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**Preventing violent radicalisation: An evidence-based approach to countering
terrorist narratives.**

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B.A. (Int.), H. Dip. (Psych.)

Thesis submitted to the National University of Ireland, Galway in fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology)

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise at this or any other university.

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work.

Signed: _____

Sarah Carthy

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List of Works

Below is a list of publications, conference presentations, and awards that have resulted from this thesis.

Publications.

- Carthy, S. L., Doody, C. B., Cox, K., O'Hora, D., & Sarma, K. M. (*in press*). Counter-narratives for the prevention of violent radicalisation: A systematic review of targeted interventions. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*.
- Carthy, S. L., Doody, C. B., O'Hora, D., & Sarma, K. M. (2018). PROTOCOL: Counter-narratives for the prevention of violent radicalisation: A systematic review of targeted interventions. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 14(1), 1-23.
- Carthy, S. L., Doody, C. B., O'Hora, D., & Sarma, K. M. (2017). TITLE: Counter-narratives for the prevention of violent radicalisation: A systematic review of targeted interventions. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*.

Conference Presentations.

- Carthy, S. L., Doody, C. B., Cox, K., O'Hora, D. & Sarma, K. M. *Counter-narratives for the prevention of violent radicalisation: A systematic review of targeted interventions*. Paper presented at:
- 75th American Society of Criminology (ASC) Annual Conference** (November 2019). San Francisco.
- Stockholm Criminology Symposium** (June, 2018). Stockholm.
- Terrorism and Social Media (TASM) International Conference** (June, 2017), Swansea University Bay Campus, Swansea.
- 40th Annual International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP) Conference** (June 2017). Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh.
- Carthy, S. L. & Sarma, K. M. "*Just in case you think we're all nuts*"; *Understanding the narratives used to justify violence amongst former violent extremists*. Paper presented at:
- VOX-Pol Third Biennial Conference: Violent Extremism, Terrorism and the Internet** (2018, August). University of Amsterdam.
- Carthy, S. L., & Sarma, K. *Countering online youth radicalisation: Developing evidence based counter-narratives and inoculation techniques*. PhD overview presented at:
- VOX-Pol workshop: Countering Violent Extremism Online and The Impact on Civil Liberties** (October, 2017). Harvard University, Massachusetts.

Awards.

- Carthy, S. L., Doody, C. B., O'Hora, D. & Sarma, K. M. (2017, April). *Counter-narratives for the prevention of violent radicalisation: A systematic review of targeted interventions*. Protocol presented at 39th Annual Psychology Student Congress, NUI Galway, Ireland. **1st prize**.
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- Carthy, S. L., & Sarma, K. (2016, May). *Countering online youth radicalisation: Developing evidence based counter-narratives and inoculation techniques*. PhD overview

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1st prize.

Abstract

Background. Since the start of the 21st century, understanding the process(es) by which an individual comes to perpetrate an act of terror has become a multidisciplinary pursuit, and a key focus of enquiry for those seeking to stop it from happening. Psychological science has, in large part, shifted this focus towards a deeper understanding of the specific, psychological mechanisms that become activated during the process of *violent radicalisation*. The *narrative*, and its ability to depict violence as an instrumental means achieving certain goals, has since emerged as a source of this activation. Strategies that attempt to challenge terrorist narratives, by *deconstructing* and *delegitimising* the violence-promoting messages they espouse, have been signalled as a promising avenue for prevention efforts. This deconstruction falls under the umbrella term, *counter-narrative*. However, despite an overwhelming volume of guides, reports, and individual studies on the topic, there has been little theoretical premise informing the design of counter-narratives. Furthermore, to date, there has been no synthesis of their effectiveness at targeting violent radicalisation. **Aim.** The primary aim of this research was to address this gap, by exploring the potential for evidence-based counter-narratives to prevent violent radicalisation into terrorism. **Methods.** Informed by the findings of a meta-analytic review (Study 1) as well as a Narrative Analysis study with former perpetrators (Study 2), this research sought to begin the process of experimentally evaluating counter-narratives in reducing propensity towards terrorism (Study 3). **Results.** The results of Study 1 ($k = 19$) indicated that, whilst counter-narratives showed promising effects on certain risk factors, such as realistic threat ($d = -.60$), in-group favouritism and out-group hostility ($d = -0.41$), the effects on other risk factors were less consistent. In terms of technique(s), the use of alternative accounts and inoculation were amongst the most promising. From here, Narrative Analysis was used to explore how narratives of perpetration were constructed (Study 2), leading to the identification of thirty-two individual narratives, as

well as six, broader, template narratives. The use of irrational, *causal fallacies* were amongst the most common techniques used to legitimise violence. However, the findings from Study 2 also supported the concept of a *quasi-rational narrative*, comprised of both irrational, and rational content, rendering it particularly resistant to deconstruction. Using this knowledge, the counter-narrative strategies used in Study 3 ($n = 150$) involved two, theoretically distinct, approaches (identified in Study 1) to counter a typical, terrorist narrative (identified in Study 2). The findings indicated that participants' *critical thinking skills* weakened the effects of the terrorist narrative, as well as *generic* attempts to counter it, resulting in some unintended effects. However, informed by *Inoculation Theory*, having participants create their own, *tailored* counter-narrative(s) reduced their legitimisation of terrorist violence, irrespective of cognitive ability. **Conclusion.** The results of these studies illustrate, first, the complexity of terrorist narratives, which, in turn, complicates strategies to counter them. By considering this in light of some methodological challenges associated with measuring violent radicalisation-related constructs, the potential for tailored counter-narratives in the context of violent radicalisation is broadly supported. The results are discussed in terms of their contribution to future and existing research on violent radicalisation. The implications of these findings for counter-terrorism practice and policy are also discussed.

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Acronyms

ALM – Animal Liberation Front
AVE – Against Violent Extremism
CGCC – Center for Global Counterterrorism Cooperation
CRT – Cognitive Reflection Test
EDL – English Defence League
ELM – The Elaboration Likelihood Model
ICCT – International Centre for Counter-Terrorism
IRA – Irish Republican Army
IS – Islamic State
ISD – Institute for Strategic Dialogue
LTTE – Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NDP – National-Democratic Party of Germany
NFC – Need For Cognition
PKK – Kurdistan Workers’ Party
PPT-US – Profiles of Perpetrators of Terrorism in the United States
PSI – Psychological Society of Ireland
RAN – Radicalisation Awareness Network
SQT – Significance Quest Theory
UN – United Nations
UVF – Ulster Volunteer Force

Glossary of Terms

Cognitive dissonance. Feelings of discomfort as a result of holding conflicting ideas simultaneously (p. 10).

Critical thinking. An individual's ability to analyse arguments, and determine, in a goal-oriented fashion, which do, and do not, have merit (p. 153).

Extremism. A belief system, characterised by an unwillingness to compromise on core tenets of a particular political ideology (p. 4).

Heuristics. Heuristics are simplifying decision-making principles that generally initiate peripheral route persuasion (p. 17).

Narrative. The interpretation of a sequence of events, whereby the characters involved have sufficient agency to make changes (p. 21).

Narrativization. The process of constructing and reconstructing consciousness and action in the context of internal and external relations of time, place and power (p. 92).

Persuasion. Any message intended to shape, reinforce, or change the responses of another (p. 15).

Plot. A narrative device that applies order and meaning to, otherwise isolated, events (p. 21).

Propaganda. A form of persuasion, characterised by the deliberate attempt to shape, manipulate, or direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the intent of the propagandist (p. 18).

Quasi-rationality. A form of information processing that induces a range of processing systems on a continuum, ranging from intuition to analysis (p. 139).

Radicalisation. A process of moving away from a point of conflict or feelings of uncertainty towards a belief system representing a narrower, unambiguous state of apparent clarity (p. 6).

Reactance. A form of resistance which involves strengthening one's initial position (p. 16).

Resistance. An elicited response to real or perceived pressure for change, against the change (p. 15).

Terrorism. The intentional, or threatened, use of violence against civilian targets, or non-combatants, in order to attain political aims through the exploitation of audience reactions (p. 5).

Violent extremism. A belief system in which the success or survival of one's in-group is perceived as inseparable from hostile action against an out-group (p. 4).

Violent radicalisation. The process of moving away from a point of conflict, or feelings of uncertainty, towards a less ambiguous state of apparent clarity, characterised by the perceived instrumentality of violence against an out-group (p. 6).

Thesis Overview

This thesis presents three empirical chapters, preceded by a general introduction to the area, and followed by a general discussion of the research findings and implications. Chapter 1 introduces the phenomenon of terrorism, focusing on the contribution(s) of psychological science to a broader understanding of its perpetration. Chapter 2 moves towards the communication aspects of terrorism, detailing how persuasive communication can facilitate violent radicalisation through the use of narratives as a means of recruitment. Chapter 3 turns the focus towards challenging terrorist rhetoric. The concept of the counter-narrative is introduced, and its theoretical and empirical bases are discussed more broadly. Chapter 4 provides a summary of the literature review, and outlines the research questions guiding the three, empirical studies presented in Chapters 5-7. In Chapter 5, with the aim of synthesising existing experimental evidence on the topic of counter-narratives, a meta-analytic systematic review is presented. Considering some of the methodological challenges associated with designing and evaluating counter-narratives in the context of terrorism, Chapter 6 presents a qualitative study in which the narratives of former perpetrators of violent extremism are explored. Chapter 7 presents an experimental study in which a terrorist narrative is fabricated from those identified in Chapter 6, and challenged using different counter-narrative strategies. Finally, Chapter 8 provides a summary of each empirical chapter, before discussing some of the limitations and implications of the current findings. The overall implications of the research for the study of violent radicalisation and the development of preventative interventions are outlined.

Chapter 1. The Psychology of Terrorism

Chapter Overview

The objective of Chapter 1 is to introduce the phenomenon of terrorism and highlight the contribution of psychological science to a broader understanding of its perpetration. The chapter begins by introducing the concepts of ‘extremism’, ‘violent extremism’, ‘terrorism’, and ‘violent radicalisation’ (Section 1.1). In seeking to understand why some people come to perpetrate acts of terror, whilst many do not, an argument is presented for the relevance of psychological science, particularly in relation to the perpetrator, or *actor* (1.2). The remainder of the chapter expands upon this concept. Theories of radicalisation are summarised, compared and contrasted before a conclusion is reached; this conclusion posits that the factors underlying violent radicalisation into terrorism are relevant only when they activate specific, psychological mechanisms. From here, the discussion briefly moves towards terrorist communication(s), and the potential of crafted messages to act upon these mechanisms as a recruitment tool. Within this framework, the narrative, and its depiction of violence as an instrumental means of certain goal-directed behaviour(s), will be the focus of Chapter 2.

1.1 Concepts

Since 2014, there have been, on average, 13,600 terrorist acts each year, from which 144,659 people have lost their lives (Global Terrorism Database, 2019). These statistics include both victims and perpetrators. In many ways, the study of terrorism originates from these numbers. Perpetrator or victim, terrorist attacks stress society’s equilibrium, prompting empirical efforts to stop it from happening. In tandem with these efforts, the study of terrorism has grown into a multidisciplinary field, welcoming contributions from a diverse

range of research areas. Whilst such a blend of perspectives, no doubt, increase the overall versatility of research efforts, the risk of conceptual ambiguity is ever-present. For this reason, it is necessary to offer specificity from the outset. During this sub-section, the terms *extremism*, *violent extremism*, *terrorism*, *radicalisation*, and *violent radicalisation*, as used in this thesis, will be defined before some theoretical frameworks informing terrorist perpetration will be offered.

1.1.1 Extremism.

Originating from party politics, the term ‘extremism’ first emerged in reference to political instability, the consequences of which were said to include undesirable manifestations of political lawlessness, such as rioting (Powell, 1982, p. 109). Here, ‘extremism’ was attributed to social dissenters or ‘rule breakers’. Today, however, the term is generally used to describe increasing political party divergences (Glaeser, Ponzetto, & Shapiro, 2005). Investigators from the START consortium¹, for example, classify extremism in relation to “far-right”, “far left”, and “single-issue” politics. In this way, extremism can be understood as a belief system existing at the poles of a particular, political equilibrium or middle-ground.

However, beyond value-laden taxonomies of “moderate” or “extreme” (Hopkins, & Kahani-Hopkins, 2009, p. 99), there is also a cognitive perspective on extremism. Cognitive closure, or the avoidance of uncertainty, “confusion and ambiguity” (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994, p. 1049) has been associated with belief systems classified as extreme (Hogg, 2004; Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & DeGrada, 2006). Indeed, irrespective of political persuasion, the phenomenon of extremism can be said to represent a “firmness of belief [and] willingness to defend a position” (Klein, & Kruglanski, 2013, P. 422). This, then, reflects a poorer ability

¹ The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) conduct research on the causes and consequences of terrorism. The centre is situated at the University of Maryland and is funded by the Department of Homeland Security.

to weigh and integrate all the relevant perspectives on an issue (Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2003, p. 781). This is termed “cognitive complexity” (Mullen, Bauman & Skitka, 2013; Tetlock, 1984). *Extremism* is, therefore, defined as a belief system, characterised by an unwillingness to compromise on core tenets of a particular political ideology (Webber et al., 2018, p. 276).

1.1.2 Violent extremism.

In mainstream discourse, the link between extremism and hostile action is often presupposed when, in fact, the two are not synonymous. Instead, the rigidity of an extremist belief system can be said to *facilitate* certain actions, including the perpetration of violence. The reason for this is that extremism is ultimately symptomatic of in-group favouritism or “group-centrism” (Kruglanski et al., 2006, p. 84). This, when combined with a thwarted perception of means and actions, can provide the scaffolding for an individual to reason that violence against an outgroup is not only legitimate, but instrumental. In other words, an extremist belief system becomes a violent one when one perceives violence, or hostile action, against an out-group to be conducive to the goals (or even the existence) of one’s in-group. In this way, the cognitive conceptualisation of extremism can be understood as *promoting*, but not *prompting*, the use of violence. *Violent extremism* is, therefore, defined as a belief system in which the success or survival of one’s in-group is perceived as inseparable from hostile action against an out-group (Berger, 2017; 2018).

1.1.3 Terrorism.

In terms of perpetration, violent extremism (i.e. an ‘act’ of violent extremism) is broader than terrorism. In a report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), violent extremism is described as encompassing “a wider category of manifestations” than terrorism, and warns against conflating the two (2016, p. 9). Nonetheless, there is some overlap. First, both are violent, or threaten violence (Ganor, 2002). Second, both acts, either real or threatened, are almost exclusively concerned with

remedying miscarriages of justice or attaining societal transformation, and are therefore political (i.e. pertaining to the state or law-making). However, Centner (2003) argues that it is the strategic focus, or *target*, of the group which earns it the definition of terrorism. The proximal victimisation of civilians (Horgan, 2017), “innocents” (Cronin, 2003, p. 33) or “non-combatants” (Ruby, 2002 p. 10) is at the crux of the distinction between violent extremism and terrorism. Compared to targeted assault, armed robbery, destruction of property, or kidnapping (i.e. broader acts of violent extremism, see Jasko, LaFree, & Kruglanski, 2016), an act of terror does not target those who are generally viewed as ‘culpable’ victims. In fact, the target of a terrorist attack is not exclusively those who are harmed, at all. Terrorism reflects an intention to exploit audience reactions to a level of extreme anxiety towards, seemingly, arbitrary violence. Ultimately, it is a form of manipulation (Schmid, 2012, p. 94).

Expanding upon this concept, Horgan distinguishes between the terrorist’s “victim”, and the terrorist’s “opponent” (2005, p. 2). Whilst the victim refers to the terrorist’s immediate target in the attack, the opponent generally refers to the decision-making body, recognised in the violent extremist belief system as the out-group whom they seek to manipulate². In other words, the victims who are exposed to the physical act of violence and terror are also instrumental for a greater purpose. The eyes of world watch as the message that one is not safe is delivered in a “theatre-of-terror” (Weiman, 2008, p. 70). In this way, terrorism can be understood as a *form* of violent extremism, with a thwarted perception of the out-group, and the means by which change can be achieved.

Bringing together the most salient aspects of these conceptualisations, *terrorism* is henceforth defined as the real or threatened use of violence against civilian targets, or non-combatants, in order to achieve political aims through the exploitation of audience reactions.

² This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 in relation to terrorist narratives.

1.1.4 Violent radicalisation.

Perpetration of such acts does not unfold spontaneously, but can be understood, instead, as a culmination of *disruption* and *movement*. Similar to the central tendency of middle politics, individuals also inhabit a cognitive ‘middle-ground’ of psychological moderation in which one’s needs and goals are in alignment (i.e. motivational balance). Psychological perspectives on terrorism suggest that in order for it to be rationally considered, some type of disruption must take place, often through internal or external threats (these will be discussed in more detail in the following sections). Upon disruption, feelings of uncertainty can arise and the individual will ‘move’ away from this disrupted state towards a narrower, unambiguous state of apparent clarity (Horgan, 2008). The process of “searching, finding, adopting, and developing” a new belief system to address this point of conflict is known as radicalisation (Silber & Bhatt, 2007, p. 16). A defining quality of radicalisation is the perceived instrumentality of destructive means (Kruglanski et al., 2014) and as such, for the remainder of this thesis, *violent radicalisation* is defined as a process of moving away from feelings of uncertainty towards a less ambiguous state of clarity, characterised by the *perceived instrumentality of violence*.

1.2 Psychological Contribution(s) to an Understanding of Terrorism

As well as enriching the language and terminology introduced in the previous sections, the multidisciplinary nature of terrorism research has also allowed for the convergence of diverse, *theoretical insights* informing a broader understanding of perpetration. Contributions from sociology (Bouhana, 2019; Turk, 2004), political science (Bjorgo, 2005; Newman, 2006), anthropology (Atran, 2006), communication science (Archetti, 2013; Braddock, 2015), and psychology (Horgan, 2005) have led to an overall recognition of terrorism as a multi-faceted phenomenon, best understood as the sum of various, moving parts; an “equivocal” view (Abrahams, 2014, p. 164). For example, amongst

these moving parts are those proposed to explain terrorism through macro-level factors such as poverty (Piazza, 2011; Piazza, 2013), conflict (O’Neill, 2005), and even increasing global temperatures (see Fjelde & von Uexkull, 2012; Miles-Novelo & Anderson, 2019; Price & Elu, 2016).

However, an inevitable question for those seeking to reduce the likelihood of terrorist attacks is, why do certain people become involved in terrorism, whilst the majority do not reach this point? In attempting to answer this question, it becomes clear that the depth of motives for terrorist perpetration likely extends beyond precipitating factors alone. Psychological science offers an opportunity to explore this, by observing terrorism as a complex, careful interplay between external and internal factors. The need to understand these internal factors, or the psychology of the perpetrator, has been signalled as a research priority (Horgan, 2012; Silke, 2003; Taylor, 1988), leading to the development of various, theoretical frameworks constructed to understand individual perpetration through the process of violent radicalisation.

1.2.1 The actor; Theories of radicalisation.

Bandura (1978; 2006) suggests that it is individual’s deliberate, rather than impulsive, acts which pose the most significant threats to human welfare. Many theories of radicalisation share this tenet, rejecting a “passive view” of perpetration (Kundnani, 2012b, p. 14) and placing agency and emphasis on the *actor*. With this focus, many early theories were characterised by ‘stages’ of becoming involved in terrorism, proposing a gradual progression from *non-violence* to violence. In McCauley & Moscalenko (2008) *Pyramid Model*, for example, the top of the pyramid is associated with decreased numbers, but “increased radicalization of beliefs, feelings, and behaviours” (p. 417), suggesting that individuals behave differently, at different stages. However, Moskalenko & McCauley (2009) found little support for terrorism as a construct emerging after (or *from*) radicalism, leading to dismissal

of the conveyer belt metaphor. Rather than exclusively originating from low-level feelings of support, they suggest that radicalisation represents individualised, cognitive patterns.

Overtime, these patterns develop into the justification and perpetration of terrorist violence, which is often perceived as the “only possible path to change” (p. 255).

Sageman (2004) describes a *Four-Stage Model* of radicalisation in which individuals also progress onwards. However, Sageman places equal importance on catalytic feelings or events that ultimately create a sense of “moral outrage” (2008, p. 225), triggering the individualised, cognitive patterns characteristic of radicalisation. When this happens, Sageman suggests that the individual begins to move towards interpretation(s) of fundamentalist materials, which spark resonance with a particular ideology, and finally spur mobilisation through specific networks. The model, largely informed by analyses of Al-Qaeda affiliated or inspired groups in the West, received criticism for over-emphasising the role of religion as well as assuming that the source of pro-violent cognitions originates from religious fundamentalism. This perspective (and other perspectives which observe indoctrination in this way, see Fishman, 1982) make an unfounded assumption that, in order for perpetration to occur, radical beliefs must serve as a “precursor” (Borum, 2011, p. 8) and this is unlikely to be the case. Nonetheless, an important component of this model is the interpretation of the individual towards what is unfolding in society. Here, it is suggested that the environment is acting *upon* certain, psychological processes.

Moghaddam’s *Staircase Model* (2005), as well as Gill’s *Pathways Model* (2008) both consider this factor, proposing that, together, environmental and organisational factors act upon individual level factors to motivate behaviour. Such external factors include grievances (such as perceived injustices or individual and/or group-level deprivation) which can serve as “catalyst events” (Gill, 2007, p. 143) and ‘trigger’ a process of individual radicalisation (Doosje, Loseman, & van den Bos, 2013). These theories describe the importance of

psychological processes only to the extent that they are activated by environmental cues, or what McCauley et al. (2008) term “mechanisms” (p. 415).

These psychological mechanisms are not to be confused with the view that “qualities of specialness” (Horgan, 2008, p. 83) exist within those who perpetrate terrorist violence. Indeed, such perspectives have been studied, found unsubstantiated, and extensively presented elsewhere in relation to profiles (Silke 1998; Bhui, Warfa & Jones, 2014). Instead, what can be taken from these theoretical frameworks is what Wiktorowicz (2005) terms a “cognitive opening” (p. 5); the activation of certain, psychological processes which allows for movement from uncertainty to clarity. *Significance Quest Theory* (SQT) combines these components, describing catalyst events, such as grievances (Gill, 2007; Moghaddam, 2005), as “significance loss” (Kruglanski et al., 2013, p. 560), and offering a motivation-based framework from which the phenomenon of violent radicalisation can be understood

Comparable to other psychological, or “psychogenic” (Murray, 1938) ‘needs’ such as “autonomy” (Deci & Ryan, 2000), “competence” (White, 1959), “self-enhancement” (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003), “self-worth” (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001), or even “meaning” (George & Park, 2012; Martela & Steiger, 2016), *Significance Quest Theory* views one’s need for personal significance as the fulcrum of most goal-directed behaviour(s) (even outside the realm of violent radicalisation). Indeed, the importance of goals in motivating human behaviour beyond “mere survival” (Kruglanski et al., 2013, p. 561) is well established (Hull, 1940; Maslow, 1942). Ultimately, Kruglanski and colleagues suggest that, by maintaining a sense of significance in one’s life, one is striving towards a condition of homeostasis; “a balanced satisfaction of the individual’s basic biological and psychogenic needs” (p. 117). During radicalisation, however, a catalyst, in the form of significance loss, can threaten this state.

Kruglanski and colleagues make it clear that this catalyst may be an “accumulation of small realizations” rather than one event (2018, p. 109), and may range from “unfulfilled high aspirations” (2018, p. 109) to personal trauma. Regardless of its manifestation, when an individual’s need for personal significance is lost, jeopardised, or missing entirely, it creates “motivational imbalance” (Kruglanski et al., 2019, p. 117-118); one’s means and goals are in discord. A number of psychological theories, which have also been applied to the study of radicalisation, have offered different terminology for this discord; for example, “motivational conflict” (*Reactive Approach Motivation Theory*, see McGregor, Prentice & Nash, 2013) “self-uncertainty” (*Uncertainty-Identity Theory*, see Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Hogg & Wagoner, 2017), “existential anxiety” (*The Meaning Maintenance Model*, Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006; *Terror Management Theory*, Becker, 1973), and “cognitive dissonance” (feelings of discomfort as a result of holding conflicting ideas simultaneously, see Elliot & Devine, 1994). Irrespective of the terminology, these theories point in the same direction; a basic dissatisfaction arising from external or internal factors which spur a re-alignment of one’s goals, and means of achieving them. In *Significance Quest Theory*, Kruglanski et al. posit that violent radicalisation is synonymous with this re-alignment, characterised by a “quest” (2014, p. 40) for personal significance. In this way, as proposed in earlier theories such as Moghaddam’s *Staircase Model* (2005), as well as Gill’s *Pathways Model* (2008), the psychological mechanism (i.e. the quest) is triggered by any event(s) that compromise an individual’s need for personal significance.

As differentiated by Moskalenko and McCauley (2017) in their ‘Two Pyramids Model’ of radicalisation, these feelings can occur independent of violent action, and it important to note that this experience is neither indicative nor predictive of violent intentions. Rather, it creates a ‘perfect storm’ for individual vulnerabilities to be exploited, oftentimes through the promise of a remedy. According to Kruglanski and colleagues, an individual is

more likely to choose violent means if it is perceived as a “viable antidote” to their discord (2018, p. 109). Resorting to violence can then incur *because of* its destructive nature, not despite (Ginges and Atran, 2011), and the level(s) of destruction, or the extent of the imbalance between the focal goal served by the extreme behaviour and other, ‘normal’ goals (this is termed ‘counterfinality’) marks the extent of the violent radicalisation process (Kruglanski et al., 2014).

Evidence in support of this goal-direct perspective has largely pointed to the relationship between the extent of individuals’ need for significance and the level(s) of violence associated with their behaviour (or behavioural intentions) such as ideologically motivated crimes (Jasko et al., 2017) and support for radical groups (Lyons-Padilla, Gelfand, Mirahmadi, Farooq, & van Egmond, 2015). In two cross-sectional studies conducted with “political extremists” detained in the Philippines and Sri Lanka respectively, Webber et al. (2018a) identified an indirect effect of significance loss (as measured through participants’ self-reported feelings of “humiliation”, “shame” and “people laughing at them” in their day-to-day lives, p. 273) on both ethno-nationalist and Islamic extremist beliefs (“killing is justified when it is an act of revenge”). These effects were moderated by different cognitive mechanisms, such as the need for cognitive closure (see Section 1.1.1, p. 3 for definition). In piloting a de-radicalisation intervention, Webber and colleagues (2018b) found that providing detained members of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) with “sustained mechanisms for earning personal significance” (p. 539), through spiritual, community, sports and family rehabilitation, participants self-reported level(s) of extremism (as measured through attitudinal support for the LTTE’s ideological goals, as well as their use of violence) reduced to a level of significance after one year.

In early experimental research conducted by Greenberg, Solomon & Pyszczynski (1990) manipulating morality to induce motivational imbalance through existential anxiety

was found to increase Christian participants' levels of hostility towards Jewish targets, compared to a control group. Replications of this research paradigm have observed similar findings on behavioural intention outcomes relating to hostility and aggression (McGregor et al., 1998). Directly informed by SQT, Webber and colleagues (2018a) manipulated significance loss with a sample of ordinary, American participants ("think back to a time when..." p. 276). They found that by inducing motivational imbalance in this way, participants were more likely to justify the use of violence, irrespective of political orientation at baseline. Dugas et al. (2016, Studies 2-5) also conducted experimental research in significance loss, but this time through the manipulation of social rejection and failure. They demonstrated a causal relationship between the manipulation of significance loss and participants' propensity towards for self-sacrificing violence. Together, these findings illustrate the nature of individual vulnerability in the context of terrorism, demonstrating a *causal relationship* between significance loss and the perceived instrumentality of violence.

In terms of pinpointing the processes underlying the perceived instrumentality of violent means, there is evidence in support of the construct of counter-finality as it pertains to destructive behaviour (i.e. the phenomenon of drastic imbalance between a focal goal served by an extreme behaviour and other, 'normal' goals, typically characterised by harmful end objectives). Schumpe et al. (2018) found that the more detrimental a means towards *other* goals, the more instrumental participants perceived it to be towards a *focal* goal. Tattooed participants, for example, provided reasons why they got their tattoos, as well as an indication of how painful the tattoo was. Schumpe and colleagues found that as perceptions of pain increased, so too did the perceived instrumentality of the means (i.e. getting the tattoo) for their focal goal (i.e. their reason for getting a tattoo). Kopetz, Woerner, Starnes, and Dedvukaj (2019) replicated this study with other, seemingly irrational means such as "doing drugs", "having unprotected sex" and "cutting or burning oneself" (p. 41). Again, as the

participants' self-reported negative consequences for these behaviours increased, so too did their perception of instrumentality; "it's risky, therefore I do it" (p. 39). This has also been observed in radicalisation towards other extreme behaviours such as disordered eating (Pelletier, Guertin, Pope, & Rocchi., 2016), addiction (Ryan, Plant, & O'Malley, 1995) and, as proposed by Kruglanski and colleagues, manifestations of violent extremism, including terrorism.

Through the activation of certain psychological mechanisms, violent radicalisation has, thus far, been described as a process of means-goal re-alignment, in which an individual comes to perceive violence as an instrumental means of achieving, or re-gaining, a sense of significance in their life. The deeper the sense of insignificance, the greater the likelihood of resorting to violent, counterfactual means, thus determining the "degree" or extent of the violent radicalisation process (Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 80). However, earlier in this section, it was noted that radicalisation, as proposed in *Significance Quest Theory*, will only be rendered violent when violence is depicted, and perceived, as a "viable antidote" (Kruglanski et al., 2018, p. 109) to regaining significance. It is here that the discussion moves towards the *communication* aspects of terrorism.

As mentioned, what differentiates violent extremism from terrorism is its calculated impact on a wider audience. There are layers of communication underpinning these violent acts, conveying not only anxiety-inducing messages through orchestrated violence, but a *rationale* to a target audience for the purpose of *recruitment*. One core focus of enquiry by those seeking to better understand the resort to violence, and a critical component of *Significance Quest Theory*, is the use of *narratives* in propaganda design (Braddock, 2015). By depicting the world, and events within it, using dichotomous, black-and-white terms, narratives lack the ambiguity and "cognitively demanding nuances" of real life (Kruglanski et al., 2018, p. 112). For individuals craving closure and certainty, narratives can present a

seemingly rational means by which their significance loss can be remedied (Hogg, Kruglanski, & Van den Bos, 2013). These narratives, and their role in the violent radicalisation process, will be the focus of the next chapter in the thesis.

1.3 Summary and Conclusions

Since the start of the 21st century, understanding the radicalisation of individuals towards the perpetration of terror has become a multidisciplinary pursuit, and a key focus of enquiry for those seeking efforts to reduce the likelihood of terrorist attacks. The objective of this chapter was to introduce the contribution of psychological science to a broader understanding of terrorist perpetration, highlighting the various theoretical frameworks proposed to explain the process of violent radicalisation into terrorism. Using *Significance Quest Theory*, the phenomenon is explored from the perspective of a “quest”, intended to remedy a loss of personal significance. When jeopardised, lost, or missing entirely, one’s need for personal significance can trigger a resort to destructive behaviour(s), as shown in various cross-sectional and experimental studies. The relevance of this theory to violent radicalisation can be further understood through the lens of manipulation; by depicting violence as a “viable antidote” to an individual’s need for significance, varying levels of influence can thwart perceptions of instrumentality. The narrative, and its depiction of violence as an instrumental means of various goal-directed behaviours, will be the focus of Chapter 2.

Chapter 2. The Psychology of Persuasion; the Role of Narratives in Terrorist Communication

Chapter Overview

The objective of this chapter is to move the focus away from the perpetrator of terrorist violence, towards the communication aspects of terrorism. The chapter deals with four key issues. First, some conceptual clarity is provided in relation to the terms ‘persuasion’ and ‘propaganda’ (2.1). Next, having dealt with conceptual issues, the chapter reviews theory and research in the area of terrorist communication (2.2). Here, the concept of the narrative is introduced (2.3), citing some key research contributions to the study of narratives in terrorist communications (2.4). In seeking to further elucidate the concept, there is a departure in the chapter away from a field-specific understanding of the narrative. Beginning with its theoretical premise in social constructionism and sociolinguistics, psychological evidence on the strategic use of narratives for the purpose of persuasion is detailed in Section 2.5. This is offered as a means of channelling existing theory and evidence into a more succinct understanding of terrorists’ use of narratives, as they pertain to the process of violent radicalisation.

2.1 Concepts

2.1.1 Persuasion.

Persuasion refers to any message intended to “shape, reinforce, or change the responses of another” (Miller, 1980, p. 11). Theoretically, persuasion is rooted in the concept of *resistance*, an elicited response to real or perceived pressure for change, against the change. Sometimes referred to as the “antithesis of persuasion” (Knowles & Linn, 2004, p. 3), resistance can be understood as a cognitive manifestation of ‘digging one’s heels in’. If

one is resistant to persuasion, the persuasive attempt is likely to fail; if a persuasive appeal overcomes resistance, the attempt will succeed.

Resistance can manifest in a series of ways, including *reactance* (strengthening one's initial position, see Brehm, 1966), inertia (resistance to change itself, see Heider, 1946; Moyer-Guse, 2008, p. 417), distrust (directed towards the source, Knowles & Linn, 2004), and scrutiny (critical analysis, see Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Failed attempts at persuasion (see Bensley & Wu, 1991; Bushman, 1998; Bushman & Stack, 1996; Tormala & Petty, 2002; 2004) typically result in unintended or "boomerang" effects (see Byrne & Hart, 2009; de Graaf, van den Putte, Nguyen, Zebregs, Lammers, & Neijens, 2017). These phenomena are largely informed by *Inoculation Theory* (McGuire, 1961) and the *Overcoming-Resistance Model* (Moyer-Guse, 2008), which are bolstered by meta-analytic evidence showing how resistance, in its various forms, can be induced. For example, individuals who have been bolstered against persuasive appeals through explicit forewarning of the incoming appeal, have shown increased resistance through the development of counter-arguments (Banas & Rains, 2010), empirically supporting a resistance-based model of persuasion.

Utilising this model, different theories have proposed ways of increasing or decreasing the likelihood of persuasion by controlling resistance. These theories tend to be informed by dual-process model of information processing, which posit that human beings process incoming information through one of two, broad channels (see Evans & Stanovich, 2013): 'system one', and 'system two'. System two is comparable to the scrutiny, or critical analysis, described above, and can be understood as a controlled, reflective, and "methods driven" (Dunwoody, Haarbauer, Mahan, Marino, & Tang, 2000, p. 35-36) approach to judgement and decision making. The other channel, also known as 'system one', is quick, intuitive and requires very little "cognitive effort" (Dhimi & Thomson, 2012, p. 219).

In the *Elaboration Likelihood Model* (ELM; Petty et al., 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999), a paradigmatic theory in the persuasion literature, ‘system two’ can be understood as the *central* route to persuasion. Persuasion through this route will generally succeed due to genuine message strength (i.e. based on “powerful arguments, sound reasoning” and good evidence, p. 139), and/or its overall concordance with the target’s position (i.e. pro-attitudinal). In other words, this route is dependent on the “valence” of the appeal (O’Keefe et al., 2013, p. 137). Conversely, ‘system one’ is not concerned with these qualities, and is referred to as the *peripheral* route to persuasion.

According to the ELM, as well as other dual-process models such as the Extended *Elaboration Likelihood Model* (E-ELM) (Slater & Rouner, 2002), the *Transportation-Imaginary Model* (Green, Brock and colleagues, 2000; 2002; 2006), and the *Heuristic-Systematic Model* (Todorov, Chaiken, & Henderson, 2002), the success of the persuasive effort in peripheral route persuasion is not dependent on the receiver’s “issue-relevant thinking” (O’Keefe, 2013, p. 137). Instead, this route relies on cues that reduce counter-arguing (Wegener, Petty, Smoak, & Fabrigar, 2004, p. 17) and activate *heuristics*. However, whilst these “simplifying decision principles” (O’Keefe & Jackson, 1995, p. 88) are useful to assess probability, and make predictions about information in an efficient manner, they lack the critical analysis required to side-step persuasion.

Evidence in support of these models of persuasion have largely pointed to the success of persuasive attempts when initiating a specific route. Carpenter (2015), for example, found that by increasing argument quality, resistance to a persuasive appeal was reduced and central route persuasion was initiated. Similarly, when attempting to induce peripheral route persuasion, a number of studies have used humour (Strick, Holland, van Baaren, & van Knippenberg, 2012), fear (Tannenbaum et al., 2015; Witte & Allen, 2000), guilt (Xu, & Guo, 2018), empathy (Shen, 2010), and a variety of other techniques (see Moyer-Gusé, 2008;

Shen, Sheer, & Li, 2015; Van Laer, De Ruyter, Visconti, & Wetzels, 2013) to effectively reduce resistance, and initiate persuasion in this way. In other words, whilst the central route induces critical analysis of incoming information, the peripheral route has been found to thrive on substandard information processing. It is, therefore, not surprising that peripheral route persuasion forms the theoretical basis of propaganda.

2.1.2 Propaganda.

Propaganda can be understood as *means* of persuasion. It is defined as any deliberate attempt to shape, manipulate, or direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the intent of the propagandist (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012, p. 6). Many propaganda theorists argue that this definition is characterised by intent. Through the exploitation of rhetorical devices, propaganda embeds a variety of techniques to assert and generalise unsubstantiated, broader assumptions (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1991). Propaganda generally surfaces when an idea or concept is a 'hard sell'. In other words, the message cannot be conveyed without ill-supported, "simplistic and direct connection between causes and effects" (Black, 2001, p. 129), necessitating such techniques.

As outlined by Tilley in their Propaganda Index (2005, see also Lee & Lee, 1939), these techniques or rhetorical devices include 'name calling' (negative labels or stereotypes, e.g. "terrorists"); 'glittering generalities' (positive-sounding, subjective euphemisms, e.g. "collateral damage"); 'transfer positive' (loosely associating one positive thing with another, e.g. expert endorsement); 'transfer negative' (loosely associating one negative thing with another, e.g. *argumentum ad Hitleru*³); 'plain folks' (applying normalcy and rationality to ideas, depicting them as "of the people"); 'band wagon' (everyone thinks a certain way, or

³ An argumentative move which dismisses, or invalidate, a certain position on the basis that it was shared by Adolf Hitler.

shares a certain opinion) and ‘manifest destiny’ (invoking deterministic “greater forces” to lend support to an idea).

Theories informing a broader understanding of these propaganda techniques generally draw them back to ‘system one’, peripheral route persuasion and the *Heuristic-Systematic Model* (Todorov et al., 2002). In their analysis of Nazi propaganda, Narayanaswami (2011) identified 17 heuristic-based biases designed to create a quick, intuitive “deviation in judgement” (p. 1), namely “authority bias” and the “bandwagon effect” (Artefacts 7-8). In this way, the presence of heuristic cues serve to increase the target’s perception that “the advocated position is valid” (Todorov, 2002 p. 197), reducing the likelihood that they will engage in central route persuasion. For example, in experimental studies, attributing a statement to a credible source (see Bohner, Chaiken, & Hunyadi, 1994), cueing “loss-framed arguments” (Arceneaux, 2012, p. 278) or having a cued, “enthusiastic” audience response (Axsom, Yates, & Chaiken, 1987, p. 31) have all been used as effective heuristic cues, and overlap heavily with techniques used in propaganda.

2.2 An Overview of Terrorist Communication Research

Today, these concepts frequently appear when speaking about terrorist organisations’ dissemination of violence-espousing messages. However, it took some time for terrorist communication theorists to incorporate such perspectives. With an early focus on mass media, theories such as the “contagion hypothesis” were posited in response to the perceived, pervasive nature of ideas, particularly in the context of military coups (see Lee & Thompson’s (1975) case-study research) and even mass media responses in the wake of terrorist attacks (Weiman & Winn, 1994). These perspectives viewed terrorist communication, not as a form of persuasive communication, but as a contagious ‘spell’, exacerbated by heightened media coverage. However, as well as portraying the targets of terrorist communication as passive consumers, the evidence in support of this perspective

tended to be anecdotal (Paletz, & Boiney, 1992; Piccard, 1991), without many new contributions to the evidence base (Nacos, 2009, Ross, 2007, p. 216).

Later perspectives incorporated aspects of psychological science, theorising that constructs such as mass social influence (Cialdini et al., 1999; Zekulin, 2018), obedience to authority (McCauley & Segal, 2009; Milgram, 1974) or social learning (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Aker, 1985; 1998) may explain how individuals becoming recruited into terrorist organisation, particularly over the internet. In their “friend-to-friend” hypothesis, Freiburger, & Crane (2008) suggested that terrorist organisations communicate through the internet to mimic the mechanisms of real-life interactions, creating relationships between targets and existing members or peers to “bridge the gap” between potential recruits and terrorist leadership (Waskiewicz, 2012). The concept of ‘framing’ arose in critique of this perspective, suggesting that the peer-mediated model of terrorist communication dismissed the target’s interpretation(s) of events.

Framing refers to the “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation; of selection, emphasis, and exclusion” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). It is almost exclusively concerned with manipulating perceptions. Recent contributions to the literature have placed emphasis on the framing of violent actions within terrorist communication(s) (Alonso, Bjorgo, Della Porta and colleagues, 2008, p. 17). Heavily informed by models of intuitive information processing (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), the framing of particular events is suggested to allow for a particular construction of reality (Borah, 2011, p. 247). Wicks (2005) suggests that, by targeting existing cognitive schemas, incoming information contributes to the framing process, drawing “constant and repeated linkage” between constructs. In anti-immigrant rhetoric, for example, this has been observed in the supposed link between “terrorism” and “Muslim” (Coppock, & McGovern, 2014, P. 250; Ibrahim, 2010; Said, 1997). In the context of terrorism, much of the research on *Framing Theory* has

been conducted using qualitative methodologies to, for example, identify the justification(s) for violence within religious frames (Groppi, 2017; Juergensmeyer, 2005), political frames of revolution (e.g. Marxist-Leninist, see Adamson, 2005), injustice (e.g. Della Porta, 1995, p. 163) or paranoia (e.g. frames in relation to “the other”, see Aistrophe, 2016, p. 189). However, this framing perspective does not explain how particular components of terrorist communication operate, and remain so *pervasive*.

In postulating that terrorism is ultimately a combination of violence and propaganda, Schmid suggests that, whilst the former aims at behaviour modification through coercion, propaganda aims at behaviour modification through persuasion (2004, p. 206). It is here the concept of framing meets the concept of persuasion. Persuasion (as detailed in Section 2.1.1, p. 15) can be understood as a means by which terrorist organisation manipulate audiences into perceiving a particular type of reality. When integrating this with the framing literature, what emerges is a new lens by which terrorist communication strategies can be analysed; the use of narrative persuasion.

2.3 The Narrative

The *narrative* is defined as the interpretation of a sequence of events, whereby the characters involved have sufficient agency to make changes (Murray, 2003 p. 113). In many ways, human beings tend to understand narrative structure almost immediately, as it dictates the order we place on events in our lives. Narratives can be communicated in countless ways but, ultimately, the sequence of events is controlled by the “*plot*”; a narrative device that applies order, and meaning to “otherwise isolated events” (Kirkman, 2002b, p. 33). Ricoeur explains that, although the sequence of events may be discordant (i.e. various protagonists, antagonists, and key events), the narrative’s plot, must help the narrative to function as one totality (“*emplotment*”, 1991, p. 21). However, of equal importance to the plot is the characters’ agency. This allows the audience to infer causality or *causal links* between events

in the plot. A plot is most enthralling when it is possible to blame unfolding events on somebody, and a well-crafted narrative will assist the audience with this task. When all of the above has come together, at the end of a narrative, there must be a “point”; a take home message to justify the narrator’s telling of the story (Ricoeur, 1980; Steedman, 1986). In the last number of years, the narrative, and its ability to simplify complex events in this way, has grown in prominence in the field of terrorism research, and become a key area of focus for those seeking to better understand terrorist communication.

2.4 Terrorist Narratives

In any form of communication, the object is to convey a particular version of reality. Terrorist organisations, in particular, seek to espouse a specific “social construction of reality” (Matusitz, 2013, p. 137) that serves their interest(s), or the interest(s) of those whom they claim to represent. Across a variety of contexts, these social constructions have been investigated through terrorist organisations’ dissemination of online communication(s), political statements, video-graphic content, disseminated material and even first-hand sources such as interviews. For example, *The Turner Diaries*, a racial dystopian novel which serves as a ‘call-to-action’ within a white nationalist ideology, has been extensively analysed and connected to at least 40 terrorist acts and hate crimes since its publication in the late seventies (Berger, 2016, p. 3). Halverson and colleagues (2011) studied religious texts, explaining how collective religious narratives such as *Seventy-Two Virgins* creates the scaffolding for groups espousing Islamic extremism to structure a narrative of martyrdom. Not all terrorist narratives, however, have been identified in physical *texts*.

In an analysis of the ideological writings and propaganda statements of al Qaeda, Schmid (2014) explains how drawing upon collective memory through traditional, Arab narratives such as the *Christian Crusades* or the Iraqi insurgency form part of a broader narrative that *The West is at War with Islam* (p. 6). In other words, historical narratives can

serve as “becoming narratives” (Boje, 1991, p. 106), existing as stories on their own, whilst also infiltrating newer ones. Schmid describes Al Qaeda’s ethos of conflict (as detailed by Bar-Tal et al., 2014), explaining how it rationalises terrorism in the context of a broader conflict perceived to exist between the West and the Muslim world. This is done by presenting an historical premise which offers “a path from the grievance to the realisation of the vision” (p. 6). To realise this vision, a variety of techniques are embedded within the narrative to rationalise violence, including portraying martyrdom as a tactic of warfare, placing little distinction between civilian and military targets (see Section 1.1.3 p. 3 and conceptualisations of ‘the innocent’) and legitimising the targeting of civilians due to their “complicity with the West” (p. 7). This use of limited interpretations of collective memory (to identify an enemy, and present them as the instigators) is a common approach in terrorist communications, and has been used by both Republican (Morrison, 2016) and Loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland.

In an analysis of interviews with Loyalist paramilitaries, for example, McAuley and Fergusen (2016) describe interviewees individual narratives of violence. They describe how interviewees ultimately reached the contention that “every Catholic was seen as a member of the IRA” (p. 564), and this was done in a number of ways. Using a similar tactic to Al Qaeda and the crusades, McAuley et al. noted that the interviewees drew upon particular interpretations of the past to rationalise future actions. By using events such as the 36th Ulster Division sacrifice at the Somme in 1916, McAuley et al. suggest that perpetrators of terrorist violence can draw upon the collective memory of their in-group (in this case, in relation to loyalism) to legitimise militant responses. Ultimately, these events formed part of a broader narrative that promoted the conflict, “forming the basis for identifying *all* Catholics in Northern Ireland the ‘enemy’” (p. 564). Although these terrorist narratives tend to have their

roots in a strong, historical identity, interestingly, it has been noted that some terrorist organisations make use of recycled narratives from *other* organisations.

By analysing case studies from Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark and Belgium, Kundnani (2012) describes how so-called ‘counter-jihadist’ groups such as the English Defence League (EDL) have recycled the underlying structure of Neo Nazi narratives by simply replacing the protagonists; “Muslims have taken the place of blacks and multiculturalists are the new Jews” (p. 6). In-depth analyses of violence-framing in far-right groups such as the National-Democratic Party of Germany (NDP) have found overlap between narratives of environmentalism espoused by far-left groups and militant xenophobia. In an analysis of online content, Hurd and Werther describe the NDP’s re-purposing of eco-narratives, as they warn that society is “already weak, polluted, threatened” (p. 145). This *Doomsday*, or *End of Times*, narrative is constantly being re-packaged to communicate urgency, and justify acts of violent extremism in apparently disparate causes ranging from far right (Pautz, 2014) to far left causes such as Earth First!, or the ‘Unabomber’ (Taylor, 1998, p. 7-10). This narrative is even apparent amongst Islamic extremist groups such as the so-called Islamic State (IS) (McCants & McCants, 2015) and the Taliban. In the case of the latter, Ingram (2015), describes how the group’s magazine ‘Azan’ re-frames world events as “manifestations of a divine conflict” or the end of times. This promotes an “atmosphere of extreme urgency and crisis” (p. 571), prompting immediate, extreme action.

However, the jump from narrative construction *to* extreme action is, nonetheless, unclear. Whilst attempts have been made to attach theoretical models (Braddock, 2015) to an understanding of terrorist narratives, the overall mechanics are only tentatively understood. Although these narratives have been, somewhat, *explored*, the ability of researchers to *explain* their underlying mechanisms is limited. In many ways, this is not surprising. Whilst

acknowledging the contributions of this literature to the field at large, it must be noted that much of it has emerged without a lot of reference to the broader field of narrative research.

In fact, the narrative has been a focus of academic enquiry since the first explorations into the construction of the self (Neisser & Fivush, 1994), and long pre-dates its entry into the field of terrorism research (Reedc, 2017a). Considering the positioning of this thesis, and the emphasis it places on socially constructed narratives, the following sections will trace these roots and draw upon existing theoretical frameworks to better inform the role of narratives in the process of violent radicalisation.

2.5 Narrative Psychology

Rooted in the deconstruction of the self and a perspective known as ‘social constructionism’, the study of narratives began as a somewhat unconventional topic in psychology. As a discipline, psychological science is generally informed by an opposing perspective known as ‘realism’.

Realism assumes that phenomena relating to human beings, such as thoughts, attitudes and behaviours, are pre-existing. As such, findings in relation to these phenomena can be ‘happened upon’ (or discovered); this is generally the premise of empiricism (as outlined in the various experimental studies discussed in Chapter 1, as well as the experiment to be presented in Chapter 7). A similar position is held in relation to mathematics, positing that the world is inherently mathematical, and human beings, through psychics and so on, have ‘discovered’ it.

Constructionist perspectives, however, see these phenomena as malleable constructs that are created by humans who are “constantly, and perpetually interpreting and changing the meaning of [their] actions” (Crossley, 2000, p. 529). In other words, objective observations of thoughts, feelings, and behaviour are unattainable because they are not fixed. According to social constructionists, this is due to human beings’ capacity to be “reflexive”

in their own worlds (Parker, 1992, p. 105). A social constructionist view of mathematics would argue, for example, that human beings have invented the language of mathematics for the purpose of understanding the world, and this explains why the field is so variable, and every-changing. The variable nature of narratives can be viewed in the same way (Heartfield, 2002).

Irrespective of its theoretical premise, however, theorists of narrative psychology (e.g. Gergen, 1991; Murray, 1997) ultimately maintain that, either socially constructed or pre-existing, the narrative is central to human beings' ability to make sense of an otherwise chaotic world. The reason for this is that, although narratives can be said to be constructed by human beings, there is also an underlying principle that the narrative has a type of innate structure. Theodore Sarbin, a pioneer of narrative psychology and one of the earliest psychologists to use stories to understand human behaviour, suggested that narratives are, in fact, innate to *how* human beings perceive the world. According to the "narrator principle" (Sarbin, 1986), whilst it can be said that human beings create and "impose" (Crossley, 2000, p. 532) structure on their experiences, the narrative is, nonetheless, pre-existing; a "root metaphor" for the human condition (Mancuso & Sarbin, 1983).

In day-to-day life, it is easy to see how some might observe this to be the case. Human beings find it difficult to interpret or describe events in their lives without imposing a specific, narrative structure. What follows is one of the most pertinent structural principles applied to the socially constructed narrative; a structure developed by sociolinguist William Labov.

2.5.1 Labovian Syntax.

The Labovian approach to narrative structure (Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972) was developed before oral narratives became the subject of textual enquiry, and has since become seminal to the study of narratives of personal experience (Patterson, 2013, p.

27). The approach offers different narrative properties, comparable to what most would understand to be the ‘beginning’, ‘middle’, and ‘end’. In this way, *Labovian Syntax* attempts to demonstrate the narrator principle of self-imposed, narrative structure; how human beings tell stories.

Abstract and Orientation. A key characteristic of oral narratives (i.e. narratives told to other people) is that one does not simply begin speaking. There is some conversational “turn-taking” (Erickson, 2003, p. 16) before the narrative is introduced. This is called the *Abstract* and it functions to signal the telling of the narrative, capturing its essence. After this, there will be *Orientation* details, situating the narrative in a particular context. This is intended to direct the listener to the “time, place, actors and activity” of the events to come (Labov, 2003, p. 64).

