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Pete Simi [a] and Steven Windisch[b]

aChapman University, Department of Sociology, Orange, California, USA; bUniversity of Nebraska Omaha, School of Criminology & Criminal Justice, Omaha, Nebraska, USA

ABSTRACT

Few issues have garnered as much attention in recent years as the topic of violent extremism (VE). Although substantial attention has been devoted to investigating the radicalization process, few scholars have examined the obstacles that hinder VE radicalization. Based on in-depth life history interviews, the current study examines five types of barriers that hinder radicalization toward mass casualty violence (MCV): mass casualty violence as counter-productive; preference toward interpersonal violence, changes in focus and availability; internal organizational conflict; and moral apprehension. In general, we address each barrier's unique contribution to hindering the likelihood of MCV. Finally, we discuss how our findings could be used as part of initiatives aimed at countering violent extremism (CVE).

In 1969 Travis Hirschi published *Causes of Delinquency* which assessed the status of existing criminological theory and outlined his own version of social bond theory. Hirschi argued, among other things, that criminological theory should focus more on asking "*why don't we do it*" rather than the more common question "*why do they do it?*"[1] In this respect, Hirschi advocated for a focus on the constraints or barriers that prevent or reduce the likelihood of crime. The importance of this twist in thinking is the emphasis on the elements of the social fabric, which compel conformity rather than deviation by limiting certain types of human behavior.

Following Hirschi, we examine violent radicalization where one expected end point is committing an act of mass casualty violence (MCV). For purposes of the current study, MCV can be distinguished from more common types of interpersonal violence along two dimensions.[2] First, as compared to interpersonal violence, which is characterized by close physical proximity between the perpetrator and victim (s), MCV typically involves a greater physical distance between the aggressor and the target.[3] Second, MCV typically involves the potential for a large number of fatalities whereas interpersonal violence is much more likely to result in fewer victims.[4] Bombings and shooting rampages are common examples of MCV while interpersonal violence includes acts such as fistfights, attacks involving blunt objects (e.g. bats) and stabbings.

Terrorism, which can be defined as "acts of violence by non-state actors, perpetrated against civilian populations, intended to cause fear, in order to achieve a political objective" is typically distinguished by the actors' ideological motivation. [5] Broadly speaking, an extremist ideology refers to any set of beliefs that challenge the

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CONTACT Pete Simi ✉ simi@chapman.edu 🖅 Sociology Department, Chapman University, Roosevelt Hall 220, One University Drive, Orange, CA 92866, USA.

Table 1. Barriers to mass casualty violence.

Barriers	N (%)
(1) MCV Seen as Counterproductive	6 (7.2%)
(2) Preference for Interpersonal Violence	11 (13.3%)
(3) Change in Focus and Availability	
a. Drugs and Alcohol	12 (14.5%)
b. Personal Obligations	13 (15.7%)
(4) Internal Organizational Conflict	
a. Hypocrisy	8 (9.6%)
b. In-fighting	15 (18.1%)
(5) Moral Apprehension	18 (21.7%)

Table 2. Cumulative Nature of Mass Casuality Violence Barriers.
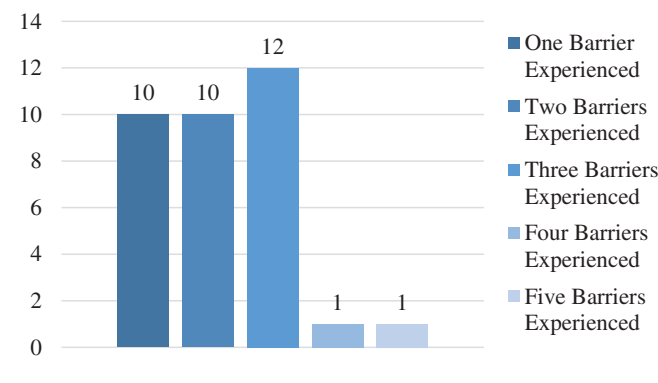
legitimacy of the state and/or authorize the use of unlawful behavior to achieve political and/or religious goals.[6] Clearly, the definition of extremism is highly subjective and subject to a host of contextual factors.

Despite a large number of definitions, radicalization generally refers *to the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs*; whereas, action pathways (or action scripts) refer to the *process of engaging in terrorism or violent extremist actions*.[7] As Randy Borum argues, we need to differentiate "radicalization" from "action pathways" because most people with radical beliefs do not engage in terrorism.[8] As part of the process, scholars often either implicitly or explicitly view MCV as the end point of the action pathway process. In light of the distinction between radical ideas and action, the current study focuses on obstacles that hinder the development of action pathways toward MCV among individuals who endorse radical beliefs. While it is widely recognized that most extremists never become terrorists, few studies have sought to explain the internal barriers that hinder the progression from extremist ideas to violent action.[9]

In order to address this gap, the current study relies on a sample of former U.S. white supremacist extremists who see themselves as victims of a world that is on the brink of collapse,[10] unite around genocidal fantasies against Jews, Blacks, Hispanics, homosexuals, and anyone else opposed to white power, and have an extensive history of involvement in terroristic activity throughout U.S. history.[11] More specifically, we present empirical findings derived from life history interviews, which illustrate different types of barriers

and each barrier's unique contribution to hindering MCV. The barriers we identified include a combination of illicit interests (e.g., illegal drug lifestyle) and conventional activities and goals such as parenthood that compete with action pathways leading to MCV. Finally, we discuss how our findings could be used as part of initiatives aimed at countering violent extremism (CVE).

