UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Conservative Politics in a Time of "Fake News" and Irrelevant Truths

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in

Sociology

by

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The Dissertation of Ian Mullins is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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EPIGRAPH

"Alas," said the mouse, "the whole world is growing smaller every day. At the beginning it was so big that I was afraid, I kept running and running, and I was glad when I saw walls far away to the right and left, but these long walls have narrowed so quickly that I am in the last chamber already, and there in the corner stands the trap that I must run into."
"You only need to change your direction," said the cat, and ate it up.

Franz Kafka, *A Little Fable*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATF Night – Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Night

FCC – Federal Communications Commission

NRC – Natural Rights Coalition

OCLP – Orange County Libertarian Party

OCYR – Orange County Young Republicans

SDLP – San Diego Libertarian Party

SDYR – San Diego Young Republicans

STS – Science and Technology Studies

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Hannah Arendt (1958) wrote that each time we talk about things that can only be experienced in privacy or intimacy, we bring them into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality that they never could have had before (p. 50). This applies to both the ethnographic accounts that I present in the pages that follow and the gratitude I express here. First and foremost, I thank every person I observed for this research project. They made possible my research and the knowledge that results. In particular, Jon Chandler, Steve Holmen, Mike Paster, Kristi Stone, Erin Seay, Estay Cazares, and Mike Benoit were always kind and generous with their time. Whether the accounts I present or arguments I make seem familiar or foreign to them, I did my best to present their actions and experiences in a manner that is both fair and responsible. I hope they agree.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Conservative Politics in a Time of "Fake News" and Irrelevant Truths

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The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election has raised urgent questions about the role knowledge plays in conservative politics. Scholars are turning their attention to the proliferation of "fake news" on the internet and what might be a new era of "post-truth" politics in the United States. Political sociologists suggest the possibility that conservatives in the United States belong to numerous "epistemic cultures," though none have done the long-term observational work necessary to investigate this claim. For my dissertation, I draw on four years of ethnographic research with conservative political organizations located in San Diego and Orange County,

California, to analyze how participants involved in conservative political organizations develop and habituate epistemic practices. I find that participants in conservative organizations engage in knowledge production as a secondary activity anchored in primary practical concerns that vary by type of organization. I demonstrate how people within organizations develop coherent sets of epistemic practices by acting in relation to common sets of practical problems, the formal and relational aspects of an organization (including the organization's relation to a broader party apparatus), and the cultural context that they produce themselves. I further demonstrate how people habituate practices that are incommensurate across types of organizations, to the extent they limit a person's ability to build relationships with people involved in different conservative political organizations within the same political scene.

INTRODUCTION

The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election has raised urgent questions about the role knowledge plays in conservative politics. Scholars are turning their attention to the proliferation of "fake news" on the internet and what might be a new era of "post-truth" politics in the United States (Sismondo 2017). Political sociologists suggest the possibility that conservatives in the United States belong to numerous "epistemic cultures," though none have done the long-term observational work necessary to investigate this claim (Gross 2013; Perrin et al. 2014). For my dissertation, I draw on four years of ethnographic research with conservative political organizations located in San Diego and Orange County, California, to analyze how participants involved in conservative political organizations develop and habituate epistemic practices. I find that participants in conservative organizations engage in knowledge production as a secondary activity anchored in primary practical concerns that vary by type of organization. I demonstrate how people within organizations develop coherent sets of epistemic practices by acting in relation to common sets of practical problems, the formal and relational aspects of an organization (including the organization's relation to a broader party apparatus), and the cultural context that they produce themselves. I further demonstrate how people habituate practices that are incommensurate across types of organizations, to the extent they limit a person's ability to build relationships with people involved in different conservative political organizations within the same political scene.

My work illuminates how conservatives come to distrust conventional sources of

information, invalidate expert knowledge, or dismiss expert knowledge as irrelevant despite viewing it as true. These findings directly contribute to the sociological literature on conservative politics in the United States (Binder and Wood 2013; Braunstein 2017; Fields 2016; Hochschild 2016; Horwitz 2013; Klatch 1999; Martin 2013; Martin 2008; Pacewicz 2016; Shapira 2013; Skocpol and Williamsom 2012) and scholarship in political science on political knowledge (Lupia 2015; Hochschild and Einstein 2015), and political communication (Cramer 2014; Cramer 2004). In addition to my substantive contributions to literatures in sociology and political science, I provide a theoretical framework for understanding knowledge production as a secondary activity that other scholars may deploy to better understand and explain how people produce non-expert forms of knowledge in other areas of social life in which people engage in "project-based" relationships. My theoretical framework contributes to the study of practice and habit more broadly. This includes but is not limited to scholarship related to civic action (Litcherman 1995; Eliasoph 2013; Eliasoph 1998), education (Jones 2009; Khan 2012; Nielson 2015; Tyson 2011), or religion (Lichterman 2005; Tavory 2016; Young 2006).

In this Introduction, I define the broader problem of ignorance in conservative politics today, describe the current state of scholarship on how people interpret political information, and frame my contribution to this discussion. I then introduce my methods, introduce each case, and provide an overview of the chapters that lie ahead.

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE UNITED STATES

People in the United States know little about politics, current events, or their government (Bartels 1996:194; Gilens 2001; Hochschild and Einstein 2015; Lupia 2016:5-6). Since political scientists and pollsters began to consistently measure "political knowledge" in the 1950s, they

have consistently found that on average, people in the United States are ignorant or illiterate of politics (Achen and Bartel 2016:37; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996:105-106).[1] Despite relative stability among peoples' levels of political knowledge over time, political ignorance has changed rapidly in the twenty-first century. In addition to past forms of political ignorance related to people who lack access to information or who avoid the news, today a significant swath of the U.S. population, who routinely acquire information from news sources that they know and trust, know less about politics than people who do not follow the news at all (Cassino et al. 2012; Cassino 2016; Dellavigna and Kapla 2007; Kull et al. 2003; Skocpol and Williamson 2012:201). I refer to this new form of political ignorance as *mediated political ignorance* to distinguish it from past forms related to *access* or *apathy*.

Political ignorance is not unique to people who vote for a particular political party or adhere to a single political ideology. However, in the past ten years, mediated political ignorance has become more widespread and of a greater magnitude among Republicans or conservatives than their Democratic or liberal counterparts. In an era defined by candidate-centered politics and technological innovation, the formation of a partisan conservative media contributes significantly to the scale and magnitude of mediated political ignorance among Republicans and conservatives.[2]

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[1] Xie and Killewald (2012) find this Americans have also sustained low levels of scientific literacy during the same time period.

[2] I disagree with Skocpol and Williamson (2012) on how significant partisan media in this regard. They claim that people overstate the significance of partisan media because the existence of a highly partisan media during the nineteenth century did not produce a similar outcome (p. 124). They are correct that newspapers and pamphleteers were tied to political parties during the nineteenth century, but they are mistaken to present it as representative of what exists today. Political parties during the nineteenth century were structured through patronage networks, often referred to as machine politics. Political parties as local political machines controlled the nomination process for elected office and exerted direct influence over the press. In the twenty-first century, machine politics has given way to candidate-centered politics—political parties no longer maintain patronage networks, control nominations, or exert direct influence over partisan media. It is in fact the opposite—conservative media exerts influence over the Republican Party because it sets the agenda among the party base. The highly localized partisan media of the

William H. Buckley and other conservative intellectuals first envisioned a conservative media as an alternative to the press in the 1950s. In the decades that followed, they established periodicals such as *National Review* and worked to expand the conservative movement by promoting conservative principles and policies, and countering what they perceived to be liberal bias in the press (Gross 2013:279; Grossman and Hopkins 2016:91). Buckley, in particular, published scathing attacks on the press and other knowledge experts, such as university professors that he viewed as biased against conservatives. Sociologist Neil Gross (2013) argues that Buckley and those around him were significant in shaping the "conservative repertoire of contention" through which participants in the conservative movement came to understand what it meant for them to *be* conservatives (p. 285-286). Buckley's attacks on liberal knowledge elites were an important part of the conservative repertoire at the time, and the practice continues to be an important part of the conservative repertoire as successive generations iteratively adapt it to contemporary media consumption practices.

Conservative intellectuals may have envisioned conservative media as an alternative to the press during the 1950s, but it only became a viable alternative during the 1990s (Berry and Sobieraj 2014:16-17; Kroger et al. 2009:636, 652). The expansion of cable television channels and new communications technologies allowed more people to publish more content across more media platforms. By the turn of the twenty-first century, conservative media had expanded to include periodicals, newspapers, talk radio, television, online news networks, and self-published blogs. Aligned with a broader trend in the media during this time period, the fragmentation of audiences increased as media outlets proliferated. News audiences fragmented along a partisan

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nineteenth century is no more representative of partisan conservative media in the twenty-first century than machine politics is representative of candidate-centered politics.

cleavage and further divided into niche audiences within their respective sides of the cleavage (Berry and Sobieraj 2014:80; Perrin 2014:142).

Conservative media today remains more oriented toward advocacy than journalism. Yet the fragmentation of audiences into niches produces circumstances within which the most prominent content producers in the conservative media have radicalized their style of advocacy.[3] Conservative media today frequently promotes negative partisanship (Abramowitz 2018)[4] by presenting information through an "outrage discourse" that blurs the line between news reports and commentary. Political scientist Jeffrey Berry and sociologist Sarah Sobjeraj (2014) write that outrage discourse involves,

> efforts to provoke emotional responses (e.g., anger, fear, moral indignation) from the audience through the use of overgeneralizations, sensationalism, misleading or patently inaccurate information, ad hominem attacks, and belittling ridicule of opponents. Outrage sidesteps the messy nuances of complex political issues in favor of melodrama, misrepresentative exaggeration, mockery, and hyperbolic forecasts of impending doom. (P. 7)

Conservative media outlets that produce or disseminate content through outrage discourse cultivate resentment among their audiences that is directed toward their political opponents—i.e. negative partisanship. Audience members are encouraged to view themselves as fundamentally different kinds of people, and to view their political opponents as dangerous.

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[3] Berry and Sobieraj (2014) and Perrin (2014) each argue that the fragmentation of media audiences into niches has led to more ideologically extreme content and fewer consequences for presenting falsehoods, because outrage media outlets escalate their outrage discourse to maintain their audience and therefore serve their advertisers. Outrage media is a profit-driven business dependent upon establishing a loyal audience of viewers who self-select into ideologically similar niches.

[4] Abramowitz (2018) presents negative partisanship as beginning to increase during the 1980s. Negative partisanship contributed to the formation of an "outrage industry" in the conservative media. However, once outrage media came into existence, it furthered negative partisanship in U.S. politics more broadly.

Outrage media is not limited to the conservative media; there is a liberal outrage media as well. However, conservative outrage media has more outlets and larger audiences than liberal outrage media. The Fox News Channel and conservative talk radio are central to this development. Fox News is the most prominent outrage media outlet involved in conservative media (DiMaggio 2011; Horwitz 2013; Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Sherman 2014). A quarter of the U.S. population watches Fox News on a routine basis—twice as large as its top two cable channel competitors combined, CNN and MSNBC (Skocpol and Williamson 2012:125). Conservative talk radio host such as Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, or Glenn Beck reach more than ten million listeners per week (ibid). Liberal outrage media does not have developed talk radio outlets, as liberal audiences are more likely to acquire information from public radio stations that adhere to journalistic conventions.[5] I will discuss Fox News in more detail in Chapter One, but for now it suffices to note that conservative outrage media has more outlets that produce or disseminate content to significantly larger audiences than liberal outrage media (Berry and Sobieraj 2014:42, 125; Grossman and Hopkins 2016: 142-143).

Conservative outrage media is also significantly more consequential for Republican Party politics than liberal outrage media is for Democratic Party politics. This relates to audience trust and consumption habits. Conservative outrage media outlets often publish content to discredit the press as being too partisan to be trusted—and their efforts have succeeded. Gallup polls published in 2014 and 2018 demonstrate that the public's trust in the press has declined since 2007. While liberals report lower levels of trust in the press as well, the overall trend is driven by a precipitous decline among conservatives who view the press as too liberal (McCarthy 2014;

[5] Audiences who acquire news from sources that adhere to journalistic conventions demonstrate higher levels of political knowledge. National Public Radio listeners do particularly well (Cassino 2012 et al.).

Swift 2018). At the same time, conservatives report high levels of trust in conservative outrage media outlets. According to a Pew Center survey published in 2012, and a Gallup poll published in 2018, more than 80 percent of Republicans claim that they have a high level of trust in Fox News.[6] The majority of Republicans trust Fox News and increasingly distrust the press. The majority of liberals trust the press and overall report higher levels of trust in more news sources.

Partisan differences related to trust also align with consumption habits. The Pew Center survey published in 2012 indicates that Republicans acquire information from few sources—many of which are limited to outrage media. Conservatives also report that they often avoid discussions of politics with people with whom they anticipate disagreement. Liberals report the inverse. They claim that they acquire information from more sources, are more likely to discuss politics with people with whom they anticipate disagreement, and trust more news sources. Conservative outrage media commands a larger portion of the Republican Party voter base and is consequentially more able to exercise authority in Republican Party politics than their liberal counterparts are in Democratic Party politics. While liberal outrage media may exist, it is trumped by conservative outrage media in both scale and effect.

The conservative outrage media defines conservative media today.[7] It is historically contingent and distinct from the press or liberal outrage media. It contributes to the concentration of mediated political ignorance among conservatives in the United States. Despite this phenomenon being concentrated among conservative audiences, the consequences reach far

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[6] The Gallup poll includes another significant finding, that more than 40% report that they do not think there is a news source that is not politically biased. This number is nearly double what it was in the early 1980s.

[7] Periodicals associated with conservative movement intellectuals such as *National Review, The Weekly Standard,* or *National Affairs* exist, but have been pushed to the margins of Republican Party politics. Conservative outrage media outlets such as Fox News, Rush Limbaugh, and niche websites on the internet such as Dredge Report or Breitbart News drive the agenda for Republican Party politics.

beyond. Nearly half of the people in the United States now claim that they view nearly all news sources as politically biased. This trend has increased rapidly since 2007 (Gallup 2018). The Conservative media has cast doubt on the press and the journalistic conventions through which they operate. What happens to peoples' ability to agree upon facts or share a sense of truth within these conditions remains an open question.

COGNITION AND POLITICAL INFORMATION

Since 2010, scholars have become increasingly interested in how people make sense of political information.[8] They have predominantly investigated this question through the study of cognition, and more specifically, through attempts to understand what sociologist Karen Cerulo (2014) refers to as the "inside" and "outside" of thought (p. 1012). These initial studies of cognition and political information are useful for advancing scholarship on knowledge in conservative politics. However, they confront a similar limitation as scholars who study political knowledge, in that they do not take into account the circumstances or situations within which people think and act. My work overcomes this limitation.

The "inside" of thought refers to the cognitive processes through which people interpret information. Scholars deploy the dual process model of cognition and the notion of hot versus cold cognition to describe thought across two continuums (Simi et al. 2017:4). They draw upon dual process models to distinguish between cognition that is a fast and mostly unconscious from that which is slow and deliberative. They describe cognition as "hot" when it is emotionally

[8] Scholars' increased interest in this question appears to be a response to increased visibility and falsehoods in public discussion. These falsehoods relate directly to what I refer to as mediated political ignorance. They include but are not limited to climate science denial, discussion of "death panels" in relation the Affordable Care Act, and the Birther Movement that questioned the status of President Barak Obama's U.S. Citizenship.

charged or appears to be driven by an emotional response and as "cold" when it is not.[9] Many scholars who study how people process political information agree that most people make sense of new political information through cognition that is both fast and hot (Kahan 2013:417). More specifically, they argue that people interpret political information through acts of motivated reasoning that occurs when a person's cognitive bias leads her or him to more readily accept new information as true when it aligns with their prior interpretations, beliefs, or attitudes (Ecker et al. 2013:293; Gaines et al. 2007:959; Swire 2017:2; Taber and Lodge 2006:767).

The "outside" of thought refers to the environment or circumstances within which people engage in cognition. In the current literature, this is limited to the particular information environment within which people access information. For example, political scientist Adam Berinsky (2015) illustrates how people develop a familiarity or "fluency" with particular information when they are exposed to it across various media platforms. He argues that people who are repeatedly exposed to the same unverified political rumor or falsehood are more likely to view it as true (p. 246). More significantly, he also finds that it is the repetition of the unverified political rumor or falsehood itself that produces fluency, and not the particular context through which the information is communicated. Berinsky suggests people who attempt to correct an unverified political rumor or falsehood may actually reinforce peoples' belief in that unverified political rumor or falsehood because they increase peoples' exposure to it.[10] In this example, the outside of thought is defined by an information environment within which people are exposed to unverified political rumors and falsehoods across various media platforms, and

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[9] For more information on dual process models and hot and cold cognition in sociology, see Cerulo 2010, 2014; Simi et al. 2017; Vaisey 2009.

[10] Ullrich Ecker and his collaborators have reached similar findings. They argue that attempts to correct misinformation may reinforce peoples' belief that the misinformation is true (Ecker et al. 2013 :292).

the inside of thought is the cognitive process of "fluency" which limits their ability to revise their previous understanding when confronted with new information or evidence that their prior understanding is incorrect.

Scholars who have turned to the study of cognition have revitalized discussions of knowledge in politics. However, similar to discussions of political knowledge, they confront a significant limitation in that they do not investigate what people do "in the wild." They conduct surveys or experiments that do not capture the situational context within which people act, nor account for how broader circumstances produce continuity across situations, people, or periods of time. Scholars must take their study of thought into the field if they are to develop better understandings of how people interpret political information, and what may be even more significant, how particular practices of interpreting information become consequential to them in their lives. They must expand their notion of the outside of thought beyond the information environment and into the world as people experience it. My investigation of knowledge production in conservative political organizations overcomes this limitation. I demonstrate how people interpret information "in the wild," and further explain why particular practices related to interpretation matter to people as they engage in political action.

Mediated political ignorance is mediated by organizations and the social context of situations within which people act, not just mass media or the information environment. My investigation of conservative political organization makes this clear. People who access the information from the same sources, and who agree more broadly in their opposition to taxes and regulation and support for individual responsibility, private property, and gun ownership, but who are involved in different types of political organizations do not agree upon what is true. People who are involved in different types of conservative political organizations develop

different epistemic practices through which they interpret information differently. They do so in such different ways that it is difficult for them to build relationships with people who are involved in a different type of conservative political organization than they are.

In this dissertation, I argue the people who are involved in a particular type of conservative political organization develop and enact epistemic practices as a secondary activity that is subordinated to a primary activity that I refer to as a "shared project." The participants or members of an organization collectively establish a shared project through their habits and routines. They do so within the confines of their organizations encoded opportunity structures. Their involvement in a conservative political organization becomes meaningful or consequential to them through their pursuit of a shared project. I further argue that people who are involved in each type of political organization develop epistemic practices that are incommensurate across types of political organization. The incommensurate aspects of their epistemic practices contribute to fragmentation across types of political organizations within the local conservative political scene.

METHODS

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in San Diego, California from April 2011 to May 2015 and in Orange County, California from October 2013 to January 2015. I began participant observation with the San Diego Young Republicans (SDYR) in 2011, the Orange County Young Republicans (OCYR) in 2013, and three libertarian organizations in 2014—the San Diego Libertarian Party (SDLP), the Orange County Libertarian Party (OCLP), and the Natural Rights

Coalition (NRC) in San Diego County.[11] I also collected documentation related to my research participants, field sites, and political scenes, and conducted eight interviews. I use the documents and interviews both to supplement my observations and to provide external verification for my data whenever possible. In this section, I present how I selected field sites, defined cases, and analyzed data.

FIELDSITE SELECTION AND DEFINITION OF CASES

I selected field sites in three stages. I began participant observation with the San Diego Young Republicans (SDYR) in 2011 in order to investigate how "run of the mill" conservatives understand what is and is not "conservative" and how their conceptions of conservativism become meaningful or practically consequential in their lives.[12] I selected SDYR because they provided me an opportunity to observe people who engage in a form of conventional Republican politics that is substantively different than the political action I had studied in my previous research project—i.e. conservatives who participate in nativist political organizations that advocate for increased border security.[13] Through an implicit comparison between "run of the

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[11] I conducted preliminary fieldwork with other conservative political organizations such as the Log Cabin Republicans of San Diego in 2013 or along with members of political organizations such as the Lincoln Club of San Diego in 2012. I did not adopt the Log Cabin Republicans as a field site because the organization was in a time of transition after their chair died and it was unclear whether or not the organization would continue to operate. I did not adopt the Lincoln Club of San Diego as a field site because access to this site was cost prohibitive. For all intents and purposes, most of the members of this organization are donors and I did not have the research funds to cover the cost of admission. To work around my lack of access, I talked to members whenever possible, recorded second-hand accounts from Young Republicans, collected journalistic accounts, and drew upon secondary literature that contains information on the Lincoln Club in either San Diego or Orange County.

[12] My attempts to understand differences in how people understand conservatism was aligned with the sociological literature on conservative politics at the time. Specifically, Neil Gross, Thomas Medvetz, and Rupert Russell (2011) published a call in the *Annual Review of Sociology* for more sociologists to investigate the American conservative movement. Central to their call is the need for sociologists to recognize that people in different times and places have different notions of what is and is not "conservative," and that when conducting research, scholars need to develop empirically driven accounts of what conservatism *is* to the people they study.

[13] I conducted an ethnographic research project with Minutemen organizations across the United States. At the time, these organizations were considered to be on the fringe of both conservative and Republican Party politics.

mill" and "fringe" conservatives, I was surprised to find that Young Republicans' notions of what is and is not conservative remained flexible as long as they did not violate core tenets of the Republican Party political program, such as no new taxes, or contradict someone with superior status or authority relative to themselves.[14] During this initial stage of fieldwork, I also began to identify how Young Republicans advance their professional careers in Republican Party politics through their involvement in SDYR. I traced Young Republicans as they moved through other organizations in the political scene, thereby establishing the linkages between organizations that promote career advancement.

I began participant observation with the Orange County Young Republicans in 2013 to investigate whether or not the linkages between SDYR and other political organizations were unique to San Diego. While I found that there are minor stylistic differences between members of SDYR and OCYR, members' career trajectories and the linkages between organizations share a family resemblance. My comparison between SDYR and OCYR had two significant implications for the third stage of my research project: first, it demonstrated that my initial findings are not unique to San Diego; second, it disproved several competing theories related to how historically contingent circumstances in each county or other facets of community context might structure the process through which Young Republicans' involvement in their respective political organizations becomes meaningful, and warranted that I further investigate the organizational aspects that structure members' practices in each organization.

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[14] Examples of this dynamic from fieldwork include a SDYR general member speaking to the SDYR President or an SDYR executive board member speaking to a San Diego City Councilor. Neither the general member speaking to the president, nor the executive board member speaking to an elected official, will contradict their superior even if their agreement with their superior in a particular situation contradicts something they said or expressed support for at another time. I discuss this in Chapter Five in terms of habit of deference.

In 2014, I set out to investigate how the process through which peoples' involvement in a conservative political organization becomes meaningful or consequential is structured, at least partially, by their organization's relationship to a broader political party apparatus and the relative density of that political party apparatus. I selected the San Diego Libertarian Party (SDLP) and the Orange County Libertarian Party (OCLP) as field sites because they are conservative organizations that are also county chapters for the Libertarian Party of California—a minor political party.[15] The Libertarian Party has a relatively small and diffuse political apparatus that seems insignificant when compared to the Republican Party. I selected the Natural Rights Coalition (NRC) as a contrast case because they are a fledging advocacy organization of conservative libertarian anarchists who exist outside of any political party and are independent of a political party apparatus.

I define analytic cases based upon my criteria for selecting additional field sites in 2014. I distinguish *types* of political organizations as cases based upon how linked an organization is to a broader political party apparatus and the relative density of that political party apparatus. I constructed three cases for this research project: *major party political organizations* that have a high degree of connectedness to a high density political party apparatus (SDYR and OCYR), *minor party political organizations* that have a low degree of connectedness to a low density political party apparatus (SDLP and OCLP), and *fledging political organizations* that have little to no connection to a political party apparatus (NRC).

In total, I conducted participant observation with five field sites. I selected field sites in successive stages. At each junction, before selecting field sites, I considered alternative field

[15] I classify a political organization as conservative when the participants or members of an organization refer to themselves as such. SDLP and OCLP members predominantly consider themselves to be conservative.

sites, conducted preliminary fieldwork to evaluate the viability of different sites, and weighed the trade-offs of different sites on the overall trajectory of my research project. I extended my criteria for selecting additional field sites in 2014 to guide my definition of cases. My definition of cases both reflects the empirical reality of different political organizations and is well-suited for my analysis.

The organizations that I have selected provide me with the best comparison available to understand how people develop epistemic practices in conservative political organizations and how differences between them become consequential within the broader conservative political scene. People in each organization express political views that share a family resemblance. They all consider themselves to be conservatives and they agree upon broader ideals such as their opposition to taxes and regulation, and support for individual responsibility, private property, and gun ownership. Each organization exists within a broader lineages of conservative politics in the United States—I will discuss these lineages soon. Despite their similarities, people involved in each type of organization establish such different shared projects, that my comparison of organizations magnifies the different ways they develop epistemic practices and produce knowledge.

My comparison of these organizations is also well suited for understanding fragmentation among conservatives within the same political scene because I was able to observe interactions between people involved in different conservative political organizations. I observed libertarian party members during their encounters with Young Republicans and anarchists, respectively. I observed anarchists interact with Republicans. I am also able to account for the lack of encounters between Young Republicans and anarchists. During each encounter, despite their agreement on broader conservative ideals, I observed the practical challenges they confront when

they communicate with others who are involved in a different type of political organization than themselves. To foreshadow this aspect of my argument, in the conclusion, I argue that it is difficult for people who are involved in different conservative political organizations to develop relationships with each other because of their incommensurate epistemic practices. Their inability to communicate hinders their ability to form informal associations with people who are involved in different types of conservative political organizations, which is of further consequence because informal associations are foundation upon which organizations develop working relations that link them to a broader political apparatus. In sum, peoples' incommensurate epistemic practices contribute to the sustained fragmentation in a local conservative political scene because they limit their ability to form the types of relationships needed to collaborate with other conservative political organizations.

DATA COLLECTION

I collected data through participant observations, historical research methods, and semi-structured interviews—I will now discuss each in turn. As presented above, I conducted participant observation with five conservative political organizations over a four-year period that began in 2011 and ended in 2015. Once I incorporated a new field site into my research project, I continued observations until I exited the field in 2015. I conducted research in accordance with many conventions of sociological ethnography. In methodological terms, I conducted overt research without deception. I told people I encountered during fieldwork that I am a sociologist and graduate student at the University of California, San Diego, and that I was there to observe their political organization as part of my dissertation research project on conservative politics in Southern California. I did not tell people specific details about my research project but I did offer

to discuss my findings with them after I finish my dissertation. I made no attempts to mislead or deceive people at any point throughout my fieldwork or this project as whole.

I observed political organizations at a variety of events and locations that included members' meetings, happy hours, non-organizational social events, and special events such as annual conferences, holiday parties, or fundraisers. Organizations meet between two and four times per month, all events are open to the public, some cost money to attend, and all events take place at night, except for a few special events. Events last between two and eight hours. While I provide detailed descriptions of these events in later chapters, members' meetings and happy hours warrant immediate attention.

All five organizations hold some form of members' meetings or happy hour, and in each organization, these events provide the central means for members to interact and build relationships with each other. Each type of political organization manages these events differently. These events are also where I primarily conducted participant observation. SDYR and OCYR conduct formal business during members' meetings—including announcements, voting, listening to an outside speaker such as candidate for elected office, elected official, or someone who is a prominent figure in local conservative politics—and socialize or network during happy hours. SDLP and OCLP combine formal business and socializing in all of their meetings—although they mostly socialize and rarely attend to formal business. All four of these organizations hold their events at restaurants or bars. NRC participants attend a weekly gathering at Jon's house (I introduce Jon in Chapter Two). While these meetings are scheduled, they are completely informal. They conduct no formal business, although they do develop routines and occasionally make group-wide announcements or host special guests from out of town.

I attended as many events as was possible, especially in the final stage of my fieldwork in 2014-2015. Practical circumstances such as scheduling conflicts or traffic limited my ability to attend all meetings or events.[16] I recorded my observations by producing detailed fieldnotes after I left a field site. During the early stages of this research project, I wrote detailed fieldnotes on my computer after returning home from fieldwork. In 2014, I began to use an audio recorder to capture my observations immediately after I left a field site—often dictating notes in my car. I used a commercial dictation software to translate audio recordings of my observations into written transcripts, and I read through each transcript to correct errors. If I was not able to dictate my field notes because I was in public, I handwrote my observations in a notebook. My initial strategy was to record as much detail about as many things as possible. Over the years, as I developed my project, I began to focus my field notes on specific topics that were relevant to my inquiry.

My fieldnotes comprise my primary source of data for this research project. I produced 83 fieldnotes distributed across field sites as follows: SDYR (30); NRC (27); SDLP (10); OCYR (8); OCLP (8). I excluded a handful of fieldnotes from 2012-2013 and a few from 2014 because they lacked sufficient detail for me to analyze. I consider this to be an issue with data quality—I was tired when I conducted the observations and was not able to capture enough relevant details of what was happening.

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[16] Traffic is a significant environmental factor in Southern California. I was able to drive to or from my field sites in Orange County in roughly one and a half hour without traffic, but this same route can take upwards of four hours in traffic. On two occasions, despite leaving early enough to avoid rush hour, traffic accidents turned Interstate 5 into a parking and prevented me from making it to my field sites in time to attend the meeting. Similarly, several organizations hold meetings on Tuesdays. When this occurred, I rotated which organizations meetings I attended. On one occasion, I attempted to attend two separate events in one night. I first attended a members' meeting in Orange County and then the NRC weekly meeting in northeastern San Diego County. The commute and time spent in the field was too taxing and diminished my ability to observe NRC that night.

In addition to participant observation, I collected documents and other forms of documentary evidence and conducted eight semi-structured interviews to supplement my field notes. I collected documents about people, organizations, events, and the political scenes included in this study. These documents include, but are not limited to, evidence of an individual's employment history, associations to other people or organizations involved in conservative politics, public statements, financial contributions to political organizations or campaigns; an organization's bylaws or affiliations; and official records of public elections. All of the information I gathered in available to the public either because it is public record or because my research subjects published it on Internet. I gathered this information from government websites, organizations' websites, periodicals, and social media platforms such as LinkedIn or Facebook. These data are included in my analysis in Chapter Three, but I primarily draw upon them to establish background information for my cases and verify my observations or secondhand accounts that I collected through participant observation. I have made an effort to find primary documents that corroborate or contradict my ethnographic claims. This has not altered my findings or the accounts I present in this dissertation, but it does strengthen my evidence for these claims.

I conducted eight semi-structured interviews in order to address gaps in data. I conducted two interviews with SDYR members in 2011 in order to gain more information about the organization, and five interviews with NRC participants in 2016-2017. My interviews in 2011 were conducted in-person while my interviews in 2016-2017 were conducted by telephone. Each interview was with someone with whom I had developed a relationship during prior fieldwork. I took notes after completing my interviews during 2011, and during my interviews in 2016-2017. I did not record the interviews and therefore do not have transcripts. These data did not factor

into my analysis; rather, I used interviews to collect background information that I could not acquire through direct observation or historical methods.

DATA REDUCTION AND ANALYSIS

I developed this research project over a long period of time. I managed and analyzed data through memo writing and a bundle of complementary practices that I refer to as the "three C's". The three C's include Compartmentalization, Compression, and Contrast-oriented comparison.

I *compartmentalized* data to manage the amount of information that I needed to consider at any given time—not to reduce the amount of data I analyze overall. I analyzed one field site at a time and conducted comparisons through a sequential analysis of field sites. I began to analyze data soon after I completed my first participant observation in 2011. The more I engaged my fieldnotes, the more quickly I was able to read or browse through them. This allowed me work with larger quantities of fieldnotes as my project developed.

I analyzed data through memo writing, in which I *compressed* information into thematic accounts that respond to a question—whatever it may be at a given time. I decided which situations and details to include in a memo based upon the question at hand. I returned to my original fieldnotes as a whole each time I started a new memo. Differing from other data reduction techniques such as coding procedures,[17] compression led me to reduce my data for the sake of a single memo and did not produce a cumulative effect in which how I classified data earlier in the project structured how I was able to see it during later stages of analysis. Since I

[17] The alternative approach is to reduce data through coding procedures that classify segments of data by theme or topic and then to compare similarly classified segments across cases. Researchers who deploy coding procedures replace the situational context in which action is observed with that of their classification. This saves them time, but it also constrains their ability to revisit or reinterpret the data.

read memos that I wrote earlier in my project and returned to my original data at later stages in this research project, I was able to revisit and question my initial findings or interpretations that had become assumptions or background information during later stages of my analysis. On a few occasions, I found that my earlier classifications or interpretations did not hold up in light of new evidence or further analysis. This allowed me make revisions and adjustments in the late stages of my analysis.

I often compared thematic accounts of different field sites in memos. I conducted *contrast-oriented comparisons* (Skocpol 1980:178).[18] I compared detailed thematic accounts of field sites to better understand how the particularities of each field site produce variation in regards to some common process. I deployed this comparative logic for both intra-case and inter-case comparisons.[19] I maintained compartmentalization during each comparison—I do not combine data from different field sites and I do not present data collected from one field site as evidence or an illustration of what happens at another field site.

When combined, my practice of the three C's kept me disciplined while working with data without constraining my ability to explore a variety of questions or interpretations. The three C's provided me with guidelines within which I read my data through several competing theories, deployed heuristics to think through possible interpretations, and developed hypotheses or competing explanations. In a sense, these practices allowed me to maintain intellectual

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[18] In the late stages of this project, I considered whether or not I would have reached similar conclusions in this research project had I deployed a different comparative logic related to comparing cases according to a set list of variables. I would be able to *if* I applied my insights from this project to a future analysis. However, at the time I conducted this research project, the literature did not include insights into which attributes or factors of conservative politics or political organizations are consequential to knowledge production "in the wild."

[19] Inter-case comparisons include types of political organizations: major political party organizations such as (SDYR, OCYR) and (SDLP, OCLP). Inter-case comparisons include major political party organizations, minor political party organizations, and fledgling political organizations within their respective political scenes (SDYR, SDLP, and NRC), and (OCYR and OCLP).

flexibility within a set of practical restraints through which I maintained the integrity of my cases and the richness of my fieldnotes as a source of data.

The analysis and findings that I present in this dissertation are rooted in a series of nine memos that I wrote between June 2014 and April 2015. In December 2014, I began to investigate knowledge production in field sites after I noticed differences in how people involved in different types of conservative political organizations present and validate information. I explored my fieldnotes and found patterns that varied by field site. I made the decision to focus on knowledge production before "fake news" or "alternative facts" became commonplace in discussions of U.S. politics. At the time, I obviously did not know that Donald Trump would be elected President of the United States in 2016, nor that what conservatives know and how they know it would become a pressing issue for democracy in the United States. However, due to historical circumstance, this project is based four-years of ethnographic data that lead into the 2016 U.S. Presidential election through which I am able to explain two significant facets of how knowledge relates to conservative politics today. First, I present how conservatives acquire, discuss, interpret, and validate information as being true. Second, I demonstrate why particular forms of knowledge or understanding become consequential in their lives—why it matters to them.

CASES

This section presents a brief introduction to each case to sensitize readers to the particularities of each case. I include significant information that is most relevant for understanding the place each type of organization occupies in conservative politics today. I also

situate each case within their shared lineage of the conservative moment and identify the junctures where their lineages diverge from one another.

MAJOR POLITICAL PARTY ORGANIZATIONS: THE YOUNG REPUBLICANS

The Young Republicans has lost the radical sheen it once had. Young Republican organizations were significant sites for young activists to mobilize during the early period of the American conservative movement. In the 1960s, Young Republican groups such as the "Rat Finks" in New Jersey became notorious for the viciousness of their attacks on Republican Party moderates. F. Clifford White launched the "Draft Goldwater Committee" from the Young Republicans. His efforts were instrumental to Barry Goldwater winning the 1964 Republican Party Presidential nomination—a watershed moment for the conservative movement. The Young Republicans also fostered the formation of other advocacy organizations such as Young Americans for Freedom or prominent Republican politicians such as such as William "Bill" Brock III, who as the Republican National Committee Chairman in the mid 1970s instituted organizational reforms that were instrumental in making the Republican Party what it is today—I discuss this in Chapter One.[20]

No longer a site for social movement mobilization, the Young Republicans has been incorporated into the Republican Party establishment. Members aspire to become political professionals or career politicians, not activists. They join the Young Republicans as a means to advance their political careers in the Republican Party, not to transform it. Figuratively speaking,

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[20] Founders of Young Americans for Freedom Doug Caddy and David Franke met in the Young Republicans in Washington D.C. The Young Republicans was part of a number of conservative organizations in Washington D.C. that college age activists frequented (Klatch 1999:18). William Brock also served as a U.S. Senator and as the Secretary of Labor for the Reagan Administration.

F. Clifford White has been succeeded by Kevin McCarthy—a skilled political tactician and fundraiser who knows how to ingratiate himself to the right people.[21] The Young Republicans today is as much of a professional organization as it is a political organization.

MINOR POLITICAL PARTY ORGANIZATIONS: THE LIBERTARIAN PARTY

In 2010, California voters approved Proposition 14: *The Top Two Primaries Act.* The measure eliminated party specific primaries. Prior to 2012, all political parties that were certified by the State of California were able to nominate candidates for elected office—the nominee for each party was listed on the general election ballot. As of 2012, California has a single, open primary for statewide, non-presidential elections. The two candidates who receive the highest number of votes per election advance to a general election run-off regardless of the candidates' party affiliations.

Minor political parties in California struggled prior to 2012.[22] Proposition 14 pushed them into further decline because it eliminated their ability to nominate candidates for the general election. They lost the ability to participate in the political process as political parties. The number of minor political party candidates declined immediately. For example, in San Diego County, the San Diego Libertarian Party (SDLP) nominated ten candidates in 2010—five for the U.S. House of Representatives, four for the California State Assembly, and two for the

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[21] McCarthy began his political career in Kern County, California. He was highly active in the Young Republicans and worked for U.S. Representative Bill Thomas. Supported by Thomas, he was first elected to the California Assembly and then the U.S. House of Representatives. With the support of Republican Party and conservative elites, McCarthy has since gained a position in Republican Party leadership.

