



Radicalization

A Guide for Fighting Extremism (Part 2)

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Curriculum Objectives

- Following this presentation, participants will be able to:
 - Distinguish between different forms of radical disentanglement
 - Understand their role in an informal network of upstanders in de-radicalization
 - Describe socio-demographic correlates of extremism
 - Identify common pre-cursors to radicalization
 - Apply their knowledge of how needs, narratives and networks in the quest for significance to assist the de-radicalization process

Definition of Terms

- Radicalization/extremism
- Forms of radical disentanglement
 - Desistance
 - Disengagement
 - De-radicalization
 - Counter-radicalization
- Upstanders
- Formers

Definition of Terms

- *Radicalization/extremism*: Embracing ideas and beliefs that are inconsistent with the values of the majority of members of society and are in opposition to democracy, diversity, civil rights, and civil liberties
 - May occur with ideas, beliefs, feelings (all of which are legal), and/or behaviors (may be illegal)

Definition of Terms: Forms of Radical Disentanglement

- *Desistance*: Someone who has achieved desistance does not engage in criminal activity, although they may continue to associate with extreme groups and maintain an extreme ideology



Definition of Terms: Forms of Radical Disentanglement

- *Disengagement*: Involves separating themselves from other violent extremists, reducing, or eliminating participation in an extremist group or activities



Definition of Terms: Forms of Radical Disentanglement

- *De-radicalization*: Involves rejecting extremist ideology as well as any behaviors prompted by such an ideology



Definition of Terms: Forms of Radical Disentanglement

- *Counter-radicalization*: generally refers to formal programs of extremism prevention or de-radicalization



Definition of Terms

- *Upstanders*: The informal network of people (parents, partners, teachers, friends, community leaders and members, and others) who can actively engage in informed and educated attempts to assist someone in de-radicalization



Definition of Terms

- *Upstanders*: The informal network of people (parents, partners, teachers, friends, community leaders and members, and others) who can actively engage in informed and educated attempts to assist someone in de-radicalization
- *Formers*: Former extremists



Socio-demographic Correlates of Radicalization

- Anyone can become radicalized and each path to radicalization is unique

Socio-demographic Correlates of Radicalization

- Different radical ideologies require different strategies for de-radicalization

Socio-demographic Correlates of Radicalization

- Certain socio-demographic characteristics, while not directly causing radicalization, as most people who experience them never radicalize, are more common amongst people who do radicalize

Socio-demographic Correlates of Radicalization

- Awareness of these factors is important for de-radicalization in the following ways:
 - To help communities identify members who are at-risk for radicalization
 - For prevention and intervention programs to address conditions that put people at risk
 - Effective programs ameliorate economic, social, and psychological correlates of extremism
 - To enable informal networks to provide support for at-risk people and/or encourage interventions for pre-cursor difficulties

Socio-demographic Correlates of Radicalization

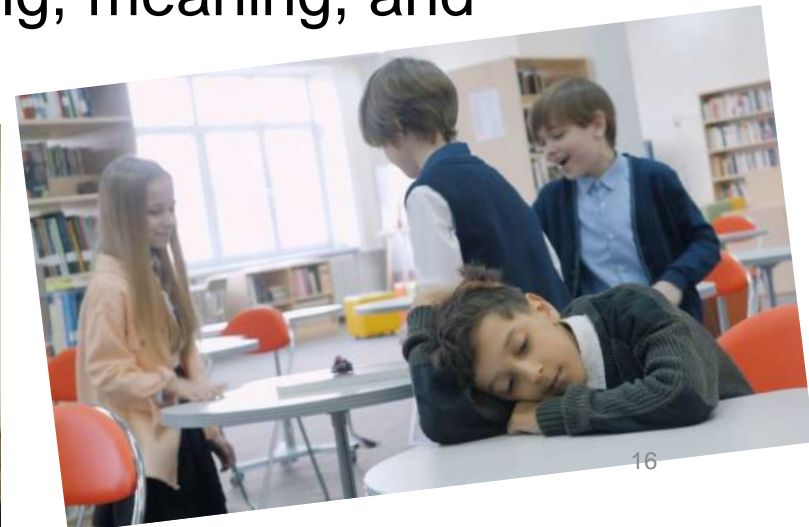
- Being male

- ~90% of extremists are male
 - Femaleness may ↑ protection and/or maleness may ↑ vulnerability to radicalization
- 28-32% of violent extremists have military experience (13% of general population)
 - Military remains dominated by men



Socio-demographic Correlates of Radicalization

- Social mobility struggles
 - Poverty, unemployment, sporadic work history
 - May struggle to get basic needs met and/or face uncertainty about them being met
 - Uncertainty increases the risk for radicalization
 - Discrimination
 - Social needs for belonging, meaning, and purpose are unmet



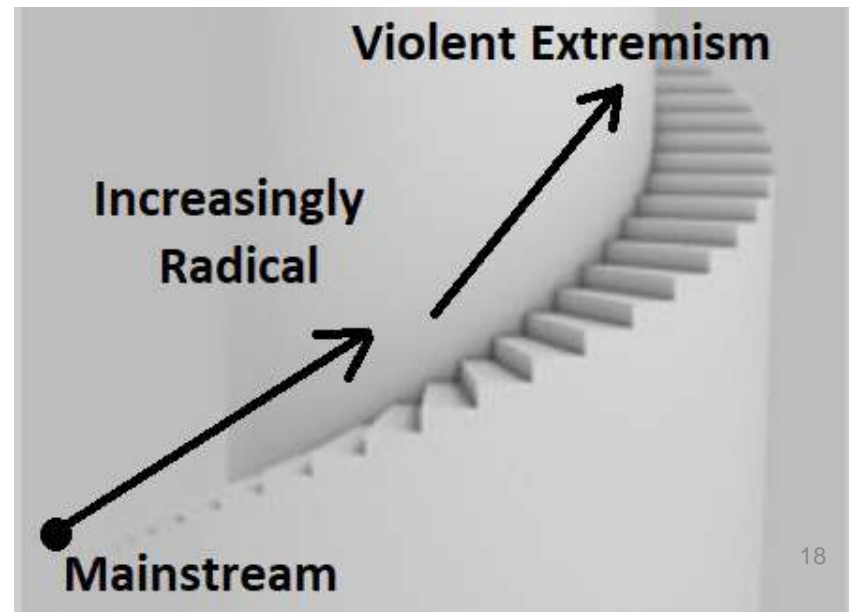
Socio-demographic Correlates of Radicalization

- Psychological and social difficulties
 - Psychological issues/diagnoses
 - Substance abuse
 - Troubled romantic, platonic, and familial relationships



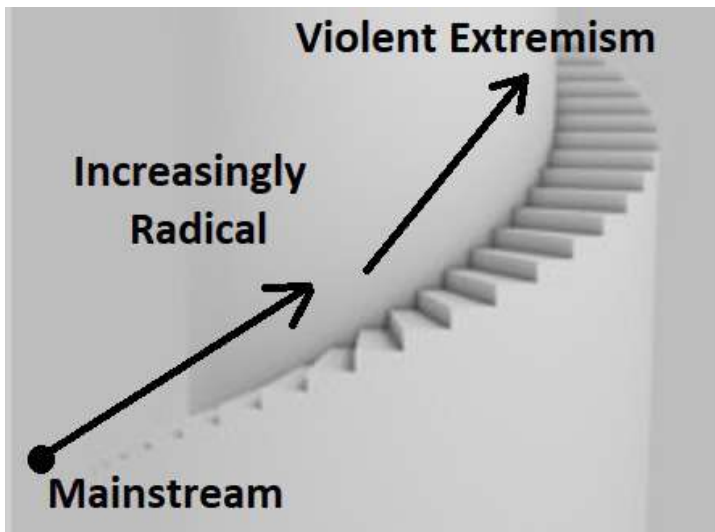
Conveyor Belt Models of Violent Extremism

- Assumptions: Person moves from conventional → increasingly radical ideology → violence motivated by extreme ideas
 - Interventions oriented towards preventing or changing radical ideas



