Women Living History: A Case Study Exploring Persona, Transformative Learning, and Social Identity in Group Participation

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Abstract

This case study set out to discover what women gain from their participation in a living history organization that was founded by men and remains male-dominated in its operations. Multiple strategies, including surveys, interviews, and participant observation, were used to investigate the eleven female participants who agreed to be part of this study. Theoretical frameworks include Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning and social identity theory with specific attention to feminist perspectives. The findings show that transformation occurs most strongly for women who have chosen a persona and that group dynamics are a major barrier in identification with the organization. In spite of both the male-female and female-only dynamics, the participants have developed strong bonds of friendship and report great personal fulfillment through participation in the group. The desire to educate and be educated was another strong theme which developed and ties closely with ideas of authenticity and group dynamics. More research is needed into the transformative power of living history/reenactment, group dynamics in volunteer organizations, and the effects of adopting a persona.

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my children, Heidi and Piper, followed by my parents, Alex and Maxine. I am also dedicating this document to those individuals who spent the most time with me while I was writing it and who listened while I talked about it endlessly: Steve, Maureen, Cindy, and Kelly. I am in deep gratitude to all of these individuals, without whom this would not have been possible.

I would like to thank the organization and all of the women who participated in this study as they not only made the research possible, but also took the time to share so much about themselves with me so that I might learn more about them. Additionally, I offer a special thank you to my associates who took time out of their lives to conduct observations for me. I would also like to thank Mary, Pat, Beth, and Denise for listening to my stories over the years along with my committee chair, Dr. Joseph Polizzi, committee members, Dr. Laurie McMillan and Sr. Gail Cabral, IHM, Ph.D., and professors who supported and guided me during that time.

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Chapter 1

*“Do you wish to understand the true history of a blade of grass? Try to become a blade of grass.”* – Lamb (2008), p. 240

**Introduction**

While the interpretation of history and historical characters is not a new practice, the focus of the literature devoted to the study of this practice has typically ignored its effect on the women who participate in it. This is reflective of a biased view of history from the male perspective, which underemphasizes the role women have played throughout the past. Many disciplines have been developed from the standpoint of one gender, inadvertently shaping the types of questions that are asked as well as their interpretations (Slocum, 1975). As someone who has participated in the interpretation and representation of an historical figure, I have come to appreciate the depth of understanding and detail that goes into what we call “living history.” Similar to historical reenactment, living history involves an active portrayal of someone from another time; however, a typical reenactor will immerse him/herself in the period, sleeping and cooking outside, whereas living historians do not generally engage in this behavior. Because the two terms are so similar, though not the same, they will be used together throughout this dissertation, but not interchangeably. As a woman, I have also been aware of the differences in expectations for men and women involved in these activities, which are based on the time period which one hopes to represent. This adds an additional element of interest to women’s involvement in living history where the period of portrayal was not always a positive one for women. For those women who engage in this hobby, depicting a woman from an earlier time period is effectively placing themselves in a subservient role, taking steps backwards from the advancements women have achieved up through today. This becomes the main question of this study: why would any woman want to put herself in this type of position? Yet, the literature devoted to living history or historical reenactment largely ignores this issue. To better understand this discrepancy, I am introducing the present research, which will approach the problem from the directions of education and psychology.

Anderson (1982) was a forerunner in detailing living history, but most of his work describes what are referred to as “living history museums,” locations such as Colonial Williamsburg where individuals conduct their work in settings meticulously made appropriate for the time period being represented. Other scholars focus on authenticity and the seemingly constant strides made by reenactors/living historians who desire to recreate the past in the most realistic way possible while simultaneously maintaining their audience’s interest (Rutherford-Morrison, 2015; Gapps, 2009; Handler and Saxton, 1988; Stover, 1989). Some researchers have even visited and engaged with specific organizations or individuals that make living history or reenactment their hobby, traveling to different sites that provide the public with an opportunity to experience the recreation of history firsthand, ask questions, and get a feel for what that time or event was really like. A great deal of information has been gained by interviewing individual members of such organizations because they offer insight into the activity not typically seen by an outside observer (Coles and Armstrong, 2008; Hunt, 2004; Sparrow, 2007). None of these studies, however, focus specifically on women.

Magelssen (2006) discusses at length the difficulties in first-person portrayal of a historical figure in terms of maintaining historical accuracy without softening the reality that was the past. He offers a number of suggestions for how living history museums can operate more effectively and he advocates for the maximization of a learning experience, but does not draw on a specific theory such as transformative learning for this purpose. Agnew (2007) mentions the potential for a reenacting participant to go through a personal transformation, but again, does not contextualize this within the transformative learning framework. Sparrow (2007), Agnew (2004), and Hunt (2004) all emphasize the hidden value of reenacting and participation with a group of this nature just as Coles and Armstrong (2008) do; however Coles and Armstrong specifically indicate that this leisure activity is ultimately educational in nature and it “would be difficult to argue that learning is not taking place (para. 24).” What the authors are referring to here, however, is not specific to the women in these organizations, but rather to the organizations as a whole, which means it is more likely to refer to the men who engage in this activity. This presents another hole in the literature which can be made more complete through the present research.

It would be difficult to find an article detailing living history or reenactment that did not have some type of discussion on authenticity, meaning how well the presenter is presenting him/herself as an individual from the past. A direct tie in to the issue of authenticity is, essentially, how much can the individual identify with the portion of the past he/she is hoping to portray or the specific individual that has been chosen for this portrayal. Lamb (2008) mentions how reenactors or living historians must sympathize with their chosen historical figure, essentially “becoming” that person themselves. Turner (1990) talks about how “time warps” can allow reenactors to feel as though they are in the same moment as those who experienced an event firsthand, especially when the reenactor is in the same physical location as the original event (p. 126). He further explains that the identity one develops in these instances may be more important than the individual’s traditional identity because it is a combination of who that person is and the characteristics of another very similar and interesting individual from the past. Handler and Saxton (1988) reinforce this idea in their discussion of how reenactors seek to “realize themselves in the process, through the simulation of historical worlds (p. 243).” And, as Hall (1994) concludes his piece, “the reenactor seeks a consciousness of history that passeth all understanding (p. 11).” The running theme of identity through reenactment and living history has clearly been explored; however it has not been explored through the use of a theory such as social identity theory, nor has it been specifically investigated with women reenactors alone.

There is no doubt that living history and reenactment are viable areas for further research and deep investigation. Throughout the existing body of literature, from Carson’s (1981) impassioned discussion of the shared experience presented through first-person interpretation to Rutherford-Morrison’s (2015) examination of the way living history museums can provide education through entertainment, the validity of this subject has been echoed over time. But, even though some authors have embedded themselves in living history or reenactment groups and interviewed specific individuals in those groups about their involvement (Coles and Armstrong, 2008; Hunt, 2004; Sparrow, 2007), these groups have typically been large in membership and are based in countries other than the United States, such as England and Australia. Furthermore, while women are occasionally interviewed in these articles, they are never the primary focus. The proposed research in this dissertation will fill the very clear gap in the literature when it comes to studying women in a small, American-based living history organization.

While it can almost be certain that the readers of each journal that published the articles under review for this research would be interested in further exploration of the same subject, there are a number of other audiences that would find this of interest as well. Reenactors or living historians themselves will be the most likely audience of this research as the results of this study could add a new degree of depth to the activity in which they engage. Students of history, present or future, will also benefit and be interested in a discussion of such a small niche in the living history arena, just as those who are specifically interested in the study of women in any context will find this valuable. Also, those who find themselves wanting to know more about the application of transformative learning theory or social identity theory to different contexts and settings will be interested to see the results of this research. It is therefore the intent of this research to explore the experiences of women in a small living history organization through the context of transformative learning and social identity theory, thereby adding to the existing body of literature in all three areas.

**Theoretical Framework**

The lenses through which this study will be seen are transformative learning and social identity theory; the belief is that the primary happenings for women in the living history group in question involve their learning about a specific period of time and that this has an effect on who they are as individuals. First, a discussion about transformational learning will help to frame the process by which a woman in this organization chooses a persona and then social identity theory will serve as a guide when discussing the experience a woman has within this organization.

**Transformative Learning.**

In describing transformative learning, Mezirow (1997) emphasizes the human desire to understand the nature of experience through the context of a particular frame of reference. The way we go about defining the world around us has everything to do with the feelings, values, and conditioning we have experienced since birth, but there is always room for modification of those frames. Such changes, as mentioned by Foote (2015), can involve everything from moments filled with bursts of knowledge to longer, more gradual changes of a person’s perspective. In either case, transformative learning can help an individual learn how to think more autonomously (Mezirow, 1997). A challenge that may be encountered by researchers studying this area, however, is the difficulty in separating transformative learning from general adult learning, since the two are so close (English and Peters, 2012).

Transformative learning is specific to adult education and can be seen in a variety of contexts, such as the “Aha” moments described by Foote (2015) and the interviews conducted by Nohl (2015) with individuals simply recounting the events of their lives. Hidden within these interviews, much like an “Aha” moment, were instances when the individual knew that change was coming or that it had already happened. One of Nohl’s interviewees specifically recalls an incident with a Samba group where he was “moved” and knew that this was an activity he would later like to engage in, yet did not see the extent to which that moment would change his life in the future. This may be because analyzing and reflecting upon one’s experiences is critical for transformation to take place, though the factors necessary to understand it have not yet been effectively defined (English and Peters, 2012). For Foote (2015), the moment of transformation was often met with resistance and considered to be a more spiritual experience that required a great deal of time for reflection and understanding before becoming an action. Foote was able to re-frame her identity in adulthood by following the “Aha” moment she had experienced years earlier and became the classic adult learner.

The women interviewed by English and Peters (2012) recognized the central role played by relationships in their transformative experiences. Much like the “crises” identified by Nohl (2015), English and Peters found that it was not always the case that these relationships provided positive experiences. On the contrary, the more challenging relationships, which presented situations of conflict for the women in the study, were the ones that provided the catalyst for change. Because of the conflict, the women realized stronger feminine identities within themselves and showed how constructive disagreement could in fact be transformative. Learning, for these women, related both to increasing knowledge about the world around them and a greater understanding of their internal worlds.

In order to change the way a person learns, he/she must carefully critique and examine the frames of reference through which he/she views the world and progress in one of four ways: the person may simply strengthen the beliefs he/she already has, finding support for an existing point of view; the individual can find a new point of view entirely, compounded by previously held beliefs; the individual can change the point of view he/she already has, as in the case of Foote, (2015) who eventually decided to become a teacher in spite of her previously held belief that she would be just like everyone else in her family if she did so; and finally, beliefs can be changed through greater awareness and analysis as to why those beliefs actually exist, a challenge that makes learning possible (Mezirow 1997).

Nohl (2015) acknowledges the phases and processes identified by Mezirow, but goes on to describe and test a model of his own to detail the transformative learning process. Transformation begins with a “nondetermining start,” much like what the Samba player identified as a moment in his life when something happened, but he was largely unaware of what that “something” was for quite some time. The next logical step is for the individual to engage in some amount of inquiry, whether this happens through discussions or actual practices of an activity. This is followed by “social testing” where the individual can gauge the reactions of others around him/her to this new idea before progressing any farther. Then, the relevance of this idea or activity shifts from being something more trivial or frivolous to becoming an integral part of the individual’s life and habits, especially if this transformation has occurred during or as the result of a crisis. This process culminates in a stabilizing of the individual within a supportive social context and incorporating the transformation into who he/she is. In all of his interviews, Nohl found that this last phase allowed his subjects to separate themselves from who they once were, effectively becoming new people and reframing themselves in the context of the world.

Nohl’s process, and that of the individuals he interviewed, is similar to the incremental experience of Foote (2015) as she progressed through graduate school and wrestled with ideas that often contradicted her previously held beliefs. A skill such as this, the ability to analyze and reflect on ideas, is not only crucial for transformative learning to occur, it is also a trait much desired by employers who seek a well-prepared workforce. This is pertinent for other types of organizations as well, especially those who require a great deal of learning prior to involvement. While we may begin to develop this skill in childhood and adolescence, as adults we are expected to have the necessary foundation to move forward with the deepening of this ability to be aware of and responsive to our own frames of reference and how they relate to the environment around us. Transformational learning can thus be a vehicle for understanding the self and making internal changes as well as effecting change at the societal and organizational level (English and Peters, 2012). Situations providing for and encouraging creativity and discourse generate the “nondetermining start” that will ultimately give the information new meaning for the individual.

The literature discussing transformative learning particular to women is scarce; in fact, not only are there few publications specific to women, gender, feminism, and learning, gender has not been recognized as an area of emphasis for those researching transformative learning. Those studies specifically related to women and learning tend to stress the necessity of women having meaningful relationships to facilitate their growth, but at the same time, women are presented as a separate category who should be treated differently in this research. Since a number of possibilities exist for the exploration of how women utilize connections and relationships in their learning transformations, especially in different types of group settings, it would seem pertinent to investigate these ideas further (English and Peters, 2012).

**Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (SIT) states that individuals tend to classify themselves into categories depending upon the types of relationships they have with organizations and other individuals. This categorization extends to others as well where an individual will look at their affiliations and determine to which groups those people belong (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Such categorizations further form the basis for an individual’s identity with the potential to boost that person’s self-esteem through group membership and positive association with their ingroup, the group with which they feel the closest identification (Brown, 2000). The extent to which the individual identifies with the organization of which he/she is a member makes a difference in terms of how well the individual will perform within the organization and also leads to a number of biases associated with the members of the ingroup and all those considered outgroups (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Brown, 2000). Additionally, the way an individual feels about one of his/her identities, such as that person’s gender or group affiliation, can have a direct effect on how other identities of that individual are understood and experienced (Zerbe Enns, 2010). It is therefore arguable that identification with a group is integral to an individual’s core sense of identity and that changes in the individual’s group membership will affect how that individual sees him/herself.

Categorization is meaningful only in relation to other types of classification; however the extent of an individual’s classification matters in terms of the degree to which he/she identifies with any one group or organization. Over the course of time, the goals of the organization may become intertwined with the goals of the individual, enhancing the individual’s sense of belonging and connection. Other factors that may serve to increase the sense of identification one feels with an organization include its distinctiveness and prestige as compared to other groups in addition to how significant those other groups may be to the individual. Typical components associated with the way groups form will also have an effect on the degree of identification felt by the individual, which include the immediacy of group members, shared interests, and liking in addition to other elements of commonality (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

Brown (2000) has noted the broad amount of literature supporting the idea of in-group bias once an individual has committed him/herself to a particular group. It is nearly automatic that what follows is the idea that those members of the group to which one belongs are inherently better than members of other groups. Although it is unclear exactly how this type of bias extends to an organization, it may be that organizational bias is a result of generalizing the group and the relationships within it. In either case, this bias is strong enough to maintain the individual’s sense of identification with the group or organization even when something negative happens to it (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

Feminist approaches to social identity analysis take these ideas a step further, recognizing the extremely complex nature of the connections between a person’s multiple identities, especially those that are associated with privilege, disadvantage, or oppression (Zerbe Enns, 2010). These categories of identity may contribute to automatic cognitive processing of stereotypes and the distinctions present between groups (Brown, 2000). There is a need, then, to better understand how different concepts related to identity operate automatically and contribute to a person’s feelings of privilege or disadvantage. Once aware of these concepts, the individual may be more sensitive to the role played by each element and the impact identity has on his/her life (Brown, 2000; Zerbe Enns, 2010).

Other areas for future research have been identified within the realm of SIT including looking into the subgroups of an organization and an individual’s commitment at that level (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Additionally, it would be important to look further into the dislike members of an ingroup have for outgroups and what might cause them to behave negatively towards one another (Brown, 2000). Finally, as Ashforth and Mael (1989) suggest, more research needs to be conducted on the effect of identification on an individual’s beliefs about the organization and how likely that individual is to internalize the organization’s values. By gaining more information about how an individual identifies with an organization, SIT as a whole would also advance our understanding of the process of identification.

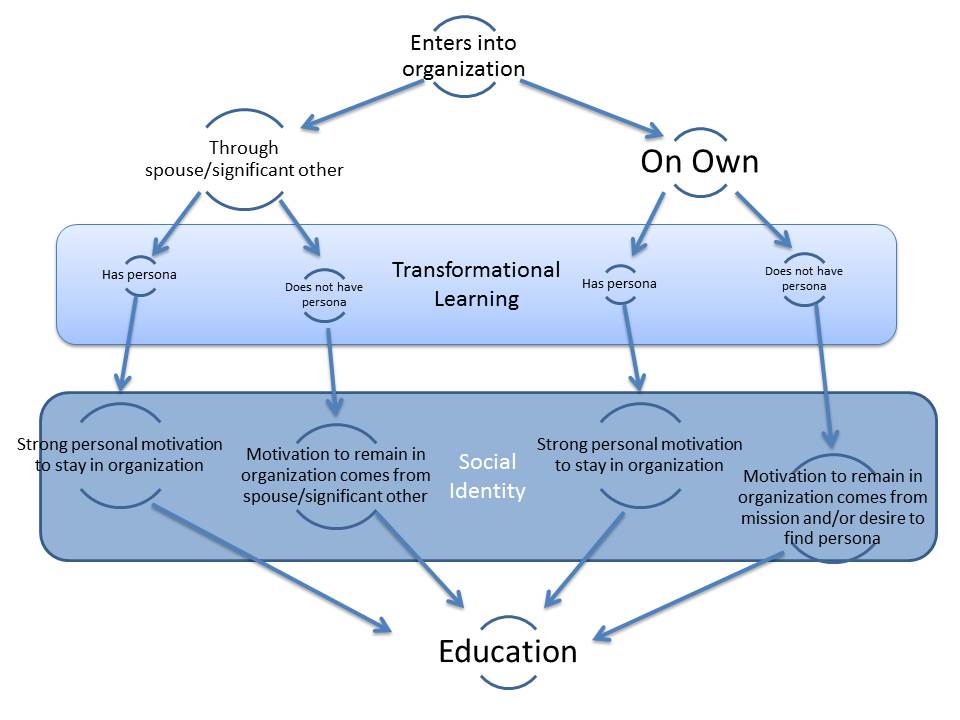
**Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

A woman can enter thegroup in question, the Military Officers of the Civil War (MOCW), in one of two ways: either because her spouse or significant other has decided to join the organization and she would like to join as well or she may decide to join the organization entirely on her own. In either case, the woman can then choose to adopt the persona of a notable 19th century woman or simply be a generic woman of the time. In the event that the woman has joined with her spouse or significant other, she may choose to portray the wife of the general he has chosen. This phase, either choosing the persona or not, involves many of the ideas of transformational learning. If the woman has chosen a persona, it is then necessary for her to research that persona in depth in order to adopt the traits and mannerisms of that individual. In other words, that becomes her “frame of reference,” a term used by Mezirow (1997), when attending events with MOCW. Adopting the characteristics of a completely different person, in addition to learning as much as one can about that person, has had a transformative effect on all of the women who have done so.

If the woman has not chosen a specific persona, or if she is playing the part of her husband’s wife, she will often find herself still wanting and needing to know more about the time period, specifically in reference to the actions and lifestyle of women, mostly those who were members of the middle class. In spite of not always having a specific persona, or not knowing much about the wife of a general, these women still have a transformative experience as they place themselves in the shoes of women who came before them.

The next phase is an indicator as to why the woman has chosen to participate in the organization and why she continues to attend events throughout the year. If the woman has chosen a persona, and experienced some degree of transformation as a result of learning about that persona, she would be highly motivated to continue with her attendance at events because of all the effort she has put into learning about that person. Her desire to teach the general public, and even other members of the organization, about this individual will prompt her to attend as many MOCW presentations as possible. Further, because of this personal connection to her persona, the woman will then identify more strongly with other members of the organization who also have personas and have gone through similar transformations. This identification will also extend to the organization in general, the basis of which is to educate the public about significant historical figures.

For the women who have a generic persona or portray the wife of a general, the identification they have with the organization began with their interest in the organization itself or through their husbands. If there was a woman who entered the organization on her own and had no persona, her motivation to continue to participate and attend events might be from her desire to support the mission of MOCW and indulge her interest in history. It is also likely that this woman would expect to eventually find a persona and believe that her participation in the organization would lead her to that discovery.

Regardless of how the woman enters the organization and whether or not she has a persona, the ultimate aim of the organization is to educate the general public about these historical figures. Therefore, no matter which path the woman chooses or goes through in her progression through the organization, the goal is to provide a better overall experience for each audience the organization encounters. An added benefit of this goal is that the educational experience is not limited to the audience alone; rather, the women who participate regularly in this organization will learn about the time period themselves, regardless of whether or not they actually adopt a persona. This process has the potential to be cyclical in nature as the more a woman is transformed by her persona, the more she wants to learn and identify with her persona, the more she identifies with the organization, and finally the more she is motivated to educate the public.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to uncover specific details about women’s involvement with a living history organization that operates in the northeastern part of the United States, mostly in Pennsylvania. At this stage in the research, women’s involvement in a living history organization will be generally defined as participation with Military Officers of the Civil War (MOCW).

**Central Question**

In order to investigate this area more sufficiently, the proposed dissertation will have as a central question: “What do women gain from their participation in the Military Officers of the Civil War, a living history organization?”

**Sub Questions**

* Why do women become involved in this organization?
* What is the procedure for choosing and adopting a persona?
* Are there rules about participation in this organization?
* What goals do participants in the organization have?
* How does participation affect their identity?
* What is transformational learning in the context of living history and this organization?

**Conceptual and Operational Definitions**

**Women**

Throughout this dissertation, any reference to women will include female members of the Military Officers of the Civil War, who identify as being women and portray female characters that are either real historical figures or fictional personas made up of characteristics from actual individuals.

**Military Officers of the Civil War (MOCW)**

Military Officers of the Civil War (MOCW) is a pseudonym for a living history organization in which members portray various notable personas from 19th century America, but who were specifically tied to the American Civil War. The members of MOCW, both male and female, are volunteers who travel to different locations mostly throughout Pennsylvania in order to conduct presentations to the public. MOCW is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization that accepts donations and membership dues that are used for various preservation efforts.

The structure of this organization has transformed since its founding in 2002, changing from having a president, secretary, and other officers to having a chairman and board members this past year. One commonality remains, however, in that all individuals holding office, regardless of the level of that office, must be full members of the organization. At the present time, as in the past, all seven board members are male. In order to be a member of the organization, one must take on a military or non-military persona and have passed a probationary period. During that time, the individual receives mentorship and must actively participate in at least two events throughout the year. Other forms of membership include family membership, member emeritus, and honorary members, but none of these other categories of membership allows the individual to vote or hold office (Organization website, 2013). At the annual membership meeting each February, all full members are invited to attend and vote while members in other categories, such as the family membership, are not present. At this time, there are thirty-three men and three women who are considered to be full voting members; all other women are under some other category of membership.

Once each month, the secretary emails the entire body of members with updates to the calendar and upcoming events and sends a list of current and active members. Both men and women in the organization receive these emails, though there are other email lists that do not contain women, such as the communication that happens among board members only. Email is the primary method of communication for all members regardless of their status and it is normal to receive several emails from the group every day. More recently, members have also been communicating through the Facebook page. Both the website and Facebook page contain lists and photos of all military, and some non-military, members in period attire so that even members who are not able to actively attend events can see what other members in the group look like. While women have always been part of the organization in a supportive form, it was not until 2013 that women began to have a more active role running separate presentations and taking on personas in the way that only the men had done previously.

**Gain**

The goal of this research is to find out why these women are participating in a patriarchal organization, portraying, at minimum, women from an era when a woman’s rights were greatly restricted and she was not considered to have a great deal of independence. What is it that the women in this organization are getting out of their participation? What motivates them to come back for event after event? The word “gain” describes any benefits these women are receiving, in any form, from their participation in this organization.

**Persona**

Both men and women are free to research and portray an individual who lived in the 19th century and had a specific involvement in the Civil War. Having a persona is not required for membership in MOCW, but it is helpful for someone who wants to actively participate in presentations. Members are allowed to change their personas so long as there is no one else portraying that individual. If suitable information does not exist on a person’s intended character, for instance the wife of a general, whose stories are not often told, the member may choose to make up a persona from contextually appropriate characteristics in order to make a historically accurate portrayal to the public. On some occasions, as an individual is studying to take on one persona, he/she may adopt a generic persona until he/she feels comfortable portraying the more specific persona.

**Participation**

In a general sense, participation does not mean that the individual has to participate in an actual presentation, but rather is simply present at an event sponsored by MOCW or an event at which MOCW is represented in some way.

**Living History**

Looking at the most concise definition of living history, presented by Jay Anderson (1985) and cited by Handler and Saxton (1988), the term may be defined as “the simulation of life in another time.” Hunt (2004) utilized a much more specific definition of living history, claiming it to be a presentation by actors of a certain time period who are both portraying individuals of the time and living under the appropriate conditions. There is still further distinction of this term: that is between those who see living history as re-creating specific elements from another time, often in a museum setting, and those who see it specifically tied to re-enactment, which would more often be in the form of a battle, but may also take the form of a trade (Krugler, 1991; Anderson, 1982). Thus, it is difficult to boil the term down to one agreed upon definition, though the similarities among definitions allows for some generalization.

For the purpose of this study, I am borrowing parts of Hunt’s (2004) definition; for Hunt living history consists of a presentation by actors of a specific time period. As Coles and Armstrong (2008) said, the term is ambiguous since it can not only represent those individuals who are doing living history but also the experience those same people are having. Therefore, the definition of living history that I will be referring to throughout this dissertation is the portrayal of a historical persona by a volunteer whose aim it is to educate the public but who also finds enjoyment in history and group socialization.

**Organization.**

When referencing an organization, this will be the Military Officers of the Civil War specifically and will not refer to any other organization.

**Delimitations**

Observations, an integral component of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Wolcott, 1997), will take place both at events where members are presenting for the public and where members get together in a more social manner. These events will take place at different locations throughout Pennsylvania. In addition to myself, observations will also be conducted by two outside observers who are members of the Ph.D. program in Human Development at Marywood University and have agreed to conduct these observations voluntarily (Hickson III, 1974; Patton, 1999).

Interviews will also be conducted with a number of women in this organization. In case study research, as well as ethnography, interviews are a primary source of obtaining information from participants (Yin, 2014; Wolcott, 1997). The interviews will be initially conducted through email where a Word document with different questions will be sent to each woman who agrees to participate. Follow-up interviews will be conducted in person to clarify any ambiguity and/or to ask participants to elaborate on their answers further. While the interviews will only take place with women in the organization, it is expected that of those who meet the criteria for participation, not all will respond to the initial interview questions nor will they all participate in follow-up interviews. Furthermore, the issue of recording these follow-up interviews with audio equipment presents an additional problem with participation as many women may choose to engage in a follow-up interview, but may not want to be recorded. This will result in some interviews being fully transcribed while others will only have handwritten notes from the encounter. Though seemingly innocuous, it could be the case that those interviews that are recorded will not be as well attended to by me since the recording equipment may act as a “crutch” for intensive listening (Yin, 2014).

The women who will be interviewed will fall into one of two broad categories: those who entered the organization because their husband became a member and those who entered the organization on their own, without their husband or significant other. The subcategories of these women include those who have a persona versus those who do not have a persona and those who are regular attendees at the organization’s events versus those who are only occasional attendees. The interviewees will be allotted several months during which they can complete their initial interview questions and observations will be ongoing for at least seven months.

**Limitations**

The most pressing limitation of this study is the issue of generalizability given that the information collected here will only apply directly to the women who are members of this specific organization. Further, the results of this study can only be generalized to similar living history organizations within the United States that operate in a comparable manner in terms of the mobility of their presentations and their inclusion and involvement of women. Nevertheless, it is still possible for the results of this one study to generalize to a number of similar situations, as evidenced by such investigations as the exploration of the *Challenger* explosion and Jane Jacobs’ book about urban planning in New York City (Yin, 2014). Similarly, the nature of ethnography is such that generalizations must be made from the small cases studied, but what must be understood is exactly how far those generalizations can be taken (Wolcott, 1987). It might be possible to generalize the findings of this study to other organizations that are similar in composition, as well as other organizations where women are present and take an active role. This research may even serve as a model for organizations which want to include women more actively, but it cannot be presumed that this research will generalize to all organizations with female members.

Though this research is open to all women in the organization, it remains highly unlikely that all of the women will participate. Several of them do not attend events regularly nor do they keep in contact with those who do; thus their reflections or opinions about the research question will remain unknown. The male opinion is, by default, also removed from the results of this study even if a few of them are questioned about the role of women in the organization. It is also problematic that the women who entered the organization with their husbands have been members significantly longer than the women who entered the organization on their own, presenting a discrepancy of several years at best. Thus all of the women who have entered this organization freely, without their husbands or significant others, have far less experience with the organization as a whole than the women who came to the organization through their husbands. A similar issue exists with both categories of women in that not every woman, even those who regularly participate, attends every event throughout the year for various reasons. Because of this, observations of these women at events may or may not include all of the participants in the study every time.

Another broad limitation involves myself as the researcher since I was a member of this organization first before I made the decision to explore the experience of women within the organization. Although this means that I do not have to earn the trust of the members of this organization, it does mean that my view is clouded by my own participation and I cannot separate myself from the research. As with most research of this nature, I am the instrument through which most of the observations will be recorded and my position within the organization removes a great deal of objectivity.

As such, it is important for me to consider myself in the context of the organization and the study and what it actually means to me to be the principal investigator in this case. My own identity within and separate from the organization shapes how I will view others’ behavior and what I will record as much as it shapes my interpretation of the data I will eventually gather. There are a number of ways I can combat this limitation, which will be further explained and elaborated on in chapter 3, including an in-depth study of myself throughout this process, utilizing the supervision of my dissertation chair and committee, and ultimately generating a supportive team of fellow researchers who will guide me to the ends of the research (Goldstein, 2003).

**Statement of Self**

I became involved with MOCW in April 2013 after I attended a Civil War themed ball in northeastern PA. For the first year of my participation, I portrayed the daughter of one of the generals and was not overly active at group functions. I did, however, start learning as much about the Civil War period as I could by listening to the presentations whenever possible, asking questions of other members, and conducting my own research into customs and etiquette of the time. At first, most of my period appropriate clothes were given to me by a veteran member of the group who also happened to be the woman who brought me in, but it was not long before I started adding to that initial collection. Many of the women in MOCW have dresses made for them at a specific shop in Gettysburg, PA and this is where I went for the same purpose. I was also happy to have my children involved in MOCW events when possible, dressing in clothes appropriate for their age and playing with period correct toys. This elevated my involvement into a full-fledged hobby where I could guarantee enjoyment for both myself and my children.

It seems that some of the members were waiting for me to choose a persona, as I found out later on, but as the saying in MOCW goes, one does not choose a persona; the persona chooses you. After I watched a couple of the women choose personas perfect for them, I began to wonder when I would find one for myself. Though I was not actively looking for a persona, I came across a woman on a Civil War blog whom I had never heard of before, but who had a great deal in common with me. This woman, a writer, journalist, and suffragist, is the persona I have chosen to portray at all MOCW events and because of how much we have in common, I have grown to identify with her quite strongly. The process of taking on a persona is ongoing as one can never really stop learning or researching about the individual one has chosen to portray; thus I am continuing to learn more and use more information from her life in my presentations.

When I took on this persona in 2014, I wanted to do so as an independent member of the organization, which is possible if the persona one chooses is a notable one from the Civil War period. Because she is not as widely known as some other women of the time, the membership committee wanted me to prove that she was important specifically to the Civil War. Although she was a Civil War correspondent in Washington, D.C. at that time, her greatest achievements came many years after the war. Added to this is the lack of information I have about her during her time in Washington, which resulted in the committee not seeing her persona as one that should take one of the few slots for civilian membership in the group. I was devastated by this, particularly before it was properly explained to me, because it felt to me like the same fight women have been fighting for centuries in order to be included on an equal level. However, once I understood that there were a limited number of civilian membership slots, and that those needed to be reserved only for characters who were integral to the war, I felt better about their denial of her importance. In order to compromise with the board and my own principles, I entered into a family membership in the organization with my significant other. In this way, I was both noted as having this persona, such that no one else could claim it, and subsequently added to the short list of women presenters at various MOCW events.

Taking on this persona changed my life in ways I never would have imagined. I have come to realize the impact of this decision as I became more and more invested in the character of the woman I portray. It is not simply that I act like this persona at events; in effect, I have to *become* her. This is no easy task as any of the other members who have personas might say and occasionally involves setting aside my own beliefs and ideas in favor of what would be historically appropriate for my persona. What has happened, then, is more of a melding of my own personality with what I know of hers, creating an identity that comes across to the audience as this woman. It is sometimes difficult to draw the line between my own self and my portrayal of her, partly because of how much we seem to have in common, but also because I attempt to do her justice as I represent her. I suspect that others in this group have a very similar experience.

This is not the only way taking on this persona has changed me personally because my newfound love of this hobby almost caused me to change Ph.D. programs entirely. When I experienced this great rebirth of my love for history, I considered switching to a history program, or a women’s studies program, to further my study of this important woman and help me educate others about her more often. Although this ultimately did not happen, it still presented me with an opportunity to re-evaluate myself and my goals that I might not have engaged in otherwise.