Complicating Action(s). Once the *Abstract* and *Orientation* is provided, the essence of the narrative (as cued in the abstract) can unfold. As mentioned in the definition offered by Murray (2003, p. 113), events, clauses or (what are termed here) *Complicating Actions* will then happen in sequence. In their research on narrative persuasion, Green and Brock (2000) suggest that these early events raise “unanswered questions”, present “unresolved conflicts”, or depict “not yet completed activity” (p. 703). The use of sequence is also called temporal juncture, demonstrating the relationship between each *Complicating Action* (e.g. “and”, “then”). Temporal juncture is important as it anchors clauses to one another, assisting with the attribution of causality, as mentioned earlier (Section 2.3, p. 21). Amongst all the *Complicating Actions* in the narrative (of which there may be thousands), there is generally a “most reportable event” (Labov, 2010, p. 547). This event is the least expected or ‘punchiest’, and may create change or conflict in the plot.

Evaluation. Throughout the narrative, the audience’s response may affect its telling or re-telling. If the narrative is fully formed, these will guide the narrator to summarise the

substance of the story at points using *Evaluation* cues. These cues are highly subjective, offering the perspective from the present as well as alternative accounts of events. They can offer a juxtaposition of real and potential events by having the listener imagine what *could have* happened, through the consequences of the event which *did* happen. The *Evaluation* cues can be understood as responses to the question, “So what?” (Labov, 2010, p. 547).

Resolution and Coda. Finally, there will be a *Resolution*. This simply follows the most reportable event, and functions to release the listener’s tension by ultimately telling them ‘what happened’. The final resolution will, sometimes, conclude with a *Coda*; a “free clause” that signals the end of the narrative (Labov, 1972, p. 225). Sometimes the *Coda* can bring the narrative back to the present (or back to the *Abstract*), but this is not compulsory as its primary function is to indicate that the story has come to an end.

Patterson (2013, pp. 29-30) composed a narrative structured according to the Labovian method⁴. A sample of it is presented below:

(A) Did I ever tell you about the time I was stuck in a lift? (O) Well, it was about five years ago. (CA) I was the last one to leave the office late on a Friday night and the lift just stopped between the eighth and seventh floors. (E) I was terrified. (E) I thought I would be stuck there until Monday morning. (CA) I frantically pushed the alarm button for ten minutes (E) which seemed like hours. (CA) Then I heard someone calling (CA) and then suddenly the doors opened between the two floors. (R) I was free at last! (E) I was so relieved. (C) There is no way I would ever get into a lift on my own now.

In observing these narrative components at play, it is easy to see how narratives can serve as malleable constructs for human beings to understand the world. However, although

⁴ Abstract (A), Orientation (O), Complicating Action (CA), Evaluation (E), Resolution (R), and Coda (C).

these structural components allude to a performative narrative told to a host of eager listeners, not all narratives are to *other people*. As mentioned, narrative constructionism views the narratives as a resource from which people ‘hang’ their experiences to establish meaning and “fashion” their identity (Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992, p.1). This can be a positive exercise; for example, in the case of birth stories (Callister, 2004), recovery from addiction (Hanninen & Koski-Jannes, 1999) or, in the context of illness and disease, as a means of coping (Tighe, Molassiotis, Morris, & Richardson, 2011), maintaining hope (Bruner, 1987) and even attributing difficult experiences to a predestined path (Qureshi, 2010, p. 282) or “quest” (Good et al., p. 838). However, narratives can also be constructed strategically, but with *negative* outcomes.

2.5.2 The strategic use of narratives; Evidence and theory.

In the late nineties, Kirkman, Rosenthal, & Smith (1998) conducted interviews with teenagers in an attempt to identify their rationale against condom-use. They observed that participants “emplotted” (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 21) their sexual behaviour within a narrative of romance, within which the use of condoms to prevent sexually transmitted infections could not be integrated. According to Kirkman and colleagues, the study demonstrated the influence of what they termed a “canonical narrative” on subsequent behaviour (p. 355). Similarly, in the case of intimate partner violence, Corbally (2015) identified different narrative strategies employed by men abused by female partners which prevented them from leaving the abusive relationship. Meyer (2015) identified similar maladaptive, narrative strategies amongst female victims of intimate partner violence. The narrative of “victim-blaming”, for example, prevented them from seeking support, as their personal narrative(s) portrayed them as “responsible for the harm inflicted upon them” (p. 78). This research highlights, not only the debilitating nature of individual narratives, but also their pervasiveness. Indeed, where the pervasiveness of narratives to influence attitudes and

behaviour has received extensive exploration and examination is on the collective level, influencing the masses.

Inter-generational, collective level narratives on the South African government's supposed development of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) as a "weapon of racial genocide" (Dickinson, 2013, p. 123) have been described as obstructive in the prevention, testing, and treatment of HIV in South Africa. In the context of conflict, Christensen (2018) identified different, inter-generational narratives of conflict in Bhutan that formed young peoples' understandings of both the past and present. Importantly, Christensen noted how the events in the narrative(s) did not need to be personally felt by the interviewees to still exist within a meaningful narrative, informing perceptions of the present (i.e. pointing to "an institutionalised form of exclusion", p. 7). In the context of collective Greek and Turkish Cypriot narratives of conflict, Papadakis, Peristianis & Welz (2006) described the prominence of conflicting narratives of the "motherland" as pertinent to the intractability of the conflict (p. 86). This has been observed between collective Israeli and Palestinian narratives, also (Adwan, Bar-On, & Naveh, 2012).

However, not only can narratives endure for generations, but they can also be manipulated. In three experimental studies designed to create specific representations of the past, Ariely (2018) found that exposing Israeli participants to particularistic narrative "frames" of the Holocaust ("While ethnic oppression is common in history, the scale of the Holocaust and number of victims is unprecedented and unparalleled" p. 7) resulted in more negative attitudes towards asylum seekers, including the provision of medical care, compared to more "universalistic" framing (i.e. citing other genocides such as Rwanda and Darfur). Although these collective memories tend to be inter-generational (and not usually felt by the narrator themselves), their effects can be permanent, "undermining a belief in a 'just' or

‘safe’ world” (Githens-Mazer, 2008, p. 560) and supporting collective perceptions of injustice (Frijda 1997, p. 123).

In four experiments Canetti et al. (2018) asked Jewish participants to remember specific films or television programmes (Study 3) from Holocaust Remembrance Day before measuring ideological identification and Jewish militancy (“in the form of support for a pre-emptive strike against Iran”, p. 7). Canetti illustrated how eliciting Holocaust narratives increased participants’ political cognitions in the form of militancy, whilst reducing support for compromises designed to create peace. In this way, the narrative was strategically manipulated to induce particular patterns of cognition.

There have been some theoretical models proposed to explain why narratives are so effective at manipulating individuals in this way. Green, Brock and colleagues (2000; 2002; 2006), in their *Transportation-Imaginary Model*, posit that, through the process of becoming absorbed into a story, one perceives it as realistic, triggering identification with the characters (Cohen, 2001), and belief-alignment. This is in line with other, resistance-based models of persuasion such as the *Overcoming-Resistance Model* (Moyer-Guse, 2008), and the ELM (Petty et al., 1986) which propose that narratives persuade due to their ability to side-step resistance (as introduced in Section 2.1.1, p. 15). Green et al. suggest that transported individuals are less likely to “stop and critically analyse” (p. 703) the positions put forth in the narrative, as the process of disbelieving is too “effortful” (Gilbert, 1991). In this way, the narrative presents a unique opportunity for those who seek to exploit it. It appeals to a basic, human need to apply structure to one’s experience, and find meaning in sometimes, isolated events. At the same time, it targets one’s tendency to think intuitively, overriding the form of information processing that appraises message valence on a critical level.

2.6 Summary and Conclusions

What has become clear from Chapter 2 is that terrorist organisations are particularly proficient at effective communication, and decades of research now point to the mechanics of persuasion for understanding the pervasiveness of the messages they espouse. From here, the narrative has been signalled as a key focus of enquiry. However, to explore this concept without positioning it within the broader, narrative literature is to risk the development of poorly informed models of understanding. Drawing together aspects of sociolinguistics and psychological persuasion, it becomes clear *how* the narrative can function to manipulate human behaviour. Empirically-supported theories of persuasion (Green & Brock, 2000; Petty et al., 1986) show how the narrative structure can succeed in persuading audiences to re-align their thoughts, feelings, or behaviour with those espoused by a narrator. By reducing resistance (Brehm, 1966) to the persuasive appeal, and, thus, the creation of counter-arguments, it is clear *how* narrative can be an ideal means of effectively communication pro-violent rhetoric. However, what remains unclear is how this process can be mitigated or, more specifically, prevented altogether.

Chapter 3. The Counter-Narrative

Chapter Overview

This short chapter introduces the counter-narrative, a targeted intervention intended to reduce the persuasiveness of a dominant narrative across a variety of contexts, ranging from education to health. In the context of violent radicalisation-prevention, the counter-narrative is distinguished from other communication-based, counter-terrorism strategies such as alternative narratives and strategic communications. In lieu of an operationalised definition, the counter-narrative is discussed from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, ranging from communication science to psychology. From here, a novel definition is provided and the chapter ends with a discussion on the state of research in relation to counter-narrative design, evaluation, and dissemination.

3.1 Background

The logic of a counter-narrative is that by offering individuals a new way of processing narrative-related information, a dominant narrative will be less likely to shape, manipulate or direct their behaviour(s). The approach is quite intuitive, and has been explored in the context of challenging inaccurate historical narratives (“counter-factual” narratives, see Mordhorst, 2008), hegemonic narratives relating autism (autism as neurodiversity, rather than disease, see Broderick & Ne’eman, 2008), narratives of infertility (maintaining a narrative of femininity in narratives of failed IVF; see Bell, 2004), as well as pervasive narratives relating to disability (challenging dominant societal scripts that reduce disability, fostering exclusion, see Scott, Novak, Leeman, & Morris, 2006, p. 12). However, in the last number of years, the counter-narrative has emerged as a key area of focus in counter-terrorism, particularly for those seeking to mitigate the effects of dominant terrorist rhetoric.

3.2 The Counter-Narrative Strategy in Counter-Terrorism

In 2015, as part of its security agenda 2015-2020, the European Commission proposed deploying the best tools to counter and deconstruct prevailing, violent extremist rhetoric (p. 13). This is in line with the United Nations (UN) Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy within which the Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) is situated. This resolution is concerned with preventing and suppressing recruitment into terrorism and, as such, encourages Member States to engage with relevant local communities and non-governmental actors in developing strategies to counter the violence legitimising narrative(s) that can incite terrorist acts (p. 6).

In their review of strategies employed by different government and grass-roots organisations to achieve this goal, Briggs and Feve (2013) explain how such strategies fall under three, broad “activities” (p. 3). The first is referred to as ‘*government strategic communications*’, and usually involves promoting the government’s agenda. This approach does not seek to directly challenge popular rhetoric, but instead promote messages that support the ideas or concepts that a government or governing body is attempting to boost. The second approach is conceptually similar, but instead involves offering different, positive stories promoting different values to those espoused in a dominant narrative; these are termed ‘*alternative narratives*’. Whilst they do serve as a response to a dominant narrative, they do not directly challenge the rhetoric, or undercut its logic.

The final approach goes beyond these by challenging, deconstructing, discrediting, and “demystifying” (p. 6) the allure of violent extremism and terrorism, as purported through dominant narratives. This deconstruction falls under the umbrella term, ‘*counter-narrative*’; tailored responses which challenge the themes intrinsic to terrorist narratives.

There have been a number of significant contributions to the study of counter-narratives which have led to its conceptual development beyond this point. Goodall Jr., a communication scholar, suggests that the defining quality of a counter-narrative is its’

communication *goals*, characterised by the “reframing” of key words and phrases (2010, p. 154-155). However, this perspective is somewhat ambiguous. Primarily, it is unclear if the counter-narrative *is* a narrative, or if it simply a set of techniques intended to challenge a dominant narrative for the purpose of reconstruing it. Furthermore, what then becomes unclear is whether, theoretically, it is the *narrative*, the *countering* or *both* that serve as the active ingredients(s) in a counter-narrative intervention. In response to this ambiguity, what follows is a discussion on the conceptualisation(s) of the counter-narrative across a variety of disciplines.

3.2.1 Defining the counter-narrative.

There are certain perspectives which posit that the content of a counter-narrative is less important than something physically ‘being there’, and distorting the violence-legitimising rhetoric by simply existing. Briggs and Feve (2013) comment that those purporting violent extremism are “able to punch above their weight because they are the most confident, vociferous and creative strategic communicators” (p. 7). The imbalance, they argue, could be reversed by mobilising an alternative voice.

Informed by *Communication Process Theory*, Weimann & Von Knop (2008) argue that counter-narrative efforts should do this by producing “noise”, and distorting the violent extremist narrative in the interim from transmitter to recipient (p. 888). Similar to what was proposed by Goodall Jr, this strategy is concerned with outcomes, such as decoding the communicator’s credibility and reputation, dulling the clarity of the message, its reach, and the receivers’ trust. However, whilst these perspectives agree that a counter-narrative should ultimately seek to discredit a dominant one, they are less concerned with its content, or how it should be constructed. Furthermore, these definitions are indistinguishable from the alternative narratives mentioned above, which comparably function to undercut violence legitimising rhetoric by focusing on what the opposition is ‘for’ rather than ‘against’ (Briggs

et al., 2013, p. 20). For example, Bocheńska (2018) proposed humanising narratives of reconciliation to ameliorate Turkish attitudes towards minority Kurds. This has also been explored in the context of other conflicts such as Israel and Palestine (Auerbach & Lowenstein, 2010), and South Africa (Moon, 2006), all of which are considered alternative-, and not counter-narratives.

Ramsey (2012) makes suggestions on content, by proposing that a counter-narrative strategy should place the majority of its emphasis on the ‘countering’ aspect through argumentation. In the context of Al Qaeda, and their online presence, Ramsey explains how Al-Qaeda supporters “are primarily concerned with using theology to justify politics” (p. 66). A counter-narrative should, therefore, challenge facets of the narrative based on principles of argumentation; namely, confrontation, opening, argumentation and, finally, conclusion (p. 56). Similarly, in 2013, the Quilliam Foundation published a practical guide to counter violent extremism online and “reclaim the internet” (Hussain & Saltman, 2014, p. 5). They advised that counter-narrative content should challenge the various political or theological arguments put forth in violent extremist narratives. Some have highlighted the difficulties of such an approach, suggesting that crafting messages that are both initiated and shaped by an adversary inevitably end up becoming an “information contest” (Reed et al., 2017, p. 44). Furthermore, by such definitions, it is not clear how a counter-narrative strategy is conceptually different to counter-arguing.

Informed by theories of persuasion, as well as communication science, Braddock & Horgan (2016) operationalise the counter-narrative as “comprised of content that challenges the themes intrinsic to other narratives” (p. 386). In this way, the counter-narrative is defined, by structure and content, as a narrative that contradicts many of the claims put forth in a dominant one. For example, Braddock and colleagues suggest that a counter-narrative designed to challenge the violent extremist narrative(s) purported by the Animal Liberation

Front (ALF) would involve emphasising the kind-hearted nature of humans and contradicting the narratives they espouse about humans being “cruel” and “arrogant” (2015, p. 48). In other words, by this definition, the active ingredients are those which create psychological resistance to the dominant narrative through the creation of counter-arguments. However, Braddock et al. also emphasise the importance of the narrative structure in terms of persuasion. By their definition, the function of a counter-narrative is to “persuade those at risk for radicalization” (p. 387). In line with such perspective, attempts have been made to edit, for example, IS defector videos to their most “damaging, denouncing and derisive content” to add to the speaker’s emotionality and, presumably, the target’s capacity for identification (McDowell-Smith, Speckhard, & Yayla, 2017).

Similarly, in 2015, the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) (in collaboration with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue) published a detailed report on the topic of counter-narratives, with recommendations for designing successful campaigns. They proposed appealing to the targets’ emotions by using professional-looking productions and satire. In this instance, the definition of ‘counter-narrative’ used by RAN places emphasis on the narrative itself, rather than the arguments or their valence. Emotions, they report, are more important than evidence as facts and statistics can be dismissed whilst emotional appeals have “greater power” (p. 6). They offer the example of satire, which has historically played an effective role in undermining violent extremist organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan through the use of humorous, high-quality productions. However, even with the level of specificity, the *nature* of the message is still unclear.

In 2013, the Center for Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC) published a report on counterterrorism strategic communications in the United Nations, commenting that amongst the most important characteristics of efforts to counter pervasive narratives is proposing the ‘correct’ message. For example, “using violence to resolve disputes, especially

against non-combatants, is an assault on core UN principles and values” (Chowdhury & Barclay, 2013, p. iv). The ambiguity of the “right” message has been subject to criticism for a lack of specificity (Schmid, 2014, p. 21). Furthermore, such a perspective on countering terrorist rhetoric introduces issues on moral relativism. Defining a counter-narrative as a means of offering the “right” answer is obscure, and offers little insights into theory, techniques or delivery. A more pertinent direction for the conceptualisation of the counter-narrative, in the context of terrorism, is to allow the target to view the dominant one in a *different way*.

Salient to most definitions of a counter-narrative is the delegitimising of violent means to reduce the likelihood of an individual becoming radicalised through a dominant, terrorist narrative. As discussed in Chapter 1, the process of violent radicalisation is characterised by the perceived instrumentality of violence. Therefore, a counter-narrative, as conceptualised in this thesis, should encourage the target to re-consider the instrumentality of violence which will, in turn, change the nature of the story. Importantly, the definition offered here does not posit that a counter-narrative must, itself, *be* a narrative. However, by using certain techniques to delegitimise the use of violence in the narrative, it is argued that this, as well as countering the dominant narrative, allows for the creation of another one. In other words, the act of *countering* creates a new *narrative*. Theoretically, through challenging dominant, terrorist narratives in this way, counter-narratives may help individuals make more informed decisions through deeper consideration of, for example, the validity of certain arguments, the rationality of hatred and, ultimately, the legitimacy of violent action.

3.3 The State of Research

In 2017, the European Commission appointed the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) to identify and report on the state of knowledge in regards to counter-narratives. Reed (2018) pointed to the “glaring gap” in counter-narrative research and

evaluation. Despite an overwhelming volume of guides, reports and individual studies on the topic of counter-narratives, there is a need for synthesis with respect to existing evidence.

However, even with an empirical basis, there is nonetheless little theoretical premise informing the design of counter-narratives, or how they may influence or mitigate a process of violent radicalisation into terrorism. From here, the counter-narrative has been described as conceptually “underdeveloped”, and lacking a “thorough grounding in empirical research” (p. 8). In a report commissioned by the European Parliament’s Policy Department for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs, Reed, Ingram, and Whittaker (2017) call for more stringent methodological designs to study counter-narratives, including the use of control groups, and a more thorough understanding of the behavioural and attitudinal basis of messaging efforts. Ultimately, there is an overwhelming consensus in both government, and academic spheres that the concept of the counter-narrative has, thus far, remained an elusive “catch-all” term (Briggs & Feve, 2013, p. 2; Schmid, 2014, p. 2), and requires a more empirical focus in order to determine its utility in the prevention of violent radicalisation.

Chapter 4. Rationale and Research Questions

Chapter Overview

The objective of this chapter is to provide a rationale for the current research programme, as well as highlight some of the methodological challenges associated with conducting research in the field of counter-terrorism. Beginning with a synthesis of the previous chapters, the key points emerging from the literature will be presented. From here, a number of methodological and conceptual challenges will be discussed. Finally, the chapter will end with an overview of the research programme, as well as the study objectives.

4.1 Summary of Literature

There are a number of key points to emerge from the literature, as reviewed in Chapters 1-3. Radicalisation, or the cognitive process by which an individual moves from uncertainty towards perceived clarity in the form of an unambiguous belief system, was identified as paradigmatic in understanding terrorist perpetration (Silber et al., 2007). However, in comparing various theoretical perspectives, it was noted by Kruglanski et al. (2014) that the factors underlying radicalisation into terrorism are relevant only when they activate the *necessary, psychological mechanisms*. When activated, these mechanisms can trigger a quest for significance, prompting an individual to perceive certain means as instrumental to their goals. Informed by *Significance Quest Theory*, it was posited that different external and internal cues can play upon these feelings of uncertainty and imbalance, presenting a means-goal configuration that legitimises violence (Kruglanski et al., 2002). This can, then, trigger a process of *violent* radicalisation into terrorism.

The narrative, and its depiction of violence as an instrumental means of certain, goal-directed behaviour(s), was the focus of Chapter 2. By, first, considering other proximal concepts, such as persuasion and propaganda, an overview of terrorist communication was

presented. The narrative, and its ability to simplify, complex real world events into unambiguous dichotomies (Ricoeur, 1980; Steedman, 1986) was then explored in the context of terrorism. Citing a variety of sources, the use of narratives by terrorist organisations was discussed, before being contextualised in the broader psychological and sociolinguistic literature.

Rooted in social constructionism, the narrative was described as central to human beings' ability to make sense of an, otherwise, chaotic world. Citing both qualitative and quantitative evidence, it was explained how, by 'hanging' experiences of everyday life onto structural, narrative principles, individuals can use narratives to establish both meaning, and identity; the Labovian approach to narrative structure (1972; 2003) was used to practically demonstrate such principles. Finally, theories of psychological persuasion were presented to underscore how the mechanics of human cognition can facilitate persuasion through narratives (Cohen, 2001; Moyer-Guse, 2008) citing experimental evidence which may inform an understanding of narrative persuasion in the context of violent radicalisation.

The counter-narrative, a targeted counter-messaging intervention, was the focus of Chapter 3. It was noted that the counter-narrative approach is not exclusive to the field of terrorism research, and examples were provided in other contexts. Nonetheless, the ambiguity of the concept was highlighted (Reed, 2018), and clarification provided. It was concluded that the ultimate function of a counter-narrative should be to *reconstrue* a dominant narrative and, in the context of terrorism, should encourage the target to re-consider the instrumentality of violent means. Having set the scene for the current research programme, what follows is a brief note on the methodological and conceptual challenges associated with conducting research in this sphere.

4.2 Methodological and Conceptual Challenges

When conducting novel research in the field of counter-terrorism, there exists a number of regulatory, and methodological challenges that hamper progress. First, it is notoriously difficult to acquire ample, high quality data. The population of interest is elusive as those convicted under terrorist legislation are predominantly convicted of offenses that fall short of physical perpetration (e.g. weapons violations, see Lloyd & Dean, 2015, p. 42); as such, statistics on the arrest and prosecution of those suspected of involvement likely reflect only a portion of the true number (LaFree, Morris, & Dugan, 2009) which, in turn, limits researchers' ability to conduct thorough, pragmatic analyses of the radicalisation process(es). Indeed, compared to other risky or extreme areas of research, such as homicide or road-traffic accidents, the actual incidence of terrorist attacks (and, therefore, prevalence of perpetrators) is not as widespread as one would think (Nemeth & Mauslein, 2019; Ruby, 2002). In other words, the data is sparse.

However, even with sufficient data, sampling and selection biases in large databases have also been raised as a concern (Mahoney, 2017; Parekh, Amarasingam, Dawson, & Ruths, 2018). This is likely rooted in conceptual ambiguity of terrorism, and its sister constructs. For example, the 'Profiles of Perpetrators of Terrorism in the United States' (PPT-US) dataset contains information on organisations known to have committed terrorist attacks against targets in the United States between 1970 and 2016 (see Miller, 2014 for final report). The database codes perpetrators as those who have "engaged in terrorist activity" (Miller & Smarick, 2012). However, in the development of the UK government's risk assessment tool for terrorist offenders, Lloyd and Dean (2015) use the term "engagement" is used to describe the process(es) by which an individual comes to identify with a terrorist cause, whilst "intent" and "capability" are used to capture the 'violent' aspect (Lloyd et al., 2015, p. 42). Such ambiguities inevitably lead to uncertainty on including violent and/or non-violent offenders

in an overall dataset, leading to selection biases. Data of this nature cannot contribute to predictive models that are any more accurate than chance (Sarma, 2017, p. 283).

Such biases can be avoided through the use of primary data. However, research informed by primary data (and therefore guided by specific research questions), such as interviews or experiments, tends to be conducted with proximal, rather than purposeful (i.e. the target population), samples such as demographically matched peers (Joose et al., 2015; Katchanovski, 2016) family members (Pearson & Winterbotham., 2017), or experts (Joose et al., 2015). Using such sources renders it more challenging to extrapolate the findings to the development of theories (i.e. external validity) and, in particular, to the development of preventative interventions. It is this overreliance on secondary sources to inform theory which prompts heavy critique of terrorism research in general (English, 2016).

However, whilst the use of primary data in research of this nature has increased considerably in recent years (Schuurman, 2018), the validity and reliability of measurement models in relation to terrorism-related constructs (i.e. outcome measurement) remains to be of poorer quality than those found in other research areas (Sheehan, 2012). From an experimental perspective, this is not surprising. Between 2007 and 2016, the amount of research articles employing experimental research designs increased to a mere 0.6% (Schuurman, 2018), suggesting that the validation of terrorism-related constructs, or the elusive “dependent variable” for terrorism (Freilich, Chermak, & Gruenewald, 2015, p. 362) is not being prioritised.

4.3 Introducing the Programme of Research

Within this confines, the objective of the current research is to explore the potential for an evidence-based approach to countering terrorist narratives, and preventing violent radicalisation into terrorism. The research was conducted in three phases using mixed methodologies. First, a systematic review and meta-analysis were conducted, examining the

effectiveness of targeted counter-narrative interventions on primary and secondary outcomes related to violent radicalisation. This study sought to synthesise the quantitative evidence in the area, identifying effective and ineffective components as well as methodological limitations within the evidence-base. The research question that guided this study was:

1. What is the impact of counter-narratives on violent radicalisation (primary outcomes) and/or risk factors for violent radicalisation (secondary outcomes)?

Prior to considering how an effective counter-narrative should be designed, the objective of Study 2 was to explore the narratives used to justify violence amongst former perpetrators of violent extremism within terrorist organisations, as well as identify the specific means of justification within these narratives. These objectives were guided by the following research questions:

1. How do former perpetrators of violent extremism construct narratives of their experience of perpetration in the context of terrorism?
2. How are propaganda techniques used within these narratives to justify the use of violent, rather than non-violent means?

In response to these questions, Narrative Analysis was used to identify the dominant, violence-justifying narratives used by ten, former perpetrators across different contexts of terrorism (Neo-Nazi, separatist etc.). Using an existing propaganda analysis template (Section 2.1.2, p. 18), a content analysis was then used to explore the use of propaganda techniques to depict the instrumentality of violence within these narratives.

Finally, informed by Studies 1-2, Study 3 sought to begin the process of conducting experimental research in the context of counter-narratives. By exploring issues related to experimental design and outcome measurement, the study sought to set a precedent for laboratory-based research in the area. The aim of the final study was to evaluate the effectiveness of two, theoretically-informed counter-narrative approaches in reducing

propensity towards violent radicalisation in participants' exposed to a dominant, terrorist narrative. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Can evidence-based counter-narratives reduce the effectiveness of a dominant, terrorist narrative? Is there a difference between generic and tailored approaches?
2. Do individual differences in cognitive tendencies moderate these effects?

Specific hypotheses pertaining to each of the three studies are presented in each empirical chapter.

Chapter 5

Study 1. Counter-narratives for the prevention of violent radicalisation: A systematic review of target interventions.

Note: An extended version of this chapter, as well as the protocol and title registration, are published in the *Campbell Collaboration* library of systematic reviews.

Carthy, S. L., Doody, C. B., Cox, K., O'Hora, D., & Sarma, K. M. (*in press*). Counter-narratives for the prevention of violent radicalisation: A systematic review of targeted interventions. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*.

Carthy, S. L., Doody, C. B., O'Hora, D., & Sarma, K. M. (2018). PROTOCOL: Counter-narratives for the prevention of violent radicalisation: A systematic review of targeted interventions. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 14(1), 1-23.

Carthy, S. L., Doody, C. B., O'Hora, D., & Sarma, K. M. (2017). TITLE: Counter-narratives for the prevention of violent radicalisation: A systematic review of targeted interventions. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*.

Abstract

Despite efforts to create effective counter-narratives in response to the narratives purported by terrorist organisations, it has been suggested that an effective counter-narrative has yet to be designed, and knowledge of what works is lacking. The first study in the thesis sought to synthesise existing, experimental evidence in the area of counter-narrative and identify the active ingredients necessary for change to occur. Studies adopting an experimental or quasi-experimental design (where at least one of the independent variables involved comparing a counter-narrative to a control or comparison exposure) were included in the review. After a scoping exercise, potentially relevant literature was identified through four search stages. This resulted in nineteen studies across fifteen publications. The majority of studies employed the use of counter-stereotypical 'exemplars', alternative accounts, inoculation or persuasive techniques. Across different intervention components, the effects were somewhat mixed. The most pronounced effects were on realistic threat perceptions towards an adversarial group, in-group favouritism, and out-group hostility. However, evidence on the

effectiveness of counter-narratives at targeting primary outcomes (such as intent to act violently) was inconclusive. Best practice guidelines for the design and dissemination of counter-narrative interventions, as they pertain to narrative-induced violent radicalisation, are discussed.

5.1 Introduction

As introduced in Chapter 1, psychological perspectives on violent radicalisation into terrorism suggest that the process can be triggered by the promise of fixing an ultimate “imbalance” (Kruglanski et al., 2019, p. 117), “existential anxiety” (Proulx et al., 2006) or dissatisfaction with one’s life. When this balance is tipped, certain external or internal factors can manipulate how individuals perceive the relationship between their actions and their needs, as appeased through “focal goals” (Pieters, Baumgartner, & Allen, 1995, p. 228).

According to *Significance Quest Theory* (Kruglanski et al., 2014) the presentation of this means-goal relationship can be heavily biased through the use of persuasive propaganda; deliberate, systemic attempts to manipulate cognitions, and shape behaviour, in line with the desired intent of the propagandist (Jowett et al., 2012, p. 6). However, the perpetration of an act of terror is a ‘hard sell’, and difficult to endorse without simplistic connections between cause(s) and effect(s) (Black, 2001, p. 129). One way of manipulating this paradigm is through the use of narratives. As introduced in Chapter 2, narratives offer a unique opportunity to simplify complex, real-world events into black-and-white logic, ignoring the ambiguity and “cognitively demanding nuances” of real life (Kruglanski et al., 2018, p. 112). In communication research, there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that narratives such as these are amongst the most effective form(s) of persuasion and attitude-change (Braddock et al., 2016), likely due to their ability to impede counter-arguing, and, therefore, reduce resistance to persuasion (Moyer-Guse, 2008).

In their review of strategies to reduce violent radicalisation, Briggs and Feve (2013) propose a strategy of challenging such narratives, by deconstructing, discrediting, and “demystifying” (p. 6) the themes they purport. The counter-narrative, as introduced in Chapter 3, emerged in this way. It follows a logic of prevention; by treating the risk of violent radicalisation upstream, incidence and prevalence of terrorism downstream will be reduced. In 2017, the European Commission appointed the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) to identify and report on the state of knowledge on counter-narratives. Conceptually “underdeveloped” and lacking a “thorough grounding in empirical research”, Reed, Ingram, and Whittaker (2017) called for a more thorough understanding of the behavioural and attitudinal basis of messaging efforts, as well as pointing to the evidence gap in terms of evaluation. Despite an overwhelming volume of guidelines (Briggs & Feve., 2013; Ebner, 2019), handbooks (Reynolds & Tuck, 2016; Tuck & Silverman, 2016), reports (Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2013) and individual studies on the topic of counter-narratives, to date, there has been no synthesis of the effectiveness of these interventions in preventing violent radicalisation.

This review sought to address this gap, by identifying the ‘active ingredients’ for change targeted in counter-narrative interventions to ultimately determine their effectiveness at targeting outcomes related to violent radicalisation. In doing so, the review was tasked with aiding counter-terrorism researchers and practitioners in the design of counter-narratives and as well as determining their utility in countering terrorist rhetoric.

5.2 Objectives

The overall objective of this review was to provide a synthesis of the effectiveness of counter-narratives in reducing the risk of violent radicalisation into terrorism and/or violent extremism. The review question that guided this objective was:

RQ. What is the impact of targeted counter-narrative interventions on violent radicalisation (primary outcomes) and/or risk factors for violent radicalisation (secondary outcomes)?

5.3 Methods

This review followed an explicit protocol with methodological guidance provided by the Campbell Collaboration. The title was registered in the Campbell Collaboration Library of Systematic Reviews in September 2017. The protocol was published in September 2018 (Carthy, Doody, O’Hora, & Sarma, 2018).

5.3.2 Criteria for considering studies in this review.

5.3.2.1 Types of interventions.

Eligible interventions included those which implemented a strategy to counter (or challenge) a dominant narrative that could be said to promote violent extremism through a process of violent radicalisation if not otherwise offset. These dominant narratives did not necessarily need to incite violence. However, it was necessary that the dominant narrative(s) promoted a belief system which depicted the success or survival of the participant’s in-group as inseparable from hostile action against an out-group (i.e. a violent extremist belief system). Furthermore, in order to operationalise the intervention as a ‘counter-narrative’, the participants must have been exposed to such a narrative *beforehand*. For example, Davenport (2013) exposed participants to a manipulated news clip about a terrorist attack before measuring their policy preferences and anxiety. However, the exposure material was not designed to challenge a dominant narrative, nor was a dominant narrative ever gauged or experimentally introduced within the sample. For this reason, the study was characterised as measuring the effects of exposure to a *narrative*, rather than a *counter-narrative*. This was the only criterion applied to participants or settings in the review.

5.3.2.2 Types of studies.

Studies adopting an experimental design where at least one of the independent variables involved comparing a counter-narrative to a control (or comparison exposure) were included in the review. Eligible study designs included randomised control trials (RCT), factorial designs, and quasi-experimental designs with baseline measure(s) of outcomes pre- and post-intervention. As noted by Silke (2001), the beginning of the 21st century marked a turning point in the use of quantitative methodologies to analyse terrorism-related data. For this reason, studies published before the year 2000 were excluded from the review.

5.3.2.3 Types of outcome measures.

In the area of terrorism research, the development and validation of measurement models in relation to violent radicalisation is in its infant stages, rendering it difficult to obtain outcome measures with strong construct validity. As such, there is a clear bias in the preventative literature towards measuring clicks, views, “hits”, comments, hashtags and follower-count, to mention a few (see Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2015, p. 12). However, whilst these indices can certainly offer insight into intervention feasibility, they do not necessarily provide an empirical basis that can determine the effectiveness of an intervention. Whilst careful not to introduce criteria too uncompromising, included studies in this review nonetheless needed to investigate the connection between exposure to a counter-narrative and propensity towards violent radicalisation by measuring at least *one empirically-supported primary or secondary outcome*. Primary outcomes included those which measured participants’ intent to act violently (Pressman & Flockton, 2014)⁵. These are also referred to as “harmful end objectives” (Powis, Randhawa-Horne, & Bishopp, 2019, p. 15). Secondary

⁵ Risk assessment for violent extremism (ERG22 and VERA version 2) is not considered best-practice in research of this nature and, although certain risk assessment tools were consulted for identifying primary outcomes, they were employed cautiously. The author endeavoured to use them in tandem with a suitable evidence base and the tools, therefore did not directly inform the identification of primary outcomes for this review.

outcomes included empirically-supported risk factors for the adoption of a radical belief system (i.e. an "overall risk factor" for violent radicalisation).

The process of identifying secondary outcomes involved the categorisation and sub-categorisation of relevant outcomes under such risk factors. In most cases, the measured outcome(s) did not share the same wording as the overall risk factor(s) in the cited literature. The process of conceptually mapping the measured outcome(s) onto identified risk factors is detailed in *Table 6 (Appendix 1.2)*. What follows is the empirical basis, and brief description, of the two main risk factors used in this review

Perceived group threat. The perceived need to defend against threats is an empirically supported risk factor for the adoption of a violent extremist belief system. In their meta-analysis of 95 samples (and five types of threat), Riek, Mania, and Gaertner (2006) illustrated how different types of perceived threat displayed significant relationship(s) with attitudes towards adversarial groups. For example, the perception of threatened group interests, or ‘symbolic threat’ (“Islamic and non-Islamic people in the Netherlands have different family values”), has been found to predict participants’ perceived illegitimacy of authorities as well as their in-group superiority (Doosje et al., 2013, p. 593; Doosje, van den Bos, Loseman, Feddes, & Mann, 2012), both of which are empirically-supported components of a radical belief system (Saucier, Akers, Shen-Miller, Knežević, & Stankov, 2009; van Bergen, Feddes, Doosje, & Pels, 2015).

‘Realistic threat’ is conceptualised as the perception of a physical threat to one’s safety or existence. This construct (e.g. “non-Islamic Dutch people have too many positions of power and responsibility in this country”) has been found to predict contact intentions in the form of “perceived distance” towards adversarial groups (Doosje et al., 2013, p. 593) which, in turn, has been shown to increase intentions for violent political participation in the context of conflict (“I support [my group’s] decisions to use violence throughout the

conflict”) (McKeown & Taylor, 2017, p. 237). Finally, the “need to defend against threats” is included as an engagement risk factor in the Extremism Risk Guidelines (ERG22+) (Powis et al., 2019, p. 15). In this review, fourteen studies were identified as measuring outcomes categorized under ‘perceived group threat’ and these included measures of both symbolic and realistic sub-constructs.

In-group favouritism / out-group hostility. The second, broad risk factor was conceptualised as in-group favouritism and/or out-group hostility. Working in tandem with in-group superiority, the perception that certain out-groups are inferior to one’s in-group is an important component of a radical belief system (Doosje et al., 2013; Loza, 2007). In fact, this dynamic (in-group vs. out-group) is a defining characteristic of violent extremism more generally (as detailed in Section 1.1.1, p. 3, see Berger, 2017; 2018). The risk factor can be further sub-categorised into two cognitive concepts related to violent action; explicit and implicit bias.

For example, Kahn and Davies (2011, p. 574) found that manipulating implicit bias (i.e. rendering members of an out-group more “stereotypical”) lowered participants’ threshold for violence against an out-group. In fact, in policing, fatal shootings of unarmed civilians have been described as manifestations of these subconscious, implicit biases (Spencer, Charbonneau, & Glaser, 2016, p. 50). Explicit and implicit bias has also been found to manifest in *direct* hostility towards an out-group (Reeve, 2019) as well as “parochial altruism” (the justification of violent action at the risk of harming oneself; see Abou-Abdallah, Kashima, and Harb (2016)) which been described as a culmination of both in-group favouritism and out-group hostility (Abbink, Brandts, Herrmann, & Orzen, 2012). Finally, variations of in-group favouritism and/or out-group hostility feature as attitudinal risk factors in the Extremism Risk Guidelines (ERG22+) (Powis et al., 2019, p. 15) as well as the Violent Extremism Risk Assessment 2 (VERA version 2) (Pressman et al., 2004).

5.3.3 Search methods for identification of studies.

Potentially relevant literature for inclusion in the review were identified through a multi-stage search strategy which first comprised of a scoping exercise to develop a list of search terms. These search terms identified through this stage (Stage 1) are presented in *Table 2 (a) (Appendix 1.2)*. As mentioned, studies published before the year 2000 were excluded from all stages of the search strategy.

Stage 2 involved targeted keyword searches on a list of relevant databases. The full list of databases is provided in *Table 2 (b) (Appendix 1.2)*. Stage 3 involved hand searches of several research and professional agencies' outputs and publications. Once duplicates were removed from the literature identified in Stages 2 - 3, a hand search was conducted on the reference lists of these papers as well as conceptual papers and books on the topic of counter-narratives (Stage 4). Finally, a number of experts in the field of violent radicalisation and narrative persuasion were contacted to request relevant (published or unpublished) literature which matched the selection criteria (Stage 5). One colleague recommended a series of published bibliographies (Tinnes, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2017) and these were included in Stage 3 of the search strategy.

See *Figure 1 (overleaf)* for the flow of studies through the search and screening process. Two, independent searches were conducted. An initial search was conducted in 2016 and, due to a surge in the publication of relevant literature on the topic of counter-narratives between 2016 and 2019, an updated search and synthesis of Stages 2 – 3 were conducted in May 2019 (the same databases were used). In order to identify potentially relevant, *unpublished* literature, the UK Home Office and Public Safety Canada were also consulted during the updated search.

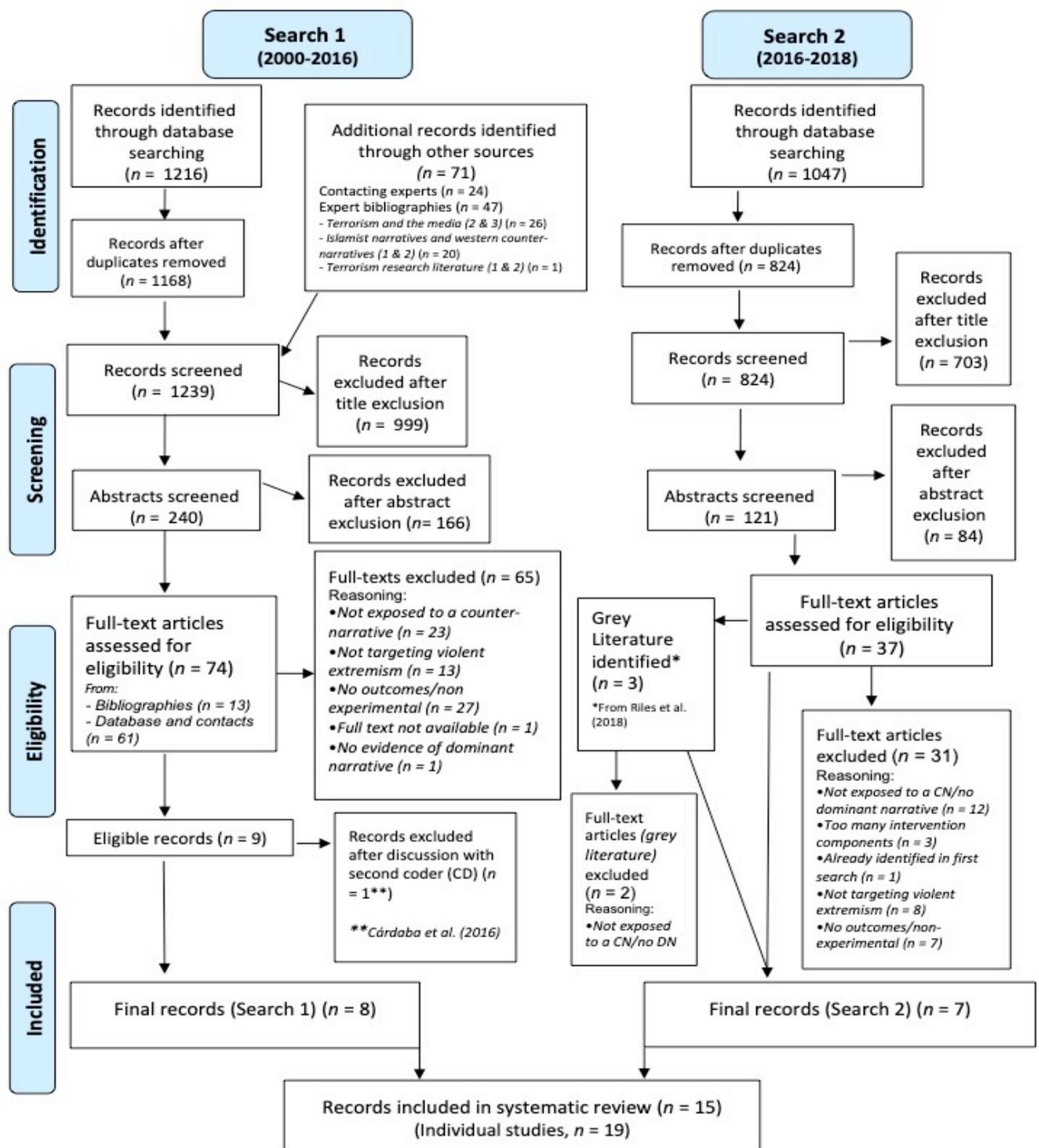


Figure 1. PRISMA⁶ flow chart of searches

⁶ The flow charts have been adapted from Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, and Altman (2009). Additional sections have been added to demonstrate the contribution from non-digital sources, as well as the role of the second coders in the screening process.

5.3.4 Data collection and analysis

See Appendix 1.1 for coding categories according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

5.3.4.1 Selection of studies.

The titles of all identified literature were screened according to the exclusion criteria and excluded accordingly. The abstracts of the remaining literature were also screened in this way, and excluded accordingly. Finally, the full texts of the remaining studies were screened according to the *inclusion* criteria, producing the final list of studies to be included in the review. Once the final studies were identified, two reviewers (CD & KC, see Carthy et al., 2018) independently repeated this process. For both searches, Cohen's Kappa (κ)⁷ was calculated to test for inter-rater reliability, applying the grading scheme as detailed by (McHugh, 2012)⁸

5.3.4.2 Data extraction and management.

Data extraction. Two reviewers double-coded all included studies for data extraction. The primary categories for coding were as follows: participant demographics and characteristics (e.g. sample size, age, gender ratio, nationality and intervention setting); the dominant narrative, as well as the method of determining the dominant narrative (e.g. pilot testing, comparison group, previous research etc.); the counter-narrative and techniques used (e.g. counter-stereotypical exemplars, narrative transformation, persuasion); study design, outcome(s) construct(s) and, finally, descriptive statistics and overall effectiveness. Studies containing more than one independent study (with separate samples) were coded as separate studies (e.g. Bruneau, Lane, & Saleem, 2017a; 2017b; 2017c). Studies based on the same sample were treated as a single study.

⁷ Cohen's Kappa (κ) (Cohen, 1960); With $p^{(a)}$ as the relative observed agreement among raters, and $p^{(e)}$ as the probability of agreement based on chance, the following formula was used, $\kappa = (p^{(a)} - p^{(e)}) / (1 - p^{(e)})$.

⁸ For Search 1, the inter-rater reliability value was $\kappa = 0.66$, reflecting a moderate level of agreement between coders, and the removal of one study. For Search 2, a value of $\kappa = 0.77$ was obtained, reflecting a moderate-high level of agreement between coders; no studies were added or removed.

Risk of bias. Risk of bias was conducted according to the Cochrane ‘Effective Practice and Organisation of Care’ (EPOC) review group data collection checklist. As in the data extraction, included studies were independently coded by two reviewers and, again, Cohen’s Kappa (κ)¹⁹ was used to determine inter-rater reliability between both coders. The risk of bias table is presented in *Appendix 1.2 (Table 5(a))*. *Unit of analysis.* Intervention effects were synthesised via meta-analysis using RevMan (Review Manager, Version 5.3). During the data extraction, relevant statistics (such as means, standard deviations and sample sizes across conditions) were extracted from results section(s) of included studies (or, in many cases, directly from the study authors) to calculate effect sizes. These effect sizes were reported as standardized mean differences (SMD). Given the nature of the outcomes (e.g. out-group bias, perceived threat, social stigma), the SMD were coded such that positive values (> 0) indicated a negative outcome (i.e. greater propensity towards violent radicalisation).

Multiple effect sizes from the same study are known to bias the overall results. Therefore, for studies with more than one outcome categorised under a single risk factor, an average effect size across these multiple outcomes was calculated, and used to represent each study (see Brewin, Kleiner, Vasterling, & Field, 2007, p. 450). In the case of studies containing more than one measure of the same sub-category risk factor, a pooled average was created. In the case of sub-group analysis, studies with measures of more than one sub-category risk factor (e.g. studies which measured both symbolic *and* realistic threat, or in-group favouritism *and* out-group hostility) were not pooled (i.e. Riles et al., 2018; see *Figure 4*). When studies reported insufficient data to calculate effect sizes, the primary authors were contacted to request the necessary information and calculations were made⁹. If data could not be obtained, the

⁹Bruneau et al. (2017a; 2017b & 2017c), provided all but the corresponding standard deviations for each group’s average score on the dependent variables. Having provided the confidence intervals (95%), and in line with the general methods for Cochrane reviews, the standard deviations were calculated as follows: $SD = \sqrt{N \times (\text{upper limit} - \text{lower limit}) / 3.92}$.

results were synthesised narratively throughout the meta-analyses section(s), and interpreted accordingly.

Assessing heterogeneity and publication bias. Heterogeneity (i.e. the amount of variation in treatment effect) was initially assessed visually using a Baujat plot (Baujat, Mahé, Pignon, & Hill, 2002) alongside the chi-square statistic. Publication bias was then assessed using a contour enhanced funnel plot (Palmer, Peters, Sutton, & Moreno, 2008), Egger's regression test (Egger, Smith, Schneider, & Minder, 1997) and the Begg & Mazumdar (1994) rank correlation test.

Sensitivity analysis. Two meta-analyses required sensitivity analysis. First, for analysis which included pooled outcomes, the analysis was re-run with singular outcomes chosen according to a different selection criteria (i.e. the most reliable). The second sensitivity analysis was conducted on analysis containing studies with high risk of bias, with such studies removed and differences observed. To detect any potential biasing of the meta-analysis due to multiple studies within the same publication, specific studies were removed and the analysis re-run to observe any differences in overall effect or between-study heterogeneity.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Study characteristics.

A more detailed version of the data extraction table (*overleaf*) is retrievable through a link provided in Appendix 1.2.

Table 1(a).

Data Extraction Table.

Study	Design	Sample	Dominant narrative	Counter-narrative techniques & delivery ¹	Outcome(s)
Cernat (2001)	RCT	<i>N</i> = 35. Eighty-eight Romanian students (<i>M</i> _{age} = not provided, <i>SD</i> = not provided, 33% female) were recruited from Electromures High school of Târgu-Mures in Romania.	Anti-Hungarian	Counter-stereotypical exemplars; <i>history test</i> .	Stereotype dimensions & evaluations
Kendrick & Fullerton (2004)	BA	<i>N</i> = 105. International students (<i>M</i> _{age} = 22, <i>SD</i> = not provided, 53.8% female) were recruited from Regent's College in London, England.	Muslims are not free to live and practice their faith in the United States.	Counter-stereotypical exemplars; <i>television commercials</i> .	Attitudes towards the US government, people, and how Muslims are treated in the US.
Ramasubramanian & Oliver (2007)	RCT	<i>N</i> = 98. Caucasian-American students (<i>M</i> _{age} = not provided, <i>SD</i> = not provided, "males and females had almost equal representation) were recruited from communications courses in the United States.	African-Americans are hostile, criminal, lazy, drug users, and aggressive.	Counter-stereotypical exemplars; <i>newspaper article</i> .	Hostile feelings & feeling thermometer.
Gonsalkoral e, Allen, Sherman & Klauer (2010)	Study 2 RCT	<i>N</i> = 49. Undergraduate students (<i>M</i> _{age} = not provided, <i>SD</i> = not provided, 78% female) were recruited from a University in the United States.	Pro-white	Counter-stereotypical exemplars; <i>manipulated Implicit Association Task (IAT)</i> .	IAT.
Alhabash & Wise (2012)	BA	<i>N</i> = 68. Sixty-eight undergraduate students (<i>M</i> _{age} = 20, <i>SD</i> = not provided, 74% female) were recruited from an introductory Undergraduate advertising course at a large Midwestern university.	Anti-Palestinian / pro-Israeli.	Persuasion; <i>video game</i> .	Explicit stereotypes & Affective Misattribution Procedure (AMP).
Bilewicz & Jaworska (2013)	RCT	<i>N</i> = 122. Students (<i>N</i> = 122, <i>M</i> _{age} = 16.84, <i>SD</i> = 0.49, 69.1% female) were recruited from Israeli and Polish high schools.	Anti-Polish	Counter-stereotypical exemplars; <i>descriptions of people</i> .	Feeling thermometer & perceived similarity to the self.

