“America’s frontier spirit is alive and well in the United States, even in the center of its biggest metropolis. Anna Maria Bounds breaks tired old stereotypes about Northeastern urbanites and their politics, and brings to life the New Yorkers who have been scarred by crisis, lost faith in government, and band together to prepare for survival. It is exactly what you want from a great ethnography: a vivid, engaging picture of a world that existed right in front of us, yet somehow remained invisible to the collective imagination. Essential reading for the sociology of politics, community, culture, and the city.”

Joseph Cohen, Founder of the award-winning Sociocast

“New Yorkers preparing for the worst, a rapidly growing social phenomenon, is traced and tracked by this terrific book profiling the ‘prepper’ movement. Written with novelistic skill, Dr. Bounds turns a sharp sociologists’ lens to what the rich, the poor, and the middle are doing: whether bugging out, or bugging in, joining a group or going it alone, *Bracing for the Apocalypse* takes you inside this important but seldom studied area.”

Andrew A. Beveridge, President and Cofounder of Social Explorer

“Anna Maria Bounds’s account of the culture, work and context of the New York Prepper subculture offers a fascinating, often hilarious reversal of stereotypes about the tribe of doomsday preppers in the city. As a participant ethnographer in the network, as an urban sociologist, and as a New Yorker who has experienced urban disaster herself, Bounds writes with equal measures of expertise, curiosity, and solidarity. She connects the urban phenomenon of doomsday prepping with the social origins of city life as well as new narratives of normalized emergency, different versions of the apocalypse, and varieties of zombies. This book offers insight, transparency, and an apt sense of the will, the vulnerability and the resilience of ‘all in’ contemporary urban life.”

Meg Holden, Simon Fraser University

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Bracing for the Apocalypse

Increasing American fear about terrorism, environmental catastrophes, pandemics, and economic crises has fueled interest in “prepping”: confronting disaster by mastering survivalist skills. This trend of self-reliance is not merely evidence of the American belief in the power of the individual; rather, this pragmatic shift away from expecting government aid during a disaster reflects a weakened belief in the bond between government and its citizens during a time of crisis. This ethnographic study explores the rise of the urban preppers’ subculture in New York City, shedding light on the distinctive approach of city dwellers in preparing for disaster. With attention to the role of factors such as class, race, gender and one’s expectations of government, it shows that how one imagines Doomsday affects how one prepares for it. Drawing on participant observation, the author explores preppers’ views on the central question of whether to “bug out” or “hunker down” in the event of disaster, and examines the ways in which the prepper economy increases revenue by targeting concerns over developing skills, building networks, securing equipment and arranging a safe locale. A rich qualitative study, *Bracing for the Apocalypse* will appeal to scholars of sociology and anthropology with interests in urban studies, ethnography and subcultures.

Anna Maria Bounds is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Queens College, City University of New York, USA.

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Bracing for the Apocalypse

An Ethnographic Study of New York's
'Prepper' Subculture

Anna Maria Bounds

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii

PART 1

Understanding the rise of prepping in the global city of New York	1
--	---

1 “Ready.Gov” versus “Ready without Gov”: Prepping for disaster	3
2 New York marks the spot: Living on the X	23
3 Popular entertainment: Preppers as characters and as consumers	44

PART 2

Prepping in New York: Going it alone or going together	63
---	----

4 “Bugging in”: Sheltering in place for the extremely wealthy and mere mortals	65
5 “Bugging out”: Strategic relocation and strategic packing	85

PART 3

Urban prepping and symbolic interaction	103
--	-----

6 New York City Prepper’s Network’s mission and organizational structure	105
7 Toughing it out over the weekend	130
8 Dodging a bullet	157

PART 4

Urban prepping as a new reflection of citizenship 171

9 Future directions for NYC prepping 173

Index 184

Preface

When I first discussed this study with Andrew Beveridge, my chairperson at the time, he chuckled and said, “You need to check out Alison Lurie’s funny novel about a sociologist who studies a cult that believes in aliens. The researchers get sucked up in it. You don’t believe in that prepping stuff, do you?”

Right away, I shook my head no, but inside I was thinking yes *and* no. I was born on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico and I grew up in a beach town on the Atlantic Ocean. Prepping for hurricanes was routine for my family (okay, my father, and we all just observed it.) That hardly qualifies me as a head case. Preppers are stereotypically seen as suspicious sorts who are very wary of other people. I am way too friendly, after all. Still, I decided to give Lurie’s book *Imaginary Friends* (1967), a quick read.

The first few sentences of chapter one gave me pause. The narrator, a fellow professor, introduces the story of Professor McMann’s research project to a group of zealots who believe in a different universe and purport to exchange messages from aliens:

Could any group of rural religious cranks really have driven a well-known sociologist out of his mind? Or were they just, so to speak, the innocent flock of birds into which we flew our plane? And is McMann really mad now, or not? What does ‘being mad’ mean, anyhow?

(p. 2)

Okay, this was an intriguing first page, but this was just one person’s assessment of McMann’s mental well-being. Studying preppers isn’t going to make me go crazy. I am not crazy for studying this group. New York preppers aren’t crazy; they have just been through a lot. Yet, reading a conversation between students in McMann’s fictional department made me reflect again (Lurie, 1967):

‘Listen, what happened to Professor McMann, I was planning to take his course?’ asked one student.

‘Well, you know what I heard,’ the other student said, ‘he took off in a flying saucer.’

(p. 2)

Now, I thought, *Oh no! Flying Saucers. Is this flying saucerish research? Am I drinking the Kool-Aid from a saucer? My interest in preppers doesn't mean that I am going to transform into a survivalist and start wearing camo, does it? Sure, Lurie's novel is funny, but it has no bearing on my reality.*

But then, I heard it later that week:

"That's Professor Bounds. She's the one who studies prepping," said a professor talking with two students. She nodded her head toward me down the hall.

Hearing my name, I smiled as I unlocked my office. My expectation was that the students would walk down to talk with me.

"That's her?" asked the first student with wide eyes.

The two students looked at one another and then they turned to stare at me. Their gaze told me everything.

I had become the oddity.

"Oh ... prepping. I am really into that," whispered the second student. "I always secretly watch those shows."

The other student nodded in agreement.

As the students disappeared down the hallway, they slipped into a hushed conversation about this secret thing, prepping.

Prepping and the image of preppers—why does it arouse so much fascination and anxiety in people? Lurie's narrator again gives some insight into this:

... I think that people can be divided into those like me who are more secure with a nice long word between them and a phenomenon, and those who are less so—who aren't reassured but frightened when the doctor tells them the technical name of that funny feeling in their stomach. Maybe that's how you tell the intellectuals from the sheep—or from the goats.

(Lurie, p. 23)

For me, this book is about exploring how we deal with that "funny feeling in our stomachs" that stems from our past experiences with disasters or from dark places in our imaginations. This book is about how groups of people seek to gain control over the unpredictable in their lives. In other words, I'm interested in the "doings of [people]" (Berger, 1963, p. 17) in planning for extraordinary circumstances.

