all new members.<sup>209</sup> Once the last Vietnam-era member died, the younger, non-Vietnam-era

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<sup>206</sup> Negron, “Motorcycle Clubs.”

<sup>207</sup> Leaving the OMG life completely, though extreme, is still referred to as social mobility within the literature. See Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*.

<sup>208</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge.”

<sup>209</sup> Dulaney, 160.

members would no longer be members of the club they pledged the same commitment to. Dulaney does not mention any members voluntarily leaving the Viet Nam Vets. The continued membership of both the young and old members demonstrates the strength of the positive social identity the club provides, and supports the idea that MC membership is for life. The newer members who were fully entrenched in the club's positive social identity—and who eventually accounted for the majority of the membership—took offense to the club's intended demobilization.<sup>210</sup> Dulaney explains that the younger, non-Vietnam-era members felt the club did not value their membership the same as the founding members. The club's nationwide body later engaged in social creativity, which Dulaney describes as “a radical shift in [the club's] organizational identity.”<sup>211</sup> The result was a change to the club's name and logo, its primary sources of identity. The club's website shows the new name as a conjunction of the old with the new: Viet Nam Vets Legacy Vets MC, subtitled with the phrase “Two Patches, One Club.”<sup>212</sup> The primary component of the logo for the Vietnam-era members is an eagle over a map of Vietnam, and the logo for the post-Vietnam-era members is an eagle over a map of the world.<sup>213</sup> The change in their identifying symbol is an example of the extreme, but sometimes necessary, steps some OMGs must take to provide the positive social identity its membership desires. Social creativity will allow the Viet Nam Vets Legacy Vets MC to keep its founding identity, principles, and membership intact long after the last Viet Nam Vet is laid to rest.

Even still, some OMG members inevitably become unsatisfied with the identity provided by the patron OMG and defect to form new MCs, join another OMG, or exit the culture altogether.<sup>214</sup> Sometimes entire OMGs, an OMG chapter, or individual members will defect to a rival OMG in search of a better social identity—a process called patching over. Only if OMG culture or the rival OMG accommodates the inclusion of the defector

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<sup>210</sup> Dulaney, 160.

<sup>211</sup> Dulaney, 160.

<sup>212</sup> “About,” Viet Nam Vets, accessed July 20, 2019, <http://vietnamvetslegacyvetsmc.com/about/vietnam-vets/>.

<sup>213</sup> Viet Nam Vets.

<sup>214</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 58.

is this a viable option.<sup>215</sup> Despite the advantage of a new member who is already committed to OMG culture, the OMG may be concerned that the new member will defect again. If the rival OMG refuses to accept defectors, the defectors often disband either individually or en masse. One of the primary obstacles to joining a rival OMG is the perceived betrayal of the defectors toward their former OMG. Quinn and Forsyth found that, in the OMG community, “dissent is synonymous with cowardice or worse,” and the rival OMG inherits danger for valuing the defector’s transgressions.<sup>216</sup> Transgressions of this type are scrutinized critically by OMG culture and, in my experience, attempting to make this kind of move from a dominant patron OMG to a rival OMG equates to an act of war between the parties. Despite the concerns, accepting the defectors is sometimes necessary for the new patron OMG if it wishes to rapidly augment its membership while simultaneously depleting the rival’s membership.<sup>217</sup> However, moving from an inferior OMG to a dominant OMG does not apply to support clubs or their members being recruited into their own patron OMGs; this is considered a promotion.<sup>218</sup>

In most cases, defectors patch over from one dominant OMG to another dominant OMG. A defector is unlikely to join an inferior OMG, which is seen as a demotion within the social hierarchy, and dangerous for both client and patron. Patching over usually involves the rival OMG adopting entire chapters or large portions of the former in-group patron, but the patching over can also happen one member at a time. Some of the defectors abandon their patron OMGs and do not join a rival OMG. OMG culture regulates itself and universally enforces its protocols. If OMG culture does not accept the defectors and they are unable to defend themselves, they usually disband.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg; Hogg, “Social Identity Theory.”

<sup>216</sup> Quinn and Forsyth, “Tools, Tactics, and Mentality,” 221.

<sup>217</sup> Negron, “Motorcycle Clubs.”

<sup>218</sup> Negron.

<sup>219</sup> This type of social mobility is not the same as an OMG member stepping down for the purpose of expansion. Expansion occurs when a member of the patron OMG is deployed to create a new client OMG for the benefit of the patron. An example of this occurred in 2012 when a member of the Hells Angels MC (patron) stepped down to form the Lords of Chaos MC, a Hells Angels MC (client) support club. See Negron, “Motorcycle Clubs.”

A recent example of defection is the 2015 fracturing of Iron Order MC into two MCs due to the loss of some members' positive social identity. Iron Order is considered an LE club in OMG culture because some of its members are LE, and it also has MIL/VET members. Although not an OMG by OMG cultural standards, like Dulaney's description of the Viet Nam Vets MC, Iron Order serves as a model of an initially law-abiding MC that evolved into an OMG. After the club was founded in 2004, Iron Order members across the nation began engaging in OMG-style crimes, including assaults on other clubs.<sup>220</sup> This activity created a negative social image for several of the members, including its founders. Michael Hogg writes that when members object to the group identity, even if it is for the greater good, they can be mistreated by the group.<sup>221</sup> Because Iron Order failed to maintain a positive image, some of the members, including the founding members, defected from the club.<sup>222</sup> They created a new, independent MC called the Iron Legacy MC, without a patron.<sup>223</sup> Soon after the defection, the new international president of Iron Legacy, Ray "Izod" Lubesky, who is also the former founder of Iron Order, sent an email to LE agencies titled "Open Letter to Law Enforcement." In the email, Lubesky wrote that "the surviving Original 8 [founders] ... broke away ... to form the Iron Legacy MC" to realign "with the original principles" of the founding members.<sup>224</sup> Approximately one year after the separation, a member of Iron Order killed a member of the Mongols MC at a convention in Colorado.<sup>225</sup> A jury found the killing to be in self-defense, but suggested the act was indicative of just the OMG culture that Iron Legacy was avoiding by separating from Iron Order.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Negron, "Motorcycle Clubs."

<sup>221</sup> Hogg, "Social Identity Theory," 12.

<sup>222</sup> Ray Lubesky, "Open Letter to Law Enforcement," letter to the San Diego County Sherriff's Department, December 2015.

<sup>223</sup> Lubesky.

<sup>224</sup> Lubesky.

<sup>225</sup> Melissa Garcia, "Law Enforcement Officer Fired Gun at Motorcycle Expo Where 1 Was Killed," CBS Denver, January 31, 2016, <https://denver.cbslocal.com/2016/01/31/shooter-at-motorcycle-expo-is-a-law-enforcement-officer/>.

<sup>226</sup> "No Charges Filed in Wild Deadly Shooting at Motorcycle Expo," CBS Denver, April 19, 2016, <https://denver.cbslocal.com/2016/04/19/no-charges-filed-in-deadly-shooting-at-motorcycle-expo/>.