Garagozov (2013)	RCT	$N = 264$. Local Azerbaijanis were recruited from Baku, the capital city of Azerbaijan. The sample included internally displaced ($M_{age} = 35.2$, $SD = 13.01$, <i>gender breakdown unclear</i> , $N = 141$) and non-internally displaced ($M_{age} = 34.3$, $SD = 13.1$, <i>gender breakdown unclear</i> , $N = 123$) participants.	Anti-Armenian	Progressive Narrative Transportation; <i>written stories</i> .	IAT.
Alhabash & Wise (2015)	BA	$N = 172$. Students ($M_{age} = 20.80$, $SD = 2.89$, 60.5% female) were recruited from introductory courses at a large Midwestern university in the United States.	Anti-Palestinian / pro-Israeli.	Persuasion; <i>video game</i>	Explicit stereotypes & AMP.
Cohen, Tal-Or & Mazor-Tregerman (2015)	Study 1 RCT	$N = 70$. Students ($M_{age} = 25.24$, $SD = 5.89$, 75% female) were recruited from a large Israeli university.	Against on campus demonstrations for Arab students.	Counter-arguments and identification; <i>fictional story</i> .	Post-exposure attitudes towards on-campus demonstrations.
Saleem, Prot, Anderson & Lemieux (2015)	Experiment RCT	$N = 194$. Participants ($M_{age} = not provided or accessible$, $SD = not provided or accessible$, 49% female) were recruited from two pools: a large, mid-western University in the United States and an (Mturk) sample.	Anti-Muslim	Counter-stereotypical exemplars; <i>news clip</i> .	Perceptions of Muslims as dangerous, support for civil restrictions on Muslims, & military action in Muslim countries.
Banas & Richards (2017)	RCT	$N = 187$. Students ($M_{age} = 19.71$, $SD = 1.40$, 43% female) were recruited from communications courses in a southern University in the United States.	Anti-government / conspiracy theory	Inoculation; <i>pre-emptive message with counter-arguments</i> .	Conspiratorial attitudes.
Bruneau, Lane & Saleem (2017)	Study 1 RCT	$N = 223$. Participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk). The ethnicity of the sample was not provided. For this review, only data pertaining to participants assigned to the control ($N = 130$ $M_{age} = 33.7$, $SD = 12.7$; 58.5% male) and counter-narrative ($N = 93$, $M_{age} = 33.6$, $SD = 12.1$; 48.4% male) conditions are reported.	The Palestinian resistance is violent.	Alternative account; <i>movie trailer</i> .	Perception of Palestinians as violent & feeling thermometer.
	Study 2 RCT	$N = 417$. Participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk). For this review, only data pertaining to participants assigned to the control ($N = 217$ $M_{age} = 34.7$, $SD = 11.6$; 51.2% male) and counter-narrative ($N = 200$, $M_{age} = 35.2$, $SD = 11.4$; 48.5% male) conditions are reported.	-	-	-

	Study 3	RCT	$N = 227$. Participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk). For this review, only data pertaining to participants assigned to the control ($N = 115$ $M_{age} = 33.0$, $SD = 12.4$; 49.6% male) and counter-narrative ($N = 112$, $M_{age} = 35.6$, $SD = 12.4$; 41.1% male) conditions are reported.	-	-	-
Cehajic-Clancy & Bulewicz (2017)	Study 1	BA	$N = 75$. Young people ($M_{age} = 20.09$, $SD = 3.74$, 61% female) were recruited from eight cities and towns around Bosnia and Herzegovina.	Bosniaks, Serbs, or Croats (i.e. the out-group) are immoral.	Moral exemplars; <i>eclectic intervention</i> .	Belief in reconciliation & forgiveness.
	Study 2	BA	$N = 85$. Young people ($M_{age} = 20$, $SD = 7.22$, <i>unknown gender division</i>) were recruited from eight cities and towns around Bosnia and Herzegovina.	-	-	Belief in reconciliation & intergroup anxiety.
Frischlich, Rieger, Morten, & Bente (2018)	Study 1	ITS	$N = 338$. Participants ($M_{age} = 23$, $SD = 4.31$, 48% female) were recruited from cities in Western Germany and included both students (67%) and apprentices.	Right wing-extremism or Islamic extremism	Counter-arguments / persuasion; <i>first person and 'behind-the-scenes' videos</i> .	Extremist attitudes.
	Study 2	ITS	$N = 157$. Participants ($M_{age} = 28$, $SD = 9.63$, 44% female) were recruited from cities in Western Germany and included both students (65%) and apprentices.	-	-	Extremist attitudes.
Riles, Funk & David (2018)		RCT	$N = 187$. Students ($M_{age} = 19.47$, $SD = 1.45$, 60% female) were recruited from entry-level undergraduate courses in the United States. <i>It is not clear if participants received an incentive for participating</i> . Those who identified as Muslim were omitted from the analyses (see 'dominant narrative' section).	Muslims are dangerous.	Counter-stereotypical exemplars; <i>movie and television clips</i> .	Social stigma & social distance.

¹See Table 6 (Appendix 1.2) for associated risk factors.

Design. Nineteen independent studies ($k = 19$), reported in fifteen papers, met the inclusion criteria¹⁰. Twelve studies used randomised control trial designs, with varying types of controls; seven studies used non-randomised designs.

Settings. The studies represented a range of geographical locations. The region most heavily represented was North America ($n = 10$). Other countries included Azerbaijan ($n = 1$), Bosnia and Herzegovina ($n = 2$), Germany ($n = 2$), Israel ($n = 2$), Romania ($n = 1$), and the United Kingdom ($n = 1$). The majority of studies were conducted in University ($n = 12$) or high school ($n = 2$) settings.

Dominant narratives. The dominant narratives, in most cases, comprised of hostile feelings towards an adversary (or “out-group”) or prejudicial leanings towards other ethnic groups. In the majority of studies, the dominant narratives were determined through pre-test(s) or baseline scores of the outcome(s) of interest.

Theory, techniques, and delivery. The techniques used in the design of the counter-narrative interventions included counter-stereotypical exemplars, persuasion techniques, inoculation, or alternative accounts. There were informed by a variety of theoretical frameworks (see *Table 3 (a), overleaf*). The majority of studies delivered their counter-narrative in video-format (e.g. commercials, movie or television clips, films or film trailers) or writing (e.g. newspaper articles or fictional stories).

¹⁰ In the protocol, it was explicitly stated that interrupted time series (ITS) designs would not be included. However, two studies using these designs were included (Frischlich et al., 2018a; 2018b) as they offered insight into psychological measurement for violent radicalisation.

Table 3 (a).*Theory and Techniques*

Counter-narrative technique(s)	Number of studies	Number of effect sizes	% of studies
Counter-stereotypical exemplars	9	13	48%
<i>Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002)</i> <i>Ramasubramanian et al. (2007)</i>	1	0	
<i>Needs-Based Model of Reconciliation (Nadler & Shnabel, 2006)</i> <i>Bilewicz et al. (2013)</i>	1	2	
<i>Priming Theory (Berkowitz, 1984)</i> <i>Riles et al. (2018)</i>	1	2	
<i>Social Cognitive Theory/Schemas (Bandura, 1977)</i> <i>Saleem et al. (2015)</i>	1	2	
<i>Intergroup Contact Theory (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006)</i> <i>Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2017a ; 2017b)¹ ; Gonsalkorale et al. (2010)</i>	2	4	
<i>Quadruple Process Model (Sherman et al., 2008)</i> <i>Gonsalkorale et al. (2010)</i>	1	1	
<i>Not specified</i> <i>Cernat (2001); Kendrick et al. (2004)</i>	2	2	
Persuasion	5	5	26 %
<i>ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)/Transportation-Imaginary Model (Green & Brock, 2002)</i> <i>Alhabash et al. (2012 ; 2015) ; Cohen et al. (2015); Frischlich et al. (2018a; 2018b)²</i>	5	5	
Inoculation Theory (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1962) <i>Banas et al. (2017)</i>	1	1	5%
Alternative account	4	6	21%
<i>Progressive Narrative Transportation</i> <i>Garagozov et al., (2013)</i>	1	0	
<i>Tripartite Model of Identity (Hammack, 2008)</i> <i>Bruneau et al. (2017a ; 2017b ; 2017c)</i>	3	6	
Total	19	25	100%

¹These interventions also incorporated contact with the adversarial group.

²Although these interventions largely made use of persuasive techniques, they also used other techniques such as encouraging perspective taking and providing participants with more information/education.

Outcomes. The majority of studies measured secondary outcomes. All outcomes, as well as their respective studies and effect sizes, are summarized in *Table 3 (b) (overleaf)*.

Table 3 (b).*Primary and Secondary Outcomes.*

	Number of studies	Number of effect sizes
Primary outcomes	3	1
<i>i.e. 'support for military action in Muslim countries' (Saleem et al., 2015); 'agreement with right wing extremist statements' (Frischlich et al., 2018a; 2018b)</i>		
Secondary outcomes		
Perceived threat	15	13
<i>Symbolic threat; the perception of threatened group interests.</i>	9	6
<i>e.g. national attitudes (Alhabash et al., 2012); 'perceived similarity to the self' (Bilewicz et al., 2013); 'belief in reconciliation' (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2017b)</i>		
<i>Realistic threat; the perception of threat to one's safety, or existence</i>	8	7
<i>e.g. attitudes towards demonstrations (Cohen et al., 2015); social distance (Riles et al., 2018); 'perceptions of Muslims as aggressive' (Saleem et al., 2015)</i>		
In-group favouritism / out-group hostility	13	11
<i>Explicit bias; perception that certain out-groups are inferior</i>	9	5
<i>e.g. 'negative evaluations' (Cernat, 2001); 'feeling thermometer' (Bilewicz et al., 2013), intergroup anxiety (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2017b)</i>		
<i>Implicit bias; relying on stereotypical information in relation to an out-group.</i>	4	3
<i>e.g. Implicit Association Test (Gonsalkorale et al., 2010); Affective Misattribution Procedure (Alhabash et al., 2012; 2015)</i>		
Total number of effect sizes		25

5.4.2 Risk of bias and quality of evidence.

Risk of bias. As mentioned in the Methods section (5.3.4.2), the results of the EPOC data collection checklist for risk of bias are presented in *Table 5 (a)* (Appendix 1.2). Cohen's Kappa (κ) was calculated for testing inter-rater reliability on a total of 171 risk of bias items (i.e. 9 items across both randomised and non-randomised studies), obtaining $\kappa = 0.72$ (i.e. substantial agreement between coders). The majority exhibited low risk of bias for

randomisation to conditions (92%), treatment of incomplete data (92%), contamination (100%), and selective outcome reporting (92%). The majority of studies did not measure outcomes at baseline (75%) increasing the risk of sampling bias. Some studies presented an unclear risk on certain domains. For example, it was not clear if deception was used in certain studies and, given the nature of the research, knowledge of condition, or allocation presented an unclear risk for 8% of the studies.

In assessing the non-randomised studies ($n = 7$), the studies naturally had a high risk of bias for maturation (change over time) and were, therefore, all regarded as exhibiting a high overall risk of bias. As well as maturation, participants' knowledge of the true nature of the study posed a high risk for 86% of the non-randomised studies.

Quality. The results of the quality assessment are presented in *Table 5 (b)* which is retrievable via a link provided in Appendix 1.2. The 19 studies were assessed according to the GRADE approach for evaluating quality of evidence. Approximately half of the studies (58%) were rated as moderate ($n = 6$) to high ($n = 5$) quality, with one randomised study of low quality. The remaining studies were non-randomised and categorized as 'low' ($n = 2$) or 'very low' ($n = 5$).

5.4.3 Synthesis of results.

Raw data could not be obtained for Kendrick and colleagues' (2004) measure of explicit bias, Ramasubramanian and colleagues' (2007) measure of realistic threat or implicit bias as measured in Garagozov (2013). As such, the findings for all these outcomes are presented narratively throughout the following sections where relevant.

5.4.3.1 Overall impact of counter-narrative interventions.

It may be useful to consult *Table 3 (a)* (Theory and Techniques, p. 62) for the remaining results sections(s). The present analysis incorporates 29 effect sizes across 18

studies (many studies measured more than one conceptually different outcome). This includes 11 randomised control trials (Cernat, 2001; Ramasubramanian et al., 2007; Gonsalkorale et al., 2010; Bilewicz et al., 2013, Cohen et al., 2015; Saleem et al., 2015; Banas et al., 2017, Bruneau et al., 2017a; 2017b, 2017c, & Riles et al., 2018), two interrupted time-series designs (Frischlich et al., 2018a; 2018b) and five single group pre/post-test designs (Kendrick et al., 2004; Alhabash et al., 2012; 2015 & Čehajić-Clancy et al. 2017a; 2017b). The studies represent a total sample of 2627 ($M_{\text{age}}^{11} = 24.1$, 57% female¹²) participants; 1789 participants were allocated to either a counter-narrative or control condition. The remainder ($n = 833$) participated in non-randomised, within-subjects designs and served as their own controls. Randomised and non-randomised studies are analysed separately.

Randomised studies. As shown in the forest plot in *Figure 2*, when all secondary outcomes (i.e. risk factors for violent radicalisation) were pooled to represent each randomised control trial ($n = 11$) the difference between those who did, and those who did not, receive a counter-narrative intervention was significant, representing a small effect size. Under a random effects model, the standardised mean reduction in risk factor(s) for violent radicalisation was $SMD = -.38$; (95% CI -0.52 to -0.23 $p < .000$). Unsurprisingly, given that the included interventions were informed by a variety theoretical frameworks measuring conceptually varied outcomes (for example, both implicit and explicit measures), there was significant between-study heterogeneity ($\chi^2 = 20.42$ [$p = .03$], $I^2 = 51\%$, $\tau^2 = 0.03$).

¹¹ The mean age of participants was calculated from the following studies: Bilewicz et al. (2013, $M^{\text{age}} = 16.84$), Cohen et al. (2015, $M^{\text{age}} = 25.24$), Banas et al. (2017, $M^{\text{age}} = 19.71$), Riles et al. (2017, $M^{\text{age}} = 19.47$), Alhabash et al. (2012, $M^{\text{age}} = 20$; 2015, $M^{\text{age}} = 20.80$), Bruneau et al. (2017a, $M^{\text{age}} = 33.65$; 2017b, $M^{\text{age}} = 34.95$; 2017c, $M^{\text{age}} = 34.3$) and Cehajic-Clancy et al. (2017a, $M^{\text{age}} = 20.09$; 2017b, $M^{\text{age}} = 20$). The standard deviation was only provided by five studies so could not be confidently determined.

¹² Calculated from the following studies: Gonsalkorale et al. (2010, 78% female), Cernat (2001, 33% female), Alhabash et al. (2012, 74% female), Bilewicz et al. (2013, 69.1% female), Cohen et al. (2015, 75% female), Saleem et al. (2015, 49% female), Banas et al. (2017, 43% female), Bruneau et al. (2017a, 47% female; 2017b, 50.15% female; 2017c, 43.35% female), Riles et al. (2018, 60% female), and Cehajic-Clancy et al. (2017a, 61% female).

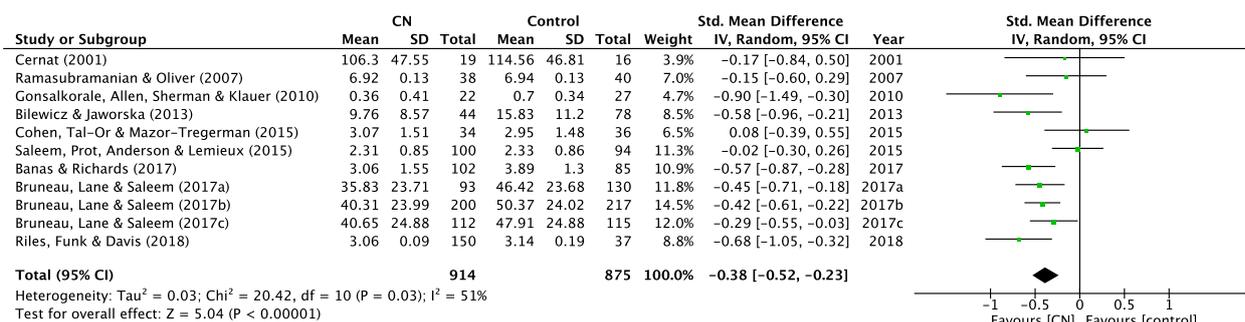


Figure 2. Forest plot of counter-narrative intervention effects on all risk factors for violent radicalisation compared to a control group.

Subgroup analysis was therefore conducted to determine if the variation could be explained by the theory and techniques used. Outcome differences were tested by the presence or absence of four theorised key components: counter-stereotypical exemplars, persuasion, alternative accounts and inoculation. Table 4 presents meta-analysis statistics separately by technique (i.e. levels of the moderator) (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004, p. 402). The use of persuasive techniques were not found to be effective ($d = .08$). However, this effect size represented a single study sample; the use of inoculation showed promising effects ($d = -.57$) but, similarly, represented a single study sample, limiting the generalisability of both findings based on theory or technique(s). The between-group differences were not significant and, as such, no further analyses were conducted.

Table 4.
 Separate variance estimates for each group.

Technique(s)	K	<i>d</i>	95% CI	Tau ²	<i>p</i>
Counter-stereotypical exemplars	6	-.40*	[-.70, -.11]	.08	-.19
Persuasion	1	.08	[-.39, .55]	-	-
Alternative account(s)	3	-.39*	[-.53, -.26]	-.00	-.67
Inoculation	1	-.57*	[-.87, -.28]	-	-

**p* < .05

Non-randomised studies.

See *Figure 3*. For studies that used single group pre/post-test designs ($n = 7$), a separate analysis was conducted. Pooling all measured outcomes to represent each study, the effect of the intervention over time was not significant. Under a random effects model, the standardised mean reduction was -0.05 ; (95% CI -0.15 to 0.04 ; $p = 0.27$). In this model, there was little between-study heterogeneity, ($\chi^2 = 4.37$ [$p = 0.63$], $I^2 = 0\%$, $\tau^2 = 0.00$), suggesting that the finding was consistent across studies. Four studies used persuasive techniques (Alhabash et al., 2012; 2015; Frischlich et al., 2018a; 2018b); Kendrick et al. (2004) did not specify their theory or techniques (but used counter-stereotypical information) and Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2017a| 2017b) delivered an eclectic intervention which included moral exemplars.

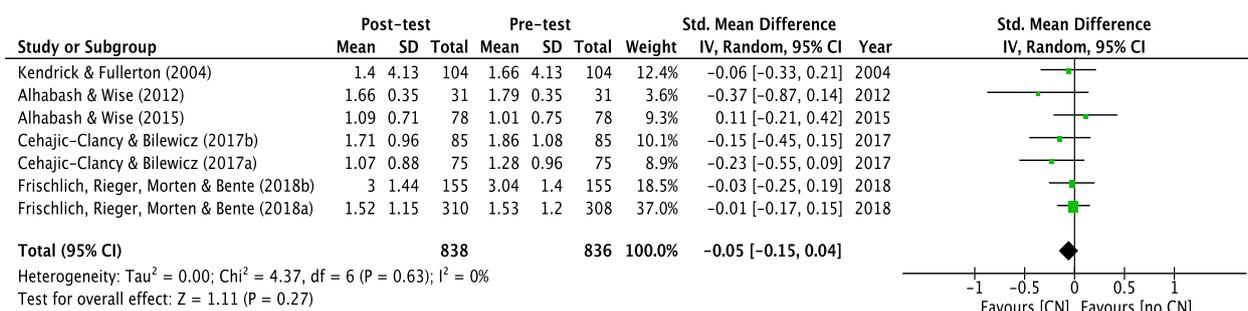


Figure 3. Forest plot of counter-narrative intervention effects on all risk factors for violent radicalisation over time.

Given the between-study heterogeneity amongst the RCTs, as well as the disparate findings between randomised and non-randomised studies (the former being superior, but the latter, nonetheless homogenous and of interest), separate analyses were conducted for each risk factor (perceived group threat and in-group favouritism / out-group hostility), including sub-groups for each sub-category risk factor where possible. Randomised and non-randomised designs were, again, analysed separately. It may be useful to consult Table 3(b) (Primary and Secondary Outcomes, p. 63) for the remaining results sections.

5.4.3.2 Perceived group threat.

Randomised. As shown in the forest plot in *Figure 4*, the intervention effect for randomised studies measuring both symbolic and realistic threat (i.e. perceived group threat) was not significant. The mean reduction was, SMD = -0.33 (95% CI -0.82 to -0.16; $p = .18$). Although there was significant between subject heterogeneity ($\chi^2 = 208.42$ [$p = .000$], $I^2 = 96\%$, $\tau^2 = 0.58$), the test for subgroup differences (between symbolic threat outcomes and realistic threat outcomes) was not significant ($p = 0.24$).

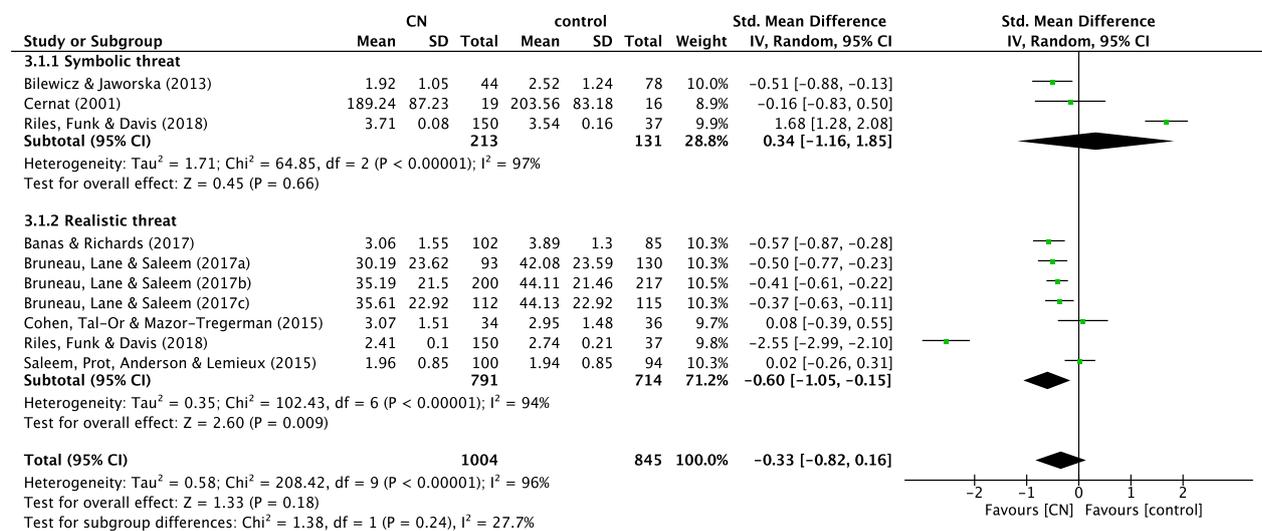


Figure 4. Forest plot of counter-narrative intervention effects on perceived group threat (both symbolic and realistic) compared to a control group.

Looking at the subgroups, the intervention effect for randomised studies which measured symbolic threat was not significant, SMD = 0.34 (95% CI -1.16 to 1.85; $p = .66$); however, there was significant between-study heterogeneity ($\chi^2 = 64.85$ [$p = .000$], $I^2 = 97\%$, $\tau^2 = 1.71$) which is likely explained by Riles et al. whose intervention saw a significant increase in symbolic threat (i.e. in the wrong direction, SMD = 1.68). Their effect for realistic threat was also significant, but in the intended direction (i.e. a reduction).

On average, realistic threat decreased by SMD = -0.60 (95% CI -1.05 to -0.15; $p = 0.01$), with, again, significant between subject heterogeneity ($\chi^2 = 208.42$ [$p < .000$], $I^2 =$

96%, $\tau^2 = 0.58$).

Non-randomised. For the non-randomised studies, Kendrick et al. (2004) were the only study authors to measure realistic threat (the remainder measured the symbolic sub-construct). When pooled, the intervention effect was not significant, SMD = -0.09 (95% CI -0.27 to 0.08; $p = .28$), with minimal between-study heterogeneity ($\chi^2 = 5.65$ [$p = .23$], $I^2 = 29\%$, $\tau^2 = 0.01$). Across both symbolic and realistic threat, this finding was heterogeneous, with no significant sub-group differences ($p = 0.77$). Thus, in within-groups samples, the counter-narrative interventions did not appear to reduce perceived group threat.

5.4.3.3 In-group favouritism and/or out-group hostility.

Randomised. As shown in the forest plot in *Figure 5 (overleaf)*, the intervention effect for randomised studies which measured in-group favouritism and out-group hostility was significant, SMD = -0.39 (95% CI -0.52 to -0.25; $p = .000$), with minimal between-subject heterogeneity ($\chi^2 = 6.86$ [$p = .33$], $I^2 = 13\%$, $\tau^2 = 0.00$). In other words, the counter-narrative intervention significantly reduced this overall risk factor compared to a control group, showing a small-medium effect. Furthermore, this was consistent across the subgroups. The effect of the intervention on out-group hostility also showed a small effect, SMD = -0.36 (95% CI -0.48 to -0.24; $p = .000$).

Data for in-group-favouritism was only available for one randomised study, and the effect was significant with a very large effect size SMD = -0.90 (95% CI -1.49 to -0.30; $p = .003$). In terms of implicit bias, Garagozov (2013) narratively reported that their “Common Suffering” counter-narrative was the most effective at reducing implicit bias, whilst “Blame

the Russians” was the least; the latter findings are to be interpreted with caution as no effect sizes were provided.

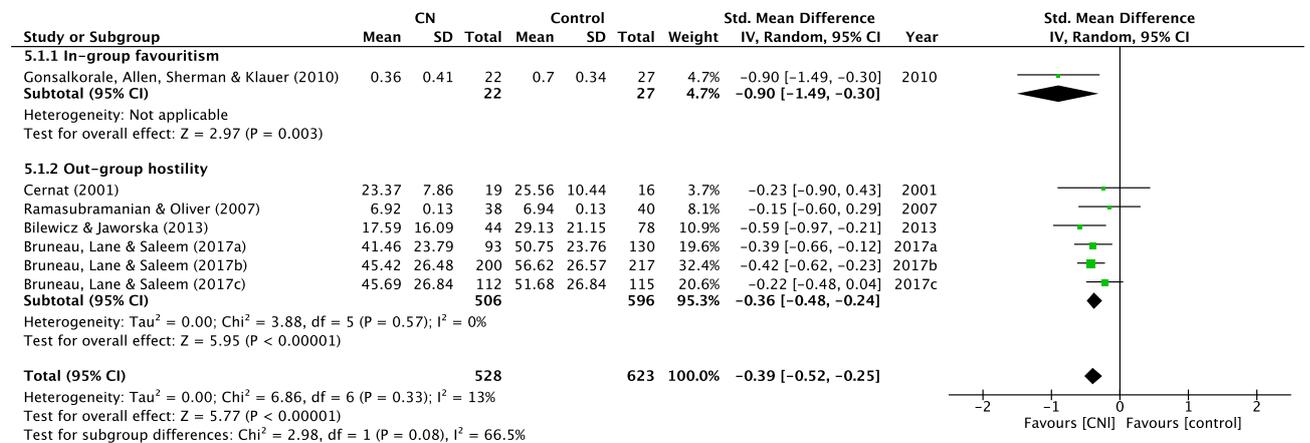


Figure 5. Forest plot of counter-narrative intervention effects on in-group favouritism and/or out-group hostility compared to a control group.

Non-randomised. In the studies that used single group pre/post-test designs and measured out-group hostility, the differences between the implicit (i.e. the affective misattribution procedure¹³) and explicit measures (e.g. negative evaluations of the out-group) of this outcome were then examined. As shown in the forest plot in Figure 6, there were significant sub-group differences ($p = .03$).

With two separate samples, Čehajić et al. (2017) measured out-group hostility on explicit measures and the effect was significant, SMD = -0.25 (95% CI -0.47 to -0.03; $p = .003$), with minimal between-study heterogeneity ($\chi^2 = 0.00 [p = .99]$, $I^2 = 0\%$, $\tau^2 = 0.00$). Conversely, the intervention effect for Alhabash et al. (2012; 2015) who measured out-group hostility using *implicit* measures was not significant, SMD = 0.13 (95% CI -0.14 to 0.40; $p = .34$). Again, there was minimal between-study heterogeneity ($\chi^2 = 0.36 [p = .55]$, $I^2 = 0\%$, τ^2

¹³ The affective misattribution procedure (AMP) measures automatic responses based on mistakes or misattributions about the sources the response; it is commonly used to measure prejudice and political behaviour (Payne & Lundberg, 2014).

= 0.00. This suggests that, whilst the counter-narrative seems to be effective (pre- to post-test) at reducing bias on an *explicit* level, this is not the case on an *implicit* level. Data could not be obtained for Kendrick et al. (2004) measure of explicit bias ('attitudes towards the US people') but it is reported that the effects of the counter-narrative intervention did not reduce this bias to a level of significance.

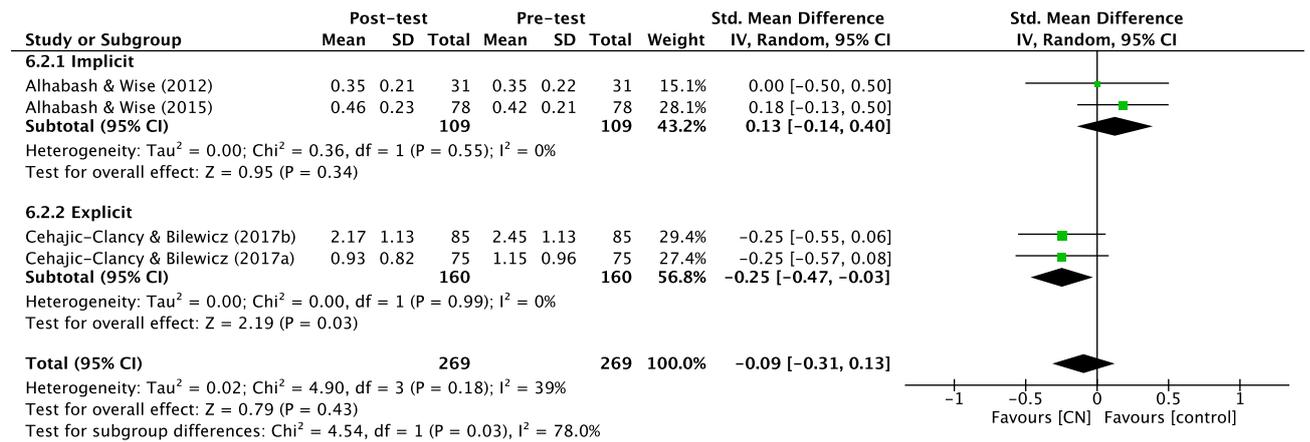


Figure 6. Forest plot of post-test changes following a counter-narrative intervention on out-group hostility (both implicit and explicit).

5.4.4 Sensitivity analysis.

Two meta-analyses required sensitivity analysis. The first related to the overall impact of the counter-narrative interventions (Figure 2, p. 66) as this analysis required more arbitrary decision-making. With multiple study outcomes, all the scores for outcomes categorised as risk factors for violent radicalisation in the original analysis were averaged, creating a single, standardised mean difference for each study. However, in line with Campbell Collaboration policies and procedures, an alternative approach can be used whereby outcomes are chosen using specific decision criteria (e.g. reliability, validity, relevance etc.). As such, a sensitivity analysis was conducted to determine the impact of this decision-making process.

To do this, the analysis was re-run using most reliable outcome (reported as Cronbach's α) and, in cases where no reliability analysis was provided the most relevant outcome was chosen. This criteria was applied to the relevant studies individually. No notable differences were observed (see *Table 7*, Appendix 1.2). When all these changes were applied together (see *Table 8*, Appendix 1.2), although there was a moderate increase in effect size (-.39 to -.58), the between-effect difference was not statistically significant ($X^2 = 0.82$, $df = 1$; $p = .37$).

The second sensitivity analysis was concerned with risk of bias with the non-randomised studies. Although the risk of bias for all these studies ($n = 7$) was regarded as high, it was noted that two studies (Frischlich et al., 2018a; 2018b) posed a particularly high risk for carryover effects and performance biases. As such, the second analysis (*Figure 3*, p. 67) was re-run without the data from these studies. The removal of these studies resulted in a stronger effect size, but this remained non-significant. The between-effect difference was, also, not significant.

5.4.5 Publication bias analysis.

Publication bias was assessed with both the randomised and non-randomised studies used throughout the analysis. The effects were heterogeneous, ($\chi^2 = 30.30$ [$p = 0.004$], $I^2 = 57\%$, $\tau^2 = 0.04$) so a Baujat plot was produced to explore possible contributors to heterogeneity. As shown in *Figure 7*, Alhabash et al. (2015) was the leading contributor¹⁴. To further examine the observed heterogeneity, Egger's regression test ($z = -0.30$, $p = 0.77$) and the rank correlation test (Kendall's tau = - 0.03, $p = 0.92$) were conducted. Both were not significant, interpreted as a lack evidence of publication bias. This was corroborated when the study effects were plotted against their standard errors in a funnel plot and the distribution of

¹⁴ 1 (Alhabash et al., 2012); 2 (Alhabash et al., 2015); 3 (Banas et al., 2017); 4 (Bilewicz et al. 2013); 5 - 8 (Bruneau et al., 2017a; 2017b; 2017c); 9 (Cehajic-Clancy et al., 2017a; 2017b); 10 (Cernat, 2001); 11 (Cohen et al., 2015); 12 (Gonakorale et al., 2010); 13 (Riles et al., 2018); and; 14 (Saleem et al. 2015).

studies was observed to be symmetrical. As such, no publication bias is reported in the overall analysis.

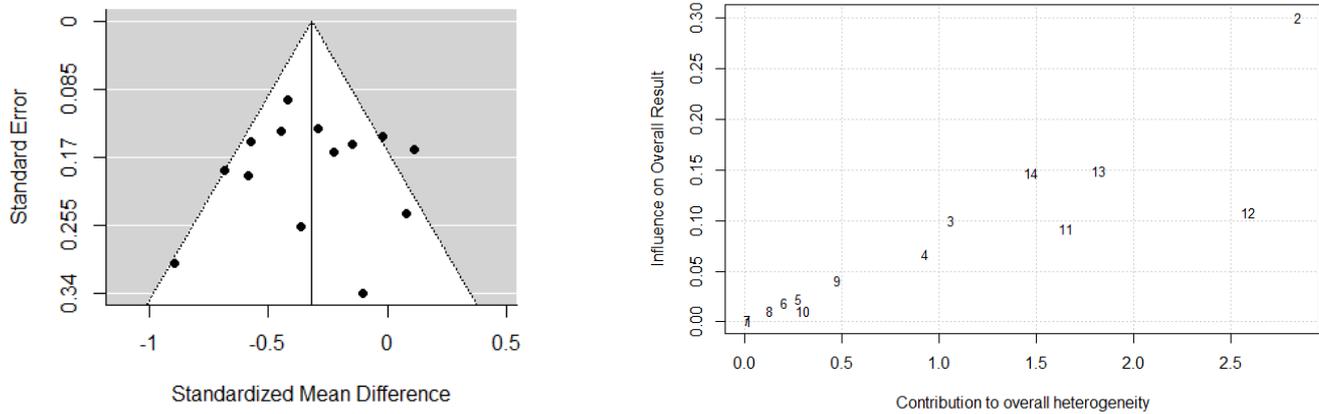


Figure 7. Funnel (left) and baujat (right) plots.

5.5 Discussion

5.5.1 Summary of main results.

The objective of this review was to provide a synthesis of the effectiveness of targeted counter-narrative interventions in reducing the risk of violent radicalisation by asking the question: what is the impact of targeted counter-narrative interventions on violent radicalisation (primary outcomes) and/or risk factors for violent radicalisation (secondary outcomes)?

Primary outcomes related to violent radicalisation included behavioural intention to engage in violent extremism or to support violent, political tactics. A small number of included studies measured such outcomes; Saleem et al. (2015) measured participants support for military action in Muslim countries following exposure to counter-stereotypical exemplars. The intervention was not effective on this outcome, nor on any of the outcomes measured in their study. Frischlich et al. (2018a; 2018b) conducted two, multifaceted studies

which measured participants' agreement with violent extremist statements. This was measured at baseline, upon exposure to violent extremist narratives and finally, upon exposure to counter-narratives. However, due to the high risk of response bias, as well as insufficient evidence demonstrating the efficacy of either narrative, the effects of the intervention at targeting these primary outcomes, whilst supporting those of Saleem et al., are tentatively interpreted. Therefore, in response to the first part of the review question, there is little evidence that counter-narrative interventions are effective at targeting primary outcomes related to violent radicalisation. However, the scarcity of high-quality studies measuring these outcomes means that this evaluation cannot, yet, be regarded as conclusive.

For secondary outcomes, there was some disparity on intervention effects. Overall, when pooling all outcomes across all randomised studies (representing 11 effect sizes), the intervention showed a small effect ($d = -0.38$). The studies with the largest effect sizes were exemplar-based, exposing participants to counter-attitudinal positive exemplars of other ethnic groups using a variety of mediums, including computer-based tasks, movie clips, and stories. However, the effects varied across different risk factors. These risk factors will be discussed in more detail below, with commentary in relation to theory, techniques and methodology.

5.5.2 Perceived group threat.

The concept of threat perception as a catalyst for the endorsement, or perpetration, of extremist violence is supported by decades of research on intergroup attitudes and relations (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Stephan et al., 1985). The findings from this review suggest that counter-narrative interventions can target this risk factor in different ways.

For example, Bilewicz et al. (2013), Cernat (2001), and Riles et al. (2018) measured outcomes which drew upon symbolic threat concepts by measuring perceived differences in morals, culture and values (e.g. 'perceived similarity' to Polish people and 'social stigma'

towards Muslims). Overall, the counter-narratives were not found to be effective on this risk factor, ($d = 0.34$). However, there were nonetheless some discrepancies between studies. In their counter-narrative, Bilewicz et al. (2013) had participants read stories of ‘Heroic Helpers’, as well as watch a presentation by a Polish person who helped Jews during the Holocaust. Similarly, Riles’ et al. (2018) used ‘helping’ exemplars, showing clips of Muslims helping Americans in movies and TV shows. However, whilst Bilewicz et al. (2013) demonstrated a medium effect of the ‘Heroic Helpers’ intervention on participants’ perceived similarity to Polish people ($d = 0.51$), the same was not found for Riles et al.; despite obvious parallels in design and measurement, their depiction of Muslim protagonists demonstrating counter-stereotypical, prosocial behaviours increased participants social stigma towards Muslims, demonstrating amongst the largest effects of any study in the review ($d = 1.68$). This disparity signals an important point of discussion for the evaluation of counter-narratives.

Active ingredients.

In reviews of this nature, such discrepancies can be traced back to two study components: the intervention, or the measurement. Both studies used validated measures, with acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .81$; $\alpha = .89$) and plausible constructs for study comparison (‘perceived similarity’ and ‘social stigma’). Therefore, the discrepancies likely arose from differences in intervention design. When focus is shifted to the counter-narrative itself, it is clear that while Riles et al. showed participants fictional clips of Muslims being helpful in the United States, Bilewicz et al. (2013) introduced participants to a member of the out-group, who then presented the counter-attitudinal content. In line with the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), increased exposure to an adversary has been found to decrease levels of hostility (see Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006); at least outwardly, this may explain why participants in Bilewicz et al. exemplar-based intervention reported significantly increased

similarity to the adversarial group, whilst Riles et al. did not. In many ways, Bilewicz et al. delivered an eclectic intervention, informed by theoretical frameworks other than those specific to counter-narratives (i.e. counter-stereotypical exemplars). In other words, the specific technique (or ‘active ingredient’) in the intervention may not have been a counter-narrative one.

Lack of specificity, in terms of techniques, arises as a challenge several times in this review. Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2017a; 2017b) attempted to increase participants’ awareness of the depth and variability of their adversarial group through the use of “moral exemplars”. Using a single group pre/post-test design, they measured participants’ belief in reconciliation, intergroup anxiety, and levels of forgiveness, before and after the intervention. In both studies, the interventions were not effective ($d = -0.15$ to -0.23). However, the learning that can be taken from this research is diluted by a ‘kitchen sink approach’ to intervention design, which included films, film trailers, case-studies, contact, and group-work over an 8-9 week period. As reviewers, a balance must be struck between isolating the individual components of an intervention, which may mean excluding studies with multifarious designs, and, simply, ending up with an empty review due to inflexible parameters. This is the reality of conducting systematic research in a developing area. However, rather than disregarding research which does not fit a mould, researchers must strive for more rigorous methodologies (and methods of synthesis) moving forward.

Symbolic versus realistic.

Although differing intervention components and theoretical frameworks certainly explain some of the heterogeneity outlined above, there were nonetheless some observable, discrepant effects within the risk factors themselves; in particular, between symbolic and realistic threat perceptions.

In many ways, this is not surprising. Both constructs map on to markedly different concepts. In line with realistic group conflict theories (see Jackson, 1993 for extensive review) realistic threat perceptions arise due to genuine threats to the safety or existence of one's in-group, whereas symbolic threat is more concerned with in-group values. In the subgroup analysis (*Figure 4*, p. 68), outcomes sub-categorised under realistic threat included measures of social distance (Riles et al., 2018), anti-government attitudes (Banas et al., 2017) and perceptions of the out-group as violent (Bruneau et al., 2017a; 2017b; 2017c). Compared to symbolic threat (as measured, for example, by Bilewicz et al., 2013 as perceived similarity to oneself), the overall subgroup effect on all measures of realistic threat was significant and negative ($d = -.60$; 95% CI -1.05 to -0.15; $p = .01$), indicating that these psychological constructs (symbolic versus realistic threat) may respond differently to counter-narrative techniques. A case in point is Riles et al. (2018), whose intervention decreased realistic threat, displaying a very large effect size ($d = -2.55$), but whose effects on symbolic threat were adverse ($d = 1.68$). Even anecdotally, within realistic threat, Kendrick et al. (2004) found that their depiction of the 'happy lives' of Muslims living and working in the United States improved certain realistic threat outcomes, but not others.

These effects illustrate the complexity of perception, particularly in the context of threat. Whilst the use of targeted counter-narratives may decrease some risk factors, their effects on others are unpredictable. As such, the evidence from this review (from a combination of randomised and non-randomised studies) indicates that counter-narratives can effectively target perceptions of realistic threat but are likely to be ineffective at targeting symbolic threat as measured by adverse stereotypes (Cernat, 2001; Alhabash et al., 2015), reconciliatory beliefs (Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2017a; 2017b) and social stigma (Riles et al., 2018). The verdict as to which risk factor is more predictive of violent radicalisation is beyond the scope of this review. However, the authors propose that future counter-narrative

interventions reflect the complexity of their prospective outcomes in their design, and consider that an ineffective counter-narrative intervention, beyond having no effect, has the potential to have exacerbating effects.

Persuasion.

However, in the majority of cases, the studies in the review used specific, comparable techniques. On measures of realistic threat, for example, two studies incorporated counter-arguments in their counter-narrative design(s). Here, counter-arguing refers to the application of contradictory information to a message with the intention of refuting it (Wheeler et al., 2007, p. 151). Informed by inoculation theory (McGuire, 1961a; 1961b), Banas et al. (2017) warned participants that a persuasive appeal was impending ('explicit forewarning'), before offering some prospective counter-arguments ('refutational pre-emption') against what was to be anti-government, conspiratorial propaganda. Along a similar vein, Cohen et al. (2015) countered anti-demonstration arguments by having participants read a fictional 'debate' between discordant friends on the topic of on-campus demonstrations. They also manipulated the 'virtuousness' of the pro-demonstration character in an attempt to increase participants' agreement with her arguments through a persuasive process of "identification" (p. 4); this process mimics the feeling of being absorbed into a story through the use of a character with whom one identifies (see Cohen, 2001). However, whilst Banas et al. demonstrated one of the largest overall effect sizes ($d = -.0.57$), Cohen et al. (2015) showed no effect and, in fact, showed a (very slight) increase in participants perception of threat ("It should be forbidden for [Arab students] to demonstrate in the heart of the campus"). This is not the only evidence that persuasive techniques may be ineffective components of counter-narrative interventions.

In two non-randomised studies, Alhabash et al. (2012; 2015) used persuasive techniques in the form of a video game designed to encourage self-persuasion through transportation (Green & Brock, 2000) and, again, processes of identification. Although this

approach saw success in reducing symbolic threat through an understanding of Palestinian motives (e.g. agreement with statements such as, “[Palestinians] want peace” and “[Palestine] is not responsible for violence”) ($d = -.54$), in terms of symbolic values (“Palestinians are cruel”), and measures of out-group hostility, the intervention was ineffective and worked in the wrong direction. These findings paint a complex picture on the use of persuasive techniques to reduce participants’ risk of narrative-induced processes of violent radicalisation. It may be the case that participants’ awareness of the persuasive appeal can influence their response, incurring reactance, scrutiny or inertia; it may also be the case that the tactic, itself, is discordant with the overall purpose of counter-narratives. Regardless, the evidence from this review does not support the use of persuasive techniques in the design of targeted counter-narratives intended to reduce perceptions of threat or out-group hostility.

5.5.3 In-group favouritism / out-group hostility.

The perception that certain out-groups are inferior to one’s in-group is an important component of a radical belief system (Doosje et al., 2013; Loza, 2007) and a defining characteristic of violent extremism, in general (Berger, 2017; 2018). In the meta-analysis based on 7 effect sizes reporting the impact of counter-narrative interventions on in-group favouritism and out-group hostility (across randomised studies, see *Figure 5*, p. 70), there was a small, significant effect ($d = -.39$). However, the interventions were, again, comprised of different intervention components. On measures of out-group hostility alone, all such studies used a ‘feeling thermometer’ which allowed for the ‘active ingredients’ to be elucidated.

The effectiveness of Bilewicz et al. (2013) contact intervention (which incorporated counter-stereotypical exemplars) has been discussed in earlier sections (p. 74-76). The next, most promising studies in this analysis were Bruneau et al. (2017a; 2017b; 2017c), who were

the only studies to challenge the dominant narrative by using what they termed an “alternative account of events”. Fallaciously perceiving a side, particularly in conflict, as violent has been said to compromise third-party sympathy (Vandello et al., 2011). Their counter-narratives, therefore, attempted to restore favourability to the Palestinian ‘side’ by providing an account with ran counter to that of the dominant narrative . This was done by showing participants a documentary film trailer depicting Palestinians engaging in non-violent resistance. This method can be said to disrupt the false binaries of the dominant narrative which associate the out-group exclusively with violence. This use of alternative accounts has been posited as a promising avenue for counter-narrative design (Braddock et al., 2016; United Nations, 2008), and the findings from this review support this approach. Offering a plausible alternative to popular discourse does appear to reduce out-group hostility, as well as realistic threat perceptions, towards the adversarial group in a dominant narrative.

However, although these alternative accounts used non-fictional content (through the use of documentary), it is not clear if this component is in any way integral to the efficacy of the intervention. For example, several other non-fictional approaches were not found to be effective. In the same analysis, Cernat (2001) had participants read exemplar-based, historical accounts, but did not report significant effects on out-group hostility ($d = -.23$). Similarly, although the findings were synthesised narratively, Ramasubramanian et al. (2007) found that participants who read counter-stereotypical newspaper articles (i.e. non-fictional content) did not report more positive ratings on the feeling thermometer to a level of significance compared to a control group ($d = -.15$). On other risk factors, Saleem et al. (2015) used positive exemplar-based news clips, reporting no significant effects on measures of symbolic threat ($d = -.02$). Conversely, Riles et al. (2018) used fictional exemplars and found that the intervention was effective for realistic threat but exacerbated levels of symbolic threat.

Although these findings broadly support the use of non-fictional (rather than fictional) content in counter-narratives, the scarcity of interventions employing the same techniques with respective, fictional and non-fictional content means that the effectiveness of one over the other cannot be clearly discerned.

Therefore, in response to the second part of the review question, there is some evidence that counter-narratives can be effective at targeting certain, risk factors for violent radicalisation. These risk factors include realistic threat, in-group favouritism, and out-group hostility (explicit, rather than implicit). However, across different intervention components, the effects are somewhat mixed, and may change with the emergence of new evidence. The use of alternative accounts, and counter-arguments showed promising effects on these risk factors. However, the use of persuasive techniques was not found to be effective, on any risk factors.

5.6 Limitations

There are several limitations that could affect the results of this review. First, the literature base was limited, as is to be expected with research of this nature. For this reason, the target populations in the studies had varying, dominant narratives ranging from entrenched ideas about conflicts to prejudicial feelings towards Muslims. This rendered it difficult to determine the effects of the intervention(s) on different, dominant narratives, as well as embeddedness of the dominant narrative(s) to begin with. The sparse literature base also leads to another limitation; a lack of comparable, valid outcomes. Although the outcomes in this review all measured outcomes related to violent radicalisation (and followed an explicit protocol in identifying acceptable outcome measures) they were, nonetheless, conceptually broad. As such, despite every effort to preserve each outcome's original construct, the process of conceptually mapping the outcomes on to risk factors for violent

radicalisation was subject to a certain amount of bias that could only be partially controlled by the sensitivity analysis

5.7 Conclusion

Despite efforts to create effective counter-narratives in response to pervasive, terrorist rhetoric, it has been suggested that an effective counter-narrative approach has yet to be designed, and knowledge of what works is lacking. The review synthesised existing evidence in the area of counter-narratives in the context of violent extremism, determining their effectiveness at preventing violent radicalisation process(es) across a spectrum of contexts including violent right wing, ethnic and religious extremism. This review included studies that evaluated the effects of counter-narrative interventions in individuals exposed to a dominant narrative which, if not otherwise offset, could be said to promote a violent extremist belief system (i.e. ‘targeted’). The studies measure the effects of these strategies on primary outcomes, such as intent to act violently, and secondary outcomes (i.e. ‘risk factors’ for violent radicalisation). Across two searches, nineteen studies met the inclusion criteria. These studies spanned the period from 2000 to 2018, and represented a range of geographical locations. Twelve of the studies are moderate-high quality, randomised controlled trials and the remainder are quasi-experimental studies.

In response to the first part of the review question, the evidence on the effectiveness of counter-narrative interventions at targeting primary outcomes related to violent radicalisation was inconclusive. In terms of secondary outcomes, the findings offer some evidence that counter-narratives can be effective at targeting certain, risk factors for violent radicalisation. These risk factors include realistic threat, in-group favouritism, and out-group hostility (explicit, rather than implicit). However, across different intervention components, the effects are somewhat mixed. The use of alternative accounts and counter-arguments

showed promising effects on these risk factors. However, the use of persuasive techniques were not found to be effective, on any risk factors.

The concept of using a communication strategy to directly counter a dominant narrative, whilst intuitive, likely requires a great deal of theoretical complexity in order to work effectively in the area of violent radicalisation-prevention. Nonetheless, the approach shows promise and, with the emergence of new research informing its design, as well as experimental research determining overall efficacy, the ability of counter-narratives to effectively prevent violent radicalisation will become clearer.

Chapter 6

Study 2. “Just in case you think we’re all nuts”; Understanding the narratives used to justify violence amongst former members of terrorist organisations.

Abstract

This chapter presents the second study in the thesis. Drawing together some of the sociolinguistic concepts introduced in Chapter 2, this qualitative study used a form of Narrative Analysis to explore the narratives used to justify violence amongst former perpetrators of violent extremism and terrorism in terrorist organisations. This study had two, main objectives. The first was to determine how individual and broader, ‘template’ narratives of perpetration were constructed. The second was to identify how violence, as opposed to *non-violence*, was depicted as an instrumental course of action. The study found that, whilst participants’ narratives contained numerous techniques by which to legitimise violence, they also reflected a great deal of rational logic. In this way, the findings support the notion of a quasi-rational narrative, in which the protagonist is portrayed with a surplus of complexity, whilst the antagonist is simplified using fallacious logic.

6.1 Introduction

In postulating a strategy for designing effective counter-narratives in the context of violent extremism and terrorism, the question has been asked; “what exactly is the narrative that we are looking to counter?” (Leuprecht, Hataley, Moskalenko and McCauley, 2009, p. 26). This chapter sought to address this question, by moving the focus of the thesis away from measurable *outcomes* identified through quantifying variables (e.g. perceived threat or out-group hostility, see Carthy et al., *in press*) towards *processes*; exploring why individuals act a certain way, and how certain decisions emerge, their meaning, and their consequences (Taylor & Horgan, 2006).

6.1.1 Qualitative research in the field of terrorism.

Qualitative data: Primary vs. secondary sources

Asking these questions in the context of terrorism is not novel. Indeed, for many decades, qualitative research has sought to answer them, dominating the field as the preferred methodology on, in particular, the process(es) of violent radicalisation (Neuman & Kleinman, 2013). To date, much of this radicalisation research has been informed by data obtained through *secondary* sources such as case studies (Corman, 2016; Kundnani, 2012; Le Blanc, 2013), intercepted communications (i.e. wiretaps) or transcripts of interrogations (Harris-Hogan, 2012; Lentini, 2011). Secondary data has also been analysed in the form of religious texts or excerpts (Halverson et al., 2011; Schmid, 2014), books (Berger, 2016; Pautz, 2014), recruitment magazines (Ingram, 2015, 2016; McCants et al., 2015), political statements (Morrison, 2016), online activity (Braddock, 2015; Vergani, 2014), and even images (El Damanhoury et al., 2018). *Primary* data (i.e. data gathered *by* the researcher) has, albeit less frequently, also been used through conducting interviews with proximal samples (i.e. individuals close to the target population) such as peers (Joosse et al., 2015) or family members of perpetrators (Pearson et al., 2017), as well as experts in the field of counter-terrorism (Fitzgerald, 2016; Katchanovski, 2016; Post & Gold, 2002).

