

LEAVING HATE:
SOCIAL WORK AND THE JOURNEY OUT OF FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to three most important people in my life, my wife Niccole, and my two children, Ethan and Asa. Niccole, I can remember when I told you that I wanted to go back to school to ultimately get my PhD (not even having a bachelor's yet). You didn't laugh at me; you said, "Do it!". You have stood by my side every step of the way as I worked these last six and a half years to get my BSW, MSW, and now PhD. You encouraged me when I began to doubt myself or got frustrated. You listened to me talk about my research (probably a little too much) and got excited with me as I took each step. Thank you for sacrificing so much so that I can pursue my dream. I could not have done this without you. You are simply the best, better than all the rest. I love you so much. Ethan and Asa, I am a better person because of the two of you. I hope this work shows you that sometimes, dreams do come true. You are amazing little humans that are going to change the world. I am so proud of you both. May you never stop learning and loving.

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Over the last 20 years, domestic far-right extremism has risen to become the greatest threat to peace and safety in the United States. In the last few years alone, racialized, minoritized, and marginalized individuals and communities have been increasingly forced to feel the pain and experience the consequences of domestic far-right terrorism. Supposing academics, community leaders, and elected officials seek to combat the rising threat of far-right extremism in the United States, a greater focus must be paid to the lived experiences of men and women seeking to exit extremist groups.

This study aimed to better understand the psychosocial processes involved in the disengagement and/or de-radicalization journey of former far-right extremists. Additionally, this study sought to understand better the potential role social work could play in the disengagement and de-radicalization of far-right extremists seeking to exit a life of hate and extremism. Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory approach provided the framework for this qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews with 18 former white nationalist extremists recruited through community informants and snowball sampling were used to answer the research question; What are the psychosocial processes involved in the disengagement and de-radicalization journey of former far-right extremists, and how do they develop in society? To date, there has not been a study located utilizing grounded theory in disengagement and de-radicalization studies. Additionally, a theory of disengagement and de-radicalization has yet to be explored. This study sought to explore and conceptualize latent social patterns and structures within the disengagement and de-

radicalization journey as a means to construct a theoretical frame to better understand one's journey from a life of hate. Study findings emerged from over 3,500 coded items from 18 transcripts. Eight themes emerged from the data, and a proposed model conceptualizing the psychosocial processes involved in the journey out of far-right extremism is introduced.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	xiii
List of Figures	xiv
List of Abbreviations	xv
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Significance and Scope of the Study	4
A Place for Social Work in the Journey Out of Far-Right Extremism	5
Chapter II: Literature Review	11
White Supremacy.....	11
White Nationalist and Supremacist Hate Groups	13
The Founding of the KKK to the Civil Rights Movement	16
The Civil Rights Movement to the 1990s	18
The 1990s to Today	19
The Alt-Right.....	20
QAnon.....	22
Women in the Far-Right Movement.....	24
White Nationalism in the Military and Law Enforcement.....	26
Radicalization	28
Significance Quest Theory.....	29
The Duplex Theory of Hate	30
The Two Pyramid Theory of Radicalization	34
The Internet, Social Media, and Video Games	38
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and Radicalization	40
Disengagement and De-Radicalization.....	41
Theories of Disengagement and De-Radicalization	42
Push and Pull Factors.....	44
Push and Pull Factors in Foreign Terrorism, Cults, and Street Gangs	46
Disengagement and De-Radicalization Programs In Western Europe	49
U.S. Response to Domestic Far-Right Extremism.....	53
Gaps in Knowledge.....	57
Chapter III: Research Methods	60
Qualitative Methods.....	61
Grounded Theory	62
Constructivist Grounded Theory.....	64
Sampling and Sample Size.....	67
Participant Recruitment	68
Data Collection	70
Constructivist Grounded Theory Data Analysis	71
Trustworthiness and Rigor.....	75
Evaluating Constructivist Grounded Theory Studies	77
Ethical Research.....	79
Chapter IV: Findings.....	82
Participant Demographics.....	82

Identifying Major Themes	84
Defining Far-Right Extremism	88
Diverse Journey	90
Gender Identity	92
Like an Addiction	100
Awakening the Conscience.....	102
Biographical Events.....	104
Encountering the “Other”	107
Disillusionment.....	109
Shattered Sense of Self and Connection	114
Ideology = Identity.....	115
Alone.....	116
Post Extremist Traumatic Stress	118
The Movement as Trauma	119
Traditional PTSD Symptomatology	120
Factors Impacting PETS	123
Social Factors Influencing the Diverse Journey	125
Empathy	125
Peer Support.....	128
“We Need Help”	129
Lack of Appropriate Services	130
Perceptions of Social Work	133
Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection.....	136
Reckoning with the Past.....	138
Unlearning Hate.....	139
Atoning for the Past	141
Proposed Model of the Journey Out of Extremism	141
Chapter V: Discussion	146
Diverse Journey	147
Awakening the Conscience.....	152
Shattered Sense of Self and Connection	153
Post Extremist Traumatic Stress	154
Social Factors Influencing the Diverse Journey	156
“We Need Help”	159
Perceptions of Social Work	161
Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection.....	162
Implications for Social Work.....	165
Future Research	167
Limitations	169
Conclusion	170
Appendix.....	173
References.....	181
Curriculum Vitae	

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Stories of Hate	34
Table 2: Participant Demographics.....	83
Table 3: Themes and Definitions.....	85

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Triangular Theory of Hate.....	31
Figure 2: Two Pyramid Theory of Radicalization: Opinion Pyramid	36
Figure 3: Two Pyramid Theory of Radicalization: Action Pyramid.....	37
Figure 4: Example of Coding Process	87
Figure 5: Proposed Model of the Journey out of Far Right Extremism.....	142
Figure 6: Christian Picciolini Tweet.....	146

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NASW	National Association of Social Workers
KKK	Klu Klux Klan
SPLC	Southern Poverty Law Center
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
ACES	Adverse Childhood Experiences
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PETS	Post Extremist Traumatic Stress

Chapter I: Introduction

The alert came at 2:45 P.M. on May 14, 2022. The New York Times reported that there had been yet another mass shooting in the United States, this time in Buffalo, New York (McKinley et al., 2022). As time progressed, more details emerged about the gunman's victims and motive. Within a few hours, law enforcement located a manifesto written by the gunman, an 18-year-old male who had traveled over two hours to murder ten Black men and women. The manifesto was a racist screed fixated on a common and historical White nationalist and supremacist trope, the great replacement conspiracy theory (Bowman et al., 2022). The great replacement conspiracy theory posits that non-White individuals are being brought into the United States to "replace" White individuals and advance a liberal and multicultural agenda. Motivated by hate and fear of being "replaced," the gunman targeted the Tops Friendly Market store in the predominantly Black Eastside neighborhood of Buffalo (Bowman et al., 2022). The premeditated Buffalo shooting is just one of many violent examples of the growing threat of domestic far-right extremism in the United States.

