

2020

## Counterterrorism Investigator Perceptions: Homegrown Violent Extremists With Mental Illness

Jeffery Brandon Perez  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Jeffery Brandon Perez

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Counterterrorism Investigator Perceptions: Homegrown Violent Extremists With Mental

Illness

by

Jeffery Brandon Perez

MPhil, Walden University, 2019

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

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August, 2020

## Abstract

Terrorism endures throughout the world. Some individuals who engage in it may suffer from a cognitive disorder. For those who investigate terrorism, preconceptions exist both toward extremists and toward people with mental illness (MI). A review of the literature has shown how counterterrorism (CT) investigators perceive terrorists' motivations, and how law enforcement perceives people with MI. In filling a gap between the two, this study aimed to research whether based on their lived experiences, do the understandings, perceptions, and attitudes of CT agents inform their biases and influence their decision-making and ultimately investigations of homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) with MI. A qualitative research tradition was used to collect data from 16 participants, all of whom were FBI CT investigators. After using interpretative phenomenological analysis, themes emerged suggesting that CT investigators perceived HVEs as cognitively and physically volatile, and that HVEs are predominantly motivated as a mechanism of MI, not ideology. Whereas CT investigators expressed empathy toward the MI aspect of case subjects, they also sought more training in the identification of MI. Investigators felt as though their beliefs were influenced by their peers, but not necessarily by society. Although CT investigators did possess preconceptions of HVEs with MI, they did not allow these perceptions to influence the investigative process, and reported they remained objective and impartial during the CT investigation. The results of this study may encourage the protection of society, assisting law enforcement and potentially thwarting acts of terrorism. The results may also have implications by informing standardized training of CT investigators, which could help them objectively assess HVE suspects.

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## Dedication

For my sisters, Katrina and Tracy, who, while having persevered in their lives through adverse hardships, have shown only unconditional love, patience, and grace.

Thank you for teaching me.

## Acknowledgements

I am reminded now, in the quiet of this endeavor's end, of Tennyson's poem "Ulysses," where among its last lines the protagonist proclaims his will "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." This journey has perhaps been the most difficult in my life, and so many countless times I considered yielding. And every time I did, there was someone there to lift me up. And, therein, this was a team effort. I'd like to thank some members of that team.

To the FBI, which has been a second home to me. I remain humbled by the measure to which my colleagues there sought my success. Through countless approvals and mountains of paperwork, they guided and helped me. For that, I am always grateful.

To my chair and dissertation committee at Walden University, your leadership and direction were paramount in this effort. You gave me structure and foresight. I knew that I was not the only traveler through this excursion into the unknown. "Upon the shoulders of giants," you were mine. For that, I am eternally appreciative.

To my loved ones, friends, and family, who so often wonderfully blurred the lines with the others. Through laughs, tears, and words of support, you have carried me here. And for that, I am speechless.

And, so, now begins the rest of my life. I hope to spend much of it learning. Whereas many have been patient and kind with me, I now seek to pay it forward.

And in striving toward this, pay it forward I shall.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Terrorism is a remarkable threat to the security and sovereignty of nations throughout the world (Zarate, 2017). In the United States, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, 2017) defines terrorism as any premeditated violence in furtherance of political, religious, or social ideologies. Terrorism occurs as either militant extremism, wherein a group of individuals work collectively to engage in violent acts, or as homegrown violent extremism, which occurs after an individual becomes radicalized and then seeks to carry out a lone act of violence (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). When considering the latter example, homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) may at times suffer from mental illness (MI) in various forms (Corner & Gill, 2015). Law enforcement, however, may possess systemic biases when investigating the people with mental illness, and these biases can affect the outcome of investigations (McTackett & Thomas, 2017; Morabito & Socia, 2015).

To consider the implications of counterterrorism (CT) investigations as well as the effects that such investigations can have throughout international political and economic infrastructure, understanding how CT investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI influence CT investigations is essential. The current study focused on how CT investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI influence the CT investigation. The purpose of this study was to understand this through analyzing lived experiences of CT investigators, their experiences with terrorism, their thoughts on MI, and their perceptions of HVEs with MI. Understanding these perceptions could mitigate potential bias within

CT investigations, and thereafter enhance the investigative process to help prevent a terror attack. This exploration was framed by Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory.

This chapter offers an overview of the relevant research of the sub topics of the study. I also discuss the importance of the study as it relates to society and the CT investigation process. After a discussion of the problem statement and the purpose of the study, I explain the conceptual framework and guiding theory to link the framework to the research question. The nature of the study section highlights the empirical method of inquiry, and definitions of key terms are provided. Assumptions affiliated with the study are reviewed, as well as the study's scope, limitations, and contributions.

### **Background**

Researchers have suggested that terrorists may engage in acts of violence due to MI (Bhui, James, & Wessely, 2016). Although Bhui, Warfa, and Jones (2014) indicated that the majority of terrorists do not suffer from MI, the word *terrorist* is used as an umbrella term to describe two typologies: (a) the militant operator and (b) the HVE, who is considered a "lone-wolf" and who operates domestically (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). In reviewing hypotheses and analyses from previous literature, Grunewald, Chermak, and Freilich (2013) indicated that, within HVE populations, MI may exist in rates as high as 50%; however, a limitation of their study was that it focused on psychological characteristics and not motivations. Although militant operators and HVEs both constitute *terrorists*, this study differentiated the two and explored perceptions of HVEs and not militant extremists.

The FBI (2017) has identified attacks by an HVE as a leading threat to national security. Shields, Smith and Damphousse (2015) conducted meta-analysis of terrorism

criminal case outcomes and indicated that post-9/11, at times as many as 87.5% of terrorists have been criminally charged as HVEs engaging in Material Support for Terrorists or Material Support for Terrorist Groups (violations of United States Code, Title 18 USC §§ 2339A and 2339B). Peddell, Eyre, and McManus (2016) explored influences of radicalized extremists and indicated that understanding the radicalized offender's mind is essential to combating terrorism. Furthermore, Engel (2015) indicated that law enforcement's increased understandings of persons with MI (PMI) could reduce injuries to both law enforcement and perpetrators.

In discussing perceptions of suspects with MI, Burkhardt et al. (2015) suggested that many law enforcement officers perceived PMI to be both erratic and dangerous. Considering implications from Weingarten et al. (2016) that interaction with a stimulus might influence future actions with similar stimuli, officers may be more prone to expect violent encounters with PMI based on previous, violent interactions and thereafter anticipate the use of force in subsequent interactions. This compounded findings by Morabito and Socia (2015), who explored interactions between police and mentally ill populations and quantitatively indicated that law enforcement stigmatized those with cognitive disorders as dangerous, which is supported by qualitative findings from Oxburgh, Gabbert, Milne, and Cherryman (2016). Lastly, Zierhoffer (2014) stated that understanding the psychology of HVEs, especially when MI is present, could help prevent an attack. While Schulenberg (2016) offered that law enforcement collectively possessed a bias against PMI, Kara (2014) indicated that police are more likely to arrest such persons immediately and thereby avoid investigating them.

Several types of decision-making biases exist within law enforcement. James (2018) identified implicit bias as an attribution of characteristics to members of specific groups and that it manifests as racial biases in policing. Liden, Grans, and Juslin (2018) stated that *confirmation bias* exists as a tendency to align perceptions with preexisting beliefs. Zapf and Dror (2018) offered that previous experiences can inaccurately influence later, similar experiences in a phenomenon known as *anchor bias*. This cognitive bias occurs as an anchoring heuristic that employs anchors to reach some end; at times this conclusion is misdirected specifically due to the anchors and can lead to incorrect conclusions within policing (Rossmo, 2016). Because these anchors can be rooted in either personal or vicarious experience, and because the goal of this study is to understand perceptions of HVEs with MI that may be based on such experiences, the application of anchor bias within this phenomenon is relevant.

Considering this preliminary review of the literature, a gap in knowledge exists. CT agents understand HVEs to be influenced by political, social, or religious ideologies (Kruse, 2016; Perry & Whitehead, 2015). Furthermore, law enforcement perceives PMI as erratic and dangerous (Burkhardt et al., 2015; Morabito & Socia, 2015). This study was needed, therefore, to fill the gap in the current understanding of how CT agents perceive HVEs with MI and how these perceptions influence the CT investigation.

### **Problem Statement**

Homegrown violent extremism represents a pervasive danger to national security (Zarate, 2017). Terror attacks perpetrated by HVEs have been responsible for many deaths in the United States. These have included incidents such as the San Bernardino shooting which resulted in 14 deaths and 22 injuries, as well as the Pulse nightclub

shooting in Orlando, Florida, which resulted in 49 deaths and 53 injuries and remains the worst terror attack in the United States since September 11<sup>th</sup> (Blair & Shane, 2016; Lee, Walters, & Borger, 2016). Hafez and Mullins (2015) indicated that the term *terrorism* overarches two types: militant terrorism and homegrown violent extremism. The FBI (2017) and Coats (2018) asserted that HVEs represent a remarkable threat to national security. Among HVEs, Grunewald et al. (2013) indicated that as many as 50% of some populations may suffer from MI. Whereas Gallagher (2016) broadly offered that MI is a factor in homegrown terrorism, Bhui, Everitt, and Jones (2014), Pitcavage (2015), Grunewald et al. (2013), and Bhui et al. (2016) offered that such MI can include personality disorders, depressions, schizophrenia, and delusional disorder.

In discussing MI, Schulenberg (2016) indicated that police possess a systemic bias when investigating PMI. Lentini (2015) and Zapf and Dror (2017) offered that such bias can influence the outcome of an investigation. The minimization of bias is important both in the study of terrorism and in scientific research (Felthous, 2014). Therefore, an essential function to combating extremism while also enhancing the field of forensics is understanding if the perceptions that CT agents have of HVEs with MI influence decision-making processes during investigations (Bhui, Everitt, & Jones, 2014; Peddell et al., 2016; President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, 2016).

Understanding CT agents' perspectives of HVEs with MI is important because agents' perceptions of PMI may impact investigations. This may be a result of preliminary experiences, either personal or vicarious, that influence later, similar experiences. Zapf and Dror (2017) referred to this as *anchor bias*. However, Grunewald et al. (2013) indicated that 40.4% of HVEs in general suffer from MI. As evidence

indicated that investigators perceive PMI to be less likely to commit complex crimes, they may be predisposed to believe that a PMI might not engage in an HVE attack and thereupon prioritize suspects without MI over suspects with it (Schulenberg, 2016). Therefore, understanding agents' predispositions of the capabilities of suspects with MI may yield earlier intervention and enhance decision-making if bias is mitigated through awareness, and in doing so protect a society that might otherwise suffer an attack (Burkhardt et al., 2015).

There was a gap in existing research concerning how police perspectives of HVEs influence terrorism investigations. On one side of the gap, CT agents understood HVE's as motivated by social ideologies like white nationalism or religious extremism (Borum, 2013; Kruse, 2016; Perry & Whitehead, 2015). On the other side of the gap, police perceived PMI as more assaultive but also more likely to engage in minor, fewer, and less complex offenses, and police are more likely to arrest them immediately and less likely to conduct thorough investigations of PMI (Burkhardt et al., 2015; Kara, 2014; Schulenberg, 2016). Emerging from this, the research problem existed as a lack of understanding how CT agents' perceptions of HVEs with MI influence CT investigative decision-making.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how terrorism investigators' possible perceptions and biases of PMI influence their investigative decision-making. In several studies, researchers have explored how HVEs perceive themselves (as victims of an external oppressor) as well as how law enforcement officers viewed PMI; there were no studies to date that explored how CT agents' perceptions of HVEs with MI influence

investigations (Corner & Gill, 2015). The intent of this study was to explore this phenomenon so that CT investigators may be able to mitigate their potential biases while enhancing their own decision-making processes. The study may help fill the gap in the literature by exploring what CT agents' perceptions of HVEs with MI are and how this might influence their decision making in these investigations by conducting qualitative interviews with a sample of CT agents.

Bhui, Everitt, and Jones (2014) stated that understanding how agents perceive the extremist's mind is crucial to understanding their investigative decision making. In exploring these perceptions, Lim (2015) and Spencer, Charbonneau, and Glaser (2016) indicated that police possess biases relative to specific demographics, and Cotton and Li (2015) offered that these types of biases, like stereotypes, influence judgment through misattribution of predetermined characteristics. Peddell et al. (2016) offered evidence indicating some terrorists may suffer from MI, and Grunewald et al. (2013) indicated that as many as 50% of some HVE populations (such as racial-supremacist violence) suffer from MI. The purpose of this study was to explore how CT agents perceive any link between MI and HVE that might influence their decision making in CT investigations, such as alternative methods of litigation, identification of bias, priming effects of future terrorism investigations, and even early intervention of a terrorist attack.

### **Research Question**

The research question for this study was RQ1: Based on their lived experiences, how do the understandings, perceptions, and attitudes of counterterrorism agents inform their biases and influence their decision-making and ultimately investigations of homegrown violent extremists with mental illness?

## Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework that aligned with this study was Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT). This psychological theory asserts that an individual's perceptions, actions, and interactions occur as a result of a triad of variables comprising interpersonal relationships, internal behaviors, and societal influence (Bandura, 1999, 2018). The theory is described in greater detail in Chapter 2. Bandura (2001) described internal behaviors as direct personal experiences and also described interpersonal relationship influences as a proxy (vicarious) determinant which relies on other people to form an individual's perceptions. Societal influences are characterized as collective perceptions of society (Bandura, 2001). In this study, I sought to explore how CT agents' predispositions of HVEs with MI influence investigations. Bandura's SCT describes how a triadic structure of perception influences actions (2001). Considering this, SCT appears to align well with this study. Lent (2016) offers that each of the triadic variables is subjective to the individual, and what one individual interprets from experience or social stimuli may not be what another person interprets. These triadic variables are discussed more in-depth in Chapter 2.

Furthermore, SCT may be applicable as Michel and Hargis (2017) indicated that SCT can have significant implications in the professional workplace. This is important when considering that Smith and Marshall (2017) found that individuals whose decisions are influenced by anchor biases can also be influenced by vicarious anchors, or those of the individuals around them. Pickett, Nix, and Roche (2018) found that biases and perceptions within the criminal justice system can be influenced by both external environments and individual experiences. This study explored a phenomenon that occurs

in a professional environment, namely government offices. Middleton, Hall, and Raeside (2018) indicated that SCT informs vicarious learning within the workplace environment and is an evolution of Bandura's social learning theory (SLT). Lim (2015) explained SLT as a psychological theory explaining an individual's behaviors and actions occur by watching other persons engage in such actions and thereafter being rewarded or punished for them.

SCT better aligns with this study than did SLT because SCT not only encompasses SLT's principles of vicarious learning but also integrates individual experiences and societal perceptions (Bandura, 2001). As this study employed a phenomenological research method based on lived experiences, and as SCT describes an individual's actions as a mechanism of individual and learned experiences, the theory also aligned with the proposed research method. Furthermore, the instrument that was employed was researcher developed to align interview questions with the framework.

### **Nature of the Study**

Saldaña (2016) indicated that a qualitative study is an empirical method of inquiry that, in terms of psychological research, seeks to explore how or why individuals make decisions or understand phenomena they encounter. The study aligned with a qualitative method of inquiry because it sought to explore how a homogenous population understands a phenomenon. Specifically, this is how CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI. As the research question addresses perceptions and understandings of CT investigators regarding their experiences with HVEs with MI, the derivatives measured include how agents perceive these extremists as well as how their predispositions

influence investigations. I directly incorporate this metric into interview questions applied to the participants.

This qualitative study was phenomenological in nature. It was exploratory to understand lived experiences of federal agents, and used semi-structured interviews with individual respondents. The research question attempted to investigate how respondents believe their perceptions of extremists influence investigations. Because of this, the method appeared to align with the research question as it was based in lived experiences (Patton, 2015).

Previous studies regarding experiences with terrorism have employed constructivist approaches. Researchers have used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate such experiences. IPA is an approach best used in psychological studies that explore some type of lived experiences, what an experience means to respondents, and how the respondents make sense of a phenomenon itself. IPA is an analytical approach within constructivism (Smith, 2011). Ferguson, Burgess, and Hollywood (2015) used IPA as a qualitative approach to explore experiences with insurgent terrorism. In identifying IPA as an analysis plan within their study, Ferguson et al. (2015) thereafter employed multiple cycles of coding to extract ordinate themes and sub-themes from interviews they conducted. As Smith's (2011) definition of IPA aligned with the study's research question regarding respondents' understanding of a phenomenon, and as Ferguson et al. (2011) have already employed IPA in a similar study regarding lived experiences with terrorism, IPA appeared to be the best analytical utility for this study.

In identifying IPA as the utility of analysis, respondents in the proposed study were interviewed, and the interviews were transcribed. Respondents comprised current or former members of FBI Joint Terrorism Task Forces that have investigated HVEs with MI. This approach to the topic was grounded in the literature, as Ferguson et al. (2015) employed IPA when exploring lived experiences with insurgent terrorism in a similar study. Through reviewing this previous literature and in considering recommendations made by Mason (2010), 16 participants were interviewed to ensure an adequate population size. In other studies, interview transcripts were uploaded to NVivo, which is software designed specifically for analysis of qualitative data. Analysis using the software might have then attempted to yield ordinate and subordinate themes to understand how CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI. Because participants did not consent to voice recordings in this study, transcripts were manually coded.

A goal of seeking repetitive themes was met once numerous themes were repeated frequently. This is referred to as *data saturation* (Saldaña, 2016). Also, Saldaña (2016, p. 294) and Creswell (2018) identified a unique type of coding which can be used within IPA referred to as the *in vivo coding* method, which is described as the use of the respondents' own words that prioritize their voice and is the approach using NVivo software. In aligning with IPA, *in vivo coding* might have been used to highlight the participants' perspectives as well, although this was done manually as no interviews were recorded.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

1. *Bias*: The presence of preconceptions or thoughts that favor or disfavor some entity, often without independent justification (Zapf & Dror, 2017).

2. *CT investigation*: The systematic process by which persons are examined to determine any nexus to terrorism (FBI, 2017).
3. *CT investigator*: A person who participates in a CT investigation (FBI, 2017).
4. *Domestic Terrorism*: Terrorism committed within the United States and rooted in an ideology that originates from institutions also within the United States (e.g. radicalized political militias) (FBI, 2017).
5. *Homegrown violent extremism*: Acts or attempted acts of terrorism planned and/or executed by a single individual without direct guidance from an outside source. Additionally called lone actor terrorism (Hafez & Mullins, 2015).
6. *International Terrorism*: Terrorism committed within the United States and rooted in an ideology that originates from governments or non-governmental organizations outside of the United States (e.g. Al-Qaeda); (FBI, 2017).
7. *Mental Illness*: A series of cognitive disorders that influence thought and behavior. Examples include schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, or delusions (Corner & Gill, 2015).
8. *Militant extremism*: Acts or attempted acts of terrorism planned and/or executed by an individual or group of persons guided by a terrorist institution with an established hierarchy. Furthermore, called group actor terrorism (Ferguson et al., 2015).
9. *Radicalization*: The process by which an individual shifts his or her value systems to realign with terrorist group ideologies (Bhui, Everitt, & Jones, 2014).
10. *Terrorism*: Premeditated, organized violence committed against an innocent population in furtherance of religious, social, or political ideologies (FBI, 2017).

### **Assumptions**

Some assumptions existed throughout this study. While they were perceived to be true, they cannot necessarily be independently verified. A preliminary assumption was that the interviews conducted with participants within this study as well as reviews of data sources such as published literature and textbook material would suffice to answer the research question. Respondents indicated that they have been CT investigators who have participated in investigations of HVEs with MI. It was assumed that they were honest in having indicated their participation. Second, an assumption was that respondents were truthfully representing their experiences and perceptions of HVEs with MI, as well as the effects that such perceptions had on the CT investigative process. This assumption is necessary because themes were extracted from their accounts; for the thematic reduction to be accurate, CT investigators' representations should be truthful. Lastly, it was assumed that the number of respondents would suffice to reach saturation and therein yield data to phenomenologically reduce thematic instances, including themes and sub-themes.

Another assumption made considered personal bias, and that by mitigating this bias, a respondent provided truthful and accurate answers to interview questions. Personal identifying information was kept confidential. Interviews were conducted with neutral inflection in voice, and body language remained neutral to allow respondents to provide honest answers. Contact was made with all respondents following data analysis to confirm information they provided.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted on respondents who were recruited using qualitative methods. Aspects of the research problem included not understanding how CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI. How this aspect influences the outcome of the investigation became a specific focus when considering the societal implications of the outcome, as improper conclusions reached at the end of a CT investigation due to perceptions can have remarkably dangerous results (such as a person with MI who was not thought capable of committing a terrorist attack engaging in such an attack, wherein it could have been stopped).

All participants needed to possess certain professional backgrounds to be included in the study. Such criteria comprised current or previous placement on an FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force squad, investigating either international or domestic terrorism. Employment titles included special agent, task force officer, intelligence analyst, staff operations specialist, language analyst, consultant, federal agent, attorney, and evidence collection specialist, who have directly participated in an FBI CT investigation of a person with a mental health disorder. For the purposes of this research, each of these job titles was considered an *investigator* as an *investigation* is defined as a formal and systemic inquiry and therefore each of these persons and job titles makes formal, systemic inquiries into the commission of a crime as defined under terrorism law. Another criterion for inclusion included the provision of consent to be interviewed, and willingness to be interviewed.

Delimitation criteria included placement on an FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force squad, but having never participated in the investigation of a person with a mental health disorder. Other delimitation criteria included removal from any such squad or position

under disciplinary or adverse conditions, as this may skew results. Other criteria included inability to provide consent, as well as an inability to provide follow-up interviews if warranted.