Black swans and the rarity of terror incidents

A large number of studies acknowledge the low base rate of terror incidents.[12] In 2013, there were 11,999 terror incidents across the entire globe resulting in 22,178 fatalities,[13] while in the United States alone, during that same year, there were 664,210 robberies, 1,092,090 aggravated assaults, and 14,196 homicides.[14] These figures suggest how powerful the "terrorism discourse"[15] and "culture of counterterrorism"[16] have become across Western societies where the fear of terror is consistently ranked as a top priority among the general public.

Despite the wide recognition among academics of the rarity of terrorism, surprisingly few studies offer explanations of the conditions or factors that help constrain actors from committing a greater number of these incidents. Part of the answer for this rarity lies in the external environment including the various informal and formal social control strategies employed such as target hardening techniques.[17] Findings from environmental criminology offer important insight about the conditions that reduce the likelihood of MCV. These studies examine the ways private citizens and agents of formal social control use specific strategies to manipulate the environment in order to reduce different types of vulnerabilities and/or minimize opportunities for violent attacks.[18] More specifically, prior research has proposed that vulnerability and expected loss are associated with various target characteristics such as the degree of exposure and ease of approach by potential terrorists.[19] As such, the focus of these studies emphasizes how conditions external to radical individuals and groups operate as constraints in terms of MCV. One area that deserves greater attention, however, are the internal mechanisms that characterize the radicalization process and how certain internal processes may also constrain further radicalization and thus reduce the likelihood of MCV.

The current status of radicalization studies

In recent years, radicalization has become a household term among the general public and media.[20] Academics have spent substantial time investigating the empirical dimensions of the process and have developed various theories to explain *how* and *why* radicalization occurs.[21] Studies have examined the ambiguous nature of radicalization[22]; the degree of consensus in meaning among academics[23]; and the methodological strength of radicalization research.[24] Although many scholars suggest radicalization is not a linear process but rather occurs in fits and starts, there has been little effort to explain why radicalization does not typically progress to the point where a person(s) commits an act of MCV.[25]

One of the most vexing issues in the study of terrorism has been the absence of appropriate comparisons between violent and non-violent extremists who have not participated in MCV.[26] While most radicalization studies rely on "positive cases" or individuals and groups who radicalized to the point of committing MCV,[27] our sample represents an

important step forward in terms of focusing on "negative cases."[28] Such a comparison can highlight the elements of the social fabric that compel conformity and reduce the threat of MCV. In this sense, results from the current study can provide important insight into the organizational and subcultural dynamics of radicalization that hinder MCV.

Previous models of radicalization characterize the process as narrowing from a broader base of ideological adherents to a smaller base of individuals who are actually willing to commit acts of terror. For example, McCauley and Moskalenko present a dual pyramid model of radicalization with one pyramid illustrating the process of radicalizing attitudes and the other representing the process of radicalizing action. Their model is important, in part, because they are careful to distinguish between beliefs and action, which are not necessarily consistent with each other. In addition, McCauley and Moskalenko highlight the reactive character that underscores the radicalization process. That is, by focusing on the extremists *and* the situations they occupy, terrorism research is better able to understand the active and reactive nature of violent extremist actions.

Informed by existing models of radicalization, we propose that it is also helpful to begin asking the following questions: What limits the larger pool of extremists who embrace an ideology but do not translate these beliefs into action? What types of conditions serve as barriers in the action pathway process? And, finally, how can the identification of these barriers help inform counterterrorism measures?

To answer these questions, we focus on identifying various self-limiting properties internal to the radicalization process, which serve to inhibit extremists from committing large-scale acts of terrorism. These self-limiting properties can be thought of as barriers. For the purposes of the current study, barriers are social and psychological circumstances that prevent progression or access to an endpoint of MCV. Barriers are not necessarily segues to disengagement and/or deradicalization; instead, an extremist may continue involvement without fully radicalizing to the point of readiness to commit MCV. In other cases, a barrier may serve to promote disengagement. In either scenario, however, the consistent characteristic is encountering a constraint that hinders further escalation. Although the following barriers inhibit the likelihood of MCV, each barrier does so in a relatively unique way. We recognize the problems inherent with counterfactual arguments, however, a number of terrorism scholars have suggested that more research is needed to address the issue of why most extremists do not become terrorists. As such, we see the focus on internal barriers as an important step in this direction.

