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Understanding the Radicalization Process of U.S. Homegrown Terrorists

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MA, Jacksonville State University, 1999

BS, University of Puerto Rico (Mayaguez), 1988

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Radicalization is an aspect in the development of homegrown terrorists; however, researchers have been unable to establish a path to radicalization, uncover how individual and social factors influence radicalization, and identify how the Internet and social media mediate this process. The purpose of this case study was to explore individual and environmental factors that contribute to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists and identify interventions. Conversion theory was used to develop an understanding of the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists. Data were derived from interviews of local and state law enforcement, military antiterrorism officers (AT), and security personnel from military installations in Eastern North Carolina. Data were analyzed applying content directed and In Vivo coding. The study results helped formulate recommendations on interventions to stem radicalization, identified the news media as a gateway for radicalization, and suggested the incorporation of perspectives from other radicalization-related theories into the conversion theory radicalization model to examine known cases of homegrown terrorists and test its viability as a model to understand radicalization. The results of this study could bring about positive social change by improving relationships and collaboration between law enforcement and community stakeholders, which might generate strategies that could exert greater influence in dissuading individuals from becoming radicalized.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this doctoral dissertation to my parents, Jose and Rebecca, who from an early age instilled in me the values of hard work and scholarship. Their sacrifices and support enabled me to reach for the stars and achieve more than I could have ever dreamed. Mom, from you I learned not to be afraid to speak my mind. Dad, from you I learned that you can always overcome your circumstances and to have faith in God, because He will never give you more than you can handle. I love you more than I could possibly express in words.

I would also like dedicate this work to the brave men and women of the Goldsboro, Jacksonville, and Fayetteville Police Departments, the Cumberland County Sheriffs' Office, and the Fort Bragg and Seymour Johnson Air Force Base AT and security personnel. Their efforts have kept their communities safe from the ravages of homegrown terrorism in spite of the many challenges they encounter. I hope that this study will not only highlight their contributions, but in some measure, help provide them with the resources they require to continue their efforts. You have my highest respect and admiration.

Acknowledgments

Thank you Lord for helping me get to this place! You have bestowed upon me innumerable blessings, which have enabled me to achieve this milestone. Without You, I am aimless and purposeless.

I would like also to acknowledge my wife Mary. Thank you for enduring the journey thus far. Thank you for patiently listening to me as I tried to formulate meaningful arguments. You are my cheerleader, my sounding board, my editor in chief, my happy place. I am a better man because of you. I love you.

To my sons, Jose, Jorge, Eric, and Evan. Thank you for the support and encouragement. I am proud of the men you have become and I challenge you to pursue your dreams and achieve your potential.

To my committee Chair, Dr. Bruce Lindsay for taking chance with me by accepting to Chair my committee. You provided me clarity when I was thoroughly confused and challenged me to consider alternative perspectives. To my committee members, Dr. Mark Stallo, and Dr. Dianne Williams; I truly appreciate you feedback and recommendations. I could not have asked for a better group of scholars to guide me along the way.

This has been one of the most challenging efforts I have undertaken in my life. Because of it, I have evolved as a man, a leader, and a scholar. This is the first step in bringing about positive social change.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

On September 11, 2001, terrorists staged the most elaborate and deadly attack on U.S. soil in recorded history. Terrorist operatives seized four commercial airliners and turned them into weapons of mass destruction. They flew two of the airplanes into the towers of the World Trade Center in New York and another into the Pentagon in Washington, DC. The fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania, and while it is unclear what the target was, experts suggested that the hijackers intended to crash the plane either into the capitol building or the White House (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004, p. 14). This terrorist attack resulted in an estimated 3,028 deaths (Arias, Anderson, Kung, Murphy, & Kochanek, 2003). The U.S. government responded with the full range of diplomatic, security, intelligence, and military capabilities to combat international terrorism, specifically Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden. This led to the deployment of military forces in pursuit of the Global War on Terrorism and the death of over 6,855 service members (Fischer, 2015).

The number of military casualties notwithstanding, the lack of any attacks on U.S. soil in the scale of those of September 11, 2001 might suggest that the combined efforts of counterterrorist, intelligence, law enforcement, military, and other security organizations have been effective. It could also mean that terrorist organizations have adapted to their environment in order to remain viable (Jackson & Loidolt, 2013, p. 288). The latest incarnation of terrorism has shifted from terrorist organizations centrally controlling operations to seeking to inspire supporters to conduct terrorism abroad, especially in Western countries (Mendelsohn, 2011; Brinkley, 2013; Rudner, 2013;

Bjelopera, 2013; Gunaratna, 2015). These efforts foreshadowed the emergence of the

homegrown terrorist. The approaches that counterterrorism forces have successfully

employed overseas to prevent large-scale terrorist attacks are not suitable to counter

homegrown terrorism threats. There has to be proportionality in the manner in which

security organizations conduct domestic operations so that they do not infringe on

constitutional rights or alienate communities. In this chapter, I will discuss the

background of the problem, define the problem, and discuss the theoretical framework. I

will also provide key definitions, assumptions, limitations, scope and delimitations, and

the significance of the study.

Problem Statement

U.S. counterterrorism efforts abroad successfully prevented large-scale terrorist

attacks since 2001. However, homegrown terrorist incidents increased during that same

period, consistent with terrorist organizations' desire to inspire terrorist attacks on U.S.

soil (Alexander, 2011; Bergen, Hoffman, & Tiedemann, 2011; Bjelopera, 2013).

Radicalization is a significant aspect in the development of homegrown terrorists (Beutel,

2010; Borum, 2011). In spite of the ongoing research on radicalization, experts have

been unable to establish a path to radicalization (Alexander, 2011), uncover how

individual and social factors influence radicalization (Kleinmann, 2012), and identify

how the Internet and social media mediate this process (Archetti, 2015). The fragmented

nature of radicalization research, the lack of a robust body of empirical research focusing

on the radicalization process (Mastors & Siers, 2014), and the lack of a comprehensive

model for analyzing radicalization (Ferguson & Binks, 2015, p. 21) have also resulted in

inadequate understanding of the problem. This gap in knowledge leads to ineffective approaches to curtail radicalization and stem the growth of homegrown terrorism. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to develop an understanding of the process by which U.S. citizens, or legal residents, develop the radical ideology that inspires them to plot or commit acts of terrorism.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative case study, I derived data from interviews with law enforcement officials at the local and state levels with counterterrorism or gang experience, as well as AT officers and security personnel from military installations in Eastern North Carolina. The interview data, coupled with current radicalization research, was used to develop a better understanding of the process that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists, while applying the religious conversion theory as a model for understanding radicalization. Eastern North Carolina is important, both regionally and nationally, across various categories. This region of North Carolina is home to the Research Triangle Park (RTP). This enterprise occupies over 7,000 acres, employs over 39,000 high tech workers, and incorporates over 200 companies that support a variety of efforts including defense, infectious disease research, and advanced computing technology research (The Research Triangle Park, 2015). This area also hosts the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, a collaborative initiative that brings together the University of North Carolina, Duke University, and the Research Triangle Institute International (RTI) to develop a better understanding of terrorism and to develop

counterterrorism approaches through the inclusion of stakeholders from academia, government, and industry sectors (Duke University, 2015).

North Carolina also has seven major military installations, with over 110,000 active duty military members that generate more than 540,000 jobs (McCrory, 2014, p. 17). Three of these bases have particular significance because military forces from these bases are actively engaged in combat operations supporting counterterrorism efforts abroad. Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, set in Goldsboro, is the home station for the Fourth Fighter Wing, which includes over 6,000 military and 600 civilian personnel (US Air Force, 2016). Camp Lejeune, located near Jacksonville, is one of the largest United States Marine Corps (USMC) bases, with a population of over 114,000 military, civilians, and family members (Castellvi, 2013, p. 11). Major units stationed at this base include Marine Corps expeditionary units that have contributed to military efforts overseas (US Marine Corps, 2016). Finally, 73 miles south of the RTP, in Fayetteville, is Fort Bragg, the largest Army base in the world. It is home of U.S. Army airborne and special forces that support national contingency defense efforts. Over 63,000 military and 11,000 civilian employees work at this installation, which is home for over 21,000 family members, and supports over 250,000 military, civilians, and retirees (U.S. Army, 2015).

Terrorism threats to these locations are a significant concern for law enforcement, and there is evidence to support these concerns. In recent years, three U.S.-born citizens (Daniel Patrick Boyd, Erwin Antonio Rios, and Justin Sullivan) engaged in terror-related activities in Eastern North Carolina, which led to terrorism-related charges (Robertson, 2011; Walker, 2013; US Department of Justice, 2015). Law enforcement,

counterterrorism, and AT specialists near these sites should be prepared to identify

potential threats to their security, including homegrown terrorists, and could contribute to

a better understanding of the process that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown

terrorists. Neither the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) nor the Triangle Center on

Terrorism and Homeland Security accepted invitations to participate in the study.

The study population for this study was a purposive sample of law enforcement

officials at the local and state levels with counterterrorism or gang experience, as well as

AT officers and security personnel from military installations in Eastern North Carolina.

Researchers use purposive sampling to deliberately seek participants who can contribute

to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation because of their in-

depth knowledge and experience in the matter (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, p. 123).

Local law enforcement officials usually are more familiar with their operational

environment and are better qualified to recognize indicators and warnings of potential

threats (Brooks, 2011). The adoption of community policing practices (ie., in which

police officers and community leaders cooperate to prioritize police efforts, identify

problems, and improve public safety) further elevates the role of the local police officer

(Aziz, 2014, p. 156). Community policing, an initiative that law enforcement agencies

have implemented worldwide, focuses on the efforts of an individual police officer or a

team of officers focusing on a geographic area or community (Terpstra, 2011, p. 92).

Police officers and sheriff deputies at the local level might not possess the requisite level

of experience, training, or clearance that enables them to provide the perspectives

required for this study. The participant sample, therefore, included individuals who had

the requisite security clearance to access relevant intelligence and have counterterrorism and AT experience. The participant pool also included law enforcement officials with gang experience because gang members usually undergo a similar radicalization process, and an understanding of gangs can provide insights into radicalization and extremism (Decker & Pyrooz, 2015). The inclusion of the perspectives of counterterrorism experts from state agencies, military AT, and security officers provided a diverse perspective on the issue and improved the reliability and validity of the research through triangulation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, pp. 312-313). Participant responses were analyzed to identity themes and patterns using content directed and In Vivo coding.

Case study research was appropriate for this research because it helped me to develop an in-depth understanding of a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2014). This involves the analysis of an actual event or phenomenon, and it provides empirical data that could inform the development of relevant theories or interventions (Mastors & Siers, 2014, p. 386). Silke (as cited in Chermak & Gruenwald, 2015) argued that researchers have relied mostly on the review of radicalization literature reviews rather than on original, field collected data to develop an understanding of terrorism (p. 134). The phenomenon that I addressed was the radicalization process of U.S. homegrown terrorists.

Research Questions

Q1: What individual and environmental factors contribute to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists?

Q2: What form of intervention would be effective to curtail radicalization?

Q3: How would a modification of the conversion theory serve to explain the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was explore the process that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists and to apply the religious conversion theory as a model for understanding the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists. I incorporated data from interviews with law enforcement officials at the local and state levels with counterterrorism or gang experience, AT officers, and security personnel from military installations in Eastern North Carolina.

This study will contribute to knowledge in the field of radicalization in two ways. First, I considered the perspectives of law enforcement officials at the local and state levels, as well as military AT officials. The lack of a substantial body of empirical research in the radicalizing field is a known gap in the research, and a case study involving perspectives from law enforcement officials, counterterrorism, and military AT officers should contribute towards filling that gap. I sought to understand radicalization from the perspective of those who have to address it daily in the real world. Another known gap in the literature was the lack of a model to understand radicalization. I applied the religious conversion theory (Rambo, 1993) as a model to understand the radicalization process of U.S. homegrown terrorists. I also compared the stages of radicalization, according to the religious conversion theory, to data from current radicalization research and the perspectives of study participants. It was critical that interview questions integrated key aspects of the theory in order to identify the

manifestation of the theory's principles in the real world. The study was ideologically neutral; I did not focus on ideologies, religious beliefs, or political philosophies, but rather the radicalization process of U.S. homegrown terrorists in general.

In a doctoral qualitative case study, (Mouras, 2013) considered the perspectives of the ranking law enforcement officers at the county level (the sheriff) on factors leading to radicalization as they related to criminal and terrorist activity. Mouras framed the research according to rational choice and deterrence theories and conducted semistructured interviews with sheriffs at an unidentified location in the United States. Mouras identified five factors related to radicalization: psychological, state of mind, social environment, individual financial issues, ideology, and Internet communications. Mouras' findings supported the application of the religious conversion theory as a model to understand radicalization because the factors fall within at least three of its stages.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Rambo's (1993) religious conversion theory (from this point referred to as the conversion theory), which incorporates aspects of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and religious studies. Although it is not a public policy theory, it helped frame the study to understand a phenomenon with significant public policy and social implications. This theory provided a model that could provide insights into a better understanding of how individual factors, experiences, and dynamics relate to the religious, social, and cultural environment of individuals. The conversion process (or radicalization in the case of terrorists) entails a series of stages that have a cumulative effect upon individuals that lead to the adoption of

a new moral paradigm (Rambo, 1993; Rambo & Bauman, 2012). The radicalization process shares similarities with religious conversion and the use of a religious conversion model could be useful in understanding the complexity of such an abstract concept (Ferguson & Binks, 2015, p. 26).

Law enforcement officials with counterterrorism training and gang experience were able to share their perspectives on the manifestation of the stages, revealing how individuals progress along the radicalization continuum, which should help develop trends and patterns associated with the process and contribute to the further grounding of the conversion theory. The perspectives of knowledgeable law enforcement officials at the local and state levels, military AT officers, and security personnel proved invaluable in understanding the radicalization process, as it applies to people in the United States. Their perspectives also assisted in conducting a preliminary assessment of the suitability of the conversion theory as a useful tool for understanding radicalization in a broader context. Through the conversion theory, Rambo (1993) postulated that individuals seek a way to find balance, a sense of self-worth, or purpose that they lost because of a crisis. Individuals who embrace extremist ideologies that lead to their radicalization should present particular individual and environmental factors that predispose them to accepting new ideas or experience paradigmatic changes in their worldview (Rambo, 1993). Their exposure to these new ideas could be the work of an advocate, agent of change, or the initiative of the individuals themselves (self-radicalization) (Rambo, 1993). This experience would lead them to eschew their old perspectives in favor of newer ones that promise to restore order in their lives and provide them a sense of purpose. This search

sets the conditions for the acceptance and internalization of extremist views, an essential element for radicalization. The interviews with knowledgeable law enforcement officials at the local and state levels, military AT officers, and security personnel generated empirical data to facilitate the identification of patterns and trends common among radicalized individuals. Furthermore, the study participants were able to provide their insights regarding counterradicalization by suggesting intervention approaches and the most appropriate means for transmitting the counterradicalization message.

Definition of Terms

U.S. homegrown terrorism: Terrorist activity or plots perpetrated within the United States or abroad by U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, or visitors radicalized largely within the United States (Bjelopera, 2014a).

Antiterrorism: The combination of defensive measures used to protect individuals and infrastructure against terrorism threats. It includes the efforts of organizations within the intelligent, military, and law enforcement communities (U.S. Army , 2008, p. 10).

Commuity policing: Law enforcement program designed to empower minority communities to help define policing priorities and improve safety. It provides personalized policing by which the same officer services an assigned area, proactively working with the area inhabitants to identify and solve problems (Aziz, 2014, p. 156).

Counterterrorism: Activities and operations taken to neutralize terrorists and their organizations and networks in order to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals (Joint Publication 3-26, 2014, pp. GL-3).

Radicalization: The process of developing ideologies and beliefs that society deems extremist or radical (Aly & Striegher, Examining the role of religion in radicalization to violent Islamist extremism, 2012, p. 850).

Terrorism: Premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually to influence an audience (Annual Country Reports on Terrorism Act of 2014).

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed that participants would have limited understanding of radicalization because their duties did not require this knowledge. This lack of knowledge notwithstanding, it was expected that they would be forthcoming and transparent in their answers. Finally, it was assumed that the collection and analysis of data from a variety of sources would imbue the study with sufficient validity and trustworthiness that would allow the findings to contribute to body of evidence in the field of radicalization.

Limitations

This study might not be able to yield generalizable findings that could apply to other areas of the country because of its qualitative nature and the small sample size. Although the conversion theory provides a holistic model that incorporates features from sociology, anthropology, psychology, and religious studies, the use of the proposed stages of conversion might prevent the consideration of other factors outside of the theoretical construct. Finally, although a case study will provide valuable empirical data from the perspective of the participants, I collected data from individuals with experience

in counterterrorism, AT, and gangs, not those who experienced radicalization. The

sample population consequently deprived the study from a valuable perspective that

merits additional research. Neither the FBI nor the Triangle Center on Terrorism and

Homeland Security accepted invitations to participate in the study; thus, the research did

not include the perspectives of counterterrorism experts from the academic field or

federal law enforcement. Several military and local law enforcement officers, however,

had previous experience with federal counterterrorism organizations.

Scope and Delimitations

In this qualitative case study, I considered the perspectives of law enforcement

officials at the local and state levels with counterterrorism or gang experience, as well as

AT officers and security personnel from military installations in Eastern North Carolina

on the radicalization process of U.S. homegrown terrorists. The data collected through

the interviews and current radicalization research facilitated the identification of patterns

and trends common among radicalized individuals and allowed for a preliminary

assessment of the conversion theory as a model for understanding radicalization. I did

not attempt to assess the effectiveness of existing counterterrorism efforts aimed at

curbing the growth of homegrown terrorism or to explore the level of collaboration

between law enforcement and community stakeholders.

I did not focus on a particular form of radical- or extremist-inspired radicalization.

Although much of the media has focused on Islamist-inspired terrorism, other sources of

radicalization merit consideration. In addition to Islamist extremists, there is evidence

that eco-extremists, anarchists, White supremacists, antigovernment extremists, and

antiabortion extremists present a significant threat to domestic security as well.

Independent of the professed ideology of prospective homegrown terrorists, the adoption

of extremist views involves a process of socialization by which they learn the values,

norms, and skills consistent with their worldview (Williams, 2011, p. 172). This process

is critical to understanding radicalization and could potentially inform future research.

Finally, I did not test the conversion theory, but rather set the conditions for a follow-up

quantitative study for that purpose.

Significance of Study

The results of this study can be used to increase the understanding of the process

that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists. It has social as well as

public policy implications. It is important to understand the radicalization process before

attempting to develop intervention strategies, which could prove ineffective or

counterproductive. Efforts to combat radicalization require more than law enforcement

action; they require greater involvement and contributions from stakeholders across all

sectors of society (Bjelopera, 2013).

The results of this study could bring about positive social change by improving

the degree of collaboration between the government and community-based organizations,

which might generate strategies that could exert greater influence in dissuading

individuals from becoming radicalized (Archetti, 2015). Closer collaboration among key

stakeholders might also improve the relationship between law enforcement and local

communities.

From a public policy perspective, the findings from this research could inform modifications to the government's approach to combating radical extremism by providing empirical data on the perspectives of radicalization from the individuals charged with the implementation of counterterrorism program directives and improving collaboration between communities and police departments. Law enforcement officials living in the communities in which they serve have increased familiarity with their environment and are better qualified to recognize indicators and warnings of potential threats (Brooks, 2011). The findings from this study could also inform training programs for local law enforcement officials that could enhance their ability to recognize indicators of radicalization among members of the communities they serve.

Finally, from a research and academic perspective, the results of this study could provide the impetus for additional research aimed at testing the conversion theory through a quantitative case study approach. The validation of the conversion theory could help further research in the field by providing a holistic model for understanding radicalization. This test should satisfy one of the identified gaps in literature regarding knowledge in the radicalization field.

<center>**Summary and Transition**</center>

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to develop empirical data from interviews with law enforcement officials at the local and state levels with counterterrorism and gang experience, as well as AT officers and security personnel from military installations in Eastern North Carolina. The interview data, coupled with current radicalization research, helped develop a better understanding of the process that leads to

the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists through the application of the conversion theory as model to understand the radicalization process. The findings could lead to the development of a useful model for understanding radicalization and appropriate intervention approaches.

In Chapter 2, I examine the current literature on radicalization. In Chapter 3, I address the methodology and theoretical framework for the study. Chapter 4 includes the discussion of the analysis of the data. Finally, in Chapter 5, I provide a summary, the findings of the study, derived conclusions, areas of further research, and recommendations for further action.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to develop empirical data from interviews with law enforcement officials at the local and state levels with counterterrorism and gang experience and AT officers from military installations in Eastern North Carolina. The interview data, coupled with current radicalization research, helped develop a better understanding of the process that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists. In ongoing research on radicalization, scholars have been unable to establish a path to radicalization (Alexander, 2011), uncover how individual and social factors influence radicalization (Kleinmann, 2012), and identify how the Internet and social media mediate this process (Archetti, 2015). The lack of a robust body of empirical research on radicalization (Mastors & Siers, 2014, p. 386), coupled with the absence of a comprehensive model for analyzing radicalization (Ferguson & Binks, 2015, p. 21), preclude a deeper understanding of the problem.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, stakeholders in the law enforcement field called for an increased role of local law enforcement agencies in homeland security efforts (Ortiz, Hendricks, & Su, 2007, p. 94). The adoption of community policing practices makes the local police officer a contributor to domestic counterterrorism efforts (Aziz, 2014, p. 156). Community policing revolves around the efforts of individual police officers or a team of officers operating in a community (Terpstra, 2011, p. 92). This study provided them with the opportunity to contribute their experience to validate the tenets of the conversion theory and the development of

intervention approaches that could help stem radicalization and the rise of homegrown terrorists.

This literature review has nine major sections. The first is radicalization, which includes current literature on radicalization related research. The second is context, which includes perspectives of individual factors as well as the relationships and social networks of individuals, and how they influence the radicalization process. The third section concerns the role of the Internet and social media as a source of extremist indoctrination and recruitment. In the fourth section, I explored counterterrorism and deradicalization efforts at reversing the effects of radicalization. The fifth section, empirical research, addresses one of the suggested gaps in radicalization research. The sixth section, homegrown terrorism, is an assessment of the threat that homegrown terrorism represents to security in the United States. The seventh section addresses the conversion theory. The eighth section includes research on gangs, which could help inform radicalization research in general. Radicalization is a complex problem, which requires the consideration of insights from a variety of sources and the development of a comprehensive model to explain it.