In the case of motorcycle culture—its hierarchies, protocols, and boundaries—Iron Legacy is on tenuous ground because the outgroup it joined is not another dominant patron OMG that can offer them protection. As Lubesky explains, Iron Legacy’s decision not to recognize the protocols and conventions of OMG culture makes the club persona non grata to all who do subscribe to it.<sup>227</sup> Those conventions include refusing to “have sit downs” (meetings), or “asking permission to open chapters.”<sup>228</sup> Rather, the outgroup that Iron Legacy joined is a community of independent, law-abiding clubs. Similarly, the Hells Angels defected from the POBOB MC after the Hollister riots, when outlaw culture was brand new; the challenge-response cycle that is prolific in OMG culture today did not develop until almost two decades later.<sup>229</sup> Iron Legacy, which defected from a patronage line that evolved to become an OMG, has a similar chance as the Hells Angels did at maintaining paternal independence and not having to disband. The LE membership of the club fosters its parity, but not as a criminal organization and definitely not through strength in numbers. Although it does not guarantee them protection from attack, in my experience, OMGs generally avoid conflict with LE clubs, unless, from an emic perspective, LE clubs force their hand. For instance, an LE MC member was charged for shooting a Hells Angels member in a bar at an annual bike rally in Sturgis, South Dakota, in 2008.<sup>230</sup> Charges were later dropped, but the LE member had been previously investigated for an altercation with Hells Angels, an incident his agency remedied with additional training.<sup>231</sup> Although uncommon, there are instances in which MCs are able to survive within the boundaries of

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<sup>227</sup> Lubesky, “Open Letter.”

<sup>228</sup> Lubesky.

<sup>229</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge”; Richard Valdemar, “Criminal Gangs in the Military,” *Police Magazine* (blog), October 25, 2007, <http://www.policemag.com/373036/criminal-gangs-in-the-military>; Bain and Lauchs, *Understanding the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*.

<sup>230</sup> Ryan Woodard, “Law Officer Shot Hells Angels Member in Sturgis, Police Say,” *Rapid City Journal*, August 6, 2009, [https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/law-officer-shot-hells-angels-member-in-sturgis-police-say/article\\_23f959b7-86ef-56b2-88cc-f3a8ceadc9cc.html](https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/law-officer-shot-hells-angels-member-in-sturgis-police-say/article_23f959b7-86ef-56b2-88cc-f3a8ceadc9cc.html); Jennifer Sullivan, “Seattle Cop Charged in Sturgis Shooting,” *Seattle Times*, August 20, 2008, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-cop-charged-in-sturgis-shooting/>.

<sup>231</sup> Sullivan, “Seattle Cop Charged”; “Assault Charges Dropped against Off-Duty Cop Who Shot Hells Angels Member,” *Rapid City Journal*, August 26, 2009, [https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/assault-charges-dropped-against-off-duty-cop-who-shot-hells/article\\_e7568899-cf30-5155-b02f-12d810aece81.html](https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/assault-charges-dropped-against-off-duty-cop-who-shot-hells/article_e7568899-cf30-5155-b02f-12d810aece81.html).

OMG culture, but not without friction and not without a significant advantage, such as LE membership.

When OMGs fail to make qualitative changes to the membership's waning social identity, as discussed in this section, it can result in a loss of membership, and lost members may seek an out-group patron. MIL/VETs who supplant their positive military identity with the surrogate OMG identity have options to leave if the conditions surrounding their identity fail. However, MIL/VETs rarely employ either of these options, which is a testament to the positive social perception OMGs afford their members, which often outweighs the potential dangers—including incarceration for criminal activity.

## **B. CHALLENGE-RESPONSE CYCLE: CULTURAL MAINTENANCE**

OMGs frequently engage in conflict, which creates the public perception that OMGs are socially maladjusted.<sup>232</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg explain that these conflicts are the basis for the challenge-response cycle, which is a series of publicly exchanged behaviors that result in increased or decreased “social rank.”<sup>233</sup> OMGs use conflict to create and maintain their criminal enterprises and to determine their position within the cultural hierarchy.<sup>234</sup> The rebellious image OMGs enjoy as a result of conflict helps them maintain their dominance, foster positive relationships with allied clubs, and keep rivals at bay.<sup>235</sup> Society and members of the OMG culture determine the rank structure: the group perceived to be most honorable is at the top, and the least honorable at the bottom. The rankings are based on eyewitness accounts, word of mouth—even if the information is flawed—and in some cases arrests and police reports.<sup>236</sup> Conversely, if the public receives positive information about an OMG—such as a news article about an OMG

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<sup>232</sup> Negron, “Motorcycle Clubs”; National Gang Intelligence Center, “National Gang Report 2015”; “National Gang Report 2013”; “National Gang Threat Assessment—2009”; Federal Bureau of Investigation, “2011 National Gang Threat Assessment.”

<sup>233</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 69.

<sup>234</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, 69.

<sup>235</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, 69; Harris, “The Fierce Commitment”; Dulaney, “Over the Edge.”

<sup>236</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*.

hosting a Christmas toy run for impoverished children—the group may find itself high on the social hierarchy of benevolent groups. Because of such cultural variations, OMGs’ social hierarchy structures also fall into a *hierarchy of social hierarchies*.<sup>237</sup> Although society and OMGs may not agree on the definition of honor, the OMGs value their criminal enterprises above all else, along with the antisocial reputation that helps them maintain these enterprises.

While society prescribes a particular rank to a group or person within each social hierarchy, in my experience with OMGs, each social hierarchy also falls within the *hierarchy of social hierarchies*. The identity that is most important to the OMG determines what the group finds honorable, and how the group expects outsiders to see them.<sup>238</sup> OMGs prioritize the identity characteristics vital to the club and therefore the individual member, which the member then ranks accordingly.<sup>239</sup> For example, because OMGs generally do not care about a positive public perception or positive labels (independent of some PR efforts), their goal is to be rated at the top of the hierarchy of antisocial groups. Rank has its privileges, and groups that are ranked among the most antisocial enjoy the freedom to operate in the OMG community, reap financial and social benefits, and stave off threats to club survival. Because cultural dominance is more important than benevolence, the antisocial hierarchy is more important to OMGs than the benevolence hierarchy within the *hierarchy of social hierarchies*. And to maintain violence, which is a fundamental means of communication in an OMG’s quest for territory, an OMG must also rank antisocial conflict above other hierarchies.<sup>240</sup>

When it comes to the challenge-response cycle for individual members of OMGs, the club is the most important aspect of a member’s life, above God, family, work, and everything else.<sup>241</sup> In a documentary for CNN called “Inside the Mongol Bikers,” Lisa

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<sup>237</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg.

<sup>238</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg.

<sup>239</sup> Harris, “The Fierce Commitment.”

<sup>240</sup> DeZalia and Moeschberger, “Symbolic Reminders of Identity.”

<sup>241</sup> Negron, “Motorcycle Clubs”; Dulaney, “Over the Edge.”

Ling provides a glimpse of this dynamic. In the video, a prospect of the Mongol Bikers MC—a former U.S. Marine and family man—explains that his commitment to the club took priority over his family. Another full-patch member describes how a member divorced his wife of thirty-five years after she gave him an ultimatum to leave the club.<sup>242</sup> For MIL/VETs, the sense of honor they have known while dedicating their lives to a cause larger than themselves fits right into this prioritization of OMG values. MIL/VETs also understand the value of conflict to establish or defend hierarchies that are key to their positive social identity.