U.S. white supremacist groups

This paper focuses on U.S. white supremacist groups (i.e., the extreme of the far right). We consider white supremacists as constituting an overlapping web of movements that include various Ku Klux Klans, neo-Nazis, Christian Identity, racist skinheads, Posse Comitatus, and segments of the anti-government militia and sovereign citizen movements. While substantial ideological and stylistic differences exist across these movement networks, members agree on some basic doctrines. White supremacists imagine they are part of an innately superior biogenetic race (i.e., "master race") that is under attack by race-mixing and intercultural exchange. They desire a racially exclusive world where non-whites and other "sub-humans" are vanquished, segregated, or at least

subordinated to Aryan authority. White supremacists idealize conservative traditional male-dominant heterosexual families and oppose homosexuality, inter-racial sex, marriage, and procreation.[29] Despite their long history committing acts of terrorism, U.S. white supremacist groups are often neglected by scholars who study this type of violence.[30] Moreover, the relative tranquility that characterizes the contemporary context where U.S. white supremacist groups mobilize represents an important condition to consider in terms of analyzing the radicalization process. In this sense, U.S. white supremacists are an important case to study the subcultural factors and internal dynamics related to radicalization as compared to studying areas with longstanding political conflicts and high levels of political violence. In the next section, we present the specific methodological approach employed throughout this study as well as participant characteristics.

Methods

Data collection

The current analysis is grounded on life history interviews of 34 former extremists in order to understand a range of issues related to the onset, persistence, and desistance of violent extremism. Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique.[31] This snowball sampling procedure produced contacts that otherwise would not be accessible using traditional means of sampling such as mailing lists.[32] Although snowball sampling minimizes the generalizability of the results of this study, the goal of qualitative research is the identification of social processes, conceptual elaboration, and describing causal mechanisms. Our long-term ethnographic fieldwork with far-right extremists provided the basis for initial contacts with former white supremacists. Each of the initial participants were asked to provide referrals to other former extremists who might also be willing to participate in an interview. Multiple individuals were used to generate unique snowballs and, thus, only a small segment of the participants was acquainted with each other. The first author conducted interviews for this study between 2012–2016 in public settings such as restaurants and coffee shops although a subsample was conducted in private settings such as the participants' home.

To be clear, the individuals in this sample no longer identify as "white power" and are no longer affiliated with organized hate groups. All of the individuals currently see themselves as "formers" or something equivalent to a former ("I'm not involved anymore"; "I moved on" etc.). In some cases, individuals have been disengaged for more than a decade and have experienced substantial changes in their social and cognitive orientations (e.g., inter-racial marriage; conversion to Buddhism etc.). All names used in this manuscript are pseudonyms to conceal the identities of our participants.

The interviews ranged between three and six hours, although multiple participants provided access over the course of several days generating 10-to-20 hours of interview data. Each participant described their experiences in sequential order moving from their earliest memories to the present. To date, the dataset includes 3,757 pages of interview transcription. During the interview, participants were asked direct questions at various points to focus on specific topic areas. To help assess participants' orientation toward MCV during their period of extremist involvement, we provided well-known, concrete examples related to previous terrorism incidents such as the Oklahoma City bombing and the underground terrorist cell,

the Silent Brotherhood. We used these questions to help participants discuss their views about the efficacy of different types of violent tactics and their own degree of radicalization.

Sample characteristics

Participants included 30 male and 4 female participants, ranging from 19 to 63 years of age. With regard to current socio-economic status, 3 individuals described themselves as lower class, 11 as working-class, 16 middle-class, and 4 described themselves as upper-class. In terms of education, 6 participants received less than a high school diploma, 8 graduated high school, 11 attended some college but did not graduate, and 9 earned some type of college degree. Only 3 participants were raised in a household with immediate relatives who were involved in extremist groups, however, a majority of the participants (n = 31) were socialized during childhood with ideas somewhat consistent with white supremacist ideology such as racism and/or anti-Semitism.

In addition to socialization, a large portion of the sample reported histories of criminal conduct including property offenses such as shoplifting and vandalism as well as violent offenses including attempted murder, street fights, and violent initiation rituals. Of the 34 participants, 31 reported a history of violent offending, 28 reported a history of delinquent activity, and 18 had spent time in prison. Most participants were active throughout the early 1980s to the mid-2000s. The level of group involvement for members of our sample included 8 individuals who founded a white supremacist group and 26 participants who were either core or peripheral members. Furthermore, the sample represents substantial variation in terms of violent extremism with several individuals who remained nonviolent extremists to individuals who radicalized to the point of committing an act of MCV but for various reasons did not execute the attack. Despite reservations about MCV, the majority of our sample pursued action pathways that involved other types of violent extremist action such as predatory attacks motivated by ideology, interpersonal disputes, and instrumentally motivated violence related to economic incentives.