Search Strategy

The main source for the literature search for this study was the Walden University online library and a variety of databases, such as ProQuest, International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center, Military and Government Collection, Political Science Complete, and Homeland Security Digital Library. Other significant sources included governmental websites such as the United States Department of State Bureau of

Counterterrorism, Library of Congress, and the Congressional Research Service. Other

sources also included the RAND Corporation, Brookings Institute, and the Heritage

Foundation. Keyword searches included the following: terrorism, homegrown terrorism,

lone wolf terrorism, American jihad, Al Qaeda, terror plots, 9/11, ISIS, Osama Bin

Laden, radicalization, violent extremism, extremism, gangs, and domestic terrorism. As

previously discussed, I did not focus on an ideological underpinning, but rather on the

radicalization process.

Radicalization

Radicalization, in general terms, is the process by which individuals adopt

extremist ideologies and beliefs (Borum, 2011, p. 30). Through this process, individuals

adopt agenda driven values and beliefs that are consistent only among a small number of

militants or revolutionaries, and which might lead to violence in pursuit of the newly

adopted worldview (Carter & Carter, 2012, p. 140).

Although scholars have suggested a link between radicalization and terrorism, it is

difficult to establish a causal relationship because having or adopting extremist views

does not make a person a terrorist. The process by which individuals develop radical

ideologies that lead them to embrace terrorism is a matter of continued research and

debate. However, radicalization does not occur in a vacuum; each one of the perpetrators

of terrorism has undergone a socialization process by which he or she was able to justify

the use of violence to advance his or her ideological agenda. The source of radical

ideologies also varies among a wide range of possibilities. Radicalization might

influence a range of terrorist motivations. Some of these include nationalist separatist

movements like the Irish Republican Army (Ferguson & Binks, 2015); individuals with political grievances like Ted Kaczynski, the unabomber, (McCauley, Moskalenko, & Son, 2013); and other radical groups such as animal rights and environmental extremists, anarchists, White supremacists, antigovernment extremists, Black separatists, and antiabortion extremists (Bjelopera, 2014b).

Hafez and Mullins (2015) summarized the proposed causes for radicalization of individuals with Western ties. Hafez and Mullins proposed four factors that lead to their adoption of extremism: grievances, both personal and collective; networks, associations, and personal relationships; religious and political ideological beliefs; and environmental enablers and supporting structures. Hafez and Mullins recommended closer collaboration between from intelligence and academic stakeholders and improved access to data from academic research that could inform ongoing efforts. Finally, Hafez and Mullins recommended the development of research approaches that do not rely solely on testing theories in the presence of radicalization, but rather seek to rebut alleged causes of in order to elucidate the factors related to radicalization.

Zekulin (2015) discussed the origins of the homegrown terrorism term and discussed a new analysis model. According to Zekulin, the term refers to individuals born, raised, or who have strong attachments to Western countries, and who act on their own accord without guidance or direction from organized terrorist groups. Zekulin argued that a more current definition should include the concept of radicalized individuals, who not only intend to conduct acts in their home countries, but also intend to travel abroad to engage in violent struggle, or jihad, and those who provide nonviolent

support in their home countries. Zekulin proposed a new term, Islamic-Inspired

Homegrown Terrorist (IIHGT), as a more precise definition of its current manifestation.

Zekulin further proposed that a better approach for understanding the homegrown

terrorist threat would be to focus on their objectives or endgames. This approach would

differentiate cognitive radicalization from behavior radicalization, with the former

leading to the adoption and nonviolent support for the new ideology, and the latter

resulting in engaging in violence, in support of jihadist struggles abroad. This new focus

on endgames, Zekulin argued, would provide a new lens from which to analyze their

radicalization.

The U.S. government, through the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)

Program, developed initiatives and allocated resources to combat radicalization, with

increased funding for programs that include greater involvement of law enforcement and

communities. The aim of these programs is to develop a stronger, sustainable, and more

flexible interaction among stakeholders from a broad variety of sectors, such as

academia, community organizations, the arts, and technology-driven organizations. This

effort places greater emphasis on the role of local law enforcement organizations in their

implementation of community policing efforts, creating pilot programs at Boston, Los

Angeles, and the Twin Cities (Office of the Press Secretary, 2015). Radicalization

research is an emerging discipline that provides opportunities for novel approaches to

expand knowledge in the field. In order to provide generalizability, establish causality,

and determine how antecedent beliefs and behaviors might influence the process,

researchers should move beyond the limited cases that informed previous understanding of radicalization and focus on new data and cases (Brooks, 2011, p. 13).

Klausen, Campion, Needle, Nguyen, and Libretti (2016) applied the Silber and Bhatt radicalization model (which consists of four phases: preradicalization, self-identification, indoctrination, and jihadization) to establish a path to radicalization based on the analysis of 68 cases drawn from court documents, convicted terrorists' online postings, and files from government investigations and the media. Klausen et al. sought to use qualitatively derived factors for subsequent quantitative analysis and revealed 24 factors associated with the radicalization process. Klausen et al. asserted that the ideology (in this case Salafism) creates the predictability required to inform an understanding the progression along the radicalization process leading to violence. A key assertion of this study revolves around the application of the model to other ideologies in order to identify mechanisms that lead to radicalization.

Chermak and Gruenwald (2015) studied the individual and environmental factors of right wing, left wing, and Al Qaeda inspired violent extremists in the United States. Through this analysis, Chermak and Gruenwald developed four conclusions that sought to identify and understand the differences between adherents from each ideology. First, terrorists lack a sense of significance that drives them to violence as a means to achieve their goals. Second, extremists develop narratives that identify threats and targets for violence. Third, extremists adapt to their environment, adopting perspectives that justify violence in retaliation for real or perceived threats. Finally, the external environment, such as the community in which they live, influences extremist behaviors. Chermak and

Gruenwald aimed at highlighting patterns that could provide a better understanding of the characteristics and motivations of violent extremists and enable future research.

Research in the radicalization field highlights the complex nature of this phenomenon. The data suggests there are many factors that might influence radicalization. It also implies that previous efforts to shed light on the problem have been ineffective for a variety of reasons. It is important to consider the input from organizations at all levels in order to gain a better understanding of the dynamics associated with radicalization; this effort should not reside solely in the academic or political realm. By gathering the perspectives of local law enforcement officers and military AT officials, who are critical in the intervention at the local level, this study might contribute to the existing body of knowledge aimed at understanding of the radicalization process of homegrown terrorists regardless of their ideology

Context

Personal relationships and support networks are critical as they relate to the adoption of behaviors. Archetti (2015) suggested that individuals do not adopt new ideological paradigms just because they access materials or propaganda; they interpret these messages based on their world-view and the understanding of their role in society, thus developing a personal identity that has a unique narrative. Archetti further argued that in the case of terrorists, their identity and narrative legitimizes the use of violence to achieve their purposes. Radicalization depends on the confluence of individual identity, personal narratives, and relationship networks, making it both a contextual and temporal outcome (Archetti, 2015, p. 54)

Costanza (2015) studied radicalization among at-risk youth and argued that radicalization research fails to appreciate how the social environment affects cognitive development and shapes an individual's worldview. Costanza advocated for a discursive approach to studying radicalization, which emphasizes consideration of culture to provide context for the radicalization process. This approach accounts for a multitude of behaviors associated with different cultures, proving more relevant than a causality-based approach that seeks to predict behavior. Costanza also argued for the application of social positioning theory to study radicalization, which emphasizes the role of the individual in the radicalization process. Costanza concluded that understanding how socio-cultural factors affect behavior should help develop approaches that include a broader community involvement to prevent radicalization. The importance of the individual's context is relevant to understanding the environmental factors that influence radicalization and how to develop counterterrorism efforts.

Malthaner (2014) analyzed the role of the social environment on the radicalization of homegrown terrorists and argued that terrorism and radicalization researchers oftentimes fail to consider the social and political context of the terrorist. The analysis emphasized the importance of relational networks in the normative formation (radicalization) of its members. The complexity of these relationships makes it difficult to understand their dynamics by focusing on individual factors, predispositions, or vulnerabilities. According to Malthaner, researchers should consider the environment in which individuals socialize in order to understand how they advance along the path to radicalization.

Alexander (2011) analyzed how Al Qaeda (AQ) and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) are able to inspire supporters to engage in terrorism on U.S. soil. Alexander reviewed the cases of 20 individuals unaffiliated with AQ/AQAP, but felt inspired by these organization's leaders or ideology, and highlighted the number of prosecuted cases of terrorism in the United States since September 11, 2001 as an illustration of the significance of this trend. Alexander discussed the differences in the individual background, motivations, and levels of sophistication of the unaffiliated and affiliated terrorists. Alexander argued that radicalization, terrorist recruitment, training, and execution of attacks could diverge significantly among cases, and concluded that self-selected, unaffiliated individuals were more likely to be successful in their efforts because of the simplicity of their plans, and their ability to avoid surveillance, even if their plots would result in less extensive damage. Finally, Alexander advocated for the development of counter narratives to challenge extremist messages.

Kleinmann (2012) studied the radicalization of homegrown Sunni Muslims from 2001 to 2010 in order to determine which factor had greater influence on radicalization: individual, group, or mass forces by comparing the radicalization rates among converts and non-coverts among the 83 cases selected. Kleinmann established that among radicalized Muslims converts, individual factors were more relevant. This means that individuals in their inner circle are more likely to persuade them along radical lines than groups or society. Kleinmann found no differences among converts and non-converts regarding group factors and suggested that mass factors had no significant impact on

radicalization. These conclusions shed light on the challenges associated with devising counter narratives to extremist propaganda.

Aly and Striegher (2012) conducted a case study of the radicalization of Jack Roche, a British citizen who Australian authorities convicted on terrorism charges in 2004. Aly and Striegher assessed the applicability of a four-stage radicalization model for their study consisting of pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination, and jihadization. According to Aly and Striegher, Roche's conversion to Islam in 1992 was an effort to counter feelings of isolation and emptiness, resulting from two divorces, a failed attempt to follow in his family legacy of military service, and alcoholism. Roche moved to Indonesia to learn more about Islam and later joined Jamaah Islameeah (JI), a jihadist organization in Australia, in 1997. Roche traveled to Afghanistan in 2000, where he underwent military and explosives training, and received orders to conduct surveillance on the Israeli embassy in Canberra in preparation for a bombing attack. Aly and Striegher argued that that although religion could influence radicalization, other secular factors could also influence the extent of the radicalization process.

Aly and Striegher concluded that continued exposure to extremism and a close association with radical individuals are important factors that could propel individuals to radicalization, with religion playing a lesser role. Accordingly, Aly and Striegher argued that adoption of Islam is not a precursor to extremism and jihadization, thus assessing that the pre-radicalization phase of the model was not useful in explaining the radicalization of Jack Roche. This argument could also apply to other sources of extremism and provides a potentially useful entry point from which counterterrorism

officials could attempt intervention approaches that could impede the progression along the radicalization continuum.

Hörnqvist and Flyghed (2012) studied two perspectives of radicalization, which contributed a significant level of ambiguity in the understanding and reactions to the phenomenon. After analyzing policy documents and scientific articles published in Europe since 2005, Hörnqvist and Flyghed assessed each of the perspectives in terms of their explanations for the causes of terrorism, the radicalization process (at the individual level), and the countermeasures that the government implemented. According to Hörnqvist and Flyghed, the culturalist perspective posited that terrorism was the result of clashes between western and immigrant cultures that leads to an inevitable threat to western civilization. The radicalization process according to this perspective is an external influence and has little to do with the socio-economic status of the individual. The responses (or countermeasures) associated with this perspective revolve around engagement with the community to dissuade the radicalization of potential recruits early in the process.

Hörnqvist and Flyghed argued that the social exclusion perspective considers social integration as a key variable in radicalization; individuals who are active members of the greater social fabric are less likely to radicalize, whereas those who live at the margins of society are at greater risk of radicalization. Radicalization, according to this perspective, involves a self-radicalization process, in which individuals have no direct connection with extremist recruiters, but rather originates from grass root efforts. In order to counter the radicalization process, proponents of this perspective advocate for

the implementation of tangible social programs to solve sources of social inequality, such as unemployment, substandard living conditions, and education. Hörnqvist and Flyghed also discussed how public officials, based on their ideological standing, tend to prefer a particular perspective, and which might lead to inconsistent and contradictory policies once the government changes leaders.

Passy (as cited in Bowman-Grieve, 2013) underscored the importance of networks as an influencing factor on behavior that could lead them to joining extremist movements. Passy asserted that social networks play an important role in the recruitment, decision-making, and socialization of its members. Communities, whether tangible or virtual, provide a safe haven for extremists, functioning as a forum to validate their beliefs, further their understanding of the movement's ideology, and encourage their commitment and participation in its activities (Bowman-Grieve, 2013, p. 2).

Hibbert (2012) researched the inclusion of reflexivity in management education as a means to develop critical thinking or reflection. The literature on this topic associates reflexivity to the process by which individuals examine their assumptions as they relate to problem solving, and challenges to those assumptions that lead to changes in thought processes. Hibbert suggested a series of approaches for teaching reflexivity. One approach includes the stimulation and facilitating critical thought through dialogue associated with factors such as gender, class, race, social status, sexual orientation, and physical capabilities or limitations. Another approach relates to exposing students to concepts and perspectives that challenge their personal worldview, not in an attempt to change their own views, but to understand the existence of other, and equally valid

interpretations of society. One other method would be the introduction of topics that challenge established managerial concepts or even educational texts and sources. According to Hibbert, individuals can learn to react and accept different perspectives, even if they challenge their closely held worldviews, or their beliefs about the system or community with whom they interact. Finally, Hibbert posited that critical thinking and reasoning is an acquired skill.

Hopkins, Green, and Brookes (2013) reviewed research related to early childhood literacy and brain development. Research into literacy suggests that a child's formative years influence heavily the cognitive and socio emotional development. Hopkins et al. argued that for children to master literacy, they must also develop innate skills alongside the development of cognitive skills. According to neuroscience research, there is a close relationship between brain development and genetics, personal experiences, and the environment. Through this study, Hopkins et al. suggested that parental and community support during early childhood is a critical requirement for the development of skills that enable individuals to react to and engage with environment, acquire feelings of trust, and the ability to self-regulate their behavior.

Czernochowski (2014) researched the influence of age and experience with previous conflict resolution in the identification of errors and subsequent adjustments in an effort to reduce conflicts associated with incorrect responses using electrophysiological markers. Czernochowski studied the responses of individuals from different age groups: children (seven to eight years old), children (10 to 11 years old), adults (20 to 25 years old), and older adults (66 to 74 years old) to incorrect responses to

a test. Through this study, Czernochowski suggested that as they age, individuals should

be able to improve their ability to identify and resolve conflict. These findings are

important as they relate to the ability to learn from previous mistakes to adjust to the

changing environment, and avoid future mistakes.

The Internet and Social Media

The influence of the Internet in radicalization and terrorism is a matter of debate

among key stakeholders. Government reports characterize the Internet as another front in

the counterterrorism effort. Spaaij and Hammd (2015) acknowledged a pervasive use of

the Internet among terrorist organizations, yet did not view initiatives that limit access to

the Internet as a linchpin in counter radicalization efforts. Before the wide use of the

Internet and social media, terrorist or extremist communicated only to their members,

limiting the reach of their propaganda (Spaaij & Hammd, 2015, p. 170).

In their report for Congress, Theohary and Rollins (2011) discussed how ISIS

established an online support network and effectively conveyed their extremist message

via social media. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) used a U.S. born

spokesperson, Anwar al-Awlaki, to spread their message with an online publication in

English: *Inspire Magazine*. Al-Awlaki's rhetoric and exhortations might have played a

role in the 2010 Times Square bombing plot, Major Nidal Hasan's shooting spree at Fort

Hood in 2009, and a foiled bombing of Northwest/Delta Airlines Flight 253 on Christmas

2009. ISIS employs modern Hollywood style productions and disseminates them via

Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to gain followers for their cause (Gunaratna, 2015, p.

11). The investigation of the April 2013 Boston Marathon bombing revealed that

Tamerlan Tsarnaev not only accessed bomb making instructions on the Internet, but also listened to extremist speeches from a radical Islamist cleric from Australia, Sheikh Feiz Mohammad, as well as sermons by Anwar al-Awlaki (Gunaratna & Haynal, 2013, pp. 51-52).

Lemieux, Brachman, Levitt, and Wood (2014) analyzed how *Inspire Magazine*, an AQAP English language publication influenced terrorism in the U.S. by applying the Information, Motivation, Behavioral Skills (IMB) framework to assess behavioral change. Lemieux et al. suggested that online content has had significant influence in the growth of homegrown terrorism by providing ideological content to further radicalization and technical knowledge that could enable homegrown terrorists to carry out attacks successfully. Lemieux et al. recommended further analysis of online content such as *Inspire* to develop effective behavior modification interventions.

Bowman-Grieve (2013) researched how extremist movements, particularly right wing radicals, established virtual communities to support recruitment, coordination, surveillance, fund raising, and continued indoctrination. Through this case study, Bowman-Grieve suggested that the Internet provides a medium by which individuals who espouse a particular ideology are able to access materials that fuel their convictions and communicate with individuals who share their views. Access to online propaganda and involvement with virtual communities could serve as means by which individuals could become more active in extremist activities. Bowman-Grieve highlighted how the White supremacist movement leverages music as an important avenue to recruit adherents to

their ideology. This music genre exposes listeners to their grievances, agenda issues, and promotes intolerance and violence against minority groups.

Janbek and Williams (2014) conducted a case study of nine Islamic terrorists and their use of the Internet since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and evaluated government counterterrorism efforts related to Internet use and the legal challenges associated with these practices. Janbek and Williams argued that terrorist organizations use the Internet to support their recruitment efforts, bolster radicalization and indoctrination, to inspire and plan attacks, and establish a support network for extremists. Janbek and Williams also found that government efforts to stymie the effectiveness of the terrorists' use of the Internet, such as the creation of fake terrorist websites and increased surveillance, prevented specific terrorist plots from coming to fruition. These efforts however, clashed with legal advocates, civil liberty activists, and general public outcry over their legality. Through this study, Janbek and Williams highlighted how terrorist organizations employ the Internet with varying levels of effectiveness, and how the complex nature of conducting counterterrorism operations in the virtual domain will require law enforcement and security agencies to adjust their practices to meet legal and ethical standards.

In spite of the recognition that terrorist organizations have exploited the Internet to advance their agenda, legal challenges, and technical constraints, make it difficult for the government to implement initiatives to counter this effort. Research suggests however, that efforts at limiting the exposure to extremist rhetoric and messaging via the

Internet might not reduce its radicalization effect and that perhaps interpersonal relationships had a greater influence on radicalization (Bowman-Grieve, 2013).

Most extremist groups have leveraged the power of the Internet to make their messages available to individuals who are prepared to accept their narrative because it is consistent with their own worldview (Bowman-Grieve, 2013, p. 2). Online content is readily available to anyone, making the dissemination of extremist messages easier than in the past (Jackson & Loidolt, 2013, p. 285). The Internet has enabled the creation of virtual communities. Sageman (as cited in Gunaratna and Haynal, 2013) argued that the Internet provides the means to develop a sense of unity and purpose that although confined to the virtual environment, might serve as a gateway to further radicalization through personal contact. This was the case of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the Boston Marathon bomber (p. 48).

Brynielsson, Horndahl, Johansson, Kaati, Mårtenson, Svenson, and Pontus, (2013) studied how potential terrorists use the Internet as a means to communicate among their confederates, share ideologically charged rhetoric, and plan their attacks. Brynielsson et al. acknowledged that lone wolfs, or individuals, who operate independent of terrorist organization control, are more difficult to detect and interdict, but their reliance on the Internet presents an opportunity for surveillance and monitoring, although their digital footprint might be small. Brynielsson et al. suggested 16 markers that could indicate the potential for individuals to engage in terrorist motivated violence.

Aziz (2014) analyzed community policing efforts in the U.S. and Britain, and the role of the community and family members in monitoring extremist behaviors. Through

this study, Aziz suggested that the use of the Internet and social media provides a sense

of anonymity and secrecy making it difficult for family members, law enforcement, and

other community stakeholders to stem the advance towards radicalization. Aziz also

found that parents were unaware of their children's involvement in extremist activities in

many homegrown terrorism cases in the U.S. and the United Kingdom.

Mellen (2015) reviewed research related to dissemination of jihadi materials and

propaganda. The analysis suggests that the Internet has facilitated the spreading of such

materials and it facilitates the socialization efforts of terrorist organizations. Mellen also

proposed that extremist recruitment does not rely solely on the Internet, but it is useful in

the initial exposure to information and support networks during the initial stages of the

process that could eventually lead to personal contact

Archetti (2105) proposed a lack of understanding regarding the implications of

the Internet and social media in the radicalization and recruitment of terrorists. Archetti

argued that media itself is not the cause of radicalization; other conditions move

individuals to embrace extremism. According to Archetti, the personal narrative of

individuals must coincide with the group's narrative in order for the message to be

effective; extremist messages will take hold in individuals who have an affinity towards

that ideology. Archetti's findings suggest that trying to message radicals is ineffective,

and there should be a concerted effort to reach out to the non-radical members of their

network, who could exert their influence upon them. By focusing on the individual's

network and through the intercession of key communicators, counter narrative messages

could be more effective. Archetti's perspectives are especially important for the development of effective interventions.

Counterterrorism and Deradicalization

Approaches aimed at reducing the influence of extremist ideologies involve the development of counter-narratives to deter potential converts from embracing extremist ideologies and adopting their worldview. These counter-narrative initiatives present a challenge for the government because it presumes that government officials are able to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable ideologies (Bjelopera, 2014a, p. 27). It would be imprudent to categorize all ideologically similar groups and individuals under the banner of violent extremists or terrorists. It would be likewise impractical to limit access to online content in an effort to curtail radicalization. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has argued against censoring access to information through the Internet in the name of countering extremism. The United States Constitution protects the freedom of speech of individuals and regardless of its inflammatory nature, extremist propaganda is not illegal (Bjelopera, 2014a, p. 27).

It is difficult to counter a personal narrative. According to Byman and Shapiro (2014), counterterrorism experts support the development of counter narratives that highlight the destructive nature of the jihadist approach. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) collaborated with the World Organization for Resource Development and Education (WORDE), to develop a community educational campaign to increase awareness of sources of radicalization (Byman & Shapiro, 2014, p. 24).