### C. HONOR-SHAME PARADIGM: OMG HONOR CHALLENGES

Honor and shame occupy opposite ends of the same continuum within the OMG challenge-response cycle.<sup>243</sup> They are the fundamental OMG cultural behaviors that are based on shared group identity, and the liberal use of violence maintains the honor associated with that identity.<sup>244</sup> The challenges and responses create structure within the cultural environment, as do honor challenges.<sup>245</sup> Positive honor challenges help define alliances, usually resulting in membership and support clubs; negative honor challenges define rivalries with other OMGs and their support clubs.<sup>246</sup> The challenges in OMG culture result in changes in hierarchical status based upon an OMG's level of honor or shame, and "concern with upholding group honor is a long-standing biker value."<sup>247</sup> Challenges to an OMG's honor have a unifying effect, binding the members closer together to address the affront, similar to the honor and requisite maintenance of military service.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Ling, "Inside the Mongol Bikers."

<sup>243</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*.

<sup>244</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, 68.

<sup>245</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg.

<sup>246</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, 69.

<sup>247</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg; Quinn and Forsyth, "Leathers and Rolexes," 250; Harris, "The Fierce Commitment."

<sup>248</sup> Quinn and Forsyth, "Tools, Tactics, and Mentality"; Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*.

An example of a positive honor challenge in OMG culture is the Outlaws MC delegating veteran motorcycle club affairs to the Viet Nam Vets MC.<sup>249</sup> The Outlaws charged the Viet Nam Vets with enforcing cultural norms in Outlaws territory. Like many positive honor challenges, this one benefitted both clubs: the Viet Nam Vets were allowed to exist in Outlaws territory, and, in return, the Viet Nam Vets pledged their support and allegiance to the Outlaws. A similar positive honor challenge occurred with the Phantom Fury MC, a mil-MC that originated in the Twentynine Palms Marine Corps base in California. Approximately twenty Phantom Fury members did not have cuts, but were uniformly dressed in khaki battle dress uniform (BDU) trousers and blood-red T-shirts.<sup>250</sup> During an LE contact, one of the members explained that his attendance at a Hells Angels support function was to pay respect to the dominant OMG, and to ask for permission to create a mil-MC in Hells Angels territory.<sup>251</sup> This is the very essence of a positive honor challenge: a “pledge of assistance, a statement of support.”<sup>252</sup> The Phantom Fury MIL/VETs knew that the Department of Justice considered the Hells Angels a criminal enterprise, but following the OMG protocol for establishing a new club took precedence.

Dulaney provides contrasting examples of honor challenges, which show how a negative honor challenge may have positive results for an OMG. For example, during a public bike night at a restaurant in Florida, in a parking lot full of spectators, a member of the Viet Nam Vets threatened to assault a sport-biker for behavior the MC did not agree with.<sup>253</sup> In a second negative honor challenge, and also with witnesses present, the Viet Nam Vets attacked the Warrior Brotherhood MC clubhouse.<sup>254</sup> A police report and

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<sup>249</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge.”

<sup>250</sup> I had personal experience with the Phantom Fury MC during their attendance at a support run for Hells Angels MC in Yucaipa, California, in 2011. One Phantom Fury MC member advised that the club name came from the military operation in Iraq called Phantom Fury. They did not have a cut yet, but he explained that the colors of their matching uniform—khaki BDU trousers and blood red t-shirts—represented the intended color scheme of their cuts. The colors stood for the lands they fought in (khaki for sand in Iraq and Afghanistan) and the blood that they shed.

<sup>251</sup> Negron, “Motorcycle Clubs.”

<sup>252</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*, 69.

<sup>253</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge.”

<sup>254</sup> General Bill of Indictment: Michael Joseph Grogan et al.

subsequent court records documented the attack on the Warrior Brotherhood, making it public record.<sup>255</sup> For the Viet Nam Vets, the public record of the attack—and its objective analysis by LE—was a positive thing: it contributed to the group’s reputation as violent instigators, and to its positive social identity as a supporting element of the Outlaws organization.<sup>256</sup> This reputation gives the Viet Nam Vets significant room to maneuver within OMG culture. For the Warrior Brotherhood, the group’s defeat at the hands of the Viet Nam Vets signified a loss of positive social identity in OMG culture; the resulting shame was a positive honor challenge by the Viet Nam Vets, however, to its patron, the Outlaws. The court disposition, which attributed the Viet Nam Vets’ actions to the Outlaws even though the initial police report made no mention of Outlaws members at the attack, represented this linkage.<sup>257</sup> As a support club, the Viet Nam Vets assume some responsibility for maintaining the Outlaws’ reputation; the patron-client relationship is sustained through the use of fear and intimidation.<sup>258</sup> Public records of the incident reaffirm both MCs’ reputations, and their willingness to use violence to maintain OMG cultural norms. In turn, this reputation facilitates their control over territory and wards off rivals’ attempts to unseat them.<sup>259</sup> Although the resulting arrests and convictions deem the behavior unacceptable, OMGs consider such honor challenges positive and acceptable means of communication to maintain cultural norms: a physical manifestation of their cultural language.

Both incidents are also significant because OMG culture is predicated on claims to territory, “a symbolic repository of honor.”<sup>260</sup> Although it did not involve other members of OMG culture, the sport-biker incident occurred within the Viet Nam Vets’ territory, an

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<sup>255</sup> General Bill of Indictment: Michael Joseph Grogan et al.

<sup>256</sup> Although OMGs abhor the gang label being used in court, police reports contribute to the positive reputation OMGs enjoy.

<sup>257</sup> General Bill of Indictment: Michael Joseph Grogan et al.

<sup>258</sup> Caine, *Befriend and Betray*; Muldoon, Lowe, and Schmid, “Identity and Psychological Health”; Quinn and Forsyth, “Tools, Tactics, and Mentality”; Harris, “The Fierce Commitment”; Quinn and Forsyth, “Leathers and Rolexes.”

<sup>259</sup> Muldoon, Lowe, and Schmid, “Identity and Psychological Health.”

<sup>260</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*, 78.

environment vigorously controlled. The second attack occurred at the Warrior Brotherhood clubhouse, its home. This attack was more significant because *home* is culturally synonymous with *safety*. The Viet Nam Vets' threat of violence, and use of violence against the Warrior Brotherhood, established dominance over both, and a position of honor.

The attack on the Warrior Brotherhood further illustrates the fluid nature of group honor within the challenge-response cycle. Save for the maintenance of territory and manpower, the Outlaws delegated MIL/VET affairs to the Viet Nam Vets in favor of attending to other aspects of their criminal enterprise. The delegated relationship is a positive honor challenge and a reaffirmation of the Outlaws' ability to maintain its domain of influence. Had the Warrior Brotherhood been triumphant during the attack, the Outlaws could have replaced the Viet Nam Vets and allowed the Warrior Brotherhood to assume the position of honor of overseeing MIL/VET affairs. Additionally, the Viet Nam Vets membership consists of mostly older, Vietnam-era veterans, whereas the Warrior Brotherhood consists of veterans of America's more recent wars.<sup>261</sup> After such a defeat, the Outlaws may have favored the younger membership of Warrior Brotherhood, and their likely success in the violent OMG war.