[22] Minor political parties lack the resources and expertise to run successful campaigns. Examples of minor political parties in California include: the Libertarian Party, Independent Party, or the Peace and Freedom Party.

California State Senate.[23] SDLP nominated one candidate in 2012,[24] and two candidates in 2014[25]—none of whom received enough votes to advance to the general election. Without the ability to nominate candidates for the general election, SDLP and other minor political parties in California are political parties in name only. For all intents and purposes, the Libertarian Party in California is a social club.

FLEDGLING POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS: THE NATURAL RIGHTS COALITION

The Natural Rights Coalition (NRC) is a standalone organization of libertarian anarchists located at the outskirts of San Diego County. While NRC participants produced an organization that is entirely their own, the space they occupy in conservative politics is not. They contribute to a lineage of libertarian anarchism or "voluntarism" that is rooted in Young Americans for Freedom's purge of libertarian members in 1969-1970.

Hostility between traditionalists and libertarians erupted during the 1969 YAF National Convention after YAF purged libertarian members months prior over their opposition to the Vietnam War and interest in anarchism (Klatch 1999:222-223). Libertarian members protested on the convention floor, fist fights broke out, and mobs of traditionalists were reported to have roamed hotels threatening their political opponents (Klatch 1999:226-232). YAF continued to cull libertarians from their ranks after the convention, and many YAF chapters that were led by

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[23] County of San Diego Gubernatorial Election General Election, Tuesday, November 2, 2010 Official Results (Report 25), released November 30, 2010.
[24] County of San Diego Presidential Primary Election, Tuesday, June 5, 2012 Official Results (Report 23), released June 7, 2012.
[25] County of San Diego Gubernatorial Primary Election, Tuesday, June 3, 2014 Official Results, released June 24, 2014.

libertarians ended their affiliation with the organization—this included half of the chapters in California (Klatch 1999:232-234).

Libertarian organizers who were either purged or left YAF established new organizations that promoted individual rights, voluntary associations, or anarchism—some were more radical than others.[26] Many former YAF chapters joined the Students for Individual Liberty (SIL), which had 103 chapters on college campuses throughout United States by 1970 (Klatch 1999:234-235). SIL provided David Nolan with a platform prior to his founding the Libertarian Party in 1971. Nolan had not been a YAF member—he was a former Young Republican—but many former YAF members were involved in the early years of the Libertarian Party (Klatch 1999:235).

Former YAF members remained active in politics in the early 1970s. They established organizations or contributed to organizations that were marginalized within conservative politics and that for all intents and purposes exist outside of the Republican Party. The traditionalists purge of libertarians did more than expel members who opposed the Vietnam War, it provided a catalyst for a libertarian movement. The Natural Rights Coalition exists within a lineage of this movement that has left Republican Party politics, has little interest returning to the GOP's tent, and that advocates for the abolition of the U.S. government. While I see no evidence that NRC participants are aware of their place in this lineage, they draw upon resources produced during formation of the liberty movement such as materials published by the Mises Institute and are part of a resurgence of libertarian anarchists who left Republican Party politics because of their opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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[26] Radical organizations such as the Radical Libertarian Alliance in Stanford, California advocated for the abolition of the U.S. government, rather than supporting increased individual rights within existing institutions.

OUTLINE

CHAPTER ONE: MAKING THE MODERN REPUBLICAN PARTY

I present how the Republican Party developed into what it is today. I focus upon turning points during which people transformed the Republican Party into a "service party," expanded party operations to include an extended network of advocacy organizations and media outlets, and the subsequent shift in which the Republican Party's extended network began to exercise authority over the conservative political program. My account includes discussion of the conservative movement's successful takeover of the Republican Party during the twentieth century, although I emphasize the organizational aspects of their story that have been neglected by sociologists.

CHAPTER TWO: LIBERTY AMONG FRIENDS

This chapter introduces the Natural Rights Coalition (NRC). I introduce several NRC participants who are significant for both the group and my dissertation. I discuss how NRC participants became involved in the organization, and I demonstrate how they collectively developed routines that have consequences for what they did and, as I will show in Chapter Five, what they could know. NRC is a fledging advocacy organization that has few ties to other organizations. For all intents and purposes, they act outside Republican Party politics and much of the surrounding conservative political scene. I present NRC as a baseline to compare political party organizations that are formally affiliated with other organizations that affect what people may do in those organizations.

CHAPTER THREE: ENCODING OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

This chapter presents how formal and relational aspects of political party organizations structure sets of opportunities and constraints—or "opportunity structures"—within which members of the organizations must act. I draw upon Andrew Abbott's notion of "encoding" to demonstrate how the immediate past structures action in the present. This chapter unfolds through a set of two comparisons. First, I describe and compare how encoding occurs in two conservative political party organizations in San Diego, California: the San Diego Young Republicans (SDYR) and the San Diego Libertarian Party (SDLP). Second, I contrast my accounts of political organizations in San Diego against their counterparts in Orange County, California—the Orange County Young Republicans (OCYR) and the Orange County Libertarian Party (OCLP)—to refine my explanation of how the various formal and relational aspects of political organizations constitute different opportunity structures.

CHAPTER FOUR: SHARED PROJECTS

This chapter presents the group customs that people develop when they come together within the constraints and opportunities produced through the encoding process. I investigate how different encoding processes structure how people in political organizations practically develop shared projects that orient their activities across meetings and situations. In relation to my broader argument, emergent shared projects in political organizations are a primary activity—that which people orient themselves toward. This provides the basis for understanding differences in secondary activities that people undertake while pursuing their primary activity, such as knowledge production.

CHAPTER FIVE: EPISTEMIC PRACTICES

This chapter presents how people in different organizations produce knowledge as a secondary activity. I link together encoded opportunity structures, shared projects, and epistemic practices to demonstrate how people in different political organizations go about producing different forms of knowledge.

CHAPTER SIX: INCOMMENSURATE PRACTICES AND FRAGMENTATION

In this chapter, I demonstrate how the ways people produce knowledge in a political organization limits their ability to develop relationships with other people in a different political organization within the same conservative political scene. I argue that there are incommensurate aspects of their respective epistemic practices that hinder their ability to communicate with each other and that lead people to talk past each other when they encounter people from different conservative political organizations. In so doing, I suggest that incommensurate epistemic practices across organizations contributes to sustained fragmentation among conservatives in the same political scene.

CHAPTER 1
MAKING THE MODERN REPUBLICAN PARTY

The Republican Party today is nearly unrecognizable from that of a century ago. The gradual decline of machine style politics during the first half of the twentieth century set in motion the GOP's long ideological march rightward.[27] Party renewal efforts in the 1960s, organizational reforms in the 1970s, the electoral ascendance of hardline economic conservatives in the 1990s, and the rapid expansion of an alternative conservative media that began in the 1990s have all contributed to the radicalization of the GOP in the twenty-first century. As a result, the Republican Party today is unified around a relentless opposition to taxes, resists bipartisan cooperation, and punishes elected officials that waver on either account (Hacker and Pierson 2005:260, 262; Hacker and Pierson 2010:199; Martin 2008:127). It is a party that serves the agenda of economic elites and conservative activists, yet is widely supported by people across the United States who are neither economic elites, nor as radical as their elected party representatives.

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[27] Legislative acts during the first half of the twentieth century established official primaries across the country, depriving the political leaders of machine-style parties of their ability to maintain the patronage networks. Without patronage, party leaders could no longer exercise authority over electoral nominations, administrative appointments, or policy. The significance of political parties waned, giving way to a new style of candidate-centered politics. Candidates began to organize their own campaigns, and new opportunities opened for marginalized conservatives to challenge the party's liberal and moderate leadership for control. See Bibby 2003:39; Campbell 2007:70; Herrnson 2013:135-137.

Political scientists have firmly established that the Republican Party and Democratic Party are not the mirror images of one other. They have distinct historical lineages, they operate in different manners, and they exist within different types of organizational networks (Grossman and Hopkins 2016:4, 12, 127; Hacker and Pierson 2011; Hacker and Pierson 2005; Kroger et al. 2009; Skinner et al. 2012). In making this point, scholars have often neglected an important aspect of how the Republican Party became what it is today: how it developed as an organization. In this chapter, I present an account of how the Republican Party developed as an organization and discuss how this development has become consequential for the state of knowledge in conservative politics today. I argue that Republican Party officials' current dependence on conservative outrage media is rooted in a series of organization reforms. At various turning points in the Republican Party's history, party officials have reformed the party structure in response to moments of internal crises. These organizational changes provided the foundation upon which advocacy organizations and media outlets expanded their authority in Republican Party politics, and have resulted in Fox News becoming a gatekeeper for the Republican Party base.

POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Social scientists have found renewed interest in political parties and have developed new ways to conceptualize them that better capture the reality of what they have become in the twenty-first century. Extended party network models and political articulation theory are two promising approaches for advancing scholarship on political parties. While each of these approaches is distinct from the other, I draw upon aspects of each in this chapter to highlight how

the organizational composition of the Republican Party has changed and to describe how party officials have lost the authority to shepherd the party's base.

The extended party network model of political parties provides a way to conceptualize political parties as organizational configurations that expand beyond the federated system of formal party organizations to also include "informal party organizations." Scholars who deploy this approach portray political parties as networks of formal and informal political party organizations that act as "teammates" or "partners" to conduct party business. They describe informal party organizations as advocacy organizations such as Freedom Works, PACs such as American Crossroads, media outlets such as Fox News, or wealthy donors such as Charles Koch and David Koch who are not affiliated with the formal party organizations but contribute to party operations and have patterned relationships to formal party organizations (Bawn et al. 2012:571; Hernson 2009:1209; Kroger et al. 2009:636; Skinner et al. 2012:69; Masket 2009:9).

I draw upon the extended party network model to highlight organizational changes in the Republican Party that occurred during the latter half of the twentieth century. Formal party organizations increased in size and also expanded their informal networks to include more advocacy organizations and special interests. By the turn of twenty-first century, Republican Party operations had become distributed across formal and informal organizations. However, while this conception is useful for understanding changes in Republican Party politics, it highlights productive relationships between formal and informal party organizations that act as "teammates" or "partners" in conducting party politics and overlooks contention between organizations within the extended party network.

Political articulation theory provides a means to better understand conflict within political party politics. Scholars who deploy this approach focus upon a political party's ability to

articulate a hegemonic bloc of voters to support their political program (de Leon et al. 2015; Desai 2007; Tugal 2009). They emphasize how political parties actively produce social cleavages and how these politicized divisions form the basis for how people come to understand themselves (de Leon 2014; de Leon et al. 2015). In addition to drawing attention to a political party's relationship to the public, this approach also highlights conflict within political parties as contention between people who pursue different articulation programs.

I draw upon political articulation theory to highlight contentious relationships between formal and informal political party organization. Specifically, I deploy this approach to capture how conservative outrage media has gained greater authority in Republican Party politics. In the twenty-first century, Fox News has become primarily responsible for articulating the Republican Party base as a hegemonic bloc of voters. It has transitioned from being a "partner" of the Republican Party to exerting authority over it.

The extended party network model and political articulation theory developed from two different intellectual lineages, and direct researchers to emphasize different aspects of political parties. However, each sensitizes researchers to significant aspects of the Republican Party in the twenty-first century. The Republican Party has an extensive extended network of informal political party organizations that exert authority within party politics. The relationship between these "teammates" or "partners" were more collaborative during the late twentieth century, but that has since changed. Advocacy organizations and media outlets that the Republican Party ceded responsibility to at an earlier time now contend for authority. Specifically, Fox News has developed the capacity to articulate a hegemonic voting bloc and in so doing has become the gatekeeper for the Republican base. It now does more than disseminate the Republican Party message, it exercises great authority in setting the agenda for Republican Party politics

(DiMaggio 2011; Grossmann and Hopkins 2016:131-132; Horwitz 2013; Skocpol and Williamson 2012).

PARTY RENEWAL AND REFORM

The 1964 election cycle marks a turning point for the Republican Party. The organization was in tatters and Goldwater's defeat further strained the relationship between party moderates and conservatives. Ray Bliss became the RNC Chairman in 1965. His administration was tasked with rebuilding the RNC as an organization and mending relationships between ideological factions. Bliss envisioned the RNC as an organization that had enough resources and services to support Republican candidates across the country, whether they sought election as the U.S. President or county coroner (Conley 2013:52, 57). To realize his vision, Bliss and his administration transformed the RNC into a "service party"—a repository of information, financial resources, and professional services that Republican candidates may draw upon to support their campaigns. Bliss first established a permanent location for the RNC headquarters and staffed the organization with political professionals with experience in public relations, public speaking, research, and management (Conley 2013:57). Prior to the this, the RNC had not had a permanent location, nor did it have a professional staff that bridged administrations. Bliss and his administration then expanded research, fund raising, communications, and training operations to build the organization's capacity to support Republican Party candidates during elections, and instituted regional training programs to further professionalize state and county party operatives (Conley 2013:58).

Within a few years, the RNC had developed the apparatus to bolster state and county party organizations. In so doing, it contributed to a surge in party members becoming involved in

their local districts. In an era of candidate-centered politics in which the Republican Party controlled neither the nomination process nor the candidate's campaign, Bliss strengthened the RNC. He professionalized the staff and united a divided party around their shared goal of winning elections (Conley 2013:53, 56). Bliss's renewal program laid the groundwork for Richard Nixon's successful presidential bid during the 1968 election cycle.

The second turning point that resulted in organizational reform of the RNC occurred following Richard Nixon's resignation. Republicans lost significantly in the elections and were in a moment of crisis. William "Bill" Brock III became RNC chairman in 1979 and was tasked with correcting the ship ahead of the 1980 Presidential election cycle.[28] He and his administration implemented organizational reforms to further expand RNC operations and assert more control over both candidates and elected officials. During this time, the RNC raised unprecedented amounts of money after they initiated direct mail fundraising operations that connected the organization to significant donors. They increased the RNC staff to 350 people—200 more people on staff than the RNC had four years prior and four times more staff members than the Democratic National Committee had during the same time period (Hacker and Pierson 2010:173). This trend continued after Brock completed his term. By 1984, the RNC staff had grown to 600 people (Aldrich 1995:257).

Well-funded and with a staff the size of a small battalion, during the 1980 election cycle, the RNC allocated far more money to critical elections and vastly out-spent their Democratic Party counterparts on state and local party building activities, candidate recruitment and training, and subsidized polling operations (Hacker and Pierson 2010:173). Brock also directed the RNC

[28] Brock began his career as a Young Republican and was involved in earlier efforts to expel Northeasterner moderates from the Republican Party.

to work directly with state-level Republican candidates (Bibby 1980:107) and thereby altered the relationship between national and state party organizations that Bliss had established.

EXPANDING THE PARTY NETWORK

Bliss and Brock were instrumental to the transformation of the RNC into the "service party" it is today. However, in so doing, they each made adjustments to the Republican Party that allowed advocacy organizations to become more established in party business and therefore the broader political process. Bliss's administration ceded local and state authority and left the tasks of candidate recruitment and campaigning to other organizations, while Brock relied upon increased donations to expand the party apparatus. Brock benefited from an emergent network of corporate donors who supported conservative candidates in order to influence policy (Burris 2005: 277; Clawson and Neustadtl 1989:768; Clawson and Su 1990:384; Neustadtl and Clawson 1988:185).

During the 1980s, the Republican Party fostered advocacy organizations that would, once established, begin to exert authority back onto the party. Notably, the Republican Party provided funding for Grover Norquist to establish Americans for Tax Reform in 1985 (Hacker and Pierson 2010). Americans for Tax Reform is classified as a non-profit 501(c) organization, and is not formally affiliated with the Republican Party. As an advocacy organization, Americans for Tax Reform has instituted a "Tax-Payer Protection Pledge" that most, if not all, Republicans elected to the federal legislature have signed. Elected Republican officials who do not sign the pledge or who vote in favor of increasing taxes lose the support of the Republican Party and are targeted by Americans for Tax Reform or similar ancillary organizations during primaries. In addition to punishing Republicans who vote in favor of taxes, Americans for Tax Reform provides a weekly

meeting that brings together elected officials, political professionals such as lobbyists, and activists. Sociologist Thomas Medvetz (2006) observed these meetings and found they provide a significant means through which conservatives developed cohesion around an anti-tax political program. As such, it is a space for political operatives to communicate across the extended party network.

From the standpoint of the extended party network model of political parties, Americans for Tax Reform represents an extension of the Republican Party. Following renewal in the 1960s and reform efforts late 1970s and early 1980s, the Republican Party provided generous funding for party operatives and conservative activists in a way that would not have made sense during the first half of the twentieth century. Americans for Tax Reform provided the Republican Party with an external enforcer that can police Republican Party officials who might otherwise deviate from the anti-tax political program. In so doing, the Republican Party helped produce an advocacy organization that constrained Republican Party officials' ability to act, but did so in a way that strengthened the conservative commitment to oppose taxes in the party.

The Republican Party's transformation into a "service party" also opened space for interest groups to gain control of the political process at the local level. In San Diego and Orange County, wealthy conservative land developers began organizing through respective chapters of the Lincoln Club. Under the Lincoln Club banner, local economic elites established themselves as local power brokers in conservative politics. They recruited and groomed candidates, provided both issue-based campaign support and direct donations to candidates' campaigns, and lobbied for pro-business legislation. With considerable amounts of money for local political organizations, Lincoln Club members policed local and state level politicians to ensure that they did not deviate from their anti-tax or "pro-business" political program. For example, in 1995 the

Orange County Lincoln Club led an effort to recall Speaker Dorris Allen from Orange County—California's first Republican Speaker of the state assembly in 25 years—because she had a deal with the outgoing Democratic speaker Willie Brown that provided her with the support she needed in order to win her position as Speaker. The Lincoln Club then backed a successful primary challenger to unseat her. Allen's replacement as Speaker, Brian Setencich (R-Fresno) made a similar arrangement with Democrats to win the position and met with the same consequences (Masket 2009:14-15).

Whether at the federal, state, or county level, Republican Party candidates and elected officials form working relationships with outside organizations not formally affiliated with the Republican Party (Masket 2009:28). The Republican Party has cultivated these relationships in an effort to remain relevant in an era of candidate-centered politics. Many of these organizations such as Americans for Tax Reform at the federal level or the Lincoln Club in California provide necessary services for the Republican Party. They recruit and manage elected officials in order to keep them on message and in support of the Republican Party's anti-tax program.

Media outlets have also become an important "partner" in the Republican Party extended network. Since the 1990s, conservative media outlets have assumed more responsibility for articulating the Republican Party base into a hegemonic voting bloc. While conservative movement publications and televangelists had contributed to this operation in the past, the partisan media that emerged in the 1990s consolidated this authority in the twenty-first century.

WONKS LOSE CONTROL

In the mid twentieth-century, conservative intellectuals and elites worked to build the ideological base of the movement and push public discussion of politics to the right by

establishing organizations that promote and disseminate conservative ideas (Gross 2013:256). Notably, in the mid 1950s, William H. Buckley established the *National Review* magazine. *National Review* marks the beginning of the American conservative media. Buckley filled its pages with critiques of American journalists and academics that he viewed as favoring liberal politics (Gross 2013:266, 275-279, 285-286; Grossmann and Hopkins 2016:91) and presented his magazine as an alternative to major broadcast news programs and well-known periodicals. From a political articulation perspective, *National Review* conveyed a message that allowed readers to position themselves against liberal knowledge elites and thereby provided a means for unifying people across the disparate conservative movement into a hegemonic bloc.

Despite the proliferation of conservative think tanks, advocacy organizations, and media outlets during the 1970s (Gross 2013:276; Grossman and Hopkins 2016; Phillips-Fein 2009; Teles 2007; Teles 2008; Medvetz 2012), the conservative media as it exists today did not begin to take shape until the 1980s when Reagan's presidential administration altered the regulatory landscape. Sociologist Robert Horwitz (2013) writes that while the federal government began to deregulate broadcast media during the 1970s, the Reagan administration accelerated the deregulation of broadcast media. He highlights how the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) during the Reagan Administration rescinded the Fairness Doctrine that obligated broadcast networks to present fair and balanced coverage of controversial topics and how its removal of other measures allowed new radio and cable television channels to be created (p. 195-197). The Reagan administration also undercut the FCC's regulatory capacity, which left the agency unable to exert regulatory control as the advent of the Internet opened new possibilities for both movement and business entrepreneurs to produce and disseminate conservative ideas

and partisan accounts of the news online (p. 196-197). The FCC during the 1980s thereby helped produce the environment within which conservative outrage media emerged.

Among the many conservative media outlets that exists today, Fox News is a juggernaut. It has the largest audience and the most influence of conservative media outlets (DiMaggio 2011:108; Skocpol and Williamson 2012:125). As I discussed in the Introduction, most Republicans view Fox News as the most trustworthy source of news today. Political scientists David Hopkins and Matt Grossmann (2016) describe the Republican Party today as relying upon Fox News to conduct its political messaging. They portray Fox News as a partner of the Republican Party in this manner. However, a closer look at the changing relationship between the Republican Party and Fox News since September 11, 2001, demonstrates that relationship between formal and informal party organizations is no longer a partnership, because Fox News has gained the ability to dictate the Republican Party agenda.

Fox News exerts authority over Republican Party politics because it has successfully articulated its viewers into a hegemonic bloc. The best demonstration of this point is how Fox News amplified the Tea Party movement of 2009-2010 into the national spotlight and came to associate being a Fox News viewer with supporting the Tea Party. In so doing, Fox News bypassed the traditional Republican Party in order to articulate a bloc of conservative voters whose partisan identification not only mattered, but who attached to Fox News more than supporting the established leaders of the Republican Party. According to journalist Gabriel Sherman (2014), this is precisely what Roger Ailes intended Fox News to become when he founded the network with Rupert Murdoch.

The Tea Party gained national attention in 2009 because it was covered by the Fox News Channel. While this grassroots movement was helped by conservative advocacy organizations

such as *Freedom Works* and *Americans for Prosperity*, it was significantly advantaged by the existence of conservative media (DiMaggio 2011:123; Horwitz 2013:192; Skocpol and Williamson 2012:123). In addition to providing sustained coverage of the Tea Party to raise its national profile, social scientists Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson (2012) argue that Fox News pundits such as Glenn Beck routinely promoted and attended Tea Party events. Over a short span of time, they demonstrate that frequent Fox News pundit participation in the Tea Party lead to the public coupling Fox and the Tea Party together as a matter of partisan identification (p. 131). To be a Fox News viewer was to support the Tea Party, and to support the Tea Party was to be a Fox News viewer.

Much of Fox News's success is because it is able to make viewing the news a matter of a person's identification. It does so by evoking a form of negative partisanship that allows viewers to see themselves as a particular kind of person. As I mentioned in the Introduction, political scientists Jeffrey Berry and sociologist Sarah Sobieraj (2014) demonstrate that Fox News is part of a broader form of media that they refer to as an "outrage industry." They characterize media outlets in the outrage industry by their discursive style. Outrage media blurs the lines between news coverage and partisan commentary. Their aim is not to inform their audience, but to evoke emotional reactions such as anger, fear, or moral indignation. They routinely present information through the use of overgeneralizations, sensational depictions of people or events, ad hominem attacks, and efforts to belittle or ridicule their political opponents (p. 7). Fox News and other media outlets that can be classified as outrage media also have been demonstrated to present information that is often misleading or false (Berry and Sobierag 2014; Skocpol and Williamson 2012).

What matters most in outrage media is producing a sense of difference between viewers and those who are cast as their political enemies. If the 2016 election has revealed anything about the nature of conservative politics and the modern Republican Party, it is that conservative media has assumed the primary role of articulating hegemonic blocs by publishing outrage media that promotes negative partisanship, not loyalty to the Republican Party. The rise of the Tea Party marks a significant transition point for Fox News and the Republican Party. It is the first time that conservative media has bypassed the Republican Party in the articulation process. It is not ancillary to the RNC, but rather contends for authority within Republican Party politics and uses its influence with voters to drive the agenda—whether that agenda aligns with the Republican Party's anti-tax political program or not.

DISCUSSION

The modern Republican Party transformed into a service party in order to maintain relevance in an era of candidate-centered politics. Bliss and Brock were each savvy tacticians who made the RNC into what it is today. However, in order to do this, they also abdicated authority over candidate recruitment, came to depend upon advocacy organizations, and so lost the Republican Party's ability to direct the future of party politics. During the early 1980s when the conservative movement realized its forty-year campaign to take over the Republican Party and the New Right coalition emerged as the dominant political coalition, it is unlikely that prominent Republicans would consider their hold on party politics to be in jeopardy. It is also unlikely that economic hard-liners would question their hold over party politics. However, the organizational changes that made the New Right coalition a dominant force in U.S. politics and

led to the radicalization of Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives are also what has led to their undoing.

The emergence of conservative media in the twilight of the twentieth century served the Republican Party's anti-tax political program at first. In so doing, it functioned as an extension of the Republican Party and contributed to its ability to politicize points of contention between Republicans and Democrats to foster a broader partisan identification among conservatives. However, by 2009 the conservative media had developed greater autonomy from the Republican Party apparatus. Fox News developed an audience that is both large enough and loyal enough to turn upon the Republican Party officials it once championed. In this way, Fox News and the many other conservative media outlets that amplify its messaging or that are more ideologically extreme began to control the articulation program. Fox News's ability to meld being a Fox viewer and a Tea Party supporter demonstrates the network's authority over Republican Party politics. At the time, and still, it is indispensable to the Republican Party's ability to maintain its base.

Conservative outrage media's authority in Republican Party politics has done more than shift who articulates the base, it has destabilized the party's establishment. Conservative outrage media articulates its audience into a hegemonic bloc by producing cleavages among the public. They do so in a different manner than Republican Party leaders had. They have recently contributed to a resurgence of racialized politics that may not have occurred otherwise. Similar to how libertarians were purged from YAF and the Republican Party in the early 1970s, conservative outrage media is redrawing the lines of who is included and excluded from Republican Party politics today. These shifts produce new possibilities for who will comprise the party and what policies they will pursue.

The unsettled quality of the Republican Party today has implications for how people understand politics or conservatism more broadly. Conservative outrage media circumvents party leaders and sets an agenda that may or may not complement their agenda. This increases the likelihood that party officials and the party's base will fall further out of alignment and there will be less convergence between how people understand issues. There will likely be more disagreement among conservatives that will lead to increased fragmentation. As I will show in the rest of this dissertation, it is important for scholars to understand the grounds on which disagreements and fragmentation occur. I will argue that in these circumstances, epistemic practices have become significant grounds for difference.

CHAPTER 2
LIBERTY AMONG FRIENDS

Every Tuesday night, libertarians gather at a private home in the mountains of Valley Center, California for the Natural Rights Coalition (NRC) weekly meeting.[29] Set in the countryside away from electoral campaigns or political parties, their interests in liberty brought them together initially, but their friendships keep them coming back. The NRC is an organization in name only—it has no bylaws, no mission statement, no officials, and according to the participants, no leaders.[30] In the absence of a formal structure or code of conduct, the participants develop a rhythm to their interactions that coheres around a set of ideals. They view each individual as being responsible for their own actions, and no one else's. They claim that a person's actions should always be voluntary or based on consent, and that no one has the right to use force or fraud against someone else or their property. The result is, as they see it, anarchy.

NRC participants are part of a broader conservative movement of libertarian anarchists that advocate for abolition of the state. The "Liberty Movement," as the participants sometimes refer to it, is comprised of small informal groups with few ties between them, and does not include large-scale mobilization. As such, the NRC participants develop ways of doing things

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[29] Valley Center is an unincorporated town in northeastern San Diego County. Many of the participants live in North County but some travel from San Diego City or western coastal cities such as Encinitas.

[30] FN NRC20150203. Also see podcast episode "Go Camping." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cASCQ1e3jRc&list=PL9361yULXYpDiI1bqE2M0ZQn0rX078DRe&index=29>.

through loosely structured interactions with each other. In the parlance of cultural sociology, they develop group customs (Fine 2012; Lichterman 2005: 52) over time through which they develop relationships, self-conceptions, and practices grounded in principles of individualism or what sociologists Paul Lichterman (1996) refers to as "personalism." In this chapter, I present an account of NRC to demonstrate how they produce collective habits or group customs through interactions with each other. Specifically, I focus my account upon the practical problems members encountered prior attending the NRC weekly meetings and how the solutions they develop to those problems together become habit over a period of time. My account of NRC in this chapter contrasts with that of political party organizations in Chapter Three, and leads into my discussion of encoding in Chapter Four. Encoding captures the process through which the past constitutes sets of possibilities and constraints within which people must act in the present. As such, this chapter may be read as the process through which participants in a fledging advocacy organization produce customs that affect what they may do a later time.

MILITARY HONORS

Jon stands near the fire pit dangling his military dress uniform from a hanger. "I should do it," he says, "I'm going to burn it." He pauses while the other participants watch. The uniform is clean, pressed, and adorned with patches and medals. Someone suggested earlier in the night that he burn it. Despite their sarcastic and joking tone, he is considering it.

The other participants on the patio are quiet. It is a rare moment of silence while they wait and shift in their seats. Finally, a man shouts from the other side of the patio, "You should keep it." A woman agrees, "Yeah, you should..." The man continues, "You never know, you might need it. [...] We might need to infiltrate the government someday." His comment is

uncharacteristic of NRC participants—no one talks about revolting or infiltrating the government. Yet, Jon responds to the man by waving his hand, as he says, “Alright, maybe another time,” and he takes the uniform back into the house.

Jon’s actions catch everyone off guard, but the participants seem just as surprised by their reactions. The man murmurs that he is glad Jon kept the uniform, once again joking that they might need it. Another man made it clear that he does not support the military but that this was more about Jon. Kristy and another woman agree, it is about Jon.

Jon often criticizes the military. He portrays it as corrupt and abusive, an institution that only serves the interests of “psychopathic bankers and politicians.” At the same time, he often talks about his past in the military. He tells others about his experiences, uses obscure military terms in casual conversation, and draws on his past to better understand whatever the participants are discussing. From the perspective of the other participants, being a veteran clearly matters to him. They were relieved when he returned the military uniform to his wardrobe. No one wants him to do something that he might regret once the excitement passed.

Other veterans were in attendance that night. Steve served as a Navy Corpsman in the same U.S. Marine Corps unit as Jon, although at a different time with no overlap. Unlike Jon, Steve rarely talks about his military service at the weekly meetings. When he does, he makes a quick comment in passing. For example, during the November 18, 2014 NRC weekly meeting, Steve retrieves a kit from his truck and provides first-aid to a participant who injured her finger. Someone comments on his noticeable skill in working with the supplies, and he mentions that he had been trained as a medic in the military. During a house warming party in March 2015, Steve comments on his recent weight loss, “I’m getting closer to my military weight.” In each of these

instances, he presents his military service in a matter-of-fact manner. He neither hides his past, nor elects to discuss it in detail.

Jon and Steve both draw insights from their experiences in the military. A self-proclaimed "Chatty Cathy," Jon just talks about it more frequently. In Steve's words, each "stared into the eyes of the beast," and it changed them. They enlisted to serve but came to second-guess their past decisions during their transition to civilian life. It took time and effort for each of them to come to terms with their service. Not only to recover from physical injury or emotional distress, but to understand a new-found sense of doubt that drove them to consider whether or not they could do things differently than they had in the past—if they could become someone new.

VETERAN TRANSITIONS

Jon did not leave the military by choice. He was medically retired after being injured during a combat mission. In 2004, he was shot multiple times in his left femur and received grenade fragmentation in his ankle and shoulder while extracting a wounded Marine in a house in Fallujah, Iraq. He jokes that this pretty much ended his running days, but it did more than that. It set him down the path of recovery that framed his transition back into civilian life and led him to libertarian anarchism.

Jon encountered a series of problems during his recovery. The treatment for his physical injuries left him chemically addicted to pain medications. His combat experiences left him emotionally traumatized and prone to "violent episodes." He says that he experienced an episode every time he was anesthetized for a routine procedure or surgery on his leg. In his words, upon waking up, "I'd pick right back up in the hell house."

In addition to his injuries, Jon's transition into civilian life was hindered by a clerical error. According to Jon, the Marine Corps dropped him from their official roll in 2008 while transferring him from Temporary Duty Retirement List (TDRL) to the Permanent Disability Retirement List (PDRL). After 13 years of service, the military simply had no record of him. He maintained health services through Veterans Affairs (VA) but was cut off from all other privileges and entitlements given to military veterans.

Lastly, and perhaps most consequentially, after ten years in the infantry, Jon was accustomed to using violence to get his way. Beyond combat situations, he punished fellow soldiers that did not fulfill their duty to his expectations. He claims, in one instance, to have kicked a soldier in the head because he fell asleep during guard duty. Violence was a common part of his life in the military—it was a habit, not a deliberate choice.

Jon encountered problems that are not unique to him. Many veterans, especially those who see combat, experience secondary medical issues related to treatment, cope with emotional distress or trauma, struggle to negotiate military bureaucracy, or find that the things they became accustomed to doing in the military do not transfer over to civilian life. Yet not every veteran deals with these problems in the same way. For Jon, it was how he worked through these problems that set him on a path to libertarian anarchism.

Jon talks about two formative moments that encouraged him make a break from his past and, in a sense, to break from convention. The first experience occurred after his last combat mission. He recalls having vivid memories of being back in the house where he was shot. He describes himself being across the room from another wounded Marine that was propped upright against a wall in a pool of his own blood. Months after the shootout, Jon looked through photographs taken by a freelance journalist that was attached to his unit and found a picture of

what he initially thought was the dying soldier. Only, the man was not a Marine, he was Iraqi, and the pool of blood was actually a red electric blanket. While it is common for combat veterans to have inaccurate memories of battle, seeing the photograph left Jon with a lingering doubt about his own perception. He identifies this moment as an instance in which his mind played a trick on him, and from his current perspective, he says that it raises the possibility that was not the only time.

The second chance encounter occurred in a dive bar when, as Jon says, a "dirty hippy type" broke him down "socratically." Whatever the man said during their night of drinks and conversation, Jon claims that he could not stop thinking about his questions. The man's questions turned into new questions, those questions turned into even more questions. Jon says that he reached a point of no return because retrospectively, he identifies this as the moment when he first felt as if his world had been turned inside out. He could not go back to the way he was in the military but he was unsure about what to do next. His talk therapy sessions with VA counselors introduced him to the idea that in order to recover, he had to get his mind to a place where he could be happy. Still, the question remained: how?

Set on becoming someone new, Jon dealt with chemical dependency through sheer will. Not knowing the severity of his addiction and ignoring his doctors' instructions, he stepped off his drugs in a matter of days and endured weeks of withdrawal.[31] He worked through his violent episodes during talk therapy sessions with VA counselors. He joined a class action lawsuit that successfully restored his name on the Marine Corp official roll. He turned to the internet

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[31] I do not have historic evidence to validate this claim, but it is similar to how Jon has dealt with other medical situations. In one instance, Jon had little puncture wounds near his wrist. He says that he was bit by a black widow spider while clearing wood. Over the next couple of weeks, the bite swells and turns a deep purple. Jon admits that it is painful but he does not seek medical assistance. Jon has access to medical care through his veterans benefits and he may also have health insurance. Yet, he chooses to treat his injury on his own.

throughout his transition and found materials that helped him understand his violent habits from non-violent perspectives.

Jon's internet search led him to YouTube videos about Marshall Rosenberg's approach to "non-violent communication," and Alfie Kohen's writings on the pitfalls of punishment and his non-violent approach to parenting called "unconditional parenting." Jon experimented with Rosenberg's techniques for "non-violent communication" and began to practice Kohen's "unconditional parenting" with his young daughter. He was already wary of conventions related to "soldier worship," and these materials both substantiated and expanded his doubts. Like other NRC participants, Jon came upon the philosophy of liberty and by extension the Liberty Movement when seeking information to help him transition from the military into civilian life. He concluded that his unconscious acceptance of conventions had driven him to the military, shaped his relationships to others, and, to an extent, fabricated his experiences while in the service. Through the highly individualistic language of Rosenberg and Kohen's work among others, Jon came to see that few of his past decisions were based on his own free will.

Jon recalls feeling energized by this revelation. Not only could he see the problem more clearly, his self-directed studies had, in his words, "reconnected [him] with learning." His enthusiasm for acquiring information cascades into other domains of his life. He began to follow Ron Paul's political career and checked the "DailyPaul"—a popular Libertarian blog[32]—on a regular basis. As his interests expanded, so did his search terms. He immersed himself in liberty-oriented blogs, discussion forums, videos, documentaries, and podcasts. He began reading books written by authors who are critical of the things he thought he knew well, such as the military.

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[32] The "DailyPaul" was an online forum to follow Ron Paul and discussion topics modeled after his style of libertarianism. The site has been shut down.

He became interested in broader historical events, such as the spread of western imperialism, and alternative ways to organize or live in society, especially anarchy. Lastly, he moved beyond self-directed study when he joined discussion groups in Southern California, attending an "unconditional parenting" group in Temecula, California and a libertarian anarchist discussion group held at Café Libertalia in the Hillcrest neighborhood in San Diego.[33] Jon made his transition into civilian life. He became a libertarian anarchist along the way.

Steve's transition was different from Jon's. He left the military on his own terms, was physically healthy, and did not have any trouble receiving his benefits. Yet he too experienced a crisis of confidence, a moment when what he witnessed during wartime lost its sense of purpose and broader conventions made less sense to him—both in terms of violence and how life in the military was managed on a day-to-day basis.[34] He too responded by searching for new types of information on the internet and found his way to libertarianism. He too began attending discussion groups at Cafe Libertalia. Then Steve, his roommate Matt, and one other person formed the Natural Rights Coalition (NRC) in order to have a discussion group closer to where they lived. They held their first several meetings at Steve and Matt's apartment before moving them to Jon's house.

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[33] The discussion group was held at a coffee shop and internet cafe owned by a local couple well-known for their involvement in the Liberty movement.