Over the last 20 years, domestic far-right extremism has risen to become the greatest threat to peace and safety in the United States. In the last few years alone, racialized, minoritized, and marginalized individuals and communities have been increasingly forced to feel the pain and experience the consequences of domestic far-right terrorism. In 2021, the Director of National Intelligence (2021), Department of Homeland Security (2020), and the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (117th Congress, 2021) each demarcated domestic far-right extremism as the gravest enemy of democracy, institutions of government, and the people of the United States of America. Domestic

terrorism at the hands of far-right extremists continues to remain a looming and exigent threat today.

Domestic far-right extremism accounts for over 60% of terrorism-related activity in the United States since 1990 (University of Maryland, 2021). In the past two decades, 66% of political violence in the United States has come at the hands of domestic far-right violent extremists at a rate that is five times that of the "far-left." Moreover, far-right violent extremist attacks account for the vast majority of all terror-related instances in the United States since September 11, 2001 (Jones et al., 2021). In the last six years alone, domestic far-right extremists have: 1) kidnapped the children of anti-racist activists, 2) murdered Heather Heyer, an anti-racist counter-protesters in Charlottesville at the Unite the Right Rally, 3) murdered 22 Latinx individuals in a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, 4) murdered 9 Black churchgoers in Charleston South Carolina, 5) murdered 11 Jewish worshipers at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, 6) mailed pipe bombs to politicians and media outlets, 7) plotted to kidnap the governors of both Michigan and Virginia, 8) murdered 5 Asian women in a massage parlor in Atlanta, 9) conspired against the United States through a violent insurrection on January 6, 2021, and 10) murdered 10 Black men and women at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York to name just a few instances.

On June 12, 2022, law enforcement officers arrested 31 armed and unarmed members of the White supremacist hate group, Patriot Front, in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, outside an LGBTQIA+ Pride event (Yousef, 2022). Patriot Front members traveled across the country and arrived in the back of a U-Haul truck to disrupt the event, riot, and incite violence. Days later, armed members of the Proud Boys, another militant White

nationalist group, disrupted Rainbow Storytimes at public libraries in Nevada and South Bend, Indiana (Bellware, 2022; Clark, 2022). Domestic far-right extremism remains an imposing threat to individuals and communities of color, religious minorities, and the LGBTQIA+ community. Since 2016, hate crimes against individuals and communities of color, religious minorities, and LGBTQIA+ individuals at the hands of far-right extremists have risen to their highest rates since the early 1990s (Anti-Defamation League, 2020; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020). From 2010 to 2021, the number of hate crime incidents recorded by law enforcement increased by 21%, from 6,628 reported incidents to 8,052 incidents involving 11,126 victims (Department of Justice, 2021). It must be noted that the number of hate crime incidents are only those that have been reported. Many hate crimes against minoritized and racialized individuals and communities go unreported. If far-right extremists were to achieve their ultimate desire and goal, the United States would only be inhabited by White individuals of pure European ancestry. For extremists, violence against racialized and minoritized individuals and communities is appropriate for achieving the goal of a White ethnostate.

While the rise of adherents to far-right ideologies and violent extremism is alarming, there is hope. Rehabilitative programming for those seeking to exit extremist groups in European nations, primarily staffed by social work practitioners, has seen positive results in providing a path out of violent hate groups and lowering levels of recidivism (Koehler, 2018). Rehabilitative and re-entry programming in Germany and Norway have shown the power of a fully-funded government response to the rise of far-right hate groups (Koehler, 2018). Although efforts in these nations have proven somewhat successful, disengagement and de-radicalization are still only an emerging

field of inquiry in studying violent extremism in the United States. Instead, attention has primarily been paid to the radicalization process. While this is beneficial, focusing primarily on radicalization creates a vast gap in the knowledge base and the development of evidence-based practices. Supposing academics, community leaders, and elected officials seek to combat the rising threat of far-right extremism in the United States, a greater focus must be paid to the lived experiences of men and women seeking to exit extremist groups.

Significance and Scope of the Study

The study of social work's role in the journey out of far-right extremism has yet to be explored. In a personal communication, a man who has de-radicalized from far-right White nationalist extremism stated that they believe social work is key to developing and providing trauma-informed evidence-based services that emphasize the dignity and worth of individuals society may have written off due to their participation in extremism (Ryan, personal communication, June 5, 2021; Perliger, 2020). Social work has a strategic role in the disengagement and de-radicalization process. It is time that the field embraces this new field of study and practice.

This study aims to better understand the psychosocial processes involved in the journey out of the far-right extremist movement. Additionally, this study seeks to explore the potential role social work could play in the journey of far-right extremists seeking to exit a life of hate and extremism. Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory approach provided the framework for this qualitative study. To date, there has not been a study located utilizing grounded theory in disengagement and de-radicalization studies. Additionally, a theory of disengagement and de-radicalization focused on domestic far-right extremism

in the U.S. has yet to be explored. Therefore, this study sought to explore and conceptualize latent social patterns and structures within one's journey as a means to construct a theoretical framework to better understand one's journey from a life of hate. Study findings emerged from over 3,500 coded items from 18 transcripts. Eight themes emerged from the data, and a proposed model conceptualizing the psychosocial processes involved in the journey out of far-right extremism will be introduced.

A Place for Social Work in the Journey Out of Far-Right Extremism

There is a service vacuum regarding rehabilitative programming for those seeking to exit far-right extremism in the United States. Today, only a few formal organizations provide services for those seeking to exit a life of hate in the U.S. (Williams et al., 2016). These organizations and their programming are primarily operated by "formers," or former members of hate groups who have de-radicalized from extremism.

While formers have insider knowledge of the inner workings of organized hate and can stand as an example to those ambivalent about exiting a life of hate, their position as a primary service provider is not a suitable replacement for professional engagement by trained trauma-informed mental health care providers, case managers, addiction specialists, and advocates. According to Bubolz and Simi (2015), disengagement and de-radicalization programming in the United States can best be compared to the "Wild West." This poses a significant challenge to programming sustainability and viability and the mental health and well-being of those chasing to leave a life of extremism and hate. To date, there are no formal academic programs to train practitioners who desire to provide human services to those seeking to exit far-right extremism. There are also no empirically tested best practices or ethical standards to

follow for practitioners engaged in disengagement and de-radicalization work.

Additionally, there is no formal government oversight, licensing, and accountability for organizations and formers providing disengagement and de-radicalization services (Bubolz & Simi, 2015).

It must be noted; this critique is not meant to cast judgment on the work being done by these programs or the formers who are willing to meet this need in the service vacuum. Instead, this critique is intended to reveal the extent to which formal education and training, best practices, ethical standards, and governmental oversight are gravely needed. The work being done by formers to help extricate their peers from extremism is noble. However, the lack of training, standards, oversight, and best practices can lead to recidivism and/or more significant personal trauma for those exiting.