The use of positive and negative honor challenges maintains an OMG's positive social identity. In OMG culture, loyalty, service, homage to the patron, and the bestowing of favors and responsibilities upon the client demonstrate positive examples. Negative examples center around territory and the sacred in-group ideology of identifying symbols. When the ideological needs of the organization, such as claiming territory as a measure of social status, clash with the practical needs of club survival, such as territory and expansion to maintain dominance in criminal markets, negative honor challenges intensify. These conflicts have manifested in the long history of challenge and response attacks between the dominant OMGs and their rivals. Maintenance of a positive social identity is an ongoing process, and the landscape changes often in OMG culture. Many MIL/VETs who join OMGs out of a desire to replicate their previous military identity are also responsible for securing the practical needs of the in-group. For example, MIL/VETs may commit crimes

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<sup>261</sup> Dulaney, "Over the Edge."

on the in-group's behalf because this practical need is mutually beneficial to—and sometimes inseparable from—the positive identity of being an OMG member.

#### **D. LIMITED GOOD: WHAT OMGS PROVIDE TO MIL/VETS**

As described by Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, a *limited good* is a marker of group honor, whether physical (such as territory) or abstract (such as status).<sup>262</sup> As Grundvall further explains, the competition for such “limited cultural capital” is responsible for inter-OMG conflicts.<sup>263</sup> Because of the finite nature of this capital, a gain by one equals a loss to the other, and this social relationship is constantly out of balance.<sup>264</sup> Limited goods can be traded for others; an OMG may engage in social creativity to this end by exchanging one group value for another, such as when the Iron Legacy MC traded its criminal principles for its original foundational principles.

Limited goods can also be collected, meaning a group can have multiple limited goods. Prior to the birth of the outlaw, the first limited good for post-World War II MIL/VETS was brotherhood. It involved sharing post-war activities with like-minded members who were equally averse to the boredom of civilian life. Their second limited good was the new identity, the badge of honor: being coined as outlaw. Already different than the rest of society, the term outlaw was public validation, and elevation above everyone outside the culture. The third limited good became territory, which in its current form corresponds with criminal enterprise.<sup>265</sup> Initially, it was similar to sports teams taking their side of the playing field. Now, territory links to an OMG's financial vitality. The fourth limited good was the one-percenter designation, the outlaw culture's equivalent of special forces, like the Green Berets' Long Tab or the Navy SEALs' Trident. For one-percenters, the designation tells others that they are at the pinnacle of the social hierarchy, and they leverage this power accordingly.

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<sup>262</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 70.

<sup>263</sup> Grundvall, “Inside the Brotherhood,” 219.

<sup>264</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*.

<sup>265</sup> Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*; Piano, “Free Riders.”

Despite having a measure of positive social identity, MIL/VETs and mil-MCs by default assume the measure that is valued by the patron OMG. The limited goods of territory and reputation are a finite resource—and they are wholly owned by the patron OMG, though shared with the client. For the client (in this case a MIL/VET or mil-MC) to receive the rewards of the positive social identity, it might be necessary for the person or the club to engage in negative behaviors they had not originally intended to partake in. Like taking the good with the bad, the Phantom Fury mil-MC sought permission from the Hells Angels, despite their criminal enterprise label. To seek such a specific limited good as the brotherhood of motorcycle enthusiasts, the client must contribute to the maintenance and protection of all of the limited goods important to the patron OMG. The required behaviors unfortunately have resulted many times in the equivalent zero-sum devaluation of societal norms, and the arrests of many who never intended to be criminals.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

This chapter used social identity theory and the social identity analytical method for additional insight into the mechanical *why* of MIL/VET behavior while avoiding moral judgement.<sup>266</sup> The research identifies a number of relevant limited goods OMGs offer MIL/VETs in relation to their newfound identity, which they obtain by joining the criminal element with a perceived positive status. The patron-client relationship affords these perceived positive identity attributes, which are maintained through the positive and negative honor challenges of the challenge-response cycle.

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<sup>266</sup> David Brannan, Kristin Darken, and Anders Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward: Terrorism Analysis* (Salinas, CA: Agile Press, 2014).

## **V. BENEATH THE SURFACE: UNSUSPECTED REASONS FOR MIL/VET MEMBERSHIP IN OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS**

This research has shown that some military members and veterans have the opportunity and desire to look for a new identity elsewhere—specifically, in the outlaw motorcycle gang culture. MIL/VETs who have combat experience and are searching for a meaningful, resonant identity in civilian life may be attracted to the honor-bound, band-of-brothers lifestyle that OMGs offer, and OMGs are equally attracted to MIL/VETs' qualities. Although some elements of OMG identity may conflict with MIL/VETs' past service orientation, they may disregard or be unfazed by this dissonance during their initial brushes with OMG culture.

Military service is a powerful symbol of honor across much of U.S. culture; although OMGs have become criminal organizations, many are also deeply rooted in honor. Using the social identity analytical method, this research has uncovered beneath-the-surface motivations that help explain why some MIL/VETs seek OMG identities. These motivations have to do with criminality, in-group cohesion, post-military productivity, regret, the unproven self, victimization, low-calorie warfare, and irregular therapy.

### **A. CRIMINALITY: PRE- AND POST-MILITARY**

MIL/VETs who have prior criminal records, such as those who were given waivers to gain admittance into the military, may be more likely to accept the criminal element associated with OMGs.<sup>267</sup> The military waiver admittance argument suggests that this particular population is more likely to make the transition to criminal association because of prior criminality. Although no specific data support this assertion, there is supporting evidence.<sup>268</sup> Kennard and Smith identify that large numbers of recruits with criminal

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<sup>267</sup> For a more complete discussion of these waivers, see Kennard, *Irregular Army*, 74–83.

<sup>268</sup> Kennard found that over 4,000 convicted felons were granted moral waivers to join the military, including one who joined the Army after serving eleven years in prison for robbery.

records and criminal inclinations have been joining the military.<sup>269</sup> For some, military service may provide a unique identity that society outside of the military cannot provide—namely, an opportunity to seek self and in-group honor through engagement in combat. Combat veterans are venerated in society *and* in their previous criminal associations.<sup>270</sup>

Supporting this view, clinical psychologist Jordan Peterson states, “In a [military platoon] of 40 people there’s going to be one guy in there whose proclivity [toward murder and sadism] is sufficiently strong so that you better keep an eye on him.”<sup>271</sup> For example, Kennard discusses Private First Class Steven D. Green, a recipient of a moral waiver who raped and murdered a fourteen-year-old Iraqi girl and her family.<sup>272</sup> Green violated the military’s in-group narrative, norms, and social order, and his actions speak to the concern of moral waivers.<sup>273</sup> Criminals who are admitted into the military may be attracted to OMGs on the basis that they are criminal organizations. And although broader society may have a negative perception of criminal associations, MIL/VETs find acceptance—like the acceptance they once found in the military—in an OMG, which may provide sufficient in-group identity and self-perceived value to overcome negative perceptions of criminality.