Archetti (2015) suggested that an indirect approach, by educating community members might yield better results than trying to message directly individuals prone to radicalization, or already radicalized. Archetti further argued that since they might have already made up their mind, it would be more effective to influence non-radicalized members of their relationship network, who have greater credibility and influence to adjust their identity and narrative (p. 56). Leveraging the influence that close associates, family members, and local leaders have over personal identity and narrative would be preferable to efforts that seek to influence behaviors from the "top-down". Byman and Shapiro (2014) argued that government agencies and officials are ineffective at influencing individuals because they do not have credibility at the local level nor do they understand the community setting. The counterradicalization narrative's focus should then leverage local community leaders as the spokespeople, who would focus more on practical concerns (Byman & Shapiro, 2014, p. 24). As with politics, counterterrorism is a local affair. Local leaders should be at the forefront of engaging with the people of their community, rather than an outsider with no local influence (Bjelopera, 2014a, p. 9).

The United States National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) recognized the need to focus on behaviors, rather than appearance or belonging to specific ethnic or religious groups to develop effective counterterrorism initiatives (Bjelopera, 2014a, p. 18). This approach should allow for the development of targeted intervention approaches and prevent the inappropriate targeting or profiling of groups or individuals. Improper interventions could lead to a waste of resources and efforts, and the alienation of potential allies in the counterterrorism effort (Bjelopera, 2014a).

Dechesne (2011) studied deradicalization programs, argued that these programs should be a principal effort to counterterrorism, and made four critical observations on deradicalization efforts. First, counterterrorism efforts should focus less on repressive means and should include efforts that motivate radicalized individuals to give up violence and reintegrate into an accepted social construct. Second, deradicalization programs in the United Kingdom, Italy, and Palestine have been successful in fostering the reintegration of former extremists into society. Third, radicalized individuals might spontaneously seek ways to abandon their violent ways as their dissatisfaction grows concerning their conditions, status, or the apparent lack of progress in their efforts. Finally, according to Dechesne, deradicalization programs should aim at changing not just behaviors, but also perspectives towards violence and the acceptability of the cause.

Dechesne's review of deradicalization programs concluded that efforts to deradicalize right-wing extremists focused not on changing their thought processes, but their behavior. Dechesne suggests that there is a lack of understanding of what motivates individuals to forfeit their radical views; and these programs could benefit from the application of insights from the field of psychology. Finally, Dechesne recommended deradicalization approaches that favor self-awareness and honesty, the presentation of acceptable alternate views, as well as additional research on deradicalization to determine its effectiveness.

Gad (2012) studied the 2009 Danish government's radicalization prevention program. The analysis revealed that the program suffered from a lack of nuance that differentiated real and perceived threats, empty attempts at developing dialogue among

dissenting parties, and the labeling of Muslims as threats. Gad found that although the

government tried to address anti-democratic elements in general, most examples of

extremism defined Islamic radicalism, failing to include left or right wing extremist

elements. Gad suggested that because these policies were the product of security-minded

officials, they focused on preventing imminent threats to the State. Some of the concerns

regarding the Danish radicalization prevention program revolved around the reaction it

elicited among those who the State viewed as threats. According to Gad, this approach

created a sense of distrust among the parties of the conflict and did little to develop a

two-way discourse on radicalization, but rather escalated the conflict.

Gad concluded that the purported dialogue was closer to a monologue, with

government officials defining expected behaviors, and providing limited opportunities for

criticism or dissent. Scholars and engaged Muslim leaders were successful in adjusting

the policies by appealing to conflict resolution approaches, yet the official language of

the program falls short of changing the security-minded perspective of the policies, which

could allow for its resurgence with a change of the ruling party. Gad's study provided

key insights into challenges associated with the development of effective

counterterrorism initiatives by highlighting the unintended consequences of poorly

developed programs.

Dalgaard-Nielsen (2013) studied programs that helped individual militants

disengage or exit from violent Islamist extremist organizations in Europe, South Asia,

and the Middle East. The study encompassed the review of 16 articles and other

publications dating back to 1990, including 216 interviews and supplemental data, and

included case studies of militants from a broad range of ideologies, from militant Islamist groups, left wing, as well as right wing extremists. Dalgaard-Nielsen's analysis shed light on how creating doubt in the mind of the militant was a useful approach. According to Dalgaard-Nielsen, the programs in South Asia and the Middle East focused their efforts on establishing a proper interpretation of the tenets of Islam, which differs significantly from the views that extremist groups advanced, especially as it related to the use of violence and the killing of civilians. The European programs featured a greater focus on economic assistance and efforts to sever ties with the extremist organization, while purposely steering away from ideological re-education. Through this study, Dalgaard-Nielsen identified difficulties in assessing the effectiveness of the programs that would motivate other countries to implement similar programs to their counterterrorism repertoire.

Dalgaard-Nielsen suggested three common reasons for militants to abandon extremist groups. First, militants lost faith in the justifications for violence and the validity of their arguments. The second reason involved the loss of faith in the organization or its leadership. The last reason revolved around changes in the militant's perspective or circumstances that made them question their commitment to the cause of the extremist group. A common thread among all three reasons was the involvement of external influences that were able to influence militants' worldview in a subtle manner, while capitalizing on their doubts. Dalgaard-Nielsen argued the worthiness of including exit or disengagement interventions to existing counterterrorism programs.

Kruglanski, Gelfand, Belanger, Sheveland, Hetiarachchi, and Gunaratna (2014) studied how the quest for personal significance served as a motivation for adoption of extremist ideologies. Kruglanski et al. developed a model that considered three components: motivation to the attainment of the personal significance goal; the means used to attain significance, which includes the application of violence; and the role that networks and group dynamics play in the socialization process that leads to the justification of violence. Kruglanski et al. cited specific examples of deradicalization programs and argued for continued assessments to determine their effectiveness. Kruglanski et al. asserted that their model could help in the development of approaches to stem radicalization and influence deradicalization efforts.

Aly and Striegher suggested that counterterrorism experts should consider radicalization as a precursor of violence in the pursuit of ideological objectives. It is critical therefore, to implement strategies that prevent individuals from embracing extremist views, or counter their beliefs through comprehensive de-radicalization programs (Aly & Striegher, 2012, p. 850). Alexander (2011) argued the importance of counter narratives aimed at combating and reducing the influence of extremist propaganda (p. 478).

According to Costanza (2015), radicalization involves an indoctrination process, in which the family and community instill upon individuals a set of extremist beliefs and values. In the absence of an opposing perspective, those beliefs shape the views and perspectives of individuals, making them more likely to take action to support the narrow interpretation usually associated with extremist ideologies (Costanza, 2015, p. 1). This

effort cannot be the sole domain of law enforcement and the federal government. The

efforts of law enforcement officials oftentimes generate mistrust and unwillingness

within the community to cooperate with them because of perceptions of unfairness or

infringement on Constitutional rights and liberties (Bjelopera, 2014a, p. 10). A broad set

of stakeholders must collaborate to counter this indoctrination, including not only the

family, but also civic and social organizations, government and non-governmental

organizations (Costanza, 2015, p. 15).

Decker, Pyrooz, and Moule Jr. (2014) researched the conditions that lead

individuals to leave gangs. Decker et al. interviewed 260 former gang members from

different cities and settings and applied Ebaugh's role exit theory as the framework to

understand gang disengagement. This theory provides a five-stage model that explains

the process of disengaging from the influence of gangs. Decker et al. found that exiting a

gang involves conflict between competing forces; the gang and the individual's desire for

a new life. Decker et al. also found that intervention programs, in spite of significant

commitment of resources, had little influence on individuals to leave gangs. Finally,

Decker et al. found that it was difficult to establish the point at which individuals

disengaged from the gang, especially because many former gang members continue to

have ties with their former associates.

Deradicalization efforts throughout the world have shown mixed reviews, but the

existence of such programs highlights the importance that governments place on creative

and holistic approaches to stem the progression of individual radicalization. While the

data suggests that this emerging effort could benefit from continued evaluation, the

creativity, and persistence showed by its proponents might eventually lead to the development of comprehensive approach that could prove effective. It would be useful to consider incorporating these themes in current deradicalization efforts in the U.S.

Empirical Research

Sageman (2014) addressed the need for field-based, empirical research to overcome the stagnation in the field of radicalization. In spite of the government's investment in terrorism research, researchers have been unable to reach consensus on what motivated individuals to take on ideologically motivated violence. Sageman advocated for a closer collaboration between intelligence and academic professionals engaging in a more robust discourse to understand the factors that lead individuals to embrace terrorism. After analyzing research efforts to understand terrorism and radicalization, Sageman proposed that most research in the field of terrorism and radicalization had fallen outside of the academic realm, and that individuals without any scientific credentials or knowledge dominated the effort. This resulted in a number of unsubstantiated claims that distorted facts and overshadowed the efforts of true scholars. Sageman recommended that the government make comprehensive and sensitive data available so that scholars can use primary data in their research. Absent this information, research will depend on mostly secondary data and agenda-driven government reports.

Mastors and Siers (2014) conducted a case study of Omar al-Hammami, a U.S. citizen who joined the terrorist group al-Shabaab in Somalia. Mastors and Siers focused on aspects of motivation for joining the organization, the indoctrination process, and group membership dynamics. Mastors and Siers found that al-Hammami's path to

radicalization began during his teenage years with the adoption of the Muslim faith and distancing himself from the moderating influences of friends and family. The most significant factors associated with his radicalization were the need for adventure and excitement beyond his life in Alabama, al-Hammami's desire for personal achievement and significance, and a difficult relationship with his father. Al-Hammami's desire for attention and personal status put him at odds with the al-Shabaab leadership, resulting in his death. Mastors and Siers concluded that the fragmented nature of radicalization research has not permitted the necessary integration of relevant concepts, resulting in a shortage of useful radicalization theories. Mastors and Siers also alluded to the limited number of existing case studies related to radicalization, recommended a greater emphasis on empirical research to widen the collective understanding of this phenomenon and to develop useful theories.

Halverson and Way (2012) conducted a case study of Colleen LaRose, also known as Jihad Jane. In 2009, federal agents arrested her in connection with her involvement in a terrorist plot to murder a Swedish cartoonist who depicted the Prophet Mohammad in a negative light. Halverson and Way's research suggested that LaRose's involvement in terrorism had less to do with an affinity for extremist ideologies, but rather a combination of individual and environmental factors. According to Halverson and Way, LaRose did not reach a high school level of education, had a troubled and abusive upbringing, had a minor criminal record, suffered with alcoholism, and seemed to have a general contempt for U.S. social norms. These factors might have facilitated

the adoption of extremist views LaRose encountered in the virtual radical Islamist community she followed via the Internet.

Halverson and Way's research revealed that while LaRose never attended Islamic services at a mosque or showed little knowledge of the precepts of the religion, LaRose accepted Islam as a way to find meaning and a sense of purpose, and as an alternative to her existing way of life. This study highlighted how individuals who live within the margins of society, with little prospects to achieve their potential because of lacking individual attributes, and who have minimal support networks, could be easy prey for indoctrination into extremism. Halverson and Way argued that access to the extremist propaganda would likely not have led to her radicalization.

These studies highlight the importance of empirical, field-based research. Radicalization research requires an understanding of a myriad of contributing factors, which are not readily always readily available in the literature. It is important to consider information from a variety of sources in order to develop a better understanding of the factors that lead to radicalization. The perspectives of individuals who are most likely to recognize these indicators can prove invaluable, lending support for the inclusion of local law enforcement perspectives in radicalization studies.

Homegrown Terrorism

U.S. counterterrorism efforts abroad resulted in the denial of safe havens and sanctuaries in under governed areas, the targeted assassination of terrorist leaders, including Osama Bin Ladin, interruption of plans and operations, disruption of fundraising and recruitment, and impeding travel and communications networks (The

Heritage Foundation, 2014). The disruption of large-scale terrorist attacks on U.S. soil since 2001 contrasts however, with an increase in the number of homegrown terrorism attacks or plots in the United States during that same period (New America, 2017).

Crone and Harrow (2011) conducted a quantitative study to identify changes in the proportion of homegrown terrorism in Western countries, using a dataset encompassing 65 acts of terrorism from 1989 to 2008. This dataset included 228 perpetrators, all of whom were Islamist terrorists. The study's framework consisted of the assessment of the perpetrators' degree of autonomy and their level of belonging to Western societies. Crone and Harrow identified an increase in terrorist incidents in the West since 2003 in which the perpetrators had a high degree of autonomy from other terrorist organizations and belonged to the country where the attack took place (homegrown terrorists). Crone and Harrow theorized that while they observed an increase in the number of autonomous and internal terrorist attacks, this trend would eventually subside when terrorist organization are able to reestablish the networks that counterterrorism actions severed. Other research suggests however, that the increase in homegrown terrorism might be a natural progression in the evolution of terrorism based on Al Qaeda's transition to a less centralized command and control approach and their shift to inspiring a global jihadi movement (Mendelsohn, 2011; Brinkley, 2013; Rudner, 2013).

Bjelopera (2013) conducted a comprehensive analysis of homegrown terrorist plots and attacks against the U.S. from 2001 to 2013 and addressed the radicalization process and challenges that US counterterroism efforts face in trying to prevent these

attacks. Bjelopera's overview of the threat and government efforts to identify and thwart terrorist plots and attacks provides valuable context to understand the complexity of the problem. Bjelopera also provided important insights into the various radicalization trends, illustrating the difficulty of generalizing on any aspects of this problem. Finally, Bjelopera recommended stronger collaboration between government counterterrorism and community organizations.

Bergen, Hoffman, and Tiedemann (2011) analyzed Al Qaeda's threat to U.S. security based on interviews with counterterrorism officials at various levels of government, as well as members of law enforcement, intelligence, and policy arenas. Bergen et al. discussed AQ's strengths, weaknesses, emerging trends in their operational approach, and posited that the inclusiveness of U.S. society would no longer insulate the country from jihadi recruitment and radicalization at home. Bergen et al. suggested a future increase in the number of individuals radicalized and recruited on U.S. soil carrying out most terrorist attacks. Current reports on terrorist incidents in the U.S. provide credibility to their projections. As of 2015, the Heritage Foundation reported 73 Islamist terrorist plots or attacks in the United States since 2001. Of those attacks, 62 (85%) were the efforts of homegrown terrorists (Inserra, 2015a). A more comprehensive and updated database of terrorist attacks in the United States reveals that since 2001, there have been 214 homegrown terrorist plots or attacks. Of this total, 194 (89%) were jihadi inspired, while the balance were the efforts of right or left wing leaning individuals (New America, 2017).

Since 2001, there have been 135 non-Islamist homegrown terrorist plots in the United States (Muslim Public Affairs Council, 2012). Between 1977 and 2011, antiabortionists have killed eight people, attempted the murder of another 17 individuals, and carried out 175 acts of arson. Between 1990 and 2010, right wing extremists were responsible for the death of 145 individuals (Loadenthal, 2013). Regardless of the ideology that drives their motivation to commit acts of terrorism, the data suggests that the threat of homegrown terrorism is real.

Borum (2011), Zuckerman, Bucci, and Carafano (2013), and Mantri (2011), assessed that homegrown terrorism represents a significant threat to domestic security. This trend seems consistent with terrorist organizations' desire to inspire terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. Homegrown terrorists can overcome law enforcement surveillance because they do not stand out and can effectively hide in plain sight, and because of the simplicity of their plans and methods, which require less coordination and communication, increasing their probability of success (Bjelopera, 2014b, p. 1). Within the U.S., local law enforcement officials assessed that Neo-Nazis, militias, White supremacists, and sovereign citizen movements represented greater threats to their jurisdiction than Islamist inspired terrorists (Muslim Public Affairs Council, 2012).

Brooks (2011) assessed U.S. Muslim homegrown terrorism and downplayed this threat by referring to the low quality of online content, cultural and language barriers that could prevent the translation of concepts to local audiences, and the difficulty in obtaining bomb-making materials. Brooks also suggested that individuals seeking to travel abroad to join terrorist organizations would find it difficult to do so because of

strict security measures, their inability to connect with jihadi networks, and the unwillingness of terrorist organizations to admit westerners because of the security risks they represent. Recent trends however, challenge these assertions.

Ramsay and Marsden (2015) studied 30 Islamist-inspired terrorist attacks from 2001 to 2013 in the U.S. and other Western countries in terms of the selection of targets. Ramsay and Marsden's study revealed a preponderance of targets within three categories: critical infrastructure (strategic and economic targets), sources of government and political influence, and large gatherings of civilians to achieve mass casualties. Ramsay and Marsden suggested that followers of leaderless jihad, or homegrown terrorists, have become more selective in the selection of their targets and that future attacks would likely seek to achieve greater impact by improving the quality of their efforts rather than quantity. Ultimately, the goal of the jihadi movement is to bring about a global Caliphate, and the actions of individual independent, unaffiliated actors are a means to the end. Ramsay and Marsden proposed that that although the number of Al Qaeda- and ISIS- inspired attacks might not be large, their strategic implications might be significant.

Schultz (2014) proposed that ISIS has appealed to its supporters to perform acts of terrorism in western countries in retribution for their involvement in the coalition fighting them in Iraq and Syria. This exhortation seems consistent with the attempt to mobilize forces to engage in terrorism in a global scale. Schultz suggested that the war in Syria and Iraq provided an opportunity for foreign fighters to join Al Qaeda, its affiliates, or ISIS. In spite of government efforts to develop narratives that counter extremist recruiting propaganda, ISIS has been successful in inciting over 19,000 recruits from 90

countries to travel to Syria and Iraq to join their ranks (Garamone, 2015). An estimated 15% of these individuals proceeded from western nations (Cragin, 2015).

Taylor and Tisdale (2015) proposed that western foreign fighters represent a significant threat to the U.S. and other western nations. First, western foreign fighters represent a significant source of human capital that jihadist groups require to carry out their operations. When western foreign fighters return to their home countries, these fighters would have acquired the skills needed to plan and conduct attacks and would have developed associations with jihadist networks abroad that could enable them to create local extremist networks to expand their operations on the domestic front. Taylor and Tisdale also suggested that western foreign fighters could also represent a source of inspiration for local sympathizers, which they would engage through jihadi-sponsored websites and use their cultural knowledge to radicalize them or elicit their support in planning or committing acts of terrorism in their home country.

Inserra and Phillips (2015) reported the existence of an Al Qaeda cell in Syria, of veteran terrorists to recruit and train Western foreign fighters to conduct terrorist attacks in their home countries. This unit demonstrated significant interest in recruiting fighters with U.S. passports to support their efforts. Inserra and Phillips also reported that in February 2015, U.S. federal law enforcement agents arrested a naturalized U.S. citizen, born in Somalia, on charges of traveling to Syria, receiving terrorist training, and returning to the U.S. to carry out terrorist acts against U.S. soldiers at the behest of ISIS. The ensuing investigation revealed that this was the first western foreign fighter to return to the U.S. with orders to engage in terrorism (Inserra & Phillips, 2015).

Hinkkainen (2013) studied the similarities between homegrown terrorism and domestic and international terrorism that could inform counterterrorism efforts. Hinkkainen's research considered the way in which the different terrorist groups seek to influence specific audiences in pursuit of their objectives. Hinkkainen focused on separatists, leftists, right wing, international and homegrown terrorism groups. The findings of Hinkkainen's study suggest that domestic and homegrown terrorism share features such as target selection logic, propensity, and methods. Hinkkainen proposed that effective counterterrorism efforts should focus on these criteria. Of particular interest is the Hinkkainen's position that terrorist groups do not target constituencies that conform to their views; terrorist groups target other groups that they perceive as having antagonistic views to their own.

Loadenthal (2013) researched how States developed their counterterrorism approaches to address the threat of ecological driven terrorist groups, such as the Animal Liberation Front and Earth Liberation Front. Loadenthal argued that these efforts focused solely on the prevention of attacks and preservation of property, rather than an inclusive agenda that considers conflict resolution approaches through the introduction of measures to imbue the process with justice, dignity, and adequate representation.

Jones and Morales (2012) reviewed Philippine government efforts to deradicalize inmates convicted of terrorism charges. Jones and Morales were interested in determining how prisoner involvement with prison gangs affected their extremist belief system. The Philippine deradicalization program is a comprehensive effort that includes education for staff, prison reforms, improvement of ongoing programs, and vocational

training and educational opportunities. Jones and Morales also reviewed deradicalization

efforts in other countries, some from Arab countries, and others from Western regions.

Jones and Morales proposed that most deradicalization programs feature efforts for

individuals to disengage physically and psychological from extremist influences. Jones

and Morales acknowledged difficulties in the implementation and assessing the

effectiveness of these programs. Finally, Jones and Morales also recognized that there is

little consensus on how to approach prison deradicalization, and that seemingly effective

programs might not be transferable to all settings and countries.

Conversion Theory

Ferguson and Binks (2015) argued that radicalization processes share similarities

with religious conversion and suggested that the use of a religious conversion model

could be useful in understanding the concept (p. 26). This led to the selection of the

Religious Conversion Theory to frame this study. Rambo (1993) postulated that in order

to comprehend radicalization, researchers must understand the individuals' environment

(context), their loss of emotional or moral balance resulting from a traumatic episode

(crisis), their desire to regain the lost balance (quest), and the emergence of a guide or

advocate to assist in the quest for balance (encounter). The strengthening of the

relationship with the advocate or guide and the introduction of a new ideology

(interaction) leads to the individual's conscious decision to embrace the new ideology

(commitment). The final stage concerns the outcomes from this commitment

(consequences). Figure 1 illustrates the progression along the stages of conversion,

adapted to address the radicalization process. The stages appear sequentially for

illustrative purposes only; their positioning does not imply that radicalization must follow that specific order.