It is very clear that the nature of my involvement in this organization involves a deep interest in its members and its purpose and I acknowledge the inherent bias that came simply from choosing to participate in this organization instead of any others. My position in conducting this research is highly subjective; however, the research I am conducting is also subjective as it comes from the experiences and thoughts of other women in MOCW. Due to the nature of this research, asking questions about “how” the women participate and behave in this organization as well as “why” they do, conducting a case study with some elements of ethnography seems to be the most appropriate method (Yin, 2014). Any researcher interested in an organization like this would have to gain the trust of its members and obtain permission to speak with and observe them over a period of time. I have already accomplished this important task and am therefore in an ideal position to conduct the case study and uncover the details about what it means to be a woman in MOCW. With the specific set of criteria I have for the women I plan to interview, I will be able to find the answer to this question in many different forms. Although I am technically in the target category of women who entered the organization on their own, I cannot participate in the same sense as they can in this research. I will, however, intersperse my own experiences and ideas throughout this document where they appropriately enrich the information I obtain from the participants.

During and after I conduct my research within this organization, I will continue my own participation as a 19th century persona. Although my involvement does not have any administrative requirements, I have taken it upon myself, together with a few other members, to operate a Facebook page for the organization where we post our upcoming events and photos from those events. I am one of two members who regularly take photos of the presentations for inclusion on both the Facebook page and main website. I am included in many of the photos posted on both pages, but I am not identified by name anywhere at this time.

**Assumptions**

Of the assumptions that exist with regard to this research study, the most basic assumption is that I, as the researcher, will be able to maintain a certain level of impartiality and will be able to remove as much of my personal bias as possible. It is also assumed that the women who choose to participate in the interviews will have done so freely and they will provide only truthful answers to all of my questions. I am also assuming that my two colleagues will be able to validate my own observations and that they will do so without any bias on their part. Finally, it is assumed that many members of this organization will want to participate and will provide as much information as they can, to the best of their knowledge.

**Significance**

While there exists much interest in the areas of living history and reenactment (Agnew, 2004; Anderson, 1982; Coles and Armstrong, 2008; Farmer, 2005; Gapps, 2009; Hall, 1994; Handler and Saxton, 1988; Hunt, 2004; Lamb, 2008; Sparrow, 2007; Turner, 1990), the vast majority of this research focuses on the male experience within whichever organization is under study. This could be due to the fact that living historians and reenactors of the 19th century are mostly male and women are not believed to have played an important role during this time period, or it could be that the women who are involved have not been seen as having uniquely different roles from men in their portrayals. In either case, there does not appear to be much literature on organizations that are identical or incredibly similar to MOCW, nor is there much literature surrounding the experience of women in such organizations (Coles and Armstrong, 2008; Gapps, 2009; Hunt, 2004; Magelssen, 2006; Pahl, 1994; Turner, 1990). The present study will fill a seemingly large gap in terms of both the exploration of different types of living history organizations and the women who choose to participate, no matter what the reason.

Individuals interested in living history or reenactment, whether they are those who perform the activities themselves or those who study them, will feel a sense of investment in this research. Historians, future historians, or other students of history, may also be interested in this research not only because it highlights women from the 19th century, but because the organization itself aims to educate the public about important historical events in America. Psychologists and sociologists who are interested in group dynamics and how a group functions as well as a person’s commitment to a group may see this as a starting point for research in the future. Anthropologists or other individuals who study groups and group culture will also find this research valuable because it is exploring a unique type of organization that has not been widely studied before. Similarly, this research will help in the understanding of volunteer organizations in a general sense, how they operate and what dynamics they have, which can be beneficial both to those who study them and to those who run them.

Anyone interested in the study of gender or women’s studies may discover some new information from this research about what prompts women to participate in this type of activity, especially since the organization has been traditionally male. These same individuals will also be intrigued by the women who have chosen personas and have taken on the characteristics of a completely different person. Therefore, this study will provide a number of varying individuals with information they may not have known was missing.

Chapter 2

*“…the reenactor seeks a consciousness of history that passeth all understanding.”* – Hall (1994), p. 11

In a 1982 *American Quarterly* publication, Jay Anderson defined living history as “an attempt by people to simulate life in another time” (p. 291). This article was later published as the introductory chapter in Anderson’s *Living History Reader* which presents a series of essays on living history museums. Anderson’s work, by and large, details the living history movement as a whole and how one might go about becoming involved in what he termed “time travel.” Most authors of living history articles cite Anderson in some way, making him one of the initiators of investigation into the living history movement. Although this work began in the later part of the 20th century, it has continued to interest researchers into the 21st century providing both answers to the questions raised about living history as an activity and questions derived from gaps in those answers. Of the questions that arise from those gaps, the one most pressing for this review is why women are not found as heavily as men in literature and what might be done to change that.

To begin with, however, the ideas of “living history” and “reenactment” must be defined separately in spite of the similarities they share. Following this are discussions of women’s involvement in either hobby and the major issues surrounding living history/reenactment which are nostalgia, identity, authenticity, and learning in living history. Both living history and reenactment are heavily tied to the conceptual frameworks of transformative learning and social identity theory, and these connections will be made salient throughout. Finally, areas for future research will be explored in an effort to continue to support the idea for the present study.

**Living History**

In order to properly engage the living history literature, it is important first to explore the various definitions employed by living history researchers. Handler and Saxton (1988) began with the idea that living history simulates life in a previous time, but refer specifically to the type of “historical simulation” that takes place in museums, reenactments, and through archeological discovery (p. 242). Since they are using Anderson’s 1982 definition, they endeavor to use it only as a guideline for the rest of their research, noting that the practice of living history is fluid and may hold many categories under its broad term. Hunt (2004) utilized a much more specific definition of living history, claiming it to be a presentation of a certain time period by actors who are both portraying individuals of the time and living under the appropriate conditions. Hunt arrived at his conclusions by studying a specific organization in the UK that reenacts the American Civil War. Thus, these are individuals who have chosen a specific historical period to portray to the public and who do so on multiple occasions and in multiple locations throughout the year. Coles and Armstrong (2008) further explain how the term is ambiguous in its applications since it can be solely about the experiences one has while doing living history, in a more specific way, or it can be very broad and general, representing all types of simulations as Handler and Saxton (1988) noted. Further distinction of this term suggests a difference between those who see living history as re-creating a day in the life of someone from another time and those who see it specifically tied to re-enactment, which would more often be in the form of a battle.

Rutherford-Morrison’s (2015) definition presents living history in a more theatrical way with a definition that includes “costumed performance” which typically takes place in an open-air museum setting (p. 77). Magelssen (2006) also refers to the practice of living history in a more dramatic way speaking of first, second, and third-person interpretations that are offered to visitors of certain living history museums. In either the first or third-person instance, the individual is adorned in period-specific costume and either speaks to the public as a specific person or speaks about the time period he/she is representing. Second-person interpretation happens when a visitor to the museum is allowed to temporarily place him or herself in the shoes of someone from the past by trying on articles of clothing or using specific tools. These examples provide visitors to living history museums with an opportunity to experience the past in a very realistic way, much more so than simply reading a plaque or listening to a short film. The fact that these activities are more oriented toward participation rather than passive listening usually means that learning is more likely to take place because the audience members are actively engaged. In fact, Pahl (1994) categorized “living history” into three different types: historical museums, history theater, and history immersion which involves the most participation from the public. Thus, “living history” is a very broad term for a representational type of performance that began in a museum setting and has expanded to become an extremely popular hobby for a large number of people in the U.S., Australia, and Europe (Turner, 1990).

**Reenactment**

Different from the term “living history” is that of “reenactment,” which essentially shares the same definition, but is often seen separately in the literature. Agnew (2004) pointed out the fact that reenacting can be fun, combining both the process of researching one’s character and place in time and the opportunity to pretend to be someone else, playing a part. Reenactment seems to be a broader term in general because it can encompass everything from the living history museum to a Hollywood film to a television program (Agnew, 2007; Cook, 2004). In fact, Lamb’s (2008) article details his involvement with the reenactment of a specific voyage that was ultimately broadcast on several different television channels, bringing the intensity and reality of the event right into the audience’s living room. This may seem to be a far cry from the individuals whose work it is to present history to the public on a daily basis or those who spend their weekends involved in the re-creation of a battle, but reenactment includes all of these varieties.

Although reenacting the American Civil War is one of the more popular time periods for reenactment (Hall, 1994), reenactment of different historical events and times are also common both in the U.S. and abroad (Agnew, 2007; Coles and Armstrong, 2008; Radtchenko, 2006; Rutherford-Morrison, 2015; Sparrow, 2007). This is in large part dependent on the cultural origins of the individuals involved in reenactment, yet it is curious that countries like England (Hunt, 2004) and Russia have an interest in reenacting time periods or specific events of other countries, such as America or France. Reenacting the events of other countries may be a function of the cost for participants as well as their personal interests, but could also be related to the country’s willingness to fund or endorse recreations from its own history (Radtchenko, 2006).

**Women’s Involvement**

Reenactment is generally considered to be a male hobby characteristically dominated by men who are reenacting battles or time periods where most women’s roles were “behind the scenes” (Hall, 1994; Hunt, 2007). This does not negate the fact that reenactment as an activity often involves the entire family because of the desire to show the life of the common person (Anderson, 1982; Hall, 1994). Many female reenactors have the opportunity to demonstrate period-correct crafting and cooking for their audiences; the learning of these trades is not something that these women would have undertaken on their own had it not been for their involvement in a reenactment society (Coles and Armstrong, 2008).

In spite of the fact that men dominate battle reenactments, partly for the sake of historical accuracy, some women have been known to participate in these activities, too. Hunt’s (2004) inquisition into the American Civil War Society (ACWS) based in the United Kingdom found that although most of the women in the group took on “support” roles, seven out of the eight women who participated in his research had an interest in battle reenactment. The women who do participate in the battles are no less dedicated than the men as they will sometimes go to extreme lengths in order to alter their appearance. From walking around with a perpetual squint to binding their breasts in order to appear flat-chested, women believe in presenting as authentic a picture as possible (Agnew, 2004). Although this may seem to be the epitome of dedication to one’s hobby, there are still others whose interest in the activity goes even deeper.

Many people enter this hobby because of a personal connection to the time period they are reenacting. In the case of the Civil War, many men had ancestors who fought in the battles and they feel this is one way to honor the memory of those individuals. One woman who was interviewed by Gapps (2009) emphasized the idea of this heavily; though she assumed the role of her great grandmother, she understood the meaning behind portraying a real person in a reenactment instead of some generic entity. When a reenactor takes on another person’s identity, as one woman specifically mentioned by Lamb did (2008), she must essentially become that person, gradually fusing more and more of her own identity with that of her character.

Some women have no interest in battles or other military endeavors when it comes to reenacting, but prefer living history because it involves direct role-playing as one person portraying another. A specific woman interviewed by Handler and Saxton (1988) indicated that she has to concentrate very hard to maintain her role, which prevents her from really transcending in her experience. In other words, this woman does not have the same kind of authentic or “real” experience as those who really feel that they *are* in another time. There were other women interviewed by Handler and Saxton who were so into the roles they played that they often forgot they were acting at all. This is quite different from the “marginal roles” described by Turner (1990) who found that women typically portrayed followers of the men and were likely involved only because their significant other got them into the hobby (p. 131). Their participation did, however, afford them the opportunity to learn more about the habits of men from a specific time period, in this case the Civil War era, while simultaneously allowing them to enjoy the clothing and practices of times gone by. It is also a benefit for couples or families to engage in this hobby together because the demands of regular reenactments, both in terms of time and money, can place a great deal of stress on any relationship.

This stress can also take on a different form amongst the members of the reenactment group who are aiming for a high level of authenticity and do not believe having women in the ranks is appropriate. Thus women who do want to participate may find that they are met with a degree of resistance from other group members because of their gender. In one instance, a woman filed and won a law suit in order to participate in a reenactment of the Battle of Antietam, but that has not stopped some reenactors from having a certain level of distaste for women participants. Some men find women’s participation in battles to be acceptable, as long as “they do not appear obviously female,” (p. 64) but reenactment groups on the internet have made comments specifically suggesting that women should form their own separate regiments to avoid violations of authenticity. Surprisingly, women who participate in battles are even seen in an unfavorable light by other women reenactors, those who portray the wives of generals or soldiers (Farmer, 2005). This happens in spite of the fact that it is historically known that women did participate in the military during the Civil War especially, but since women are not associated with the stereotypic male qualities of aggression and danger, their presence on the battle field seems to removes the realistic nature of the reenactment (Hunt, 2004).

**Nostalgia**

A major criticism of reenactment/living history in a general sense is that it is simply an exercise in nostalgia (Gapps, 2009) and there is danger in holding onto the past with a belief that it was something other than what it was. Sometimes reenactment is lumped together to include “nostalgia toys” which could be anything from models of a battle to figurines, suggesting that it may be somehow less of an experience than it is (Agnew, 2007). As a motivator, nostalgia may be problematic when living history museums, presenting certain aspects of life according to a particular time in history, have chosen to represent certain elements over others, regardless of the reason. In this case, the exercise in nostalgia gives the audience a perception of life from only one point of view, possibly representing a state agenda or the agenda of the institution presenting the work (Magelssen, 2006). In a more positive sense, however, feelings of nostalgia about the past could inspire an individual to learn more about a particular area and even invoke feelings of sympathy that may not have been present previously (Lamb, 2008).

Sympathizing can be both a positive and a negative addition to a reenactor’s activity because while it adds to the realistic sense of what is occurring, it can also be emotionally draining (Magelssen, 2006) and can result in the individual distancing him/herself from other groups of the same time period (Cook, 2004). The physical pain that reenactors often endure is a symptom of this desire to have a real understanding of what it was like for individuals “back then” and whenever possible, they attempt recreations of old photographs to similarly illustrate how proficient they are in the hobby (Gapps, 2009). Nostalgia alone does not keep this hobby in business, but it can be said that reenactment as an activity may have originated in feelings of nostalgia and that is why it creates such a strong hold on its members (Hall, 1994).  
 For Southern reenactors, nostalgia is a great motivator for their involvement as this hobby gives them the opportunity to pay their respects to their ancestors and express their often inexpressible feelings about the past and the present (Farmer, 2005). Human beings seem to have an inherent need to revisit the past and indeed for veterans of the Civil War themselves, this need was fulfilled through restaging important battles and putting on their gear (Turner, 1990). Perhaps another explanation for the desire to fulfill this need, or at the very least another aspect to it, is the quest for identity, which can be shaped through a greater understanding of the past.

**Identity**

Often shaped through relationships with others, an individual’s identity may go through a number of transformations throughout a person’s life (Kegan, 1994). In particular, gaining a sense of authority over one’s identity is important to one’s sense of self, which is often connected in a detrimental way to the culture and the individuals in one’s environment. The individual needs to secure authority over his/her sense of self, rather than having that self be under the control of the multitude of contexts in which the individual operates (Kegan, 1982). The identification that comes with the advancement of a person’s age is a direct contributor to the commitments that individual will eventually make (Erikson, 1968).

Erikson believed that identity development needed to take place primarily during adolescence, though not exclusively, because this is a time when the individual makes connections between him/herself and elements of society. There are not only positive aspects of identity, but also negative ones as the individual must put together that which has been praised and also shamed or punished into one solid sense of self. To Erikson, identity is just one aspect of a person with an epigenetic nature; that is, it is continually developing over the lifespan. This does not, however, mean that a firm identity need not develop into adulthood, but rather that a person may seek or be presented with opportunities to grow his/her identity throughout his/her life. If an individual has a problem with identity development, he/she may seek an entirely different identity that is deemed more acceptable later on (Evans, 1964).

If a person has come to this point, and is perhaps seeking a sense of meaning or connectedness, that person may find it within an organization, especially if that organization is perceived to be the embodiment of desirable characteristics for that individual. This type of identification is of a social nature and is “similar to identification with a person” (p. 22) where some degree of reciprocity exists allowing for a social element in identification. Identifying with a person, though similar to identifying with a group or organization, typically stems from the desire to take on the traits of the other individual and essentially make a concerted attempt to *be* like that person. Research has indicated that both forms of identification work together, however, as the individual develops (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). These ideas have particular pertinence to the study of living history/reenactment as will be made known in subsequent paragraphs.

Reenactment may be a catalyst for different types of identification, including personal identification, religious, or ethnic identification (Radtchenko, 2006). As a reenactor, an individual essentially becomes a “monument” to the individual and time period he/she is portraying, but even though the person is a monument, he/she is able to travel, to move from location to location, and spread knowledge in a number of areas (Gapps, 2009). It is helpful for living historians to be able to draw parallels between their own lives and the lives of the individuals they are portraying as this will enrich their experience and similarly increase their capacity for transformation as they go about reenacting or portraying this other person (Agnew, 2007). This type of reflection, according to Mezirow (1997), often leads to what amounts to substantial transformation of the individual. When such a transformation occurs, the individual is said to be more in touch with who he/she is; through reenactment/living history, the individual will better understand his/her own identity (Handler and Saxton, 1988).

By portraying someone else, the reenactor actually becomes more of him/herself because he/she is engaging in a hobby that allows him/her to be creative and participate in an activity that has deep meaning for him/her. The clothes and accessories of a reenactor also become an extension of this identity, adding to the reenactor’s authenticity and enriching their overall experience as a reenactor (Turner, 1990). In fact, some men liken the extent to which reenactors obsess over the details of their outfits and accoutrements to the stereotypical way women speak about their clothes and accessories. Further, although reenacting holds the appearance of a stereotypical male hobby, seasoned reenactors and living historians actually know as much about etiquette, tailoring, and food as they do about military endeavors. Reenacting thus seems to add a traditionally feminine element to an otherwise extremely masculine activity (Sparrow, 2007).

Battles and reenactment of war, particularly when it comes to the Civil War, present another opportunity for research on identity between in-groups and outgroups. The lines of division remain between the north and the south thereby separating those reenactors who conform to each side into those groups. It may be easy, then, for individuals in either group to appropriate the stereotypes or prejudices associated with their “opposites.” The social identity that develops as a result is separate, but entirely relevant, to the development of an individual identity (Brown, 2000).

When an individual becomes a member of an organization that is engaged in some type of historical reenactment/living history, the new member must adopt and come to terms with the philosophical beliefs of that organization. When the individual is new to the activity, he/she may have high expectations for the experiences he/she will have, believing they will essentially find themselves through their participation. Because each group has different ideas about what constitutes authenticity, it is important for the members of the group to accept the learning experiences of the new members as they figure out what to do and how to go about doing it. New members, or even veteran members, may seek to explain any mishaps in authenticity for no other reason than to maintain a sense of identity with the group and also create a general feeling of solidarity that the group will thrive on for its existence. There are ways in which members of the same group can be comfortable representing that group publically even if they exhibit different levels of authenticity. By connecting elements of the group’s beliefs about authenticity, the learning curve experienced by the individual joining the group, and the desire to come to some type of compromise between the two, a realistic agreement can exist (Decker, 2010).

Reenactment fits well with Erikson’s (Evans, 1964) and Kegan’s (1982; 1994) ideas about identity development because it presents the individual doing the reenacting with an opportunity for “self-exploration and confirmation.” Though the context of this self-exploration lies within the themes of the Civil War, the issues and ideas brought up by the war itself lay the foundation for this personal transformation. The living historian/reenactor must learn to situate him/herself within this realm and apply the changes caused by the war to their current lives; the individual is also, in turn, looking for a sense of meaning (Turner, 1990). The thinking process of a living historian/reenactor seems to be transformed through this hobby and through that transformation, a new identity surfaces.

**Authenticity**

No discussion of living history/reenactment would be complete without an understanding of the crucial role that authenticity plays in all levels of this activity. Regardless of the time period in question, the reenactor or living historian endeavors to be as authentic in his/her portrayal as possible, growing in his/her understanding of authenticity the longer he/she participates in the hobby. If authenticity means “historically accurate,” (Handler and Saxton, 1988, p. 243) there are a number of levels of authenticity and a certain amount of ambiguity to the term so that it is open to interpretation. Radtchenko (2006), for instance, distinguished between two forms of the word “authentic” where one form refers to a feeling the living historian/reenactor has, as to how “real” his/her experience is, and the other form relates to validity in the construction of the experience itself. Still, this is an area of priority for all living history organizations and one that is not taken lightly by any means.

In some ways, authenticity is ambiguous because historians do not always know everything about a given time period nor can they always reenact an event or occurrence properly (Hunt, 2004). Because of this, it seems living historians/reenactors are perpetually trying to attain the ultimate level of authenticity that is possible for them because only then can they actually re-create the past rather than simply symbolize it (Handler and Saxton, 1988). Most reenactors understand, however, that true authenticity is not possible, though it is certainly worth striving for, and they debate about whether or not being authentic is truly necessary for the work that they are doing (Gapps, 2009). In fact, the very presence of an audience removes a great deal of authenticity since battles or everyday behaviors would rarely, if ever, have been watched by the public (Farmer, 2005).

The classic term for a reenactor who is not very authentic, either because that person has just started out in the hobby or simply does not take authenticity very seriously, is “farb” which stands for “far be it for me to tell them what they are doing wrong” (Agnew, 2004; Farmer, 2005; Gapps, 2009; Hall, 1994; Turner, 1990). This term is most often used by more experienced reenactors to describe those just entering the hobby. “Farbs” are distinguished from hardcore reenactors who painstakingly research their clothing and material down to their buttons and belt buckles (Lamb, 2008) and they would be offended by any comparison between the two. Farmer (2005) compares “hardcore” reenactors to serious weight trainers at the gym and “farbs” to individuals who only visit the gym occasionally. The divide between these two groups may be seen as quite excessive when the more hardcore reenactors refuse to participate in or attend events at which a large population of “farbs” is expected to be in attendance. In fact, the strides made by living historians/reenactors to be as authentic as possible can be qualified as extreme in many instances and even dangerous in others (Agnew, 2004; Gapps, 2009).

The quest for authenticity may have different levels with the most extreme being where the individual actually jeopardizes his/her physical health in order to achieve a certain look or state of being. Many men have starved themselves and been pleased when they acquire a cough as that is most likely what men of the Civil War often had to deal with (Sparrow, 2007). In fact, the more physical pain a person is in the more authentic that individual considers his/her experience since fatigue, being cold, and sleeping outside were all very common aspects of daily past life, especially at times of war (Gapps, 2009; Lamb, 2008). Reenactors may even go so far as to change their speech patterns and poise or posture to reflect research they have done on the period (Hall, 1994). The problem remains, however, that no matter how dedicated or hardcore a reenactor is, he/she is still only representing the past, not showing the past itself, because no historical account is ever completely accurate (Handler and Saxton, 1988).

Another important limitation on authenticity is the reenactor’s/living historian’s own body, which is often too tall, too old, or too plump to portray an individual from another time. This is perhaps the greatest challenge of all because reenactors themselves are technically anachronisms; a realization such as this can be discouraging for those who are striving for the utmost authenticity. This is also a difficult realization for an individual who would like to reenact or portray someone from a different ethnic background or someone with a different skin color. The question then becomes one of ethics and whether or not it is even possible for that reenactment to take place (Gapps, 2009). If an individual is drawn to the reenactment of something that is not easily performable for them, there may be something else underlying that experience that the individual is actually seeking.

For many living historians, the goal of their work is to discover for themselves what it was like “back then,” to have an experience that brings them close to feeling what others might have felt, and effectively change their point of view entirely (Mezirow, 1997). The goal in this sense is for the experience to be authentic, even if the reenactor and his/her accessories are not completely authentic. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know what the subjective experience of another person was like, nor can a reenactor know how the person he/she is portraying actually felt in a given situation, but in spite of these limitations, it is still possible to provide a realistic experience to both the public and the reenactor him/herself (Handler and Saxton, 1988). Not unlike Nohl’s “nondetermining start” (2015), Turner (1990) refers to these realistic experiences as “time warps” (p. 126) while Handler and Saxton (1988) call them “magic moments” (p. 246). Lamb (2008) even mentioned the term “wargasm” (p. 248) as yet another description of what an authentic reenactment experience can feel like from the interpretive point of view of a reenactor. Regardless of what it is called, this level of authenticity is the most sought after for reenactors and living historians.

**Learning through Living History**

There are differing opinions in the field when it comes to whether or not living history can be categorized as an educational experience and if so, to what degree the activity is one based in learning. It cannot be argued that an amount of learning is required for anyone to participate in a reenactment/living history organization because the individual in the activity needs to conduct research about whom that person is going to portray (Coles and Armstrong, 2008). Still, some researchers argue that living history is more about the camaraderie and leisure time than it is about learning (Hunt, 2004).

One of the main ideas behind living history as an activity is that it is a lot easier to learn about history by doing it than by simply reading about it second hand (Hall, 1994; Pahl, 1994). As is true with living history museums, other forms of living history/reenactment provide the opportunity for active participation on both the part of the individual doing the performance and the audience members in attendance (Magelssen, 2006; Pahl, 1994). Participation in living history, no matter who is doing the participating, is a multisensory experience; the sights, sounds, and smells of reenactments provide a uniquely enriching element to the activity and further an individual’s learning (Anderson, 1982; Gapps, 2009; Pahl, 1994; Turner, 1990).

Returning to the question of whether or not one can call living history a learning experience, Hunt (2004) collected data from the members of the ACWS in order to discover what their motivation was for participation. Coming out on top through member surveys was a desire for camaraderie, which ultimately results in a social life as an end product of being involved in a “worthwhile hobby.” Hunt’s argument centers on the importance of leisure in everyday life and how participation in a living history activity can change an individual’s sense of self and fulfillment. While he acknowledges the educational value of participating in living history, he finds it to be secondary to the significant weight held by what he calls “serious leisure.” Furthermore, this leisure activity presents the participants with the means to escape their everyday lives and do so in an environment full of like-minded individuals and camaraderie. While this is important because having such an environment to escape to is positive for all group members, it still downplays the significance of learning in this activity.

Coles and Armstrong (2008) found multiple participants in living history organizations who attested to the amount they had learned through their involvement with the groups. Because they have to engage in research to portray their character, even if that character is an anonymous person, it is difficult to suggest that education is not an integral part of this hobby. A less-researched participant would quickly find him/herself in a minority among fellow hobbyists which would impact the level of camaraderie felt by that individual. While the learning that takes place is mostly related to the specifics of the activity, such as learning a trade or researching appropriate clothing and weapons, the fact that these things are taking place means the individual is ultimately learning about history and doing so even if he/she had minimal interest before. Learning then not only takes place in the individual doing the activity, but also in everyone who is watching the activity take place. As suggested by Pahl (1994), participation in “living” history is ultimately the best way for one to learn about history, making this a high priority in the activity of living history/reenactment.

One might say that participation in a living history/reenactment organization provides its members with a sense of solidarity, a place where their interests, and some cases desires, can be supported in a socially acceptable way (Anderson, 1982; Farmer, 2005; Hunt, 2004; Turner, 1990). Group participation is an important element of life, one that often does not receive the attention it deserves in the literature (Hunt, 2004). Articles about and studies of living history/reenactment organizations have taken place through participant observation and interviews (Coles and Armstrong, 2008; Decker, 2010; Farmer, 2005; Gapps, 2009; Hunt, 2004; Lamb, 2008; Pahl, 1994) however, the groups under scrutiny were typically very large, were generally found in the southern or western United States as well as England and Australia, and did not engage in the same types of presentations as the group identified for the present study. Similarly, there is not the same focus on women in this hobby as there is on men, which suggests that something might be missing from the overall understanding of the interplay between gender, transformative learning, and identity in groups or organizations. The present research will attempt to fill this gap and explore these ideas more fully.

Chapter 3

“*Women generally participate by playing* marginal roles *– camp followers or visitors to their ‘menfolk.’” –* [emphasis added], Turner (1990), p. 131

**Introduction**

In this case study, women participants of the Military Officers of the Civil War (MOCW) were observed and interviewed in an effort to gain an understanding of what their experience is like within this living history organization. The information collected will begin to fill the gap in the literature surrounding living history and reenactment in terms of female representation and may serve as a catalyst for future research on the subject. Following an overview of the research design, the participants will be discussed in detail along with the instruments used, procedure, and finally how the data will be analyzed.

**Research Design**

The aim of this study is to both describe a specific group of individuals, in detail, as they engage in very specific behaviors and to understand what their experience in that group is like. In order to undertake this research properly, I as the researcher needed to spend a great deal of time immersed in this group to not only establish a positive rapport with the group members, but also to better understand the group’s culture and the function of each individual within the group. The description of this group and the understanding of the members’ behavior, as well as the understanding of the group’s culture, would not be complete without interviews of the group’s participants. In other words, the most appropriate research methodology to use in this situation is a combination of case study techniques with elements of ethnography, where the primary means of data collection are observation and interviews (Yin, 2014; Sangasubana, 2009; Wolcott, 1987).

**Subjects**

The individuals of interest in this research are women participants in MOCW who are either active or passive in their roles within the organization, portraying a specific persona that they have chosen or simply portraying the wife of their husband’s chosen general. In some cases, a woman will adopt a generic persona as she either prepares for her role as a notable 19th century individual or simply wishes to give the public a name during conversation. Historically speaking, the main role of the women in MOCW was to act in a less noticeable position, being at minimum a visual representation for audience members to enhance their overall experience. Most of the women who portray the wives of the generals have at least a working knowledge of the period, even if they do not know about their persona specifically.

Although women used to behave in a more silent manner, not participating at presentations except to answer an occasional question from an audience member, there has been a monumental shift in the role of women in this organization over the past two years. Going from little to no participation at events to having their own presentations has resulted in several different categories of women now within the organization, which is what led me to my choice of participants. First, I was interested in obtaining information from women who entered the organization only as a supplement to their husbands’ interest, who may not have otherwise had a great interest in history, but merely chose to participate in order to spend more time with their husbands. On the opposite end of this characteristic are those women who entered into the organization freely, without their husbands or significant others, but rather because they themselves have an intense interest in a 19th century persona that they have chosen to portray. Though few in number, there are also women in the organization who do not have husbands at all, but who have joined out of a deep respect and love of history.

A second general characteristic of participants is whether or not they have chosen a persona to portray at each of the events where MOCW is invited. Many women in the organization have retained their original roles, those being the wives of their husbands’ chosen general, but a number of women have stepped out of those roles and into more independent ones, separate from their husbands. In other instances, women have continued to portray the wife of their husband, but have added contextual information in order to better portray that woman since it is often the case that little information exists about the wives of Civil War generals. Although the women who entered into the organization freely, separate from a spouse or significant other all did so in order to portray whichever persona they had chosen, it seems that the women, who in many cases came into the organization somewhat unwillingly because of their husbands, have found more of a purpose for their membership through their chosen personas. These two broad characteristics, whether a woman came in because of her husband or not, and whether she has a persona that she actively portrays or does not, are the two main sets of criteria that were used in evaluating potential participants.

There are approximately 20 women who are members of MOCW in one way or another, out of a grand total of about 40 members, but it is not my intention to interview and observe all of them. In fact, in a given year, it would be impossible to observe all of the women who are technically in this organization because not all of them attend events with any regularity. Even though all of these women meet some aspect of the criteria categories mentioned earlier, there are very few women who entered the organization without their husbands and who have adopted and regularly portray a persona. Thus, I hoped to obtain information from all members of the small group of women who entered the organization on their own and interview the other group of women until a point of saturation, which is generally thought of as the point at which answers start to repeat themselves, and is agreed upon by researchers as the time at which interviews cease (Baker and Edwards, 2012).

The vast majority of women who participate in this group, well over 90%, are middle-aged between 40 and 60 years old. Four women in the group (including me) are the only female members under the age of 40. Of the four of us, two are regular participants who have personas and portray them in the presentations, one attends in minimal period attire simply as the wife of her husband’s general, and the fourth is a new member who is working on her persona and only had the opportunity to attend two events last year. Although the rest of the women are above the age of 40, the vast majority fall in their 50’s or early 60’s with only one or two women actually in their 40’s. It follows, then, that the general make-up of the group is middle-aged individuals, both male and female, with very few who represent a younger population.

Most of the members of MOCW reside in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, or Maryland with a few exceptions. There are members in Virginia, Florida, and Michigan and we even have a member in Scotland. There are two towns in Pennsylvania that have higher concentrations of members, but other than this, members are generally more spread out, which is the reason why it is difficult for them to attend all of the events every year. As a result, it is a requirement of the full members to attend a minimum of two primary events each year in order to retain their chosen persona and membership in the organization. This does not, however, apply to the women who are under the membership of their husbands, but it does apply to those women who are members of the organization on their own.

As far as hobbies are concerned, this is not one of the more inexpensive ones to undertake for anyone, regardless of that person’s socioeconomic status. The gentlemen can easily spend $1000 on one uniform, but this is usually a one-time expense since that is the only outfit they need for most of the events. Women, on the other hand, need to adhere to more specific dress codes that are context dependent and technically age dependent as well. In this period of American history, women of the middle class had several different types of dresses including day dresses, traveling dresses, tea dresses, and ball gowns. Thus most women in MOCW attempt to have at least one of each type of dress in order to conform to the needs of each type of event they attend throughout the year. Each dress can range from $100 to $400 or $500, depending on type and complexity, which means that at the outset, a woman is spending at least as much or more than her husband or significant other on clothes. For couples who are just entering this hobby, this is a significant expense because there is more to an appropriate outfit than simply having the correct dress or uniform. It is difficult, then, for anyone to enter this hobby who is not at least a middle-class member of society, though it is certainly not impossible. There are always ways to obtain less expensive items, either online or through second-hand shops specifically aimed at this hobby, and there are even some members who make a lot of their own clothes and accessories.