[34] Steve began to see his religious conservative upbringing and the "military way" as manipulative and needlessly complicated. He describes the military way as "a whole lot of hurry up and wait." His initial splintering with convention appears to have occurred over wanting to operate differently than the military way during a time when he witnessed how following procedure (such as how to acquire medical supplies) delayed peoples' treatments and caused them to needlessly suffer. This splinter seems to have grown into a cleavage when he left the military and began working as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). As a Navy Corpsman, he often did the work of a doctor. As an EMT, he was unable to do basic procedures because he was not technically certified. He claims to have experienced a type of alienation (my words) from his work. He knew how to help people, he had experience doing particular procedures, yet a bureaucratic system prevented him from doing so. Steve, more than Jon, seems to have already had a propensity for highly individualistic ideals prior to leaving the military, and finding libertarianism provided him with a good fit for his personal tastes.

Many NRC participants, whether or not they are military veterans, claim to have experienced a crisis of confidence similar to Jon and Steve—Mike refers to these moments as their "libertarian origin stories." For example, Mike and Kristy report that they experienced a crisis of confidence when running for elected office as Libertarian Party candidates. Each claims that the experience revealed to them that political system is broken because it excludes people from being able to participate in the politics. Also, similar to Jon and Steve, Mike and Kristy also searched the internet for a solution and then eventually found their way to Jon's house. This is not an accident. Each participant claims to have encountered a similar problem when they began to doubt the things they routinely did in their daily lives. They also turned to the internet for a solution. In so doing, they found blogs, forums, videos, podcast, and websites dedicated to telling them the truth about this or that. Their self-directed study substantiated their feelings of doubt and provided them with a vocabulary to articulate the problem in highly individualistic terms. The problem, as they began to see it, is not that they made a series of bad decisions, it is that they are trapped in a system that prevents them from willfully choosing to do anything at all.

A participant's self-directed study only goes so far; it provides them with a solution to their initial problem by substantiating their initial doubts and provides them with a language to begin articulating what is wrong but it also leads them to encounter another problem. When confronted by vast amounts of information on the internet, how do they know which information to trust? They encounter a problem of excess (Abbott 2016), or as Jon describes it, "There's so much shit out there. It's hard to know what's real." Ironically, the further participants delve into liberty-oriented materials that substantiate their doubts and help them articulate their experiences through highly individualistic language, the less able they are to solve this problem on their own. They need other people to help them sort through the information they find, and to help them

make judgements about which sources are trustworthy or whether or not a particular piece of information is "real."[35] When confronted by the problem of excess, all NRC participants pursued the same solution—they attended discussion groups that aligned with their burgeoning love of liberty.[36]

Participants arrive at discussion groups for the first time having developed a general sense of what type of sources are untrustworthy. Their self-directed study fosters an understanding that conventional sources of information mislead their audiences in order to maintain the status quo.[37] They distrust major media outlets such as CNN, Fox News, The New York Times, or any source of information they see as linked or potentially linked to a government agency or political party. In this sense, whether or not NRC is the first discussion group they attend, they often have established a feel for which sources of information are real prior to attending—they view source as being real when the information they acquire from it helps them articulate their experiences. The combination of distrusting conventional sources and judging information based on whether or not they can find evidence for it in their own lives provides them with a starting point. Once they come together, they further develop methods for evaluating information that helps them sort through troves of unconventional sources. In the

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[35] The participants' need to find other people to help them sort through and evaluate information they find during self-directed study stems from their increasing skepticism of conventional sources of information such as mainstream media outlets or government agencies. Also, their attempts to discuss the material they find online with people they know can often strain their existing relationships. Kristy claims that her sister now thinks she is a "wacko" and a "fanatic" for not believing everything she is told. Jon occasionally mentions that he has "burned a lot of bridges" by talking to military veterans about liberty. As a result, they are often left increasingly isolated without a means for evaluating sources or information.

[36] This is an instance of what Neil Gross (2013) refers to as reputation-based self-selection. They begin attending the group because of the reputation, not the specific people involved.

[37] NRC participants filmed this discussion and aired it as an episode on the podcast. Mike's comments begin around the 13:48 time mark.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5g6oEjwo1k&index=19&list=PL9361yULXYpDiI1bqE2M0ZQn0rX078DRe

process of so doing, they become friends and make their affection for one another central to who they are as a group.

THOSE IN THE KNOW

During his transition to civilian life, Steve developed a reputation among an extended community of Liberty activists. His contributions to online discussions forums turned into an offer. He was asked to produce a weekly show for The Voluntary Virtues Network (VVN), an internet station dedicated to "voluntarists" programming. He agreed, filming the first episode of *The NRC Table Top Discussion* on "The Fall of the State" in his apartment along with Matt and Mike.[38] Soon after, they began filming "the podcast," as the participants refer to it, at Jon's house during the NRC weekly meeting. Filming the podcast quickly became a significant and enjoyable part of their routine.[39]

NRC participants treat the podcast as an ongoing project. They purchase new equipment and learn more about how to edit video in order to increase the production value of the podcast. They experiment with the format, even attempting to film their discussions after the official podcast wraps or while they are bar hopping on a Friday night. However, the one conceptual aspect of the podcast that causes them the most trouble is the name. Steve changed the name of the podcast several times. He said that the first name is too dry, while the second fell flat with the

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[38] The podcast first aired on the Voluntary Virtues Network (VVN) on July 12, 2014. VVN has a set streaming schedule but also makes its content available on YouTube. Steve and the other NRC participants aired their podcast on VVN until Steve moved to Boise to attend the University of Idaho in 2016. Without Steve, VVN stopped airing the NRC's podcast. Since then, the remaining participants created their own YouTube channel to air the podcast, "The Nook."

[39] The participants film one episode per week. They have a panel discussion about a topic from a libertarian anarchist perspective. Anyone who attends the weekly meeting can choose to sit on the panel. They edit each episode before sending it to VVN. It streams on VVN during a set time slot but is also available to view anytime on the VVN YouTube channel.

rest of the group. The third time, he turned to the group to help him pick the new name rather than deciding on his own. Amid discussion over the name, one participant suggested, "The Nook." In an instance, they ceased discussion and everyone smiled. One participant said, "It's perfect." Another followed, "yeah, the Nook." They agreed on the name and they begin to share their memories of when they first came up with "the nook."

The participants name the podcast after the secret hangout spot they established during the Libertopia Conference in San Diego.[40] "The nook" was nothing more than the back room of a hotel, an offset staging area that was isolated from the rest of the conference goers. They made this space into their own private retreat and named it "the nook" while drinking heavily one night. They even came up with a saying that they still recite to each other in conversation: "Those in the know, know the nook." There are two variations of how they carry out the exchange, both involved call-and-response. In the first variation, one participant says the first half of the saying, "Those in the know," and then another participant finishes the statement, "know the nook." In the second variation, the first person tells others the entire saying and then another participant or participants repeat either a part of the saying or the entirety of the statement.

Whether or not participants recite the saying through the first or second variation of the exchange, they convey a similar meaning. First, they refer to themselves as "those in the know" because they view themselves as the kind of people who are able to unmask misinformation, government sponsored propaganda, and to recognize the hegemonic aspects of social conventions. They are those who have figured out how to find truth in a society built to keep

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[40] Libertopia is an annual conference for libertarian anarchists or voluntarists. Some of the participants volunteer at the event while others just attend. The conference draws liberty activists from all over the United States.

them from it. Second, they make a corollary claim, when they say "know the nook," they are referring to each other. In this sense, they are able to find truth in a world that is obscured from them because they have found each other and do so together.

Whether or not participants fully articulate this saying in this manner, they reinforce this meaning through sentimental expressions during these exchanges. They convey a personal warmth and excitement as one person *calls* and the others *respond*. They mutually acknowledge their friendships and also express appreciation for each other. In so doing, they express camaraderie.

DIFFERENT WAVELENGTHS

NRC participants distinguish themselves from the general public. They view themselves as the kind of people who can unmask misinformation and see through attempts to deceive them, and the general public as the people who either cannot or choose not to do the same. They engage in these acts of self-definition with the general public as their comparison group through the practice of questioning why the general public accepts conventions or is deceived by misinformation. They provide a variety of answers to the question. They depict people in the general public as making a personal choice, as being brainwashed, or as being intellectually incapable of seeing the truth. I present a brief account of each response below to demonstrate how the practice of persistently asking and answering this question allows them to sustain their shared conception of who they are as a group.[41]

[41] Another way to think about this is to consider how answering this question helps them remain convinced their explanations of the world are correct when there is significant evidence or consensus that they are not correct.

Response 1: Personal Choice

In August 2015, Mike makes a comment about how ISIS soldiers depicted in the media always seem to have Toyota trucks. Over the next several months, he repeats his observation about the trucks each time another participant mentions ISIS in conversation. He tells others that it seems "fishy" or that "they," who he does not specify, are not fooling him. After major news outlets such as CNN and ABC News air stories about ISIS's apparent fondness for Toyota trucks that October, Mike is astonished by journalists who claim that they do not know how ISIS acquired so many Toyota trucks. He tells the others, "It's not much of a mystery from where I'm standing." He chuckles and passes judgement on the journalists, "See, it's all a bunch of fake news"—a charge he repeats periodically over the next month.[42] The other participants communicate their agreement with nods or short affirming statements. Mike's implication is clear to everyone involved in this conversation and does not need to be said: the United States government is somehow involved in ISIS acquiring Toyota trucks. Another participant asks him why other people in the general public are not able to see truth behind the news reports. Mike responds, "I don't know, maybe they just don't want to." From his standpoint, in this instance, he communicates that the general public does not see the truth because they choose not to.

Response 2: Brainwashing

Mike's skepticism of the news reports involving Toyota trucks relates to a broader distrust of both news and entertainment media that he shares with other NRC participants. They

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[42] Websites that some of the NRC participants read, such as ZeroHedge.com, also began to report about ISIS and Toyota trucks in October 2015. These lesser known websites report the stories in a conspiratorial manner, and claim that the U.S. Department of Defense sold the trucks directly to ISIS under the pretense that they were selling them to Syrian rebel militia. I have no evidence of Mike reading these sources at this time. His observation of the trucks predates media reports.

often refer to the media as being "state sponsored," and claim that it, similar to other state sponsored institutions such as compulsory education, indoctrinate the public. They portray the media as inundating people with images and ideas that narrow their imaginations of what is possible. In the situation depicted above, when another participant asks Mike why the general public does not see the truth behind the news reports that ISIS has a lot of Toyota trucks, Mike could easily have said that it is because people are brainwashed—a response that both he and other NRC participants have given in similar situations.

NRC participants depict people as brainwashed to convey that a person does not choose whether or not they know the truth. Whether participants portray the general public as ignoring the truth by choice or as being unable to see reality produces few practical consequences for their conversations. When participants discuss the public complacency as a matter of choice, they are more likely move onto another topic of discussion. If they present the general public as brainwashed, they are more likely discuss possible ways to break the state's hegemonic hold over the public. For example, during the April 21, 2015 weekly meeting, after a participant portrays the public as brainwashed, another announces that he has a business idea that will allow the general public to picture an alternative society. He presents his idea as a business plan, and pitches them his idea for starting an online streaming service similar to Netflix. He tells them that it would hosts the same type of programming as Netflix with a significant difference—people would be depicted solving problems in a non-violent and voluntary manner. No shoot-outs, no forced imprisonment, no domination. "It will show people that another way is possible," he says. The participant dismisses his own idea because of the start-up cost are too high, but the group continues to discusses the specifics of his plan anyway.

Response 3: Cognitive Capacities

Participants occasionally consider the possibility that people in the general public who are not "in the know," are unable to see the truth because their brains work differently. While participants more often explain the general public's inability to see the truth as a matter of choice or brainwashing, they naturalize their differences to the general public when they question whether people in the general public will ever see the truth. Also during the April 21, 2015 NRC weekly meeting, Jon and another NRC participant sit on the patio near the fire.[43] "It's peaceful," one of them says. Jon muses about an idea he is considering, about why some people are better than others at seeing what is real. "Are you familiar with wavelengths?" he asks. "No," responds the other participant. Jon stands up and begins to draw imaginary lines in the air with his pointer finger. His hand swoops down and then curves upward in a fluid motion, swoops back down, curves up, down again, up again, down, up. "Imagine that there is a flat line," he gestures toward the middle point that intersects each wave. "The flat line represents objective reality," he says. The other participant gives Jon his full attention.

Jon continues to draw imaginary lines in the air, "People are like wavelengths in how they think." He condenses each wave, making each peak and nadir closer together; "some have really short wavelengths." He expands the waves, heightening the peaks and deepening the nadirs, "and others have really large wavelengths." Jon explains that some people view the world in a way that allows them to see reality more often than other people because they have shorter wavelengths, while the people who see reality less often are more likely to believe in illusions because they have larger wavelengths that intersect objective reality less frequently.

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[43] I am the other person in this situation. I follow Matthew Desmond's (2016) lead by presenting myself as participant or member in the body text in order emphasize my research subjects. I do so throughout this dissertation. I identify each instance within which I present myself as such in a footnote in order to maintain transparency.

Whether NRC participants respond to the question of why others do not see what they see by invoking personal choice, compromised freewill, or differences in cogitation; or whether they respond to the question in a quick and potentially dismissive manner or a slow and deliberative mulling of a possibility, NRC participants distinguish themselves from an unspecified general public by their ability to see beyond the lies and illusions presented to them on a daily basis. They repeat these exchanges in a manner that reinforces their shared understanding of who they are, and doing so provides them with another point of commonality. They are those who see the objective truth of the world because together they continue to question what others take for granted and work through whatever obstacles stand in their way.

DEVELOPING ROUTINES

I began observing NRC in July 2014. Their meetings were loosely structured at the time. People arrived around the same time, they ate food, drank alcohol, or sat near the fire pit but there was no order or regularity to their meetings. For example, during the July 1, 2014 weekly meeting, Steve wants to make a few announcements to the group. He walks around the house asking people to gather on the back patio. It takes his 20 minutes to wrangle the other participants to the join him. This changes after Steve incorporates the podcast into the weekly meeting.

By the end of September 2014, NRC participants organize their night around filming the podcast. No one keeps a formal schedule or timetable to regulate activities, they simply develop a rhythm that routinizes a particular sequence of activities. People arrive around 8PM and gather in or near the kitchen. Jon puts bowls of blue corn chips and popcorn on the counter while he and his young daughter bake sweet potatoes biscuits with blue berries. During this time, people talk

about whatever is on their mind whether it relates to their personal lives or is an idea they came across in the past week during their self-directed studies. This is also the time when they decide what the topic of discussion will be for the podcast and solicit volunteers to sit on the panel.

Once ready, Jon serves the biscuits with a side of homemade boysenberry jam, people continue drinking and Matt goes to the back patio to setup the camera, lights, and microphone for the podcast. Jon follows shortly thereafter to start the fire. People continue their conversations as they slowly migrate to the back patio. Steve, nor anyone else, wrangles people. Rather, they express enthusiasm for the podcast and tend to find their own way to the back patio when it seems like time to start filming. This takes longer some night than others, almost everyone in attendance participants in the filming, either as a panelist or audience member. They organize themselves around the activity.

When everyone is in place, Matt starts a stopwatch on his cell phone and displays it off camera in view of the panelists. Steve picks a time to begin the podcast and waits for his time to begin. For example, he tells everyone, “Okay, let’s start at a minute-thirty.” He steadies himself and waits for the stopwatch to strike 1:30. However, without fail, someone talks immediately before the designated starting time. At first, panelist attempt to ask questions before beginning or an audience member talks without knowing what is going on. They then begin to view disrupting the start as a joke. It becomes common place for someone to talk before the start time, leading Steve or another participant to identify a new start time that is then disrupted in a similar manner. After several false starts, Steve begins introductions that first identify who are the panelist and what is their “preferred beverage of choice.” Once everyone has been introduced to their audience online, Steve introduces a topic and they discuss it for the next 30 minutes or so. Each episode ends much the same way as how they begin—with an inside joke shared among the

participants. As they approach the 30-minutemark, someone on the panel tells the others that they have been thinking about something or that they have a question, then they incorporate the idea of robot sex into whatever conversation they are in the midst of. Steve announces that unfortunately they are out of time and that they will discuss robot sex next week.

After the panelists record 30 minutes of dialog, Matt shuts off the cameras. People move around the patio and house. Discussions around the fire tend to extend the topic of the show or go off toward another direction that was triggered by the podcast discussion. The people who go into the kitchen, whether it is to get more beer, food, or just to escape the smoke, they resume small talk much they had engaged in prior to the podcast being filmed.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I argue that NRC participants' involvement in the organization provides a solution to the problem of excess they encounter during self-directed study. I show that they have developed a shared understanding of who they are as a group, and routines that organize activities as weekly meetings. In this section, I demonstrate the link between these three elements as they relate to the formation of collective habits (or customs).

Many participants claim to have experienced a crisis of confidence prior to joining NRC. They turned to the internet for a solution and engaged in self-directed study that substantiated their feelings of doubt, and provided them with a vocabulary to articulate the problem in highly individualistic terms. They now encounter a second problem, they no longer trust conventional sources of information and do not have a means to evaluate unconventional sources on their own. They solve this problem by joining a discussion group.

NRC provides participants with a space to discuss unconventional ideas. For many, this is their reason for being there in the first place. It is only later that their friendships become central to their involvement. Together, they sort through misinformation, propaganda, and hegemonic conventions to understand the objective truth of the world. Their skepticism of social conventions or conventional sources of information became a habit. Their questioning why the general public does not see the world the same way as they do also became a habit. Together, NRC participants solved the problem of excess and developed habits that support their ability to do so in the future.

NRC participants developed routines that align with their need to solve the problem of excess and further supported their shared understanding of the group. NRC participants only developed routines during their weekly meetings once they began to film the podcast. The participants approached the podcast with a sense of purpose to inform the public. They viewed it as an opportunity to help others sort through the misinformation that obstructs their view of reality—to share their solution with others. As a shared activity, filming the podcast provided them with a common point of reference to organize themselves. They developed routines related to who does what and when, but more significantly, they developed ways of coming together as a group, not individuals.

NRC participants developed habits over time that support their skepticism of social conventions, enable their ability to distinguish themselves from the general public, and allowed them to come together as a group. This set of related habits are important for two reasons. First, they are an emergent aspect of the group that the participants developed through their collective engagement with each other and the environment (Dewey 1922:16, 40). As such, they are representations of the group's own reality that is distinct from that of individual members' own

beliefs or traits (Litchermann 2005:52). Second, the NRC is an organization that does not have formal bylaws, affiliations, or obligations of any kind. I investigated habits in order to capture how the past affects action in the present (Dewey 1922: 40). I will demonstrate how these habits affect the ways NRC participants can engage in knowledge production practices in later chapters.

CHAPTER 3
ENCODING OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

The Natural Rights Coalition (NRC) is a standalone organization that did not exist prior to the participants coming together. They had no bylaws, mission statements, or relationships with other organizations to pressure participants to conduct themselves in a particular manner. Participants made decisions about where and when to hold meetings, and they collectively developed habits, routines, and rhythms through their continued involvement in the group. Individual participants drew upon experiences, known repertories, ideological aspirations, and moments of creativity to help them solve practical problems along the way. In a sense, NRC participants did not have an "organizational memory" (Abbott 2016:7) to guide their actions, and in the absence of formal guidelines, written records, or established group customs, they began a process of organizational learning anew.

NRC is similar to many fledging political advocacy organizations in that what members do and the decisions they make in the early days of the organization significantly affects what members can do at a later time (Blee 2013:657; Blee 2012; Gross 2009; Haydu 2010). However, NRC and other fledging political advocacy organizations differ from established advocacy organizations or political parties in that, once established, the latter tend to operate according to formal regulations that structure internal governance as well as associations to other organizations that support particular habits and shape opportunities for their membership (Lichterman 2005).

Andrew Abbott introduces the concept of "encoding" as a means for researchers to understand how the past—or "encoded historical experience"—structures a set of possibilities and constraints within which people must act in the present (Abbott 2016:13, 33; Abbott 2005: 310-312; Abbott 2001:234-235, 237). Abbott (2016) argues that this concept helps scholars keep in mind that certain parts of the past are encoded and (re)encoded into the present synchronic social structure and that this reiterative processes of encoding is what allows analysts to view social structure as stable over time (p. 14).[44] While the encoded present of my cases relate to broader historical trajectories, such as the shifting political terrain of American political institutions or the conservative movement's take-over of the Republican Party in the twentieth century (Chapter One), in this chapter, I narrow my investigation to how the local and more immediate past constitutes sets of possibilities and constraints within which people involved in either a major or minor political party organization must act.

This chapter unfolds through a set of two comparisons. First, I describe and compare how encoding occurs in two conservative political party organizations in San Diego, California: the San Diego Young Republicans (SDYR) and the San Diego Libertarian Party (SDLP). Second, I contrast my accounts of political organizations in San Diego against their counterparts in Orange County, California—the Orange County Young Republicans (OCYR) and the Orange County

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[44] This sociological conception of encoding has distinct advantages over that developed by experimental psychological and cognitive scientists who present encoding as the means for individuals to retain information that they acquire through experience. Both conceptions deal with how people learn through experience, however they account for continuity across people and time differently. The sociological conception draws the researcher's attention to how the situation as it is situated within broader configurations of historical events produces relative stability in synchronic social structure from one moment to the next, while experimental psychologists and cognitive scientists approach continuity from the perspective of individual cognition in which continuity relates to a person's ability to remember. Abbott introduces memory as one means by which people encode the past into the present (2016:7), although he identifies this as only one form of encoding. Taken as a whole, his conception of encoding allows researchers to escape what he refers to as the "trap" of thinking the only way the past has an effect on the present is through an individual's perception of the past (2001:258).

Libertarian Party (OCLP)—to refine my explanation of how the various formal and relational[45] aspects of political organizations constitute different sets of possibilities and constraints within which members must act. My analysis in this chapter provides the background for Chapter Four and Five, in which I demonstrate how different sets of possibilities or constraints—or opportunity structures in politics—affect the formation of group customs and epistemic practices.

I focus my discussion in this chapter upon the topic of elections and campaigns because these activities are central to the internal governance of each organization and a political party which is to engage in electoral politics. I investigate the formal aspects of organizations through a close reading of bylaws supplemented by participant observation of an organizations members as they execute or fail to execute formal obligations or procedures. Organizational bylaws provide members with written guidelines that constitute a significant aspect of organizational memory that when followed produced continuity across successive membership cohorts. I investigate the relational aspects of organizations through participant observations of organizational members as they engage in cooperative actions with political campaigns that are further supported by secondary verification whenever possible. I verify information collected through observation with materials gathered from public records such as the California State

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[45] The formal aspects of each organization are established through an organization's bylaws and contracts with other organizations or firms that structure internal governance or obligations. I investigate the formal aspects of organizations that pertain to how the bylaws of each organization define official positions and membership criteria, the obligations or privileges associated with each position or membership classification, and the protocols through which members must conduct official business—if they follow official mandates. I also investigate the formal aspects of organizations related to their contractual obligations to other organizations within a federated system or political party's extended network. The relational aspects of organizations are those developed through relationships between an organization or the organizational members and other political or advocacy organizations, most of whom are in the same local political scene. To narrow my focus, I specifically investigate the relational aspects of organizations that develop through acts of coordination that bring an organizations' members into direct contact with those of other organizations or that allow organizational members to imagine a linkage to someone else in the political scene based upon their involvement in a political organization. I discuss the former in terms of working relationships and the latter in terms of "success stories" that, when available, allow members of an organization to imagine what their involvement in an organization could lead to in the future.

Worker Salary Database or newspaper articles, press releases, official websites for political organizations and professional firms, and social media platforms such as *Facebook* or *LinkedIn*, in addition to direct communications with members and internal communications distributed to the organization's electronic mailing list.

FORMAL ASPECTS OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

The San Diego Young Republicans (SDYR) and the San Diego Libertarian Party (SDLP) maintain their own bylaws that regulate internal governance and provide a means for organizational stability over time whether that stability is achieved across successive administrations and membership cohorts or through continuity in leadership. In what follows, I present specifics about the SDYR bylaws and SDLP bylaws that relate to administrative structure and election protocols as the structuring the mechanism through which people assume administrative positions in the organization. I present a detailed account of SDYR bylaws that may seem tedious but I do so to illustrate the specificity of the SDYR bylaws so that I may contrast them to the much less specific bylaws of SDLP. In addition to the bylaws, I present an ethnographic account of the 2015 Elections for each organization that illustrate how members' practices either align to the protocols detailed in the bylaws or they do not. In other words, I describe the written guidelines that makeup a significant aspect of the SDYR organizational memory and demonstrate whether or not the bylaws structure an organization's members' practices.

SDYR bylaws require that the organization maintain an executive board that consists of a President, Vice-President External, Vice-President Internal, Treasurer, Secretary, and two Directors-at-Large. Bylaws also permit the board to appoint an Executive Director as an addition

member of the board.[46] Each executive board officer is appointed to a one-year term, although the President requires a three-year commitment to the organization—one year as a voting member on the executive committee to be eligible for the office,[47] one year serving as President, and an additional year on the executive board in advisory capacity as a non-voting member.[48]

SDYR bylaws provide a clear authority structure between the President and other executive board positions—the President operates as the chief executive officer for the organization who oversees other executive board members as they go about organizational business. The other members of the executive board are charged with specific areas of jurisdiction and obligations but do not have direct authority over each other. For example, the External Vice President is responsible for fundraising, membership recruitment, and all matters of public relations that includes the maintenance of the SDYR website and social media accounts.[49] The Treasurer handles all funds and maintains records of money collected, deposited, and disbursed. She or he is also responsible for maintaining all regulatory filings and keeping membership records such as a list of who has paid their membership dues.[50] Neither the External Vice President nor the Treasurer can manage how the other fulfills the obligations associated with his or her position.

SDYR bylaws include a provision in which the executive board may exercise authority over the President or any other officer through a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote. The bylaws state that the President is "ultimately responsible for the success or failure" of all organizational

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[46] SDYR Bylaws § 2.2.
[47] SDYR Bylaws § 2.3(b)(1).
[48] SDYR Bylaws § 2.2 (h).
[49] SDYR Bylaws § 2.2(c).
[50] SDYR Bylaws § 2.2(d).

operations or programs.[51] The executive board may vote to remove the President if she or he demonstrates "gross negligence" or "a dereliction of duty."[52] They may also remove the President from office if she or he registers with another political party, or acts in a manner that is "willfully destructive" or "presents a clear and present danger to the wellbeing" of SDYR or Republican Party.[53] While this leaves room for interpretation of what constitutes "gross negligence" or a "willfully" destructive act, the bylaws are clear, executive board members have the authority to remove the President from office for being what they consider to be an ineffective manager or a bad Republican.[54]

SDYR bylaws establish three membership classifications. To be considered a "regular members," a person must (1) be between 18 and 40 years of age, (2) be registered as a member of the Republican Party, (3) live, work, or attend school in San Diego County, and (4) be current on her or his membership dues.[55] A regular member who does not renew their annual membership dues becomes a "dormant member" for three months after their dues lapse.[56] If a person fails to meet criteria 1-3, they may become an "honorary member" after receiving approval from the executive board and paying their membership dues. Only regular members

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[51] SDYR Bylaws § 2.2(a).
[52] SDYR Bylaws § 2.4(a).
[53] SDYR Bylaws §3.5(a).
[54] One way the executive board may be able to rule that the President is unfit for office is if he or she fails to meet his or her obligations as they appear in the bylaws. For instance, the bylaws state that the President must present the board with a budget and political plan within eight weeks of beginning his or her term. The executive board then has two weeks to discuss and approve the budget. No reimbursements are allowed from the time the President assumes office until the executive board approves the budget (SDYR Bylaws § 2.2(a)(iii)). A president who does not meet the eight-week benchmark or that cannot get a budget approved effectively shuts down operations for the organization.
[55] SDYR Bylaws §3.1.
[56] SDYR Bylaws §3.3.

who are "in good standing"—i.e., current on their membership dues—may cast ballots during general votes[57] or run for elected office.[58]

The SDYR Executive Board must hold an annual election to select the executive board for the following year.[59] The election should be held in March, no later than one week following the February general meeting.[60] The President conducts the election unless they are also a candidate in the election. If the sitting President is a candidate in the election, the Internal Vice-President shall preside over the election as the Acting-President. If the Internal Vice-President is also involved in a contested election, any Executive Board member who is not involved in a contested election may serve as Acting-President.[61]

The Executive Board must produce a list of candidates and eligible voters prior to the election.[62] To be eligible for elected office, a person must be classified as "a regular member,"[63] who is "in good standing," while Presidential candidates must complete a full-term as voting members on the executive board prior to running office—as noted above.[64] Regular members who have been "in good standing" as of January 15 are also eligible to vote in the election.[65] All votes cast by ballot must remain "secret." The candidate who receives the majority of votes wins the election, if no candidate receives a majority during the initial vote, the board will conduct a second round of run-off voting.[66]

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[57] SDYR Bylaws §2.3(c), §4.2(c).
[58] SDYR Bylaws §2.3(b).
[59] SDYR Bylaws § 2.3.
[60] SDYR Bylaws § 2.3(a).
[61] § SDYR Bylaws 2.3(a)(3).
[62] SDYR Bylaws § 2.3(a).
[63] SDYR Bylaws § 3.1.
[64] SDYR Bylaws § 2.3(b)(1).
[65] SDYR Bylaws § 2.3(c).
[66] SDYR Bylaws § 2.3(a).

SDYR bylaws provide members with detailed members that establish the administrative structure, membership criteria, punitive action against members, election protocols, and candidate edibility requirements. All SDYR members have access to the bylaws and with the exception of what constitutes "gross negligence" or a "willfully" destructive act. When SDYR members follow the bylaws, they provide detailed guidelines that leave little room for imagination or variation across members.

SDLP bylaws are less specific. They do not describe the relationship between officers, nor do they specify who is responsible for drafting and presenting the budget or whether or not the executive committee may change the proposed budget through deliberations. They also do not include any mention of a political plan or organizing document that officers can use to coordinate their activities toward a unified program or project. As written, the bylaws do not even include specific language for how to coordinate activities across executive officers, who provides oversight, or who is responsible upon success or failure of a particular action. The lack of formal rules leaves the inner workings of the organization to the discretion of the executive officers.

SDLP bylaws include little guidance in relation to elections. The most striking difference when compared to SDYR bylaws is what is *not* written into the SDLP bylaws. The document does not include an article or section that mandates elections, much less if a candidate for office can conduct the election or if ballots must remain secret. The bylaws do mention elections in relation to voting eligibility criteria. The document states that all individuals voting in the annual election must be current members of the San Diego Libertarian Party and have their membership verified upon entrance to the convention "to assure that only members will be voting."[67] The

[67] SDLP Bylaws Article 8.

bylaws do not specify between different classes of members, although they do include a stipulation that members meet three criteria: (1) they "have registered with the Registrar of Voters as a Libertarian in the Libertarian Party of California Region 37;" (2) they have submitted "an application" to the executive committee that was approved by the executive committee; and (3) they are current on their membership dues.[68] Without a direct mention to elections, Article 9 applies to all deliberative proceedings, which may include elections, and states that parliamentary authority shall be conducted in accordance with *Robert's Rules of Order, Revised.*[69]

SDLP's bylaws provide less specific language than SDYR bylaws relating to eligibility requirements for elected office, elections, relationships between executive officers, and oversight procedures. SDLP bylaws specify that the executive committee shall contain an Executive Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, and committee chairs designated to particular tasks such as membership, campaigns, and publicity.[70] The bylaws provide short descriptions of the responsibilities associated with each position; for instance, the Executive Chair shall preside over all business and membership meetings and the Secretary must maintain a membership roster.[71] The bylaws also require a two-thirds majority for the executive committee to create an annual budget.[72] However, despite these common elements, there is little similarity between SDYR and SDLP bylaws.

SDLP bylaws do not require candidates for the executive board to have prior experience with the organization, nor do they require a candidate for Executive Chair to have completed a

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[68] SDLP Bylaws Article 3.
[69] SDLP Bylaws Article 9.
[70] SDLP Bylaws Article 4 §1, Article 6 § 5-7.
[71] SDLP Bylaws Article 6 § 4.
[72] SDLP Bylaws Article 4 § 6.

term on the executive board. It is possible for candidates to gain office without prior experience or knowledge of the inner workings of the organization, and to serve without access to mentorship or guidance from past executive officers. SDLP bylaws include no mechanisms that might routinize communication across successive administrations, such as clauses that provide the immediate past chair a non-voting position on the executive committee. The absence of such provisions makes the stability of the organization more a manner of practical contingencies, such as the whims of those elected, than a means of bureaucratic procedure. To further contrast the elections and procedure in each organization, I present two ethnographic accounts: the first presents the SDYR 2015 Election and the second presents the SDLP 2015 Election.

> Young Republicans gather on the patio of a Buffalo Wild Wings sports bar for their monthly members' meeting. Located in an outdoor mall, the patio is narrow and sits adjacent to an open-air walkway dividing it from the backsides of several department stores. Illuminated by the flashing lights from nearby television screens and fluorescent bulbs hanging over the walkway, Jesse Gipe, the President of the San Diego Young Republicans, stands in front of the crowd and calls the meetings to order. He leads the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and informs them of the evening's agenda: their annual elections. It is time for SDYR members to elect a new executive board.[73]
>
> What follows is quick and uneventful. The outgoing executive board, consisting of Jesse, two vice presidents, and a handful of officers, solicited candidates prior to the meeting. Each candidate runs unopposed, and there is little chance that someone from the crowd will enter the race. Yet, Jesse appears to follow protocol with exacting precision.[74] He lists each position and the respective nominee. Upon introduction, he allows each candidate to address the crowd. He tells them to say a few words about themselves and what they will do if elected. After the last speech is delivered, Jesse asks the crowd if anyone wishes to nominate themselves or someone else for office. No one responds. He proposes a motion to vote for the candidates as a slate to expedite the process. No one responds. The crowd watches him but they remain silent. Jesse asks, "Do I have a seconder?" Michael, an outgoing executive board member, ends the pause: "seconded." With the motion seconded, Jesse administers the remainder of the

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[73] FN SDYR 20150330.

[74] Jesse followed two protocols: first, he conducted the meetings in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order; second, he followed all of the steps necessary to establish the election as valid and fair.

> procedures. The group unanimously approves the slate. Having completed his duties, Jesse congratulates the new board members, and adjourns the meeting. This officially ends his term as president and marks the beginning of a new administration

During the election, Jesse acts in a similar manner as the speaker of a parliament. He follows protocols, keeps people accountable to the established rules, and uses his position to establish the guidelines through which other people participate in the proceedings. While he is charged with conducting the election because he is the outgoing president, any other member who is versed in the SDYR bylaws could have done it the same way.

The 2015 SDLP election also has a predictable outcome but for a different reason. SDYR executive officers recruited candidates for office prior to the meeting and no other members choose to challenge them for office which led Jesse to propose the candidates as a slate—the one act that violates SDYR bylaws because votes are no longer "secret"—whereas the SDLP election outcome is certain because Benoit does not provide other members with the opportunity to challenge him. He does not solicit candidates prior to the annual convention when the party votes on leadership, nor does he inform members that they may run for election at any point prior to or at the annual convention.

> Libertarian Party members fill the patio of the Boll Weevil Restaurant in San Diego. While SDLP members typically meet across the street at Giovanni's Italian Restaurant for their monthly Super Club, they have crossed Clairemont Mesa Blvd. in order to hold their annual convention. Halfway through the all-day event, Mike Benoit (*Benoit, hereafter*) the executive chair of the organization announces that they are going to vote. Another longtime administrator of the organization distributes ballots to the attendees. After everyone has a ballot, Benoit tells them to mark their selections on the paper and to turn in their ballots. Members quietly mark on the ballots and then turn them in by stacking them on a table near the middle of the room. Upon the last person turning in their ballot, the election concludes and the members return to business as usual.

A comparison of the bylaws for each organization reveal striking differences related to how written rules can guide the internal governance of each organization. SDYR bylaws provide much more detail when presenting positions, responsibilities associated with those positions, the relationships between officials, protocols for successions of leadership positions, and measures to guard against radical changes in organizational leadership by requiring past service as an eligibility requirement for President—to mention a few. SDYR executive board members adhere to these guidelines and thereby have little to figure out when executing party business such as their annual election. Their doing so also makes the process through which members gain leadership positions transparent and predictable. A member who seeks a position on the executive board may anticipate the process with an assurance that they will be able to seek election without interference. While no one nominated themselves during the SDYR election, they could have. Jesse provided them with opportunity to volunteer and make a speech before members voted. SDLP members did not have the same opportunity. SDLP bylaws are vague and are most notable for what they lack. The process through which SDLP members can run for election is unknown because it does not follow a written set of rules and is at the discretion of the current leadership. Benoit, who is both conducting the election and is a candidate in the election, does not provide other SDLP members with an opportunity to nominate themselves or make speech's. Rather, the election begins and ends with little notice or discussion.

Bylaws are a significant form of organizational memory for political party organizations because they are a contractual aspect of how the organization should be run and how executive officers are expected to execute party business. Neither Jesse nor Benoit egregiously deviate from their organizational bylaws during their respective elections. Jesse makes votes public during a situation when no elections were contested and Benoit fails to conduct voting as a

deliberative process in accordance a parliamentary procedures manual. What the difference in bylaws demonstrates is the openness and transparency of elections. In 2015, SDYR election are more open and transparent than the SDLP election because Jesse provides people with an opportunity to run for office and follows protocol that allows people to speak prior to voting despite the election being uncontested. Benoit, on the other hand, holds elections in accordance with the bylaws but does not provide other members with an opportunity to challenge him nor does he follow a prescribed set of procedures. He merely hands out a paper ballot that constrains members' choices and helps ensure that elected leaders remain on the executive committee—thereby limiting SDLP members' ability to advance within their organization.

Affiliations and Obligations

Bylaws are a significant formal aspect of political party organizations; affiliations are another. SDYR and SDLP are both affiliated with broader political parties and must meet contractual obligations in order to maintain their status. In this section, I present each organization's formal affiliations and what people in each organization must do in order to maintain their affiliations. In so doing, I demonstrate how formal relationships between political party organizations affect practices within an organization.