Acknowledgements

My sincere and deep gratitude is given to the New York preppers who shared their world with me. In particular, I am especially grateful to the members of the New York City Prepper's Network. Your knowledge and your camaraderie are important pillars of this book. To not just survive but thrive after a disaster? I'd bet on each of you.

I also thank to my colleagues in the Sociology Department at Queens College, City University of New York, for their support and encouragement. Thank you to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for financial support. A special thanks to Andrew Beveridge, Joseph Cohen and Suzanne Strickland for contributing constructive comments throughout the research and writing process. My students were also terrific guides in helping me to imagine the future of New York.

As always, I am indebted to Robert A. Beauregard for his scholarship and his guidance.

My deep appreciation is also given to my editor, Peter Heap. He has offered tremendous insight in guiding this book to fruition. Chelsea Randall's incisive reviews of my work have also strengthened its focus and its depth. Josephine Barnett, a scholar-in-making, offered invaluable feedback and stellar wordsmithing. My research assistant, Kimberly Pogorelis-Palmiotti, was masterful in tracking down elusive sources. My thanks to Damon Rowe as well for helping me follow up on a lead or two. Thank you to Taylor & Francis, especially Neil Jordan, for your expertise.

I wish to acknowledge Michael Mills of the University of Kent. My conversations with Michael about our respective research interests in prepper subcultures were very important in conceptualizing this project.

This book could not have been written without the insight and boosterism offered by Meg Holden of Simon Fraser University. Meg's thoughtful critiques have been crucial to my work. However, her most important contribution has been the sense of freedom that she has encouraged in my thinking. Since our days together at the New School, Meg and I have sought to focus on projects that speak to our minds and hearts as urban citizens. I learned that sensibility from Bob Beauregard. I am still learning from Bob's work.

Thank you to my family and friends for their support throughout this project. Asa and Sue have been champions of the cause. Susan has definitely been my best cheerleader. My love and thanks to Scott for his willingness to be game (to join me on a hike or to fix a computer glitch in the middle of the night).

Thank you also to New York, the city of my dreams.

Lastly, this book is dedicated to those that I meet in the forest and by the campfire.

Part 1

Understanding the rise of prepping in the global city of New York

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1 “Ready.Gov” versus “Ready without Gov”

Prepping for disaster

Imagine this: America terrified by an advancing march of godless sub-humans, massacres at sacred places and grocery stores, planned explosions across the country, fears of government corruption and collapse, swaths of devastation caused by a hurricane and a visit by an alien probe.

A pitch for a new *Mad Max* movie or another apocalyptic blockbuster? No.

This scary synopsis is derived from America’s headlines just before the 2018 Midterm Elections.

A snapshot of the national news during the pivotal time of Midterm Elections reveals that Americans were anxious about much more than congressional races. Threatened by a large caravan of Central American migrants walking to the US to seek refuge from violence and poverty, President Trump moved quickly to tighten Southern border controls and send Army troops to protect the country from what he termed an “onslaught” that included “criminals” and “Middle Easterners” (Davis and Gibbons-Neff, 2018). Shouting anti-Semitic slurs and brandishing an assault rifle, a gunman opened fire and killed eleven worshippers at a Pittsburgh synagogue (Robertson, Mele, and Tavernise, 2018). After forcibly attempting to enter a predominately black church, a man killed two black senior citizens at a Kroger store in Jefferson, KY (Zraick and Stevens, 2018). Thirteen pipe bombs were mailed across the nation to prominent Democrats and critics of President Trump (Wootson and Horton, 2018). Reports of voter suppression in Georgia (Fausset and Blinder, 2018) and Florida sparked national debate (Thrush and Peters, 2018). At the same time, suspicion continued to mount about the competency and trustworthiness of a White House whose operations were described as “a nervous breakdown of the executive power of the most powerful country in the world” (Woodward, 2018, p. xxii). In addition to these man-made crises, sections of the South were dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Michael (Fausset, Mazzei, and Blinder, 2018). On Election Day, two Harvard astronomers increased national jitters by announcing the possibility that a mysterious flying interstellar object (a quarter-mile long and traveling at a speed of more than 196,000 miles per hour) sighted over Maui may have been a fully operational space probe (Molina, 2018). Was this strange national news cycle an anomaly? Hardly.¹

4 *Understanding the rise of prepping in NYC*

Since the September 11th attacks, there has been an undercurrent of fear and anxiety in American culture, encompassing our politics, our media and our private lives. For the last seventeen years, 70% of Americans have worried about the possibility of a future terrorist attack.² According to Chapman University's Survey of American Fears (2018), corrupt government officials are the top American fear (73%), followed by fears about the environment (climate change and pollution), fears of bad things happening to loved ones (serious illness or death) and fears about financial security (not enough money for the future or high medical bills).³ Furthermore, we are becoming more afraid; all top fears are now shared by more than half of Americans.

With no shortage of terrifying news, it is no wonder that, at the close of 2018, less than one-third of Americans believed that the country was headed in the right direction (Saad, 2018). This loss of faith in America's moral compass, however temporary, has been attributed to the culture of fear now omnipresent in our country (Altheide, 2017; Glassner, 2010). However, this consternation about America's future also stems from knowledge gained from a source far more significant than media cycles or the warnings of politicians: Experience. Americans, particularly New Yorkers, are becoming increasingly familiar with disaster and are thus learning to take matters into their own hands. We have come to understand that

although the world has experienced major crises in the past, our time is unique in combining high levels of technical expertise with a continuing sense of extreme vulnerability. The more we learn about our world, the more we realize our existence is precarious.

(Wuthnow, 2010, p. 3)

Given New York's stature as a global city, September 11th has come to symbolize an attack not just on our nation, but an attack on the Western world. However, it is also important to understand 9/11 from a localized perspective in order to determine its specific meaning and impact on New York residents. Taking the attack out of the local context prevents it from being situated within New York's recent history of disaster. In tracing New York's recent history of disaster, a different perspective starts to emerge on experiencing disaster or its threat at the local level post 9/11. While national memory may be stuck in 2001, New Yorkers have continued to contend with disaster. Since 2001, New York has endured many severe crises (or threats of disaster) including five terrorist attacks, natural disasters (including two hurricanes, two tornadoes and an earthquake), technological failures (such as two black-outs), fears of pandemics (COVID-19, the Swine Flu and the Ebola Virus) and economic or government instability (the longest recession since World War II) (See Table 1.1). In 2020, New York has now become the epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. As a result of this unpredictability, some New Yorkers are now looking beyond governmental assistance to protect their families. They are increasingly turning toward the practice of

Table 1.1 New York’s disasters and disruptions (2001–17)

YEAR	DESCRIPTION	NATURAL DISASTER	TERRORIST ATTACK	PANDEMIC/EPI- DEMIC THREAT	TECHNOLOGI- CAL FAILURE	GOVT OR ECONOMIC INSTABILITY
2017	Port Authority Terminal Bomb attack		X			
	West Side Bike Path Vehicular Attack		X			
	Flooding *	X				
	Winter Storm Stella *	X				
	Winter Storm Niko	X				
2016	Chelsea Bomb Attack		X			
	Flash Flood	X				
	East Harlem Metro North Train Fire				X	
	Coastal Flooding	X				
	Zika Virus Threat			X		
2015	Legionnaires Disease Outbreak			X		
	East Village Gas Explosion				X	
	Blizzard - Juno	X				
	Measles Threat			X		
	Hepatitis A Threat			X		

(Continued)

Table 1.1 (Cont.)