Women in MOCW were asked to participate in this study voluntarily and I did not offer any incentives for them to do so. The voluntary nature of their involvement is something that was repeated to all of the potential participants several times in my explanation of the research, in the informed consent form, and in their participant letter and email. Given that most of the women in the organization know me personally, I did not want them to feel that this relationship obligates them to participate in my research. Instead, I would rather their idea of our relationship be one where they can feel free to ask me questions at any time about their participation before and/or after they chose to get involved. Since I already had a positive rapport with the women in the group and the group as a whole, I expected them to see this as a constructive learning experience for everyone involved.

I introduced the idea of this research at MOCW’s annual meeting in February 2016. At this meeting, I gave my potential participants an overview of the research study and made available all the documentation they might be interested in reviewing before agreeing to become involved. I then let them know that they would receive an email from me with the interview questions attached and that this email would actually go out to all of the women in the group because not all of them attended the meeting (See Appendices A, B, and C). The email thus served two purposes: to refresh the idea of the study in the mind of those women who were present at the February meeting and to recruit additional participants from the population of women who were unable to attend that meeting.

**Instruments**

Although I was the primary instrument making observations through my participation in MOCW, I also asked two other individuals to conduct observations in order to validate my own. The interview questions that were posed to the participants did not come from any pre-existing measure but rather were created specifically for this research (See Appendix C). Most of the follow-up questions were unstructured because they came from the initial responses the women gave me and primarily served to confirm what the participants already said. Additionally, different topics were explored depending on the specific characteristics of each woman and her involvement with the organization as well as what her goals for the organization are and what direction she sees the organization heading.

**Participant Observation.**

One of the most fundamental tools in an ethnographic study is observation, particularly participant observation, because it affords the researcher with the opportunity to gain an understanding of the culture of the group and its behavior from an internal position. It also provides the researcher with the opportunity to examine description against facts to determine if what was said during an interview matches with observed behavior. It is important to acknowledge, however, that there are a number of factors at play in these observational situations including the observer(s), the environment, and those subjects under observation. As the participant observer, I knew that it would be impossible for me to see every behavior, action, and reaction among the women in MOCW at a given event. I also knew that I might have to distance myself from the group as much as reasonably possible since I have pre-existing relationships of varying degrees with many of the members (Becker and Geer, 1957; Sangasubana, 2009; Wolcott, 1997).

My existing membership in MOCW meant that I had no problem observing the interactions of women with other group members at each function I attended. Although there are some women whom I do not know that well, because they live far away and are unable to regularly attend events, I have developed a positive rapport with the women whom I see most often. I have already acknowledged the fact that I have a personal stake in this research (see Limitations, Chapter 1), not only because I am a member of this organization, but also because I am personally attached to the persona I have adopted and regularly portray. This, however, I see as an advantage with the other members of the group because they know how involved and dedicated I am to the education of the public about this period in history. Additionally, it is important to establish a strong relationship with the group under study, creating the conditions necessary for the participants to feel comfortable disclosing information (Doody and Noonan, 2013). Due to the nature of this study, I do not believe that there is a viable way to obtain the necessary information without personally participating in the organization because there would be far too much information missing by only observing the activities from the outside. This is supported by Yin (2014) who emphasizes the nature of participant observation as a way for the researcher to take on different roles within an organization or setting, especially when studying a particular culture.

I knew that this would present a problem with reactivity, meaning that my presence in the group as a researcher instead of just a member may have caused the other group members to act differently (Sangasubana, 2009). As will be mentioned in the next section, this was also a potential issue in terms of having other observers aside from myself and the knowledge that the participants were constantly being watched at events where they are not used to such scrutiny. On the other hand, these women are used to being in public settings and may be immune to the watchful eye of public observers, not to mention the fact that they are used to my presence among them. By remaining as unobtrusive as possible, I meant to lessen the effect reactivity had on this research (Sangasubana, 2009).

**Memo-Writing.**

In both case study research and ethnography, it is important to record information on a regular basis in a manner that makes data analysis more efficient. In this study, this took on the form of memo-writing, which is a more systematic way of taking notes where each memo will be dated and organized by location. This added another level of description to the existing participant observations and interviews as well as contributing to the overall analysis of the data. Finally, these memos served as an aid in the identification of the themes of this study and helped to provide a frame of reference for their organization (Saldaña, 2013; Sangasubana, 2009; Singh, 2015; Yin, 2014).

Because most of my time spent with this organization requires me to adhere to period appropriate procedure, most of my notes or memos were written in pencil on paper that is as close to being period correct as possible. Memos taken out of the public eye, either in period clothes or 21st century clothes, had more leniencies in terms of the physical materials I used. Though these memos did not always contain the same sensitive information as the interview responses, they were nevertheless kept in the same secure location as the rest of the data gathered throughout this research process. Writing memos throughout the data analysis process also helped with understanding the evolution of the research and how I processed and made sense of the data (Saldaña, 2013).

**Outside Observers.**

In order to help with the reliability and validity of my own observations, which were clearly and unavoidably biased and subject to incredulity, I had two other individuals who are not members of MOCW conduct observations simultaneous to my own (Patton, 1999). In general, direct observation of a setting is subject to a number of reliability issues, making the case for having multiple observers a strong option to protect against this problem (Tellis, 1997). Having the perspectives of two different individuals, aside from myself, was invaluable when looking at the behavior of women in this group because it would be difficult for my observations, on their own, to cover everything that was happening (Sangasubana, 2009). By adding other observers, I lessened the amount of time needed to conduct these observations (Hickson III, 1974). In terms of reactivity, the most obvious case where this may have been a problem was not when the group was making presentations to the public but rather when they were socializing after the conclusion of an event. Not knowing either of these two observers had the potential to cause the women to have different conversations than normal or even behave in different ways very subtly. While it was not terribly difficult for me to be unobtrusive in my involvement with the group, this was not necessarily the case with these two observers, especially because I introduced them to a lot of the women with whom they were interacting. At least half of their observations were conducted from the vantage point of the public, sitting in audiences and watching presentations or simply walking around between areas where the group was set up. Once they were introduced as my colleagues, those women who had already participated in the study, or were planning to, seemed to be very open to speaking with them and answering any questions they may have had.

The two individuals who have agreed to assist with this research are both students in the Ph.D. program at Marywood University and I have experienced their company in more than one course during the time I have been in the program. The first observer I asked for assistance is a woman in my cohort who is also in the dissertation phase of the program. I have known her since 2012 when we both began studying for this Ph.D. and though she has been aware of my participation in this living history organization, she had never been to an event nor had she seen me in period clothing. After deliberating about having only female observers, myself and observer one, I decided to seek an additional observer who would be male and would naturally offer a very different perspective. My second observer was in his second year of the Ph.D. program at the time I asked him and I have known him since the fall of 2014 when we had a statistics course together. Although this observer has seen pictures from different events, he, too, had not actually attended any of those events nor had he spent any amount of time with any of the members. Thus, both observers went into this research as relatively impartial bystanders who knew very little about the group in general. Additionally, both observers were offered monetary compensation or reimbursement for their travel expenses since the majority of events are not located within a short driving distance from their homes.

Before beginning their observations, I gave both observers a list of the events I planned to conduct observations at in order for them to plan ahead and decide what they could attend. Since I did not meet with them in person prior to the first event where they were assisting with observations, I sent them an email with some detail about how the event would proceed and what they might want to look for. I did not, however, want to provide them with too much information as I wanted their initial reactions to be as real and unbiased as possible. The information they received essentially informed them of how each event would proceed, the type of setting it would take place in, and other very general information about the group members. Each observer was asked to take notes and pay particular attention to three broad categories of interactions: how the women interacted with the public, the men in the organization, and one another while wearing period clothes; how the women behaved while conducting a presentation; and how the women interacted and behaved when not wearing period clothing, if applicable. They did not receive extensive instructions beyond telling them to write down what they saw and the exact locations in which they might want to focus their attention. The observers were free to speak with members of MOCW when necessary and clarify any of the observations they were making. Following their observations at each event, both observers returned their notes to me for analysis.

**Interviews.**

Since interviews are one of the major categories of data collection in an ethnographic study (Sangasubana, 2009; Wolcott, 1997) as well as in case study research (Yin, 2014), this was another major tool that I used to gain information from my participants. Because the women in this group are so spread out geographically, it was not possible to conduct interviews at all of their homes. Instead, I interviewed two of them over the phone and two of them at an event while the rest were either interviewed in the own homes, my home, or a neutral location. The reason why this research was initiated electronically is because not all of the women attend all of the events throughout the season and I knew some of them would only be present at specific times. This not only gave me access to a broader audience, but given that many of the women work full-time, it allowed them the freedom to complete the questions when they could without the pressure of a specific deadline. Several of them wrote lengthy responses to the initial questions, providing me with a great deal of rich data and important starting points for our follow-up interviews. All of the women who were interviewed further, regardless of the format, consented freely and we worked together to find the most appropriate time and method for those interviews.

Although I did not provide the participants with an initial deadline for them to complete their responses, I did send out one reminder email in July (see Appendix D) and I spoke with one participant directly because I wanted to ensure that she had received the first communication after I realized she had been left out of the initial email list. I did not solicit any of the women directly for their responses short of asking whether or not they received my email and I did not pressure any of the women to respond. Many of the women in the group asked me questions about my study and wondered whether or not they should participate and I addressed those questions as they arose. I conducted several informal interviews or small group discussions with the women who had either already participated in the study or who stated they had read and understood the informed consent form in the initial email. The interviews I conducted mainly served as a means for them to elaborate on what they had already said as well as my checking in to make sure I was correct in my understanding of what they had said. Out of the eleven total participants, nine were interviewed beyond their intial responses and of those nine, seven were recorded and transcribed by me. I also took notes during each interview, no matter the format, so that I could compare what they had said with what had been recorded or in the case of those that were not recorded, this served as the basis for the summaries I wrote of each interview. The women whose interviews were recorded were all asked whether or not they consented to that method and those who were not recorded were sent summaries of the interview so that they could confirm that I represented our discussion accurately (Yin, 2014).

**Document/Website Analysis**

Although there are minimal documents associated with MOCW, I needed to analyze them to see if they held any relevance to the present research. These documents included the rules of the organization and the membership application, both of which are available on the organization’s website. MOCW also has a Facebook page, which I am partially in charge of, that links to the website and holds most of the pictures from the events attended by the organization. The website contains photos and pages for each individual male member, some women, and information about the group’s schedule. There are also pages detailing the origination of the group, a recruiting page with information for potential applicants, and a speaker’s bureau listing all of the members who are willing to make individual presentations separate from the group. I was not presented with any other documents from the organization nor did I need to look at anything aside from those documents mentioned on the website, but these were invaluable to me as I went about analyzing the data (Yin, 2014).

**Procedure**

Before taking any other steps, I made the board members of MOCW aware of the idea of this study in October 2015 to get a feel for their willingness to allow me access to the group. In a brief email to these men, I described what I was planning to do and offered to answer any questions they might have before I proceeded with my proposal. Obtaining this unofficial, preliminary approval was necessary before advancing any further in this research because it was entirely within their rights to deny me access to the group as a researcher (Sangasubana, 2009). Once the proposal was completed, I sent the chairman an electronic copy of that document along with a copy of the letter he would need to sign in order for me to proceed with the research. I made arrangements to present the idea of this research at the group’s annual meeting in February 2016 where I obtained the signature of the chairman on the support letter in order to comply with the requirements of Marywood University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). It is important to note that both in my discussions with the board members and subsequent ones with the women and other members, the voluntary nature of this research was stressed heavily so that everyone understood that there was no obligation to participate simply because they know me.

The annual meeting held every February was the most opportune moment to initiate this research because it is the only time each year when the majority of members, both men and women, are in one location. This event has been held in Gettysburg for each of the years I have been a member of the organization and while it has taken place at an area hotel in the past, in February 2016 it was held in a restaurant. In the past, men and women would have lunch separately so that those who were attending the membership meeting, generally the men, could transition seamlessly from lunch to the meeting without leaving the room. The women ate together separately and might discuss a few things after eating, but would break out sooner than the men. However, due to the change in location, all of the men and women ate together and when it came time for the meeting, the women simply exited the building to engage in other activities while the men proceeded. This actually made my presentation easier because I was able to speak to the entire group at one time and field questions from both the men and the women present. Additionally, this meant that nearly everyone was aware of my study and that would decrease the number of times I had to repeat the details over the course of the next few months.

I was fortunate enough to have an existing rapport with a majority of the group members who are regulars at each year’s events, which meant that I did not need to obtain access to the group through a third party as some researchers do. I did, however, need to be clear about my dual role as both participant and researcher in the organization for that year, which meant that I might have to distance myself slightly from the group at times in an effort to reduce my own biases (Sangasubana, 2009). As I mentioned before, throughout my presentation to the group I made it known repeatedly that their participation would be completely voluntary and would in no way have an effect on their relationship with me or the organization as a whole. My goal for this initial meeting was to have at least some of the women declare their intent to participate in the study but more importantly, I was there to answer any questions they might have in person. Although a number of questions were asked of me during the presentation, mostly by the gentlemen in the group, I did not receive too many questions from the women after I had finished.

Following the conclusion of that weekend, I sought approval from the IRB with all of the necessary documentation. Approval was granted on April 4th, 2016 and I sent out the initial email on April 5th, 2016 (see Appendix A) detailing the study and inviting those women who were not present at the meeting to participate. Included in this email was a PDF version of the stamped informed consent form that was approved by the IRB and the interview questions in a Word document. Because I had submitted a waiver of documentation of informed consent, I was not required to collect hard, signed copies of the consent form from each of the participants so long as it was included in the initial email they received. The women were free to download the Word document and fill in their answers on their own, sending them back to me when completed.

As the responses came in, they were printed and labeled as Participants 1 through 11 and I indicated the date and the number of pages that each response contained. While reading through the responses, and later going over the interview transcripts, I generated preliminary themes since it is important to conduct data analysis all throughout the data collection process so that those themes that are discovered can be revised and revisited multiple times (Sangasubana, 2009). I made the determination to begin interviewing the participants who answered my questions early in the research process, though some of these women were not interviewed further until later in the summer. This was at least partially due to convenience as I conducted the first face-to-face interviews with those women who were geographically closest to me or whom I knew would be present at the first few events I was attending. In addition to speaking one-on-one with these women, as I mentioned before I also conducted a few more informal interviews on site at the events when I felt it opportune to ask them their thoughts on the presentations of the day or why they had decided to come. No matter which event I attended, I carried with me either a number of sheets of period appropriate paper or a period appropriate notebook and pencil with which I recorded my observations and any answers to questions I received from these women.

Participant observation began in April and continued until August when the organization presented at an historic village in southwestern Pennsylvania. Some details about the events at which participant observation took place are as follows:

* The April event took place at a park in southeastern Pennsylvania where a large reenactment recurs every year. MOCW set up several tents for the men and women in the group to meet and greet the public, giving at least some impression that they were interacting with individuals from another time period. The group stayed at this event on Saturday and Sunday from 9 am until 5 pm, conducting presentations by both the men and women separately on each day. This event took place entirely outside, but one member offered to cook dinner for the group on Saturday night using the campfire. This meant that members were able to socialize more informally after the event had officially concluded.
* At the beginning of May, MOCW enjoyed its spring gathering event which takes place in Gettysburg and is the most casual event of the year. Members had lunch together at the same restaurant where the February meeting took place. This year was somewhat different than past years in that following lunch, the men conducted a presentation for the public outside the restaurant. After this presentation, the group headed to the battlefield to continue socializing with one another and to talk to the tourists who happened to be there. Everyone spent the majority of the day in period attire, though some members changed to 21st century clothing for dinner, which was “on our own” instead of with the group. This year, this event was a fairly even combination of indoor and outdoor time with the highlight of the day being the time spent on the battlefield interacting with the public.
* In June, MOCW participated in an event held at an historic house in southeastern Pennsylvania where a number of other reenactors and living historians were present. This outdoor event took place over the course of a weekend and is relatively new for our group. Both days, MOCW made presentations for the attending public and the organization used the porch of the house as a “home base.” When not presenting, MOCW members were free to roam about the property as they pleased, in period attire, speaking to the public and other reenactors. What was different this year was that one of the members set up a tent fly for the women to sit under behind the house; what this meant was that someone needed to be present at that area at all times in order to monitor the equipment and artifacts under it. Thus, the group had two places in which they could gather, those being the porch of the house and this tent fly in the yard.
* The July event is one of the biggest of the year since it corresponds with the anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg. MOCW has participated every year, but while the members do not actively participate in the reenactment of the battle, they do make a number of presentations to the public. In years past, the group was based at an area hotel, setting up a small camp outside. This year, however, the group was located in downtown Gettysburg on two separate lots and this was where all of the presentations took place. Many individual members did presentations on their own or with one other person, but the major presentation took place on Saturday evening and included all of the men who were in attendance. Aside from the February event, this was the most well attended event of the year since it is in conjunction with the reenactment of the Battle of Gettysburg. The majority of our time in Gettysburg this past year was spent outdoors so that is where socialization among group members primarily took place. There were no organized meals for the entire group to dine together, but many members chose to eat together at various times over the weekend.
* Though not originally on the schedule of events for the group, I chose to conduct more observations at a town anniversary celebration in northeastern Pennsylvania where the group rode a train to the center of this town in order to conduct a presentation. This event took place late in August and had very few members in attendance. The majority of the day was spent outdoors which was problematic for many of the members due to the extreme heat. This was also an issue in terms of the audience as they had a difficult time observing the presentation from an unshaded location. The majority of the socialization that took place for this event happened on the trip to the presentation spot and then after the event was over where a dinner had been organized at a local restaurant in part to honor the birthday of one of the members.
* The final event that I chose to conduct observations at was at an historic village in southwestern Pennsylvania. This is a reconstructed 17th century town where most buildings contain an individual who teaches the public about a trade or craft such as weaving or pottery making. MOCW made presentations on both Saturday and Sunday; however, these presentations were only made by the men. The women found that more informal conversation with visitors to the village was more productive than trying to organize an official presentation. Most of the members who attended this event stayed at the same hotel and were able to socialize there, but a number of other members stayed on site at the village and worked together to cook over the open fire each morning. On Saturday evening, a member volunteered to cook dinner for everyone and it was greatly enjoyed by everyone who attended.

In order to enhance the validity and reliability of my observations, I had hoped that the outside observers would be able to attend most of the events I attended or that at least one of them would be present at each location. This was not the case, however, due to their schedules and other obligations, but I was pleased to have both of them attend the major event in July and have each of them attend two more events separately in August. Having their observations gave me some advantage in my attempts to remove bias and helped with creating a broader picture of the group as a whole (Yin, 2014). The presence of the outside observers was made known well in advance and I did not have any objections to their presence at any of the events.

Though Sangasubana (2009) recommends writing down observations as soon as possible, this was not always possible for me due to the nature of the events and exactly what I was doing at them. Thus, I would write some notes down if I could during or immediately after an event was over, but then I would reflect on those notes at a later time in my memos. Both of the outside observers provided their notes for me promptly following each observation and I kept all of these documents on a secure computer while I was reviewing them. I repeatedly reflected on my memos and observations throughout the course of the data collection period, which helped me to see the themes emerging from the interview responses and also helped me bring attention to certain issues experienced by the group. I also took some time to reflect on what the other observers had noticed and compare that to what I was getting from the participants. This became more and more interesting as the conclusions of each did not necessarily match one another, which led to important discrepancies that will be discussed in later chapters.

While my formal participant observation concluded at the last event in August, I did not officially cease the collection of data until mid-September. Once this happened, I began the data analysis process of coding all of the responses, interview transcripts, and interview summaries for important and recurring themes and ideas. More than once, I sent participants copies of what I had written about them to ensure that I was representing them accurately and that I had not inadvertently inserted my own opinion or viewpoints onto theirs (Sangasubana, 2009). Throughout the whole process, I made considerable effort to maintain as much confidentiality as possible knowing that no matter what I did, some identifiable information about each participant would inevitably come through. None of the raw information was ever shared with anyone and I remained the only person who could link each participant to their participant number and the responses they provided. When I did speak with my committee chair or a committee member about the information, I did not use any names or other identifiable information about the participants and tried to speak as generally as possible. I wrote chapters 4 and 5 from October 2016 until January 2017 and expect to defend at the end of March 2017. Some of the members have asked to read all or portions of the completed document which will be made publically available once it has been finalized.

**Data Analysis**

The nature of this research is such that I needed to have the data in front of me before I could begin organizing it and coding for themes. Sangasubana (2009) refers to this process as being inductive rather than deductive since the researcher starts with the specifics of the information collected before moving on to more general ideas. Saldaña (2013) confirms this idea stating that a more “data-driven” approach to coding is as justifiable as predetermining coding procedures. Since I already had a personal stake in this research and have inherent bias, it was important for me to conduct the data analysis in this way because it would minimize the impact my personal ideas had on the information I gathered. Therefore, though I had some minor expectations about what I would find, I did not have any major preconceived ideas about the responses I received, nor about the observations I or my other observers made.

Because the primary goal of this study was to gain an understanding of what it is like to be a woman participant in MOCW, I was looking for a lot of descriptive words and phrases in the responses I received. I followed the initial coding process outlined by Saldaña (2013) where many words and phrases were first identified and subsequently grouped together under different titles. The number of groupings grew over time and ultimately became the themes I will present in chapter 4. After the major themes were identified, I went back to look for any sub-themes and initially generated a few; however, following further review, I realized that what I once thought were sub-themes actually had considerable support, enough to make them into themes, and I revised my conclusions. Because there was considerable information to sift through, it was important for me to take notes on each participant and write down exactly where their support of each theme could be found in their responses. Even though all of the women are part of the same group, the differences in how they entered, their level of knowledge, and their level of participation required me to look at the data from several different angles in order to come up with a complete picture of who these women are.

After I wrote the descriptions of each participant (see Appendix F), I sent each description to the woman it was about and asked for any changes she wished to see or confirmation that it was accurate. These descriptions were the partial basis for the answers to my research questions, though the final product is a much more detailed and rich description of all of their stories woven together. Quotes are used where appropriate and help to relay a number of important points that were made by these women. Though I had originally intended to weave my own opinions throughout chapter 4, the data was rich enough in and of itself that it did not generally warrant any further addition from me. I did, however, make comments where necessary and appropriate to corroborate ideas or comments made by some of the women or to explain something that would only be known to individuals in this hobby. Although the generalizability of the data may be limited, this adds to the existing body of qualitative literature on living historians and reenactors. Similarly, it strengthens the large quantity of feminist literature as a new perspective on women’s identity development and feelings about participating with a traditionally male-dominated group.

Chapter 4

“*It feels like we’re actresses without a script.*” – Participant 6

Conducting a case study offers an opportunity to grow in understanding complex individual, group, and organizational events or phenomena while asking “how” or “why” questions in order to carefully analyze decisions that were made and the results that came of them (Yin, 2014). In addition to looking at the organization as a whole, important subgroups must also be a large focus of the research, particularly in terms of the level of their commitment to the organization. The way group members interact with one another, how they are managed in the organization, and how their identities are formed in the organization can be assessed through observation and it is particularly important to look at those individuals who are new to the group (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). The major question asked here is how do these factors affect the individual’s identity in and around the context of the organization?

Both English and Peters (2012) and Nohl (2015) conducted interviews in order to gain the richest, most informative data they could; using open-ended questions is consistent with feminist interviewing techniques (English and Peters, 2012) and allows the participant the freedom to tell his/her own story in a biographical, though not necessarily factual, way (Nohl, 2015). In order to get at the heart of social identity and transformative learning, the present research followed the protocol set forth by the aforementioned researchers, looking at how the women in MOCW have changed and what they have learned through their involvement. In March 2016, I sent out an email to all of the women in MOCW detailing my research and including several attachments; these additional documents were the informed consent form approved by Marywood University’s IRB and a Word document with the initial interview questions I was interested in. Nine of the eleven participants were interviewed beyond their initial responses, in an open-ended style, to allow them to elaborate on their experiences within the organization and the changes they themselves have felt. All of their responses, both in their initial returned emails and in their interviews, were coded for themes and pieced together to answer the central question and sub-questions set forth in chapter 1. What follows is this analysis, the answers to those questions, and how it all relates to the ideas of social identity and transformative learning in addition to important background information that will allow the reader to better understand the context of the women in this group.

**A Detailed Description of “The Split”**

Although I was not a member of the organization when the schism in the group occurred, I very quickly heard about it when I first became a participant. Additionally, almost every one of the eleven participants mentioned it in some way even if they were not present for the event themselves. Most of the detail I have about this occurrence came from one woman who was participating in the organization almost since its inception and who lived through the split as it was occurring. There were a number of other women who arrived either prior to the split or immediately afterwards who also offered some explanation and detail; thus, this description is a combination of all of this information.

The organization began with a handful of men in 2002 who participated in only a few formal events throughout the year, but, as I learned, did a number of informal events during the nicer weather where the members would travel to Gettysburg for the day, have lunch, and spend time on Little Round Top speaking with the public. In the early days of the organization, the main topic of discussion during the group’s signature program was the various battles fought during the Civil War and how each general acted and reacted during them. According to the woman who gave me the most detail about the split, the men were very dedicated to authenticity and remaining in their 19th-century personas to the point where they would do so even when the public was not around. The group also did not socialize a great deal outside of these events that they attended, nor did they consider the women to be anything more than “eye candy” (this exact phrase was quoted by more than one of my participants). At this time, the women did not have personas, were seated separately from the men, but they did not remain in a state of period correctness unless the public was around. In their time together, they would talk about their modern lives and families, though they were wearing period attire and demonstrating period activities such as quilting, nor was it even a question as to whether women should be more active in the organization.

In 2009, there was an explosion in membership according to one participant that precipitated the changes that would come in the next few years. While the origin of the organization focused on battles and discussion of “tactics, troop placement, equipment, etc.” (Participant 10), many of the men who joined after the organization’s inception wanted to focus more on the men themselves and their relationships, thoughts, personal lives, motives, and other details beyond the war. It is also true that some men believed in speaking about both of these areas in order to make their education of the public more comprehensive. Some members, however, disagreed with the direction the organization was heading by not focusing solely on the battles and there was also an increase in socialization at this time that these same individuals were not comfortable with. Most of these men had been reenactors prior to their membership in the group which is where their interest in promoting education about the battles came from. This is also where their stress on authenticity was born, which they felt should stretch beyond the presentations and into all of the time they spent in uniform. These individuals had less and less tolerance for those who did not agree with them nor did they seem to have a respect for those differences.

MOCW has a number of events throughout the year in which it participates and only a handful of those are exclusive in terms of which generals may attend. This is due to the fact that it is factually known that only certain people were at certain locations at these times and therefore it would not make sense to have others who were not there. Aside from this, any event that is on the organization’s calendar is open to all, but this side group of dissenters wanted to be exclusionary and began recruiting select individuals to support their cause. Instead of approaching the group in a respectful manner to indicate that they would be branching off to form their own organization, they “blindsided” the president of the organization in the evening at an event in August 2012. Although most members were aware of the differing feelings of these individuals, no one expected this split to occur when it did. Participant 10 said there was “such a sense of betrayal” and “it was akin to an ugly divorce that has left many scars.” This is evident by the fact that it is still mentioned today, still thought about, and even members who were not present during that time know what is meant by “the split” or the “schism in the group.”

Although the participation of women was not the only issue that caused the split, I understand from several of my participants that the new group that splintered off does not allow the participation of women in any form. All of the women who did not want to split off from MOCW, had to sell their clothes and relinquish the hobby as that is what their husbands wanted. The differences in opinion certainly made it difficult for these individuals to remain in the organization, but according to one of my participants, she believes the other reason for the split was simply personality and some members not liking others or wanting to be around them. Similarly, those who split off did not believe women should do anything more in the organization other than act as escorts or accessories to the generals, nor did they see a place necessarily for civilian personas such as President Lincoln’s personal secretary. Each of the women who described the split noted that the organization has been better since it happened, has grown even more, and has become stronger in spite of the hurt and anger that it caused.

**Participant Information**

While greater detail about each of the individual participants is included in the appendix, the following is some general information to better understand these women’s backgrounds. Of the eleven women who participated, one is an honorary member, but also under a family membership, one is a probationary member, eight are under a family membership, and one is an individual member. Also in terms of the women who participated, six are or have been teachers at one point in their lives, four are retired, and three are portraying personas that have something to do with either their current profession or what they studied in college. Nine of the eleven women who participated entered the organization through their husbands while two entered freely on their own. These women vary in age from their 40’s to their late 60’s, though there is not a lot of variance in terms of how long they have been involved in the organization, with the average being about 3 years. Most of them joined around or after the split with only one being around prior to that major change in the organization.

**Clothing Analysis**

Included in Table 2, which can be found in Appendix G, is a comparison of clothing for men and women who want to be a part of the organization and dress appropriately. This information was taken from one website, Blockade Runner, because it offers clothing for both men and women. This is not to say that the individuals in MOCW purchase any items from this seller, but is rather meant to give at least some idea to the reader about how much it costs each person to be properly outfitted. The ranges provided depend either on size or type of material and are only an estimation of what one person might spend. In fact, based on my personal purchases and knowledge, I believe these are rather low estimates, especially for the women’s clothing, as I can attest to spending over $500 on a ball gown alone. Not every individual in the group will have these exact items and in many cases, they have a lot more items than what is listed in the table. What Table 2 does represent, though, is a rough minimum of what a man and a woman would need to participate in more than one type of event as a man may wear his uniform all the time, no matter what event he attends; however a woman will need to have a different type of dress depending on whether the group is presenting outside, having dinner, or going to a ball. Information to create this table was taken exclusively from one website where both men’s and women’s clothing is offered (Blockade Runner, 2014).

**A Typical Event**

Events basically fall into two categories: those during which a presentation is made by the group at some point and those that are more social in nature where presentations are not made. Though each event varies tremendously in a number of ways, those that take place over a weekend and involve the group giving a presentation have a number of similarities. Group members who arrive from out of town will typically get to the event location on Friday evening and will often gather in small groups for dinner. If there is set-up involved, i.e. tents/canvas, those group members who are responsible for doing that will arrive even earlier. Saturday morning will often see group members gathering for breakfast at different locations, depending on whether or not the hotel includes that meal with the accommodations. Presentations are normally scheduled for late morning or early afternoon; thus group members can arrive at the presentation site in the earlier part of the morning to help set up or prepare anything that needs to be prepared. This time is also spent socializing, shopping, or running other errands that need to be completed prior to the presentation. Sometimes, the women conduct a presentation before the men conduct theirs while other times the women’s presentation follows the men’s presentation. Still other times, the women do not present at all formally, but rather interact with the public on a more informal basis.

It is expected that any time the group has set up tents, there will be members there for the majority of the day to interact with potential audience members and also monitor the equipment to make sure it is not stolen. Generally, though, the group’s members are not tied to the area for any specific length of time aside from the scheduled presentation time. If the women are not presenting, they also do not have to be present at the site, but many of them will make an effort to watch the men’s presentation, especially if the audience is small. In the case of few audience members, the women will often pose questions in order to keep the presentation moving. Lunch is typically acquired on one’s own at the individual’s expense and may be taken at any point around when the presentation is scheduled. Members will often have lunch together in small groups or at the very least, with his/her spouse.

After the presentation is over, members have more free time to interact with the public and one another until the park/location closes or until dinner. Very often, a dinner is organized for all members in attendance at a local restaurant, which is scheduled well in advance and requires members to firmly indicate whether or not they will be in attendance. If no formal dinner is scheduled, members may again choose to eat in small groups or they may decide to eat on their own apart from the other individuals in the group. Depending on the nature of the event, Sunday morning may either follow a similar pattern or, if no presentations are scheduled, this would be a time where group members pack up and get ready to return to their respective destinations. Depending once again on the hotel, some members may choose to have breakfast with others on Sunday morning at the hotel or at another location before heading out. The expenses incurred during each event are the sole responsibility of the member(s) in attendance. Table 2 outlines a rough estimation of what it costs for a couple to attend an event, though there is great variance in the type of hotel, the season of the event, distance traveled, type of car used for travel, and where and how much members eat for each meal. In order to make these estimations, I considered the least expensive and most expensive events the group attends each year.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Estimated Cost Per Event** |  |
| **Hotel Accommodations** | **$79-$140 per night** |
| **Food** | **$150 - $200** |
| **Gas** | **$30 - $80** |
| **Total** | **$338 - $560** |

Table 1: Estimated Cost Per Event

Taking these estimations into account, I am able to roughly calculate what it costs each member to be a part of this organization every year. An individual membership is $40 annually and a family membership is $50 each year; members are required to attend at least two events per year, which would make their annual cost of membership at least $716 to $1160. If the individual wanted to attend more events, perhaps four, that would bring the cost up to between $1392 and $2280. Since the vast majority of women in the organization are under a family membership with their spouses, they are able to share this cost together. The few women who are individual members of the organization, two of whom were participants in this study, must incur the cost of membership on their own. If a woman decided she needed a new outfit, which tends to happen fairly frequently, this would add another $200 -$300 onto the total for that year, bringing it to between $1592 and $2580. As will be shown later in this chapter, cost can be a huge factor for anyone who wants to get into this hobby and may also become a barrier to regular participation. Turning now to the women themselves, we will start to get a better idea of what it is like being a member of this organization.