## **B. IN-GROUP COHESION: BROTHERHOOD**

The positive identity that service members attain in the military creates an in-group identity, which, in turn, alienates them from the out-group they inevitably face when they return to the civilian world. During boot camp—the first gates through which all warrior elites must pass—service members form a collective identity based on service and commitment that widens the gap between the in-group and out-group.<sup>274</sup> To MIL/VETs,

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<sup>269</sup> Kennard; Smith, *Gangs and the Military*; National Gang Intelligence Center, “National Gang Report 2015.”

<sup>270</sup> Kennard, *Irregular Army*.

<sup>271</sup> Jocko Willink, “Jocko Podcast 155 w/ Jordan Peterson: Jordan Peterson and Jocko vs. Evil,” *Jocko Podcast*, YouTube, December 12, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU8IwII8hhc&t=15s>.

<sup>272</sup> Kennard, *Irregular Army*.

<sup>273</sup> Kennard.

<sup>274</sup> Harris, “The Fierce Commitment”; Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*.

the ninety-nine percent of society that did not volunteer to serve, did not experience boot camp, and did not experience combat can seem like a foreign people speaking in a foreign tongue.<sup>275</sup> Those who have served feel most comfortable around others who share their social identity, narratives, and experiences.<sup>276</sup>

When MIL/VETs return home from combat deployments, some feel they are returning to a society that is disinterested and unappreciative.<sup>277</sup> Civil society can feel like a negative honor challenge against returning MIL/VETS who are feeling vulnerable and unprepared for the return to civilian life.<sup>278</sup> Brian Borsari et al. show how this negative honor challenge between the civilian and MIL/VET in-groups is exemplified in undergraduate programs.<sup>279</sup> Their research found that, similar to general society, undergraduate students who are veterans are more inclined to associate with other veterans.<sup>280</sup> While Phil Klay, writing for the *Wall Street Journal*, reminds readers that some service members (even those who have combat experience) do not suffer any negative consequences, some MIL/VETs feel that society sees them as “broken,” and society’s attempts at compassion come off as “awkward pity.”<sup>281</sup> Others feel that society is aloof regarding the realities of military service.<sup>282</sup> Koumalatsos explains how civilian life can seem devoid of purpose and positive identity:

I felt as if my entire adult life had been a lie. Nothing mattered anymore. I just wanted to go back to my team. I wanted to go back to having a purpose. I missed being a Reconnaissance Marine; I missed being a Marine Raider.

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<sup>275</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*.

<sup>276</sup> Wood.

<sup>277</sup> Brian Borsari et al., “Student Service Members/Veterans on Campus: Challenges for Reintegration.,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 87, no. 2 (2017): 167, <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000199>.

<sup>278</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*; Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*; Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*.

<sup>279</sup> Borsari et al., “Student Service Members/Veterans on Campus,” 167.

<sup>280</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*; Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*.

<sup>281</sup> Phil Klay, “Treat Veterans with Respect, Not Pity,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 23, 2014; Dulaney, “Over the Edge,” 155.

<sup>282</sup> Klay, “Treat Veterans with Respect”; Jocko Willink, Echo Charles, and Sean Parnell, “Jocko Podcast 192 w/ Sean Parnell: Outlaw Platoons Long and Horrific Road,” *Jocko Podcast*, YouTube, August 29, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMHcju2eAfw>.

That was who I truly was! Now, after having lost those titles, what was I?  
Was this the life that I had to navigate for the rest of my life?! If so, then I  
didn't want it!<sup>283</sup>

MIL/VETs' previous in-group relationships have also been beneficial for post-war recovery. During the Vietnam war, as Wood recounts, soldiers rotated in and out of theater individually; during World War II, however, whole units decompressed together during the long, ship-board voyages home.<sup>284</sup> Taking a page out of the World War II playbook, Wood explains that the current U.S. military practice once again rotates entire units into and out of theater instead of replacing members individually, as in Vietnam.<sup>285</sup> He also explains that a modern approach to therapy for returning MIL/VETs depends on the forgiveness and acceptance of their community, and the in-group identity important to the individual.<sup>286</sup> In response to a negative honor challenge from an unappreciative society, difficulties integrating, and the inability for some to relate their experiences to their family and friends, some might seek the group therapy Wood recommends in the most unsuspected patrons.

### C. DRESS SHOES CAMP: POST-MILITARY PRODUCTIVITY

Among former Marine Corps and Army infantrymen, some feel as if they have “crossed the Rubicon”: they are unable to achieve a positive social identity in normal civilian life.<sup>287</sup> Some MIL/VETs joined the military “as emerging adults” straight out of high school and with minimal life experience.<sup>288</sup> Society values productive membership, and one way to achieve this is through employment, which is a measure of social status and positive identity. They dedicated years of their life to the military and some have no obvious transferable military-to-civilian job skills.<sup>289</sup> While many noncombat military

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<sup>283</sup> Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*, 88.

<sup>284</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*.

<sup>285</sup> Wood.

<sup>286</sup> Wood.

<sup>287</sup> Stephen Dando-Collins, *Caesar's Legion: The Epic Saga of Julius Caesar's Elite Tenth Legion and the Armies of Rome* (New York, NY: Wiley, 2002).

<sup>288</sup> Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*; Wood, *What Have We Done*; Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*.

<sup>289</sup> Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*.

jobs have civilian applications—such as mechanics, medical assistants, or jobs in the food service, to name a few—many others, for example, infantry, do not directly translate into marketable civilian job skills. An added sense of uselessness accompanies an infantryman on an already “alien planet.”<sup>290</sup> As discussed earlier, social mobility is subject to the permeability of the out-group, which in this case is the transition from military service to civil society.<sup>291</sup> The infantry tools that provided the positive social identity and created opportunities for honor, such as hand-to-hand combat, marksmanship, booby-traps, battlefield trauma, and bayonet skills, do not have many civilian equivalents. Army Colonel David Sutherland told Wood, “What keeps us alive on the battlefield is anger, paranoia, hypervigilance, sleeplessness.... And the sleeplessness, paranoia, hypervigilance, being aggressive, doesn’t just turn off....”<sup>292</sup>

Civil society’s in-group identity is potentially even more daunting for special operations members, who are trained to kill efficiently. Although these MIL/VETs are not necessarily looking to be killers, it is an attractive option, as it means they will be valued for the skills they have become so proficient in—especially since swinging a hammer or working the French fry station for minimum wage may feel even further from the post-military life they envisioned.<sup>293</sup> Wood describes the emic dilemma of soldiers who struggle to find a positive identity through civilian employment:

Also gone: your stature as a successful warrior. An army sergeant who’s taken his squad to war and brought his soldiers back safe? No civilian can understand the field wisdom, the tactical cunning, that accomplishment demanded; the patience required, the hours waiting sleepless and rigid with worry as a team is late returning from night patrol. The pressure-tested leadership it all took. For some, leadership in wartime, responsibility for a few soldiers or hundreds, is the high point of a lifetime. Yet that skill, and the authority it conferred, seem to belong back there in the war; here at home the sergeant is just another guy nursing a late-night beer, or he’s the

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<sup>290</sup> Mitic, *Unflinching*, loc. 1563.

<sup>291</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*.

<sup>292</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*, loc. 3091.