There were several conceptual frameworks related to the study that were not employed. Bandura's SLT indicates that perceptions and actions occur through vicarious learning, specifically through watching others being rewarded or punished for their actions (Lim, 2015). This was not employed as Middleton et al. (2018) indicated that SCT (the study's current framework) is indeed an expansion of SLT. Kahneman and Tversky's (1972) theory on representativeness heuristics is another framework considered for this study, but it was not employed. The theory indicated that individuals' perceptions of a phenomenon may be influenced by its characteristic similarity to its parent phenomenon as well as the features of the process that created it (Kahneman & Tversky, 1972). Considering this, CT agents may make judgments about HVEs with MI based on their perceptions of PMI and combine them with their perceptions of HVEs. Considering SCT comprises a multivariate approach to behavior that includes direct personal experiences, Kahneman and Tversky's (1972) findings may therefore be used to inform internal preconceptions that CT agents possess.

SCT also allowed for the exploration of its other variables (environment and interpersonal relationships) that influence CT agents' decision making processes. SCT also aligns with researching anchor biases. Smith and Marshal (2017) stated that anchors can be either personal or vicarious, and two of the three perceptions SCT explored comprised personal experience and learned information through interpersonal relationships (Bandura, 2001). Considering this, Kahneman and Tversky's theory of

representativeness heuristics was not used as a framework, however, supported SCT's direct personal experience variable.

The approach used in this study may also be transferable to future, similar studies. Specifically, transferability exists as the context within which a study's methods or findings can be used in future studies to research similar phenomena (Burchett, Mayhew, Lavis, & Dobrow, 2013). As this study employed phenomenological, qualitative methods to understand how CT investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI interact with the CT investigative process, future applications of this study's methodology might be used to explore how CT investigators' perceptions of religion or politics interact with CT investigations of religious or political terrorism, for example.

### **Limitations**

Considering that limitations of sample respondents are restricted to federal CT investigators within the United States, it was presumed that this study was not universal to any different population. Limitations only applied to individuals who work or have worked with FBI Joint Terrorism Task Forces, have a fluency in English, have directly participated in CT investigations, and who have investigated PMI. Furthermore, several variables were not explored and were not accounted for in this study. Such variables include whether the HVE with MI being investigated subscribed to social, political, or religious ideologies, or if they engaged in domestic or international terrorism.

Within qualitative research, bias exists as a limitation to data collections (Creswell, 2018). Specifically, Creswell (2018) indicated that even the presence of an interviewer in front of a participant can influence responses; as a result, the interviewer's non-verbal cues and voice inflection should remain as neutral as possible so as not to

influence the outcome of responses. A researcher's personal biases, such as opinion or experience, should not influence the respondent; as a result, no personal opinions were introduced within the interview questions or relayed through non-verbal communication (Creswell, 2018).

### **Significance**

This study was original as it sought to explore how a population (CT investigators) perceived a group of individuals (terrorism suspects suffering from some perceived MI) and how this influenced their decision making in CT investigations. The literature indicated that no studies have been conducted exploring how terrorism investigators' perceptions about HVEs with MI influence investigation decision making. This concept was what makes the study both unique and important because the decision making processes of CT investigators may, as a result of this study, include less bias of HVEs with MI and reach more accurate conclusions.

The implications of understanding how CT agents perceive HVEs with MI may include intervention of a terrorist attack, criminal litigation, and identification of any bias among investigators toward the mentally ill (Zierhoffer, 2014). Requa (2014) found that bias against terrorism suspects can influence judicial outcomes in courtroom settings, and that jurisprudence becomes asymmetrical against those charged with terrorism crimes. Researching the phenomenon may determine if similar bias exists from CT investigators toward HVEs with MI, especially if investigators have previously investigated HVEs with MI; Viscusi and Zeckhauser (2017) found that past experiences with terrorism can influence an individual's perceptions of future interactions. Weingarten et al. (2016) referred to this influence as *priming*, wherein exposure to a stimulus can influence

reactions to similar stimuli at later times. Smith and Marshall (2017) found that such anchored bias, which they indicated was a bias that influences judgment based on an initial experience (the anchor), can cause people to become more confident in their assessments of phenomena with anchors. Identification of any pre-conceptions that hamper investigations of HVEs with MI, such as their level of dangerousness, could lead to better identification of legitimate terror threats or more accurate investigative findings. This may lead to earlier intervention or arrest, and could prevent a terrorist attack.

This study informed positive social change as it sought to protect society, assist law enforcement officers, and potentially thwart an act of homegrown violent extremism. It may also have implications by informing standardized training of CT officers, as the findings could help them be more adept at spotting and assessing HVE suspects. Specifically, three populations would benefit from this study.

Primarily, CT investigators could be provided with training regarding their perceptions and predispositions about HVEs with MI. If any bias is determined as an outcome of this research, the investigators could take steps to mitigate the effect through training that highlights an awareness of such bias. Secondly, HVE suspects who suffer from MI would positively benefit as they could be provided with psychiatric services post-litigation. Third, society would benefit from being more informed about HVEs, the lives saved by successful and positive outcomes of CT investigations, increased awareness by investigators, and from the emotional and economic damage avoided if an attack could be prevented.

## **Summary**

Domestically, terrorism is perceived as a national security threat committed against innocent persons in furtherance of ideological platforms (Zarate, 2017). Homegrown violent extremism occurs when a person commits an act of terror independently and with minimal logistical support, guidance, or training from a terrorist institution. Some homegrown violent extremists suffer from MI (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). Literature indicated that law enforcement not only may possess preconceptions of PMI, but also that these perceptions can influence the outcomes of investigations (Morabito & Socia, 2015). Considering the significant implications of CT investigative findings, it appears necessary to understand better how CT investigators' preconceptions of HVEs with MI influence the investigative process.

In this study, I explored perceptions that CT investigators have of HVEs with MI, and employed a qualitative method of phenomenological inquiry grounded with Bandura's SCT. Specifically, I included interviews of federal CT investigators to explore how their perceptions of HVEs with MI influence their investigations. In doing so, the results bridged a gap in the literature between how law enforcement perceives terrorists and how law enforcement reacts to suspects with MI, and provided insight into how such perceptions influence CT investigations.

A review of the relevant literature, discussed in the following chapter, includes synthesis of empirical data on terrorism typologies, psychopathologies of terrorism, bias in law enforcement and investigations, law enforcement perceptions of PMI, SCT, and qualitative research methods. Each of these topics was researched, and identification of key elements, definitions, and implications of the specific topic were presented and synthesized with data and information extracted from the existing body of literature.

Furthermore, each of the topics was assessed for its contribution to the study, as well as any conflicting literature written about it.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

To safeguard society against the phenomenon of homegrown violent extremism, it is essential to understand how CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI and how these perceptions influence CT investigations (Bhui, Everitt, & Jones, 2014). Biases exist within law enforcement of specific demographics that may include individuals with MI (Lim, 2017; Spencer et al., 2016). Some forms of these biases may affect investigators' judgment of HVEs with MI through the application of predetermined perceptions, and as a result officers may subconsciously assign guilt or innocence to suspects based on MI alone (Cotton & Li, 2015). As much as 50% of HVEs may suffer from some form of MI (Grunewald et al., 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to understand how law enforcement perceptions of HVEs with MI influence their decisions within terrorism investigations (Grunewald et al., 2013; Peddell et al., 2016); a current problem is that this phenomenon is not understood.

Current research indicates that CT investigators understand that extremists are motivated by religious, political, or social ideologies (Borum, 2013; Perry & Whitehead, 2015; Kruse, 2016). This perception is essential to understanding the motivation of terrorism actors because it identifies their inspiration, and in doing so helps establish their psychological culpability. Empirical data also suggest that law enforcement perceives PMI to be more assaultive but less likely to engage in complex criminal behavior. Considering this, law enforcement is more likely to arrest PMI as opposed to conducting a thorough criminal investigation (i.e. CT investigation) of their actions (Burkhardt et al., 2015; Kara, 2014; Schulenberg, 2016). Between the perception that CT investigators

have of HVEs and the perception that law enforcement has of PMI, there exists a void of understanding the perceptions of how law enforcement perceive HVEs with MI and how such perceptions influence investigative behaviors. In an exhaustive review, Corner and Gill (2015) found no studies to date exploring how CT agents' perceptions of HVEs with MI influence investigative processes. Zierhoffer (2014) suggested that understanding the mind of a terrorist could help prevent a terrorist attack. Therefore, it appeared that understanding how CT investigators perceived terrorist minds could better enable such prevention. With this study, I sought to explore that phenomenon.

In the following chapter, I discuss the literature search strategy used to identify relevant research. After I explain my search strategy, I discuss the conceptual framework, SCT. Next the key elements of the study are explored, including psychopathologies of extremists, biases within law enforcement, police perceptions of PMI, and qualitative techniques. The review of the literature will display how other researchers have explored similar phenomena within terrorism, bias, and police perception research.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

To research the body of empirical data for this study, I searched several online databases through Walden University. The databases I searched included the Social Sciences Citation Index, PsycINFO, ProQuest Central, MEDLINE, International Security and Counter Terrorism Reference Center, Criminal Justice Database, HeinOnline, Emerald Insight, and the Directory of Open Access Journals. Using Boolean search logic, key phrases and terms were searched for within the databases. These terms included *terrorism, police, bias, mental illness, social cognition, social theory, phenomenology, homegrown violent extremism, domestic terrorism, international terrorism,*

*radicalization, violence, police perception, law enforcement, mental disorder, correlation, criminal investigation, dangerousness, sampling, and qualitative research.*

Researching these phrases yielded empirical studies relevant to the purpose, problem, and research question of this study. To stay relevant to recent research, most articles used in this study were published between 2014 and 2019; those that were not within this range provided historical information.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that best aligned with this study was Bandura's SCT. This theory offers that perception, action, and interactions are a manifestation of internal experience, intrapersonal relationships, and environmental influence (Bandura, 1999, 2018). Expanding on these three elements, Lent (2016) identified this as Bandura's "tripartite" of human agency, wherein action and perception are based on the identified internal, intrapersonal, and societal experience. Bandura (2001) previously addressed agency, identifying it as the bridge between how an individual perceives a phenomenon and the behavior that follows as a result of the perception. Humans, therefore, are the agent of their perceptions and belief systems, and actions are the products the agents create (Bandura, 2001). Bandura (2018) later identified SCT as a "triadic co-determination of causation" (p. 130). For Bandura, this triad of individual, proxy (interpersonal), and collective (societal) influence works simultaneously to yield a behavior or action.

### **Definitions of Tripartite Model Within Social Cognitive Theory**

When considering the tripartite model of SCT, Bandura (2001) indicated that internal influences exist as a repository of information based on past experiences.

Therein, individuals recall their past experiences with a particular phenomenon and employ what they learned from this experience to future, similar phenomena (Kahneman & Tversky, 1972). Interpersonal influences exist as a similar cognitive directory wherein individuals base their behavior on experiences learned or perceived from those within their immediate personal circles, such as friends or family; these are referred to as *proxy determinants* (Bandura, 2001).

Interestingly, Michel and Hargis (2017) highlighted another type of SCT proxy determinant as an individual's coworkers, thereby also applying SCT to the current study within a CT workplace. The implications of Bandura's (2001) and Michel and Hargis' (2017) interpersonal determinants can further be synthesized with Smith and Marshall (2017) who indicated that an individual's decision can be influenced by vicarious perceptions. Last, environmental influences exist as the macro-level stimuli that influence an individual's perceptions based on societal norms or opinion. At times, such influences can yield an individual's perception of a phenomenon even if the individual has no personal experience with the phenomenon itself (Bandura, 2001).

In this study of law enforcement perceptions, Bandura's SCT was applicable as it served as both a foundation of how individuals perceived a phenomenon (agents' perceptions of HVEs with MI), and how they then employed this perception to influence a behavior (how the perception influences the CT investigation). By employing qualitative research methods, Horsburgh and Ippolito (2018) indicated that SCT was essential to understanding how individuals learn from others and how such learned information influences individuals decision making. Furthermore, Middleton et al. (2018)

indicated that SCT specifically informs decisions made based on an individual's vicarious learning from coworkers.

### **Comparative Assessment of Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Theory**

Lim (2015) identified Bandura's SLT as a theory indicating that an individual's actions are manifestations of behaviors learned vicariously. Such vicarious determinants include the observation of other individuals who engage in similar actions, and whether such individuals receive reward or punishment. Sternszus and Cruess (2016) also offered that SLT comprises a two-phase model of action. The first phase is exposure and observation to a behavior of another individual. The second phase is the evolution of that observation into an individual's personal behavior. SLT, therefore, can be used to inform the intrapersonal experience variable of SCT's tripartite model.

Ultimately, SCT was more appropriate for this study than SLT was because SCT comprises not only SLT's intrapersonal variable, but also combines with personal and societal variables that constitute SCT's tripartite co-determination. Considering this study employed phenomenological methods based on the lived experiences of CT investigators, and those lived experiences include individuals' actions as a mechanism of individual and learned behaviors, the theory also aligned with the proposed research method. In exploring perceptions in this study, I also explored biases. Smith and Marshall (2017) indicated that biases can be either personal or vicarious, and SCT explores personal experience and learned information through interpersonal relationships (Bandura, 2001). Therefore, SCT also aligned with researching biases investigated within this study.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts**

An exhaustive review of the existing literature regarding MI, police, terrorism, extremism, perceptions, bias, and qualitative methods yielded empirical studies to review for this research project. Within this chapter, I explore research into perceptions and psychopathologies of terrorism. I also explore perception and correlations of MI and crime, bias within law enforcement, and qualitative research methods and processes.

### **Perceptions and Psychopathologies of Terrorism**

To better understand how individual perceptions influence CT investigations, I identified the relevant literature on terrorism as well as extremists who suffer from MI. To do so, I researched the legal definition of terrorism, the effects terrorism has on society, and the subtypes of terrorism itself. It was also relevant to research the psychopathologies and cognitive processes of different types of terrorists, namely homegrown violent extremists. Considering that this study's research question explores law enforcement perceptions of terrorists, I also researched the perceptions that CT investigators specifically have of terrorists.

**Definition of terrorism.** Terrorism is a threat to the national security of the United States (Zarate, 2017). It is a phenomenon that exists as a sum of social attitudes, grievances, and personal cognition, and it is also a crime. The FBI (2017) indicated that terrorism is any premeditated violence against innocent populations that occurs in furtherance of religious, political, or social ideologies; the elements of this crime include violence, targets, and motivations. In as much as this is a legal definition, however, there are also operational elements to engaging in a terrorist act.

Winters (2017) offered that terrorism refers to the principle of proliferating fear to coerce political leaders. Furthermore, terrorism employs this doctrine by forging violence

outside of morals through targeting non-combatants. Winters (2017) offered that terrorism thereby accomplishes both the proliferation of propaganda as well as imposing psychological effect on targets who were not direct victims. Aven and Guikema (2015) had previously indicated this and offered that by targeting non-combatants and spreading an ideological message, terrorists seek to achieve a political or religious goal.

Collectively, terrorism also exists well outside the boundaries of the United States. Although international definitions vary slightly, it is often regarded as violence against innocents in furtherance of some ideology (Clarke & Papadopoulos, 2016). Makinda (2016) offered terrorism seeks to undermine global institutions which comprise human rights, health care, shelter, and education, whereas Clarke and Papadopoulos (2016) suggested that in doing so it is an international epidemic that plagues parts of the world with any significant geopolitical activity.

When synthesizing these definitions and considerations it appears evident that to radicalized extremists, terrorism is a means to an end. The FBI (2017) stated that terrorism is an act in furtherance of an ideology. Winters (2017) identified that terrorism forges a psychological reverberation among masses. Furthermore, considering that Aven and Guikema (2015) indicated that terrorism spreads a political or religious message, the act of committing terrorism then becomes a bridge between some perceived religious or political strife and addressing such strife when all other means of diplomacy have either been exhausted or circumvented. Because it exists in areas with geopolitical strife and undermines human rights, it is indeed a phenomenon that exists throughout the world (Clarke & Papadopoulos, 2016; Makinda, 2016).

**Societal effects of terrorism.** Society is affected by terrorism in many ways.

Coats (2018) indicated that social effects of terrorism include attacks on critical infrastructure that comprise damage to economies, cyber postures, international trade, and government institutions. Bandyopadhyay, Sandler, and Younas (2018) added to this, offering that government trade is specifically affected within import and export industries. While acts of terrorism impact infrastructure negatively, Arvanditidis, Economou, and Kollias (2016) found that acts of terrorism increase trust from the public toward governments in the immediate aftermaths of terror attacks. It appears, then, that if a goal of terrorism is to undermine public trust of government, a terror attack may be counter-productive. Zarate (2017) aggregated these perceptions, indicating that terror attacks committed domestically do pose acute threats to the institutions that comprise national security. Synthesizing this, we find that terror attacks forge an inverse relationship between national security and trust toward government institutions; as one decreases, the other incidentally increases.

Domestically, examples of terrorism include the attack on the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando Florida. Considering that this attack was committed against innocent persons in furtherance of a religious ideology, and that it targeted a specific demographic, it constituted the legal definitions of both a terrorist act and a hate crime (Blair & Shane, 2016). Lee et al. (2016) examined the San Bernardino attack of 2015, wherein 14 people were gunned down in furtherance of ideologies rooted in foreign terror organizations. Interestingly, societal effects from this attack constituted a re-examination of mass casualty response protocols, as coordination issues arose among first-responders arriving on the scene (Lee et al., 2016). Furthermore, Moran (2017) offered that stress disorders

would likely persist among victims of the 2017 Las Vegas shooting at a music concert where 58 people were killed. Whereas these examples were acts of terrorism, they represent both international and domestic terrorism, which are the two types of terrorism investigated by the U.S. government (FBI, 2017). It appears, then, that while the societal, psychological effects of different types of terrorism can be different, the motivational origins also vary.

**Motivational origins of terrorism.** Although terrorism is defined as violence against innocent populations in furtherance of a political or religious ideology, the motivations and inspiration behind such acts can originate from different locations. If the point of origin for a terror act exists within the United States, the act is generally considered domestic terrorism (FBI, 2017). Piazza (2017) offers that specific examples include internal state actors such as right-wing political groups that attempt to proliferate nationalist, racist, or white supremacist belief systems through violence targeted at noncombatants. Not all terror attacks, however, are inspired by domestic ideologies from within the United States.

In contrast to domestic terrorism, terrorist attacks inspired by ideologies emanating from a foreign group are considered an act of international terrorism (FBI, 2017). The perception of a terrorist attack, however, is relative. If a faction of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), for example, committed an attack in the United States, this would be considered international terrorism as the IRA is based in Ireland. If, however, the IRA committed an attack in Ireland, the Irish government would thereafter be justified in referring to the attack as an act of domestic terror. Englund and Stohl (2016)

indicated that international terrorism is often perpetrated through the guidance of foreign state actors or foreign nongovernmental organizations.

Defining terrorism has significant challenges. Greene (2017) indicated that the definitions of terrorism, both domestic and international, can differ among nations relative to the legal and social needs of the nation as well as the gravity of the interaction between the nation and terrorism itself. Terrorism can be considered a broad phenomenon that nations define using political, social, or religious standards. Remarkably, whereas the definitions of terrorism can be used to classify who terrorists are, some lawmakers have sought to define terrorism to identify victims of terrorism and thus to allocate government assistance to them (Greene, 2017). To add to the challenge of defining terrorism, Gregg (2014) also indicated secular and religious terrorism may be difficult to differentiate, specifically when religious groups seek some type of political change. Examples include organizations like Hizbollah; although the group's name literally translates to "*Party of Allah*," and although it seeks to proliferate in the religious rule within the Levant, it is a political party recognized by the government of Lebanon that recurrently seeks power within Lebanese parliament (Gregg, 2014).

Nonetheless, international terrorism and domestic terrorism represent motivational origins behind terror acts; the specific *motivation* is determined by whether the perpetrator was inspired by a domestic or foreign actor (FBI, 2017). On the other hand, the compositional *typology* with which the terrorist act is carried out constitutes an entirely different approach to the identifications of terrorism. These two compositions include the individual who acts alone, known as the *homegrown violent extremist*, and the

individual who acts as part of a structured organization with an identified hierarchy, the *militant operator*.

**Typologies of a terrorist attack.** The phenomenon of terrorism is perpetrated by radicalized extremists. Whereas radicalization is a process, extremism exists as the far, extreme end of some political or religious spectrum (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). Indeed, individuals who embrace these ideologies to effect an attack do so individually or as members of some organized group. When conducted by an individual who has received motivation or minimal guidance from some outside group, the terrorist act exists as homegrown violent extremism. The homegrown violent extremist is at times called the *lone wolf* or *lone actor* (Hafez & Mullins, 2015).

When conducted by a group that has some form of organization and hierarchy, the terrorist exists as a militant operator. The militant operator is at times called the *group actor* (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). Jasco, Lafree, and Kruglanski (2017) offered that among HVEs, perceived economic or social loss was a predictor of violence motivated by ideologies. They also found that such loss-perception could be vicarious within operationally militant groups. Gallagher (2016) suggested that when HVEs perceive some strife, they latch onto an ideology that counters the strife which thereafter enables their violent, terrorist behavior. HVEs' perceived oppression, therefore, may exist as a micro-level expression of some external group's macro-level perceived oppression. Additionally, Hafez and Mullins (2015) indicated that HVEs may engage in violence when they perceive their culture to be under attack; the oppression of the larger group extends to the individual. When the larger group coalesces into some organized structure to resist the oppression, however, militant terror groups emerge.

Ferguson et al. (2015) stated that organized, militant terror groups emerged from a small population when that group perceives oppression from a larger, more powerful organization. Piazza (2017) identified examples of militant operators as right-wing terrorists inspired by nationalism or white supremacy that believe their national or racial identity is under threat. Perry and Whitehead (2015) added to this by linking racism and nationalism to militant terrorism through social identity complexity theory, therein using the theory to assert that when individuals combine nationalistic views with racism as a manifestation of perceived oppression, they act out by engaging in militant terrorism with others who share similar views (the social variables that formulate social identity). When this social identity exists as a product of religion, however, Vergani and Bliuc (2018) argued that individuals were attracted to militant groups based on recruitment language that used authoritarianism and religiousness to operationalize in contrast to white supremacy seen in nationalist groups.