Whilst not disregarding the important contribution of this knowledge to a broader understanding of radicalisation (and recognising that the use of primary data is not necessarily a guarantee of high-quality research, as noted by Schuurman and Eijkman, 2013), such methodological approaches, when dominating the field, can be problematic. Particularly in the context of individualised processes (i.e. violent radicalisation), the further the researcher is from the primary source (i.e. the ‘radicalised’ individual), the more “distorted” the data may appear (Ross, 2004, p. 29). In particular, overreliance on such sources can increase the risk of bias (Silke, 2001, p. 6) as knowledge becomes almost exclusively

informed by secondary and/or tertiary information. This ultimately makes it difficult to extrapolate findings to theory (English, 2016; Horgan, 2004, p. 30; Schuurman, 2018). On the whole, Schuurman et al. (2013) suggest that, in order to progress radicalisation research by exploring the decisions that emerged before perpetration, detailed and reliable primary data from *perpetrators* are crucial (p. 8).

Primary data; interview-based research.

Despite the exceptional ethical, and methodological, challenges arising from accessing primary data, there have, nonetheless, been significant contributions to the field. These have included participant observation (whereby the researcher becomes physically immersed in their focus of study, see Sluka, 1987), and, more commonly, interviews with perpetrators who have since ceased involvement with a terrorist organisation (Horgan, 2012). These are colloquially referred to as “formers” (Koehler, 2014).

Interviewing formers. In research of this nature, the interview-format typically varies study-to-study. Some have conducted interviews with a focus on *disengagement* from terrorism. Yilmaz (2014), for example, interviewed 13 former members of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), as well as a left-wing terrorist organisation before developing what they termed, a *Rites of Passage Model* of individual disengagement from terrorism. Horgan and Taylor, on the other hand, conducted semi-structured interviews with a focus on *engagement*, and, specifically, the activities of members of the Provisional IRA during their involvement (1997; 1999; 2003). Conversely, some researchers have conducted interviews with formers in which they trace their journey *into*, as well as *out of*, violent extremism and/or terrorism (Ilardi, 2013) in the hope of gaining a broader insight. By interviewing former members of terrorist organisations involved in insurgency operations, for example, Reed (2013) sought to identify why conflicts escalate or *deescalate* overtime, taking a more longitudinal focus.

Finally, and of particular relevance to the current study, a number of studies have been conducted with former members of terrorist organisations on the topic of recruitment, and their pathways *towards* involvement, and eventual perpetration. These have been conducted with former members of various, designated terrorist organisations such as Hizballah and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, Flanigan, 2008), Neo Nazi (Blazak, 2001; Blee, 1996), and Far-Right movements (Fangan, 1997), as well as religious and separatist groups including Sikh female fighters (Gayer, 2012) and former members of Islamic extremist organisations (Post, Sprinzak, & Denny, 2003; Speckhard, & Akhmedova, 2005). Others have explored recruitment processes across more than one terrorist organisation (Coates, 2011); Bosi & Della Porta (2012).

Methodological transparency in interview-based research with formers. In 2016, Harris, Simi, and Ligon (2016) published a review of interview-based research in the field and noted that, despite the substantial increase in data derived from interviews such as these over the last number of years, there remains a number of field-wide limitations. Namely, Harris et al. highlighted that most interview-based research in the field of terrorism does not mention *how* the interview data were analysed (e.g. thematic analysis, content analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis etc.) (p. 610), indicating a lack of methodological transparency (i.e. the extent to which details about the research method are provided in the manuscript). Harris et al. advised that, to ensure transparency with regard to inferences, researchers utilise *other fields'* strategies and norms for method-reporting and analysis, when conducting interview-based research (p. 612). This study sought to respond to this recommendation, by applying an epistemological, and methodological, approach called Narrative Analysis to an interview-based study of terrorism involvement. The lens by which this approach is applied is through participants' use of *narratives*.

6.1.2 Qualitative research in the field of terrorism: Narratives.

Rational and irrational narratives. Using a variety of methodologies, there exists a qualitative evidence base in which narratives have been explored before. For example, in a study on “narrative rationality”, Cormann (2016, p. 9) explored the narratives used to justify terrorist attacks by both perpetrators and their supporters across two contexts (Islamic extremism and Right-Wing extremism), using case studies to inform the study. Cormann suggests that violence-justifying narratives resonate, not from reasoning derived from facts, but from congruence with stories that an audience “knowns to be true” (p. 12). In other words, the narrative appears rational. In the case of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), using Thematic Analysis, Braddock (2015) analysed uploaded content on the organisation’s website, and suggested that certain persuasive techniques promoted radicalisation through identification with story characters, emotionally laden appeals, and the inseparability of in-groups from out-groups. These contributions have pointed to the potential for persuasive techniques to ‘dress up’ narratives of violence, manipulating audiences into decreasing resistance to the ‘rational’, narrative elements and, subsequently, the ‘irrational’ persuasive elements (see the *Transportation-Imaginary Model*, Green & Brock, 2002; Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2006). Not unlike other qualitative research in the field, narrative research of this nature tends to be dominated by secondary data; nonetheless, there have also been some significant interview-based studies exploring perpetrators’ violence-justifying narratives in the context of terrorism.

Interview-based research; Narratives. In 2008, Sompar interviewed 24 “ex-militants” in Jammu and Kashmir. Using an interpretive method, participants’ personal encounters with violence, humiliation and discrimination formed, what the author termed, “collective and cultural narratives of injustice and oppression” (p. 150). These narratives, they argue, fuelled participants’ feelings of anger and alienation, spurring their involvement in armed revolution.

In 2014, Canter, Sarangi, & Youngs conducted semi-structured interviews with three individuals convicted of terrorism-related offences, also in India. Using McAdams' (2001) life-story method Canter and colleagues' attempted to construct participants' life-history narratives into "chapters" or "key scenes", asking questions about key protagonists, before creating narratives loosely based around "before involvement", "during involvement", and "me as I would like to be" (p. 163). Canter and colleagues suggest that the inclusion, exclusion, and treatment of various protagonists and antagonists in a narrative can provide insight into the subsequent, unfolding perspectives by which an individual reflects upon their lives.

The current research sought to refine these approaches, by using semi-structured interviews to determine, exclusively, the *narratives used to justify violence* amongst former perpetrators of violence in a range of terrorist organisations (i.e. Right Wing, Islamic and Separatist) using Narrative Analysis. Before the epistemological grounding and objectives of the current study are presented, some of more pertinent challenges associated with conducting research of this nature will be discussed.

6.1.3 Conducting research on sensitive topics: Challenges.

As discussed in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2, p. 41), the field of terrorism research is not particularly conducive to the collection of primary data; these hindrances are exacerbated in the context of an *in-person interview*. On an operational level, the population of interest is difficult to access (Merari, 1991) and, without a gate-keeper (or formal contact), the researcher often has little recourse other than to rely on informal introductions or even venturing into conflict zones (Horgan, 2012, p. 10). Whilst the latter certainly increases the risk to the researcher (and tends to be avoided), even planned encounters carry with them a certain amount of situational risk (Lee, 2005; Silke, 2004a, p. 13). Situations can arise whereby the researcher's presence or agenda explicitly provokes hostility from those in the

setting, for example (see Ellison, 1996). However, even in dynamics whereby the interviewer attempts to avoid hostility (by balancing the conversation and displaying empathy with the interviewee, see Myers, 2000, p. 149), there are additional risks, such as the interviewee disclosing incriminating information, and placing the both parties in a sensitive (or even compromised) position.

For the interviewee themselves, the risk of emotional distress is heightened as they recount particularly traumatic periods in their lives, and the lives of those around them. Beyond distress, Dolnik (2011) warns that the tone of the interview can offer the interviewee a ‘false impression’, leading participants’ to believe that their personal situation can be ameliorated by the interaction (e.g. such as receiving personal favours with regard to public sympathy or legal help, p. 229). Indeed, a key moral challenge facing the interviewer is that of, either intentionally or unintentionally, appearing to *legitimise* the acts perpetrated by the interviewee, which carry with it ethical repercussions for both parties (Dolnik, 2011, p. 12). On the other hand, *delegitimising* what an interviewer has to say poses new challenges. The topic of terrorism is, itself, an emotive subject and researchers have, in the past, struggled to maintain objectivity in how they choose to interpret the views espoused by perpetrators (Silke, 2001, p. 2) by misinterpreting their overall role in the research agenda (Schmid & Jongman, 1998, p. 175) and subsequently limiting the scope of the data. For these reasons, considering conducting primary research in the field of radicalisation research requires a great deal of introspect, and understanding of the complexities of the phenomenon.

6.1.4 The current study: Epistemological position.

Whilst acknowledging the challenges associated with researching radicalisation in this way, there nonetheless exists a space whereby epistemologically-grounded, primary data can be obtained for the purpose of understanding radicalisation from the perspective of the radicalised individual. Indeed, there are a range of theoretically, and technically,

sophisticated methods that can be applied to this concept (Sandelowski, 2000). However, identifying the most appropriate methods for answering specific research question(s) requires careful consideration of the *epistemological focus* of the construct of interest (Pope & Mays, 1995). Terrorism, in itself, has been described as a “social construction of reality” (Matusitz, 2013, p. 137) and much of the discussion in the previous chapters has placed emphasis on how individuals both defend and *depend* on their constructed experiences within this context.

Language-based forms of analysis, such as Discourse Analysis and Narrative Analysis, are premised by a belief that, not only is language socially constructed, but it reflects a *discursive* construction (Adjei, 2013). In line with social constructionism (see Section 2.5, p. 91) this perspective views everyday psychological phenomena, such as rationalisations or justifications, as tools by which individuals “manage their interests” (Willig, 2008, p. 96) to achieve certain objectives. Therefore, these phenomena become things that “people *do* rather than something people *have or are*” (p. 97).

Narrative Analysis goes beyond this, viewing the *narrative* as the ‘scaffolding’ by which this is achieved (comparable to psychological schemata, see Anderson, Spiro, & Anderson, 1978). Rather than simply reflecting (or recounting) experiences, narratives serve particular functions, providing meaning for the past, as well as motivating *future* actions as one “acts out the story as the script demands” (p. 7). This has been discussed in Chapter 2 as part of the strategic function of narratives (Section 2.5.2, p. 29). Therefore, in seeking to explore how individuals construct narratives to justify future actions, the most appropriate epistemological approach was identified as social constructionism; within this philosophy, the most appropriate form of analysis was determined to be *Narrative Analysis*.

When using this approach, the researcher is the story analyst, and the focus is on the internalised and evolving life stories of the interviewee. Rather than creating dynamic of asking and answering questions, the goal of this approach is three-fold. The first is to

encourage *narrativization* during the interview; the process of constructing and reconstructing consciousness and action “in the context of internal and external relations of time, place and power” (Somers, 1994, p. 616). In other words, the interviewee is encouraged to give “storied” responses (Mishler, 1986). To achieve this, specific sets of *prompt questions* (see Smith, 2015, p. 218) are designed to gauge to whom the narratives are directed (“Who would you like to hear your reasoning?”), as well as their function(s) (“How is this story helpful / dangerous?”). These are referred to as circulation, connection, and function questions.

Second, in the analysis phase, this approach seeks to define the narratives *as told by* the interviewee(s). This is markedly different to other forms of qualitative analysis that aim to, for example, construct theory (*Grounded Theory*, see Strauss & Corbin, 1997), explain experiences (*Phenomenology*, see van Manen, 2016) or interpret behaviour (*Ethnography*, see Fetterman, 1998). In Narrative Analysis, the researcher does not labour over the data but, instead, aims to “keep the story intact” (Riessman, 2008, p. 53) before, thirdly, “clustering” them into a narrative, or set of narratives (Smith, 2015, p. 220).

Finally, using this ‘scaffolding’, and informed by the *Transportation-Imaginary Model* (Green et al., 2002; 2006), as well as the narrative research conducted by Corman (2016) and Braddock (2015), the second part of this study sought to explore the *irrational* components of these narratives. Understanding that the narratives told by individuals are only vehicles by which ideas can be communicated, the second part of this study sought to isolate the elements of the narrative(s) that justified the use of violence. This was done by exploring participants’ use of persuasive, *propaganda techniques*. By analysing *if* and *how* participants used these techniques in their narratives, the study sought to understand how the instrumentality of *violent*, rather than *non-violent* means, was specifically depicted in participants’ socially constructed narratives.

6.2 Objectives

The aim of the current study was to explore the narratives used to justify violence amongst ten, former perpetrators of violent extremism and/or terrorism¹⁵ in terrorist organisations. With an epistemological grounding in social constructionism, the data were analysed using Narrative Analysis, and clustered using a sociolinguistic syntax called Labovian Syntax (1972; 2003). From here, all individual level narratives were coded for depictions of the perceived instrumentality of violence using a specific propaganda analysis template (Tilley, 2005). The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do former perpetrators of violent extremism construct narratives of their experience of perpetration in the context of terrorism?
2. How are propaganda techniques used within these narratives to justify the use of violent, rather than non-violent means?

6.3 Ethics

The study received ethical approval from the research ethics committee at the National University of Ireland, Galway in September 2017 (Appendix 2.1). The committee made number of recommendations before approval. First, it was recommended that the primary researcher inform participants that consent forms (i.e. consent forms containing participants names) would be stored for a period of two years. This was to ensure that participants were aware that a record of their name would exist for this length of time, ensuring fully informed consent with respect to anonymity. Second, in the case of face-to-face interviews, it was recommended that a Safety Protocol be implemented (see Appendix 2.2).

¹⁵ Whilst all interviewees were members of terrorist organisations, and were involved in violence (or the incitement of violence) on behalf of the organisation, not all of these acts could be categorised as ‘terrorism’. See Section 1.1.2 – 1.1.3 (pp. 4-5) for the important distinction between ‘violent extremism’ and ‘terrorism’.

6.4 Method

6.4.1 Participants and recruitment.

See *Table 9* for demographic information relating to participants. In order to be included in the study, participants must have been a member of a terrorist organisation (defined as a non-state organisation known to have engaged in terror tactics, see Section 1.1.3, p. 5) for at least five years, be considered a ‘former’ (i.e. no longer active in the organisation) for at least two years (this was a safety precaution as outlined in the Safety Protocol in Appendix 2.2) and, during their time in the organisation, have been involved in the perpetration or incitement of violence, in the form of violent extremism or terrorism on behalf of the organisation. Four participants were recruited through an online platform for former violent extremists called Against Violent Extremism (AVE); one additional participant was approached by one of these participants on behalf of the researcher, and recruited this way (i.e. snowball sampling). One participant, who had written an autobiography and was in the public domain, was recruited through direct communication. One participant, upon learning about the study, contacted the primary researcher directly and volunteered to participate. Three participants were recruited from an organisation comprised of former members of the IRA (ex-prisoners). All participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form outlining issues of consent, anonymity and the nature of the research (see Appendix 2.3). In cases where participants did not submit a signed consent form before the commencement of the interview, consent was provided verbally at the beginning.

6.4.2 Data collection.

The interviews lasted between 50 and 100 minutes, and took place either via Skype or, in the case of the former IRA participants, in their offices in Belfast, Northern Ireland. All interviews were audio recorded.

Table 9.*Participant Information*

ID	Gender	Date of interview	Recruitment method	Age	Ethnicity	Type	Organisation Time ¹	Activity	Imprisonment
Q22	Male	14/03/2018	Contacted directly / Twitter	42	White American	Skinhead	7 years	Hate crimes	3 years
I1	Male	29/11/2017	Coiste	68	White Irish	IRA	< 10 years	Killing a police officer	16 years
K1	Male	12/04/2018	AVE	38/39	White American	Jihad	10 years	Recruitment/using to internet to threaten bodily harm.	3 – 4 years (reduced from 11)
I2	Male	29/11/2017	Coiste	53-58 ²	White Irish	IRA	6 -7 years	Did not disclose.	15 years
Q21	Male	01/12/2017	AVE	37	White Canadian	White supremacy/Separatist	13 years	Hate crimes.	1 year (numerous stints)
Q23	Male	22/04/2018	AVE	27	White American	Neo Nazi	8 years	Hate crimes.	8 years (numerous stints)
I3	Male	29/11/2017	Coiste	60/61 ³	White Irish	IRA	> 10 years	Bomb-making	21 years (3 stints)
Q24	Female	24/04/2018	Volunteered	43	White American	'White Power' Skinhead	5 years	Hate crimes.	None.
K2	Male	03/06/2018	Contacted directly / email	53	British Pakistani	Mujahideen foreign fighter (Bosnia, Afghanistan and Kashmir)	5 years	Foreign fighter.	5 years.
V1	Male	22/06/2018 and 28/06/2018	AVE	60	White British/Northern Irish	UVF	6 years	Killing an informer.	10 years.

¹Does not include imprisonment.² Born “early sixties”³ Born 1956

6.4.3 The interview schedule.

The interview schedule was designed to encourage participants to attend to certain moments in their lives. These periods were broadly divided into ‘before involvement’ and ‘during involvement’¹⁶. In a bid to keep the participants’ stories intact, the interviewer used prompt questions (as detailed on p. 90). These questions had two, main purposes. The first was to encourage participants to give response in a story-like format (i.e. narrativisation). The second was to aid with analysis.

Although open-ended questions are more likely to encourage storied responses (Mishler, 1986), in some cases, due to the sensitive nature of the conversation (i.e. speaking about perpetrating acts of extreme violence), it was preferable to begin with dichotomous questions before eventually moving on to open-ended questions¹⁷. Similar approaches have been used for conducting interviews on topics relating to discrimination (Essed, 1988), moral conflict (Attanucci, 1991), and youth-related violence (Labov, 1982).

6.4.4 Data analysis

As detailed below, the data from the interviews first underwent a four-stage procedure of *Structural Narrative Analysis* (for example, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 2008). This involved (1) *transcription and reflection*, followed by (2) *familiarisation*, (3) *coding*. This was followed by the (4) *analysis* stages of, first, (a) searching for themes, reviewing themes and naming themes before (b) applying the Labovian Syntax (as detailed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5.1) and (c) clustering individual narratives. This procedure is presented visually in *Figure 8*. The narratives then underwent a *content analysis*.

¹⁶ Interestingly, although participants were rarely directly asked about their experiences post-involvement, many spoke about this time unprompted. This is referred to in more detail in the discussion section on the distinction(s) between retrospective and ex tempore narratives.

¹⁷ For example, “were you aware of the political climate in Northern Ireland when you were growing up?” oftentimes produced more storied responses than “can you describe the political climate in Northern Ireland when you were growing up?”.

This involved the identification of propaganda techniques (Section 2.1.2) used, within the narratives, to justify violent means.

6.4.4.1 Structural Narrative Analysis.

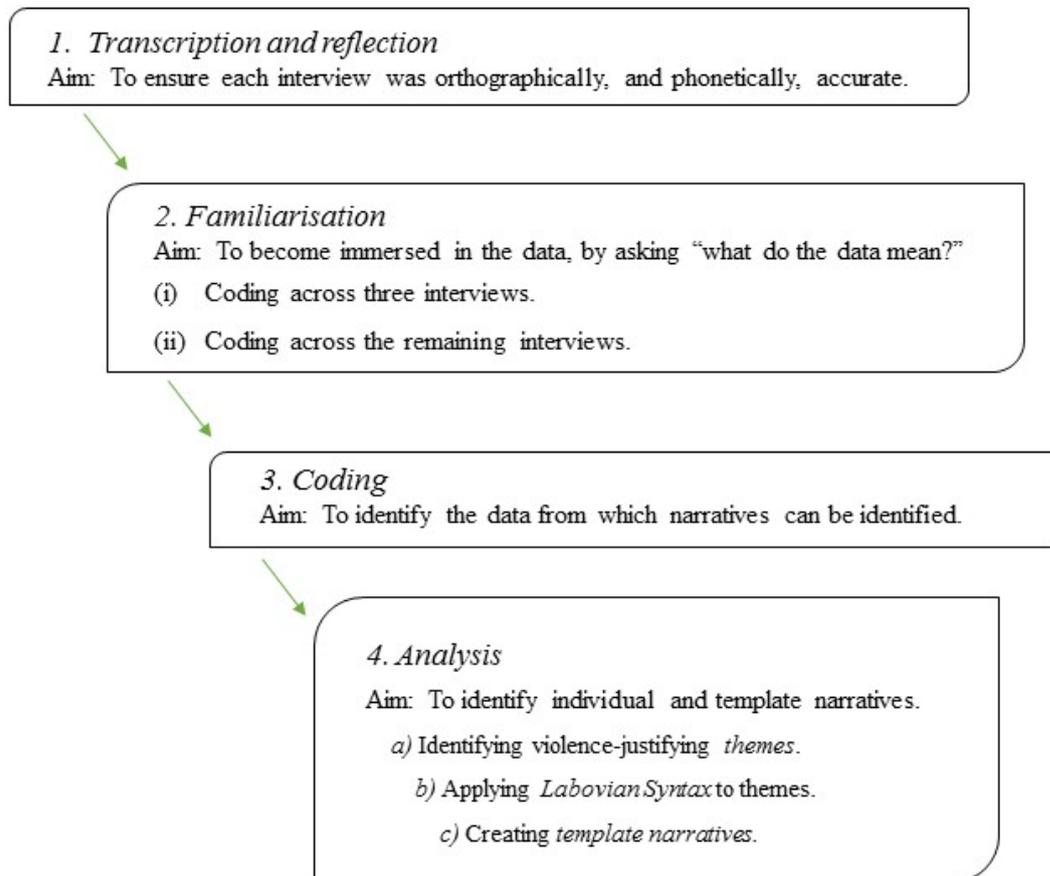


Figure 8. Structured Narrative Analysis (Procedure)

1. Transcription and reflection.

Data was transcribed orthographically (i.e. verbatim). During this process, it was decided that the paralinguistic (phonetic) features of the transcript would be included in instances where they affected the participants’ meaning (e.g. semblances of sarcasm, annoyance or humour). After transcription, each transcript was imported into the qualitative data management software Nvivo, and read alongside the transcript to ensure it was orthographically, and phonetically, accurate.

2. Familiarisation.

The transcript was then re-read for the purpose of familiarisation. During this stage, the goal was to become immersed in the data through active listening, and analytical and critical thinking. This was guided by three prompt questions informed by Braun and Clarke (2013): “how common sense is their story?”; “what assumptions do they make in talking about the world?” and; “what kind of world is ‘revealed’ through their account?”. This familiarisation process was divided into two sub-stages, and inevitably sought to answer the question “what do the data mean?” (p. 204). The two familiarisation stages are detailed below, and presented visually in *Figure 9*.

Familiarisation stage (i). The prompt questions were first applied to a Neo Nazi transcript, followed by an IRA transcript, followed by a Jihadi transcript. This was to ensure commonalities were identified across different types of terrorism and violent extremism. After coding these three scripts, the common codes were aggregated into one overall code. As the goal of Stage 2 was to become familiarised with the data (rather than identify properties) the codes exclusive to one transcript only were discarded. For example, where Q22 spoke about the importance of race (coded as *a world whereby race was a considerable factor*), I1 spoke about the distinction between unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland (coded as *a world whereby ancestral political preference was a considerable factor*) and K1 spoke about the acceptance of Islam in the United States (coded as *a world where religion was a considerable factor*), these three codes were aggregated into an overall code: “a world where race, ethnicity, political leanings and religion are significant factors”.

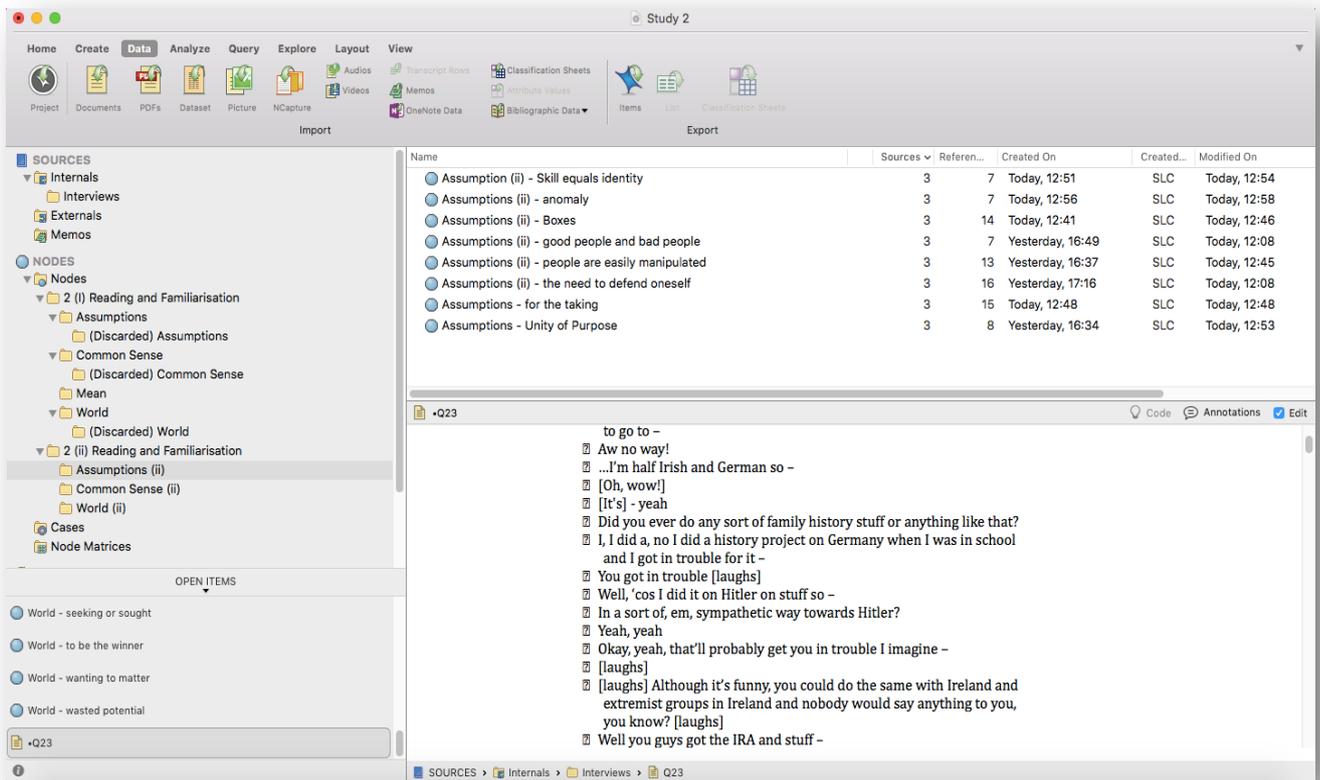


Figure 9. Stage 2 ('Familiarisation') (i) and (ii) using NVivo.

Familiarisation stage (ii). Stage (i) was loosely repeated with the 'new' overall code titles, although the process of aggregation became gradually less necessary.

3. Coding.

The goal of this stage was to identify the data to be used in the final, analysis stage (i.e. the material to be used in the narratives). As discussed earlier, the overall goal of analysis was to keep the story intact (Reissman, 2008) rather than build it from disparate parts (p. 53). Therefore, in the coding stage, a method of 'complete coding' was used. Unlike 'selective coding' (which usually takes place after initial concepts have been identified in the data), this method allows for coding of entire sections of text. Whilst it was not always possible to identify the narrative properties within entire sections of text, coding all potentially relevant data nonetheless allowed for the overall narratives to be preserved in the format told by the participant, or narrator. As this was the final opportunity to scan each

interview transcript in its entirety before analysing the coded sections, annotations or ‘points of interest’ were highlighted throughout to contribute, in particular, to the questions: “what (and why) did the interviewee choose to include this information” and; “what information did the interviewee choose *not* to include? Why?”.

4. Analysis.

The goal of this stage was to identify individual-level and broader, *template* narratives. Some narrative theorists call for an individualistic approach to narrative analysis whereby comparisons and contrasts are *not* made between, or across interviews (Labov, 1972). However, as the research questions were concerned with identifying commonalities in the construction of narratives across a range of contexts, a more thematic approach was employed in this stage to allow for comparisons of different interviewees’ narrative accounts. This involved first, *a*) searching, defining, and naming themes related to the justification of violence before; *b*) using these themes to define the individual level narratives, and *c*) finally, using these individual level narratives to inform the development of broader, ‘template’, narratives. These three steps (*a*, *b*, and *c*) are described in detail below.

a) Searching, defining and naming themes.

The codes from the stage 3 coding folders were copied to the stage 4 (i) interviewee thematic folders. Each folder was named after the individual interviewee, and themes (or ‘nodes’) were created as higher level nodes (i.e. not connected to a specific participant) within each folder. Themes were defined, and named, based on their proximity to justifying violence. In many cases, the themes contained excerpts from several contributors’ interviews. For example, as shown in *Figure 10*, the theme ‘everything was fine’ was comprised of codes from both V1 and K1. Once these themes were defined and named, the stage of defining and naming narratives could begin.

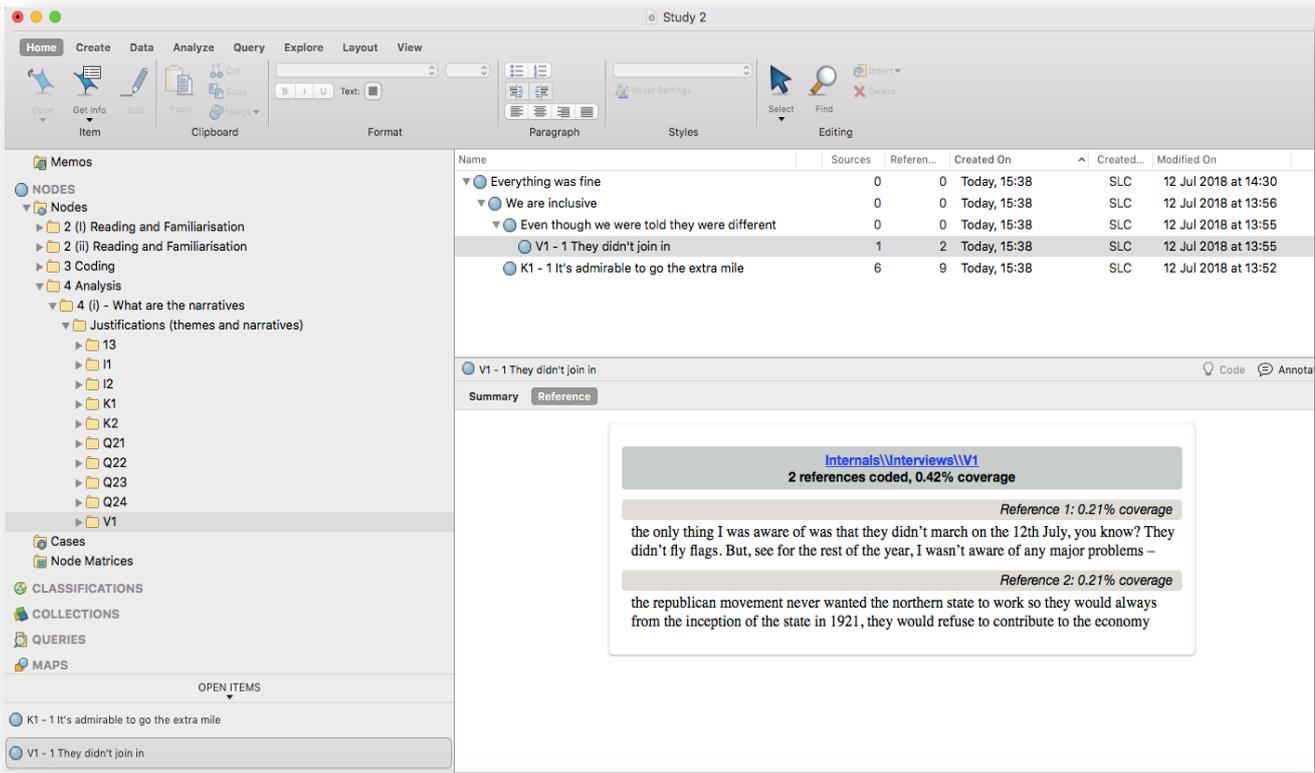


Figure 10. Stage 4 ('Analysis'): defining and naming violence-justifying themes.

b) Defining narratives; Applying Labovian Syntax.

In his structural description of narratives, (Labov et al., 1967; Labov, 1972) outlines six, common properties or “elements” (Labov, 2003, p. 2): an *Abstract* (a summary of the essence of the narrative), *Orientation* (time, location and people involved), *Complicating Action* (the sequence of events), *Resolution* (the end result), *Evaluation* (significance and meaning), and *Coda* (the perspective of the present). This is referred to as Labovian Syntax, as detailed in Chapter 2. It has been described as a detailed and rigorous method for the analysis of personal narratives (Patterson, 2013, p. 33), and has been previously applied to similarly large portions of interview data (see Mischler, 1986; Frost, 2009). The themes arising Stage 3 ('Coding'), were organised into these narrative properties.

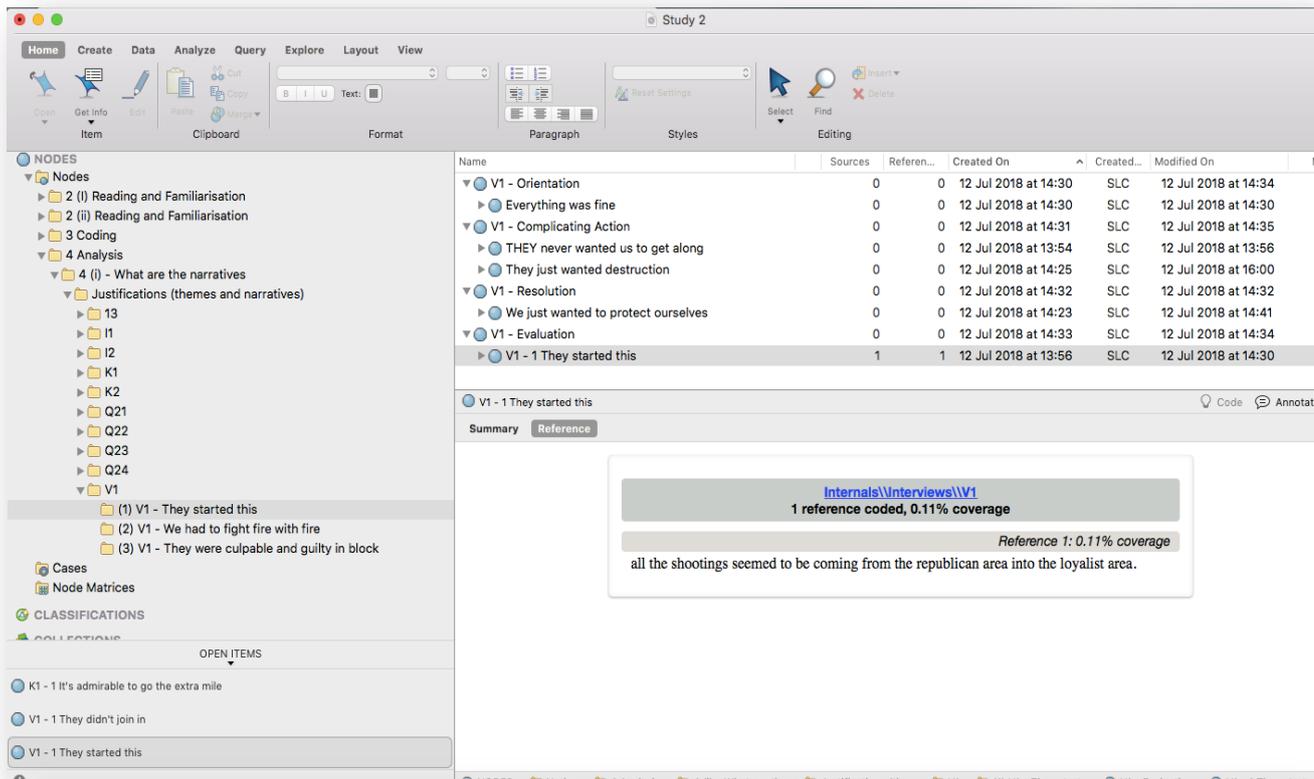


Figure 11. Stage 4 ('Analysis'): Applying Labovian Syntax to violence-justifying themes.

For example, for participant V1 (as shown in *Figure 11*), the theme 'everything was fine' became the *Orientation* property (time, place, and people involved) whilst the theme 'they just wanted destruction' became one of the *Complicating Actions* (event(s) in the narrative). This continued until the narrative had at least three narrative properties. Although this stage of analysis drew upon component themes (i.e. parts of the interview that were not spoken at the same time), the structure was only loosely applied, and attempts were not made to 'squeeze' themes into narrative properties. Once the properties were identified, a title was given to each individual narrative, capturing the "chronological arc of meaning" in the individual experience (McAlpine, 2016, p. 36). This served as the narrative *Abstract* (i.e. what the narrative is about). In order to differentiate between the different narratives, the participant ID was added to the

narrative number, followed by property (for example, the narrative *They Started This* was the first narrative belonging to V1 so it is identified as V1⁽¹⁾. When talking about, for example, the *Orientation* part of this narrative (the theme, ‘everything was fine’), it is identified as V1⁽¹⁾_(o)).

c) *Creating template narratives (‘narrative map’)*.

After the narratives were defined according to Labovian Syntax, they were reviewed and arranged into maps to create broader narratives. These are referred to as ‘template’ narratives. To do this, the contextual details (i.e. the name of the antagonist(s), the name of the in-group, times, dates and locations etc.) from each narrative were removed, in order to isolate the underlying sentiment, and connect this sentiment to other narratives (i.e. creating a template narrative from composite, individual narratives).

For example, for participant V1 (as shown in *Figure 11*) the narrative, *They Started This* contained ‘everything was fine’ as the *Orientation* (time, place, and people involved), ‘they just wanted destruction’ as one of the *Complicating Actions* (event(s) in the narrative), and ‘we just wanted to protect ourselves’ as the *Resolution* (the end result). When this narrative was arranged in the narrative map (*Figure 12*), the underlying sentiment reflected a theme of imminent *threat*, and this connected to the narrative *Something Bad is Going to Happen*, which was described by Q21 (see *Figure 17*, p. 124).

Labovian Syntax is considered an appropriate format for comparing multiple narratives in this way. Previous research has compared the different elements across time by the same narrator (see Ferrara, 1994), as well as comparing different narratives by different narrators (see Bell, 1998; 1999). A sample of this process is provided in Appendix 2.5; see *Figure 12* for a visual representation.

Table 10.
Inventory of Propaganda Techniques and Samples of Coded Data

Overall Technique	Description of technique (see Tilley, 2005, p. 72)	Sub-techniques
Name calling NC	Labels or stereotypes that encourage a summary negative response, ignoring complexity or evidence.	Moral labels 4 Simplification 16
Sample	Q21 <i>“Look at how the, the NC4 gypsies came through Europe, right? And PF8 they’re ruining Christian Europe”</i>	
Glittering generality GG	The use of “positive-sounding euphemisms”, abstract (positive) labelling, subjective adverbs or adjectives.	Glittering generalities 5 Rationalisations 6
Sample	V1 8 TN <i>“the IRA didn’t play by those rules of engagement and therefore, em, my argument and many of us argued that 6, 16 GG terror had to be fought with terror”</i>	
Transfer positive TP	Technique whereby the “good” of something rubs off on something else (e.g. appeal to authority, or testimonial).	Appeal to authority 1 Testimonials 2 Symbolism 12
Sample	I3 <i>“we’re TP volunteer soldiers and you know, 6 it’s obvious that GG in a war and in a conflict that we’re going to suffer casualties as well as civilians are going to suffer casualties unfortunately”</i>	
Transfer negative TN	Technique whereby the “bad” of something rubs off on something else, allowing it to be dismissed or discredited.	Vagueness 7 Guilt by association 12 Incredible truths 10 Insinuation 11 Disinformation 15
Sample	K1 10 <i>“I think it was like the TN futility of passive protesting and, and efforts that I had seen”</i>	
Plain folks PF	Implying that certain ideas are “of the people” or for the greater good.	Plain folks play 9
Sample	K2 <i>“We wanted to PF secure our areas, keep our areas safe, stop these guys from, you know, beating up our kids”</i>	
Bandwagon BW	Implying mass support for a particular view, and suggesting “collective ownership” through references to sometimes imagined communities.	Assertion/accusation 3
Sample	Q21 <i>“I mean PF9 we were in 11 countries so we were GG5 projecting this BW7 same message in 11 white specifically white based countries”</i>	
Manifest destiny MD	Removal of accountability, and attribution of responsibility to destiny, fate or larger forces.	Pinpointing the enemy 8 Card stacking 17
Sample	I2 MD <i>“there’s a war on whether that, you know, whether that came to us or whether, you know, 8 we didn’t go to war it came to us”</i>	

6.5 Results

This study had two objectives. The first was to determine how individual and template narratives of perpetration were constructed by former perpetrators of violent extremism and terrorism across a range of contexts. The second was to identify how the perceived instrumentality of *violent*, rather than *non-violent* means, was depicted in these narratives. The results of the study will now be presented in line with these objectives.

6.5.1 Individual level narratives.

After Stage 4 (analysis), 32 individual narratives were identified across the ten interviews. All of these individual narratives contained an *Orientation*, *Complicating Action* and *Resolution*; some also contained an *Evaluation* and one contained a *Coda* (a “free clause” that signals the end of the narrative, Labov, 1972, p. 225). These narratives are not discussed individually but, instead, presented visually as composite parts of the template narratives (Figures 13 – 18). They are also provided in Appendix 2.6.

6.5.2 Template narratives.

The process of reviewing and arranging the individual level narratives into a narrative map involved, first, removing contextual details (i.e. names of antagonists, protagonists etc.) to identify the narrative’s underlying sentiment, and connect this sentiment to other narratives.

Six template narratives were identified in this way, and they are discussed individually, below. Commentary on the use of propaganda techniques will be discussed in Section 6.5.3). The individual narratives from which they are comprised are presented at the beginning of each section, as well as in *Figures 13-18*.

Narrative 1. *I'm not going to stand by and do nothing.*

I1⁽²⁾ Q23⁽²⁾ I3⁽¹⁾ K2⁽¹⁾ K1⁽³⁾ I3⁽³⁾ V1⁽¹⁾

See *Figure 13*. In Narrative 1, *defeatism* was constructed by participants as a by-product of passivism. In situations whereby a protagonist must make a decision between remaining passive or choosing to rebel (and be defiant), there was an assumption that passivity was not worthy of merit. In some cases, the 'passive' people were named; in other cases they were contrasted with a different version of themselves.

I1, a former member of the IRA born at the onset of the conflict in Northern Ireland, spoke about his parents' attitudes towards defiance. He explained that "there wasn't an acceptance of that because they had been reared in the state where, I suppose, you didn't really verbalise your politics... they were all very passive" (I1⁽²⁾_(O)). K2⁽¹⁾_(O) spoke about growing up as a second-generation Pakistani in the United Kingdom and being subjected to everyday racism. He explained that "a lot of the older generation still have this kind of, eh, eh inferiority complex to the white person" and that choosing to be passive, choosing to accept persecution, "that was the norm in those days". In contrast, both participants described their generation as 'special', "a generation coming through of young people who were a wee bit more radical than their parents" (I1⁽²⁾_(CA)); revolutionaries, questioning their parents' defeatist approach, asking "why should I have to put my head down to these [white] people?" (K2⁽¹⁾_(O)). Indeed, several times throughout the interview, K2 (when speaking about various groups defending Muslims around the world) stressed that "we weren't cowards" K2⁽¹⁾_(O). For K2, this theme created a juxtaposition between his generation, and that of his parents', and was an important component in all his narratives.

The underlying *pride attached to action* and rather than inaction surfaced several times throughout Narrative 1. I3, another former member of the IRA, maintained that he was never going to accept the subjugations by the British establishment against Catholic

communities in Northern Ireland: “there was nothing that the British could do to deter me and people like me. That they couldn’t buy me, they couldn’t intimidate me” (I3⁽³⁾_I). Q23, a former Neo Nazi skinhead who became radicalised in prison, felt similarly. When explaining why he felt so strongly about the Neo Nazi belief system, he described the treatment of fellow Neo Nazis in prison, and exhibited exasperation at their beliefs being silenced, whilst others could practice their belief system(s) freely; “It’s a belief, you know? People believe in Christianity and, uh, Muslims or whatever” (Q23⁽²⁾_(E)). Like I3, Q23 felt as though arbitrary, austere sanctions were being applied to him, and his community, on ethnic grounds. For all participants within this narrative, the option to accept the perceived grievances was calculated to be the weaker option. In many of the individual narratives, these grievances (i.e. civil restrictions) served as the *Complicating Action* or ‘trigger’. Once triggered, these *Complicating Actions* allowed for the future actions. This is summarised by K2⁽¹⁾_(E) when he describes his thought-process upon witnessing the persecution of Muslims in Bosnia: “I wasn’t really aware of the, eh, the, the, the, the social political dynamics that were going on at that time, em, but what I did know was that I needed to do something about it, I needed to help these people”. In other words, the perception of grievance spurred violent action.

However, a critical element of this narrative is *the attribution of blame*; “We didn’t go out looking for this, this came to our streets” (I3⁽¹⁾_(R)). An important anchor for these participants to justify choosing violence was the futility of passive action given that the adversarial offense was brought *to* the participant; *the other* started it. This is achieved through clear identification of protagonists and antagonists. For I3, this was the British; “every time you encountered a British army foot patrol, they viewed all young people of a certain age as a potential threat” (I3⁽³⁾_(CA)). For, V1⁽¹⁾_(R), a former member of the UVF, it was *(cont’d on p. 110)*.

Narrative 1.

I3⁽²⁾ We are not a submissive people

- (a) *I wasn't born a Republican.*
- (c4) "No the British army were intent on intimidating the nationalist people into submission"
- (a) "I'm very proud that I, em, took part in that resistance against the, em, the... what the British were trying to do here"
- (a) "... they couldn't buy me, they couldn't intimidate me, they couldn't, eh, torture me"

K2⁽²⁾ I'm not the sort of person who does nothing

- (a) "we've got our parents telling us this but, personally, I don't give a shit, why should I call yo- why should I have to put my head down to these white people?"
- (c4) "... it hit a chord inside me that, well, why, why are these Christians attacking Muslims?"
- (a) "obviously a part of being a good Muslim is also about helping other people"
- (a) "I needed to do something about it, I needed to help these people"

Q23⁽²⁾ We will not be silenced

- (a) "we're here to make our race better, we're here to fight for our people"
- (c4) "why am I getting trouble for the things that I believe in, you know?"
- (a) "if anybody's gonna argue against your beliefs it comes down to violence"
- (a) "It's a belief, you know? People believe in Christianity and, uh, Muslims or whatever"

I1⁽²⁾ The chosen generation

- (a) "they were all very passive"
- (c4) "my generation would have been a generation coming through of young people who were a wee bit more radical than their parents"
- (a) "Colonialism is wrong and, if they're not going to give reform then you have to go for revolution"
- (a) Generation revolution

K1⁽²⁾ Violent jihad is defensive

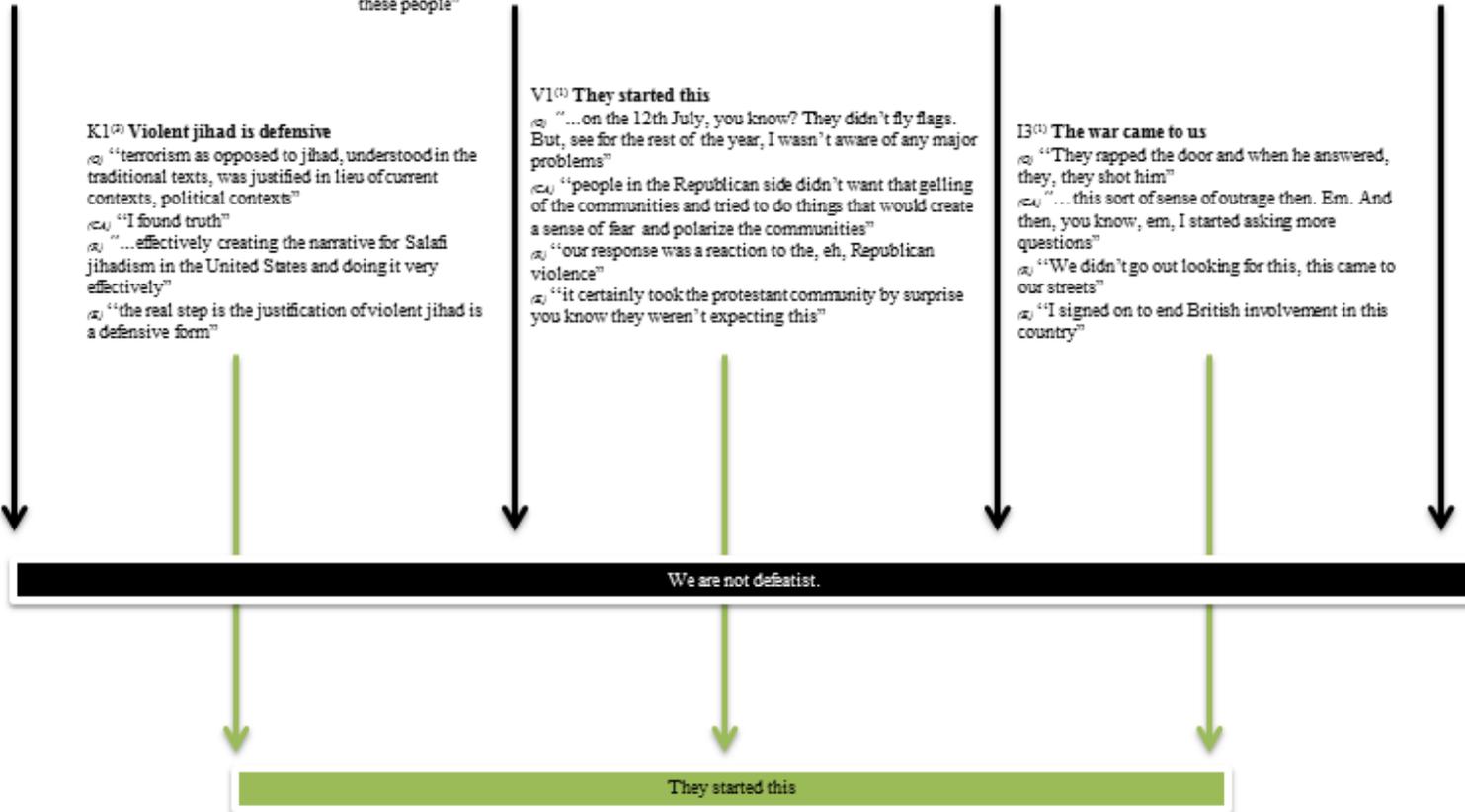
- (a) "terrorism as opposed to jihad, understood in the traditional texts, was justified in lieu of current contexts, political contexts"
- (c4) "I found truth"
- (a) "... effectively creating the narrative for Salafi jihadism in the United States and doing it very effectively"
- (a) "the real step is the justification of violent jihad is a defensive form"

V1⁽²⁾ They started this

- (a) "... on the 12th July, you know? They didn't fly flags. But, see for the rest of the year, I wasn't aware of any major problems"
- (c4) "people in the Republican side didn't want that gelling of the communities and tried to do things that would create a sense of fear and polarize the communities"
- (a) "our response was a reaction to the, eh, Republican violence"
- (a) "it certainly took the protestant community by surprise you know they weren't expecting this"

I3⁽¹⁾ The war came to us

- (a) "They rapped the door and when he answered, they, they shot him"
- (c4) "... this sort of sense of outrage then. Em. And then, you know, em, I started asking more questions"
- (a) "We didn't go out looking for this, this came to our streets"
- (a) "I signed on to end British involvement in this country"



Narrative 1.
I'm not going to stand by and do nothing.

Figure 13. Narrative 1: "I'm not going to stand by and do nothing".

the Republican movement. He explained that “[their] response was a reaction” to the violence brought onto their community by the Republican side. For I2, a former member of the IRA, parallels are drawn between the Republican response (protagonist) to the British occupation (antagonist) and France’s response (protagonist) to the Nazi invasion (antagonist) during World War II: “the occupying force was there and, em, I thought it was proper. My duty was to go out and fight it” (I2⁽³⁾_(E)). In this way, participants were able to justify violent action using two, specific narrative components: first, the adversarial group introduces violence, and persecutes the participant (or the participant’s community). Second, either through a generational upheaval (or a strength within the individual), the participant refuses to adopt the narrative that “we don’t want to cause any problems and we don’t want to make any issues” (K2⁽¹⁾_(E)).