SDYR regular members are permitted through the bylaws to establish or end an affiliation to any volunteer organization that is recognized or chartered by the Republican Party through a four-fifths (4/5) majority vote.[75] Once they establish an affiliation, the executive committee is responsible for ensuring that the SDYR "abide by the rules" and follow the "lawful

[75] SDYR Bylaws § 1.3.

directives" entailed by the affiliation.[76] During the time of my fieldwork, SDYR is a county chapter of the California Young Republican Federation (*California Young Republicans, hereafter*),[77] and is also an affiliate of the Republican Party of San Diego[78] and the Young Republican National Federation.[79] SDYR's other affiliations, the Republican Party of San Diego County and the National Young Republican Federation, do not produce *additional* formal rules that members must abide by or lawful directives that they must follow. Pertaining to the former, SDYR bylaws already state that the primary objective of the organization is to "make the Republican Party the majority party," and "to work to elect Republicans to public office and secure the appointment of Republicans to other positions in government." For the former, SDYR established a relationship with the Young Republican National Federation toward the end of my time in the field and whatever obligations may result from this affiliation subsequent to Jesse Gipe's administration are not captured in my data.[80]

As a county chapter of the California Young Republicans, SDYR is obligated to host an annual fundraiser and recruitment event that follows the California Young Republicans' signature theme of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, and are also required to transfer a portion of the funds they raise through special events and the collection of membership dues to the state-wide organization. SDYR members refer to the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms event as "ATF

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[76] SDYR Bylaws § 1.3.
[77] SDYR Bylaws § 1.3. Also, prior to 2011, there were two competing state-wide Young Republican organizations. Following their merger in 2011, the California Young Republican Federation is the sole Young Republican organization that has jurisdiction state-wide.
[78] http://www.sandiegorepublicans.org/affiliated-groups.html, last accessed on December, 17 2017.
[79] As SDYR President, Matt Stockton established a direct relationship with the Young Republican National Federation. In his farewell email to the SDYR listserve as chapter president, he writes that the relationships will provide them with the resources they need to help keep San Diego red (email March 21, 2016).
[80] Prior to 2016, SDYR had little to do with the National Young Republican Federation, although that changed when Matthew Stockton became SDYR President. Following Matt's term as President, SDYR was recognized as "Best Small Chapter" by the national federation.

Night." To adhere to the theme, the event must raise money and include activities that incorporate all three elements presented in the title, although as Young Republicans joke, "not in that order!"[81] SDYR raises money by soliciting donations from members of the local political scene and selling tickets to the event: SDYR members pay $30 to $35 in order to attend, while non-members pay $40.[82] The ticket to the event includes time at a shooting range, 50 rounds of ammunition, a cigar, and two drink tickets. Attendees begin the event at a local shooting range where they are able to fire guns at targets. Then they move the event to a local bar that permits smoking on the premises and they smoke cigars and drink alcohol.[83] I now present an ethnographic account of the 2013 SDYR ATF Night that emphasizes Jesse's efforts to organize the event while he served as the SDYR External Vice President, prior to be elected SDYR President. In so doing, I demonstrate how SDYR members act in accordance with the bylaws to fulfill their obligations produced through formal affiliations to other organizations.

> Few SDYR members are involved in planning ATF Night. The External Vice President oversees preparations for the event, whether they make the arrangements themselves or delegate planning responsibilities to another member. As External Vice President in 2013, Jesse makes the arrangements for that year's ATF Night. He makes the reservations, acquires supplies, and maintains the list of people who purchased tickets. He also fulfills the role of event planner the night of, as he continues and manage the event until it is complete.
>
> Jesse is the first SDYR member to arrive at the shooting range. He appears flustered, as he approaches two clerks who stand on the other side of a display case. The clerks are unkempt men—the glossy sheen of oil on their faces contrasts the faded matte finish of their camouflage clothing. Jesse introduces himself to the clerks as a representative of the Young Republicans and asks if the manager is available. Neither clerk responds immediately; one looks away, while the other leans on the display case and shuffles through a small stack of papers. Jesse asks a second time, his voice wavering. The clerk who is shuffling papers answers,

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[81] SDYR October 2015 Newsletter.

[82] The price of the event varies depending on the year and when someone purchases the ticket. SDYR official emails received July, 12 2013 and September 9, 2014 both advertise the member price as $30, while I paid $35 in 2014 (sdyoungrepublicans.org receipt # 447289024).

[83] SDYR FN 20140809, SDYR FN 20130716, SDYR email received September 9, 2014, and July, 12 2013.

> "We'll let her know." After another short silence, the clerk comments, "I hear that you can kill someone in California if you're a Republican." Jesse laughs nervously, "That's absolutely true." "It's not true in Florida," the clerk tells him. "Actually, that's not the case in California. It's okay to kill someone as long as *they* are a Republican," Jesse concludes. This time, Jesse and the clerk share an awkward laugh that acknowledges that the other person had made an effort to play along. Jesse comments on how expensive ammunition has become in California. The clerk says, "Yeah," and turns his back away from Jesse and the counter.
>
> Jesse soon becomes too busy to be nervous. More than 60 attendees arrive within a short span of time, and Jesse appears to be everywhere all at the same time managing the event. He directs people to sign-in on a clipboard and fill out information sheets and disclaimers with shooting range clerks. He helps portion ammunition from a large bulk bag into small plastic cups containing 30 rounds each. He introduces SDYR members to prominent conservatives who are in attendance as he circulates. Then he shepherds the crowd from the lobby to a classroom for safety training, from the classroom to shooting stalls, from the stalls to the bar, ensuring the event goes off without a hitch each step of the way. Toward the end of the night, as attendees drink alcohol and puff on cigars, the 2013 SDYR President addresses the crowd. He thanks Jesse for his hard work and for organizing a successful event. Jesse fulfilled his duties according to the SDYR bylaws, and so doing, the organization met their contractual obligations to the California Young Republicans.

Few SDYR general members are aware the amount of effort that Jesse put into organizing the event. There are also unaware that the SDYR is contractually obligated to host the event. Instead, they experience ATF as a fun event through which they can network with prominent political figures.

SDLP stands in stark contrast to SDYR. While SDLP is also affiliated with a state party organization (The Libertarian Party of California) whom they transfer half of their membership dues to in exchange for their dues-paying members' ability to vote for party officials at the

county and state level,[84] the two organizations could not be more different in regards to their connectedness to other organizations or their local political scenes.

As a county chapter affiliated with the Libertarian Party of California, SDLP operates autonomously and in isolation from the state party and other county chapters. The state party does not serve as a communications hub between Libertarian Party county chapters, nor do SDLP members volunteer for campaigns outside of San Diego; in fact, few volunteer for any campaign in San Diego unless it is their own. I did not observe direct communication between SDLP members and the state party, nor county chapters. I rarely heard of secondhand accounts of communication between members in different Libertarian Party organizations. In what seems to be an exception to standard practice, one former SDLP member recalls that he became involved in the SDLP after returning a recruitment postcard to the state party. Ted Brown, a long-time official of the state party, called him on the telephone and asked that he contact Benoit directly.[85] In short, while SDYR is active within the broader conservative political scene and Republican Party, SDLP operates in near isolation.

RELATIONAL ASPECTS OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

The relational aspects of organizations are those developed through relationships between an organization or the organizational members and other political or advocacy organizations—most of whom are in the same local political scene. In this section, I investigate the relational aspects of organizations that develop through acts of coordination that bring an organizations'

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[84] FN SDLP 20171215. Mike Benoit (SDLP Chair) and Jerry Dixon (SDLP Treasurer) discussing the general membership that they send half of their membership dues to the state party, no other SDLP members indicated that they know nor communicate with people in other Libertarian county chapters or the state organization.
[85] Interview with Mike Paster 20171012.

members into direct contact with those of other organizations or that allow organizational members to imagine a linkage to someone else in the political scene based upon their involvement in a political organization. I discuss the former in terms of working relationships and the latter in terms of "success stories" that when available, allow members of an organization to imagine what their involvement in an organization could lead to in the future. As mentioned in Chapter One, formal and informal political party organizations are linked through working relationships to form extended party networks. They are the ties that bind organizations together into a broader political party apparatus or extended party network.

Working Relationships

San Diego Young Republicans maintain relationships with other political and advocacy organizations in San Diego County and California through working relationships in which SDYR holds what I refer to as *coordinated volunteer events* for the campaigns of Republican Party candidates. These relationships provide the connective tissue between SDYR and other organizations and operatives in the local political scene. As such, these relationships provide opportunities for SDYR members to gain access to established conservative figures involved in San Diego politics that may provide members with a means to advance their political careers along a particular lineage or trajectory but not others.

I investigate how the relational aspects of the organization help constitute the opportunities and constraints within which SDYR members must act through an analysis of coordinated volunteer events. These events are a means through which the organization produces stability over time and constitutes particular sets of opportunities for members that are not reducible to the actions of individual members at any single point in time. I distinguish

coordinated volunteer events from an individual SDYR member's volunteer activities through three criteria: 1) SDYR executive officers endorse the event through an act of communication that associates the organization to an event—whether or not SDYR financially sponsors the event; 2) SDYR executive officers actively recruit SDYR members to volunteer;[86] 3) multiple SDYR members attend the event and volunteer together. I present findings from my analysis of nine SDYR coordinated events held from 2011 through 2014—this includes the 2012 and 2014 election cycles, and two special elections held in 2013. I also include information from multiple coordinated volunteer events held during the 2016 election cycle to provide further context to events held during the time horizon of my analysis.

In San Diego, campaign organizations operate for less than a year at a time. Candidates often hire the same personnel across election cycles or activate the same working relationships, but neither staff nor organizations who have helped the candidate during previous campaigns are obligated to join or volunteer for subsequent campaigns. This aspect of campaigns provides successive cohorts of SDYR members with similar opportunities to become involved in campaigns over time because successive SDYR administrations and membership cohorts must establish their working relationships each campaign cycle to preserve the organization's relationships to Republican Party politics in a constantly shifting landscape of campaign organizations. It also provides representatives with a ready-made means of establishing working relationships based upon past cooperation between SDYR and the campaign organizations of Republican Party candidates even if the personnel in one or both organizations have turned-over.

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[86] I identify recruitment efforts when SDYR executive officers issue *a call to action* to SDYR members through which they ask people from the organization to volunteer at the event, together. They issue a call to action through official email messages, announcements during the monthly meeting, and through informal conservation with other members.

Lastly, the incentive structure for maintaining these relationships remains in place across election cycles because campaigns continue to need volunteers and SDYR members continue to need more established figures in the local political scene to help them advance their political careers. I observe working relationships between political organizations and political campaign organizations because they are the most prevalent and most consequential form of association for SDYR members. They shape how SDYR members gain exposure to other organizations and occasionally join those other organizations.

SDLP endorses Libertarian Party candidates in San Diego elections. However, SDLP does not conduct coordinated volunteer events to support Libertarian Party candidates and SDLP members also seem indifferent toward campaigns—less than a handful of members assist or volunteer to support Libertarian Party candidates. Apart from the lack of coordination and absence of volunteers, Libertarian Party candidates in San Diego do not establish campaign organizations. Instead, they carry out their own campaigns without staff, prior experience, or the resources necessary to run a competitive campaign. In short, SDLP does not establish working relationships with Libertarian Party candidates, nor do libertarian campaigns have the technical expertise or resources to establish or manage campaign organizations with which SDLP could potentially form working relationships.[87] When it comes to electoral politics, the absence of working relationships further isolates SDLP from the broader conservative political scene in San Diego.

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[87] SDLP Executive Chair Mike Benoit has run for public office on several occasions and he has provided advice to Libertarian Party candidates. Former candidates describe their relationship to Benoit as that of a mentor and mentee. Within this relationship, Benoit instructed candidates how campaign for themselves through activities such as gaining local media coverage or petitioning to be included in debates.

Despite SDLP's absence of working relationships with local campaign organizations, SDLP members occasionally discuss reaching out to Republican or Democratic campaigns. During the 2014 Holiday Party, SDLP Executive Chair Mike Benoit initiates group discussion on how to increase their membership and become more involved in the local political scene. Some members suggest that they restructure their monthly meetings to be more discussion-oriented, or that members act friendlier toward one another; however, one member suggests that they reach out to local Republican or Democratic campaigns. The member argues that SDLP speaks for a delegation of roughly 12,000 voters in San Diego County, and that they should leverage their numbers to gain a greater voice in local politics. The member's claim that SDLP speaks for 12,000 voters is not substantiated by evidence, rather, in this discussion, the claim conveys a sense that SDLP is significant because they have leverage over Republican or Democratic campaigns.

SDLP members who make similar comments present the idea that Republican Party candidates and Democratic Party candidates should engage them on their own terms, thereby allowing SDLP to be a broker for a libertarian voting bloc. They do not discuss whether or not SDLP members should volunteer or donate to political campaigns across party lines. The particular member who raises the suggestion at the 2014 SDLP Holiday Party does not want to join or participate in a campaign; he wants a Republican or Democratic campaigns to ask SDLP for help. Some members of the audience at the Holiday Party agree with the man, and voice their support prior to Benoit shifting the discussion to a new topic. In this instance, the member's suggestion is a form of self-aggrandizing talk—he makes this comment as an end unto itself. He presents an imagined libertarian voting bloc and conceptualizes the relationship between SDLP and major party political campaigns in a manner that is flattering to SDLP. Following the

discussion, SDLP members do not act upon the suggestion. They do not discuss how to contact political campaigns, nor do they initiate a call to action that would attempt to bring SDLP members into contact with members of other political organizations.

Coordination of Volunteers

SDYR members are not required to volunteer for political campaigns, yet a third of members do.[88] SDYR executive board members recruit and coordinate volunteer events on behalf of local campaigns and occasionally participate in a broader mobilization effort that is led by other organizations, such as the California Young Republicans or the Republican Party of San Diego County. In each instance, SDYR executive board members issue a call to action to general members that communicates that they as an organization are holding or participating in a coordinated volunteer event for a political campaign, such as precinct walk or phone banking event. They may relay the call from another organization or they may produce the call themselves. In both instances, whether or not the call originates with them, they make it clear that SDYR members will volunteer together. The following ethnographic observations demonstrate how SDYR members encounter calls to action as intragroup communications.

> SDYR members receive an email from the organization's official email account on July 9, 2013. The message is nothing more than a list of upcoming events. The subject heading includes, "Special Call to Action for SD16 Race!!"—referring to the special election to fill the vacant seat for California State Senate District 16. The message includes information for the "Throw Down with Andy Vidak," a precinct walk in support of the Republican candidate in Fresno, California on July 13-14. California Assembly member Travis Allen and the California Young Republicans sponsor the event and will pay the entire cost for volunteers to attend: Allen will pay for all transportation, lodging, and food, while

[88] There were 35 SDYR members during the 2014 election cycle and roughly 12 SDYR members actively volunteered during the 2014 election cycle.

the California Young Republicans provide "after-hours entertainment" that includes a pool-party, t-shirts, and cigars. Lastly, the message claims that more than 100 Young Republicans will attend, in addition to at least six state-wide Republican Party officials that includes the California Republican Party Chairman, the California Assembly GOP Leader, and a handful of California State Senators.[89]

Three days later, during the July 2013 SDYR Happy Hour, eight SDYR members sit around a table at the Stone World Bistro in Liberty Station, the former U.S. Navy Training Center that has since been converted into shops and restaurants. A man asks if anyone at the table is going to Fresno tomorrow. Liz and a few other people suggest that they will go; another says that she has not decided; and a woman who is attending her first SDYR event openly wonders what everyone is talking about. The man tells the newcomer that Young Republicans from across California are traveling to Fresno to canvass for Andy Vidak so that they can prevent Democrats from gaining a super majority in the State Senate. Liz adds, "It's all expenses paid." Another member comments, "I heard they rented out the entire Ramada Inn for this." Liz tells the newcomer that SDYR will rent a van for the trip, and that there will be space available if she would like to join them. The man who commented on the hotel tells everyone that after they finish campaigning, there is usually a huge party with free alcohol and prize giveaways. Liz finishes the pitch by telling the newcomer that they get to spend time with prominent Republicans during the after party—*nudge-nudge*. The next day, Liz and twelve other SDYR members travel to Fresno to canvass for Andy Vidak.[90]

As SDYR members canvass in Fresno, a political scandal involving San Diego Mayor Bob Filner nears a tipping point at home. Less than a month later, Filner resigns as San Diego Mayor, which triggers a special election to fill the vacancy. SDYR mobilizes for the Republican Party candidate Kevin Faulconer—first during the primary and then during the general election. They hold a series of coordinated volunteer events from September 2013 until election day in February 2014. SDYR members volunteer in phone banks, canvas precincts,[91] and participate in election day public demonstrations that include waving Faulconer campaign signs and "poll watching."

The process that went in to organizing the SDYR for a campaign based in Fresno depends upon a communications system established by their formal affiliations and supported by

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[89] SDYR email, July 9, 2013 from sdyoungrepublicans@gmail.com.

[90] The SDYR Facebook page posted a picture on July 13, 2013 of the SDYR members in Fresno with the caption, "SDYRs after a long day of walking for Andy Vidak in Fresno!"

[91] SDYR members helped organize and participated in a joint effort with College Republicans for a "College Republicans Vs. Young Republican Throwdown" in San Diego. The event brought CRs and YRs from across the state to San Diego to canvas on behalf of Kevin Faulconer. SDYR members also participated in Kevin Faulconers "All Hands on Deck" precinct walk on November 16, 2013. Confirmed, email from sdyoungrepublicans@gmail.com on February 2, 2014.

the voluntary compliance of county chapters. The California Young Republicans initiated this coordinated volunteer effort on behalf of Andy Vidak's campaign, but once SDYR executive board members received the initial call, they urged their members to participate in the "Throw Down for Andy Vidak." Since the call was relayed through SDYR communications, SDYR members received the call from their peers, not the California Republicans. The statewide call thus has a local feel, and pressure on SDYR members to attend comes directly from their peers. In this way, Young Republicans mobilize locally even if the call comes from afar.

The 2013 special elections for California Senate District 16 and 2014 special election for San Diego Mayor, for which the Republican candidates campaigned from September 2013 until election day in early February 2014, benefited from happening outside of the standard election cycle. California elections are scheduled to occur on even calendar years such as 2012 and 2014. Candidates who campaign during an odd year for a special election potentially have access to more resources, such as wealthy benefactors and volunteers. Excluding people involved in local special elections, Young Republicans from across California were available to travel for mobilization events because they were not active volunteers in local elections. These circumstances make special elections during off years different than more routine acts of coordination that bring people from different organizations into contact with one another. During scheduled even year elections, SDYR volunteers remain in San Diego and do not receive outside assistance from Young Republicans in other areas of California. Rather, coordinated volunteer events to support local campaigns iteratively establish working relationships with campaigns in which they already share informal associations with a candidate or campaign staff.

SDYR executive board members issue a call for local campaigns during the standard election cycle in much the same manner as during special elections, but without activating their

extended network of political organizations outside San Diego. In the lead up to the 2014 general election, SDYR mobilized for Carl DeMaio's campaign for U.S House California District 52. Similar to their efforts to support his 2012 campaign for Mayor of San Diego, the executive board organized group phone bank events. Jesse announces the event to the general membership and asks them to sign-up on a piece of paper circulating in the audience. After the meeting, he continues to recruit members to attend. He approaches one member as he circulates the crowd, they shake hands and Jesse says, "I'll see you there, right." His soft form of persuasion includes a dash of social expectation, "right." The member agrees to attend and signs his name to the paper.

SDLP members do not establish working relationships with political campaign organizations but they are occasionally called to action. However, when called upon to become involved in a political campaign, they ignore the call. The following excerpts present two instances in which a former SDLP Executive Chair, who has since joined the Republican Party, issued a call to action for SDLP members to become involved in Republican Party campaigns.

> Richard Rider left SDLP prior to 2012 to become more involved in the Republican Party. A former SDLP Executive Chair and founder of San Diego Tax Fighters,[92] Rider is well known in the conservative political scene as an anti-tax activist. On August 14, 2014, Rider sends everyone on the SDLP listserve an invitation to his home for an "informal" fundraiser for Chris Cate's 2014 campaign for San Diego City Council District 6. Rider writes that it is an opportunity for SDLP members to "[g]et a chance to meet boyish-looking but manly-acting Chris Cate," who is at the center of a consequential election that may determine San Diego tax politics into the near future.[93]
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> On January 31, 2015, Rider addresses SDLP as an honored speaker at their Annual Convention. He begins with a reference to *Star Trek: The Next Generation*: "I know, I've been assimilated to the Borg," he says, commenting on

[92] http://sandiegotaxfighters.com/.
[93] Email from rrider92131@gmail.com send as a reply to sdlibchat@listserv.sdlp.org on 8/14/2014.

> how he joined the GOP. After the audience laughs, he tells them about the hard truth of San Diego politics: there is no hope for them to elect a Libertarian Party candidate to public office. If they want to influence government or have a voice in politics, he tells them they must support the Republican Party. He further claims that SDLP could have tipped the 2014 U.S. House of Representatives election for District 52 in Carl DeMaio's favor. Rider then tells them another hard truth: they will need to start small in the Republican Party by running for "small positions" that other people do not want.

Rider issues two separate calls for SDLP members to become more involved in Republican Party campaigns. He first invites them to attend his fundraiser for Chris Cate with the promise of gaining access to the candidate that they would not have otherwise, and then he encourages them to become more involved in Republican Party politics more broadly, referencing DeMaio's 2014 loss as one instance in which they could have tipped the election. In relation to the second call, it is unclear over the course of his address if Rider tells SDLP member to leave SDLP in order to join the Republican Party, or if he envisions SDLP becoming an auxiliary organization to the Republican Party similar to SDYR. The latter aligns with SDLP members' own talk of how to become more significant in local politics with one crucial difference: SDLP members frame possible working relationships with the Republican Party of San Diego County in terms of Republican Party candidates seeking them out for help, whereas, if Rider is suggesting that SDLP become an auxiliary organization to the GOP, he tells them to go to the Republican Party candidates and to participate on that candidate's terms and not their own. While I suspect that SDLP members' discussions of developing working relationships with other political parties is merely talk that allows them to view themselves in a positive light, if they seriously consider either of Rider's calls, they would likely find the prospect of becoming involved in Republican Party campaigns on someone else's terms unpalatable. This is perhaps

indicated by SDLP members' responses to Rider's calls: they ignore both, and do not even discuss the matters again.

SDYR and SDLP members respond to a call to action differently. Young Republicans often respond in a favorable manner with roughly a third of the organization routinely becoming involved in a particular event. Libertarian party members on the other hand, give little thought to an invitation to become involved in a volunteer or donor event for a political campaign. These responses matter because they form the basis of whether or not an organization is able to establish a working relationship with a political campaign. Working relationships form a type of bridge (Lichterman 2005) between organizations that foster mutual support but also provide opportunities to build relationships. For Young Republicans, working relationships provide them with the ability to become involved in other political organizations that may help them advance their political careers. To better understand how this happens, I now turn to a discussion of which political campaigns SDYR establishes working relationships with. In so doing, I present a form of organizational memory that is dependent upon renewable sets of relationships between Young Republicans and Republican candidates for elected office and their campaign staff.

An Explanation of Working Relationships

SDYR bylaws do not list decision making criteria to guide SDYR members to which campaigns to support and no single explanation fully accounts for which campaigns SDYR support through coordinated volunteer events. As a starting point, SDYR only supports campaigns for Republican Party candidates—volunteering for a campaign that challenges a Republican Party candidate or ballot measure is prohibited in the bylaws and is grounds for

expulsion from the organization. Yet, SDYR does not support all Republican Party candidates.[94] Apart from this formal restriction, among the remaining plausible factors that affect which campaigns SDYR supports through coordinated volunteer efforts—all of which are relational aspects of the organization—there is only one attribute of the relationship between SDYR and the campaigns they choose to support: SDYR executive board members have an informal association to the candidate or his or her staff. In other words, informal relationships between SDYR and a campaign are a necessary but not sufficient condition for explaining whose campaigns SDYR establishes and maintains a working relationship.

To support this claim, I first evaluate a series of alternative explanations that may affect whether or not SDYR holds a coordinated volunteer event for a campaign: [1] the candidate's policy positions or ideological orientation; [2] the competitiveness of a particular election in relation to other campaigns during that election cycle; [3] the geographic location; or [4] if the candidate asks SDYR for volunteers. Second, I present evidence to directly support my claim about the significance of informal associations to SDYR working relationships with other organizations. This argument will further support my broader discussion about how encoding occurs, because it demonstrates how working relationships established during previous election cycles affect which working relationships SDYR members establish at a later time. This last point further supports the sequence involved in my claim that an informal association precedes SDYR holding a coordinated volunteer event for a campaign, and that once they establish a working relationship with a campaign SDYR members may form new relationships that provide informal associations at a later time.

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[94] SDYR bylaws §3.5.

Alternative one: candidate policy position or ideological orientation. SDYR does not support campaigns because they adhere to a strict program of policy positions or because they adhere to a particular ideological brand of conservatism. In 2012, SDYR held coordinated volunteer events for both Mayoral candidate Carl DeMaio and City Council District 1 candidate Ray Ellis. DeMaio established his reputation in San Diego as a tax advocate who champions free market principles. During his term on the San Diego City Council, he publicly led efforts to cut the city's budget by reducing benefits to city employees, to allow the city to outsource contracts without the involvement of unions, and opposed Proposition D, a ballot measure that would have raised the city's sale tax by a half percent over the next five years. Ray Ellis stands in stark contrast to DeMaio. He pursued local labor unions to support his campaign and had previously donated money to support Proposition D and Nathan Fletcher, DeMaio's more moderate primary challenger who left the Republican Party shortly after DeMaio received the nomination.[95] For two Republican candidates in San Diego, DeMaio and Ellis differ on significant policy issues, and their ideological orientation varies substantially from market fundamentalism to centrist.

SDYR support of DeMaio and Ellis is not limited to the 2012 election cycle. SDYR also supported each candidate in later elections. SDYR held coordinated volunteer events for DeMaio during his 2014 campaign for the U.S. House of Representatives California District 52, and Ray Ellis during his 2016 campaign for San Diego City Council District 1. SDYR supported both DeMaio and Ellis during multiple election cycles during which different SDYR executive boards and membership cohorts established working relationships with these candidates' campaigns. The policy positions and ideological orientations of these different candidates as they relate to

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[95] Keegan Kyle, "Not in the GOP Mold: A Voter's Guide to Ray Ellis," in *Voice of San Diego* (April 30, 2012), https://www.voiceofsandiego.org/neighborhoods/not-in-the-gop-mold-a-readers-guide-to-ray-ellis/.

the central issues of Republican Party politics demonstrates that the particularities of a candidate's policy positions and ideological orientation do not prevent SDYR from establishing working relationships during campaigns.

Alternative two: competitiveness of a campaign. It is plausible that SDYR supports campaigns because candidates are involved in a more competitive election than other candidates.[96] After all, SDYR's mission is to get Republican candidates elected. In 2012, DeMaio and Ellis were each involved in competitive primary elections and then less competitive general elections—each lost, DeMaio by roughly 5% and Ellis by almost 10% of the vote. However, SDYR also held coordinated volunteer events for George Plescia's less competitive 2012 campaign for State Senate District 39.[97] Plescia received the second highest number of votes during a primary in which no candidate surpassed 50% of the vote. He benefitted from sharing the primary ballot with two Democratic Party candidates—one who split the vote enough to prevent Democrat Marty Block from exceeding 50% during the primary. While Plescia trailed Block by less than 3% of the vote during the primary, he later lost the general election by more than 17% of the vote. In relation to DeMaio and Ellis's campaigns, Plescia had little chance of winning the election.

SDYR could have supported other Republican Party campaigns during the 2012 election cycle that were more competitive than Plescia. Brian Bilbray's 2012 campaign for the U.S. House of Representatives California District 52 posed a strong challenge to the incumbent,

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[96] In 2010, California voters approved Proposition 14. The proposition restructured non-presidential elections for public office into an open nonpartisan primary in which voters may vote for any candidate regardless of their voter registration. The new laws stipulate that candidates who candidate who receives more than 50% of the vote during the primary win the election outright and the general election. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the vote during the primary election, the two candidates who receive the most votes enter into a run-off during the general election.

[97] Email from sandiegoyr@gmail.com, received on 9/17/2012.

Democrat Scott Peters. Prior to his 2012 campaign, Bilbray served in the U.S. House of Representatives for California District 50 for six years. After the boundaries for U.S. congressional districts were redrawn in California, Bilbray—a sitting member of the U.S. Congress—became the challenger to incumbent Peters in District 52. Bilbray received more votes than the other candidates during the primary, although he benefited from Peters also being challenged by a well-known Democrat, Lori Saldana, which split the Democratic vote. During the 2012 general election, with the Democratic vote consolidated, Bilbray lost the election by less than 3% of the vote. SDYR could also have supported Scott Sherman's campaign for San Diego City Council District 7. Sherman, who was endorsed by the Republican Party of San Diego County, faced a strong Democratic opponent and a Republican challenger who had not received the Party's endorsement. Sherman received 50.09% of the vote during the primary, avoiding a run-off during the general election.[98]

SDYR held a coordinated volunteer event for Plescia during the 2012 election cycle despite there being two high profile elections in San Diego County that are decidedly more competitive. One aspect that accounts for why SDYR supports Plescia and not Sherman is that in 2012 and 2014 election cycles, SDYR only holds coordinated volunteer events for campaigns during the general election. Sherman gained more than 50% of the vote during the primary and therefore skipped the general election. However, this same factor does not account for why SDYR supports Plescia and not Bilbray during his general election campaign because Bilbray was a stronger candidate who was engaged in a much tighter election. SDYR's support of Plescia despite Bilbray being a stronger candidate who is involved in a more competitive election.

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[98] Accounting for outside interest, all Republicans candidates mentioned in this section were endorsed by the Republican Party of San Diego County and the Lincoln Club of San Diego. The Lincoln Club of San Diego is a local power broker for conservative politics in San Diego.

Alternative three: geographic location. SDYR does not support campaigns that are limited to a particular area of San Diego County. San Diego County is vast and can take several hours to traverse when driving in traffic. SDYR held coordinated volunteer events for Plescia's campaign which included portions of San Diego city and sprawled into outer San Diego County, as does the district in which Bilbray campaigned. Also, while the U.S. House of Representatives California District 52 might take volunteers further away from where they live and work than would volunteering in the California State Senate District 39, SDYR was highly active within DeMaio's 2014 campaign for U.S. House of Representatives in that same district as Bilbray. In short, SDYR does not support Plescia's campaign because it is geographically more convenient for their members to do so, nor because they are not willing to hold coordinated volunteer events in U.S. House of Representatives California District 52.

Alternative four: campaigns that ask SDYR for help. SDYR regularly invites local conservative figures to speak at their monthly meetings. Some speakers address the organization's membership out of a sense of responsibility; some support the organization without asking for anything in return (although they might a later time); others address SDYR to recruit volunteers for their campaigns. Plescia spoke at SDYR's June 2012 meeting prior to SDYR holding a coordinated volunteer event for his campaign, as did DeMaio in March 2013 and Chris Cate in both June 2013 and May 2014 before each received campaign support from SDYR. Yet SDYR does not hold a coordinated volunteer event for a campaign merely because the candidate speaks at their monthly meeting or solicits their help. Sherman spoke at SDYR's July 2013 meeting prior to the 2014 election for which SDYR did not hold a coordinated volunteer event. Larry Wilske, Republican Party candidate for U.S. House of Representatives California District 53, asked SDYR for help with his 2014 campaign and did not receive it.

During October 2014, Wilske invited SDYR to bring a limited number of SDYR members to visit him on his yacht so that he may update them on his campaign. SDYR members who were interested in attending were asked to RSVP for the event with the condition that space was limited and that people who had participated in SDYR volunteer events in the past were given priority for attending.[99] At the event, Wilske presented SDYR members with an overview of himself, his policy positions, and a report on his campaign. Afterward, he socialized with his guests and encouraged them to become involved in his campaign.[100] Despite Wilske's attempts at nautical persuasion, SDYR continued to support DeMaio's 2014 campaign for the U.S. House of Representatives District 52 and Chris Cate's 2014 campaign for San Diego City Council District 6, but did not support Wilske's bid in the U.S. House of Representatives. Wilske demonstrates that SDYR does not hold coordinated volunteer events for every candidate that solicits their help.

Leading explanation: informal associations. SDYR holds coordinated volunteer events for campaigns based on whether members of the SDYR executive board have an informal association to the candidate or someone on her or his staff. DeMaio employed SDYR members on his 2012 and 2014 campaigns, and maintained a strong relationship to the organization by speaking at their monthly meetings, making donations to SDYR, and sponsoring special events such as their 2013 Holiday Party.[101] DeMaio and his staff also maintained relationships to SDYR members. For example, DeMaio's 2012 campaign manager Ryan Clumpner maintained

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[99] Email from sandiegoyr@gmail.com, received on October 10, 2014.
[100] SDYR FN 20141021.
[101] Email from sdyoungrepublicans@gmail.com received on January 18, 2013. The email includes photos of Carl DeMaio at the Holiday Party.

personal associations SDYR members such as Matthew Donnellan—2012 SDYR President.[102] DeMaio hired SDYR members to work on his campaign staff. Young Republican Tommy Knepper served as DeMaio's deputy campaign manager in 2012 and campaign manager in 2014. DeMaio also employed Young Republicans Stacia De Los Reyes, Chase Kassel, and Steven Esparza during his 2014 campaign.[103] DeMaio's association to SDYR and SDYR members may even reach back to his 2008 campaign for San Diego City Council District 5.

Ray Ellis also hired Young Republicans to staff his campaigns, and is considered by Young Republicans to be a "HUGE supporter" of the organization.[104] Donnellan was campaign manager for Ellis's 2012 campaign,[105] while SDYR executive officer Hannah Jane Castillo was campaign manager for Ellis's 2016 campaign.[106] During the 2016 election cycle, SDYR supported Ellis's campaign by holding monthly phone banking events for five consecutive months,[107] conducting a precinct walk, and distributing Ellis's campaign literature throughout the La Jolla neighborhood of San Diego.[108] While SDYR did not hold coordinated volunteer events during the 2012 or 2014 primary elections, they did during 2016. In addition to the efforts

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[102] I have not confirmed whether or not Clumpner is a Young Republican. I verified his associations to SDYR members by investigating their correspondence on Facebook. To demonstrate the content of their correspondence: Donnellan responds to Clumper's post about an article that presents Ice-T supports gun rights. Clumper writes: "Awesome, but not surprising. Ever heard rap lyrics about the virtues of gun control and trusting your personal safety to the police? Maybe Will Smith did that once, idk." Donnellan replies: "Sometimes I miss Duane Dichiara playing Will Smith on loop. All day." Ryan Clumper's Facebook page, July 24, 2012. On November 12, 2012, Clumper posts: "That time Stephen's hard drive crashed five days before the election"—referring to Stephen Puetz. Donnellan replies: "All the people with non-crashed hard drives thought it was working just fine." These exchanges both suggest that Clumper and Donnellan have past experiences working together on a campaign. These posts are available to the public. I acquired this information without being Facebook friends with Clumper or Donnellan.
[103] Email form sdyoungrepublicans on June 20, 2014. Knepper is listed as a "notable Young Republican who helped win local races."
[104] SDYR September 2016 Newsletter.
[105] Keegan Kyle, "Not in the GOP Mold: A Voter's Guide to Ray Ellis," in *Voice of San Diego* (April 30, 2012), https://www.voiceofsandiego.org/neighborhoods/not-in-the-gop-mold-a-readers-guide-to-ray-ellis/
[106] Hannah Jane Castillo's *LinkedIn* profile. Accessed on January 1, 2018.
[107] sdyoungrepublicans.org/get-involved-with-a-campaign-today.html. Accessed on January 2, 2018.
[108] SDYR September 2016 Newsletter.

to support Ellis in 2016, SDYR also held coordinated volunteer events for Sherman's 2016 reelection campaign for San Diego City Council District 7. It is possible that SDYR did not hold coordinated volunteer events for Sherman in 2012 because they did not support any candidates during the primary and Sherman bypassed the general election by receiving more than 50% of the vote in the primary. Although, it is also possible that SDYR established a working relationship with Sherman's 2016 campaign because he hired Young Republican Liz Saidkhanian in 2013[109] and Ryley Webb in 2014[110] to work in his City Council Office. Liz, in particular, provides Sherman with a strong informal association to SDYR executive board member because she has been active and highly visible in the organization for years.

Chris Cate, as well as his fellow San Diego City Council member Mark Kersey, are former SDYR Presidents who maintain a relationship with the organization. Cate spoke at SDYR monthly meetings in June 2013[111] and May 2014.[112] SDYR members attended a campaign fundraiser for Cate one week after he spoke at the monthly meeting in 2013.[113] Around the time they held a phone banking event to support his campaign,[114] Cate hired Young Republicans James Hauser and David Downs as his lead and deputy campaign managers, respectively.[115] Lastly, Cate maintained casual relationships with SDYR members. He played in their fantasy football leagues with them, and won his league in 2012.[116] Kersey also maintained his

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[109] Liz Saidkhanian's *LinkedIn.com* profile. She is also listed as a staff member on Council member Sherman's official government website: https://www.sandiego.gov/citycouncil/cd7/staff.
[110] Ryley Webb's *LinkedIn.com* profile. He is also listed as a staff member on Council member Sherman's official government website: https://www.sandiego.gov/citycouncil/cd7/staff.
[111] Email received from sdyoungrepublicans@gmail.com on June 20, 2013.
[112] Email received from sdyoungrepublicans@gmail.com on May 14, 2014.
[113] Email received from sdyoungrepublicans@gmail.com on June 20, 2013 and June 25, 2013.
[114] Email received from sdyoungrepublicans@gmail.com on June 20, 2014. The email contains a photograph of SDYR members sitting around a table of telephones in Cate's campaign headquarters.
[115] Email received from sdyoungrepublicans@gmail.com on June 20, 2014.
[116] Email from sdyoungrepublicans@gmail.com received on September 9, 2013.

relationship to SDYR by donating money to their operations budget[117] and inviting them to attend campaign events that include significant figures in the San Diego conservative political scene.[118] Placeia is also a former SDYR member. This may account for why SDYR held coordinated volunteer events for his 2012 campaign despite his race being less competitive than other Republican campaigns during the same election cycle.

SDYR establishes working relationships with local Republican Party political campaigns each election cycle by holding coordinated volunteer events for candidates with whom they have informal associations. Other relational aspects may factor into internal decisions of which campaigns SDYR supports in this manner, but a clear pattern emerges when working relationships are compared across election cycles. While SDYR establishes working relationships with campaigns each election cycle, they produce continuity across election cycles by establishing working relationships with campaigns whose candidates or campaign staff they know.