YEAR	DESCRIPTION	NATURAL DISASTER	TERRORIST ATTACK	PANDEMIC/EPI- DEMIC THREAT	TECHNOLOGI- CAL FAILURE	GOVT OR ECONOMIC INSTABILITY
2014	Ebola Virus Threat			X		
2012	Hurricane Sandy *	X				
	Hurricane Sandy *	X				
	Tornado, Waterspout	X				
2011	Hurricane Irene *					
	Hurricane Irene *					
	Earthquake	X				
2010	Time Square Bomb Attack		X			
2009	The Great Recession					X
2008	The Great Recession					X
2007	The Great Recession					X
	Steam Pipe Explosion				X	
2006	Queens Blackout					
2005	Hurricane Katrina *	X			X	
	Severe Storms and Flooding *	X				

2004	Tropical Depres- sion Ivan *	X		
	Severe Storms and Flooding *	X		
	Severe Storms and Flooding *	X		
	Snow *	X		
2003	Power Outage			X
	Severe Storms, Tornadoes and Flooding *	X		
2002	Earthquake *	X		
2001	Snowstorm *	X		
	World Trade Center Attack *		X	
	Severe Storm, Winter Storm *	X		

NYC Emergency Management Natural Hazard Mitigation Plans (2009–2016)

* Disaster declared

8 *Understanding the rise of prepping in NYC*

prepping—developing skills and strategies to minimize physical and economic harm to themselves and their families in the event of disaster.

As Jason Charles, the leader of the NYC Prepper's Network (NYCPN) explained,

Zombies aren't real. Neither are aliens. This isn't about science fiction stuff. Preparedness is about preparing for real things. Real things like what we've already been through, like 9/11 and Sandy. New Yorkers need to be educated about preparedness skills.

In speaking about the government's ineffectiveness in responding to disaster, another NYCPN member, Marlon, observed that:

9/11 told us that, Hurricane Katrina told us that. There is no cavalry coming. The world has grown too fast, where there are simply not enough resources. Manpower, military, everything. You can go to a town and there may be 50,000 people. That's not Manhattan. In New York, there is 8 million. Where do you put 8 million people in a disaster? So, you have to fend for yourself—and to fend for yourself, you have got to learn these things.

With strategies ranging from moderate to obsessive, prepping is the practice adopted by individuals who prepare and plan to independently survive disaster (and sustain themselves) in a context of scarce food, dwindling supplies and without government assistance (Mills, 2018; Perry, 2006; Reinhardt, 2017). This book aims to explore the city dweller's unique approach to prepping. Given the density and diversity of New York, urban prepping culture promotes strategies for learning diverse skills and knowledge (unrelated to city life) as well as forming strong social networks to aid survival in a crisis situation. The architecture, infrastructure and resources of New York impact how one preps to survive disaster. As one former gang member and prepper stated, "We are about showing people how New Yorkers prep. That this isn't about rednecks and monster trucks." What defines Domsday for these urban dwellers? What skill sets and supplies constitute being "prepared" for disaster in the city? How are preppers' expectations of government and individuals defined by class, race and gender? For example, within the city, prepping strategies seem to be heavily influenced by income and locale. Wealthy NYC preppers prepare by building bunkers, while middle-class NYC preppers plan to leave the city in the event of a disaster. Exposing the stark contrast between wealthy and less affluent preppers adds a dynamic layer to the debate about the divided city and class disparity (van Kempen, 2007).

Disaster scholarship has an extensive history of complex and sometimes competing definitions of disaster that has been shaped by conceptualization processes, new knowledges and discipline paradigms (Perry, 2018). This research project supports Quarantelli's (2000, p. 682) consensus definition of disasters as "relatively sudden occasions when ... the routines of collective social units are seriously disrupted and when unplanned courses of action"

must be taken and that "disasters are social and that they are [to be] understood in human interactions" (Perry, 2006, p. 12). Within the field of disaster research, disasters are also viewed as distinct from emergencies and catastrophes (Alexander, 2014; Perry and Lindell, 2007) and extreme disruptions from conflict situations (Peek and Sutton, 2003; Quarantelli, 2005). However, a central research question remains regarding the influence of culture and who has the power to define disaster and frame a crisis as disaster (Webb, 2018). In the effort to acknowledge the significance of the term's assigned meaning with a culture, this qualitative study defines disaster broadly to reflect the wide range of scenarios referred to within the prepping community, including natural disasters, pandemics, terrorist attacks, nuclear and technological disasters, as well as the collapse of the global economy and national governments. (For prepper examples of disaster, see Charles, 2014; Edwards, 2009).⁴

While many disaster scenarios have been firsthand experiences for New Yorkers, these scenarios also echo the real or predicted disasters that have been frequently featured in American media. Mills' study (2018) argues that the American phenomenon of prepping is a response to uncertain anxieties around disaster risks that are driven by the consumption of disaster-based news reported in mainstream media rather than any singular fixation on an impending apocalypse. Mills' finding is significant because it breaks free from the earlier limited contention that prepping is driven by the fear of a final and complete collapse of civilization (Foster, 2014) rather than a reflection of disaster-based media and uncertainties about our current world.⁵

Therefore, this research addresses a popular misconception that preppers plan to protect their families against one particular type of disaster—the apocalypse. Derived from the ancient Greek word "apokalupsis," which means to uncover or reveal, the apocalypse refers to the complete final destruction of the world as described in the biblical book of Revelation (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). In the Book of Revelation, the Four Horsemen of Apocalypse symbolize Conquest, War, Famine and Death, all grave dangers that signal the end of days (See Revelations 6: 1–8);⁶ no longer only literary devices used in the Bible to reinforce compliance to church doctrine by instilling fear about the last judgement. The chaos and pain supposedly brought forth by the Four Horsemen might now be considered part of the American news cycle. In prepper jargon, references to the apocalypse are numerous. For example, TEOTWAWKI (The End of the World as We Know It) and WTSHTF (When the Shit Hits the Fan) are two popular acronyms used as shorthand to indicate any number of disasters (with temporary or long-term effects). If unfamiliar with this discourse, a researcher may risk incorrectly determining that the use of these terms reflects a prepper's strong belief in an impending final and complete destruction of the world. However, as Annette, a NYCPN member explained, "We are *not* crazy people. People need to understand that we are not preparing for doomsday and the end of the world. *We are prepping for tomorrow. Tomorrow.*"