<sup>293</sup> Wood; Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*.

unemployed new father trying to juggle rent and car payments, the electric bill and a wife who's used to operating on her own.<sup>294</sup>

Some jobs, with additional certification in some cases, are suitable for infantrymen—for instance, being a bouncer, teaching firearms classes, or contracting to teach tactical and survival skills.<sup>295</sup> However, few of these jobs exist in the market because it is already saturated with volumes of returning infantry.<sup>296</sup> Education can help MIL/VETs assimilate back into civil society, but some MIL/VETs have difficulty with college curricula, which can limit employment opportunities.<sup>297</sup> If employment creates positive social value in civil society, and MIL/VETs have difficulty finding gainful and identity-fulfilling employment, the disconnect leaves some returning MIL/VETs seeking fulfillment through patronage in groups that value their existing identity.

Smith and Kennard found that many gang members seek patronage in the military for a better life, and for a positive social identity that their gangs could no longer provide.<sup>298</sup> They want to escape awful environments and hope to achieve the positive benefits and opportunities that military service promises. Gang members make this transition expecting to do well; if they do not, they may regress and return to the life they came from. Recounting his experience in Vietnam, Richard Valdemar describes how the pre-military gang experience made many gang members excellent soldiers and a positive value to their new military patron.<sup>299</sup> For others, as Kennard discusses, the post-military positive identity was elusive because of criminal records in their younger, pre-military lives.<sup>300</sup> The patronage change to peaceful society is already difficult for many who served honorably, and who successfully avoided the criminal life when they discharged. The

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<sup>294</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*, loc. 2988.

<sup>295</sup> Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*.

<sup>296</sup> Jocko Willink, "Jocko Podcast 118 with Dan Crenshaw—Always Find a Mission," *Jocko Podcast*, YouTube, March 21, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71kbGdc1Alc>.

<sup>297</sup> Borsari et al., "Student Service Members/Veterans on Campus."

<sup>298</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*; Kennard, *Irregular Army*.

<sup>299</sup> Valdemar, "Criminal Gangs in the Military."

<sup>300</sup> Kennard, *Irregular Army*.

change is less forgiving for those with pre-military criminal convictions, and it stands to be reasoned that things would be even worse for those who received a dishonorable or other-than-honorable discharge. Jerry Langton and Smith explain that some such MIL/VETs have joined OMGs due to limited opportunities for income in the absence of a legitimate job.<sup>301</sup> In this case, any positive identity will do.

#### **D. SECOND-CHANCE HELL: REGRET**

According to Wood, many MIL/VETs carry the painful burden of moral injury with them, which conflicts with their character and deeply held religious beliefs, such as the necessity for some soldiers to kill a child in combat to save American lives.<sup>302</sup> This example illustrates competing in-group narratives. Wood explains that before the military, soldiers enjoyed the positive identity of a moral culture, sometimes backed by religious philosophy that prohibited killing because life, especially a child's life, is sacred.<sup>303</sup> On the other hand, Wood explains, during the oath of enlistment, soldiers pledge their support to another patron, the military.<sup>304</sup> Keeping their oath and doing what is necessary in combat, however horrible, is evaluated as a positive honor challenge, as it likely prevents American deaths.<sup>305</sup> Some soldiers struggle with their actions, which can be interpreted as shameful by their pre-war, civilian in-group narrative.<sup>306</sup> In contrast, failure to maintain the warrior ethos by not committing acts necessary to support the effort or to protect American lives can be considered shameful by the military in-group narrative.<sup>307</sup> Society's perceived failure to acknowledge, understand, and forgive when necessary leaves some MIL/VETs feeling ostracized and in a state of social dishonor.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*; Smith, *Gangs and the Military*.

<sup>302</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*, loc. 94.

<sup>303</sup> Wood, loc. 785.

<sup>304</sup> Wood.

<sup>305</sup> Wood.

<sup>306</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*.

<sup>307</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg.

<sup>308</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, 78.

Wood also explains that moral injuries are sometimes caused by the actions or inactions of the MIL/VETs, or decisions beyond their control that may have caused their comrades to suffer injury or death.<sup>309</sup> From Mitic's perspective, soldiers can never be adequately prepared for the impact of peer casualties; any preparation is exponentially different when compared to the real deal.<sup>310</sup> For some, the moral injury will manifest as regret for discharging from the military and leaving their brothers behind to fight without them. As retired Army Captain Sean Parnell explains:

Regret is life's worst poison. It just is. It eats at you forever for the rest of your life. You never want to look back on your life and say the word should.... I hate the word should.... I also hate it because I don't ever want to look back on my life and say God I should've done this differently.<sup>311</sup>

For others, regret can manifest as an identity crisis for leaving the military while being unprepared for civilian life.<sup>312</sup> For some MIL/VETs, leaving the battlefield means losing any future opportunity for redemption, or an opportunity to do something different—or correctly—the next time. A useful analogy is when a person loses a fight and then obsesses over the negative honor for days, dwelling on what they should have done differently. With the War on Terror ending, some opportunities to redeem a positive identity from combat, such as employing a different tactic and preventing the catastrophe, will never be available again. This identity shift is important to recognize because without an opportunity for redemption, one might indefinitely suffer from a negative social identity, unable to assimilate to society's in-group.<sup>313</sup>

## **E. GET SOME: THE UNPROVEN SELF**

Quinn and Forsyth explain that, for those who are driven by excitement, war can potentially satisfy those needs.<sup>314</sup> Many who went to combat wanted to *GET SOME!*

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<sup>309</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*, loc. 223, 228.

<sup>310</sup> Mitic, *Unflinching*, loc. 1983.

<sup>311</sup> Willink, Charles, and Parnell, "Outlaw Platoons Long and Horrific Road."

<sup>312</sup> Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*; Mitic, *Unflinching*.

<sup>313</sup> Brannan, , and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 78.

<sup>314</sup> Quinn and Forsyth, "Tools, Tactics, and Mentality," 221.

(engage in armed combat with the enemy), especially those in the elite combat patronage lines like Navy SEALs, Green Berets, and hardcore infantry. Valdemar opines that, especially for those brought up in tough neighborhoods, “becoming a macho warrior was every boy’s dream.”<sup>315</sup> Becoming a warrior is complemented by the positive social image associated with the special forces units listed above. Success in combat is a positive honor challenge, and even a courageous death at the hands of the enemy is a source of in-group honor.<sup>316</sup> Those who have engaged in armed combat, a negative honor challenge to America’s enemies, represent “an elite and ancient brotherhood of arms.”<sup>317</sup> Warriors can validate their membership in the warrior class by facing an enemy in combat.<sup>318</sup> A lack of opportunity to face the enemy may feel like a lack of validation as a warrior.

Many soldiers, however, do not experience the specific honor of combat. Some deploy to combat zones but end up in non-combat units like transportation, water reclamation, or finance. Frontline military culture—the in-group that is doing the fighting as opposed to the out-group that is supporting the fighters—shares a positive social identity according to the warrior ethos. Frontline soldiers use negative honor challenges through military cultural vernacular to describe the out-group: terms like POG (*person other than grunt*, which is every other job in the military except for infantry), or REMF (*rear echelon mother fucker*, which is everyone who supports the frontline troops).<sup>319</sup> These pejorative terms are often used by frontline troops to refer to supporting personnel, a badge of shame when comparing responsibilities and experiences.

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<sup>315</sup> Valdemar, “Criminal Gangs in the Military.”

<sup>316</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strinberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*, 69.