**Central Question**

At the outset of this research, I asked the following question: “What do women gain from their participation in the Military Officers of the Civil War, a living history organization?” Part of the answers to this question came in the responses from the second half of question one on the initial survey I sent to the women which stated “…and why do you continue to participate in this organization?” The responses vary, naturally, but do not always correspond to whether the woman joined the organization with her husband or came in alone. While Participants 9, 10, and 11 stated that their continued involvement in the organization has to do with their husband’s, there were some slight differences in how they described this. Participant 9 became involved because of her husband and only continues because he continues. Participant 10 emphasized the partnership between herself and her husband and how she believes it is important for her to support him in this hobby and for him to see her at events with him. Similarly, Participant 11 stated that she participates because her husband “loves it so much,” but added that it has “increased [their] socialization,” which is akin to the responses of Participants 3 and 7 who focused on the camaraderie. Participant 3 mentioned meeting good people and making new friends while Participant 7 stated that she continues because of “the kindness and support shown by all.” Participant 3 also made it a point to emphasize the women’s group, though small, as being a reason why she continues her participation. Participant 5 appreciates the opportunity to be “part of the group” and Participant 1 mentioned camaraderie as well and the “common commitment” shared by members of the organization to “teaching through living history.” Participant 1 also enjoys meeting with members of the public and though it may not be directly related to her continued participation in the organization, Participant 2 mentioned that her involvement has “at times require[d] physical labor” and she will “definitely continue” her participation.

Participant 8 stated in a general way that her involvement with the organization has been very rewarding and one of the main reasons why her participation has declined in recent years is due to health issues she has experienced, not necessarily the group itself. Participant 6 has “enjoyed the weekend events and the people” and used the word “enjoy” two other times in discussing her experience with the organization. Participant 6, along with Participants 1, 2, and 5, also mentioned learning or education in some capacity as the reason for her continued participation in the organization. She said she is “learning more with every event” and “it has been a positive decision” in her life. Participant 1 said it is an “ongoing teaching AND learning experience [emphasis hers]” and she appreciates that one can “never be done learning” through both her own research and by listening to the stories of other members. Participant 2 stated that her experience has been educational in addition to being “fun” and “challenging,” and Participant 5 said “the desire to educate oneself” is very important to her, along with a “commitment to historical accuracy.” Similarly, Participant 5 hopes that through her efforts in the organization, she will “inspire the general public” to “love and respect” history. Finally, Participant 4 stated that her involvement with the organization has contributed to her “intellectual and emotional growth,” and that her persona and the group have become “so much part of [her] existence” that she “couldn’t imagine life without them.” To a different extent, Participant 5 hopes to “continue to grow as a reenactor and public speaker” through her involvement.

The details presented above came solely from the initial point of contact made by each of the participants in their answers to my emailed questions; however for many of them, what they gain from their participation goes deeper as was revealed in the follow-up interviews I conducted with them. Both Participant 2 and Participant 7 mentioned the audience as a great part of where they find value and enjoyment in their involvement with the group. For Participant 2, she loves to see the eyes of the public as they are watching the group’s presentations and she also loves walking in parades because she can see the appreciation they have for what we are doing. Participant 7 is an educator herself; thus she believes that if the audience can walk away from a presentation having learned something, then it was a good presentation. She mentioned hearing “good questions” and receiving “good answers” as being an indication that learning is taking place, but it is also important to her to see that the audience is enjoying the presentations through their reactions. For both of these participants, the experience is rewarding because of what the group is doing for the audiences it has.

Both Participant 3 and Participant 5 told me that they are in the group because it is fun; Participant 5 said, “I’m in the [MOCW] because it’s fun. It’s a lot of fun.” and Participant 3 said, “I enjoy the teaching…it’s fun.” What is interesting, though, is how Participants 3 and 5 further distinguished themselves from one another in terms of whether or not this enjoyment is selfish. Participant 3 said, “very selfishly, I enjoy it.” but Participant 5 said, “I like the fact that it’s not a purely selfish hobby” because she is “furthering other people’s education and getting people excited about history.” Participant 3 went on to say, “it’s fun to step outside yourself” and because the persona she portrays is perceived to be quite different from who she actually is in real life, it is fun to take on that kind of challenge. For Participant 3, “the teaching and the acting” as well as the social aspect of the group make up the components of her motivation to continue, although she did mention that she only enjoys “most” of the other women in the organization. As for Participant 5, she thinks of her membership “as a role” and that it’s her “job” to educate people and “make history fun; make them want to go into history.” Participant 5 also likes the camaraderie, the acceptance she has received from both the men and women in the organization, and she loves “to get dressed up.” It helps that the individuals in the group are “pleasant to be with” as well because if they weren’t, that would make the experience a lot harder for her or anyone else involved. Participant 5 went on to say, “I don’t feel like I’m just being selfish and just having fun, but there’s a lot of fun involved, too, and I think that keeps you coming back obviously is the fun.” Participant 5 said she can take what she enjoys doing and “use it again for non-selfish reasons” and that is why she maintains her involvement in the organization.

Participant 6 is a relatively new member of the organization and had never heard of this type of activity prior to her knowledge of the organization. I asked her what her motivation to join was and she said, “I’ve always been um, a risk taker…I’ve always liked to do different things.” Being in this organization has also helped her focus her research and reading and she feels as though she is back in college again, which is very similar to Participant 5 who said, “it’s like you get to do all the fun research of having the paper but I don’t have a teacher and I don’t have to write the paper; I just have to have it in my head.” Participant 6 is also one of the women who joined the organization without her husband “because it gives [her] something to do” and she also feels like there is potential for her to make a difference. “I don’t think our country is doing justice to what they’re teaching our young kids,” she said and so she believes that what this organization is doing is making a difference for the audiences who are seeing the presentations. Many of the organization’s members do presentations on their own, including her, and she has been told that people “really enjoyed [her] presentation and they learned a lot,” which may not be a great difference, but “at least it’s better than nothing.”

Participant 9’s experience is somewhat different because she told me this is her “husband’s hobby” and though she feels passionate about telling the stories of both of their personas, she would not be participating if he were not participating. In a similar sense, Participant 10, who has been involved with the organization almost since the beginning, loves watching her husband “do his thing” and she also feels it is very important to honor the real people whom the group is portraying. This responsibility is one of the things that compels her to keep going with the organization, in addition to the enjoyment she has in being at different events with her husband. Participant 1 also feels that she needs to keep her persona alive because she was one of those “anonymous women that’s always just mentioned as a footnote” and she hopes that our audiences can see “we’ve come far and haven’t come far enough.”

When I asked Participant 4 what her primary reason for participating in the organization is now, because she initially joined through her husband, she said, “to discuss all the social issues related to women.” Her interest in the group at this point is speaking about all of the issues women of the period had to deal with and as Participant 1 mentioned, show “where [women] are and how far they still have to go.” Participant 4 has also undergone quite the transformation since joining the organization because as it stands now, she really embodies the persona she chose and enjoys the events where she’s “most teaching.” Right now, this is her purpose: “I want people to understand really what women did and what it was like for women during that period of time.”

**Sub-Questions**

*Why do women become involved in this organization?*

For the vast majority of women who participated in this research, the answer to this question was simple: they joined because their husband wanted to join. This is true for Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, and 11, and to the best of my knowledge, Participant 8 as well. Participants 5 and 6 have different stories because both of them joined the organization on their own, separate from their husbands. Participant 5 said “it’s something I want to do” and as mentioned before, Participant 6 said, “it gives me something to do.” For Participant 5, she and her husband are in agreement. This is something she is “passionate about and he’s supportive.” Participant 6 indicated that she and her husband “don’t hardly have anything in common” and though they do a lot of things together, she needed something that she was interested in as much as he was interested in his own hobbies. Both Participants 5 and 6 have had their husbands come along to various events, but both also know that their husbands are not interested in participating with the group. Participant 5 said that although her husband has some interest in it, he has no desire to take on any kind of persona, does not have any acting ability, and would not want to speak in front of crowds. Participant 6’s husband was asked by the men in the group to join but he, too, declined and according to her, did not really enjoy coming to the events at which he was present. Since she does not accompany him to the different activities he does on his own, she understands that “this isn’t his cup of tea,” even though it is easier for her to participate when he is around. It is clear, though, that in the earlier years of the group, women did not enter unless they were following the entrance of their husbands, but in the past couple of years, five women (including myself) have entered on their own even though not all of them chose to participate in this study.

*What is the procedure for choosing and adopting a persona?*

I asked many of the women in the organization who joined because of their husbands if it was simply a “default” for them to take on the persona of the wife of their husband’s chosen general. This is true for Participants 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, and 11 though the degree of each of these women’s involvement varies considerably. Participants 2, 7, 10, and 11 act as the wife of their husband’s chosen general, but not through speaking publically. Participant 7 in particular stated that she has no desire to take on a persona and would prefer to stay in the background speaking on a more informal basis with the public. Both Participants 2 and 10 struggle like a number of other women with the lack of information available to them on their particular persona. For both of these women, they would be interested in knowing more about the wife of their husband’s chosen general, but is not easy to conduct research on these particular women. Participant 2 would be interested in doing more, perhaps, if she had more information, but she does not like to speak in front of people. Participant 10 said, “it’s awful” how little information is available on her person and she knows “her story must have been so incredible” yet she cannot tell this story because her attempts at researching this persona have been futile.

There is a great deal of information available for Participant 9’s persona, in spite of the fact that she was the wife of a general; thus Participant 9 is able to portray her with some accuracy. Participant 8 first chose a well-known persona who has a great deal of information out there on her, but then changed her persona to the sister of her husband’s chosen general in order for her to have a reason to be at a military encampment. Participants 1 and 3 again defaulted to portraying the wives of their husband’s chosen generals, but both of these women have used their personas as vehicles to educate the public. Participant 1 has had to infer a great deal about her persona based on who her husband was and where she was born and raised in addition to the few facts she knows about her family. She now uses her persona to portray a more traditional woman during the ladies’ presentations. Similarly, Participant 3 took what little information she has on her persona and found certain facts that allowed her to develop her own interests. She said she is “able to everything that [she] wants through her” and has also used her persona to portray a more traditional lady of the time period.

Both Participant 4 and Participant 6 chose personas that were in the same general occupations as their own and were able to do a lot of research on these women. Participant 4 first heard about her persona through a book that was given to her by a friend and Participant 6’s persona is a well-known individual that she decided on after reading about another similar woman who did not seem to fit with her beliefs and personality. It took a few meetings of the organization before Participant 4 was allowed to adopt her persona in a more official manner, but because of the details of her persona, Participant 4 was made an honorary member in the group, not a full member, which meant she had no voting rights in the organization. It is my understanding that up until recently, there was only one woman who was technically a full member and had voting rights in the organization, but she did not participate in this study. Participant 6, who again was a more recent addition to the organization, did not have the same issue with her persona even though she is technically “generic” right now until she can prove to the other members of the organization that she knows her character inside and out. An oddity in the organization is Participant 5, who is probably the only individual that I am aware of who had her persona chosen for her. This is because, she told me, the original persona she had in mind was something of a nobody and the board of the organization felt it would be better for her to choose someone more well-known who had a lot of research available on her. She does not remember who suggested her persona to her, but she is happy with the choice and found that it seems to fit her fairly well.

*Are there rules about participation in this organization?*

Although many changes have taken place in the organization since its inception, many of the rules have remained the same or similar. Currently, the rules of the organization are downloadable from the website and I obtained a great deal of information from reading them that I detailed in my memos. The organization exists both for educational purposes and as a charity, operating as a non-profit organization that accepts dues from its members and uses its funds for acts of preservation and also to create historical markers or monuments that honor members who have passed away. Outlined in the rules are six different types of membership: the two individual memberships are for military and non-military personas; the probationary membership is for any individual who is in the process of becoming a full member in either a military or non-military role; the family membership is for those who are related to an individual or probationary member in either a military or non-military role; the emeritus status is for those who have retired along with their spouses or widows and the honorary membership does not require the payment of dues, nor does it allow for voting rights, but is still distinguished and approved by the board. With certain exceptions, all members pay dues depending on what type of membership they have and they are permitted to request a special dispensation if they are experiencing financial difficulty.

Only one person can claim any one persona at a given time, though members are allowed to change personas if they wish. If one person gives up his/her persona, other members in the organization are asked first if they would like to take on that persona before it is opened to anyone else. A number of individuals in the organization have more than one persona and there is continued talk about the rules regarding this dualism. The events in which the organization participates are categorized as “primary” or “secondary” depending on whether the group gets some monetary compensation for its appearance and how large the event is. Secondary events are those that are smaller, do not highlight the organization, or are merely for enjoyment and socializing. Members are required to attend a minimum of two primary events each year, but can again receive some dispensation if they are unable to make this commitment. There are also rules about behavior and how it is supposed to conform to 19th-century standards of conduct and the organization sees itself as being “family friendly,” meaning any actions or behavior that are not appropriate will be subject to disciplinary action. Members must also be sure to follow the rules of whatever park or location at which the organization is present and there are certain safety standards that must be upheld as well.

No more than 75 military personas and 15 non-military personas are permitted to be members at any given time. To apply for membership, an individual must be at least 19-years-old, complete an application, pay dues, and begin studying his/her persona. The individual is also assigned a mentor at this point who will not only monitor the individual’s progress, but will also keep the Membership Committee up to date on his/her status and efforts. There is no exact period of time for a person to be a probationary member as it depends entirely upon the readiness of the individual and whether or not he/she has completed the aforementioned requirements. If this person does not live up to the standards of the organization, he/she may be asked to withdraw his/her application.

Participant 6 told me that she “had to be reminded of the rules a couple times,” specifically in her email communication. This happened when she sent an email to one member of the group who promptly told her that while it was acceptable for her to send it to him, it would not be acceptable for her to share with the group as a whole. She is also “trying to learn when we can be ourselves” and has determined that “however [she’s] addressed” (in emails) she will respond accordingly. Participant 3 also mentioned two unwritten rules that she and another member of the organization came up with: “Be true to your persona…be true to the spirit of your persona…and have fun.”

Participants 1 and 4 both spoke about the major change experienced by the organization after the split which was the more dramatic involvement of the women in the sense that they were now giving presentations separate from the men’s presentation. In Participant 1’s description, some of the women “got permission” to run presentations during the summer of 2013 in Gettysburg, which was incidentally the 150th anniversary of the battle and part of the reason why so many additional presentations were offered by this organization. Still, the addition of the women’s programs had to be approved by certain members of the organization before they could be held. Similarly, Participant 4 recounted her experience in trying to get her persona approved, which, as mentioned earlier, required several different meetings and she believes created quite a debate among the men. I spoke of my own experience in trying to have an official persona in chapter 1, which was not wholly unlike the experience of Participant 4. Although there may have been some men who were opposed to women increasing their participation in the organization, that has changed and according to Participant 10, there is only one or possibly two gentlemen who currently do not agree with the direction in which the organization is heading.

*What goals do participants in the organization have?*

Some of the women were asked directly about what changes they might like to see in the organization in the future; others included some information that suggested what goals they have for their participation in the organization. Three of the participants, Participant 3, Participant 4 and Participant 9, mentioned something dealing with the women’s involvement in the organization in terms of how they participate. Participant 3 would like to see “more incorporation of the women” and “better integration,” and also suggested that the annual meetings be open to more than just the full members. Participant 4 would like to see all the women involved, “each feeling that they would have something to contribute.” She believes that the women have an “increasingly important role in the organization,” but are not important enough, yet. She also believes that each time the men conduct a presentation, the women should also conduct their own presentation in a more consistent manner. Participant 5 would agree with this point; though she loves the women’s-only programs, she thinks the group could do more in terms of having the women present together with the men. She explains that, though it may not seem natural right away, it might become more natural as time went on and it would certainly provide a more “rounded look at the time period.”

In a similar fashion, Participant 9 would like to see more “development of the customs of the period” in terms of the women engaging in independent research about topics such as the Sanitary Fairs, nursing, the language of fans, and others. This way, even the women who cannot find much written about their persona will have a way to enrich the organization overall. Participant 5’s goals are much the same as her reasons for involvement in general as she indicated that she hopes to grow as a public speaker and reenactor through her involvement with the organization. For Participant 7, who struggled to find a way to fit it, a goal of hers was doing just that and this has recently been remedied since she found a new way to participate at events using her love of sewing. Another change that Participant 3 would like to see take place is better management of the email distribution as she is often left out of the electronic communications that take place among members. Finally, a goal had by all of the participants in this study is education and though it takes on different forms for each person, all members hope to see the audiences learn something from each presentation.

*How does participation affect their identity?*

The question of how their participation has affected their identity received a very wide variety of responses from the participants ranging from no affect at all to virtually life-changing effects. Although Participant 9 indicated that the longer she is in persona, the more she identifies with that individual, she also mentioned that she does not believe she has changed personally since she became involved with the hobby or the organization. Similarly, Participant 8 said that she started out portraying one individual and changed to a different person, but said that this did not change her in any way. Participant 7, who does not actively portray a persona, said her involvement in the organization has made her more self-aware while Participant 11 does not see any real change in herself since she became involved. What is interesting, though, is that Participant 9 told me about a time when she made an outburst during a presentation after an audience member said something unpleasant about her husband. While it is true that she is married to him in real life, and thus it would make sense that she would want to defend him if necessary, she did this while they were at an event portraying their respective personas and did it *as* the wife of her husband’s chosen general. In that sense, her portrayal of this persona must have some impact on her as an individual.

Both Participants 1 and 3 indicated that they believe they have created a “hybrid persona” where they have taken some factual information from the lives of the women they portray and blended it with other factual information from the period in order to meet the needs of the organization. Both women portray a more traditional character to serve as counterpoints to the radical or more forward-thinking women portrayed by others. In speaking with Participant 3, she mentioned that she tries “to be her” but is “not always entirely sure what that is.” Depending on the nature of the presentation, Participant 3 may be someone who is completely different from herself or may be presenting as herself in the garb of someone from another century. Participant 1 identifies with her character as a mother, empathizing with the losses that were common to individuals of any social class, and also indicated that she feels closer to the persona she has than she would to a woman who disguised herself as a man in order to fight in the battles. Participant 5, who did not actually choose her persona, does not feel as though she *is* that person just yet because her persona is so complex. For each of these individuals, it seems as though when they are in period attire attending an event with the organization, they are halfway between themselves, who they are in real life, and their personas based on what they know about them.

Participant 10 initially indicated that her portrayal of her particular persona has not had a significant impact on her life, though she has made every effort to adopt the mannerisms of the period, which is challenging because of how different they can be from current customs. She has gained more general knowledge of the period and also more knowledge about the role of women during the period and is especially touched by what these people endured and how they kept going. She said,” And they just kept going, you know, no safe space, no nothing, they just kept going.” This has caused her to look more at her own life and count the blessings she has as well as what our country has become because of the sacrifices that were made by these people. In our interview, though it is difficult for Participant 10 to find information about her persona, she mentioned that she feels a very strong identification with her because of the similarities in their lives. Though she would need a great deal more information in order to present to the public as this persona, her knowledge about this woman’s life and the life of her husband has made her more aware of how important it is to keep records.

Both Participants 5 and 6 mentioned that research makes portrayal of their personas a lot easier; however, for Participant 6, this went a step further. She indicated that the more she researches her persona, the more she feels as though she picked herself in the 1800’s. What is even more interesting is that both in her initial response to my questions and during our interview, Participant 6 would slip back and forth from referring to her persona as another person and speaking in first-person when talking about her persona. This would indicate a great meshing of the two, similar to what has happened for Participant 4.

Participant 4 is perhaps the individual who has been most changed by her portrayal of this other individual and she said that both the group and her persona are “now so much part of [her] existence, [she] couldn’t imagine life without them.” Participant 4 also indicated that she has “always had enormous anxiety” when it comes to speaking in front of a group; however when she is in persona, she now feels “completely at ease” and can speak to small or large groups of people. Participant 4 has definitely progressed since taking on her persona, which is evident in the way she presents as this woman now. “She’s definitely taken me over,” she said, indicating that she has gotten “better and better” at portraying this woman and expressing her persona’s mannerisms which are not wholly unlike her own. Participant 4 also mentioned to me that when she is dressed as her character, she is “more outgoing and aggressive,” but acting this persona has helped her in “plain clothes to be a little more outgoing.”

*What is transformational learning in the context of living history and this organization?*

Regardless of what level a woman is at when she enters the organization, there is always something to be learned, even on a small scale. Not all of the women have experienced what might be referred to as transformational learning, but several have undergone changes as a result of their participation in the organization. As a general rule, it seems that the greatest transformation comes with finding more information on the persona one has chosen to portray along with how similar that person is to the woman portraying her.

Participant 11 indicated that a challenge for her has been learning to adopt the customs of the period and though Participants 2 and 7 did not expressly say the same thing, it is understood that they as well had to go through this learning process. None of those women have active personas beyond portraying the wife of their husband’s general, but they must nevertheless learn to act and speak somewhat differently than they do in their regular lives. Participant 10 said there was a lot to be learned when she joined the organization and as was mentioned above, her expanded knowledge of the war has allowed her to better understand what everyone endured and how they must have felt during the war. Participant 9 has become passionate about telling the truth about her persona and her persona’s husband, which is information that is not often known to the general public. Through her research, Participant 3 has discovered that “some of the women were extremely political…to advance their husbands,” which is different from what she initially thought. Participant 5’s research has led her to a greater understanding of how women must have felt in a world focused on men because this is the reality even in the context of the group.

Participant 8 is knowledgeable about the fashion of the era and learned how to make “from scratch, period attire,” which was not without its challenges. Participant 1 spoke of how she learned from the presentations of others and how these presentations specifically affected her views of the southern cause. “This is so much deeper than I expected this experience to be in my life,” said Participant 1, recalling what she thought when she first started learning more about slavery. Hearing a specific story told by one of the other members was “just really transcendent because he could capture emotion so deeply” and it was “almost life-changing” because it will “stay with [her] forever” and is the reason why she reacts very differently to those who continue to support the reasoning of the south. Even though she appreciates both sides, “everything goes back to slavery” and she no longer sees the southern reenactors or civil war movies with the same eyes. Participant 1 also feels that she is doing something worthwhile and that is “profoundly empowering” for her.

Participant 6 had no understanding of what a living history organization was, had never heard of one before, and said “it had never even crossed [her] mind” that such a thing could exist. Upon seeing the group’s presentation for the first time, prior to her interest in membership, she mentioned how she did not quite understand everyone pretending to be someone from another time period. She also did not know a great deal about the persona she eventually chose, but as noted earlier, she has come to a point where she slips back and forth between speaking in first-person as herself in the 21st century and speaking in first-person as her persona in the 19th century both in our interview and in her initial response. Participant 4 has perhaps experienced the greatest transformation, though, as she went from her initial involvement as a general’s wife only to a fully developed, independent persona who she “becomes” when she puts on her persona’s clothes. Participant 4 agreed that dressing as her persona is like a transformative experience and that the process she has undergone in order to be more like this woman has served the same purpose of transformation.

**Descriptions of Events**

Before moving on to the themes that arose from the data gathered, I would like to describe the different events that the group participated in during the spring/summer of 2016 in order to help explain the themes better. I attended a total of seven events from April 2016 through August 2016 as a participant observer. With the exception of the events that took place in Gettysburg, PA, my descriptions of the events will not include a specific location but will simply describe the area, the set-up, and what occurred there in order to prevent easy recognition of the group. All of the events I attended during this period had at least one portion held outside, thus allowing for the set-up of tents and other paraphernalia in most cases. I created diagrams depicting the setup of each event, which of course varied due to the terrain and the nature of the event itself.

The first event I attended in April was at a park where it is traditionally very cold and windy, but this year was the first time since I have been a participant that this was not the case. At this event, the Ladies fly was set up along with several of the generals’ tents and the various banners and flags we carry were on display in front of them. There were two fire pits going most of the time as on the Saturday of this event, one of our members offered to cook a turkey stew over the open fire for all who wished to partake in it. This is a large event where many living historians and reenactors participate, set up tents, cook, and visit the sutlers, who are merchants specifically for Civil War era clothing and other materials. The gentlemen conducted an organized presentation on both Saturday and Sunday of that weekend as did the women; however it was noticeable that while the women attended the men’s presentations, there were no men who stayed for the entirety of the women’s presentation. Because of the sutlers present at this event, the opportunity to purchase needed materials is great and many men and women take advantage of this. However, it is generally noted that the women do the shopping and are expected to be found there when not sitting at the tents.

The second event took place in Gettysburg and had both indoor and outdoor time. We had an organized luncheon, a presentation, and then spent some time on Little Round Top speaking with the public. Both the luncheon and the presentation were at the same location which is an historic restaurant in downtown Gettysburg. The location for the presentation was not ideal, however, as there was limited seating for both the gentlemen doing the presentation and the audience members, including the women of the group. Because of this, the audience was quite small and though some people who were walking by on the street stopped to listen, it did not seem that anyone stayed through the entire presentation. The group’s experience on Little Round Top was better in that there was greater interaction with the public and both the men and the women who wished to speak to the people up there had the opportunity to do so. Even though the women did not do a formal presentation like the men did, they were still able to speak in persona on Little Round Top and many of them indicated to me later that this was one of the most fulfilling experiences they have had with the public.

For the event in June, our group was once again set up outdoors, but the makeup of this event was different from the one in April. The tents for both the living historians/reenactors were more spread out and though our group set up the Ladies fly, there were no tents for the generals to spend their time under. Some sutlers were set up a distance away from where the reenactors and living historians had their tents, but there were not as many as were present at the April event. There were presentations both days; however due to the small number of group members present, both men and women conducted these presentations together. On Sunday, I was the only woman who remained that had a persona and wanted to speak, so I sat with the gentlemen as we addressed the public.

In July we were in Gettysburg once more, but the men and women were set up separately. Many of the women found this to be troublesome as the men were located in a quieter, shadier location, and seemed to be drawing more of the public because of this. Numerous tents were set up for both the gentlemen and the ladies, but the gentlemen had the addition of another tent designated specifically for presentations. This had seats for the audience as well as a PA system, which the women did not have. Many of the women’s presentations were drowned out by the noise of the street and the lack of chairs for audience members to sit in made it difficult to have larger groups. There were women doing a number of demonstrations, though, in addition to the presentations that were going on; some women showed different sewing techniques like quilting, had a working antique sewing machine, and offered a presentation depicting the different layers women would have to don in order to get dressed each day. Several times, those of us who wanted to conduct different presentations about women attempted to do so, but it was difficult to find a location conducive to this that was not in the presentation tent designated for the men’s presentations. Some dyad or small group presentations took place there; however these were primarily for the gentlemen, not the women. There were two major events for the men, on both Saturday and Sunday nights, but there was not a specific “major” event designated for the women as we had presentations lined up all day on both days. Overall, this event was as much of a learning experience for the group as it was anything else because this was the first time we had been in those locations and we now know what works and does not work for next year.

Another event that month took place in a small town as they were celebrating the anniversary of the town’s founding. We took a train to get there, but there were a number of problems that made this day and the event quite difficult. First, the heat was nearly unbearable and during the event, there was no escape from it as our presentation was in direct sun. Second, our transportation was several hours late in getting us to the event, thus making our time at this “festival” quite short. We had minimal time to enjoy what was set up in the town because we had to return to the train to get back to our starting point. The audience who attempted to brave the heat for our presentation was also in direct sunlight, so there were not many people who stayed through the whole thing. This, again, was an event that taught us what should and should not be done in the future.

The final event I attended was at the end of August in a reconstructed 17th century town where it is not required of us to set up tents. However, many of us elected to stay in some of the buildings on-site, which meant that we also needed a fire pit to cook breakfast and heat water for tea and coffee. A member of the group again volunteered to cook dinner for everyone, but instead of doing it over an open fire, one of the buildings was allotted for this activity. The men’s presentations took place both on Saturday and Sunday; however, the women did not have an opportunity to conduct an organized presentation. Instead, we did engage the public as they entered the village and found that we spoke with nearly everyone who was present on Saturday. The heat, again, was a factor for this event as both our group members and members of the public had no way to get out of it as the only place that is air conditioned at this location was the welcome center. Still, the audience for both of the gentlemen’s presentations was quite significant and they asked a number of interesting, pertinent questions that allowed the gentlemen to speak about the different dimensions of their personas. Given this information, it is hoped that the reader can approach the thematic analysis with a deeper understanding of the nature of the organization and how it operates at each individual event at which it is present.

**Themes**

1. Learning and education are important for both the group members and the audience

When it came to coding the information provided by the participants, one of the first ideas that kept repeating was that of knowledge or education in some form. In fact, all of the eleven participants mentioned some form of learning in their initial responses that were sent to me via email and Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 10 expressly elaborated on this topic in their interviews with me. Though Participants 2 and 9 were not quite so specific, both of them mentioned something about knowing more about their personas, either the amount of time and effort it takes to study that person or the desire to know more when such little information is available. This, too, fits with the overall theme of education which is not only geared towards the audiences who see the presentations, but also affects each member whether he/she plans to or not.

Since learning and education take on different forms within the organization, each must be looked at separately. First, there is the research that each individual must do in order to portray her persona or at minimum, portray a woman of the 19th century with some accuracy. Then, there is the mission of the organization, which is to educate the public about the Civil War era and the individuals who lived through it. There is also the information that the women pick up simply by attending group presentations or listening to other members speak and the varying level of interest they have in educating themselves about their personas and the period. A lot of these areas overlap for some of the women, but one thing remains true: no matter what the status of a woman in the organization, the importance of education is understood.

Participant 11 found it difficult to “learn all the customs and codes of dress for this period,” which is similar to Participant 2’s reasoning for not taking on a persona. She said it takes a “great commitment” and the individual “must be knowledgeable about [her] persona,” something that would be difficult for her given the lack of information available on the wife of the general chosen by her husband. Participant 2 wishes she knew more about her persona and would be more inclined to speak as her if she had that information. Participant 7 has a “new appreciation for history” for which she admitted she “had no appreciation” prior to her involvement in the organization. She is enjoying learning the history that she “was reluctant to see as important as a young adult,” but has not gone beyond her role in the background.

Participant 8 noted that her “knowledge of the period and of various historical personae of that era has been enriched” simply by sitting through the presentations made by the organization. Though she studied her persona to some degree, she was not able to develop any type of deep understanding of who her persona was as a person, though she admitted she might have been inclined to do more had she lived closer to this woman’s home town. Choosing a persona, though, inspired her to make her own “period correct attire which, of course, was preceded by research into the fabric they used.” This research also led Participant 8 to develop a greater understanding for the “how and why” of women’s dress at the time and a “fuller understanding of the role of women on the homefront.” Being knowledgeable about this area led Participant 8 to contribute to the group in speaking to the public about the “dress and fashions of the era.” Thus, Participant 8 was very clear about how necessary it was to do research and learn about the period in order to appear credible in the organization.

Participant 9 specifically noted that one of the greatest rewards she has had through her involvement with MOCW is in seeing how knowledgeable the other members are. She also said it takes time to get into the 19th century and adopt those mannerisms while avoiding modern mannerisms, which means one basically has to learn to be more formal overall. For her role, there is a lot of memorization and a lot of reading that has to be done for this hobby, which makes it quite time consuming; however, the longer she is in persona, the more she is able to identify with her persona. Purchasing and wearing the clothing also presented her with some degree of a learning curve, much like Participant 6 who had a lot of “trial and error” with her own clothes. Participant 6 also agreed that there was a learning curve when she joined the organization, but since she has always had an interest in history and she likes “to learn anything [she] can learn,” it was not a problem for her to do the research for her role. The more she learns about her persona, the more she feels that she picked herself out of the 1800’s and believes she would have been just like her persona. Unfortunately, Participant 6 has not yet had the opportunity to show the organization all the research she has done on her persona, but she has been able to present in character to other organizations and noticed in reviewing the videotapes of those presentations that she said she could hear in her voice that it felt like she was there. “I feel like I’m the type of person that I just love to learn and I love to teach,” she said, later adding that “[she] want[s] to know everything there is about the Civil War.” Participant 6 went on to say, “I’m finding that one hour isn’t enough to talk [about her persona].” Finally, she also stated “I wanna know what they do, you know, what battles they were in, why are they famous, or not famous, why are some names more recognizable than others, and so it’s focused my research and my reading more than it was where I just kind of read whatever caught my eye. I feel like I’m back in college again.”

Participant 5 mentioned something similar in her interview:

“I’m looking these people up because I find how important are they to her in her life and … [it] seems like I’m always doing research now, but it’s kind of cool because I always loved to do research and it’s like, I liked school, you know it’s like constantly having to write a paper only I don’t ever actually have a deadline, I don’t actually have to write it, so it’s like you get to do all the fun research of having the paper but I don’t have a teacher and I don’t have to write the paper, I just have to have it in my head. And every once in a while there’s an oral exam.”

Participant 5 emphasized that the “desire to educate oneself” is very important to her and her involvement with the organization has inspired her to research more. This has added to her understanding of women’s roles at the time and she is enjoying the research, which is why she has piles of books in her house. In terms of her persona, it gets easier to portray her as she researches more and fortunately, there is a lot for her to look at and a lot to learn. Participant 5 is different in that she came to the group with a lot of preexisting knowledge and this knowledge relates to the complaints she has about the group’s overall commitment to historical accuracy. The complaints she has about the women in the group mostly have to do with the types of fabric their clothing is made out of and the number of beads she will often see on a woman’s dress, which is not appropriate for the period. Participant 5 reads many sources in order to fully research her persona and finds that she shares many things in common with her. She also expects that because of the amount of research she does, she will be included in presentations whenever they are done because she has “made the effort” to be there and is not there “as a tag along with someone else. I’m here of my own volition so I expect that I’ll be included.”