Annette's need to make people understand that preppers are not awaiting the apocalypse is significant. It is a reminder that preppers face a bias, as American discourse has already categorized their activities as fringe or extreme behaviors (Huddleston, 2016). Preppers have been grouped with survivalists and other fringe groups such as militias and white supremacists even though their respective goals are quite different. Survivalist groups and other extremist groups have seized apocalyptic myths (religious or secular) and the traditions of American individualism and exceptionalism to promote their distorted views of the world and its demise (Lamy, 1997; 1996). In these narratives, after Armageddon, the new world order will be determined by the most deserving; the strongest who fought for our survival (identified as their particular group.) Yet, as Mitchell (2002) explains, survivalism is not centered on "practical readiness for coming uncertainties" (p. 214) but rather on apocalyptic "storytelling." Such storytelling "is primarily resistance to rationalization, to fixed meanings and predictable process, an encompassing game of make-believe" (p. 215). Conversely, preppers are committed to practicality and self-sufficiency.

The drive to protect one's family from disaster has launched a tremendous prepping economy that expands well beyond the sales of traditional survivalist goods. Beyond survival guides and manuals, the prepping economy now includes popular entertainment, outdoor recreation and wellness, as well as military equipment. In popular entertainment, apocalyptic storylines and prepper characters allow viewers to engage in the creative process of the destruction and rebirth of both society and self. While preppers still purchase knives and guns (for both hunting and protection), the outdoor market also appeals to preppers through its diverse array of camping gear (often repackaged as survival items), nature courses and adventure retreats. Given their interest in natural resources, preppers often practice sustainability by producing or purchasing organic and local foods. In the wellness market, preppers become certified in first aid, learn about natural remedies, and practice mindfulness and situational awareness techniques to increase their resilience in a disaster.

To better understand the prepping phenomenon, this book explores the origins and practices of the urban prepper subculture in New York City in the 21st century—an era of intense public anxiety about government and economic instability, environmental catastrophes, pandemics and technological collapse (Beck, 2009). Concerns about all levels of security (ranging from national to personal) drive both public policy and personal decision making. Rather than relying on the promise of aid by government agencies in disasters, Americans have turned to self-protection strategies to ensure their safety. Urban prepping's reliance on self and social bonds rather than on government assistance during disaster is a pragmatic move that harnesses local resource networks and community building to minimize harm. As a participant-observer, I studied the social structure of the NYCPN (NYC Prepper's Network), the city's only publicly-known prepping group, to analyze how

their organization, rituals and language demonstrate their commitment to self-reliance and the weakened belief in the bond between government and citizen in a time of crisis.

My study draws on symbolic interaction theory to explore how NYCPN's membership practices work to have a long-term impact on behavior. Based on extensive fieldwork completed in 2017–18 and 43 in-depth interviews I conducted (with NYCPN members, independent preppers, prepping consultants and prepping suppliers), my exploratory research compares the NYCPN's social solidarity (Collins, 2004) and its prepping strategies with the strategies of independent preppers. Independent preppers are not members of a formal prepping group. While they may sometimes attend classes or events related to prepping, independent preppers engage in prepping practices alone and do not train with a group. In the event of a disaster, independent preppers do not plan to survive with or gain assistance from anyone beyond their close circle of family and/or close friends. Independent preppers have a wide range of incomes—from extremely wealthy to modest.

In 2010, NYCPN was established to serve as a group for city dwellers to learn and to share knowledge about prepping. Their mission is based on three principals: learning, commitment and trust. As explained on the NYCPN Meetup page (2019),

NYC Preppers Network is an Emergency Preparedness and Wilderness group for city dwellers that are concerned with preparing for disasters. Some of us don't live in a home, have garages, wells, basements or attics to store our survival gear in. Most of us live in apartments. City occupants face a different set of challenges. Space, Food Storage, Water, Security, Sanitation, Evacuation Routes and many other issues are of a great concern for city dwellers.

To work on overcoming these numerous challenges, the NYCPN engages in activities ranging from lectures to weekend excursions at various skill levels. Therefore, my field research has encompassed sites ranging from a church meeting room in Washington Heights to a remote snowy mountainside in the Catskills. Regardless of the physical location, field research has meant "the small scale, the here-and-now of face-to-face interaction ... the scene of action and the site of social actors" (Collins, 2004, p. 23).

The NYCPN's (2019)

primary goal is to create a community network of like-minded individuals who share their knowledge of all things related to self-sufficiency ... to establish a network of folks to share ideas with, learn from and eventually hope to trust should the need arise.

In 2019, the number of members was 459. However, most meetings and excursions attract between 20–30 members. The majority of group members

are people of color. Group members are located across the boroughs with most living in Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn. Some members also live on Long Island or in New Jersey, but they still participate in the group. Most group members are middle-aged and have families. NYCPN members are in the age range of responsibility; they have people and property to protect. The members also hold jobs in diverse economic sectors such as emergency response, law, retail, security, technology, tourism and education.

In 2012, National Geographic's hit reality television series, *Doomsday Preppers*, introduced America to the prepper stereotype: a camouflage-wearing and gun-toting white male fixated on protecting himself and his loved ones against a dangerous unknown. The series profiled (and sometimes mocked) preppers who stockpiled supplies, weapons and other items to prepare for the apocalypse. Through staged performances of masculine labor and manly rituals, this show cast prepping as a predominately white masculine activity (Kelly, 2016) with few preppers of color or female preppers shown. The enormous popularity of *Doomsday Preppers* gave rise to other reality television shows such as *Apocalypse Preppers*, *Doomsday Castles* and *Meet the Preppers*. In addition to television shows, popular American movies (such as *Mad Max: Fury Road*) were also cashing in on our fear of the apocalypse, offering "a glimpse of what the end might be like—thought experiments that provoke us to think about the unthinkable, dress rehearsals for a show we hope will never open" (Biskind, 2018, p. 25).

Hollywood depictions of preppers reflect an exaggerated expression of American individualism, a core theme in preparedness. Given the popularity of apocalyptic storylines and the extreme characterization of preppers, Foster (2014) refers to this genre as "apocotainment": the apocalypse as entertainment for the masses. In analyzing reality television shows on prepping, Kelly (2016) argues that male performances of disaster preparedness promote hegemonic masculinity by staging scenarios that require stereotypically "manly" skills for survival. Disaster scenarios, such as widespread chaos and destruction, are perceived to require a militaristic outlook to prevail in the imaginary post-apocalyptic world (Christian, 2016). After studying the representations of women preppers in the reality television series *Doomsday Preppers*, Christian (2016) finds that the show's depictions of female preppers are framed only to reinforce the recuperation of wounded hegemonic masculinity rather than recognizing the women's respective prepping abilities. As the televised preppers engage in intense labor and invent novel ways to escape disaster, their actions encourage viewers to tap into the collective belief in the power of the fierce white male hero, full of bravado and might, that has a starring role in the popular American imagination.