Synthesizing this, motivations between HVEs and militant operators appear mono-directional. Whereas a lone violent extremist may receive motivation from a domestic or foreign, militant group with which he or she aligns a value system, militant groups do not appear to receive motivation from a particular HVE or individual. Rather, Ferguson et al. (2015) indicated that militant terrorist groups emerge when a population perceives injustices and oppression from a more powerful group. Therefore, it is through this proxy of militant groups from whom HVEs draw their motivation. However, whereas perceived oppressions may motivate militant groups as well as HVEs, MI may both contribute to and exacerbate this perception.

**Psychopathologies of terrorists.** Among militant terror groups and individuals who are groomed as HVEs, MI appears to exist as an attractive characteristic for recruitment (Popescu & Ciurlau, 2017). At times, however, MI also exists among HVE's who are not recruited per se, but acquire motivation from militant groups (Peddell et al., 2016). When considering the psychological implications of terrorism *as a behavior*, Johnson (2016) indicated that psychological frameworks should be used to study the cognitive architecture of terrorists because the decision to engage in an act of terror is driven by some psychological motivation. Hafez and Mullins (2015) offered the behavior of homegrown violent extremism is operationally different from militant group terrorism. Johnson (2016) indicated the behavior of terrorism exists as a mechanism of some psychological process, especially when MI is present. It then appears that the psychopathologies of the homegrown violent extremist versus the militant operator are different.

***Psychopathology of the homegrown violent extremist.*** There are many psychopathologies from which HVEs suffer. Zierhoffer (2014) highlighted the need for understanding the mind of the homegrown violent extremist, specifically indicating that understanding such a mind when MI is present could prevent a terrorist attack. Peddell et al. (2016) offered that HVEs suffer from multiple mental health issues and social isolation which they operationalize into violence justified by some perceived grievance. Olsson (2015) offered that HVEs may outsource their grievances by expressing disappointment in parental figures, possess apathy or frustration toward work, intimate relationships, or authority figures, and find difficulty fitting in with peers during key psychological developmental phases of their lives. Bhui, Warfa, and Jones (2014) offered

that persons who suffer from depression are more vulnerable to radicalization, and countered Olsson (2015) by indicating that *resistance* to radicalization increases through greater socialization. Considering all of the possible cognitive disorders from which HVEs suffer, the specific psychopathology of congenital disorders coupled with the environmental influences that leads to radicalization appears to be somewhat unique to each HVE.

Gallagher (2016) also offered that as a result of MI, HVEs may attach themselves to ideologies that enable their violent behaviors. Bhui, Warfa, and Jones (2014) found that younger persons at risk of radicalization who are both enrolled in school as well as suffering from depression are more likely to engage in violent extremism. This may be coupled with Olsson's (2015) finding by suggesting that those who are enrolled in school are more likely to recognize and suffer due to social ostracization from their peers, and thereafter identify some perceived ideology of oppression to connect to and express themselves through violence.

Pitcavage (2015) indicated that HVEs experience psychological maladjustment, noting MI should not deprivilege the role ideology plays on the path to radicalization. MI and ideology, therefore, serve as a bridge between perceived oppression and violent action (Pitcavage, 2015). Grunewald et al. (2013) highlighted nearly 40% of HVEs suffer from MI and abuse illicit substances, also adding that 61% have prior arrest records. Furthermore, HVEs are 13 times more likely to suffer from MI than are militant operators (Corner & Gill, 2015; Pitcavage, 2015). Specific disorders include schizophrenia, personality disorder, organic brain trauma, and depression (Corner & Gill, 2015). In a similar study, Corner, Gill, and Mason (2016) offered that schizophrenia, delusional

disorders, personality disorders, and stress disorders were also present among HVEs. Pitcavage (2015) further added to this, indicating such MIs were present in as much as 30% of HVEs who, in contrast to Grunewald's et al. (2013) study, did not also suffer from substance abuse. Although HVE's are more likely to suffer from MI than group actors, unique psychological processes still evolve within the individual militant terrorist.

*Psychopathology of the militant operator.* Ferguson et al. (2015) provided a set of environmental conditions that preface the emergence of a militant terror organization. Specifically, the phenomenon of militant terrorism materializes when a population perceives some oppression or injustice from a more powerful group, and then acts out through guerrilla warfare or terrorism against the more powerful institution by operationalizing under some established hierarchy. Sheikh, Gomez, and Atran (2016) added to this, indicating that individuals within such communities are more likely to become radicalized when individuals around them adopt such values systems, thereby highlighting the dynamics of social influence within the radicalization process. Interestingly, Counted (2017) indicated that when leaders of terror organizations are identified within these communities, subordinates can emotionally attach to such individuals and are willing to defend him or her through violence if the leader's image is attacked; a limitation of his study, however, was a small participant population ( $n = 3$ ).

It appears, then, that the psychological dynamics involved with the radicalization of the militant operator are more based upon social influence in contrast to MI. Bhui et al. (2016) offered that MI was only a small contributor to militant terrorism that involved group dynamics. Corner and Gill (2015) highlighted percentages, indicating that less than 4% of militant, group-actor terrorists suffered from MI, but that over 30% of lone

HVE's suffered from MI. There exist many unique mental disorders from which terrorists suffer.

**Correlations between homegrown violent extremism and MI.** MI is over 13 times as likely to exist in homegrown violent extremists as it is in militant operators (Corner & Gill, 2015). Russell (2017) and Bhui, Everitt, and Jones (2014) highlighted the presence of depression among many HVEs. Corner et al. (2016) indicated that depression exists in 7% of HVEs. Bipolar disorder also existed in 4% of HVEs. Several disorders existed at rates higher in HVEs than in the general population. Whereas acute stress disorder exists in only 1% of the general population, it exists in 3% of HVEs. Furthermore, delusional disorder exists in 2% of HVEs, but in 0.25% of the general population. Most remarkable is schizophrenia, which only exists in 1% of the public, but in nearly 9% of HVEs. Interestingly, learning disabilities exist in 11% of the public, but do not exist en masse among HVEs (Corner et al. 2016). Collectively, Corner et al. (2016) indicated that some form of MI may exist in as much as 47% of HVE populations within the United States, but when averaging this occurrence with prevalence throughout other nations, this number drops to 27%; the authors indicate this may be a result of under-reporting. Lankford (2016) propagates this phenomenon, indicating that MI is often undiagnosed in homegrown violent extremists.

**Cognitive processes within the CT investigation.** When considering the processes of the CT investigation, Borum (2013) indicated that investigators seek to identify whether the perpetrator acted alone, if indeed the suspect was directed by any outside group (to determine if the case is an instance of domestic or international terrorism), and attempt to ascertain a motivation for having committed the crime. This

serves several purposes. Primarily, if the individual did not act alone, law enforcement will attempt to identify any co-conspirators to mitigate any imminent threats to life. Secondly, the FBI (2017) indicated that violence carried out in furtherance of terrorism law satisfies the legal conditions of a terrorist act. Tierney (2017) added to this investigative process, offering that law enforcement should also focus on the suspect's behavioral activity, grievances, social isolation, and financial history as well. There appears to exist, however, bias within criminal investigations.

Lentini (2015) offered that within many investigations, contextual bias drives law enforcement to decide outcomes of data analysis based on external expectations. Considering the dynamics and gravity of any CT investigation, this may transpose to HVE investigations as well. Liden et al. (2018) also added to this, offering that police are more likely to presume guilt of an individual when the subject has been arrested. They link the arrest to culpability, even though a person is innocent until guilt is proven. Rondon (2018) offered that bias against specific Muslim persons are propagated within the media, and that such prejudice blinds the public to the presence of MI in homegrown violent extremists. Arguably, then, Muslim persons accused of perpetrating a religious-inspired attack which are in custody and who have MI may suffer from remarkable bias during the investigative process.

**Perceptions CT investigators have of terrorists.** Regens, Mould, Jensen, and Graves (2016) offered that CT investigators inherently find some of the behaviors in which terrorism suspects engage suspicious. Such behaviors include attempted recruitment of others, elicitation of information, and security testing of facilities. Incidentally, a review of the literature did not yield any data indicating that CT

investigators perceive terrorists as mentally ill, which is a gap this study seeks to explore. Rather, Holgersson and Strandh (2016) offered that police perceived the threat of terrorism to be high, but that both law enforcement agencies and medical organizations are ill-prepared to address a terror attack.

### **Perceptions and Correlations of MI and Crime**

This study explores the perception that CT investigators have of HVEs with MI. Considering that violent extremism is a criminal activity, and some homegrown violent extremists suffer from MI, it appears relevant to review the literature regarding the correlation between MI and crime as well as the perceptions law enforcement has of the PMI. As a result, topics that were researched included correlations between MI and crime, incidence rates of police encounters with the mentally ill, and use of force by law enforcement against PMI. Furthermore, as criminal behavior may result in litigation, the criminalization of PMI and their legal dispositions were also researched.

**MI correlations to crime and police encounters.** Burkhardt et al. (2015) and Morabito and Socia (2015) indicated that when considering the collective of encounters that police have with the public, nearly 7% of contacts include interactions with persons who suffer from some form of MI. Watson and Wood (2017) supported this statistic, indicating that between 6 - 10% of police contacts involved PMI. Livingston (2016) offered that nearly 25% of PMI have either been arrested or have had some type of police encounter. Of these, nearly 41% suffered from bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. This is interesting, considering that Corner et al. (2016) highlighted rates of schizophrenia among HVEs at nine times the prevalence among the general public. Aside from instances of schizophrenia, other disorders also exist among forensic populations.

Bhui, Warfa, and Jones (2014) indicated that younger persons are at higher risk for violent radicalization. Cashman and Thomas (2017) studied the prevalence of mental health disorders among offenders who represented such a younger population. Their findings indicated that other cognitive disorders that existed within this demographic included behavioral disorder among 21%, substance abuse disorders among 20%, anxiety disorders among 17%, and personality disorders among 12%. Watson and Wood (2017) contributed to this, highlighting that 63% of PMI who come into contact with police suffers from confused thinking, 42% suffer from depression, and 30% have suicidal ideations. Interestingly, police also perceived that 81% of the PMI with whom they came into contact suffered from some serious MI such as schizophrenia. Aside from this perception, there existed other opinions that police had of persons suffering from some form of MI.

**Perceptions that police have of persons with MI.** McTackett and Thomas (2017) offered that police often based their perceptions of PMI on previous contacts that individuals have had with police, or through the observation of a subject's non-verbal cues. At times, the observed presence of MI also translates to dangerousness and unpredictability (McTackett & Thomas, 2017). Morabito and Socia (2015) also offered that police also link PMI to potential dangerousness simply as a mechanism of the MI. These perceptions that police have of the mentally ill can be synthesized with findings by Perlin and Lynch (2016), which offered that PMI are nearly four times more likely than the general population to die in encounters with police.

Oxburgh et al. (2016) offered that the perceptions that police have of PMI are also more negative than the ones they have of persons without MI, but that police are also

eager to assist PMI. As a result, Krameddine and Silverstone (2015) indicated that police officers are becoming trained in verbal and non-verbal communications with PMI to both increase empathy and employ de-escalation strategies with them to counter increased uses of force.

**Proactive interactions between police and PMI.** Kara (2014) offered that police often are reactive to PMI, and in doing so respond to call-outs of PMI in contrast to opening investigations on them. There are, however, specific teams that are designed to interact with PMI within communities. Taheri (2016) highlighted the presence of crisis intervention teams (CIT's) that conversely proactively seek to contact PMI to monitor and assist them. This interaction between CITs and PMI occurs because police agencies have identified that PMI are more greatly represented within the criminal justice system (Taheri, 2016). As a result, CITs are designed to identify individuals within communities who suffer from MI, establish rates of recidivism among such populations, and also seek relevant psychiatric care for at-risk persons (Kara, 2014). Nonetheless, police resort to use of force against PMI as a result of existing perceptions.

**Use of force incidents with PMI.** Police possess several perceptions of PMI. Specifically, the belief that the mentally ill are dangerous and unpredictable transposes into increased uses of force among PMI (McTackett & Thomas, 2017). Kara (2014) offered that use of force on mentally ill is not as rare as it is with the general population, but that when it occurs, it can be both volatile and fatal. Incidentally, the frequency of uses of force against PMI has increased in the last decade (Kara, 2014). Engel (2015) highlighted that nearly 12% of use of force incidents involve PMI.

There appears, then, to be a higher incidence of uses of force among PMI when cross-referencing this with Morabito and Socia (2015), who indicated that only 7% of police encounters involve PMI. When considering this disparity, Engel (2015) also indicated that PMI are IS more likely than the general population to resist arrest. Interestingly, Kahn, Thompson, and McMahon (2017) offered that the public perception of uses of force against the mentally ill is remarkably lower than against the general population, even though Engel's (2015) data indicates it occurs with higher prevalence. Disparities also exist when considering conviction rates among PMI.

**Adjudication and criminal dispositions of PMI.** Schulenberg (2016) offered that although PMI are less likely to commit crimes, they are indeed more likely to be convicted of violent crimes. Specifically, 26% of persons within the criminal justice system that are tried for these crimes are convicted. This is compared against 54% of PMI who are tried for the same violent crimes, over twice the rate. Gill and Murphy (2017) also indicated that persons with MI are over represented within the criminal justice system. As a result, many court institutions have implemented jail diversion platforms, such as treatment programs, that lead to lower rates of recidivism among PMI (Gill & Murphy, 2017). Regardless, MI itself appears to at times be criminalized.

**Criminalization of MI.** Following the deinstitutionalization of PMI from mass psychiatric facilities, many individuals who suffered from MI found themselves readmitted to communities that were ill-prepared to assist them (Schulenberg, 2016). As a result, police more readily arrested PMI instead of assisting them; this occurred to under-trained law enforcement who immediately sought to adjudicate a call-out in contrast to following through with psychiatric assistance for a subject (Schulenberg, 2016).

Having recognized this phenomenon, many police departments sought to establish units that could specifically assist PMI. These units emerged as both crisis intervention teams as well as MI response teams that sought to interact with mentally ill persons and divert them from criminal adjudication (Campbell, Ahalt, Hagar, & Arroyo, 2017). Such teams not only seek to provide psychiatric assistance to PMI, but also seek to redirect them within the criminal justice system to court institutions that specialize in litigating criminal charges against mentally ill persons. While such courtrooms that specialize in working with the mentally ill might attempt to provide psychiatric treatment in lieu of incarceration, they also seek to provide psychiatric care for those who may ultimately become incarcerated (Schulenberg, 2016).

### **Bias within Law Enforcement Processes**

As this study explores how CT agents perceive extremists with MI, it is necessary to review the literature to determine how such perceptions within law enforcement can influence decision-making. Biases exist within law enforcement (Schulenberg, 2016). To understand how conclusions are formed within investigative processes, it is necessary to understand the lenses through which police understand their environments, even if such lenses are refracted through some form of preconception. As a result, this section will review literature that establishes the presence of bias in law enforcement, types of bias within law enforcement, the influence that bias has on criminal investigations, and how existing biases of terrorism suspects influence criminal litigation.

**Presence and types of bias within law enforcement.** Schulenberg (2016) highlighted that although PMI are less likely than the general population to commit crimes, they are nearly twice as likely to be convicted of a violent crime as are people

who do not suffer from MI. This might indicate both a procedural bias against the arrest of PMI as well as a judicial disparity in convicting PMI. Schulenberg (2016) adds that PMI are indeed more likely to be victims of a crime than they are offenders. Nonetheless, the disjuncture between policing and the criminalization of MI can exist as a result of exceptionally limited access to psychiatric care resources for the mentally ill as well as under-trained police forces (Schulenberg, 2016). Several types of bias emerge when exploring perceptions that law enforcement possess.

*Anchor bias.* Zapf and Dror (2017) offered that law enforcement officers' previous experiences can inaccurately influence later, similar experiences in a phenomenon known as anchor bias. Specifically, the previous experience from which the officer establishes some heuristic is referred to as the anchor. This is important when considering that Smith and Marshall (2017) found that individuals whose decisions are influenced by anchor biases can also be influenced by vicarious anchors, or those of the individuals around them. This might indicate that CT investigators are influenced by the shared experiences of other agents with whom they work, and further aligns with the study's conceptual framework in which Bandura (2018) indicated that one of the variables of social cognitive theory is indeed the influence that interpersonal experience has on behavior. Anchor bias also has specific influence within CT investigations.

Viscusi and Zeckhauser (2017) identified that within the CT investigative process, anchor biases emerge when agents' previous experiences with terrorism investigations influence similar case characteristics in future inquiries. The anchor exists as a conclusion which an investigator draws from evidence, and upon seeing comparable evidence in other inquiries arrives at a similar conclusion. Yang, Sun, and Shanks (2018)

indicated that any judgment rooted in a numerical analysis (e.g. suspect financial records, phone-call analysis, number of times psychiatrically evaluated, etc.) could gravitate toward previously encountered numerical anchors. Such anchors may thereafter influence a terrorism investigation by comparing statistical analysis of one HVE suspect to a previous suspect with similar metrics.

***Implicit Bias.*** Lim (2015) highlighted the presence of implicit bias among police, and identified such bias as the assignment of particular characteristics to a member of a specific demographic on the basis of membership alone. Spencer et al. (2016) further identified such demographics as race, age, or gender. Implicit bias exists as law enforcement's attribution of characteristics to members of specific groups, and it manifests as racial bias in police practice (Dukes & Kahn, 2017; Nadal, Davidoff, & Allicock, 2017; James, 2018). It can, however, also exist as a bias against the mentally ill (Morabito & Socia, 2015).

Cotton and Li (2015) offered that implicit bias may exist as stereotypes of particular demographics, and that these preconceptions influence judgment through misattribution of predetermined characteristics. This can be synthesized with Morabito and Socia (2015), who offered that police link MI to potential dangerousness simply as a mechanism of the cognitive disorder. Pickett et al. (2018) found that such biases and perceptions within the criminal justice system can be influenced by both external environments as well as individual perception, which aligns with Bandura's (2018) tripartite social cognitive theory that asserts an individual's perceptions are influenced by through experience and vicariously.

**Confirmation bias.** Peters (2018) indicated that confirmation bias is an epistemic refraction that skews evidence in favor of existing beliefs. This tendency can selectively use existing facts in furtherance of pre-existing theories (Peters, 2018). Dando and Ormerod (2017) stated that this particular bias existed within law enforcement investigations; a limitation of their study, though, was that officers could have engaged in confirmation bias more often than documented. Rossmo (2016) articulated that confirmation bias is endemic within criminal investigations, and that it manifests as premature judgment wherein investigators make up their minds about culpability or innocence prior to assessing evidence. Liden et al. (2018) added to this, highlighting that within police interrogations, officers tend to presume guilt of a person solely because the person is in custody.

**Bias' influence of criminal investigations.** Lentini (2015) implied that confirmation bias can directly influence investigations. Notably, when confirmation bias influences the expectations of some investigation, investigators may allow premature determinations to influence the direction of the investigation and analysis. Such analysis will go on to feed a conclusion that may result in the determination of guilt or innocence of a suspect.

Dando and Ormerod (2017) and Rossmo (2016) paralleled this analysis, indicating that police engage in hypothesis-generation at the very beginning of the investigative process, and that such hypotheses were subject to bias. This contrasts with allowing the evidence to build and establish the fact without the interjection of a hypothesis that may subconsciously guide investigative analysis. Felthous (2014) offered

that the minimization of bias is crucial within the study of terrorism, as only objective findings can positively influence CT investigations.

**How bias against terrorism suspects influences litigation.** Bias exists specifically within CT investigations (Clarke, 2018). When considering homegrown violent attacks that are inspired by religious ideologies, Clarke (2018) also indicated that law enforcement sometimes deploys implicit biases against Muslims and presumes an individual's practice of Islam equates a nexus to terrorism. Viscusi and Zeckhauser (2017) found that past experiences with terrorism can influence an individual's perceptions of future interactions, so an officer may allow previous experience with religious suspects to influence upcoming investigations. Weingarten et al. (2016) referred to this influence as priming, wherein exposure to a stimulus can influence reactions to similar stimuli at later times. As a result, the implicit bias of assigning characteristics to a demographic (e.g. religion) may simultaneously exist as an anchor bias if the officer has previously investigated members of the same religion. Interestingly, timing of a criminal prosecution can also exist as an influence.

Shields et al. (2015) indicated that the success of prosecuting a terrorist attack corresponds to the chronological nexus the prosecution has to the attack. Amirault and Bouchard (2017) added to this, suggesting that the timing of a suspect's litigation relative to the terrorist attack, the specific charges of which they are accused, and the ideological function of the attack can all influence a longer sentence of a suspect. Therefore, triers of fact within the criminal justice system may anchor their perceptions of suspects within the terrorist attack for which they are accused, and thereafter operationalize their bias by more heavily adjudicating the suspect's sentence.

## **Research Methods and Processes**

This study explored how the experiences that CT investigators had yielded specific experiences and perceptions. Considering that this exploratory nature was based in lived experiences and how agents perceived their constructed knowledge of homegrown violent extremists, it became necessary to review the literature on qualitative research conducted through interpretative phenomenological analysis. Therefore, this section will review qualitative definitions and techniques in research, phenomenology, IPA, sampling methods in qualitative research, and the utility of phenomenological analysis in terrorism research.

**Qualitative research.** Creswell (2018) indicated that qualitative research is the scientific explorations of descriptions and perceptions, and it seeks to comprehend the meaning individuals ascribe to a particular phenomenon. Qualitative inquiry can also investigate how understandings of an environment can inform reactions to it (Gray, 2017). This aligned with the current study, as it sought to explore how a perception influenced a behavior. Notably, there exist specific ways in which persons understand their environment, such as from phenomenological perspectives.