Participant 10’s involvement with the organization has “increased [her] knowledge of the Civil War Era and opened [her] eyes to the many aspects of the time period.” She has learned a lot more about women during the time period “because [MOCW] so strongly embraces female participation” and although there is little to no research on her own persona, she has endeavored to learn as much about the other aspects of Victorian life as she possibly can. “I’m still learning the communication styles of the day and do find it awkward, as it’s so formal when compared with modern convention,” she said, also noting how difficult it is to stay in character all of the time while speaking with members of the public. Participant 10 is another individual who will not present to the public unless she can do so credibly and wishes she could find more information on her persona. She made a considerable effort to find this information, visiting archives and a historical society, but finding that no one seemed to recognize the name of her persona, nor were they willing to help her look for more information. She believes her husband knows more about her persona than she does and when she has time, she would like to retrace the lineage of this woman in the hopes of learning more. Participant 10 had a lot to learn in the beginning, but has added to both her knowledge and her wardrobe little by little over the years.

Half of what Participant 3 finds most rewarding about her participation with the organization has to do with learning; teaching and researching are two of the things she enjoys most. The organization has “given [her] a great creative and research…outlet” and she really enjoys the teaching as she mentioned several times. She mentioned that “there’s a lot of interesting research that can be done” and though finding information on her persona exactly is a bit of a challenge, she is “taking advantage…of the fact that if very little is known about the person, it’s hard to do something wrong” so long as one stays true to the period. She has taken a few facts about her persona and given her plausible interests that fit with her own in order to use her persona as a teaching tool and show the variation among women of that time. “I’ve had people confuse the Civil War with the Revolutionary War, many people,” she noted, thus “we need interesting personae to interest the public.” Similarly, as has been noted before, Participant 1 believes her persona is a point of view that the group needs in order to show the different views of women in that time period. Participant 1 believes her involvement with the organization is an “ongoing teaching AND learning experience [participant emphasis]” and she feels it is a “great responsibility” to represent another person; “you owe it to that person to be as authentic and genuine as possible,” which naturally comes through research. “You have to learn as much as possible about that person’s life and anticipate the kind of questions audiences will have,” she said, adding, “I enjoy challenges and this is an ongoing one.”

When Participant 4 first joined the group, she “had no interest in history and knew very little about the Civil War.” She said she was told that all she needed to know in order to be a part of the group was how women dressed during the period and what were appropriate ways to act. She quickly received criticism from some of the women in the organization about her clothing, being told that it was “not historically accurate.” This led her to research the different styles and varieties of the era, though “it didn’t convince any of the most precise reenactors that my mode of dress was even acceptable.” After reading a book about her persona and deciding to portray that person, she began to identify with her and eventually read everything that exists on this individual, including hard-to-find letters and documents. When she visited an important location to her persona, she spoke with an historian in that town and found that she knew more about this character than he did; I asked her if that felt good and she said, “That felt good. I felt like I probably had done my work. They had every book that ever was written about her and I had every book that had ever been written about her.” Currently, Participant 4’s primary reason for participating is to “discuss all the social issues related to women” in order to promote “the ideas of where women came…where they are and how far they still have to go.” Participant 4 added that she likes the events “where [she’s] most teaching. I love teaching. I teach anyway, but I love it. Anything where we can present and teach and not just sit around all the time is the kind [of event] I like.” Participant 1 said something incredibly similar: “I love to teach and I love to learn; I guess it’s a perfect combination” and she also said that part of her reason for being in this group is “to provide this living history and our mission is to educate about the war and about the people that lived in that period of time and I feel very strongly about that.” What’s more is that Participant 1 learns so much about the period on a regular basis and she finds that each time she learns something new, “the period becomes more real to [her].”

All of the participants, except 4 and 11, indicated that they picked up information simply by sitting and listening to other members of the group conduct presentations. This type of vicarious learning tends to happen often, especially for the women who habitually sit and listen to the presentations conducted by the men. Even Participant 11 mentioned having learned at least some information about the Civil War simply by listening to her husband speak about it for many years prior to their involvement in the organization. Thus, although individual research is quite common for the women in this group, it is also just as common for them to pick up the information that they need simply by being in the presence of other group members.

Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10 all mentioned the mission of the organization in one way or another, that we as a group are there to educate and because that is our focus, there are many natural consequences of that. As Participant 4 said, “we’re there to teach, we’re not there to just sit around and socialize. Our goal is to teach about a whole variety of issues, not just the battles. What we’re teaching about is all the issues that came up during the war…and that’s our organization now.” Even Participant 10 said, “I’m not looking to do a woman’s thing, but our group promotes it, so it should be there” and agreed that since the mission of the organization is to educate, we should be educating in as many ways as possible. When I discussed women’s participation and the mission of the organization with Participant 3, noting how it is all about education, after all, she said, “we don’t really get in their way…we’re doing something alongside them” and hopes that any initial issues some of the men may have had with women presenting have been resolved. Participant 1 also mentioned problems from those who are “wrapped up in the authenticity of every little detail” because the rest of the members are more interested in “putting our mission of education in the forefront.” Participant 9 said it well when she said, “The women are imparting the knowledge they have acquired in interesting and engaging formats with the public, which enhances the educational goals of [MOCW].” Even though some things have changed in the organization over the years, the desire to stick to the educational mission remains the same.

Participant 5 “love[s] to see the public interested when we do our panel talks” and Participant 7 believes that what the audience is getting out of the presentations is very important. When the audience asks good questions and receives good answers, Participant 7 knows that learning is taking place. This, for her, is very rewarding. Similarly, Participant 6 said, “To have an opportunity to “bring history alive” [participant quotes] for people that may not know much about it or have an interest and ask questions is a very rewarding experience, especially with young people.” Participant 6 also said, “I don’t think our country is doing justice to what they’re teaching our young kids…so I feel what we do does make a difference.” In a similar statement, Participant 3 noted, “I mean one of our jobs is the general public is woefully uneducated” acknowledging that while they may have received the education in school, they have often forgotten by the time they are adults.

It is clear that learning takes place in a number of different forms facilitated by this organization; not only are the members learning on their own and from each other, but the audiences who come to hear the presentations are learning as well. In general, the more a woman learns about her persona, the more she feels connected to that individual although this is not always the case. Since the overall mission of the organization is to educate, the fact that learning is taking place on so many different levels would suggest that the organization has been quite successful with its mission. This does not come without a price, however, as has been alluded to through some of what the women have said in this section; this price will thus be explored in more detail in the following segment.

1. Group dynamics are a given, but often difficult to deal with

Nearly all of the participants mentioned something about the dynamics of the group whether it had to do with the men or the other women and this has affected their participation in a number of different ways. Participant 8 referenced “the split” and said, “As with all groups as membership expands, group dynamics sets in that creates tension, friction, and intolerance that often leads to some combination of restructuring and change.” Participant 1 explained it in terms of different philosophies: “Those who left and formed their own group came from a reenacting background and they were more rigid in their approach and their insistence on authenticity on every level. This is a common problem among anybody in reenacting or in living history, which are similar and compatible, but not really the same thing.” Participant 10 agreed stating, “The larger an organization grows, the more diverse it becomes” and “[the members who split off] were simply intolerant of others’ views and motivations.” Participant 10 believes that the growth of the organization “has precipitated the other changes” as “the bigger you get, you become this microcosm of society and … that’s when the different views and the different objectives started coming in.”

While “the split” was an actual occurrence that many of the women referenced, there is another split that is different and involves only the women currently in the group. I was told by many of the participants that there are at least two, but more likely three groups of women within the larger group as a whole and that this split among the women involves differences in philosophy much like the men who separated several years ago. I asked Participant 2 if she feels comfortable in the organization and her response was mixed. She indicated that there are two factions of women and though she finds the majority of women enjoyable to be around, she often gets the feeling that one group of women does not think the other group is “good enough.” She noticed that they gather on their own and their separation is not blatant at all, but rather more of an undertone. She does not find this to be out of the ordinary in any way as this is something common in groups, but it seems that some women believe a general’s wife should dress a certain way and when she does not, she is effectively looked down upon. Participant 2 reiterated that this hobby is not an exact science and all the women are doing the best that they can with what they have. Participant 9 also said that having cliques in a group is normal and seems to take it in stride.

As I continue reporting the ideas these participants have about the different groups of women, it is important to note that to the best of my knowledge, I only received input from women in one of these groups. Though I believe there may be a slight overlap with a few of the participants, the majority of those who participated in this study are members of the same group who see other women in the organization as having different opinions and feelings towards them. Therefore, all of the opinions expressed by the participants in this study can only help to infer what the women in the other groups are thinking and what their reasoning is for behaving in the ways that they do. Participant 6 got wind of the “stitch Nazi’s” (as she referred to them) and spoke of how she was warned about the women who “will actually get close enough to see how many stitches you have per inch” and that she should “just ignore them.” Participant 5 might actually be in that category as she has “tried to tread lightly on this subject” but she sometimes feels “that there’s a little undercurrent…that people are maybe intimidated by me” due to the amount of knowledge she has. “We are walking education for people whether we want to be or not,” which is why Participant 5 has some basic complaints about the authenticity of 19th century clothing. She said, “Those ladies that don’t participate, even though they’re not opening their mouths, people still see them and say, ‘oh look, that’s how they wore stuff.’” And though she said that “some ladies are warmer to [her] than others,” she really enjoys them and looks forward to seeing them during events.

Participant 3 said that while she has “encountered mostly warm, friendly people who share a love and respect for history,” she has also “found less welcoming cliquish people” in her time in the organization. This participant also said that she believes she might be the unofficial head of the women’s group, a position she would rather have been elected into, though she has “not gotten any particular push-back about being in charge” thus far. She said she’s “not going to tell anybody what to do” because she’s “crazy, but not stupid.” This is especially interesting because she also noted that when the women first started doing presentations, she did not want any of the other women to feel left out so she made a point to ask them if they would like to join. She believes “some people took that as pushing rather than inclusion; a demand rather than a request” and this may have led to some negative feelings toward her at one point. She thinks that now “people understand [her] better” and she understands others better as well and finds it interesting that the women who are newer to the organization seem to be the ones who want to develop more so.

Participant 1 initially told me that there were two distinct groups of women, but in talking about it further, it appears that she identified three as well: “There’s a core group of women that very much want to be involved with [presentations]…there’s a group that does not want to stand up for any reason and talk and then there’s a group that I know of that they do presentations with their husbands in other states…but for some reason they don’t seem to join the [MOCW] group of women when we’re presenting.” In her response to me via email, Participant 1 elaborated even further stating that some women were intimidated by the changes that came to pass in the organization, some disapproved, others believed the organization should not change and that it was a man’s organization, and “still others felt pressured to participate and backed off, even threatening to quit.” Speculating, she thinks that the same “feelings and philosophies that split the men” are present in the women who dress more authentically and “are a little bit disdainful of what we’re doing” in terms of highlighting the women separately from the men. She also surmised that this more authentic group of women believes that “we don’t know enough” even though everyone remains friendly and civil to one another.

In Participant 10’s view, the division among group members may have gotten worse since the split in 2012. “There is a mild division among the men, but more significant division among the women,” she said, following this by stating that from her perspective, this division has to do with “philosophies of period correctness.” Participant 10 emphasized that there are “three completely separate groups” and there are others who are looking for a group and trying to figure out where they fit in because they might be new to the organization. One of Participant 10’s biggest issues with the dynamics is respect and the feeling that her desire to remain in the background and not present is not respected as it should be. She also said that for the most part, she feels comfortable with many of the women even if they do not share the same opinions about women presenting, but is uncomfortable sitting and socializing with those women who seem to believe that she doesn’t “measure up” to their standards of authenticity.

Participant 4 explained that even before “the split” in the group, there was a growing division among the women where the then two groups were not speaking very much with one another; one group again was very focused on authenticity while the other just wanted “a general impression” so they could talk to the public and didn’t care as much about the details. She first became aware of the differences among the women when she had to conduct research to defend her attire and she went on to become friends with the women who “thought most like [her] and seemed to want to expand their interests beyond appropriate dress.” When the women began presenting alongside the men, she says the split became even greater. She has noticed that “most of the non-participants won’t even come to hear the women present” and “there are several women who won’t even talk to [her],” which she identified as her greatest struggle with the organization. In our interview, she elaborated on the presentations made by the women stating, “to the women’s group, the men don’t come” and “the men don’t come at all, but the other women do not come at all.” She believes this has to do with the fear that if they are in the audience watching the program, they will be asked by a woman on the panel to answer a question. Though she “would never do that,” she believes there may be one other woman who might. She also said that the split among the women has gotten progressively worse in terms of socializing and she believes that it is not only a split about fashion, but also over location since those who live in certain areas seem to spend more time with one another than they do with the group as a whole. She said, “It’s partly geographical. Does this sound a little like the Civil War?”

Another interesting dynamic is in how the women feel about the men in the organization and the differences between the view of those women who joined on their own and those who came in through their husbands. Participant 10 had a great deal to say about this, noting that “some of the ladies are looking a gift horse in the mouth. My opinion is, and has always been, that this is the [MOCW]…it is ***their*** organization” (emphasis hers). She does not want to see the men in the organization become frustrated with continued pressure from some of the women as that will only “impede the advancement the women seek.” Similarly, when I asked Participant 1 if she thinks that the women who have personas should present with the men, she replied with the following: “I actually have strong feelings about that. You might not be in agreement with me. I think that the [MOCW] started as a man’s group and that their signature event is [removed to maintain confidentiality] and that we should preserve that…I don’t think we should dilute that experience.”

On the other side, Participant 3 said almost the exact same sentence as Participant 10; however, where Participant 10 emphasized how the organization belongs to the men in a more positive sense, Participant 3’s response came after I asked her what she might have perceived as being more negative in the organization: “OK, well, to start with, it’s the [MOCW, emphasizing the masculine part of the name] [pause] and others.” Participant 5 said, “sometimes it’s a bit of a boy’s club, although I guess that gives me a taste of regard for women in the 19th century. It is sometimes hard to sit quietly while they kind of take over the stage, as it were. In that respect, I am like my persona.” During our interview, Participant 5 said, “the nature of the group is [the men], so sometimes I feel like we’re not wanted or we’re not needed…sometimes when we go someplace, the only thing that’s on the menu is [the men’s signature program] so what’s the sense of you and I going if it’s only about the [men].” In a very similar way, Participant 6 said, “Joining an organization that is dominated by men…has been a learning experience.” Later she added, “I…feel more comfortable joining in a conversation with the men rather than putting together a puzzle with the ladies. The ladies are wonderful and very welcoming, I am just finding the role differences challenging.”

The way that Participant 10 described it is that some men are worried that the women will want to be everywhere the men are and she does not believe that is necessary. However, what Participants 5 and 6 are saying is that when we are socializing as a group, in plain 21st-century clothes, there is no reason to continue the 19th century male-female dynamics. It is interesting to note that as a general rule, during the afterhours socialization, only those women who are not married to a man in the organization are the ones socializing with the men; all other women, who are married, typically socialize with one another.

1. This group is a source of great friendship

Participants 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 all explicitly mentioned how their participation in the organization made an impact on their socialization levels and granted them the opportunity to make new friends, which is very interesting given the dynamics mentioned by these same women. Participants 5 and 6 may be too new to the organization to have explicitly stated that they value the relationships they have with other members, though it is at least partially implied in Participant 6’s statement that she has “enjoyed the weekend events and the people.” Participant 11 noted that being in the organization “gives us something to do together” and “it has definitely increased our socialization.” She also made a point to say that “[MOCW] has definitely exceeded our expectations and we have made a lot of new and great friends.” This was also true for Participant 4 who initially took time to get to know everyone in the group and preferred to observe for a while before doing anything more, such as taking on a persona. She stated that she didn’t really get involved for a while except for “making a couple good friends.”

For those who have been in the organization longer, friendship plays a much more prominent role in their responses to both the initial questions and in their face-to-face interviews. “[MOCW] has offered me a wider variety of friendships and relationships,” said Participant 7, which is nearly identical to Participant 9 who said, “Membership has enabled us to develop new friendships and visit places we would not otherwise have been.” Participant 8 reiterates this by saying, “The people I have met in the hobby who share my love of that era in history and the many personal bonds of friendship developed over the last 16 years” is her greatest reward. Participant 2’s response to the same question of what her greatest reward has been regarding her participation in the organization was: “That’s easy, the friendships made.” Again, with regard to the same question, Participant 3 listed “friendship” as the first of several rewards she has garnered through participation, but she elaborated by saying, “I have also made good friends with people of varied backgrounds and different from the people I usually meet at home and work. (I never had friends from [town name omitted] before).” Participant 3 did have a caveat to this topic, though, as in our interview she specifically stated that she enjoys “most of the other women,” but that does not stop her from having fun with the organization.

In her early involvement with the organization, there was one couple who Participant 10 and her husband were “extraordinarily close with,” but unfortunately, these individuals left the group during the split. Participant 10 still enjoys spending time with “people who share a common interest,” but unfortunately, she no longer feels comfortable in the organization. What is disturbing is that she “loved being a part of the organization” at one point, but no longer feels this way due to the changes in the relationships among the women. It must be difficult, then, for her to attend events and participate in an organization where she once found great enjoyment but finds that no longer, even though she “respects and admires the ladies of the [MOCW] in all of their roles within the organization.” And, “at most events, I am typically able to find other women who are solely involved to support their husbands to sit with and enjoy the experience stress-free.”

Participant 1 is no different than most of the other women who have found great friendship in this organization and made a point to elaborate on the topic quite a bit: “We made an entirely new circle of friends who share our passion for history and for this period. We find this extraordinary because at our age you don’t expect to develop strong new friendships or take on an entirely new hobby…A great deal of our social life revolves around [MOCW].” This participant also said that “through the years people got very friendly” which allowed them to see each other socially and as we know from the history of the organization, partially led to the split in 2012.

1. The varying importance of authenticity

It has already been implied that the women who participated in this study have different ideas about what it means to portray a woman of the 19th century authentically. However, the difference in opinions of these women is believed to be a large part of the rift among the women in general and it says a lot about the way they choose to participate. There is a large spectrum in terms of what the women believe to be acceptable when it comes to how they dress; on one end there are opinions like that of Participant 2 who said that all of the women are simply doing the best that they can when it comes to dressing well since it is “not an exact science,” which means that some variation should be acceptable. There is also Participant 7 who up until recently, did not even own a corset, which is a primary part of a 19th century woman’s wardrobe and she finds the wearing of that item to be unpleasant to say the least. Participant 6 has struggled with outfitting herself because she has a difficult body type to fit, which led her to making her own dress. At one event, she mentioned having worn something that she purchased from a website believing it was “Civil War era” and she thought, “if it’s farby or something somebody I’m sure will tell me and I got so many compliments on it.” She believes that at this point, she can tell what “farby” is, though she still struggles with exactly what her persona should wear.

As Participant 3 said, she believes “it’s more important to be true to the period than necessarily true to your precise persona.” She also indicated that if she found, through research, that something she was doing went against something her persona did, she “might stop,” though it seemed she would look for a way around that. As has been discussed previously, Participant 3 is one individual who has created a sort of hybrid persona, somewhere between herself and the 19th century woman she portrays, which means it would be difficult to say that her portrayal is completely authentic. In a similar way, Participant 10 had stated that while she tries to remain in character as much as possible, she has “witnessed individuals refuse to answer an audience member’s question because his persona would not have known about it.” She does not believe anyone should walk away from a presentation wondering, especially if someone in the group is able to address the question. Because of this, she will often step out of character in order to “discuss topics [her] persona would not be able to address.”

Participant 10 had more to say on this issue:

“In the living history community, there are many who believe every piece of clothing, every accessory, every hair style, and every word uttered must be exactly as it was in 1863. While I agree with this precept as far as encampments are concerned (i.e. no water bottles or soda cans in view of the public, no use of electronics in view of the public, etc.), I draw the line when it comes to attire. I am less obsessed with this level of period correctness and do the best I can to create an image of how many women of the era dressed, but don’t go beyond that…I am satisfied serving as a gateway for individuals learning about the Victorian era.”

She went on to say that while she admires and respects those women who engage in a high level of scholarship and authenticity, she wishes that that respect was reciprocated as she finds very often that it is not. Participant 9 would like to see “more chivalrous conduct from the men around [her]” as she believes that both the clothing and the period dictate that it should be so.

Participant 1 said that “to study one person, you have to look at the overall picture of the times in which they lived – how they dressed, what they ate, the factors that educated or motivated them, … etc.” She also believes we owe it to the person we are representing to be as authentic as possible and when she was told by someone at a historical society that she had it “down pat,” she felt that was “the highest compliment [she] could have been paid.” Participant 1 also mentioned that “feeling authentic and confident” when she is presenting has been her greatest struggle, even though she finds it rewarding. At the same time, in her description of the split she noted that those who left insisted on “authenticity on every level,” which she believes to be quite rigid and tends to take away from the educational mission of the organization. Still, Participant 1 placed a lot of emphasis on how wearing the clothing helps her feel more period and more authentic. “I’m not gonna lie; the minute you put your clothes on, you walk differently, you sit differently…I’ve heard actors say how costuming is transformational for them…and for me it kind of works the other way.” She does not find it difficult to be in that period, but acknowledges the possibility that other women might struggle with it because of how men and women were supposed to act individually and around one another.

Participant 4 made it known that the split among the women has to do with “those that wanted to be historically perfect and those that wanted just to share the experience” and though she was criticized initially for her clothing, even in the face of disconfirming evidence, she has done enough research to know what is and is not historically accurate. She proclaimed to be part of a group of women that was more open or more liberal in their thinking: “we don’t care so much about the details; we just want to get a general impression and talk to the public.” The other group of women, she said, believed it had to be one way, which is why the group of women split long before any drastic changes were made in the organization.

Participant 5 and Participant 8 seem to have the most different ideas from the other women previously mentioned based on what they had to say in their responses. Although brief, Participant 8 mentioned her greatest “challenge” in being part of the organization was “learning to accurately make, from scratch, period correct attire,” which suggests that she places a great deal of importance on dressing authentically. Participant 5 explicitly stated that “the commitment to historical accuracy is very important” to her and she would like to see “more ladies committed to historical accuracy.”

Participant 5 elaborated on this subject a great deal during our interview, saying, “I am very much so a stickler for authenticity. If you’re going to do this, you are a walking…embodiment for somebody of that time period and you know, you gotta do it right.” She does not believe in presenting in attire that is not “as accurate as [she] can make it” because this is educational and “it has to be right.” We went on to discuss how for some of the women in the group, authenticity is not at the top of their list due to the range of interest that the other women have. Participant 5 did agree that she would “have to let that go” even though she has a hard time with the fact that the public tends to see a lot more than we think when we are “on display” for them at different events. She knows that not everyone is “really into it” and would never make a comment about another woman’s outfit that was not solicited, but still thinks there are a lot of things the women do that bother her a great deal because again, “people notice. People see it…we are walking education for people whether we want to be or not.” Participant 5 admitted that she had her farby day as well and a friend of hers “took [her] to task for everything [she] was wearing, because it was bad.” Thus, for her, if the group is doing something for the public that is educational, there should be a greater focus on authenticity than there is now in many cases; it is very different if the group is doing something social and not in the public eye as at that point, it does not matter so much what anyone is wearing.

1. This is an organization to be proud of

In a number of different ways, several of the women indicated that being part of this organization made them proud on some level, whether it was due to the reactions of the public or simply observing the men “doing their thing.” Participant 2 stated that her “peak experiences” always happen during a parade because of her personal connection to military service. She loves watching the reactions from the audience as we march by, especially when veterans salute, and she knows that they appreciate what we are doing. Participant 9 said that she and her husband are “very honored to have been invited to join this organization” because “being part of an organization with such knowledgeable and professional people” is one of the greatest rewards she has experienced as a member. Participant 5 was “honestly impressed with the knowledge and the skills…that these guys have and how engaging they are,” noting that at different events throughout the year, our organization has the tendency to draw crowds where others do not. She also said she is “thrilled to have been asked [to join the organization]” and wants to continue “as long as the group will have [her].”

Participant 10 said that her greatest reward from participating with the organization is simply watching her husband “do his thing” because she is “blown away by the level of scholarship he has attained over the years. She was unable to find words to describe what it does for her to watch him interact with the public and share his love of history with them and she would love to be able to do enough research about her persona where she and her husband could present together, almost like a play. Participant 1 also said, “I’m very proud of the men in [MOCW]” and went on to say “they just know so much” even though it does not always come out due to what kinds of questions the audience is asking. Like Participant 10, Participant 1 is also in awe of her husband saying “you don’t usually look up to your husband…but when I see him doing [his persona], I sometimes have to catch myself…there have been moments where I just have felt like he was [his persona] for that moment.” She said she has heard other women say the same thing about their husbands or significant others and that it’s “hard to believe that’s the man [they’re] living with.”

Participant 10 did not leave the women out of her admiration, though, as she said this in her first response to me: “I’d like to close by saying how much I respect and admire the Ladies of [MOCW] in all of their roles within the organization. Their passion for what they do is admirable and appreciated.” She is in awe of all the members of the organization who display such commitment to honoring “those who came before us” and allow us to have the freedoms and liberties we have today. Participant 1 also said about the women that “we’re now talking about things that really matter to women and relating them to the present day,” which is an important message to get across to our audiences. She “really love[s] what the women are doing” and admires them for doing it, though she feels she represents “more a point of view than a person at this point.” Participant 1 believes that we are a unique organization in the way that we represent women, and this has “generated a great deal of interest and response from the public.”

1. This is an expensive hobby

Based on the tables provided in this chapter, it is evident that a great deal of money is required to get into this hobby and to participate in it regularly. Even if one has the bare minimum apparel, there is still the cost of attending events including gas, lodging, and food, which are often prohibitive for some. Participant 9 identified her greatest struggle in being part of the organization as “purchasing and wearing the proper apparel” and Participant 6 said she has “found the time and financial commitment much more than I anticipated.” She went on to say that “it has been a considerable financial investment for the first year” as she went about acquiring the necessary clothes and accessories that are different depending on the type of function one attends. During our interview, Participant 6 spoke about her struggles with the clothing and her decision to start sewing again because one of her limitations in terms of participation is financial. “It’s not like I can’t afford anything; I just, I didn’t realize that these dresses were $400 and $500.” She had initially bought fabric to make a ball gown, or have someone make one for her, but then decided that it is very unlikely that she will ever attend a ball and so she will have to sell that fabric, along with a number of other items she acquired by mistake.

Participant 2 mentioned the same limitation in her initial response, stating that “trying to be period correct can be quite costly. Also, out of town events require overnight stays which requires overnight accommodations.” Because of this, she says, she and her husband have had to be “selective on how many events we attend.” Participant 2 also implied that the cost of attire was problematic when it comes to the different factions of women since some women expect the generals’ wives to dress their best, but this is really not feasible for everyone. Participant 10 had a similar comment, noting that “the cost alone to be in period correct attire is astronomical. Even if I had the money, I wouldn’t spend it on such attire, just on principle.” Participant 5 took a similar viewpoint stating “if you have the desire, you can get around the money somehow” while understanding that not everyone has the desire. This is why she said she has “piles of fabric” because it is too costly for her to pay someone else to make her a gown when she can make one herself. In discussing her issues with authenticity and fabric, she showed me different types of patterns that were common to the era and spoke about the fiber content of period correct fabric. “These are all silks,” she said, showing me one of her books. “Of course not everybody can afford silk and silk’s not appropriate; it gets dirty easily…then it’s time to make another dress.”

Participant 1 made a special point to discuss the cost of this hobby: “It’s worth noting that this can be an expensive hobby, requiring a uniform and firearms (at the very least for the men) and appropriate period clothing for the women. Depending upon your rank and status, this cost is quite variable.” In addition to the clothing and accessories purchased by most members, the group needs to set an ambiance whenever it “makes camp” for a weekend of presentations. This requires period correct tenting, chairs, tables, rugs, candles, lanterns, plates and utensils, pots, glasses, cups, and other dishes for the group to eat from and cook with. On top of that, the organization owns a trailer to hold a lot of this material, which has to be stored at a storage facility when not in use. Many members have purchased their own tents and paraphernalia to go with them, but this also means they need to have a vehicle large enough to transport all of their items. Some members will also supply the group with snacks when we are tented at a location for a long period of time including fruits, crackers, peanuts, hard tack and cookies or brownies. Even though there is a bare minimum required for participation, it quickly becomes greater than that with the more events one attends and the more one finds he/she needs in order to remain as authentic as possible in front of the public.

1. It is an ongoing quest for knowledge/truth

While all of the members have to learn something about the period, the amount of knowledge they acquire and the amount of time spent acquiring this knowledge varies greatly. Even when one has acquired information about his/her persona, it is often necessary to revisit that information and review it prior to conducting each presentation. This is true for Participant 9 who spends a great deal of time “reviewing and getting back into the 19th century,” but it is worth it for her because she has found that many lies have been told about her husband’s persona and together with him, they can tell the truth. Even though Participant 6 has a great deal of information to go through on her persona, there are still some important details that she remains unsure about. “I have yet to find anything in my research that proves or disproves” something personal related to her persona and she’s “still trying to figure out what’s true and what’s not.” This is a difficult task when over 150 years stand between us in the present day and the women who we are representing from the 19th century.

Both Participant 6 and Participant 5 have run into instances where individuals have asked them questions they were unable to answer or at least unsure of how to answer. “One of my fears as I do more and more presentations with [MOCW]… [is] there may be people that know as much about me (her persona) as I do.” When subjects of a personal nature come up about her persona she doesn’t quite know how to respond: “Well, I guess I could answer it by ‘I really think that my private life is none of your business.’” In the same way, Participant 5 said, “I’ve already had people ask me questions I can’t answer or that are more difficult to answer.” These questions might have to do with feelings or philosophies held by her persona and she finds herself thinking quite deeply about those types of questions. When another member in the organization asked her a question, she “gave him one answer and [she] did more research and had to give him another answer.” The point that the women in our group are getting more thoughtful questions is important as when the group first started, most questions had to do with what kind of clothing they were wearing underneath their outfits. Now, though, as Participant 5 said, the thought-provoking questions are those that “hadn’t even crossed [her] mind” and require her to continually do more research on her persona.

Participants 1, 2, 3, and 10 seem to be starved for information on their personas and are either always looking for more or simply wish they knew more. Participant 2 knows a bit about her persona, including some information as to her movements and relationships, but does not know enough to feel comfortable talking to the public as this woman. She wishes she knew more about her, as does Participant 10 who spent so much time searching for information to no avail. “I know her story must be so incredible,” said Participant 10, relating the little information she knows about her persona and further stating that she would love to go up to this woman and ask her about her life. A lot about her persona has to be left up to the imagination: “just imagining being completely on your own…but at the same time such an incredible support to your husband. She just supported him…he had it from nowhere else, so it had to come from her.” Because it is difficult to find a trail, this information has effectively been inferred from what is known about her husband’s persona and the context of their situation during the war.

Participant 3 says she “was fortunate to find some information about [her persona],” which gave her “some interesting material to work with.” In discovering some information about her persona’s family, she had some latitude to develop her own interests through her persona as it would seem logical that her persona would have been aware of certain information. The way she portrays her persona depends on the nature of the presentation she is doing, though, but she tries “to be her” even though she is “not always entirely sure what that is.” Like Participant 10, some of what she “knows” about her persona is inferred using other information and the context of the period. “I have no information about this, but she followed her husband…I don’t know whether she did that as a traditional woman…or an adventurous spirit.” Participant 1 is in a similar dilemma with her persona noting that “there are mysteries about [her persona] that I will probably never solve. She fascinates me.” Knowing and understanding the feelings her persona must have had about different subjects or issues is part of that mystery along with where her persona resided before, during, and after the war. Part of what has made this a passion for Participant 1 is that “like so many women throughout history, [her persona] is defined by her husband’s accomplishments and there is very little information about her as an individual.” What Participant 1 has discovered has been very interesting and allows her to portray this woman with some degree of accuracy, not to mention the fact that even though so few facts exist about her persona, taking on her role has “intensified [her] participation in the organization.” Participant 1 described the ongoing challenge of having a persona very well:

“We cannot truly know another person completely, even those with whom we are related, married, friends, or acquaintances. It is a larger challenge to try to “know” a person who is long deceased. Aside from learning about the individual, one has to research the customs and mores of the time during which they lived. I have had to learn to walk, speak, and act like a person from another era.”

In our interview, we spent some time discussing her ongoing quest to find more information about her persona and she told me that she has “picked up” the practice once again. The relationship between her persona and her husband is a “big, big question mark” to her, which makes it fascinating. “I think she was an accomplished woman and if I can keep her name in the front of people, I’m glad to do that.” Participant 1 went on to say that she “enjoy[s] playing this role, not only because it shows that then, as now, there were different points of view within society, but because expressing such outdated opinion shows how far women have come in 150 years.”

1. Transformational experiences are common

Without exception, the women who participated in this study identified a time when something happened that changed them in some way while participating in this hobby. Many of them provided very detailed descriptions of their experiences, but I will be omitting some of that detail in keeping with the confidential nature of this report. No matter what happened, though, each woman was not the same after the experience and in many cases, the experience changed her forever.