Social work is uniquely positioned to help fill the vacuum of rehabilitative services for those seeking to exit far-right extremism in the United States. Social workers can research and develop evidence-based programming that aids in the rehabilitative journey out of extremism. Due to the threat that violent domestic far-right extremism poses to both the United States and its citizens, especially individuals and communities of color, religious minorities, and the LGBTQIA+ community, social work has an ethical responsibility to engage this threat on the front lines through both activism and the provision of services (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021).

Some may question why social work practitioners should stand on the front lines of this work. This is a valid question as the profession has primarily operated in realms not connected to this work (i.e., child welfare, mental health, substance use, schools, health care, and leading the social service sector). However, there are numerous reasons

why social work and social work practitioners are positioned to be highly effective in this field of practice. The profession's core values, rigorous training, and broad field of practice situate social work practitioners perfectly for rehabilitative work with those seeking to exit a life of hate.

First, the strengths-based perspective from which social workers practice allows practitioners not to see individuals as the sum of their misdeeds but as strong individuals with dignity and worth who inherently possess the tools needed to achieve change and their goal of leaving a life of extremism and hate. The strengths perspective is necessary for this work as it is easy to cast aside and see overt racists and far-right extremists as irredeemable and without worth due to their repugnant and insidious thoughts and deeds. Through the strengths perspective, social workers will view individuals seeking to leave a life of hate as both redeemable and able to thrive as members of society.

Second, though not formally trained in disengagement and de-radicalization work, social workers are trained and equipped through accredited academic programs to provide many of the services that are the foundation of this work, as demonstrated in Western European Nations. Social workers receive training and must successfully pass courses in mental health diagnosis and assessment. According to Simi et al. (2017), most of those who become active in organized hate have an underlying mental health challenge or have a history of trauma that may or may not have been diagnosed or treated. As trained mental health care providers, social workers can offer trauma-informed services that engage underlying mental health challenges and trauma that can stand as both a barrier blocking their exit from extremism and impetus for possible recidivism.

Simi et al. (2017) state that those seeking to leave extremism often carry a heavy weight of guilt and shame for having inflicted harm on others. Purposely and intentionally harming another individual can be traumatic itself. In essence, individuals can enter organized hate with trauma and exit with even more. As Freiere (1972) posits, oppression is traumatic for the oppressed and the oppressor. It is not being suggested that the trauma of those harmed by former extremists be overlooked or diminished in any way. Nor is it meant that there be no accountability for those who have inflicted harm through extremism. On the contrary, accountability is needed, and the voices of the victims of extremists must be heard and honored. However, if rehabilitative programming are to be effective, an honest examination of the trauma experienced by those who have served as ambassadors and weapons of hate is needed.

Not only are social workers trained to provide mental health care services, they are also trained to do so in a trauma-informed manner. Social workers can provide trauma-informed individual and family therapy for those choosing to exit extremism. The impact of engaging in violent extremism is not felt by the individual alone. Their families are also impacted. Providing services and care to both the individual and family unit is needed to repair relationships and cultivate a new familial ethos and culture free from hate.

Additionally, social work practitioners are trained in and can provide trauma-informed group therapy that may prove to be an effective tool in rehabilitative work. Group work cultivates a sense of camaraderie and emphasizes shared life experience as a modality of care. Additionally, distrust of institutions is prominent in far-right ideologies (Windisch et al., 2017; Galant, 2015). If former extremists see others, like themselves,

engaging in care, trust for the process and provider can be cultivated. Camaraderie and a sense of shared purpose are leading contributors to radicalization (Windisch et al., 2017; Galant, 2015). Thus, providing a space for a similar connection outside extremism is warranted. Exiting extremism is similar to embracing it. It involves a search for place, connection, and purpose (Blee, 2018).

While social workers are trained to provide individual and group therapeutic services, they are also masters of aiding their clients in developing social networks. In a recent episode of the podcast *Motive*, Chandler shared his struggles to leave a White nationalist group. Chandler stated that while he fears retaliation from the group, his greatest fear and what keeps him connected to the group is being alone (Yousef, 2020). The need for human connectivity cannot be underestimated in the journey out of far-right extremism. Social workers' training in building and strengthening social networks may prove invaluable for those embarking on the journey out of far-right extremism.

Third, research is beginning to reveal that harboring and acting on hate can be addictive and engage the same part of the brain as substances. Simi et al. (2017) posit that individuals fail to successfully disengage and/or de-radicalize from extremism and hate groups due to the addictive nature of hate. As part of their education, social workers receive training in both the etiology of and delivery of services specifically designed to treat substance use and misuse. This training positions social workers to provide effective and evidence-based services that engage the addictive nature of hate and work with clients to cultivate effective coping skills that can be used to avoid a "hate relapse." Leaving extremism demands a replacement for the value hate provides chemically in the brain (Blee et al., 2017; Blee & Deutsh, 2012).

Finally, many of those renouncing extremism may do so with a criminal record or in dire need of connection to social and economic services. A criminal record can hinder obtaining employment or housing. As such, connection to services that meet the needs wrought by criminal extremist activity will be needed. Simi et al. (2017) suggest that a criminal record, social stigma, and economic anxiety due to not securing employment may be significant barriers to both exiting extremism and recidivism. Case management is a core pillar of a social worker's education. Social workers are trained early in their academic careers to be effective and efficient case managers who connect clients to proper services. Case management is yet another tool that social workers can bring to the work of disengagement and de-radicalization.

Chapter II: Literature Review

White Supremacy

One cannot begin to understand domestic far-right racially and ethnically motivated extremism without first examining its ideological underpinning, White supremacy. Numerous historians and academics see White supremacy as the foundation upon which the United States was founded (Jones-Rogers, 2020; Du Bois, 2013; Bonna-Silva, 1997; Greene & Jordan, 1971). It permeates all levels of society and its sociopolitical structures. Kaufman (2021) posits that White supremacy is the belief that White individuals are naturally physically, emotionally, and intellectually superior to those of other races. It can be easy to view White supremacy as a uniquely American problem. However, White supremacy is a phenomenon that has existed in a global context long before the birth of the United States. Through colonialism, imperialism, and the institution of chattel slavery in the fifteenth century, White supremacy found a welcome home in the early colonial settlements of the United States.

White supremacy is much more than a simple paradigm; it is structural and crystalline by nature. White supremacy is interwoven, both overtly and subversively, throughout the political, cultural, and social fabric of the United States. Overtly, the ideology rests at the core of numerous policies throughout American history that were crafted to promote the interests of Whites at the expense of those who are non-White. For example, White supremacist housing, health, education, and criminal justice policies have, and continue to, exclusively benefit White individuals (Ferber, 2019; Delgado et al., 2017; Frankenburg, 1993). Subversively, White supremacy is entrenched by the "inertia of custom, bureaucratic procedure, impersonal routine, and law" (Guess, 2019, p.