**Phenomenology.** Saldaña (2016) identified phenomenology as the philosophical interpretation of experience, specifying that it explored how individuals interpreted the world around them. Yuksel and Yildirim (2015) differentiated phenomenology from constructivism, suggesting that the constructivist constructs what he knows, but that the phenomenologist knows what he constructs. As the participants in this study will be interviewed regarding their personal experiences, phenomenology aligns with the approach as Adams and Manen (2017) offered that phenomenological research seeks to

explore lived experiences. Once data is acquired through a phenomenological approach, it can be interpreted through any number of analytical methods. One particular method includes interpretative phenomenological analysis.

**Interpretative phenomenological analysis.** Vanscoy and Evenstad (2015) identified interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a process within qualitative research that extracts interpreted themes from observed phenomena. To do so, the narratives provided by participants within a study are cross-referenced to other participant accounts, and similarities between the accounts are denoted in a process called phenomenological reduction. Heinonen (2015) offered that in doing so, IPA allows for hermeneutic observations and comprehension of an individual's lived experience. As the process of a CT investigation is an act in information-gathering, IPA aligned with this study considering that Vanscoy and Evenstad (2015) stated that IPA was effective in exploring experiences among information professionals. IPA further aligned with this study, as previous studies that explored experiences with terrorism also employed IPA (Ferguson et al., 2015).

**Sampling methods in qualitative research.** Mason (2010) discussed sampling techniques in PhD studies that employed qualitative interviews. Notably sample sizes in IPA can comprise between five and 25 participants, often determined by the point at which themes become repetitive; this is referred to as *saturation* (Mason, 2010). Gentles and Vilches (2017) offered that ambiguity should be avoided in qualitative research so as to focus on a particular group of persons who share an experience. Furthermore, sampling within qualitative studies should target participants who have the ability to bring contextual details to the study (Gentles & Vilches, 2017). Considering these applications

of qualitative research conducted through interpretative phenomenological analysis, these empirical techniques appear to align with the study.

### **Research Summary of Findings**

Terrorism represents any violence committed against innocent persons in furtherance of religious or political ideologies, and in doing so represent a remarkable threat to both the United States and other countries throughout the world (Clarke & Papadopoulos, 2016; FBI, 2017; Zarate, 2017). It affects mass psychology, economies, and governments (Winters, 2017; Coats, 2018). Because the criminal elements of terrorist acts include their motivations, terrorism is often investigated through a lens of motivational origins. These include international and domestic terrorism (FBI, 2017; Piazza, 2017). The operational act of terrorism, however, is determined by whether the perpetrator acted alone or is part of a group. These phenomena are carried out by HVEs and the militant operator, respectively (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). This study explored perceptions of the HVE.

Historically, HVEs have often experienced MI at rates that approach 50% (Grunewald et al., 2013; Corner & Gill, 2015; Pitcavage, 2015). These disorders include schizophrenia, delusional disorders, personality disorders, depression, social isolation, and substance abuse (Bhui, Everitt, & Jones, 2014; Corner & Gill, 2015; Olsson, 2015). Specifically, stress disorders, delusions, and schizophrenia existed at higher rates among HVE's than in the general public (Corner et al., 2016). Whereas many HVEs often experience some perceived oppression from an external component, their MI serves as the bridge between the oppression and the final, violent act that comprises terrorism

(Pitcavage, 2015). The presence of MI among these offenders, however, extends to the macro-analysis of encounters between PMI and law enforcement.

Approximately 7% of police contacts involved PMI (Burkhardt et al., 2015; Morabito & Socia, 2015; Watson & Wood, 2017). As 25% of PMI have been arrested, many suffered from bipolar disorder or schizophrenia (Livingston, 2016; Corner et al., 2016). It appears that schizophrenia not only appears to be a common variable among PMI with criminal histories, but also among homegrown violent extremists. Police are more likely to perceive PMI as erratic or dangerous, and these perceptions result in increased uses of force against PMI (Morabito & Socia, 2015; Perlin & Lynch, 2016; McTackett & Thomas, 2017). These perceptions may often emerge as evident biases within law enforcement practices. What is not known, however, is how such biases by law enforcement may transpose to HVEs when they suffer from MI and how those biases influence the CT investigation process. The current study will fill this gap by interviewing CT agents with experience in investigating HVEs with MI. The findings of this study will thereafter extend knowledge both in the discipline of forensic psychology as well as criminal justice CT investigative procedures.

The canvass of biases that often exist within police practices include anchor bias, implicit bias, and confirmation bias (Schulenberg, 2016; Smith & Marshall, 2017; Lim, 2015; Dukes & Kahn, 2017; Nadal et al., 2017; Dando & Ormerod, 2017). These biases can negatively influence judicial conclusions by incorrectly informing investigative findings, and researchers can arrive at misinformed conclusions of guilt or innocence (Viscusi & Zeckhauser, 2017; Schulenberg, 2016; Zapf & Dror, 2017). Felthous (2014)

highlighted that identification and minimization of bias is crucial in terrorism investigations. The study of this phenomenon best aligns with qualitative inquiry.

Qualitative research exists as an exploration of how individuals perceive and react to a phenomenon (Creswell, 2018; Gray, 2017). Whereas phenomenology is a qualitative method of understanding a lived experience, interpretative phenomenological analysis is the technique of synthesis narratives provided by participants who share the investigated experience (Saldaña, 2016; Adams & Manen, 2017; Vanscoy & Evenstad, 2015). Specifically, IPA involves interviews of five to 25 participants who are targeted for their lived experience regarding a perceived phenomenon and who bring contextual details to the study (Mason, 2010; Gentles & Vilches, 2017).

### **Conclusions**

This chapter discussed the literature search strategy employed throughout the study and how articles were chosen for use. Furthermore, I discussed databases and types of keywords that were employed to search for empirical data. The conceptual framework was reviewed as it applied to alignment within the study. Next a literature review explored the key elements of this study that comprise definitions and effects of terrorism, psychopathologies of extremists, correlations between terrorism and MI, and perceptions of terrorists. Police perceptions of the PMI were also reviewed as well as correlations between MI and crime. Another section discussed biases within law enforcement and how these biases influence criminal and terrorism investigations. Last, the qualitative techniques that are employed throughout this study were also researched.

The review of the literature displayed how other researchers have explored similar phenomena within terrorism, bias, and police perception inquiries. It also identified the

gap as not understanding how CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI, and how this perception interacts with CT investigations. Considering that this gap can be addressed by phenomenological inquiry into the experiences of CT investigators, the following chapter will describe the research methodology that serves as the architecture of this inquiry. Specifically, qualitative methodologies employing phenomenological techniques and analysis as well as the participant identification and recruitment techniques of this study will be described in Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### **Introduction**

To understand the investigative decision-making processes of CT investigators, it is essential to understand their perceptions of HVEs (Bhui, Everitt, & Jones, 2014). Moreover, it is necessary to understand how CT investigators perceive suspects with MI when investigating HVEs who suffer from mental health disorders, and how this perception may influence the CT investigation. Although researchers have studied CT agents' perceptions of HVEs, and although there exists literature concerning the perceptions law enforcement has of criminal suspects with MI, there exists no literature regarding how investigators perceive HVEs with MI (Burkhardt et al., 2015; Kruse, 2016; Perry & Whitehead, 2015; Schulenberg, 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions CT investigators have of HVEs with MI, and how those perceptions influence CT investigations.

This chapter will provide an overview of the study's methodology. Both research design and rationale will be explored, as well as my role and responsibilities within the study. I also discuss the specifics of the methodology, as well as trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and any concerns that may arise throughout the study.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The purpose of this study was to explore how terrorism investigators' possible perceptions and biases of PMI influence their investigative decision making. The study's research question is:

RQ1: “Based on their lived experiences, how do the understandings, perceptions, and attitudes of CT agents inform their biases and influence their decision-making and ultimately investigations of homegrown violent extremists with mental illness?”

In this methodology section, I outline how to address this question within a qualitative tradition, specifically because this tradition can answer the research question by employing phenomenological analysis.

### **Central Phenomenon of the Study**

The principal function of this study was to explore the perceptions CT investigators have of HVEs with MI. To research this, it is necessary to understand the concepts of the CT experience. Preliminarily, terrorism is a crime that exists as some premeditated, organized violence committed against an innocent population in furtherance of religious or political ideologies (FBI, 2017). A CT investigator is any person who investigates this crime. Homegrown violent extremism represents a typology of terrorism wherein a lone actor attaches to some radical ideology and commits violence in furtherance of it, but has limited (if any) contact with a structured terrorist organization (Hafez & Mullins, 2015).

In this study, I also explored perceptions law enforcement officers have of suspects with MI. As these perceptions may be informed by bias, it is relevant to understand the types of bias that often exist for law enforcement officers. Notably, these comprise anchor bias, implicit bias, and confirmation bias. Anchor bias exists as a preconception rooted in some previous experience (the anchor) that influences future behavior with other, similar experiences (Zapf & Dror, 2017). Implicit bias occurs when an individual assigns a characteristic to a person based only on the individual’s

demographic (Lim, 2015). Confirmation bias exists as a phenomenon wherein an individual reaches a conclusion before collecting evidence, and thereafter selects only the evidence that supports the conclusion (Peters, 2018).

Last, I explored MI, which is any disorder that affects cognition and subsequent behavior (Morabito & Socia, 2015). Among terrorism suspects, prevalent MI disorders include schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, substance abuse disorders, and personality disorders (Corner & Gill, 2015; Corner et al., 2016; Grunewald et al., 2013; Pitcavage, 2015). In this study, I sought to explore the perceptions investigators have of HVEs who suffer from MI, which included these examples.

### **Research Tradition**

For this study, I employed a qualitative method conducted through a phenomenological approach, notably because I sought to explore perceptions and how persons react to their understanding about a phenomenon. Both Creswell (2018) and Gray (2017) indicated that qualitative researchers seek to explore perceptions and how individuals react to them. Whereas Saldaña (2016) identified phenomenology as the methodical interpretation of experience, Vanscoy and Evenstad (2015) highlighted interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the process through which themes of perception are discovered. Furthermore, I employed IPA in this study as Vanscoy and Evenstad also indicated it is effective for researching how information professionals, like criminal investigators, interpret phenomena. As IPA aggregates narratives provided by research participants, the accuracies of their accounts were confirmed and their statements were analyzed for coding and thematic instances.

### **Rationale**

Because the goal of this study was to understand lived experiences of criminal investigators and how they apply those experiences, the qualitative approach used herein did not focus on quantitative, statistical data, but rather on interpreting and analyzing personal experiences. Interview questions in this study sought to examine the participants' experiences with HVEs with MI, and if these perceptions influenced their behaviors within the CT investigation thereafter.

A review of the literature indicated that the perceptions law enforcement officers have of PMI can influence their decisions during the criminal investigation process (Dando & Omerod, 2017; Lentini, 2015; Rossmo, 2016; Schulenberg, 2016;). Specifically, I investigated whether law enforcement officers' perceptions of HVEs with MI influence the CT investigation, if at all. Because this study was an exploration of how a perception influences a behavior, IPA of a lived experience through qualitative methodology was most appropriate.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I was the only researcher and observer throughout this study. My research duties included extraction of themes through interviews aligned with IPA. This required an annotation of all statements and nonverbal cues that occurred during the interviews in addition to responses to the interview questions (Creswell, 2018). First I asked participants to complete a demographic questionnaire to collect basic information, such as years in law enforcement or education. I then asked the participants open-ended questions during interviews that occurred in-person, via a digital interface, or over the telephone. Thereafter, data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

I work within a CT setting, specifically with an FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force (FBI JTTF), and have previously participated in investigations of HVEs with MI. To avoid letting any bias interact with this research, I asked open-ended questions, the answers to which depended on the participants' experiences without interruption from me. To avoid confirmation biases of answers, I designed the questions to allow the participants to share their stories without my experiences influencing theirs. My thoughts and experiences were annotated throughout the interviews and data collection process. I expressed empathy with participants, and encouraged them to share their thoughts while simultaneously building rapport with them.

Although in some instances, I may have limited professional interaction with participants, I did not have any supervisory position over any of them. Furthermore, there were no instructor relationships that involved any form of decision-making or power over any of the participants. All participants were asked to participate voluntarily, and some of them did not have any relationship with me at all. To mitigate any bias of existing professional relationships, I interacted in the same manner with all participants regardless of whether a previous professional relationships existed.

Furthermore, to mitigate any issues of interviewing any coworkers, all participants were reminded the study existed independently of the professional environment, and their participation in the study did not influence or affect any professional interactions. Also, I used data analysis techniques specifically designed to mitigate any sub-conscious bias or disruption from me; this will be further discussed in the data-analysis section.

## **Methodology**

In this section, I reviewed the logic and techniques of participant selection, the specific instrumentation of the semi-structured interviews, the procedures for recruiting individuals, and the method for data analysis.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The research question for this study was “Based on their lived experiences, how do the understandings, perceptions, and attitudes of CT agents inform their biases and influence their decision-making and ultimately investigations of homegrown violent extremists with MI?” As a result, the accessible population was comprised of any persons who have officially participated in a CT investigation of an HVE who suffers from a perceived MI to determine if the investigator has a bias for or against the mentally ill. This sampling frame included such individuals who have worked at FBI field offices on JTTFs. This sampling strategy was justified by considering the FBI is the primary entity which investigates terrorism, and when considering the research question the sample population of CT investigators is seemingly the group of individuals who can satisfy its collection requirements.

Criteria for inclusion for the study’s participants included current or previous placement or participation with an FBI JTTF. Participants had to have participated in the investigations of a terrorism suspect with MI. Within the FBI, an investigation may be an initial CT inquiry of a person (called a Guardian lead), a preliminary investigation, or a full investigation; each of these types exercises different legal tools. Participant job titles may include special agents, task force officers, staff operations specialists, consultants, intelligence analysts, language analysts, attorneys, or evidence collection technicians; for the purposes of this study, each of these titles was considered an investigator. Another

criterion for inclusion was that each participant will have provided consent and willingness to be interviewed. Lastly, participants should also have been willing to engage in a follow-up interview if one was needed.

Criteria for exclusion in the study included having worked for the FBI, but never having participated in the investigation of a terrorism suspect with MI. Another exclusion criterion included removal from any such investigative position due to disciplinary or other adverse conditions, as this may skew the interview question responses. Other criteria included an inability to provide consent or willingness to be interviewed.

For this study I recruited a sample size between 12 and 24 participants or until saturation was reached with as many participants as possible (see Mason, 2010). Saldaña (2016) identified saturation as a repetition of themes among qualitative data sets and indicated the relationship between saturation and sample size exists as the common platform from which dense data analysis occurs in a qualitative study. A participant pool of 12 to 24 individuals represents the higher-end of the participant spectrum, specifically in phenomenology (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016). Moreover, a participant pool of 12 to 24 individuals closely mirrors previous phenomenological studies of terrorism that employed IPA. Through employing IPA in their study of political terrorism, Ferguson et al. (2015) recruited 11 participants. In synthesizing Burkholder et al. (2016) with Ferguson et al. (2015), a participant pool of between 12 and 24 individuals was appropriate for this study. If a crisis or other significant national security event occurs during the data collection process, this may impede participant recruitment. Should this happen, it was my goal to seek at least 12 participants. Ultimately, I interviewed 16 participants.

Due to the unique nature of the participants, I employed purposive sampling through in-person or email invitation. Purposive sampling is used in studies to identify and explore experiences of individuals who experience unique phenomena (Patton, 2015). Preliminarily, invitation brochures were provided to participants, followed by informed consent forms. Should participants have consented, they would have been asked to sign consent forms as well as provide additional initialing if they, furthermore, consented to have their voices recorded.

### **Instrumentation**

Participants were interviewed in person, via digital platforms such as Skype, or telephonically as needed. Demographic questionnaires determined non-identifying biometrics of participants, and then open-ended interview questions were administered to guide the interview while simultaneously providing the participant with opportunities to express his or her experiences with the phenomenon. This study's research question was "Based on their lived experiences, how do the understandings, perceptions, and attitudes of CT agents inform their biases and influence their decision-making and ultimately investigations of homegrown violent extremists with MI?" Furthermore, the conceptual framework of the study was Bandura's SCT, which comprises a tripartite model of human behavior that stems from the individual, intrapersonal, and societal perceptions of a phenomenon (Bandura, 2018).

To align with both the research question as well as the conceptual framework theory, I designed the open-ended interview questions to fill the gap identified by the research question through exploring the participants' individually, interpersonally, and societally influenced perceptions of the stated phenomenon. Each interview question

addressed the research question while building upon one of Bandura's (1999) tripartite variables. These questions (see Appendix A) were researcher-produced. The interview questions began with warm-up questions that introduce the participant to the research. This allowed for introduction as well as familiarization with the research process. In general, these initial questions focused on investigators' demographics as provided by the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), as well as experiences with terrorism investigations, and personal and vicarious perceptions of HVEs with MI. Appropriate follow-up questions helped clarify participants' answers as needed.

The basis for the development of this instrument existed as a construct of addressing the research question through a phenomenological lens. Adams and Manen (2017) indicated that interview questions should elicit concrete material from participants' lived experiences. As a result, each of the questions considered the participant's personal experience. Furthermore, Vanscoy and Evenstad (2015) stated that interpretative phenomenological analysis sought to extract descriptive data from participants. Due to this, many of the questions asked the participant to describe or explain their perceptions or experiences.

Holloway and Galvin (2017) identify content validity as the extent to which the interview questions are accurately able to answer the research question. Considering that a threat to validity exists when data is incorrect or incomplete, validity was established by attempting to gather both accurate and comprehensive data. Specifically, this was accomplished by employing two techniques highlighted by Holloway and Galvin (2017). Preliminarily, a research journal which annotates techniques and procedures encountered throughout the study was kept. Next, the participants were allowed to answer fully and in

their own voice so as not to introduce distortion or bias into their accounts (Holloway & Galvin, 2017).

During these processes, the participants were encouraged to be thorough and truthful in their accounts of their experiences with the phenomenon. Furthermore, Holloway and Galvin (2017) identify that relevance contributes to content validity, specifically when assessing whether each interview question poses some significant relation to the research question. Each of the interview questions was, therefore, designed with this in mind, and is relevant to the research question by aligning the inquiry into the phenomenon with the conceptual framework.

### **Procedures for Participation, Recruitment and Data Collection**

Once participants were identified that satisfied the criteria for inclusion into the study and recruited as discussed in the previous purposive sampling section, a date and time were established for the interview. The interview setting occurred in an area which was away from other co-workers and private. Examples may include a local library or café setting that provided an environment where the participant and I could clearly communicate with one another or private office setting. All interviews were conducted in English.

Data collection occurred by interviewing participants in private settings. To protect the identities of the participants and isolate the identities from any notes or recordings associated with their interviews, a random number generator from [www.random.org](http://www.random.org) was used to generate a random number between 1 and 10,000,000. Only this number (and not the identities of the participants) was annotated on any recordings, subsequent transcriptions, and notes affiliated with any interviews. Following

transcription and analysis and prior to any publication of the findings, all voice recordings of participants would have been destroyed to mitigate risk of participant identification post-publication. The transcriptions of the recordings might have been used to conduct coding and thematic extraction. Participants were informed that recording of their voices was also voluntary, and they were provided a separate initialing section in the informed consent form that annotated their consent to be recorded. No participants consented to have their voices recorded. A participant's declination to have his or her voice recorded did not exclude him or her from the study; rather meticulous notes that I took during the interviews with them were recorded.

Any demographic data that describes participants also had the random number placed on it, but as it may also have been identifiable information about the participant, it was also destroyed following analysis and prior to publication.

I collected all data. Settings for interviews were away from the main office area or building, and afforded privacy to the interviewer and participant. This was to ensure that the participant could express him/herself without interruption from outside variables, as well as to maintain the confidentiality of the participants involved in the study.

Frequency of data collection depended on availability of participants. However, attempts were made to collect the data from the participants in as short a time frame as possible to ensure the interview approach used with the different participants was similar. Each interview lasted no more than 60 minutes. If the participant additionally consented to having his or her voice recorded, data would have been recorded using digital audio devices that had internal memory and could thereafter be transferred to external hard drives for thematic analysis. No participants consented to having their voices recorded.

A follow-up plan was necessary if recruitment resulted in too few participants. Preliminary recruitment through in-person invitations or email invitations through purposive sampling might have proven ineffective at recruiting the established number of participants within the local operational FBI Division. If this had occurred, I would have reached out to adjacent FBI divisions to recruit the requisite number of participants.

Following the interviews, participants exited the study by following debriefing procedures. Participants were asked to return for follow-up interviews if such interviews are necessary. However, none were predicted for the particular structure of this study as it is non-longitudinal. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study. They were also provided with my contact information. Finally, they were sent a summary of their responses, as well as an opportunity to clarify any of their responses.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The transcript notes of the interviews were manually transcribed. In order to understand how CT investigators perceived HVEs with MI, the transcriptions were analyzed to extract phenomenological themes from the narrative in order to address the research question. This occurred through the coding of the transcribed narratives. If participants elected to participate in the study but not to have their voices recorded, I would have taken meticulous notes of their responses and code them accordingly as well. Holloway and Galvin (2017) and Creswell (2018) identified coding as the process of aggregating data with similar meanings and thereafter assigning each aggregate a label or names, referred to as the “code.” Holloway and Galvin (2017) and Saldaña (2016) identified *in vivo* coding as the singling-out of words or phrases that are provided by participants during their interviews, and thereafter establishing codes based on these

words or phrases. This study might have employed *in vivo* coding through the use of NVivo software, a digital qualitative analytics tool had participants opted to have their voices recorded. By applying *in vivo* coding with NVivo software, any bias or disruption of the data based on my personal experience would have been mitigated by beginning the coding process with the participants' own words. This technique was justified for this study when considering I work in the same profession (CT) as the participants, and may also have a professional relationship with the participants. No interviews were recorded, so I manually coded interviews.