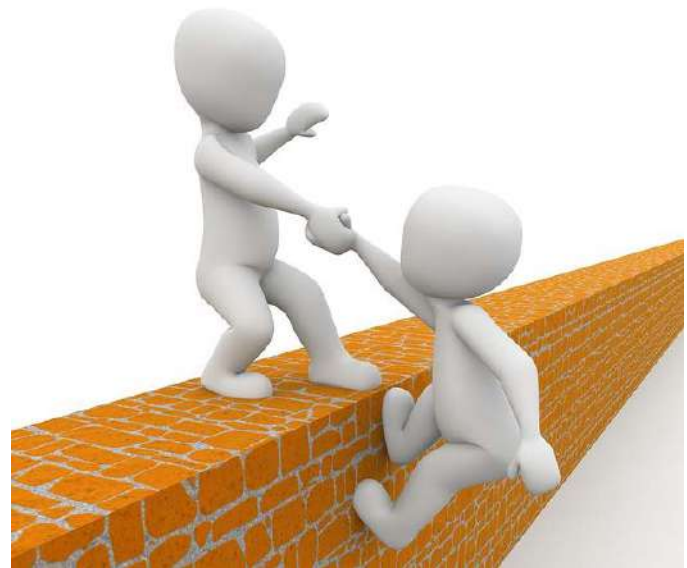
Conveyor Belt Models of Violent Extremism

- Criticisms:
 - Path to extremism is individualized and non-linear
 - Heavy handed government responses to extreme ideas can entrench current and create new extremists
 - Focus on extreme ideology → wars on ideas



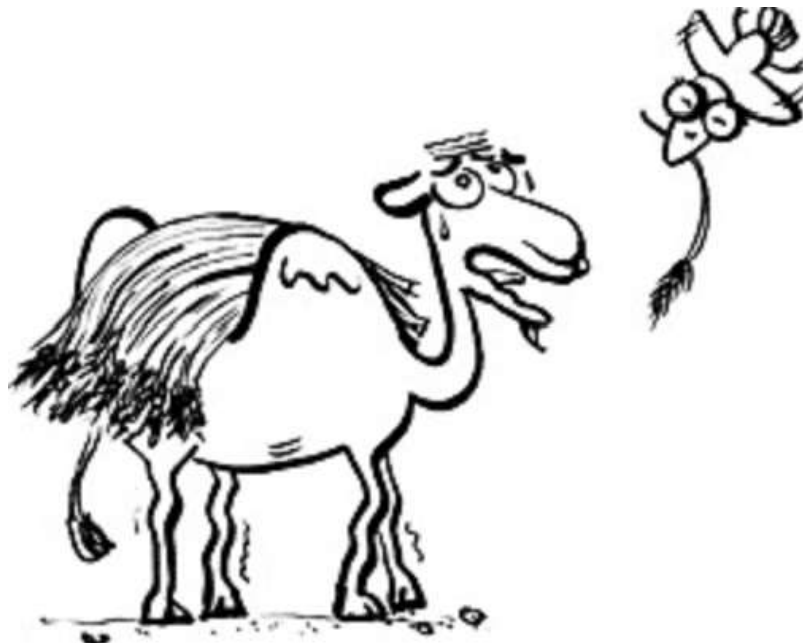
Conveyor Belt Models of Violent Extremism

- Strengths:
 - Upstanders are crucial in the de-radicalization process
 - Understanding how and why radicalization happens can assist upstanders in engaging in firm and empathic strategies for countering radicalization



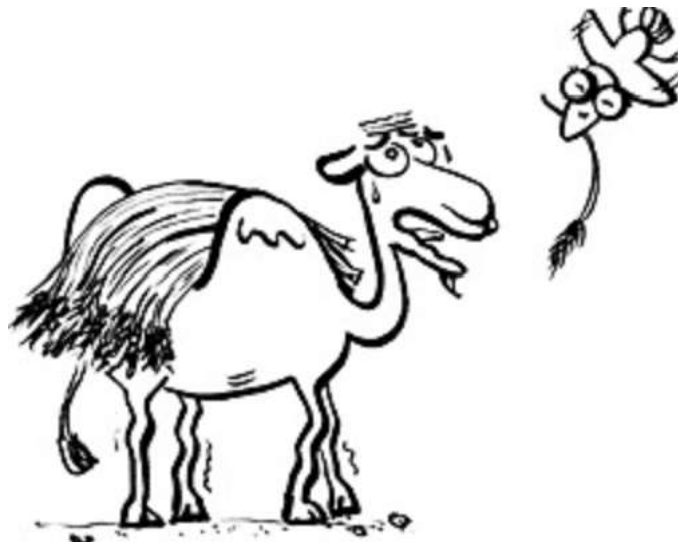
Conveyor Belt Models of Violent Extremism: Precursors

- Precipitating (triggering) event: Personal and/or political trauma



Conveyor Belt Models of Violent Extremism: Precursors

- Precipitating (triggering) event: Personal and/or political trauma
 - *Cognitive opening/unfreezing/biographical availability*: Precipitating event causes an identity crisis during which they question previously held beliefs and are open to new (and extreme) ideas and values to make sense of their lives



Conveyor Belt Models of Violent Extremism: Precursors

- **Grievance:** Difficulties are interpreted as an injustice inflicted upon us (either as an individual or a group) by others



Conveyor Belt Models of Violent Extremism: Precursors

- **Grievance:** Difficulties are interpreted as an injustice inflicted upon us (either as an individual or a group) by others
 - Violent extremists do not snap; they decide and plan violence
 - Authorities should be cautious of creating a precipitating event/ grievance when managing a person of concern



Conveyor Belt Models of Violent Extremism: Precursors

- Communicating Intentions of Violence
 - Direct or indirect warnings precedes most targeted violence
 - But warning behaviors are poor predictors of violence

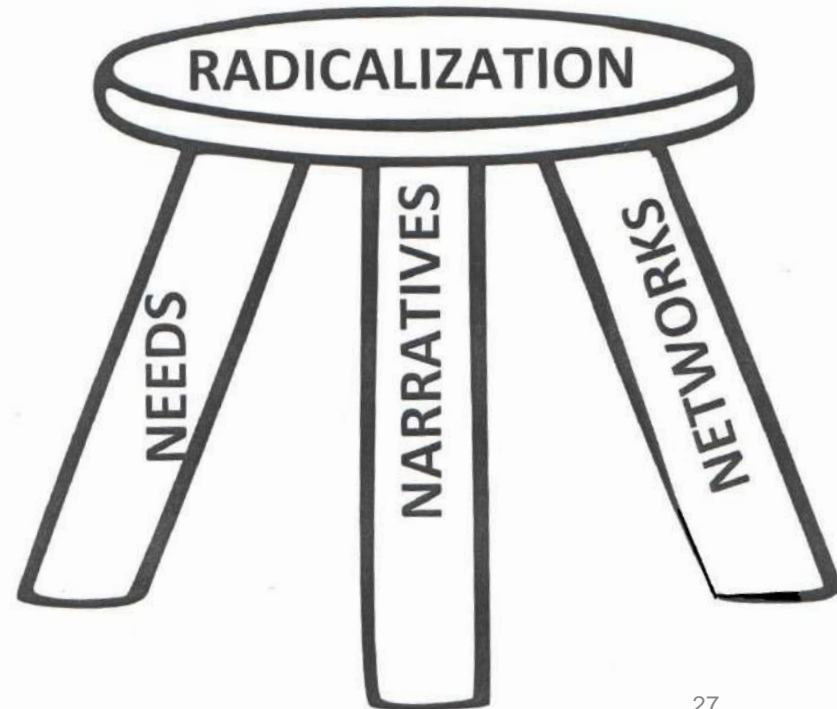
Conveyor Belt Models of Violent Extremism: Precursors

- Communicating Intentions of Violence

- All warnings should be taken seriously and reported to authorities
 - Heavy-handed, punitive, and/or formal responses to extremism often fail or backfire
 - “Proof” that their grievances are legitimate and that they are being persecuted
 - Authorities should be judicious in their responses

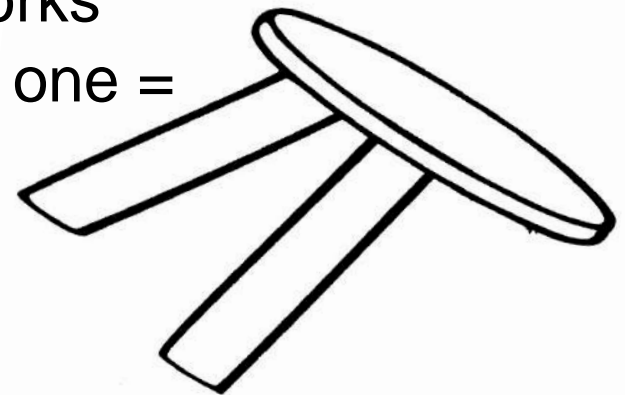
Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns

- Overlap in psychological theories of radicalization
 - Staircase model of radicalization: Precipitating event, cognitive opening, grievances, change in worldview
- Kruglanski et al. (2014): “The quest for significance”
 - Pillars of radicalization
 - 3Ns or “needs, narratives, and networks”