Figure 1 Radicalization Stages
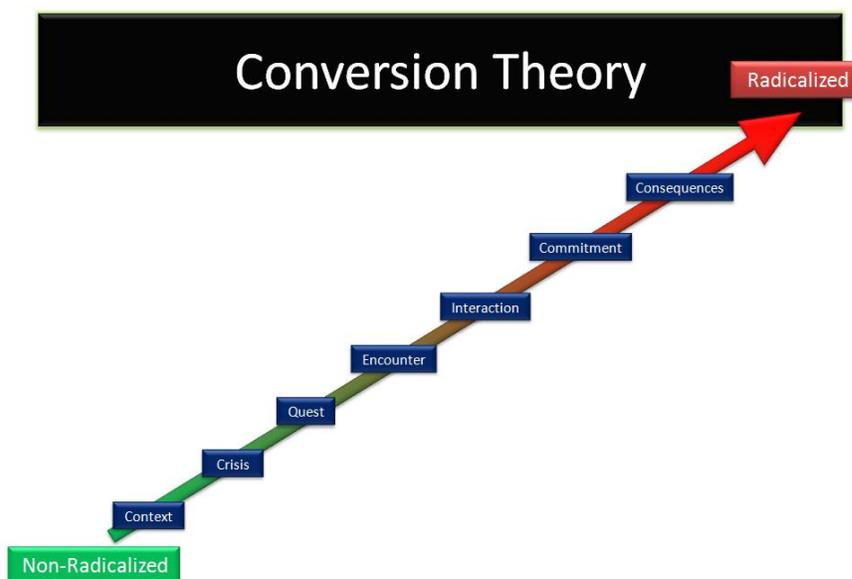
Regardless of the extent to which homegrown terrorists experience each stage and how deeply they commit to radical ideologies, this model should assist in understanding the progressive nature of their radicalization and help identify areas in which key stakeholders might be able to intervene and disrupt the process. The inclusion in the Conversion Theory of aspects of radicalization research, psychology, religious studies, and conflict studies makes it a valuable holistic approach for developing an understanding of the radicalization process of U.S. homegrown terrorists.

Borum (2011) studied theories of extremism and radicalization, as well as the nature of radicalization within the context of processes. Most radicalization-related

theories attempt to explain this phenomenon from a social science perspective. Borum proposed a multi-disciplinary framework for understanding how individuals embrace terrorism. He noted that the reinforcing nature of the conversion stages could help explain the radicalization of Islamist extremists since 2001.

Kahn and Greene (2004) conducted a quantitative study to determine if the seven stages were apparent in the participants experiencing religious conversion. Kahn and Greene found strong evidence for the relevance of six of the stages, except context and suggested that the complexity of each individual's background made quantification of this dimension difficult for their study. According to Kahn and Greene, the complexity of the context, which includes individual and social settings of potential terrorists, further supports the need to understand how these factors contribute to radicalization.

Meyer (2013) referred to the conversion theory to illustrate that conversion is progressive in nature rather than an instantaneous occurrence, and compared how neurological factors affected progressive and instantaneous religious conversion, postulating that the conversion process appeared to restore a sense of well-being to individuals who experienced distressing events in their lives. This renewed sense of purpose is consistent with the quest stage of the conversion theory, in which individuals seek resolution of a crisis, and leads to an encounter with an agent of change, be it a person, groups, or ideology.

Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo (1999) assessed how conversion affected the personality of the convert and how some individuals are more predisposed (because of their personality) to convert. Paloutzian et al. argued that conversion, rather than

occurring in a vacuum, it involves a close interaction of historical, cultural, psychological, and social contexts. Paloutzian et al suggested the use of a holistic model that incorporates perspectives from various disciplines and sources to place radicalization within a real-world context, beyond of the confines of theoretical discourse.

Oppenheim, Steele, Vargas, and Weintraub (2014) researched why individuals joined insurgent groups, why some remained loyal to the group, and why others defected. Oppenheim et al. found that consistent with the commitment stage of the conversion theory, defectors were more likely to acknowledge their past actions, regardless of how regrettable these actions might be as part of their submission to their newfound worldview. The new group's acceptance of the member's past contributed to a greater commitment to the group's organizational objectives, and an abrogation of their previous groups' goals. Oppenheim et al. concluded that individuals were more apt to defect the insurgent organization when it deviated from their ideological foundation. These insights should apply to terrorist organizations as well and are important for the development of counterterrorism initiatives that could focus on reintegration of formerly radicalized individuals into the mainstream society.

Gangs

Decker and Pyrooz (2015) studied gang-related radicalization, and they acknowledged that there are marked differences between the motivations of gang members and terrorists. Decker and Pyrooz suggested that gangs do not necessarily have religious or political motivations, they and focus more on local efforts; terrorist actions have ideological underpinnings, and their actions have international aspects. Decker and

Pyrooz argued that both groups coincide in key areas, which make comparative research

attractive as it might yield better understanding of extremism and radicalization. Gangs

and extremist groups are hard-to-reach populations, with a membership consisting of

mostly young males; gang actions victimize and harm the communities where they act,

and these actions are usually disproportionate to the real or perceived affronts that justify

them; and finally, both groups share similarities in their socialization processes,

mobilization, and use of violence (Decker & Pyrooz, 2015).

Decker and Pyrooz also identified 12 principles based on an analysis of gang

research that could also apply to terrorist or radicalized groups and postulated that there

are also aspects of terrorism and extremism research that could inform the understanding

of gang dynamics. Accordingly, Decker and Pyrooz suggested that a triangulation of

ideas and methods related to both gang and extremist research could yield improved

validity and reliability, and proposed several approaches that could benefit an

understanding of both groups. Given the similar social aspects related to belonging to

gangs and extremist groups, an understanding of disengagement strategies could be

beneficial across the board. In addition, Decker and Pyrooz stressed the importance of

assessing the efficacy of engagement programs to avoid investing limited capital in

programs with questionable success records. Both groups show parallels between

membership and behaviors, but although membership in gangs results in an increase in

violent behaviors, it does not establish causality, in that belonging to a gang does not

make individuals criminals and that not all criminals belong to gangs. Borum (as cited in

Kleinmann, 2012, p. 282) made a similar assessment related to extremism and terrorism; espousing one view one does not necessarily cause the other.

Simi, Windisch, and Sporer (2016) conducted a research project focused on violent extremism, the influence of early year trauma, adolescent delinquency, and potential risks factors on extremist engagement. Simi et al. uncovered that individuals manifested a variety of motivations for involvement in violent extremism, such as peer pressure, attraction to the group's reputation, and improvement of their personal level of significance. Simi et al. found that participants in the study expressed that other motivations for joining extremist groups included protection from school bullying and other gangs in their community and suggested that individuals who join extremist movements do so for the same reasons they would join criminal gangs. Research into gang involvement is not different from extremist engagement, lending credence to the value of considering both events as related and that understanding the dynamics of one choice sheds light on the other. The complexity of gang life and violent extremism require innovative approaches to uncover the factors that influence their recruitment and radicalization efforts.

Alleyne, Fernandes, and Pritchard (2014) researched how gang members use moral disengagement (through the application of moral justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, attribution of blame, and dehumanization) as a socializing strategy to engage in violence. Alleyne et al. sought to understand the mechanisms that allow young gang members to engage in violent behavior and suggested that gang violence is a function of the gang's collective identity

and threats to its identity and that gang values and mores override social values; yet, it is not clear how this happens. Alleyne et al. examined the relationship between gang membership and violent criminal behavior through the exploration of sociocognitive mechanisms. Prior researchers considered current theories of moral disengagement, such as Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which explains social and antisocial behavior. Bandura argued that individuals develop the moral agencies that inhibit inhuman behavior and facilitate humanity; however, in order to overcome conflicts in the presence of immoral behavior, they apply moral disengagement techniques, such as moral justification, euphemistic labels, advantageous comparison, diffusion of responsibility, displacement of responsibility, distortion of consequences, and dehumanization.

Through a comparison of young gang members to nongang members, Alleyne et al. sought to test how much moral disengagement mechanisms facilitate violence. Alleyne et al. revealed that gang members had a significantly higher propensity than nongang members did to engage in moral justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, and dehumanization. Alleyne et al. suggested that gang membership leads to the dehumanization of others (nongang members), facilitating the application of violence and argued that the purpose of moral disengagement was not to justify violence, but to shield its members from cognitive dissonance. Moral disengagement is applicable to gang violence as well as radical extremism.

Smith, Rush, and Burton (2013) analyzed research related to gangs, organized crime organizations, and terrorist groups to understand their similarities and distinguishing characteristics and found that although their composition and goals might differ, they share other characteristics, such as recruitment techniques and engaging in criminal activity to support and fund their efforts. Smith et al. concluded that the similarities and potential influence of one of these organizations upon the others justifies the need to develop a better understanding of their composition and methods in order to develop appropriate intervention efforts.

Scott (2014) studied youth gang membership within the California youth corrections system. Interviews with institutionalized individuals revealed that gang membership has correlates to more pronounced violent behaviors, as compared to non-gang members. Scott proposed that important variables associated with gang-related violence are the length of membership and previous membership in institutional gangs. Scott recommended the implementation of strategies aimed at treating violent behaviors, while considering groups processes. Scott also recommended that intervention approaches should also consider efforts to sever gang ties in order to reduce the propensity for engagement in violent or criminal behavior.

Summary and Transition

Any effort to understand and counter radicalization requires an understanding of its mechanisms and the many factors that influence it. Not every extremist becomes a terrorist; exposure to extremist ideology will not necessarily result in the radicalization of the masses. Research suggests that individuals must be receptive to the message because

it is consistent with their narrative and worldview. In spite of the ongoing research on radicalization, the path to radicalization is still elusive, as are the influence of individual and social factors. Likewise, the role of the Internet and social media on the radicalization requires further research. Ongoing gang research into their recruitment and socialization practices suggests affinity with broader extremist and terrorist movements, justifying its consideration as a complementary source of knowledge for understanding radicalization. Current research also lacks sufficient empirical findings as well as a comprehensive model for understanding radicalization.

This study could contribute to the body of knowledge of radicalization research by providing empirical data from the case study involving key stakeholder perspectives on the radicalization process of U.S. homegrown terrorists. The inclusion in the conversion theory of research involving radicalization, psychology, religious studies, and conflict studies makes it a valuable holistic approach for developing an understanding of the radicalization process of U.S. homegrown terrorists. By addressing this knowledge gap, the findings could help develop meaningful and effective interventions to counter the appeal of extremist organizations or ideologies and stunt the rising trend of homegrown terrorism.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to derive empirical data that could shed a better understanding of the process that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists based on interviews with local law enforcement officials, state and federal counterterrorism officers, and military AT officers from locations in Eastern North Carolina, as well as current radicalization research. The review of the literature yielded a number of gaps in the understanding of radicalization. They include the inability to establish a path to radicalization (Alexander, 2011), how individual and social factors influence radicalization (Kleinmann, 2012), the mediating effect of the Internet and social media on radicalization, (Archetti, 2015), a shortfall in empirical research on radicalization (Mastors & Siers, 2014), and the absence of a comprehensive model for analyzing radicalization (Ferguson & Binks, 2015). In this study sought to answer the following research questions:

Q1: What individual and environmental factors contribute to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists?

Q2: What form of intervention would be effective to curtail radicalization?

Q3: How would a modification of the conversion theory serve to explain the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists?

This chapter will include a detailed explanation of the methodology for the study. I will explain the design and justification for the research approach, the role of the researcher, and mitigation of bias. In this section, I will include a more in-depth explanation of the methodology, sampling, participant selection, instrumentation, and

interview protocol. Another key topic is data collection and analysis, including trustworthiness and validity. In the closing section, I will address ethical matters in the execution of the study.

Research Design and Rationale

Case study research is used to develop an in-depth understanding of a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2014), which, in this case, was the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists from the perspective of individuals who are familiar with the phenomenon. This approach involves the analysis of an actual event or person, and it provides empirical data that could inform the development of relevant theories or interventions (Mastors & Siers, 2014, p. 386). Furthermore, a case study allowed for the application of the conversion theory by comparing it to the perspectives of the individuals who are more likely to identify radicalization in the community and would be the first to intervene to prevent terrorist plots and attacks. Finally, Silke (as cited in Chermak & Gruenwald, 2015) argued that rather than gathering original data in the field, many researchers tend to rely on literature reviews to develop an understanding of terrorism (p. 134).

Role of the Researcher

Researchers should be clear on their role in a study because it can affect the credibility of their findings (Unluer, 2012, p. 1). They could potentially fall into one of four categories: participant, participant-observer, observer-participant, or observer (Yin, 2011, p. 122). Researchers could also assume the role of interviewer in situations in which observation, participation, or a combination of both is not feasible. Interviews

provide context and differing perspectives to the subject under investigation (Maxwell, 2013, p. 88). Ultimately, the role of the researcher depends on the purpose of the study. For this qualitative case study, I took on the role of interviewer because it was the most effective approach for gathering data from knowledgeable participants. Other roles, such as participant, observer, or a combination of both would not have facilitated the gathering of relevant data.

I had no formal relationship with the study participants. My role as member of the armed forces provided some form of indirect kinship because of the role of the military in combating terrorism, but did not provide any authority over the participants. Regarding military AT officers, although they are members of the armed forces, I had no authority over them. As the sole researcher and interviewer, there was a potential for my personal views and bias to influence data gathering and analysis (Yin, 2011, p. 146).

Researcher Bias

As a member of the U.S. Army, I have personal views and perspectives regarding terrorism and the threat that homegrown terrorists represent to national security. The widespread reporting of terrorist acts and plots in the United States influence the manner in which I view this phenomenon, and it was a significant motivator for me to enter into this field of study and to frame my research. To reduce the influence of my views on the matter, I remained vigilant in preventing my bias from skewing data collection approaches and analysis. It was important that I remain objective and instill a high degree of integrity to the process. As a qualitative researcher, I strived to practice inductive learning, to ensure that the findings represented the emerging data rather than

my personal perspective. Additionally, remaining neutral and objective assured the objectivity or confirmability of the research. The research approach was clear and transparent, allowing its replication. I stored the raw data and analysis for additional review. Finally, I reminded myself that it is through a rigorous examination of the data and objective presentation of the findings that I would be able to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of radicalization.

I did not foresee any ethical issues to arise during this study because of conflicts of interest or power differentials or the interaction with protected populations. The participants worked for law enforcement agencies and other military organizations, so there was no professional relationship between the participants and myself. Participation in this research did not involve the use of incentives, and the participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time.

Methodology

In this qualitative case study, I sought to develop empirical data that can lead to a better understanding of the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists, based on interviews with local law enforcement officials, state and federal counterterrorism officers, and military AT officers from locations in Eastern North Carolina, as well as current radicalization research. The analysis of data from interviews helped me to develop trends and patterns associated with the radicalization process within the framework of the conversion theory. The findings could lead to the development of a useful model for understanding radicalization and the development of appropriate intervention approaches based on empirical data.

Sampling

The planned study population for this study was a purposive sample of officers from local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies from cities across Eastern North Carolina and AT officers from three military installations in the region. This area of North Carolina is important, both regionally and nationally. It is home to the Research Triangle Park and three major military installations. Law enforcement officials from the cities of Goldsboro, Fayetteville, and Jacksonville should be prepared to identify potential threats to their safety, including homegrown terrorists. AT officers and security personnel from military installations in the region should also understand indicators of radicalization and terrorist threats.

Researchers use purposive sampling to seek participants who can contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation because of their in-depth knowledge and experience in the matter (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, p. 123). Law enforcement officials are usually more familiar with their operational environment and are better qualified to recognize indicators and warnings of potential threats (Brooks, 2011) and radicalization activities in the community (Connors, 2009, p. 243). Although the goal was to interview 26 participants, data saturation is a function of data quality and richness, not a number of interviews. For this study, it was more important to have participants with experience that would allow them to provide informed insights than to have a large sample size.

Qualitative research usually involves a smaller sample as compared to quantitative research, which allows for greater depth of analysis rather than statistical

significance (Miles et al., 2014, p. 31). Case studies require the selection of purposeful

sampling units to generate sufficient content-rich data. There are not absolute approaches

in determining sampling sizes in qualitative case study research, so decisions on sampling

depend on the research question and depth of the participants' understanding of the

phenomenon (Miles et al., 2014, p. 30).

Researchers must balance quantity and quality of data, addressing the potential of

diluted analysis, failure to reach saturation of data, or the generation of too much data,

that could make analysis unmanageable. I wanted interviews with 26 participants, which

would help generate sufficient data to develop themes and patterns on the factors that

influence the radicalization of homegrown terrorists. The total number of participants

was 23, which satisfied data collection efforts and helped reach data saturation.

Saturation regards the point in a study in which data collection no longer yields additional

perspectives or after the full development and validation of themes and patterns (Yin,

2014, p. 125).

Participant Selection, Contact, and Recruitment

Qualitative researchers collecting data through interviews should be prepared to

define their sample population, select the suitable sample size for their study, determine

an appropriate sampling strategy, and establish the approach for recruiting participants

(Robinson, 2014, p. 25). Participant identification and recruiting began by contacting the

police departments in Goldsboro, Fayetteville, and Jacksonville and requesting their

participation in the study. When the respective agency responded affirmatively on

participating in the study, and after identifying potential participants, each one received

an e-mail invitation to participate in the study, which included the informed consent

form, the scope, and purpose of the research, as well as measures to ensure the

confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Another useful participant recruitment

approach for this case study was the use of snowball sampling. This approach involves

adding participants to the sample population based on the recommendations of other

participants. It is important that this approach be purposeful, rather than convenience

based (Yin, 2011, p. 89). The size of the organizations that supported the study allowed

for the use of snowball sampling as the main approach, based on the recommendation of

the organization's leadership. This ensured that participants met the qualifications for

inclusion in the study.

The recruitment from state law enforcement agencies followed a similar

approach. Recruitment of military AT officers and security personnel involved

contacting each installation garrison commander and requesting authorization for

inclusion in the study. In addition to Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB)

approval, it was important to identify any requirements that each organization might have

to ensure the ethical performance of research with their personnel. This entailed approval

from the Department of the Army and Air Force Human Research Protections Office

(AHRPO). This was important for recruiting participants from military installations

because each military service has an IRB process.

Instrumentation

Protocols for qualitative research should have broad but specific questions that

help guide the line of inquiry and a framework that permits the discovery of confirming

and disconfirming data. The protocol should allow the researcher to triangulate the data and enhance the discovery of new insights (Yin, 2011, pp. 103-104). Interviews containing open-ended questions should yield insights and fidelity (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, p. 130). Data collection for this study included a researcher-developed questionnaire that allowed the participants to share their perspectives on the process that contributes to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists. The use of a standardized, open-ended interview protocol helped me to focus the interviews and facilitate data analysis by comparing emerging themes and patterns. The main concern as a qualitative researcher was the collection of sufficient data for the study.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol questions related directly to the main research questions. This aligned the instrument with the study's purpose and theoretical framework. This approach satisfied the collection of sufficient data to satisfy the inquiry by reaching data saturation (Simmons-Mackie & Lynch, 2013, p. 1287). The preliminary plan called for a single interview, which was conversational in nature. Although the questions provided a framework for data collection, the interview required additional prompts or follow-up questions to develop a full understanding of the participants' perspective on the study subject. The interviews took place at the individual's place of work, at an office or conference room with privacy, free of distractions that provided a comfortable, familiar setting for the participants. Before the interviews, each participant stated that he or she understood his or her right to refuse to participate in the study or answer any question that he or she felt was inappropriate.

The researcher-developed interview protocol consisted of 10 questions that were used to understand the participants' perspectives on the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists. The appendix contains a copy of the interview protocol. The questions were as follows:

1. Describe your counterterrorism training and any experiences with terrorism in the field.

2. How would you define homegrown terrorism? In your view, which group represents the most significant homegrown terrorism threat?

3. What individual factors (education, financial, social standing, family) might make an individual susceptible to radicalization?

4. What environmental factors (family, friends, associations) might make an individual susceptible to radicalization?

5. What type of event might cause an individual to embrace extremism?

6. How do radicalized individuals encounter extremist propaganda?

7. What would be an effective approach to counter extremist propaganda?

8. At what point of the radicalization process are individuals past the point of effective intervention?

9. Is there anything you would like to add that might be useful in understanding the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists?

10. Do you know of anyone else who might be able to provide more information on radicalization?

The interview protocol questions were consistent with themes from the literature review, which helped me to integrate the conversion theory into the study. The questions addressed issues regarding individual factors that influence radicalization (establish context and crisis from the conversion theory). Other areas include encounters with extremism (determine encounter and interaction from the conversion theory and influence of the Internet in radicalization), the development of counter narratives, as well as the best approach and timing to influence individuals at risk for radicalization (counterterrorism themes, deradicalization, and commitment from the conversion theory).

The research called for a pilot study with at least five counterterrorism specialists from locations other than the data collection sites to avoid influencing participants' answers. Pilot study participant identification and recruiting began by contacting counterterrorism specialists from the Joint Special Operations University and National Defense University, and requesting their participation in the study. This effort was unsuccessful, so the study proceeded without a pilot study. Although the lack of a pilot test could have increased risks in terms of the validity of the instrument, nesting the interviews questions with the research questions and the theoretical framework was sufficient to ensure the questions were appropriate. Furthermore, the theoretical framework provided preliminary codes for data analysis. By embedding the instrument with the study's theoretical framework, it had the sufficiency required for data collection.

Validity

The validity of a study refers to the proper collection and analysis of data so that the findings are an accurate representation of the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2011, p.

78). In qualitative research, the use of a multiple case study approach lends confidence to its findings. Being able to replicate the findings among various cases increases their validity and trustworthiness (Miles et al., 2014, pp. 33-34). Data collection involved participants from different organizations, geographies, and jurisdictions, thus incorporating the perspectives of more than one source, which strengthens the reliability and validity of the research through triangulation (Miles et al., 2014, pp. 312-313). Another method that strengthens the confidence of findings is the inclusion of different perspectives, such as validating or nullifying cases, extreme, and deviant cases (Miles et al., 2014, p. 32).

Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection Procedures

As the sole investigator for this study, I conducted the data collection and analysis. Each participant provided one interview, which lasted approximately 60 minutes. This approach was consistent with shorter case studies, in which the researcher relies on open-ended questions and a more conversational approach to interviewing the participants (Yin, 2014, p. 111).

Researchers should record the interviews, at a minimum, with an audio recorder, but should strive to record it with a video recorder. The analysis of the data should extend beyond the spoken word, and it should consider pauses, emphasis of certain words, and body language (Yin, 2011, p. 5). For this study, each interview was recorded, which enabled accurate transcription.

The recruitment plan for this study considered the number of participants by organization, geography, and jurisdiction in order to meet the planned sample size. It

was evident that not all members of the partner organizations met the qualifications for

inclusion in the study, so the organization's leadership identified and coordinated with its

members for the interviews. The study also considered participants from other locations

not from the initial potential sample pool. While the goal was to interview 26

participants, data saturation is a function of data quality and richness, not number of

interviews. For this study, it was more important to have participants with experience

that would allow them to provide informed insights than to have a large sample size.