651). The result of subversive racism has, over time, informed institutional ethos and practices that rest on "internalized assumptions of White superiority over non-White ethnic groups" (Guess, 2006, p.654).

White supremacy is a constant social, political, and cultural pillar of the American experience that must be reckoned with. As the prevailing driver of racially and ethnically motivated far-right extremism, White supremacy cannot be viewed as having existed solely in our nation's past. Nor can it be thought that White supremacy and its presence in the body politic was eradicated at the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln or when Black Americans were given the right to vote during the Civil Rights Movement. On the contrary, White supremacy is alive and flourishing in the American conscience. One needs to only look at the election of Donald Trump to the presidency and his continued popularity within right-wing politics to see White supremacy's influence and presence (Sitaraman, 2020). In a 2018 study regarding White supremacist rhetoric, Sanchez (2018) found that Trump's textual winks and polysemy contributed to the mainstreaming of White nationalist and supremacist ideologies. Additionally, Burston and Twine (2019) found that Trump's ability to rest at the center of intersecting identities and grievance accelerated the acceptance of a White nationalist agenda.

Throughout his campaign for and time in and out of the White House, Donald Trump and his political allies have used many of the same White supremacist racialized dog whistles from this nation's past to stoke grievance against non-White and non-Christian individuals. Inflamed rhetoric regarding immigrants, Muslims, Black, and Latinx Americans, and LGBTQIA+ citizens is a boondoggle for domestic far-right

racially and ethnically motivated extremists who see Trump's embrace and normalization of White identity politics as the culmination and mainstreaming of their work toward a White "ethnostate" (Bellew, 2019; Bloom, 2011).

While it is not suggested that all individuals on the right of the political-ideological spectrum are domestic far-right racially and ethnically motivated extremists, there is no longer a meaningful line of demarcation between organized hate and the mainstream conservative Republican Party. This can be seen through the election of public officials with social and financial ties to White supremacist hate groups (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020). The Southern Poverty Law Center (2020) reported nine elected public officials, five in the House of Representatives and four in the United States Senate, publicly expressing extremist sentiments. White nationalist lawmakers have found a welcoming home in the hallowed halls of the United States Capitol. Said lawmakers have a history ranging from raising funds and accepting donations from far-right organizations and extremists to attending events hosted by hate groups promoting White supremacist and anti-government policies. According to Hartzell (2018), there has been "a marked resurgence of explicitly pro-White rhetoric and a rise in public displays of White supremacy, including the emergence of a loose group of disgruntled pro-White and far-right reactionaries who have strategically adopted the label of White nationalist" (p.7).

White Nationalist and Supremacist Hate Groups

White nationalism is a term that originated among White supremacists in the early 1900s as a means to rebrand themselves as protectors of the United States' European heritage rather than racist actors in American society (Anti-Defamation League, 2021;

Blee, 2019). In essence, White nationalism is White supremacy weaponized. According to the Anti-Defamation League (2021), White nationalism was birthed out of a desire of White supremacists to distinguish themselves as active rather than passive adherents to the racist ideological tenants of White supremacy. Said White supremacists believed that it was not enough to hold White supremacist thoughts but were bent on adopting a form of White supremacy that emphasized defining a country or region by White racial identity and promotion of the interests of Whites at the expense of individuals and communities of color.

White nationalists believe that majority-White countries are declining economically and culturally due to non-White immigration and the advancement of civil rights among non-Whites, women, and religious minorities (Jones et al., 2021; Hawley, 2019). As such, White nationalist extremists advocate establishing a physical White "ethnostate" populated solely by those of pure European descent. White nationalists believe that White individuals will unite as one national polity, either in a White homeland or White nation, through the violent killing or exclusion of racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and otherized sexually-oriented minorities. White nationalists are not generally interested in the United States as a nation. Instead, adherents to a White nationalist ideology aspire to replace the United States with the White "ethnostate." Liberal democracy promotes equality and multiculturalism and is therefore rejected by White nationalists.

The most straightforward manner of understanding White nationalism is by reviewing the "14 Words." The "14 Words" state, "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children." Penned by David Lane, a core member of the

White nationalist extremist group The Order, the "14 Words" has become the rallying cry for the far-right and the closest thing to a motto or campaign slogan for the organized White nationalist movement (Michael, 2009). In the "14 Words", the core values of Whites nationalist extremism can be seen. The "14 words" can be seen as a mandate to secure an exclusively White "state" to preserve Whiteness and its privileges for future generations.

In the United States, White nationalism consists primarily of two large and overlapping spheres. One sphere houses the White supremacist and anti-semitic hate movement, including varying sub-groups and sub-movements. Groups and sub-groups include, but are not limited to; 1) Identity EVROPA, 2) The Patriot Front, 3) The KKK, 4) The Nationalist Socialist Movement, 5) Hammerskin Nation, and 6) Atomwaffen Division. The complementary sphere houses anti-government and isolationist/separatist groups, known as the "Patriot" movement or civic nationalists. Groups include, but are not limited to; 1) Oath Keepers, 2) Sovereign Citizens, and 3) Three Percenters. Inside each sphere are also single-issue movements. Single issue extremism tends to be to the far right of the mainstream conservative movement and often includes; anti-abortion extremists, anti-immigrant extremists, anti-Muslim extremists, and anti-public lands extremists (Windisch et al., 2018; Simi, 2015; Dobratz & Shanks Meile, 2000).

The Southern Poverty Law Center (2020) estimates that 917 White nationalist hate groups are currently operating throughout the United States. While each group is unique, they share a common White supremacist and nationalist ideology. However, how each group acts upon its beliefs varies greatly. Some groups seek to spread hate over the radio waves, while others use violence to achieve their goals. Groups like the Oath

Keepers, Proud Boys, and Bugaloo Bois are militaristic, using force as a means to an end for their cause (Ashe et al., 2021). Others, like Don Black's *StormFront*, use technology to recruit new converts to the White nationalist ideology. Whatever the vehicle, each approach is rooted in White supremacy and will fight to achieve the goal of both the White "ethnostate" and the fulfillment of the "14 Words."

The Founding of the KKK to the Civil Rights Movement

It could be easy to see the threat of White nationalist extremism as a modern-day invention. However, it is not. The history of the United States is filled with different iterations of White supremacist nationalism that have evolved over time. Painter (2011) posits that in every instance of progress for Black individuals, there is a backlash from White individuals and White supremacist groups seeking to preserve Whiteness' position, power, and privilege in American society. History bears Painter's point true as each prominent moment of progress for individuals and communities of color has seen Whiteness rear its insidious head in response.

After the fall of the Confederacy to the Union in 1865, racial tensions between newly freed slaves and White individuals in the South ran high. In response to the South's loss and reconstruction, former Confederate soldiers and other Southerners formed the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The KKK was established to terrorize newly freed Black American slaves physically and psychologically (Simi, 2015; Blee, 2008; Blee, 1991; Wald, 1980).