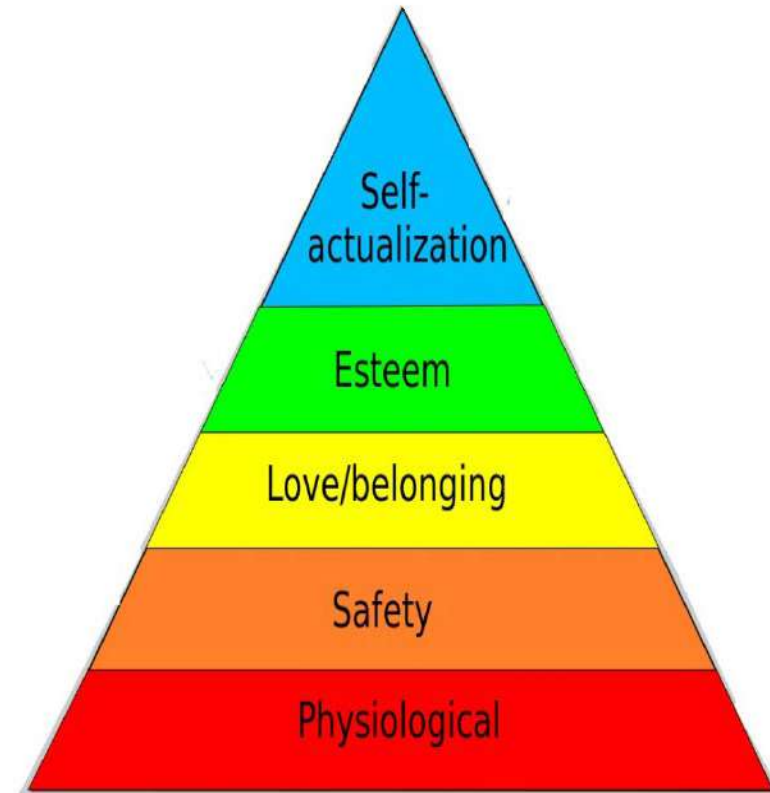
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- Kruglanski et al. (2014): “The quest for significance”
 - Pillars of radicalization
 - 3Ns or “needs, narratives, & networks”
 - All 3 pillars are necessary; missing one = failure to radicalize



Socio-psychological theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NEEDS

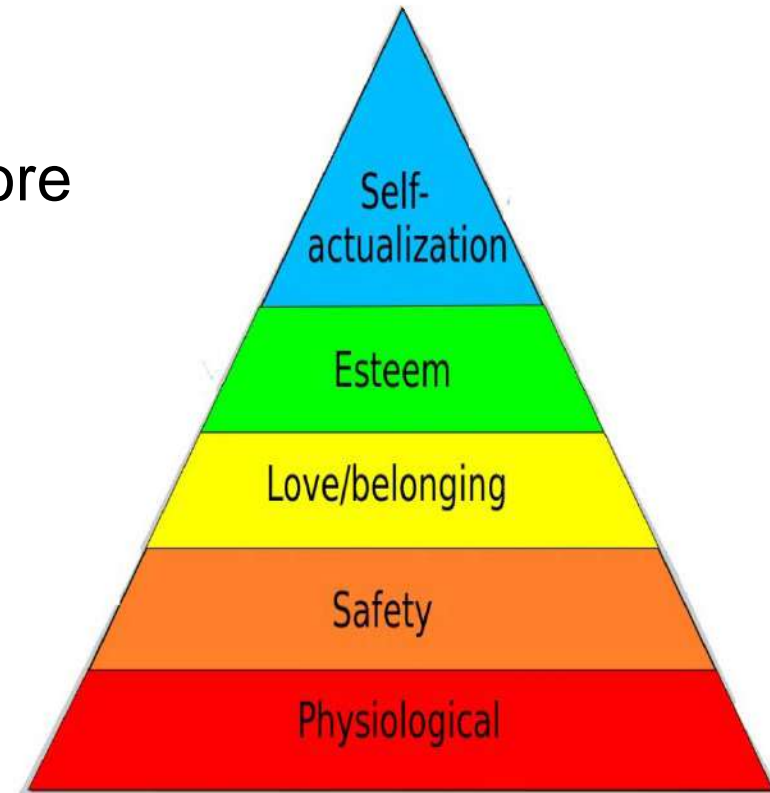
- Need for significance (belonging, purpose, respect) is key in radicalization



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NEEDS

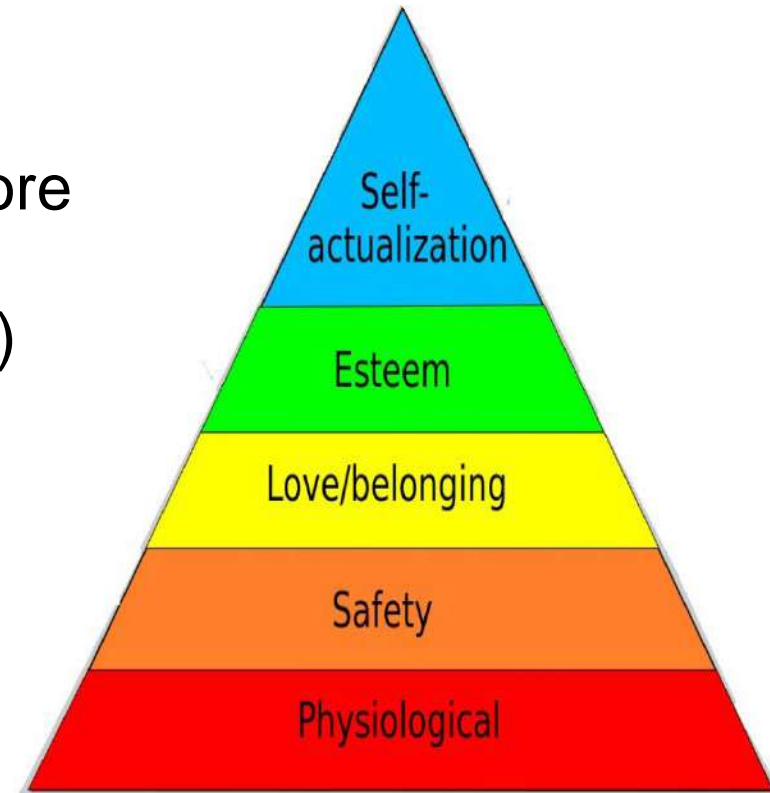
- Need for significance (belonging, purpose, respect) is key in radicalization
 - Discrimination → loss of significance → attempts to restore significance



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NEEDS

- Need for significance (belonging, purpose, respect) is key in radicalization
 - Discrimination → loss of significance → attempts to restore significance
 - Seek out new ideas (Narratives) and people (Networks)



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NARRATIVES

- Narratives involve the stories we tell to make sense of our world and our place in it
 - Meritocracy (myth) example
 - Despite inaccuracies, believing this has psychological benefits for those of higher and lower status



Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NARRATIVES

- Narratives involve the stories we tell to make sense of our world and our place in it
 - Narratives do not need to be accurate to be believed

Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NARRATIVES

- Narratives involve the stories we tell to make sense of our world and our place in it
 - Recruitment narratives
 - Validate feelings and meet emotional needs



Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NARRATIVES

- Narratives involve the stories we tell to make sense of our world and our place in it
 - Recruitment narratives
 - Validate feelings and meet emotional needs
 - Focus on the individual grievance as a group grievance
 - This focus increases the sense of belonging