This stereotype of the American prepper depicted in the media disappears in the context of New York. New York preppers are not exclusively white males who exhibit traits of hegemonic masculinity. The majority of the NYCPN are people of color. Preppers are African American. Preppers are Puerto Rican. Preppers are Mexican. Preppers are Asian. Many preppers are also women. These are the people left out of the "prepper as hero" narrative.

This is particularly surprising, considering that Jason Charles, the leader of the NYCPN, a rugged African American firefighter (described as "calendar-worthy"), actually appeared on the *Doomsday Prepper* televised series. In reflecting on the white male stereotype of preppers, Inshirah, a female, African American member of the NYCPN, explained:

That cowboy idea doesn't apply to everyone in prepping. Preppers aren't necessarily those white guys in the backwoods or the guys wearing tactical gear. This isn't about being an individual, the lone wolf. This involves mothers and families. This is about the city. That's not who we are and what we are about.

I believe that she is right.

Furthermore, New York's white preppers also do not fit easily into the low to middle income economic stereotype portrayed by the media. The New York prepping world also includes America's extremely wealthy whites—multi-millionaires and billionaires. For these white elites, prepping has little to do with independently surviving disaster in difficult conditions. For this prepping set, disaster preparedness requires staff, involves escaping to a private hideaway in a distant exotic locale or tucking oneself away in a posh safe room to nosh on treats prepared by the chef.

My research in studying New York preppers revealed to me that analyzing this phenomenon solely according to the national political context and its links to individualism is misguided. Instead, I argue that urban preparedness is not really about the national. Preparedness is about the local, where the work happens. It is about place. It is about self. It is about tribe. It is about connection. Therefore, I argue that the goal of urban preparedness is more closely connected to other philosophical underpinnings such as Stanley Cavell's (2004, p. 326) concept of "moral perfectionism," in that being triggered by crisis causes one "to seek to know what you are made of". In keeping with Emerson (1841), urban preparedness is about self-reliance as an aversion to conformity, casting off one way of knowing the world and embracing the challenge that "character teaches above our wills" (p. 184). By stepping outside of the identity of a typical city dweller, urban preppers break free from their way of knowing the world and expand their respective self-identities to include new roles and ways of engaging in life as New Yorkers. One NYCPN member explained, "We are about getting you comfortable in the discomfort, pushing you past your normal way of life."

Within New York's prepping subculture, prepping is a practice of strengthening one's mental acuity as well as one's skills. The focus is on improving one's self to make a greater contribution to the group. In this regard, prepping seems to require more than just stuffing a big bag with emergency supplies. When adapting to tremendous pressure or adjusting quickly to harsh surroundings, responding to disaster requires a presence of mind that reminds one that "nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your

own mind” (Emerson, 1841, p. 178). This moment calls for self-reliance, Emerson’s interior turn; the demand of silence and attention to the inner self as it asserts knowledge. In such an instance, one engages in the project of moral perfectionism by moving toward one’s further self. Perfectionism in this sense is not about striving for superior achievement in all aspects of life, but determining what makes a life good by exploring how to fulfill our duties to one another given our limitations (Levine, 2011).

Urban life offers the chance to pursue perfectionism by promising a rich and authentic experience that is based on risk; the risk to know oneself and the attempt to know “the other” (Holden, 2017). For city dwellers, this opportunity for exploration and connection is what makes a life good. Cities have always been at the intersection of the strange and the risky. As Jane Jacobs (1961) notes, “Great cities are not like towns, only larger. They are not like suburbs, only denser. They differ from towns and suburbs in basic ways, and one of these is that cities are, by definitions, full of strangers” (p. 30). To maintain order in a sea of strangers, New Yorkers have always had to rely on a discrete code to assure and assess safety. As Sennett (1992) observes,

... the rituals by strangers on crowded streets give each other little clues of reassurance which leave each person in isolation at the same time; you drop your eyes rather than stare at a stranger as a way of reassuring him you are safe; you engage in the pedestrian ballet of moving out of each other’s way ...

(p. 299)

This etiquette of reservation and formality serves as a buffer. In addition to introducing a level of civility, it also reinforces a sense of distance from one another.⁷ Through this figurative distance, we are able to remain tolerant of unacceptable behavior while simultaneously assessing our safety. Moving beyond a city made of a “world of strangers” (Lofland, 1973) to a city made for democratic progress (and the individual pursuit of perfectionism) requires the public realm.

The public realm is “the city’s quintessential social territory” (Lofland, 1998, p. 9). The public realm encompasses treasured parochial and public spaces in urban life such as Washington Square’s dog runs and political protests like the 2017 Women’s March. In our common spaces, through our varied and daily interactions with one another, we practice local democracy. For the public realm to function successfully, so that it may reflect both the pleasures and tensions of city life, the expression of a shared set of social values among strangers—a sense of urban citizenship—is required. Urban citizenship is based on the influence of civil society on citizenship (Holston, 1999), and consists of five clusters of rights and responsibilities: safety, political engagement, tolerance, recognition and freedom (Beauregard and Bounds, 2000).

Urban prepping should be considered as an extension of this form of localized citizenship. First, urban prepping takes place in the public realm; prepping meetings are held in public spaces like Central Park and in parochial spaces such as church meeting rooms. Second, safety is a responsibility shared by both the state and citizens. However, New York's recent history of disasters has demonstrated the government's limitations in protecting its citizens. As a result, some citizens have sought to protect themselves by learning and practicing prepping strategies. Huddleston's (2016) participant observation study of a Midwestern prepping group indicates that the micro-resilience of these groups enhances larger local systems and may improve a community's ability to withstand disaster. Therefore, urban prepping may prove to be a vital measure in closing a perceived gap in our emergency response system.

A specific example of closing the perceived gap in New York's emergency response system is a coordinated response among neighborhood groups in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. As explained by one former gang member and prepper from the Lower East Side:

The first night of the blackout, there was a gunshot and cops all around. We figured we'd better drop colors or we'd be wearing a noose instead. The OG's from all the gangs figured it out. Figured out which gang had more trucking licenses so we could get stuff in and out of our neighbors for our people. So, that's what we did. The women were incredible in finding out whatever we needed and the trucks brought it all in. We'd dropped colors until it was over.

Joining an urban prepper group or even connecting periodically with other preppers could also be interpreted as a form of political engagement. Rather than remaining unknown and alienated, urban preppers are banding together to form networks and to learn skills that are useful in helping others, not just themselves, in crises. Given their interest in preparedness, preppers might serve as community advocates to ensure that the local government meets its safety responsibilities such as conducting building and fire code inspections. Through studying online prepping communities, Kabel and Chmidling (2014) found that these preppers made health-related decisions such as changing lifestyle choices (such as dietary improvements and exercising) to reduce future health risks to improve their chances of survival after disaster, and sharing information regarding treatment for both emergencies and long-term health care needs in the absence of medical professionals. Beyond information sharing, urban preppers might also take on the role of advocating for better access to neighborhood health resources.