The KKK saw a resurgence in the early 1920s. The KKK rose in response to increased rates of immigration. Anti-immigrant sentiment against the nearly 27 million individuals seeking a new life in the United States between 1880 and 1920 fueled a renewed organized hate movement. Again, the KKK stood as the leader at the helm. The

Progressive Era KKK blended xenophobia, religious prejudice, and conservative moralism to demonize Black, Catholic, Jewish, Mexican, Asian, and other non-White individuals and communities (Simi, 2015; Blee, 2008; Blee, 1991; Wald, 1980).

The Progressive Era KKK boasted an estimated membership of three to five million individuals (Blee, 2019). To be a member of the KKK, one had to be; 1) White, 2) non-Catholic Christian, and 3) native-born in the United States (Ferber, 2019; Blee et al., 2017). The Klan of the 1920s was mainstream and filled with "normal" Americans (Ferber, 2019; Blee et al., 2017). The Progressive Era Klan played a significant role in the domestic politics of its day, shaping policy and influencing lawmakers. After the Klan's collapse in the early 1930s, violent White supremacism in the United States became a marginal phenomenon. This does not mean that White supremacist thinking and violence were not present. Instead, it is an assessment of the KKK's mainstream social and cultural appeal and its presence in electoral politics. Much like today, the KKK's presence after its demise was veiled (Windisch et al., 2018; Blee, 2017).

The KKK saw a third wave of social integration re-emerge into American social and political life during the Civil Rights Movement. White southerners seeking to maintain segregation and the Jim Crow laws developed to ensure White dominance used violence to suppress Black activists and their allies. According to Cunningham (2014), the KKK's domestic terrorism resulted in 70 bombings in Georgia and Alabama and the arson of over 30 Black churches in Mississippi alone. This reemergence of the KKK saw its decline in the late 1960s due to both an increase in FBI surveillance and social and political umbrage against the group (Cunningham, 2014).

The Civil Rights Movement to the 1990s

The time following the Civil Rights Movement was highly volatile regarding race relations in the United States. Seeing the progress made by activists, new White supremacist hate groups began to organize to extinguish the perceived threat to White dominance. Founded in 1974 by William Pierce, the National Alliance (NA) was considered the most dangerous neo-Nazi group of the decade (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2021). Rather than focusing on the present-day alone, the NA was also fixated on the future and the founding of the White "ethnostate" (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2021). The rhetoric of the NA was overly genocidal, with calls for the eradication of individuals who were non-White. The NA and Pierce are most notably known for producing "The Turner Diaries," a novel depicting a race war in the United States wherein the "protagonists" slaughter non-Whites and Jews and overthrow the government to establish White authoritarian rule. "The Turner Diaries" remains a fixture within White nationalist extremism and is often referred to as the movement's "bible."

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the United States saw a rise in neo-Nazi groups across the nation. Neo-Nazism is a post-WWII militant, social, and political movement that seeks to revive and implement the Nazi ideology curated by Adolf Hitler (Simi, 2015). Neo-Nazis sought to employ their ideology to promote hatred and White supremacy, attack racial and ethnic minorities, and create a White "ethnic fascist state" (Simi, 2015). Neo-Nazism and White nationalism are not confined to the United States. Both are global phenomena with organized representation in many European countries. Troubling is the interconnectedness of the groups. Rather than being isolated players,

neo-Nazis are connected to a broader global movement that emboldens the execution of a White supremacist and nationalist ideology.

During the 1990s, White nationalist and anti-government groups used tragic events to build their movement. For example, in 1992, Ruby Ridge, Idaho, served as the site of an eleven-day standoff between the FBI and Randy Weaver. Weaver was an alleged member of the Aryan Nation, a White supremacist hate group that made assassination threats against then-president Ronald Regan. The standoff resulted in the deaths of a U.S. Marshall and Randy Weaver's wife and son.

The events at Ruby Ridge and prevailing anti-government and White supremacist sentiment helped ignite the modern militia movement, resulting in a spree of domestic terrorism in the 1990s. Most notable is the 1995 "Turner Diaries" like bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building by White nationalist extremists Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols (Sloan, 2016; Ward & Pilat, 2016). In addition, the 1990s saw the birth of such hate groups as the New World Order, the White Aryan Resistance, and The Church of the Creator (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2000).

The 1990s to Today

In the last quarter of the 20th century, White nationalist groups adopted a faux academic tone and constructed a presence on the newly formed internet. Founded at the beginning of this period were the Council of Conservative Citizens (CoCC) and StormFront. Designated a White nationalist hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, the CoCC believed the United States must be a pure caucasian country, and true Americans are those of pure European descent. Although the CoCC served as a clearinghouse and online home for White supremacist and nationalist rhetoric and

propaganda, its refined image attracted lawmakers and right-wing elites to its cause. Between 2000 and 2004, at least 38 elected officials attended CoCC-hosted events.

Like the CoCC, StormFront holds far-right nationalist beliefs while maintaining a modern and socially palatable aesthetic. Founded in 1995 by Don Black, a former leader in the Alabama KKK, StormFront "was the first major hate site on the internet" (Bowman-Grieve, 2009). StormFront is a moderated forum designed to be innocuous. StormFront attracted not only society's dejected and overt racists but also mothers and wives seeking recipes and parenting ideas. Don Black's StormFront served as the archetype for future forum sites like 4Chan and 8Chan, which serve as radicalization tools for the far-right today (Bowman-Grieve, 2009).

The Alt-Right

Another contemporary iteration of White nationalism in the United States is the "alt-right." According to Hawley (2019), The alt-right, short for "alternative right," is a branch of the complex White supremacist movement. The alt-right consists of a loose network of White supremacist and nationalist individuals and groups who reject mainstream conservatism in favor of politics that embrace implicit or explicit racism, antisemitism, and White supremacy. While the term "alternative right" has been in the far-right lexicon since 2008, the term gained mainstream traction and attention in 2015 when Richard Spencer used the term to describe a new wave of White identity politics gaining traction in the United States that ultimately led to the election of Donald Trump to the presidency (Hawley, 2019). It must be noted that the alt-right is more than an ideology. It encompasses a cast of national and international actors such as politicians,

think tanks, media outlets, and a robust internet community (Thompson & Hawley, 2021; Ganesh, 2020; Moss & O'Conner, 2020; Varda & Hahner, 2020).

Main (2018) posits that the alt-right is roughly built upon four core elements. First, the alt-right rejects liberal democracy as it advocates for multiculturalism, diversity, and equality. Second, the alt-right believes that society only functions properly when Whites hold political, social, and cultural dominance. Third, as liberal democracy has led to the decline of America in the eyes of the alt-right, American principles of governance must be rejected to pursue the promotion of the White race and its interests. Finally, the alt-right embraces White identity politics and vitriolic rhetoric that, up until this point, has been a tool of the fringe right of the political-ideological spectrum. The alt-right actively participates in race-bating, derogatory ethnic humor, overtly prejudicial stereotyping, and the flaunting of extremist symbols. Essentially, the alt-right rejects the principles of equal rights and liberal democracy, two pillars of American society as we know it today.