The violence-justifying narrative is, therefore, constructed in the following way; the presence of a violent adversary, an “uppity”, “proactive” I1⁽²⁾_(CA), persecuted people and, finally, an reasoned assumption that passive action and defeatism are not mutually exclusive concepts, allows for a sound evaluation: “we didn’t talk about it we just went and did it” I3⁽¹⁾_(E).

Narrative 2. *We have to take the law into our own hands.*

Q24⁽²⁾ Q22⁽¹⁾ K1⁽⁵⁾ V1⁽²⁾ I2⁽²⁾ Q24⁽¹⁾ Q21⁽³⁾

In Narrative 1, the concept of passivity is acknowledged and manipulated to portray a defiant protagonist, refusing to be submissive in the face of an adversary. In Narrative 2 (*Figure 14*), passivity is encountered again, but associated with societal ‘decision-makers’. In this narrative, antagonists such as the government or the state authorities are portrayed as flawed, fraudulent, ill-equipped, but ultimately passive, forcing the protagonist to respond in an ‘extreme’ fashion. This template narrative begins with the protagonist becoming aware of

persecution by an adversary. This persecution can take many forms; Q22, a former American Skinhead, is suddenly made aware that “white people are always being persecuted” (Q22⁽¹⁾_(O)) and begins questioning the everyday, double standards in his society: “how come I don’t get extra points on my applicant... because I’m white¹⁸?” (Q22⁽¹⁾_(O)). V1⁽²⁾_(O) describes “a well-organized, Republican terrorist group who were trying to undermine the stability of the state” whilst K1, a former Al Qaeda recruiter, presents an image of the United States who purport “so much about human rights and democracy while [they are] unwilling to critically look at [themselves]”, owing to a “growing resentment of the society [he] had grown up around” (K1⁽⁵⁾_(O)). Q21, a former Canadian Skinhead describes the threat of mass immigration: “look at how the, the gypsies came through Europe, right? And they’re ruining Christian Europe” (Q21(3)_(O)). However, beyond these perceived persecution, it is the action or inaction of the government, the police, or other form(s) of authority that determines the protagonists’ actions. In other words, their grievances are exacerbated by the inability, or refusal, of the ‘powers that be’ to acknowledge and confront these issues.

When Q22 discovers that the “institution here is run by Jews and that they secretly steal money and they give it to Israel”, more unearthing leads to a realization that the government cannot address his grievances: “well that’s conspiracy on the other side, then, they’re not going to tell us the truth” because, logically, “if they lied about this, then they’re lying about that” (Q22⁽¹⁾_(R)). For V1, his narrative was more reflective of ‘no-confidence’, and he describes a similar juxtaposition. He describes how the Republican movement used guerilla warfare tactics, and did not adhere to “strict rules of military engagement”. The armed forces in Northern Ireland, however, “had their hands tied by their political masters” (V1⁽²⁾_(R)) and had to adhere to these rules. This creates an uneven playing field whereby the IRA is given a *carte-blanche* in terms of warfare whereas those supposed to be defending the

¹⁸ Here, Q22 is referring to affirmative action with regards to University education.

Protestant community are (fatally) restricted. This is gradually building towards the protagonists' *needing* to engage in more lethal tactics.

On a less political level, Q21 and Q24 describe their White Power Skinhead politics as a more overt display of “what [society] actually believe” (Q21(3)_(R)). Exacerbated at her parents, Q24⁽¹⁾_(R) rationalizes “you [her parents] actually believe this stuff but you just won’t say it”. This was also the case with Q21, who, when speaking about Muslims in the United States, maintained that “honestly, I mean in the United States, at that time, man, your run-of-the-mill person would be like, you know, let’s get rid of these people” (Q21(3)_(E)). Despite a covert acceptance of their politics, Q24 and Q21 found that those around them were “too cowardly” (Q24⁽¹⁾_(R)) to speak up. In a similar way to the conspiratorial nature of the power systems described above, these participants find themselves restricted by the society they live in; a society that refuses to be “blatant” (Q24⁽¹⁾_(R)) about what is right in front of their eyes. These feelings of exacerbation are shared by K1 who feels as though his society, rather than being cowardly, is simply *ignorant*. Speaking about the Iraqi insurgency post-9/11, K1 admonishes the American people for supporting a government who was persecuting Muslims around the world; “the way that they sold baseball cards with operation desert storm and I remember just think like... This is total insanity” (K1⁽⁵⁾_(O)). What these individual grievances and frustrations have in common is the discovery of “an inherent contradiction in mainstream, intellectual discourse” (K1⁽⁵⁾_(CA)). For this reason, in order for large-scale change to occur, they need to take the law into their own hands.

However, a desire to go above the law does not necessarily denote violence. The lack of faith with those who should be protecting one’s in-group does not serve as justification for, for example, targeting civilians. To counteract this, and render this narrative a violent one, V1 (*cont’d on p. 114*).

12⁽²⁾ Non-violent action did not work

(a) "it was just pure sectarianism in a sense"
(c) "Quickly, the mood changed from being protecting us to being here to, again, keep the nationalists people in their place in a sense"
(s) "you either take a view of you just accept it, become apathetic about it... or, you do something about it and, to me, doing something about it was becoming involved in the army"
(x) "I believe if I was in the same situation today, same circumstances... what was happening, same things happening, I'd be back, back at it again"

22⁽¹⁾ Well, it's a conspiracy

(a) "As a white male, in America, I feel that we are 'being persecuted'"
(c) "they would say, 'cos God wants you to know the truth now, Q22"
(s) "see if they lied about this, then they're lying about that"
(x) "I thought this was good. You know what I mean, like, I thought that I was teaching them some, something that was right and good"

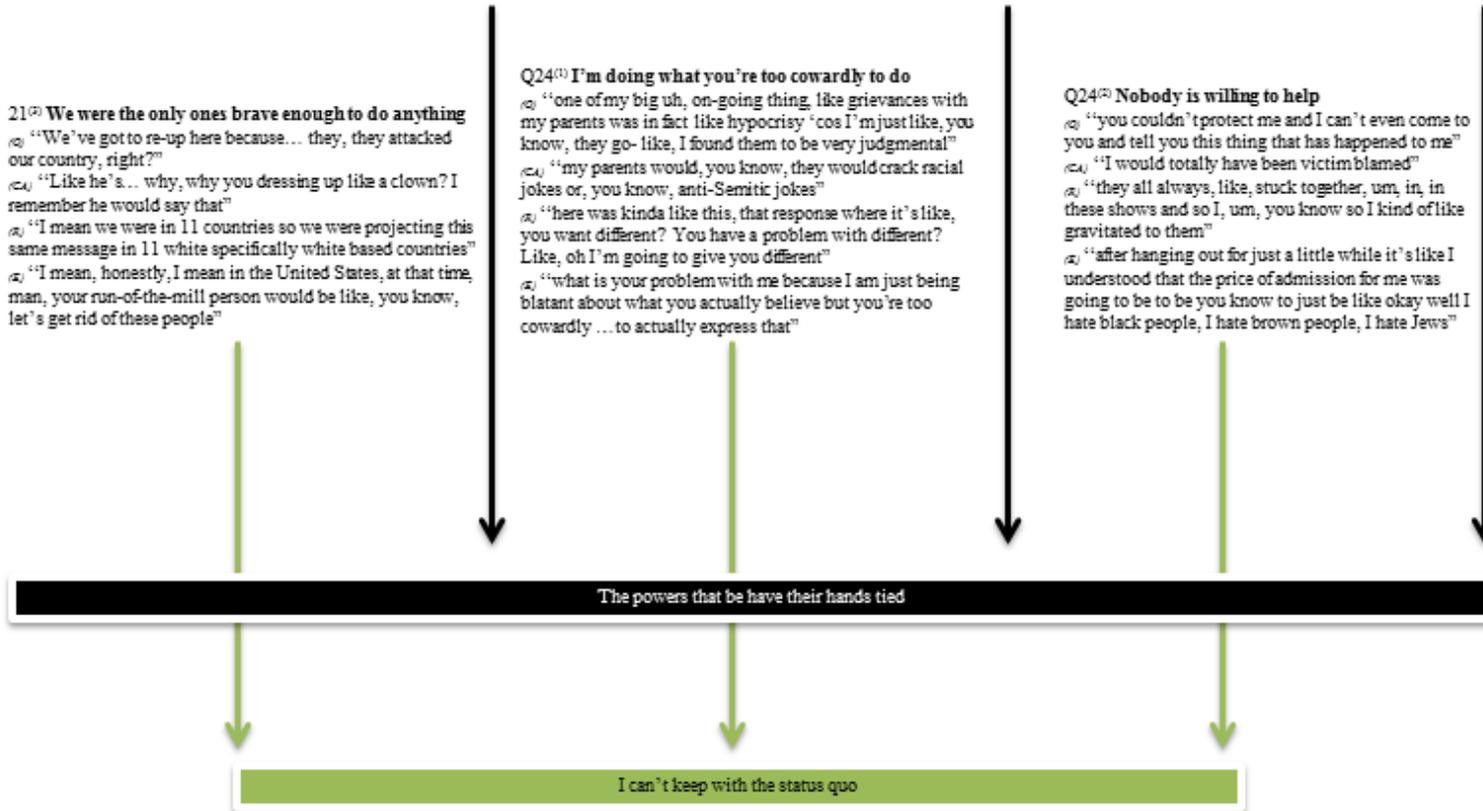
Narrative 2.

K1⁽²⁾ We have to take the law into our own hands

(a) "the way that they sold baseball cards with operation desert storm and I remember just think like - ... This is total insanity"
(c) "we needed to make a movement that had a coherent logic to it that could counter mainstream discourse"
(s) "I have to stay upon this path and there's no other path apart from it, um, this is, this is my purpose"
(x) "I think it was like the futility of passive protesting and, and efforts that I had seen"

V1⁽²⁾ We had to fight fire with fire

(a) "there was a, a well organised Republican terrorist group who were trying to undermine the stability of the state"
(c) "the forces of law and order had their hands tied by their political masters and they had to engage the IRA, or the Republican movement, the military wing of the Republican movement through strict no- rules of military engagement"
(s) "the bombs that the IRA planted in bars and vice versa so both sides were using those tactics"
(x) "the IRA didn't play by those rules of engagement and therefore, em, my argument and many of us argued that terror had to be fought with terror"



Narrative 2.
We have to take the law into our own hands.

Figure 14. Narrative 2: "We have to take the law into our own hands".

describes how acts of terrorism were justified in light of the tactics used by the IRA; they didn't "play by those rules of engagement and therefore, em, my argument and many of us argued that terror had to be fought with terror" (V1⁽²⁾_(E)). The gap that the Northern Irish government could not fill *could* be filled by the UVF. In fact, a strong factor in joining the UVF was that "they were seen to be more active and more ruthless in their [exhales] in their response to what would have been Republican terrorism" (V1⁽²⁾_(R)). Although K1 did not engage in violence with Al Qaeda, his objective was to incite violence through "a movement that had a coherent logic to it that could counter mainstream discourse" (K1⁽⁵⁾_(CA)) rather than inciting a movement of protest. "Based on the futility of passive protesting and, and efforts that [he] had seen" this approach was the only approach which that could "rival" (K1⁽⁵⁾_(CA)) the perceived injustices and grievances in the protagonists' world. I2, for example, talks about "the realization" that peaceful responses "had been a disaster" I2⁽²⁾_(R) so, given that "both sides were using those [violent] tactics" V1⁽²⁾_(R), fire needed to be fought with fire.

When these elements are combined, the narrative that emerges is one where, first, the protagonist finds themselves in a compromised position. Unable to turn to those who are supposed to help, they are shocked by the "insanity" of the situation but must nonetheless do something. In a bid to react, and defend their community, they use the only tools available to them, concluding that "fire [needs] to be fought with fire".

Narrative 3. *Our prejudices were correct*

K1⁽⁵⁾ V1⁽³⁾ Q23⁽¹⁾

Happening upon evidence or "the truth" was pivotal to violent action in Narrative 2. However, this realisation was also at the crux of Narrative 3. For motives fuelled by emotion, the use of apparently logical evidence can serve as a useful alibi. For many of the participants

in this narrative, there was an existing, emotional prejudice towards an antagonist that became strengthened upon discovery of this evidence, or “truth”. See *Figure 15*.

For example, for K1, a key antagonist was *society at large*. K1⁽⁵⁾_(E) describes his “personal hatred of the society that didn’t intervene” when he suffered physical and emotional abuse at the hands of his Mother during his childhood in Pennsylvania. This existing disdain for American society deepened when K1 became aware of the American government’s treatment of Muslims overseas. He observed “a level of intellectual hypocrisy, um, to be able to judge others but not, um, to judge ourselves under the same principals” (K1⁽⁵⁾_(CA)). Whilst K1 had developed a resentment towards his own society in childhood, making discoveries about American foreign policy in adulthood strengthened this contempt. For some participants, this disdain was somewhat generational.

For V1, for example, the antagonist was the *Catholic community*. In childhood, V1 was aware of the fundamental differences between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. He expressed disdain for that community, particularly towards *their* narrative about discrimination: “some of that I think is being manipulated, you know that there was as much discrimination” (V1⁽³⁾_(CA)). He then used the example of Catholics seeking employment; “they would always argue you know, we can’t get jobs but I don’t necessarily think that that’s the case” (V1⁽³⁾_(CA)). However, prejudice in the absence of evidence is not sufficient to justify violent action. For V1, these feelings became magnified when his Father, a civilian, was killed by the IRA. In order to justify violence against Catholic communities, V1 combined his existing prejudices with the actions of the IRA, reasoning that “in the light of voting patterns [for Republican parties], actually, there was a validity in our argument at the time in targeting the Roman Catholic community in block” (V1⁽³⁾_(E)). Comparable logic was used in KI’s justification of the 9/11 attacks explaining that although “9/11 was something that most, uh, Muslims said was not permissible in Islam. I thought it was” (K⁽¹⁾₍₂₎).

Narrative 3.

V1⁽²⁾ **They were culpable and guilty in block**

α₁ "the republican movement never wanted the northern state to work so they would always from the inception of the state in 1921, they would refuse to contribute to the economy"

α₂ "I wanted revenge"

α₃ "you could toss a bomb into a barroom and kill, you know, a number of people it was, eh, it seemed a better way to terrorize that group"

α₄ "they were culpable and guilty and they were either actively supporters of or involved in, okay?"

K1⁽²⁾ **We have to take the law into our own hands**

α₁ "the way that they sold baseball cards with operation desert storm and I remember just think like - ... This is total insanity"

α₂ "we needed to make a movement that had a coherent logic to it that could counter mainstream discourse"

α₃ "I have to stay upon this path and there's no other path apart from it, um, this is, this is my purpose"

α₄ "I think it was like the futility of passive protesting and, and efforts that I had seen"

Q23⁽³⁾ **My prejudices are...correct**

α₁ "look at them, they're in our neighbourhood selling drugs to our, to our people"

α₂ "when you're in prison you start seeing how other cultures, uh, react - ... and, and the way they carry themselves and you think all people are like that"

α₃ "if anybody's gonna argue against your beliefs it comes down to violence"

α₄ "you're supposed to be protecting your own people and being about your own race, you're not supposed to have anything to do with any other people because they believe that the white race is the superior race"

I have an emotional hatred of my adversary

I found found evidence in support of my "prejudices"

Narrative 3.

Our prejudices were correct

Figure 15. Narrative 3: "Our prejudices were correct".

For Q23, the antagonists were *Black people*. In his own neighborhood, he commented that “they’re in our neighborhood selling drugs to our, to our people” (Q23⁽¹⁾_(O)); however, it was his exposure to different ethnic groups in prison that reaffirmed these feelings. Here, he witnessed similar behavior; “it stuck in your head, like, all black people act like that, all, all Mexicans act like that”. Combining these old and new prejudices supported his motive to defend the white race at all costs; “you start thinking, like, you know, our race is the better race and the white people are better than them, you know?” (Q23⁽¹⁾_(O)).

For these participants, the discovery of evidence that reaffirmed their previous, highly emotive and contemptuous, feelings towards an antagonist allowed for the consideration of more violent tactics; “the reason I wanted to train in bomb-making was because you can kill more people with a bomb than you can with a gun” (V1⁽³⁾_(CA)). This ‘evidence’ purported that American society was ignorant and “these people are stupid” (K1⁽⁵⁾_(O)), that “the white race is the superior race” (Q23⁽¹⁾_(R)) because, non-white people, “they’re all the same” (Q23⁽¹⁾_(O)) and, finally, that the Catholic community, in block, are “culpable and guilty” (V1⁽³⁾_(E)). With this ‘new’ information confirming existing prejudices, the culmination of evidence appeared overwhelming, spurring violent action.

Narrative 4. *The underdog*

K1⁽¹⁾ K1⁽⁴⁾ Q21⁽¹⁾ Q21⁽³⁾ K2⁽²⁾ Q22⁽³⁾ Q23⁽³⁾

Thus far, there have been no recognisable story templates, or folk tales (i.e. master narratives, see Halverson et al., 2011) from which these template narratives have been derived. As shown in Figure 16, Narrative 4 is markedly different. By building upon an existing Master narrative of *The Underdog*, three recognisable narratives emerged. These included the life of Malcolm X, the novel ‘The Turner Diaries’, and the film ‘The Warriors’. These will be discussed individually.

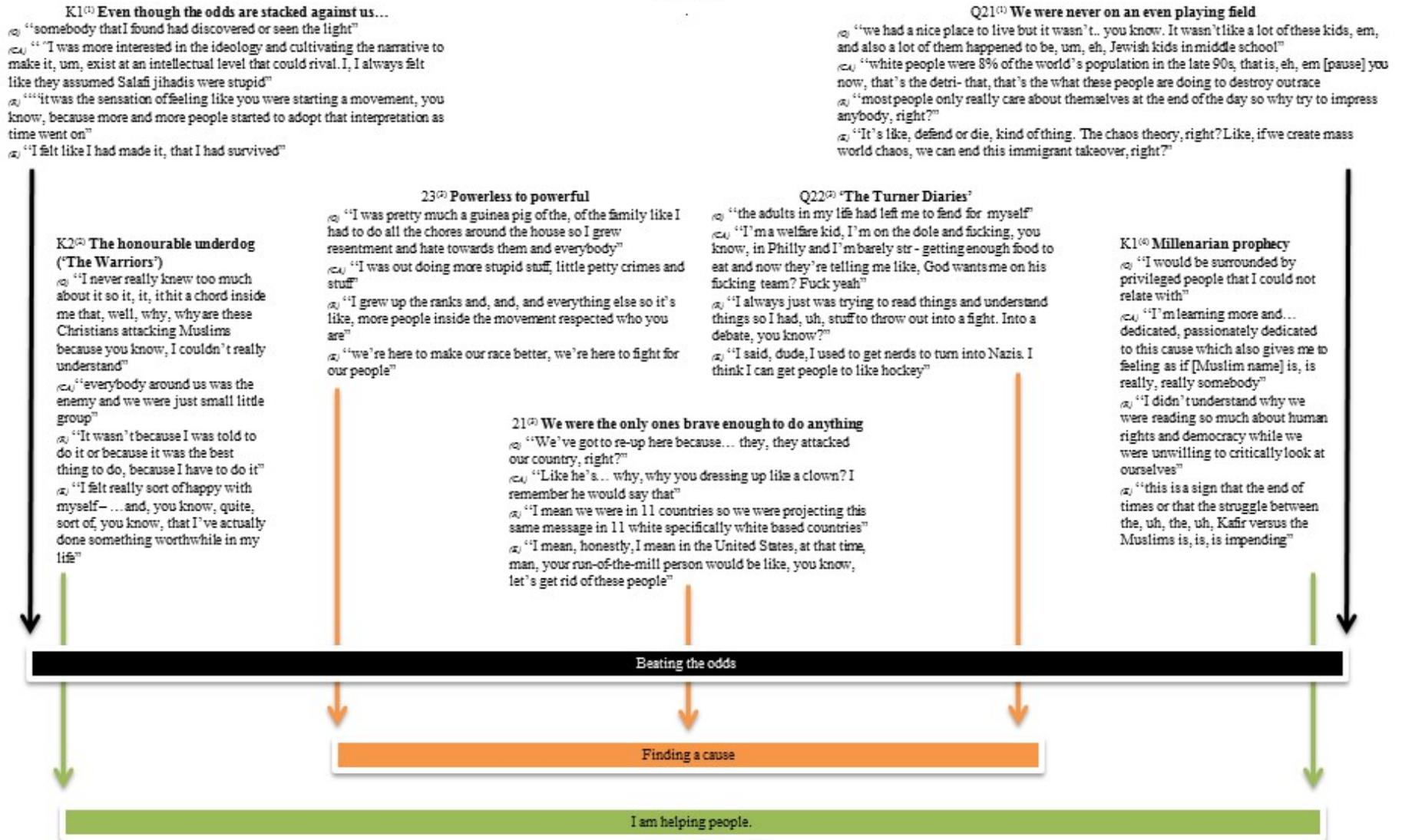
Malcolm X. Comparable to Narratives 2 and 3, the participants in Narrative 4 described happening upon ‘the truth’ and this discovery “hit a chord” (K2⁽²⁾_(O)). For some, this realization sparked feelings of panic. In others, however, discovering ‘truth’ weaved into a narrative of self-development, and beating the odds. K1 described, as a young man, going to prison for petty crimes and reading about the life of Malcolm X¹⁹. In describing the destructive path that led him to prison, K1 drew parallels between his life and the life of the “radical revolutionary” (K1⁽¹⁾_(O)) he was reading about. To him, Malcolm was “somebody that [he] found had discovered or seen the light” (K1⁽¹⁾_(O)). K1 “had run away at 16, Malcolm ran away at a very young age” and then “he got incarcerated and he changed his life” (K1⁽¹⁾_(CA)).

Berating meaningless crime was also an important aspect for Q23 who had a similar experience in prison. He described his initial prison stints as “stupid stuff, little petty crimes and stuff” (Q23⁽³⁾_(R)) but, upon become a Neo Nazi, the prospect of being sent to prison “fighting for the cause” (Q23⁽³⁾_(R)) was far more digestible. For both, their respective discoveries re-directed their destructive path: “I mean it just transformed my identity and made me feel like I was a new person” (K1⁽¹⁾_(CA)).

K1 continued to perceive his journey as mirroring that of Malcolm X, “walking the streets that Malcolm once walked” (K1⁽¹⁾_(O)). However, although he described Malcolm as “potent as an archetype” (K1⁽¹⁾_(O)), the narrative K1 adopted, within Malcolm’s story, resonated on a more latent level as an underdog defeating the “trauma and the odds that were against [him]” (K1⁽¹⁾_(CA)). This concept of an underdog resonated with other participants, but with different templates.

¹⁹ Malcolm X was an American-born Muslim minister, and human rights activist. He was a notable critic of American social policy, and largely credited with defending the rights of African Americans in the fifties and sixties.

Narrative 4.



Narrative 4.
The underdog.

Figure 16. Narrative 4: "The Underdog".

The Turner Diaries. Q22 described a similar archetype, this time Earl Turner; the protagonist in the novel 'The Turner Diaries'. This book is a work of political fiction that describes a race war between white nationalists and their non-white adversaries, outlining how the white nationalist political agenda can be pursued, mirroring the events of the story. The character of Turner, "he's just this normal guy in the beginning. He's just a normal Joe, working-class guy and, and then things start to happen" (Q22⁽³⁾_(O)). In a similar way to K1, whose background allowed him to find commonalities in the story of Malcolm X, believing that he "can become Malcolm in the modern era" (K1⁽¹⁾_(CA)), Q22 describes the odds that were stacked against him growing up in Philadelphia: "I'm a welfare kid, I'm on the dole and fucking, you know, in Philly and I'm barely s-r - getting enough food to eat and now they're telling me like, God wants me on his fucking team? Fuck yeah" (Q22⁽³⁾_(CA)). The evolution from 'nobody' to 'somebody' feeds into the narrative of an underdog and, in line with the narrative of a 'persecuted people' in Narrative 1, "like being in France in 1940" (I2⁽³⁾_(E)), the participants in this narrative do not see themselves (at first) as an equipped, powerful, 'favourite' force; they were the underdogs.

The Warriors. In the story of Malcolm X, K1 described the feeling "I had made it, that I had survived" (K1⁽¹⁾_(CA)) and "the sensation of feeling like you were starting a movement" (K1⁽¹⁾_(R)); beyond discovering the truth, there was an almost prophetic calling similar to that of Q22; "God needs soldiers like you. He needs angels like you" (Q22⁽³⁾_(CA)). In this narrative, *The Warriors*, K2 described a similar trajectory to the humble beginnings of Malcolm X.

Growing up in Birmingham amidst racial discrimination from, ironically, Skinheads such as Q22, K2 formed a gang called 'The Lynx'. K2 describes a situation whereby "everybody around us was the enemy and we were just small little group" (K2⁽²⁾_(CA)), just like in the film 'The Warriors'. This film, released in 1979, was an action thriller about a New

York City gang who were forced to return to their home ‘turf’ in The Bronx after being framed with the murder of the leader of another gang. K2 explains how “we kind of saw ourselves as The Warriors, you know? The, the, the small little group, you know, fighting against the bigger because that’s what we were” (K2⁽²⁾_(CA)). Despite their ‘dark horse’ demeanor, The Lynx were successful in defending their community against these racist gangs. Later, when K2 describes the plight of Muslim people in countries such as Bosnia, Kashmir and Afghanistan, the template of *The Warriors* was still potent. Upon joining the Mujahideen, K2 describes “fighting against a superior power” (K2⁽²⁾_(R)) and the honor associated with rising up, despite the odds; “it wasn’t because I was told to do it or because it was the best thing to do, because I have to do it” (K2⁽²⁾_(R)). Sacrifice of this nature brought with it an immense sense of pride for other participants.

Despite beginning with one Skinhead group in Canada, Q21 describes how the movement grew: “I mean we were in 11 countries, so we were projecting this same message in 11 white, specifically white, -based countries” (Q21⁽³⁾_(R)). For Q22, the movement originated from lowly beginnings on the streets of Philadelphia to eventually become “the leading hate state in America at the time” (Q22⁽³⁾_(E)). Similarly, embodying the archetype of Malcolm X through honing both himself and the movement, K1 “saw it growing, we saw the traffic growing on the website, we could literally measure it, um, I mean you would see attacks by people that had contact with our, our website” (K1⁽¹⁾_(R)). This sense of pride was shared by Q23 and K2.

Q23 grew from a petty criminal to a figure of authority in the Neo Nazi movement; “I grew up the ranks and, and, and everything else so it’s like, more people inside the movement respected who you are” (Q23⁽³⁾_(R)). For K2, the pride of fighting with the Mujahideen came from feeling “that I’ve actually done something worthwhile in my life” (K1⁽¹⁾_(CA)). In all

cases, the effort and exertion of battling the odds, only to surface as the hero, brought with it huge personal reward.

Narrative 5. *Something bad is going to happen.*

K2⁽³⁾ Q22⁽²⁾ Q21⁽²⁾ V1⁽¹⁾ I2⁽¹⁾ I1⁽¹⁾

Thus far, all narratives have made reference to persecution, before happening upon ‘a discovery’. This discovery tends to alert the protagonist that something terrible is about to happen. This is the premise of Narrative 5; the threat of things getting worse, and the sense of urgency with which the protagonists respond to avoid an irrecoverable situation (see *Figure 17*).

The participants in this narrative describe the *threat-related anxiety* emerging from their discoveries, stressing their trepidation about what it may mean. Q21 explains when he learned that “white people were 8% of the world’s population in the late 90s” (Q21⁽²⁾_(O)) and how this statistic, the suggestion that “the white race will die” (Q21⁽²⁾_(R)), “worried” him greatly (Q21⁽²⁾_(O)). I2 did not learn that there was an impending threat but, rather, he witnessed atrocities that signaled an exacerbation of the current political situation in Northern Ireland. He spoke about loyalist paramilitaries in Armagh “going around just killing, randomly killing nationalists”. To highlight the immediacy of the threat, “where [he] lived, em, within an eight-month period there was 9 people killed” (I2⁽¹⁾_(O)). To him, it became apparent that “there’s a war on” (I2⁽¹⁾_(O)) between his community and the antagonist(s) who wanted to eradicate them.

With an established, evolutionary narrative about ‘the other’ and what he perceived to be a natural idiosyncrasy between ‘us’ and ‘them’ that “goes back to our Neanderthal cousins”, Q22 feared that the adversary was “going to make the white race extinct in the world” (Q22⁽²⁾_(O)). In a similar way to I2, who maintained that “areas would have been

absolutely wiped out if the IRA hadn't been there" (I2⁽¹⁾_(E)), Q22 felt that the very existence of the white race depended on his response. For K2, his choice to fight with the Mujahideen was almost exclusively informed by the atrocities committed against Muslims across the world; "it was always about concentrating on where the Muslims were being attacked" (K2⁽³⁾_(CA)). In all cases, the 'choice' to engage in violence was portrayed as exactly the opposite. Similar to Narrative 1 (which presents the protagonist's dilemma of 'action-or-inaction'), Narrative 5 does not present violent action as a choice but, instead, as an *obligation*.

I1 offered three hypothetical questions in the *Resolution* of Narrative 5: "Who wants to go out and shoot people?", "Who wants to learn how to make a [expletive] bomb?" and, finally; "Who wants to go to jail?" (I1⁽¹⁾_(R)). The lunacy of these actions leads to the conclusion that there must have been a good reason. For Q21, this reason was "if we don't fight for our race, like you're saying, nobody will and the white race will die" (Q21⁽²⁾_(R)); for I2, engaging in violent action against "locally recruited" (I2⁽¹⁾_(O)) loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland was an attempt to protect his community from further, ceaseless persecution: "if the UVF, UDA, whatever else, thought they'd a free hand, I mean there'd be, in terms of attacks and that there, you know, there'd have been no stopping them" (I2⁽¹⁾_(E)).

The logic of this narrative is knitted between an imminent threat and the protagonist's response. The participants describe how, "[their] response was a reaction" to the contextual determinants of the time, allowing participants to reason that they were "the guy down the street", "a good neighbor" (I1⁽¹⁾_(O)) who were called upon, "to stand up [for the white race]... to be one of the warriors" (Q22⁽²⁾_(CA)), concluding that a decision *not* to respond with violence would almost certainly have insured a wealth of destruction by their adversary. Through this justification of violence, the narrative succeeds in removing the protagonists' individual culpability, whilst attributing blame exclusively to the antagonist(s).

Narrative 5.

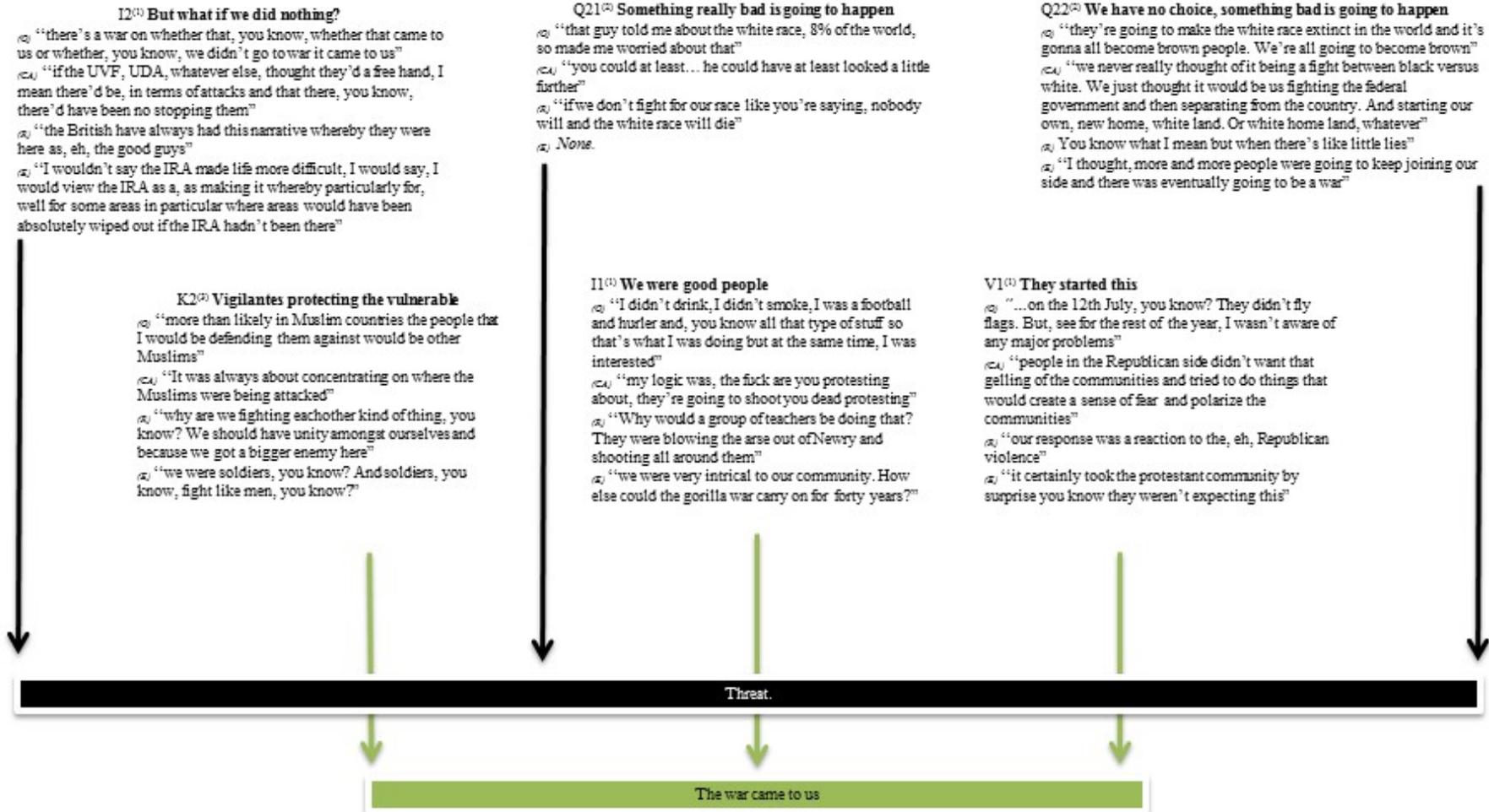


Figure 17. Narrative 5: "Something bad is going to happen".

Narrative 6. *The end justifies the means.*

13⁽²⁾ K1⁽²⁾ I2⁽³⁾ K2⁽⁴⁾ Q22⁽⁴⁾

See *Figure 18*. Narrative 6 is largely fueled by the goal that the participants are striving towards. Although the participants present distinct contexts, they nonetheless stress the narrow means by which their goal(s) can be attained, as well as the urgency with which action needs to be taken.

I2 begins the narrative with a harmonious *Orientation*, describing relations between Nationalist and Unionist communities in Armagh “where you had to get somebody to cut the hedge out there and it would have been a Protestant neighbor, and that, who’d have done it for you” (I2⁽³⁾_(O)). K2, although being exposed to ethnic discrimination on the streets of Birmingham, explained that in terms of Muslim persecution overseas, “[he] never really knew too much about it” (K2⁽²⁾_(O)) and, for both participants, learning of the atrocities committed against those who they both viewed as ‘their people’ “hit a chord” (K2⁽²⁾_(O)). For I2, the realization that “the society in which we lived, it wasn’t right” (I2⁽³⁾_(O)) led to thinking a more holistic perspective, thinking about a *new world*.

The context played a role in this novel way of thinking. 13 was aware that the situation in Northern Ireland was somewhat unique: “it was a very different time then to what it is now” (13⁽²⁾_(O)) but today’s context, he reasoned, was a context of war; “it’s obvious that in a war, and in a conflict, that we’re going to suffer casualties as well as civilians are going to suffer casualties, unfortunately” (13⁽²⁾_(E)). This leap from a context of harmony to a context of “fighting against a superior power” (K2⁽⁴⁾_(R)) allowed for different tactics to be used. This was particularly justified when the goal was a noble goal intended to drastically improve the current context, and strive towards this new world.

Narrative 6.

K1⁽²⁾ The end justifies the means

- (c) "I don't have a fear of saying what's going on"
- (cA) "it was a personal hatred of the society that didn't intervene"
- (A) "We saw it growing, we saw the traffic growing on the website, we could literally measure it, um, I mean you would see attacks by people that had contact with our, our website"
- (A) "you want to tear down the world and rebuild it in your own image, um, but, eh, the method and the means to get there, uh, you consider, you know, um, that the end justifies the means"

I2⁽²⁾ Bigger than us.

- (c) "you sort of felt that you were within a state that you'd no stake in it and the state was putting no stake into you either"
- (cA) "in order to, for society to be changed, you need the British out of the equation"
- (A) "I would have thought, from my point of view was that, only thing that was a waste of time was actually, sort of, em letting the Brits off the hook in a sense"
- (A) "that feeling that they're part of a, the broader struggle"

Q22⁽²⁾ Sodom and Gomorrah

- (c) "We just thought it would be us fighting the federal government and then separating from the country. And starting our own, new home, white land. Or white home land"
- (cA) "You are gonna ruin Sodom and Gomora and that's what we need you for"
- (A) "if we gave you a gun and there was a ba- a minority baby in a crib, would you go up and shoot it if you could get away with it. And that's what they wanted us all the answer. And of course you all answer yes"
- (A) "I thought this was good. You know what I mean, like, I thought that I was teaching them some, something that was right and good"

I3⁽²⁾ This is what happens in war.

- (c) "it's a very different, it was a very different time then to what it is now"
- (cA) "We didn't go out looking for this, this came to our streets"
- (A) "I signed on to end British involvement in this country"
- (A) "it's obvious that in a war and in a conflict that we're going to suffer casualties as well as civilians are going to suffer casualties unfortunately"

K2⁽²⁾ Kamikaze Pilots

- (c) "I remember distinctively my thoughts at the time because they're ingrained into my head was that, 'how can one human being be so barbaric to another human being?'"
- (cA) "obviously it was my fate, it was my destiny. I, I didn't, I didn't choose the flight, I chose to fight"
- (A) "Where you're fighting against a superior power, if the Mujahideen need to attack an army post or an army convoy and the only way that they can get into that is that somebody has to physically go and ram a vehicle into the cape of the army post, yeah?"
- (A) "Just like when the Japanese Kamikaze pilots when their airplanes used to get, eh, taken out they would fly them into the ships"

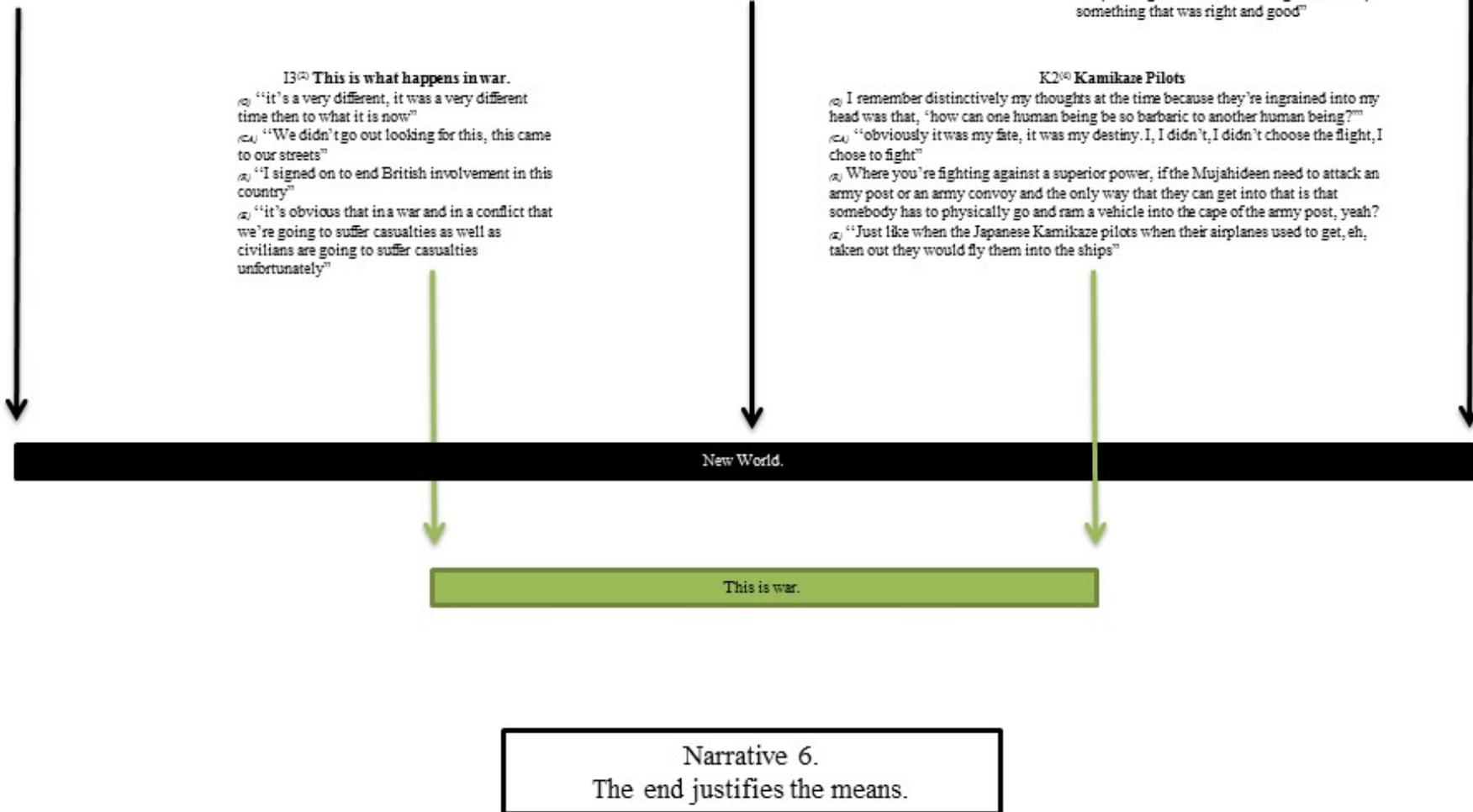


Figure 18. Narrative 6: "The End Justifies the Means".

For Q22, and many of the participants who prescribed to a Right-Wing belief system in this study, this goal was very idyllic, “starting our own, new home; white land. Or white home land” and, ultimately “a future for white children” (Q22⁽⁴⁾_(O)). For I2, this future would also exist on the basis of separation, with “the British out of the equation” (I2⁽³⁾_(CA)). This goal (a state no longer occupied by the British), was not presented as a new concept. In many ways, participants drew inspiration from established templates “from 50 years prior to it; the state was the state” (I2⁽³⁾_(R)); these templates also existed outside of Irish history with 13 describing the “mirror image of it happening wherever armies go right around the world” (13⁽²⁾_(E)), and the empathy that the Republican movement subsequently felt with “any country which, you know, is fighting a struggle or a liberation struggle or people who feel they’re under occupation” (I2⁽³⁾_(E)). In terms of action, K2 also used a literal template to frame, this time, martyrdom missions, “just like how, you know, in World War One and World War Two when British soldiers would, you know, would climb the wall and run head on into machine gun fire, knowing that it’s certain death” (K2⁽⁴⁾_(E)). For both I2, I3 and K2, violent action was rationalized through historical templates (i.e. what had gone before).

For other participants, this template was less literal and more prophetic; “obviously it was my fate, it was my destiny” (K2⁽⁴⁾_(R)) with instructions prescribed by something, or someone, ‘bigger’ than the participant themselves: “I believed that, look, at, with all things being said and done, I thought that God wanted me in this group” (Q22⁽⁴⁾_(CA)). Although his narrative was not specifically included in Narrative 6, this sentiment of being part of something ‘bigger’ also surfaced with 11 who maintained that “there’s almost on- an ongoing folk memory, only one way to do it is, resort to arms” (I1⁽²⁾_(CA)). In terms of an ancestral template, “it was the same role. It was still, the continuation of the struggle” (I2⁽³⁾_(CA)).

With a clear idea of the world these participants wanted to create, and an historical, or spiritual, template to follow, the means by which this world would be created was also clear.

For Q22, owing to the conspiratorial nature of the government presented in Narrative 2, “we just thought it would be us fighting the federal government and then separating from the country” (Q22⁽⁴⁾_(O)) and, similarly, I2 felt that “in order to, for society to be changed, you need the British out of the equation” (I2⁽³⁾_(CA)). This separation was not going to be simple. K1 explained how “[he] want[ed] to tear down the world an rebuild it in [his] own image” given “the futility of passive protesting and, and efforts that [he] had seen” (K1⁽²⁾_(O)). This concept of wreaking havoc to achieve a new world order also resonated with Q22, who believed he was going to “ruin Sodom and Gomora²⁰” (Q22⁽⁴⁾_(CA)). Although his narrative was not included in Narrative 6, Q21 phrased it interestingly as “if we create mass world chaos, we can end this immigrant takeover, right?” (Q21⁽¹⁾_(E)). In other words, in order to fix things, although the destruction of whole cities is extravagant and, arguably, unjustified (punishing all for the crimes of a few), “the method and the means to get there, uh, you consider, you know, um, that the end justifies the means” (K1⁽²⁾_(E)).

6.5.3 Propaganda techniques.

The aim of this second phase of analysis was to determine how the instrumentality of *violent*, rather than *non-violent* means, was depicted in participants’ individual narratives (see Appendix 2.6 for individual narratives). To do this, an inventory of propaganda techniques, informed by Tilley’s Propaganda Index (2005), as well as some sub-techniques from the US Army’s Psychology Operations Field Manual (1979), was compiled. This inventory was applied to the narratives to, first, determine *what* techniques were used (i.e. incidence) and, second, *where* the use of particular techniques were most prominent in the narratives (i.e. in the *Orientation*, *Complicating Action(s)*, *Resolution*, *Evaluation*, or *Coda*). From here, the analysis aimed explore *how* these techniques were used to justify violence (i.e. how and

²⁰ The Jewish cities provoked God’s anger and wrath with sins so grievous, the cities needed to be destroyed.

where they were combined). See *Table 10* (p. 104) for a full list of techniques, descriptions, and sample excerpts. The incidence and recurrence of the techniques will now be presented.

Incidence: What techniques appear?

Across the 32 individual narratives, a total of 497 applications of propaganda techniques were identified. The incidence of propaganda techniques is presented visually in *Table 11*

Table 11.

Results of Content Analysis

	Technique	Overall	Number of instances			
			Orientation	Complicating Action	Resolution	Evaluation
NC	Name calling	21 4%	8	9	3	1
GG	Glittering generality	142 27%	20	45	52	25
TP	Transfer positive	55 10%	10	18	18	9
TN	Transfer negative	113 22%	46	38	14	15
PF	Plain folks	82 16%	24	34	16	8
BW	Bandwagon	32 6%	10	9	7	6
MD	Manifest destiny	46 9%	6	15	14	11
O	Other	33 6%	8	14	11	-
	Total	524	132 25%	182 35%	135 26%	75 14%

The most frequently occurring techniques were *plain folks play* (implying that ideas are, ‘of the people’), rationalisations such as *glittering generalities* (broadly affirmative (unverifiable) abstract labelling), *transfer negative* (such as guilt by association, and incredible truths) and, finally, pinpointing the enemy (a form of *manifest destiny* in which accountability for an action is removed). These accounted for approximately 67% of the total techniques used.

Recurrence: Where do the techniques appear?

It may be useful to consult *Table 10* (p. 104) during this sub-section.

These techniques appeared most frequently in the *Orientation*, *Complicating Action(s)* and the *Resolution(s)* components of the narratives; it is important to note that these components serve different functions within the narrative structure (see p. 101 for an outline of Labovian Syntax). For example, the *Orientation* usually sets the scene for the protagonist’s action(s); it is here that the protagonist expresses the original conflict or grievance. An example of this is provided in an excerpt from Q22^{(1)(O)}:

9 PF “As a white male, in America, **10 GG** I feel that we are being persecuted”

Q22^{(1)(O)}

For Q22, the original grievance was a feeling of persecution (signalling virtue connotations, i.e. a *glittering generality*) as a white male in America (implying normalcy for an opinion, i.e. *plain folks play*). In this way, the use of these techniques allowed for orienting details to clearly identify, first, the protagonist and, subsequently, the antagonist(s).

Conversely, the use of propaganda techniques in the *Complicating Action(s)* served different function; to support and admonish the *actions* of the antagonists and protagonists. This was particularly pertinent in the various descriptions of the “most reportable event” (Labov, 2010, p. 547). In Labovian Syntax, this event is the least expected (or ‘punchiest’), and generally allows for change, or conflict, in the plot (as introduced in Chapter 2, Section

2.3). An example of the use of propaganda techniques when describing such an event is provided in an excerpt from I3^{(3)(CA)}:

10 “No, the British army were intent on **TN** intimidating the **PF** nationalist people into submission” I3^{(3)(CA)}

In this *Complicating Action*, I3 uses a form of *transfer negative* called an incredible truth (a conspiracy-type technique which presents an unbelievable, damning suggestion or truth) when describing the motives of the British army. In describing the actions of the protagonists, however, I3 uses a different technique; *plain folks play*. In other words, whilst the techniques used in the *Orientation* set the scene for the characters in the narrative, their application in the *Complicating Action(s)* mainly functioned to depict these characters’ actions in desirable or undesirable ways.

Finally, propaganda techniques also featured heavily in the *Resolution* component(s) of narratives. As mentioned, the *Resolution* generally follows the most reportable event, and serves to release the listener’s tension, ultimately telling them ‘what happened’. Here, participants’ used specific techniques to defend various acts of violence in the *Resolution* sections of the narrative. An example of this is provided in an excerpt from K2^{(4)(R)}:

MD “obviously it was my **13** fate, it was my **7** destiny- I, I didn’t, **16 GG** I didn’t choose the flight, I chose to fight” K2^{(4)(R)}

First, K2 uses *manifest destiny* to remove accountability from his own actions; this is achieved by the use of symbolism (i.e. fate) and vagueness (i.e. destiny). He then uses a *glittering generality* in the form of positive abstractions (i.e. fight and flight). Whilst these techniques are used to justify the protagonists’ *own* violence, these techniques are not applied to the *antagonists’* use of violence. This can be observed in the *Complicating Action(s)* of a narrative constructed by V1⁽¹⁾.

10 TN “people in the Republican side didn’t want that gelling of the communities and **7** tried to do things that would create a sense of fear and **132nternalise** the communities”

Here, V1 uses different techniques to describe the antagonists’ use of violence. By applying *transfer negative* through incredible truths (suggesting they purposely sabotaged the protagonists’ existence), and vagueness (removing specificity from certain accusations), it is implied that the protagonists’ use of violence was more complex than the actions of the antagonists’.

How propaganda techniques are used to justify violence.

Many coded sections of text included a mix of different techniques and these techniques, when combined, allowed for entire narratives to justify the protagonists’ actions, in various ways; namely, through the dilution of the protagonists’ own behaviour, placing excessive blame on the antagonists’ behaviour, presenting indefensible positions and, finally, creating dichotomous, polarising extremes from which to simplify complex phenomena.

Dilution. Below is a quote from the *Evaluation* component of the narrative, *The End Justifies The Means* by K1⁽²⁾:

7 “You want to tear down the world an rebuild it in your own image, um, but, eh, the **7** method and the means to get there, uh, you consider, you know, um, that **6 GG** the end justifies the means” K1^{(2)(E)}

Here, K1 use both rationalizations and *glittering generalities* when talking about the motives for engaging in violence. The rationalization (a somewhat sweeping statement using vague, or elusive, language to explain or justify questionable acts) is used when describing the goal, as well as the means (“the end”, “method”). *Glittering generalities*, in the form of positive abstractions (“rebuild”) are used to justify the goal and the means. These tend to be

more emotive than rationalizations, allowing the listener to make associations between terms, without having to explain them. When combined, these techniques allowed for the protagonists' own behavior to be diluted. Similarly, in the narrative *Something Bad Is Going To Happen*, Q21⁽²⁾ uses a *glittering generality* with *plain folks play* in the *Resolution*.

9“if we don’t **GG** fight for **PF** our race like you’re saying, **8 OTHER** nobody will and **10 TN** the white race will die” Q21^{(2)(R)}

The use of the term “fight for our race” invokes positive, virtue connotations signaling a *glittering generality*. *Plain folks play*, implying that certain actions are for the good of others, is evident in the use of “our race”.