Given the popularity of apocalyptic storylines and the extreme characterization of preppers, one might expect New York preppers to be viewed negatively or with some suspicion. However, city life requires that we refrain from preventing non-violent activities or forms of expression that may run

counter to our beliefs. Therefore, New York preppers benefit from the tolerance exercised by other city dwellers. In exchange, preppers must also recognize that other people may not share their same commitment to preparing for disaster. This right and responsibility allows us to inhabit the same space with one another.

Urban prepping may also be considered an expression of the right to recognition. For people of color who believe that their communities may have been underserved during previous disasters, prepping represents agency and a demand for recognition to address inequalities in the distribution of resources and aid. In this regard, urban prepping makes an important break with misperceptions about preppers' motivation to prepare against disaster and a lack of trust in the government. As depicted in the mass media, a stereotypical prepper's drive to stockpile and prepare for disaster is spurred by conspiracy theories such as a fear of the sudden loss of First Amendment rights. In short, a stereotypical prepper seems to be motivated by the fear that "the government is coming for me." Conversely, after observing media coverage of communities of color and poor communities receiving little emergency support during disasters such as Hurricane Katrina (Dyson, 2006), an urban prepper may believe that one should prepare themselves for disaster. Therefore, an urban prepper may be driven by the fear that "the government isn't coming for me." Finally, urban prepping also underscores the importance of freedom in city culture. New Yorker preppers are developing new social relations and make new claims for their interests and needs in city life. In other words, urban prepping provides a meaningful outlet for exploring a deeper understanding of one's self and one's responsibilities to others. However, urban prepping also demonstrates the danger of freedom, specifically the freedom to opt out of civil society. By retreating to secret locations or hiding in safe rooms, powerful elites choose isolation over democracy.

In keeping with Mills (2018) and Huddleston (2016), my exploratory research contributes to scholarship on prepping by using original empirical data to analyze the motivations for and practices of prepping in New York. Based on data gathered from field research as well as in-depth interviews, my work aims to provide a detailed and comprehensive analysis of New York prepping as understood by members of this subculture. This book is divided into four sections that provide a comprehensive approach for analyzing the rise and practice of prepping in New York.

Part I: Understanding the rise of prepping in the global city of New York

Following Chapter 1's overview of the study, Chapter 2 provides a profile of New York as a global city, outlining both its tremendous appeal and its tremendous dangers. As one prepper consultant explained, "Living in New York is like living on the X." Given New York's power and prestige as a global capital, it is an attractive target for terrorist attacks. For New Yorkers, the

advantages of city life seem to outweigh the risks represented by the city's recent history of disasters and potential threats. However, in the wake of these crises, many New Yorkers have now sought to make preparations to protect themselves against disaster. Since 2001, New York has experienced several crises (or threats of disaster) that reflect the major categories of "Doomsday" scenarios including: terrorists attacks, natural disasters, pandemics, technological failures and economic or governmental collapse. Each type of disaster (or its threat) has placed an unusual set of stressors on New Yorkers. Next, the NYC prepper economy is examined to learn how urban preppers utilize markets such as the city's local foods network and outdoor recreation retailers as well as prepping consultants and suppliers. The chapter closes with a discussion of my participant-observation research method and my subject position as a New Yorker studying this particular (and peculiar) topic. My experience as a New Yorker who has endured each of these disasters provides me with a unique sociological lens for studying prepping. Therefore, my reflexive approach encompasses a practice of participant-observation, in-depth interviewing, fieldwork (attending events such as meetings, retreats, conferences and lectures) and archival research (reviewing prepper literature and discussions of prepping in the popular press).

Chapter 3 explores current representations of the apocalypse and prepping throughout popular entertainment. These representations hold meaning for both mainstream audiences and preppers. In popular entertainment (television, movie and books), apocalyptic storylines allow audiences to engage in the creative process of the destruction and rebirth of both society and self. These narratives reinforce collective anxiety about the future and the importance of self-reliance and agency. This chapter also examines the influence of popular culture on preppers. movies and books that are significant to New Yorker preppers are discussed. The NYCPN has also been widely covered in the popular press. Members have sometimes viewed this coverage as negative or demeaning. To combat such coverage, group members have become media savvy to promote a more positive image of prepping.

Part II: Prepping in New York: Going it alone or going together

Chapter 4 studies the prepping strategy of sheltering in place (Bugging In) that is practiced by both the extremely wealthy and the middle class. Based on their economic position and location, extremely wealthy New Yorkers sometimes construct safe rooms (often smaller interior apartments within their apartments) as places of refuge during disaster. Given their higher income, these posh preppers are also able to purchase expensive prepping equipment in response to reports of disasters in other areas or in the early stages of potential disasters in New York. Middle-class New Yorkers have more modest preparations for sheltering in place. Given that safe rooms are unaffordable to them, this segment of the population stores supplies in "prepper closets" (designated areas of their homes, which are often small

apartments). These preppers have also developed strategies to protect their homes and apartments from certain disasters.

Chapter 5 discusses the prepping strategy of leaving an area to escape disaster (Bugging Out) that is practiced by both the extremely wealthy and the middle class. For the extremely wealthy, bugging out practices include purchasing secret strategic relocation destinations (homes in exclusive and remote areas) as well as purchasing curated luxury bug out bags that contain state-of-the-art survival equipment. Middle-class New York preppers also seek to escape disaster through more modest means such as leaving the city on foot to reach safe locations in the Tri-State Area and preparing their own bug out bags with more reasonably priced equipment.

Part III: Urban prepping and symbolic interaction

Chapters 6–8 provide a narrative and analysis of my experience as a participant-observer in the NYCPN. Unlike independent preppers who rely only on their individual skills without support, this group learns and practices prepping together in the hope of bolstering their success in surviving (and sustaining themselves throughout) a disaster. Throughout these chapters, symbolic interaction theory is used to study the NYCPN as a social structure and its valuable use of symbols, rituals and language to reinforce prepping behavior. After discussing the NYCPN's history and organizational structure, the narrative then recounts and analyzes my experience at different types of group events (retreats, excursions, workshops and meetings) as well as relevant non-group prepping events.

Part IV: Urban prepping as a new reflection of citizenship

Chapter 9 concludes by suggesting that prepping is a meaningful lens for examining both the anxiety about and promise of 21st century America. In the Cold War era, Americans were concerned about civil defense against an ideological enemy. In our current period, we are confronted by many potential enemies—political, economic, environmental and technological. Urban prepping is a reflection of how we depend on community (and self), not solely government, in moments of crisis. The qualities and challenges of urban prepping are discussed in comparison to preppers in rural and suburban areas. New directions for research on urban prepping groups are introduced. For example, the social structure and interactions of an urban prepper group that plans to survive together must be analyzed to understand how the recognition of future dependency impacts its agenda and practices. The social structure and interactions within female-led prepping groups (or all-female groups) should also be investigated to learn if and how their agendas and practices might differ from male-led groups (or predominately male groups). In future research on urban prepping groups, symbolic interactionism remains a critical tool for analysis.