Analysis and coding process

We analyzed the data using a modified grounded theory approach.[33] Grounded theory allows the researcher to analyze qualitative data in order to develop theories 'grounded' within the data.[34] The benefit of grounded theory is the ability to acknowledge the role people play in shaping their world; the interrelationships between meanings and behavior; and systematic analysis through coding and hypothesis testing. It is important to note that researchers should not generalize theories constructed using grounded theory beyond the data, but they can test hypotheses derived from grounded theory.[35] In this approach, the research begins with a broad interest or question that provides the investigator with flexibility. Due to the nature of grounded theory, the focus of the coding process develops overtime as interview transcripts are read and re-read. The inductive nature means our approach did not initially involve trying to identify specific barriers to MCV but instead we "discovered" these barriers through an in-depth immersion in the data.

Grounded theory coding techniques involve the construction of themes and subthemes based on a careful reading and re-reading of the interview transcript. The initial data coding involved various steps but began by reading entire interview transcripts line-by-

line to determine differences and similarities within and across our participants. Following the coding stage, each barrier event was individually analyzed for common themes and characteristics. Once all participants were coded, final ratings were discussed and reviewed among the authors for quality assurance.

Types of barriers to mass casualty violence

Based on our analysis, we identified five types of barriers: (1) mass casualty violence as counter-productive; (2) preference toward interpersonal violence; (3) changes in focus/availability; (4) internal organizational conflict and (5) moral apprehension. Table 1 outlines these results. An extremist may experience one of these barriers during their involvement and that may be enough to disrupt the action pathway process and, thus, reduce the likelihood of MCV or the extremist may experience multiple barriers either simultaneously or sequentially. We do not see these barriers as unfolding in a linear fashion but rather a person may experience barriers in a variety of sequences.

As Table 2 illustrates, the barriers we present are not mutually exclusive as a large portion of our sample (n = 24) encountered multiple barriers over the course of their involvement in violent extremism. Specifically, we identified 10 participants who experienced one barrier; 10 who experienced two barriers; 12 who experienced three barriers; 1 who experienced four barriers and finally, we identified 1 participant who experienced all five barriers. In the following sections, we examine each barrier in greater detail.

Barrier one: Mass casualty violence as counter-productive

The first barrier constraining MCV includes the organizational and individual belief that mass casualty violence is counter-productive. In the section below, we elaborate on how this type of mechanism serves as a barrier and also provide empirical illustrations for its unique influence in hindering the likelihood of MCV.

Mass casualty violence as counter-productive

The first sorting mechanism away from MCV is the organizational perspective that violence is counter-productive. Although most participants joined a white supremacist group that endorsed interpersonal violence, six participants (18%) joined groups that condemned large-scale acts of violence.[36] These organizations did not view MCV as an effective political strategy because they felt it would have a negative impact in terms of public relations and political effectiveness.[37]

An organization's reluctance to promote MCV may be related to either pragmatic and/or moral reasons. The most important feature of this barrier is that the organization establishes parameters that serve to constrain individuals by prohibiting certain types of violent behavior. As a result of these organizational constraints, individual trajectories are directed away from MCV. Instead, the organization encourages individuals to coordinate political marches, recruitment efforts and other non-violent political strategies. The following participant explains how the organization he was affiliated with selectively recruited certain types of individuals and actively discouraged violence, and, MCV, in particular:

> We were trying to build a movement of thinkers and workers and people who were fair and honest. That [violent action] was looked down upon really…Because if someone is going to take your name and they're going to go out there and commit acts of violence, (a) it's going to cause problems with the feds and (b) it's going to get the common white person that you want to listen to you turned off. You're not going to go anywhere with it, so we didn't want people like that. (Jake, National Alliance, 2013)

From this perspective, MCV attracts unwanted attention from law enforcement and could also hinder recruitment efforts. Jake's organization deliberately avoided enlisting individuals predisposed toward extremist violence and following a person's entry communicated disapproval for MCV. This organization emphasized recruiting certain types of individuals while restricting certain types of political tactics.

Jake's example also highlights the extent to which some extremist organizations fear the negative social image that accompanies MCV. Contrary to extremist organizations that view MCV as a recruiting tool and a means to enhance public image,[38] some extremist organizations view negative publicity as a distraction from organizational goals. Whether the organization considered MCV as counter-productive or the extremist organization sough to avoid a negative social image, the unifying characteristic is that both discouraged the consideration of MCV as a viable political strategy. In the next section, we consider how interpersonal violence is preferred over MCV.

Barrier two: Preferences for interpersonal violence

The second sorting mechanism away from MCV is an individual preference towards interpersonal violence. For purposes of the current study, interpersonal violence includes acts such as fistfights, attacks involving blunt objects (e.g. bats) and stabbings. Furthermore, interpersonal violence is characterized by close physical proximity between the perpetrator and victim(s), and as to compared to MCV, is much more likely to result in fewer victims. In the next section, we discuss how a preference toward interpersonal violence reduces the likelihood of MCV from occurring.