Young Republicans establish working relationships with campaigns which they have informal associations. This explanation for which campaigns they support has implications for how past working relationships affect future working relationships. Since campaign organizations are established each election cycle, the relationships Young Republicans form with candidates or campaign staff during one election cycle may become the basis for which campaign they establish a working relationship during the next election cycle. In other words, working relationships are iterative because they must be established each election cycle, yet

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[117] Kersey is listed as a "Platinum Sponsor" on SDYR's website. A platinum sponsor donates a minimum of $1000 to SDYR.

[118] SDYR FN 20110627. Kersey invited SDYR members to attend his campaign fundraiser hosted by the Lincoln Club. SDYR members were not pressured to donate but they were provided with an opportunity to network.

personal relationships formed during a campaign provide a means for continuity across election cycles and SDYR members cohorts.

Since SDYR supports campaigns with whom members of the executive board have informal associations to the candidate or their staff. SDYR establishes working relationships with campaigns by drawing upon a type organizational memory that is not like written documents such as bylaws because it is dependent upon members being able to renew relationships with Republican Party candidates or their campaign staff. In this sense, informal associations provide a fleeting form of organizational memory that must be maintained.

The Question of Sequence

Campaign organizations last for a single election cycle. Candidates or staff may work together during later elections, but those campaign organizations are different iterations of what existed prior, not a continuation of the same organization. For example, DeMaio employed some of the same staff for his 2012 and 2014 campaigns and deployed a similar recruitment strategy by enlisting SDYR members to volunteer during both elections. However, SDYR holding coordinated volunteer events for DeMaio in 2012 does not account for why SDYR does the same during the next election cycle. Instead, DeMaio hiring familiar faces from his 2012 campaign to work his 2014 campaign, combined with his personal efforts to maintain a relationship with SDYR during the interim period between campaigns, account for how he was able to activate SDYR volunteers for both election cycles. During each election cycle, informal associations precede SDYR establishing a working relationship with DeMaio's campaign organizations. The associations he forms with Young Republicans during the 2012 campaign cycle are what partially allow him to establish a working relationship to SDYR during the next campaign cycle.

The same is true for Ray Ellis, who maintains informal associations with SDYR during the four-year interim period between his campaigns—he remained a "HUGE supporter"[119] of the organization and hired Young Republicans to staff both his 2012 and 2016 campaigns.

Since informal relationships precede working relationships, it is also possible for informal associations between SDYR and Republican Party candidates or campaigns to disappear. DeMaio sustains his relationships to SDYR through continued engagement. Had he not done so, he may have lost his ability to activate SDYR on behalf of his campaign. Brian Bilbray provides a counter point to DeMaio. Bilbray employed former SDYR President Andrew Lund, first as a Field Representative for his U.S. House of Representatives California District 50 office from 2007-2011, and then as a Legislative Assistant in his Washington, D.C. office from 2011-2013.[120] Lund may have been able to serve as a link between Bilbray's 2012 campaign from Washington, D.C., but it is also possible that Lund being in Washington severed that link. I did not observe or find evidence for any other associations between Bilbray's 2012 campaign and SDYR members during this time. It appears that Bilbray once had informal associations with SDYR, but that his connection to the organization disappeared by 2012.

Success Stories

Many Young Republicans go on to have careers in politics whether they become politicians, political professionals that staff offices or commissions, or become associates in private firms related to political work. However, Young Republicans or SDYR alumni only become consequential to current members when they are made part of the organizational

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[119] SDYR September 2016 Newsletter.
[120] Andrew Lund's *LinkedIn.com* profile page.

memory through the encoding process—when they become known to current members as success stories.

SDYR does not formally publicize members' alumni status. They do not have a list or directory for current members to access, nor do individual alumni publicize their prior involvement with the organization on their professional profiles, such as those hosted on *LinkedIn.com*. Instead, SDYR members communicate alumni status to each other informally. For example, people new to SDYR learn that George Plescia, Mark Kersey, and Chris Cate are past SDYR Presidents because executive board members identify them as such when issuing a call for coordinated volunteer events to support their respective campaigns, or include them as part of their biographies when they speak at monthly meetings. Similarly, following the 2014 election cycle, a SDYR executive board member sent members a list by email of "Notable Young Republicans." She or he sent the list to recognize Young Republicans—whether past or present SDYR members—who were identified as either working as staff on particular campaigns or as "Rockstar Volunteers." The list identifies former Young Republicans as success stories, but, similarly to how executive officers identify Plecia, Kersey, and Cate's alumni status, do so when discussing former members in a different context. In short, SDYR board members only mention past members to current members when the past member can be held up as a success story—they do not tell stories of past members who appear unremarkable or who provide examples of cautionary tales.

Lastly, without a shared record of past members, SDYR members are reliant upon their memories of past members. Excluding instances in which someone identifies themselves as a past member—which I did not observe—their organizational memory is comprised of what members are able to recall. Their recall seems biased toward past SDYR Presidents rather than

general members. Perhaps this is because past presidents are more visible than other members and wield more authority during their time in SDYR, or because they are more likely to advance their careers in the San Diego political scene (contingent on their staying in San Diego).[121]

Past SDYR Presidents include: Jesse Gipe who is Manager of Economic Development at the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation—a highly influential organization in San Diego politics; Eddie Sprecco who is the Chief Executive Officer of Associated General Contractors Of America San Diego Chapter Inc.;[122] Matthew Donnellan who is a former staffer for San Diego City Council member Lari Zapf, campaign manager for Ellis's 2012 campaign, and Executive Director for the College Republicans national organizations; Mark Kersey who is a San Diego City Council member and current candidate for California State Senate; Chris Cate who is a San Diego City Council member; Andrew Lund who is a Government Relations Associate at C.J. Lake in Washington D.C.—a law practice and lobbying firm; and Matt Stockton who is managing a campaign to recall Democrat Josh Newman California State Senator Distinct 25.[123] DeMaio—who currently works the host of a talk show on conservative radio—initiated the recall campaign that Stockton now manages.[124]

In addition to the higher visibility of past SDYR Presidents, other SDYR members gain notoriety that endures in collective memory for a shorter span of time. Young Republican Michael Hadland worked as a Chief of Staff for Rocky Chavez, California State Assembly

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[121] My data does limits me from assessing whether or not there is a self-selection eKersey, Cate, Sprecco, Gipe, and Stockton all remain involved in the San Diego political scene and are well known alumni whereas Donnellan and Lund moved to Washington D.C. and are less well known by current members. As for the other part of my claim, my data limits me from assessing whether or not there is a self-selection effect with SDYR Presidents because I do not have a comprehensive list of past members who were not SDYR Presidents.
[122] https://www.agcsd.org/AboutAGC/Staff.html.
[123] Stockton's professional profile on *LinkedIn.com*. I still need to verify Stockton's position as a policy advisor for Do and as a Field Representative for Waldron. I prefer to verify employment for government employees through publicly available records detailing compensation. Data for 2017 is not yet available.
[124] https://ballotpedia.org/Josh_Newman_recall,_California_State_Senate_(2018).

member for District 76. Liz Saidkhanian is a staff member of San Diego City Council member Scott Sherman. More recently, after serving as Ray Ellis's 2016 campaign manager and the Manager for Leadership Development for the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce, Hannah Jane Castillo now works as the Assistant Deputy Director in the White House Public Liaison Office.[125] These Young Republicans are perhaps remembered through personal associations, but their professional accomplishments are more likely the reason current Young Republicans view them as past SDYR members and as success stories.

Libertarians party members lack success stories. It is rare for SDLP members to discuss their current peers, and they discuss past members even less. With the exception of Richard Rider, who communicates directly with SDLP members and identifies himself as the former SDLP Executive Chair, SDLP do not present other libertarians as success stories without special occasion, such as Benoit's death in January 2016. Days after Benoit dies, Mark Schwartz announces his death in the form of a eulogy on his personal Facebook page. While Mark identifies Benoit as his mentor who helped him run for elected office, he fundamentally praises Benoit for continuing to advocate for liberty without being able to provide a list of accomplishments. He does not point to a single instance within which Benoit was ever able to advance his political career within the local political scene beyond being the SDLP Executive Chair.[126] Granted, Benoit's death produced a special circumstance in which people tend to think fondly of the deceased. This is not to say that other SDLP members did not think of Benoit in a

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[125] Castillo's professional profile on *LinkedIn.com*. I am unable to confirm Castillo's position on the White House's official website because the Trump administration has not created webpages for many of their offices, and ironically, the Office of Public Liaison does not have a webpage.
[126] Mark Schwartz Facebook page, accessed on January 4, 2016.

similar manner during his life, but to say that they did not discuss it among each other during monthly meetings or social gatherings.

Since success in SDLP is in the eye of the beholder, the organization lacks a collective memory of what they can accomplish through their involvement in the Libertarian Party. Apart from Mark's eulogy for Benoit, SDLP members do not identify former members as success stories that they can look to in order to imagine what they can accomplish through their involvement in the Libertarian Party. Following Benoit's example, the best they can strive for is to be persistent in their advocacy, but they cannot point to a single example of a former SDLP member who has advanced their political career in the San Diego political scene. When compared to Young Republicans, libertarians who look for signs of what they might accomplish through their involvement in SDLP stare into a void.

OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES IN POLITICAL PARTY ORGANIZATIONS

Young Republicans and Libertarian Party members encounter different types of opportunities through their involvement in their respective political party organizations. For the sake of exposition, I refer to these differences as corresponding to different types of opportunity structures because they constitute qualitatively different sets of possibilities and constraints within which people involved in each organization must act. Each type of opportunity structure directs members of an organization toward particular activities. In relation to SDYR and SDLP, the significant aspects of opportunity structures are how *labor opportunity structures*—because they relate to participation in the work force (Abbott 2005:310)—are encoded into SDYR in a way that directs Young Republicans to participate in the political process as a means for them to advance their professional careers, while the absence of these opportunity structures in SDLP

constrains Libertarian Party members from participating in the political process or attempting to advance their political careers in their local political scene through other means.

Young Republicans benefit from participating in an organization that provides them with the ability to serve as executive officers of the organization and encourages them to become involved in the broader political scene through working relationships between SDYR and Republican candidate campaigns. Each cohort of SDYR members has access to these opportunities because they organize activities around election cycles. More senior SDYR members leave the organization after they gain experience as administrators and campaign personnel, thereby providing space for newer members to promote their own careers in a similar manner. Furthermore, the availability of success stories presents newer members with realistic expectations of what their involvement in SDYR can lead to.

In contrast, the absence of opportunities in SDLP constrains SDLP members' ability to advance their careers in the local political scene. Without an ability to advance within SDLP or use their involvement in SDLP to become involved in other political organizations, Libertarian Party members are not able to gain the experience or expertise needed to gain a paid position on a political campaign or as an associate in a political firm. In addition to building their resume, a rule of thumb in politics is that one of the most significant ways of being promoted through a political scene is to find a good boss who will take you with them. For example, Brian Bilbray hired Andrew Lund from his campaign to serve on his congressional staff, and Carl DeMaio promoted Tommy Knepper from deputy campaign manager in 2012 to campaign manager in 2014. SDLP members lack of involvement in political campaigns limits their ability to develop relationships to more prominent figures in the conservative political scene who can help them advance their career in politics either as a political professional or as a candidate—similar to how

Mark Kersey and Chris Cate gained the support of the San Diego Lincoln Club which for all intents and purposes made them *de facto* Republican Party candidates for City Council in their respective districts.

Comparison to Orange County

Organizational memory and encoding are two linked processes. The encoding process is accomplished through written documents such as bylaws, formal affiliations that produce added obligations that a political party organization must meet, as well as the working relationships an organization develops with other organizations that constitute sets of opportunities and constraints within which people must act. In this chapter I have demonstrated that the encoding process produces two radically different opportunities structures in SDYR and SDLP. SDYR routinizes promotion within the organization and provides a means through which different membership cohorts establish relationships to other political organizations. As a result, SDYR members' have opportunities to participate in the political process as a means to advance their careers. Experientially, their involvement in SDYR directs them toward short-term goals within the organizational while also allowing them to imagine long-term goals through the availability of success stories. SDLP members are not able to view short-term or long-term goals of career advancement or political victory through their involvement in SDLP. Few are able to advance within SDLP and they are presented with few opportunities to become involved in other political organizations. As a result, in an environment within which SDLP members' do not have the means to plausibly imagine the SDLP as the path to a future in politics, they orient themselves to the present moment with relatively little consideration of their future prospects in politics.

Now I turn to the question of whether or not these findings are generalizable beyond San Diego. To provide an initial response to this question, I compare SDYR and SDLP to their

counterparts in Orange County. In so doing, I find that the encoding processes in the Orange County Young Republicans (OCYR) and SDYR occur in a similar manner. OCYR and SDYR both operate according to their respective bylaws, and they maintain similar formal affiliations to their local Republican Party organization and the California Young Republicans. They each fulfill their formal obligations that are entailed through those affiliations. They also draw upon informal associations to establish working relationships, and provide members with success stories upon which they can model themselves and imagine their future prospects in politics such former OCYR President Emanuel Patrascu who was actively campaigning for the State Assembly in 2013 and 2014. As a result, people involved in both SDYR and OCYR act within similar encoded opportunity structures.

SDYR and OCYR do have their differences. Most notably, OCYR holds fewer coordinated volunteer events than SDYR. This seems, in part, due to traffic. At their monthly members' meetings, OCYR members often ask guest speakers what they propose to do about "the traffic problem" in Orange County. For example, during their September 2014 members' meeting, OCYR members ask both U.S. Representative Mimi Walters and candidate for Mayor of Dana Point, California how they should solve the traffic problem in Orange County. OCYR members also discuss the traffic problem amongst themselves during casual conversation. During their August 2014 members' meeting, one OCYR member tells his peer that Orange County has two major problems: "bringing in more tech and traffic." During their November members' meeting, an OCYR executive board member tells a general member that they do not hold events in Southern Orange County because, "no one wants to drive down there in traffic." I compiled a map that displays all of the locations OCYR and SDYR held events in 2013 and 2014. OCYR is more geographically centered that SDYR in their respective county. They tend to

meet in an area that contains Costa Mesa, Tustin, Huntington Beach. Traffic may not be the only reason OCYR holds fewer coordinate volunteer events than SDYR, but it is plausible that OCYRs' response to the practical challenges imposed by traffic differs in each organization's encoding process.

OCLP differs from SDLP in that no one person retains the Executive Chair position for more than a year or two. In this sense, OCLP members have more opportunities to advance within OCLP than SDLP members have in SDLP. However, OCLP members' inter-organizational mobility does not improve their career prospects in politics outside of SDLP because regardless of who is charge of OCLP, the organization does not establish working relationships with other types of conservative political organization within the same political scene. OCYR members' act within a labor opportunity structure that is similar to SDLP members. OCYR members' also respond to their isolation from other political organizations by engaging in a similar manner as SDLP members: they engage in self-aggrandizing talk through which they present themselves in a favorable light but do not act to build relationships with other political organizations. To illustrate the OCLP's similarity to SDLP, the following ethnographic account presents OCLP members discuss the possibility of voting for candidates who are affiliated with other political parties.

> During the July 8, 2014 OCLP social meetup, roughly 15 libertarians sit at a long rectangular table on the patio of the Karl Strauss Brewery in Costa Mesa, California. They engage in light conversation with each other. Brian tells a few others about his exploits on Slate.com earlier that day: "I posted a comment and then there was like 140 posts in a matter of minutes. I don't know how to find the darn thing," referring to his comment. Another member who is also named Brian asks someone to tell him what is the libertarian position on suicide. Meanwhile, Mike explains to a newcomer why libertarianism is tricky to define: "It's such an individualistic philosophy. […] There's almost an inherent contradiction in having a libertarian party because we're all so individualistic."
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> After a period of small talk, Tom, OCLP Vice Chair, initiates a group

> discussion. He tells everyone about a Libertarian Party organizer in Washington who posted a message on Facebook: "He said that people in the chapter up there could vote for [candidates] outside of the LP. […] I think that's a great strategy because now they can use their votes to help out libertarian friendly candidates." Mike responds, "Hmmm, yeah." Another members says, "That makes sense." Tom proposes that they deploy a similar strategy in Orange County.
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> Members discuss other topics for several minutes and then Tom returns to his idea of allowing libertarians in Orange County to vote for candidates who are affiliated with other political parties. He describes libertarians as comprising one percent of total voters in Orange County: "Think about it. One percent might be enough to sway an election in some districts. The Democrats are making a huge push in Orange County." Tom adds that tell Republican candidates that they will vote for Democrats in order to, "get assurances" from the Republican candidates. Several other members agree. Peoples' attention wanes as Tom continues to discuss his strategy for how to "leverage votes." People begin to converse with those immediately near them at the table; they tell each other about which Republican Party candidates they voted form in previous elections.

OCLP members discuss the possibility of leveraging a libertarian voting bloc to assert authority in political elections. Similar to SDLP members, they do so as a form of self-aggrandizing talk that does not initiate or translate into a form of political action. They portray themselves as able to direct a unified libertarian voting bloc that does not exist in order to suggest that major political party candidates should provide them with assurances or acquiesces to their demands. They also make comments about how the idea of a Libertarian Party is almost a contradiction because libertarians are too individualistic to work together, and they tell each about how they already vote for Republican candidates. In so doing, they respond to a similar set of circumstances and provide a similar response as their counterparts in SDLP. In the absence of political opportunities, they discuss themselves as being in a position of authority in local politics as an act in and of itself.

My comparison between conservative political organizations in San Diego and Orange County suggests that my initial findings related to SDYR and SDLP are representative outside San Diego County. While there are differences between SDYR and OCYR, and SDLP and

OCLP, labor opportunity structures appear to be significant aspects of the encoding process in each county; these opportunity structures account for similarity across major political party organizations and across minor political party organizations, as well as differences between each type of organization. My comparison also suggests, that while SDYR members' and OCYR members' ability to advance within their respective organizations may improve their future prospects, inter-organizational mobility in these organizations may only matter when an organization is linked within a broader political apparatus or extended party network through working relationships. OCLP members are able to advance within their organization but they are not able to parlay a leadership position in OCLP into an opportunity in a different conservative political organization in the same political scene.[127]

[127] I do not have enough data on past OCYR members to fully assess whether or not OCYR remaining within a relatively confined geographic area limits OCYR's members' ability to establish information associations with people involved in other conservative major political party organizations. Therefore, I am not able to state whether or not OCYR members' have more or less opportunities to advance their political careers than SDYR members.

CHAPTER 4
SHARED PROJECTS

The political organizations I study differ according to how opportunity structures are encoded (Chapter Three). The encoding process produces sets of opportunities and constraints within which people must act but it does not fully determine what people actually do when they come together in a political organization. For example, San Diego Libertarian Party (SDLP) members attend Supper Club on a monthly basis under the auspice of being a political party even though they are no longer active in electoral politics. Encoding demonstrates how past actions of the California legislator (Introduction) eliminated SDLP's ability to have candidates involved in general elections, and the limits to which SDLP members develop administrative experience in a political party or develop relationships to people in other political organization that will create opportunities for them down the line (Chapter Three), but this does not explain what SDLP members actually do in the absence opportunities to participate in the political process or advance their career in politics. In this chapter, I turn my attention to the collective habits that people develop when they come together within the constraints and opportunities produced through the encoding process. While I focus my attention on SDLP, I also discuss the Natural Rights Coalition (NRC) and the San Diego Young Republicans (SDYR) to develop an understanding of how the encoding process affects what people do in each organization.

In this chapter, I argue that encoded opportunity structures form circumstances within which people in an organization develop shared practical projects (*hereafter,* "shared projects").

I present shared projects as a way to describe how people involved in political organizations acquire collective habits through which they practically orient themselves toward a shared activity. For example, in Chapter Two, I present how NRC participants develop a set of related habits that supports their skepticism of social conventions or conventional sources of information, their shared understanding that they are different from the general public, and their ability to come together as a group. I deploy the concept of a shared project to refer to the practical orientation that emerges when NRC participants enact these habits in practice. NRC participants orient themselves toward a shared project of friendship that emerged through their attempts to find truth. In this instance, NRC participants' shared project differs from their stated intention for the organization, which is to create a voluntary society.

I further argue that people involved in political organizations orient themselves toward shared projects as their primary activity. Whether or not people are conscious of their efforts, the shared project depicts the group's tendency to direct action toward a particular end. As such, shared projects can be compared across political organizations according to which ends people in each organization orient themselves toward. I identify three different generic pursuits that people in each of my cases pursue, though to varying degrees: social relationships, self-conceptions, and future prospects. Social relationships refer to friendships or other forms of personal associations. Self-conceptions refer to forms of identification, or a person's perception that they are a particular kind of person. Future prospects refer to opportunity for career mobility. In Table 1.1, I present how the three organizations that I discuss in this chapter compare along these three generic pursuits. I rank order each organization according to the relative degree to which people in each the organization orient their actions toward that end.

Table 1.1 Practical Orientations by Political Organization.

Org	Primary Orientation	Secondary Orientation	Tertiary Orientation
NRC:	social relationships	self-conceptions	future prospects
SDLP:	self-conceptions	future prospects	social relationships
SDYR:	future prospects	social relationships	self-conceptions

As I mention above, NRC participants primarily orient themselves toward a shared project of friendship or social relations as it appears on Table 1.1. They still care about self-conceptions, although their focus on self-conceptions is often subordinated to their friendships. People in NRC have few opportunities to advance their careers through their involvement in the organization, and accordingly, future prospects matter little to them in this regard.

It should also come as no surprise the SDYR members primarily orient themselves toward future prospects. They often join SDYR to advance their political or professional careers, and the organization provides them opportunity to do so. Despite their focus on career advancement, SDYR members still form friendships. However, they do so less frequently than NRC participants, and on a much more limited basis. SDYR members often begin and end their relationships with other members as acquaintances. They are more likely to form relationships based upon networking, thus subordinating them to their career ambitions. They care little about self-conceptions in comparison to SDLP members.

SDLP is an interesting case in relation to shared projects because it is a political party organization that is not active in electoral politics. It exists within a broader political party apparatus, but provides members with no opportunity to advance their careers in politics. SDLP

members who see each other on a regular basis rarely act as if they are friends—they can even be nasty to each other at times. The question is, what do they do at Supper Club? I argue that they are engaged in a vanity project. SDLP members orient themselves to achieving a particular self-conception of themselves as "strong-willed individuals."

To further develop my argument about shared projects, I now turn to empirical accounts of each organization. I present a detailed account of SDLP as a vanity project. I then contrast SDLP with accounts from NRC and SDYR to illustrate variation across organizations. I conclude with a discussion of how shared projects form the basis for how a person's involvement in a political organization becomes meaningful to them.

SDLP AS A VANITY PROJECT

Mike Benoit (*hereafter* Benoit) is the Executive Chair of the San Diego Libertarian Party and he treats SDLP as his organization. He and a few longtime members serve as the executives and administrators of the organization. There is little opportunity for other SDLP members to challenge incumbent executive officers for a leadership position, nor does participating in SDLP provide members with opportunities to advance their political careers outside the organization. Benoit makes no apologies for how he runs SDLP. He often tells new members that SDLP is "not a democracy" and that he "rules with an iron fist." He means it. He sets the agenda, and he alone determines whether or not someone has permission to speak during a meeting, often stating the guidelines for when and how people can contribute to a group discussion prior to beginning the discussion. Members often follow Benoit's guidelines for how to conduct themselves at Supper Club. However, for the moments when people violate his guidelines, he deploys an

effective response—he shouts the loudest and demands compliance. He relentlessly asserts his authority until even the most stubborn audience member concedes.

Benoit's leadership style has limits. He directly enforces matters of procedure and personal conduct that structures how SDLP members interact with each other, but he exercises significantly less influence over how they make sense of those interactions and the understandings that result. For example, Benoit presents the Libertarian Party as being ideologically more committed to laissez faire policies than the Republican Party. He emphasizes the link between ideological commitments and particular policy positions, especially on issues related to the income tax and due process.[128] Few SDLP members describe the Libertarian Party in the same way. They may agree with the broader notion that libertarians care about liberty, but they rarely link their personal understandings of liberty to particular policy positions. There are also SDLP members that conceive of the Libertarian Party without considering its ideological tilt. Rather, these members treat the Libertarian Party as something that merely signals that they are not Republicans. In this sense, SDLP members act under Benoit's watchful eye but the reality they carve out for themselves occurs beyond the reach of his "iron fist."

A Party of Their Own

At Supper Club, SDLP members express a common sentiment—they feel at odds with or slighted by the Republican Party. While SDLP members express many different ideas of what the Republican Party is or is not that vary across members as well as situations when the same member presents different understandings of the GOP at different times, SDLP members find a broad sense of commonality with one another based on the sentiment that each of them is

[128] FN SDLP 20141215.

dissatisfied with the Republican Party. They draw on this initial understanding as a cornerstone upon which they make sense of both SDLP as a collective and their personal involvement in the organization.

SDLP members present the Libertarian Party as an alternative to the Republican Party by exchanging their grievances with the Republican Party during casual conversations.[129] One person initiates an exchange by stating their grievance as a proclamation, and then a second person replies by stating their grievance with the Republican Party without directly engaging the substantive aspects of what the first person said. For example, during the December 2014 Supper Club, one SDLP member tells several others, "the Republican Party has been taken over by neocons[ervatives]," and that "there are no neocons here." A second member responds, "I like watching old Western movies because that's how a libertarian world would look," something he says the Republican Party does not understand.[130] During the July 2015 Supper Club, after telling a story about someone who presumed that he was naive, one members tells a few others, "What do I look like, a Republican?" A second person begins talking about his recent experience addressing the San Diego City Council "[Republican San Diego City Councilor] Chris Cate has glazed eyes," he says. "Yeah, we run on the same page ... we should work together," he implies that he and the city councilor both smoke marijuana and take similar positions on the issues

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[129] SDLP members rarely discuss the Libertarian Party as an alternative to the Democratic Party. I observed two incidents in which members of the Libertarian Party wondered why Democrats were not joining the Libertarian Party. Three SDLP members and one guest discussed the possibility of recruiting during a group discussion--Benoit and Marcos were the most involved in this discussion (FN SDLP 20141215). In Orange County, several members of the Orange County Libertarian Party (OCLP) raised the same possibility of appealing to Democrats in districts in which a Democratic Party candidate poses a strong challenge to a Republican Party candidate to "leverage" Republican voters to support Libertarian Candidates, one OCLP members says (FN OCLP 20140708). In each occurrence, Libertarian Members continued to discuss their similarities with Democrats as a means to further distinguish themselves from the Republican Party. SDLP members and OCLP members present how they see themselves as aligning with the Democrats in order to demonstrate they can gain support from people that the Republican Party cannot, to the fault of the Republican Party.

[130] SDLP FN 20141215.

related to marijuana. Then upon second thought he says, "[Cate] won't actually act on them." During both of these exchanges, the SDLP members who share their grievances establish that they disapprove of the Republican Party in some way and then they discuss something else.[131]

SDLP members criticize the Republican Party because of what it communicates about who "they" are as a collective, not the Republican Party. They give little attention to what another speaker says, and they rarely linger on a particular claim, yet the routine act of airing their grievances to other people allows them to claim a shared experience with each other. Through this practice, SDLP promote the idea that each person at Supper Club chooses to attend because they feel at odds or slighted by the Republican Party. SDLP members find a sense of commonality in the idea that this claim is true, whether or not it is actually true. The idea provides them with a shared vocabulary of motive and a means for making sense of who they are as a collective. They view attendance at Supper Club as signaling that a person is principled enough to assert their will or defend their interests, even if it means upsetting others or defying people in positions of authority. In the words of one member, people who attend the SDLP Supper Club are "strong-willed individuals."

Strong-Willed Individuals

During the December 2014 Super Club, an argument erupts between two men during a group discussion at Supper Club. Benoit intervenes, addressing those involved in the exchange: "Now be quiet! It's not your turn to talk. Wait your turn." While Benoit deals with the

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[131] I present each SDLP member as presenting a grievance as a short statement. This is a decision that I made as a writer to focus upon the substance of their grievance. In practice, a SDLP members state grievances in statements of different length. The SDLP member who comments about the Republican Party being comprised of neoconservatives presents a short statement, while the man talking about Chris Cate presents a longer statement that I consolidate for the sake of presentation.

disruption, several people in the audience talk amongst themselves. Samantha[132] draws her attention to a young man sitting across the table. She stares at him as if to study his face, trying to derive meaning from his contorted cheeks or unhinged jaw. She may be concerned that the young man looks uncomfortable or she may recall that it is his first time attending Supper Club; whatever her reasons, she attempts to explain the situation to him. "Oh don't worry dear," she says. "These things are bound to happen because we're all just so individualistic here." She waves her hands over the table in a flurry of motions as if to fan away an unpleasant odor. The man remains silent and she continues. "You see, nobody wants somebody else telling them what to do. We're all just a bunch of strong-willed individuals." Benoit silences the men and both Samantha and the young man shift their attention back to the group discussion.[133]

Benoit regains control of the room without much resistance from the men involved in the argument. This is not always the case. In other instances, SDLP members turn their attention to Benoit and protest his telling them what to do. These situations develop in a similar manner as that Samantha and the young man witness; however, after Benoit intervenes to resolve the argument, one of the SDLP members involved in the conflict argues with Benoit about whether or not he has the authority to tell them how act during group discussion. During the April 2014 Supper Club, one member involved in this type of situation becomes increasingly agitated after Benoit tells him to be quiet. The man spits small droplets of saliva onto the table in front of him as he yells, "Why do you get to choose who speaks?" During the October 2014 Supper Club, under similar circumstances, a member's face turns red and he shouts, "Who are you? Who are you to decide?" In both instances, an SDLP member confronts Benoit with a flash of intensity

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[132] Samantha is a pseudonym.

[133] FN SDLP 20141215. SDLP members rarely explain confrontations between members. This is a unique occasion in which an SDLP member describes what is happening in what otherwise is a common occurrence.

that is not present prior to Benoit's intervention and that disappears shortly after being expressed. Benoit responds to both SDLP members in a similar manner: he shouts the loudest and demands compliance until they concede.

During the initial argument, members of the audience act as bystanders. They do not express support for either of the SDLP members involved in the argument, nor do they attempt to resolve the conflict. They sit and watch until Benoit intervenes. Roughly a quarter of the audience reacts when someone tells Benoit that he does not have the authority to tell them what to do. They applaud, and then return to being bystanders moments later. Benoit does not acknowledge the applause, nor does it slow his efforts to regain control over the room.

Audience members always seem to applaud after someone tells Benoit that he cannot tell them what to do. This is the only situation where audience members collectively express approval or disapproval during group discussion with any regularity. SDLP members get into confrontations with each other every one to two months; one of the members involved in the argument challenges Benoit more often than not, and audience members applaud every time someone tells Benoit that he cannot tell them what to do. They applaud with such regularity in this situation that their response appears to be a matter of habit, and the absence of other forms of collective expression during group discussion suggest that the substantive aspects of the situation contribute to the habituation of their applause.

Samantha and the audience members all engage in a similar practice of self-discovery when they act to affirm confrontations between SDLP members—self-discovery in the sense that they develop an understanding of what type of 'self' is possible in these situation, a "who are we," not a "who am I." Samantha justifies the argument to the young man on the grounds that the men are highly individualistic people who do not like to be told what to do. Audience members

applaud when someone tells Benoit that he cannot tell them what to do. During confrontations, ideals become realized in action, SDLP members come to see themselves as highly individualistic and associate their individualism with 'not being told what to do.' Their shared conception of SDLP members as strong-willed individuals leads them to anticipate conflicts and to justify confrontations when they occur.

Herding Cats

SDLP members occasionally joke that it is difficult for them to coordinate group activities at Supper Club because doing so, they say, is similar to "herding cats." They make the joke as a remark in passing or commentary on a situation they perceive to be disorganized or chaotic. During the April 2014 Supper Club, one SDLP member responds to a number of people speaking over each other as they engage in casual conversation over dinner, he exhales a belabored chuckle and says, "like herding cats." During the 2014 SDLP Annual Convention Benoit instructs people on how they can use their convention ticket to pay for their meal. He repeats the announcement 30 minutes later after the restaurant's manager complains that convention-goers are still interrupting the wait staff in the main dining room. Upon hearing Benoit make the announcement a second time, one SDLP member leans toward the person sitting to his left, "You know what they say about a room full of Libertarians? Getting them to do anything the same way is like herding cats." SDLP members find humor in the notion that people attempt to coordinate group activities or expect them to cooperate when it is in their cat-like nature as strong-willed individuals to disobey their commands in order to do what they want.[134]

[134] Ruth Braunstein (2017) observes conservatives in her case study make similar jokes about herding cats.

When they joke about "herding cats," SDLP members point to a significant practical problem they encounter at Supper Club—the problem of estrangement.[135] When they decide who to eat dinner with, what to talk about during causal conversation, or how to act during group discussion, to name a few routine activities, they coordinate with people they know little personal information about, feel little attachment to, and express little responsibility for. In the absence of personal relationships that transcend their organizational association, and when their shared understandings of who they are as a collective poses a significant challenge to developing personal relationships, SDLP members find alternative ways to coordinate their actions with others whom they are indifferent toward.

To deal with their estrangement toward each other, SDLP members take refuge in their shared notion of individualism and seize upon opportunities during group activities to act according to that ideal. They realize their self-conception as strong-willed individuals through principled action in situations where acting in a highly individualistic manner means that they should not compromise or give off the impression that someone else has swayed or altered how they approach something. As a result, SDLP members engage in a practice of self-realization when they act in a manner that demonstrates their independence from external influence, when they communicate that they did not let someone tell them what to do. Their attempt to realize a self-conception as a strong-willed individual is a collective habit that helps them solve a common problem they encounter and that affects the relationships they can form with each other. In order to deal with their estrangement toward one another, they act in a strident manner that further perpetuates their estrangement.

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[135] SDLP members experience a problem of estrangement in a similar manner as NRC participants encounter the problem of excess (Chapter Two).

NRC AS A FRIENDSHIP PROJECTS

Sociologist Paul Lichterman (2005) writes that different collective habits produce different kinds of group togetherness (p. 52). SDLP members may be prevented from pursuing professional projects to advance their careers in politics because of external circumstances, but NRC participants operate within similar limitations and yet direct themselves toward a significantly different type of shared project. The differences between these organizations resides in their respective habits. NRC participants have habits that support collaboration between them and mutual reliance among them. SDLP members have habits that support their inability to cooperate and estrangement from each other. These differences become clear when compared to how SDLP members and NRC participants deal with a disruptive peer in their respective organizations. I provide two accounts that demonstrate situations in which NRC participants act to preserve their friendships during moments of contention.

Disruptive Friends and Extreme Statements

NRC participants developed a routine once they incorporated the podcast into the weekly meeting. In so doing, they also introduced an activity that led to a sense of tension among the participants that they did not anticipate. Ron is a loud person who often gets drunk at the weekly meeting.[136] Once intoxicated, Ron is not only loud but he actively engages in conversations from across the room or patio. He hears something that interests him and then shouts his contribution. No one minds that Ron speaks loudly or that he shouts comments from across the room or patio, rather they view it as just something their friend does. In this sense, Ron's manner of

[136] Ron is a pseudonym.

communication does not bother anyone when he does so in the course of casual conversation or informal discussion. However, his boisterous speech and eagerness to engage people across the room or patio does produce moments of tension between participants while they are filming the podcast.

During the September 9, 2014 weekly meeting, Ron disrupts the participants' panel discussion while they film the podcast. He is intoxicated and shows no signs of slowly down. He stands roughly 15 feet away from the panel as they film the podcast. He sways side to side and takes a few small steps as if he just needs to move. He finishes the first of the three bottles of beer that he drinks during a 20-minute span. He goes into the house to retrieve the second. Back on the patio, beer in hand, he searches for something that he can use to remove the bottle cap. He shuffles over to a decorative iron oven that is nearby. The audience and panelist are distracted by sound coming from Ron's direction. *Clank, clank, clank.* Ron is hunched over hitting the lower part of the bottle cap against the edge of the iron oven. Unable to open his bottle, he tries again: *clank, clank, clank.* And again: *clank, clank, clank.* A man sitting nearby turns his body toward Ron and makes a "psst" sound. He raises his hand slightly and tries to get Ron's attention. Ron acknowledges the man and says, "Hey, there's a bottle opener in the kitchen." Ron says that he knows but that he is fine using "this thing" as he gestures at the iron oven. With some persistence, Ron successfully opens his bottle of beer.

Five minutes later, Ron finishes his beer, retrieves another one from the house and walks over to the iron oven. *Clank, clank, clank*. The people around me turn their heads, again. The man who previously told Ron that there was a bottle opener in the kitchen glares at him and looks frustrated. Unlike the first time, no one attempts to correct Ron. Rather, they watch him out of the corner of their eyes, unwilling to tell him what to do.

In addition to making a clanking noise as he attempts to open his beer bottles, Ron also becomes increasingly vocal during the filming. He first talks to people around him. Then he begins to make loud remarks to the panelists who are in the midst of recording their discussion for public consumption. He shouts, "it's wrong!" and "it's immoral," and "it's a violation of the nonaggression principle." Ron's comments escalate to the point where Steve momentarily pauses the panel discussion to ask Ron to join them. Steve extends his arm toward Ron, chuckles and says: "Ron, if you want to be in the podcast." The rest of the panel laughs and encourages him to join them on camera.[137]

In the following weeks, Ron's comments become a fixture on the podcast. He occasionally serves as a panelist, but his presence is most noticeable as a voice shouting from the background. Ron's disruptions become frequent enough that Jon raises the issue in one of the panel discussions. He asks the rest of the panel whether or not they have a policy on "chatter from the peanut gallery." Matt responds first, "Well, I think we've done pretty good so far." Steve then announces that they welcome questions and comments from the audience. In this sense, rather than asking Ron to be less disruptive or expressing their frustration with his actions, they alter the format of the show to include audience questions as a means to better incorporate Ron's "contributions." Similarly, the audience members seem to anticipate Ron's comments and no longer attempt to silence him. However, while people have quickly become accustomed to his verbal contributions, there have been instances in which he has physically blocked the camera and disrupted the show.[138]

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[137] FN NRC 20140909. You can also watch the panels respond to Ron on the Intellectual Property episode of Fireside Philosophy. Begin watching at 14:40.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrVJNodKbNY&list=PL9361yULXYpDiI1bqE2M0ZQn0rX078DRe&index=10.