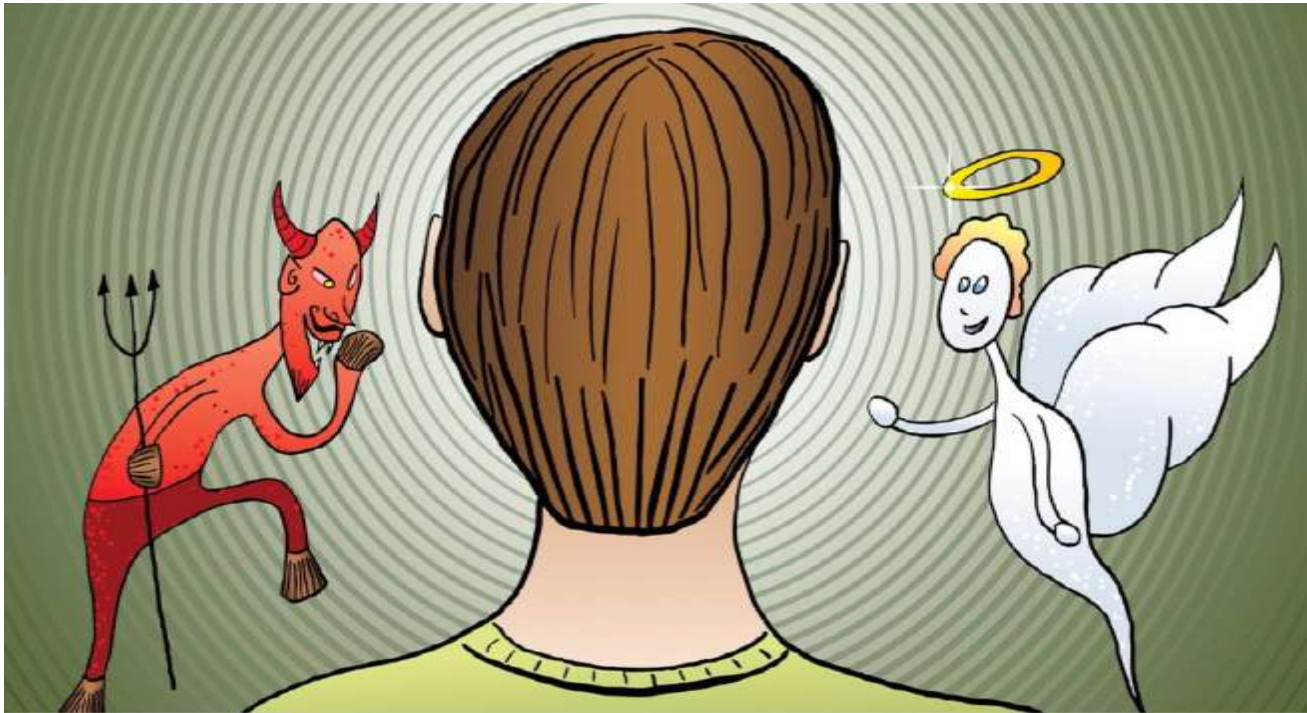
Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns-- NARRATIVES

- Narratives involve the stories we tell to make sense of our world and our place in it
 - Recruitment narratives
 - Validate feelings and meet emotional needs
 - Focus on the individual grievance as a group grievance
 - Include a call to action that:
 - Serves the extremist community
 - Provides the recruit with
 - A sense of control
 - Meaning and purpose
 - A method of improving their status



Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NETWORKS

- Sutherland's Theory of Differential Association



Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NETWORKS

- Kruglanski et al. (2019): Networks teach narratives and meet needs for belonging and respect



Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NETWORKS

- Extremists become increasingly isolated from people with moderate views
- They associate with an increasingly smaller group of trusted fellow extremists

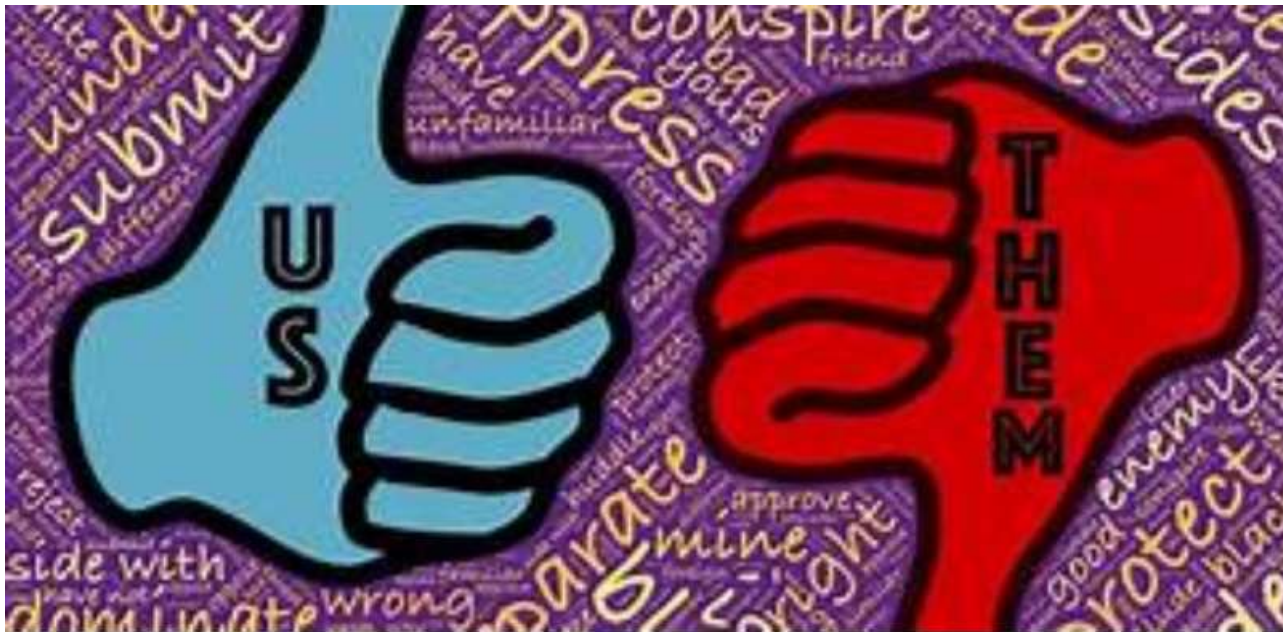


Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NETWORKS

- Extremists become increasingly isolated from people with moderate views
- They associate with an increasingly smaller group of trusted fellow extremists
- Their identity becomes increasingly focused on their extremism
 - *"It stripped me completely from being a father, husband, brother, son, it stripped me of that identity, of what I was to other people, I became this person who was completely focused on the other side."*
 - -Former paramilitary member

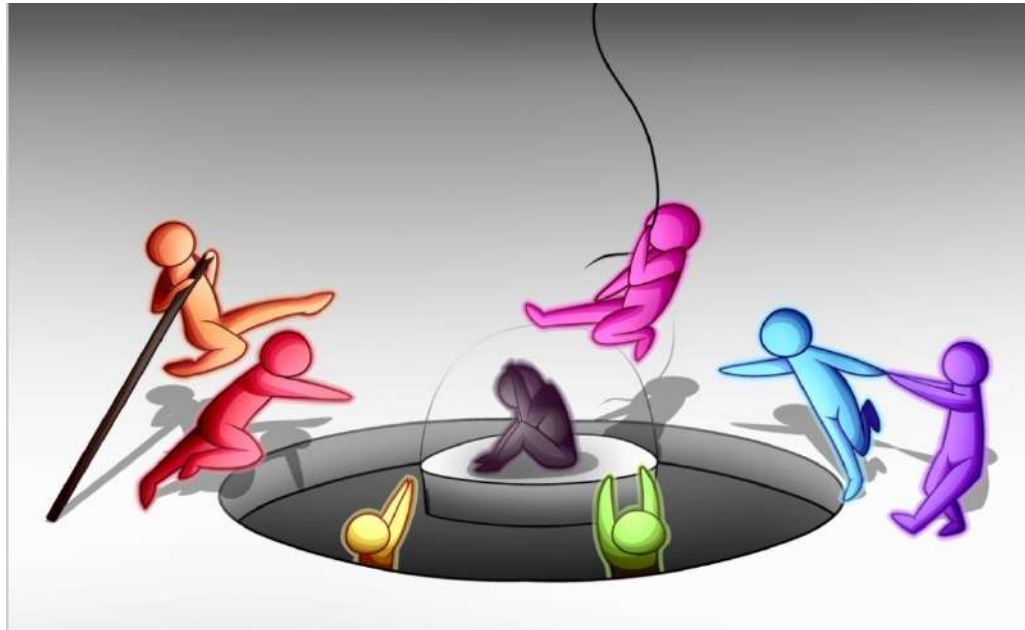
Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NETWORKS

- Isolation + all-encompassing self-identity → seeing all outgroup members in black and white terms