Preferences for interpersonal violence

Individuals entering extremism do not begin this process as a blank slate but rather become extremists with existing preferences that include both ideological and/or tactical dispositions. For example, persons entering white supremacist groups have typically already internalized strong anti-black beliefs but have much less clearly defined views regarding Jewish people.[39] More broadly, a person entering extremism may prefer certain types of political tactics (e.g., public marches) while discounting other strategies (e.g., leafleting). The same can also be said about tactics involving violence. One study found that most individuals are already violent prior to embracing extremist ideology.[40] In this way, the likelihood of committing MCV partly depends on tactical preferences to achieve political goals.[41]

MCV is typically a detached experience. While some extremists like Timothy McVeigh (the Oklahoma City bomber) and Eric Rudolph (the Olympic Park bomber) preferred to coordinate large scale attacks, other extremists may prefer interpersonal violence. In our sample, eleven participants (31%) were identified as possessing preferences for

interpersonal violence which served to constrain MCV. Individual preferences are only part of the story. Extremists are typically embedded within social networks distinguished by specific cultural values, norms, and practices.[42] Although extremist culture is not exclusively violent, much of this world is focused on the promotion of violence. Yet, the type of violence promoted varies within extremist culture. For extremists more closely tied to the streets, their violence resembles conventional gang conflicts.[43] In this sense, individual and subcultural preferences are deeply reciprocal.[44] Subcultural norms are an important source of influence supporting the use of violence to resolve conflict.[45] Nonetheless, merely examining whether a particular subculture promotes violence may neglect the specific types of violence a culture promotes while simultaneously discouraging other types of violence.

In our sample, we found a substantial number of individuals who described conforming to a combination of individual preferences and subcultural norms surrounding the use of interpersonal street violence. They described interpersonal violence as a masculine endeavor,[46] whereas, shooting or bombing people from a distance was considered dishonorable and unfair. As the following participants explained, compared to street fighting, using a gun expresses a lack of masculinity and physical prowess.

> That's how I felt about it [using a gun]… I just felt like it was such a pussy thing… There was a couple times I got into it with people where I thought they were going to have a gun, but it was almost like a cocky thing to me that I was like, this dude is going to have a gun, let me beat the fuck out of him with brass knuckles to prove a point. (Scott, Northern Hammerskin, 2013)

> I was always more of a fist and boots kind of a guy but some of the people were open to whatever was at hand… We always thought that to resort to guns like in the way the gang bangers do was always kind of a pussy thing to do. It is little more manly to get in there and duke it out. There was just definitely a rush in beating somebody's head in. I don't know like a primal thing. (Chase, Aryan Terror Brigade, 2013)

Both of these statements suggest a "street code"[47] that glorifies fist fighting over other types of violence.[48] For these individuals, interpersonal violence reinforced their self-image as a "bad ass" or "Aryan warrior."[49]

The following statement underscores how the perception of intimacy related to interpersonal violence also served as an attraction for some of the participants:

> I guess what makes us more of a threat is that we are personal. We're not going to shoot you from 50 feet away. We're going to look you in the eyes. We're going to fucking feel your life drain in our hands. We're not some pussies… It's not like we're doing drive-bys and gang shootings, it's like an execution. We know who killed you. We know who fucked you up. We know who fucking maimed you. To me that's what got [me] off. (Stanley, United Society of Aryan Skinheads, 2014)

This statement also illustrates the enjoyment that violence provides to some individuals. In this sense, Stanley derived physical and/or sexual pleasure from violent acts. Part of this pleasure is directly connected to observing the consequences that result from the violent encounters including hurting and killing others. Several of our participants discussed the sensual qualities of interpersonal violence as distinct from less personal types of violence.[50] These individuals claimed to prefer interpersonal violence because they enjoyed the intimacy that is associated with this type of violence.

The idea that a subculture of violence constrains MCV may seem counterintuitive. A certain portion of violent extremists involved in street-level violence may become further radicalized by their experiences with this type of violence sometimes referred to as a "taste for blood."[51] We, however, did not find this in our sample. In fact, the person in our sample who came closest to committing an act of MCV had no history of violence either during his time as an extremist or prior to his involvement in extremism. Despite the lack of participation in MCV, many participants reported being "open" to the idea during their time of involvement. As such, it appears those individuals who were open to MCV experienced counter-balancing conditions that constrained their proclivities toward MCV. In the next section, we discuss how changes in focus and availability influence a person's willingness to commit an act of MCV.

Barrier three: Change in focus and availability

The next type of barrier involves different ways that an extremists' focus and availability constrain further progression toward MCV. By focus, we mean central organizing activities that structure a person's life while availability simply refers to the physical time a person has to invest in different activities. As part of this, we identified two different types of constraints that influence focus and availability: drugs/alcohol lifestyle and personal obligations.

Drugs and alcohol

The first type of constraint in terms of focus and availability involves the use of drugs and alcohol. Out of the 34 participants, twelve (35%) were identified as shifting their focus away from planning an act of MCV toward drugs and alcohol. Previous studies highlight high rates of alcohol use among the far-right,[52] and while ideologically prohibited, street drugs are also common.[53] The excessive use of illegal drugs and alcohol serves as a barrier to MCV in two ways.