Once codes were identified, they were analyzed for themes, which Holloway and Galvin (2017) identified as overarching patterns in the data that are based in language. If themes were identified as having similarities, they would also have been assessed for super-ordinate themes. Should any discrepancies have occurred, they would be reviewed manually and thereafter integrated into the thematic analysis. Once codes and themes became repetitive within the data collection, data saturation occurred. Specifically, data saturation is the repetition of thematic instances in qualitative data sets (Saldaña, 2016).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Within qualitative studies, trustworthiness exists as a mechanism to evaluate a study over several variables that include credibility, dependability, and veracity (Hadi & Closs, 2016). Within this study, trustworthiness then became a component that established triangulation, member checking, and external review by committee members; these specific techniques ensured credibility, dependability, and transferability.

### **Credibility**

Credibility within research studies establishes internal validity (Lub, 2015). Specifically, internal validity is defined as the legitimacy and veracity of a study (Lub, 2015). Interpretative phenomenological analysis seeks to explore individuals' experiences with a phenomenon (Vanscoy & Evanstad, 2015). To understand the participants' interpretation of how their perceptions of HVEs with MI influence the CT investigation, it was essential to ensure that the thematic analyses of the findings within this study were credible. Thematic analysis occurred following saturation, which is a recurrence of extracted codes (Mason, 2010). Notably, prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks, and external committee review supported this study's credibility (Holloway & Galvin, 2017; Thomas, 2017; Ellis, 2019).

**Prolonged engagement.** The process by which a researcher understands a phenomenon's cultural settings and value systems is known as the prolonged engagement (Holloway & Galvin, 2017). As it pertains to CT investigations, therefore, it is essential to understand the underlying perceptions and values of the environments in which CT investigators work. This can highlight any biases or other perceptions that CT investigators possess, which not may be attributable to their perceptions of HVEs with MI. This was established within the research questions by exploring the backgrounds and team-dynamics of the individual CT investigators.

**Triangulation.** The synthesis of multiple sources and methods to understand and analyze a phenomenon is known as triangulation (Rooshenas, Paramasivan, Jepson, & Donovan, 2019). To triangulate the findings of this study, multiple participants were interviewed, and their responses to interview questions were coded and analyzed for thematic instances. Furthermore, members were recruited through purposive sampling in

order to identify the best participants who satisfy the criteria for inclusion of the study. Last, dissertation committee members reviewed the approaches of this study (Creswell, 2018).

**Member checks.** The process by which the researcher re-confirms the findings of a research interview with the participant is known as a member checks (Thomas, 2017). This occurred within the study by summarizing the interview, contacting the individual participant with the summary, and inquiring about any inaccuracies within the synopsis. This provided the participant with a chance to clarify any perceptions that might not have been clear during the process of the interview, and therefore better established a baseline of data for the research process. As notes and summaries with the interviews did not use personally identifying information but instead used a random number generation assigned to each participant, member checking occurred as soon as possible following an interview and prior to moving on to another interview to avoid creating a list or documentation that correlates notes or summaries to the identifications of participants.

**Transferability.** By providing the mechanisms by which the data findings of this study can be applied in alternative settings, research, or phenomena, the transferability of the study increases (Burchett et al., 2013). Specifically, this external validity may be applicable within other, generalized situations that might possess some peripheral nexus to the findings of this study. This may include future studies that employ a variation in participant selection, for example, of how CT investigators' perceptions of politics influence their investigations of politically inspired terrorism. Transferability is also employed when consumers of this study process the findings of the study relative to their own individual needs (Burchett et al., 2013). To provide these alternative applications in

a real-world process, accounts of the participants were detailed as much as possible and were thereafter be analyzed for applicable patterns.

**Dependability.** A study's ability to repeat its methods and procedures to establish stable data collection in the future is referred to as dependability (Creswell, 2018). It is therefore necessary to ensure that the methods through which participants are recruited, the settings in which they are interviewed, and the techniques with which the data is thereafter analyzed are clearly and concisely annotated. The purpose of this is so that the study could be replicated in the future using similar, if not the same, techniques (Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, a journal in Microsoft Word concisely dictated all the processes involved with the study to accurately dictate all techniques involved in the data collection and analysis process (Holloway & Galvin, 2017).

**Confirmability.** The objectivity with which the research study is conducted is referred to as confirmability. Specifically, this is as it relates to other researchers' abilities to confirm the study's findings given the same data and techniques addressed in the audit trail (Ellis, 2019). This supports the overall trustworthiness of a study, because it ensures that the data is interpreted and analyzed accurately with a mitigation of bias (Ellis, 2019). This study employed an audit trail journal in Microsoft Word to allow other researchers to research similar phenomena.

**Reflexivity.** The process by which knowledge is constructed of an existing phenomenon within research based on experiences with it is referred to as reflexivity (Darawsheh & Stanley, 2014). Specifically, a researcher must *reflect* on his or her background or positions of a phenomenon, and how those perceptions influence the techniques with which the phenomenon is studied. This occurs to maintain coder

reliability. Considering the existing background in CT investigations, I created a reflexive journal not only to support confirmability, but also annotate experiences during the research process.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Prior to beginning the study, engaging in any interviews, or collecting data, approval was sought through the FBI Institutional Review Board as well as Walden University's Institutional Review Board. Permission to approach participants for the study was acquired from the FBI Special Agent in Charge of the division in which the study occurs. Requests for participation occurred through in-person purposive recruitment. Due to the private nature of the responses provided by the participants, confidentiality was offered to each individual. Those interested in participating in the study and who satisfy the criteria of inclusion were provided with an informed consent form, and were assigned a random participant number to maintain their privacy. After interviews were conducted, respondents were provided with a debrief form.

Interview notes and/or recordings collected from interactions with participants were labeled with random participant numbers generated from [www.random.org](http://www.random.org) instead of names to avoid using personal information affiliated with any notes or transcriptions. The recordings were also saved on an external digital media device that was stored in a locked safe and was destroyed following analysis and prior to publication. Also destroyed following analysis and prior to publication was any collected demographic data that could be used to specifically identify the participants. The assignment of a random number to the notes, recordings, and/or transcriptions, as well as the pre-publication destruction of any recordings or demographic data was to protect the participants from any professional

reprisal should any controversial responses be provided to interview questions by isolating the identity of the participant from the responses given.

Participants in the study were also informed they may retract their consent and withdraw from the study at any time, and were also informed they can ask questions at any time to seek a better understanding about the role of the research. Participants were provided with contact information to the FBI IRB to express any concerns, complaints, or questions.

Other ethical issues concerned recruitment of participants within my own workplace. To mitigate any ethical issues regarding this, at no time did I hold any supervisory position over any participants. All participants were volunteers. Furthermore, all participants were treated equally and with respect; there was no difference in treatment of participants with whom there existed a professional relationship and those with whom no such relationship existed. Should any participants have had any concerns or complaints, they were provided with contact information for the FBI IRB. Last, all participants were reminded that their participation had no bearing on the work environment, nor influenced any future professional interactions.

### **Summary**

Understanding CT investigators' perceptions of extremists is essential to the CT investigative process (Bhui, Everitt, & Jones, 2014). Aligning with this, it also appeared necessary to understand how they perceive HVEs with MI when the investigation is of a terrorist with cognitive disorders. A gap in the literature existed regarding how CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI (Perry & Whitehead, 2015; Kruse, 2016; Burkhardt et al., 2015; Schulenberg, 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived

experiences and perceptions that CT investigators have of HVEs with MI, and how those perceptions influence the CT investigation.

This chapter provided an overview of the study's methodology. Both research design and rationales were explored, as well as my role and positionality within the study. The specifics of the methodology were discussed, as well as considerations of trustworthiness. Furthermore, concerns that may arise throughout the study were explained. Ethical considerations were also discussed. This methodology will support data collection, to be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

One of the more endemic threats to society is the phenomenon of terrorism (Zarate, 2017). Although militant groups act as organized structures and violently proliferate in their political or religious ideologies, individual HVEs may act alone to raise awareness of their own, radicalized perceptions (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). Although they may employ some ideology to justify their acts of violence, at times MI is HVEs' vehicle to the violent act forged by some cognitive distortion of their own reality (Corner & Gill, 2015). Because HVEs employ violence to achieve their goals, it is logical that law enforcement may thereafter investigate or arrest them. Law enforcement, however, may possess biases, especially when investigating PMI; such biases may influence the tide of their investigations (McTackett & Thomas, 2017; Morabito & Socia, 2015).

Persons who engage in acts of homegrown extremism may suffer from MI. Furthermore, police may possess biases when investigating those with MI. It then becomes necessary to understand how investigators perceive HVEs with MI. It is also essential to comprehend how those perceptions influence CT investigations. As a result, the purpose of this study was to explore how investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI influence the investigative process. This was done by answering the research question:

RQ1: Based on their lived experiences, how do the understandings, perceptions, and attitudes of CT agents inform their biases and influence their decision-making and ultimately investigations of homegrown violent extremists with mental illness?

In this chapter, I describe the setting of the study to include organizational influences of FBI CT investigators, the demographics of the participants, data collection

procedures and anomalies, evidence of trustworthiness within the study, results of the study, and a summary of the study's key concepts.

### **Setting**

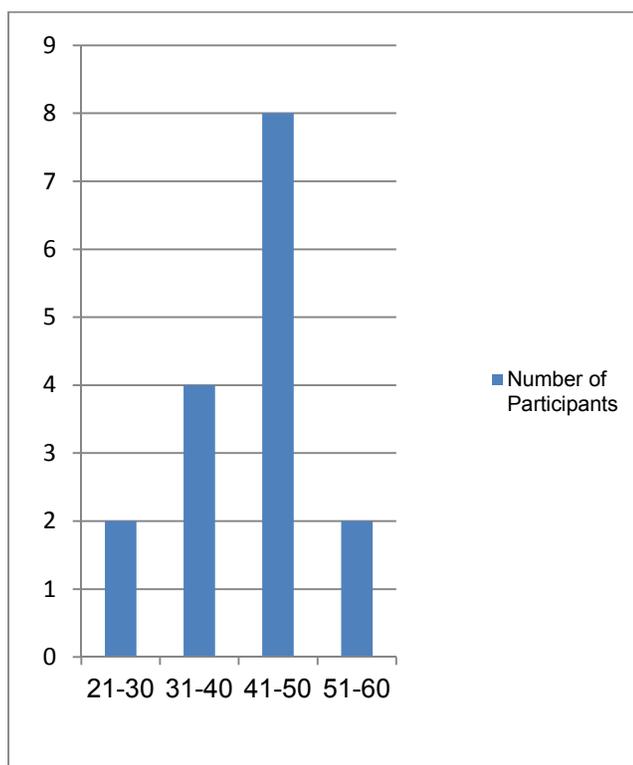
The interviews occurred in person in private settings away from the main work area such as private conference rooms or areas that were compartmentalized from public access or interruption from other FBI employees. All participants were initially approached in person without other individuals present to inquire about their interest in participating in the study. They were provided with an invitation to the study and were thereafter given an informed consent form that detailed the stipulations of their participation in the study. If they consented, they signed the form. They were provided with a separate option to have their voices recorded. None of the interviews was recorded.

There was no incentive provided for participation in the interview. At times, interviews occurred in buildings where I work on the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force. Interviews, however, were conducted in private rooms. To mitigate any effects of participants' or my affiliation with the workplace, respondents were reminded that their interview participation was confidential and had no influence on their professional workplace environment. No changes in personnel, budget cuts (such as government shutdowns), or other traumas existed.

### **Demographics**

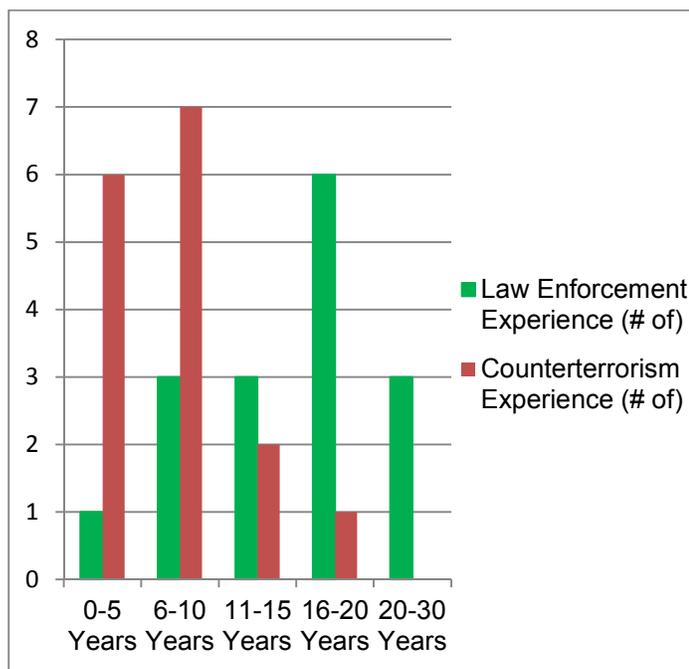
All participants satisfied the study's inclusion criteria by self-identifying as CT investigators who have previously participated in a CT investigation of a person with MI. All participants spoke and understood English. Of the 16 participants, two were between

the ages of 21 and 30; four were between the ages of 31 and 40; eight were between the ages of 41 and 50; and two were between the ages of 51 and 60. The number of participants is represented in Figure 1 as a function of age groups. When considering their time in law enforcement, one had 0-5 years of experience; three had 6-10 years; three had 11-15 years; six had 16-20 years; and three had 20+ years. When considering their time working in FBI CT investigations, six had 0-5 years of experience; seven had 6-10 years of experience; two had 11-5 years of experience; and one had 16-20 years of experience. Figure 2 represents the number of participants as a function of experience in law enforcement and counterterrorism. To maintain confidentiality of participant identities, no further demographic data was collected.



**Figure 1**

Number of participants as a function of age groups



**Figure 2**

Number of participants as a function of experience in law enforcement and counterterrorism

Participants were asked about their training or education in psychology or terrorism. Three participants indicated they had no training or little training in psychology. Five participants indicated they had some training or some college in psychology. Eight participants indicated they had extensive training with a certification, or a bachelor's degree or higher in psychology. Eight participants indicated they had a moderate level of training or education in terrorism, and eight participants indicated they had a high level of training or education in terrorism. Six participants indicated they had low training or education in the basic psychology of PMI, three participants stated that they had moderate training, and seven stated they had a high level of training in such identification.

Participants were asked if they believed their training or education in the psychology of terrorism or MI was adequate. Seven responded that it was adequate, and nine responded that it was inadequate. I then explained to respondents the definition of the term *bias* as a preconceived attitude. Eleven participants indicated they had sympathetic biases toward PMI, whereas five did not. Six participants indicated they did not have negative perceptions of PMI, whereas eight indicated they had some negative perception.

### **Data Collection**

Sixteen individuals agreed to participate in the study after in-person recruitment and consented to an interview after being provided a study consent form. Data collection using the study's open-ended interview questions lasted for two months. The study was conducted using a qualitative analytic approach with semi-structured interviews that occurred in person. All interviews lasted from 45 minutes to one hour. The location of the interviews occurred in private settings entirely compartmented from other employees. Although participants were offered a separate option to have their voices recorded during the interview, none accepted the recording process. No interviews were recorded. Instead, I took copious notes as to what the participants were saying during the interview.

No deviations occurred from the collection plan in Chapter 3. The only unusual circumstance that occurred was one participant experienced a family emergency during the first interview question and rescheduled. During the rescheduled interview with this participant, a new consent form was read and signed. The interview thereafter proceeded normally, and no other anomalies occurred.

### **Data Analysis**

Saturation of the data occurred after approximately ten interviews. However, 16 interviews were conducted considering the unique nature of the participants. Phenomenological reduction yielded six main themes, each of which had between three to five sub-themes. The data was coded in alignment with Vanscoy and Evenstad's (2015) interpretative phenomenological analytic techniques, which extract descriptive data from participants' transcribed narratives. To collect and analyze the data, I created a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel. The first column of the spreadsheet contained all the interview questions, and the subsequent columns included the participant number and their responses to each interview question. This allowed me to review responses to each question en masse, and thereafter extract individual quotes from which I yielded codes. These were then used to determine sub-themes and themes by identifying repetitions of statements and phrases throughout the series of interviews. By doing this, I identified the essence of the lived experiences of the participants.

The interviews yielded six themes that included CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI as cognitively and physically volatile; CT investigators perceive that HVEs with MI are motivated as a mechanism of MI and not ideology; CT investigators express empathy toward persons with MI regardless of HVE status; CT investigators remain objective about HVE investigations; CT investigators feel as though they need more training in mental health; and CT investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI are influenced by coworkers, but not society. A discrepancy existed between the framework and the data, which is later discussed.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness within a qualitative study is its evaluation concerning credibility, dependability, and veracity (Hadi & Closs, 2016). This study's trustworthiness was established through audits, triangulation, and member checking. Notably, participants reviewed their answers and provided addendums in instances where they edited their responses. This was critical to ensure the proper evaluation and analysis of the responses provided by participants, as well as to assess the totality of extracted codes.

### **Credibility**

Lub (2015) indicated that credibility within a study can be established through internal validity, which constitutes both a study's legitimacy and veracity. Furthermore, Vanscoy and Evenstad (2015) indicated that IPA explores a person's experience with a phenomenon. As a result, the procedural enhancements of credibility within IPA were applied to the study to establish its legitimacy and, therein, credibility. Holloway and Galvin (2017) and Thomas (2017) identified these as the utility of prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks, and external audits.

Holloway and Galvin (2017) identified prolonged engagements as a researcher's understandings of a phenomenon's cultural settings and value systems. I have worked in CT investigative settings, and have experienced much of the culture therein. However, my familiarity with this setting may not be those of other CT investigators. As a result, and to ensure prolonged engagement, the interview questions explored the individual backgrounds and team-dynamics of CT investigators. For participants with whom I was not personally familiar, rapport was established through calm interaction and availability to answer their questions.

Triangulation is the analytic synthesis of multiple sources to understand a phenomenon (Roosehnas et al., 2019). To ensure triangulation within this study, 16 participants were interviewed, and their responses were coded and phenomenologically reduced. They were recruited through purposive sampling to avoid peripheral data that would not contribute to the study. Last, my dissertation committee will conduct a peer review as suggested by Creswell (2018).

Thomas (2017) suggested that researchers re-confirm the findings from individual participants through a process known as member checks. This occurred in the study through providing participants with a list of their interview question responses, and asking them to report any inaccuracies within their responses to allow them to clarify any of their perceptions or responses. This process yielded two participants who responded with minor corrections. These were thereafter added to the master interview spreadsheet and incorporated into the coding.

### **Transferability**

Burchett et al. (2013) identified how research procedures within a particular study can be applied to alternative research settings as transferability. Future studies may research, for example, how investigators' perceptions of public officials influence their investigations of corruption among these representatives. To ensure this study's transferability to them, I described the conditions and specific methodologies of this study in detail. I also described the conceptual framework, the physical recruitment process, and the phenomenological analysis of the findings. This allowed the study to serve potentially as a research framework for prospective qualitative inquiries.

### **Dependability**

Creswell (2018) indicated that a study's capacity to be repeated using its same meticulous methodology is considered its dependability. To ensure this study's dependability, I concisely annotated techniques used to recruit participants, interview settings, and analysis and coding techniques of the participant narratives. I developed a Microsoft Word file that dictated the processes of data collection involved with the study, as well as the minutiae of the interview processes. For example, the discrepancy of the aforementioned family emergency during one of the interviews was annotated in this word file. In doing so the data collection and analysis processes were transparent to any individuals who may engage in similar research in the future.

### **Confirmability**

Ellis (2019) referred to the objectivity of a study as its confirmability. Moreover, this is the ability of other researchers to confirm the study's findings by using the same data collection and analysis techniques. I annotated this process in the data collection process Microsoft Word file. I completed this in this study by recurrent maintenance of the Microsoft Word document, as well as secure storage of interview notes if other researchers need to reconstruct the analysis. Because of this, other researchers may begin to extract similar codes and themes if they use interpretative phenomenological analysis as well.

## **Results**

Throughout this study, I used qualitative data collection and analysis techniques to address a lack of understanding investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI. The interviews employed nine questions, each of which was designed to address the RQ. Specifically, this is RQ1: Based on their lived experiences, how do the understandings,

perceptions, and attitudes of CT agents inform their biases and influence their decision-making and ultimately investigations of homegrown violent extremists with mental illness?

The respondents who participate in the study were approached and invited to participate through purposive sampling. Considering that I knew that they satisfied the criteria of inclusion for the study, this method of recruitment was in contrast to, for example, random sampling. After each participant read and signed the informed consent form, interviews occurred in person. Although each participant was offered the opportunity to have his or her voice recorded, all participants opted out of having their voices recorded.

While responding to the nine questions asked during the interviews, each participant provided answers based on their personal lived experiences. I designed interview questions to align with a phenomenological data collection approach such that the participants could respond based on their past practices having investigated HVEs with MI. Interview questions can be found in Appendix A. I also designed interview questions to address the research question while being grounded in the conceptual framework, Bandura's (1999) social cognitive theory. In doing so, I aligned the interview questions with both the phenomenological approach as well as the conceptual framework.

I analyzed the notes from the interviews and identified commonalities. These became codes, which I organized into sub-themes. From these, I identified ordinated themes of the study. Six themes emerged. Sub-themes were extracted from direct quotes or codes, and were built upon beliefs, perceptions, or experiences in alignment with IPA

tradition. The sub-themes were analyzed for similar concepts, and used in the formation of main thematic instances.

**RQ1: Based on their lived experiences, how do the understandings, perceptions, and attitudes of CT agents inform their biases and influence their decision-making and ultimately investigations of homegrown violent extremists with mental illness?**

This research question produced six themes that included CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI as cognitively and physically volatile; CT investigators perceive that HVEs with MI are motivated as a mechanism of MI and not ideology; CT investigators express empathy toward persons with MI regardless of HVE status; CT investigators remain objective about HVE investigations; CT investigators feel as though they need more training in mental health; and CT investigators' perceptions of MI are influenced by coworkers, but not society.