<sup>317</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*, loc. 417.

<sup>318</sup> Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*.

<sup>319</sup> Peter Sessum, “Why Grunts Hate POGs,” *The Dogtag Chronicles* (blog), April 4, 2012, <https://thedogtagchronicles.com/2012/04/04/why-grunts-hate-pogs/>; “Glossary of Military Acronyms,” Military.com, April 4, 2012, <https://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/glossary-of-military-acronyms.html>.

Klay, a Marine Corps veteran and author, speaks of society's overestimation that MIL/VETs have experienced combat.<sup>320</sup> As a result, he explains, society tends to bestow upon veterans a sense of pity for the trauma they are presumed to have suffered because of actual combat. When misapplied, it ventures into the greater shame of stolen valor, which means wearing unearned military decorations.<sup>321</sup> With the War on Terror coming to an end, those who wanted to experience combat and never got the chance may never get the opportunity. They missed the ultimate test of warriorhood, never achieving the positive identity their peers in uniform did.

Although not an OMG member, Andres Raya models the loss of personal honor and a worst-case example of this concern. In my experience, a gang's in-group identity rests on the limited good of respect, which in the OMG culture is synonymous with fear.<sup>322</sup> Respect is measured through a public evaluation of gang members' individual and collective reputation, and killing an enemy is the highest honor. Raya was a Norteno gang member who spent seven months in Iraq but did not experience combat.<sup>323</sup> On January 8, 2005, he killed Ceres Police Department Sergeant Howard Stevenson and wounded his partner, Officer Sam Ryno, using military-type tactics and an SKS assault rifle. According to Kennard, Raya "hadn't seen any combat. On this night he was determined to make up for it."<sup>324</sup> Overseas, the enemy was the insurgent fighters trying to oust their American occupiers and American sympathizers. In the gang world, gangs are the insurgent forces trying to oust the police occupiers and rival gangs. Killing any enemy will do, but killing a police officer is the highest honor. Perhaps returning to his Norteno gang without killing any enemy was sufficiently shameful to force his hand, the fast track to redemption.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Klay, "Treat Veterans with Respect."

<sup>321</sup> Bryant Jordan, "Stolen Valor Act Clears Senate," *Military.com*, May 23, 2013, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2013/05/23/stolen-valor-act-clears-senate.html>.

<sup>322</sup> Falco and Droban, *Vagos, Mongols, and Outlaws*, 82; Negron, "Motorcycle Clubs."

<sup>323</sup> Matt Kennard, *Irregular Army*; Smith, *Gangs and the Military*; Valdemar, "Criminal Gangs in the Military."

<sup>324</sup> Kennard, *Irregular Army*, 63.

<sup>325</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 78.

## F. VICTIMIZATION: DISCARDING THE WARRIOR IDENTITY

America's soldiers volunteered to be the warriors the country could depend on to defend the Constitution and all those under its watch: the protectors. Their enlistment was a positive honor challenge to their military patronage, affirmed during their oath of enlistment.<sup>326</sup> Under that identity, they went to combat, fought, bled, and died for their country. Every engagement with the enemy was a reaffirmation of the honor of the warrior class, whether or not the societal out-group knew, and whether or not it cared.<sup>327</sup> Many joined the military when they were eighteen years old and their positive warrior identity obligations consumed their entire adult life.<sup>328</sup> After discharging from honorable service, their patronage transferred to civil society. In civil society, Grundvall explains, "the use of force had been monopolized in the hands of the state authorities, that is, the police."<sup>329</sup> Under the new patronage line, the legitimate warriors are LE and active-duty military during combat—and veterans are neither.<sup>330</sup> Koumalatsos explains that for some, civilian life is already a potential strain on their mental health, and some have difficulty transitioning from warrior to civilian.<sup>331</sup> The need to be protected, even by LE, can be a source of shame for those who subscribe to the warrior ethos and do not feel they need protection. Defecting from society's ascribed shame may feel like MIL/VETs' only legitimate alternative.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, 69.

<sup>327</sup> Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*.

<sup>328</sup> Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*.

<sup>329</sup> Grundvall, "Inside the Brotherhood," 216.

<sup>330</sup> J. Bryan Hehir, "The Just War Ethic and the Military Support of Science and Technology," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 577, no. 1 (December 1, 1989): 99–105, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.1989.tb15054.x>.

<sup>331</sup> Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*, 125. 128.

<sup>332</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*.

## **G. LOW-CALORIE WARFARE: SUPPLEMENTING THE WARRIOR IDENTITY**

As Lisa Ling surmises, OMG members “are willing to die and kill for each other, and there are not that many other outlets that allow men to feel that kind of Alpha way.”<sup>333</sup> Many MIL/VETs achieved a positive social identity through positive honor challenges and commitments while standing shoulder-to-shoulder with their brothers in military service and sometimes combat. For some, membership in OMGs extends their military life, with similar commitments to achieve similar honors. For others, OMG membership is a tool to resolve a negative social identity sometimes associated with, and other times due to a lack of, socially acceptable options. For MIL/VETs, transitioning from military service to civil society may eliminate opportunities to obtain the positive social identity that escaped their grasp during military service or combat. Others may be drawn to pre-military identities that were already socially unacceptable. The absence of opportunities may have contributed to the sense of longing and may have contributed to their decision to join an OMG. Unable to travel back in time or return to combat, the obsession with redeeming a personal position of honor cannot be satisfied as an ordinary citizen. As Charles Falco says, “The seduction of being [an OMG member] was an addiction,” the closest many will ever get to domestic combat.<sup>334</sup>

In search of a positive identity, some MIL/VETs engage in negative honor challenges against societal norms. While navigating the liminal state between the honor of military service and the perceived loss of honor in civilian life, those who cannot quite adjust engage in a series of negative patron-client relationships, according to society’s etic perspective. In contrast, through the emic perspective of OMG membership, they honorably serve an in-group narrative that provides a positive identity, and unique opportunities to redeem past regrets and transgressions.<sup>335</sup> At the same time, however, these opportunities thrust MIL/VETs into a life of crime. Although not enemies in far-away

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<sup>333</sup> Ling, “Inside the Mongol Bikers.”

<sup>334</sup> Falco and Droban, *Vagos, Mongols, and Outlaws*, 146.

<sup>335</sup> Ling, “Inside the Mongol Bikers.”

lands, OMGs are constantly at war against their rivals, and act as a surrogate for many of the things that are important to the MIL/VET. Psychologist Brett Litz developed coping strategies that focused on the necessity of asking soldiers about their adjustment related to their military service and combat identities.<sup>336</sup> OMG warfare is not the addiction these MIL/VETs were searching for; it is never as good as actual warfare, but provides just enough “to jolt the adrenaline”: a *low-calorie warfare*.<sup>337</sup>

The new relationships, achievements, celebrations, and privileges for successfully ascending into OMG membership mimic such military rites of passage as completing boot camp and achieving promotions and leadership roles. Dulaney’s description of “the relatively antisocial characteristic of loud exhaust pipes and the large, imposing size of the bikes,” and the OMG life of partying, loud noises, police sirens and helicopters, revving motors, yelling and fighting, loud music, the occasional gunfire, and maybe even a call to arms might be just what the doctor ordered.<sup>338</sup>

Another incentive to join motorcycle culture is the U.S. military’s program for pre-ordering and purchasing vehicles tax-free before returning from overseas, including the iconic Harley Davidson motorcycle, the staple of OMGs. Additionally, the Harley’s reputation for oil leaks and breaking down might also appeal to the military tank or vehicle mechanic whose life centered around fixing the weapons of war, and ensuring they were always ready to perform in combat against a rival. America calls them heroes for serving in far-away lands, and now their new OMG brothers embrace them to carry on new fights against new rivals.