Participant 11 detailed a time when she was interviewed and, though she was relatively new to the organization, was told she handled it very well. She suggested this had something to do with the knowledge that her husband has shared with her over the years and the idea that she may have acquired more than she originally thought. Participant 7 struggled to fit in to the group, but recently found herself a niche that she believes will work well for her. Together with some of the other women in the group, she will engage the public with a demonstration of a period activity, but it was finding this option that she described as a “peak experience” for her. The peak experiences for Participant 2 have already been mentioned as she finds great enjoyment from the group’s participation in parades because of the audience’s reaction to us as we march by. “It gets me every time,” she said.

Participant 9 described a time when she was so much in character that she temporarily forgot herself and did something without thinking. This was a moment when she was very caught up in her portrayal of her persona, as were the people around her, to the point where she acted as her persona in a way that may or may not have been consistent with that woman in real life. Participant 8 detailed the first reenactment she and her husband attended and hearing someone sing a song appropriate for the time. She said, “In that moment, my husband and I were transported to a different time and place and we thought of all those young sons long ago in their tents on the eve of battle.” She believes that those who have been reenactors or living historians for a long time can all highlight similar experiences.

One of Participant 6’s presentations was recorded for her and she noted that the further into her presentation she got, the more like her persona she became. “I could hear it in my voice. It was like I was there,” she said, adding that her husband had been in attendance at this particular presentation and he said, “man, you are awesome.” He said she sounded like she *was* her persona and this is when she thought “it feels like we’re actresses without a script, if that makes any sense…and a really good actress, you know, there’s no disconnection between the two.” Participant 6 surmised that this must be what it is like to “really get into your role” as she could “see and hear it in [her] voice that [she] was totally in persona.” Another experience she described had to do with an encounter with the public at one of our events where she was answering questions for a group and had both personal information and information about her persona that was useful for them. “It was a very rewarding, valuable experience and I felt like I had been of value to them,” she said. In a similar way, Participant 3 described a different event where both the men and the women in the group presented together and both received many interesting questions from the audience. She noted that “it was clear that there was public interest in home life and progressive women!” since not all of the questions were directed to the men.

Participant 3 also mentioned, in our interview, how certain events, due to their locations, allow you to feel more “period” than others. “There’s something about just walking around Gettysburg,” she said, which is not unlike Participant 10 who said, “if you ever go to Gettysburg and [you’re] not in period attire, you just feel weird. It’s like the place you’re supposed to be dressed.” I told both of these women that I have to agree with them, noting that one of the events where I feel closest to the period happens in Gettysburg each year. Participant 10 also described an early experience she had in the organization where one event that she and her husband attended kept them so busy that they were speaking with “hundreds of people from around the world.” During those few days, they met a range of people including those who knew a lot about the Civil War and those who knew almost nothing. She said, “It was gratifying being able to light a spark and bring some level of Civil War history and Victorian living to so many people who knew nothing about it. We had a blast!”

For Participant 5, both of the experiences she had which made an impact on her life had to do with being in period clothing when the public was not around. At two separate locations, in two different instances, Participant 5 had the opportunity to participate in period activities with as little modern interference as possible. In the first case, she and a number of other individuals played games and danced in light given only by lanterns while listening to period appropriate music being played and watching fireflies in a nearby field. The second occasion when Participant 5 felt close to the period was watching a battle reenactment from a position that paying spectators were not allowed to be. For her, it was as if she was watching the battle happen in real time and everyone around her was wearing period correct attire: “the view and what we saw was incredible.” The “ticket carrying spectator” would never have gotten as close as she got. Though not quite the same, both of Participant 1’s peak experiences also had to do with being very close to individuals in period attire, but for her it was as if she was actually in the presence of the real people being portrayed by a living historian. Hearing an individual present as Abraham Lincoln and separately hearing a man present as the highest ranking colored officer in the war changed her greatly. Though she heard both of these individuals present on more than one occasion, it was the individual who portrays the colored officer that changed her mind about the war. “In both places, the audience was riveted and many of us were in tears,” she said about his presentations, following this up in our interview with “I just remember sitting there thinking this is so much deeper than I expected this experience to be in my life…it was just really transcendent because he could capture emotion so deeply and I mean I can’t imagine ever forgetting that.” Participant 1 ended by noting that having a living historian who really captures the essence of the individual he/she is portraying is “almost life-changing” and it is the reason why her feelings about the south have changed.

Participant 1 also described a visit she made with her husband to the gravesite of the individuals they portray. At a separate time, they were also able to visit the grounds where their personas lived at one point, which made it feel so real to her. “I felt incredibly humbled to be able to represent them,” she noted, because of how real they felt to her. Participant 1 is not alone in her visitations to important locations as many of the members of MOCW are able to travel to the towns where their personas spend a portion of their lives. This accounts for one of Participant 4’s peak experiences as well because even though the home of her persona is no longer standing, she was able to visit the location and spend a decent amount of time in the town, chatting with an historian and even handling artifacts connected to her persona. At the gravesite of her persona, she “couldn’t stop crying,” which is very unlike her regular self, but this clearly shows the connection that she has to this woman. Participant 4 also had an experience where she spoke to a very large crowd and though she has historically had a terrible fear of speaking, she felt completely at ease because she was presenting as her persona. Over the years of her portrayal of this persona, she has not only progressed as a speaker, but has also become more and more connected to that woman, which has changed her greatly.

**Outside Observers**

Finally, I would like to highlight the information given to me by my outside observers as it, in many cases, corroborates what the participants said themselves about this group. Therewere three separate events that the outside observers attended; both of them were present at one event and each came individually to two more events. Following these events, each observer sent me a set of notes that they took from each location and the specific instructions I gave them. I asked each of them to pay attention specifically to the women in the organization, how they interacted with one another, members of the public, and the gentlemen in the group and they also had occasion to speak one-on-one with many of the women. In addition to having a sign posted at each event detailing the observations that were taking place, I announced to the women that these individuals were present in order to help me with my observations and I introduced them to any women they did not know. In general, though, they did not heavily interact with the women they were observing and remained in the crowds or the audience as much as possible. What follows are summaries of each observer’s notes from the respective events they attended; for Gettysburg, they are combined because they were both in attendance. For the other events, each attended separately, thus what is presented are the observations of one individual.

Gettysburg – Observers 1 & 2

Both observers were present at the Gettysburg event in July for one day, during which time they were able to watch presentations, note the set-up of the event, interact with different members of the group, and carry on observations of women in the organization. One Observer noted that while giving presentations, the women in the organization would remain in persona the entire time, but when speaking to other women in the group outside of a presentation, they would act as their 21st century selves. This observer also noted that those women who portrayed a more traditional persona tended to remain in persona for a longer amount of time, often engaging with the observer as that persona rather than their 21st century identity. Women who portrayed more “progressive” personas, on the other hand, seemed to drop their 19th century personas more often. This observer hypothesized that this could be a personality trait, or it could be that the more traditional persona has the tendency to impress a more rigid presentation on the woman who has adopted such mannerisms.

A lot of conversation that the Observers overheard had to do with where the presentations for the women should be taking place. These conversations took place only in the absence of tourists or audience members and there was a great deal of talk about how the area where the men were set up seemed to be attracting more visitors. The women also spoke about which group members were at the event and how one group member had recently adopted a new persona, complete with a new outfit, creating a great deal of excitement. It was noted that when women interacted with men in the organization, for the most part they remained in their personas. If they were traveling from one area to another, though, the dropped their personas unless they were approached by a tourist during which time they would actively engage that individual. At the tents, interactions were typically not in persona, unless there was a joke being made about one of the other group members.

It was observed that women in the group typically engaged one another in persona when tourists or audience members were present, encouraging the audience to ask questions, and providing opportunities to explore the different topics of concern for each persona. The women were very good about not having any 21st century items with them or on their person while at this event. It seemed interesting that while the women would typically ignore a tourist or audience member’s use of a 21st century device, such as a phone or iPad, the men in the organization often used these devices as conversation starters, seeming curious about something so strange to their 19th century selves. Although the weather at the time was quite warm, it was surprising that it was not much of a topic of conversation, though the observers did hear stories about other events prior to this one where the weather was even less cooperative.

Some of the women in the group came to a consensus that since there were more members of the public at the men’s staging area, they should go over there to engage them. However, it was noted that once they were over there, the women seemed to congregate with themselves rather than actively engaging the public. Due to the nature of this event, the public was likely to be more interested in the generals’ presentations on account of the battle, but there must be some other way for the women to attract as much of an audience as the men had. While the generals were sought out by members of the public because of their personas, the women often had the opportunity to engage tourists who complimented them on their clothing. The observers also said that male living historians or reenactors seemed to engage one another in persona even if the general public was not paying attention to them, acting as though it was still the 19th century. Female living historians/reenactors, on the other hand, did not do this quite as often and if it did happen, it had less to do with the events of the 19th century and more to do with what was happening that day. It was unclear as to whether the women were generally disappointed about the men having more of an audience than they did or if it had more to do with the planning of the locations for this particular event that led them to feel dismay.

The observers also described an apparent lack of advertising for the women’s events and staging area as there was not much signage to direct members of the public to the area and the tents that were set up were not very close to the sidewalk. It was noted that when one woman was delivering a biographical talk, there was more of an audience present to hear the information, but not all women engaged in such a presentation. This led to a question of whether there might have been more of an audience if there were more women who gave biographical presentations. It was noted again that none of the women utilized any 21st-century devices or conveniences and that those who gave biographical information were extremely knowledgeable about their personas.

Outside of their presentations, the women spoke with one another about their 21st-century lives, which led to the belief that the group is very close-knit and the individuals in the group care a great deal about one another. There seemed to be a common bond among those women who were doing everything they could to present an accurate portrayal of their personas. When actively in persona, the women spoke to one another and treated one another as 19th century women, though there was some variation in terms of those women who portrayed more traditional personas and those who did not. The women who remained at the tents did not appear to adopt as much of a 19th century decorum, but this could have been because there were not as many members of the general public around them. The observers were generally impressed with the women’s ability to remain in persona and with the amount of knowledge each woman had about her character and the time period.

In speaking with some of the women in the group, it seemed that for many women, there was not a lot of information available on the particular persona they had chosen, so they were regularly concerned about representing that individual accurately. For those women who did have a lot of information to research regarding their personas, they felt a greater responsibility to get that person “right.” The audience seemed to be more comfortable with names they were already familiar with, though they were fascinated by the stories of women who acted in very modern ways as compared to their time periods. The women’s portrayals of their personas were very real for the audience members as they would directly address the women as their persona and seemed to understand and enjoy the first-person portrayals. Many members of the public asked to have their pictures taken with the women in the group and others simply asked to take pictures of the women alone.

While the interactions between the men and women in the organization were 21st century in nature, if they passed one another along the tents, they addressed each other by their personas, not as their 21st century selves. The observers also did not notice many women attending the presentations given by the men and thought that the women would have benefitted from a similar set-up to what the men had, including a tent with chairs and a sound system, along with larger signs to draw in a bigger audience. It seemed that there was a difference in what the men and women were presenting in that the men typically spoke about battles and history in general while the women spoke more about the social order of the time period and tried to give an impression of what it was like to be a woman during that era. This seemed to have more of an appeal for women in the audience as there were more women who attended the women’s presentations than there were men. The observers felt that the attention to detail paid by the women was extraordinary and that more debate topics, such as about slavery or education, could add to the existing program.

Train and Town Anniversary Observations

As there was only one other observer at this event, this summary reflects the notes of that single individual. This event took place on a very warm day and while the train was late, the observer noted that both the men and women in the organization were regularly interacting with members of the public. Some members of the group had a difficult time with the heat, so other individuals took care of them by bringing them water and cold handkerchiefs for relief. This observer noted the sense of family and caring that the group members have for one another as being quite significant.

Because this observer was at the previous event, it was clear that the women present this day were wearing new and different outfits from before and the observer found that the commitment level of the women to their clothing was evident in how they were dressed. On top of that, the observer was impressed that these attempts at authenticity were carried out in spite of the extremely warm temperatures of the day. During the train ride, the observer noted that both men and women addressed one another by the names of their personas and did not reveal any 21st century items. Many members of the group traveled up and down the train interacting with the public and entertaining both adults and children during the trip. This showed a high level of commitment to education on the part of the group and when someone asked the observer to consider joining the organization, the observer said it must take a great deal of time to do something like this properly and that time was not readily available for this observer.

The observer noticed that the women were treated as if they were from the 19th century quite often by individuals outside the organization and much like in Gettysburg, they were asked to take pictures with a number of individuals from the public. The observer heard a conversation during which an individual from the audience spoke to one of the women about how she would have loved to live in that time period, which was surprising to the observer seeing as how women did not have as many opportunities or freedoms during that time. During the actual presentation, there were only two women present who presented opposing views for the time period. While the observer noticed that the audience enjoyed the conversation between these two women, they seemed to take more interest in one woman over the other. Following the presentation, some of the men engaged the children who approached them and it was evident to this observer that there is a dedication to instilling a love of history in the next generation. The observer also emphasized a commitment to answering the audience’s questions and the cohesiveness of the group as the members were actively involved in planning a dinner after the event that would celebrate one of the members’ birthdays.

Observations from the reconstructed town

Once again, there was only one observer present for this event, thus the summary that follows comes from the notes of that single individual. The event took place in a venue similar to an open-air museum and as the observer arrived, it was noted that the signage and advertisements for the organization did not include mention of any women. On the website for the location, they did mention that women would be present, but the observer noted that the wording made it seem as though the women were connected to the men, when in reality many of them do not have connections to the generals at all. While the main event was in the afternoon, the observer was told that in the morning many tourists were interacting with the women in a very positive way; the women told this observer that this event was more engaging than the one at Gettysburg had been a month prior. However, this observer mentioned seeing greater interaction at the Gettysburg event and noted that at that location, the women had their own identity separate from the men where they could draw in members of the public with different activities and period correct items while at this event, there was no such space for the women. This observer stated that at this event, it seemed as though the women were more of an accessory to the men and they had lost the identity they had in Gettysburg, yet it was curious that the women were reporting that this event was a better experience overall for them. This led the observer to question whether the women were claiming the audience as their own even though that audience was more focused on the men or if they were actually comfortable taking on a supportive role.

While the main event was going on, the women sat off to the side and simply listened. There were no questions directly asked of them although one question posed by an audience member concerned whether or not wives of generals had the opportunity to visit their husbands during the war and one of the generals directed this question to his wife. Overall, the observer noted minimal interaction between the women and the members of the audience during the presentation. After the presentation was over, though, the women in the group would engage one another in persona in front of the public; however it seemed to this observer that there were fewer opportunities for the women to have discussions about topics important to them. Interestingly though, many members of the public asked the women to engage them out of their personas as their 21st century selves. The observers speculated that this was due to the smaller number of individuals present and the more intimate atmosphere that was created because of this. There was one woman in the group who was cooking in one of the houses, creating a very realistic portrayal of what women would have gone through during that time, but the observer did not see many people enter that building and thus many members of the public may not have known she was there.

Chapter 5

*“But I don’t think I just want people to know her; I want people to understand really what women did and what it was like for women during that period of time.” –* Participant 4

The main purpose of the present study was to discover what it is that women who participate in MOCW gain through their involvement in a group that is so clearly male-dominated. Another similar question was why women become involved with the organization to begin with along with whether or not there are rules for them to follow regarding their involvement. It then became prudent to find out exactly what goals the participants in this organization have and how being a part of this group affects their identity as well as how it might transform them through learning. In order to discover the answers to these questions, it was necessary to not only speak directly with the women of the organization, but also to observe them in several settings relative to the different events the group is involved with. Interviews were the primary method of obtaining data for this research, which is consistent with much of the qualitative literature previously undertaken, both in terms of living history/reenactment and case studies (Coles and Armstrong, 2008; English and Peters, 2012; Hunt, 2004; Nohl, 2015; Sparrow, 2007; Yin, 2014). What follows in this final chapter is a discussion of the findings from the present study, the implications of these findings, and recommendations for future study relative to this area of inquiry.

**Findings**

In chapter 1, I introduced a conceptual framework hypothesizing that the outcome for each female member of MOCW was education, mostly in terms of educating the public who comes to each presentation by the group. It was therefore expected that a theme of education would emerge in some manner given the heavy emphasis the organization places on education and the desire to improve the understanding of each audience about this specific period in history. The participants also asserted that there is just as much education for them personally as there is for any audience member and the source of this education varies from books and other research to simply listening to the stories presented by other members of the group. This finding not only helps to answer the central question of what women gain through their involvement, it is also supported by the transformative learning literature and partially fulfills an answer to the question of what transformative learning is in the context of the organization. Since transformative learning involves changing one’s “frame of reference” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5) by reflecting on our previously held beliefs (Mezirow, 1990) and generating new meaning from the changed ideas (Cooley, 2007), it is not only the women in the organization who experience this, but also the men and the audience members who attend presentations and interact with the group. It is ultimately the educational goal of the organization to inspire everyone to think differently about history and this is rampantly evident in the women who participated in this study.

Nearly all of the women mentioned something about how the learning that came as a result of their participation in MOCW changed them in some way, whether it was simply giving them more respect for the study of history or if it completely changed their views about the Civil War. Both Mezirow (1997) and Foote (2015) asserted similar conclusions as to the power of education and self-reflection and how one can be transformed through learning experiences. All of the women were asked in the initial interview if they had a “peak experience” at any point during their participation in living history/reenactment and through these experiences, the women were often transformed because of what they had learned. Coles and Armstrong (2008) defended similar findings noting that leisure activities such as living history/reenactment promote adult learning for all involved, the participants and the members of the audience, which is wholly similar to my education findings. Turner (1990) likewise stated that for many living historians/reenactors, there is much to be gained from educating the public while Pahl (1994) firmly declared that living history is meant to produce a type of immersive education where everyone can feel personally involved with history. This is the opposite of Hunt (2004) who believed that living history/reenactment was a ‘serious leisure’ activity whose primary purpose was not education, but camaraderie although he would concede that a commitment to authenticity naturally required a level of education not previously attained. The link between authenticity and education also partially answers the question of how members of MOCW go about choosing and adopting a persona and explains why a certain level of education is so necessary for individuals in this group. I will visit this link again later in the discussion of authenticity as a finding, but it is clear that a circular link exists between education, transformation, and the varying levels of authenticity achieved by these women.

In spite of the fact that the mission of this organization is education and the members embody that mission fully, there remains a glaring discrepancy in the types of personas that are represented by this group. The vast majority of men chose to portray generals, who often, though not always, represented a more privileged class of men of the period. The women, too, represent characters from the middle or upper classes even if they have not chosen a persona simply because of the status of the personas chosen by their husbands. Though the personas of both the men and women represent a variety of individuals, there is a great lack of diversity in the overall representation of individuals of the period. To date, there is only one African American in the organization, which means that the rounded look at the time period several of the women are longing for has still yet to be attained.

Although I knew anecdotally about the different levels of group dynamics present in MOCW, I was not wholly aware of how deeply it affects the participants nor did I know the extent to which it makes a difference in how the women feel about the organization. What continued to surprise me over and over again was how committed these women are to the group and how they claimed to have made great friends in the organization in spite of these dynamics. Most of the women seemed to accept the fact that dynamics exist in a group no matter what one does, especially when the group gets bigger and bigger and invites differing personalities. As Brown (2000) indicated, this could be the result of ingroup bias and the idea that in spite of its troubles, the women who are in MOCW still believe their group is better than all others, which helps them excuse or explain any unwanted behaviors. What is particularly interesting to note here is the discrepancies in what was witnessed by the outside observers and what the women of MOCW noted themselves. The vast majority of participants did not make any comments about the differences in set-ups for the men in the group verses the women and those who did made it known that the women should be grateful for what they have. The observers, on the other hand, saw that the women’s conditions were vastly different from the men’s and noted that the women would have benefitted from similar set-ups. Also, because most of the women so strongly identify with the group and have made it a prominent fixture in their lives, they are more willing to deal with the group’s dynamics since their gains and rewards still outweigh the negatives of the experience (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Both “the split” described in chapter 4, also known as the schism in the group, and the split among the different factions of women were repeatedly identified by the participants as being difficult to work through and get over, yet there was only one woman who blatantly said that this has negatively affected the way she feels in the group. This is interesting considering the extent to which these differences have affected the women, whether or not they realize it fully. Even more interesting is how this division and the backlash over the women’s increasing involvement reflects the typical qualities of social change in general. When change occurs in any sense, it is often met with resistance in many different forms and that can be seen in this organization with the various factions, the split, and the continuous undercurrents identified by the participants.

One might ask, with a group such as this, whether a sense of solidarity has formed among the women being that they are effectively a sub-culture of the organization that must rally together if they are going to elicit any changes in the group whatsoever. Solidarity typically arises out of common interests in overcoming some form of oppression; thus the potential for this to develop within MOCW is real; however, from what these findings show, though the friendships are strong, the split among the women and their differences of opinion are preventing any true sense of solidarity from developing (Fenwick, 2008). It is also natural that dealing with group dynamics could be a barrier for some group members in terms of their level of identification with the organization, but in terms of the literature, this typically has to do more with authenticity than anything else (Farmer, 2005; Gapps, 2009). Hall (1994) noted that “farbs” are “tolerated” in living history/reenactment organizations to an extent, but this undoubtedly causes tension in a group (Decker, 2010; Farmer, 2005), which is ultimately the essence of what the women in the present study had to say.

Being a part of this group naturally allows me to see the extent of the friendships among its members firsthand; thus I expected this to emerge as a theme through the research process. Given the issues with group dynamics, I did not, however, expect the extent of this friendship to be so intense, nor did I expect so many of the women who participated to identify it as being one of their greatest rewards/gains from participation in the organization. This is also a great portion of why these women are involved with the group, in spite of the fact that most of them did not join on their own. Though her study was different in its intentions, Cooley (2007) also found that women who had initially gotten involved with a particular group or organization for “practical reasons” ended up continuing their involvement for personal ones due to the friendship and connections that developed. Hunt (2004) is one to agree that an activity such as this is a great source of comradery, but so do Anderson (1982) and Turner (1990) who both detailed the very specific acts that living historians/reenactors engage in while participating in an event. From a different angle, Cooley (2007) found that deep friendship associations among women in small groups help to elicit a feeling of identity with that group just as Fenwick (2008) noted how the formation of strong bonds among women working together solidified their sense of community. The problem with MOCW is that even though there are many friendships that have formed among the women over the years, not all of the women have felt safe in the group when it comes to difference of opinion and without that kind of environment, transformation and growth cannot occur for them (Cooley, 2007). Still, the literature in general did not emphasize the level of friendship seen in the responses of the participants in this study, which holds implications for future research that will be discussed later.

Although I knew, again, to some extent that authenticity was an issue in MOCW, I must have been unaware of how sharp the divide is in terms of the women in this group and their ideas about what it means to be authentic, but beyond that, whether they actually care. This certainly helps to answer the questions about the rules for participation in the organization, the participants’ goals, and the procedure for obtaining a persona, but it also deals with transformative learning and how participation affects each woman’s identity. Since this subject was so prominent in the living history/reenactment literature, I hoped it would come through the women participants of this study, but unfortunately I see it creating significant problems with both sides having legitimate arguments for their positions. It is understandable that some women want to be as authentic as possible and one of the driving forces behind a high level of authenticity is the proper education of the public, but those women whose primary purpose in the organization is a supportive role rather than an educational one may not necessarily need to be held to the same standard. Decker (2010) discussed this issue at length describing how difficult it is for some group members to accept others who represent lower levels of authenticity. Many of the women in MOCW simply do not have the same dedication to authenticity as others do, which may affect their status in the group (Decker, 2010). Since there is such great variation in the idea of what constitutes authenticity (Handler and Saxton, 1988; Hunt, 2004), the same variations should be accepted in living history/reenactment groups such as MOCW. The literature tells us that true authenticity is nearly impossible to achieve (Gapps, 2009; Handler and Saxton, 1988), but at the same time, the experiences that approach a certain level of authenticity are those that seem to have the greatest effect on the members of a living history/reenactment group as was shown especially by Participant 5 in her recounting of several experiences that seemed to bring her close to the time period. Part of the limits on authenticity, for both the women in MOCW and other living historians/reenactors, is the expense one must go to in order to appear more authentic. Though this will be elaborated on further in a subsequent section, it is worthy to note here how the issue of authenticity is also one of social class as those who wish to be more authentic must have the necessary resources in order to make that a reality. Being more authentic requires more money or if one is making his/her clothing, that individual needs to have the time in which to perform those duties. I don’t presently know of any men in the organization who have made their own uniforms, but many of the women have or continue to engage in this practice. This division mirrors the gender dynamics of the organization where the men, who are members, have less of an investment in terms of the clothing they must acquire while the women, who are generally not members and do not have the same rights as full members, must put forth considerable effort, time, and money in order to portray themselves authentically.

The one finding that I did not expect at all was that this is an organization to be proud of and most of the women, regardless of personal issues they may have had with the group, find at least someone in the organization whom they believe to be worthy of praise. The fact that the mission of the organization is educational in nature, too, adds to the feeling of pride for many of these women because they believe they are making a difference. Even though most of the women were brought in by their husbands, they quickly realized that of all hobbies to have acquired, this is a very worthy one and doing it with an organization such as this holds a great deal of merit. Having pride in this organization at least partially explains what the women get out of their participation and for some, it helps to explain why they became involved, specifically if they were asked to join. This also has implications for an individual’s identity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Brown, 2000) as well as implications for the procedure of adopting a persona and the rules of the organization. The living history/reenactment literature, however, is fairly silent about this topic, except when it comes to those individuals who take pride in keeping certain aspects of history alive or emphasizing something they believe in (Farmer, 2005; Gapps, 2009; Hall, 1994; Hunt, 2004; Radtchenko, 2006; Sparrow, 2007). This means that pride in one’s organization, specifically a living history/reenactment organization, is an area that is vastly underexplored and will be discussed more deeply in a later section.

Although I am personally aware of the high cost required to attend events as part of MOCW and purchase clothing and accessories to look appropriate at those events, I was not expecting this theme to come out so prominently among my participants. It seems that the greatest connection that existed between the expense of the hobby and other concepts connected to it was authenticity; as was mentioned before, these two ideas are invariably connected and can be used as a fair excuse for those who do not wish to go to extremes to be authentic. The lengths that some individuals go to in order to appear as authentic as possible or simply to attend as many events as possible naturally require the use of a great deal of funds. This means that the hobby is at least partially exclusive since only certain classes of people can afford the extra expenses it carries (Farmer, 2005). Although many authors in the literature explore this idea at least in part (Hunt, 2004; Sparrow, 2007; Turner, 1990), the discussion is typically surrounding the men in the hobby and the items they need to purchase in order to be more authentic, rather than looking at the amount of money a woman must spend simply to walk around a camp or interact with the public during an event. This again reflects the gender dynamics of the organization and the hobby in general where the women are considered to have more supportive roles yet much more is required of them to participate. Even though Hall (1994) states that the social class of living historians/reenactors is not confined to any one area in particular, it is obvious that not everyone can engage in a hobby that demands so much money and time, both of which are luxuries, especially when there is more than one individual in a family who is interested in it. Interestingly, this mimics not only the social class issues of the Civil War era, but also those of today; individuals who are members of the lower socioeconomic statuses will not have the resources to have any hobby let alone one as expensive as this. This remains yet another area that could be explored in greater depth in the future.

Because I expected education to be a dominant theme in this research, I also surmised that some part of that would have to do with searching for truth or expanding one’s knowledge on a regular basis. As I quickly found out, this is a great part of what the women in MOCW are gaining from their involvement as so many of them have plunged themselves into researching their personas and this has kept them interested in the group and in the events where they get to share their research with the public. For most of the women, the information that is available to them about their personas is scarce, which makes the quest that much more exciting and frustrating at the same time. The knowledge they have gained has also transformed them in many ways, changing their ideas or perspectives so that they approach their lives differently than they used to (Foote, 2015; Mezirow, 1997; Nohl, 2015). The quest for truth or at a minimum, a search for knowledge, is quite prevalent in the literature from those whose motivation is one of authenticity (Handler and Saxton, 1988) to those who are looking for answers or simply to educate themselves further (Agnew, 2004; Coles and Armstrong, 2008; Cook, 2004; Hunt, 2004; Radtchenko, 2006). Both Agnew (2004) and Coles and Armstrong (2008) highlighted interview responses similar to my own where the living historians/reenactors stated that they are looking for answers, filling in the blanks, and have become more and more interested in researching history due to their involvement with these organizations. Radtchenko (2006) mentioned the “constant search for documents” that provide answers that group members are seeking, which is nearly identical to a lot of what my participants had to say. The literature heavily supports this finding and the responses from my participants show that it is not only men who have an interest in gaining more and more knowledge in this hobby, but that women are equally as interested in this in order to further themselves in the hobby.

After reading many interesting descriptions of transcendent experiences called by many names: “magic moments” (Handler and Saxton, 1988), “time warps” (Turner, 1990), “wargasm” and “period rush,” referenced by Agnew (2004) and Farmer (2005), I expected to see similar experiences made salient throughout the responses of the women in this study. I was not disappointed as every single participant had a unique and often transformative “peak experience” that she described in her response to my questions. These peak experiences, consistent with the process of transformational learning outlined in the literature (Cooley, 2007; Mezirow, 1997; Nohl, 2015), were reflected upon carefully and intentionally, which effectively initiated the process of transformational learning. This adds to what the women in MOCW gain from their involvement as so many of their experiences provided them with opportunities they never would have had otherwise or transformed them in some way. For some of my participants, their transformative experiences had to do with the persona they chose and feeling close to that person even for a moment; for others, it was a more general experience happening at a reenactment or other event where listening to music or hearing someone speak transported them to another time and place. These “magic moments” or peak experiences are not only sought after by living historians/reenactors; they are often the sole reason they continue in the hobby, making their time and effort worthwhile (Handler and Saxton, 1988; Turner, 1990). Participating in living history/reenactment events provide opportunities to explore one’s self (Turner, 1990), which can lead to “significant personal transformations” (Mezirow, 1997). The more absorbed an individual is in a particular experience, the more potential that experience has to change that person (Agnew, 2004; Nohl, 2015). This can be seen in nearly all of the participants who identified a peak experience, thus adding not only to the living history/reenactment literature on the subject, but also to the transformational learning literature, supporting a definite link between the two.

In chapter 1, I presented a conceptual framework detailing how I expected to find the process of entering the organization and developing within the organization for the women who would participate in this study. After analyzing the data gathered during the study, I have revised this framework and separated it to be true for both the women who enter the organization because of their husbands and those who enter the organization on their own.

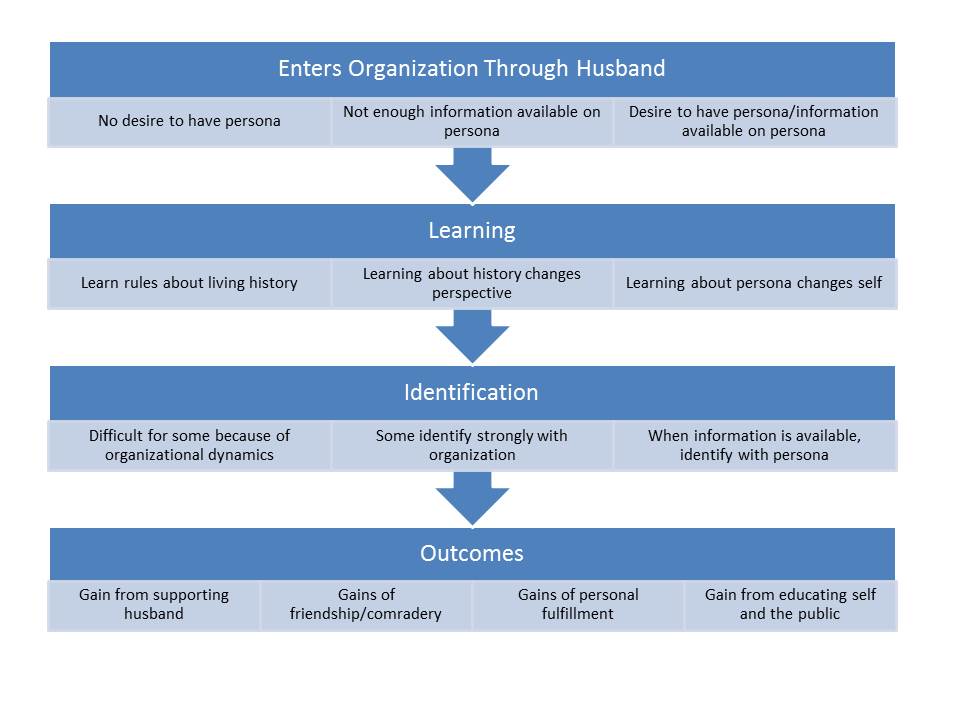


Figure 2 - Conceptual Framework Revised, Version 1

In this revised framework, the women enter the organization through their husbands, but either do not have any desire to take on a persona, have difficulty finding enough information on the persona they have defaulted to, or they have a combination of having enough information on their persona and wanting to portray that individual in group presentations. Once this has been established, their learning takes on different appearances; they not only have to learn the rules about the organization, but they have to learn as much about their persona as possible. In learning about their persona, those who have at least a moderate amount of information available to them find that they change on some level, whether that be a minimal amount or a great amount. The amount of change that occurs within the individual seems to be directly connected to how much information is available on her persona along with how much she identifies with that women. For many of the women, their learning through group participation also changes their previously held perspectives on history, opening their eyes to either what they had not known previously or giving them a new view from which to see historical events. The biggest barrier for many of the women in terms of identifying with the organization itself seems to be the often difficult group dynamics. Some of the women feel that the friendships they have made enhance their experience in the group and assist in their identification with the organization, while others have difficulty getting past those issues. Finally, the women are not simply in MOCW to educate or be educated, although this is still a very prominent gain for them. Instead, they also find that the friendships they have made, the comradery, the support they provide for their husbands, and the feelings that they get from being part of the education of the public are what keep them returning to events.