Following is a chart (Figure 3) that includes a visual representation of the themes and sub-themes that were extracted from the data; the themes in italics are followed by their respective subthemes. Once the sub-themes were analyzed, they were aligned and reviewed for similar concepts. This analytic process was then used to identify the themes.

**Figure 3**  
**Themes yielded from analysis of Subthemes**

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6
<i>CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI as cognitively and physically volatile.</i>	<i>CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI are motivated as a mechanism of MI, not ideology</i>	<i>CT investigators experience empathy toward persons with MI, even if the person is an HVE.</i>	<i>CT investigators remain objective about HVE investigations</i>	<i>CT investigators feel as though they need more training in mental health</i>	<i>CT investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI are influenced by coworkers, but not society.</i>
					
CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI as high-risk case subjects.	CT investigators believe MI is the most remarkable of causes that contribute to radicalization of HVEs with MI.	CT investigators seek to get treatment for HVEs with MI.	CT investigators do not allow preconceptions of HVEs with MI to influence the investigative process.	CT investigators feel they do not have adequate training in mental health to identify or interact with HVEs with MI.	CT investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI are influenced by coworkers when discussed.
CT Investigators perceive HVEs with MI as dangerous.	CT investigators consider the presence of MI exacerbates existing ideologies as an expression through violence.	CT investigators feel sympathy for HVEs with MI when no imminent threat exists.	CT investigators rely on the facts of the investigation.	When CT investigators identify HVEs with MI, it is based on experience, not training.	CT investigators perceptions of HVEs with MI are not influenced by coworkers when it is not recurrently discussed with coworkers.
CT Investigators perceive HVEs with MI as violent. <sup>a</sup>	CT investigators do not believe that HVEs with MI can consider the consequences or impact of their actions or what they have to lose.	CT investigators believe HVEs with MI are more susceptible to the influence of radicalization.	CT investigators' priorities are to mitigate the threat, regardless of the presence of MI.	CT investigators perceive that when they identify HVEs with MI, it is for recognition purposes only and not for treatment, response, or intervention.	CT investigators perceptions of MI are not influenced by society.
CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI as erratic and unpredictable.	CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI as socially isolated due to MI, and become radicalized to seek acceptance.				

<sup>a</sup> Codes within this sub-theme were controlled to exclude the phrase *violent in homegrown violent extremism* and only included separate descriptors *violent* or *violence*.

**Theme 1: CT Investigators Perceive HVEs With MI As Cognitively And Physically Volatile.**

Respondents offered insight into how they perceive HVEs when they suffer from MI. Their answers reflected how they understood both the physical and mental aspects of these terrorism suspects, and yielded a recurrence of specific phrases. Primarily, CT investigators perceived HVEs with MI as mentally erratic. They also perceived them as physically volatile and prone to engage in violent acts.

**Sub-theme: CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI as high-risk case subjects.** Six of the participants interviewed indicated that they understood HVEs with MI to exist, in some capacity, as high-risk individuals. P0970530 stated that HVEs with MI are a “bigger risk factor because they’re not thinking the right way” as well as being a “more at-risk population, and that they have a much higher chance of doing something to perpetrate some terrorist activity.” In response to being asked about terrorism suspects with mental health disorders, P2603595 offered that they “may be apt to take risk that others would not.” P8035566 described HVEs with MI as being “a little more risky.” P6104632 stated, “they can be a higher risk when considering their factors that contribute to homegrown violent extremism because you don’t know what they’re going to do.” P8642304 indicated HVEs with MI were high-risk when planning a terrorist act as “they’re more likely to follow that through because they have nothing to lose and will see it through.” Considering these responses, participants thereby indicated that HVEs with MI were high-risk subjects because they might not be thinking correctly or might be willing to take risks other persons do not as they have nothing to lose.

**Sub-theme: CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI as dangerous.** When asked about the perception of HVEs with MI, P6104632 indicated “I think the combination can be dangerous. If the HVE has a diagnosed MI, I believe that person can be more dangerous than a normal person because they can have a heightened sense of creativity and focus to carry out the initiative and target. They can have a lost sense of compassion where they don't care about anybody else, so put others in danger.” This particular response was unique, as the participant used the phrase “danger” or “dangerous” three times to respond to one interview question. P2603595 stated that when some terrorist-inspired threat to life exists from a suspect with MI, it is necessary to consider the “danger posed to many people” in order to “address the threat.” When asked about the perception of HVEs with MI, P2603595’s first one-word sentence in the response was “Dangerous” and then went on to explain HVEs with MI “may not be constrained by all the things that keep you or I from acting out. Whether that's relationships, career, salary. They're unmoored from those restraining factors.” These responses indicated that CT investigators perceived HVEs with MI as dangerous because the MI restricted them from expressing compassion as well as be restrained by other social norms.

**Sub-theme: CT Investigators perceive HVEs with MI as violent.** When considering this sub-theme, special precautions were taken to exclude statements that included the phrase “homegrown violent extremist,” as this particular phrase constituted many of the interview questions as “HVE.” Therefore, responses were controlled for by analyzing only those statements with separate descriptor words “violent” or “violence.” When considering how the phrase “homegrown violent extremist” may have influenced a

response that included the word “violent,” by contrast no participants used the word “homegrown” in their responses to describing HVEs with MI. P2603595 indicated HVEs with MI were “more likely to act in a violent way and have greater impact.” P1530265 stated that HVEs with MI seek to make “the most violent action or be as powerful as they can be.” P9074947 offered that the psychological environment of HVEs with MI “fosters a violent reaction to get their point across.” P5986256 indicated that these suspects “want to do violent things” against Americans. P8320146 said that HVEs with MI “are attempting to influence a social goal through violence,” and also added that an HVE with MI is going to go through a shorter “thought pattern of wanting to commit a violent act to achieve a goal” in contrast to a suspect without MI. P6104632 stated that HVEs with MI “become violent and aggressive in their words.”

Upon discussing international terrorism, P4809364 offered HVEs with MI may “espouse violent ideologies pushed by the Islamic State.” P1633105 replied they were more likely to “carry out acts of violence and not have any remorse about it.” Lastly, P0716610 stated terrorism suspects with mental health disorders may have “more of a violent regressive action than someone without MI.” These responses perhaps highlight the dichotomy of violence with which CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI. Specifically, they perceive them as either acting out violently, or as having violent thoughts.

**Sub-theme: CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI as erratic and unpredictable.**

P2603593 said HVEs with MI may be “perceived as erratic, potentially destructive.” P4809364 offered “I feel they may be prone to erratic behavior. Still I have to give

credence to the allegation that, for example, the person is going to blow up a school, but at the same time expect the unexpected.” This same participant then said that such suspects must be “viewed with the lens that someone might be erratic or difficult.”

P8035566 indicated that with HVEs who have MI, there is some “mental thing at work here that is making this person's decisions go in whatever direction, either erratic or what have you” and also stated that with these suspects there “may be more erratic patterns.”

These responses indicated CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI as engaging in unexpected behavior driven by a thought process that lacks any formidable direction.

**Theme 2: CT Investigators Perceive That HVEs With MI Are Predominantly Motivated As A Mechanism Of MI, Not Ideology.**

CT investigators understood HVEs with MI to seek violent action as a result of MI, and not necessarily as an attachment to some radical ideology. They believe HVE's with MI do not always consider how actions may yield consequences. CT investigators also perceived that when HVEs with MI do attach to some ideology, the MI exacerbates the reaction to the ideology. The MI, then, becomes the vehicle to some violent act.

**Sub-theme: CT investigators believe MI is the most remarkable of causes that contribute to radicalization among HVEs with MI.** This emergence of this sub-theme required a synthesis of several respondents' answers. Preliminarily, P2603595 offered that radicalization occurs when a greater power oppresses a lesser power by stating terrorism is “violence perpetrated by typically the weak against a stronger entity. So for example, where in state-on-state military violence, a party has the ability to project force easily. But in this case, it's a demographic group that lacks equal military and other forms of power compared to the opponent. It's a relative weakness by the perpetrator. So

it's asymmetric projection of force by the weaker party.” Thereafter, P0970530 stated, “HVEs with MI would not have become HVEs if they didn't have MI, and they weren't pulled in whatever direction they are going as far as ideology.” When asked about HVEs with MI, P8642304 then specifically offered that “MI doesn't discriminate,” and P0970530 paralleled this thought by stating, “people with MI or mentally ill does not discriminate based on your socioeconomic status or education or anything.” Considering these responses, CT investigators may perceive the process by which HVEs with MI radicalize possibly exists as a perception, rooted in indiscriminate MI, that the HVE is being oppressed by a greater force.

This sub-theme is also supported by other responses. P4447626 specifically stated, “when I look at it from a terrorism perspective, someone who may be mentally ill makes me believe that their MI, not necessarily their radical beliefs, is driving their decision making” and later stated, “in the case of investigations of people I thought had MI, I could see myself concluding the MI was driving their desire to commit terrorism rather than true beliefs.” P9074947 offered that HVEs with MI sought to engage in terrorism “because some degree of MI they have” and also that “MI certainly can influence the behaviors we're investigating.”

P8320146 said, “MI is contributing in some way to your ideology to commit a violent act.” P7088034 offered “I'd ask a lot of questions prior to evaluating the threat, because MI could be a reason the threat is happening. The illness could be the reason the threat is emerging.” P1530263 suggested that homegrown violent extremism may sometimes be “tied to true belief and sometimes to the mental health disorder. It's not about making the political point of terrorism, it's about making the most violent action or

be as powerful as they possibly can. Responding to the voices in their head as directly as they possibly can.” P9074947 offered a specific type of instance by indicating that HVEs with MI may have “delusions of grandeur where they think they can pull off a grand scheme and change the minds of the masses.”

**Sub-theme: CT investigators consider that in instances where HVEs with MI have also subscribed to a radicalized ideology, the presence of MI exacerbates existing ideologies as an expression through violence.** Lending to the previous sub-theme, it is possible that HVEs with MI may also subscribe to a radical ideology which, in a vacuum of MI, yields violence. In such instances, the presence of MI may worsen an otherwise already negative reaction to the ideology. P0970530 stated, “I think if the MI was treated, they would be less likely to have such extreme views” and that because of the MI, perhaps they have “more motivation to engage in the [terrorist] act.” P0716610 offered “I think that MI will exacerbate how an individual deals with their um... beliefs for lack of a better word... as an example a normal person who wants to change something in government ... they may file paperwork, or talk to their congressperson... but someone with MI thinks the government is out to get them so they can only foresee change by killing the congressperson as opposed to writing them a letter” and then differentiated the HVE with MI from the HVE without MI by stating “Then someone in the same [terrorist] organization who is friends with that person [without MI] who actually has MI feels the best way to resolve that same belief structure is to kill ...or rob.”

P6104632 offered that HVEs with MI may “become fixated on what they see on the news like ISIL or mass stabbings. Their MI, depending on where they're at, they can be out of control, can have feelings of aggression, different levels of the way people

feel.” In providing these responses, CT investigators seemed to have isolated the motivations from HVEs with MI from HVEs without MI, which P4447626 and P1530263 both referred to as the “true believer.”

**Sub-theme: CT investigators do not believe that HVEs with MI can consider the consequences or impact of their actions or what they have to lose.** P8320146

offered that HVEs with MI may have difficulty when attempting to “process things that are happening around them and their reactions are in-turn affected by ... the brain's ability to process the information,” and later added that “Some people just have a MI and cannot process situations.” P2603595 stated that HVEs with MI (and as a result of the MI) are not “constrained by all the things that keep you or I from acting out. Whether that's relationships, career, salary. They're unmoored from those restraining factors.”

P8642304 added, “But also it’s the understanding that if someone has a MI, I think the likelihood of what they're claiming or planning, they're more likely to follow that through because they have nothing to lose and will see it through.” The American Psychiatric Association’s (2013) DSM-5 highlights personality disorders that inhibit an individual’s ability to consider actions of their consequences. As a result of this, these responses may suggest that the inability to process consequences or an impact of behavior may be result from MI when the HVE suspect indeed suffers from some form of MI.

**Sub-theme: CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI as socially isolated due to MI, and become radicalized in an attempt to seek acceptance.** P5986526 said

HVEs with MI “are social outcasts, and to me, it's because of their MI. They feel outcast. And they might be discriminated against because of their MI.” P6104632 offered that

HVEs with MI “for whatever reason they feel isolated and may have not assimilated.”

P4808354 stated that among HVEs with MI, radical ideologies may be “very attractive to someone who may struggles socially” and “they're frequently not well-equipped to handle normal social interaction.” P8642304 indicated HVEs with MI are “more susceptible to terrorist ideologies because they feel loneliness and the idea of being in a group, especially if being celebrated, is a positive light and appeals to them. Because one of the results of MI is loneliness, whether you're physically alone or not, they can feel isolated or different.”

P8035566 said they may be “someone who is lonely and depressed and feels they lack meaning. Their life has no meaning. They have a very heavy need or desire to be a part of a group or belonging.” P9136605 said, “they tend to be isolated, loners that cannot feel that they're justified in what they do. So they seek justification and guidance and get that through social media.” Considering these responses, CT investigators may perceive that HVEs with MI feel ostracized, and that the sense of ostracization is exacerbated by MI to the point the HVE with MI has a need to feel belonging to some organization even when the organization espouses violent, radical ideologies.

### **Theme 3: CT Investigators Experience Empathy Toward Persons With MI, Even If The Person Is An HVE.**

Throughout the series of interviews, CT investigators expressed empathy with case subjects who suffered from MI because of the MI itself. They did this in several ways, either through seeking treatment, or possibly understanding that the motivation exists due to an underlying MI. When no immediate threat existed, CT investigators often sought to determine if HVEs with MI were in need of psychiatric intervention, either

cognitive or through the use of medication. In such instances, CT investigators sought to establish psychological assistance for suspects.

**Sub-theme: CT investigators seek to get treatment for HVEs with MI.**

P4447626 stated that investigations of HVEs with MI have “led me more down the path of trying to get mental health services for them.” P6143738 offered “The MI, if it presents itself, it's an opportunity for me to get someone the treatment and help they need.” P0970530 stated that CT investigators must consider “how you think they can be treated or not treated, and I don't mean talking treatment but clinically treated with medications or counseling.” P1530263 indicated that when addressing HVEs with MI, options include “Getting them assessed in a mental health assessment facility. Having them committed by legal guardians to a mental health treatment facility. At a lower option if it's not a large perception, just discussing the mental health issue with them directly, or discussing it with friends or family. There's a whole world of options in that realm.” P1633105 offered that when an immediate threat-to-life doesn't exist, an option would be to “set up resources for them like the Mental Health Services Team where they could properly be evaluated so that they receive the proper treatment.” Considering these responses, CT investigators seek treatment for suspects either by offering them avenues to treatment or showing them where to go.

**Sub-theme: CT investigators feel sympathy for HVEs with MI when no imminent threat exists.** P2603595 offered that “I think I'd be more sympathetic because I'd be more concerned with the individuals and then wonder how if possible how to ameliorate the effects of mental illness” when talking about HVEs with MI. The same participant highlighted that while they are still “perpetrators of violent acts,” they are

“also the victims of the society they live in.” P1530263 stated most CT investigators were “sympathetic to that mental health issue,” and that it was necessary to consider “good options for that person's mental health future and without much of a mental health treatment system in this country to support that, and especially there's a mental health treatment framework in this country, and it doesn't include terrorism at all.” P5986256 stated that during an investigation, “I'd like to have mental health support if I can get it.” P8642304 indicated that “if you're sending in a SWAT team to a situation that a visit to the crisis response center can fix, you're doing a disservice to that person.”

**Sub-theme: CT investigators believe HVEs with MI are more susceptible to the influence of radicalization.** P8642304 specifically annotated that “I think people with mental illness are more susceptible to terrorist ideologies.” P6104632 offered that HVEs with MI may be “subject to brainwash. Because of the MI they are subject to being influenced.” In addressing perceptions of HVEs with MI, P4809364 offered that behind the suspect, there may be a “group or the influence or the influencers,” and in the same question’s response indicated that “we might say this person is schizophrenic...bare that in mind.....be on the lookout for some abnormal behavior.” P9136605 indicated that there may be someone “who got them to think that way or sort of influence them, rather than thinking this is a lone wolf homegrown violent extremist that has calculated and made rational decisions to justify their potential terrorist activity.” P9074947 stated that they may be “motivated by ... outside influences.”

#### **Theme 4: CT Investigators Remain Objective About HVE Investigations.**

Part of the research question sought to identify how the perceptions CT investigators had of HVEs with MI influenced the CT investigation itself. Although

previous themes identify the perceptions that CT investigators have of HVEs with MI, analysis of responses from participants indicated that these perceptions do not influence the objectivity or process of the HVE investigation. CT investigators follow investigative protocol. They also rely on facts and evidence of the case, not their perceptions.

**Sub-theme: CT investigators do not allow preconceptions of HVEs with MI to influence the investigative process.** In response to how perceptions of HVEs with MI influence the CT investigation, P4809364 stated investigations were “black and white looking into a crime being committed... there's no difference the way I'd treat them.” P8035566 offered “I think the actual investigative method and our kind of way the FBI works, I don't think it changes much ... way we do things stays the same.” P8642304 indicated “You have to be very objective with the situation,” and “I think if you let preconceived notions seep their way into what you're doing, you'll poison the well and not get a good outcome, in my opinion. You have to look at it as objectively as possible, given all the circumstances of the situation.” P8320146 offered “at the end of the day I will have to prevent an act of terrorism. And I would still conduct the investigation in the same manner and allow the courts to rule on their competence.”

P1633105 said, “It doesn't change anything. Knowing that they have that before, I believe that I would still carry forward the investigation and arrest as needed. And then it would be up to the courts to determine whether or not that individual has a MI.”

P1530263 offered, “Well, there are a lot of investigative tools that we use that are dry. They are not going to change no matter who the subject is.” P0970530 said, “I don't know if I would work the case differently.” By providing these responses CT

investigators indicated that objectivity remains in investigations of HVEs with MI, such that these investigations are treated the same as others.

**Sub-theme: CT investigators rely on the facts of the investigation.** P6104632 indicated, “mental illness doesn't make a difference, I rely on the facts. You investigate the totality of the crime,” and then offered “mental illness is not a crutch, rather we should just focus on the facts of the case and the totality of the investigation.” P5986256 offered that “I'm going to get to the nuts and bolts as far as disrupting, preventing everything I can to stop it...because I need to save innocent lives.” Instead of focusing on MI, P7088034 relied on other “things like the specifics of the crime, location, time, persons involved. Before or after you commit the crime, you still have MI.” P4447626 noted that “I feel like I look at the facts and evidence.” P1633105 stated, “You need to arrest based on the facts and actions and crimes committed.” P0716610 said “I think with the investigation... what are the facts? What are the crimes what are they doing? Mental illness doesn't affect that part of the investigation.”

**Sub-theme: CT investigators' priorities are to mitigate the threat, regardless of the presence of MI.** P1530263 said, “there's a lot of different factors that influence MI in a threat situation. Basically, no matter the perception in this line of work, there are certain things you have to do to mitigate the threat.” P5986256 stated, “I would take immediate action and preserve life, limb, and property I guess. I'd try to see if I can't find resources to assist me because of that angle, but no different than if it was not a mental illness situation.” P6143738 offered “I tend to put the threat above all is my logic.” In terms of MI, P1633105 stated, “knowing that they have that before, I believe that I would

still carry forward the investigation and arrest as needed.” P0970530 said, “So that it doesn’t become a threat to life, you want to mitigate it without escalation first.”

**Theme 5: CT Investigators Feel As Though They Need More Training In Mental Health.**

There appeared to exist a disparity between the amount of subjects that CT investigators investigate who suffer from MI and the amount of training CT investigators receive in mental health. CT investigators felt as though they did not have adequate training in mental health, and also that when they identified suspects with mental health it was based on experience, not training. Some CT investigators who believed that their investigations involved some form of MI also provided a numerical percentage during their interviews of their number of case subjects that suffered from MI. This number averaged 47.875% of case subjects in investigations ( $n = 8$ ;  $\mu = 47.875$ ;  $SD = 27.782$ ). This is remarkable, as a review of the literature indicated that between 40% and 50% of homegrown violent extremists suffer from MI (Grunewald et al., 2013; Corner & Gill, 2015). The percentage provided by participants in this study, 47.875%, falls well within this range. Because only eight participants of the total number of participants ( $n = 16$ ) provided a numerical percentage, standard deviation was calculated using Bessel’s Correction such that  $s = \sqrt{[(\sum(x_i - \mu)^2)/(N-1)]}$  in contrast to  $\delta = \sqrt{[(\sum(x_i - \mu)^2)/N]}$  (this average is provided only to compare the percentage of investigations that involve MI to CT investigators’ perceptions of training adequacy and not to assert any other quantitative analysis).

**Sub-theme: CT investigators feel they do not have adequate training in mental health to identify or interact with terrorism suspects with MI.** In response to

being asked if the amount of training in mental health is adequate to identify HVEs with MI, P4809364 replied “No. It just came up recently, as an example, I did an interview a few weeks ago. And the individual in question was diagnosed with ADHD and may be... in the future... diagnosed with bipolar, schizophrenia, etc.,” and then went on to explain that the expectation of interacting with this person was entirely different from actually interacting with the subject, whom the investigator later described as “gregarious” and “pleasant.” In response to the same inquiry, P9136605 replied “No. Because I'm not a psychologist or psychiatrist... I'm not qualified to observe first-hand MI and make that call.” P1530263 also responded “Not based on my training, no. I don't think I've been trained to. I could use more training.” P4447626 offered “I think I don't have a strong understanding...I feel as though I don't have the appropriate level of training to fully understand. I don't know enough about MI to know exactly what their motivations are.” P9074947 said, “I've had zero training to qualify me as someone who can diagnose a MI.”