A significant difference between this latest iteration of White nationalist extremism and its ideological forefathers is how adherents present themselves to the broader public. Rather than wearing White Klan hoods or sporting Black Doc Martin combat boots and shaved heads, alt-right proponents have sought to present themselves in an innocuous manner, both physically and ideologically. Nowhere can this be seen better than what transpired in Charlottesville, Virginia, at the Unite the Right Rally of 2017.

Emboldened by the election of Donald Trump and the escalation of a perceived White identity culture war, men dressed in polos and khakis carrying lit tiki torches descended upon the city of Charlottesville to protest the removal of a confederate statue

in one of the city's parks. While the clothing choices of the alt-right may seem trivial, it is the manifestation of the evolution of the ideology. After the 1990s and the rise of neo-Nazim in the United States, thought leaders within the White supremacist and nationalist movement sought to mainstream their ideology by adopting a "boots to suits" approach (Thompson & Hawley, 2021). The "boots to suits" approach seeks to soften the edges of the movement and convert and radicalize nationalist curious individuals. This approach has worked as the White nationalist ideology has become a dominant fixture in the mainstream political dialogue in the United States (Thompson & Hawley, 2021). Anti-hate groups are troubled by this latest evolution of White nationalism and the "boots to suits" approach, as it is getting harder and harder to distinguish who is an active White nationalist ideologue.

QAnon

QAnon is a non-centralized conspiratorial movement within the United States that has gained prominence since the presidential inauguration of Donald Trump in January of 2017. Birthed out of the alt-right, QAnon blends elements of White supremacy and nationalism with anti-government and anti-democratic conspiracies. Rather than holding to a single ideological orthodoxy, QAnon is an amalgam of numerous conspiracy theories, White nationalist talking points, and anti-government sentiments that have existed in the body politic of the United States for some time (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). Named after the United States Department of Energy's highest level of security clearance, the Q clearance, the QAnon conspiracy posits that former President Donald Trump is fighting a battle against a "deep state" cabal. The "deep state" cabal is filled

with Satan-worshipping Democrats and elites who traffic children and feed off their blood (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021; Ganesh, 2020).

Although QAnon adherents have been at political rallies since 2017, the conspiratorial movement's presence is prominently seen in online forums like 4Chan and 8Chan. Today, QAnon material can be found on mainstream social media outlets like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, leading to radicalization (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021; Ganesh, 2020). QAnon situates the elements of White supremacy and nationalism into an altruistic package (Partin & Markwick, 2020). While an altruistic package can serve to make the movement more appealing and mainstream, it can also fuel and justify violence against those believed to be members of the "deep state" cabal (Partin & Markwick, 2020). For this reason, the FBI and Department of Homeland Security labeled QAnon a national security threat in 2020. The threat QAnon poses to the United States was seen on January 6, 2021, when insurrectionists wearing QAnon attire and carrying QAnon flags stormed the United States Capitol to overthrow the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Despite being labeled a national security threat, 97 QAnon-supporting political candidates were in the 2020 primaries. Of the 97 candidates, 24 were victorious in their primaries and ran in the 2020 general election. In addition, in 2021, two freshman congresswomen from Georgia and Colorado supportive of QAnon were seated in the 117th Congress (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021).

The QAnon movement continues to grow at an alarming rate in the United States. In 2019, it was estimated that only five percent of Americans believed in the theory or its constructs (Rogers, 2021). That figure rose to ten percent in 2020 and seventeen percent

in 2021 (Rogers, 2021). Equally troubling is the news that QAnon is gaining traction in numerous European nations like France.

Today, QAnon is fueling COVID-19 anti-vaccine misinformation in the United States and abroad. It is also fueling the Anti-Critical Race Theory movement in the U.S. Appealing to its White supremacist and nationalist roots, online QAnon forums and their purveyors see the classroom as the site for the next battle in the culture war between liberals and conservatives. QAnon followers have taken their fight from the digital world to school board meetings around the United States, demanding a non-critical view of America's racial history and Whiteness as an institution. Essentially, the fight QAnon is waging is for the actualization of the "14 Words", "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children." In a recent study, Conner and MacMurry (2021) found that over half of respondents who identified as being active in the most recent school board controversies surrounding critical race theory also reported subscribing to one or more of QAnon's core tenants. Conner and MacMurry's (2021) study raises concerns as QAnon is becoming increasingly immersed in American society.

Women in the Far-Right Extremist Movement

The stereotypical image of a member of a White supremacist extremist is an angry White male (Hawley, 2019). This stereotype is not without merit, as the far-right extremist movement is built upon a solid foundation of misogyny (Darby, 2020; Bloom, 2011; Blee, 2003). However, White women have and continue to play a vital role in cultivating and maintaining the ethos of hate groups, recruiting new members, and raising the family (Darby, 2020; Blee, 2003).

Although it may induce a sense of cognitive dissonance to see White women as willing participants in an oppressive, misogynistic system, they are foundational in the ideology's advancement and the fulfillment of the "14 Words" (Darby, 2020; Blee, 2008; Blee, 2003). From overseeing numerous aspects of chattel slavery in the Southern United States to serving as Hitler's "Furies," White women have stood at the precipice of the mainstreaming of White supremacist and nationalist beliefs throughout history (Jones-Rogers, 2019; Lower, 2014). Blee (2003) posits that without White women in their ranks, the organized hate movement would be like a rudderless ship, adrift and unable to reach its goals.

Jardina (2019) notes that White women are a key demographic in the body politic and found that they can often carry more deeply entrenched racist ideas. These ideas have wound their way throughout society and all local, state, and federal government levels. Jardina (2019) argues that White women can carry racist and White supremacist ideas openly and without reproach due to their positionality in society. White women are often viewed as caretakers and fill positions in society that are in the helping professions like education, nursing, and social work (Jardina, 2019; Frankenburg, 2005). As such, White women are often viewed for their contributions to society rather than the ideology they hold to, allowing for an embrace of what would often be seen and described as overtly racist.

White women are also often seen as fierce protectors of their children, or as some would say, Mama Bears (Jardina, 2019; Frankenburg, 2005). It would be unfathomable to hold a White mother accountable for actions taken to protect their young. As such, racist and White supremacist beliefs are openly shared without consequence under the banner

of the protection of children. This is no more clearly seen than in the current school board fights regarding the discussion of race in the classroom and the debate over transgender women and girls competing in female-designated sports. While it is not suggested that every White woman is racist or a member of the far-right extremist movement, how White women can mainstream White supremacy in American society must be discussed.

Little contemporary research has been done exploring White women's role in the present-day iteration of far-right extremism in the United States. Moreover, even less research has been conducted to explore both White women's path(s) to radicalization and/or their journey out of the far-right extremist movement. As women play a crucial role in the far-right extremist world, more research exploring their involvement and exit is gravely needed.