First, drugs and alcohol may become an individual's central point of focus for his or her lifestyle. Over time, the focus on drugs and alcohol may reduce the relative importance of extremism. For some individuals, the consumption of drugs and alcohol comes to overshadow the ideological component of their involvement, and therefore, reduces an individual's willingness to commit MCV. For example, the following participants describe how drugs and alcohol became their central focus.

> I told them, 'Look you know, everything's been great and everything else but I'm just going to let you guys know that I am using coke and as it turns out, I really like it better than your movement.' (Jeremy, White Aryan Resistance, 2013)

> I tell everybody methamphetamines saved my life. Yeah, it saved my fucking life. It got me thinking, "Where is this shit? When is it going to get here? Who has the shit?" I just did not give a fuck anymore. (Jack, Skinhead Dogs, 2013)

Second, excessive use of drugs and alcohol may disrupt the cognitive skills necessary to plan an act of MCV. During the consumption of drugs and alcohol, extremists may discuss ideas related to political violence but once sober these attacks rarely come to fruition. Excessive substance use may prevent brainstorming discussions from moving to

reasoned proposals that involve detailed planning. At the same time, the use of drugs and alcohol may encourage more spontaneous types of violence that require less planning such as "gay bashing" or "bum rolling." In support of this claim, previous research indicates that street violence is often spontaneous with little coordination or planning involved.[54]

Each of the participants above illustrate how substance use reduced the importance of extremism. Instead of coordinating and planning acts of MCV, these participants spent their time buying and consuming illicit drugs or large quantities of alcohol. In these cases, substance use functioned to obstruct MCV by refocusing the extremists' attention on matters other than planned violence. As our data suggest, drugs and alcohol interrupt the indoctrination of members and strategic efforts to coordinate acts of MCV. This occurs because the excessive consumption of drugs and alcohol occupies time that could be spent planning and coordinating MCV. In addition, our sample indicates they were more likely to commit spontaneous acts of violence while under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

The irony of this finding is that individuals who became immersed in a drug lifestyle, and, thus, constrained in terms of MCV simultaneously became more involved in various forms of criminality (e.g., burglaries, robberies, drug distribution, etc.). While the change in availability and focus created an obstacle to MCV, these individuals often experienced heightened involvement in generic criminality. This finding suggests that reductions in violent extremism may not coincide with reductions in criminal activity more broadly, which has important implications in terms of disengagement and desistance. In the next section, we examine another type of activity that occupies a considerable amount of time and focus that serves as a distraction for MCV.

Personal obligations

The second type of constraint related to focus and availability involves the impact that various non-movement, personal obligations have on an individual's capacity to move forward toward MCV. The presence of personal obligations can be thought of as changes in "biographical availability"[55] such as employment, marriage, and children. In all, thirteen participants (37%) were identified as experiencing a change in focus and availability, which constrained the likelihood of MCV and shifted their attention toward personal obligations (e.g., children, work). In these situations, obligations of everyday life encourage a "stake in conformity."[56] Personal obligations, such as marriage and children, create interdependent systems of attachment or "social bonds" that connect the person to conventional society.[57] These attachments alter a person's routine activities, constrain unstructured socialization time, and have the ability to alter one's sense of self through cognitive transformation.[58]

While there are multiple types of personal obligations that serve to constrain MCV, we found that children were the most common type in our sample. Eight participants (23%) indicated their children prevented them from "doing anything" because they felt compelled to remain an active part of their children's lives.[59] In these cases, becoming a parent did not directly result in disengagement but did reduce involvement in violent activities and their willingness to participate in MCV. For example,

> When I had my kids, there was something in me that put up a barrier that said, "I want to do this thing, I want to have this belief, but I also don't want my family to be involved in it." I didn't have that kind of rhetoric at home, I didn't urge my kids to follow in my footsteps. (Chester, Volksfront, 2013)

> That has always been the massive roadblock. My whole thing was, raising my kids and hopefully the world will be better so I wouldn't have to go fight. That was the main thing that prevented me from ever doing anything. (Jack, Skinhead Dogs, 2013)

Both Chester and Jack's experiences underscore a "commitment to conventional lines of action."[60] That is, the extremist must consider the costs of committing an act of MCV and the risk associated with losing their investments in conventional behavior.[61] In the examples above, family responsibilities took precedent over their obligations to violent extremism.

Our findings regarding the second barrier are consistent with a series of criminological studies that investigate how the structure of an individual's time correspond is related to involvement in delinquency and crime.[62] That is, greater amounts of unstructured socializing time, correspond with higher rates of criminal behavior. The defining characteristic of the second barrier is the availability of time and focus. That is, time spent focused on drinking or using drugs and personal obligations (e.g., children, spouses, or work) is less time available to spend planning acts of MCV. In the next section, we examine how hypocrisy and in-fighting produces internal organizational conflict, which acts as a forth type of barrier to MCV.

Barrier four: Internal organizational conflict

The fourth type of barrier, internal organizational conflict, occurs when an extremist experiences disappointment from organizational collaboration and day-to-day operations. Among the current sample, we identified two different sources of internal organizational conflict: hypocrisy and in-fighting.