After finalizing the interviews, it was important to provide a feeling of closure to

the participants. The exiting process was also a valuable opportunity to uncover

additional information that did not surface during the interview. This also allows

participants to have the last word (Yin, 2014, p. 140). The exit approach also included a

reassertion of the confidentiality of the interview and a discussion of the participant's

availability for any follow-on interviews. Finally, each participant was thanked for their

role in advancing knowledge in the field of radicalization and offered them, as well as the

partner organization an opportunity to receive an abstract of the study once completed, or

a presentation of findings and recommendations.

Data Analysis

Qualitative inquiry can generate a large amount of data from a variety of sources,

such as interviews, documents, records, and media. Depending on the volume and the

variety of sources, analysis can become a daunting process. There is more than one

coding method, each with a particular purpose.

Regardless of the research design, qualitative researchers should articulate the problem, establish the purpose of the study, and then develop questions that enable them to collect data that capture the essence of the problem from the perspective of those who experienced it. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative inquiry usually has a central question from which other questions evolve (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, pp. 87-88). The arrangement of a problem statement grounded in the literature informs the line of questioning, thus preventing a disjointed approach in the study. For this study, the suggested gap in the literature helped develop the main research question: what are the factors that influence the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists.

Qualitative approaches do not have a set approach for data analysis, so researchers decide on their method base on their experience and the purpose of the study. The basic qualitative analysis methods are memo writing, categorizing by themes (coding), and connecting strategies (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105). This study relied on coding for analyzing the data, employing content directed coding using the broad categories of the conversion theory to develop initial code categories. This led to first cycle coding, specifically using In Vivo coding, in which codes key phrases or words from the raw data helped visualize the emergence of themes and patterns. This approach is suitable for less experienced researchers and for studies that emphasize participant's words and perspectives. The next step was second cycle coding to identify emerging patterns and themes (Miles et al., 2014). Second cycle coding involves reassembling of the codes or labels into clusters or themes, followed by the interpretation and drawing conclusions (Yin, 2011, p. 176).

Data analysis benefited from qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), specifically Atlas TI, version 7. This software assisted with data storage and access, tracking of completed and ongoing analysis, and retention of records at the completion of the study. Atlas TI also helps condense transcribed field notes and compare them during the coding process. It also displays codes and data in graphic form, which is helpful for organizing data when conducting longitudinal or multi-site studies. This Windows-based application helps organize non-numeric data, such as interviews, field observations, literature reviews, Internet content, surveys, and audiovisual files. It also helps identify subtle relationships among the emerging concepts and themes. (Miles et al., 2014, p. 182). Data was stored the data on an external hard drive, which has password and encryption protection.

The analysis process requires a deliberate approach to gain the acceptance of the study's findings. This includes a continuous checking of the data, a thorough assessment of the analysis to ensure its comprehensiveness, and the recognition of any biases that could cloud the interpretation of the data (Yin, 2011, p. 177). It is also essential to seek any rival explanations, or discrepant cases, that could provide rival explanations for the findings. This involves an iterative review of assumptions, an assessment of participants' responses to questions in order to rule out reflexivity, and a review of the data to ensure it is a true representation of reality, not the researcher's interpretation (Yin, 2011, p. 80). Case study researchers should seek to understand the participant's perspective while minimizing their intervention in the process outside of the collection of data (Unluer,

2012, p. 9). Scholarly research requires transparency and clarity that strengthens it

trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research provides rich and valuable insights that help understand

events and phenomena from the perspective of those who experience them. This

methodology does not have the controls common with quantitative inquiry, which limit

the influence of researchers and participants. Qualitative researchers should strive to

imbue their studies with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to

improve the acceptance of their findings among the scholarly community.

Researchers should establish high levels of validity and reliability that clearly

demonstrates the value of their empirical findings if they want to contribute to solving

social problems. A possible threat to validity involves in the introduction of researcher

bias into the findings by interpreting the data according a particular paradigm or

perspective (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). Researchers should focus on establishing that their

findings are a true representation of the data, by clarifying participant perspectives,

maintaining accurate records, and through triangulation (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, pp.

131-132). Another approach to ensure the validity of the findings is to consider

alternative explanations for the observed phenomena. Researchers should not ignore

discrepant data; they should include it in their discussion and findings even if it does not

support their conclusions (Miles et al., 2014, p. 313).

The various sources of information provided triangulation through the

incorporation of various perspectives and source on the issue and improved the reliability

and validity of the research (Miles et al., 2014, pp. 312-313). I strived to remain open to contradictory perspectives, recognizing personal bias and preconceptions, and remaining consistent in the gathering and analysis of the data.

This study focused on the perspectives of law enforcement officials from various geographies and jurisdictions, in order to contribute to the advancement of empirical knowledge in the field of radicalization. It was critical therefore, to establish its external validity to determine if the findings were analytically generalizable to other situations and not just this particular case (Yin, 2015, p. 40). One strategy for ensuring the external validity of findings is by developing a thick description of the nature of the study's subject matter (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, p. 133). For this study, participant selection and data collection approaches yielded an in-depth understanding of the radicalization process of U.S. homegrown terrorists from the perspectives of law enforcement officers at the local and state levels, as well as military antiterrorism officials, and security personnel, thus satisfying the requirements for transferability or external validity.

Reliability relates to the consistency of data collection and analysis that demonstrate quality processes and integrity of the researcher (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312). In qualitative research, the lack of consistency in data collection and analysis could discredit the study's findings (O'Sullivan, Rassel, & Berner, 2008, p. 111). Researchers should be mindful to use the same criteria for coding raw data throughout the research (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, p. 132). It is reasonable to expect adjustments during and after data collection, but in order to minimize threats to validity, researchers should assess the consistency of their methods before data analysis (O'Sullivan et al., 2008, p.

117). Testing for reliability is also an iterative process. For example, if the data shows

comparable findings across different sources, then the collection and analysis should be

reliable (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312). Other approaches also include the collection of

sufficient data to reach saturation and the development of a meticulous audit trail to

facilitate other researchers to retrace the investigation's steps and potentially reach the

same findings (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, p. 133).

Qualitative researchers should strive to imbue their study with a high level of

confirmability, and minimize the influence that their personal views, prejudices, and bias

might have on the collection and analysis of data. This would allow others to replicate

their research and confirm their findings. They do so by providing an explicit description

of their methodology, a clear explanation of data collection and analysis, consideration of

discrepant cases or explanations, and by being transparent about how their views might

have influenced their findings (Miles et al., 2014, pp. 311-312). This study had the

required features to ensure confirmability. Chapter 4 (Findings) and Chapter 5

(Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations) established a link between the

interpretation of finding and conclusions, and relied heavily on the perspectives of the

participants, which is consistent with accepted confirmability strategies in qualitative

research (Cope, 2014, p. 89).

Ethical Procedures

Federal law requires institutions that receive federal grants for research involving

human subjects to minimize risks to human research participants, establishing a balance

between the benefit of the research versus the risk to the subject. Researchers must

justify the essential need to use human participants; assure participants of their safety and minimize risk; and conduct their study fairly and transparently. Participants must be volunteers, must provide informed consent, and reserve the right to refuse to participate in the study at any time. Finally, researchers must protect the confidentiality of the data, as well as the anonymity of participants unless they provide their consent (Mandal & Parija, 2011, p. 55). This study incorporated all those features.

Ethical standards require that researchers treat human subjects with respect by obtaining informed consent and upholding the voluntary nature of their participation. Researchers must also ensure that the benefits of their study outweigh the potential harm, and should strive to minimize any harm to the participant (beneficence). Researchers must assure the IRB that the research has a valid purpose (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, pp. 313-314) as well as proving that participant selection supports the purpose of the study, and that convenience or accessibility was the sole basis for their selection (O'Sullivan et al., 2008, p. 252).

A significant concern involving qualitative research is ensuring the confidentiality of data. Threats to confidentiality involve potential disclosure of sensitive information or unauthorized access to the data through breaches of the database (Pope, 2015, p. 348). In order to protect the data, the encrypted files were stored them in a separate external hard drive. The identity of the participants was protected by only using initials and avoiding specifying their specific work location.

Summary

This qualitative case study aimed to derive empirical data that could shed a better understanding of the process that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists based on current radicalization research, and interviews with local law enforcement officials, state counterterrorism officers, military anti-terrorism officers, and security personnel from locations in eastern North Carolina. Case study research was appropriate because it helps develop an in-depth understanding of the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists from the perspectives of individuals who are familiar with the concept. The study population for this study was a purposive sample of individuals knowledgeable in the radicalization, counterterrorism, and antiterrorism fields from cities from eastern North Carolina.

The study called for interviews with 26 participants. Interviews containing open-ended questions yielded valuable insights and fidelity. This qualitative case relied on In Vivo coding for first cycle coding, which identifies key phrases, or words from the raw data that helped identify themes and patterns (second cycle coding). Data analysis relied on the use of computer assisted CAQDAS. This software assisted with data storage and access, as well as tracking of completed and ongoing analysis. This study contained credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability necessary to improve the acceptance of its findings and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of radicalization. Finally, the study complied with established ethical standards and ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. .

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to derive empirical data to better

understand the process that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists and

to apply the religious conversion theory as a model for understanding the radicalization

of U.S. homegrown terrorists. I incorporated data from current radicalization research

and interviews with law enforcement officials at the local and state levels with gang or

counterterrorism experience, as well as AT officers and security personnel from military

installations in Eastern North Carolina. I sought to identify the factors that contribute to

the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists, potential intervention approaches from

the perspective of the participants, and how would a modification of the conversion

theory serve to explain the radicalization of U. S. homegrown terrorists. This chapter

includes the perspectives of the study participants on the factors that lead to the

radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists, based on their experience and training. It

has five sections: demographics and data collection, data analysis, evidence of

trustworthiness, results, and summary.

Demographics and Data Collection

Participants for this study included eight local police officers with experience in

gang investigations from four different local law enforcement agencies, two of which had

Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) experience. Other participants included five AT

officers from two military installations, two with prior federal counterterrorism

experience with DHS and the United States Secret Service, and one with previous JTTF

experience. The next group included nine military installation security officers, five of

them civilian and four uniformed. The last participant was a state-level counterterrorism investigator. Data collection occurred over 9 weeks. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and took place at the participants' work place, after they read and signed their informed consent form. There were no follow-up interviews. Each interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder. To ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity, their names appear only on the informed consent form and at the beginning of the interview recording, but not on the transcript. Data were stored in an encrypted and password-protected external hard drive.

The recruitment plan for this study included the number of participants each organization, geography, and jurisdiction in order to meet the planned sample size of 26. Partner organization leaders assisted in the identification of qualified study participants. The plan included contingencies to recruit participants from other locations aside from the initial potential sample pool. The goal was to include at least two law enforcement officers with counterterrorism and AT experience from police departments in the cities of Goldsboro, Fayetteville, and Jacksonville. I also included two AT officers from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, Camp Lejeune, and Fort Bragg; three federal officers; and five state officers.

After engaging with the various organizations to solicit participation in the study, it became evident that it was not feasible to recruit participants from the FBI or Camp Lejeune. It was likewise impractical to interview local police officers currently collaborating with the JTTF. Overall, the participant pool consisted of 23 participants. At the local level, the emphasis shifted to law enforcement officials with gang experience

because gang members usually undergo a similar radicalization process, and an

understanding of gangs can provide insights into radicalization and extremism (Decker &

Pyrooz, 2015). Members of the Cumberland County Sherriff's Office, as well as civilian

police, and military security forces from military installations were also included. Seven

participants had experience with federal counterterrorism agencies, such as the

Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the FBI, United States Secret Service, or

JTTF; one of the participants worked at the state level. The interviews were a

straightforward affair; there were no unusual circumstances during the interactions.

Some of the local police officers expressed concerns that they would not be able to

contribute to the research because of their lack of involvement in counterterrorism

investigations, but felt more confident after explaining the similarities between the

radicalization dynamics of gang members and individuals who embrace extremism.

Data Analysis

In this qualitative case study, I sought to derive empirical data that could shed a

better understanding of the process that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown

terrorists and to apply the religious conversion theory as a model for understanding

radicalization. I also incorporated data from current radicalization research.

The coding process included content-directed coding using the broad categories of

the conversion theory to develop initial code categories. This led to first cycle coding,

using in Vivo coding, in which codes, key phrases, or words from the raw data helped

visualize the emergence of themes and patterns. The next step was second cycle coding

to identify emerging patterns and themes (Miles et al., 2014). Second cycle coding

involves reassembling the codes or labels into clusters or themes, followed by the interpretation and drawing conclusions (Yin, 2011, p. 176).

The analysis process began with the transcription of the interviews, using Atlas TI to highlight key statements and words the participants shared and placing them into categories. The initial codes for the study were counterterrorism experience and training, definition of homegrown terrorism, the group that represented the greatest threat, individual factors, environmental factors, crisis, access to extremist propaganda, countering extremist propaganda, and point of no return. During the initial coding and analysis, it became apparent that the initial sets of codes were insufficient to capture the perspectives of the participants, leading to the addition of motivation.

Counterterrorism Experience and Training

Mastors and Siers (2014) identified the lack of a robust body of empirical research on the radicalization process as a contributing factor in the understanding this phenomenon. In order to overcome this shortfall, the participants in this study included law enforcement officials at the local and state levels with counterterrorism or gang experience and AT officers and security personnel from military installations. It was important to ascertain the participants' training and experience to establish their qualifications for participation in the case study. Although there are differences between counterterrorism and AT operations, involvement in both require collaboration with organizations dedicated to protect life and property against acts of terror and imbue the individual with knowledge of terrorist operations and threats.

Definition of Homegrown Terrorism

The first step in solving a problem is defining it. One of the challenges associated with addressing the threat of homegrown terrorism is finding a comprehensive definition that incorporates its varied dynamics. Such a definition would allow counterterrorism and AT stakeholders to develop and implement effective initiatives to attack the source of extremist socialization. It could also help develop strategies to inoculate the population, especially those who are more susceptible to such propaganda, from internalizing these messages and going down the path of radicalization.

Group That Represented the Greatest Threat

This code incorporated participant perspectives of the greatest homegrown terrorist or extremist threat. Their experience and training provides a lens through which they assess the threat. This perspective is important because it relates to individual factors, environmental factors, the manner in which they access extremist propaganda, and the development of effective counter propaganda efforts. Extremist and terrorist groups have different objectives and modes of operation.

Individual Factors

This code relates to the context stage of the conversion model and the first research question (What individual and environmental factors contribute to the radicalization of U. S. homegrown terrorists?). It includes beliefs, motivations, aspirations, experiences, and perspectives that could make an individual susceptible to radicalization. Extremists exploit these factors to recruit and indoctrinate supporters.

Environmental Factors

This code also relates to the context stage of the conversion model, and the first research question (what individual and environmental factors contribute to the radicalization of U. S. homegrown terrorists?). It includes associations, relationships, or networks that could make the individual susceptible to radicalization. When coupled with individual factors, environmental factors influence the way individuals approach crisis.

Crisis

This code relates to the crisis stage of the conversion model and the first research question (What individual and environmental factors contribute to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists?). Crisis could result from a traumatic episode or from a series of setbacks. Regardless of its source, it could precipitate an individual's loss of emotional or moral balance, sense of purpose, or self-worth, leading him or her to seek an ideology or outlook in an effort to regain what was lost.

Access to Extremist Propaganda

This code relates to the quest, encounter, and interaction stages of the conversion model, and the second research question (What form of intervention would be effective to curtail radicalization?). It refers to the source from which individuals might access extremist rhetoric, ideology, and messages that could lead them along the radicalization path. An understanding of this function could inform counter propaganda efforts.

Countering Extremist Propaganda

This code relates to the second research question (what form of intervention would be effective to curtail radicalization?). Participants shared recommendations on approaches that could prove effective in countering the effects of extremist messaging or propaganda. It could include individuals or entities that could influence an individual progressing along the radicalization continuum.

Motivation

This code includes participant perspectives on conditions that might prompt individuals to become radicalized or join an extremist organization. The insights related to this code are significant for addressing these issues in comprehensive counter propaganda initiatives. It relates to the context and crisis stages of the conversion theory and informs the second research question (what form of intervention would be effective to curtail radicalization?).

Point of no Return

This code relates to the commitment and consequences stages of the conversion model, as well as the third research question (how would a modification of the conversion theory serve to explain the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists?). The point of no return is the point in which efforts to stem the advance of an individual along the radicalization continuum become ineffective.

Results

The radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists is a complex phenomenon with significant public policy and social implications. In this study, I sought to address several

gaps in the understanding of radicalization. The first gap was an insufficient understanding of how individual and social factors influence radicalization (Kleinmann, 2012). The second gap was the lack of a comprehensive model for analyzing radicalization (Ferguson & Binks, 2015, p. 21). These shortfalls in knowledge have significant implications in terms of developing effective approaches to curtail radicalization and stem the growth of homegrown terrorism.

In following section, I will discuss participant qualifications for involvement in the study, their definitions of homegrown terrorism, and their perspectives on the greatest threat to national security. I will then address each of this study's research questions. Each research question section incorporated the responses to each relevant code.

Experience and Training

Of the 23 participants, 15 had military experience. All participants working on military installations had AT training, a yearly requirement for Department of Defense employees. All five participants serving as installation AT officers had military experience with deployments in support of combat operations. Although I was unable to interview anyone who currently worked with the FBI JTTF, at least three local law enforcement participants had prior experience working with the JTTF. The other local police officers were working with, or had experience, with the gang investigative unit. A review of the background of the participants validated that they had the experience and training to have informed perspectives on extremist organizations, the main source of homegrown violent extremists or terrorists. Their current or past duties exposed them to information on extremists' goals, recruiting efforts, and indoctrination. Overall, the

collective experience of these participants allowed them to provide rich data to inform radicalization.

Defining Homegrown Terrorism

Participants shared their personal definitions of homegrown terrorism to establish context to their perspectives. They also provided views on the groups that represented the greatest threat. Participants provided a wealth of views to this question. Several military installation AT officers alluded to the difficulties in defining this phenomenon. DM stated, "it's hard to define," while BB argued that "it gets convoluted depending on who you talk to." CF added, "it's something you can't predict, it's not traceable, there's no threat stream."

Other definitions were more comprehensive, such as AA's, whose response was "a United States citizen radicalized in the prison system, returning to the street, and looking for their self or purpose." PL referred to "anyone from within the country who changed their philosophy from being pro-America to being anti-American in some form or another." SN added, "someone who has been radicalized that goes against what we perceive as the norms of American society." NK provided a more nuanced definition. In his view "a homegrown violent extremist deals with a radical ideology that has roots with a foreign terrorist organization, but they're not a card-carrying member, nor do they take tactical direction [from that organization]." AM indicated, "I think of a lone wolf; an individual, probably not even born and raised in the United States, and brought up in the formative years." DK suggested,

Someone who lives in America, may be a naturalized citizen, someone who calls

America home for a period of time, but doesn't agree with American policy,

turned their back on western civilization and start to believe in extremist efforts to

overthrow that policy.

RR referred to "a U.S. based person; might be a citizen, might not be a citizen, they

commit a criminal act to further their agenda, be that political or religious." BB

contributed that "most of them don't have a connection with an external source." These

definitions are consistent with Bjelopera' s definition.

Some participants clarified the ideological differences among homegrown

terrorists. SS stated, "it's not just Islamic terrorism, it can be secular, or Christian," while

DK added that "there's extremism in just about every religion; Christians fire-bomb

abortion clinics, anarchists who don't believe in standing government attack federal

buildings." JS contributed that a homegrown terrorist "believes that the government is

out of control, it has too much control, too much power, they are money hungry and don't

care about the citizens." CW stated, "homegrown terrorism comes from a person's

personal choice to accept an ideology that matches their views."

Greatest Threat

Regarding the group that represents the greatest threat to security in the United

States, 12 respondents placed Islamic-motivated individuals on top of the list. Sovereign

citizen and criminal gangs were the second most assessed greatest threat. Insider threats

and religion-motivated individuals (regardless of faith) were at the bottom of the list. It

was evident that the participants' background influenced their definition of homegrown terrorists and threat assessments.

Research Question 1

This section includes relevant codes that help address the dynamics that could lead individuals to become radicalized. They are individual factors, environmental factors, crisis, motivations, and access to extremist propaganda. Their placement follows the order of the radicalization stages according to the conversion theory. The combined effects of individual and environmental factors generate a crisis and motivate them to embrace extremism. Participant perspectives were generally consistent with the findings in the literature.

Individual Factors

Participants identified 58 individual factors they considered made individuals susceptible to radicalization. An analysis of the cited factors generated three narrower categories: self-worth, maturity, and cognitive development. This is consistent with second cycle coding (Yin, 2011, p. 176).

Self-worth. The self-worth category included themes such as hopelessness, lack of self-worth, low self-esteem, and lack of purpose or belonging. As BB stated, "People that don't see that my life means anything" and "I think its self-worth starts and isolationism compounds it." PL added, "they no longer value themselves individually." SN contributed, "lack of self-worth, purpose, belonging." EH considered that individuals who embrace radicalization lost hope.

Maturity. Specific factors related to maturity included mental capacity,

misguided, ease of persuasion, weak-mindedness, malleability, and ease of influence. BB noted,

> We have kids that get on computers continually. It has also degraded our maturity levels. That's why you see people in the age groups of 20s to 30s susceptible to influences outside of the main church, state, family; because they are not at the maturity level you would expect a 25-year-old to be at.

> JS commented, "they have no impulse control, no concept of the consequences for their actions."

Cognitive development. Closely related to maturity, cognitive development might also influence the adoption of radical ideologies. Participant responses included lack of education and psychological events that alter thought processes. From DM's perspective, "some people do not have the mental intestinal fortitude to stand up for a strong belief system and are easily swayed." BG suggested of individuals who embrace extremism, "most of them are not fully educated," indicating a poor of understanding of what they are doing. SN considered, "an individual with lower education and working a minimum wage job as being more susceptible to being radicalized."

Environmental factors

Another condition that might influence radicalization is the environment that surrounds the individual. While individual factors relate to the individual's personal background, environmental factors have to do with their upbringing, their associations, and their support network. Participants identified 76 environmental factors they estimated influenced radicalization, organized under categories such as positive

reinforcement, reactions, family life, and community support. Several participants

clarified that while certain environmental factors might make individuals susceptible to

radicalization, there are no "cookie cutter" answers regarding environmental factors;

people react differently to similar situations. Their perspectives were generally consistent

with the findings in the literature.