[138] FN NRC 20141014.

Despite altering the format of the podcast to better accommodate his comments, Ron disrupts the podcast in new ways. While filming a podcast on cannabis, a middle-aged couple arrives. Seeing that the only open seats were on the other side of the podcast being filmed and there was no other way to get to them besides walking in front of the camera, Ron loudly tells the couple to just go through. The couple hesitates and remains standing in the same spot. Ron repeats himself, "Go ahead, it's fine, go on." Seeing that the people still would not walk in front of the camera, he stands up from his seat and walks back and forth between the camera and the panel. Ron's actions stop the panel's discussion and draw everyone's attention. As Ron walks in front of the camera with everyone's undivided attention, he says, "See, I told you, it's fine." As he makes one last pass, he exaggerates his walk by imitating the "walk like an Egyptian" dance. The crowd looks visibly upset—their faces are tense and bodies stiff. After Ron makes two passes in front of the camera, the couple concedes and walks in front of the camera to sit in the vacant seats. Seeing that they had, Ron sits back in his initial seat and panel discussion resumes.[139]

Ron is the only participant to view walking in front of the camera as an acceptable act. In so doing, he causes a scene and makes other people uncomfortable. While NRC participants do not have any written rules or codes of conduct, they express the idea that everyone be treated with respect. Ron fails to do so in this instance, as he had previously from the "peanut gallery." While he may view himself acting in a manner that is beneficial for the couple who arrive late and were in need of a seat, his walking in front of the camera is inconsiderate to everyone else because he disrupts an activity they enjoy. No one confronts Ron while he causes the scene, nor do they do so afterward. Rather, people once again attribute Ron's actions to just being

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[139] FN NRC 20141014.

something he does. While it is possible that they do not confront him for ideological reasons or because they dislike uncomfortable conversations, it is more plausible that they do not do so because Ron is their friend and confronting him for being disruptive during the podcast does not seem worth jeopardizing their friendship.

NRC participants do not confront Ron because they do not want to jeopardize their friendships, but there are also other occasions when someone intervenes to defuse a situation before it escalates into a conflict. During the April 21, 2015 NRC weekly meeting, Jon deescalates a heated discussion between Kristy and another member before it erupts into conflict.[140] Kristy questions why the government needs to fund or conduct scientific research. The other participant narrows the discussion to cancer research and describes how the NIH and NCI fund and oversee research that results in technologies and procedures that they license to private companies, and that private companies use those technologies or procedures to manufacture products. Kristy asks why business was not involved in the process, the other participant reiterates that private businesses is involved. Kristy rephrases her question, "Why can't business do it all?" They continue the discussion, both become irritated, and neither wavers in their position. Jon swoops into the conversation, "Hey, hey, hey, what's going on over here?" The other participant tells him that they are just making extreme statements. "Well, I like extreme statements," Jon says before he introduces a new topic of conversation. The tension wanes and all three participants begin a new discussion without looking back.

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[140] I am the other participant involved in this discussion. After more than a year with the NRC, I engaged NRC participants in discussion without restraint. Prior to this conversation, I sustained a discussion of Marx and Hegel with the participants that lasted four months. We discussed topics across our differences from a place of curiosity and mutual respect for the other party. This is the only time that I got close to being in an argument with another NRC participant. It is also significant that Kristy is the other person involved because other NRC participants would have had a different reaction to my argument as long as they viewed me as listening to their argument and seriously considering what they have to say.

Jon intervenes in the tense discussion between Kristy and another participant to preserve their friendship. NRC participants rarely end discussions because they disagree with one another. Disagreement tends to have the opposite effect—it drives them further into the topic until they find a point of agreement that allows them to reconcile any differences they may have expressed. However, in this situation, Jon recognizes that Kristy and the other participant are not going to find common ground, nor are they going to walk away from their exchange feeling good if the tension was left to fester. Rather than expanding the topic to find common ground, he provides a point of rupture that allows participants to relax and move on from the discussion.

NRC participants often prioritize their friendships over other pursuits. They avoid confrontations with each other and attempt to deescalate disagreements when they seem contentious enough damage their friendships. In this sense, while participants join NRC as a solution to the problem of excess, over time they develop habits that orient them toward a shared friendship project. They may view themselves as people who are "in the know" (Chapter Two) and rely on each other in order to sort through all of the information that is out there, but they do so within the limits set by their commitment to each other.

Online Reputations

NRC participants may prioritize their friendships, but they still orient themselves toward realizing a particular self-conception. They merely do so less often. NRC participants occasionally encounter situations within which their commitment to their friendships conflicts with their reputation in the broader community of libertarian anarchists. For example, Steve goes on vacation in early January 2014. The participants continue to film and publish the podcast without him. They film two episodes on private property in a voluntary society. They received

negative feedback from their audience for the first episode. Some viewers criticized them for being "too collectivist."[141] They filmed a second episode to clarify any possible misconception related to the first episode that might lead their audience to view them as collectivists. Steve returns the following week. He tells the other participants that he wants to film a third episode on private property in a voluntarist society. He further explains that there are some things he would like say that were not included in the first two episodes.

Steve owns the podcast. The Voluntary Virtues Network provides him with programing slot and he chooses to produce the show along with his friends. However, in the end, Steve views his reputation as linked to the podcast. Even when he is out of town, the content communicated on the podcast reflects upon him. He films a third episode on the same topic because he wants to repair the podcast reputation and his own in the process. In this instance, Steve's involvement in NRC is in conflict with his personal reputation in the broader community of libertarian anarchists.

Steve films the third episode on the topic to repair is reputation but he does so in a manner that does not offend the other NRC participants. He presents his position on the topic without directly criticizing the people who were involved in the first two episodes. He presents a positive account for how property rights could be maintained in a society organized through anarchy without diminishing what other NRC participants had said previously. Steve does not damage his friendships by filming a third episode on the same topic. Even though he has

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[141] I suspect that the viewers were upset with comments that Jon and I made during this episode. I occasionally participated in the podcast. The participants often enjoyed engaging in discussions with me because they claim that I provide them with another viewpoint. My discussions with NRC participants only generated tension on two occasions. This one and the previous account that documents my disagreement with Kristy. You can view the podcast episode here.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLCeccF06AU&index=24&list=PL9361yULXYpDiI1bqE2M0ZQn0rX078D

personal reasons for filming the episode, he does so within the confines of a shared friendship project.

SDYR AS A PROFESSIONAL PROJECT

SDYR provides an additional contrast to SDLP. I demonstrate in Chapter Three that SDYR members have opportunities to advance their careers in politics through their involvement in the organization. They also are less oriented to friendships with each other. As a result, they handle disputes differently than SDLP and SDYR. Unlike SDLP members who seek confrontations with their peers, SDYR members avoid conflicts. When disagreements occur, they find ways to save face and end the interaction as soon as possible. For example, during the May 2011 Happy Hour, SDYR members gather at a bar in the North Park neighborhood of San Diego. A person who is attending for the first time mentions the Minutemen in conversation.[142] Joan, a SDYR executive board member,[143] responds, "Yeah, the Minutemen are… fanatical." Appearing self-conscious, she clarifies, "Because they are so focused on a single issue." Another SDYR executive board member who is sitting next to her began to shake her head side-to-side and says, "the Minutemen are not as crazy as they're made out to be. Tea Partiers aren't crazy either." Joan does not respond. This is an uncomfortable moment that neither of them seems prepared for. Members typically defer to the person who has more status than them, but in this situation both women were members of the executive board and they were left without a means to adjudicate their disagreement. The other board member attempts to clarify her statement just

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[142] I am the person attending for the first time. This was my first night of fieldwork for this research project.
[143] Joan is pseudonym.

as Joan had moments earlier. The woman says, “I just meant the Tea Party is filled with ordinary people.” With a glance, both women agree to move on without further comment.

SDYR members avoid disagreement. When a disagreement occurs, they act to end the discomfort, not to preserve their friendships or realize a self-concept at the other person’s expense. They simply act to restore order and go on with regular business.

SDYR members also avoid criticizing each other in public. The only exception occurs when they express their expectation that the organization is for professional advancement. In 2011, it was more acceptable for people to attend SDYR for social reasons. However, by 2014, this had changed and members no longer discussed themselves as attending SDYR event to make friends or be around “like-minded people,” a common sentiment expressed by Young Republicans years earlier. For example, during the 2014 ATF Night, Young Republicans gather for drinks and cigars at a local cigar lounge in the Kearny Mesa area of San Diego. Jesse and a handful of executive board members mingle near the door; they greet people as they pass. Someone who is attending this event for the first time stops to talk to Jesse and the others. Jesse asks him if he is having fun. The man says that he is and further comments that it feels great to be around so many people that think like him. They exchange a few more pleasantries and then the man states that he attends SDYR for social reasons. A board member comments, “I guess if that’s what you’re looking for.” Jesse thanks the man for coming to signal that their small talk has ended.

During my time in the field, I observed SDYR become more committed to a shared professional project. Members slowly professionalized to the point that they crowded out people who attended for social reasons. The executive board member’s comment, “I guess if that’s what you’re looking for,” is indicative of the newer cohorts of members. SDYR members may become

friends, but doing so is a secondary concern for them. They primarily direct their actions toward career advancement in politics. For example, former SDYR members who run for public office such as Chris Cate hire a former SDYR peers to manage or staff their campaigns. Cate also maintains his friendships with current Young Republican and participates in group activities such as the SDYR fantasy football league. While these relationships may be sincere, they are also informal associations that are necessary Cate's future campaign organizations to establish a working relationship with SDYR (Chapter Three).

DISCUSSION

Encoded opportunity structures set limits upon which types of shared projects people in a particular organization may pursue. SDLP members and NRC participants have few opportunities to pursue a shared professional project. However, what they do within those constraints is a matter collective habits. In this chapter, I have argued that all three political organizations pursue different shared projects that can be differentiated by the relative degree to which people orient their actions toward social relationships, self-conceptions, and future prospects. SDLP members direct their actions toward a shared vanity project through which they privilege their individual abilities to achieve a self-conception as a strong-willed individual. They do so in manner that limits the degree to which they can form friendships with each other. NRC participants direct their actions toward a shared friendship project because they prioritize their relationships toward each other, even when doing so interferes with their ability to achieve a particular self-conception. SDYR members direct their actions toward a shared professional project.

Shared projects are more than a useful way to distinguish organizational cultures. Comparing organizations' shared projects highlights how a person's involvement in a particular organization becomes meaningful or practically consequential to them. For example, SDLP members' involvement in their organization became meaningful to them because of their shared vanity project. They experience satisfaction in realizing the self-conception of a strong-willed individual. Their involvement in SDLP's shared vanity project also precludes other possibilities. A person who wants to make friends is going to have a more difficult time doing so at SDLP Supper Club than they will at the NRC weekly meeting because each group's collective habits support different shared projects.

CHAPTER 5
EPISTEMIC PRACTICES

People in conservative political organizations develop epistemic practices to produce and validate knowledge. Their practices and the forms of knowledge both vary by type of political organization. In this chapter, I investigate how people in each type of conservative political organization develop epistemic practices through which they produce knowledge. I argue that they produce knowledge as a secondary activity that is subordinated to their respective shared projects (Chapter Four). Natural Rights Coalition (NRC) participants develop epistemic practices to unmask the objective reality of the world within which they live while pursuing their shared friendship project. San Diego Libertarian Party (SDLP) members develop epistemic practices that generate self-knowledge while pursuing their shared vanity project. San Diego Young Republican (SDYR) members develop epistemic practices to construct "insider accounts" of politics while pursuing their shared professional project. I begin this chapter with a discussion of knowledge, through which I develop a conception of knowledge as truth claims that people collectively produce and validate through a process of colligation.

TWO CONCEPTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE AND AN ALTERNATIVE

Many social scientists who study knowledge agree that for a bit of information, an account, or an explanation to be knowledge, it must be true.[144] For it to be true, they claim that it must be based upon modes of rational inquiry and empirical evidence. For example, political scientists who study "political knowledge" present knowledge as a person's ability to recall discrete facts. For information to be a fact, they claim it must be objectively true (Della and Keeter 1996; Lupia 2016:26). Similarly, sociologists who study what they refer to as "the making of social knowledge" present knowledge as accounts of social life that are based upon empirical evidence, rather than that which is "fictional and fabricated" (Camic et al. 2011:3). These scholars, both those who study political knowledge and social knowledge, limit their conception of what is knowledge to forms of expert knowledge because they present experts as having the authority to determine what is true.

Despite their agreement, social scientists who claim that knowledge must be true present two different conceptions of what knowledge is. They each deploy a mode of inquiry that directly relates to their particular conception of knowledge. To illustrate the differences of political scientists and sociologists in this regard, I draw upon the distinction that Andrew Abbott (2008) makes between knowledge as a collection of "Rankean facts" and knowledge as the result of a process of "colligation."

Political scientists conceptualize knowledge as the brute accumulation of facts. They describe knowledge as an attribute of memory that, similar to other individual attributes, can be measured through survey instruments. They capture differences in political knowledge across populations by asking survey respondents a series of questions about politics and current events, then comparing who knows more or less across demographics classifications. They ask questions

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[144] There is a subset of sociologists for whom knowledge is a form of culture.

that have discrete answers that can be verified with empirical evidence and are not controversial. For example, political scientist Markus Prior (2005) conducted the News and Entertainment Survey (NES) to investigate if the types of television programs people watch affects their level of political knowledge. The NES was administered in two waves; the first wave, conducted in 2002, included the following questions to test respondents' knowledge of current political events (I present correct answers in bold text):

> "Would you say there is more, less, or about the same amount of crime in the United States today as compared to 10 years ago?" (more/**less**/same)
>
> "In the war in Afghanistan, which of the following groups fought on the side of the coalition led by the United States and Britain?" (The Islamic Jihad/The Taliban/**The Northern Alliance**/ Al-Qaeda)

The second wave, conducted in April 2003, included the following questions to test respondents' knowledge of office holders, institutions, and governmental processes.

> "Who is the current secretary of defense?" (**Donald Rumsfeld**/John Ashcroft/George Tenet/Colin Powell)
>
> "Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not?" (President/Congress/**Supreme Court**)
>
> "How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a Presidential veto?" (one-half plus one vote, three-fifths, **two-thirds**, three quarters)

This sample of questions from NES is typical of the questions political scientists ask survey respondents to measure their level of political knowledge. They view a survey respondent's response to each question as an indicator of what knowledge she or he possess and compiles their responses into an index that represents their overall level of political knowledge.

Political scientists who study political knowledge conceptualize knowledge as what Abbott (2008) calls Rankean facts. They treat knowledge as the accumulation of discrete facts, such as knowing that crime rates have decreased in the United States over the past 10 years or that Donald Rumsfeld was the U.S. secretary of defense in 2003. They portray a survey respondent who knows relatively more facts than less as having a greater level of political knowledge.

Sociologists who study social knowledge concentrate upon the social process through which experts produce "*descriptive information and analytic statements*" about social life or society (Camic et al. 2011:3, emphasis in original). They conceptualize knowledge as the result of "colligation," not as the brute accumulation of facts.[145] Abbott (2008) describes colligation as the act of binding together facts and ideas into some new form or synthesis (p. 534).[146] Knowledge as colligation contains facts but is not reducible to any single fact. Scholars who are most closely associated with this research program study how institutions structure the process through which researchers engage in colligation. For example, they study how peer-review panels make funding decisions (Lamont 2009); how Internal Review Boards define what counts as "ethical research" (Stark 2011); or how university professors manage their political commitments (Gross 2013).

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[145] Camic et al. (2011) do not use the term "colligation." I portray their approach to knowledge as colligation because they focus on the process through which experts construct descriptive information and analytic statements.

[146] See Richard Swedberg (2017) for an extended discussion of colligation. Abbott also discusses colligation in "Event Sequence and Event Duration: Colligation and Measurement" (1984). In his earlier work, he conceptualizes colligation as a means for understanding events as the binding together of occurrences at different "levels," each of which may have its own "story." I do not engage colligation in relation to events here, nor do I discuss historians who have developed the concept within their discipline. Rather, I follow both Abbott (2008) and Swedberg (2017) in my focus upon a more generic aspect of colligation that relates to how people produce knowledge that requires facts be included but is not reducible to the discrete facts contained within it.

Political scientists who study political knowledge and sociologists who study social knowledge provide useful insights to understand what basic information people know and how experts produce facts or factual accounts of social life or society. However, both are inadequate to further scholarship on the relation of knowledge and conservative politics because their conceptions of knowledge are too narrow.[147] The former prevents scholars from understanding how people interpret information or how what people know relates to what they do in actual situations. The latter excludes the possibility that amateurs produce knowledge that is real both in practice and consequence. In this chapter, I draw upon the notion of knowledge as colligation in combination with insights from the Science and Technology Studies (STS) literature to overcome these limitations.

STS scholars investigate expert knowledge as "truth claims," not as true statements. They also directly observe the epistemic practices through which experts produce truth claims, not the institutions that structure practices more broadly. As a result, STS scholars develop detailed accounts of how experts warrant, develop, and validate truth claims (Knorr Cetina 1999:1, 246). In order to investigate epistemic practices and knowledge production in amateur settings, I conceptualize knowledge as truth claims that people produce through colligation. I investigate the epistemic practices people in each conservative political organization develop and deploy related to how they warrant, produce, and validate truth claims. I begin with accounts of NRC participants and then continue to discus SDLP members and SDYR members in turn.

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[147] Sociologists who study knowledge as a form of cultural understanding attempted to develop an alternative approach during the mid-1990s. I do not include their conception of knowledge here because they failed to establish their program. They describe knowledge as encompassing all cultural forms of knowing and shift their attention to understanding the social organization that makes different forms of knowledge and modes of knowing possible (Swidler and Arditi 1994:306). These approaches are largely uninformed by research in STS that has been at the forefront of understanding knowledge production. They also have the opposite program of the approaches that I present here, and are thus not discriminating enough when defining knowledge and thereby present different modes of knowing (such as knowledge and ideology) as being similar.

NATURAL RIGHTS COALITION

NRC participants want to know the truth about the world within which they live. Their shared friendship project provides them both with meaningful relationships to other people who share their skepticism and provides them with a means to solve the problem of excess (Chapter Two). They develop epistemic practices directed toward identifying instances within which their ability to observe objective reality is obscured, and that allow them to work through the obstruction to learn what lies beyond. To identify obstructions, they read situations through a shared theory through which they presume that social, economic, and political elites manipulate people and distort reality for their own benefit. They seek to identify the methods through which elites manipulate, and instances where reality has been distorted. In a sense, they develop epistemic practices to infer reality from the absence of evidence rather than describing reality based on direct observation.

To demonstrate NRC participants' epistemic practices, I present three passages below. The first passage presents their ideal form of knowledge that is derived from direct experience with the world. The second passage presents Kristy and Jon discussing the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. This passage demonstrates how they each draw upon personal experiences to substantiate their doubts as to whether or not the shooting happened as it was reported in the news. The third passage presents the participants as they discuss the theory of "chemtrails." This passage illustrates how NRC members evaluate the quality of a source of information and engage in colligation. When viewed together, these three passages demonstrate how NRC participants develop epistemic practices to identify the absence of evidence as indicating that reality is being obstructed from them. These passages further demonstrate how

NRC participants deploy a shared social theory to both identify that which obstructs reality and to envision what lies beyond obstruction.

The Pang of Silver

Mike pulls a silver dollar from his pocket. He shows it to a few people who stand in Jon's kitchen, then he passes the coin around: "I usually have a few of these on me." Jon takes the coin. "Oh, yeah," he says as he drops the coin onto the marble counter top below. The coin makes a thud, followed by the sharp sound of metal vibrating as it wobbles to a stop. "There's nothing like that pang of silver," Jon comments. Mike: "There's certainly nothing like the feel of it." Jon: "*You can't fake it.*" Jon passes the coin to Steve who pays significantly less attention to it. The coin itself is tarnished, the shine covered by aged hand oils and dirt, and the once crisp edges are now dull. This is not the first time Mike has handled the coin, nor is Jon the first to make it ring by dropping it onto a hard surface. Mike returns it to a plastic sleeve that was meant to protect it. Jon mentions that sliver is currently a good price and that he is hoping to buy some more soon.[148]

Mike and Jon repeat this interaction on another occasion as well.[149] The exchange unfolds in a similar manner. Mike pulls a silver coin from his pocket and passes it around. Jon asks if he can drop the coin to "hear that silver ding." The coin rings as it strikes the concrete patio. Jon pinches his thumb and pointer finger into the okay sign and nods his head, Mike repeats, "Silver, silver."[150]

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[148] FN NRC October 28, 2014.
[149] FN NRC November, 11 2014.
[150] NRC published this interaction on their weekly podcast. You may view the exchange at the following link. Mike pulls the coin from his pocket at the 16:52 mark, Jon drops the coin at the 19:29 mark. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5g6oEjwo1k&index=19&list=PL9361yULXYpDiI1bqE2M0ZQn0rX078DRe.

Mike and Jon like the familiarity of a silver coin. They know the sound silver it makes as it strikes a hard surface and the feel of it in their hands. They know what it is and no one can mask the truth of it from them. This is their ideal form of knowledge. They seek to know the truth of the world within which they live through direct experience that cannot be masked or hidden from them. Unfortunately, society is much more difficult to decipher than a silver coin, and they spend much of their time questioning what is real and what is an obstruction that prevents them from directly experiencing or knowing the truth. Their skepticism is both a habit (Chapter Two), and a starting place from which they investigate the world around them.

Skepticism and Sandy Hook

NRC participants often draw upon personal experiences to warrant and validate their skepticism. They also articulate their skepticism to each other in ways that foster and maintain their friendships. In a sense, they bond through a shared skepticism and strengthen their bonds by giving each other support and affirmation. For example, during the May 19, 2015 NRC weekly meeting, Kristy initiates a conversation with Jon and a few other participants: "My family doesn't understand my beliefs. My sister thinks I'm a wacko. [...] She thinks I'm a fanatic because I don't just accept everything I'm told." Acknowledging that her opinions are unconventional, she describes her sister. "She just accepts everything she's told. I mean, I don't see why it's such a bad thing to question what people want you to believe." Jon responds with his favorite affirmation, "right on."

Kristy spent much of her life in Connecticut, and her extended family still lives there. Similar to how Mike and Jon discuss the silver coin, Kristy expresses a familiarity when she talks about Connecticut. She knows what life is like there and she still considers herself to be

connected to the state because of her family and friends who still live there. This familiarity is present when she discusses the incident occurring on December 14, 2012, where a man shot and killed 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School.[151] She continues talking to Jon and the other participants. "You just never know what's true. [...] I was talking to my sister and some friends that live [near Newton, Connecticut] and none of them knew anyone that had been affected [by the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School]." Kristy continues, "I mean, I know several people in the county and none of them know anyone that was there." Kristy clarifies that she does not completely dismiss the possibility that the Sandy Hook shooting occurred, but that she also does not see harm in questioning whether or not it happened, or what people want you to believe happened because in the end, she says, you just don't know what's real.

Kristy questions whether or not she knows the truth of what happened at Sandy Hook Elementary. She articulates her skepticism related to the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting when she claims that she does not know anyone who has been directly affected by the school shooting, nor does she know anyone who knows someone who was. She implies that if the shooting had occurred, or had occurred as reported on the news, there would be evidence to support these accounts within her personal network. She substantiates her doubts by drawing attention to what she perceives as a lack of evidence.

Jon also doubts whether or not he knows the truth about what happened at Sandy Hook Elementary. He affirms Kristy's skepticism and then further articulates his own. He questions whether or not the government staged the shooting. "You just never know what those fuckers are

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[151] The man also shot and killed his mother prior to going to the elementary school and committed suicide following the mass shooting.

up to," he says. "I saw those black helicopters flying training missions over Charleston," referring to his time in the Marines. "I'm talking Psyops. Most people don't think they operate in the U.S., but I've seen those helicopters flying around at night." Kristy encourages Jon, "Wow. People just don't want to believe that." "No, they don't," Jon responds. Kristy repeats her statement as a question, "I mean, why do you think that is?" They pause for a moment; the answer is obvious and neither needs to say it.

Jon leans toward Kristy and the other participant, and lifts his eyes, "Are any of you aware of Wolfgang Halbig?" They both say no. Jon continues, "He's an interesting guy. [...] He's a former police officer and school administrator. [...] This guy's been around, and he's looking into Sandy Hook. He's filed all these FOIAs to get access to the police reports." Kristy reconsiders her previous response, "Oh, maybe I have heard something about this. Isn't there something about the [reported] time line [of the shooting] not making sense." Jon is enthusiastic, "Yeah, that's the guy! They keep stonewalling him. This attorney just keeps blocking his request, and [Halbig's] just trying to get them as a matter of public record." Kristy utters, "interesting." Kristy and Jon are once again in a moment where they agree and do not need to say any more, yet Jon says it anyway: "You know, there's probably something in there that they don't want people to know about."

Kristy and Jon are engaged in two different types of activities. First, Jon consoles Kristy as she talks about her relationship to her family. Kristy tells Jon and the other participants that she might just be "PMSing" to down play her emotions, but it is clear to everyone that she feels sad and upset. Jon and the other participants respond as friends. They listen and support her. Second, in the midst of a sentimental conversation, Kristy and Jon question whether or not they know the truth about what happened at Sandy Hook Elementary. They articulate their respective

experiences and affirm their shared doubts. In so doing, they support each other and construct a truth claim.

Kristy and Jon do not determine whether or not the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting occurred. They establish that the truth of what happened is being masked or hidden from them. Kristy first establishes that there is a lack of evidence to support official reports of the shooting because neither she nor anyone she knows was directly affected by the shooting. Jon then validates her doubts, and incorporates his personal exposure to the "black helicopters" that further constructs a scenario through questioning their ability to understand what happened. Lastly, Jon incorporates outside information about Halbig to establish that someone he views as credible is being denied access to official records related to the reported time line of the school shooting. In the process of supporting each other, they bind together the idea that people should be able to question what others want them to believe with information that they perceive as facts to claim that the truth of what happened at Sandy Hook Elementary is being kept from them.

Streaks Across the Sky

NRC participants' shared friendship project mediates how they produce truth claims through colligation. Their epistemic practices provide them with a means to both strengthen or maintain their bonds while also establishing when the truth of the world is being hidden from them. Kristy and Jon's conversation illustrates how participants reciprocate validation when they agree, but does not demonstrate how they handle disagreement. Given that participants' involvement in NRC begins as a solution to the problem of excess and sorting through troves of unconventional sources remains a significant activity for NRC participants, how they deal with disagreement is important for their ability to maintain their friendships and discover the truth of

the world in which they live. The following account presents how NRC participants evaluate the trustworthiness of a source and manage disagreement.

During the July 14, 2015 NRC weekly meeting, NRC participants discuss whether or not a set of documentaries provide reliable evidence to support the existence of chemtrails. People refer to "chemtrails" to describe the concentrated cloud-like streaks that airplanes leave behind when they fly through the atmosphere. People who discuss chemtrails often claim that the cloud-like streaks are a means for the government to administer mind controlling chemical agents to the population below.[152]

Several NRC participants recommend two documentaries on chemtrails to Steve: *What in the World Are they Spraying?* and *Why in the World are they Spraying?* The following week, Steve tells his fellow NRC participants that he is pretty disappointed in the documentaries because film makers claim to have evidence but never show it to the audience. Steve is not convinced by the documentaries because they do not present evidence that proves that cloud-like streaks running the horizon are concentrations of thought-altering chemicals. Matt agrees but does not take a strong position. The rest of the group—Jon, Kristy, Mike, and a participant that I refer to as "the Dude" because of his preference—all want to know more about why Steve doubts claims made in the documentaries. They focus their discussion on Mount Shasta in California because the filmmakers focus their attention on this region.

> Steve: I was pretty disappointed. Especially because of how you guys talked about [the documentaries]. Because watching it, most of the show was, 'oh we have all of this evidence for chemtrails,' and they don't actually show the evidence. There was a couple of things, I think some water tests which I then looked up and found that those aren't out of normal ranges at all.

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[152] You can watch this discussion on YouTube. The participants filmed it as a podcast episode: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaEoKfGPns0&index=47&list=PL9361yULXYpDiI1bqE2M0ZQn0rX078DR.

Steve checked the filmmaker's claims by comparing them to information that was collected through environmental surveys and is available to the public. Upon doing so, he finds that the filmmaker's claims are not accurate and implies that the documentaries are not a good source of information. He wants there to be direct evidence that would allow him to say with confidence that the cloud-like streaks running the horizon were concentrations of thought-altering chemicals. Without direct evidence, he remains unconvinced.

Matt agrees with Steve but takes a relatively weak position on the matter. Jon, Kristy, Mike, and the Dude all want to know more about why Steve has doubts about the documentaries. The Dude asks, "Even the soils on Mount Shasta?" Steve explains his answer and the participants begin to evaluate Steve's counter-evidence together.

> Steve: Yeah [...]. First of all, aluminum, which is one of the chemicals that [the filmmaker] said is high. Aluminum is the third most abundant material in the earth's crust. [...] On average, the soil is seven percent already, and they, they measured it at 6.8.
>
> Jon: But that has to be extracted, right, and oxidized.
>
> Mike: Yeah, that's what they say. Aluminum is a manufactured product.
>
> Jon: Yeah, right, aluminum isn't...
>
> Steve: Not in its pure form, it isn't. But what they were testing for is the chemical form, it wasn't for the pure, pure, aluminum form. [...] One of the things was elevated levels of barium, or was it barium?
>
> Mike: Barium
>
> Jon: Barium and strontium.
>
> Steve: I didn't look too much into the strontium but I probably should have. But barium, the levels in the samples, first of all, that they presented in *What in the World Are They Spraying*, were normal levels. But, according to government levels. They are within government mandated levels. But I think, if there were elevated levels, you have coal burning plants, and electric plants that also put out barium that can account for any elevated levels.

Despite their initial doubts about Steve's position, Jon and Mike support him in making his case. Jon questions Steve on the point that aluminum is one of the most abundant metals in the Earth's crust. He mentions that those metals were not the same as what the filmmaker found in the soil. Rather than disproving Steve, he helps him clarify which form of aluminum the filmmaker claims to test. Jon and Mike also help Steve recall the names of different elements when he hesitates. It is not until Steve has an opportunity to fully state his position that the rest of the panel begins to cast doubt on his argument, specifically his use of evidence.

The Dude and Matt both present alternative possibilities to explain elevated levels of aluminum in Mount Shasta's soil. The Dude suggests that the U.S. Air Force may be releasing chaff into the environment—a military countermeasure wherein aircraft tactically scatter metals to scramble enemy radar. He claims that a friend of his who is in the U.S. Air Force told him about chaff but he offers no evidence that the military is doing so over Mount Shasta in California. Matt proposes that people may be spraying aerosols into the ionosphere to enhance communications technologies or modify the weather. Differing from Steve's suggestion that elevated levels of chemicals in the soil of Mount Shasta might be the by-product of nearby industry, the Dude and Matt each attribute elevated levels of aluminum to deliberate acts to modify the environment. The participants now have several competing explanations in front of them, each of which has implications for whether or not the documentaries are a good source of information. If they accept the counter evidence that Steve presents or Matt's alternative explanations for elevated levels of chemicals in the Mount Shasta region, then the documentaries are a bad source of information. If they accept the Dude's suggestion, then it is more likely that they will view the documentaries as a good source of information on the topic of chemtrails.

The Dude's suggestion that the military may be releasing chaff in the sky above Mount Shasta is not plausible, and he offers no evidence that has happened. Yet, his point resonates with the participants because he appeals to their skepticism and introduces a sense of doubt into the discussion. In so doing, he begins to construct a context within which the participants discredit Steve's counter evidence that he gathered from environmental surveys.

Jon then substantiates their doubts and further produces the content within which their skepticism drives the discussion forward.

> Jon: You get into this same thing with global warming. You have so much money going into, it is anthropogenic, it isn't anthropogenic. And you got, I'm sure, a brigade of government workers putting out disinfo, just to cloud the water even more. So you're at the point where it's just so much shit out there that it's hard to even tell what's true.

Jon references global warming in order to cast doubt on whether or not people can access accurate information. He questions Steve's reliance upon environmental surveys and "government mandated levels" as a means to interpret results from an environmental survey.

Jon persuades Steve that he made an oversight in relying upon environmental surveys and measures determined by the government. Steve nods his head in affirmation and says, "It's true." They agree that whether or not the environmental surveys are accurate no longer matters because they cannot trust them. They establish that in a world within which brigades of government workers sow confusion among the public, government mandated levels do not provide them with a reliable means for interpreting environmental survey data. In the absence of reliable sources of information that directly relate to the documentaries, they turn to personal experiences and materials that further explicate the context within which they can evaluate the claims made by the filmmakers.

Jon introduces two bits of information to further construct a scenario through which the existence of chemtrails seem more likely. First, he mentions that he has seen corporations advertise their "high altitude spraying operations" on the Internet. Second, he introduces claims made by someone that he considers to be an expert on matters related to government budgets and the "deep state." Specifically, he claims Catherine Austin Fitts' work on "black budgets" demonstrates that the government has vast amounts of money that they could use to conduct covert high altitude spraying operations (I discuss Austin Fitts in more detail in the discussion section). In the confines of this discussion, having already established the existence of "disinfo" that obscures their ability to know the truth, Jon now presents the background information through which the participants can envision chemtrails and a subsequent cover-up as real. Only one piece is missing; the will of government officials to do so.[153]

NRC participants engage in an act of colligation as they evaluate whether or not the documentaries are a good source of information. They are only able to justify they perception that the documentaries are a good source of information when they view them from the standpoint of their colligation. In other words, Jon, the Dude, Mike, and Kristy are able to explain away the lack of evidence in the documentary because of what they know about government workers disseminating "disinfo" to produce public confusion, the corporations who provide high altitude spraying services, and the U.S. government's "black budget" through which operatives could easily fund a chemtrail operation. They bind together various bits of

[153] There is a significant dimension to this discussion that I leave out in the interest of space. Steve and Matt make several attempts to get the other participants to distinguish between chemtrails and weather modification. They argue that there is ample evidence that weather modification exists, but that does not mean chemtrails are real. The other participants continue to conflate chemtrails and weather modification, and therefore view their perception that weather modification exist as evidence that chemtrails exists.

information to produce a scenario that allows them to explain away the documentaries' lack of evidence as the result of conspiracy, and thereby as "evidence of absence."

Steve remains unconvinced. He accepts that the environmental surveys he referenced cannot be trusted, but he still challenges the other participants to consider alternative possibilities. He suggests that the cloud-like streaks across the sky are trails of condensation or "contrails," not chemtrails. Jon, Mike, the Dude, and Kristy dig their heels in and provide examples that further elaborate and defend their colligation. Jon and Mike cite their personal experiences to do so. Jon tells them that he grew up near an Air Force base and never saw the "horizon-to-horizon trails" that he sees today. Mike claims that he has witnessed people who post about chemtrails at three or four in the morning receive a flood of negative responses within 20 minutes. He attributes this to their being "paid trolls" on the Internet. The Dude mentions another documentary that demonstrates how the U.S. government conducted weather modification as a military weapon to flood German towns during World War II and the Ho Chi Minh Trail during the Vietnam war. Once the participants established the scenario through which chemtrails could plausibly exist, their colligation became their primary means for incorporating new information.

The participants' discussion of chemtrails begins over a disagreement of whether or not a pair of documentaries are good sources of information. In Chapter Two, I argue that NRC participants first seek out discussion groups that align with their burgeoning love of liberty because they have become skeptical of conventional sources of information and need other people to help them sort through unconventional sources of information. I refer to this as a problem of excess because the participants encounter too much information and need others to help them solve the problem.

I also demonstrate in Chapter Two how NRC participants develop habits that support their skepticism of conventional sources of information as well as their shared understanding as people who are able to come together as a group and find truth together. In Chapter Four, I demonstrate how these NRC participants direct their attention toward a shared friendship project. They may come together as a solution to the problem of excess, but their sustained involvement in NRC led to their developing friendships that they prioritize over other activities.

In this chapter, I now argue that NRC participants' shared friendship project affects how they attempt to find the truth when they are together—in other words, how their epistemic practices are subordinated or anchored in their friendships with one another. For example, when discussing chemtrails, each participant's individual contribution is moderated by their shared desire to have a group discussion. Participants do not curtail others' contributions or prohibit particular conversations. No one monologues. They listen to each other and allow anyone who would like to contribute the opportunity to do. They take turns contributing new information or perspectives that expand the parameters of the discussions. Where they expand to or go next after someone makes a comment is often contingent upon what someone else said previously. In sum, they engage each other in a respectful manner that nurtures their friendships while also advancing the discussion. This can be contrasted with how SDLP members conduct discussions.

SAN DIEGO LIBERTARIAN PARTY

SDLP members realize their self-conception as strong-willed individuals through principled action in situations where acting in a highly individualistic manner means that they should not compromise or give off the impression that someone else has swayed or altered how they approach something. As a result, SDLP members engage in a practice of self-realization

when they act in a manner that demonstrates their independence from external influence, when they communicate that they did not let someone tell them what to do.

These efforts in turn significantly affect how they engage in epistemic practices and are able to engage in acts of colligation. In order to present or evaluate truth claims during casual conservation or group discussion they must either do so while acting to realize their self-conception or confront others who act in a highly individualistic manner. In relation to the former, they engage in epistemic practices that are in service to their attempts to realize a self-conception. In relation to the latter, they must coordinate their activity with others who are doing so, in which case their ability to present or evaluate truth claims is shaped through their interactions with other SDLP members in the act of realizing their own self-conception. In this case they must present or evaluate truth while attempting to realize a self-conception or in responding to others who are. In either case, SDLP members engage in epistemic practices as a secondary activity—they orient their actions toward practices of self-realization and develop epistemic practices along the way. The epistemic practices they develop hinder their ability to engage in colligation.