**Sub-theme: When CT investigators identify HVEs with MI, it is based on experience, not training.** P6104632 stated, “I can have somewhat of an idea whether or not someone has MI. It's just ... years of working in law enforcement and dealing with a lot of people who have distorted reality.” After indicating an ability to recognize mental illness in HVE suspects, P2603595 stated, “But that's not based on formal training, that's a gut feeling.” Similarly, P1633105 replied, “Based on experience and intuition; I believe that I could adequately determine that.” P6143738 referred to previous experiences in uniformed law enforcement, offering “Based on my time in patrol, I can see people who are in crisis or having behavioral issues.”

P9074947 indicated an ability to identify MI among HVEs “somewhat based on my experiences.” After highlighting an inability based on training to identify MI among HVEs, P1530263 stated, “but my experience has helped me become more aware of mental health issues from the outset or become aware of them earlier otherwise.” These responses help address how CT investigators believe they can identify MI among HVEs when, collectively, they feel as though they do not have adequate training in mental health disorders.

**Sub-theme: CT investigators perceive that when they identify HVEs with MI, it is for recognition purposes only and not for treatment, response, or intervention.**

P4447626 said, “I feel as though I have a baseline understanding of common mental illness that we encounter, and I can recognize signs they might be suffering.” This same participant later suggested a potential ability to recognize MI, but an inability to assess for malingering. The participant stated, “I believe I have encountered enough to have some level of understanding about what a mentally ill terrorism subject in general will look like ... I'm not a mental health professional, and a lot of times, there's a thin gray line between someone who's not mentally ill and someone who is mentally ill and not masquerading.” Prior to indicating an ability to identify HVEs with MI, P6143738 stated, “I think it's difficult to gauge that without having clinical knowledge to further identify what their condition is.” Also prior to indicating an ability to identify HVEs with MI, P8035566 stated, “it's difficult because we don't know definitively” when asked about their understanding of HVEs with MI. P097530 specifically highlighted the ability to identify but not respond to HVEs with MI by stating, “Could I make a recommendation by seeing someone and say they need to go to an expert? Yes. But to handle it, no.”

**Theme 6: CT Investigators' Perceptions Of HVEs With MI Are Influenced By Coworkers, But Not Society.**

The conceptual framework of this study was Bandura's (1999) social cognitive theory, which asserted a tripartite model of behavior influenced by personal experience, vicarious interpersonal influence, and societal perceptions. To align and build upon this framework, interview questions were designed to address personal experiences of investigators (in line with phenomenological analysis) as well how coworkers' perception influenced the individual's perceptions of HVEs with MI, how society's perceptions influenced the individual investigator. Coding of the interviews indicated that CT investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI are influenced by coworkers when discussed and, intuitively, not influenced when not discussed. Interestingly, CT investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI are not affected by society.

**Sub-theme: CT investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI are influenced by coworkers when discussed.** When asked about lessons learned from coworkers about HVEs with MI, P9136605 replied, "myself and coworkers have worked cases where" they have "seen individuals who are easily manipulated and taken down a path by criminal organizations," and then offered "I do rely on the opinions and skill sets of my peers. And take their opinions professionally. ... So I do think my peers have valid opinions if they've had first-hand exposure to it in their casework." When asked about peer influence, P8320146 replied, "It influences it greatly. We are in a business that uses lessons learned from personal experiences and having those relayed to me by coworkers helped formulate my own actions based on their experiences, so I would say

significantly.” This response is aligned with Bandura’s (1999) interpersonal variable of his triadic element within the social cognitive theory.

P1633103 said, “I mean I would almost say that having a good coworker with a good understanding of what mental illnesses are out there, and what symptoms an individual exhibits, can be very helpful,” and from these coworkers the participant “learned a greater understanding of the different mental illnesses that are out there and how those can affect an individual's decision, actions, and desires to carry out acts of violence against people.” P4447626 stated that when considering interpersonal perceptions of HVEs with MI, “if that’s what investigators more seasoned and trained than I am think and feel about mentally ill homegrown violent extremists, I find myself adopting some of those same mindsets and beliefs.” P1530263 replied about coworkers’ perceptions as “I think it's given me a higher level of awareness. A better ability to communicate. Hopefully less negative bias at the outset.”

The interpersonal perception of P0970530 “derives” from coworkers’ perceptions of HVEs with MI are “a much more at risk population, and that they have a much higher chance of doing something to perpetrate some terrorist activity or activities that would be criminal in some way.” P8642304 indicated that understanding how coworkers perceive HVEs with MI “gives me a greater understanding how to view a threat in more than one way,” and compared this to the perception of case subjects with the perception of a painting by indicating “I think there are different ways of looking at things. If you and I see the same painting, you might see something different than I see in the painting, and we analyze it differently.” P2603595 discussed how coworkers’ perceptions are a force-multiplier by indicating that “I've heard a lot of stories from coworkers. Because you see

a lot in this job, but talking to your coworkers, you see ten times as much” and, as a result, “I think it helps you expand the spectrum of the distribution. You know, where are the outliers? When you hear stories of extraordinary behavior, it widens that distribution.”

**Sub-theme: CT investigators’ perceptions of HVEs with MI are not influenced by coworkers when it is not recurrently discussed with coworkers.**

Although this sub-theme may seem intuitive, it is necessary to isolate the influences that coworkers’ perceptions have on the individual CT investigator. When asked if coworkers’ perceptions had any influence when discussed, P4809364 replied, “No. Because we don’t,” and also offered “I guess it hasn’t really come up... I'm trying to think of concrete time when someone said something” about the mental health aspect of HVEs. P9074947 replied, “I would say not influenced much by coworkers at this point. Because I haven't had conversations about specific subjects.”

When asked about the degree to which coworkers’ perceptions had influence, P8035566 indicated “Not much, honestly.” P5986256 suggested that discussion only occurs regarding specific cases and not general discourse, and even in such instances coworkers’ opinions influence “I would say very little,” and “because I would have already come to that opinion before they said anything because of me observing what the person did or said.” P6143738 expressed having only two previous conversations about HVEs with MI, then when asked how these influenced personal perceptions replied “I’d like to say that it doesn’t. I’m... I like to be impartial and look at the data on my own to come up with my own decision but I know it's hard not to.” P7088034 explicitly stated the influence coworkers had on personal opinion was “Little to nothing. I don’t really talk

to them about HVE's," and that "I don't know what their perceptions are, because I don't really discuss it with them."

**Sub-theme: CT investigators' perceptions of MI are not influenced by society.** Although the findings partially align with the conceptual framework that interpersonal experience influenced personal perception, CT investigators were not necessarily influenced by societal perceptions. This is a stark contrast to the second variable of Bandura's (1999) tripartite model. Although P8035566 identified that society desires an "out-of-sight fix for mental health," the participant then sought to "understand what the outside forces may be and don't allow it to distract me." Addressing societal perceptions, P5986256 specifically stated, "I don't think it influences it a lot because my being in law enforcement so long and dealing with a lot of people with MI, I've kind of ...my opinion, my view on it is my own. It's not influenced by the way society perceived it."

P8320146 offered that society sees persons with MI as "weak and unable to cope with stress in a lot of ways and lash out and withdraw from society," and when asked how this influences personal perception replied "It doesn't. I rely on my personal experiences to form my perceptions, and those experiences include personal relationships with people who suffer from mild MI. And through those observations, it's not weakness." P6143738 believed society perceived PMI as "Negatively. Violent. Unstable. Dangerous," and then in response to personal influence of this perception offered "I try not to ... we're supposed to be as impartial as possible, and I think having preconceptions can lead to lapses in judgment, good or otherwise."

P8642304 provided a specific example, offering society “views them as lower than people with physical illnesses due to the fact that a physical illness can be treated with medication more effectively than a MI,” and then described stigmas against persons with PTSD. When asked how these perceptions influenced personal perception, the participant replied, “I don’t really think I’ve taken society’s queues knowingly in regard to how I interpret it.” P7088034 cited personal experience overcoming societal perception, highlighting society believes “that people with MI are crazy, that they don’t understand them, and that they’re bad people and that something is wrong with their brain and they can’t control it,” and then “I don’t believe society’s perception at all because of my background” with interacting with PMI. P1530263 indicated while society perceives PMI “Generally negatively. MI is viewed as a major problem and problem and people tend to be shunned,” it is necessary to “try to be conscious of those biases and try to make rational judgments about what’s going with a person rather than a knew jerk reaction.”

There existed a discrepancy between Bandura’s (1999) social cognitive theory and the results of the study, specifically when considering that while CT investigators were influenced by coworkers, they were not heavily influenced by society. This contradicts social cognitive theory’s third tripartite element, which states that individuals are influenced from societal perceptions. This discrepancy will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

### **Summary**

Individuals who were recruited for this study were CT investigators who met several criteria for inclusion. Specifically, they must have previously been involved in the investigation of HVEs with MI. A total of 16 participants were interviewed for this study.

Participants fell within various age ranges, and had different experience levels in law enforcement and CT investigations. Most participants fell between 41 and 50 years old, had between 16-20 years of law enforcement experience, and had between 6-10 years of CT investigation experience. The participants were recruited using purposive sampling, and were approached in person and provided an invitation. After signing informed consent forms, participants were interviewed in private settings away from other coworkers.

Following a data analysis process that included qualitative thematic reduction, six themes emerged that addressed the research question and aligned with the conceptual framework. The six themes that emerged included CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI as cognitively and physically volatile; CT investigators perceive that HVEs with MI are motivated as a mechanism of MI and not ideology; CT investigators express empathy toward persons with MI regardless of HVE status; CT investigators remain objective about HVE investigations; CT investigators feel as though they need more training in mental health; and CT investigators' perceptions of MI are influenced by coworkers, but not society.

Within Chapter 5, I will discuss the implications of this study, how it can be used to enhance CT investigations, and how this study can affect social change by enhancing safety for law enforcement professionals and safety. Following this, I will discuss the limitations of the study, as well as how some inferences from the study may lead to future research in the field.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### **Introduction**

By employing a qualitative tradition and analyzing the data through a lens of interpretative phenomenology, with this research project I sought to understand the perceptions CT investigators have of HVEs with MI. I conducted this research to determine how these perceptions interact with the CT investigative process. Incidentally, I attempted to provide insight into analytical findings of this study by researching the perspectives of the CT investigator. This is an essential approach to exploring the lived experiences of individuals through IPA. Historically, CT investigators perceived HVEs as having been motivated by political, social, or religious ideologies (Kruse, 2016; Perry & Whitehead, 2015). Fundamentally, CT investigators also represent the law enforcement community. Both Burkhardt et al. (2015) and Morabito and Socia (2015) have suggested that law enforcement officers perceive PMI as dangerous and erratic. In this study I sought to explore the gap between perceptions of HVEs and PMI, and went further to understand how these perceptions influenced CT investigations.

Through purposive sampling methods, 16 participants were identified as CT investigators who previously investigated HVEs with MI. The element of having investigated a suspect with MI represented a criterion for recruitment. The interviews with the CT investigators included discussions about their experiences having investigated terrorism, their experiences interacting with persons with MI, their perceptions of MI, and ultimately whether or not they believed their perceptions of HVEs with MI interact with their CT investigations. Their responses were thereafter analyzed and coded for themes. Findings included investigators' perceptions that HVEs with MI

are non-linear and erratic thinkers, they are motivated by MI, and these perceptions do not affect the investigative process. Agents also appeared to empathize with the mental health of case subjects, and desired more training in identification of MI. This chapter will summarize the thematic analysis with support from the existing body of research and literature. Furthermore, this chapter will provide a summary of the results from the research, discuss the study's limitations, highlight significant implications that resulted from the research, and provide suggestions for similar research projects in the future.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

A review of the literature yielded no specific knowledge on perceptions that CT investigators have of HVEs with MI. Existing research explored the perceptions CT investigators had of HVEs (Borum, 2013; Kruse, 2016; Perry & Whitehead, 2015), perceptions law enforcement officers have of persons with MI (Burkhardt et al., 2015; Kara, 2014; Schulenberg, 2016), and types of biases that exist in law enforcement (Viscusi & Zackhauser, 2017; Zapf & Dror, 2017). None of this research specifically addressed the perceptions CT investigators have of HVEs with MI and how these perceptions interacted with the CT investigative process. With this study, I sought to fill that gap and through the data, I identified six themes.

#### **Theme 1: Counterterrorism Investigators Perceive HVEs With MI As Cognitively And Physically Volatile.**

Theme 1 highlighted the perceptive divergence with which CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI. Notably, it indicated that CT investigators understand HVEs with MI as unpredictable case subjects, but in doing so suggested that this perception was one of both physical and mental volatility. This inferred that agents observed HVEs with

MI to be unstable in terms of the way they think and behave. Several participants used the phrase “erratic” in their descriptions of subjects.

Participants also perceived case subjects with MI to pose a high risk, notably to public safety. In alignment with this theme’s apparatus of cognitive volatility, for example, P0970530 highlighted that HVEs with MI were indeed high-risk factors because they do not “think the right way,” and that this would possibly lead to their endeavors to “perpetrate some terrorist activity.” This theme suggests that CT investigators do not perceive that HVEs with MI are linear or predictable thinkers, and may psychologically exist in contrast to other forms of criminal behaviors such as structured white collar or financial crimes. Participants also appeared to perceive HVEs with MI as willing to take risks that others might not.

Aside from psychological volatility, CT investigators also perceive HVEs with MI to be physically dangerous. One respondent, P6104632, used the word “dangerous” three times in a single response. This was similar to findings of Morabito and Socia (2015), who suggested police perceived PMI as dangerous. Other participants highlighted that case subjects can be considered dangerous due to not necessarily being restrained by other social norms like interpersonal relationships or careers. Others attributed the danger to a lack of compassion expressed by HVEs with MI. Collectively, these responses indicated that CT investigators understood case subjects with MI to be dangerous because they posed a risk to other people and did so because they lacked empathy and social restraints.

CT investigators also understood HVEs with MI to be violent. This was assessed through use of the word “violent” or “violence.” This was not phenomenologically

reduced by inclusion of any use of the phrase “homegrown violent extremist,” as this phrase was used, either directly or implied, in some of the interview questions. By contrast, respondents did not use the individual word “homegrown” to describe any of their case subjects. Participants indicated that they believe HVEs with MI were indeed violent toward others. To quote P8320146, this occurred either as an expression of their “thought patterns” or, as P9074947 indicated, an attempt to communicate their “point.”

**Theme 2: Counterterrorism Investigators Perceive HVEs With MI Are Predominantly Motivated As A Mechanism of MI, Not Ideology.**

CT investigators indicated that they believe HVEs are often radicalized because of MI. P0970530 indicated that, had it not been for MI, suspects “would not have become HVEs.” Agents also perceive that anyone is subject to becoming an HVE with MI, as MI was indiscriminate against social class, education, or background. Other participants, like P4447626, notably said that MI, and not radical beliefs, were responsible for “driving” their decision making. The use of this verb, “driving,” may suggest that CT investigators could interpret MI among HVEs with MI as a bridge over which the HVE “drives” to the violent phenomenon of terrorism. In other words, MI can be a catalyst between extremists’ cognitive distortion of reality and terrorism.

Traditionally, terrorism occurs as violence perpetrated in furtherance of some social, religious, or political ideology (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2017). The extremist possesses some sentiment that is bridged to a criminal act through an ideology, such as radicalized Salafism (Johnson, 2016). CT investigators, however, perceive that the bridge between an adopted ideology and the violent (terrorist) act is not, for example, a radical belief system. Rather, the bridge is MI that, to quote P4447626, is

“masquerading” as some ideology. In other words, if terrorism exists as a combination of an oppressed sentiment (often “asymmetric” oppression from a “stronger entity” against a “weak ...perpetrator,” as P2603595 indicated) coupled with an ideology, then extremism among HVEs with MI may exist, in part, as a combination of perceived emotional strife with MI.

In some instances, CT investigators indicated that HVEs exist who have adopted a violent ideology, and also have MI. In doing so, agents differentiated between the person with MI who adopts an ideology, and the ideologist who also happens to have MI. In the latter, investigators perceived that the presence of MI exacerbated existing ideologies. One participant, P0716610, indicated that among a population of ideological extremists, a person with MI may engage in violence in contrast to other members without MI as a resolution of a “belief structure.”

CT investigators also appear to think that many HVEs with MI are socially isolated. Described by P5986526 as “social outcasts,” HVEs with MI may be socially rejected due to the stigmatization of their MI. When this occurs, an interpersonal void develops for the HVE through the process of social isolation. In pursuit of filling this void, according to P8035566, they seek to become “a part of a group or belonging.” When such a group happens to espouse radical belief systems, P8642304 suggested that the HVE with MI becomes “susceptible to terrorist ideologies” in an effort to overcome a remarkable sense of ostracization.

**Theme 3: Counterterrorism Investigators Experience Empathy Toward Persons with MI, Even If The Person Is An HVE.**

CT investigators often indicated that they sought to get psychological help for HVEs with MI when no imminent threat to life existed. P4447626 highlighted the desire to acquire “mental health services” for case subjects. Other participants even specified the potential for counseling or introduction of medications when warranted. One participant, P1530263, even stated that simply discussing the mental health issue with the subject was a possibility. This inferred that CT investigators were either implicitly willing to seek treatment for the HVE with MI, or were willing to discuss it with the subject in an effort to persuade the subject to individual seek treatment. This aligned with Oxburgh et al. (2016), who stated that while police may have some negative perceptions of PMI, law enforcement remained eager to assist them.

CT investigators also feel sympathy toward the MI aspect of HVEs with MI. P2603595 specifically used the word “sympathetic” when describing a case subject with MI, and then indicated a desire somehow to mitigate the effects of the MI itself. Participants also described the internal contrast of the HVE with MI, both as a perpetrator of violence but also as a victim of society. Agents also expressed an interest in the longitudinal well-being of the suspects’ mental health.

P1530263 sought solutions toward a path for the “mental health future” of suspects. P8642304 indicated that using law enforcement tactics against suspects when visits to crisis centers were applicable would be a “disservice to that person.” This specific phrase that this participant used, “person,” suggests CT investigators observe the individuality of terrorism case subjects who suffer from MI, and when necessary they see them as human beings in need of treatment.

#### **Theme 4: Counterterrorism Investigators Remain Objective About HVE**

##### **Investigations.**

Although CT investigators highlighted their perceptions of HVEs with MI, they do not allow these perceptions to influence the counterterrorism investigation itself. Notably, they are impartial and rely on evidence. P8642304 stated that it was necessary to remain “objective with the situation,” and then used the analogy that the introduction of preconceptions can “poison the well” of the investigation. This is essential in criminal investigations, as objectivity remains crucial in the identification and application of evidentiary articles. CT investigators also indicated reliance on facts of the investigation. P6104632 notably stated, “I rely on the facts. You investigate the totality of the crime.” Others suggested they were focusing on the “specifics of the crime.” In doing so, P5886256 sought to “save innocent lives.” Coupling this statement with the above “poison the well” analogy tends to suggest that investigators also consider the consequences of not being objective.

Although CT investigators recognize that HVEs may suffer from MI, and although they express empathy toward the mental health disorder aspect of their case subjects, their priorities are to mitigate the threat regardless of the presence of MI. P1530263 stated, “no matter the perception” of MI, you need “to mitigate the threat.” Another participant highlighted the necessity to “put the threat above all.” This would infer that CT investigators, while expressing humanity when able, also focus on identifying and addressing any threat that manifests as terrorism.

#### **Theme 5: Counterterrorism Investigators Feel As Though They Need More Training In Mental Health.**

CT investigators indicated that at times they felt as though they did not have enough training in mental health. Collectively, they also suggested that nearly half of their case subjects suffered from mental health disorders. Considering the disparity between the perceived lack of training in mental health and the high incidence of case subjects with MI, it appears as though they are in need of more training in mental health.

P4809364 expressed surprise after interacting with a case subject who was previously understood to have MI and who presented with a “gregarious” demeanor. Other participants specifically said that they needed more training in mental health. P4447626 indicated a lack of “a strong understanding” of their MI due to not having an “appropriate level of training.” Perhaps if CT investigators had more training in the identification of mental health, they could enhance their interactions with persons who have MI.

Other participants attributed their ability to detect MI among case subjects to their experiences in law enforcement. P2603595 described it as a gut feeling. Other participants suggested that their experience gave them a better awareness of mental health disorder among persons that they interview. If indeed investigators received training in mental health, they could couple it with their law enforcement intuition that would allow them specifically to identify their intuitive perceptions.

CT investigators also differentiated between identification of MI for recognition and identification for treatment. P4447626 highlighted an ability to “recognize signs” of MI, but then suggested an inability to assess for specific disorders. The same was true for P097530, who indicated an ability to recommend expert interdiction of HVE’s with MI, but also highlighted an inability to handle the MI itself. Inherently, it is not the

responsibility of CT investigators to handle MI. However, treatment and adjudication for MI populations may be expedited if CT investigators can isolate mental health disorders by referring court systems to specialists on behalf of MI populations.

**Theme 6: Counterterrorism Investigators' Perceptions Of HVEs With MI Are Influenced By Coworkers, But Not Society.**

The conceptual framework of this study was Bandura's (1999) social cognitive theory, which asserted a tripartite model of behavior influenced by personal experience, vicarious interpersonal influence, and societal perceptions. While CT investigators' perceptions were influenced by personal experience and coworkers (the first two elements of social cognitive theory), they did not indicate that they were influenced by societal perceptions of MI. When CT investigators discuss HVEs with MI with coworkers, they indicated that the coworkers' perceptions influence them. P9136605 highlighted that "my peers have valid opinions if they've had firsthand exposure" to HVEs with MI. Others stated that coworker opinions influenced them greatly. P4447626 highlighted the need to adopt the beliefs of "more seasoned and trained" investigators. P2603595 also indicated that other investigators' perceptions were a "force multiplier." The presence of interpersonal influence may highlight counterterrorism investigation's incidence as a social phenomenon in itself.