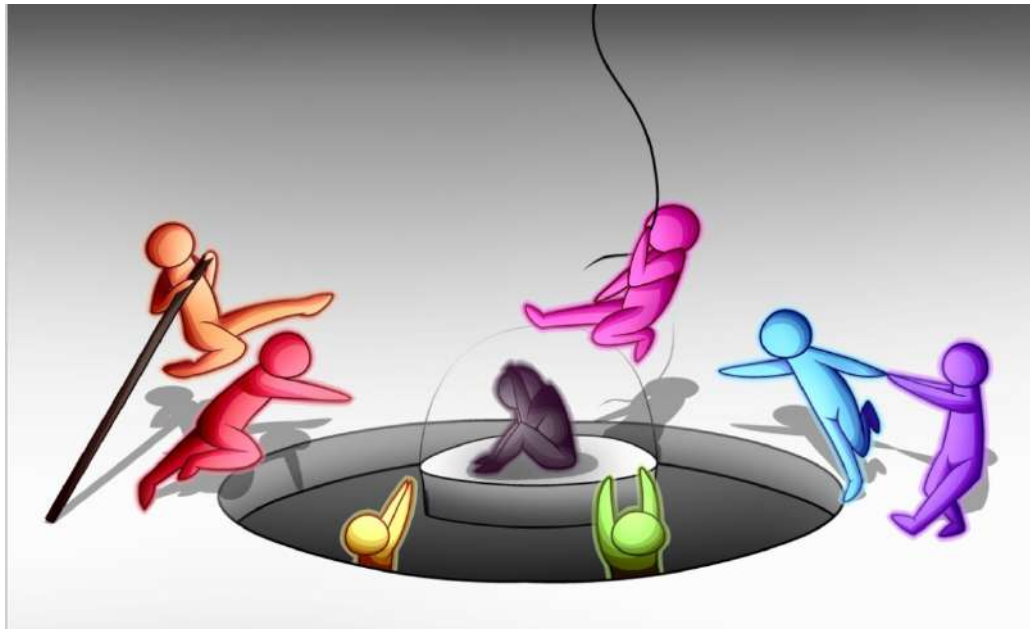
Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NETWORKS

- Networks are key to radicalization, but also key to de-radicalization



Socio-Psychological Theories of Radicalization: The 3Ns - NETWORKS

- Networks are key to radicalization, but also key to de-radicalization
 - Contact with moderates and positive interaction with the targeted outgroup are crucial



Dismantling the Three Pillars

- Conventional person → loss of significance → quest for significance → radicalization
- Extremist → loss of significance → quest for significance → de-radicalization



Dismantling the Three Pillars

- Precipitating Event
 - Unrelated to extremist ideology/group
 - Birth of child, serious illness, death of loved one
 - Related to extremism/group
 - Burn-out
 - Disillusionment
 - Negative group dynamics

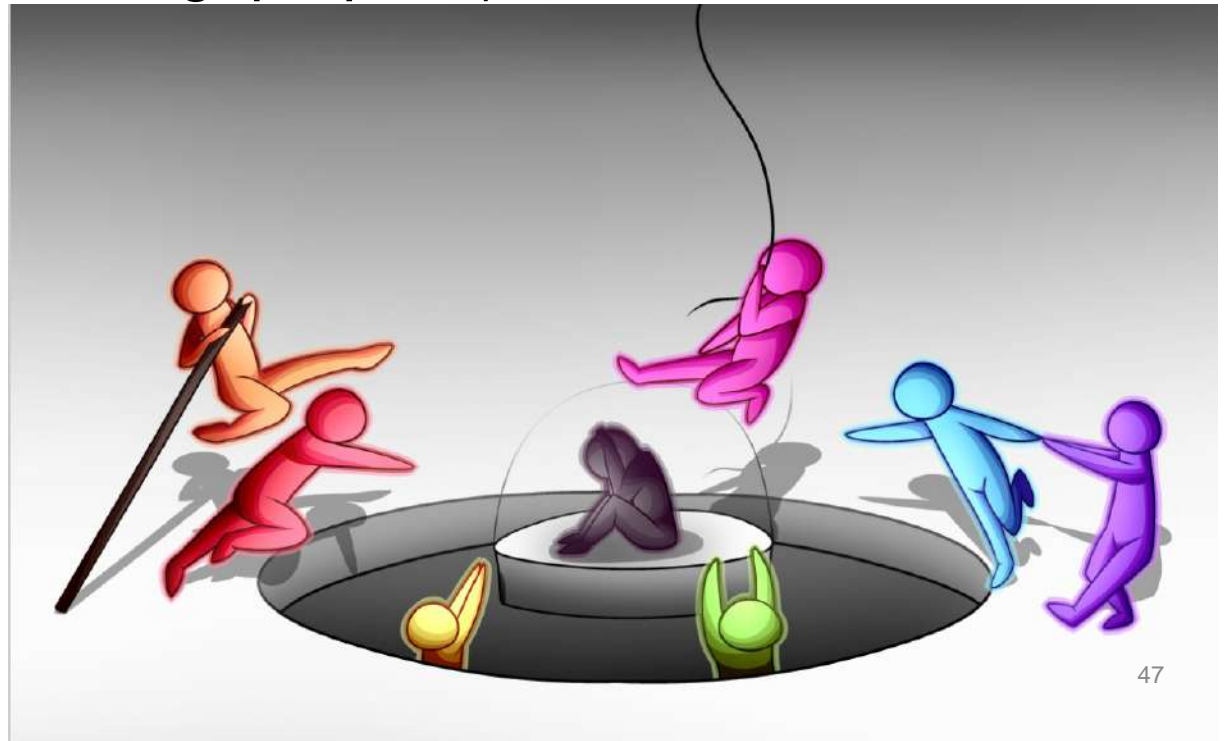
Dismantling the Three Pillars

- Precipitating Event → Cognitive opening



Dismantling the Three Pillars

- Precipitating Event → Cognitive opening
- Upstanders are on the front line
 - Become the new network to meet needs (for belonging, meaning, purpose) and conventional narratives





Radicalization: A Guide for Fighting Extremism (Part 2) Materials and Outline

Materials:

- Facilitator's Notes and References
- Participants' Handout
- 1-hour PowerPoint Presentation

In Part 1 of this Guide for Fighting Extremism (*Making the Invisible Visible*), we examine how violent extremism is increasing and is difficult to combat due to online recruitment, coded messages, and extremism both emerging from mainstream ideologies and being mainstreamed. In order to counter radicalization, we must first recognize it. Once recognized, an upstander must understand the push and pull factors that lead to radicalization in order to effectively encourage de-radicalization. Part 2 addresses factors that can lead to extremism. Part 3 of a Guide for Fighting Extremism discusses strategies of friends, family members, and other community members (“upstanders”) for informally assisting in the de-radicalization process. Part 4 examines the vulnerabilities of the Latinx community in regard to extremism.

Radicalization: Brief Outline

- I. Introduction: Definition of Terms
 - A. Radicalization/extremism
 - B. Desistance, disengagement, de-radicalization, and counter radicalization
 - C. Upstanders and formers
- II. Socio-demographic correlations of extremist violence
 - A. Being male
 - B. Social mobility struggles
 - C. Psychological and social difficulties
- III. Conveyor Belt Models of Violent Extremism
 - A. Staircase models and their problems
- B. Precipitating events and grievances
 - 1. Cognitive opening
 - C. Communicating intentions
- IV. Psycho-Social Factors in Radicalization: The Quest for Significance
 - A. Needs
 - B. Narratives
 - C. Networks
- V. Dismantling the Three Pillars



Radicalization: A Guide for Fighting Extremism (Part 2)

Teacher's Notes

Curriculum Objectives (Slide 2)

At the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

- Distinguish between different forms of radical disentanglement
- Understand their role in an informal network of upstanders in de-radicalization
- Describe socio-demographic correlates of extremism
- Identify common pre-cursors to radicalization
- Apply their knowledge of needs, narratives, and networks in the quest for significance to assist the de-radicalization process

Introduction: Definition of Terms (Slides 3-10)

Many researchers have defined radicalization and extremism with some definitions focusing on ideas, beliefs, or feelings, and others, emphasizing behaviors (Trip et al., 2019). The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has a behaviorally oriented definition, describing radicalization as embracing views that support violence to change society. However, as Trip et al. (2019) note, there are situations in which supporting violence to change society is not necessarily extreme. They describe such groups as pro-democratic social movements that limit their violence exclusively to the responsible party and limit any attacks to be proportional to the offense while maintaining a focus on problem solving and corrective action. For the purposes of this presentation, radicalization and extremism refer to embracing ideas and beliefs that are inconsistent with the values of the majority of members of society and are in opposition to democracy, diversity, civil rights, and civil liberties. Violent extremism is a threat to both individuals and society (Lokay & Robinson, 2022; U.S. Department of Justice, 2023) and violates various laws, however, not all extremism is violent, and extremism itself is not illegal in the U.S.A. (Vergani, 2023). Because extremism contradicts many social values and because of its association with various forms of targeted violence including hate crimes and terrorism, it is important that families and community members have tools for preventing and countering it.