SDLP members' practices of self-realization shape epistemic practices in several ways. First, their attempts to realize a self-conception a strong-willed individual leads them to treat hostility toward other members as acceptable conduct and confrontations as natural or normal forms of interaction at Supper Club. Second, SDLP members practice acts of self-realization that further their estrangement from each other, and the continued absence of personal relationships (or affective bonds) allows SDLP members to express hostility toward other members without consequence. Third, engaging in practices of self-realization hinders SDLP members' ability to cooperate with others, thereby making them more reliant on Benoit's autocratic leadership style

to coordinate group activities. As a result, Benoit is at the center of all group discussions. He acts as an intermediary between SDLP member interactions, a conduit that routes communications. In all, SDLP members who are engaged in practices of self-realization produce a type of entropy that preserves their estrangement, makes acts of hostility toward other members seem appropriate, and bolsters Benoit's authority over procedural matters.

Group discussions at Supper Club often lack coherence because individual members pursue their own ends during the discussion with few attempts to cooperate with others. This lack of coherence prevents SDLP members from establishing shared evaluative criteria for how to acquire information, present truth claims to others, or how to evaluate claims made by other people. Their practices of self-realization lead them to present and evaluate truth claims as a means to confront others, not convince them. They develop epistemic practices in which a good claim is one that demonstrates that someone is acting of their own accord, and that they are not being told what to do.

Victory Gardens

Mark arrives early for the July 2014 Supper Club. He carries on a light conversation with Benoit as he unpacks materials from a crate that he brought with him. He arranges a handful of books on gardening, boxes of meals that are used to enrich soil, and a stack of printouts that he made for the occasion. The other members arrive, order food, and find their seats for the night. Benoit calls the meeting to order and announces that Mark is going to present on "Victory Gardening."

Benoit introduces Mark; "I'm handing the floor over to Mark. Some of you know him, and some of you don't." Mark attends the Supper Club on a regular basis and is one of the more

active members in the organization.[154] Yet, introductions are still in order because some people are attending for the first time, while others attend infrequently or attend regularly but do not know Mark because they sit at a different table than he does. Mark stands in front of his display, holding his notes, and begins the presentation.

"Victory Gardening is about more than growing food," Mark says. "It's about being self-sufficient." He asks the audience if anyone grows their own food. Two audience members respond. An older man from the back of the room says, "I do. I have to because Social Security doesn't give me enough to eat." Mark acknowledges the man, and the man continues, "I live on the other side of the mountain..." Chip interrupts,[155] "I've been doing this for over ten years. It wasn't a big deal when I started." Mark thanks each of them and says that he is going to help the rest of them sort through all of the information that is out there on gardening so that they too can grow their own food. Mark presents himself as providing a service to SDLP members.

Several minutes into the presentation, Chip begins to grumble, "I do this. ... I know." Later, he continues, "tell ... as if ... ten years doing this." Mark ignores Chip and begins making the case for people to build elevated planter boxes and to "double dig" their plot. Mark points to books in his display and tells the audience when he is referencing information from a particular book. Chip sighs and moves his hands around—his left hand rubs his right elbow, then his forearm, he moves his hands to his lap, then he crosses his arms across his chest. Benoit has seen this before. He addresses the room: "Now, now. Keep your comments to yourself. You'll have a

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[154] Mark ran for San Diego City Council as the Libertarian Party candidate in his district. Despite losing, he does what he can to stay involved in the process. For example, he attends city council meetings to address the council. He occasionally records his statements and posts them on YouTube. In one instance, he asked the city council to tell the police department to stop washing their cars. He told them that California was in a drought and residents were being asked to reduce their water consumption. He asked why the police officers need to wash their cars so frequently.

[155] "Chip" is a pseudonym to maintain his privacy. He is not a public figure. He has not run for elected office, nor does he contribute to other public forums such as YouTube.

chance to ask questions at the end of the presentation." Chip shifts in his seat and appears to be grinding his teeth. Benoit repeats himself in a more assertive manner, "Keep your comments to yourself!" Benoit directs his comments to the room, but it is clear that he is speaking to Chip.

Mark continues, Benoit watches Chip, and Chip becomes more agitated. Finally, Chip interrupts Mark, repeatedly. At first, he speaks over Mark, adding content to the presentation. Mark lists autumn vegetables that grow well in San Diego, Chip tells everyone what he grows at home. Mark talks about how to space plants in a planter box, Chip tells everyone about his garden. Mark goes through the various kinds of meals people can use to enrich their soil, holding up the boxes he set out on display, while Chip tells everyone how he enriches the soil in his garden. Each time he interrupts, Mark acknowledges his comments, Benoit scolds him, and then Mark continues with his presentation without missing a step.

After several attempts to assert himself into the presentation, Chip reaches his breaking point. "I'm trying to help you," he hovers over his seat and yells at Mark, "I've been doing this for over ten years. You need to listen to someone with experience." Benoit yells at him but he keeps his focus on Mark: "You're an idiot! An idiot! You need to listen to your elders. You're an idiot!" Mark tries to calm Chip—raising his hands palms down and making eye contact with Chip as if to communicate that he means no harm—but it is too late; the room falls into chaos. Chip and Benoit's shouting fills the banquet hall. Chip turns his attention to Benoit, telling him that he does not get to decide who talks. The audience applauds. After a few more exchanges, Benoit and his booming voice prevail. Chip returns to his seat and keeps to himself for the

remainder of the presentation.[156] Mark, seemingly shaken by the situation, pauses for a moment. He then looks down at his notes and continues the presentation until his allotted time expires.

During Mark's presentation, Benoit enforces guidelines for how people may participate in group discussion, Mark provides a service to his SDLP peers, and Chip demands recognition in ways that both violate Benoit's guidelines and belittles Mark. Each of these SDLP members has a significant hand in producing the situation. They do so from varied participatory statuses and speaker roles. Benoit acts as SDLP Chairman to assign participatory status to other members. Benoit grants Mark the ability to be a full participant when he introduces Mark as a 'presenter' and "hand[s] the floor over" to him. At the same time, Benoit assigns everyone else a partial-participant status when he addresses them as an audience and states guidelines for how they may contribute to the discussion. He tells the audience that they may only ask questions at the end of Mark's presentation.

Benoit sets guidelines for how audience members may contribute to the discussion before Mark begins his presentation and then enforces those guidelines throughout Mark's presentation. He acts as SDLP Chairman to deny Chip the ability to act as a 'presenter,' the speaker role he grants to Mark. Benoit intervenes to enforce his guidelines. He becomes upset and scolds Chip as the situation escalates, yet even then he acts to preserve his authority. Benoit shapes the

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[156] Some SDLP members in the audience were interested in the presentation and asked questions. A man tells Mark that he cannot taste a difference between organic and conventional produce, asking if there is actually a difference between the two. A woman asks Mark if she can grow tomatoes in a pot. Mark tells the man that organic and conventional produce taste the same because plants process natural and synthetic nutrients the same way. He tells the woman that she can grow tomatoes but that she should mix several different meals into the soil. In both of these exchanges, an audience member asks Mark to share his expertise, and Mark complies. They do so in a friendly manner that does not lead to hostile exchanges or Benoit enforcing a breach in his rules. However, the friendlier exchanges are momentary and fleeting. The more frequent Chip's interruptions become, the less people ask questions about how produce tastes or whether or how they grow a vegetable. Chip's actions do more to shape the context of the discussion than the audience members asking questions in a friendlier manner that both defers to Mark's expertise and follow Benoit's guidelines.

discussion by setting and enforcing guidelines. He does not appear to be concerned with the information Mark or Chip convey, nor whether published materials or personal experience are more trustworthy sources of information.[157]

Mark's aim is to provide a service to the group. He assumes the speaker role of a "presenter" in order to teach the people in the audience how to grow their own food. He delivers a presentation that he prepared specifically for this occasion. He goes as far as to set up a display of his research materials and gardening supplies. He addresses the audience as a whole and maintains a personal distance from individual members when possible. He clearly identifies the source of information—he points to or picks a book from his display as he claims to relay information to the audience from that particular source. In so doing, he attributes authorship of the content he presents to multiple experts that are neither present nor known to most SDLP members.

Chip's aim is to experience recognition; to feel as if others view him as he seeks to be viewed. He interrupts Mark's presentation by making a series of descriptive statements about how he grows food at home. Excluding his response to Mark's initial question (does anyone grow their own food?), he speaks over Mark, causing Mark to pause his presentation. Chip does not introduce new information into the discussion, he merely repeats what Mark said—presenting himself as knowing the same information from personal experience rather than having read it in a book. In so doing, Chip interrupts Mark in order to recast himself as an authority on gardening. He attempts to act as a "presenter," although his status in this situation as a partial-

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[157] As a counterfactual, had Mark presented information solely based on personal experience, Benoit's reaction to Chip would be the same because he is reacting to Chip's violation of his guidelines. Benoit is enforcing the rules; he is not evaluating the substance of what Chip says. After all, Mark and Chip are presenting the same information on how to garden.

participant limits his capacity to do so. Chip becomes increasingly frustrated when other people fail to adequately acknowledge or listen to his expertise on the topic, and Benoit denies him the privileges associated with being a full participant. Each time Chip fails to successfully assert himself as a "presenter," he escalates his actions until the culminating moment when he lashes out against Mark, calling him an "idiot," and challenges Benoit's authority to set the guidelines through which people can participate in the group discussion.

SDLP members demonstrate the challenges they encounter during group discussions. They develop epistemic practices that are subordinated to their shared vanity project and prevents them from reaching agreement or even accepting that someone else has something to contribute. As such, their epistemic practices hinder their ability to produce and validate knowledge through colligation. In contrast to NRC, where every participant is able to contribute to the discussion, SDLP members often assert that they are the only person with the authority to speak on a particular topic.

SAN DIEGO YOUNG REPUBLICANS

SDYR members develop epistemic practices that are mediated by their shared professional projects. They engage in acts of colligation through highly structured relationships that are determined by their relative status position within the organization and broader political scene. People with lower status express deference toward, and validate those with higher status.

In 2011, as Jesse begins his tenure with the Young Republicans, Matt Donnellan (Donnellan hereafter) is SDYR President. At the 2011 September social happy hour, a monthly event in which members meet at a bar for drinks and casual conversation, Donnellan, Erin, and three other members are the first to arrive. Erin, the SDLP Internal Vice President who is in

charge of organizing social happy hours, and one other member push two large round tables together in order to accommodate everyone that might attend. Donnellan sits near the center where the tables meet.

After engaging in small talk and ordering drinks, Donnellan brings up the Occupy Wall Street protest. As part of broader action taking place in cities across the United States, protestors in San Diego marched through downtown and set up camp in the Civic Center Plaza near several municipal offices. He tells everyone that the police are going to break up the camp. He looks at his watch and says, "[The Police] are going to break it up in five hours and 20 minutes." Smirking, he repeats himself, counting down, "...five hours and 19 minutes." The lone general member in attendance, who is new to the group, asks how he knows what the police are going to do.

Looking at the new member, Donnellan says that he works at city hall and that his boss, San Diego city councilor Lorie Zapf, helped make the decision. Broadening his attention to the rest of the group, he says that Zapf met with the Chief of Police and a few other high-ranking city officials. He clarifies that while he did not witness the meeting, Zapf told him about it afterward. Donnellan has the group's undivided attention.

The wait staff delivers drinks. Donnellan continues, "The police can do it anytime. The protestors are violating city ordinances." The protestors set up camp last week; an executive board member asks Donnellan why the police are waiting. Donnellan smiles and responds, "Because their right to free speech trumps city ordinances." The group waits for Donnellan to tell them more. "It's really a budget and safety issue," he says. He tells them the police department is redirecting officers away from other neighborhoods in order to escort city councilors to and from

work each day. That, “Security is necessary in a time like this,” and that is precisely what the protestors cost the city, “security.”

Eddie arrives. Donnellan does not miss a beat. He continues telling everyone information that he claims to have heard earlier. He says that people from “the labor unions” are teaching the Occupy protestors how to demonstrate. Several other general members arrive. Appearing to notice a television screen in the bar area that is airing CNN, Donnellan shifts the topic of conversation. He asks people who they would like to win the 2012 Presidential nomination for the Republican Party. Just like that, Donnellan is finished discussing Occupy and so is everyone else.

During the 2013 July social happy hour, nine SDYR members arrive at the Stone Brewing Bistro in the Liberty Station area of San Diego. The group is comprised of the executive board members and two others—one of whom is attending for the first time. Peter, a board member, mentions that he was listening to The Voice of San Diego on the radio as they discuss San Diego Mayor Bob Filner. He pauses to justify his source of news, “It’s left leaning but I like that they present all the facts.” No one objects. Peter continues, “I guess Jerome’s Furniture donated the office furniture for his entire office.” Liz, also a board member, joins in, “I’ve heard that developers supposedly put checks on his desk instead of giving them to the city treasure. ... One of them even left a message to tell him that the checks were there.” People are becoming more lively as they share what they know with each other.

Someone mentions that Mayor Filner’s girlfriend dumped him after women began accusing him of sexual harassment. Someone else says the city had to pay for police officers to escort him to Paris during his vacation. Liz adds, “The police don’t even want to protect him because it’s too difficult. Because he lives in a large condo complex in downtown.” She further

claims that Filner used to live "somewhere like Chula Vista," and that he only moved to San Diego so that he could run for public office. The members' collective excitement is nearing a fervor.

Liz has an idea. She tells everyone that she is going to text several city councilors to see what they think. She tells the woman who is attending a Young Republican event for the first time that she has the private cell phone numbers for several city councilors. While typing messages on her phone, Liz says, "We should invite them to our next meeting to gossip about what it's like to work with Filner."

Eddie arrives amidst the excitement. He is currently the SDYR President. He has two guests with him. Eddie and his guest stand behind members talking amongst themselves. Peter says, "The host of Voice of San Diego claims to have busted [Filner] two years ago." Someone adds, "And then they endorsed him anyway." Eddie briefly breaks from his private conversation to contribute to the Young Republicans conversation, "You didn't disappoint us," referring to Mayor Filner. Eddie raises his drink into the air to make a toast, "We knew who you were, and that's why we didn't vote for you. Thanks for living up to our expectations." He chuckles, looks around to see everyone looking at him, and returns to his private conversation. The members calm and began transitioning into other conversations.

DISCUSSION

People join political organizations having already developed routines related to how they acquire information. Their involvement in a political organization does not seem to change this. For example, people who are involved in each of the political organizations that I study watch CNN or The Daily Show on Comedy Central. They read stories published in The Washington

Post or other major newspapers. They either watch conservative outrage media such as Fox News or InfoWars on television or see clips from these shows on YouTube. I see no evidence that a person's involvement in a conservative political organization leads them to stop watching, reading, or listening to any particular source of information.

A person's involvement in a conservative political organization may lead them to acquire information from sources they may not have otherwise. People in each organization expose other participants or members to new sources of information that they find useful. For example, NRC participants often recommend that their peers read Smedley Butler's *War is a Racket*, the Zero Hedge blog, or various other materials published by the Mises Institute. In SDLP, Benoit offers all members a free copy of Frédéric Bastiat's *The Law*. SDYR members passively encourage each other to follow the local news more closely whether that leads them to read the San Diego Union Tribune, the SD Rosta blog, or to listen to the Voice of San Diego radio show.[158] In each organization, people either suggest or pressure their peers to acquire information from sources they may not have accessed otherwise.

People also join a political organization with prior notions of what is a "good" source of information. Their involvement in a political organization may or may not alter their initial judgements. NRC participants maintain their initial perceptions of what counts as a good source of information but refine their ability to identify good sources through their involvement in the organization. For example, prior to forming or joining NRC, the participants involved in the chemtrails discussion all distrusted sources of information that they view as linked to the press or government. Through their involvement in NRC, they refine their abilities to collectively

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[158] SD Rosta is a blog through which well-known local Republicans discuss San Diego politics. SDYR members consider the Voice of San Diego to be a left-leaning news organization. On multiple occasions, I observed SDYR members discuss information that they claim to have heard on the Voice of San Diego radio show.

determine if a particular source is trustworthy. Their discussion on chemtrails began because a few participants recommended *What in the World Are They Spraying?* and *Why in the World Are They Spraying?* to Steve, and Steve was not persuaded by the documentaries. I present their discussion on chemtrails because it is ostensibly about whether or not the documentaries are a good source of information—it is not about whether or not chemtrails exist.

Steve critiques the filmmakers because they do not present enough evidence to support the claims they make. He also references evidence from geological surveys that directly contradicts the filmmakers' claims. It is only through discussion that the other participants develop a justification for their viewing the documentaries as a good source of information. They discredit Steve's reference to environmental surveys because they can be linked to the U.S. government, and then construct a narrative through which they interpret the filmmakers' lack of evidence as a form "evidence of absence." In the end, while Steve remains unconvinced, the other participants determine that the documentaries are a good source of information precisely because the filmmakers' claims cannot be externally verified through comparison with other sources of information such as environmental surveys. So, while NRC participants develop a general distrust for information that can be linked to the press or government prior to joining NRC, it is through their participation that they gain the ability to validate sources as credible or trustworthy.

SDLP members and SDYR members are more likely than NRC participants to develop new perceptions of what counts as a good source of information. They develop activity-specific preferences that directly relate to the involvement in their respective organization. SDLP members generally prefer the convenience of sources that are readily available to them. They are much less likely to discriminate between sources than NRC participants or SDYR members.

Rather, at Supper Club, SDLP members present a source as good when it enables them to assert authority during conversations with their peers or in group discussions. They hereby develop a sense of what counts as a good source within the confines of conversations or discussions at Supper Club. For example, during their discussion of victory gardens, Mark and Chip present similar information on how to garden but still find themselves in a contentious situation because Chip wants to be the expert on the matter. He discredits the materials Mark references to assert his own experiences and therefore himself as the only valid source on the matter. SDLP members judge the quality of a source based upon the effect it has within the confines of their conversations or discussions as Supper Club, not the merits of the source.

SDYR members tend to be relatively well informed about politics or current events prior to joining the Young Republicans. Through their involvement in SDYR, they develop a preference for privileged or exclusive information about the local political scene that does not appear on the news. They judge the quality of a source based upon a person's status in the Young Republican organization or the broader conservative political scene, and how exclusive or privileged the information seems. They view a source as good when the person sharing the information has relatively high status and they are in a position to share information that is not widely known. For example, SDYR members consider Donnellan to be a good source of information when he tells them that the San Diego Police are going to raid the Occupy protest camp. He both serves as president of the organization and works directly with City Councilor Lari Zapf. He has relatively high status and privileged access to decisions that are made behind closed doors at City Hall.

People in each conservative political organization access a variety of sources. Their participation in an organization does not prevent them from acquiring information from any

particular source. Their involvement in a political organization may lead them to access new sources of information and develop situation-specific preferences for what counts as a good source during group activities. However, where people acquire information is only one part of the story. What they do with it is another. People in each organization work with information differently. They develop epistemic practices that vary according to how they present information to each other, how they collectively validate a speaker or a bit of information, and subsequently, how they treat information as good, bad, or useless.

Presenting Information

People in each organization present information in patterned ways. NRC participants rely heavily on personal experience to evaluate secondary sources and present evidence. When they present personal experiences, they identify whether it is their direct experience or if it is something someone else told them. For example, Kristi justifies her doubts relating to the Sandy Hook shooting because she has family that lives in the area and does not know anyone who was directly affected by the shooting. Jon states that he has seen "the black helicopters" that conduct psy-ops missions inside the United States. During the chemtrails discussion, the Dude claims that his friend who is in the Air Force told him about chaff. In each instance, the participant identifies whether or not it is their experience or something they heard second hand. Kristy does not have direct experience with a Sandy Hook victim, Jon has direct experience with covert military operations, and the Dude has secondhand information about military tactics. NRC participants prefer direct, firsthand experience as a source of information but they also treat indirect, secondhand experience from a trusted individual as a good source of information.

When they reference indirect, second hand experiences, NRC participants often qualify the original source of information by providing background information. For example, the Dude introduces his friend as being in the Air Force to qualify his as someone who knows about chaff. When Jon incorporates the idea of "black budgets" into their discussion on chemtrails, he references Catherine Austin Fitts. Earlier in the night, he had described her as a credible source on government budgets because she had previously served as Federal Election Commission Secretary. He is mistaken. Austin Fitts served as the Assistant Secretary of Housing during George W. Bush's presidential administration. Nevertheless, the mistake is not relevant, because he introduces her as someone who was an accomplished government official and whose experiences led her to become critical of the U.S. government. Similar to how Steve describes himself and Jon as having "stared into the eyes of the beast" (Chapter Two) only to be horrified by what they saw, NRC participants describe people such as Austin Fitts as converts to liberty who are uniquely qualified to speak about the inner workings of government.

NRC Participants present information from secondary sources to several different ends. First, they introduce personal or second hand experience to broaden the parameters of the discussion. For example, the Dude references his friend who is in the Air Force and then the participants quickly expand their conversation on the documentaries to include a variety of alternative explanations. They link their personal experiences to material from a secondary source to make their experiences indicative of a broader point or to make the point from the secondary sources seem more realistic.

SDLP members present information as a mere reminder of what they as individuals know. They often make proclamations and appear as if they are talking-at people, not having a conversation. They occasionally attribute authorship to secondary information but rarely describe

the content of the source. As a result, they present information as a remark without providing other members enough context to engage in the information or assess sources that they are not already familiar with. During discussion, such as Mark's presentation on "Victory Gardening" in which one person attempts to disseminate specialized information to SDLP members, the discussion devolves into bitter arguments in which one type of source is contested in ways that have little to do with the substantive information.

SDYR participants present information in different ways depending on if they are involved in a group discussion or personal conversation. During group discussions, they assume speaker roles based on organizational position and protocols. SDYR members rarely present information as personal experiences; rather, they make collective statements about what they as Republicans should think, want, or do. During casual conversation they assume positions based on status and directly attribute authorship to information. They associate information with particular people who have more authority in the Republican Party or conservative political scene, and describe their relationship to those people to provide context for the information presented. In these situations, they clearly distinguish between what they know and think and how they came to know or think it.

Validating Speakers and their Sources

People in each organization assess and validate information in different ways. NRC participants evaluate information based on the source and work to affirm or validate the speaker, even when they disagree. While they distrust conventional sources of information, they rely on their skepticism of the information they acquire from those sources to help them better understand objective reality. In other words, they distrust information from conventional sources

but trust that they can properly interpret that information to better understand the world. NRC participants validate speakers who present misinformation as something that blocks their ability to see objective reality. They encourage and affirm speakers who treat misinformation as a type of error that they can work around by assuming that information from conventional sources is always false, and therefore the opposite of that information must be true. NRC participants also affirm speakers who present alternative information or accounts from liberty-oriented sources. They give more credence to sources when a speaker presents secondary materials that resonate with their own personal experiences and when they view the source of information as sharing their skepticism of convention (or having undergone a similar break from convention as them; when they view the source as operating on the same wavelength, so to speak). NRC participants validate speakers and information with positive affirmations, using statements like "right on," "yeah," or a smile. They also do so when they ask for more information or build upon what that person had said.

SDLP members may validate information during confrontations when different people within which they refute types of sources. They do so when they repeat the same information as someone else, even though they do so in a contentious manner. In this sense, SDLP members collectively validate information when multiple people assert that it is true while simultaneously refuting the sources of that information. For example, during Mark's "Victory Garden" presentation, Chip interrupts Mark on several occasions so that he can communicate the same information as Mark. In this sense, they disagree over who has the authority to speak on the topic and what counts as a good source, but they agree upon the information being presented. This is as close as SDLP members get to reaching a consensus during discussion.

SDLP members make the same point in quick succession to validate the information. However, in doing so, they do not validate the speaker. Compared to NRC participants, SDLP members rarely validate speakers. When they do validate speakers, they tend to do so in situations that are self-affirming. Samantha's explanation to the young man after they witness an argument between two men is a form of affirmation (Chapter Four). She validates the men involved in the argument when she portrays the confrontation as acceptable conduct. Audience members express a similar affirmation when they applaud a speaker who tells Benoit that he cannot tell them what to do (Chapter Four). They all validate speakers who assert themselves when confronted with opposition—the only content that matters in this situation is an expression that they will not be told what to do. In so doing, they reinforce their shared notion that SDLP members are a collective of strong-willed individuals.

SDYR members validate information though acts of deference. SDYR members with less status in the organization and in the local scene defer to people with higher status than themselves. In so doing, they evaluate information based on the status of the source—whether the source is a single person who has privileged access to political dealings such as city councilors or someone who knows who knows someone that has privileged access. For example, Donnellan discussion of the Occupy Protest. SDYR members respond to him with deference. The new member naïvely asks how he knows the information, but the seasoned SDYR members do not. Nor does anyone question him as he presents a litany of competing reasons why the police department has allowed the camp to persist. He tells them that the camp violates city ordinances, but freedom of speech trumps city ordinances, that it is really about how much it costs the city, or rather it is about safety.

Good, Bad, and Useless Information

NRC participants distinguish between good and bad information—material from nonconventional sources that aligns with their collective experiences is good, while "misinformation" from conventional sources is bad. However, despite their mistrust of material from conventional sources, they treat "misinformation" as useful. They often discuss material that they do not trust because they view it as reliable in the sense that it is always released in an attempt to deceive or confuse people. They treat "misinformation" as an obstruction that blocks their view of objective reality. In order to ascertain the truth of a person, situation, or event, they attempt to work through the obstruction in order to access objective reality. In other words, bad information is useful because they know that it will always tell them what is not true.

SDLP members are far less discriminating between good and bad information. They do not distinguish between the credibility of information they acquire from an anonymous blog, a fringe media program such as InfoWars, or a major media outlet such as the New York Times. Their involvement in SDLP reinforces their media consumption habits. At Supper Club, SDLP members do not discuss the merits of different sources of information, nor do they evaluate particular claims. Instead, they deploy information while asserting they are a strong-willed individual. Whether information is good or bad is beside the point as long as presenting information helps them realize their self-conception. They collectively validate information as an unintended consequence of self-realization practices. Consequently, these practices constrain SDLP members' ability to actively develop ways to evaluate and validate types of sources or information because to do so would require that people be willing to let others influence what they do or how they approach something. In other words, SDLP members exacerbate their

personal consumption habits and media illiteracy because it is against their cat-like nature to cooperate or let others influence them (Chapter Four).

SDYR members view privileged information as good information because it is useful to them. They treat privileged information a means to locate themselves in the broader status order. In another sense, once they acquire privileged information, they can relay it to other people in ways that may help present themselves as insiders of similar or higher status. As long as the information conforms to a broad set of points emphasized in the Republican Party program, the substance of the information is less significant to them than their ability to attribute it to a source—in a broad sense, the information cannot support or justify tax increases, unions, or any other highly politicized issue that would align them with Democrats. SDYR members view information as bad or less useful when it is widely understood or shared. They occasionally ask people if they have seen a news break on a major cable network, but once people indicate that they have, the conversation transitions to a new topic.

Similar to SDLP members, SDYR members seek information that is useful to them. Although, unlike SDLP members, SDYR members are more likely to view information that is less useful to them as still being true. SDYR members find information as useful when it helps them advance their political careers. For example, they might view climate change as a significant issue, but if someone with higher status in the political scene tells them that it is not, their concern becomes irrelevant because it does not help them advance their career—because they rely on people in higher position to provide them with opportunities to move into position with more responsibility and authority.

CHAPTER 6
INCOMMENSURATE PRACTICES AND FRAGMENTATION

Fragmentation within the political scene persists across types of conservative political organizations. While differences of ideology or interests distinguish Young Republicans, libertarians, and anarchists, they agree more than they disagree, and their stated interests often overlap. In this chapter, I argue that divisions across conservative political organizations are partially maintained through differences of collective habits within organizations that make it difficult for someone from one type of political organization to become involved in another. I present three sets of ethnographic accounts that capture what happens when someone who is involved in one type of political organization visits another. These accounts demonstrate how the habits people develop during their involvement in one political organization are incommensurate with practices in other organizations and that these incommensurate practices provide grounds upon which people sustain fragmentation within a conservative political scene.

I first present a set of ethnographic accounts that illustrates the challenges libertarians have when attending Young Republican events. I do so by describing a former SDLP member who has volunteered for Carl DeMaio's 2014 campaign as he mingles with Young Republicans at the 2014 SDYR ATF Night. I also include an account of a Young Republican who works for the DeMaio 2014 campaign as he reflects upon his view of libertarians. This account primarily demonstrates how the libertarian habit of seeking more immediate and fleeting moments of satisfaction through acts of realizing a self-conception clash with Young Republicans more professional oriented habits that reward sustained involvement that leads to career advancement

over a longer period of time. Specifically, that libertarians attempt to be a strong-willed individual is incommensurate with the Young Republicans' habit of being that revolve around being deferential to those with higher status.

I then present a set of ethnographic accounts that describes what happens when a Republican from northern San Diego county visits the Natural Rights Coalition's weekly meeting. Neither Young Republicans nor any establishment Republicans in San Diego city were aware that NRC exists, much less attended their meetings. This excerpt presents a unique opportunity to observe how NRC participants respond to someone who speaks to them as a representative of the Republican Party. The guest presents himself as an authority figure who has privileged information and expects NRC participants to be deferential toward him as someone with higher status in the local political scene. This particular account demonstrates little on its own because the guest is also an NRC participant's father; I therefore contrast it with other accounts that demonstrate how NRC participants handle disagreements with guest to identify which aspects of this account relate to a misalignment of habits. My doing so helps illustrate the challenges Republicans encounter when attending NRC weekly meetings both because of incommensurate practices relating to how they discuss information and speaker roles people assume during those discussions.

Lastly, I present a set of ethnographic accounts that depict what happens when NRC participants attend Supper Club to debate SDLP members about the virtues of anarchy over a limited government. I present this account in two parts: part one presents interactions between NRC participants and SDLP members prior to the debate beginning; part two presents the debate between them. Part one demonstrates how the SDLP members' habits related to being strong-willed individuals—specifically how they attempt to engage others by making themselves the

center of attention—conflicts with NRC participants' attempts to have more detail-oriented discussions. Among other things, this draws out differences in how people in each organization establish and maintain relationships with others within their same organization. Part two demonstrates the incommensurability of their epistemic practices writ large. I emphasize differences in how people manage group discussions, present information, and attempt to validate particular bits of information when confronted with alternative interpretations of the same material, alternative forms of evidence, and contrasting practices of collective validation. The end result is that NRC participants and SDLP members speak past each other as if they were engaged in two separate discussions.

LIBERTARIAN OUTREACH

Once a year, Young Republican chapters around the country host their marquee fundraiser, the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms event, or "ATF Night" as Young Republicans in San Diego refer to it. In addition to raising money for the operations budget, each chapter relies on the event to promote its own organization and recruit new members. In San Diego, following a trip to a shooting range, members and their guests gather in the large private room of a cigar and scotch lounge to puff tobacco and have a few drinks. SDYR executive board members stand near the entrance to the room. Jesse, Eliza, and Paige greet people as they arrive, handing them several drink tickets. As the room fills, Jesse and the other board members settle into a space near the corner. They talk with each other to pass the time.

Halfway across the room, several guests huddle in the walkway while they wait for seats to become available. Kourosh introduces himself to a few other guests: "I work for Carl DeMaio." He began working in DeMaio's campaign office the week prior. He says that his new

boss told him that he should attend Young Republican events. “So here I am,” he says. Someone asks him what he does for DeMaio. He tells them that he has been doing stuff around the office but that he is not yet sure what his job entails. Someone asks him how he got the job. He continues, “They contacted me. I just got an email one day.” Kourosh is a member of the College Republicans at the community college he attends. The DeMaio campaign sent the members of his chapter a recruitment email. Upon receiving this email, Kourosh was happy to join.

Kourosh conveys a sense of enthusiasm when he speaks—he talks quickly, rapidly moving his hands around in the limited space available to him in this situation. Maintaining his enthusiasm, he suddenly announces, “You should meet my friend Eric. Hang on.” He turns, reaches his hand out, taps someone on the shoulder, and waves him over. “This is Eric. He’s working on the DeMaio campaign too.” Eric stands next to Kourosh and shakes hands with everyone. “What do you do on DeMaio’s campaign?” someone asks. Eric responds, “I’m in charge of reaching out to libertarians.” Without being prompted, he explains:

> I know all the libertarians around. I was involved in the Libertarian Party for years, and I still know everybody. I was on the board. And, I was even going to run for president. But Mike Benoit’s an absolute tyrant. He’s an asshole. I mean, he rules with an iron fist, and he doesn’t want anybody else to be able to do anything. I had support but I couldn’t take it anymore. But everybody still knows me, [he raises his telephone for everyone to see] and I still have their numbers. I have hundreds of numbers. That’s why DeMaio needs me. I can turn out libertarians for him.

Eric further insinuates that the DeMaio campaign recruited him because of his reputation in the local political scene. This is only true if you consider Kourosh to be a representative of the DeMaio campaign. Shortly after being recruited, Kourosh invited Eric, his friend from community college, to join him. Kourosh made the same offer to others in the cigar lounge—

telling them that he will pass on their email addresses and telephone numbers to his boss. “You can expect to hear from boss pretty soon,” he tells them.

Several months later, Young Republicans gather on the patio of Buffalo Wild Wings for their monthly members meeting. A field team for the local news is there covering the event because Neel Kashkari, the 2014 Republican Party gubernatorial candidate, is set to address the Young Republicans. The news team sets up their camera near the patio door, where it is the narrowest. Jesse looks around and begins staging the scene. He directs a handful of members to huddle behind the news reporter, making it seem as if there is a large number of people in the background. Jesse tells people in the huddle, “Just stand here and talk.” Everyone complies.

Jesse introduces Derek to another member: “This is Derek, he’s busy on the DeMaio campaign.”[159] Derek acknowledges Jesse by tilting his head several times. “What do you do?” someone asks. Derek lists several managerial duties and says, “...and I was recently tasked with libertarian outreach.” He sounds exasperated as he says the words, “liber-tarian out-reach.” A member mentions that they met someone else claiming to do the same thing months prior.[160] Without much hesitation, Derek responds, “I don’t know them, and I’ve been with the campaign since the beginning.” The same person asks Derek how he likes organizing libertarians. He becomes more animated, chopping his hand close to his body, pausing it mid-swing:

> It’s frustrating. They should like Carl [DeMaio]. I try telling them, if you want lower taxes and you say that you want smaller government, you’re not going to do any better than him. I mean, it’s simple. But they don’t want to do anything. They say they want change but when it comes time to show up and do something, they don’t do anything.

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[159] Derek is a pseudonym because he did not speak to me in his capacity as a public official.
[160] I am this member.

Derek claims to do "libertarian outreach" because he was asked to, not because he wants to. He seems to view it as a waste of time, even if he does not explicitly say it.

Eric did not last long as a volunteer on the DeMaio campaign, nor did he join SDYR as a member. No one on DeMaio's campaign staff that I spoke to verified Eric's claim that he was brought onto the campaign to mobilize the libertarian vote—whether I asked by name or described him by physical appearance, no one could even recall him being there. Similarly, SDLP members do not confirm that he had support to challenge Benoit for the SDLP Executive Chair. Rather, Eric's comments are a form of self-aggrandizing talk that helps him realize a self-conception in the moment. He asserts that DeMaio's campaign needs him because he has the ability to contact hundreds of libertarians in San Diego without knowing that the DeMaio campaign has access to a voter database maintained by the Republican Party that includes the names, party affiliation, and contact information for all registered voters in DeMaio's district. Other than providing him with a prop, Eric's phone and contact list is insignificant to DeMaio's campaign.

It is not surprising that Eric does not continue his involvement in SDYR or DeMaio's 2014 campaign because Young Republicans will not give him the recognition he seeks, nor is he likely to view the means through which Young Republicans achieve recognition in SDYR desirable. Young Republicans tend to view the form of self-aggrandizing talk that Eric conveys as meaningless and tacky. Eric communicates to Young Republicans that he does not understand how major political parties or campaigns operate when he touts his contact list. When he brags about his standing among libertarians, he associates himself with people that Derek describes as not doing anything when it matters—Derek is representative of other Young Republicans in this

regard. He also demonstrates a lack of deference when he claims that a prominent figure within the San Diego political scene such as DeMaio needs him to appeal to a subset of conservative voters. Eric postures in a manner that is common among libertarians but that conveys to Young Republicans that he is not someone that they need to take seriously.

To be taken seriously in this setting, Eric needs to *do something* that Young Republicans view as valuable such as being a "Rock Star Volunteer" (Chapter Three) by maintaining his involvement in a campaign organization throughout an entire campaign cycle. Herein lies the problem for Eric; as a Libertarian Party member who attempts to become more involved in the Republican Party, he seeks recognition upon attending an event while Young Republicans express recognition through acts of deference that are tied to career advancement. Eric would like to be seen in a similar manner as Derek without doing the work that Derek has done. It is unlikely that Eric will sustain his involvement in Republican organizations long enough to do the work Derek has done, and if he does, he may not receive the initial recognition or sense of satisfaction that he is accustomed to through his involvement in SDLP. While it is possible for Eric to learn how major political parties and campaigns operate and to acquire habits through his involvement in SDYR or the DeMaio campaign, he must first get past the negative experiences associated with acting as a libertarian among the Republican ranks.

A REPUBLICAN AMONG ANARCHIST

During the NRC weekly meeting on February 24, 2015, a middle aged man walks into Jon's living room. Someone in the kitchen yells, "Ben!"[161] Another shouts, "Hey!" Jon walks to

[161] Ben is a pseudonym. I mask Ben's real name because he is the parent of another member who does not publicize her or his full name to the broader public. I verified claims that Ben makes about his own involvement in politics using public records.

the entry way to greet the man. He embraces Ben's arm with one his hands and shakes Ben's hand with the other. "Welcome. It's great to see you," Jon says. Kristy follow's suit. She hugs Ben and tells him that his presence is a "lovely surprise." Noticing that a newcomer is watching participants walk over to greet Ben, Jon tells him that Ben is the father of one of their regulars.

Time passes and Ben still lingers near the entryway having made it no more than a few steps into the living room. Tired of standing, he sits in a nearby chair and settles into a conversation with Jon and a few others. Before long, Ben breaches the subject of politics and finds ways to work his political biography into the conversation. He first mentions that he sits on a local governmental commission and that he also has ties to the Central Committee for the Republican Party of San Diego. A little later, he tells them that he has run for public office in the past and that he may do so again in the near future at his fellow party operatives' behest. Ben adopts a new posture in the conversation as he establishes his political credentials. He addresses his audience as if he speaks for the Republican Party: "We need to..." or "Our chances are looking good," or when bragging about how he made a particular decision on behalf of the broader Republican Party that denied a civil service internship program funding, he boasts, "I said, nope, nope, nope." Ben projects his authority over the topic of politics by distinguishing himself from his audience; he asserts that he is a significant person in the Republican Party.