Blame. Here, Q21 also uses a technique called *pinpointing the enemy*. This technique attributes an excessive amount of blame to a particular target or antagonist). Q21 uses this technique at the end of the sentence when it is suggested that, first, nobody will protect the white race (pinpointing the government) and that “the white race will die” (pinpointing non-white people). Similarly, in the narrative *This Is What Happens In War*, I3⁽²⁾ pinpoints the enemy, whilst using *plain folks play*:

“I was determined at an early stage that **MD 8** there was nothing that the British could do to deter me and **PF 9** people like me” I3^{(2)(R)}

By implying that “there was nothing that the British could do”, I3 attributes blame to the target, removing the narrator’s culpability in the situation. Conversely, through the use of the phrase “people like me”, I3 suggests that the narrator’s feelings and motivations are shared. These techniques, together, signal a *Manifest Destiny*, depicting the protagonist as blamelessness.

Indefensible positions. Other frequently occurring techniques included the use of incredible truths; somewhat farfetched positions attributed to the target, intended to damage their character or credibility as a form of *transfer negative*. In the narrative *Our Community Needed Us*, I1⁽¹⁾, used a form of *transfer negative* called an incredible truth to justify the use of violent, rather than peaceful means

3 “my logic was, PF the [expletive] are you protesting about, 10 MD they’re going to shoot you dead protesting” I1^{(1)(CA)}

Here, because the accusation is rooted in truth²¹ (“they’re going to shoot you dead protesting”), I1 attributes an indefensible position to the target, whilst using elements of *plain folks play* to suggest the peaceful means would, in fact, be harmful for the community.

Similarly, in the narrative *We Have No Choice, Something Bad Is Going To Happen*, Q22⁽²⁾ uses both incredible truths and *plain folks play* to justify violent means.

10 PF “They’re going to come and take my wife, my sisI... but, you know [pause] and so... that’s what perpetuates and keeps the fear going” Q22^{(2)(O)}

Again, the accusation (accusing Black people in Canada of being dangerous) removes the credibility of the adversarial group; meanwhile, through introducing *plain folks play* in the use of familial terms such as “my wife” and “my sister”, the motives of the protagonist are somewhat diluted.

Polarizing extremes. Another technique that occurred somewhat frequently was simplifications; a summary, negative response that reduces complex phenomena to polarizing

²¹ In the late 1960s, when Catholics in Northern Ireland began to protest for equal rights, marches often turned violent due to excessive reactions from the police force (comprised almost entirely of adversarial, Loyalists) leading to the emergence of militant groups on both sides (see Mac Ginty, Muldoon, & Ferguson, 2007).

extremes. For example, in the narrative *We Will Not Be Silenced*, Q23⁽²⁾ uses simplification alongside pinpointing the enemy to defend the Neo Nazi movement:

“we believe PF ours is a 13 TP religion too, you know. And it’s, it’s just how we believed and, though our beliefs are wrong, PF 8 we get in trouble for it so there’s, you know, 16 GGit’s not right” Q23⁽²⁾⁽⁰⁾

By using terms such as “wrong”, and “right” to describe the beliefs of the organization, Q23 creates a simplified worldview in which facts are reduced to ‘black and white’ logic. The use of *plain folks play* through “ours is a religion” (this is also an example of *symbolism*, whereby the “good” of one thing transfers to another) and “we get in trouble” allows for the creation of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Together, these techniques allow for the creation of a dichotomous worldview in which the antagonist is the persecutor, and the protagonist is misunderstood.

6.6 Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore how narratives that justify violent extremism and terrorism are constructed across different contexts, including Right-Wing, Islamic and separatist violence. This involved in-depth analysis of interviews with former members of Al Qaeda, the IRA, the Mujahideen, Neo-Nazi and skinhead movements, and the UVF.

6.6.1 Summary of findings.

The first research question that guided this study asked, “How do former perpetrators of violent extremism construct narratives of their experience in the context of terrorism? Guided by Labovian Syntax, 32 individual narratives were identified to form 6 template narratives of violence perpetration. These narratives were constructed in a variety of ways.

In order to set the scene for violent action, the orienting details of the narratives clearly identified the other characters, and antagonists of interest. These were typically

depicted as un-complex characters. For example, third-party characters were typically depicted as passive (Narrative 1), ill-equipped or flawed (Narrative 2), or ignorant (Narrative 3). The antagonists were depicted similarly; hateful (Narrative 1), vicious (Narrative 2 and 4), imminently threatening (Narrative 5 and 6), and largely true to form, based on existing prejudices (Narrative 3). In terms of the *actions* of the antagonists in these narratives, these were depicted to portray the protagonists' actions as exclusively *reactionary*. In the *Complicating Actions* of participants' narratives, the antagonist is described as acting unprompted without warning. Therefore, in the *Resolution*, the protagonists' response(s) appear moral (Narrative 1 and 6), necessary (Narrative 2, 3 and 5), and worthy of merit (Narrative 4). The use of propaganda techniques to justify these actions were largely in these sections; the *Orientation*, the *Complicating Actions*, and the *Resolution*.

Depicting the protagonists' violence as reactionary is assisted by the use of a variety of techniques. Techniques such as *pinpointing the enemy* orient the listener to the antagonist, implying that they seek destruction. Other techniques to achieve this include the presentation of indefensible positions (transfer negative), suggesting that the antagonist is unyielding and will "shoot you dead" in the absence of an equally violent response. Not only does this place an excessive amount of blame on the antagonist, but it also removes culpability from the protagonist. Later on, when using phrases such as "fight for our race" and "rebuild the world", the protagonists then use *glittering generalities* to invoke positive, virtue connotations, thus diluting their own undesirable actions. Ultimately, what these techniques serve to do is exacerbate the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' constructed in the narratives, and simplify complex phenomena to polarising extremes. Two points of discussion in relation to these findings will be presented in the sections to follow: the complexity of the protagonist compared to the antagonist, and the quasi-rationality of the narrative itself.

6.6.2 The antagonist: *Un-complex and dichotomous*.

Narratives contain three types of actors: the protagonist, the antagonist and third-party witnesses (Labov, 2010, p. 548). In narratives of personal experience, Labov (2001) suggests that the protagonist is often depicted as the *most* complex. Indeed, the role of the protagonist often demands such complexity, as the protagonist strives to conform to moral standards (in a complex weave of actions and intentions), whilst it is the antagonist's role to thwart these attempts, with little concern for why or how (Monrouxe, 2013, p. 117). In the current study, whether the antagonists were figures of authority (V1; Q23), the government (K1; I1; I2; I3), Jews (Q22), or a combination of several actors (Q21; Q23; K2), the participants would present themselves, (i.e. the protagonist in the story), as multi-faceted, and with a variety of motivations. The antagonists, on the other hand, were portrayed in dichotomous, black or white terms. In fact, even third-party witnesses such as fellow citizens (K2), parents (I1; K1), and peers (Q23; I3) were simplified; described as ignorant, unenlightened, and even cowardly. It is within this paradigm, the complex protagonist and the un-complex antagonist, that the use of flawed logic in the form of propaganda techniques was most abundant.

As discussed in Chapter 2, propaganda techniques are manifestations of one-sided logic. They contain fallacies (such as *The Bandwagon Effect*, see Nadeau, Cloutier and Guay, 1993) or 'failed' logic that result in an "incorrect argument" (Walton, 1980, p. 264). For example, the causal or 'post hoc ergo propter hoc' fallacy (Woods & Walton, 1977) results from misplacement of the necessary conditions for causality (Neuman, 2003), presuming that because B comes after A, B comes *because of* A. People use fallacies every day, for different reasons, usually without malice (Kahneman, 2011). However, regardless of the context, in order to use this reasoning, one must rely on information that are not dependent on "issue-relevant thinking" (O'Keefe, 2013, p. 137) but, instead, on cues that activate *heuristics*; simplifying decision-making principles which were introduced in Chapter 2 (see Section

2.1.1). The reasoning is, therefore, derived from intuitive, rather than contemplative, processes (Allen, Preiss, & Gayle, 2006), as illustrated in models such as the Heuristic-Systematic Model (Chaiken 1980) and the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo; 1981 1986). Reliance on heuristics through this route can occur for a number of reasons. The individual may not find information particularly relevant or interesting (“involvement”, see Petty & Cacioppo, 1984), they may have different cognitive tendencies (e.g. ‘need for cognition’, see Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Cacioppo, Petty, Kao, & Rodriguez, 1986) or, perhaps, the task may be overly complex. It has been suggested that ill-structured tasks, for example, are more likely to spur this ‘system one’ processing (Cader, Campbell, & Watson, 2005; Dunwoody et al., 2000; Hammond, 2000), likely due to the difficulty of applying ‘methods’ to something ‘unmethodical’. Kahneman and colleagues (2000; 2002) observed that when in scenarios where there was no objective ‘answer’ within the exposure, even intelligent individuals were more likely to agree with a “plausible error”, that appeared *causal* (p. 68). Indeed, when describing the narrative from a sociolinguistic perspective, Labov described one of the main functions *of* the narrative as forming the narrator’s “theory of causality” (Labov, 2003, p. 67).

The function of this paradigm to infer causality has been explored in experimental settings. Strange and Leung (1999) found that when experimenting with narratives on complex, social issues, such as young people dropping out of school, the use of narratives influenced participants “causal reasoning”, by cueing the retrieval of “story-congruent instances” (p. 444), depending on the story they read. When the information provided in the narrative was situational (“inadequate funding, undertrained and disillusioned teachers”, p. 439), the cause of the problem was described as societal; when the narrative contained dispositional information (“emotional and motivational issues often associated with adolescence”, p. 439), the young people themselves were identified as causal to the issue. In other words, the nature of the narrative, and the structure of protagonists and antagonists,

allows for causality to be easily inferred. Indeed, this traces back to the definition of narrative presented in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3).

In this study, interviewees provided their reasons for engaging in violence on behalf of terrorist organisations in narrative format (as was the premise of the study). Through the use of heuristics, several instances of propaganda techniques were identified, alluding to the causes of various events within the story. What is clear from previous research, as well as the content of the narratives identified here, is that narratives are particularly conducive to causal fallacies. Furthermore, in the context of conflicting, political ideas about action, and inaction, it is not surprising that interviewees relied on heuristics to infer causality, and attribute blame. The environments from which their narratives emerged were incredibly complex, and certainly ill-structured. .

6.6.3 The quasi-rational narrative.

However, it was also noted that participants engaged in heuristic-based processing, largely, when speaking about orienting details, *Complicating Actions* and ultimate *Resolutions* (see *Table 11*). When reflecting on events from the perspective of the present (i.e. the *Evaluation* sections), flawed logic was less frequent. In fact, the logic of many of these sections was quite strong, logical and analytical. Indeed, in their model of the decision-making processes employed organisations such as Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah, Chatagnier, Mintz & Sambad (2012) also noted that the decision-making strategies were oftentimes careful and systematic, revealing a “sensitivity” (p. 136) to different challenges, and an understanding of current events. In many ways, the logic that emerged from the narratives in this study reflected a type of *quasi-rationality*; a form of information processing that induces a range of processing systems on a continuum, ranging from intuition to analysis (Cader, Campbell, & Watson, 2005; Dunwoody et al., 2000; Dwyer, 2017; Hamm, 1988; Hammond, 1981).

Although the research on quasi-rationality in the context of terrorist narratives is limited, research on terrorist organisations use of propaganda in general have observed similar findings. In an analysis of defensive propaganda from two IRA publications, ‘An Phoblacht’ (‘Republican News’), and ‘The Andersonstown News’, Sarma (2007) commented that the campaigns made use of both rational and irrational messages, to justify certain actions. The use of quasi-rational messages (which made use of both empirical, and emotive arguments) were particularly pertinent in the justification of specific acts of violence, such as defensive smear campaigns against two IRA members before they were eventually executed (p. 1082). In the specific context, of narratives, there is empirical evidence supporting this idea, that human beings’ construction of narrative-related information may be controlled through both intuitive and rational processing systems. This is the premise of *Cognitive Continuum Theory* (Dunwoody, Haarbauer, Mahan, Marino, & Tang, 2000); a theory of judgement that posits that different qualities of a task can induce a spectrum of cognitive modes, ranging from intuition (i.e. heuristics) to analysis (i.e. critical reflection).

Nazione (2016) measured the effects of different types of narratives on the production of systematic versus heuristic-based thoughts and found that, not only did participants tend to produce both, but, across third-person and even first-person narratives, participants produced significantly more systematic than heuristic thoughts. This suggests that narratives do not ‘stunt’ rational thinking. In a study measuring the effects of an emotional film, Das, Nobbe, & Oliver (2017) manipulated the processing system by increasing cognitive load (i.e. task difficulty). The study hypothesised that manipulating cognitive load for those watching the “moving” film would not affect transportation into the film, as cognitive load was concerned with the central, rather than peripheral route to persuasion. However, the findings indicated that increasing cognitive load reduced transportation, hindering the overall processing of the narrative. In other words, the participants required both their “rational” and “irrational”

cognitive capacities to process the narrative fully (Das, Vonkeman, & Hartmann, 2012).

In this study, whilst the content analysis of propaganda techniques provided insight into the use of heuristic cues to attribute blame, and infer causality, the narratives themselves were not fallacious. They reflected a type of quasi-rationality, in which systematic inferences were interweaved with flawed logic to present a semi-rational, semi-irrational stories that legitimised violence.

6.7 Limitations

There are a number of limitations to be noted in the current research. First, inter-rater reliability (IRR) analyses were not conducted on the coded data. Although striving for objectivity and reliability in constructionist research of this nature (i.e. narrative or discourse analysis) has, itself, been criticised (Hammer & Berland, 2014), the use of a second coder would likely have improved the consistency of the content analysis (i.e. the coding of propaganda techniques). To counteract this, efforts were made to, instead, strive for “rigour” (Guba & Lincoln, 1986), and identify any bias and subjectivity by means of the researcher reflection (this is presented in Chapter 8, Section 8.2).

Another limitation in the study arises from the fact that individuals naturally draw upon narratives using a great deal of retrospect, to the point of them narrating a rehearsed version of events. For example, participants may reflect upon past decisions from the perspective of the *present*, weaving their past experiences into a narrative of a ‘novelty’ whereby ‘looking back’, their actions seemed more justified. For example, V1 spoke about his Father being killed by the IRA and K2 spoke about, at the age of eleven, being beaten up by skinheads on his way home from school and these pivotal moments formed their rationale for seeking revenge. However, these events, now remembered with retrospect, may not reflect the individuals’ decisions to use violence *ex tempore*. Building upon this point, it is anecdotally noted in the field of terrorism research that many ‘formers’ are acquainted and, as

such, share their narratives of personal experience with each other to the point that they've become 'cross-contaminated'. These limitations (the *ex tempore* nature of narrativization as well as the cross-contamination of individual narratives) are, in practice, difficult to overcome.

However, Structural Narrative Analysis does offer a mechanism for overcoming these tendencies, particularly through the use of circulation ("Who would you like to hear/not hear your reasoning?"), connection ("Who does this reasoning connect you to?") and function questions ("How is this story helpful / dangerous?"). As pointed out by Dolnik (2013), "gaining control over the interview process is crucial to avoid walking away from field interviews with only what the terrorist wants to project" (p. 47). Many individuals who choose to talk about their experiences with terrorism have likely exhibit certain practice effects. However, by introducing novelty through the use of interview templates, such as those offered in Structural Narrative Analysis, there is a great deal of potential for original, thoughtful content from interviewees.

6.8 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to explore the narratives used to justify violence amongst former perpetrators of violent extremism in terrorist organisations. Guided by Labovian Syntax (1972; 2003), the central objective of this study is identify how individual-level and broader, template narratives of perpetration are constructed. From here, content analysis was used to identify the nature of the content, and determine if intuitive information processing was used to misrepresent the perceived instrumentality of violent, rather than non-violent, means. Six, broad template narratives were identified across ten interviews. These narratives used a variety of techniques to justify violence, largely in the *Orientation(s)*, *Complicating Action(s)*, and *Resolution(s)* of narratives. However, the narratives also reflected a great deal of rational logic. In this way, the use of narratives to justify violence

reflected a quasi-rationality, in which the protagonist was portrayed with a great deal of complexity, whilst the antagonist was reduced to levels of dichotomy, and fallacious logic.

Chapter 7

Study 3. Countering terrorist narratives: Assessing the efficacy and mechanisms of change in counter-narrative interventions.

Abstract

This chapter presents the final study in this thesis. Considering some of the theoretical and methodological challenges relating to counter-narrative design and evaluation identified in Study 1, Study 3 sought to test a number of hypothesised processes implicated in the prevention of violent radicalisation through counter-narratives. In many ways, the central aim of the study was to begin a phase of theory-building, exploring novel ways of experimentally testing counter-narratives in the laboratory. By, first, identifying how the ‘effectiveness’ of a counter-narrative campaign could be measured, two strategies were evaluated against terrorist rhetoric. Considering the role of cognition in the processing of narrative-related information, participants’ ($n = 150$) cognitive reflection and need for cognition were measured, before they were randomly assigned to a narrative that legitimised terrorist violence, one of two counter-narratives, or a control. Returning autonomy to the target by having them actively counter the terrorist rhetoric themselves was found to be more effective than offering generic, counter-narratives. Whilst considering the challenges and limitations associated with measuring violent radicalisation-related constructs, the findings of the experiment demonstrate the extent to which individuals vary in their susceptibility to violent, terrorist narratives, as well as attempts to counter them.

7.1 Introduction

As the findings from Study 2 have shown, narratives that justify terrorist violence are fundamentally complex. Rather than resulting from failed logic, it is more likely that they reflect a type of *quasi*-rationality. Whilst certain narrative components may, indeed, be bolstered by intuitive elements (i.e. propaganda techniques directed towards the antagonist(s)), these elements do not *dominate* the overall story. Whilst this, no doubt, sheds light on the process(es) implicated during violent radicalisation through narrative persuasion, the question nonetheless remains, how can this complexity be channelled into evidence-based solutions?

7.1.1 The value of experimental research in terrorism.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in researching *any* terrorism-related phenomena, one finds that the field is overwhelmingly dominated by qualitative or quasi-experimental methodologies (Neumann et al., 2013; Silke, 2008). This is not necessarily a sweeping critique but, rather, an indication of where the field ought to direct more substantial efforts. Whilst qualitative and quasi-experimental methodologies can offer initial, exploratory insight into complex, terrorism-related phenomena (without excessive concern for reliability or validity), an overreliance ultimately impedes progression *away* from exploratory and descriptive phases, towards an explanatory position (see Robson, 2002). In other words, it can lead to a state of “stagnation” (Sageman, 2014), mid-“leap” between both phases (Silke, 2001, p. 2). In order to bridge this gap, efforts must be pointed towards *theory-building*.

Theory-building and problem-solving are accompanying pursuits (Argyris, Putman & McLain, 1985); one must apply one to build the other. Experimentation offers an opportunity to do this through *theory-testing*. Distinct from other types of empirical work (e.g. cohort²² or

²² Cohort studies identify the population of interest from past records, and retrospectively follow them to the present.

cross-sectional²³ studies), studies employing experimental designs are equipped to maintain a high level of control over possible confounding (i.e. extraneous) variables in an artificial setting. This in turn allows for key theoretical components to be elucidated and evaluated, whilst also creating the necessary conditions for replication (Arce, Croson, & Eckel, 2011, p. 374). In this way, the causal connections between the independent and dependent variables can be established (Kirk, 2012, p. 24), allowing for explanatory models to be devised. In many ways, laboratory-based experimentation is the next, logical step in the study of violent radicalisation process(es). However, whilst experimental designs are well-established in the social sciences more broadly (Breakwell, Hammond, Fife-Schaw, 2000), the approach is somewhat novel in this area, and presents new and unique challenges.

7.1.1.1 Challenges of conducting experimental research in terrorism.

This section is an expansion of the discussion on methodological and conceptual challenges offered in Section 4.2.

External validity. When studying violent radicalisation in an experimental setting, it is an unavoidable critique that any such findings will reflect poor external validity. The external validity of a study refers to the extent to which its findings persist outside the experimental setting (see Berkowitz, & Donnerstein, 1982; Levitt & List, 2007). Experiments with poor external validity can be said to bear little relationship between variables manipulated in the laboratory, and the way individuals would respond in the “real world” (Kreps & Roblin, 2019, p. 591). The context of terrorism, for example, lends itself to several, *response biases* whereby participants’ perceptions of what is socially acceptable may influence their response to certain stimuli (i.e. social desirability bias, Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954), such as agreement with terrorist statements or videos (see Banas, 2017; Abdollahi, Henthorn, &

²³ Cross-sectional studies show the prevalence of phenomena in the population of interest at a particular time.

Pyszczynski, 2010; Frischlich et al., 2018). However, whilst the critique of ecological validity is not unfounded, it must be considered in light of the value of the research to theory.

Camerer (2011) argues that the appropriateness laboratory-based experiments (i.e. poorer external validity) relates to the purpose of the research. If the field is in a phase of *theory-testing*, the precondition of external validity must be weighed against this positioning. Whilst the generalizability of findings is paramount in research designed to *directly* inform policy (Kessler et al., 2015), in an area which is seeking to understand general principles, laboratory experiments with strong *internal* validity, can offer a unique opportunity to advance the field (Schram, 2005).

Reliability of measures. However, whilst such experiments allow for tightly controlled environments, there nonetheless exists the additional challenge of reliability in terms of *measurement*. As noted by Drucker (1974), predicting and manipulating variables is best achieved when you can quantify how much or how little of it exists. Whilst measures of several cognitive (e.g. ‘aptitude’; Roberts, Markham, Matthews, & Zeidner, 2005), emotional (e.g. ‘emotional regulation’; Garnefski & Kraaij, 2007) and behavioural phenomena (e.g. ‘social anxiety’; Cuming, Rapee, Kemp, Abbott, Peters, & Gaston, 2009) have been honed and available for decades, this is not the case for violent radicalisation.

With self-report measures largely dominating the field, this elusive outcome is generally gauged by means of attitudinal indicators. These include measures of national identification (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011), support or sympathy for ideological extremism (Bhui et al., 2014; Webber et al., 2017), death anxiety (Orehek, Sasota, Kruglanski, Dechesne, & Ridgeway, 2014), willingness to become a martyr (Bélanger et al., 2012; Orehek et al., 2011; Pyszczynski et al., 2006), and other, group-related outcomes such as willingness to offer financial support to (Swan et al., 2010), or fight / use violence on behalf of, a terrorist organisation (Kruglanski, Gelfand, & Gunaratna, 2012; Moskalkenko, &

McCauley, 2009). Indeed, the *primary* and *secondary* outcomes detailed in Chapter 5 as part of the systematic review (Section 5.4.1) allude to the breadth and variability of measures when it comes to quantifying violent radicalisation, ranging from risk factors such as perceived group threat (Doosje et al., 2013; Riles et al., 2018) to “harmful end objectives” (Powis et al. 2019, p. 15) such as support for violent extremism or military action abroad (Frischlich et al., 2018; Saleem et al., 2015).

In the absence of valid, standardised measures of violent radicalisation into terrorism (Romaniuk, & Fink, 2012), a major challenge facing experimenters is that of garnering sufficient construct validity to ensure the measure used is, indeed, conceptually mapping onto the intended phenomenon (Clark & Watson, 1995).. A comparable challenge exists with other ambiguous terms, including “wellbeing” (Dodge et al., 2012), “mindfulness” (Desbordes et al., 2015), and “trauma” (Weathers & Keane, 2007). A means of overcoming this is to strive towards theoretically-informed measures, testing aspects of construct validity and replicating these measures across different experimental settings.

Whilst these challenges are no doubt reflected in the dearth of laboratory-based experiments in the field of terrorism research (Schuurman, 2018), Braddock (2019) notes that these methodological challenges can gradually be overcome and should not inhibit efforts to conduct meaningful experimental studies on the phenomenon of terrorism (p. 4). Indeed, there have been some note-worthy experiments which have excelled in this task and, in turn informed a number of explanatory models.

7.1.2 Laboratory-based experiments.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Kruglanski and colleagues’ *Significance Quest Theory* (2013) has been supported by several laboratory-based experiments. By, first, manipulating participants’ motivational imbalance (Webber et al., 2018a) and social rejection (Dugas et al., 2016, Studies 2-5), participants’ increasing propensity towards radicalisation (as measured by

agreement with extremist statements and willingness to self-sacrifice) have been explored in the laboratory. Other theoretical perspectives on violent radicalisation have also been empirically tested in this way, including *Terror Management Theory* (Pyszczynski, Rothschild, & Abdollahi, 2008) and *Moral Disengagement Theory* (McAlister, Bandura, & Owen, 2006). In terms of violent radicalisation through narratives, Green and Brock (2000), in their *Transportation-Imaginary Model*, have conducted extensive laboratory based experiments. By measuring participants' levels of absorption or "transportation" (p. 701) into a narrative, they demonstrated a positive relationship between these constructs and participants' reporting of story-consistent beliefs. This has largely bolstered their theory of narrative persuasion as a product of diminished resistance.

Indeed, the study of violent radicalisation seems to be moving towards explanatory and predictive models of understanding, and this evidence (as well as informing efforts to prevent it) demonstrates that laboratory based experimentation is both feasible and crucial. The following sections will set the scene for the current experiment by, first summarising existing knowledge on the process of violent radicalisation (specifically through narratives, as introduced in Chapter 1), before offering two, theoretical frameworks that can be used to inform counter-narratives.

7.1.3 Constructing and evaluating counter-narratives.

Violent radicalisation through narratives.

Drawing together the core concepts informing the previous chapters, it becomes clear that violent radicalisation can be understood as a cognitive shift; a process of means-goal re-alignment in which the presentation of a narrative can manipulate an individual's perception(s). Namely, the narrative plays the perception that violent (as opposed to non-violent) means are somehow instrumental to the attainment of certain goals. The more vehemently the individual resorts to violent (or *counterfinal*) means determines the "degree"

of the radicalisation process (p. 80). This is the basic premise of violent radicalisation as a process emerging from narrative persuasion.

As observed in Study 2, and informed by *Cognitive Continuum Theory* (Dunwoody et al., 2000), these narratives can be comprised of both rational, and irrational, content. The rational content may include geo-political facts or unbiased information which are not intended to manipulate audiences. The irrational content, however, can be said to induce sub-standard information processing, producing errors in judgement which result from the misplacement of the necessary conditions for causality (Kahneman, 2011; Neuman, 2003). This has been observed in Study 2 by the use of propaganda techniques to, amongst other objectives, place excessive blame on the antagonists' behaviour and create dichotomous, polarising extremes from which to simplify complex phenomena. In other words, the narrative is quasi-rational.

If done well, the exact point of transition from rational to irrational will be unclear, allowing for causality to be inferred (Lamb, 2013). In this way, by inducing quasi-rational processing, the narrative is rendered more persuasive than other forms of persuasive communication (as shown by Braddock et al. 2016; Das et al. 2012; 2017). This is the premise of narrative persuasion, and the theoretical underpinning informing terrorists' effective use of violence legitimising narratives. As such, any strategy to counter these narratives must consider this complexity in its design.

Strategy 1; Plausible, causal alternative(s).

In theoretical conceptions of counter-narratives, it has been suggested that terrorism-specific strategies should place the majority of their emphasis on the 'countering' aspect (Ramsey, 2012). This has also been signalled by practitioners in the field (The Quilliam Foundation, 2014) and has demonstrated some effectiveness in the experimental studies synthesised in Study 1 (Chapter 5); in particular, the use of alternative accounts saw success

at targeting a number of risk factors for violent radicalisation, such as realistic group threat and out-group hostility (Bruneau et al. 2017; Garagozov, 2013). The first counter-narrative strategy, therefore, sought to incorporate this technique into a form of counter-arguing. By challenging only the irrational elements of the narrative, the intention was to legitimise its rational aspects.

However, as highlighted by Johnson & Seifert (1994) in their studies correcting disinformation, simply correcting false information is not always enough to reduce its effectiveness (as synthesised in Study 1, for example, Frischlich et al. (2018) found that exposure to a counter-narrative after exposure to violent extremist propaganda *increased* agreement with violent extremist statements, see Figure 3, p. 67). To avoid any such unintended effects, Schwarz, Sanna, Skurnik, & Yoon (2007) suggest that, if one is presenting the ‘opposite’ or offering the question, “have you considered [alternative view]?”, it will be more successful if generating alternatives is perceived as “easy” (p. 131), as the target is less likely to experience resistance to the correction (Brehm, 1966, see Section 2.1.2 for discussion on resistance in the context of persuasion). In other words, the plausible alternative must appear equally as causal as the fallacy. Therefore, the first strategy highlighted the error in logic only during the *fallacious* elements, whilst also providing a plausible, causal alternative to the use of violence in the narrative.

Strategy 2; Inoculation and self-persuasion.

As an “inherently defensive” strategy, the counter-narrative is particularly susceptible to resistant responses arising from distrust or inertia. The second strategy considered ways of manoeuvring these resistant responses, taking a different theoretical focus. According to *Inoculation Theory* (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961; McGuire 1962) individuals can be protected against persuasive appeals through “explicit forewarning” (Compton, 2013, p. 221) of the appeal which prompts the development of counter-arguments

(see Banas et al., 2010 for extensive review). Meta-analytic evidence from Study 1 showed how warning participants that a persuasive appeal was impending, before offering some prospective counter-arguments (“refutation” see McGuire et al., 1961, p. 329) reduced the effectiveness of anti-government, conspiratorial propaganda (see Banas et al., 2017).

Whilst explicit forewarning may not be feasible in violent radicalisation prevention, channelling the mechanics of inoculation into a preventative strategy by having individuals create their *own* counter-narrative is reasonable. This approach is also supported by research on cognitive dissonance reduction as a means of self-persuasion (see Aronson, 1999; Cialdini, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1981; Zimbardo, 1965). Informed by these perspectives, the second approach sought to prime participants to counter a dominant narrative themselves. Whilst they were not explicitly told that a persuasive appeal was impending (this is termed “*explicit* forewarning”; see McGuire, 1964), they were told that they would be required to argue against the instrumentality of violence (thus, reflecting, the extent of radicalisation, see Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 80) in the narrative. By allowing participants to feel that the arguments they created against the use of violence were their own (Wilson, 1990, p. 45), the likelihood of them experiencing resistance to it *being countered* would be reduced.

The role of cognition.

This section has, thus far, provided the theoretical premise of violent radicalisation through narratives, as well as different frameworks that can be used to counter them. Although these frameworks differ (quasi-rationality, alternative accounts, and inoculation), the constructs are nonetheless rooted in a simple concept; resistance. All three strategies are designed to increase or decrease participants’ resistance to one, or the other. This is, at its core, a cognitive process. Earlier in Chapter 1, in describing those who prescribe to an extremist belief system, the term “cognitive closure” was introduced. Namely, it was noted that a trait of such individuals was a desire to avoid “confusion and ambiguity” (Webster et

al., 1994, p. 1049), thus, exhibiting poor “cognitive complexity” (the ability to consider all, relevant perspectives on an issue, see Van Hiel et al., 2003, p. 781). Expanding upon this idea, these traits may impact upon the effectiveness of counter-narratives, particularly in terms of *critical thinking skill and disposition*.

Critical thinking refers to an individual’s ability to analyse arguments and determine, in a goal-oriented fashion, which do, and do not, have merit (Ennis, 1993; Loes & Pascarella, 2017; Ruggiero, 2012). Critical thinking *skill* refers exclusively to one’s ability to do this. In the context of radicalisation, Orehek, Mauro, Kruglanski, and van der Bles (2012) found that participants who perceived unifinal means (i.e. means are ones that are instrumental to only one goal) as instrumental to their goals (a component of radicalisation) had a desire for speed and fluidity in terms of goal-attainment, but were not very skilled at critically evaluating information. Critical thinking *motivation*, or one’s attitudes towards the exercise of thinking, has also been found to influence perceptions, and may be of relevance to counter-narratives in this context; Haugtvedt & Petty (1992), for example, found that individuals with high motivation were resistant to hearing a counter-message following a persuasive one. As such, it is beyond speculative that these constructs would have some bearing on the process(es) underpinning violent radicalisation through dominant terrorist rhetoric, as well as both proposed strategies to counter it.

7.1.4 The current study.

Informed by the theoretical strategies outlined above, the current study was a laboratory-based experiment which re-constructed events in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Within this theme, two counter-narrative strategies were tested on a dominant, terrorist narrative. To do this, a neutral, *rational* narrative was first created. This detailed the conflict, as well as key protagonists (this narrative was constructed according to

Labovian Syntax (1972; 2003), see Section 2.5.1). This narrative served as the control ('Neutral Narrative' condition or 'NN').

Next, the terrorist narrative 'to-be-counterred' was designed. The Neutral Narrative (NN) was overlaid with three, *irrational* aspects which justified the actions of Hamas²⁴ ('violent justifications' or VJ). This rendered the narrative *quasi*-rational and created the second condition ('Violent Narrative' condition or 'ViolentN'). The VJ claimed that by choosing *not* to engage in violence, various, worse things to happen (such as the protagonists' race becoming extinct, or prolonged persecution by the antagonist, i.e. a causal fallacy). This argument logic is sometimes termed a 'Slippery Slope Argument' (Corner, Hahn, & Oaksford, 2011)²⁵ and is observed in the use of *glittering generalities* and *plain folks play* identified in Study 2. During such an argument, a series of "gradual steps" brings the argument from an ordinary, acceptable idea (such as non-violence or peaceful protest) to an unacceptable idea (such as extinction). In this way, the ViolentN narrative shared a similar sentiment and structure to two of the template narratives identified in Study 2: Narrative 1 ('I'm not going to stand by and do nothing') and Narrative 5 ('Something bad is going to happen').

The final two conditions introduced two strategies to directly counter the ViolentN. The first strategy introduced plausible, causal alternatives to the VJ, by depicting non-violent means (i.e. peaceful protest) as *equally instrumental* to the goals of the organisation. This condition was labelled the 'Generic Counter-Narrative' or 'GenCN'. Conversely, the second counter-narrative strategy primed participants to find this alternative *themselves* by

²⁴ A Palestinian resistance organisation responsible for numerous terrorist attacks on civilians and armed forces in Israel and the occupied territories.

²⁵ Examples of such arguments were apparent in many of the narratives identified in Study 2. For example, in Narrative 1 ("Colonialism is wrong and, if they're not going to give reform then you have to go for revolution", I1⁽²⁾) and Narrative 5 ("they're going to make the white race extinct in the world and it's gonna all become brown people. We're all going to become brown" Q22⁽²⁾).

encouraging the creation of counter-arguments. This condition was labelled the ‘Tailored Counter-Narrative’ or ‘TailCN’ condition. Finally, to explore differences in response to these narratives and counter-narratives, participants’ skill and motivation in relation to critical thinking were also explored.

7.2 Objectives

Cognisant of the methodological challenges associated with laboratory-based experiments in the area of radicalisation (particularly in relation to outcome measurement and validity) the current research did not place strict emphasis on ambitious, overall predictions. As discussed, research of this nature is in a phase of theory-building, wherein experimental approaches are still being honed. Therefore, the objective of the study was to set a precedent for laboratory-based, experimental research in this area, demonstrating the importance of reliability in terms of outcomes, and internal validity in terms of study design. Ultimately, this objective was concerned with learning lessons that could be translated into future research. With this overall objective in mind, the following study hypotheses were also explored:

H1. The first hypothesis predicted a main effect for condition, with post-hoc tests showing that participants in the ^{Violent}N condition have the highest risk of violent radicalisation, with lowest levels reported for participants in the tailored counter-narrative condition (^{Tail}CN), followed by the generic counter-narrative (^{Gen}CN) condition.

A neutral narrative condition (NN) was used as a comparator with no hypothesised effects.

H2. The second hypothesis predicted that scores on the Cognitive Reflection Test (CRT) and levels of Need for Cognition (NFC) would moderate these the effects of condition on the dependent variables. That is, individuals with higher scores on these scales would report the *lowest* risk of radicalisation when exposed to both the ^{Violent}N as well as the

counter-narratives (^{Tail}CN and ^{Gen}CN), with lower scorers displaying the *highest* risk of radicalisation in these conditions.

7.3 Method

7.3.1 Participants.

One hundred and fifty undergraduate psychology students from the National University of Ireland Galway participated in the study ($M_{age} = 21.4$ years, $SD = 5.4$ years). Ninety-eight of the participants were female (65%, $M_{age} = 20.5$ years, $SD = 2.43$ years) and 52 were male ($M_{age} = 23.1$ years, $SD = 8.3$ years). Participants received course credit for participation.

7.3.2 Materials.

Exposure.

The exposure material was a video, fabricated to appear as a Ted X talk presented at a University in Germany. Using documentary style clips and overlaid voices, the video appeared as a question-and-answer style snippet of the event (see Figure 19). The variations of the script used in each experimental condition is presented in Appendix 3.3.

The experimental conditions were as follows:

1. *Neutral Narrative (NN)*. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was depicted in narrative format, in a documentary-style video with a voice-over recounting key, political events in the region, as well as actions perpetrated by Hamas. The video was designed to be neutral, presenting an unbiased, rational description of the conflict. All four videos in the experiment were variations of this Neutral Narrative (NN).

2. *Violent Narrative* (*ViolentN*). In the Violent Narrative video, the NN was overlaid with three violence justifications (VJ) to justify Hamas' use of violence in the conflict. They were²⁶:

VJ 1. If Hamas don't go for violent revolution, the Israelis won't stop. They will completely and utterly suppress the movement, the existence and the independence of the Palestinian people.

VJ 2. If Hamas don't use violence, the Israelis will eventually take every inch of Palestinian land from the Palestinian people until it all becomes Israel.

VJ 3. If Hamas don't use violence against what Israel is trying to do, the Palestinian race will no longer exist. It will become extinct and there will no longer be any such thing as a 'Palestinian'.

3. *Generic Counter-Narrative* (*GenCN*). In the first *counter-narrative* video, the *ViolentN* video was simply overlaid with generic counter-narratives in the form of a questions from "members of the audience" (see Figure 19D, *overleaf*). These were designed to directly counter the VJ, arguing for the use of *non-violent* actions in the conflict. These arguments were designed to be perceived as equally as plausible as the VJ.

4. *Tailored Counter-Narrative* (*TailCN*). The second counter-narrative video required the participant to do more than simply sit back and watch. At the beginning of the *ViolentN* video, participants were told that, during the video, they would be asked to write down arguments "against the use of violence in the conflict" (forewarning). They were then prompted to write these arguments (counter-arguing) following each VJ (i.e. three times). See Appendix 3.4.

²⁶ Whilst the violent justifications may seem repetitive in this format, they were less discernible in the exposure as they were introduced sporadically throughout.



Figure A. Ted X promotional clip.



Figure B. Signalling a discussion on the conflict.



Figure C. The 'dubbed' speaker presents the narrative.



Figure D Audience members asking questions.



Figure E. Documentary-style clips.

Figure 19. Key elements of the exposure material, including the Ted X façade, signalling a presentation and discussion of the conflict (Figures A-B), the presenter (Figure C), an example of audience members asking questions (Figure E) and samples of documentary-style clips illustrated throughout (Figure E).

Measures

Moderators. As mentioned, there is evidence to suggest that critical thinking may interact with the processing of narrative-related information. As such, two constructs of related to critical thinking skill and disposition were measured: cognitive reflection and need for cognition. An adapted version of the *Cognitive Reflection Test* was used to measure cognitive reflection. Participants were presented with seven ‘brain-teasers’, including the three, original items (Frederick, 2005), and four addition items (Toplak et al., 2014). A total score was calculated from the amount of correct answers²⁷.

The Need for Cognition Scale (NFC; Cacioppo et al., 1982) was used to measure cognitive motivation. Participants responded to 18 self-report items on a 5-point Likert-scale. A total NFC score was calculated through the sum of scores, with higher numbers indicating higher need for cognition. The scale had good internal reliability ($\alpha = .86$).

Dependent variables. The outcome of interest in this study was the internalisation and prevalence of violence-legitimising norms (see Beir, 2016) as a predictor of violent radicalisation (characterised by the perceived instrumentality of violence, see Kruglanski et al., 2014). Although there exists a number of validated scales to measure constructs of violent radicalisation (e.g. Moskaleiko and McCauley’s (2009) ‘Activism and Radicalism Intention Scales’ (ARIS)), these scales are more trait-based, and can be difficult to apply to experiments with tailored exposure and fabricated elements. Furthermore, the risk of performance biases due to direct questioning increases the likelihood of ceiling effects. Therefore, drawing on a paradigm modified from Pyszczynski and colleagues (2006, p. 259), the outcome of interest was measured as follows:

²⁷ Due to the popularity of the measure, participants were also asked which (if any) of the items they had seen before. No practice effects were observed.

Participants read a fabricated statement released by the spokesperson for a (fictitious) University society (who openly legitimized Hamas' use of violence, see Appendix 3.4.1), before indicating on a 7-point Likert scale the extent to which they liked, respected and shared the opinion of the University society *and* the spokesperson (two subscales; 9 items). This was designed to measure the 'prevalence' of violence-legitimizing norms. Participants also rated the extent to which they a) agreed with the arguments put forth in the statement (2 items) and; b) had behavioural intentions of supporting the University society (2 items). Participants also rated the extent to which they a) agreed with the arguments put forth in the statement (2 items) and; b) had behavioural intentions of supporting the University society (2 items). These items were assessed in various measurement models before two, broad dependent variables were constructed based on their construct validity: *Argument Adoption* and *Group Support*. All items are presented in Appendix 3.4.2. The development of the measurement model(s), as well as their goodness-of-fit, is presented in the results section (Section 7.5.2).

7.3.3 Procedure.

Pilot.

To determine the effects of the manipulation, as well as the comprehensibility of the measures, a pilot study was initially conducted with sixty-five participants (78% female). A number of aspects were noted. The manipulation of condition(s) did not result in a wide distribution of scores, suggesting that the exposure was not performing as saliently as expected. The presentation of concurrent spoken–written information has been found to yield poorer learning benefits comparable to written-only information (Kalyuga, Chandler, & Sweller, 2004; Koroghlanian, 2000). Therefore, to render it more impactful, and ensure attentiveness, subtitles were removed, and the violent justifications were made longer and re-recorded. In terms of measurement, two manipulation checks were added to ensure the

violent justifications were salient enough. As they resulted in floor effects, items that asked participants what they thought “other people” would think were removed. Finally, in keeping with the paradigm constructed by Pyszczynski et al. (2006, p. 259), all reverse-scored items were removed, to avoid confusion.

Main experiment.

As detailed in *Figure 20*, the main experiment was conducted in two parts.

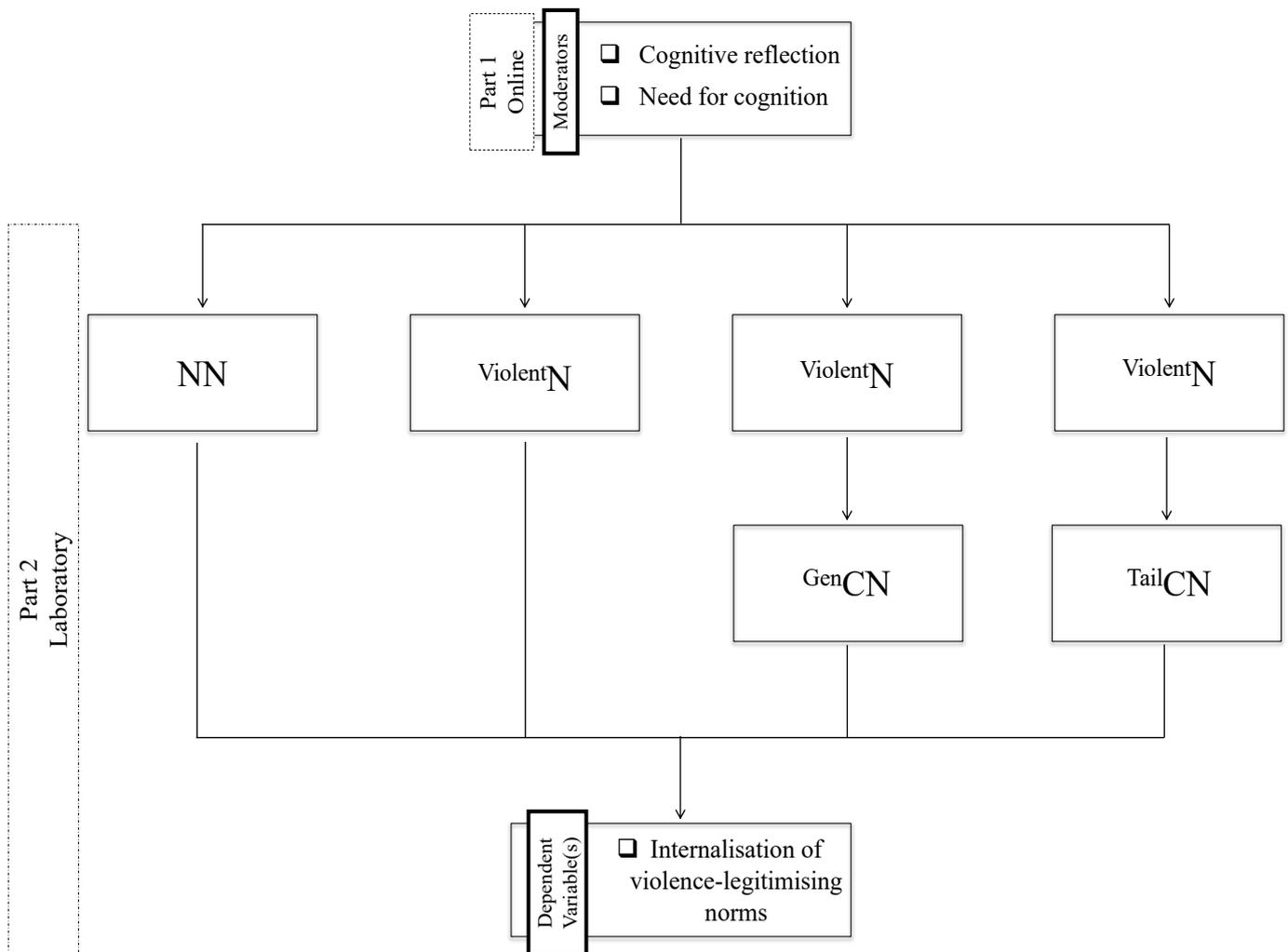


Figure 20. Study procedure.

Part 1 (Online). Privately, participants completed an online questionnaire which included a consent form, demographic measures (age, gender and nationality) as well as measures of their:

- (i) Cognitive reflection
- (ii) Need for cognition

Part 2 (Lab). 24 hours later, participants arrived at the lab where, after completing a short distraction task²⁸, they were randomly assigned to one of the four video conditions. Randomised treatment allocation (with equal probability) was computed via the “randomizr” package (v. 0.16.1; Coppock, 2018) for R (Team, 2013). Following exposure, the video directed participants to complete the dependent measures. Once completed, they notified the researcher, concluding the experiment.

7.4 Ethics

The study received ethical approval in December 2018 from the research ethics committee at the National University of Ireland, Galway (Appendix 3.1).

It was noted by both the ethics committee and the researcher that the exposure material used in the study had the potential to influence participants beyond the laboratory setting. For this reason, and in line with the British Psychological Society guidelines (2017) on the use of deception in experimental research, participants were contacted at the end of the study and assured that the nature of the video was fabricated. This was to avoid participants misidentifying the exposure as factual, and potentially allowing it to inform their understanding of a complex, geo-political conflict comprised of several perspectives. They were also offered the option of withdrawing consent given that deception was used. The debrief form is provided in Appendix 3.7.2.

²⁸ A wordsearch, see Appendix 3.7.1

7.5 Results

7.5.1 Statistical strategy.

Descriptive statistics were used to present the mean scores of the outcome(s) across the experimental and comparator conditions (see *Table 13, p. 166*) and the first hypothesis was tested using a MANOVA in the first instance, with post-hoc comparisons made using individual ANOVAs and *t*-tests. The magnitude of these differences was assessed by computing effect sizes (eta squared / η^2).

Relevant items on the Need for Cognition (NFC) scale were reverse scored and recoded according each tool's scoring instructions. Total scores for the NFC scale, the Cognitive Reflection Test and the dependent measures were computed. Cronbach's Alpha (α) and Omega (ω) coefficients were generated to evaluate the internal consistency of each measure. Due to its ability to incorporate latent variables, Structural Equation Modelling was deemed the most appropriate method to, first, construct measurement models of the dependent variables before observing exploratory models across conditions. Moderation analysis was performed using PROCESS (Hayes, 2017). All other analysis were performed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, IBM, 2016).

7.5.2 Development of the measurement model(s).

The development of the measurement models is detailed in *Table 12 (overleaf)*. Prior to analysis, the 9 'prevalence' items were assessed as a single measurement model. The single factor model indicated a less than acceptable model fit. The chi-square test was significant (142.92, $p = .00$) with TLI (0.72), IFI (0.80) and CFI (0.79) all below the acceptable threshold of 0.95, and a RMSEA value of 0.17 (i.e. not between 0.00 – 0.08). The factor loadings ranged between 0.33 and 1.12. Items 4 ("To what extent do you believe that [spokesperson]'s opinion is relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?") and 9 ("The opinions expressed by [spokesperson], and Free Palestine are relevant to this conflict") were

problematic as both were significantly negatively skewed (z-skewness = -4.17 and -3.91 respectively). In other words, participants tended to more strongly agree with these items, compared to the other seven items, creating a ceiling effect. For this reason, items 4 and 9 were excluded from the analysis, and the model was constructed with two subscales which measured *SpokespersonSupport* (i.e. support for the individual spokesperson, and her arguments) and *OrganisationSupport* (i.e. support for the organisation she represented).

Table 12.

Model Indices Based on ‘Prevalence’ Subscales with ‘Agreement’ and ‘BehIntention’ Items

Model	<i>df</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
a) <i>SpokespersonSupport</i>							
<i>Items 1, 2, 3, 5</i>	2	3.70	0.16	0.99	0.98	0.99	0.076
b) <i>SpokespersonSupport</i> and Agreement							
<i>Items 1, 2, 3, 5 + Agree1</i>	5	13.35	0.02	0.97	0.94	0.97	0.12
<i>Items 1, 2, 3, 5 + Agree2</i>	5	9.31	0.10	0.98	0.97	0.98	0.076
<i>Items 1, 2, 3, 5 + Agree1 + Agree2</i>	9	82.21	0.00	0.82	0.69	0.81	0.23
c) <i>OrganisationSupport</i>							
<i>Items 6, 7, 8</i>	0	<i>unidentified</i>	<i>unidentified</i>	1.00	<i>unidentified</i>	1.00	0.44
d) <i>OrganisationSupport</i> and BehIntention							
<i>Items 6, 7, 8 + BI1</i>	2	0.67	0.72	1.01	1.03	1.00	0.00
<i>Items 6, 7, 8 + BI2</i>	2	2.37	0.31	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.04
<i>Items 6, 7, 8 + BI1 + BI2</i>	5	13.49	0.02	0.96	0.91	0.95	0.12

AIC is not provided as the sample size is <200 (Hooper et al., 2008, p. 56)

As mentioned, two additional items were included in the study to gauge participants’ agreement with the various points made in the exposure. As a model on their own, these items indicated a poor fit. It was suspected that this occurred as one item gauged participants’ agreement with the plight of Hamas (Agreement 1), whilst the other gauged participants

agreement with the spokesperson for the pro-Hamas society (Agreement 2; “If Hamas do not use violence in this conflict, things will get worse for the Palestinians”). In other words, participants were indicating the extent to which they agreed with the spokesperson for one question, but Hamas for the other and the latter likely elicited a more conservative response. Considering this distinction, the first item (Agreement 1) was considered conceptually comparable to the *SpokespersonSupport* model. When it was added (see models a) and b) on Table 12), this item fit well onto the model, supporting the logic that this item was related to participants individual support for, and adoption of, the arguments purported by the individual spokesperson for the pro-Hamas society. This created the first dependent variable: *SpokespersonSupport* and ‘Agreement’. This dependent variable is annotated as ‘Argument Adoption’ for the remainder of the chapter.