Positive reinforcement. Participants observed that individuals without positive

support groups and reinforcement, who lacked structure, and felt the need for affiliating

with individuals with similar views, seem more apt to embrace radicalism. BB stated,

"we want to talk to people, we want people to be like us, we want to have friends," which

coincides with CC's view that "we tend to cling to people that we have stuff in common."

This need for support allows extremists to recruit and indoctrinate followers. DD

explained that extremists bring newcomers into their fold, show them that they are part of

the family, "and once they're in that comfort zone, they feel like family, you can start

training them to the way you want them to be." DD added that the inclusion of religious

undertones and justification of actions in support of God provide a significant level of

support. PS considered that the new associations provide individuals with "a brotherhood

and somebody cares."

Reactions. In some instances, individuals could embrace radical views as a

reaction to environmental threats, real or perceived. NK asserted that individuals

embrace extremism as a form of opposition to threats by stating, "it all comes down to us

versus them" and "its going to be you and your buddies." Other responses highlighted

reactions to individual's inability to meet their objectives such as "everything he tried, he

failed at", "he got knocked down", or "the other person is a problem or the reason for their problems." Other reasons that study participants discussed involved unfavorable experiences with other environmental elements such as bullying, teasing, negative interactions with law enforcement, or the perception that society pushed them away. These events and experiences lead to a condition that RR explained, "the feeling of low self value and worth that is being manipulated when they're down."

Family life. Study participants identified factors related to the deterioration of family life as significant contributors to radicalization. They identified the disintegration of the family, not having a strong family, the lack of a family structure, individuals detached from their normal family, poor parental involvement with youth, and individuals looking for the support they do not get at home as salient environmental concerns. In general, the lack of strong family bonds might lead individuals to embrace associations to fill that void, a situation that could favor the introduction of external influences. For example, BB stated,

When we grew up, the family was important; you dealt with family on a daily basis; you ate your meals; you did things together. School added to that; it was a partnership. Church also, everyone knew everybody. It's not that way anymore.

SN commented, "if you don't have the structure or support network, you are on your own. It's one of the factors that make inner city youth susceptible to join gangs." From the opposite perspective, family dynamics can serve as a catalyst for the adoption of extremist views. From AM's perspective, "certain ideas could be imprinted, talking around the dinner table, with parents who have an ideology or worldview about certain

cultures of groups of people," so this could lead to an environment in which extremist views pass from one generation to the next. On this topic, CW added, "White supremacists are indoctrinated at an early age; it's a family social group."

Community support. Participants identified factors related to community support during their interviews. Most of them related perspectives of community disengagement. AA talked about individuals who lived outside of the community fold when stating, "but for whatever reason wasn't accepted, didn't feel a sense of community," and that extremists want to "cut off their relationship with their family and community." NK asserted that the risk of radicalization increased "if you're not connected to your community." Family, associations, support networks, and the community all play a role in the socialization of the individual. BB commented, "the actual physical socialization process has been blown completely apart." This could then provide opportunities for other influences, which could lead individuals to embrace extremism, as WH stated, "you are dealing with somebody who don't have someone to sit with them, the influence in their lives, to mentor them."

Additional themes. Other themes that participants suggested included meeting perceived needs and identity, the gang as family, the development of group mentality, and brainwashing. In some instances, as WH stated, "they grow up knowing [or thinking] that theirs is the right way of doing things," not being able to differentiate between right and wrong. These perspectives illustrate the importance that positive support has on the development of an individual's moral code.

Crisis

The combination of individual and environmental factors set the conditions for individuals to undergo a crisis that could potentially lead them to radicalization. Study participants identified 25 events that could potentially lead individuals to a crisis state. Subsets of this code include losses, perceptions, and external triggers. Five participants would not commit to any specific event that could precipitate a crisis because it varies from person to person. DM also alluded to the complex nature of crisis and provided a comprehensive definition:

> It could be a multitude of things; it could be death in the family, it could be abuse, drugs, like I said, in some cases it could be financial factors, or it could be that person who feels like they're lost out there and they are open to any new idea.

> SS noted that it could be a series of events or setbacks, not just one event, that could precipitate a crisis.

Losses. Three participants considered financial losses significant enough to contribute to a loss of purpose or significance. Three others cited personal losses or death of a family member as a crisis-precipitating event. Two other participants indicated that challenges to faith or religious foundation could also contribute to individuals losing their sense of stability and develop a crisis.

Perceptions. There are instances when crisis-generating events result from perceptions. For example, BB asserted that it could relate to the manner in which individuals "interpret and misrepresent information," resulting in a skewed view of the situation. JS's perspective supports this assertion. In his view, individuals might

"believe either the government was doing too much, acting beyond their scope of responsibility and priorities, or were not doing enough." He also felt that individuals "believe they are being held back, being oppressed, and not afforded the same opportunities." JP added that individuals sometimes develop a perception that "[they are] continually getting beat down, not physically, but through society, not getting the job that they want, not getting into the college they want, not being able to make the money they want." These perceptions might lead to a feeling of disenfranchisement, which AA argued, "makes a population that is ripe for recruitment."

External triggers. Another perspective regarding crisis-generating events concerns external triggers, or actions from external entities. According to AM, such an event could be one that "touches me or something to do with me, my family, or my belief, or my religion." Other potential external triggers include discrimination, bullying, or peer pressure. JS also noted how the influence of the environment, by observing that individuals experiencing crisis "grew up in this life." WH proposed that a lack of parental guidance could also precipitate a crisis.

Motivations

Study participants provided insightful perspectives on what motivates individuals to embrace beliefs associated with extremist organizations. This was not a specific question from the data collection protocol, but their responses justified adding this particular theme. The participants identified 63 motivations for joining extremist organizations. They are grouped under the following categories: the need to belong,

grievances, dissatisfaction with status quo, protection or survival, religious zeal, seeking a sense of purpose, thrill seeking, or financial profit.

Need to belong. Study participants identified 13 motivations associated with the need to belong and for acceptance. Among these, the most common motivation is the need to fit in. From DD's view, "they are looking for something or somebody to understand them, nurture them." BB discussed, "Like most gangs, if I get accepted I walk around bolder, and chest popped up a little bit. If I don't get accepted I need to find someone that will accept me." According to JW, "they're looking for something…fit into a society or group, they come to believe that they fit in and started to believe what other person is selling." This perspective suggests that a person can join a group without accepting their beliefs and can embrace them afterwards. The need to fill a void in their lives was the second most identified reason. These answers suggest that individuals find themselves not fitting into their environment and seek ways to fill emotional voids or find acceptance they otherwise do not have, either because they do not have a strong support network at home or because their views are not consistent with the majority. RR alluded to this situation when discussing online forums and discussion groups: "There's an instantaneous gang without even having to be jumped in now." These conditions make individuals who do not have strong support networks susceptible to radicalization.

Grievances. Participants identified 13 grievances that could serve as a motivation for individuals to embrace an extremist ideology or join an extremist group. The most common grievance has to do with revenge or retaliation for actual or perceived wrongs or affronts against a person's culture, ethnicity, or beliefs. Some of these

grievances relate to feelings of distrust against the government. Individuals could be

upset with the police, or perceive a lack of trust in the government and its leaders. For

example, BG stated, "they thought the government was screwing them," while CC

suggested some people develop "resentment against our policies." According to JS,

Sovereign Citizens, "do not trust the government or any symbol of authority." In the case

of white supremacists, they might distrust other ethnicities or races. The last grievance

has to do with feelings of despair. As PS stated, "Somehow they're upset with something

like that and [it] has to be changed; they're trying to show their purpose, you're not

listening to my story my idea. What I want doesn't matter ." At some point, these

grievances become so overwhelming that they could lead individuals to embrace

alternative views that challenge what they view as oppression or injustice. Under the

right conditions, and with the support of others who share similar perspectives, these

feelings could evolve to the need to take action, and in some cases, that action could be

violence.

Dissatisfaction with status quo. Another motivation for embracing opposing,

and oftentimes extremist views, is a deep-rooted dissatisfaction with the current state of

affairs or status quo. Participants identified 12 examples of this motivation, which was

evenly split between anti government views and desires for a better outlook in life. BB

considered how people might feel about the current political situation; "people get

outraged, that's not what I'm about, I don't want to be associated with anybody that is

about that. So how do I disassociate with something?. I move as far away from it as I

can." According to JS, Sovereign Citizens, "they become a sovereign citizen or extremist

as much as they believe they're going to create their own country within the United

States, they don't have to follow the constitution, state laws, federal laws." DM pointed

to the internal conflicts that some individuals might experience and offered,

> A segment of the population is pushing this narrative that America is a bad
>
> country; look what we did to the Indians [Native Americans], we had slavery, we
>
> interned the Japanese during WWII. I love America because it has all these
>
> freedoms, but I hate it because it's tainted. Others might fall victim to extremist
>
> propaganda.
>
> Based on his experience, BB related the themes the message contains
>
> You are hating life right now, your parents suck, they are making you do things
>
> you don't want to do, the world is treating you like crap, you don't have a job, but
>
> here is something that will help you.
>
> CC added, "I belong to something, it might not be perfect but it's far better where

I came from."

Protection or survival. One of the many motivations for individuals to join

extremist groups or gangs is for protection or survival against real or perceived threats.

Study participants identified nine such factors, with all of them pointing to a variety of

threats. BB asserted that "as with gangs, people join them [extremist groups] for

protection in jail. Non radicals might join radicals for the same reason." WH pointed out

that "they don't feel they are being protected, they don't have an identity, somebody is

against them." Individuals victimized by bullies might also turn to gangs for protection,

as WH posited, "you have younger kids, who might be smaller or weaker, and they are

constantly being bullied at school so they look at a protector so to speak, it might be a gang member."

Religious zeal. Religion could influence individuals to embrace extremism. Study participants referred to religion as a mediating factor that could lead individuals to radicalization. MB commented, "a person who is lost and find religion appealing and they could help radicalize them." SN discussed how Major Nidal Hassan, who killed 13 people in Texas in 2007, "was doing it for religious [reasons], maybe not political." From BB's perspective

> Almost all the wars in history have been fought because we had some religious [reason] thrown in and that's what increases the intensity. It's the step that gets them beyond fighting and committing suicide to further their element. Religion is very strong to most people, it's what they hold and latch on to.

> MB provided a keen observation, "a person who is lost and finds religion appealing and they [extremists] could help radicalize them."

Seeking a sense of purpose. A lack of purpose in life was a significant individual factor that made individuals susceptible to radicalization. Participants identified six motivations related to seeking a sense of purpose that drove individuals to embrace extremism. The loss of purpose or significance is also an outcome resulting from a crisis, a major stage within the radicalization process. According to the participants, individuals join extremist groups to find a reason for being, to be remembered, or to contribute to a cause. AM postulated, "they believe what they doing supports a cause…they believe that they are right."

Accessing extremist propaganda

As stated previously, individuals who have the right combination of individual and environmental factors are susceptible to the influence of extremist propaganda. They might encounter it before or after a crisis, but in any case, accessing this material, under the right conditions, can lead individuals to become radicalized. Interviewees shared their views on the means by which individuals access extremist materials. While they identified the Internet and news media as the most prevalent means, they also discussed other alternative means. Their perspectives were generally consistent with the literature, but some participants shared views that the literature did not address.

Internet and social media. The majority of participants pointed to the Internet and social media as the main source for individuals to access extremist propaganda. According to SS,

> Those individuals, you can monitor whatever you want to monitor, but frankly if they are holed up in their room with their computer, accessing this stuff, radicalizing themselves, looking for things using search engines, and you know how search engines work, you already accessed a few sites, they'll steer them to other sites.

Extremist organizations have become quite adept at leveraging the power of the Internet and social media to share their messages. NK commented, "[extremist group] spokespeople are very charismatic and speak the language; they're hitting up any platform you could think of." RR expanded on this perspective,

I can sit in my room and be online with like-minded people that are in the same negative world," while also acknowledging that extremists do not rely solely on the Internet and social media to spread their message by pointing to "the media outlets, TV, video games.

According to JS, extremists are developing ways to protect their messages " [they use] twitter and there is something that they were posting within the message that let you know that it was a trusted source and you could go to a different page or link on the Internet to find what message they were trying to put out."

News media. The media, such as news and other commercial broadcasting methods contribute to the dissemination of messages that generate or exacerbate the crisis state and influence the path to radicalization. These messages have a socializing effect on the individual. DM provided an interesting perspective by stating, "news organizations that are sending out conflicting images and information so people don't know who to trust" and expanding further by postulating that the media has propagated a "narrative that America is a bad country." BB also asserted the influence of media, "the biggest influence individuals have in their daily lives is the TV and Internet." Other means according to BG include "charismatic speakers…you hear the right thing and eventually you're going to drift away nobody's going to pull you back." SN added, "there has to be a network somewhere be it someone providing them with information to turn them, someone who is providing material resources, or training." EH alluded to the fact that the messages are "being reinforced continuously."

Other means. The Internet and the news media are not the only ways that individuals use to access extremist propaganda. Participants suggested that personal contact and "word of mouth" have in radicalization. This is especially important when considering captive populations such as individuals in prison, those who live in gang-infested communities, or those who grow up in families where they receive constant extremist indoctrination. Other forms of media, like music and music videos serve as socializing vehicle, especially among gang members and white supremacists.

These statements illustrate the importance of the Internet and social media as a preferred means to propagate extremist messages, but also point to other means of disseminating extremist propaganda. From BB's perspective, "individual contact I think is the biggest one, and then it gets followed on with Internet and media anywhere in the world where you can find the information you seek." AM argued that the media plays an important role in spreading extremist propaganda by stating, "the media is that gateway; it drives me to the underground Internet to find those blogs, those websites to seek out information." At least eight participants expressed that the media, whether in television or print, played a significant role in the dissemination of extremist messages. One participant stated that the 24-hour news cycle and the constant exposure to terrorist attacks made it so that "they don't have to search; it's all over the news." Another participant indicated that the news media "repackaged the [terrorists'] message." Five participants opined that personal contact was also an effective means to access propaganda. Three mentioned radicalization in prison as the initial access point for radicalization, while one referred to music and concerts for spreading extremism.

Research Question 2

This section includes participants' proposals regarding intervention strategies to prevent individuals from advancing along the radicalization process. In response to this question, participants identified 41 efforts. The most commonly suggested approaches were the creation of doubt among at-risk individuals regarding the validity of their extremist ideology, leveraging former extremists, and greater community involvement. Their perspectives were generally consistent with the findings in the literature.

Creating doubt

Participants suggested the implementation of strategies that create doubt in the mind of individuals who might be at risk for radicalization, or who are already advancing on this path, by exposing them to the unvarnished reality of the path they considered embarking upon. DM argued, "Something has to happen that makes them question their new ideology." In this regard, DK proposed, "It's almost like that scared straight kind of thing and putting into them to fear what they can become what can happen to them if they could do a down that path." CF recommended showing them "showing what the ground-level guys are dealing with," which could create, according to SS, "doubts about what he was doing." With a more radical approach, BB argued for, "showing when we get their videos of chopping off heads and burning them in cages, and we broadcast that, tell me how this is a civilized and peaceful religion?"

Leveraging former extremists

Closely related to this strategy, was the collaboration with former extremists or gang members to engage individuals and share their experiences in an effort to dissuade

them from following in their footsteps. DM suggested, "someone who might have been going down the radicalization process, get that counter message, causes them to question that direction they're going, you can turn them around." BB considered, "get some of these people who were on this path, that did break that cycle and get the word out there." SS suggested leveraging "a former gang member who knows their language and understands exactly what they are going through."

Greater community involvement

Participants suggested that greater community involvement was critical to the implementation of effective intervention approaches. This includes the creation of positive interactions with various community stakeholders, such as youth or community programs, law enforcement, and religious entities, which could provide an alternative view to that of extremists. DK suggested, "reintroduce them into the community and show them that what you're preaching and reading and believing…they're pulling the wool over their eyes that's not what America is about." One specific program in this category originated with a local police department, which staged interventions for convicted felons when they started to stray away back to their former ways. JP described the program:

> We give them job opportunities, places that accept convicted felons to work there, we have a priest or pastor come in so they have someone to speak to, will have their family members there to show them how it's impacting their life, it's hurting you, and their kids.

The police department had conducted only one such intervention so there was no feedback available, but it illustrates how stakeholders are leveraging all the local resources at their disposal to reintegrate individuals into the community and give them a sense of value and purpose.

Participants also proposed the introduction of mentorship programs to provide individuals with productive guidance to help them address their daily challenges. BB recommended,

> You have to get somebody who they will listen to and respect to tell them that is not the life. The moderate Muslims of America need to come to the aid of troubled youth on the path of self-destruction. If it's somebody that can talk or at least reach out to somebody logically then they have a chance of not going down that road.

JS argued that it does not need to be elaborate: "it might be time, to sit down and talk to them, and listen to them, and tell them that things aren't as bad as they think," while PS argued that it might just entail "having somebody to talk to. Is understanding the reasons why this person's going down that path what makes them do that." Greater community involvement rests on the collaboration of a variety of community stakeholders. The most referenced stakeholder, from interviewees' perspective, is the family. They advocated for greater parental engagement as well as collaboration with other stakeholders. From RR's vantage point, "the first place to start is within the home." Other stakeholders include religious leaders, mentors, or anyone who can influence individuals and provide a different perspective, an alternative to extremism.

Participants also advocated for greater involvement from local government officials and agencies. NK proposed,

> In the UK they tried to integrate social services, medical services; the softer stuff that's not a sexy. I believe that there are some softer entities and approaches in addition to law enforcement efforts. There are some economic factors that cause people to become isolated. The softer items are shown to be contributing factors that lead to radicalization. The holistic approach it's a must.

These perspectives underscore the importance of involving as many community stakeholders in countering extremism.

Challenges

In spite of the best intentions and efforts of law enforcement and community stakeholders, the implementation of programs aimed at countering extremist propaganda and ideologies faces tangible challenges. Participants identified challenges in the implementation of counter extremist efforts. The most commonly discussed challenges were ineffective government responses and difficulty in recognizing indicators.

Ineffective government responses. The most commonly cited challenge was ineffective government responses to extremist propaganda. An important feature of any information-based effort is the delivery of the message to the target audience in a manner that influences their behavior. These programs must consider local dynamics. Cities in the west coast will generally present different demographics and even climate than cities in the Midwest or Southeast part of the United States. Likewise, small towns are quite different from big cities. According to the participants, existing counter propaganda

efforts are not reaching the individuals at the local level. As NK noted, "messages don't resonate with those at the community level, they are not engaging at the hometown level" and DM also stated, "[the message} is not reaching to the bottom where it needs to be." The communicator also influences the effectiveness of the message. From BG's perspective, "if it isn't someone close to you, you're not going to listen." EH added, "what I say might resonate with a very small segment; there are target audiences that will not hear me. One I am a law enforcement officer, two, I am a middle-aged white guy."

Difficulty in recognizing indicators. It is difficult to intervene without the recognition of indicators. Some people might see some signs, but fail to put them in context. SN suggested, "people around them, family members, don't see it, well they did see, but they didn't realize they did until afterwards." These conditions highlight the complexity of the problem. In addition, because they usually operate in small numbers and do not coordinate directly with terrorist organizations, radicalized individuals or homegrown terrorists present a small signature that could give away to their intentions. BG suggested, "they're going to choose to stay off the radar," while SS cautioned, "the biggest challenge is probably going to be these individuals who show no patterns. There are some individual factors here that aren't going to fit that model and those are the individuals who are going to slip through the cracks." MB argued, "unless they're trying to lead or are outspoken, homegrown violent extremists are hard to find." It is important then, for family members, friends, and the community to engage with at-risk individuals to be able to identify changes in behavior that could signal their conversion to extremism.

Research Question 3

While participants' experience and training allowed them to provide a wealth of perspectives regarding factors that could influence radicalization and possible intervention approaches, they were not familiar with the conversion theory and the radicalization model. It would not have been appropriate to elicit their recommendations on how to modify it, since they would not have been able to provide informed perspectives.

Feedback on conversion model

Several participants however, provided unsolicited assessments of how the model depicted the progression along the radicalization continuum. CC and SS indicated that they liked how the model captured the radicalization process. DD added, "This is a good model, I haven't seen it laid out like this but I do like this." CF stated, "I think your model is fantastic," while JP expressed, "I think the model does a really good job."

Point of no return

Although they had limited exposure to the radicalization model, participants provided their perspectives regarding the point of no return in terms of radicalization, which is an implied point within the radicalization continuum. Eight participants argued that the point of no return is near the commitment stage of the conversion model. Based on this perspective, once individuals reach this level, rehabilitation will be difficult. AA argued, "I like looking at breaking the cycle, but first if you don't recognize it, you go past the point of no return and we have a real problem." BB offered,

I think you have to get to them before they decide on taking action, but it is

extremely hard to tell when they get to that point. We have to break the pattern,

but once the individual determines or reaches the final point, you aren't stopping

it. We have to determine what the individual is thinking.

Juxtaposing this perspective, eight other participants stated that there is not a

point of no return; radicalized individuals can come back from the brink of radicalization

at any stage. For example, JP stated, " there really isn't a point of no return unless they

kill themselves," while JS asserted, "for gangs, at any given point in their lives, there's

got to be that break, [a] catalyst, [a] reason they want to get out." On this topic, AA

stated, "you can get someone to the boiling point, but cannot stay there forever." This

might suggest that there are no hard answers to this question, and that it varies according

to the individual. Finally, seven participants considered that reaching the point of no

return depends on certain conditions. DE and DK thought that varied among individuals.

Three other participants considered that individuals reach the point of no return if they

decide to take action, justify their use of violence, or had already engaged in violent

behavior. The remaining two participants argued that it is possible to bring back

individuals from the point of no return only if the incentives override their commitment.

EH proposed, "without a defining moment forcing that person to see they've gotten to the

lowest point but they could go, they don't self-actualize and realize I'm not going to have

a long life with this." The factors that make extrication from the radicalization process

difficult, and could ultimately lead to violence, are worthy of analysis because they could

inform deradicalization efforts.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research seeks to develop an understanding of complex events or phenomena eliciting the perspectives of participants with robust knowledge of the subject matter. While this methodology does not feature controls imbedded in quantitative inquiry, qualitative researchers should establish high levels of validity and reliability that clearly demonstrates the value of their empirical findings in order to add to the existing body of knowledge in the given discipline, and more importantly, contribute to the solution of pressing social problems. Maxwell (2013) postulated that the introduction of researcher bias into the data collection and analysis threatens the validity of the study's findings (p. 124). Qualitative researchers can imbue their studies with procedures to ensure the validity and transferability of their findings to other contexts and that given a similar population other researchers can reach similar results. These procedures include a detailed description of sample population, study settings, and methodology; the inclusion of robust description of the findings; and conclusions are consistent with other sources (triangulation) (Miles et al. 2014, pp. 312-314).