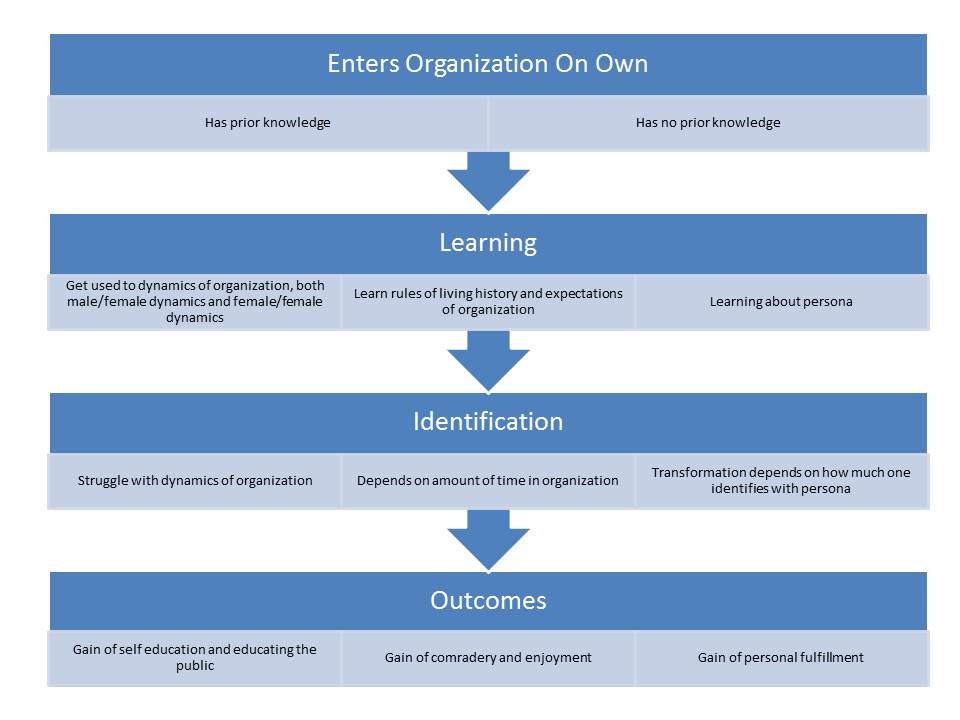


Figure 3 - Conceptual Framework Revised - Version 2

For the women who enter the organization on their own, they are either coming into the group with prior knowledge of living history/reenactment or they have no experience whatsoever. Though learning about their personas is a challenge, the greatest amount of learning seems to deal with the dynamics of the organization, especially the male-female dynamic. Those who came without any prior knowledge of living history also have a steep learning curve in terms of figuring out the rules surrounding the hobby and how to behave in different group situations. The amount of identification they feel with the organization therefore is heavily dependent on how much time they spend with the group and how long they have been part of it. The extent of their personal transformation depends on the level of identification they have with their personas given that some personas may be more difficult to identify with than others. Similarly, the organization’s dynamics, being difficult for them to deal with at times, prevent them from fully identifying with the group. The outcomes for these women are the enjoyment they receive from educating the public and themselves, which is weighted especially heavily for these women, they enjoyment that they receive from being around the other members of the group, and how they feel they are making a difference through what they are doing. With all things being equal, regardless of how a woman entered the organization, the single most important factor in her transformative experience is the extent to which she identifies with her persona and the most important factor dealing with identification is the dynamics of the group.

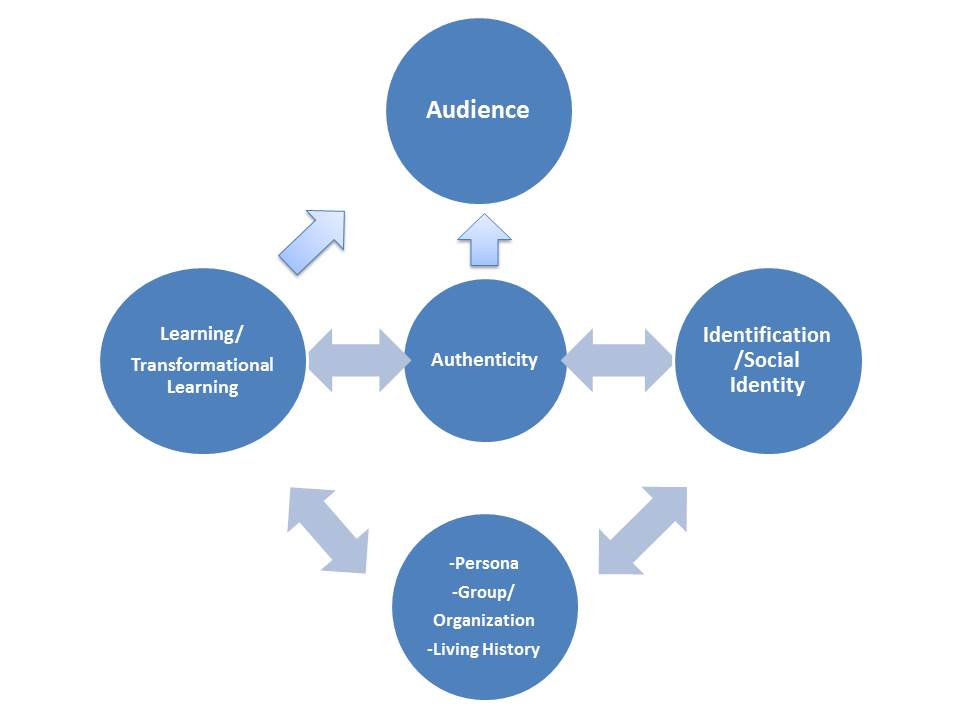


Figure 4: Conceptual Framework Revised – Version 4

In order to fully represent the cyclical relationship of many of the terms prevalent throughout this research, Figure 4 was created to show how learning and identification affect the women in this organization. The issue of authenticity is at the center, showing how it relates both to the learning and transformational learning that takes place for the women in the organization and the audiences who come to each presentation. As women learn, they often become more authentic in their portrayal of a 19th-century individual, but a desire for an authentic portrayal will also inspire more learning. This learning becomes transformational when the woman is in an authentic situation, experiencing what someone of the period might have experienced or at least something very close to it. The audience, too, is transformed by more authentic portrayals of these personas as they are learning facts they may have never been aware of. Authenticity also has to do with how strongly a woman identifies with the organization since those who tend towards a lower level of authenticity tend to feel outcast by those who follow stricter rules. Therefore their social identities with certain aspects of the group are weak as compared to those who exhibit a more authentic portrayal. Both learning and identification also have revolving relationships with the woman’s persona, the group itself, and living history as a hobby. The more one learns about her persona, typically, the more she identifies with this persona and that would in turn inspire her to learn more. The more one identifies with the group itself, the more one might be inspired to learn more about history and thus become more authentic in one’s 19th-century portrayal. Similarly, the more one learns about the hobby of living history, the more one can identify with the group he/she participates with and the more authentic that person then wants to become. All of these elements, together, create a framework with which we can understand the women’s participation in this organization.

**Implications**

Because this research is about women only, it is inherently of interest to anyone in gender or feminist studies, especially those with an interest in history. As the living history/reenactment literature has shown, the study of women in this area is very much underrepresented since this is a traditionally male-dominated hobby and the historical periods most frequently portrayed do not seem to present many unique opportunities for women. The women in MOCW have shown, however, that with some dedication and research, one can find strong, interesting, unique women throughout history who are often overlooked and bring them to the forefront so that the general public may have the opportunity to learn more about them. If this information is shared, perhaps more women who participate in the living history/reenactment hobby would be more willing to step up to fill similar roles thereby inviting more research into the motivations of and effects on women who choose this path.

Those who study history, current and future historians, and those with an interest in the living history/reenactment realm should be particularly interested in this research since it addresses women in a small organization while most of the other living history/reenactment literature only looks at larger organizations. What is also interesting about this for those in the historical field is how laypersons, or individuals without historical backgrounds, are perpetuating the study and education of history of their own volition. One might ask, then, if individuals with no academic training in history whatsoever are so dedicated to the preservation of history, particularly of women in history, why aren’t more students of history engaged in similar pursuits. This could inspire more individuals in the history field to take on different roles in the name of education.

In spite of the fact that Mezirow’s landmark publication on transformational learning dealt with women re-entering college programs (Mezirow and Marsick, 1978), English and Peters (2015) made it known that there is a severe lack of research into the transformative learning experiences of women in any venue. The findings of the present research show again and again that there are strong links between living history/reenactment and transformative experiences, which not only suggests that those who have an interest in or have already begun a study of transformative learning ought to pay more attention to how women experience it, but that there is another niche of available research in linking transformative learning to the living history/reenactment hobby. The women who participated in this study have shown that there is a great deal to be learned about the transformative power of studying history and taking on the persona of someone from a different time period and this is something that needs to be better understood by anyone who focuses on adult education.

The study of groups and group dynamics is not new by any means, nor is the study of social identity, but once again, the literature seems to lack the connection between this and the living history/reenactment community. Integrating women into a male-dominated domain is often difficult (Perdue, 2016), but the transition may be eased by offering open communication lines among group members and could result in the formation of a strong sense of solidarity among the underrepresented members. Though there have been studies of solidarity and how it relates to women and the groups with which they identify (Fenwick, 2008; Perdue, 2015), none have concentrated on a group similar to MOCW. Social Psychologists and Anthropologists make it a point to understand group functions, but there is currently no bridge between their study and the living history/reenactment literature. The living history/reenactment authors identify so many links to social identity and group dynamics, but do not explore them to the extent that they ought to be. The present research identifies several different areas that directly address group dynamics and identity, especially in terms of “the split” and the division among the women in MOCW and these cannot be unique to this organization alone. In fact, an entirely separate level to group study that can be explored here has to do with the volunteer nature of these organizations. There is not a single organization mentioned in this document that pays its members for their participation; thus the findings of this study and other research on living history/reenactment groups can help us to understand how volunteer organizations operate and how individuals operate within them. There are many volunteer groups that exist and it would be interesting to compose a body of literature devoted to understanding how their group dynamics might differ from other organizations and how they contribute to cultural change in their methodology.

**Future Research**

As I have alluded to both in my discussion of the findings of this research and in the implications, there are a number of areas where future research is not only possible, but also needed in order to advance the study of transformative learning, social identity, and women in male-dominated organizations. The greatest area for this research lies within the living history/reenactment communities that are represented in the literature mostly through large organizations where women are not prominent members. The women who participated in this study support the idea that transformation occurs only after one changes his/her frame of reference (Polizzi and Frick, 2012), but it was not only the women in this group who underwent a change. The transformation of MOCW from an entirely male-dominated group to one where women have an increasingly prominent role is a path that other organizations can follow or perhaps are following, but unless there is research conducted on these groups, whether the process is similar to the one followed by MOCW will remain unknown. More research can certainly be conducted with MOCW itself since it seems to be a fairly unique organization in the living history/reenactment community and not all of the women who are involved in the group participated, thus leaving a gap in the knowledge that was gained through this research. More specifically, it would be interesting to look at only one or two of the women in MOCW, the ones who have experienced the greatest transformation, in order to generate a deeper understanding of what that transformation looks like and how it could be provoked in other similar individuals.

Another area that does not seem to have been explored much in the living history/reenactment literature is that of pride in one’s group or organization. This may be due to the fact that most of the groups analyzed were quite large, but even so, the group’s reputation depends on its members and being part of a group that has a positive reputation should inspire some amount of pride within them. This, again, was not made salient in that literature although it was often implied, which means that there are a number of groups that could be explored further to find out how pride is formed and what conditions are necessary for that to happen.

The circular link between group dynamics, authenticity, and the cost of being in this hobby is another area that could use more exploration beyond that already begun by Decker (2010). As the present research found, most of the issues with group dynamics had to do with differing views on appropriate levels of authenticity, which is directly tied to the individual’s level of commitment to being authentic and how much money one has to spend on this venture. This opens a further window into the study of living history/reenactment organizations as though many authors in that literature implied that there are certain classes of people who may be more attracted to this hobby than others, it usually did not directly address the issue that one has to have some disposable income in order to even engage in this hobby. Furthermore, the women in MOCW have shown that the amount one spends in order to be authentic does not correspond with her status in the organization, which means that women are often putting out a great deal of their incomes yet receive little in return except arguments about how authentic they are. This is an area that could be explored more; how do women feel about spending so much money for a hobby that is primarily their husband’s?

Volunteerism, too, opens an entirely new area of possible research in a number of ways. An issue of class is one way, in terms of whether or not one has to be of a certain socioeconomic level in order to consider volunteering and what other factors go into that decision such as time and location. If one did not own a car or have access to regular transportation, for instance, it would be difficult for that individual to volunteer. Another area to consider might be the cost-benefit ratio of volunteer work. Looking at living history/reenactment from this direction makes the hobby considerably questionable, especially for those individuals who reenact out on the battlefield, sleep in tents, and regularly expose themselves to the elements. Then, there are the dynamics associated with a group of volunteers and exactly how much one can expect from someone who is giving his/her time freely without any tangible reward. Many people enter a volunteer organization in order to effect change and make a difference in some respect, yet this can be overshadowed by negative group dynamics. Looking further into these areas would not only help with the understanding of volunteer organizations, but it would also help those organizations themselves in all of their practices.

Although I faced a number of challenges in undertaking this research, namely my close, personal involvement with the group and the fact that this study was not welcomed by every member in the organization, I learned so much more than I ever imagined I would. I am pleased to have found so many links between my own data and the published literature on living history/reenactment, transformative learning, and social identity theory as it adds tremendous support to the viability of this study. I also believe that should the members of MOCW read this in its entirety, they will learn a lot more about themselves and the group and hopefully find more positive connections among themselves than negative ones. Additionally, it might help them to better understand the different perspectives of the group’s members which would hopefully lead to a higher tolerance to those differences overall. My greatest hope would be to see all of the women in MOCW feeling appreciated and respected for whatever level of involvement they have and for them to be continuously supported both by the group as a whole and by the other women individually in whatever endeavors they choose to pursue.

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Appendix A

**Letter to Participants**

A Qualitative Study of Women’s Involvement in a Living History Organization

You are invited to participate in a research study about women’s experience in a living history organization. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a member of the Confederation of Union Generals either through your husband/significant other or on your own. You must be at least 18 years of age in order to participate in this study. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

This study is being conducted by: Amanda Silva, a doctoral student at Marywood University completing her dissertation in the Human Development program.

**Background Information**

The purpose of this case study is to uncover specific details about women’s involvement with a living history organization that operates in the northeastern part of the United States, mostly in Pennsylvania.

**Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer several interview questions that will be emailed to you in a Word document and return those answers to the researcher electronically. You will also be asked to consent to being observed in public settings at Confederation of Union Generals events by the researcher and two confederates: Amanda Silva (researcher), Cynthia Hamill (confederate), and Vincent Chesney (confederate). These will include events in Scranton, PA, Neshaminy, PA, Gettysburg, PA, Shwenksville, PA, and Bedford, PA. You can complete the answers to the interview questions on your own time, but once you provide your responses, follow-up questions may be asked of you to clarify your answers. These follow-up questions will either be posed to you in person at an event, through email, or over the phone. While you are asked to complete these answers on your own time, your responses should be submitted by the last day in August 2016.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

The risks to participation in this study are no greater than ordinarily encountered in daily life.

The benefits to participation include contributing to the current literature and research about living history organizations by adding the perspective of women that is not often reported on. This research will also add credibility to the Confederation of Union Generals as an organization and its members.

**Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records.

Records will be retained for a minimum of 1 year. Paper documents will be shredded and electronic files will be deleted after 5 years has passed.

**Participation is Voluntary**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the researcher, or Marywood University or the Confederation of Union Generals.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships previously identified. If you choose to withdraw, any answers to interview questions that you have provided will be deleted or shredded immediately.

**Contacts and Questions**

The researcher conducting this study is Amanda Silva, ABD. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact the researcher via phone at: 570-498-3572 or via email at: silva.amanda.m@gmail.com.

You may also contact the researcher’s sponsor, Dr. Joseph Polizzi, via phone at: 570-348-6211 x2497 or via email at: japolizzi@marywood.edu.

If you have any questions now or later, related to the integrity of the research (the rights of research subjects), you may contact Dr. Laura Camlet Houser at Marywood University, Director of Research and Sponsored Programs, via phone at: (570) 961-4778 or via email at: [lacamlet@maryu.marywood.edu](mailto:lacamlet@maryu.marywood.edu).

You may keep this form for your records.

Appendix B

**Initial Email Communication**

Dear Ladies of COUG,

If you were present at our Winter Rendezvous event, you heard my presentation with regard to the research I am conducting as part of the completion of my Ph.D. in Human Development at Marywood University. For those of you who were not present at Winter Rendezvous, I will provide a brief synopsis of this research below.

I am interested in the experience you have had as a member and participant of the Confederation of Union Generals. In order to uncover what your experience has been and is like, I would like to ask you to answer a few questions through email on your own time. These questions will be provided in a Word document for you to include your responses and return to me prior to the end of August of this year. In addition to these questions, I will be conducting observations of the women in the group at the COUG events between now and August of this year, which includes: Neshaminy State Park, Neshaminy PA; Spring Social, Gettysburg, PA; Pennypacker Mills, Schwenksville, PA; Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, Gettysburg, PA; and Old Bedford Village, Bedford, PA. Because I am a member of this organization, I have also asked two fellow doctoral students to observe these public events in order to validate my own observations. You will have the opportunity to get to know them at each of the different events this year.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and I have attached a letter outlining that participation to this email. If you decide to participate, you can also decide to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with me or the Confederation of Union Generals. Please feel free to ask me any questions you might have about this research at any time throughout the process. I will do my best to answer your questions as soon as possible.

I have attached several documents to this email, including the one mentioned above. First, you will find the participant letter outlining the study once again and your involvement in it. This also provides contact information for myself and the chair of my dissertation committee, as well as the Director of Research and Sponsored Programs at Marywood University. Then, you will see the document with the interview questions and instructions for answering them. If you choose to participate, you may simply type your answers to the interview questions in the same document, save it, and return it to me via email, or you may choose to create a separate document for your responses. There are not guidelines as to the length of your responses, but I do ask that you think about each question fully before you begin to answer it.

This study has been approved by Marywood University’s Institutional Review Board. I want to stress once again the voluntary nature of your participation; you are under no obligation to include yourself in this research whatsoever. I also want to thank you for your thoughtful consideration and your time. And once again, please feel free to contact me with any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

Amanda Silva a.k.a. Lillie Devereux Blake

Silva.amanda.m@gmail.com; 570-498-3572

Appendix C

**Interview Protocol**

Potential participants will be sent a standard email, a copy of which is included below, along with the participation letter and a copy of the interview questions, also included below. Should they agree to participate, they will be instructed to answer the questions provided to them in a separate document and return them to me via email.

1. What has your experience with COUG been like and why do you continue to participate in this organization?
2. Has your involvement in COUG changed you in any way?
   1. If you have chosen a persona, has this choice changed you in any way?
   2. Has your membership in this organization affected your personal life?
3. If you have chosen a persona, please describe what it is like to take on the mannerisms and characteristics of another person.
   1. Why did you choose a persona?
   2. If you have not chosen a persona, would you like to choose one in the future?
4. What is the greatest struggle you have experienced as a participant in this organization?
5. What is the greatest reward you have experienced as a participant in this organization?
6. Have you ever had what might be called a “peak experience” in your time as a participant in this organization? If so, please describe it below.
7. Have any critical incidents occurred during your time as a member of COUG where you may have seen a change take place? If so, please describe them below.
8. If there is any other information you wish to provide, please feel free to include that below.

Appendix D

**Follow-Up Email Communication**

Dear Ladies of COUG,

As I am nearing the end of my data collection as part of the research for my dissertation, I would like to offer this brief reminder about your participation in the study. If you chose to participate and submitted your interview responses to me already, thank you very much for your help. If you chose to participate but have not yet submitted your responses, please know that I can only take them until the end of August when I will be finishing my observations. Finally, if you have not yet decided whether you would like to participate or not, there is still time for you to take part in the study should you want to.

Attached to this email you will find a copy of the initial email that went out to all the ladies in the COUG, the participant letter outlining the study, and a copy of the interview questions. This study has been approved by Marywood University’s Institutional Review Board. Remember that your participation in this study is optional and voluntary and you are under no obligation to do so. I would like to thank you all once again for your help and consideration and as always, please feel free to contact me with any questions that you may have.

Sincerely,

Amanda Silva a.k.a. Lillie Devereux Blake

Silva.amanda.m@gmail.com; 570-498-3572

Appendix E

**Signage**

**Research Observation in Progress**

This research is investigating women’s experiences in a living history organization through interviews and observations. It has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Marywood University. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact:

Amanda Silva (Principal Investigator)

silva.amanda.m@gmail.com

Dr. Joseph Polizzi (Sponsor)

japolizzi@marywood.edu

Dr. Laura Ann Camlet Houser, Director of Research and Sponsored Programs at Marywood University

lacamlet@marywood.edu

Appendix F

**Descriptions of Participants**

In the descriptions that follow, I detail the information that was provided to me by each of the 11 participants who consented to be part of this study. There are some references that will be made throughout, including a reference to “the split” described above, which many of the participants, though not all, lived through. I have taken considerable effort to make these descriptions as anonymous as possible so that if other members of the group were to read about each participant, it might not be so easy to pinpoint who the person is. However, there is some information about each woman here that must be at least somewhat specific in order to support the findings of the research.

**Participant 1**

Participant 1 joined the organization through her husband and has been involved with the organization since before the split. She has chosen to portray the wife of her husband’s chosen general, but has done some work on developing and understanding that persona. There is limited information on the wife of her husband’s chosen general; however, with what Participant 1 does know, she has filled in some of the unknown areas with what can be assumed based on contextual knowledge of the period. Participant 1 submitted her initial interview responses via email on 6th April 2016 and was interviewed face-to-face on 19th May 2016.

Participant 1 indicated that her experience with MOCW has “changed her greatly,” particularly because she had not previously had an intense interest in the Civil War period and the information she has gained through her involvement with the organization and listening to the stories of other members has made a significant impact on her personally. Although she does not necessarily have a deep connection to her persona, she indicated that she can at least identify with this woman as a mother, particularly because this general’s wife lost several children. Participant 1 has not lost a child herself, but she can empathize with what that must have felt like. She also feels it is a “great responsibility” to portray another individual because she is representing someone who actually lived and though it is difficult to really know that person without much left behind, she still needs to be as authentic and true to the period as possible. Putting on the period attire transforms this participant into a woman of the 19th century and even changes her posture and the way she conducts herself because she believes all of her mannerisms and actions need to reflect those of that time period. Participant 1 indicated, however, that this is an ongoing challenge, but not one that she is unprepared to take on.

Prior to the increase in women’s involvement in the organization, Participant 1 indicated that the women did not do much. In her interview, she mentioned that women were referred to as “eye candy” because of their beautiful and interesting outfits and members of the public would often approach them with questions specifically about their attire. Since the women have become more involved, Participant 1 seems to have felt intensification in her participation because the public has taken interest in what the women have to say and she has taken this opportunity to represent a more traditional viewpoint. Many of the women who have either taken on a persona or joined the organization recently represent very strong personae that were out to effect change; Participant 1 has chosen to represent the other side of this and delights in declaring an “outdated opinion” because it helps the audience see how far women have advanced.

With regard to the increased involvement of the women, Participant 1 was the first to openly discuss the idea that this change has not been an easy one within the organization, nor has it been an easy one among the women themselves. Participant 1 mentioned that there are actually two or three factions of women in the organization including those who have a persona and participate in presentations, those who do not have a persona and do not wish to participate in presentations, and those who are sticklers of authenticity and may have a persona or participate in presentations, but not with the other group of women. She is under the impression that this third group of women might look down on the other two for inaccuracies in dress or mannerisms relative to the 19th century and though everyone is friendly to one another, it is still apparent that these divides exist. Many women felt pressure to participate and that made them want to retreat into the background even further. Other women participate in a lot of functions as the wife of their husband’s chosen general and it is odd to Participant 1 that they will present in that way but not with MOCW. Though she does not know the exact reason for this, she surmises that it again has to do with authenticity, that they do not like what the more active women are doing, and do not feel it is appropriate for women of the period. Again, these are Participant 1’s thoughts about the issue and what she is guessing might be the reasons why this third group of women does not participate with the active women in MOCW.

Participant 1 indicated that she has had many peak experiences during her time in the organization including vising the gravesites of her persona and her husband’s persona, listening to current or former members performing as their personas, and visiting the site of the home of her husband’s persona, all of which make her participation in the organization so much more real to her. These peak experiences are coupled with the joy that Participant 1 gets from the group’s presentations to the public, which is what the mission of the organization is, and make it a “fuller” experience in general for both her and the audience. Her increased knowledge of the Civil War has made her less tolerant of the Southern viewpoint that the war was only about states’ rights, but she does believe that it is important to have both sides represented at major functions. When she visited the south recently, her experience made her very aware of how real the war continues to be to those individuals who live there, which is understandable considering the great losses they suffered in men and property. Still, it is evident to her that while the north moved on from this experience, the south did not, and this is an awareness that she would not have had had she not been a participant in this organization.

In our face-to-face interview, I asked Participant 1 if she believes the women who have personas should present with the men. This is something she feels very strongly about; although there are some women who fit with the men due to the nature of their personas, other women do not fit as well with the generals. She believes this is something that should be preserved yet at the same time, it should be regular practice to have women present either before or after a “Meet the Generals” because if the presentations were combined, it would dilute the content of both. She did, however, agree that if the group as a whole is small, there is nothing wrong with those women present who want to speak about their personas to be a part of the address to the public. Participant 1 particularly appreciates those events when we are more informal in our interactions with the public because to her it feels more natural and normal, as if she is simply carrying on a conversation (because she is) where she can interject her “traditional” opinion when it comes to the dress and habits of the other women. The other times, when we sit in a row and speak to the audience in a more formal way, feel to her more like scenes when the audience is simply waiting for us to say the next thing.

Learning is a large part of Participant 1’s membership in the organization; she said she loves learning and the educational mission of the organization is a large part of the draw of her membership. She believes she is always learning something new, whether through her own research or the ongoing research of others in the group, and that with each amount of knowledge she gains, the closer she feels to the period itself. As indicated earlier, a great part of her transformation happens when she puts on the period attire, which she likened to actors finally putting on their costumes after studying a role for so long. For her, though, it works in the opposite direction where putting on the clothes is the catalyst for her feeling more as though she were a part of the 19th century.

Participant 1 believes that the changes in the organization are very reflective of the changes that took place around the actual time period of the Civil War. Some women chose to participate in the women’s movement while others did not. Some women disguised themselves as men and went off to war, but others did not. The same is true for the women in MOCW where some women want to take on a more active role as participants of the organization while others are quite content with remaining in the background and portraying a general’s wife. Participant 1 hopes that the differences in the lives of women in the 19th century versus today are coming through in our presentations and that the audience sees just how far women have come since then.

Her favorite events are those that allow her to feel closest to the period through the setting in which they take place. Although she knows that she is “playing a part,” she still feels that certain settings allow her to feel more “normal” in the sense that in her period attire, she feels as though she belongs there rather than she as a transplant from the 21st century. Participant 1 continues to be inspired by and proud of the individuals in the organization for the dedication they have shown to their personas and the knowledge they continue to impart on the audiences that receive them. Whenever anyone has an opportunity to really explore the feelings of the individual he or she portrays, which happens when an audience member asks a more open-ended question, it amazes her that these individuals can provide answers without a second thought. This fits very well with the educational mission of the organization as well as the opportunities for Participant 1 to feel more authentic.

Finally, when asked if Participant 1 would cease her involvement in the organization if her husband ceased his, her answer was two-fold. If he was no longer able to continue due to health problems or something similar, she would not continue either because she would not want to be away from him if he needed her. If he were to pass away, she does not know if she would continue her involvement because it would be emotionally difficult to attend without him, though she would greatly miss the living history and social aspect of the group.

**Participant 2**

Participant 2 became involved with the organization through her husband in 2012, after “the split.” She specified that it is her husband who is the member, but because of their involvement, their social calendar has filled up quite a bit and she finds enjoyment in their participation. Participant 2 first sent in her responses to the initial interview questions via email on April 13th, 2016 and we spoke over the phone in September, but that interview was not recorded.

If the group has changed her in any way, it has certainly increased her knowledge of the Civil War. She indicated that she enjoys wearing the period attire, though does not so much enjoy actually putting it on. Different seasons present different challenges when it comes to dressing according to 19th century challenges, but Participant 2 said that after she’s been dressed for a period of time, she does not even think about it anymore. She and her husband started getting involved with the organization after going to a Civil War ball, which Participant 2 loved and is something outside the normal realm of what most people do. It is her husband who loves Civil War history, though; thus if he decided to discontinue his participation, she would also discontinue hers because without him, she would have no reason to attend. She did indicate that she would miss the interaction, but since most members are paired up in some way, it is difficult for someone who is an individual at times because of the nature of some of the events.

Participant 2 has taken on the persona of the wife of her husband’s chosen general; however, she does not have any desire to present as this woman. Like many other women, there is not a lot of information on this particular general’s wife, though she knows a few small pieces of information about her. Still, she does not like to speak in front of people and does not want to pretend to be an expert on something she has so little information about. She did indicate, though, that if she had more information on this woman, she might be more inclined to act as her a little more openly. Participant 2 said that taking on a persona takes a great deal of commitment and requires a great deal of knowledge, which is part of the reason why she is content with the portrayal as the wife of her husband’s general.

Participant 2 mentioned that dressing in this attire can be costly and this is one of the greatest struggles she has encountered as a member of the organization. This comes in addition to the cost of attending events, overnight accommodations, and travel expenses, which is why they do not participate in all of the events during a calendar year. When it comes to her clothing, she thinks that some of the women believe that the wife of a general should dress a certain way and this is part of the reason she does not always feel comfortable in the group. She believes that all of the women who attend events are doing the best that they can in terms of their attempts to be authentic, but she often feels as though one particular faction of women does not think she or other women are “good enough” to be around them because of their attire. She did mention that having multiple factions of women in the group is normal, especially given the size of the organization, and that for the most part, she feels very comfortable with the majority of the women she encounters.

Any time the organization participates in a parade, Participant 2 feels she is experiencing what one might refer to as a “peak experience.” With a family history of military involvement, she feels very touched when veterans salute the group as we march by. This also gives her a feeling of being appreciated for what we are doing and she is delighted to see the public enjoying what they are seeing. She also likes it when people take pictures of her for the same reason, that they are showing their appreciation for her attendance. In addition to this, she really enjoys going to the different places each event takes place in and one of her greatest rewards since joining the organization has been the friendships she has made. In spite of the fact that some members seemed to not appreciate the increased involvement of the women, Participant 2 said that the group has “grown by leaps and bounds” since “the split” and more women became involved; thus it would seem that this change was for the better rather than for the worse.

**Participant 3**

Participant 3 became involved in the organization through her husband, joining approximately in 2012 right around the time of the split. Her initial responses to my interview questions were received April 19th, 2016 and I interviewed her face-to-face on August 15th, 2016. She stated that her experience with the organization has been both positive and negative where she has found very warm, welcoming people and other people who are more inclined towards cliques.

Although it was her husband’s passion for history that initiated their entrance into the organization, and Participant 3 went the “easy route” by portraying the wife of her husband’s persona, she has undertaken some research in order to make this persona more accessible to her. As is common with many other women, there is not a lot of information to be found on Participant 3’s persona, so she has taken some contextual information along with some other research and combined it all to make a character. It has been easier for her to portray the wife of her husband’s person rather than finding another persona to research, but she continues to research other aspects of the period and has found a lot of interesting information that she can tie into her own interests and the makeup of her persona. She believes that other women in the group should take advantage of the fact that little is actually known about their personas and to sort of mold them to fit their own interests and the needs of the organization. However, this is not to say that if she ever found out that her person did not enjoy one thing or another that she would continue doing it in spite of that. She thinks it is both important to be true to the persona and the time period, but is comfortable with the hybrid persona she has created. Additionally, she placed great emphasis on having fun in the group and how she continues to participate because she finds it very enjoyable.

Participant 3 finds her membership in this organization to be a great outlet for her in terms of research and creativity and she has enjoyed making friends with numerous people of very varied backgrounds. She made specific emphasis to the fact that the group originated as a man’s group, but has become more accepting over the years of the women who want to participate more actively. She has a hard time with the women who do not want to participate at this higher level and makes attempts to encourage their participation but has felt some level of negativity from certain women in the group because of this. She enjoys the events where women are highlighted and particularly likes when the audience directs questions to the women that give them a better understanding of what the period was like for women. Participant 3 also noted that though she has seemed to have a lot of pushback from other women in the group, she has not received any from the men or she is totally unaware of it.