Ben suddenly changes the topic of conversation, "The real threat facing cities is Somalis." The other participants seem unsettled by his comment but say nothing. Ben continues his statement, "The Sunni Somalis are coming into this country and now Obama wants to bring in the Syrians"—referring to Sunni Muslim immigrants from Somalia. A participant challenges Ben, he tells him that Somali immigration has been beneficial for places like San Diego and Minneapolis because the immigrants are opening businesses in rundown neighborhoods. Jon

listens and nods slightly in a manner that neither signals agreement nor disagreement. Ben responds, “Muslim terrorists had threatened to bomb the Mall of America”—an iconic shopping mall located in Minnesota. Jon mentioned earlier in the evening before Ben arrived that he views terrorists as “inorganic” or unnatural because they had to be driven to radicalism by those who “turn the economic and political screws.” Yet, in this instance, he says nothing of the sort. Rather, Jon expands the boundaries of the conversation by introducing the idea that the U.S. military conducts covert operations in the United States; “Most people don’t understand that there are actual arms of the U.S. government that go out there to antagonize people in order to make this stuff work.” Jon’s response comes off as noncommittal and evasive, it is unclear whether or not he agrees with Ben. NRC participants often introduce new bits of information that expand the boundaries and shift the discussion in a new direction, but Ben does not know how to respond to Jon’s comment. Ben first quiets and then jokes that he should probably “check on his date,” referring to a friend who accompanied him to the meeting. Whether Jon attempts to steer the conversation in a new direction or if he is just being polite by not directly criticizing his guest, the other participants welcome Ben’s silence because it ends an uncomfortable conversation.

Jon and the other NRC participants treat Ben differently than their peers. They grant Ben a special status because he is the father of an NRC participant. Had Ben not been their friend’s parent, they might have been more willing to directly challenge him or they have left the conversation because it made them uncomfortable. Jon periodically makes a similar point to other NRC participants that he makes to Ben. However, in those other instances, Jon is more assertive and presents more detailed accounts about how the U.S. Military conducts covert operations in the United States. His comment to Ben is vague in comparison. For example, Jon

makes a similar contribution during a conversation with Kristy on May 19, 2015. He introduces information about the U.S. military conducting covert psychological operations in U.S. cities to provide a basis for them to question whether or not the U.S. government orchestrated or staged the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. During this conversation, he claims to have personal experience with this type of operations relating back to his military service which he uses to directly cast doubt on conventional accounts of the Sandy Hook Shooting. He makes a similar claim during a group discussion of Chemtrails on July 14, 2015. Building upon previous comments about how the U.S. government has a secret black budget to conduct operations "off the books," he suggests that the U.S. government may execute a chemtrail program to either chemically manipulate entire populations of people or that it conducts covert psychological operations that produce a widespread sense of confusion over whether or not chemtrails exist. In both instances, Jon explicitly introduces covert operations in the United States as a particular *means* to achieve a specific *end.* When talking to Ben, Jon holds back, he does not specify the covert program as a means nor does he identify an end.

Had Ben attended the NRC meeting without being the family member of a NRC participant, he would likely have been treated in a similar manner as other guests. To better demonstrate this point, consider Zach.[162] Zach attends the November 11, 2014 NRC weekly meeting as the guest of a regular participant. Upon his arrival, participants welcome Zach with handshakes and pleasantries, and make efforts to include him in their conversations. Toward the

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[162] Zach is roughly 18 years old and lives with his mother in a suburban beach community in San Diego County. He carpooled to the meeting with a regular NRC participant who he had met on a libertarian-oriented message board weeks earlier. This is the only meeting Zach attends. I followed up on Zach during the 2016 election cycle while attempting to understand more about people who attend an NRC weekly meeting but do not return. During this time, Zach's Facebook page was adorned with iconic symbols associated with the Alt Right. For example, his profile picture is a picture of Pepe the Frog—a cartoon character appropriated by the Alt Right that became a means for people to identify themselves as aligned with the Alt Right through meme-based communications.

end of the evening, Zach gets into an argument with a handful of participants. He tells the participants that Muslims should not be in the United States because their values are incompatible with Western civilization. One-by-one the participants challenge Zach. They ask him to consider different aspects of his statement. One person asks why he thinks that, another asks him to consider where values come from. Zach asserts his initial point in response to each. The conversation escalates as the participants question Zach in a more temperamental manner. They raise their voices and their friendly suggestions of "you should consider," become statements such as "you're not seeing the point." Zach is obstinate and unyielding in his responses as he continues to assert his initial point. The participants' frustration builds as each of Zach's responses needle their patience a little more. The following week, Jon reflects on the discussion. He acknowledges that Zach expressed "unpopular views" and "pissed people off," but that he is proud of how the group handled the situation because they remained receptive to Zach while challenging him to see if he had really thought his position through. When asked what was "unpopular" about Zach's views, Jon concludes, "... Zach believes in objective morality."[163] NRC participants bestow a special status upon Ben because he is a participant's father. Participants would likely treat Ben in a similar manner as Zach had he not been related to one of their peers.

Ben is an odd case because he is a Republican involved in politics in Escondido, California—a city in northeastern San Diego County. Republicans in Escondido are marginalized within the broader Republican Party politics in San Diego and are not representative of the ideological leanings or political style of the Young Republicans. However, Ben's visit to the NRC weekly meeting demonstrates an important facet of epistemic practices that make it

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[163] FN NRC 20141118.

challenging for Republicans to become involved in the NRC. Ben identifies himself as having a privileged position within Republican politics in Escondido that provides him with access to privileged information and then he assumes a posture of speaking for the Republican Party.[164] He anticipates that his audience will respond to him with deference when he comments about Muslims, and the NRC participants instead respond by challenging him. Despite Jon's tepid response, he still presents enough of a challenge that Ben makes an uneasy joke about his date in order to end a topic of conversation that he initiated. Had a Young Republican attended the NRC weekly meeting and not Ben, the contrast between a Young Republican who relies on deference to navigate status hierarchies and NRC participants who purposefully reject hierarchical forms of organizations would have been even more acute.

OPPORTUNITIES AT BETTER TABLES

During the 2014 SDLP Christmas Party, Benoit announces that the SDLP will hold more group discussions in 2015.[165] Marcelo stands and tells the audience that he hopes they will be able to engage in group discussions without SDLP members insulting each other. Months later, as part of this initiative, Benoit invites Mike Paster from the Natural Rights Coalition to attend Supper Club to debate whether anarchy or "limited government," as Benoit refers to it, is a better way to organize society. Mike relays Benoit's invitation to NRC participants, and a handful agree to attend Supper Club.[166] NRC participants arrive at Giovanni's Italian restaurant for the

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[164] This is similar to how SDYR President Matt Donnellan presents himself as having privileged access information about the upcoming San Diego Police Departments crackdown on Occupy protesters.
[165] FN SDLP 20141215.
[166] Prior to his involvement in NRC, Mike was an active member of SDLP. He ran for U.S. Congress as a Libertarian Party candidate in 2010. These days, he rarely attends SDLP events but maintains a seat on the executive board.

July 2015 Supper Club. The banquet hall is already half-filled with more SDLP members still to arrive. Benoit greets Mike first, then Jon, Steve, the Dude, and a few others. Mike lingers as the other NRC participants find a table along the wall. Mike jokes with Benoit, engages in light conversation with Mark, and then rejoins the other NRC participants.

SDLP members continue to arrive, and NRC participants fall into conversation among themselves. Steve mentions that there is a psychology professor who asks his students an interesting extra-credit question on their exams: "They can choose to receive two extra credit points or six extra credit points, but there's a catch," he says. "If more than 20 percent [of the students] choose six, no one gets any extra credit. People—." Steve continues as Charles, an SDLP member, approaches Mike. Charles talks quietly, slightly above a whisper. He complements the NRC weekly podcast. Mike thanks him. Charles then presents Mike with an opportunity; "I've got a better table for you if you want to film the podcast at my place." Mike slouches in his chair, "Okay man." Charles pats his shoulder as he says, "You don't need to decide now." Charles then returns to his seat and Mike rejoins the conversation without comment.

Steve tells the other NRC participants that when presented with a choice to receive more or less extra credit, a student is likely to choose six points because she or he thinks that they will be the one to receive six points, not two. "It's based on the tragedy of the commons," he says. With Charles back in his seat, an elderly man approaches Mike. The elderly man asks, "Are you a gamer and into computers?" "I'm not sure," Mike says. NRC participants shift their attention to the elderly man, who is still waiting for Mike to finish his answer. After an awkward pause, Mike asks for clarification; "What do you need, man?" The elderly man says that he has an idea

for a website. Mike appears as if he is experiencing an epiphany; he knows exactly what to do. He swings his outstretched arms across the table and directs the elderly man's attention to Steve.

Steve recognizes Mike's cue and tells the elderly man that he goes to school for computer science. The elderly man asks Steve which school. Steve tells him that it is a local community college. The elderly man is silent at first and the responds, "I don't know. They have these online schools." His comment hangs as if suspended in midair; there is another awkward silence. Steve asks him what he would like to do. "I want to create a competing website to Craigslist," the elderly man responds. NRC participants do not respond; there is another awkward silence. Without receiving a response, the elderly man continues. He tells them that Craigslist has been taken over by corporate investors. Steve asks him if the corporate investors affect the websites service. The elderly man appears caught off guard by Steve's question. He pauses and then responds, "The website has plenty of problems. Have you ever tried to advertise a business on there?" Steve has not. Benoit announces that they are beginning the meeting. The elderly man reacts to Benoit's booming voice as a call to return to his seat, and complies.

NRC participants do not have meaningful encounters with either Charles or the elderly man. These encounters demonstrate the contrasting aspects of NRC participants' collective habits from those of SDLP members that diminish their ability find common ground or even effectively communicate with each other. In what follows, I draw out these contrasts related to how the people in each organization initiate interactions, their respective styles through which they engage each other, and their respective standards of evaluation through which they identify and judge evidence of the various claims made during the encounters presented above.

Initiating an Encounter

At their weekly meetings, NRC participants join or leave conversations without interrupting whomever is speaking. SDLP members frequently initiate short interactions during which they exchange short declarative statements. When NRC participants visit Supper Club, these respective practices combine to produce a situation within which neither NRC participants nor SDLP members directly invite people who are involved in the other organization to join their conversations. Steve does not pause or acknowledge Charles or the elderly man as they approach Mike. He acts in manner that is consistent with how NRC participants conduct themselves at their weekly meetings. He may have acted differently had Charles or the elderly man introduced themselves to the NRC participants. However, neither Charles nor the elderly man make any attempt to introduce themselves to the NRC participants. They speak directly to Mike and do not acknowledge the other NRC participants.[167] Steve and the elderly man only speak to each other after Mike facilitates their interaction. Without his intervention, Steve probably would not have entered into a conversation with the elderly man.

Style of Engagement

NRC participants often have long drawn out discussions with each other. They begin with a single idea and then expand the parameters of the discussion to include a broader range of topics. SDLP members often have short conversations with each other that do not develop the discussion and do not expand to include other topics. NRC participants' and SDLP members' respective styles of engagement conflict in duration and trajectory of the discussion or conversation. However, within this difference, NRC participants and SDLP members also

[167] Mike is technically a SDLP member but is also a familiar face for SDLP members who attended Supper Club 2010-2012.

express a different willingness to engage in discussions or conversations with people based upon whether or not the discussion or conversation was their idea.

NRC participants are often willing to discuss ideas or topics that are not their own. SDLP members are relatively less willing to do so. Steve initiates a discussion with his fellow NRC participants when he introduces the extra credit assignment. Within the time that Mike talks to Charles, the other NRC participants ask Steve questions about the extra credit assignment and prompt him to expand the parameters of the discussion. Charles pulls Mike out of the NRC participants' discussion and in order to proposition him. As the NRC participants begin to collectively discuss an idea, Charles delivers his proposition and leaves by the time Steve mentions that the extra credit assignment is based upon the tragedy of the commons.[168]

The elderly man also propositions Mike; he wants a business partner. He interacts with Mike and Steve on his own terms. The elderly man, Mike, and Steve talk about the elderly man's business idea. Steve does so after ending a discussion that he had initiated on the extra credit assignment. Mike and Steve continue to converse with the elderly man despite the interactional challenges of doing so. They ask him to elaborate his idea and question what he says. They demonstrate their willingness to have a conversation with the elderly man based upon an idea that is not their own. Neither Charles nor the elderly man demonstrate a willingness to do the same.

Standards of Evaluation

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[168] This is an instance of happenstance when viewed in relation to SDLP members' style of engagement in relation to that of the NRC participants. The tragedy of the commons refers to the idea that people are incentivized to get as much as they can, as fast as they can from the commons even though their doing so is detrimental to the well-being the commons. In this instance, the NRC participants' group discussion represents the commons while Charles illustrates the idea conveyed within the tragedy of the commons.

NRC participants often consider different types of evidence in order to develop and validate truth claims. They frequently discuss personal experience, books, movies, podcasts, and blogs, to name a few. They draw connections between material that they acquire from different types of sources in order to provide evidence for a truth claim. They engage the substantive aspects of various materials or situations in order to do so. To demonstrate this point, Steve first presents the extra credit assignment as an idea, and then he presents it as evidence for a truth claim that people act in their self-interest. He substantively links the extra credit assignment to what he claims is a principle of human nature. SDLP members do not evaluate materials or truth claims based upon their substantive link. Rather, they assert truth claims and sometimes reference materials as evidence in order to establish their epistemic authority over their peers. The elderly man asserts that Craigslist has problems. He responds to Steve's question related to whether or not corporate investors affect the service Craigslist provides to users with another question that prompts him to assert his authority, again. The elderly man does not present what is wrong with Craigslist or how he knows that there are "plenty of problems," he merely asserts that it is the case. In this instance, his assertion is a means of evaluating his truth claim; the specifics do not matter, only that he has the epistemic authority to determine that it is true.

NRC participants and SDLP members confront significant practical challenges when they encounter each other. They initiate interactions in different ways that may lead NRC participants to ignore SDLP members, while SDLP members may be reluctant to become involved in a conversation that is based upon someone else's idea. They interact with each other through different styles of engagement that result in miscues and uncertainty. NRC participants may ask SDLP members to elaborate or defend the statements they make in a manner that is unfamiliar to them, while NRC may be unfamiliar with SDLP members' style of making short declarative

statements. Lastly, NRC participants draw connections between evidence and truth claims while SDLP members assert truth claims and then occasionally reference evidence to establish their epistemic authority. While it is possible for NRC participants and SDLP members to overcome these practical challenges, in the next section I demonstrate just how difficult it is for people involved in NRC or SDLP to effectively communicate with each other.

THE DEBATE

Benoit calls the July 2015 Supper Club to order. He announces that they are trying something new tonight. He invited members of the Natural Rights Coalition to Supper Club to debate whether anarchy or "limited government" is a better way to organize society. He points toward NRC participants sitting at a table against the wall. NRC participants scan the room and wave to their hosts. Benoit asks for two NRC participants to join him at a long table in the back of the room that serves as their stage for the debate. Mike and Jon stand and walk to the stage.

Benoit announces the rules for the debate and the guidelines for audience participation. The debate will last 30 minutes. Each panelist will make an opening statement, not to exceed one minute per panelist. Then the audience will ask questions. Their questions must be to the point and take no longer than 30 seconds. Benoit takes a moment to emphasize this point, his shoulders slump and flails his limp arms from side-to-side, "Don't go on-and-on making a statement of your own" he says. Returning to the guidelines, he tells the panelists that they have up to one minute to respond to an audience member's question.

After he announces the rules, Benoit needs two volunteers before they can begin the debate. Benoit asks if someone is willing to keep time. Several people shout in response but Jim is already standing by with his wrist watch in hand. Benoit tells the audience that he needs one

more SDLP member to argue for limited government. Charles springs into action and quickly crosses the room to claim the final seat at the table before someone else does. Lastly, Benoit announces that in addition to being a panelist, he will also serve as the moderator. Everyone in their place, the debate begins.

Benoit offers Mike and Jon the ability to speak first, but they defer. Benoit begins, "As Thomas Paine told us, government is a necessary evil." He tells the crowd that they need limited government to protect them and their property from "the evil side of humanity." He argues that only a state can act as a "final arbiter" to preserve their property rights during disputes, and can maintain a military to defend them from other "bigger, badder states." Audience members applaud. One SDLP members utters, "Mikey likes it," while others comment to themselves as if they too were panelists.[169] Benoit breaks from his role as a panelist and shifts his attention to an audience member. He makes a sweeping gesture with his right hand and says, "Not if you've read *The Law* by Frédéric Bastiat."[170] He provides no further explanation.

After Charles delivers his opening statement, Benoit turns the floor over to the remaining two panelists. Jon defers to Mike. Mike looks at Benoit and begins, "I'm glad you brought up Thomas Paine," he turns to face the audience, "Many people forget the rest of the quote. Thomas Paine says that government is a necessary evil at best, and an intolerable one at worst."[171] He repeats himself, emphasizing "at best." Mike tells the audience that government will always be evil, regardless of what form it takes. He suggests that anarchy *can* provide a better way to live

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[169] The audience member who says, "Mikey likes it," is probably joking. I understand the reference but do not understand how it fits into this situation. I included this detail because it is fun.

[170] I could not hear the comment from where I was sitting, nor did my audio recorder capture it. Benoit mentions Bastiat's book from time-to-time. A year prior, he gave away free copies of this book to people attending the Supper Club. He had a medium sized box filled to the top with copies of *The Law.*

[171] Mike is an avid reader. He often reads several works from the same author before moving onto a new author. For example, he went through a period where he read various works by Voltaire. In the same manner, Mike recently went through a lengthy period where he read Thomas Paine's works.

because it allows people the freedom to solve their own problems, together.[172] Mike concludes, NRC participants applaud. Jon compliments Mike and tells him that he made a great opening statement.

Jon begins his opening statement, "I guess that I come at this from the perspective of a military veteran." He mentions his military career and that he began to study anarchy after being discharged. He tells the audience that he would like to build upon Mike's opening statement. He says, my path to anarchism has taught me that people are capable of more than we often realize. He continues, with the assistance of new technologies, people are fully capable of governing themselves without a state. Jon concludes, NRC participants applaud once again, and Mike compliments Jon for a job well done.

Benoit opens the floor to questions. He reminds the audience of the rules. SDLP members begin asking questions. Each directs their question to "the anarchists" in a gotcha manner. They ask questions in a way that sets up the recipient to provide an answer that they as the questioner view as invalidating the recipient's initial position. One SDLP members asks, "What if someone tries to rob you? What will you do then?" Another says, "Without the police, who's going to protect your property?" A series of similar questions follow.

Halfway through the Question and Answer portion of the debate, a younger attendee stands up and speaks loudly, "Given what a failure anarchy is in Somalia, how would it ever work here?" Benoit and Jim respond at the same time. Jim tells the audience member to clarify his question. Benoit turns his attention to Jim, "You're not the moderator." Jim continues, "You have to assume that they're actually worse off without their past leaders." In this instance, Jim is

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[172] Mike tells the audience that no one knows what anarchy will look like because people will have to figure it out in the moment. He tells them that there will be problems to solve but that he thinks people are capable of solving those problems.

neither the timekeeper nor the moderator, he is someone that does not like the question or perhaps the audience member that asked it. Jim attempts to tell them about an article he read in the *New York Times* but both Benoit and the audience member ignore him, turning their attention to each other.

Benoit tells the audience member to ask the question in a different way. The audience member refuses. Benoit insists. He refuses again and begins challenging Benoit directly, "Who are you to say how we can ask questions?" He repeats himself, "Who are you...?" SDLP members in the audience applaud. Benoit is noticeably irritated. Not to be outdone, he lashes out at the audience member. He shouts, "A question needs to have a logical point, and it has to make sense!" The audience member sits down in his chair and keeps to himself for the rest of the meeting.

Benoit assumes control of the room. He tells Jon and Mike that they do not have to answer the question; he scolds the room for throwing them a "curve ball." Mike responds first. "He doesn't have to re-ask it. I'm happy to take a curve ball." The audience applauds.

Jon responds first: "I'm happy to answer the question. Somalia, in whatever form of anarchy they may have isn't necessarily worse off based on what they had before." Mike nods his head in agreement. Jon continues, "We're also not trying to capture a type of anarchy that existed before. We're trying to improve and produce a new one. One which we can thanks to technology." The audience does not respond and waits for the next question. Benoit, still agitated, declines to answer saying that they are going to move on.

Marcelo stands up. He tells the panelists and crowd alike, "We need to have a true debate." He continues, "We should have someone that represents the other spectrum of anarchy, and we should have an anarcho-communist." Benoit laughs and raises a dismissive hand—

bending his wrist forward and waving his limp hand. He tells them that is not the debate they are having. The panelists took another question from the audience.

After 30 minutes expires, the allotted time for questions, Benoit instructs each panelist to make a closing statement, after which he announces that the debate is over. Marcelo objects: "The audience should be able to make a closing statement." Benoit waves his hand in approval. *On behalf of the audience*, Marcelo makes a long winded statement about why people need a government. He reiterates many of the points Benoit made earlier in the night. Once he concludes, Benoit once again announces that the debate is over and asks the crowd if there are any other topics that they want to talk about.

Lee, an elderly woman who attends regularly, says that she wants to ask the anarchists a question. Benoit says, "The time for the debates is over. It doesn't make sense to keep asking them questions." Lee continues anyway. Her question was not much of a question, but a long statement that lasted nearly five minutes. Benoit makes several attempts to stop her but she continues anyway. Jon attempts to answer her but she speaks over him. They repeat this exchange several times. Finally, Lee stops talking and Benoit once again declares that the debate is over.

The debate between NRC participants and SDLP members magnifies the differences between each groups' epistemic practices. First, NRC participants are supportive of each other while SDLP members are hostile. This difference is most visible when Jon first defers to Mike during the opening statements, and then begins his own opening statement by complementing Mike. Benoit does not extend the same courtesy to Charles, nor does Charles acknowledge Benoit in his opening statement. Instead, Benoit, Charles, and the audience all make opening statements that lead to tension between them.

Second, NRC participants make detailed statements and welcome people to challenge them. For example, Jon and Mike are receptive to the audience member that questions whether or not anarchy would work in the United States based upon his perception of anarchy in Somalia. Jon responds directly to audience member's question by challenging his notion that people in Somalia are worse off after the collapse of the state and then further elaborates upon how his vision for what anarchy could be. SDLP members do not invite further discussion of the points they make. At the end of his opening statement, Benoit tells an audience member, "Not if you've read *The Law* by Frédéric Bastiat." He makes the comment to assert epistemic authority over the audience member and does not explain what he means by the comment or how it relates to the broader discussion. By the same token, Jerry responds to audience member who references Somalia by claiming that he read an article in *The New York Times*. He does not specify which article or what it said, only that he knew something that the audience member did not.

Lastly, NRC participants allow other people to redirect the discussion while SDLP members argue over who has the procedural authority to direct the discussion. Mike discusses Thomas Paine during his opening remarks because Benoit did. Mike did so in a manner that directly engages Benoit's comments and challenges the point Benoit made. SDLP members, on the other hand, perpetually argue over who is able to direct the discussion. Jerry and Benoit tell the audience member who references Somalia to rephrase his question. Benoit conveys to Jerry that he should not attempt to moderate the discussion. The audience member questions whether or not Benoit can tell him what to do. Marcelo insist that he be allowed to speak on behalf of the audience. Lee also asserts herself at the end to extend the debate after Benoit had declared it over. In each instance, SDLP members argue over who may direct the debate. Their efforts are more procedural than substantive.

INCOMMENSURATE EPISTEMIC PRACTICES

People who are involved in different conservative political organizations within the same political scene confront significant practical problems when they encounter people who are involved in a different type of conservative political organization. They have different habits, routines, and practices related to how they initiate interactions, present themselves during those interactions, what they consider to be worth talking about, and how they evaluate information. During encounters with each other, they talk past one another. As a result, the incommensurability of their epistemic practices becomes grounds for difference through which people maintain fragmentation within their local conservative political scene. I will discuss this point further in the conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Political ignorance is mediated by organizations and the social context of situations within which people act, not just mass media or a person's information environment. In the preceding chapters of this dissertation, I have demonstrated that people who are involved in a particular type of conservative political organization develop epistemic practices as a secondary activity that is subordinated to a primary activity that I refer to as a "shared project" (Chapter Five). The participants or members of an organization collectively establish a shared project through their habits and routines (Chapter Two, Chapter Four). They do so within the confines of their organizations' encoded opportunity structures (Introduction, Chapter One, Chapter Three). Their involvement in a conservative political organization becomes meaningful or consequential to them through their pursuit of a shared project (Chapter Two, Chapter Four). I further demonstrated that people who are involved in each type of political organization develop epistemic practices that are incommensurate across types of political organization (Chapter Five, Chapter Six). The incommensurate aspects of their epistemic practices contribute to fragmentation across types of political organizations within the local conservative political scene (Chapter Six). I now address three broader implications of the themes contained within my dissertation.

SHARED PROJECTS, EPISTEMIC PRACTICES, AND FRAGMENTATION

Leaders of a conservative political organization draw upon their informal associations to people in other organizations to establish working relationships between organizations that are in the same political scene (Chapter Three). Peoples' informal associations are therefore a significant means through which organizations become linked together within a political party apparatus or extended party network (Chapter One). It should be of no surprise to readers that conservative political organizations that orient themselves toward a shared professional project have relatively dense networks of informal associations that are sustained through iterative working relationships. People involved in these organizations act within existing political opportunity structures to advance their own careers in ways that also perpetuate ties across organizations (Chapter Three). However, understanding why people are involved in different types of conservative political organizations is not as obvious.

It is difficult for people who agree upon broader conservative ideals related to taxes, regulation, individual responsibility, private property, and gun ownership, but who are involved in different types of conservative political organizations, to establish informal associations. Their inability to establish informal relationships contributes to the sustained fragmentation in their local conservative political scene, because it in turn impedes their means to establish working relationships. I demonstrate how the distant past affects the space people occupy in their local political scene (Introduction, Chapter One), but many of the challenges people now confront when they encounter others who are involved in different types conservative political organizations relates to more immediate practical differences (Chapter Six). They pursue different shared projects (Chapter Four) and develop incommensurate epistemic practices that hinder their ability to develop relationships (Chapter Five, Chapter Six).

I present accounts in Chapter Six that illustrate the challenges people confront when they encounter people who are involved in a different type of conservative political organization than they are. Whether they are former SDLP members at SDYR's ATF Night, a Republican or budding Alt-Right participant who attends the NRC weekly meeting, or NRC participants at the SDLP Supper Club, they find themselves in an unfamiliar situation. Their habits, routines, and expectations are out of sync with the environment and no longer help them negotiate the people or settings they encounter. They either end up in an uncomfortable situation or are unable to effectively communicate with other people with whom they could potentially form a relationship. In each instance, they fail to form new informal associations that may provide them with a means to establish a working relationship at a later time.

It is possible for people to overcome the initial challenges that they encounter when they attend an event for a different type of conservative political organization. Through their continued involvement in a different type of conservative political organization, they can develop new habits and routines, they can orient themselves toward a different shared project, and they can develop new epistemic practices. However, peoples' shared projects and epistemic practices make this unlikely because the substantive differences between them are anchored in existing habits, routines, and relationships. Eric, the former SDLP member who attended SDYR's 2014 ATF Night, illustrates how the substantive differences of each organization's shared project produces a barrier for someone to maintain their involvement in a different type of conservative political organization. At ATF Night, Eric pursues a vanity project as he asserts that he is a strong-willed individual to Young Republicans. They are dismissive of him. Rather than validating him or providing him with a good adversary against whom he can achieve his self-conception, they view him as tacky, unknowable, and as not deserving of their attention. For Eric

to maintain his involvement in SDYR or another political organization oriented toward a shared professional project, he would have to endure a period during which he does not know what to do and is denied the opportunity to gain satisfaction in the manner to which he was accustomed at SDLP. The same is true for anyone who transitions from one type of conservative political organization to another. NRC participants would need to become accustomed to SDLP's agonistic style of discussion or SDYR's status hierarchies. SDLP members would need to compromise in order to participate in NRC, or pay dues in SDYR. Young Republicans would need to give up their career ambitions to maintain their involvement in either NRC or SDLP. In sum, people need to maintain their involvement in a conservative political organization that denies them opportunities to make their involvement meaningful in a manner to which they have become accustomed.

My research suggests that fragmentation of conservatives in the same political scene is, in part, maintained through practical differences. Shared projects and epistemic practices provide grounds for difference, not ideology or interests. Social scientists should continue to pursue this line of inquiry to understand how practical differences produce division within and across political communities.

VARIETIES OF IGNORANCE

Political scientists who study political knowledge have reached an impasse. They agree that political ignorance is a lack of political knowledge (Introduction), but no longer agree on whether or not it is a problem (Lupia 2015; Hochschild and Einstein 2015). Their reliance on survey methods to measure knowledge simply does not provide them with enough evidence to answer these questions. To advance scholarly understandings of the current state of knowledge

within conservative politics, scholars must go beyond the mere quantification of political knowledge to understand how what people know and how they come to know it structures the possible ways they may act within particular situations and inter-situationally. To do so, scholars must deploy an alternative conception of ignorance. Andrew Abbott's notion of "varieties of ignorance" provides a useful starting point.

Abbott (2010) begins with the premise that everyone is ignorant and that their ignorance varies by kind, not quantity (p. 175). He refers to each kind as a "variety" that varies along three generic dimensions: ignorance of available facts, of literatures written by specialists, and of skills—habits of thought through which people consider multiple possibilities, engage alternative arguments, parse moral and empirical judgements, find agreement between information collected from different sources or that relate to different phenomena, and revise or reject their previous understandings or theories, if necessary (p. 183). In short, he distinguishes varieties of ignorance according to how people evaluate and organize facts in relation to other information or literatures and whether or not their attempts to do so will stand against the onslaught of new facts or literatures at a later time (p. 184).

Where political scientists capture the amount of facts people are able to recall in an attempt to produce Rankean facts of their own, Abbott's varieties of ignorance sensitize a scholar's attention to ways in which people engage in colligation (Chapter Five). People involved in the conservative political organizations I study are all amateur knowledge producers, as opposed to professionals who produce social knowledge such as financial analysts (Knorr Cetina 2011) or experts who produce scientific knowledge such as particle physicists or molecular biologists (Knorr Cetina 1999). To narrow my discussion and to demonstrate the usefulness of this approach, I focus upon how people involved in different types of political

organization express varieties of ignorance related to U.S. politics. I omit SDLP in order to highlight my comparison of NRC and SDYR. I am not concerned with empirically validating peoples' truth claims in this section.

Young Republicans and NRC participants are diametric opposites in their ignorance of facts, and they vary significantly in their ignorance of literatures written by specialists. Their ignorance of facts and ignorance of specialist knowledge align, respectively, to constrain what types of information they seek and will consider as being true. SDYR members know facts related to current events, how the Republican Party operates as an extended party network, and the technical aspects of campaign politics, but they are ignorant of facts related to how what they do as political operatives fits into a broader lineage or set of relationships. They further seek insider or privileged information as a form of specialist knowledge. Some also attend training programs known as "campaign colleges" that teach them how to manage campaigns, manage campaign finance, or work with voter files. Both the facts they know and the information they seek from specialists contributes to their ability to act as technicians in their local conservative political scene.

NRC participants know facts pertaining to what they might consider to be the broader truth of politics. They know about social and economic elites' involvement in the political system but are of the ignorant of day-to-day or technical operations of government, political parties, or campaigns. They further seek literatures written by specialists that support or articulate their broader understanding of politics. Specifically, they seek materials written by people who previously worked in government but have since become critical of the state, such as a former general who is now critical of the military or a person who was a high-ranking official in a U.S. federal agency who now exposes government malfeasance. In each instance, SDYR

members and NRC participants pursue specialist knowledge that further perpetuates their ignorance of facts. They pursue knowledge produced by specialists that reinforce their respective varieties of ignorance rather than expand the types of facts they know.

SDYR members and NRC participants all pursue specialist knowledge that reinforces the types of facts they know and thereby constrains their informational environment. However, it is their ignorance of skills that makes their differences most apparent. SDYR do not often seek to find agreement between different sources of information. Rather, they readily reject their previous understandings or theories based upon the status of a new source of information that conflicts with their prior understanding. In so doing, they grant epistemic authority to people who have more direct access to those with greater authority and higher status positions within their local conservative political scene than they themselves can claim. They are deferential to those who have higher status as a habit, and thereby treat the information or understandings they present as superior to their own. Whether or not SDYR members believe that this information is true is irrelevant because their actions produce practical consequences, not their thoughts.

NRC participants are so thoroughly committed to the idea that there are people who act in bad faith to obstruct reality from them that they are reluctant to revise or reject their previous understandings. They consider a wider variety of information and sources than SDYR members, yet they do so in a manner that confirms their prior understandings. They find agreement between different types of information by interpreting them within the confines of an existing theory. They discredit new information that comes from conventional sources because they view it as a deliberate attempt to mislead or confuse the public, and they more readily accept new information from unconventional sources that further articulate their existing theory, even when the new information is based on assertion, not evidence. They ultimately grant epistemic

authority to themselves as people who are able to sort through misinformation. In so doing, they construct a situation defined by epistemic closure in which the more they learn, the more they engage in confirmation bias, and the more reluctant they become to reject or revise their previous understandings.

SDYR members and NRC participants are all amateur knowledge producers. Yet, they produce forms of knowledge that contain a different variety of ignorance. SDYR members produce an amateur variety of ignorance through which people lack the skills needed to evaluate the quality or relevance of facts in relation to broader discussions (p. 184). They evaluate facts in relation to the relative social status of the source on a situation-by-situation basis. Their habitual deference to those who have higher status leads them to uncritically reject or revise their previous understandings, thereby limiting their ability to produce a synthesis of relevant information. NRC participants do the opposite. They express a form of *synthetic ignorance* that Abbott associates with expert knowledge producers (p. 189). Their interpretations of new facts, theories, and understandings are driven by their existing theoretical synthesis. They may consider the particularities of facts or information during a particular discussion, but the particularities of that discussion soon fade into their overarching synthesis.

SDYR members' and NRC participants' respective varieties of ignorance are consequential for understanding the state of knowledge within conservative politics today. SDYR members' uncritical acceptance of facts and understandings in service to their career ambitions in politics helps account for the public positions that Republicans who are associated with major political party organizations take. They approach knowledge as an instrument to further their political ambitions. For example, Republicans may accept that scientific research on global warming is true, but that truth is practically irrelevant as long as it is the Republican Party

position that humans do not cause climate change.[173] At the same time, NRC participants demonstrate how people outside of establishment politics may come to view the press as presenting "fake news." They discredit conventional sources of information as a means to incorporate them into their existing theoretical synthesis. Lastly, it is important to realize that SDYR members' uncritical acceptance of new information and NRC participants' ability to explain away facts that challenge their existing understandings are anchored in their respective habits, routines, and relationships. Their particular varieties of ignorance are merely entailments of the broader circumstances within which they act.

COGNITION AND "ENVIRONING CONDITIONS"

Nearly a century ago, John Dewey (1922) argued that consciousness is a collective process, not an individual act (p. 85). He developed his notion of habit to capture the process through which people collectively develop tendencies through mutual engagement with each other and their environment (p. 40). Habits of thought, as habits, require an environment (p. 69). To better understand the interplay between environment and habits, Dewey proposed that scholars investigate the "environing conditions" within which people develop habits (p. 91).

Dewey's approach to environing conditions and the study of consciousness fell to the wayside of mainstream sociological discussion in the twentieth century. Yet his identification of individual-oriented conceptions of consciousness as a problem and the study of environing conditions as a solution to that problem is a welcome intervention to sociologists' current discussions of cognition. Sociologists who deploy heuristic models of cognition related to the

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[173] On several occasions, I observed Republicans state in private that they believe in climate change but they would not make similar claims during political events.

dual process model or hot and cold cognition conceptualize cognition as an individual act (Simi et al. 2017; Vaisey 2009). They rely on a particular lineage of cognitive scientific and neuroscientific research whose premises they take for granted without investigating potentially problematic assumptions built into neuroscientific explanations of cognition (Abend 2018). More recent research in cognitive science and neuroscience suggests that cognition is not a fully individual act, and that humans' ability to engage in cooperative acts of distributed cognition with other people, in addition to their ability to act toward modifying their material environment, are constitutive of cognition (Rouse 2015). Therefore, to understand cognition sociologists must investigate how people collectively engage each other and their environments.

Karen Cerulo's (2014) conception of the "inside" and "outside" of thought (p. 1012) provides a useful starting point. However, scholars should expand their conception of the outside of thought beyond the information environment to include Dewey's broader notion of environing conditions. In the preceding chapters, I have done just this. I investigate habits, encoded opportunity structures, and shared projects to better understand what forms of thought are possible within each type of conservative's political organization. In so doing, I not only develop an account of how people produce and validate truth claims, but I also demonstrate why it matters to them. Social scientists who investigate cognition as an individual act that may or may not be rational are too apt to miss the forest for the trees. To understand the current state of knowledge in conservative politics is not a matter of what facts people know, but rather how they come to know certain facts, how particular understandings come to matter to them, and how broader patterns such as mediated political ignorance produce broader consequences for everyone else.

FINAL REMARKS

Scholars often make the same mistake as journalists, activists, or laypersons: they assume that people would act differently if only they had more or different information. They may consider how people come to know what they know, but they do not consider how what they know becomes consequential to them in their lives. My research suggests that knowledge in conservative politics in the United States is not about facts that are supported by empirical evidence. What people know is anchored in their habits, routines, and relationships. To criticize what they know can threaten that which anchors their relationships and epistemic practices; their friendships, self-conceptions, or professional careers. The solution to mediated political ignorance among conservatives in the United States is not merely to discredit falsehoods and unverified political rumors or to develop a tool-kit for dealing with motivated reasoning; the environment that supports the social production of ignorance must also change. Thought is a habit, and people can only change their habits by altering the environment within which they act.

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