Hypocrisy

In general, hypocrisy arises when a person observes a discrepancy between what individuals profess and what these individuals are actually doing. Within any social movement, these types of discrepancies are likely to emerge.[63] As an individual begins observing multiple instances of these discrepancies, the person may begin to experience a generalized disappointment with the entire movement as opposed to single individuals. As part of this process, the person may begin to question the sincerity of other members.[64] We found eight participants (24%) who reported observing hypocrisy and experiencing a general disappointment related to the broader movement.

A common reason for entering extremism is the appeal of joining a higher moral cause predicated on virtues such as loyalty, kinship, and purity.[65] For instance, there is a widespread subcultural norm within the white supremacist movement prohibiting illegal drug use. As noted above, despite this formal prohibition, drug use is common among white supremacists.[66] The discrepancy between the norms and practices surrounding drugs creates a sense of hypocrisy that may frustrate members who remain "true to the values" and, in turn, encourage them to question the legitimacy of the entire movement. In these situations, the individual's attachment to the extremist group begins to weaken. As the following participant explained,

> That scene [white power] is completely contradictory to what they say. They say one thing but we all act in a completely different way... Claiming we are working every day and supporting the family and doing this and doing that. All this stuff, it was all a joke, it was

bullshit. We worked and everything but we all drank like fish. We were all raging alcoholics and it just took a while. (Jim, WAR, 2013)

Over time, Jeremy came to recognize a growing number of discrepancies and experienced strong feelings in response to this growing recognition. The disconnection between the groups' beliefs and members' inaction lead to frustration. For example, Blake described his general realization that as a whole the movement lacked integrity because individual behavior was consistently at odds with the stated ideals and goals of kinship and loyalty:

It's a whole bunch of hypocrites, back stabbing, and the whole movement is kind of a joke... some of these dudes might fully believe it is "white pride, white power." You learn at some point, it's all just a joke. It's a fucking scam. (Blake, Aryan Strikeforce, 2014)

The above quotes illustrate the weak, and at times, absent leadership that seems to characterize a number of these groups. Specifically, these accounts reveal an absence of a central leadership, capable of providing a shared vision that shapes collective behavior and ultimately creates an impression that individuals are working together for a common goal.[67] In the absence of this shared vision conveyed by skilled leaders, internal inconsistencies and contradictions become extenuated. Another source of internal organizational conflict originates from inner-group violence.

In-fighting

Overall, fifteen participants (44%) experienced violence or conflict in their own group or with other white supremacist groups. Participants indicated that disputes often stemmed from a variety of interpersonal conflicts. For example,

The in-fighting was another reason why I really got disenfranchised... It was awful. I couldn't relate to that. We'd go to a concert in Detroit. We would always end up with somebody fighting over a girlfriend or something else. I was like, "This isn't what I signed up for." I thought, "Aren't we supposed to be in this together? We've already got enough enemies." Then all of a sudden we're going to fight each other. (Chester, Volksfront, 2013)

As one of our interviewees speculated, in-fighting may also distract extremists from externalizing their aggression and directing radical action to outgroup members.

That is another one of my special theories, so much in-fighting between the members in different groups, I think that's almost a buffer for some of the violence that perhaps would've gone outside of that whole group if it wasn't happening within the group. (Abby, Hammerskin Nation, 2013)

In the examples above, participants discussed factors that led them to become dissatisfied with internal organizational conflict in the movement. These individuals became disappointed because they originally joined the movement to fight "racial enemies" but soon realized other white supremacist groups were the primary target of violence.

Barrier five: Moral apprehension

The fifth barrier to MCV, which we refer to as moral apprehension, may be the most difficult to move beyond. At this point, the extremist contemplates the logistics of

committing an act of MCV, including the consequences associated with taking human life. In the process of considering these consequences, the extremist recognizes their actions could potentially hurt or kill "innocent" people, including children and the elderly. We identified one source of moral apprehension: failure to employ moral disengagement.

Failure to employ moral disengagement

Although a large segment of our sample (n = 30) were identified as violent extremists, eighteen participants (53%) experienced moral apprehension related to the idea of committing MCV. The recognition that killing innocent people is unacceptable suggests the internalization of conventional societal moral standards. While these moral principles act as guides for prosocial behavioral, these principles are governed by a dynamic process where "moral-censures" can be selectively disengaged in order to participate in antisocial behavior.[68] This self-censorship process is what Bandura referred to as *moral disengagement*. The process of moral disengagement allows extremists to commit violence by diffusing personal responsibility, dehumanizing victims, minimizing consequences, and using language that rationalizes their actions (e.g., "collateral damage"). The extensive violent histories among most individuals in our sample suggest a clear capacity to harm other people, yet this ability did not necessarily translate into a willingness or capacity to inflict MCV.