Another major draw for Participant 3 is in the educational mission of the organization and teaching the public as much as possible; she hopes that other individuals in the organization can see that the women’s programs fit well with this mission. She would, however, like to see the women integrated more into the organization and for communication within the group to be managed better. She has noticed that the newer female members in the group have all taken on personas, and strong ones at that, which means that there has been a change in the organization itself. When I asked her if she would still participate if her husband stopped, she said it would depend on the manner of his decision. If he were to simply decide he no longer wanted to attend, she would not continue to attend either, but if he passed away or went out of town for a long period of time, she would still want to maintain her participation. Again, this is something that she enjoys, which she stressed heavily, and she finds the social aspect as well as the teaching and the development of the other women in the group to be a positive experience.

**Participant 4**

Participant 4 became involved in the organization through her husband and initially had no interest in history. They joined the organization just prior to “the split,” but were not at the particular event when that took place. I received her initial responses to my questions via email on May 1st, 2016 and conducted a face-to-face interview with her a few weeks later which was recorded and transcribed. She indicated that in spite of some problems she had with the group when she joined initially, as well as some other problems that seem to persist, she feels her involvement with the organization has been a positive experience.

When she first began participating with the organization, Participant 4 portrayed the wife of her husband’s chosen persona, but she said she was often criticized for the way she was dressed. She was told that her clothing was not authentic and this inspired her to research the clothing of that period in more detail in order to prove that there was great variation in the ways that women dressed. Although she enjoys fashion in a general sense, the fact that this was the main topic of conversation for the women during events became tiresome for her so when she was presented with the opportunity to learn about a particular persona, she jumped at the chance. Before women had taken on personas, Participant 4 indicated that there was a split among the women where some women who were very focused on authenticity splintered off from others and not only criticized her but also ignored her when they did not approve of what she did or how she dressed. To maintain a certain level of interest in the group, Participant 4 felt she needed to do something else, which is why she chose to research and adopt the persona that she was made aware of and she has only taken off from there.

In her research of this persona, Participant 4 has read many books and even visited the home town of this woman, which she felt was a very moving experience for her. The persona she chose had many similar experiences to her and also held many similar viewpoints, which is part of the reason she identifies with this woman so much. When Participant 4 approached the group wanting to portray this particular persona, she was not warmly received, but she persevered and is now at a place where she can make presentations and participate at events as often as all of the gentlemen do. Interestingly, Participant 4 has always had a great fear of public speaking, but in more recent months, her portrayal of this persona has all but eliminated this fear. There was one time in particular where Participant 4 spoke to a very large audience and indicated that she was not afraid at all; she had really become her character and taken on her persona and felt she was speaking as this woman.

Initially, it did not seem that other members of the group wanted Participant 4 to speak as her persona at all, but it became clear that the audience was interested in her and her story and they continue to have this same level of interest today. None of the negative actions or behaviors that were aimed at her deterred her in any way from her goal of presenting this persona and Participant 4 even indicated that she feels a connection to the group. This again comes in spite of the fact that she believes many women in the group feel alienated by her and do not want to talk with her because of her feelings about women participating. Still, she has had several experiences that show her that the research she has done and the presentations she is doing are very accurate and are making a difference for the public who is hearing them.

Participant 4 has taken the mission of the organization to heart and believes that at every venue, we are there to teach the people who attend our events. Because of this, her actions and behavior at events may seem to be more aggressive because she is often approaching members of the public in order to speak with them rather than having them seek her out. In some cases, she may be the only individual doing this while other members of the group sit and socialize. These tendencies, she said, are not necessarily like her as an individual, but rather become more pronounced when she takes on the role of her persona. I asked her if this experience has been a transformative one for her, to which she agreed saying that she is a lot more outgoing when she is wearing her period attire as this persona than she would be out of it. She wishes that all of the women of MOCW would become more involved in some way, not necessarily speaking in presentations but through demonstrating period customs, crafts, and whatever else these women are interested in showing. For Participant 4, educating the public means teaching them about all sorts of issues beyond just battles and tactics and her primary reason for being in the group right now is to emphasize all of the issues related to women of the period. When she says “all of the issues,” she specifies that no matter what it is, from child care to suffrage to the Christian Commission, they all matter because they all represent the different reality of women of the period.

Making numerous references to the split among the women and the different factions of women within the group, Participant 4 speculated about why the women have formed these separate groups even though she may not be certain of these reasons. She knows there are women who do not want to participate at all; except by attending events at the side of their husbands. This she understands as those women did not join the group with the expectation that they, too, would be presenting or that they would be standing out in any way apart from the background. She also thinks that many of the women who do not sit and watch the ladies’ presentations are afraid that they will be called upon to answer questions and she wishes that this were not the case. Although she mentioned that she would never do that, she believes there is one other woman in the group who probably would. With regards to the other women who are in a different faction, she believes there is both a disconnect over ideology but also one over location as she can see that those women who live geographically closer to one another are those who spend the most time together socially. She also indicated that there was a time when going out to dinner after an event meant that the entire group would go out together; however, at this time there is a split in terms of who you are having dinner with and even which hotel one stays at. In spite of this, she maintains that everyone is civil to one another even if there is little overlap in socialization among women.

Even though Participant 4 entered the organization with her husband, she is one of the only women who specifically said she would continue her membership even if he did not. She said she has become so involved in the group that it would be like giving up a part of herself and that it has become a highly significant part of her life at this point. She believes a lot of changes have taken place within the group since she joined, and she would like to see the women’s presentations highlighted at every event where we have a great deal of time, making it more officially part of the group than it is now. Though the mission of the organization remains the same, the group now has a unique opportunity to help the public understand about the entirety of the Civil War period and not just the battles that went on.

**Participant 5**

Participant 5 is one of the two individuals in this study who joined the organization separately from her husband. Her initial interview responses were received on May 26th, 2016 and a face-to-face interview was conducted on June 16th, 2016, which was subsequently transcribed. Although she indicated that her experience with the organization has been mostly positive, she does believe that in many cases the women’s stories come second to the stories of the men in spite of the fact that the group seems to be shifting overall to include more than just stories of battles.

This participant is unique in the fact that she was not only asked to join the group, but her persona was actually chosen for her. The initial persona she had an idea about portraying did not seem to have a great deal of information about her; thus another one was suggested to her and she said she is quite happy with this choice. Participant 5 has taken this opportunity to really highlight her persona as a whole individual, rather than the unidimensional person that many members of the general public think of her as, but because of her complexity, Participant 5 believes it will take a great deal of time to fully get into her character. Still, with the information she does have on this persona, she has indicated that she feels there are many similarities between herself as a person and this woman, that many of their opinions are similar, and she does not have a difficult time representing these opinions because they were very much ahead of her time. Participant 5 has also had the opportunity to visit locations associated with her persona, which is not true of every woman who has chosen a persona to portray, but at the time of her visit, she had not been as invested in this woman’s character as she is now so she believes she would get more out of a second visit than she did the first.

Participant 5 is one of several women in the group who makes her own clothing, partly for authenticity reasons and partly due to the cost of having another make it. She places a great deal of emphasis on being authentic and as period correct as possible and she would like to see a greater commitment from the group when it comes to historical accuracy. She emphasized how important authenticity is to her and said that whether the other women realize it or not, they are on display for the public whenever they step out to do an event and have a responsibility to represent the clothing and customs of the era appropriately. If a woman, or anyone in the group for that matter, is not dressed in proper 19th century attire, he/she is misleading the public who she says, notice a great deal more than people might think. This, she stressed, goes back to the educational nature of the organization and the fact that what we are wearing is as much of an educational tool for the public as our presentations. She does understand, however, that not every woman in the group has the funds or the desire to engage in a high level of authenticity, so she is also making an effort to let go of some of the authenticity related issues that bother her.

Participant 5’s involvement in the group has changed her in a few ways including making her a more confident speaker and inspiring her to do more research. She has also become more knowledgeable about women’s roles during the Civil War and learning about her persona has added to her overall motivation for doing living history. She is one of the few women who entered into the organization with some prior experience in the hobby and she envisions doing this for a long time. Although it can be challenging to take on the life of another individual, she finds that her demeanor and mannerisms are different when she is wearing 19th century attire. Taking part in this group and learning about this persona has also given her an excuse to buy more books, which she said could never be a bad thing.

I asked her why she joined the group without her husband and why she is participating in a hobby without him, to which she spoke about how this is something she wants to do and he supports her in that. Though he will attend events with her on occasion, it is not a hobby that holds much interest for him even though other gentlemen in the group have tried to persuade him to join. She knows he is not comfortable speaking before crowds and has never done any acting as she has, so she is content doing demonstrations and presentations without him.

With regard to the group itself, Participant 5 had a number of things to say when it comes to the other women and the organizational dynamics. She said she has been a member of other groups before that have broken up over personality differences and given that this group has already had one split, she does not believe it is inconceivable for another to occur. She would like to continue with MOCW as long as she is welcome to do so and finds the camaraderie of the group to be very rewarding. However, she indicated that she feels as though the men may be more accepting of her than the women and wonders if the women are simply intimidated by her or they do not appreciate or want her knowledge. She enjoys getting dressed up and the fact that “it’s not a purely selfish hobby” because we are out there educating people and presumably getting them excited about history. Though she has a lot of fun, she also feels that when she does not get to present and she has taken the time to attend an event that this is unfair to her because she has put in as much effort as all of the other individuals in order to attend. She knows that many of the women are essentially “tagging along” with their husbands, but because that is not her situation, she expects to be included whenever she is present. She also believes that where possible, and when appropriate, the women who have personas should present with the men because it gives the audience a much more balanced look at the time period.

Even though Participant 5 holds authenticity on such a high level, she would find it rude to actually walk up to someone and tell her that what she was wearing was wrong. She noted that a lot of the women’s fabrics and some of the details of their clothing are incorrect for the period, but she does not want to give her opinion unless it is requested of her specifically. There are certain events that make her feel closer to the 19th century because of the settings in which they take place and that adds to the experience for her as a whole. In general, Participant 5 looks forward to the opportunities for growth that this organization provides for her and hopes to serve as an inspiration to others in terms of her love of and respect for history.

**Participant 6**

Participant 6 is one of the two individuals in this study who did not join the organization through her husband. She came into this organization with a pre-existing interest in the Civil War era and is relatively new to the group. I first received her interview responses on July 6th, 2016 and conducted an interview with her face-to-face on August 8th, 2016. This interview was transcribed and put together with her initial interview answers in order to create this summary.

Participant 6 has had a very positive experience with MOCW although she did not know quite what to expect when she joined. She described the process of learning about the organization and ultimately joining it as being very serendipitous and she was immediately welcomed by other women in the group. When asked why she would join this group she knew very little about, she highlighted her intense love of learning, her interest in history, and a “risk-taker” personality coupled with the fact that she enjoys doing different things. In response to the question of why she joined the organization separate from her husband, she said that the two of them have little in common and she wanted something she could be interested in as much as he is interested in his own hobbies. Although it is often easier for her to travel to events when he tags along, she knows that taking part in this organization is not something he necessarily wants to do and she is more than willing to attend events on her own. There are times when it is nicer to have him along, such as a dinner when most people in the group are paired with a significant other; however, she makes an effort to make things easier on herself if he is not around, especially by staying at the same hotel as other members so that she can hitch a ride with them if needed.

Even though Participant 6 chose a persona right away, and was assigned a mentor to help her develop this persona, she did not speak as that persona until several months after she joined the organization. Like so many others in the group, the persona she chose is very similar to her in many ways despite living over 100 years apart and though she believes portraying this other person is challenging, she also noted that it has been a more natural transition than she expected. In fact, Participant 6 has actually done a number of presentations outside of the organization for groups local to her as her persona. During these presentations, she has felt very much as though she is portraying this woman accurately, so much so that audience members have commented on how real the experience was for them because of the intensity of her character. Another experience she described as being a “peak experience,” was a time when she was able to speak with a group of students and answer questions for them both in her persona and also outside of that character in her 21st century self. She believes that presentations such as these really make a difference to the audience she is engaging, that she has added value to their time, and that teaching the younger generations about parts of history they may not be familiar with is a very worthy cause.

Although she has not had any negative experiences with the group per se, she does feel the undertone of male dominance in the organization, which is something she is not used to. In her profession, she noted, she never felt that she was treated any differently because she is a woman; however, she finds the division of men and women in the evenings when it is time to socialize a bit difficult to get used to. When we are in civilian attire, she finds it hard to understand why the men and women continue to sit separately rather than meshing together and feels more comfortable in the company of men because she appreciates their topics of conversation. This clear division, though, has helped her be more aware of what women went through years ago and also how far women still have to go in order to achieve full equality.

Participant 6 is one of several women in the group who has made at least some of her own clothing, which she mentioned was something new to her as she had not engaged in regular sewing for some time prior to her entrance in the group. Right away, she was made aware of certain women in the group who are referred to as “Thread Nazi’s” because they place such a high emphasis on authenticity that they will actually count the stiches in a woman’s clothing. For this and other reasons, she has been occasionally worried about her clothing, but finds that if no one says anything to her, she must be reasonably authentic at the very least. The type of persona she has chosen does not necessarily dress like the other women, so for her it was a different learning curve when it came to acquiring the proper attire. She mentioned this was one area where her expectations fell short as she did not realize the extent of the cost for a woman’s 19th century wardrobe. This is partly why she chose to make some of her own clothes, but she also mentioned that a lot of what she has tried on in the past did not fit her correctly, so it is better for her to make something that she knows will fit her. Due to some health issues, it is also necessary for her to approximate some of her wardrobe in certain types of weather because she would be tremendously uncomfortable otherwise.

Unlike some of the other women, Participant 6 finds that it is her health that often prevents her from participating more than anything else. Although she wants to attend every event on the calendar, she has physical limitations which she must take into account when deciding whether or not she can be present at an event. Participant 6 enjoys traveling, especially for something that has become a passion for her. She was never content to only know about the life of her persona, but rather wanted to know everything she possibly could about the entire Civil War era and being an avid reader, this brought a great deal of focus to her existing love of research.

Since she is new to the organization, Participant 6 is still in a probationary period and has spent this time absorbing all the information that she can in order to understand the group better. She said her normal self is not reserved at all and that she is willing to step up and take charge of certain tasks; however, it was important for her to understand the workings of the group prior to thinking about doing this. I asked her if she felt as though learning about the culture of the group and all of its subtleties was a bit of a learning curve for her and she agreed that it was. She still has a hard time distinguishing when we can act as our 21st century selves and when we should be in persona through email and she also mentioned that she has had to be reminded of the rules of the organization a few times. She is also still trying to figure out what is and is not true about her persona, as she often hears contradictory information, but knows that will come with time. Though she is not able to attend every event as she would want, Participant 6 has greatly enjoyed the weekends she has spent with the group and has found a great deal of warmth and helpfulness since she joined.

**Participant 7**

Participant 7 became involved in the organization through her husband towards the end of 2012. She sent her initial interview responses to me via email on July 14th, 2016 and I spoke with her over the phone in early September. Our phone interview was not recorded, but it was summarized and approved by her. Participant 7 has had a variety of experiences, both positive and negative, with the organization and she shared those with me in her responses.

For a period of time, Participant 7 had little to nothing to do with the organization, but her involvement has increased more recently and this is in part to show support to her husband. Though she is not always fond of wearing the corset, and in fact did not wear one up until more recently, she has always loved the clothing and has enjoyed adding to her 19th century wardrobe over the years. Her involvement with the organization has also increased her appreciation for history in general, which she said was virtually non-existent prior to her membership. She has also enjoyed meeting a wide variety of people who are part of this hobby and making new friendships with those individuals who participate in the group. This comes after a period of time when she felt as though she was on the outside of the group, not knowing anyone upon entering, and this has been a struggle for her in terms of finding a way to fit in.

Although Participant 7 does not wish to take on a persona and prefers to remain in the background, she does enjoy learning about history and has recently found a way that she can participate in a more active way next year. She is looking forward to doing a demonstration with some other women in the group because this has given her a new sense of purpose within the organization and will provide her with a way to connect her personal interests with the educational mission of the organization. In our interview, Participant 7 indicated that what the audience gets from the group’s presentations is very important to her and that if they can leave the presentation having learned something new, then it was a worthwhile experience for all involved. She knows that the audience is learning when they are asking good questions and receiving good answers and their reactions to what they are learning is very rewarding to her.

At one event in the past, Participant 7 had an unpleasant experience with another member of the group that left her feeling as though she did not want to participate at all. Though this experience left a profound impression on her, she told me that her feelings about it have mostly been resolved and did not cause her to stop attending events entirely. There was one evening where several women were able to open up about some of the things that were bothering them with regard to the group and she believes this helped her greatly. She had felt pressured to participate in the past, even though she indicated that she had no desire to do so, and this was an ongoing problem for her. Still, she recognizes the fact that those women who are presenting as different personas are very excited about what they are doing and forget that not all of the women feel that way. Since the night when these women were able to open up, the pressure has mostly been relieved and she feels much more comfortable with her participation. She, too, indicated that there is more than one faction of women within the group as a whole and that finding a niche for herself will allow her to really enrich her experience.

When asked if she would continue her membership if her husband discontinued his, she said she would still want to continue. However, getting to different events on her own would be a challenge as most of the events are quite a distance from her home. If distance were not an issue, though, she said that she would want to continue her participation. In spite of some issues she has had with other members in the organization, her overall impression of the group is that these individuals are kind and supportive, especially when a member is in need, and this is why she maintains her involvement.

**Participant 8**

Participant 8 was one of two women who I was unable to speak with further about their initial responses. Her answers were emailed to me on August 5th, 2016 and she indicated that she has been involved with the organization since before it became an official organization. During that time she has found it to be a rewarding and worthwhile hobby; however there are health issues, issues related to aging, and also a “leveling off” of interest that have resulted in some decline in her participation as of late.

Though she initially had a persona other than the wife of her husband’s chosen general, she switched her persona in order to have her presence at a military encampment make more sense to the general public. She does not believe her choice in persona changed her in any way, in part because she is unable to deduce the important factors about this woman due to a lack of available research. She thinks that if she lived closer to the home of this woman she might have been more inclined to engage in primary research on her; however she is satisfied with the contribution she has made in discussing clothing customs of the period. Participant 8 is one of a few women who have undertaken the challenge of making her own clothes, but this involved a great deal of research and a large time commitment to make the clothing accurate. It also led her to a greater level of understanding about the roles of women at home and exactly why, and how, they dressed the way they did.

Expanding her knowledge of the Civil War era has been one of the ways Participant 8 was personally affected by her involvement in the organization, but she has also enjoyed the opportunity to meet other women who share a similar interest in history, particularly that era. She indicated that some of her friendships have lasted for the past 16 years since becoming a part of this organization and this has been her greatest reward. One particular “peak experience” that she described involved the first reenactment she and her husband had ever attended and she said it felt as though they had been transported to a different time and place. She said most living historians or reenactors can highlight similar experiences in their own tenure in the hobby.

Participant 8 was present during “the split” and mentioned that the individuals who left did so because they felt the organization was growing too much, new members were not being inducted properly, and the group was becoming more social than they liked. Beyond that, some individuals simply disliked others and no longer wished to associate with them; thus the changing dynamics of the organization created a great deal of tension. This preceded a change within the organization, but once those individuals left, the organization continued to move forward.

**Participant 9**

Participant 9 became involved with the organization through her husband. She and her husband had adopted notable personas prior to their entry into the organization, which they portrayed at various events throughout their home state and in other areas. At this time, they are participating both with MOCW and on their own and have attended a number of events over the past two years. In 2015, Participant 9 attended 12 of the 17 events her husband attended and in 2016, she attended eight out of the 14 he had done as of our interview. The reason Participant 9 continues her involvement with MOCW and the other events in which her husband participates is because of his desire to continue. If her husband chose to cease his portrayal of his chosen general, she would also stop portraying this general’s wife as this hobby is his passion, not hers. Participant 9 has other interests that she enjoys outside of this organization and she is very active with those endeavors.

In my interview with Participant 9, which was not recorded, but was still summarized and then reviewed by Participant 9, she spoke a lot about the persona she portrays and how she believes there is a lot of misinformation about both this persona and the husband of this persona that needs to be rectified. Through her study of these two people, she has come to have a different opinion of them than she may have had previously and she feels very passionate about their story. When in persona, Participant 9’s husband often defers to her to answer certain questions from the audience that he will not address himself, believing that the real person would also have refused to entertain such questions. Because of this, Participant 9 will often be speaking during a presentation that typically involves only gentlemen, but her husband recognizes not only the important role that the wife of this general played in his life, but the fact that there are certain questions that can be better answered by her.

Although Participant 9 indicated that she does not believe she has changed personally as a result of her portrayal of this woman, she did mention that the longer she is in persona, the more she is able to identify with that person. When Participant 9 and her husband are doing an event for an entire weekend, they both remain in persona for the entirety of that weekend and as a result, she is more likely to feel like her persona. She described one incident in which a member of the audience referred to her husband, who was in persona at the time, in a very rude way, calling him a name with regard to something he did. Participant 9 spontaneously jumped up and demanded that this man apologize to her husband before recovering herself and sitting back down. In that moment, she was caught up in the portrayal of her persona just as the audience member was caught up in the strong feelings he had about her husband’s persona.

Participant 9 spoke of the great time commitment required of her for this persona, which involves a lot of reading and preparation before each event. She and her husband have been a part of many different kinds of events including a play about a significant painting from the Civil War and presentations for a local Civil War roundtable detailing specific events in the lives of their personas. Because they have a large property to take care of, this hobby is part-time for them and they are not actively seeking events to attend. It is often a simple word-of-mouth recommendation that will alert them to potential venues for their presentations, but again, they prefer to do these events on the side. It was their original intention to remain “group-less,” that is, they wanted to do their presentations on their own, but Participant 9 feels very honored to have been asked to join MOCW with her husband because she sees it as a very professional organization full of many knowledgeable individuals. She and her husband entered MOCW after “the split” and she has developed new friendships with the group’s members since then. She finds being part of the organization very rewarding as well as learning more about the war and the persona she portrays.

Participant 9 noted that she has seen a progression in the group in the past few years where the women are participating more and not simply relegated to the status of eye candy. She would like to see more development of the customs of the period, meaning that those women who cannot find a great deal of information on their persona can look into other areas, such as the Sanitary Commission, and present that information to the public. She applauds those women who have taken the initiative to spread the knowledge they have acquired, believing it fits in with the educational mission of the organization. She does think, though, that period customs should dictate more chivalrous behavior from the other gentlemen in the group as it is necessary for all of the group members to behave more formally when in period attire and during presentations. Finally, with regard to the group in general, she did indicate that having cliques is a normal part of any group, but that the group members have been very warm and welcoming to her overall.

**Participant 10**

Participant 10 has been involved in the organization since 2004, two years after its inception, and it was her husband who spurred this involvement. It was immediately evident that Participant 10 began her involvement, and maintains it, in order to support her husband. She indicated that the other women who were involved during those early years did the same and she enjoyed getting to know them as they shared this commonality. Although she began with very little in the way of period attire, she now has an extensive wardrobe that is much larger than her husband’s. I conducted an interview with Participant 10 at the end of August during an event we were both attending. This interview took place in a secluded location apart from the rest of the group while they were interacting with the public and I was able to record and transcribe it. A few weeks prior, on August 22nd, 2016, Participant 10 submitted her initial interview responses via email.

When Participant 10 was initially involved with the organization, she told me that it was just a “handful of guys who sat around talking to people.” In both her initial answers and her face-to-face interview, she said that this is one of the greatest changes that have taken place in the organization since its founding, and that it has grown exponentially. She continues her participation with the group because she enjoys watching her husband interact with the public while in persona and would not likely continue if he chose to discontinue his membership. She would, however, be interested in continuing the portrayal of the wife of her husband’s chosen general if he passed away as sort of a way to honor the legacy of both her husband and the general he portrays. This response is not uncommon at all as at least one other woman said something similar in her interview.

Participant 10 said that among other things, her knowledge of the Civil War era has increased tremendously since she began participating with the organization and because of the women’s participation in the group, she has also come to know a lot more about women’s roles during that time period. As with many other women, there is little to no research available on her persona, this particular general’s wife, which makes it difficult for her to truly embody this woman at an event. She does feel a kinship with this woman, however, based on what she does know and hopes to someday have the time to dig deeper into the research that can be found about her in order to create something similar to a play where she and her husband read letters back and forth. Unfortunately, though she desires to know more about this woman, her efforts to find information through various libraries or historical societies have proven futile; thus she only knows what may have appeared in books about the general himself.

Because of the sparse information on Participant 10’s persona, she endeavors to take on as much of a 19th century manner as she possibly can, but often finds this to be a challenge. She indicated that she will frequently have to step outside her character in order to answer questions from the public and feels this is appropriate because the mission of the organization is, above all else, to educate. She would never want to see a member of the public leave the group with questions unanswered. A very strong point of contention with Participant 10, relative to speaking with the public, is her need to be a credible source whenever she is in period attire. She does not have the time now to devote to extensive study of any one subject and because of that, she does not feel comfortable making any kind of presentation or joining in with the women’s group presentations. Therefore, if she can answer a question from a member of the audience, she will, but in most cases would prefer not to speak in order to help maintain the credibility of the organization as a whole.

While she hopes to be able to conduct or participate in presentations in the future, an even greater challenge she has experienced within the organization is simply due to the organizational dynamics that are true of any group. In the early years of the organization, the group was much more focused on the discussion of battles and there were very few formal events that happened each year. As the group grew, however, this changed and the organization became much more social in nature. She said in her interview that even when the public was not around, the men would stay in persona and continue to talk about the specific battles their personas attended and what their reasoning was for their behavior. The women, she said, generally demonstrated quilting, held teas, and read poetry while in the public eye, but were more free to discuss their personal lives when the public was not around. Over the years, as the group became more social, some individuals felt that this was inappropriate and resisted the change. While these men were primarily focused on battles and battle tactics, other men thought it was more important to look at their personas as whole people, discussing their personal lives as well as their lives on the battlefield. This was part of the basis for the split, she said, along with the fact that some members wanted to exclude others from certain events, and the feelings related to this are still felt today. She believes, however, as do other participants, that this split ultimately made the group stronger and allowed for greater participation from women and civilians that would not have been allowed in the early days.

When we discussed the split in our face-to-face interview, Participant 10 told me more about how this splinter group does not permit women to participate in any way and her friend, that she and her husband were quite close with, was in tears when she had to sell all of her clothing. Over time, though, this woman came to accept the way the new group was being run, especially because it was what her husband wanted. Although this woman is not a part of the organization in question, it was still interesting to get an idea about what happened to the wives of the men who split from the group several years ago.

In terms of the women currently in the organization, Participant 10 was not the first to note that some women seem to be divided from others and this division is one over philosophy. She feels that she is often looked down upon by these other women because her level of “period correctness” may be sub-par to their standards. This division, she thinks, extends at least in part to the husbands of these women because they are more likely to associate with those people whom their wives deem appropriate to interact with socially. Given the great cost of being period correct, Participant 10 said it is not within her realm of interest to spend so much money on clothing that is meant to be as authentic as possible when she will always serve as a conversation starter for the public who is interested in how women dressed. She stressed the level of respect she has for the women who do maintain a high level of authenticity, but wishes they would reciprocate that respect towards her.

While Participant 10 is proud of the women in the group who have taken on strong personas and have a great desire to present them to the public, she believes that some of these women might be asking more of the organization than what is due to them. If a woman is not a full member, she indicated, she is not technically entitled to the fullest measure of rights bestowed through membership. When some women do not share equal time with the men, they often cite that as an indication of oppression, yet in the opinion of Participant 10, this is an organization of generals who have been more than willing to encourage female participation and those women who are not full members should be grateful for this. She worries that if the men feel too pressured, they might decide they no longer want to have women participants and the whole movement will have been counterproductive.

Participant 10 has always loved history, though not Civil War history, and she greatly appreciates a number of events the group participates in throughout the year. Her favorite event that the group participates in now is Remembrance Day in Gettysburg because it helps her connect to the emotions of the day and the feelings of gratitude that she has for all military members who have made sacrifices over the years. Knowing more about the way the men lived during the Civil War, what they lived through, and how they persevered continues to remind her that her life right now is full of blessings and that she has it a lot easier than anyone did back then. Whenever Participant 10 does an event, she said it makes her more and more aware of how the Civil War shaped our country into what it is today.

There was one event several years ago in Philadelphia that she described as being a “peak experience” for her. During this event, she said so many people took her picture and stopped to speak with her that she felt extremely fulfilled in her role within the organization as an educator of Civil War history. Sparking the public’s interest, especially when they knew little to nothing about the era, made the experience extraordinary. At that time and in the early years of her participation with the organization, she loved every minute of it. Now, however, she indicated in our interview that she does not identify with the organization at all, nor does she feel comfortable with it anymore. This is due in great part to the lack of respect she feels, as mentioned earlier, in particular from the very different groups of women she believes have evolved. However, there are even two men who she mentioned that she believes still have trouble with the idea of women participating on such a high level or seating them in the men’s tent. Still, as she said, since the group is focused on education and promotes the participation of women, it should be very prominent. She thinks that some men might be worried that the women will infringe upon the time that the gentlemen have to themselves and that the women will want to be everywhere that the men are. She certainly would not want to see this happen as she believes it is very healthy for the men to sit around by themselves from time to time and simply be men.

I asked Participant 10 what it would take for her to be happy in the organization once again and she said it all comes down to respect. She feels that the “social drama” and other antics of members of the organization take her back to similar situations she faced in high school when she was not supported in her desire to be a certain way or to believe in certain things. She would like her experiences with the group to be stress-free and judgment free and for her choices in how she wants to participate to be respected. She will participate more when she wants to, but it will be on her terms alone.

**Participant 11**

Participant 11 is the second woman I did not follow up with after her initial interview response, but she is also fairly new to the organization through her husband’s involvement and has not attended many events. Her interview responses were received on September 1st, 2016 and she indicated that her participation in the group is because her husband enjoys it greatly and she believes it has actually changed and helped him a great deal. She enjoys the fact that this is a hobby that she and her husband can do together and indicated that it has increased their social involvement quite a bit offering them an opportunity to make many new friends.

Currently, Participant 11 portrays the wife of her husband’s chosen general, which was actually suggested to her by her husband himself. Although she did not indicate that she has done any research on this persona, she understands the duties that a woman of that era would have if she were the wife of an officer and that they are not wholly unlike her own duties today. In general, though, when in period attire, Participant 11 is mainly acting as herself, only with the background of this particular woman instead of her own. She did mention that one of the challenges with participating in the organization has been learning all of the customs of the period as well as gaining a better understanding of the expectations associated with clothing and attire. Although she has been in the organization for only a short time, she mentioned what she might refer to as a “peak experience” in the way that she handled some questions that were asked of her at an event this year. Being told that she did well was very encouraging to her because of how new this experience is, though she admits some of it must be due to the knowledge her husband has passed on to her over the years.

Overall, Participant 11 indicated that becoming involved with MOCW has been a very positive decision and she has seen how much of a difference it has made in the life of her husband. Seeing his enjoyment is her greatest reward as he has been a lover of history for a long time and this is the ideal outlet for that passion.

Appendix G

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| --- | --- |
| **Woman's Basic Outfit** | **Man's Uniform** |
| Skirt - $79.95 - $99.95 | Senior Officer Frock Coat - $179 - $214 |
| Garibaldi Shirt - $32.95 - $79.95 | Pants - $99.95 |
| Corset - $149.95 - $189.95 | Suspenders - $14.95 |
| Stockings - $7.95 | Vest - $45.95 |
| Chemise - $24.95 | Boots - $169.95 |
| Traveling Boot - $79.95 | Shirt - $24.95 |
| Pantaloons - $29.95 | Cravat - $9.95 - $14.95 |
| Hoop Skirt - $59.95 - $79.95 | Hat - $89.95 |
| Petticoat - $69.95 - $89.95 | Hat cord - $9.95 |
| Cloth Purse - $14.95 | Heavy tin cup - $9.95 |
| Straw Hat - $39.95 | Sabre belt - $54.95 - $84.95 |
| Crocheted Snood - $29.95 | Officer Gauntlets - $39.95 |
| Parasol - $34.95 | Sabre - $229 |
| Fan - $14.95 | Canteen - $49.95 |
| Fingerless Mitts - $9.95 | Sash - $47.95 |
| **Total - $680.25 - $827.95** | Glasses - $39.95 |
| **Day Dress** | Pocket Watch - $29.95 |
| $119.95 - $159.95 | Flask - $24.95 |
| Bonnet - $129.95 | **Total - $1171.20 - $1241.20** |
| **Total - $249.90 - $289.90** | |
| **Tea Dress** | |
| $189.95 - $209.95 | |
| Felt Bonnet - $89.50 | |
| **Total - $278.50 - $299.45** | |
| **Ball Gown** | |
| $229.95 - $349.95 | |
| Hooded Cape - $169.95 | |
| Cotton Slippers - $8.95 | |
| **Total - $408.85 - $528.85** | |
| **Other Accessories** | |
| Under sleeves - $24.95 | |
| Zouave Jacket - $69.95 - $89.95 | |
| Medici Belt - $34.95 | |
| Winter Bonnet - $39.95 | |
| Carpet Bag - $49.95 | |
| **Total - $219.75 - $239.75** | |
| **Grand Total - $1837.25 - $2185.90** | |

**Table 2: Clothing Analysis**

Figures

Figure 1 p. 17

Figure 2 p. 153

Figure 3 p. 155

Tables

Table 1 p. 80

Table 2 p. 205