Intuitively, CT investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI were not influenced by coworkers when they did not discuss it with coworkers. Although this is inherent, it is necessary to highlight in order to distinguish the influence coworkers' opinions have of HVEs with MI when it is actually discussed. When asked if coworkers' perceptions had any influence when discussed, P4809364 replied "No. Because we don't." P7088034

explicitly stated the influence coworkers had on personal opinion was “Little to nothing. I don’t really talk to them about HVEs,” and that “I don’t know what their perceptions are, because I don’t really discuss it with them.”

As a contraindication to the conceptual framework, CT investigators’ perceptions of MI do not appear to be influenced by societal perceptions. This contrasts with social cognitive theory’s last element of its triadic variables, the societal influence. When considering society’s opinions, P8035566 replied “I don’t allow it to distract me.” When asked how societal influence interacts with personal perception, P8320146 replied “It doesn’t.” Responses that indicated no influence from society abounded among participants. P7088034 even replied “I don’t really think I've taken society's queues.”

Moussaid et al. (2013) offered a potential solution to describe the discrepancy between this study’s results and Bandura’s (1999) conceptual framework. Notably, Moussaid et al. (2013) posited that socially-influenced perception is rooted in both a majority effect and an expert effect. In instances where the expert effect differs greatly from the majority effect, this is referred to as *bounded confidence*, and perception tends to be biased toward the expert effect. In the instance of counterterrorism investigators, a unique phenomenon occurs. The “peers” of each CT agent, who are investigators themselves, also likely constitute “experts” in the field of counterterrorism. As a result of coworkers being a combination of peers as well as experts, their opinion is likely to weigh heavily among the individual CT investigator, much more so than society.

Epigenetics may also describe this phenomenon. Whereas bounded confidence exists as a nurture explanation to perception, epigenetics may constitute a nature description. Weinhold (2006) suggested that congenital changes to DNA structure (not

sequencing) can yield non-learned neurobehavioral responses to environmental stimuli. Szyf (2014) explained that these responses could extend to emotional reactions. As a result, CT investigators may have more emotions attached to HVE case subjects than does society, and as a result may be concrete in their responses to them.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The foundational theory that guided this study was Bandura's (1999, 2018) Social Cognitive Theory, which is a conceptual approach that bridges an individual's behaviors to his or her perceptions influenced by personal experiences, intrapersonal learning, and societal influence. These constitute the triadic variables of the theory's tripartite. As an alignment between this study with the conceptual framework, CT investigators discussed their experiences with HVEs with MI, how their coworkers' perceptions of HVEs influence their own perceptions, and how society's perceptions of PMI also influence them.

Aligning with the first variable of the triad, CT investigators appeared to construct their perception of HVEs with MI based heavily in their own experiences. Participants like P9074847, P4447626, or P6104632 would often use phrases like "in my experience" or "from my experience" to describe their perceptions. As a result, these series of personal experiences satisfied the first of Bandura's (1999) variables. Interestingly, participants' constructions were also paramount in qualitative phenomenology, which has remarkable roots in constructivism. This, fundamentally, highlights the essence of phenomenology – to describe something based on lived experience.

Aligning with Bandura's second element, interpersonal influence, CT investigators seemed to take remarkable influence from their coworkers. Many of them

considered their coworkers to have professional opinions, and considering the amount of influence that existed there appeared to be noteworthy social networking that existed among CT investigators. Some participants attributed the utility of coworkers' opinions to the vicarious experiences that were learned in discussing HVEs with MI, and others suggested that coworker opinions were force multipliers.

Bandura's (1999) last element of his triad is societal influence. Interestingly, CT investigators overwhelmingly did not appear to be influenced by societal perceptions of MI. This discrepancy, in particular, may have several explanations. Moussaid, Kammer, Analytis, and Neth (2013) identified that individual perception can be influenced by the *expert effect* (identified as the opinion of a highly confident individual) and the *majority effect* (identified as critical aggregation of layperson opinions). Moussaid et al. (2013) offered a potential solution to describe the discrepancy between this study's results and Bandura's (1999) conceptual framework. Notably, Moussaid et al. (2013) posited that socially-influenced perception is rooted in both a majority effect and an expert effect. In instances where the expert effect differs greatly from the majority effect, this is referred to as bounded confidence, and perception tends to be biased toward the expert effect.

In the instance of counterterrorism investigators, a unique phenomenon occurs. Considering that CT investigators' perceptions are heavily influenced by coworkers but not society, Moussaid et al. (2013) highlighted the *bounded confidence* effect wherein individuals are more influenced by experts than the majority when the two opinions differ. Since CT investigators may inherently be considered experts in the field of CT, and since investigator's coworkers are other CT investigators, the opinions of these "vicarious experts" may indeed outweigh the opinions of society. This phenomenon

would be in-line with bounded confidence, and represents a unique deviation from social cognitive theory such that the interpersonal variable of Bandura's (1999) tripartite model represents an influence from the experts in the field. In other words, the "peers" of each CT agent, who are investigators themselves, likely constitute "experts" in the field of counterterrorism. As a result of coworkers being a combination of peers as well as experts, their opinion appears to weigh heavily among the individual CT investigator, much more so than society. This, however, may represent only a nurture element within a nature-versus-nurture formation of behaviors. A nature, or congenital, explanation may also exist.

Inherited psychological perceptions, known as epigenetics, may also describe this phenomenon. Whereas bounded confidence exists as a nurture explanation to perception, epigenetics may constitute a nature description. Epigenetics represents congenital phenotypical changes to human physiology that do not involve any alteration to DNA sequence mechanisms (Weinhold, 2006). Specifically, changes to DNA structures occur as methyltransferase attachments to the helix structure itself, and not to the sequencing of, for example, the cytosine-guanine or adenine-thymine algorithms encountered within the helix (Weinhold, 2006). A result in the changes of these structures can yield neurobehavioral responses that are congenital, not learned.

Szyf (2014) offered that this epigenetic neurobehavioral response may extend to emotional reactions. Due to this, CT investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI may oppose society's perceptions as a construct of inherited perceptions of simply "violent" persons, a group which intuitively may yield an emotional response from CT investigators. Weinhold (2006) suggested that congenital changes to DNA structure (not

sequencing) can yield non-learned neurobehavioral responses to environmental stimuli. Szyf (2014) explained that these responses can extend to emotional reactions. As a result, CT investigators may have more emotions attached to HVE case subjects than does society, and as a result may be concrete in their responses to them.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of this study existed as reflections of its research tradition and analytic approach, as well as of the stringent participant selection methods it used. Notably, qualitative tradition which employs IPA may lead to subjective analysis of thematic findings. This was mitigated through the peer review conducted by dissertation committee staff. Furthermore, the participant selection sampling methods identified exceptionally unique participants whose perceptions, while representing their unique population, cannot necessarily represent society's perceptions of HVEs with MI as a whole, nor did the participants' perceptions necessarily represent FBI CT investigators nationwide.

### **Limitations Concerning IPA**

Limitations of this study emerged when reviewing its construction, specifically when considering its use of IPA as an analytic method. Vanscoy and Evenstad (2015) indicated that while IPA provides guidance for analysis, there can exist "variation in the execution" of such analysis (p. 345). Specifically, the extraction of themes through coding may depend on the researcher's perception of different codes, and as a result represents a subjective perspective of the researcher. This may affect future attempts to replicate the analysis of this study or studies like it. In order remain as objective as possible, I considered and employed several techniques.

Primarily, I analyzed the data using techniques that aligned with IPA, specifically those wherein I found common phrases to yield themes. As participants' voices were not recorded, I meticulously took notes of answers to each of the interview questions and thereafter compartmentalized the notes relative to each question. I did this to avoid cross-contaminating a response to one question with another, and thereupon could compare responses to individual questions among different participants to yield commonalities to specific questions. I completed this by entering responses into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and comparing multiple responses to one specific interview question. Heinonen (2015) offered that this cross-reference approach within IPA would allow for a comprehensive understanding of individuals' lived experiences, an essence of IPA itself.

Secondarily, I considered my personal biases. I work as a counterterrorism investigator on an FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force. I am also a student of psychology and have studied MI. Considering that this doctoral study explored perceptions of terrorists with mental disorders, I needed to consider my personal perceptions and biases of both topics. To mitigate the introduction of my perceptions and biases into the analytic process, I first considered subconscious introduction of bias in the design of the interview questions. Heinonen (2015) indicated that within IPA, researchers must reflect on their own existing biases and offered that to do so researchers should employ interview questions that reflect the essence of the research question itself so as to mitigate existing bias from interfering with the research process. As a result, I designed the research questions to investigate the phenomenon surrounding the research question – CT investigator perceptions of HVEs with MI. Further, to mitigate my attitudes toward counterterrorism and MI from being introduced into the interview questions, I sought

guidance from a third party, my dissertation committee members, to review my interview questions. Furthermore, I allowed participants to answer fully without interruption so as not to introduce my own biases into their responses.

### **Limitations Involving Participant Selection**

This study employed purposive sampling, which Patton (2015) defined as a technique used in studies to identify and explore experiences of individuals who experience unique phenomena. It was necessary to do so in order to address the research question concerning how CT investigators perceived HVEs with MI. Arguably, CT investigators who had not previously investigated HVEs with MI were excluded from this study as they could not satisfy the conditions of the research. This was necessary to align with the conceptual framework wherein Bandura's (1999, 2018) first variable of social cognitive theory's tripartite highlighted that perception was based on personal experience. Although it would have been futile to interview a participant with no experience investigating HVEs with MI, all participants appeared to have previously investigated multiple HVEs with MI. As such, no participants investigated only one HVE with MI, and as a result a limitation of this study was its inability to compare perceptions of investigators who investigated one HVE with MI against an investigator who investigated multiple HVEs with MI.

Another limitation of this study was its geographic location. Participants belonged to one FBI division. There are multiple FBI divisions throughout the United States. Previous analysis from the FBI indicates irregular scatter densities of terrorist acts across the United States; that is, terrorism does not occur homogeneously within the United States, but is often concentrated to dense population centers (FBI, 2019). As a result, the

incidents, types, and experiences of investigators from one division may differ from experiences of investigators in other divisions.

Last, another limitation was that I did not differentiate domestic terrorism investigators from international terrorism investigators. International terrorism constitutes ideologies which are centered from areas outside of the United States, whereas domestic terrorists employ ideologies that originate from within the United States. As a result, no distinction was made between CT investigators' perceptions of HVEs with MI who were inspired with international terrorism ideologies in contrast to those inspired by domestic terrorism ideologies.

### **Recommendations**

This study focused on perceptions that CT investigators have of HVEs with MI, and how these perceptions interacted with the CT investigative process. Specifically, the abbreviation HVE stands for homegrown violent extremist, which is a typology of terrorism (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). Compared to militant terrorism (which constitutes group activities such as those observed in Al Qaeda), HVE behavior comprises individual activity and, incidentally, is often called lone-wolf or lone-actor terrorism (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). HVEs, however, may espouse different motivational origins from either political or religious ideologies. Blair and Shane (2016) indicated that the perpetrator of the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, FL committed the act in furtherance of a religious ideology. Sweeny and Perliger (2018) indicated that the perpetrator of the Oklahoma City Bombing did so in furtherance of political ideology. Both perpetrators were HVEs, regardless of their political or religious motivations. Recommendations for

future studies may include isolating CT investigator perceptions of political or religious HVEs, and thereafter comparing themes extracted from the two areas.

Other recommendations may include an expansion to different FBI divisions. Specifically, this may include analysis of CT perceptions in areas with high densities of terrorism investigations versus those with lower densities. Once this data is collected, it can be cross-analyzed to highlight how investigators from different geographic areas perceive HVEs with MI, and whether these perceptions are similar or different.

Last, this study was qualitative in nature, in part because it explored whether or not CT investigators possessed biases and how these biases interacted with the counterterrorism investigative process; there was no existing presumption that they indeed did. Considering the findings of this study indicated that CT investigators remain objective and do not appear to allow their perceptions of HVEs with MI to influence the investigation, a quantitative approach that researches a null hypothesis  $H_0 =$  “Counterterrorism investigators are not influenced by their perceptions of HVEs with MI” may be recommended for future research. Specifically, such an approach could isolate types of biases that exist and against which types of MI among terrorists they occur. For example, quantitative analysis could determine if confirmation biases or implicit biases are more likely to exist among CT investigators, and whether these biases are more likely to exist against HVEs with depression or schizophrenia.

By comparing demographic analysis to the findings, this study also suggested there appears to be a relationship between the amount of education and training a CT investigator has and the words that are used to describe HVEs with MI. Notably, these words include phrases like “dangerous,” “violent” or “violence.” There also appeared to

be a relationship between the ages of CT investigators and their beliefs that they could adequately identify HVEs with MI based on training or experience. Last, there also appeared to be a relationship between the numbers of years CT investigators had in law enforcement, and whether or not they felt they meaningfully understood the motivations of HVEs with MI.

One of the limitations of this study was that it did not differentiate perceptions that CT investigators had of HVEs with MI who were inspired by international terrorism from those who were inspired by domestic terrorism ideologies. This limitation, however, may fuel a future study. Such a study could investigate if CT investigators perceived domestic HVEs with MI differently from international HVEs with MI. If such a perception was different, and whether participants investigated both international and domestic terrorism, researchers could inquire as to why this differentiation occurred.

Last, another future study could research how the level of MI interacts with the level of empathy that CT investigators feel for HVEs with MI. For example, researchers could investigate if CT agents were more sympathetic to HVE suspects with severe MI like hallucinatory schizophrenia in contrast to those with mild depression. Alternatively, researchers could investigate if expressions of empathy differed toward HVEs with anxiety disorders, dissociative disorders, mood disorders, substance-abuse disorders, or psychotic disorders.

### **Implications**

When considering cognitive or physical volatility, CT investigators had several perceptions of HVEs with MI. They perceived them as high-risk individuals, specifically to the public. They understood them as erratic thinkers who engaged in non-linear

cognition that yielded unpredictable behavior. Agents at times overwhelmingly described them as dangerous, specifically because they lacked empathy and were unmoored by social restraints. Last, agents perceived HVEs with MI as violent and willing to engage in aggressive actions.

CT investigators also perceived that with HVEs with MI, emotional strife is the vehicle to violence, and MI is the bridge. Often times this strife exists as a perceived sense of oppression, and CT investigators perceive that violence becomes the outlet with which this frustration is released. In some instances, PMI adopted an ideology. In others, persons with an existing ideology suffered from MI. CT investigators believe that the presence of MI in the latter example exacerbates the response to the ideology, which manifests as violence. Agents also believe that HVEs with MI are socially isolated due to the MI, and in an effort to feel accepted or belonging, they adopt belief systems of radical groups.

When an imminent threat to life does not exist, CT investigators seek to get psychological help for HVEs with MI. Notably, they defined this either as clinical counseling or as medication. Agents also at times feel sympathy for the mental health aspect of HVEs with MI, showing compassion toward them as a result of suffering from mental disorder. Investigators also were interested in the long-term mental health of subjects. CT investigators highlighted their humanity by describing HVEs with MI as individual persons experiencing mental health disorders.

CT investigators remain objective about investigations. They recognize the consequences of lacking such objectivity and are aware of the influence their perceptions can have in the counterterrorism investigation. They rely on evidence, facts, and totality

of circumstance. This indicates that they investigate the crime, not the person. Especially in an era where law enforcement is accused of criminalizing MI, this objectivity is essential and has remarkable implications. CT investigators also place the threat above all else. If able, they express empathy toward case subjects, however, place public safety first and “no matter the perception” of MI, seek to “mitigate the threat.”

Because CT investigators inferred a remarkable percentage of their case subjects suffered from MI, and because they said they felt as though they did not have adequate training in MI, CT investigators likely desire more training in mental health disorders. Participants indicated they might be better able to interact with subjects who have MI if indeed they received more training in it. When having successfully identified MI in suspects, CT investigators attributed it to intuition based in law enforcement experience. The implications from this suggest that CT investigators may be open to receiving more training in the identification of mental health disorders to recognize the existence of such disorders among their case subjects.

CT investigators seem to rely on the opinions of their coworkers when HVEs with MI are discussed. Often, they feel as though other coworkers’ perceptions constitute professional opinions grounded in experience. Inherently, this influence does not exist when CT investigators do not talk about HVE’s with MI. CT investigators do not appear to be influenced by societal perceptions of MI. This contrasts with the last element of Bandura’s (1999) social cognitive theory, societal influence. Agents recurrently suggested that societal perceptions did not influence them, and were inclined to deny the queues that society emitted concerning MI.

Law enforcement can generally predict where to dispatch more police officers. For example, geographic areas with concentrations of lower socio-economic conditions may yield higher crime (Schmallegger, 2012). It is the impetus of such predictions that prefaced the phenomenon of “predictive policing,” wherein criminologists use statistical analysis to predict possible future criminal behavior (Perry, McInnis, Price, Smith, & Hollywood, 2013). And it is the contrast to this that perhaps makes homegrown violent extremism, when rooted in MI, such a remarkable phenomenon – that, according to CT investigators, HVEs with MI are *unpredictable*. And that they are “erratic.” In quoting P8642304 and P0970530, both the phenomenon of homegrown violent extremism and MI are “indiscriminate,” the coupling of them yields a perfect storm for violent behavior that cannot be foreseen. This implication is remarkable, as it begins to offer insight into why homegrown violent extremists are considered one of the nation’s top national security concerns – because of their unpredictability.

When considering implications for social change at the individual level for CT investigators, awareness of their own preconceptions and biases might help them remain more objective during investigations. Notably, identifying that CT investigators indeed have biases of HVEs with MI might help them remain focused on objective evidence as opposed to perception. When considering social change within organizational implications, Theme 5 specifically highlighted that CT investigators desire more training in mental health. This study could assist in justifying such enhanced training. Implications of social change at a societal level suggest that a focus on objective facts of a case rather than existing biases could enhance successful case litigation, and as a result

this study could in-part contribute to the prevention of a terrorist attack. In so doing, a social change implication of this study might partially contribute to saving lives.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to explore the perceptions that counterterrorism investigators had of HVEs with MI. In doing so I attempted to bridge a gap in the existing literature between the perceptions that CT agents have of HVEs, and the perceptions that law enforcement has of persons with MI. By employing interpretative phenomenological analysis rooted in qualitative tradition, analysis of participants' responses provided a more in-depth understanding of the perceptions they had of HVEs with MI. With a research question that sought to bridge the gap while addressing its utility in CT investigations, six themes emerged. These included: counterterrorism investigators perceive HVEs with MI as cognitively and physically volatile; counterterrorism investigators perceive that HVEs with MI are motivated as a mechanism of MI and not ideology; counterterrorism investigators express empathy toward persons with MI regardless of HVE status; counterterrorism investigators remain objective about HVE investigations; counterterrorism investigators feel as though they need more training in mental health; and CT investigators' perceptions of MI are influenced by coworkers, but not society.

These specific themes could be used to guide future research into the perceptions that CT investigators have of HVEs with MI. Some of them include a differentiation between the ideological origin of the radicalized ideology, while others might one day investigate differences of perceptions toward varying HVEs with different MIs. Now, however, we understand that CT investigators perceive HVEs with MI to be non-linear

thinkers who engage in behaviors as erratic as their own thinking. Fortunately, and perhaps due to their training and experience, CT investigators do not allow these perceptions to influence the counterterrorism investigations. At times when imminent threats do not exist, the humanity of CT investigators emerges as they seek psychological treatment options for case subjects. Agents also understand that many variables influence and affect HVEs with MI.

In closing this chapter, this dissertation, and this academic journey, it is perhaps most appropriate to end with a quote from one of the participants, P1530263, that seemed to encapsulate a collective perception that CT investigators had of HVEs with MI: “If you talk to 100 different homegrown violent extremists with mental illness, it's entirely possible you come up with 100 slightly different motivating factors. Or 100 different factors within one mentally-ill homegrown violent extremist.”

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## Appendix A: Interview questionnaire and open-ended interview questions

**Demographic Questionnaire**

1. In which age range are you?
  - a. [21-30]
  - b. [31-40]
  - c. [41-50]
  - d. [51-60]
2. How many years have you worked in law enforcement?
  - a. [0-5]
  - b. [6-10]
  - c. [11-15]
  - d. [16-20]
  - e. [20+]
3. How many years have you worked in CT investigations?
  - a. [0-5]
  - b. [6-10]
  - c. [11-15]
  - d. [16-20]
  - e. [20+]
4. Tell me about your training or education in psychology or terrorism.
5. Tell me about your training or education in basic psychology of mentally-ill (e.g. can include workshops or online training).
6. Do you believe your training or education in psychology of terrorism or mentally illness is adequate?
7. Bias is a preconceived attitude. It is often difficult to determine in oneself, and it can be positive or negative. Do you have any sympathetic biases of the mentally ill?
  - a. Do you have any negative perceptions of the mentally ill?

### **Open-Ended Interview Questions**

1. How do you define terrorism, specifically homegrown violent extremism?
2. What does the term “mental illness” mean to you?
3. How do you believe society perceives persons with mental illness?
  - a. How does this influence your own perception?
4. How would a life threatening situation perpetrated by a person with mental illness influence your reaction to that person? (e.g. is a call-in terrorist act threat).
  - a. If not a life threatening situation, would you approach the person with mental illness differently?
5. How would you describe your background in investigating terror suspects with mental health disorders?
6. How would you describe your understanding of terrorism suspects who suffer from mental health disorders?
7. Do you feel you can adequately identify terrorism suspects who suffer from mental illness based on your training or experiences?
8. What have you learned from coworkers about homegrown violent extremists with mental illness?
  - a. How does this influence your own perception?
9. Based on your understanding of homegrown violent extremists with mental illness as well as what you’ve learned from co-workers, what is your perception of homegrown violent extremists with mental illness?
  - a. How does this perception interact with your terrorism investigations of them?