White Nationalism in the Military and Law Enforcement

For decades, researchers of far-right extremism have found a correlation between the military and law enforcement and White supremacist and nationalist extremism. However, the events of January 6, 2021, with shocking images of active-duty members of the military, veterans of the armed services, and active-duty law enforcement participating in insurrectionist activities have brought a renewed sense of urgency to understand said correlation better and combat it.

Since the late 1990s, infiltration of the United States armed services and law enforcement institutions has been part of the organizing strategy for far-right extremists (Jones et al., 2021; Simi et al., 2013). Members of far-right White supremacist hate groups have heavily emphasized recruiting active-duty military personnel. One such group, the National Socialist Organization (NSO), presents a grave threat to the United

States. Since its founding five years ago, the NSO has recruited active-member military and law enforcement members to acquire bomb-making expertise and military-style training procedures.

Quantifying the scope of organized hate's infiltration of the nation's armed services and law enforcement personnel remains a high priority for academics and journalists alike. However, due to government obstruction and the Pentagon's refusal to grant interviews of former and active military personnel, efforts to study and investigate the phenomena have been greatly hindered. Additionally, the Pentagon lacks a centralized mechanism to track and report personnel flagged for either ties to organized hate groups or holding White supremacist and nationalist sentiments (Jones et al., 2021; Simi et al., 2013). In light of the January 6th attack on the United States Capitol Building and the confirmed presence of active-duty military and law enforcement personnel, efforts are being made in the Biden Administration to explore the scope of the problem. Additionally, in their study of White nationalism and the military, Ralston et al. (2021) found that public concern about White nationalism's presence in the armed service and law enforcement has steadily risen since the attack on the capital.

Severely lacking, however, is a coordinated effort to understand law enforcement personnel's ties to organized hate or their holding of White supremacist and nationalist sentiments. As each police department is overseen by a local municipality rather than the federal government, the responsibility of understanding the recruitment and membership of active-duty law enforcement falls on their shoulders. Local municipalities, many in desperate need of fiscal resources, cannot research such a complex subject, let alone remedy it.

It is especially prudent to understand the subject of law enforcement recruitment and membership in White supremacist hate groups in light of the growing rates of police brutality against individuals of color. Research has shown that individuals of color are disproportionately targeted by law enforcement (Jones et al., 2021; Simi et al., 2013). This may be due to the structural White supremacy upon which the institution was founded upon, but it may also be due to more insidious reasons. May understanding the recruitment and membership of law enforcement in organized hate be a key to tackling the problem of police brutality?

Radicalization

As previously mentioned, one cannot understand disengagement and de-radicalization from far-right domestic White nationalist extremism without fully understanding the radicalization process of said extremists (Koehler, 2018). Often, the road an individual has journeyed to radicalization is the same road they must travel to exit a life of hate a membership in a White supremacist and nationalist hate group (Koehler, 2018). The journey of radicalization is not a monolith. One's journey is unique and deeply personal. As such, numerous lenses are needed to understand the road to radicalization better. While the field of inquiry into U.S. domestic radicalization is growing, the knowledge base as to why and how an individual is radicalized in domestic far-right White supremacist hate groups in the United States is limited. Therefore, a framework focusing on foreign terrorism will be utilized to explore the varying paths that lead to one's radicalization into a life of hate.

Significance Quest Theory

In their study of ISIS and foreign Islamic terrorism, Kruglanski et al. (2015) provide a generalized definition of radicalization. Radicalization is a gradual process in which an individual adopts an extremist belief system or ideology that accepts or promotes violence. Kruglanski et al. (2015) continue by stating that radicalization is a "process of supporting or engaging in activities deemed (by others) as a violation of important social norms (i.e., the killing of civilians)" (p.87). Finally, Kruglanski et al. (2015) argue that individuals radicalize when their commitment to a goal served by their radical behavior outweighs their commitment to other goals in their lives. This new focus is the quest for significance, which Kruglanski et al. (2015) define as the fundamental desire to matter, gain respect, and "be someone" in one's sphere of influence.

Significance quest theory (SQT) posits that there are three drivers of radicalization and violent extremism 1) need, 2) narrative, and 3) network (Kruglanski et al., 2018). SQT also asserts that the need for personal significance and meaning in one's life is the dominant psychological and social need that underlies violent extremism and radicalization.

A violence-justifying ideological narrative also contributes to the radicalization of individuals by delineating a collective cause that can provide a White nationalist curious individual the significance and meaning they desire. A violence-justifying ideological narrative also provides a radicalized individual the collective means to pursue the group's cause and desired ends (Kruglanski et al., 2018). Finally, cultivating a network of people who adhere to a violence-justifying ideological narrative leads individuals to perceive the narrative and the radicalized group's actions as morally acceptable.

The Duplex Theory of Hate

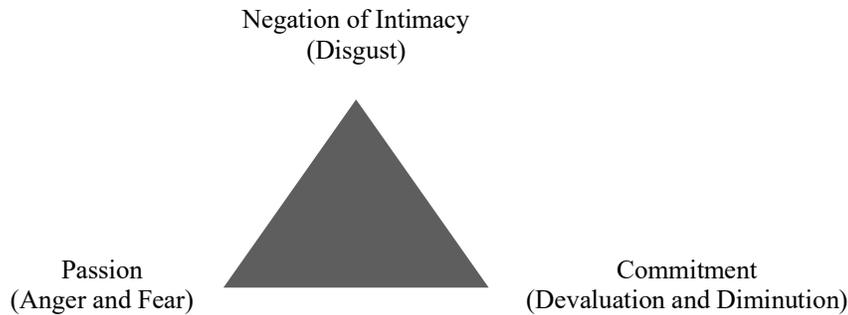
Hate can best be defined as intense hostility, disgust, and aversion that is usually derived from fear, anger, or a sense of injury (Oxford Lexico, n.d.). Developed in 2003 through the work of Social Psychologist Robert Sternberg, the duplex theory of hate presents a conceptual structure of hate and how individuals and groups transmit hate. Sternberg's (2003) work regarding the psychology of love led to an assumption that hate is the opposite and absence of love. However, Sternberg (2003) found the opposite to be true. Hate, posits Sternberg (2003), is neither the opposite or absence of love. While hate is closely related to psychological love, their relationship is structurally complex with little to no correlation present between the two. As such, a new theoretical framework emerged to understand the nature of hate better.

The duplex theory of hate is the summation of two interconnected and symbiotic theoretical frameworks, the triangular theory of hate and the story-based theory of the development of hate. To understand the development and transmission of hate, an examination of both sub-theories is needed.