Notes

- 1 News of the election results were quickly replaced by the continued coverage of events such as the deadly California wildfires (Fuller et al., 2018) and allegations of voter suppression and ballot fraud (Gardner et al., 2018).
- 2 My analysis of Gallup's yearly polling on Terrorism (2002–18) indicates that every year roughly 42% of Americans worry a great deal about a future attack while roughly 28% of Americans indicate that they worry a fair amount.
- 3 According to the Chapman University Survey of American Fears, the top fears for 2018 were: Corrupt government officials (73.6%); Pollution of oceans, rivers and lakes (61.6%); Pollution of drinking water (60.7%); Not having enough money for the future (57%); People I love becoming seriously ill (56.5%); People I love dying (56.4%); Air pollution (55.1%); Extinction of plant and animal species (54.1%); Global warming and climate change (53.2%); and high medical bills (52.9%).
- 4 In this regard, the definition acknowledges how preppers conceptualize disaster as a result of both experience and fear (imagining the consequences of a disaster type that has yet to occur in the United States such as a large nuclear strike).
- 5 However, this argument should now be reexamined in response to the rise of "Brexit Preppers," Britons who fear crisis after Britain's withdrawal from the European Union (Castle, 2018).
- 6 In American culture, references to the deadly power and evil of the Four Horsemen remain a constant. As a child half-listening to Sunday sermons, any strange scripture about the Four Horseman only made me daydream even more about the conquests in *King Arthur and the Knights of the Roundtable*, my favorite book series. I could only be terrified by the mesmerizing power and deadly evil of The Four Horsemen of Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling (Ric Flair, Arn Anderson, Ole Anderson and Tully Blanchard).
- 7 An older New York Guidebook makes this assertion more humorously and definitely more cynically in observing, "Perhaps more than in any other city, a sense of nervy self-preservation is rife here: people make studied efforts to avoid eye contact, and any unusual behavior clears a space immediately: the atmosphere of impending violence is sometimes sniffable" (Dunford and Holland, 2002).

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Notes

Chapter 1

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- 2 My analysis of Gallup's yearly polling on Terrorism (2002–18) indicates that every year roughly 42% of Americans worry a great deal about a future attack while roughly 28% of Americans indicate that they worry a fair amount.
- 3 According to the Chapman University Survey of American Fears, the top fears for 2018 were: Corrupt government officials (73.6%); Pollution of oceans, rivers and lakes (61.6%); Pollution of drinking water (60.7%); Not having enough money for the future (57%); People I love becoming seriously ill (56.5%); People I love dying (56.4%); Air pollution (55.1%); Extinction of plant and animal species (54.1%); Global warming and climate change (53.2%); and high medical bills (52.9%).
- 4 In this regard, the definition acknowledges how preppers conceptualize disaster as a result of both experience and fear (imagining the consequences of a disaster type that has yet to occur in the United States such as a large nuclear strike).
- 5 However, this argument should now be reexamined in response to the rise of “Brexit Preppers,” Britons who fear crisis after Britain's withdrawal from the European Union (Castle, 2018).
- 6 In American culture, references to the deadly power and evil of the Four Horsemen remain a constant. As a child half-listening to Sunday sermons, any strange scripture about the Four Horseman only made me daydream even more about the conquests in *King Arthur and the Knights of the Roundtable*, my favorite book series. I could only be terrified by the mesmerizing power and deadly evil of The Four Horsemen of Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling (Ric Flair, Arn Anderson, Ole Anderson and Tully Blanchard).
- 7 An older New York Guidebook makes this assertion more humorously and definitely more cynically in observing, “Perhaps more than in any other city, a sense of nervy self-preservation is rife here: people make studied efforts to avoid eye contact, and any unusual behavior clears a space immediately: the atmosphere of impending violence is sometimes sniffable” (Dunford and Holland, 2002).

Chapter 2

- 1 In 2018, the Archives even held an exhibit titled “Unlike Historians: Materials Collected by the NYPD Surveillance Teams, 1960–1975.” The exhibition explored the images of surveillance photographs of civil rights, anti-war, and feminist protestors (Targets included the Communist Party, the Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam, the American Renaissance Party and Youths Against War and Fascism).

- 2 The quote was not originally attributed to Mark Twain. It was first stated by Paul Bourget (1852–1935), a French novelist and critic, in his commentary on American culture. His critique of American culture was first published as a series of articles in US newspapers and then later became the book *Outre-Mer: Impressions of America* (1895). Twain used the quotation in the first line of his satirical essay which is a response to Bourget's reflections. Although not well-remembered, Bourget had a remarkable literary career in which he was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature five times.
- 3 Services is the largest employer at fifty-eight percent of all jobs in the city. However, this category is quite broad, encompassing not just professional and business services but media and tourism jobs as well.
- 4 The top four cities are forecasted to be New York, Tokyo, Los Angeles, with Shanghai and London tied for fourth place.
- 5 A Nissan Pathfinder filled with smoke but did not fully detonate (Baker and Rashbaum, 2010).
- 6 A pressure cooker bomb exploded on West 23rd Street, injuring thirty-one people; a second bomb was discovered on West 27th Street. Another bomb also exploded on the Jersey Shore but did not injury anyone (Workman, Rosenberg, and Mele, 2016).
- 7 A driver plowed a pickup truck down the bike path along the West Side Highway, killing eight people and injuring eleven (Mueller, Rashbaum, and Baker, 2017).
- 8 A would-be suicide attacker detonated a pipe bomb strapped to his chest; however, the bomb failed to fully detonate and seriously injured the attacker (Nir and Rosenbaum, 2017).
- 9 New York also experienced slight earthquakes in 2002 (FEMA Disaster Report, 2002) and in 2019 (Hignett, 2019).
- 10 If in Queens, one may also go to Long Island. However, as an island, this area provides limited resources and no possible option for moving farther out by car or foot.
- 11 A variety of local organizations also support other agrarian interests. For example, the New York City Beekeepers Association (NYCBA) promotes sharing best practices and interest in beekeeping in an urban environment. The NYCBA (2018) reported in 2018 that there were roughly 550 beehives kept by New Yorkers throughout the city with the majority of hives located in Manhattan and Brooklyn.
- 12 Commercial hydroponic farms now supplies rare herbs to New York's top restaurants (Krueger, 2017).
- 13 For a compelling discussion of vertical farming, see Despommier (2010).
- 14 I completed a pilot study in 2013. In 2017–18, I returned to the field to conduct a revised and expanded full study. In the interim period, I focused on my teaching responsibilities and worked on other research projects.