Finally, two more items were included in the experiment to measure participants’ behavioural intention to support an organisation that legitimized the violence perpetrated by Hamas (*BehIntention*). On their own, these items indicated a poor model fit. This likely occurred due to response bias, as participants may have perceived the first item (BI1) as more direct than the first, inducing a social desirability effect²⁹. Nonetheless, it was reasoned that the concept of behavioural intention was conceptually in line with the second ‘prevalence’ subscale due to its relationship with the organisation at large. After removing the item with the greatest likelihood of social desirability bias (BI1), the remaining item (BI2) was included in the *OrganisationSupport* model. With acceptable construct validity, this created the second dependent variable in the study; *OrganisationSupport* and *BehaviouralIntention*. This dependent

²⁹ The first item (BI1) asked participants: “Rate the degree to which you would consider joining the Free Palestine cause”; the second item (BI2) asked participants: “Imagine you were approached by a member of the DCU society *Free Palestine*, and asked to make a small donation to help with the running of the organisation. Please indicate how likely you would be to support the organisation”.

variable is annotated as ‘Group Support’ to indicate physical and attitudinal support for the pro-Hamas society) (see models c) and d) on Table 12).

Although ‘Argument Adoption’ and ‘Group Support’ were correlated constructs ($r = 0.70^{**}$), the goodness-of-fit was superior when assessed individually. It was therefore speculated that the models mapped onto different constructs in terms of the prevalence and internalization of violence-legitimizing norms. As such, the variables are observed separately in the hypotheses testing.

Table 13.

Descriptive statistics of all dependent variables across conditions.

	Condition											
	1. Neutral Narrative (NN)			2. Violent Narrative (ViolentN)			3. Generic Counter-Narrative (GenCN)			4. Tailored Counter-Narrative (TailCN)		
Dependent variables¹	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Argument Adoption	20.76	5.06	38	22.00	5.37	37	22.35	4.65	40	19.18	4.94	34
Group Support	16.79	3.73	38	17.49	4.62	37	17.18	3.54	40	15.24	4.67	34
Total	37.55	7.90	38	39.49	9.38	37	39.53	7.49	40	34.42	8.83	34

¹ Greater numbers indicate greater internalization and prevalence of violence-legitimizing norms.

7.5.3 Hypotheses testing.

See *Table 13* for descriptive statistics of both dependent variables across the four conditions.

Hypothesis 1 (H1)

The first hypothesis predicted a main effect for condition, with participants exposed to the violent justifications (VJ) alone (^{Violent}N condition) demonstrating the highest scores on the dependent variables, with lowest levels reported for participants in the tailored counter-narrative condition (^{Tail}CN), followed by the ^{Gen}CN. The neutral narrative condition (NN) was used as a comparator with no hypothesised effects.

See *Figure 21*. Separate univariate ANOVAs were used to explore the effects of condition on the two dependent variables (the decision not to conduct a MANOVA in this instance is discussed in light of the findings in the limitations section). This revealed a significant effect of condition on participants' adoption of the violent arguments ('Argument Adoption'), $F(3, 145) = 2.96, p = .03, \eta^2 = .69$. Individual t -tests revealed that participants in the ^{Violent}N condition reported significantly higher 'Argument Adoption' compared to those in the ^{Tail}CN condition, $t(69) = 2.30, p = .03$. Furthermore, there was a significant difference between both counter-narrative conditions. Participants in the ^{Gen}CN condition, as well as scoring the highest 'Argument Adoption', were significantly higher than participants in the ^{Tail}CN conditions $t(72) = 2.84, p = .01$. There was no significant effect of condition on 'Group Support'.

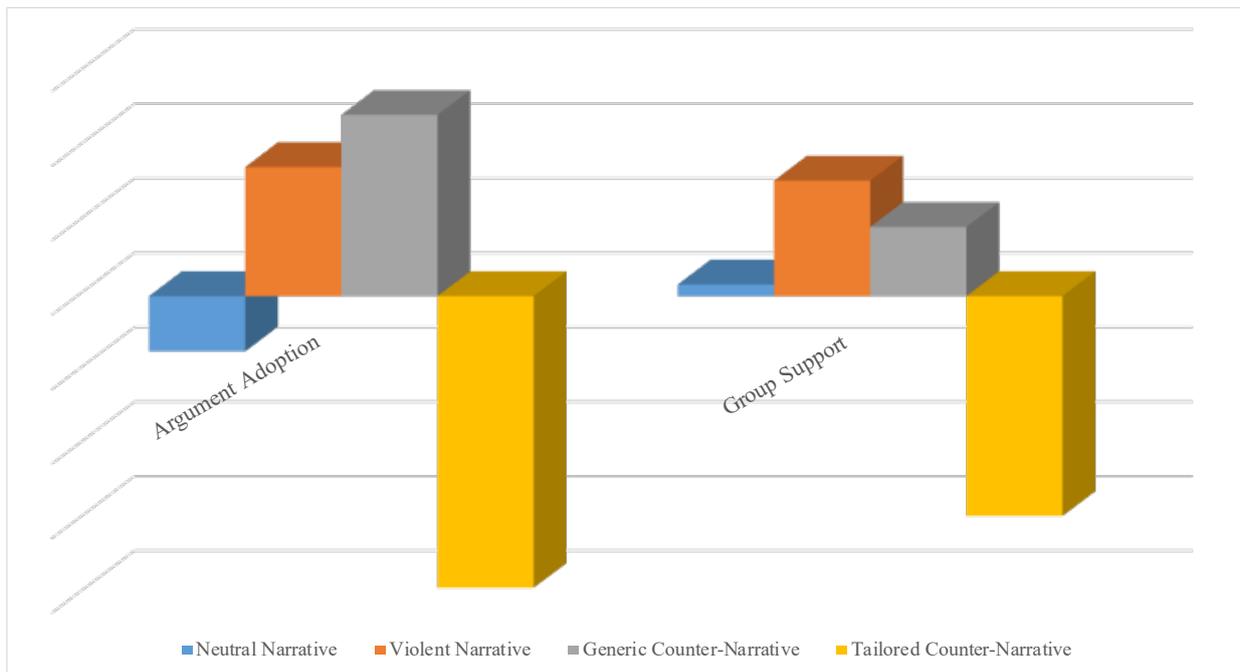


Figure 21. The internalisation and prevalence of violence-legitimising norms as measured through Argument Adoption and Group Support across all narrative conditions.

These results partially support the first hypothesis, which posited that, upon exposure to a violent terrorist narrative, a tailor-made counter-narrative can produce violence-legitimizing norms of a comparable level of those not exposed to a terrorist narrative at all. Contrary to this hypothesis, however, the findings indicate that exposure to a generic counter-narrative can produce comparable effects to those exposed to a terrorist narrative alone (ViolentN condition).

Hypothesis 2 (H2)

The second hypothesis predicted that the participants' scores on the Cognitive Reflection Test (CRT) and Need for Cognition (NFC) scale would moderate the effects of condition on the dependent variables. Structural Equation Modelling was used to observe any moderation effects by comparing models across conditions.

First, scores on the CRT and NFC scale were added to the measurement models ('Argument Adoption' and 'Group Support') outlined earlier. The potential paths were evaluated and the model did not reach an acceptable level of goodness-of-fit. The chi square test was significant (631.32, $p = .00$), with TLI (0.74), IFI (0.77) and CFI (0.77) all below the acceptable threshold of 0.95, and a RMSEA value of 0.08. The model did not demonstrate any significant relationships between CRT or NFC scores and any of the latent variables.

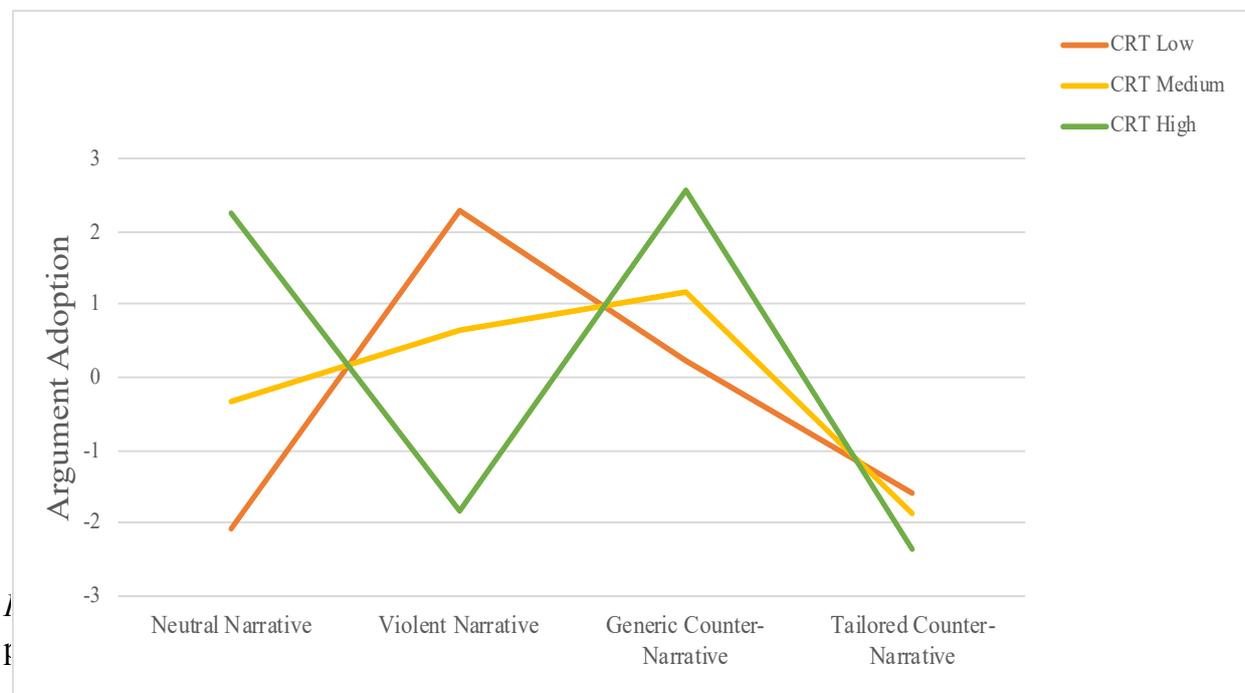
A multi-group analysis was then conducted to determine if there were any significant *differences* between the paths/model depending on experimental condition (i.e. a multi-group effect). Not only was the model still below an acceptable level of goodness-of-fit, but it also dis-improved when observed as a multi-group model. The chi square test was significant (2549.89, $p = .00$), with TLI (0.43), IFI (0.46) and CFI (0.45) all well below the acceptable threshold of 0.95, and a RMSEA value of 0.08. The difference between models was not significant ($p = .13$), and the model did not demonstrate any significant relationships between NFC scores and any of the latent variables, irrespective of condition. Therefore, the second hypothesis was not fully supported, as need for cognition scores did not interact with the exposure on the dependent variables.

However, this was not the case with scores on the Cognitive Reflection Test, resulting in a modified model in which NFC was removed. This improved the goodness-of-fit slightly (338.89, $p = .00$, TLI = 0.60, IFI = 0.66 and CFI = 0.65). When observing the endogenous (i.e. dependent) variables individually, the models reached an acceptable goodness-of-fit on both 'Group Support' (26.73, $p = .14$, with TLI (0.87), IFI (0.91) and CFI (0.91)) and 'Argument Adoption' (46.55, $p = .11$, with TLI (0.94), IFI (0.95) and CFI (0.95)). As the model containing both 'Argument Adoption' and 'Support' could not be explored further (due to poor fit), it was decided to explore the moderating effects of the CRT on each

dependent variable across conditions. This was done using Process³⁰. The analysis for each dependent variable is presented individually.

The Moderating Effects of CRT on DV1. Argument Adoption. Using Model 1, ‘Argument Adoption’ (mean-centred; Y variable), condition (multi-categorical / ‘indicator’; X variable) and, finally participants’ overall score on the CRT (i.e. out of a possible 7) were inputted. The overall model was significant, $F(7, 141) = 3.12, p = .01, R^2 = .13$.

Using indicator coding for the predictor variable, conditions two (^{Violent}N), three (^{Gen}CN) and four (^{Tail}CN) were compared with condition one (NN; comparator or control). Participants CRT scores interacted with the presence or absence of violent justifications (i.e. NN vs ^{Violent}N), predicting levels of ‘Argument Adoption’, $b = -1.70, t(141) = -3.22, p = .001$. Participants who scored one standard deviation below the mean on the Cognitive Reflection Test reported higher ‘Argument Adoption’ in the ^{Violent}N condition, compared to their counter-parts in the NN condition. See *Figure 22*.



³⁰ Here, the decision to use PROCESS was motivated by a desire to potentially calculate and implement bootstrapping (see Hayes, Montoya, & Rockwood, 2017, p. 78).

Participants scoring one standard deviation *above* the mean task score reported lower ‘Argument Adoption’ in the ^{Violent}N condition compared to similarly scoring participants in the neutral condition. This suggests that a superior ability in this domain can be protective against violent justifications, but not against narratives alone. Participants CRT scores also interacted with the presence or absence of generic counter-narratives (i.e. ^{Violent}N vs ^{Gen}CN), predicting different levels of ‘Argument Adoption’, $b = 1.30$, $t(141) = 2.62$, $p = .01$. Contrary to the previous interaction, participants with higher scores on the CRT reported significantly *higher* ‘Argument Adoption’ when presented with generic counter-narratives (^{Gen}CN condition). In other words, the generic counter-narratives interacted with high scoring ability, resulting in higher adoption of the arguments that legitimized terrorist violence. Interestingly, CRT scores also interacted with the *type* of counter-narrative (i.e. ^{Gen}CN vs ^{Tail}CN) presented, $b = -4.92$, $t(141) = -2.74$, $p = .01$. Higher CRT scorers, as mentioned, reported the highest ‘Argument Adoption’ in the ^{Gen}CN condition, but the lowest in the ^{Tail}CN condition.

Finally, when comparing participants who created their own counter-narratives (^{Tail}CN) with those who received none at all (^{Violent}N), although CRT ability determined susceptibility to violent justifications in the ^{Violent}N condition, similarly scoring participants responded no differently to medium- or high-scoring participants in the ^{Tail}CN condition, $b = 3.05$, $t(141) = 2.64$, $p = .01$. In other words, unlike the generic approach, participants’ ability to cognitively reflect seems to have little bearing on their adoption of violent arguments when they are instructed to do it themselves.

The Moderating Effects of CRT on DV2. Group Support. Using Model 1, ‘Group Support’ (mean centred; Y variable), condition (multicategorical/ ‘indicator’; X variable) and, finally, participants’ total CRT score (W) were inputted, and the overall model was significant, $F(7, 141) = 2.53$, $p = .02$, $R^2 = .11$. See *Figure 23 (overleaf)*.

When contrasted with the neutral narrative condition, there were no significant interactions between experimental condition ($^{Violent}N$, ^{Gen}CN , or ^{Tail}CN) and CRT score. However, in the sample of those exposed to violent justification, when contrasting those who did, with those who did not receive generic counter-narratives ($^{Violent}N$ vs ^{Gen}CN), an interaction was identified, $b = 1.30$, $t(141) = 3.15$, $p = .002$. For participants who scored lowest on the CRT, the generic counter-narratives were effective at reducing their ‘Group Support’ compared to those who did not receive generic counter-narratives ($^{Violent}N$), $b = -2.73$, $t(141) = -2.25$, $p = .03$. However, for those who scored highest on the CRT, this variable interacted with the presence of generic counter-narratives, resulting in higher scores on the ‘Group Support’ measure compared to their $^{Violent}N$ counterparts who did not receive any counter-narrative intervention at all.

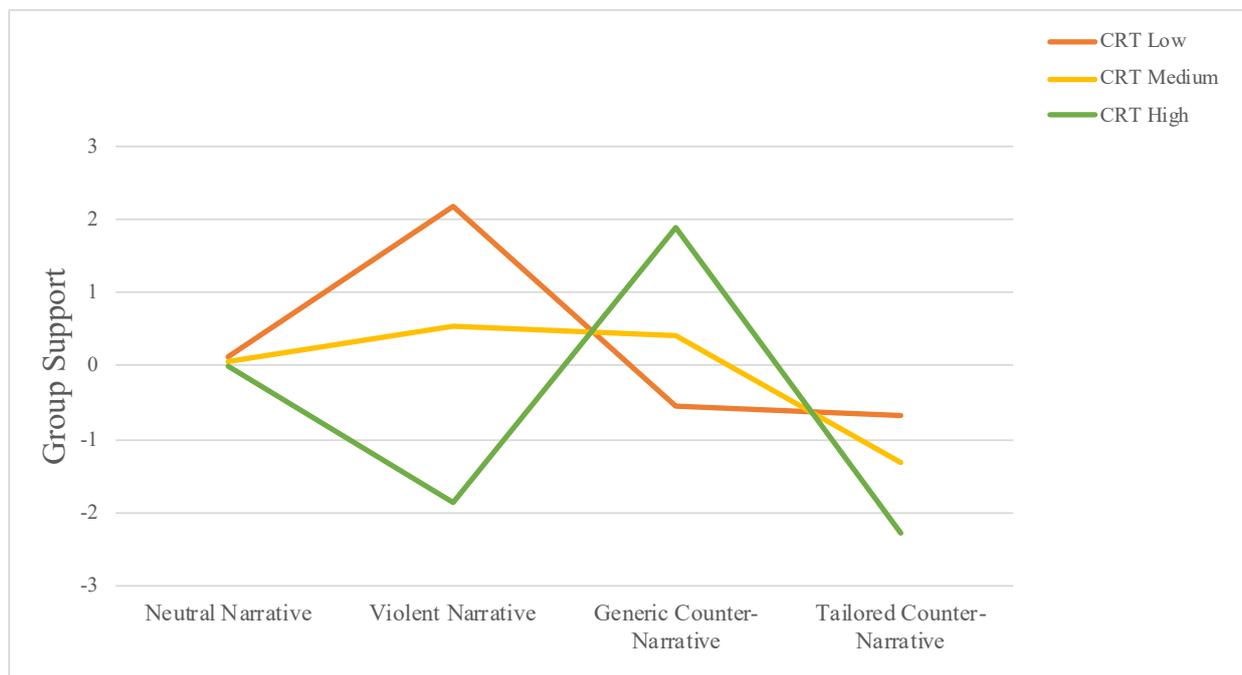


Figure 23. The moderating effects of scores on the Cognitive Reflection Test (CRT) on participants’ support for a violence-legitimising organisation.

In other words, for participants most capable of cognitive reflection, when they were exposed to a generic counter-narrative, they reported higher support for the organization who legitimized terrorist violence (i.e. 'Free Palestine'), and higher behavioural intention to financially support the organisation than if they had received no counter-narrative intervention at all (i.e. the ^{Violent}N condition). Interestingly, like the first dependent variable, this effect did not occur in the presence of tailored counter-narratives. Whilst the high-scoring CRT participants reported higher 'Group Support' in the ^{Gen}CN condition, levels of 'Support' did not differ across CRT levels in the ^{Tail}CN condition, $b = -4.15$, $t(141) = -2.79$, $p = .01$.

7.6 Discussion

The aims of this study were premised by an overall objective of theory-building, and beginning the process of conducting experimental research on the prevention of violent radicalisation through narratives. With this in mind, the study aimed to test the effectiveness of two counter-narrative strategies in reducing the risk of violent radicalisation in participants' exposed to a narrative that attempted to justify terrorist violence. The latter was created by overlaying a rational narrative about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with irrational, violent justifications. These justifications created a 'Slippery Slope Argument' (Corner et al., 2011) to encourage participants to make a "plausible error" (Kahneman et al. 2000; 2002, p. 62) in reasoning (see the ELM; Petty et al., 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999), and perceive that, if Hamas were to use non-violent means of attaining their political goals, various "worse" things would happen. The effects of each strategy, in light of current research and theory, are discussed below.

7.6.1 The generic counter-narrative.

Having showed promising effects in Study 1, this strategy incorporated the use of an alternative account (Bruneau et al. 2017; Garagozov, 2013). Whilst legitimising the rational

aspects of the narrative, the strategy sought to challenge only the irrational elements (i.e. the violent justifications), in a bid to avoid a resistance response, such as reactance (Brehm, 1966). As these justifications were logically flawed (i.e. they did not provide a sufficient basis for A (non-violence) *causing* B (various, negative outcomes)), the Generic Counter-Narrative (^{Gen}CN) highlighted these flaws, as well as providing a plausible, causal alternative (see Johnson et al., 1994; Schwartz et al., 2007). In terms of the effectiveness, those who received this form of counter-narrative reported comparable levels of violence-legitimising norms (as measured by ‘Support’ and ‘Argument Adoption’) to those exposed to violent justifications alone (^{Violent}N). Furthermore, those in the ^{Gen}CN condition reported significantly higher ‘Support’ and ‘Argument Adoption’ compared to those in the ^{Tail}CN. Whilst acknowledging the limitations associated with measuring such dependent constructs (as will be discussed in Section 7.7), this nonetheless suggests that, not only was the tailored approach more effective, but the generic counter-narrative was no more effective than propaganda alone. This may have occurred for a variety of reasons.

Offering evidence which points out the error in the argument is not a new approach to countering misinformation and, unfortunately, boomerang effects (i.e. the original attitudes beliefs becoming strengthened upon refutation) are not uncommon. In this case, the unintended effects of the ^{Gen}CN may have occurred due to the ‘continued influence effect’ (a phenomenon whereby the *retraction* of information increases acceptance of the original belief, despite the error being clearly highlighted, see Allport and Lepkin, 1945; Kahneman and Fredercik, 2002). This allows for the continued influence of discredited information (Johnson et al., 1994, p. 1420). The repercussions of the continued influence effect have been observed in the pervasiveness of the unsubstantiated link between vaccines and autism (Baren-Cohen, 2009), as well as Iraq’s harbouring of weapons of mass destruction during the Bush administration (Kull, Ramsay, & Lewis, 2003). Whilst this can be avoided by offering

more plausible alternatives, the causal fallacies used in the violent justifications may have appeared *more causal* than the alternatives offered in the ^{Gen}CN. Ultimately, in challenging terrorist narratives that promote violent action, the evidence from this study does not support the use of counter-narratives that offer an alternative to violence.

7.6.2 The tailored counter-narrative.

In the second approach, however, participants were encouraged to create their own counter-narrative. Informed by *Inoculation Theory* (McGuire, 1964) and research on self-persuasion through reducing dissonance (Aronson, 1999), participants were provided with forewarning that they would be required to provide arguments against the use of violence (“refutational pre-emption”; Banas et al., 2017). The logic of this approach was that participants would be primed to create their own, Tailored Counter-Narrative (^{Tail}CN) to the dominant narrative, thus reducing the likelihood of them experiencing resistance to it *being countered*. Furthermore, it meant that the plausible, causal alternative would be more likely to appear both plausible and causal *to the specific participant*. By allowing participants to feel that the arguments they created against the use of violence “reflect[ed] their true nature or beliefs” (Wilson, 1990, p. 45), unintended effects (such as “boomerang” effects) would be less likely. Not only did participants in the ^{Tail}CN condition reported the lowest levels of ‘Support’ and ‘Attitude Adoption’ across all conditions, there was also a significant difference in ‘Argument Adoption’ between the ^{Gen}CN and ^{Tail}CN conditions. This finding is corroborated by a recent study conducted by Braddock (2019), who found that inoculation negatively predicted perceptions of a terrorist group’s credibility³¹.

³¹ This study was not included in the Systematic Review (Study 1) as it was published after the final search.

Reactance theorists would argue that the effects the TailCN strategy are attributable to its tendency towards a more co-operation focused relationship with the target of a message; by sidestepping threats to the target's "freedom to decide for [themselves]" (Worchel & Brehm, 1970, p. 18), little or no resistance is elicited. For example, Linn and Knowles (2002) found that, by acknowledging that the target of the message may wish to disagree with the message, the message created less resistance in the target. In many ways, the nature of the interaction was changed as the target did not feel as though they were being persuaded. It is likely that, although the generation of viable alternatives may have counteracted the causal fallacies, inducing reflection rather than intuition, it was the participants' *agency* in their own cognitive processing that determined the success of the counter-narrative. In terms of the ecological validity of the tailored approach, it can not, yet, be confidently discerned whether this apparent ability to independently counter a terrorist narrative would persist outside the laboratory setting. Indeed, in the context of experimental research in all areas of counter-terrorism, this challenge was noted in Section 7.1.1.1. However, what this finding does provide is a 'proof of concept' for the mechanisms underlying effective counter-narrative efforts. If resistance to the idea of a counter-narrative is reduced, and autonomy returned to the target individual, the skills are surely there to challenge terrorist rhetoric. However, depending on the embeddedness of the rhetoric to begin with, reducing this resistance may be the focal task.

However, another angle that must be considered is the *nature* of the two counter-narrative 'tasks', which were ultimately quite different. It is generally accepted that experiments observing cognitive workload tend to be more effective when they contain participatory elements (Wilson et al., 1999). For example, in an intervention designed to reduce the negative effects of media violence, Byrne (2009) found that participants who participated in an activity following the intervention (i.e. writing down what they had

learned) reported less aggressive tendencies than those who did not participate in a cognitive activity post-intervention. Similarly, participants in the ^{Tail}CN condition may have been more engaged because they were required to write things down, compared to participants in the ^{Gen}CN condition, who were largely passive. Nonetheless, this observation can be considered in light of existing policy and practice in countering terrorist narratives; recognising the nature of narrative persuasion (altogether, a complex experience as detailed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5.2), it would be remiss to assume that a passive tool would match this depth of experience. In other words, an effective counter-narrative should go beyond this, being careful not to manipulate, but nonetheless demanding participation from its target.

7.6.3 Critical thinking.

Interactions with the terrorist narrative.

The study also hypothesised that two variables would moderate the effects of condition on the dependent variables: ‘Need for Cognition’ (NFC; Cacioppo et al., 1982) and scores on the ‘Cognitive Reflection Test’ (CRT; Frederick, 2005; Toplak et al., 2014). Critical thinking, in its various applications, has grown into a heavily researched area. Arising from its expansion is the distinction between critical thinking “skills” and one’s disposition or attitude towards the exercise of thinking critically (Butler, 2012). This study attempted to measure both. Whilst the NFC scale was used to gauge participants’ “cognitive motivation” to engage with the exposure, the CRT attempted to measure participants’ tendency to override pre-potent or ‘gut’ responses, and engage in further reflection in the hope of finding a “correct response” (Toplak et al., 2014, p. 147).

In the final, structural model combining NFC and CRT scores, no significant interactions or main effects were observed for NFC across any of the conditions. Despite correlating highly with each other, both variables appeared to interact differently with the exposure. For those who performed well on the Cognitive Reflection Test, exposure to

violent justifications had little or no effect in terms of violence-legitimising norms. In line with the dual-process models of cognition that informed the design of the ^{Violent}N condition, such as the *Elaboration Likelihood Model* (ELM; Petty et al., 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999), the *Transportation-Imaginary Model* (Green & Brock, 2000), and the *Heuristic-Systematic Model* (Todorov et al. 2002), a superior ability to cognitively reflect may have side-stepped intuitive information processing and encouraged reflection. This finding is consistent with previous research in the area of cognitive reflection which has shown that high CRT scorers are more likely than low CRT scorers at avoiding logical fallacies (Oechssler, Roeder, & Schmitz, 2009). Indeed, it is an important point to note that even crafted propaganda attempts are not a ‘silver bullet’ for manipulating audiences, and individual differences do play a role. For example Shortland, Nader, Imperillo, Ross, & Dmello (2017), found that individuals with low trait aggression who watched an Islamic extremist video reported lower aggression levels post-exposure compared to control participants.

Interactions with the counter-narratives.

In terms of the counter-narratives, there was little evidence informing how these variables would interact with either approach, and the results were unexpected. From testing the first hypothesis, it was clear that exposure to the ^{Gen}CN condition created a type of boomerang effect. However, when including CRT ability, this boomerang effect was exacerbated for participants who scored well on the test. In other words, for participants most capable of cognitive reflection, the generic counter-narratives *increased* their violence-legitimising norms, whilst for high scorers in the ^{Violent}N condition, the presence of violent justifications *decreased* their violence-legitimising norms. This may have happened for a number of reasons.

The ^{Gen}CN strategy focused exclusively on the content of the argument, ignoring, according to Schwarz et al. (2007), “the metacognitive experiences that are part and parcel of

the reasoning process” (p. 128). According to Kahneman et al., exposure to discordant information does not “dislodge the feeling” (2002, p. 68) that what we believe, or what we have learned, is correct. This “feeling” may have arisen from exposure to the violent justifications. However, when confronted with extraneous, generic counter-arguments offering alternative perspectives, a conflict may have arisen between the participants’ reasoning, and the reasoning in the exposure. In their meta-analysis, Banas et al. (2010) indicated that “refutational” messages (which refute an opposing point of view) are more persuasive than their one-sided counterparts; the two sided-ness of the ^{Gen}CN, as well as conflicting with the high CRT scorers’ own arguments, may have unintentionally rendered the violent justifications more persuasive.

Given that such effects occurred alongside scores on the CRT, rather than the NFC scale, it is clear that there is a marked difference between participants’ cognitive ability, and cognitive motivation. Previously studies finding interactions between ‘Need for Cognition’ and exposure have observed such effects with outcomes such as transportation or argument recall or appraisal (Cacioppo, Petty, & Morris, 1983; Green et al., 2008). It is not clear why no such findings were observed in this study. However, what is clear is that bolstering cognitive reflective ability is a far more evidence-based and ethical approach to countering terrorist narratives than the use of generic counter-narrative techniques such as those used in this study.

7.7 Limitations and Future Research

The current research, as a novel, first step in conducting counter-narrative research in the field of radicalisation, faced several methodological challenges, and bore a number of key limitations. Measuring constructs related to violent radicalisation is an elusive task. Indeed, this challenge was highlighted in Study 1 when discussing outcomes (see Section 5.6).

Drawing upon a measure used by Pyszczynski et al. (2006) to gauge participants “support for

a martyrdom-espousing student” (p. 534), items were included in this study that assessed the extent to which the participant liked, agreed with, respected and believed this person to be intelligent. Whilst every attempt was made to ensure the items attended to the internalisation and prevalence of violence-legitimising norms, the measurement model(s), nonetheless, had to be adapted several times to ensure acceptable construct validity; items 4 and 9 (that asked about the relevance of opinions) created ceiling effects due to response bias, and had to be removed from the model³². Other studies have pointed to such biases as a problematic by-product of such types of questions (Fisher, 1993), particularly in politically-themed research (Brown-Iannuzzi, Najle, & Gervais, 2018). Having removed these items, it then became clear that the items mapped onto different constructs, resulting in two, separate measures (‘Support’ and ‘Argument Adoption’). Whilst the construct validity of the measurement model(s) improved, each measure subsequently contained less items than intended. With a complex study design, richer outcome measures would likely have shown a stronger effect size, and relieved concerns about Type 1 errors.

One such example was in the testing of the first hypothesis, whereby a decision was made to not conduct a MANOVA. By developing separate measurement models for violence-legitimising norms (i.e. ‘Argument Adoption’ and ‘Support’), it was speculated that the models may map onto different constructs, rendering a MANOVA inappropriate. Nonetheless, by conducting individual, “unprotected” ANOVAs, the likelihood of a Type 1 error was increased (see Scheiner, 1993, p. 96), and this must be considered in light of the individual analyses. Finally, when analysing the interaction between scores on the Cognitive Reflection Test on both dependent variables across conditions, it is noted that the initial goodness-of-fit for the multi-group analysis was poor, and it is not considered best-practice to

³² The ceiling effects may have occurred due to participants tending to go for the ‘politically correct’ answer (i.e. stating that *all* opinions are relevant, even those of Hamas).

continue testing beyond this stage. Whilst the model fit for each dependent variable was deemed acceptable, considering the fit of the initial model increases the likelihood of a Type 1 error, and should be considered in respect to the moderation analyses.

The steps that have been taken to apply experimental rigour to this study, whilst highlighting the above limitations, nonetheless offer a template for future studies. Building upon this work, and insisting upon empiricism through experimental methodologies, is the only means by which the field of terrorism research can move towards explanatory models. It is recommended that future researchers replicate designs such as this, carefully considering the constructs they're measuring, and using existing theoretical frameworks to inform these steps. In this way, the study of radicalisation can move into a new, exciting phase of scientific enquiry, whereby research does not simply seek to explore, but also *explain*.

7.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to introduce rigorous methods to the study of counter-narratives, in the hope of understanding some general principles in relation to their design. From a theoretical perspective, a certain amount of clarity is emerging in relation to the 'active ingredients' in counter-narratives. Based on the present findings, compared to a generic approach, tailoring a counter-narrative to an individual, by inviting them to create their own, is a more effective way of reducing the effectiveness of a narrative espousing violent action. Furthermore, although such narratives can increase violence-legitimising norms, the findings of the study suggest that individuals vary their susceptibility to such messages. Those with superior cognitive reflection skills are, on the whole, more bolstered against the fallacious logic presented in such narratives; however, this is the same skill which increases resistance to a generic, counter-narrative approach. For these reasons, care must be taken to consider both the audience, *and* the counter-message, when seeking to mitigate the influence of terrorist narratives

Chapter 8.

General Discussion

This chapter presents an overview and discussion of the main aims and findings of the current research programme. The chapter will begin with a main summary of each empirical study, and their implications for counter-terrorism research and policy. Acknowledging the limitations of each study, suggestions are provided for future research directions. The chapter ends with general conclusions relating to the potential for counter-narratives in preventing radicalisation, as well as the contribution of this research to the existing evidence and theory.

8.1 Thesis Overview

In response to international calls to deploy the best tools in response to violent extremist rhetoric (European Commission, 2015; United Nations Security Council, 2014), the aim of the current research was to determine the potential for counter-narratives in this sphere. The thesis began with an assessment of the contribution of psychological science to an overall understanding of terrorist behaviour. The term radicalisation was introduced, and defined as a cognitive process by which an individual moves away from a point of conflict, or feelings of uncertainty, towards a belief system representing a narrower, unambiguous state of apparent clarity. Informed by *Significance Quest Theory*, it was posited that certain external and internal cues can play upon these feelings of uncertainty, presenting a means-goal configuration that legitimises violence, triggering *violent* radicalisation into terrorism.

The narrative, and its depiction of violence as an instrumental means of certain, goal-directed behaviour(s), was the focus of Chapter 2. However, before considering the narrative as a means of recruiting ‘would-be’ terrorists, other proximal concepts, such as persuasion and propaganda were defined. Considering these constructs, the area of terrorist communication was broadly introduced, before the use of narratives by terrorist organisations

was summarised, citing some key, research contributions. It was noted that the importance of the narrative in human experience long predates its entry to the field of terrorism. Rooted in social constructionism, the narrative can be understood as central to human beings' ability to make sense of an, otherwise, chaotic world. Citing both qualitative and quantitative evidence, it was explained how, by 'hanging' experiences of everyday life onto structural, narrative principles, individuals can use narratives to establish both meaning, and identity; the Labovian approach to narrative structure was used to practically demonstrate such principles. Theories of psychological persuasion were presented to underscore how the mechanics of human cognition can facilitate this process, and render a narrative strategically persuasive.

The counter-narrative, a particular counter-messaging intervention, was the focus of Chapter 3. Considering its conceptual ambiguity, it was concluded that, in the context of terrorism, the ultimate function of a counter-narrative should be to *reconstrue* any dominant narrative, encouraging the target to re-consider the instrumentality of violence. It was suggested that this would, in turn, change the nature of the story. It was noted that in the last number of years, there has been an overwhelming consensus in both government and academic spheres to develop the concept of the counter-narrative, and determine its utility in the prevention of violent radicalisation, moving it away from an ambiguous, "catch-all" term (Briggs & Feve, 2013, p. 2; Schmid, 2014, p. 2). Before considering some of the regulatory and methodological challenges relating to reliability and validity in research of this nature, the aims and objective of the current research were presented.

In the context of preventing violent radicalisation, the overall objective of the current research programme was to explore the potential for an evidence-based approach to countering terrorist narratives.

Study 1.

In order to position the current research within existing evidence and theory, the first study involved synthesising the findings of previous experimental research, in the form of a systematic review and meta-analysis. This review followed an explicit protocol (Carthy et al. 2018), with exclusionary criteria applied to non-experimental study designs. This resulted in the identification of nineteen independent studies ($k = 19$), reported in fifteen papers, that measured the effects of a counter-narrative intervention on outcomes related to violent radicalisation.

Results of this study indicated that, whilst certain counter-narrative interventions showed promising effects on risk factors for violent radicalisation such as realistic threat ($d = -.60$), in-group favouritism, and out-group hostility ($d = -0.41$), the effects on symbolic threat and implicit bias were less consistent. Furthermore, whilst certain techniques, such as the use of counter-stereotypical exemplars, alternative accounts, and inoculation were effective at targeting these risk factors, the use of persuasive techniques designed to reduce resistance and counter-arguing (i.e. through identification and transportation) were not found to be effective.

These findings point to the complexity of countering narratives in this area, and highlight a number of issues in the existing literature. In particular, the findings highlighted the need for researchers to design counter-narratives according to existing, theoretical frameworks. This would allow for the ‘active ingredients’ in the intervention to be isolated, and evaluated. Furthermore, the review noted the drawbacks of evaluating counter-narrative strategies using measurement tools that do not attempt gauge propensity towards violent radicalisation. It was recommended that studies use, where possible, empirically-supported risk factors for violent radicalisation, which would in turn create for a wider evidence-base from which to synthesise existing evidence and, importantly, determine effectiveness. Finally, it was noted that a limitation of this review was the lack of specificity in terms of the

dominant narratives being countered; this lead to the question, what is the counter-narrative *countering*?

Study 2.

As an inherently defensive strategy, Study 2 was premised by the proposal that any attempt to design a counter-narrative should, first, explore the dominant narratives that justify violence in the first place. Therefore, the overall aim of Study 2 was to explore the narratives used to justify violence amongst ten, former perpetrators of violent extremism and/or terrorism in terrorist organisations. This study took note of the importance of acquiring primary data in qualitative research of this nature, whilst highlighting the need for a clear, epistemological grounding in interview-based research. Using Narrative Analysis, 32 individual narratives of perpetration were identified, which were then clustered into six, template narratives. From here, in order to identify how violent, rather than non-violent, means were depicted in these narratives, all individual level narratives were coded for propaganda techniques (Tilley, 2005).

These narratives used a variety of techniques to justify violent means, and these were largely identified in the *Orientation(s)*, *Complicating Action(s)*, and *Resolution(s)* of narratives. In these sections, the scene was set for violent action by identifying antagonists, and other characters of interest, before illustrating their actions. Once identified, techniques such as *pinpointing the enemy (transfer negative)*, *plain folks*, and *glittering generalities* were used to is exacerbate the dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’, simplifying complex phenomena to polarising extremes. However, the narratives also reflected a great deal of rational logic, dressing up rational scaffolding with irrational components. In this way, the use of narratives to justify violence reflected a *quasi-rationality*, in which the protagonist was portrayed with a great deal of complexity, whilst the antagonist was reduced to levels of dichotomy, and fallacious logic.

Study 3.

Considering some of the theoretical, and methodological, problems relating to counter-narrative design and evaluation identified in Study 1, the final study in this thesis sought to examine the impact of different counter-narrative strategies in reducing the effectiveness of a dominant narrative purported by a terrorist organisation. The ultimate purpose of Study 3 was to explore the potential for rigorous methods in a methodologically challenging field, in the hope of moving towards explanatory models of violent radicalisation, and how to mitigate it.

In countering a fabricated, violence-legitimising narrative (Violent Narrative or $^{Violent}N$), the first approach sought to integrate the use of alternative accounts, as well as counter-arguments, to challenge only its irrational aspects. The second approach was informed by research on Inoculation (McGuire, 1961) and self-persuasion (Aronson, 1999). By priming participants to counter the $^{Violent}N$ themselves, participants were required to argue against the instrumentality of violent means, reconstruing it and, therefore, creating their own counter-narrative. These strategies were referred to as *generic* (^{Gen}CN) and *tailored* (^{Tail}CN) counter-narratives, respectively. Finally, the study explored how components of critical thinking moderated the overall effect(s) of these approaches.

One hundred and fifty participants ($M_{age} = 21.4$ years, $SD = 5.4$ years) were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions ($^{Violent}N$, ^{Gen}CN or ^{Tail}CN) or a control (Neutral Narrative). First, the study hypothesised that those in the $^{Violent}N$ condition would demonstrate the highest risk of violent radicalisation (as measured by violence-legitimising norms), with lowest levels reported for participants in the tailored counter-narrative condition (^{Tail}CN). The second hypothesis predicted that scores on the Cognitive Reflection Test (CRT) and levels of Need for Cognition (NFC) would moderate these effects. The dependent

variables were assessed in various measurement models before two, broad dependent variables were constructed based on their construct validity: *Argument Adoption* and *Support*.

Compared to a generic approach, tailoring a counter-narrative to an individual, by inviting them to create their own, was observed to be a more effective way of reducing the effectiveness of a narrative espousing violent action, partially supporting the first hypothesis. It was theorised that by allowing participants to feel that the arguments they created against the use of violence were their own (Wilson, 1990, p. 45), the likelihood of them experiencing resistance to it being countered would be reduced. This finding is corroborated by other findings on narrative inoculation in the context of radicalisation prevention (Banas et al., 2017; Braddock, 2019). However, the effects of the generic counter-narrative were not as hypothesised, with participants in this condition reporting comparable risk of violent radicalisation as those exposed to a violence-legitimising narrative alone.

In response to the second hypothesis, it was observed that that individuals vary their susceptibility to both violent-legitimising narratives, as well as generic counter-narratives. Those with superior cognitive reflection skills, as measured by the CRT were, on the whole, more bolstered against the violent narrative; however, this is the same skill that increased their resistance to the generic, counter-narrative approach. For these reasons, it was noted that care must be taken to consider both the audience, *and* the counter-message, when seeking to reduce the effectiveness of violence-legitimising terrorist narratives.

8.2 Methodological Limitations

The present research contributes to a body of knowledge in the radicalisation prevention literature. Although specific limitations relating to each study were noted within the relevant chapters, general limitations with implications for the thesis as a whole are now discussed.

8.2.1 Evidence-base.

Several international actors such as the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), and the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) have commented on the need to properly design and evaluate counter-narratives (Saltman, Dow, & Bjornsgaard, 2016), resulting in numerous, internationally-funded initiatives and strategies. Whilst Study 1 sought to offer a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of certain, targeted counter-narrative interventions on reducing propensity to violent radicalisation, it was acknowledged that the scope and span of counter-narrative interventions likely extended beyond the 19 studies included in the review. This is the case for two reasons.

First, it may be the case that certain, counter-narrative strategies were not identified in our search strategy to begin with. This is not necessarily a critique of the search but, rather, refers to what Sageman terms the “stagnation” (2014, p. 565) of terrorism research with regards to government-funded projects not being made available to academics, creating an “unbridgeable gap between academic and the intelligence community” (p. 573)³³. This is not to suggest that potentially relevant studies are being withheld; however, with the ‘counter-narrative’ becoming common currency in the world of counter-terrorism, it is unlikely that more attempts at design and evaluation have not been more broadly attempted.

Second, for the counter-narrative strategies that did appear in the initial searches (for example, Frennett et al., 2015; Macnair & Frank, 2017), the majority did not meet the inclusion criterion for outcomes related to violent radicalisation. Instead, the evaluative components of many of these campaigns were more reflective of feasibility, rather than effectiveness. Metrics such as likes, comments, ‘bounce-and-exit rates’, or shares (see Denaux & Rollo, 2019) may

³³ Note. The UK Home Office and Public Safety Canada were contacted, requesting potentially relevant studies for inclusion in this review. However, the reviewers suggest that, given the timing of the review (in tandem with Brexit negotiations, changes in UK leadership as well as parliamentary elections), the full breath of the counter-narrative activities in the Commonwealth may not have been exhausted.

provide practical information about a counter-narrative campaign, but these cannot be interpreted as empirically-supported risk factors for violent radicalisation, or components of a radical belief. As such, such metrics cannot indicate if the target of the campaign has a reduced risk of transitioning into terrorism. It is for these reasons that many published, potentially informative counter-narrative campaigns could not be included in the synthesis, despite their relevance to the area at large.

8.2.2 Reliability.

Indeed, whilst advocating for an impetus towards empirically-supported risk factors in radicalisation research, there is, nonetheless, another key consideration to be noted in terms of outcome measurement. The research synthesised in Study 1 and outlined in Study 3 (as well as the majority of cited, experimental literature in the thesis) makes use of self-report measurement. Whilst such measures largely dominate experimental research in psychology (Gerald & George, 2010), a key limitation with such measurement is the extent to which participants are accurately representing their thoughts, feelings, and/or behavioural intentions to the degree that they would outside the experimental setting (Aiken & West, 1990; Hofmann et al., 2005). This has been noted with regard to “mind-wandering” in experimental settings (Smallwood et al., 2007, p. 527), the potential for scale or measure misinterpretation (Barrett, 2004) as well as response bias(es). Whilst the reliability of terrorism-related outcomes in this field has been extensively discussed (Section 7.1.1), and partially addressed by means of measurement validation in Study 3 (Section 7.5.2), and risk of bias and quality assessment in Study 1 (Appendix 1.2, *Table 5(a)* and *5(b)*), the fallibility of self-report measures is, nonetheless, a pertinent limitation in research of this nature. In addition, as noted earlier in the thesis, inter-rater reliability was not incorporated into the coding stages of Study 2, and should also be considered alongside broader limitations in terms of reliability.

8.2.3 Validity.

As alluded to in Sections 6.1.1 and 7.1.1 (when commenting on the methodological challenges associated with conducting both qualitative and quantitative research in the field of terrorism), a noteworthy limitation of the current research relates to the overall validity of the evidence. Whilst Chapter 7 largely denoted validity in terms of the extent to which its findings persist outside the experimental setting (and has been discussed elsewhere), the term is applicable to all forms of empirical evidence. In qualitative research, for example, validity is sometimes termed “truth value”, and refers to various compounding factors such as researcher bias (Noble & Smith, 2015, p. 34), as well as sampling bias (Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2007) that could affect the credibility of the research.

To ensure adequate validity in Study 2, a researcher reflection was conducted to account for the impact of the researcher on the research (intersubjective reflection); this reflection included possible, compounding factors such as the researcher’s professional background, gender, and ethnicity. The remoteness of the researcher from the lived experience of terrorism was also reflected upon. However, it is nonetheless practically challenging to ensure complete neutrality, and this limitation is noted. Another commonly raised limitation in relation to interview-based research in the context of terrorism is the opportunistic nature of sampling (Dolnik, 2011). Whilst exclusion criteria were devised and applied to potential participants (i.e. on the basis of violence perpetration, see Section 6.4.1), it is nonetheless likely that those who were interviewed were representative of a sample ‘willing to speak’, rather than a representative sample of former perpetrators of terrorism and/or violent extremism.

8.3 Researcher Reflection

The aim of this section is to present the researcher’s reflection(s) on Study 2. The purpose of this exercise was to better understand the researcher’s personal philosophies, as

well as the dynamics of their interviewer/interviewee interaction that could influence the subjectivity of the research and/or the researcher. This section is divided into personal reflexivity (the impact of the researcher on the research), and key learning points (the impact of the research on the researcher).

8.3.1 Personal reflexivity; Intersubjective reflection

Intersubjective reflection is a process of researcher reflection whereby the focus is on the “situated and negotiated nature of the research encounter” and how “unconscious processes structure relations between the researcher and participant” (Finlay, 2002, p. 215). In order to identify the situated and negotiated dynamic between the researcher and the participant, the potential impact of the researcher’s professional background, ethnicity, and remoteness from the lived experience of terrorism was explored through the following questions:

1. “Did the researcher’s psychological training, or professional identity as a psychologist facilitate the sensitive information shared by the participants?” In many encounters, it was noted in the process notes (Halpern, 1983) that certain interviewees commented on the fact that the researcher worked in the field of psychology. This dynamic was observed particularly in participants asking for opinions or advice concerning emotional trauma, and how it may have contributed to later actions in life. In such cases, the researcher was mindful of the difference between being a researcher, attempting to engage in empathic listening and rapport building, and offering any therapeutic perspective on the participant’s personal situation. Care was taken to clearly highlight the role of the researcher, whilst offering non-partisan advice on further supports or resources.

2. “Did the researcher’s ethnicity, as an Irish national living in the Republic of Ireland, affect interview dynamics, particularly for participants who were once members of the IRA or the UVF?” The researcher was aware that the process of revealing

information about the self to interviewees (i.e. self-disclosure) can lead to role confusion (Dickson, Knussen, & Flowers, 2007). Whilst it was clear to all participants that the researcher was from the Republic of Ireland, the researcher was careful to avoid disclosing their personal opinion(s), or offering any information pertaining to their religion or political leanings.

3. “Did the researcher’s remoteness from the lived experience of terrorism affect how the research was conducted?”. The topic of terrorism is a highly emotive subject and it is common for researchers to misinterpret their role in the research agenda (to fix, rather than understand; see Schmid & Jongman, 1998, p. 175). At times, the researcher noted that they were struggling to maintain objectivity in how they interpreted the views espoused by interviewees (see Silke, 2001, p. 2). The importance of self-care was evident during this process (Lee, 1993) and, to ensure the integrity of both the research and the participants, the researcher regularly stepped back from the data and re-assessed their role, before returning with a sharper perspective.

8.3.2 Key learning points.

In line with Schön’s model of reflective writing (1987; 1991), this section is structured according to two, distinct types of reflection, to aid with identification of the key learning points encountered during the research process. The first is reflection-*in*-action (the experience, and subsequent actions) and, reflection-*on*-action (the ongoing reframing, reconsideration, and learning from the experience). The aim of these processes was to highlight the various instances of “challenge-to-competency” (Shaw, 2010, p. 233) that shaped the nature of the research. The learning points that arose during this process are provided below.

Learning point 1. Considering ethical guidelines; Labelling.

In line with the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) code of ethics (2019), all participatory research is ethically required to respect participants' right to receive an appropriate explanation of the nature, purpose and results of the investigation (p. 17), as well as protect the dignity and wellbeing of participants (p. 12). On occasion, in attempting to balance both principles, ethical dilemmas arose that required supervisory discussion, and reconsideration of subsequent actions.

Reflection in action. Prospective participants were offered an appropriate explanation of the nature and purpose of the research, by describing *why* the participant had been invited to participate (i.e. the population of interest) as well as the types of questions the study was seeking to answer. This information was designed to be transparent on these points, including terms such as “violent extremism”, and “former”. However, in the early stages of recruitment, it became clear to the researcher that many participants were not comfortable with such rhetoric. In a written correspondence with a potential participant, the correspondent highlighted that a) “language relating to our past is a key issue for us”, and; b) the framing of the study would likely to cause upset, as well as jeopardise the willingness of individuals to participate; “we were not members of a ‘violent extremist organisation’ nor are we ‘formers’”. The source of this dilemma lay with respecting the right of participants to receive an appropriate explanation of the nature of the research (*integrity*), whilst also protecting their dignity and wellbeing (*responsibility*). It became clear that both principles could not be maintained without a reframing of the research.

Reflection on action. Following supervisory discussions, a decision was made to remove subjective, emotionally-laden terms from a) the information provided to participants, and; b) the language used in the interviews. In this way, the participants' likelihood of distress or discomfort was reduced. However, this would, in turn, affect the integrity of the

information provided to participants, as, in many ways, certain elements of the study were being withheld. Therefore, it was decided that, in the absence of colloquial language, a more scientific, clinical approach could be explored whereby the phenomena are described explicitly. For example, instead of saying “other terrorists”, the concept would be re-framed to: “other people who had committed similar acts of violence with similar organisations”. In observing this slight change in language, the researcher noted that, very often, the absence of evocative language by the researcher did not reduce the likelihood of the participant using it themselves, and the terms surfaced regardless. However, it nonetheless created a dynamic whereby the participant was not being labelled as something they did not identify with, whilst also being clear about the nature and purpose of the investigation.

The process of considering, and re-considering the use of specific words or phrases was pivotal for the overall development of this thesis, as well as the researcher’s own development in the field of counter-terrorism. Following this exercise, previous thesis chapters were re-visited, and terms elucidated to ensure consistency, and transparency. For example, removing labels such as ‘terrorist’ or a ‘violent extremist’ and, instead, using technical language to describe, where possible, the behaviour(s) of interest, and the complexity of experience for those who perpetrate such acts.

Learning point 2: Imperfect knowledge.

Reflection in action. The researcher was aware of the nature of counter-terrorism research, and the urgency by which findings can be applied to policy (Lum, Kennedy, & Sherley, 2008). This created an additional layer of responsibility on behalf of the researcher, owing to feelings of discomfort that arose from potentially synthesising imperfect knowledge.