Violent extremists can extrapolate from extremism in three distinct ways: desistance, disengagement, and de-radicalization (Jensen & Simi, 2019; Pressman, 2009; Abrams, 2021). The violent extremist who achieves *desistance* does not engage in criminal activity, although they may continue to associate with extreme groups and maintain an extreme ideology. Extremists who *disengage* succeed in separating themselves from other violent extremists, reducing or eliminating participation in extremist groups or activities. *De-radicalization* involves rejecting extremist ideology as well as any behaviors prompted by such an ideology. *Counter-radicalization* generally refers to formal programs of extremism prevention or de-radicalization. Multiple such programs have been developed in the U.S. and throughout the world, however, their effectiveness is not always well evaluated (Horgan, 2021; Pressman, 2009; O'Mahoney et



al., 2023) and some formal institutional responses have even been found to further entrench extremism (DeMichelle et al., 2021; Brown, 2022).

Several qualitative studies have found that informal networks, such as family, friends, and other community members are often crucial in assisting an extremist in the de-radicalization process (Pressman, 2009; Jensen & Simi, 2019; Brown, 2022; Rune et al., 2022; Haughtstvedt, 2022). It is in their “quest for significance” or desire for belonging, meaning, and purpose (Kruglanski et al., 2014) that many extremists become radicalized, but these needs do not diminish when they are no longer being met by the extremist network. In some instances, it may be that the primary driving force for joining extremist groups is social rather than ideological (Pressman, 2009). Parents, partners, teachers, friends, community leaders and members, and others can help bolster the recovering extremists’ sense of belonging and purpose. In this presentation, we refer to the informal network of people who can actively engage in educated attempts to assist someone in de-radicalization as *upstanders* (Davies, 2009; Anser, 2021).

In addition to the extremists' informal network of non-extremists, some studies suggest that engagement with de-radicalized extremists, referred to as *formers* (former extremists) can assist in the de-radicalization process. Some formers have become de-radicalization activists who provide advice and support for both recovering extremists and upstanders (Brown, 2022; Rune & Sveinung, 2022, Cashmere, 2019). Techniques for finding and utilizing the assistance of formers are discussed in Part 3 of the Guide to Fighting Extremism.

Socio-Demographic Factors Associated with Radicalization (Slides 11-14)

There are as many paths to radicalization as there are radicalized individuals (Horgan, 2012; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017); in this sense, every radicalized person must be dealt with as their own individual case. Additionally, different radicalized ideologies—such as that of an Islamist Jihadist versus that of a White supremacist, require different strategies for de-radicalization (Abrams, 2021). However, there are certain socio-demographic characteristics that while not directly causing radicalization—as most people who experience them never radicalize—are more common amongst people who do radicalize. Understanding the social, psychological, and institutional motivations for radicalization is crucial to any de-radicalization attempts (Pressman, 2009; Trip et al., 2019; Jensen et al., 2016), and this presentation reviews the research on these motivations in order to assist bystanders in becoming upstanders.

Understanding the socio-demographic correlates of those who become radicalized is important for both preventing and addressing radicalization. In regard to prevention, knowing what factors lead to radicalization can assist communities to develop programs to reduce or eliminate those factors, as well as identify community members who are at the most risk for radicalization. In designing programs of intervention, more than the extremist ideology must be addressed. Effective programs will also include methods of amelioration of the economic, social,



and psychological difficulties that precede violent extremism (Brown, 2022; Trip et al., 2019; Jensen et al., 2016). Among informal networks, upstanders who are aware of the correlates of extremism may be able to provide support or encourage intervention for potential extremists that reduces their chances of radicalizing in the first place.

Being Male (Slide 15)

While more research needs to explore how masculinity relates to violent extremism (Duriesmith & Ismail, 2022), it is clear that men are far more susceptible to radicalization than women. In reviewing four large studies funded through the National Institute of Justice, 99-100% of the terrorists were male; males make up just 49% of the population (Smith, 2018). Jensen et al. (2016) found that on average, 90% of extremists were male, in their analysis of Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS), which is the largest database of American extremists. This analysis found that 95% of Jihadist and far-right extremists were male, while 75-88% of left-wing and single-issue extremists were males (Jensen et al, 2016). It could be that being female offers some protection against extremism and/or violence, and/or that maleness increases vulnerability to extreme ideas; again, more research is needed to understand this strong relationship between sex and targeted violence. Additionally, having military experience is also associated with terrorism. While 13% of the U.S. population has military experience, studies found that 28-32% of those who attempted to or engaged in violent extremism had military backgrounds (Jensen et al, 2016). Although women have been allowed in the military since 1948, as of 2021, women only made up 19.4% of our armed forces (Statista Research Department, 2023).

Difficulties with Social Mobility (Slide 16)

While extremists in the PIRUS database did not have substantially different educational backgrounds than the general population (Jensen et al, 2016), many people who radicalize have struggled with maintaining or improving their socio-economic status through conventional means, such as education and employment (Jensen & Simi, 2019; Brown, 2022; Popp et al., 2020; Pressman, 2009). Being poor, unemployed, and/or having a sporadic work history are all risk factors for embracing violent extremism (Smith, 2018). As a result of their occupational and economic struggles, they may have difficulty meeting basic needs such as food and shelter or experience discrimination based on social class. Many formers report experiences of discrimination, be it as Muslim, a rural White, or as a convicted felon (Jensen & Simi, 2019; Brown, 2022; Popp et al., 2020; Pressman, 2009). Having a criminal history is a risk factor for violent extremism as well (Jensen et al., 2016; Smith 2018).

Social and Psychological Difficulties (Slide 17)

Whether the social and psychological difficulties that many extremists face are a cause or a consequence of their difficulties with social mobility is unclear. What is known is that many



extremists have psychological issues or formal diagnoses of mental disorders (Smith, 2018). They also frequently have troubled romantic, platonic, and familial relationships and may be more socially isolated than those who do not radicalize (Smith, 2018; DeMichelle et al., 2021). Additionally, extremists may have substance abuse issues (Jensen & Simi, 2019; Ferguson & McCauley, 2020).

The picture of the terrorist that emerges then is that of a man with a propensity towards (legitimate/military or illegitimate/criminal) violence who faces difficulties on a number of fronts, including economic, psychological, and social. Amman et al., (2016) found that an increasing number of stressors was positively related to radicalization. And yet, again, most people who experience these difficulties do not radicalize. Two additional factors that promote radicalization are experiencing a precipitating event and grievances.

Conveyor Belt Models of Violent Extremism (Slides 18-20)

Following the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. in 2001, there was a spate of research on radical extremism and terrorism. In addition to identifying various correlates with violent extremism, many of these studies proposed what has more recently been dubbed a “conveyor belt model” of violent extremism (McCauley & Moksalenko, 2017). Underlying these models was the assumption that prevention and intervention prior to or at the point of radicalization would reduce if not eliminate the potential for extremist violence. While the details of these theories vary somewhat, all of them examine how a person moved from someone who held conventional ideas and values to someone who held radical ideas and then became willing to kill or die for those radical ideas (Moghaddam, 2005; Horgan, 2005; Wiktorwicz, 2005; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). While of course people are not born with extreme views or terrorist intentions, more recent research indicates that the pathway to extremist violence is rarely linear, that those on a path to extremism will not necessarily become more extreme over time, and that extremist views are poor predictors of violence (Horgan, 2012; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). Not only do conveyor belt models fail to capture the non-linearity of radicalization, over-reactions by governments to extreme ideologies can both entrench those already committed to extremism as well as create new extremists. Furthermore, the focus on the ideological components of radicalization lends itself to ideological wars, which again has the potential for backlash (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017).

While criticisms conveyor belt models of radicalization have many important implications for policy and formal interventions to radicalization, the purpose of this presentation is to help upstanders – family, friends, associates, community members—in informal responses to a radicalizing individual. Thus, understanding the psychological processes and social and psychological needs that can lead to radicalization remains an important foundation for curbing extremism. Understanding how and why radicalization happens can assist upstanders in engaging in informed and empathic strategies for countering radicalization.