The failure to employ moral disengagement techniques illustrates the cognitive difficulties extremists may experience while considering MCV as a viable political strategy.[69] Extremists who fail to employ moral disengagement techniques are unable to justify the use of violence against their intended targets. Contrary to the common perception that extremists are "crazy" individuals determined to kill as many innocent bystanders as possible, our data suggest extremists struggle with the idea of taking another person's life. When participants are unable to justify the use of violence, a recalculation often occurs that limits the acceptability of MCV.

> I knew this would have been the largest act of its kind in U.S. history. That's part of why I thought we were supposed to do it, because we knew that it would have an impact. I don't think I realized how huge until I actually got into the church with the bomb, and saw the people, and saw the damage that could occur. It hadn't hit me yet. But once it hit me, yeah, it hit me. Being that close, there was no denying my life changed at that point. In my heart, at that point, [my group] died. (Keith, Creativity Alliance, 2013)

Some of the participants described a more general unwillingness to cross a particular threshold for violence. For these participants, the psychological strain resulting from the shame and guilt of killing another person was too much of a burden to justify MCV. As the following participant explains,

> Even though I was violent and you know I hurt people left and right, myself, people around me… inside there was a certain line that I knew I wouldn't cross. One of them, I don't think, on my angriest, most hateful day that I could murdered anyone… I think that would have been just too much. (Abby, Hammerskin Nation, 2013)

While Abby reports participating in extensive and serious violence, she claims she was unable to kill another person. In the following account, when asked why he did not do carry out an act of MCV Blake responded:

> Like I said, I'm not ignorant; I acted ignorant; I'm not an unintelligent person. I do have a certain degree of intellect. I'm not a sociopath, so I understand I have a conscience. Usually if you're not fighting off a hangover you come to these moments and, "well I've never wanted to really kill someone." (Blake, Aryan Strikeforce, 2014)

Blake's comment underscores his view that MCV is committed by "sociopaths" or people without a conscience. From his perspective, a "normal" person would not be able to commit this type of violence and because Blake sees himself as normal, the idea of committing this type of violence is reprehensible. These comments highlight the importance of thresholds that individuals develop in terms of the type and severity of violence he/she is willing to commit.[70] Interestingly, Blake did report committing a large number of other acts of violence including an incident where he tried to hit another person with a truck he was driving. Blake's case underscores the point that moral apprehension related to MCV is not an indication of an unwillingness to commit violence but rather represents an interpretive code where certain types of violence are permissible and others are prohibited.

Conclusion

We began this paper by pointing out that most extremists do not commit acts of MCV. The empirical reality of this rarity requires explanation. In this paper, we focused on internal mechanisms that serve to constrain individuals from moving toward MCV. More specifically, the aim of this paper was twofold. First, we examined the factors that inhibit the violent radicalization process and prevent more extremists from committing acts of large-scale violence. We developed an empirically informed conceptual model that focuses on five barriers that obstruct MCV.

Each of the barriers we identified addresses larger issues related to organizational and leadership characteristics. In the first barrier, leaders effectively communicate prohibitions against extremist violence that creates a barrier toward MCV. In the remaining barriers, however, a lack of effective leadership is unable to provide a shared vision among individual members of white supremacist groups. The lack of shared vision creates a vacuum of sorts where various changes in availability and focus such as involvement in a "partying lifestyle" and children constrain the likelihood of MCV. At the same time, the lack of shared vision results in a greater likelihood that individuals become frustrated with the movement, which also constrains MCV. The final barrier, moral apprehension, also reflects the lack of a shared vision. The prevalence of moral apprehension among our participants underscore that white supremacist organizations were not effectively preparing individuals to participate in planned terror attacks.

The second aim of this paper involved a discussion of how this model could help inform strategies to counter violent extremism (CVE). Because these barriers share considerable overlap with studies focused on extremist disengagement and deradicalization,[71] findings from the current study can be used to refine certain counter-messaging strategies. Current CVE initiatives that employ counter-messaging tactics often focus on challenging the accuracy of an extremist's ideology, which may unintentionally reinforce attachment to the ideology.[72] Instead, we suggest focusing on techniques to emphasize and/or exploit the various barriers illustrated above. In particular, counter-messages that rely on existing sources of internal organizational conflict can do so without

trying to convince an extremist that his/her ideology is inaccurate. As part of this approach, counter-messaging strategies could promote the extent of hypocrisy and "back-stabbing" among extremist groups. In addition, messages could also highlight moral issues by emphasizing the "innocence" of potential victims. Finally, counter-messages could promote individual and organizational preferences toward non-violent political tactics by highlighting the efficacy of legal political activism over MCV.

While we relied on a sample of U.S. domestic extremists to construct the model, efforts should be made to assess the model across a wide range of extremist ideologies to determine its applicability. In addition, future research should also address how these findings compare across a spectrum of different types of ideological orientations. More specifically, future research should compare samples from various western and nonwestern societies. Finally, a comparison between those who did and those who did not carry out MCV would provide insight into the strategies violent extremists use to overcome these barriers.

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ORCID

Pete Simi http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1842-2108