Reflection on action. The researcher continuously sought to explore and include data that pertained, exclusively, to the research question(s). During supervisory discussions, the

potential interpretation(s) of the findings were at the forefront, and words were chosen carefully to avoid ambiguity. For example, observing that many participants became involved in terrorism following persecution by an adversary, the researcher was careful not to suggest that vehemently opposing oppression, maltreatment, or discrimination was a pre-cursor to committing a terrorist attack; importantly, the researcher reflected on what such an insinuation may mean for global oppression around the world, and was careful to emphasise the difference between legitimate grievances, and illegitimate responses.

8.4 Overall Implications of Findings

In global efforts to reduce the appeal of terrorist organisations, and prevent individuals from joining them, the countering terrorist narratives has become a focus of enquiry for academics and practitioners alike. Indeed, a number of counter-narrative guidelines have been published by a variety counter-terrorism actors, and are freely available to the public (Ebner, 2019; The Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2016; Tuck et al., 2016). Beyond publications on the topic, in 2018, five of the eight projects supported by the European Commission REG-AG program³⁴ were concerned with the development of counter-narratives (Frischlich et al., 2018). What has become clear from the current research programme is that any attempt to design a counter-narrative should reflect the complexity of that which it seeks to counter and consider that an ineffective counter-narrative, beyond having no effect, has the potential to have exacerbating effects. Indeed, the counter-narrative, in many ways, has a much more difficult job than the dominant one.

8.4.1 The terrorist narrative.

In an analysis of Lehi, a Zionist paramilitary organisation in Israel, Cromer suggests that if terrorist narratives were not, even partially, confirmed by true events “they would soon

³⁴ The REG-AG programme is concerned with supporting “dialogue and exchange of best practice in fostering tolerance and mutual respect” (European Commission, 2018, p. 1).

become obsolete” (2017, p. 284). Whilst acknowledging the half-truths, simplifications, and ill-supported claims that formed composite parts of the individual and template narratives identified in Study 2, it must also be noted that such techniques are not exclusive to terrorism. In fact, flawed reasoning is characteristic of the *majority* of human communication (Kahneman, 2011). The findings from Study 2 are in line with Cromer’s suggestion, pointing to a quasi-rationality that colours fact with fiction, truth with deception. In this way, a blanket approach to countering such narratives is theoretically unsupported, and likely to result in manifestations of resistance such as reactance (strengthening one’s initial position, see Brehm, 1966), inertia (resistance to change itself, see Heider, 1946; Moyer-Guse, 2008, p. 417), distrust (directed towards the source, Knowles & Linn, 2004), or scrutiny (critical analysis, see Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The quasi-rational construction of terrorist narratives that legitimise violence must, therefore, be considered when seeking to counter them.

8.4.2 Countering terrorist narratives.

In 2014, the Quilliam foundation published a practical guide to countering violent extremism online, advising that governments, civil society, and the private sector work jointly to deliver effective counter-messages that address the theological arguments put forth in terrorist narratives. This report remarked that such efforts should “contextualise the scriptural references that are used by extremists” (Hussain & Saltman, 2014, p. 109) in an attempt to undermine their credibility. An example of such an initiative is the ‘Ibaana’ programme, a prison programme in which a trained chaplain challenges the theological arguments used by these prisoners to justify their extremist views (see HM Government, 2014). However, the evidence emerging from this thesis on the effectiveness of such approaches is unclear.

Informed by Study 1, Study 3 used logical, theoretically-informed counter-arguments in the form of alternative accounts against a dominant, pro-Hamas narrative (Generic

Counter-Narrative or ^{Gen}CN). The goal of this approach was to introduce a plausible, causal alternative to the use of terrorist violence. Unexpectedly, a ‘boomerang’ effect occurred in this condition, with participants’ levels of violence-legitimising norms at similar levels to those exposed to the terrorist narrative alone. Indeed, when observing the moderating role of participants’ scores on the Cognitive Reflection Test, it became clear that the stronger the participants’ ability to override pre-potent, ‘gut’ responses, the less affected they were by these plausible, causal alternatives. It would appear that this strategy, that of contextualising, challenging, and undermining the credibility of the dominant narrative, led the ‘critical thinkers’ to experience resistance; an elicited response to real or perceived pressure for change, against the change (Knowles & Linn, 2004). Considering that cognitive reflection served as a protective factor against the justified, violence-legitimising narrative (*ViolentN*), it is a noteworthy point that it also served as a protective factor against attempts to counter it.

Critical thinkers and counter-narratives. In Chapter 2, the contagion hypothesis was discussed and dismissed as an unsubstantiated perspective on how terrorist organisations target potential recruits. One of the criticisms of this perspective, posited by Nacos (2009) was its assumption that the media can spread ideas like a virus, ignoring the “intelligence and good judgement” of those whom consume it (p. 4). With the above finding, this theme has arisen again, but this time it is the intelligence and good judgement of individuals that is being overlooked in relation to *counter*-narratives. Such approaches, the present one included, incorrectly assume that a plausible, equally causal ‘counter’ to a dominant narrative will infiltrate the intelligence and good judgement of target. In many ways, this finding was corroborated in Study 1 in relation to persuasion.

Persuading against terrorism. A technique that frequently arises in counter-narrative guidelines is the use of persuasive techniques. In 2013, the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), in collaboration with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, published a

detailed report on counter-narratives, with recommendations for designing successful campaigns using emotions, professional-looking productions, and satire. Emotions, they report, are more important than evidence as facts and statistics can be dismissed whilst emotional appeals have “greater power” (p. 6); satire, they report, has historically played an effective role in undermining extremists such as the Ku Klux Klan whilst high quality productions “critical to legitimacy and appeal” (p. 6).

In general, despite the obvious success of persuasive communication in creating new attitudes (“response-making”; see Berlo, 1960), the approach is a precarious methodology for countering existing attitudes or behaviour, particularly on contentious outcomes such as threat, hostility or the legitimisation of violence. It has been suggested that counter-narratives should be aimed at individuals “further along the path to radicalisation” (Briggs et al., 2013) and, as such, there are several unintended effects which may arise from the use any technique that runs the risk of increasing resistance. If an individual wants to maintain psychological consistency with their baseline attitudes (Wegener, Petty, Smoak. & Fabrigar, 2004), is not motivated to cognitively restructure (Festinger, 1957), or simply does not wish to engage with the appeal (Briñol, Rucker, Tormala, & Petty, 2004) such attempts will likely result in a boomerang effect (as seen in Study 3 with the ^{Gen}CN) or no change at all. Furthermore, with extant evidence that persuasive communication techniques are used to entice vulnerable individuals into supporting, or perpetrating, acts of violence (Braddock et al., 2016; Jowett et al., 2018), the logic of *embracing* these methods in an attempt to counter their pervasiveness is counter-intuitive, as well as ethically irresponsible. If the counter-narrative is to become an evidence-based tool for countering violent extremism, it should not employ the same, manipulative techniques of those whom it intends to discredit.

The tailored approach. This echoes the concerns offered by researchers such as Reed (2017b) and Ingram et al. (2016) who comment that counter-narratives are “inherently

defensive” (p. 12), and any attempt is likely to fail for this reason. An key finding to emerge from Study 3 was on the effectiveness of the Tailored Counter-Narrative (^{Tail}CN) approach. Here, participants were guided to challenge the instrumentality of violence as put forth in terrorist narrative. By allowing participants to feel that the arguments they created against the use of violence “reflect[ed] their true nature or beliefs” (Wilson, 1990, p. 45), this strategy sought to reduce any unintended effects, and restore autonomy to the participant. Whilst the evidence from this thesis is not without methodological limitations, this finding is nonetheless theoretically (McGuire, 1961), and empirically supported (Banas et al., 2017; Braddock, 2019).

8.5 Conclusion

For those who work to stop terrorist attacks from happening, it is becoming clear that “hard” approaches to combatting the issue must also be complemented by more innovative approaches; strategies that deter individuals from ever becoming involved offer a unique opportunity to do this. As discussed broadly at the beginning of this thesis, terrorist propaganda generally surfaces when an idea or concept is a ‘hard sell’, and cannot be conveyed without simplistic, seemingly causal connections between cause(s) and effect(s) (Black, 2001, p. 129), necessitating the use of deceptive techniques, and compelling narratives. Although it has been acknowledged that the nature of terrorist narratives is not purely intuitive, there is nonetheless an obvious tool at the disposal of those seeking to counter such narratives; they are relatively easy to counter. Furthermore, with the correct skills, most individuals can do it. Although the use of clever arguments, sound logic, or impressive videography may outwardly appear promising, it is, in itself, quite defensive. If the narratives purported by terrorist organisations are so farfetched, why can people not counter them, themselves?

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Personality and Social Psychology, 92(3), 389 - 401. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.3.389>

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Study 1.

1.1 Coding Categories.

1.1.1 Exclusion criteria

a) Exclusion criteria for title and abstract screening

- 1) Exclude Duplicate
 - a) Publications which match another title in exactly (i.e. title, author and year) should be excluded.
- 2) Exclude Language
 - a) Publications not published in English should be excluded.
- 3) Exclude Publication Type
 - a) Publications that do not report first-hand empirical findings (e.g. government reports, newspaper articles and minutes of meetings) should be excluded.
- 4) Exclude non-Intervention
 - a) Publications which are not exposing participants to an intervention should be excluded.
 - b) Publications which are not adopting an experimental design (e.g. RCT or factorial design) should be excluded.
- 5) Exclude Narrative vs. Counter-Narrative
 - a) Publications which do not challenge an existing narrative should be excluded.
- 6) Exclude Unrelated to Violent Radicalisation
 - a) Publications which do not measure outcomes related to violent radicalisation or target risk factors for violent radicalisation should be excluded.

1.1.2 Inclusion criteria

b) Inclusion criteria for title and abstract screening

- 1) Counter-Narrative intervention
 - a) Publications exposing participants to an intervention which can be operationally defined as a counter-narrative should be included.
 - i. The counter-narrative intervention may be therapeutic (delivered following exposure to an existing narrative).
 - ii. The counter-narrative intervention may be preventative (delivered before exposure to a narrative ‘to-be-counterred’)
- 2) Evidence of existing narrative
 - a) Publications which show evidence of an existing narrative or a narrative ‘to-be-counterred’ should be included.
 - i. The narrative may be determined by baseline/pre-test scores.
 - ii. The narrative may be experimentally introduced.

- iii. The narrative among the population may be empirically evident in a different study.
- iv. The narrative may be evident in the sample due considerable evidence to be weighed by the initial and second coder.

3) Outcomes

- a) Publications which measure outcomes related to violent radicalisation should be included.
 - i. Outcomes may be primary outcomes related to violent radicalisation (e.g. engagement in violent extremism or providing support to violent extremist groups).
 - ii. Outcomes may be secondary outcomes related to violent radicalisation (e.g. adversarial stereotypes, outgroup feelings or attitudes towards violence).
 - Secondary outcomes, in particular, must be considered a risk factor for violent radicalisation, (see *Table 6*).

4) Design

- a) Publications adopting an experimental design where at least one of the independent variables involves comparing a counter-narrative to a control or comparison exposure should be included. These may include:
 - i. Randomised Control Trials (RCT) whereby participants are randomly assigned to experimental or control conditions (e.g. two-group between-subjects design).
 - ii. Factorial designs, with more than one independent variable (e.g. pre-post as a within-subjects variable, and exposure (e.g. present/absent) as a between-subjects variable).
 - iii. Single group pre- and post-test studies which collect longitudinal data at baseline and end-line.

1.2 Additional Tables

Table 1(b).

Data Extraction Table (extensive).

Available from:

https://nuigalwayie-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/s_carthy1_nuigalway_ie/ETFWjSVCZodLuQg0a5orEmYBtynx_5-rwzEQt0lurBhFHg?e=kLXRQQ

Table 2 (a).

Search Terms

Search domain	Topical domain	Key Words
Title or Abstract	Intervention (<i>'counter-narrative'</i>)	(Alter-messaging OR Alternative framing OR Anti-messaging OR anti-radicalism message OR anti-radicalization message OR Anti-terrorist campaign OR Anti-violence campaign OR Argument scrutiny OR attitude-change OR Citizen messenger OR Common narrative OR Contesting narratives OR Countering ideological support for extremism OR Counter analogy OR Counter-argument OR Counter-attitudinal OR Counter-campaign OR Counter example OR Counter-ideological OR Counter-message OR Counter-messaging campaign OR Counter-messaging intervention OR Counter-messaging interventions OR Counter-messaging strategy OR Counter-messenger OR Counter-narrative OR Counter-narrative campaign OR Counter-narrative message OR counter-radicalisation OR counter-recruitment OR counter-speech OR counter-strategy OR countering campaign OR countering materials OR ideological counterpoint OR strategic narrative OR narrative intervention OR narrative transportation OR public diplomacy OR

		rhetorical education OR Security narrative OR strategic communication OR Ideological response)
Title or Abstract AND Full Text	Research area (<i>'counter-terrorism'</i>)	(Anti-colonialism OR Anti-imperialist OR Anti-terror OR Anti-terrorism OR Battle of Ideas OR Conflict OR Conflict resolution OR Counter- terrorism OR counter-radicalization OR Countering Violent Extremism OR CVE OR Deradicalisation OR Deradicalization OR De-radicalisation OR De-radicalization OR Disengagement OR Extremism OR Ideological distortion OR ideological distortions OR Ideological battle OR Ideological War OR Indoctrination OR intellectual activist OR Islamic terrorism OR Islamist terrorism OR militant activist OR Online radicalisation OR Recruit OR Radical OR Radical group OR Radical movement OR Radicalisation OR Radicalism OR Security OR Terrorism OR Terrorist action OR violence OR Violent Extremism OR War OR War of ideas OR Terrorist threat OR Terrorist incident OR Terrorist ideology OR Terrorist sympathiser OR Violent extremism online OR Violent extremist ideology OR Violent extremist message)
Full Text	Problem (<i>'terrorist narrative'</i>)	(Alternative historical accounts OR Extremist propaganda OR Extremist sympathiser OR Audio-visual production OR Branding OR Collective memory OR Digital communication OR Extremism online OR Extremist argument OR Extremist content online OR Extremist ideology OR Extremist message OR Extremist narrative OR Anti-American OR anti American OR Anti-American rhetoric OR Global narrative OR Ideology, Ideological influence OR ideological legitimization OR Ideological message OR Ideological support OR Indoctrination OR Islamist extremist narrative OR Islamist ideology OR Jihadi ideologues OR Justifications for violence OR Legitimacy of terrorism OR Local narrative OR Master Narrative OR Media communication OR Message OR Message manipulation OR Meta-narrative OR Misinformation OR Misinformation online OR Narrative OR narrative criminology OR Narrative transformation OR Observational Argument OR Online extremism OR opinion change OR Persuasion OR Persuasive communication OR Personal narrative OR Persuasive strategies OR

Political idea OR Political strategy OR Propaganda campaign OR radicalism OR radical ideology OR radical narrative OR radical perspective OR radical perspectives OR radical theorist OR radical worldview OR recruitment narrative OR Religio-ideological OR Religious justification OR Rhetoric OR Rhetorical tactics OR Rhetorical terrorism OR Rhetorical vision OR Social-influence OR Statements OR Terror OR recruitment strategies)

Table 2 (b).

Search methods and databases.

Database	Area	Search method
Web of Science	<i>Science</i>	1 “Intervention” TITLE and “Research Area” TOPIC and “Problem” TOPIC
		2 “Intervention” TITLE and “Research Area” TITLE and “Research Area” TOPIC and “Problem” TOPIC
		3 “Intervention” TITLE and “Research Area” TOPIC and “Problem” TITLE
		4 “Intervention” TITLE and “Research Area” TITLE and “Problem” TITLE
		5 “narrative” TITLE and “experiment” or “randomised control trial” or “randomized control trial” or “RCT” TOPIC and “violence” OR “extremism” OR violent extremism
PsycInfo	<i>Psychology</i>	“Intervention” TITLE or ABSTRACT and “Research Area” ALL FIELDS and “Problem” ALL FIELDS
		“Intervention” TITLE or ABSTRACT and “Research Area” TITLE or ABSTRACT and “Research Area” ALL FIELDS and “Problem” ALL FIELDS
		“Intervention” TITLE or ABSTRACT and “Research Area” ALL FIELDS and “Problem” TITLE or ABSTRACT

		<i>Shortened</i> “Intervention” TITLE or ABSTRACT and <i>Shortened</i> “Research Area” TITLE or ABSTRACT and <i>Shortened</i> “Problem” TITLE or ABSTRACT
Scopus	<i>Science</i>	<i>Shortened</i> “Intervention” ALL and <i>Shortened</i> “Research Area” ALL and <i>Shortened</i> “Problem” ALL
		“Intervention” TITLE-ABS-KEY and <i>Shortened</i> “Research Area” ALL and <i>Shortened</i> “Problem” ALL
		“Intervention” TITLE-ABS-KEY and “Research Area” ALL and <i>Shortened</i> “Problem” ALL
		“Intervention” ALL and “Research Area” ALL and <i>Shortened</i> “Problem” ALL
		“Intervention” ALL and “Research Area” ALL and “Problem” ALL
Zetoc	<i>Reports</i>	(keywords) “terrorism” and “narrative”
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts	Political Science	“Intervention” ABSTRACT and “Research Area” ABSTRACT and “Problem” ABSTRACT and (excl. book reviews and news) <i>Shortened</i> “Intervention” DOCUMENT TITLE
		<i>Shortened</i> “Intervention” ABSTRACT and “Research Area” ABSTRACT and “Problem” ABSTRACT
Columbia International Affairs Online	Politics	(keywords) “terrorism” and “narrative” and “prevent”
Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA)	Social Science	<i>Shortened</i> “Intervention” DOCUMENT TITLE or “Intervention” ABSTRACT or “Research Area” DOCUMENT TITLE and “Problem” ABSTRACT
		<i>Shortened</i> “Intervention” DOCUMENT TITLE and “Research Area” DOCUMENT TITLE and “Problem” ABSTRACT
		(keyword) “terrorism” ABSTRACT and <i>Shortened</i> “Intervention” ABSTRACT

		<i>Shortened</i> “Research Area” ABSTRACT and <i>Shortened</i> “Intervention” ABSTRACT
		“Intervention” DOCUMENT TITLE and “Research Area” ABSTRACT and “Problem” ALL 16 (2015-2020)
ETHOS	Unpublished (Doctoral Theses)	(keywords) ‘terrorism’ or ‘radicalisation’ or ‘radicalization’ and ‘narrative’
NCJRS Abstracts Database	Criminal	(keywords) ‘terrorism’ or ‘radicalisation’ or ‘radicalization’ and ‘narrative’ “COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM”
Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)	Science	(keywords) “violent extremism” or “violent extremist” and “radicalization” or “radicalisation” “counter-narrative” OR “counternarrative”
Hedayah (Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security and Society)	Security	(keywords) “violent extremism” or “violent extremist” and “radicalization” or “radicalisation”
SAGE	Science	[[Title counternarrative] OR [Title counter-narrative]] AND [All experiment]

6. Was knowledge of the allocated interventions adequately prevented during the study?	High risk.	Low risk.	Low risk.	Unclear.	Low risk.	Unclear.	Low risk.					
7. Was the study adequately protected against contamination?	Low risk.	Low risk.	Low risk.	Low risk.	Low risk.	Low risk.	Low risk.	Low risk.	Low risk.	Low risk.	Low risk.	Low risk.
8. Was the study free from selective outcome reporting?	Low risk.	Unclear.	Low risk.									
9. Was the study free from other risks of bias?	Low risk.	High risk.	Low risk.									

¹No baseline measure.

²Varied ages and IDP status.

Table 5(b).

Quality Assessment.

Available from:

https://nuigalwayie-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/s_carthy1_nuigalway_ie/ET5vXZFbZ7REp3IgSoopnMoBdvFFMI5Vehriu1sUJo1Cbw?e=WtFq3Y

Table 6.

Study Outcomes and Their Associated Risk Factors

Study	Outcome	Sample item(s)	Risk Factor		
			Sub-category	Overall	
1	Cernat (2001)	Stereotype dimensions	<i>Hungarians are: aggressive, extreme etc.</i>	Symbolic threat ¹	Perceived group threat
		Evaluations	<i>Feelings towards Hungarians: admiration, respect, attraction, joy, disgust etc.</i>	Explicit bias	Out-group hostility
2	Kendrick et al. (2004)	<i>Rate your feelings towards: The US government.</i>		Realistic threat ³	Perceived group threat
		<i>Rate your feelings towards: How Muslims are treated in the US</i>			
		<i>Rate your feelings towards: The US people.</i>		Explicit bias	Out-group hostility
3	Ramasubramanian et al. (2007)	Hostile feelings	<i>[Feelings towards African-Americans]: fear, anger, hostility etc.</i>	Realistic threat ³	Perceived group threat
		Feeling Thermometer	<i>[Feelings towards African-Americans]: from 0° (very negative) to 100° (very positive)</i>	Explicit bias	Out-group hostility
4	Gonsalkorale et al. (2010) Study 2	Implicit Association Task (IAT)	<i>Participants used two keys to categorize 12 target images (six Black faces, six White faces) and 16 evaluative words (8 pleasant, 8 unpleasant).</i>	In-group favouritism/out-group hostility	
5	Alhabash et al. (2012)	National attitudes	<i>[Palestinians]: “want peace”, “are responsible for violence”, “are democratic” etc.</i>	Symbolic threat ¹	Perceived group threat
		Affective Misattribution Procedure (AMP)	<i>Participants were exposed to an image of a Palestinian, followed by a neutral (usually Chinese) image which they then rated for “valence” (i.e. negative – positive).</i>	Implicit bias	Out-group hostility
6	Bilewicz et al. (2013)	Feeling Thermometer (Alwin, 1997)	<i>[Feelings towards Polish people]: from 0° (very negative) to 100° (very positive)</i>	Explicit bias	Out-group hostility
		Perceived similarity to the self (reversed)	<i>[shared with Polish people]: “common interests” “common experiences”</i>	Symbolic threat ²	Perceived group threat
7	Garagosov (2013)	Implicit association task (IAT)	<i>Participants used two keys to categorize images of the former Armenian president (Serzh Sargsyan) and evaluative words</i>	Implicit bias	Out-group hostility
8	Alhabash et al. (2015)	Explicit stereotypes.	<i>[Palestinians are]: dirty, loyal, cruel etc.</i>	Symbolic threat ¹	Perceived group threat
		Affective Misattribution Procedure (AMP)	<i>Participants were exposed to an image of a Palestinian, followed by a neutral (usually Chinese) image which they then rated for “valence” (i.e. negative – positive).</i>	Implicit bias	Out-group hostility
9	Cohen, Tal-Or et al. (2015) Study 1	Post-exposure attitudes	<i>[Arab students] “It should be forbidden for [Arab students] to demonstrate in the heart of the campus”; “each and every citizen has the right to express his or her opinions everywhere, including on campus” etc.</i>	Realistic threat ⁴	Perceived group threat

10	Saleem et al. (2015) <i>Experiment 3</i>	Perceptions of Muslims as aggressive	<i>[Muslims are]</i> : dangerous, violent etc.	Realistic threat ³	Perceived group threat	
		Support for civil restrictions for Muslim Americans	<i>[Muslims Americans]</i> : should not be allowed to vote, should have to do annual security clearance checks with government agencies etc.			
		Support for military action in Muslim countries	E.g. "I would support the use of U.S. military to reduce the influence of Islam on other countries"	Radical belief system		
11	Banas et al. (2017)	Conspiratorial attitudes	<i>[The position advocated in the anti-government message¹ was]</i> foolish / wise, bad / good, unfavourable / favourable, unacceptable / acceptable etc.	Realistic threat ³	Perceived group threat	
12	Bruneau et al. (2017)	Study 1	Palestinian violence	E.g. " <i>[Palestinians]</i> are much more violent than other groups"	Realistic threat ³	Perceived group threat
			Feeling thermometer (Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993)	<i>[Feelings towards Palestinians]</i> : from 0° (very negative) to 100° (very positive)	Explicit bias	Out-group hostility
13	Bruneau et al. (2017)	Study 2	Palestinian violence	See Study 1.	Realistic threat ³	Perceived group threat
			Feeling thermometer (Haddock et al., 1993)	See Study 1.	Explicit bias	Out-group hostility
14	Bruneau et al. (2017)	Study 3	Palestinian violence	See Study 1.	Realistic threat ³	Perceived group threat
			Feeling thermometer (Haddock et al., 1993)	See Study 1.	Explicit bias	Out-group hostility
15	Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2017)	Study 1	Belief in reconciliation	<i>I believe/don't believe that [Towards Bosniaks, Serbs, or Croats]</i> : "will ever be able to live together in peace", "can cooperate together" "can build a country together" etc.	Symbolic threat ¹	Perceived group threat
			Forgiveness	"I am ready to forgive <i>[Bosniaks, Serbs, or Croats]</i> for things that they have done during the war", "I could never forgive the committed crimes" etc.	Explicit bias	Out-group hostility
16	Čehajić-Clancy et al. (2017)	Study 2	Belief in reconciliation	See Study 1.	Symbolic threat ¹	Perceived group threat
			Intergroup anxiety	<i>[Feelings towards Bosniaks, Serbs, or Croats]</i> : trust, comfort, confidence etc.	Out-group hostility	
17	Frischlich et al. (2018)	Study 1	Extremist attitudes	Agreement with: <i>[RWEX and ISEX propaganda]</i>	Radical belief system	
18	Frischlich et al. (2018)	Study 2	Extremist attitudes	See Study 1.		
19	Riles et al. (2018)	Social Stigma (Link et al., 1997, p. 181; Smith, 2012)	"Most people would think less of a person who is a <i>[Muslim]</i> ", "Most employers will hire a <i>[Muslim person]</i> if he or she is qualified for the job", "Most people believe that <i>[Muslims]</i> cannot be trusted"	Symbolic threat ²	Perceived group threat	
		Social Distance	"Could you see yourself renting a room in your home to <i>[a Muslim person]</i> ?", "Could you see yourself spending an evening socializing with <i>[a Muslim person]</i> ?" etc.	Realistic threat ⁴		

¹Perceived differences in values and/or motives ²Perceived group differences ³To one's physical safety ⁴To one's existence

Table 7.

Sensitivity Analysis Testing Individual Study-Changes for Analysis 5.4.2.1 (Figure 2)

Analysis	Study	Decision	SMD	95% CI	p	Heterogeneity	
Original analysis	Cernat (2001)	Overall average across outcomes	Stereotype dimensions (aggression + extremism / 2) + negative evaluations (Hungarians) / 2	-.39	-0.55 to -0.24	<.000	($\chi^2 = 19.38$ [p <.02], I ² = 54%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Sensitivity analysis	Cernat (2001)	Most relevant outcome (no reliability analysis provided)	Stereotype dimensions (aggression + extremism / 2)	-.39	-0.55 to 0.24	<.000	($\chi^2 = 19.41$ [p <.02], I ² = 54%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Result	No change						
Original analysis	Bilewicz et al. (2013)	Overall average across outcomes	Perceived similarity to the self + feeling thermometer / 2	-.39	-0.55 to -0.24	<.000	($\chi^2 = 19.38$ [p <.02], I ² = 54%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Sensitivity analysis	Bilewicz et al. (2013)	Most valid ($\alpha = .92$)	Perceived similarity to the self	-.39	-0.54 to -0.24	<.000	($\chi^2 = 18.73$ [p <.03], I ² = 52%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Result	No change						
Original analysis	Saleem et al. (2015)	Overall average across outcomes	(Violent perceptions + civil restrictions / 2) + military action / 2	-.39	-0.55 to -0.24	<.000	($\chi^2 = 19.38$ [p <.02], I ² = 54%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Sensitivity analysis	Saleem et al. (2015)	Most valid outcome ($\alpha = .92$)	Civil restrictions	-.39	0.55 to -0.22	<.000	($\chi^2 = 22.81$ [p <.01], I ² = 61%, $\tau^2 = 0.04$)
Result	No change						
Original analysis	Bruneau et al. (2017a)	Overall average across outcomes	Palestinian violence + feeling thermometer / 2	-.39	-0.55 to -0.24	<.000	($\chi^2 = 19.38$ [p <.02], I ² = 54%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Sensitivity analysis	Bruneau et al. (2017a)	Most valid outcome	Palestinian violence	-.40	-0.56 to -0.25	<.000	($\chi^2 = 19.86$ [p <.02], I ² = 55%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Result	Slight increase in effect size						

Original analysis	Bruneau et al. (2017b)	Overall average across outcomes	Palestinian violence + feeling thermometer /2	-.39	-0.55 to -0.24	<.000	($\chi^2 = 19.38$ [p <.02], I ² = 54%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Sensitivity analysis	Bruneau et al. (2017b)	Most valid outcome ($\alpha = .87$)	Palestinian violence	-.39	-0.55 to -0.24	<.000	($\chi^2 = 19.36$ [p <.02], I ² = 54%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Result	No change						
Original analysis	Bruneau et al. (2017c)	Overall average across outcomes	Palestinian violence + feeling thermometer /2	-.39	-0.55 to -0.24	<.000	($\chi^2 = 19.38$ [p <.02], I ² = 54%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Sensitivity analysis	Bruneau et al. (2017c)	Most valid outcome ($\alpha = .93$)	Palestinian violence	-.40	-0.56 to -0.25	<.000	($\chi^2 = 18.80$ [p <.03], I ² = 52%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Result	Slight increase in effect size						
Original analysis	Riles et al. (2018)	Overall average across outcomes	Social stigma + social distance / 2	-.39	-0.55 to -0.24	<.000	($\chi^2 = 19.38$ [p = .02], I ² = 54%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Sensitivity analysis	Riles et al. (2018)	Most valid outcome ($\alpha = .92$)	Social distance	-.58	-0.94 to -0.22	.001	($\chi^2 = 104.60$ [p <.000], I ² = 91%, $\tau^2 = 0.29$)
Result	Moderate increase in effect size						

Table 8.*Sensitivity Analysis Incorporating Multiple Changes For Analysis 5.4.3.1 (Figure 2)*

Analysis	Study	Decision	SMD	95% CI	p	Heterogeneity
Original analysis	<i>Cernat (2001); Bilewicz et al. (2013); Saleem et al. (2015); Bruneau et al. (2017a, b & c); Riles et al. (2018)</i>	Multiple outcomes in a single study are pooled to create an average (see Table 11a).	-0.39	-0.55 to -0.24	<.000	($\chi^2 = 19.38$ [p = .02], I ² = 54%, $\tau^2 = 0.03$)
Sensitivity analysis	<i>Cernat (2001); Bilewicz et al. (2013); Saleem et al. (2015); Bruneau et al. (2017a, b & c); Riles et al. (2018)</i>	The most valid/relevant outcome is chosen from each study (See Table 11a)	-0.58	-0.94 to -0.21	0.002	($\chi^2 = 107.29$ [p = .000], I ² = 92%, $\tau^2 = 0.30$)
Result	Although there was a moderate increase in effect size, the between-effect difference was not statistically significant ($X^2 = 0.82$, df = 1; p = .37).					

Appendix 2: Study 2

2.1 Ethical Approval Statement



Leas-Uachtarán
um Thaighde

Vice President
for Research

28 September 2017

Ref: 17-Sep-04

Sarah Carthy
School of Psychology
NUI Galway

Dear Sarah,

Re: "Countering online youth radicalisation: Developing evidence-based counter-narratives and inoculation techniques"

I write to you regarding the above proposal which was submitted for Ethical review. Having reviewed your response to my letter, I am pleased to inform you that your proposal has been granted **APPROVAL**.

All NUI Galway Research Ethic Committee approval is given subject to the Principal Investigator submitting annual and final statements of compliance. The first statement is due on or before 28 September 2018.

See annual and final statement of compliance forms below. Section 7 of the REC's Standard Operating Procedures gives further details, and also outlines other instances where you are required to report to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Walsh
Acting Chair, Research Ethics Committee

2.2 Safety Protocol



Safety protocol for face-to-face interviews

The following details the safety protocol for conducting face-to-face interviews.

The Participants

The participants involved in this study will be categorised as ‘former’ extremists (or ‘formers’). To be categorised as such, the participants can no longer be active in any violent extremist organisation. The participant must be disengaged from the organisation for a minimum of two years (if not previously vetted by the Against Violent Extremism network). If the researcher suspects that an individual is less than two years ‘out’ of the organisation, they will not be interviewed.

The Location

The interview will take place in a public place (e.g. café, office building, University campus) with the time, date and location agreed, in writing, beforehand (i.e. via email or text message).

‘Buddy’ System

Before the interview, the interviewer will inform at least one other (most likely, the interviewer’s supervisor) the time, date, location and predicted length of the interview. The interviewer will make contact with this person immediately before and after the interview.

The Interview Schedule

As mentioned, those involved in this study will be categorised as ‘formers’ and, as such, will not be active in any terrorist organisation. However, to minimise the risk of the researcher becoming exploited by the participants, the researcher will make clear from the beginning of the interview that, “although the project cannot benefit the participants personally, the knowledge gained will hopefully help us better understand how people become involved in extremism”. This will reduce participants’ expectations of any political or bureaucratic influence that could be asserted by the researcher.

2.3 Participant Information Sheet

 <p style="text-align: right;">Scoil na Siceolaíochta School of Psychology</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Understanding narratives of violence</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Participant Information Sheet</p> <p>You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This information sheet will tell you about the purpose, risks and benefits of this research study. If you agree to take part, we will ask you to sign a Consent Form. If there is anything that you are not clear about, we will be happy to explain it to you. Please take as much time as you need to read it. You should only consent to participate in this research study when you feel that you understand what is being asked of you, and you have had enough time to think about your decision.</p> <p>Thank you for reading this.</p> <p>Purpose of the study. We are trying to understand if an effective counter-narrative can be constructed to counter violent extremism. In particular, we are interested in people who have spent at least 5 years with such an organization but who are no longer involved with the organization for at least 2 years. The study will take the form of a one-on-one interview and you may be asked for a second interview.</p> <p>Taking part – what it involves. <i>What will happen to me if I take part?</i> You will be interviewed at a time which suits you. The interview will last one hour and will be tape-recorded and transcribed with pseudonyms used for all names and identifiable features. During the interview, we will discuss your experience of the effective 'narratives' used in violent extremist recruitment and the potential for 'counter-narrative' techniques. No expertise in the area of narratives or counter-narratives is necessary although participants will be asked to draw upon their own experiences.</p> <p><i>What are the possible benefits in taking part?</i> Although the study cannot benefit the participants personally, the knowledge gained through this research will inform counter-terrorism policy and reduce the likelihood of ineffective (or harmful) strategies.</p> <p><i>What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?</i> During the course of the interview, you may be asked to reflect on topics which you may find upsetting. In such an event, no pressure will be applied to finish the interview and the interviewer will proceed as delicately as possible. Necessary services will be offered if necessary and appropriate.</p> <p><i>What happens at the end of the study?</i> The results of the study will be used in the design and evaluation of counter-narratives. It is likely that the results will be published next year and, if requested, the publication can be sent to you.</p>  <p style="text-align: right;">Scoil na Siceolaíochta School of Psychology</p>	<p>It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your rights in any way.</p> <p>Confidentiality All information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. The information collected in this research study will be stored in a way that protects your identity. The recordings will be transcribed for analysis. When transcribing interviews, pseudonyms will be used for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Participants' names.2) Names mentioned in the interview.3) Any identifiable events, places or organisations. <p>Following transcription, audio recordings will be destroyed. Following completion of the study, physical notes taken throughout the interview will be destroyed; transcripts of audio recordings will be stored on a password protected computer for a period of 5 years before being destroyed. Consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet until October 2019 before being destroyed. The primary researcher (me) will have sole access to the consent forms and transcripts. Results from the study will be reported as group data using pseudonyms and will not identify you in any way.</p> <p>Summary Once again, we invite you to take part in this study but remind you that it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.</p> <p><i>Whom do I contact for more information or if I have further concerns?</i></p> <p>Sarah Carthy s.carthy1@nuigalway.ie Kiran Sarma kiran.sarma@nuigalway.ie</p> <p>If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent and in confidence, you may contact the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee; c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, ethics@nuigalway.ie</p>
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2.4 Consent Form



NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

Scoil na Síceolaíochta

School of Psychology

Participant identification number:

CONSENT FORM

Title of project: Countering violent radicalization: Developing evidence-based counter-narratives.

Name of researcher: Sarah Carthy

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and have had enough time to consider the information.

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
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(initials)

Name of Person taking consent (if different from researcher)	Date	Signature
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N/A

N/A

N/A

Researcher	Date	Signature
------------	------	-----------

Sarah Carthy

1 for participant; 1 for researcher; 1 to be kept with research notes

2.5 Sample of Stage 4 (c): Template Narrative Process

For example, in their narrative “it’s a conspiracy” Q22⁽²⁾ spoke about discovering that there was a threat to the white race which risked its very extinction. The participant spoke about standing up for his race, and wanting to create a new world that would be self-governed, preserving the future of white people, removed from the contamination of non-white people. However, it also became clear to Q22 that the government was corrupt with a conspiratorial motive, powered by Jews. This means that securing a future for white people could not be attained passively and that war would have to ensue. Unfortunately, this was the only way to avoid a dilution of human kind and the inevitable extinction of the white race.

Contextually, I2⁽¹⁾ described a different narrative to that of Q22⁽²⁾. I2 explained that the Catholic community in Northern Ireland was being persecuted by their Loyalist adversary. In order to protect his community, he felt as though it was his duty to go out and fight this oppressing body. However, the narrative on the part of the British and Loyalist forces was that of a violent, Republican movement, seeking to wreak havoc; from here, it became apparent to I2 that a ceasefire, or any form of non-violent action, was the equivalent of giving the adversary a “free hand”. In fact, if they (the British and Loyalist forces) felt as though the Republican movement were to simply respond passively, “there’d have been no stopping them” in the mistreatment and massacre of the Catholic people in Northern Ireland.

In the template phase, however, parallels could be drawn between these two narratives based on sentiment, rather than context. This is a story of a protagonist happening upon a discovery that both they, and their community, are being threatened. Responding to this threat with violence is an option created in the wake of a corrupt, ruling body that will only continue to allow this persecution of an innocent people unless drastic steps are taken. Violent extremism, therefore, is justified as the only avenue that can feasibly interrupt the violent oppression of an innocent people; if violent action is not taken then something awful

will inevitably ensue. These two individual narratives (Q22⁽²⁾ and I2⁽¹⁾) formed composite parts of the template narrative “something bad is going to happen”; Narrative 5 (*Figure 16*).

2.6 Individual Narratives

The link to access the 32 individual narratives identified across ten interviewees (approx. 32 pages) is available here:

https://nuigalwayie-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/s_carthy1_nuigalway_ie/EfixbCtLon9MjbtISeupbkEBzcMyVDmUgVtcQaRyNjfSkq?e=sQ5b51

The narratives are also presented visually in Figures 12 – 17.

Appendix 3: Study 3

3.1 Ethical Approval Statement



Leas-Uachtarán
um Thaighde

Vice President
for Research

26 February 2019

Ref: 18-Dec-06

Sarah Carthy
School of Psychology
NUI Galway

Dear Sarah,

Re: 'Countering online youth radicalisation: Developing evidence-based counter-narratives'.

I write to you regarding the above proposal which was submitted for Ethical review. Having reviewed your response to my letter, I am pleased to inform you that your proposal has been granted **APPROVAL**.

Your reviewers made one small suggestion: that you replace 'confirm that you want your data to be used' to 'check that you want your data to be used' in the first sentence.

All NUI Galway Research Ethic Committee approval is given subject to the Principal Investigator submitting annual and final statements of compliance. The first statement is due on or before 25 February 2020.

See annual and final statement of compliance forms below. Section 7 of the REC's Standard Operating Procedures gives further details, and also outlines other instances where you are required to report to the REC.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Davison
Chair, Research Ethics Committee

3.2 Participant Information Sheet

 **NUI Galway**
OÉ Gaillimh

Scúil na Siocrálaíochta School of Psychology

Participant Information Sheet

Title of project: Understanding political attitudes

Name of researcher: Sarah Carthy

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

This Participant Information Sheet will tell you about the purpose, risks and benefits of this research study. If you agree to take part, we will ask you to sign a Consent Form. If there is anything that you are not clear about, we will be happy to explain it to you. Please take as much time as you need to read it. You should only consent to participate in this research study when you feel that you understand what is being asked of you, and you have had enough time to think about your decision.

Thank you for reading this.

Purpose of the study.
We are trying to understand the effects of video information on attitudes.

Taking part – what it involves.
What will happen to me if I take part?
At the end of a PS428 lecture, you will be asked to complete a consent form and some questionnaires. Later in the week, you will be contacted with a link to a video. This video will depict a conflict but will not be graphic or violent. After watching the video, you will be asked to answer more questions. The whole process should take no longer than 20 minutes.

What are the possible benefits in taking part?
You will be awarded course credit of 5% for the PS428 module. Furthermore, you will be given a lecture on the nature of the experiment and participation will hopefully aid in your understanding.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
There are no direct risks of involvement. If at any point you become distressed, either by answering the questions or watching the video, you will be provided with contact details of the researcher who can direct you further.

What happens at the end of the study?
The results of the study will be used in the design and evaluation of counter-narratives. It is likely that the results will be published next year and, if requested, the publication can be sent to you.

Do I have to take part?

OÉ Gaillimh, NUI Galway,
Bailiar na MíOileáin, University Road,
Gaillimh, Éire Galway, Ireland
T +353 91 433 333 psychology@nuiagalway.ie
F +353 91 331 333 www.nuiagalway.ie

 **NUI Galway**
OÉ Gaillimh

Scúil na Siocrálaíochta School of Psychology

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your rights in any way. You will also be offered another way of obtaining the PS428 course credit if you wish.

Confidentiality
All information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. The information collected in this research study will be stored in a way that protects your identity. We will store the data for 5 years after which they will be destroyed. Results from the study will be reported as group data and will not identify you in any way.

Summary
We warmly invite you to take part in this study but, once again, we remind you that it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Whom do I contact for more information or if I have further concerns?
Sarah Carthy s.carthy1@nuiagalway.ie
Kiran Sarma kiran.sarma@nuiagalway.ie

If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent and in confidence, you may contact the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research,
NUI Galway,
ethics@nuiagalway.ie

OÉ Gaillimh, NUI Galway,
Bailiar na MíOileáin, University Road,
Gaillimh, Éire Galway, Ireland
T +353 91 433 333 psychology@nuiagalway.ie
F +353 91 331 333 www.nuiagalway.ie

3.3 Script

The variations of the videos used in each experimental condition are available via the Open Science Framework at:

https://osf.io/jnwbv/?view_only=8160d08007d346efa46f18c05ec9b18f

The following script contains narrative elements according to Labovian Syntax (0 - 23), violent justifications (VJ1, VJ2, & VJ3), and generic counter-narratives (GCN1, GCN2, & GCN3).

0. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been ongoing for decades.
1. However, a lot of people don't know why the conflict arose so I'd like to speak to you about that now.
2. Near Syria and Egypt, there is a small, highly contested piece of land known to some as Israel, and other as Palestine.
3. In the 1920s, "national awakening" among Jews led to waves of immigration into what was then Palestine.
4. Atrocities committed during the Holocaust led to more immigration.
5. In 1947, the UN made a "partition plan" to divide the land between the Palestinians and the Jewish immigrants.
6. The Jewish side became 'Israel' and this sparked the first of the Palestinian uprisings.
7. After a ceasefire in 1949, Israel managed to procure more land, called "Jewish settlements"
8. Here, they controlled the movement of people and goods.

9. And so began several more uprisings by the Palestinians.

10. These uprisings were led by the group 'Hamas'.

11. Following several years of unsuccessful negotiations, the conflict re-erupted in September 2000.

(VJ1) If Hamas don't go for violent revolution, the Israelis won't stop. They will completely and utterly suppress the movement, the existence and the independence of the Palestinian people.

12. Yes, somebody has a question?

(CN1) I hear what you're saying but we do not know for certain that a violent revolution would be more effective than a non-violent revolution. Surely there is an alternative?

13. Well, just keep listening.

14. In 2005, Israeli Prime Minister Sharon ordered the removal of Jewish settlers and soldiers from Palestinian land, calling an end to the occupation.

15. However, illegal occupations still exist, and are ongoing, in many areas of Palestine.

(VJ2) The choice to use violence. If Hamas don't use violence, the Israelis will eventually take every inch of Palestinian land from the Palestinian people until it all becomes Israel.

(CN2) I understand your point but in terms of the Jewish settlements, Hamas' use of violence, as opposed to non-violent protest, may actually escalate these settlements rather than stop them.

16. Perhaps but the story doesn't end there.

17. The tensions between Israel and Hamas escalated until late 2008, with a violent exchange between the Israeli Defence Forces and Hamas, resulting in thousands of civilian casualties and billions of euro in damage.

18. By February 2009, a ceasefire was signed with international mediation between the parties.

19. However, Israeli occupation, and small and sporadic eruptions of violence continued.

(VJ3) Simply put, if Hamas don't use violence against what Israel is trying to do, the Palestinian race will no longer exist. It will become extinct and there will no longer be any such thing as a 'Palestinian'.

(CN3) But Hamas do not know that non-violence won't achieve the same goal. To stop the Palestinian race becoming extinct, how do we know that violence is even working to stop that from happening?

20. Just keep listening as we're almost at the end.

21. (R) On January 14th 2004 Hamas detonated a bomb at Erez Crossing between Israel and Palestine.

22. Four Israeli soldiers patrolling the border, as well as one Israeli civilian, were killed.

23. And that's a snapshot overview of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict .Thank you.

3.4.2 Manipulation.

! At certain points during the video, you will be asked to write down arguments *against* the use of violence in this conflict.

! For example, if the argument said:
"It is okay to punch someone if they try to rob you"

! Your counter-argument could be:
"But punching them could escalate the situation"

! When prompted, please write down your counter-arguments on Sheet 'X'. You can turn over Sheet 'X' now and continue watching the video.

3.5 Dependent Variables

3.5.1 Sheet A.

Sheet 'A'

In September 2018, the translated version of this Ted X talk was screened before a debate hosted by the DCU 'Literature and Debating Society'.

In response to the talk, Laura King, a spokesperson for 'Free Palestine' (a pro-Hamas society in DCU) released the following statement in regards to the conflict.

“You have to remember that Hamas are not provoking this conflict. They did everything they could to deal with this peacefully but without a violent response, the actions of Israel against Palestinians will intensify. Each and every action undertaken by Hamas attempted to defend Palestinian land, life and independence. The attacks by Hamas were measured and justifiable”

Now turn over Sheet 'B' in front of you and answer the questions.

3.5.2 Sheet B: Items used to construct dependent variable(s)

1 “Prevalence”

1. How much do you think you would like Laura King?
2. To what extent do you think that Laura King's description of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is accurate?
3. To what extent do you agree with Laura King's opinion?
4. To what extent do you believe that Laura King's opinion is relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
5. To what degree do you respect Laura King's opinion?

6. To what extent do you agree with the views expressed by the DCU society *Free Palestine*?

7. To what degree do you respect the DCU society *Free Palestine*?

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

8 The DCU society *Free Palestine* have an accurate understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

9. The opinions expressed by Laura King, and *Free Palestine*, are relevant to this conflict.

2. "Agreement"

Agreement 1. Hamas have no choice but to use violence in this conflict.

Agreement 2. If Hamas do not use violence in this conflict, things will get worse for the Palestinians.

3."Behavioural Intention"

B11. Rate the degree to which you would consider joining the *Free Palestine* cause

B12. Imagine you were approached by a member of the DCU society *Free Palestine*, and asked to make a small donation to help with the running of the organisation. Please indicate how likely you would be to support the organisation.

3.6 Additional Tables and Figures

Table 14.

Correlation matrix for all variables across all conditions (N = 149)

	Argument Adoption	Support	Age	NFC	IRI					CRT	Moral Identity			CES-D	Neuroticism
						IRI _{PT}	IRI _{FS}	IRI _{EC}	IRI _{PD}			MI Internal	MI Symbolic		
Argument Adoption	1														
Support	.70**	1													
Age	-.09	-.16	1												
NFC	-.05	-.10	.18*	1											
IRI	.03	.14	-.18*	.15	1										
IRI _{PT}	-.09	.03	-.02	.27**	.65**	1									
IRI _{FS}	-.00	.01	-.12	.19*	.71**	.28**	1								
IRI _{EC}	-.00	.14	-.09	-.08	.74**	.45**	.35**	1							
IRI _{PD}	.16*	.14	-.22	-.16	.53**	.02	.16*	.18*	1						
CRT	-.00	-.12	.18*	.24**	-.08	-.07	.03	-.18*	-.00	1					
MI	.05	.04	-.13	-.03	.30**	.16	.15	.40**	.10	-.07	1				
MI _{Intern}	-.06	-.14	-.03	.40**	.164*	.19	.43**	.00	-.08	.71**	1				
MI _{Symbol}	.10	-.09	-.02	.16	.11	.08	.28**	-.03	-.05	.90**	.34**	1			
CES-D	.12	.12	-.23**	-.08	.29**	.11	.27**	.01	.35**	-.03	-.06	-.02	-.06	1	
Neuroticism	.07	.06	-.23**	-.05	.32**	.01	.25**	.13	.44**	-.08	-.17*	.01	-.23**	.69**	1

Significance level: *p<.05, **p<.01

IRI – Interpersonal Reactivity Index

MI – Moral Identity

CES- D – Depressive Symptoms

3.7 Additional Materials

3.7.1 Distraction task.

Easter Word Search

K K Z O C X T I N R P Q G U S
G B S I P U Q J H M K Y B G O
J M Q Q U U S J A H M U Q B Q
Y Y M U Y R D R R A N A W W P
Y D Z N E K I C E N M W E Y S
C Y I T C R P R Y W W D I J E
F Z S B R L K L A T O F A N S
Y A B P O Q D T U L A L S N S
E Y X G S U W F H V H H F H E
C M S E S E T A L O C O H C R
H H P H Z J Z K G H M H P J D
G G U V N M U A W Y D Z E J A
C W P R S A C F J C E I H T E
S Z D W C E Z E X A F S Z W K
N E S I R H Y S P R I N G V X

BUNNY
CHOCOLATE
CHURCH
CROSS
DRESSES
EASTER
FLOWERS
RISEN
SPRING

3.7.2 Debrief Form



NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

School of Psychology
Scoil na Siceolaíochta

Sarah Carthy
School of Psychology
NUI Galway

10th July 2019

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking part in my experiment “Attention and Perception on Short-Term Memory tasks”. I am contacting you now to tell you some details about the experiment, as well as to confirm that you want your data to be used.

The true nature of the study was to examine radicalisation and the effectiveness of justifications for violent extremism, as well as attempts to counter them. I hypothesised that those of you exposed to violent justifications would be more likely to support a violent extremist group than those who were not. I also hypothesised that those of you exposed to counter-narratives (arguments against the violent justifications) would show less support for the group. As well as this, I predicted that your levels of cognition motivation, as well as your cognitive tendencies, would influence how you interpreted the video. I will explain each step now.

1. Before the study, you filled out an online questionnaire in which you completed measures of need for cognition, empathy, moral identity, neuroticism and depressive symptoms. You also completed the Cognitive Reflection Test
2. In the lab, you were asked to complete a word-search about Easter; this was just a distractor task to get you comfortable.
3. Next, you watched one of four versions of a video about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (i.e. four conditions). Some of you watched a video which had arguments justifying the violence perpetrated by Hamas (violent narrative condition) some watched a video which did not have any justifications (neutral narrative condition). Some watched a video with violent justifications combined with counter-arguments (generic counter-narrative condition) and, finally, some of you watched a video in which you wrote your own counter-arguments on a sheet in front of you (tailored counter-narrative condition). Please note that purpose of this debrief is not to tell you what condition you were in.

4. Finally, you completed a questionnaire measuring your legitimisation of violence, adoption of the arguments in the video and behavioural intention to support an organisation who legitimised violence.

It is important that you understand that the information in the video was fabricated for the purpose of the study and the “Ted Talk” was not real. I created the video myself, mixing together documentary footage alongside an unrelated Ted Talk. Although elements of the video were rooted in truth, it should not be interpreted as an accurate depiction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Although the findings are still preliminary for the moment, in line with theory, we found that participants exposed to the violent justifications reported higher propensity towards violent extremism but, interestingly, the counter-narratives did not always temper this effect. Those of you who created your own counter-arguments (tailored counter-narrative) reported the lowest on all outcome variables. Please know that the information collected in this study is completely anonymous and, despite the nature of the study, it does not reveal anything negative about any of the individuals who participated.

I cannot thank you enough for participating. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or if you would prefer your data not be used in the study.

Thank you again!

Sarah