A Precipitating Event & Grievances (Slides 21-24)

While research has identified several sociodemographic characteristics correlated with extremism, it would be inaccurate to propose that these factors are causal; the majority of people who experience any constellation of these factors never radicalize. In reviewing four studies funded through the National Institute of Justice, an empirical link was found between experiencing a triggering event or trauma and becoming radicalized to terrorism (Smith, 2018). This event may be personal, such as losing a job, or political (e.g., believing an election was stolen), or some combination of the two (e.g., being fired after participating in the January 6, 2021 insurrection), and was present in nearly three-quarters of those who became radicalized (Jensen et al, 2016). Extremists are not the only types of people who experience a precipitating event before embracing violence; students who engage in school shootings frequently experience a precipitating event, such as the breakup of a romantic relationship or failing grades (O’Toole, 2000). Likewise, both push and pull factors leading to gang membership have been identified, and triggering events constitute a push factor (Howell, 2010). Furthermore, most studies find that an increasing number of stressors tends to result in increasing difficulty in healthy coping (Amman et al., 2016).

Precipitating events have been hypothesized as creating a “cognitive opening” that allows the focal person to re-interpret their life and the world, possibly in extremist or radical terms (Wiktorwicz, 2005). Prior to radicalization, the individual experiences an identity crisis during which they question previously held beliefs and are open to new (and extreme) ideas and values to make sense of their lives. While the term “cognitive opening” was coined by social movements theorist Wiktorwicz in 2005, the concept is known as “unfreezing” in psychology, and “biographical availability” in sociology (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). Klausen (2016) found that 92% or more of extremists experienced this pre-radicalization phase that lasted on average one to two years. As the person has not yet committed to an extreme ideology or group during this phase, upstanders have the opportunity to intervene if they can recognize the signs and are equipped with the necessary tools for de-escalation of radicalization.

Precipitating events can be separate from or connected to an offender’s “grievances.” For example, the termination of a romantic relationship may be ideologically unrelated to someone who is developing a White supremacist identity. However, the loss of a significant other might be interpreted by the person of concern as being “freed” to engage in violence that the relationship constrained. Conversely, the loss of a job or failing grades may act as both a triggering event and a grievance that encourages the offender to engage in violence. In understanding both precipitating events and grievances, it is important to recognize that offenders do not “snap,” but instead decide and plan to engage in violence (Amman et al., 2016). This is positive news for the prevention of violence as the time involved in the offender’s decision to and planning of an attack is also time that community members can use to prevent the attack.



Again, although all people face challenges in life, only a minority become extremists. It is not the traumatic event that causes radicalization, but rather how the focal person comes to interpret the event. As humans, we actively engage in making sense of our world, and when the troubles we face are interpreted as an injustice inflicted upon us by others, we have a grievance (Sizoo et al., 2022). In examining grievances, Sizoo and colleagues (2022) note that while grievances might be personal, they also can emerge when a focal person is exposed to stories of injustice to a group with whom the focal individual identifies. In some instances, extremist recruiters have been known to exploit such stories as a recruitment strategy (Sizoo, 2022). In other instances, behaviors of those who are trying to manage a person of concern (such as employers, school administrators, or law enforcement) have been shown to produce a precipitating event or grievance (Amman et al., 2016). The FBI recommends taking a caretaker approach and considering “last straws” when authorities need to respond to a person of concern (Amman et al., 2016). Jensen et al. (2016) asserts that successful CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) programs will address grievances not only through education regarding misperceptions but also through acknowledging legitimate grievances.

Communicating Intentions of Violence (Slides 25- 26)

Prior to engaging in targeted violence, many different types of offenders engage in warning behaviors or leakage that indicate their intentions. There is a large variety of specific types of warning behavior, and these may express themselves fairly directly, such as “I am going to kill everyone in upper management,” to more subtle warnings, such as an increased focus on violence in general, or end of life planning (Amman et al., 2016). While those who have engaged in targeted violence frequently engage in warning behaviors, it is important to note that warning behaviors do not predict future violence; many people who show warning behaviors do not end up engaging in violence. In conjunction with other factors, warning behaviors can be used to assess the level of threat posed by a potential offender (Amman et al., 2016).

Heavy-handed, punitive, and/or formal responses to extremism often fail, or worse, backfire and result in a more entrenched commitment to extremism (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Brown, 2022). These types of responses can provide “evidence” to the person of concern that their grievances are legitimate and that they are being persecuted. On the other hand, there are many examples of warnings that were ignored. For instance, the FBI had received a reliable tip from an adult close to Nicholas Cruz five weeks prior to his shooting of 17 people at a Parkland school in Florida (Berman & Zapatosky, 2018). While law enforcement and other authorities need to be judicious in their responses to threats of violence, all threats of violence need to be taken seriously and reported.

Psycho-Social Factors in Radicalization: The Quest for Significance (Slides 27-28)

There is a great deal of overlap in the theories examining the psychological factors driving extremism (Jensen et al., 2016; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). These theories adopt a



staircase model of radicalization which includes a precipitating event, cognitive opening, and grievances, as well as reinterpretation of one's situation and/or values, and association with other extremists. Kruglanski et al. (2014) dubbed their model of these issues "the quest for significance" and labeled the different aspects of the quest as "needs, narratives, and networks" or the "3Ns" which they argue are the three pillars of radicalization. Various researchers have found empirical support for the 3Ns (Jasko et al., 2020; Jasko et al., 2016; Belanger et al., 2019; Popp et al., 2020) using that terminology or using similar ideas labeled differently (Smith et al., 2016, Sizoo et al., 2017, Klausen, 2016; Wiktorwicz, 2005). Using Kruglanski's terminology, we review how the quest for significance and the 3Ns lead to radicalization below.

Importantly, Kruglanski (2019) argues that all three pillars must be in place before radicalization can occur; if any pillar is missing, a person will not radicalize. In regard to prevention or intervention, this provides multiple avenues for addressing and/or disrupting the three pillars.

Needs (Slides 29-32)

As humans, we all experience basic physical, psychological, and social needs. In 1943, Abraham Maslow proposed that people experience a hierarchy of needs in his paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation." Maslow's hierarchy of needs includes physiological needs, the need for security, love, and belonging, social needs or the need for respect, and finally self-actualization. Maslow proposed that the needs of the lower in the hierarchy must be met before higher-level needs can be pursued. As noted in the discussion of socio-demographic correlates of extremism, many extremists experience difficulty with social mobility, which may result in difficulty in meeting their needs for belonging and esteem. For example, poor people may face discrimination which impedes their sense of belonging, and people with employment difficulties may be treated with disrespect. Indeed, social mobility difficulties may result in needs for safety or other basic physiological needs going unmet. Even if these needs are currently being met, difficulties in this arena can result in uncertainty, which has been shown to increase the propensity toward violence and extremism (Kruglanski, 2023; Ferguson & McCauley, 2020; Hogg et al., 2013).

Kruglanski and colleagues (2014, 2019) describe the need for significance as a desire to belong, to be respected, and to have a sense of meaning and purpose, and they argue that this need for significance is key to radicalization. As noted previously, many extremists report experiences of discrimination, be it as Muslim a rural White, or a convicted felon (Jensen & Simi, 2019; Brown, 2022; Popp et al., 2020; Pressman, 2009). Discrimination is one method by which significance may be lost and trigger a quest for significance. The authors note (Kruglanski et al., 2019, para. 1 [abstract]):

The quest for significance is activated in one of three major ways: (a) through a loss of significance occasioned by personal failure or affront to one's social identity (e.g., ethnicity, religion, race), (b) through a threat of significance loss if one failed to respond



to a challenge or to defend one's group values, and/or (c) through an opportunity for a significance gain (e.g., becoming a hero or a martyr) by selflessly defending one's group values.

When significance is lost, people will seek means to find or restore it. In doing so, they might experience a cognitive opening (Wiktorwicz, 2005) which enables them to consider new ideas, values, and identities. In their desire to restore their significance, a potential radical may seek out new ideas and new people which brings us to the second and third pillars of radicalization, narratives, and networks.

Narratives (Slides 33-37)

Narratives involve the stories we tell to make sense of our world and our place in it. For example, one mainstream narrative in the U.S. is that U.S. is a meritocracy in which people earn their positions due to ability and effort. Of course, this narrative is highly inaccurate, but it continues to legitimate individuals' successes and failures in life. While a belief in a meritocracy might have obvious benefits for people of high status—justifying their success and worthiness, McCoy and colleagues (2013) found that meritocratic beliefs can also improve the health and self-esteem of people in lower status groups by providing lower-status people with a sense of personal control and a belief in future opportunities.

Just as the meritocracy narrative does not need to be accurate in order to convince mainstream Americans that our system is legitimate, alternative narratives offered by extremists can be persuasive regardless of the degree to which they may or may not align with empirical facts. Studies of the alternative narratives that radicals use to recruit new members have been found to contain certain commonalities which are discussed below.