Chapter 3

- 1 For an analysis of social organization and action attribution as revealed through interactions of manipulation in competitive board game play, see Hofstetter and Robles (2019).
- 2 Current movie databases do not include an “apocalyptic” category for movies. Apocalyptic movies are scattered across genres (including categories such as science fiction, horror, disaster, and super-hero action). Furthermore, the use of the words “apocalyptic” or “post-apocalyptic” in storylines is sometimes misleading as both terms are invoked to capture interest rather than to serve as an accurate description. Also, some apocalyptic movies are really superhero movies in which a famous comic book character must use his or her strength to save the world from ruin. For example, in *Wonder Woman* (2017), the superhero aids mortals by killing Ares, a god who is set on destroying humankind.

- 3 *Titanic* is ranked number one by earning \$659 million in US box-office ticket receipts. The Boxmojo.com database contains information on box-office grosses from the 1979 to the present day.
- 4 On January 31, The New York Times reported twenty-one deaths due to the polar vortex (Smith, Bosman, and Davey, 2019).
- 5 Desus and Mero is a popular American late-night talk show on Showtime. Known as Desus and Mero, the New York comedy duo of Daniel Baker, a Jamaican-American, and Joel Martinez, a Dominican-American, has attracted large audiences across different media platforms. Their humor and witty interactions draw on their experiences as Bronx natives and their observations about American culture and politics. Their previous successes include their popular “Bodega Boys” podcast and hosting *Viceland*’s first daily late-night talk show.
- 6 For an interesting discussion of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and similar movies, see Ford and Mitchell, 2018.
- 7 Disaster scenarios, such as widespread chaos and destruction, are perceived to require a militaristic outlook that allows hegemonic masculinities to prevail in the imaginary post-apocalyptic world (Christian 2016).
- 8 Simpson and Mallard (2017) accurately and amusingly observe that the volume of scholarship across disciplines on the television series has launched the field of *Walking Dead* studies. For anthologies, see (Simpson and Mallard, eds., 2017); (Langley, ed., 2015); (Keetley, ed., 2014); (Robichaud, 2012); (Yuen, 2012); and (Lowder, 2011).
- 9 At the American Israel Public Affairs Committee’s annual policy conference, Gingrich discussed Forstchen’s novel and advocated for an American EMP strategic plan. He argued: “It’s based on fact, it is accurate, and it’s horrifying, and we have zero national strategy to respond to it today.” He laid out a scenario in which three small nuclear weapons detonated at the right altitude would eliminate all electricity production in the United States. Which is why, he concluded, “I favor taking out Iranian and North Korean missiles on their sites” (Crowley, 2009).
- 10 This novel does not address the reality that New York’s extremely wealthy were probably doing quite well in their luxury bunkers.

Chapter 4

- 1 See Dio’s Account of the Great Fire and Herodian discussion of other fires.
- 2 My attempts at securing an interview with a New York safe room owner were unsuccessful. An interview with a former associate of a safe room owner (who was not required to sign an NDA) was informative. However, I did not include the information as its reliability could not be confirmed. Furthermore, disclosing any information about a safe room without the permission of the owner raises legal and ethical issues.
- 3 The scope of the project actually came to light during the Iran-Contra hearings in 1987 when it was briefly mentioned by Oliver North. Starting in 1982, North spearheaded the covert project that, along with other national security programs, consumed the majority of FEMA’s funding for an eleven-year period (See Garrison, 2006). At Iran-Contra hearings, controversy arose when Representative Jack Brooks (Democrat of Texas) asked North if “‘plans for the continuity of government’ included a ‘contingency plan in the event of an emergency that would suspend the American Constitution’” (Weiner, 1994; p. 1).
- 4 See ready.gov for a list of emergency supplies for sheltering in place.
- 5 Once issued to combat troops by the US military, MREs are ready to eat self-contained rations that are produced and sold to the public.
- 6 At the request of preppers, sometimes names (even pseudonyms) and neighborhoods are not provided to avoid disclosing their stockpile and to protect their safety in the event of catastrophe. However, I am permitted to disclose their gender,

- family status and borough location to facilitate an understanding of their approach to creating a prepping closet.
- 7 According to The New York Times bestseller, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* (Kondō, 2014), the KonMari method of decluttering is based on the principle of maximizing joy in one's home. People should only keep items that give them joy. All other items should be discarded.
 - 8 Bamford (2004) attributes the failure to prevent the September 11th terrorist attack on the World Trade Center to a downsized military and weakened US intelligence. According to Bamford, on that day, only fourteen fighter jets were responsible for protecting the entire US mainland. Two F-15s were scrambled from the Otis Air National Guard Base in Falmouth, MA; however, they were too far away to intercept the hijacked planes. The closet fighters were located at the Air National Guard 177th Wing at the Atlantic City Airport. However, since 1998, the two fighters had been unarmed and used only training practices.

Chapter 5

- 1 Given the 2018 tragic helicopter crash into the East River which killed the tourists-passengers, and the excessive noise caused by takeoffs and landings, the city government has sought to curb the helicopter tourism industry and has halted helicopter travel on weekends. However, some pilots have chosen to ignore these restrictions. In 2012, a billionaire helicopter pilot, Mayor Bloomberg, generated controversy when he was caught flying during the no-fly ban on weekends (Grynbaum, 2012).

Chapter 6

- 1 Launched in 2002, Meetup is a website used to organize online groups that host in-person events for people with similar interests.
- 2 This data is based on my interactions and conversations as a participant-observer. As a group member, I attended all meeting types and had access to Meetup profiles. Given the reluctance of many preppers to be identified or even to disclose basic information, conducting a formal survey was not possible or appropriate in this study.
- 3 To stay on the membership list, individuals must be active on the Meetup group page. If a member is not active on the page (such as responding to an event announcement or posting a question about an upcoming event) for a year, the person is deleted from the group.
- 4 My conversations with NYCPN members rarely included discussions of specific salaries. Instead, I learned the type of positions that people held within particular sectors. These positions ranged from mid-level to senior positions. Based on my interview data and informal conversations, NYCPN members view themselves as part of the middle class.
- 5 The "first year" period refers to May 2017–18. Data analysis was conducted in June 2018.
- 6 Note that a few members chose to attend meetings regularly, but they did not go on excursions while other members chose to attend excursions but did not attend meetings.
- 7 Between 2010 and 2012 (before Jason assumed leadership of the group), the NYCPN mainly met to hold discussions about prepping topics. With the start of Jason's tenure, the group's activities expanded to focus on skill development and excursions. The first group leader was unavailable to be interviewed.
- 8 For a discussion of sexual interaction and ethnographic research, see Martin and Haller, 2018.

Chapter 7

- 1 Children sometimes attended events. However, studying children was not part of this research project. In accordance with IRB guidelines, no field notes were kept regarding the activities of children and no conversations were held with the children regarding this research project or prepping.
- 2 A firebox is a camp stove. It is a multi-fuel collapsible metal box used for cooking or providing warmth.
- 3 For an examination of objectification theory's application to men, see Davids, Watson, and Gere (2018).
- 4 For preppers, "WTSHTF" is an acronym for the phrase "When the shit hits the fan".

Chapter 8

- 1 At her request, I have not shared any examples.

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