In order to achieve a high level of validity, each participant was assessed in order to determine that they possessed the requisite knowledge and experience to provide informed perspectives on radicalization. The planned sample population included local law enforcement with experience with counterterrorism operations, acquired through collaboration with the FBI's JTTF. This proved to be unfeasible since the FBI limits their agents and other collaborating law enforcement officials' participation in research given the sensitivity of their investigations. This resulted in an adjustment in the sample

population to include local law enforcement officers with experience with gang investigation units, because gang members usually undergo a similar radicalization process as terrorists, and understanding gang dynamics offer a different perspective that could shed valuable insights into radicalization and extremism (Decker & Pyrooz, 2015, p. 109).

The participant pool also included military anti terrorism and law enforcement officials, who protect military installations daily against all sorts of threats, to include terrorism. The inclusion of 23 participants from a wide range of jurisdictions with different levels of training and relevant experience provided a significant degree of source triangulation. Finally, the analysis of the data included a rich description of participant perspectives. Their views were captured using In Vivo coding, which helped develop themes and patterns, followed by the reassembling them into clusters or themes, consistent case study protocols (Yin, 2011, p. 176). Finally, throughout the analysis, participant responses were checked against the findings from relevant scholarly research, assessing a high degree of consistency between them.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

This qualitative case study aimed to derive empirical data that can shed a better understanding of the process that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists based on interviews with local law enforcement officials, state counterterrorism officers, and military anti-terrorism officers from locations in eastern North Carolina. The analysis of the data suggested that the participants had the requisite experience and training to provide informed perspectives on the matter of the study. They were able to

provide keen insights into the individual and environmental factors that could predispose individuals to embrace extremist values and beliefs. They were likewise able to offer thoughtful perspectives on events that could lead individuals to a crisis state that could make them susceptible to extremist propaganda and the different motivations that could propel them to extremism. Participants also identified the point at which individuals might have advanced along the radicalization pathway to a point of no return, shared insightful recommendations on how to counter extremist messages, and a number of initiatives aimed at preventing individuals from embracing radicalism.

Two important perspectives emerged during the data collection and analysis. Because of the inability to recruit participants working with the JTTF, the inclusion criteria was adjusted to include local police officers working in gang units. It seems to have been an appropriate adjustment because these officers were able to share a wealth of knowledge on individual and environmental factors, recruitment, and motivations for joining gangs. Current research points to similarities between gangs and extremist movements in terms of reasons for joining, as well as recruitment, and socialization dynamics. Developing an understanding one group can help inform the other.

An unexpected perspective was the referring to the news media as a "gateway" to radicalization. The role of the news media as the initial source of exposure to extremist propaganda that leads individuals to search for more information from the Internet and social media is not addressed in the literature. This might suggest that contrary to research, the Internet and social media are neither the sole nor the most significant means for accessing extremist materials.

These responses provided the data to answer the research questions. They also identified areas for further research. The next chapter will encompass the interpretation of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to derive empirical data to better understand the process that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists and to apply the religious conversion theory as a model for understanding the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists. Silke (as cited in Chermak & Gruenwald, 2015) argued that many scholars relied on literature reviews rather than on original, field-collected data to develop an understanding of terrorism (p. 134). In this study, I incorporated radicalization research and interviews with law enforcement officials at the local and state levels with counterterrorism or gang experience, AT officers, and security personnel from military installations in Eastern North Carolina.

I sought to identify the environmental factors that contribute to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists, the form of intervention that would be effective to curtail radicalization, and how a modification of the conversion theory would serve to explain the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists. The participants provided perspectives on individual and environmental factors that influence the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists, as well as potentially effective intervention strategies to stem the rise of extremism. Their answers also provided insights that aided in the assessment of the conversion theory as a model to understand radicalization. This chapter includes five sections: interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and conclusion. The interpretation of findings is arranged by each of the research questions.

Interpretation of the Findings

Research Question 1

The participants offered a number of perspectives related to the factors that influence radicalization. They acknowledged, however, difficulties in establishing causality between factors and the adoption of extremist behaviors and attitudes because of the complex nature of the problem. Personal relationships and support networks influence the adoption of attitudes, values, belief, and behaviors. Exposure to materials or propaganda alone does not lead to the adoption of new ideological paradigms. Individuals interpret information based on their personal narrative. In the case of extremists, their worldview legitimizes the use of violence to achieve their purposes. Radicalization relies on the convergence of a person's contextual factors (individual and environmental factors), their individual narrative, and the extremist message (Archetti, 2015, p. 54). Alexander (2011) argued that radicalization, recruitment, training, and methods of attacks vary significantly among individuals (p. 475).

Individual factors

One of the identified gaps in the radicalization literature concerns an understanding of how individual and social factors influence radicalization. The internal make-up of individuals, resulting from their life experiences, influences the development of their psychological profile, personality traits, and cognitive development over time (Kleinmann, 2012, p. 283). Unless individuals grow up in an environment that exposes them to extremist imagery and rhetoric, radicalization may occur as the result of a conscious decision to embark in such a journey. It is important to understand how

personal narratives mediate radicalization. Individuals interpret information through lenses shaped by their own views, or narrative. They base their decisions on responding to a call to action to engage in extremist efforts only if they find the message appealing and consistent with their beliefs (Archetti, 2015, p. 55). This justifies the need for considering how individual factors influence radicalization. Participant perspectives yielded three themes: self-worth, maturity, and cognitive development.

Self-worth. The participant proposed that a lack of self-worth, low self-esteem, and a lack of purpose or belonging might make individuals susceptible to recruitment into extremist organizations. These factors are consistent with what Venhaus (as cited in Borum, 2011) called identity and status seekers. Venhaus (as cited in Borum, 2011) suggested that individuals embrace radical ideologies and join extremist organizations to find themselves, their purpose, and a sense of belonging (pp. 26- 27). Pantucci (2011) further suggested that loners or alienated individuals could be co-opted by terrorist organizations, exploiting their desire to belong and contribute to a meaningful cause (p. 3). Costanza (2015) posited that the individuals might be willing to accept extermist interpretations of Islam as a way to gain self-worth, safety, and security in response to a hostile environment (p. 1).

Maturity. Participants identified maturity-related factors that could make individuals susceptible to radicalization. From a psychological perspective, mature individuals should be able to adjust their behaviors to adapt to changes in their environment. This would require the ability to discern between right and wrong (Czernochowski, 2014, p. 124). Simi (2016) postulated that radical groups recruitment

efforts focus on adolescents who do not have the maturity level to understand the ideology to which they were about to enter (p. 60). These factors point to individual traits related to diminished ability to make value judgments between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, and diminished character growth, which increases the potential for individuals to become influenced and adopt extremist views.

Cognitive development. The participants postulated that a lack of education, altered thought processes resulting from psychological events, and weak moral foundations could make individuals easy prey for extremist recruiters. Existing technology, such as television, Internet, and video games might have improved certain forms of cognition among young adults, but at the cost of other skills. Greenfield (as cited in Cavanaugh, Giapponi, & Golden, 2015) argued that multitasking skills, spatial visualization, and divided attention skills might have improved with technology; but, other critical skills such as inductive analysis, critical thinking, and reflection have declined (p. 377). A child's upbringing could also affect his or her cognitive development. Neuroscience researchers suggested a relationship between brain development, genetic makeup, personal experiences, and the environment (Hopkins, Green, & Brookes, 2013, p. 26). Critical thinking skills are essential for individuals to understand the source of their beliefs and to appreciate different points of view, even if they challenge their own. These are acquired skills through reflection (Hibbert, 2012, p. 805).

Environmental factors

   Another condition that might influence radicalization is the environment that

surrounds the individual. Although individual factors relate to the individual's personal

background, environmental factors have to do with his or her upbringing, his or her

associations, and his or her support network. The participants argued that environmental

factors, such as lack of positive reinforcement, reactions to events, family life, and

community support could influence the adoption of extremist beliefs and attitudes. These

views are supported by findings in the literature. Kleinmann (2012) postulated that

groups have a socializing effect on individuals. Friends and family members with radical

views could influence individual radicalization ((Kleinmann, 2012, pp. 284-285).

Archetti (2015) provided a similar argument, in that the nonradical members of the

individuals' family and associations could be instrumental in preventing their advance

towards radicalization. This should be a consideration in the implementation of efforts to

counter extremist propaganda (Archetti, 2015, p. 55).

   Positive reinforcement. The participants observed that individuals lacking

adequate positive support networks that reinforce acceptable values and behaviors are

more likely than not to embrace extremism. These perspectives are consistent with the

findings of Alleyne et al. (2014), who argued that the absence of a support network that

exposes individuals to acceptable values makes them more susceptible to negative

influences that lead to moral disengagement. According to Bandura's (1986) social

cognitive theory, moral disengagement explains social and antisocial behavior. Bandura

argued that individuals develop the moral constraints that inhibit inhuman behavior and

facilitate humanity; but, to overcome conflicts in the presence of immoral behavior, they apply moral disengagement techniques. Gangs also apply moral disengagement to socialize its members to engage in violence (Alleyne et al., 2014, p. 753). Furthermore, Simi et al. (2016) found that individuals joining extremist movements were attracted the group's reputation and sought to improve their personal standing and significance. These groups offered the type of support that enables individuals to easily adopt extremist values and behaviors.

Reactions. According to the participants, individuals could embrace radical views as a reaction to threats, real or perceived. The responses from the study participants were consistent with the findings in the literature. For example, Costanza (2015) argued that political and economic exclusion exacerbates the radicalization problem among youth (p. 1). Hörnqvist and Flyghed (2012) argued that social disengagement, resulting from segregated living conditions or unemployment, could lead to the development of values and mores different from that of society (p. 323). Aly and Striegher (2012) posited that individuals dissatisfied with U.S. foreign policy, or their social or political conditions, might embrace radical views (p. 854).

Family life. From the perspective of study participants, the resulting conditions related to the deterioration of the family are significant contributors to the adoption of radical behaviors. This is consistent with the work of Goldman, Giles, and Hogg (2014) who identified maltreatment, poor family structure, poor parenting, and low attachment between the child and parents as risks factors for gang involvement (p. 816). Costanza (2015) argued that from a young age, individuals grow up learning extremist values and

beliefs through indoctrination at home. The social environment affects their cognitive development and helps to shape their view of the world (Costanza, 2015, p. 1). Hörnqvist and Flyghed (2012) argued that external pressures and poor social integration influence individuals' potential for becoming radicalized (p. 331).

   Community support. The participants identified factors related to community support, especially community disengagement, as contributors to the acceptance of radical views. The level of community engagement and support could be a factor that influences radicalization. In the absence of positive community support, coupled with myriad of individual factors, individuals are susceptible to extremist messaging. Malthaner (2014) suggested the need for considering how the environment in which individuals socialize influences their advance along the path to radicalization (p. 640). Individuals will rely on any source that provides them a sense of belonging and community support. Ongoing competition among social dynamics could correlate to susceptibility towards radicalization. According to Archetti (2015), individuals who embrace extremism find that these views are consistent with their identity and their individual narratives, and they find a support network within these circles.

   When individuals lack certain traits or values, and when their environment does not provide them with the nurturing, support, or positive feedback they crave, they will seek it elsewhere. Extremist organizations capitalize on these weaknesses to recruit and indoctrinate supporters, especially in Western countries. Although there are a variety of individual and environmental factors that influence radicalization, it is difficult to quantify each particular category or establish how each contextual factor influences the

radicalization process, making this an area that could benefit from further research, especially of a quantitative nature.

Crisis

The confluence of individual and environmental factors can lead to a crisis state, in which individuals lose a sense emotional or moral balance resulting from a traumatic episode (Rambo, 1993). The study participants suggested events that could potentially lead individuals to a crisis state, including losses, perceptions, and external triggers. These perspectives are consistent with findings in the literature. McCauley, Moskalenko, and Son (2013) us the term unfreezing to describe sudden changes that result in a personal crisis. These changes could be financial such as loss of employment, threats of physical or emotional nature, or relationship problems. Individuals who lose control and predictability over their lives are more apt to consider sweeping changes in their lives, such as relationships, behaviors, and values, thus embracing a new paradigm in order to gain the control or balance they lost (author, year). Aly and Striegher (2012) discussed a four-phase radicalization model, in which the second phase, self-identification, coincides with the crisis stage of Rambo's model (p. 853). When in the self-identification phase, individuals experience exposure to internal (individual) and external (environmental) triggers, which could include trauma; social disengagement; and discrimination, financial, or economic setbacks.

These events could lead individuals to seek mental or emotional stability by changing significant features in their lives, such as religion, personal significance, relationships, and associations. Participants argued, however, that it is difficult to point

to any event as the cause of a crisis because it varies from person to person. This is consistent with the findings of Aly and Striegher (2012), who found that there is limited evidence to suggest that the presence of crisis-precipitating events could make individuals susceptible to radicalization (pp. 859-860).

Losses. The participants considered financial losses, personal losses, death of a family, or challenges to faith or religious foundation as possible contributors to a loss of purpose or significance that could lead to crisis. This type of crisis is what Rambo (1993) categorized as one that causes individuals to question their life and meaning. Events that could drive individuals to an existential crisis come from a variety of sources. Regardless of its nature, they could affect the mental and emotional stability of individuals, leading them to seek other perspectives and usher them to embrace radicalization. There is a close relationship between individual and environmental factors and the manner in which individuals react to them. Rambo (1993) reaffirmed the importance on the context on the severity and extent of the crisis, but also alluded to the degree of activity, or passivity, of the convert as considerations in the process. Individuals can let someone guide them along, or they can choose to take a more active role (author, year, p. 45). The dynamics between factors and the stages of the radicalization continuum highlight their interaction, making the conversion model an appropriate tool for understanding the path towards radicalization.

Perceptions. The participants suggested that crisis-generating events might result from perceptions, such as disenfranchisement, feelings of oppression, or threats. Bjelopera (2014a) proposed that law enforcement efforts could generate perceptions of

unfairness or infringement on constitutional rights and liberties (p. 10). Hinkkainen

(2013) argued that extremist groups choose their targets based on the perceived

assessment of their opposition to organizational objectives: they do not target their

supporters (p. 166). In the case of eco-terrorist movements, they focus their efforts on

targeting property as they advocate for the rights of animals and the preservation of the

environment. These groups consider that traditional means of political pressure, such as

protests, marches, and leafleting would not elicit the appropriate of state attention to their

agenda (author, year, p. 93). Although these perceptions focused on group efforts,

homegrown terrorists who identify with any of these causes are likely to resort to similar

strategies to advance their goals.

External triggers. Another perspective regarding crisis-generating events

concerns external triggers, or actions from external entities. External triggers might

include discrimination, bullying, or peer pressure. Extremist groups, and by extension

extremists, operate in an environment in which they are responding to the action of other

entities. In this instance, extremists are concerned with countering the efforts of

opposition or adversarial groups (Decker & Pyrooz, 2015, p. 107). Individuals might join

extremist groups because of conditions resulting from their environment, resulting from

environmental challenges such as unemployment or lack of parental support, or the

search for protection from threats (Simi et al., 2016, p. 45).

Motivations

Study participants offered insightful perspectives on possible motivations for

embracing extremist beliefs. Although this was not a content-directed code, second cycle

coding led to its addition. The most common motivations included the need to belong, grievances, dissatisfaction with status quo, protection or survival, religious zeal, and seeking a sense of purpose. There are a number of motivations for joining extremist organizations. According to Hafez and Mullins (2015), these include grievances and religious or political beliefs (p. 961). Decker and Pyrooz (2015) postulated that gangs and extremist groups represent an opposition to threats, real or perceived (p. 107). Participant perspectives regarding motivations to join extremist movements are consistent with those from the literature. I stopped reviewing here. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at your references.

Need to belong. Participant perspectives on this theme suggest that individuals find themselves not fitting into their environment and seek ways to fill emotional voids or find acceptance they otherwise do not have, either because they do not have a strong support network at home or because their views are not consistent with the majority. These conditions make individuals who do not have strong support networks susceptible to radicalization. Research into the topic suggests that individuals join gangs to satisfy a need for belonging and for protection against external threats (Scott, 2014, p. 792). In this regard, Hafez and Mullins (2015) asserted that individuals who alienate themselves from society could find extremist messaging that provides a feeling of community extremely appealing (p. 969).

Grievances. Participants identified grievances that could motivate individuals to embrace an extremist ideology or join an extremist group. The most common grievance

identified was actual or perceived affronts against an individual's culture, ethnicity, or beliefs. At some point, these grievances might become so overwhelming that they could lead individuals to embrace alternative views that challenge what they view as oppression or injustice. Under the right conditions, and with the support of others who share similar perspectives, these feelings could evolve to the need to take action, and in some cases, that action could be violence.

According to McCauley et al. (2013) grievances generate feelings of desperation and outrage that fuel acts of terrorism. Grievances fall into two categories: personal and political. Personal grievances relate to perceived unjust injuries aimed at the individual, or loved ones. Political grievances relate to injustices towards a group, or cause (McCauley, et al., 2013, p. 11). Hafez and Mullins (2015) suggested that individuals might find themselves economically marginalized, feel alienated from the greater culture or society, feel victimized, or hold fundamental disagreements with government policies. They proposed that there is no guarantee that an individual could transition from beliefs to action, unless there is a catalyst for action (Hafez & Mullins, 2015, p. 961). This is consistent with Borum's assertion (as cited in Kleinmann, 2012) that not everyone who adheres to extremist beliefs is a terrorist (p. 282), as well as Zekulin (2015), who proposed a distinction between those who provide support extremist causes and those who are willing to engage in violence (p. 60).

Dissatisfaction with the status quo. According to a 2015 Pew Research Center poll (n=6004), 57% of U.S. residents expressed frustration with the government, while 22% expressed anger (Doherty, 2015, p. 28). This is not an insignificant percentage.

Some people might try to improve their lives by seeking better opportunities, but consistent with those who have grievances, some individuals might resort to less constructive approaches, such as embracing extremism and violence. Likewise, according to the social exclusion theory, individuals who live within the margins of society, and are unable to improve their conditions because of discrimination or social alienation, are more likely to embrace radical views (Hörnqvist & Flyghed, 2012, p. 323). In Europe, Muslim immigrants contend with poor economic conditions, unemployment, and residential segregation. According to Hafez and Mullins (2015) these conditions lead to higher crime rates in these areas and the development of stereotypes, which makes these individuals highly susceptible to engaging in extremist or radical behaviors (p. 962).

Protection or survival. According to participants, one of the many motivations for individuals to join extremist groups or gangs is for protection or survival against real or perceived threats. Human nature moves individuals to seek security as a basic necessity, leading to the search for protection or protector (Maslow, 1943, p. 380). Simi, Windisch, and Sporer (2016) suggested that youths joined gangs for protection from bullying and threats from other gangs in their community (p. 50). In a prison setting, Toch (as cited in Scott, 2014) found that inmates generally must either engage in violence to defend themselves or seek protection (p. 783).

Religious zeal. Religion could influence individuals to embrace extremism. Study participants suggested that religion could serve as a mediating factor that leads individuals to embrace extremism. Radicalization literature has many cases of how

religion could influence individuals to embrace extremism. Examples include Osama Bin

Ladin's fatwa to wage jihad against the United States (Rudner, 2013, p. 955), ISIS'

appeal to its supporters to conduct terrorist attack in West (Schultz, 2014), or the

justification of right wing extremists to bomb abortion clinics. Religious zeal is not

necessarily a leading cause of radicalization, but it could serve a socializing or

indoctrinating tool for extremists to manipulate others. Security officials argue that

individuals who travel abroad to fight in Syria and Iraq are not necessarily driven by

religious zeal, but more so by a quest for adventure, consistent with thrill seeking

behaviors (Byman & Shapiro, 2014, p. 5).

 Seeking a sense of purpose. Participants suggested that individuals might

embrace extremism seeking a sense of purpose they did not have. Accordingly, they join

extremist groups to contribute to a cause and to be remembered. When considering the

Theory of Human Motivation in this context, this is perhaps an attempt to reach the

highest level in the hierarchy of needs, which usually occurs when the individual has

satisfied all other basic needs (Maslow, 1943, p. 383). This is consistent with the

culturalist perspective, which suggests that the main drive behind embracing radical

views and engaging in violence has little to with the individual's socioeconomic status,

but rather a desire to strike against perceived injustices, sparked by a lack of direction and

naiveté (Hörnqvist & Flyghed, 2012, p. 326).

Accessing extremist propaganda

 Radicalization research contains ample data addressing the manner in which

individuals might access extremist propaganda. While there are a variety of means by

which this information might become available to potential homegrown terrorists, the literature suggests that the Internet and social media are the predominant medium for propagation and acquisition. Regardless of the means of propagation, research suggests that extremists are effectively disseminating their propaganda and it influences the radicalization of susceptible individuals. It is also important to note that these messages could lead to moral disengagement, which provides justification for violent behavior (Alleyne, Fernandes, & Pritchard, 2014, p. 752). The perspectives of study participants on this topic generally align with findings in the literature, with the notable exception of the news media serving as a "gateway" for accessing extremist propaganda.

Internet and social media. The majority of participants pointed to the Internet and social media as the main source for individuals to access extremist propaganda. The advent of the Internet has allowed extremist groups to reach broader audiences (Spaaij & Hammd, 2015, p. 170). Terrorist groups have leveraged the power of the Internet to make their ideology available to everyone. Al Qaeda publishes an online periodical, Inspire Magazine, which not only serves as a vehicle for ideological indoctrination, but also provides practical guides for the manufacture of bombs and how to conduct terrorist attacks (Theohary & Rollins, 2011). ISIS has gone further by developing videos that rival Hollywood style productions, and are readily available via all the known social media venues (Gunaratna, 2015, p. 11).