Narratives are used not only as a means of guiding current and future actions of (potential) extremists but also to meet current emotional needs (Radicalisation Awareness Network [RAN], 2019). As noted previously, many extremists experience a triggering or precipitating event prior to radicalization. Radical recruiters often use a narrative of victimization and/or a sense of exclusion that validates the experience of the potential radical. By legitimizing the feelings of the potential recruit, the recruit is enabled to see other group narratives as legitimate. While acknowledging individual victimization, extremists also emphasize group grievances and a pervasive sense of injustice. This often frames the individual victimization as part of the group victimization. For a Jihadist, their victimization occurred because they are Muslim; for a White supremacist, it is the result of their Whiteness; for incels, it is because of their status as men, and so on (RAN, 2019). In so doing, recruiters may manipulate or misrepresent various historical facts, social statistics, or other empirical information. However, there is often at least some kernel of truth in the group grievance narrative that is exploited by recruiters. Additionally, the focus on group grievances also provides those undergoing a quest for significance with a sense of belonging.



In addition to meeting the psychological and emotional needs of potential radicals, recruitment narratives also involve a call to action. This call to action serves the wider needs of the extremist community but also has multiple psychological rewards for the recruit. The call to action provides a sense of control to the recruit; they can change their situation and the situation of their group through their own individual choices and actions. The call to action also provides a sense of meaning and purpose to the recruit. By accepting the call to action, the recruit will be improving conditions for their group, but also improving their own status within the group. In this way, narratives function not only to provide a frame for interpreting past and current events but also a blueprint for improving the recruit's future.

Networks (Slides 38-44)

Violence does not occur in a vacuum, and understanding the social and environmental predictors of violence is crucial to assessing threats and preventing violence. In 1937, Edwin Sutherland introduced his empirically based Theory of Differential Association to explain why some people engage in deviance, and others do not. According to Sutherland, social deviance occurs when interactions with others result in more support for rule-breaking activities than for rule-abiding activities. Interactions with those who support rule-breaking vary in frequency, intensity, and proximity, and higher levels of exposure to one or more of these dimensions increase the likelihood of deviant behavior.

In discussing networks, Kruglanski et al. (2019) recognize the importance of associating with others who hold extreme views and support extreme actions in becoming radicalized. Other people are important for teaching a potential recruit a new narrative, but also for meeting the needs for acceptance, belonging, and respect. Networks also provide a mechanism for improving an individual's status within the group: By engaging in extreme actions for the cause, the group confers more esteem on the actor.

In their study of those who participated in paramilitaries during the conflict in Northern Ireland in the latter half of the twentieth century, Ferguson & McCauley (2020) describe in detail the centrality of networks in radicalization. As radicalization occurs, members become increasingly isolated from those with more moderate views. In their words (Ferguson & McCauley, 2020, p.4):

[A]s they become operatives in the conflict and are forced to live with the pressures and stressors associated with this lifestyle, they socialize within even smaller circles of like-minded paramilitarists whom they felt they could trust. As they are also under constant surveillance and threat, they become more paranoid, obsessive, and insulated from people outside the extremist group.

In addition to becoming more isolated from those with moderate views, members' identities as extremists become increasingly all-encompassing. According to one member of a



paramilitary, after becoming inducted into the group, “It stripped me completely from being a father, husband, brother, son, it stripped me of that identity, of what I was to other people, I became this person who was completely focused on the other side” (Ferguson & McCauley, 2020, p.5).

Ferguson & McCauley (2020) also note how isolation and an all-encompassing self-identity can also lead to seeing out-group members in black-and-white terms. One member of a Protestant paramilitary group describes how he initially only targeted members of Catholic paramilitaries, but eventually he came to see all Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland as the enemy and legitimate targets of violence.

Kruglanski (et al, 2019), Ferguson & McCauley (2020), and others (Pressman, 2009; Popp, 2022; Brown, 2022) found that while networks are a crucial element of radicalization, networks are also essential to de-radicalization. Both exposure to people with more moderate views and positive interactions with members of the targeted out-group are keys to altering viewpoints and eschewing violence.

Dismantling the Three Pillars (Slides 45-48)

While the loss of significance can trigger a quest for significance that can result in radicalization, the process can also work in reverse and result in de-radicalization. When reversing to de-radicalization, extremists tend to follow the same processes as they did when radicalizing. Generally, there is a precipitating event that may be unrelated to the extremist ideology or group, for instance, having a child, a serious medical diagnosis, or the death of a loved one. More frequently, the precipitating event is connected to the extremist ideology or group. Participation in extremism, particularly when violence is involved, is psychologically stressful, exhausting, and can be traumatic (Ferguson & McCauley, 2020; Pressman, 2009). Members may experience burnout which triggers the de-radicalization process. Additionally, a member may become disillusioned with the group due to leadership, in-fighting, betrayal, or other negative group experiences (DeMichelle et al., 2021). As with radicalization, this precipitating event can create a cognitive opening for de-radicalization.

It is upstanders who are often on the front line when radicals experience a cognitive opening that leads them to seek more moderate narratives and networks. Just as the extremist group provided a sense of belonging, meaning, and purpose that led to radicalization, moderates can meet those needs to trigger de-radicalization (Popp et al, 2021; Kruglanski et al. 2019). Having the right people in the right place at the right time is often essential for de-radicalization (Brown, 2022), and having upstanders available to be the right people is paramount in the process.



Radicalization: A Guide for Fighting Extremism (Part 2) **Participant Handout**

Introduction: Definition of Terms

Radicalization/extremism

Forms of radical disentanglement:

Desistance, disengagement, de-radicalization and counter-radicalization

Upstanders: The informal network of people (parents, partners, teachers, friends, community leaders and members, and others) who can actively engage in informed and educated attempts to assist someone in de-radicalization

Formers: Former extremists

Socio-Demographic Correlations of Extremist Violence

Being male

Military experience

Social mobility struggles

Poverty, unemployment, sporadic work history, discrimination

Psychological and social difficulties

Psychological issues/diagnoses

Substance abuse

Troubled romantic, platonic, and familial relationships

Conveyor Belt Models of Violent Extremism

Assumptions: The person moves from conventional → increasingly radical ideology → violence motivated by extreme ideas

Interventions oriented toward preventing or changing radical ideas

Criticisms

Path to extremism is individualized and non-linear

Heavy-handed government responses to extreme ideas can entrench current and create new extremists

Focus on extreme ideology → wars on ideas

Strengths: Upstanders are crucial in the de-radicalization process and understanding how and why radicalization happens can assist upstanders in engaging in firm and empathic strategies for countering radicalization

Precipitating (triggering) event: Personal and/or political trauma

Cognitive opening/unfreezing/biographical availability: Precipitating event causes an identity crisis during which they question previously held beliefs and are open to new (and extreme) ideas and values to make sense of their lives

Grievance: Difficulties are interpreted as an injustice inflicted upon us (either as an individual or a group) by others

Violent extremists do not snap; they decide and plan violence



Authorities should be cautious of creating a precipitating event/grievance when managing a person of concern

Communicating Intentions of Violence

Prior to engaging in targeted violence, offenders often engage in warning behaviors that indicate their intentions

Heavy-handed, punitive, and/or formal responses to extremism often fail, or worse, backfire

All threats of violence need to be taken seriously and reported

Psycho-Social Factors in Radicalization: The Quest for Significance

Overlap in psychological theories of radicalization

Staircase model of radicalization: Precipitating event, cognitive opening, grievances, change in worldview

Kruglanski et al. (2014): “The quest for significance”

3Ns or “needs, narratives, and networks”

All 3 pillars are necessary; missing one = failure to radicalize

Needs

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs: Includes physiological needs, the need for security, love, and belonging, social needs or the need for respect, and finally self-actualization

Difficulty with social mobility → unmet needs

And/or uncertainty that needs will be met

Uncertainty → violence and extremism

Kruglanski: The need for significance (belonging, purpose, respect) is key to radicalization

Discrimination → loss of significance → attempts to restore significance

Seek out new ideas (Narratives) and people (Networks)

Narratives

The stories we tell to make sense of our world and our place in it

Example: Meritocracy (myth)

Psychological benefits for those with higher and lower status

Narratives do not have to be accurate to be believed

Narratives of Radical Recruiters

Individual and group grievances

Meet emotional needs for belonging

Call to action → sense of purpose and method of obtaining the respect of in-group

Networks

Differential association: We adopt the values, beliefs, and behaviors of those with whom we associate the most

Networks teach narratives and meet needs



Dismantling the Three Pillars

De-radicalization often follows the same processes as radicalization and upstanders serve as the network that meets needs and provides narratives for those who are de-radicalizing



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