More importantly, OMGs provide military members with an extended positive identity and the continuation of an identity they found important during their military careers.<sup>339</sup> That identity is based on the bonds of military life, which began in boot camp and culminated, for some, during the horrors of combat, forging a shared identity few

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<sup>336</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*, loc. 3319.

<sup>337</sup> Wood, loc. 2893.

<sup>338</sup> Dulaney, “A Brief History of ‘Outlaw’ Motorcycle Clubs,” 4.

<sup>339</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*; Dulaney, “Over the Edge.”

outsiders can fully comprehend.<sup>340</sup> Few nonmilitary options offer a semblance of those bonds or are able to reassure MIL/VETs that their identity will endure when they leave the military.<sup>341</sup> Additionally, MIL/VETs' leadership ability and combat experience complement the constant state of warfare among OMGs rivaling over territory. And for MIL/VETs who are struggling to find employment, OMGs sometimes offer work and opportunities to make money, even if by selling drugs.<sup>342</sup> LE is an option for those without criminal records or other disqualifiers. However, if the transition to peaceful civilian life is happening too slowly for a MIL/VET, as Wood suggests, then the year or more of most agencies' hiring processes might be unbearable—particularly if there ends up being no job at the other end.

## **H. IRREGULAR THERAPY: UNCOMMON CURE**

Wood explains how the trauma sustained in combat is unique; it does not compare to any other type of trauma, and the most successful recovery methods for MIL/VETs involve immersion into a community of individuals who have experience with similar types of stress and intensity.<sup>343</sup> The definition of community, however, must come not from society but from the MIL/VETs themselves. Like the variety of troops that join the military, community also comes in all shapes and sizes. Some MIL/VETS find their definition of community—and their socially constructed identity—in OMGs. One example of community is a group of like-minded individuals joined together for the love of family, sharing good times, and always having a brother's back, no matter the cost.<sup>344</sup> Add in the love of riding, and an OMG is a perfect fit. Therapy methods used for MIL/VETs in the past have experienced high drop-out rates, and many MIL/VETs who underwent these therapies felt withdrawn, a symptom of the shame they for their perceived wrongs in

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<sup>340</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*; Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*; Dulaney, "Over the Edge."

<sup>341</sup> Smith, *Gangs and the Military*; Dulaney, "Over the Edge."

<sup>342</sup> Langton, *The Secret Life of Bikers*; Smith, *Gangs and the Military*.

<sup>343</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*.

<sup>344</sup> Willink, Charles, and Parnell, "Outlaw Platoons Long and Horrific Road."

combat, or because of the negative social identity associated with PTSD, which has a direct effect personal well-being.<sup>345</sup>

OMGs do not expect MIL/VETs to justify anything they have done overseas in combat, or even any past criminal convictions.<sup>346</sup> And MIL/VETs who feel impatient and unable to bear the quietness of civil society may not want to wait for a twelve-visit therapy process to work.<sup>347</sup> They may find quicker and more satisfying results through the OMG prospecting period, which, although it is lengthy, consumes their time with busywork rather than formal therapy sessions. MIL/VETs may barely have time for life and prospecting, let alone therapy from a government service they are convinced does not work—a service that may also bring shame if misunderstood by their non-OMG peers.<sup>348</sup>

Koumalatsos provides a unique insight into the difficulty of searching for a positive social identity, which he describes as “finding your passion”; for him, the process included contemplating suicide and ended just shy of actually pulling the trigger.<sup>349</sup> Although he was keeping up positive appearances among his family and friends, he felt lost—far away from the person he was before he discharged from the military. During his search for a new identity, he wrote:

When I left my career as a Marine Raider I did what I thought I was supposed to do. I did what every good Special Operator does and that’s getting a job as a government contractor doing basically the same things I had been doing my whole life, but now as a civilian. When that job ended I did what every Special Operator does when they are done contracting and that’s to start a tactical consultation business. So I did that.... I never stopped to ask if this was something I wanted. I never stopped and asked myself if I even liked doing what I was doing.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*, 97; Muldoon, Lowe, and Schmid, “Identity and Psychological Health.”

<sup>346</sup> Dulaney, “Over the Edge.”

<sup>347</sup> Wood, *What Have We Done*.

<sup>348</sup> Wood.

<sup>349</sup> Koumalatsos, *Excommunicated Warrior*, 177.

<sup>350</sup> Italics added; Koumalatsos, 178.

He says his thoughts of suicide did not stem from a feeling of brokenness or from PTSD. He was exhausted and “craving rest, not death” because he “was battling [a positive social] identity crisis. Who the heck was I if not a Recon Marine or a Marine Raider?”<sup>351</sup>

When addressing the difficulties with transitioning to post-military or post-combat life, Jocko Willink suggests that it is important for MIL/VETs to “always find a mission,” meaning a new purpose in civilian life.<sup>352</sup> He describes examples that call back to the military identity, such as volunteering for veterans causes, or starting or contributing to veterans associations. For that reason, Willink’s leadership consulting company, Echelon Front, created EF Overwatch, a recruiting firm that helps place previous special operations members into organizations that can take advantage of their unique skills.<sup>353</sup> EF Overwatch pairs these MIL/VETs with civilian companies in need of effective leadership, a mission-essential skill for special operations forces. EF Overwatch also fosters a “multiplicity of identities” among MIL/VETs, allowing former special forces soldiers to claim identities both as leadership consultants and as special forces soldiers.<sup>354</sup>

## I. CONCLUSION

This research identified specific motivations that lead some MIL/VETs to seek a positive identity among OMGs, and these motivations deserve further exploration. Nefarious actors have been able to join the military to expand their criminal tradecraft; and MIL/VETs are motivated to join OMGs—filled with nefarious actors—to redeem regrets or missed opportunities from their military service, or to seek post-military employment and fill identity deficits that OMG culture provides through its pseudo-warfare environment. Many OMGs offer a plug-and-play continuation of military life. It therefore might not be a coincidence that the one percent of the U.S. population who volunteered to serve in the military might find comfort in this one percent of outlaw motorcycle culture. Perhaps additional research into the specific motivations that lend to this membership will

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<sup>351</sup> Koumalatsos, 91, 93.

<sup>352</sup> Jocko Willink, “Always Find a Mission,” 43:15.

<sup>353</sup> EF Overwatch, accessed July 20, 2019, <https://www.efoverwatch.com/>.

<sup>354</sup> Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*.

uncover suitable alternatives to the lure of OMG culture. MCs did not have aspirations of living a life of crime. Many will never cross the line into criminal behavior, although they ride among criminals. Like the rest of society, the laws require that MIL/VETs be held accountable for their actions by LE, who must maintain the delicate balance between vigilance and protecting constitutional rights, especially for the MIL/VETs who have paid for those rights with their service.

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