The Internet has also allowed the formation of virtual communities, providing potential recruits with the support and positive reinforcement they lack at home (Bowman-Grieve, 2013). Sageman (as cited in Gunaratna and Haynal, 2013) argued that

the Internet provides the means to develop a sense of unity and purpose that could lead to further radicalization through personal contact. Likewise, Lemieux, Brachman, Levitt, and Wood (2014), asserted that online content has influenced the growth of homegrown terrorism by providing ideological content to further radicalization and technical knowledge that could enable homegrown terrorists to carry out attacks successfully (p. 368).

The role of extremist narratives propagated via mass media, the Internet, and social media on radicalization is a matter of debate. According to Archetti (2015), one of the gaps in the research is an understanding the mediating effect of the Internet and social media on radicalization. Research on the topic suggests that extremist groups have capitalized on the power of social media and the Internet to disseminate their message. These statements illustrate the importance of the Internet and social media as a preferred means to propagate extremist messages, but also point to other means of disseminating extremist propaganda.

News media. According to participants, the media, specifically news and other commercial broadcasting methods contribute to the dissemination of messages that generate or exacerbate the crisis state and influence the path to radicalization. Research suggests that news coverage of terror attacks causes an increase in the severity of new attacks within the next two months and the number of attacks in the proceeding ten months (Beckmann, Ralf, & Tobias, 2017, p. 15). While the study did not assess how the coverage influenced individuals, it supports the premise that news coverage influences terrorism. Terrorist organizations, through their attacks and the corresponding news

coverage, aim to garner attention to their grievances and objectives, and gain credibility (Nacos, 2012, p. 265). The advent of satellite television allows for the instantaneous dissemination of the struggles of people living in contested areas such as Iraq and Syria. These images have a polarizing effect on the viewers, increasing the perceptions of sectarian strife (Byman & Shapiro, 2014, p. 2). These broadcasts could serve as a catalyst for individuals in search of a purpose in their lives, to travel to those regions to fight against their enemies. They can also decide to conduct attacks in their home countries if they are unable to travel.

Other means. Simi (2016) found that extreme right-wing recruiting efforts recognize the need for gradual indoctrination so they leverage social events such as music shows and house parties (p. 59). They also used stickers, fliers, and leaflets, face-to-face engagements, and music concerts (pp. 62-70). They disseminate their message of intolerance and violence through a variety of media and target impressionable at-risk youth. Radicalization within the prison systems is another area of concern. Basra and Neumann (2016) found that ISIS and other terrorist organizations recruit members among the imprisoned population (p. 25). Prison is also an initial point of contact for far-right extremists (Simi, 2016, p. 194).

The perspectives of the study participants were generally consistent with the findings of the literature. It is imperative to acknowledge that regardless of the means by which they access the extremist propaganda, absent the aforementioned individual and environmental factors, individuals will not embrace radical ideologies and attitudes. The concept of the media serving as a "gateway" or entry point for further exploration of

extremist propaganda via the Internet is intriguing. The aspect of the Internet as a supporting element of accessing extremist information is perhaps an area that could benefit from further research.

Research Question 2

Understanding the factors that influence radicalization is instrumental to the developing of strategies to counteract the recruiting efforts of extremists. Because of its complex nature, and because individuals present a variety of typologies, radicalization presents significant challenges to those who would attempt to implement efforts to stem the growth of homegrown terrorism. It is also important to consider the manner in which they access the extremist propaganda, since this would suggest a more practical approach for countering it. Individuals who do not have the support and nurturing they crave usually find then within the virtual setting of online forums, but surrounded by extremists who exploit their weaknesses (Neumann, 2013, p. 432).

Participants offered a large number of recommendations on what they thought would constitute effective intervention approaches. Their proposals included creating doubt about the justification for embracing extremism, leveraging reformed extremists or gang members to dissuade others from advancing along the radicalization path, and greater community involvement. These approaches are consistent with Aly and Striegher (2012), who recommended the implementation of comprehensive strategies to counter extremist views and beliefs (p. 850), and Alexander (2011), who argued for the development of alternative or counter narratives to lessen the influence of extremist propaganda (p. 478). According to Dalgaard-Nielsen (2013), extremist narratives have

many contradictions, moral dilemmas, and conflicts that could serve as an entry point for counter radicalization efforts (p. 111). A comparison of participants' proposals with recommendations of the literature suggests a high degree of consonance in terms of ideas and perspectives.

Creating doubt

Participants suggested the creation of doubt in the mind of the radicalized individual regarding the legitimacy of their behaviors as a means to counter the influence of extremist messages. Counter radicalization research advocates for the implementation of measures to discredit extremist messages and to educate individuals so they are able to refute or question the validity of the propaganda (Neumann, 2013, p. 433). Dalgaard-Nielsen (2013) studied programs that helped individual militants disengage or exit from violent Islamist extremist organizations in Europe, South Asia, and the Middle East. The analysis shed light on how creating doubt in the mind of the militant was a useful approach, especially as it related to the use of violence and the killing of civilians (p. 103) and the desire to protect loved ones from the consequences of their extremist behaviors (p. 106). Decker, Pyrooz, and Moule Jr.(2014) researched gang disengagement and found that violence creates a sense of doubt among gang members, which could lead to reduced willingness to engage in violence (p. 280). Behavior modification, through the creation of doubt, could lead to sufficient separation from the extremist group's core values, resulting in improved probability of success in deradicalization efforts.

Leveraging former extremists

Closely related to this strategy, was the collaboration with former extremists or

gang members to engage individuals and share their experiences in an effort to dissuade them from following in their footsteps. Participants suggested greater collaboration with former extremists or gang members to engage individuals and share their experiences in an effort to dissuade them from following in their footsteps. In their study, Kruglanski, et al., (2014) discussed the collaboration of a former Abu Sayyaf Group member with the government deradicalization efforts, yet did not specify his role. Dalgaard-Nielsen (2013) supported the inclusion of former extremists to influence individuals suceptible to radicalization (p. 109). Former extremists or gang members could also support counter radicalization efforts by informing research that could lead to the implementation of appropriate intervention strategies. The literature has a robust body of research involving former extremists or gang members. Simi, Windisch, and Sporer (2016) gathered valuable data from former violent extremists for their research.

Their findings suggest that early childhood trauma can potentially create the conditions that make individuals suceptible to the influence of extermists or gang members (p. 126). Kruglanski and colleagues (2014) also gathered data from former extremists on how their loss of significance influenced their adoption of extremist and violent behaviors. Dalgaard-Nielsen's (2013) research on the reasons why militants leave extremist organizations could also provide useful insights to inform counter radicalization efforts. Militants might lose faith in the justifications for violence and the validity of the group's arguments; they might lose faith in the organization or its leadership; or finally, changes in the militant's perspective or circumstances that made them question their commitment to the cause of the extremist group (p. 102). All three reasons involved

external influences that were able to alter militants' worldview and capitalize on their

doubts. Decker, Pyrooz, and Moule Jr. (2014) interviewed 260 former gang members in

a variety of settings to understand disengagement dynamics (p. 271).

Greater community involvement

Understanding that the environment influences behaviors and attitudes,

participants shared their perspectives on what elements within the community could

contribute in deterring individuals from embracing extremism. They identified

community stakeholders such as family or parents, people with influence or knowledge,

churches or religious leaders, and community organizations that could become involved

in efforts to counter extremist efforts to radicalize individuals. This perspective coincides

with that of radicalization researchers, who recommended approaches focuses on

educating and influencing non-radicalized members of the individual's family or

associations, since they would have greater influence on their behavior (Archetti, 2015, p.

56). Byman and Shapiro (2014), argued that programs should leverage local community

leaders key communicators, because they who would focus on practical concerns (p. 24).

Bjelopera (2014a) plainly suggested that local leaders should be at the forefront of

engaging with the people of their community, rather than outsiders with little local

knowledge and influence (p. 9).

Challenges

The implementation of intervention strategies is a difficult task because

individuals present a variety of typologies and existing efforts might not be effective for

all potential homegrown terrorists, especially if they do not consider the dynamics of

local communities. Participants identified ineffective government responses and difficulty in recognizing indicators as the most significant challenges associated with the implementation of counter extremist efforts. Current research highlights difficulties in developing programs aimed at countering extremism, particularly because one approach might not work in all settings (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013, p. 108).

Ineffective government responses. Intervention programs have proven ineffective for a variety of reasons. Participants suggested that these efforts do not reach their intended target audiences. It is critical to enlist the assistance of individuals and organizations that could influence individuals susceptible to radicalization or who have already embraced extremism. Dechesne (2011) argued that deradicalization efforts should consider the inclusion of non-repressive initiatives and incentives to motivate radicalized individuals to renounce violence and to become part of the community (p. 288). These views reinforce Bjelopera (2014a), who posited that law enforcement efforts could generate mistrust and unwillingness within the community to cooperate with them because of perceptions of unfairness or infringement on constitutional rights and liberties (p. 10). They are also consistent with Costanza (2015) who advocated for the collaboration among a broad set of stakeholders to counter extremist indoctrination, including the family, civic and social organizations, government, and non-governmental organizations (p. 15). Weine (2013) recommended a closer collaboration between law enforcement, relevant government agencies, the media, and community organizations to provide a synergistic approach to countering radicalization (p. 88). Adding to these difficulties, extremist behaviors short of violence have constitutional protections

(Bjelopera, 2014b, p. 2), thus limiting the ability of law enforcement and counterterrorism agenices to prevent terrorist attacks.

Difficulty in recognizing indicators. Klausen et al. (2016) argued that overt behaviors change as individuals advance along the radicalization pathway (p. 69). This highlights the importance of knowing what indicators to look for. Participants suggested that the inability to recognize indications of extremist behaviors that could lead to violence hinders intervention efforts and argued that while some people might notice some signs, they might fail to put them in context. Consistent with this perspective, Archetti (2015) proposed that efforts should center on educating and influencing family members, co-workers, and other non-radicalized associates because they could have greater sway and credibility with those who are susceptible to radicalization or who are already exhibiting indicators of embracing extremist views (p. 56). Byman and Shapiro (2014) likewise highlighted the need to enlist the support of community organizations to increase awareness and understanding of sources of radicalization (p. 24).

Research Question 3

A gap in the radicalization research is the lack of a comprehensive model for understanding this process. According to Ferguson and Binks (2015), radicalization processes share similarities with religious conversion and the use of a religious conversion model could be useful in understanding the concept (p. 26). This led to the selection of the Religious Conversion Theory (Rambo, 1993) to provide the framework for this study. The Conversion Theory incorporates aspects of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and religious studies, providing a holistic perspective for viewing

radicalization. Rambo (1993) postulated that in order to comprehend radicalization, researchers must understand the individuals' environment (context), which includes individual and environmental factors, their loss of emotional or moral balance resulting from a traumatic episode (crisis), their desire to regain the lost balance (quest), and the emergence of a guide or advocate to assist in the quest for balance (encounter). The strengthening of the relationship with the advocate or guide and the introduction of a new ideology (interaction) leads to the individual's conscious decision to embrace new values and beliefs (commitment). The final stage concerns the outcomes from this commitment (consequences). This model should assist in understanding the progressive nature of radicalization and help identify areas in which key stakeholders might be able to intervene and disrupt the process.

Context and Commitment

While the Conversion Theory provides a holistic perspective for viewing radicalization, by incorporating features from sociology, psychology, anthropology, and religious studies, it does not consider factors that could influence radicalization. The stages of radicalization that the model provides help visualize the progression towards extremism, but the inclusion of other perspectives into the Context and Commitment stages could improve its utility.

Perhaps a more nuanced approach would entail the inclusion of tenets of Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation (1943), rather than just the presence or absence of factors within the Context stage. This stage refers to the collection of individual and environmental factors that make an individual susceptible to enter into a crisis stage. The

factors by themselves, fail to explain why individuals experience crisis. According to Maslow, behavior is the expression of the motivation of individuals to satisfy certain needs. The attainment of one need generates the motivation for the satisfaction of the next, until achieving all needs, reaching self-actualization. We should consider how the individual reacts to its environment, but the environment alone does not sufficiently explain behavior (pp. 370-371). The Context stage could benefit from a deliberate analysis of the level of satisfaction of individuals, rather than the presence or absence of factors. The inability to satisfy basic needs is a more reasonable explanation for experiencing crisis and for advancing along the radicalization continuum. Individuals who feel satisfied with the attainment of their basic needs would unlikely enter into a crisis state, and if they did, they would likely be resilient enough to withstand without changing their core beliefs and values.

Point of no return

The point of no return in terms of radicalization refers to the point in which individuals have become fully committed to their cause and have little chance of de-escalating and returning to an earlier stage in the process. The literature provides several perspectives of the point of no return along the radicalization continuum. McCauley, Moskalenko, and Son (2013) referred a continued indoctrination process of that leads individuals to lose any sensitivity against violence (p. 8). In their study of Jack Roche, an Australian homegrown terrorist, Aly and Striegher (2012), found that although Roche had misgivings about his assigned task to bomb the Israeli embassy in Canberra, he continued with his assignment because he feared his handlers would physically harm him (p. 857).

It would be useful to assess how individuals overcame their innate abhorrence towards inhumanity. The next adjustment would therefore incorporate Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), which explains social and antisocial behavior, specifically as it relates to the application of moral disengagement, into the Commitment stage to identify the point of no return. The acceptance of a new ideology that leads to the Consequences stage lacks a mechanism of action as it relates to radicalization and the adoption of violence as an acceptable form of expression. This is not a normal pattern of behavior for most people and points to a socialization process aimed at overcoming innate aversions towards violence.

Bandura (1986) argued that individuals apply moral disengagement techniques to overcome conflicts in the presence of immoral behavior. Moral disengagement is the process by which individuals justify behaviors that most people would consider reprehensible, and it features prominently in literature as a key mechanism for indoctrination and the justification of violence (Bandura, 1999; Bandura, 2004; Aly, Taylor, & Karnovsky, 2014; Alleyne, Fernandes, & Pritchard, 2014; Goldman et al., 2014; and Simi, Windisch, & Sporer, 2016).

Limitations of the Study

Because of its qualitative nature, the background of the participants, and small sample size, this study might not provide generalizable findings that could apply to other areas of the country. The application of the Conversion also prevented the consideration of other factors outside of its theoretical framework. Finally, while the study participants provided valuable insights into radicalization, their perspectives were constrained by their

level of experience and training on counterterrorism, antiterrorism, and gang

investigations. Very few participants had actual experience in counterterrorism

investigations at the federal level, given the inability to recruit participants from the FBI

or local law enforcement working with the JTTF.

Recommendations for Action

This study found that local and state law enforcement officers, military AT and

security personnel share consistent perspectives on factors that influence radicalization

and potential intervention approaches. Given the scope of their duties, it was expected

that state law enforcement and military personnel would have the training and experience

to provide informed perspectives to address the research questions. There was a question

however, of the quality of the perspectives from local law enforcement officers. While

initial impressions might have suggested they might not have the appropriate level of

experience and training, their work with criminal gangs and gang members allowed them

to contribute to this study with informed perspectives that were consistent with the

findings of existing research in the field of radicalization.

In addition, the inclusion of law enforcement officers with experience in gang

investigations imbued the study with perspectives that highlighted the importance of local

law enforcement agencies in stemming the rise of extremist behaviors in local

communities. Federal agencies, including the DoD, have been successful in preventing

large-scale terrorist attacks in the United States since the events of September 11, 2001,

by focusing their efforts on terrorist organizations and networks abroad. The

transformation of the threat into decentralized planned and executed operations, justifies

the involvement of local law enforcement agencies in this effort in a more deliberate

manner. Based on these findings, the following proposals are recommended.

Radicalization training

Study participants suggested that individual factors and environmental factors

such could influence the adoption of extremist beliefs and behaviors. They also noted

that the inability to identify these factors make it difficult to implement effective

intervention approaches. These perspectives are supported by findings in the literature.

It is recommended therefore, that law enforcement agencies, at all levels, institute

ongoing training for local police departments that focuses on the identification of

indicators of radicalization among members of the communities in which they patrol.

The implementation of community policing initiatives highlights the importance of local

police at being able to identify the presence of extremist behaviors in the communities

with whom they interact. They are usually the first on the scene; they should know what

to look for in terms of radicalization and potential terrorist threats.

Intervention strategies

Participants offered suggested a variety of intervention approaches they

considered would be effective in stemming the rise of radicalization in their jurisdictions.

These included creating doubt about the justification for embracing extremism,

leveraging reformed extremists or gang members, and greater community involvement.

They also identified a number of challenges related to the implementation of effective

and sustainable intervention approaches, such as ineffective government responses and

difficulty in recognizing indicators. Participant views are consistent with findings in the literature as well.

It is recommended then, that intervention strategies include all community stakeholders, which could leverage their capabilities to overcome capability gaps of other organizations. Collaboration among stakeholders should not be limited to government agencies. It should include local civic and volunteer organizations that work within the community and understand local dynamics.

Another recommendation would entail the development of quantifiable measures of effectiveness to assess intervention programs and determine the feasibility of implementing them in other geographies. Law enforcement agencies are working diligently within their jurisdictions with acknowledged resource constraints that require the allocation of resources to efforts with demonstrated measures of effectiveness. This assessment would also allow for prioritizing efforts in terms of focus and resources.

Local police departments should also share their best practices with other jurisdictions, especially regarding the implementation of intervention programs aimed at disengaging community members from gangs. These programs could inform state and federal level programs since they consider local dynamics and conditions. Likewise, federal efforts should include greater funding and resources to assist local law enforcement so they can manage the threat at the lowest level possible. This should be a cooperative effort, not a competition.

Recommendations for Further Study

The study findings highlighted two areas for further research. First, while the literature and most participants identified the Internet and social media as the main sources of extremist propaganda, several participants suggested that the news media served as "gateway" or entry point for further exploration of extremist propaganda via the Internet, making the Internet a supporting mechanism rather than the primary source. Findings in this area could potentially guide future intervention efforts to address developing trends and patterns.

Second, the inclusion of perspectives from other radicalization related theories could imbue the Conversion Theory and its application against known cases of homegrown terrorists could serve as a real test of its viability as a model to understand radicalization. The literature suggests that research suffers from a lack of a comprehensive model for understanding radicalization. It also recommends theory making and testing, which could validate these models and inform intervention approaches.

Implications

This study sought to increase the understanding of the process that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists. It has significant social as well as public policy implications. It is important to understand the factors that mediate the radicalization process before attempting to develop intervention strategies, lest they squander limited resources and become hollow efforts. Efforts to counter the rise of

extremism in our communities require a holistic approach that leverages the capabilities of community stakeholders.

This study could bring about positive social change by improving the degree of collaboration between individuals, government agencies, and community-based organizations, which could lead to the implementation of comprehensive strategies that have greater probability of success. Furthermore, the coordinated efforts between stakeholders, especially law enforcement agencies and community-based organizations might also improve their relationship with local constituencies, resulting in less marginalization and less need for repressive methods to ensure public safety. Finally, by understanding the factors that lead individuals to embrace extremism, all stakeholders could help improve the quality of life of all members of society, assisting them to achieve their potential, which in turn will make our communities stronger and more resilient.

Conclusion

Homegrown terrorism plots and attacks have risen significantly in recent years. Every day, news media reports highlight the aftermath of these events. The first step in combating this rising trend is understanding the factors that lead individuals down that path. Well-meaning intervention programs that fail to consider local dynamics, or ignore the perspectives of those charged with public safety are likely to perform poorly. This problem affects all sectors of society, so the solution cannot emanate solely from the law enforcement.

Study participants included an array of law enforcement officials at the local and state levels with counterterrorism or gang experience, antiterrorism officers, and security

personnel from military installations in eastern North Carolina. This study sought to identify relevant individual and environmental factors that contribute to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists, the form of intervention that would be effective to curtail radicalization, and how would a modification of the Conversion Theory could serve to better understand the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists. The collective experience and training of the participants enabled them to provide informed perspectives to answer the research questions. They offered a number of perspectives related to the factors that influence radicalization. Personal relationships and support networks influence the adoption of attitudes, values, belief, and behaviors. Study participants identified 58 individual factors categorized under self-worth, maturity, and cognitive development that that in their view could predispose individuals to embrace extremism.

They also identified 76 environmental factors that could also influence radicalization. The most salient factors included positive reinforcement, reactions, family life, and community support. Regarding intervention strategies to prevent individuals from advancing along the radicalization process, participants identified 41 efforts. The most commonly suggested approaches were the creation of doubt among at-risk individuals regarding the validity of their extremist ideology, leveraging former extremists, and greater community involvement. In general, their perspectives were consistent with the findings in the literature, suggesting a high degree of validity. Finally, after applying the Conversion Theory to this qualitative case study, it was assessed that the inclusion of other theoretical perspectives, such as the Theory of Human

Motivation and Moral Disengagement could provide a more comprehensive model for understanding radicalization.

Participant perspectives highlighted the need for increased collaboration among as many stakeholders as possible. While local law enforcement agencies strive to make their communities safer, they are sometimes challenged by shortfalls in resources and lack of cooperation. Their contributions are critical to ensure the security of the people living in eastern North Carolina. A comprehensive approach to addressing radicalization would empower stakeholders from many sectors of the community to collaborate in the effort, which could improve relationships among the many constituencies, requiring less repressive methods to ensure public safety, while reducing marginalization, and improving the ability of all members of the community to achieve their potential.

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Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire

Introduction of Study

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the process that leads to the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists based on interviews with a variety of law enforcement officials, military antiterrorism (AT) officers. You were asked to participate in this study because of your knowledge and experience in this field, and your proximity to a key site or military facility that would be targets of terrorism. The study will not focus on specific ideologies, religious beliefs, or political philosophies, but rather the radicalization process in general. The interview will consist of ten questions and you should answer them using your experience, training, and personal knowledge; the study will not focus on departmental procedures. The findings of this study should help develop an evidence-based understanding of radicalization, which is a key aspect of homegrown terrorism.

1. Describe your counterterrorism training and any experiences with terrorism in the field.

2. How would you define homegrown terrorism? In your view, which group represents the most significant homegrown terrorism threat?

3. What individual factors (education, financial, social standing, family) might make an individual susceptible to radicalization?

4. What environmental factors (family, friends, associations) might make an individual susceptible to radicalization?

5. What type of event might cause an individual to embrace extremism?

6. How do radicalized individuals encounter extremist propaganda?

7. What would be an effective approach to counter extremist propaganda?

8. At what point of the radicalization process are individuals past the point of effective intervention?

9. Is there anything you would like to add that might be useful in understanding the radicalization of U.S. homegrown terrorists?

10.   Do you know of anyone else who might be able to provide more information on radicalization?