Hate is often considered a single emotion. On the contrary, hate can be seen as having multiple components that emerge and interact in different ways and at different times due to the fluidity of an individual's social environment (Sternberg, 2020; Sternberg, 2004; Sternberg, 2003). Sternberg (2003) posits that there are three components that construct hate; 1) negation of intimacy (brought by disgust), 2) passion (brought by anger and fear), and 3) commitment (brought by devaluation and diminution). Each component in the triangle produces a different action to physically,

socially, and psychologically manifest hate. Figure 1 below provides a visual depiction of the triangular theory of hate.

Figure 1
Triangular Theory of Hate (Sternberg, 2003)



Negation of Intimacy. Intimacy can best be defined as both the feeling of and seeking of closeness (Oxford Lexico, n.d.). Negation of intimacy is the avoidance of closeness and a deep desire for distance (Sternberg, 2020; Sternberg, 2004; Sternberg, 2003). Through negation of intimacy, distance is sought from individuals and groups that elicit disgust and repulsion. Distance evoked due to disgust and repulsion often leads to the dehumanization of the targeted individual or group (Sternberg, 2003). According to Sternberg (2004), negation of intimacy is often slow to develop and slow to fade within an individual's thinking.

Passion. Passion can best be defined as a strong and barely controllable emotion (Oxford Lexico, n.d.). In the triangular theory of hate, passion manifests itself in either anger or fear. Individuals or groups that have been the targets of negation of intimacy are often viewed as imminent threats who should be feared. An example is how Black men were depicted during the Reconstruction period in U.S. history. White supremacist

propaganda depicted Black men as rapacious with an unnatural and animalistic urge to rape White women and attack children. It must be noted that Black men are still depicted in this way in American society. According to Sternberg (2003), passion is rapid in its growth and rapid in its demise.

Commitment. The third construct of the triangular theory of hate is the decision to commit to hating the targeted individual or group. Sternberg (2003) hypothesizes that the commitment to hate is the devaluation and diminution of said targeted individual and group and often manifests as contempt. Individuals who have decided to commit to hate are often bent on shifting thinking and fomenting hate within the social environment they exist (Sternberg, 2020; Sternberg, 2004; Sternberg, 2003). Sternberg (2003) argues that an attempt to shift the thinking of others and foment hate is often carried out through some manner of "education," misinformation, and propaganda. Essentially, hate is transmitted through radicalization. Sternberg (2003) posits that a commitment to hate is often rapidly decided and slow in its demise.

The Story-Based Theory of the Development of Hate

The story-based theory of hate focuses on the narratives one adopts about an individual or group that elicit an ultimate commitment to hate. Sternberg (2003) defines these narratives as "stories of hate." Each story of hate has two characters: the hater's role and the target individual or group (Sternberg, 2020; Sternberg, 2004; Sternberg, 2003). Sternberg (2003) notes that stories of hate have a beginning, middle, and end. A story of hate's ending is often intentional distance from and acts of dehumanization of an individual or group. However, a story of hate can lead to criminal acts of violence against the target individual or group. Stories of hate are in a state of fluidity as they are

constantly being revised and rewritten due to the experiences one has. Notably, Sternberg (2003) points out that a story of hate will be perceived differently by each participant in the story leading to incongruent realities for each character. Individuals may have multiple stories of hate operating concurrently and interacting with each other.

Sternberg (2003) hypothesizes that there are eighteen stories that elicit an ultimate commitment to hate. Different stories give rise to triangles of hate and are rooted in one or more sides of the triangle (negation of intimacy, passion, and commitment). Table 1 below lists Sternberg's (2003) eighteen stories of hate and the constructs of the triangle of hate they are thought to incite. The title of the stories of hate hypothesized by Sternberg (2003) are straightforward and are seen as self-explanatory.

According to Sternberg (2003), stories of hate emerge through socialization in one's social environment. However, propaganda is often used for the sedimentation of narratives about target individuals or groups in the minds of potential committers to hate. While some of the narratives and stories may have glimpses of truth, construing a group as a monolith and relating to individuals based upon preconceived notions can quickly turn perceptions into reality for those committed to hate. Once a story has been adopted as reality by those committed to hate, the individual is often no longer willing to question whether a story is true or seeks to change their beliefs about a targeted individual or group (Sternberg, 2020; Sternberg, 2004; Sternberg, 2003).

Table 1
Stories of Hate (Sternberg, 2003)

Story	Construct(s)
Stranger vs. In-Group	I, C
Impure Other vs. Pure In-Group	I
Controller vs. Controlled	C
Faceless Foe vs. Individuated In-Group	C
Enemy of God vs. Servant of God	P,C
Morally Bankrupt vs. Morally Pure	I,C
Death vs. Life	I, C
Barbarian vs. Civilized	I,P,C
Greedy Enemy vs. Financially Responsible In-Group	I,P,C
Criminal vs. Innocent Prey	P,C
Torturer vs. Victim	I,P,C
Murderer vs. Victim	I,P,C
Rapist vs. Victim	I, P, C
Animal vs. Human	I,P
Power Crazy vs. Mentally Sound	C
Infiltrator vs. Infiltrated	C
Comic Character vs. Sensible In-Group	C
Destroyer of Destiny vs. Seeker of Destiny	C

Note. I= negation of intimacy; P= passion; C= commitment

The Two Pyramid Theory of Radicalization

Emerging in 2017 in response to the events of Charlottesville, Virginia, the two pyramid theory of radicalization was conceptualized to provide a lens through which to study the process of radicalization into violent extremism. Through the work of McCauley and Moskaleiko (2017), the two pyramid theory of radicalization manifested in response to the doubts about the usefulness of the concept of radicalization by numerous scholars in the field of extremism (Kundnani, 2015; Horgan, 2012; Sedgwick, 2010; Kilcullen, 2009). The scholars' primary concern is that when terrorism becomes

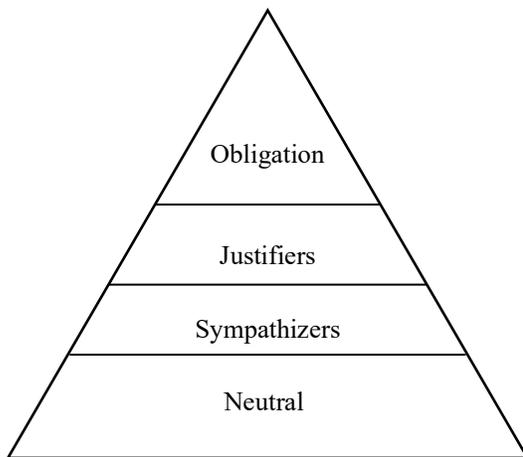
difficult to predict and there is pressure to provide answers in a time of uncertainty, a hyper-focus on radicalization occurs. McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) worked to develop a theoretical framework that addresses both by understanding the concerns of fellow scholars in the field and valuing the concept of radicalization.

The Opinion Pyramid. McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) conceptualize the journey of radicalization as two separate pyramids that help explain each other. The first pyramid, the Opinion Pyramid (OP), is constructed upon social norms that originate through socialization and individual worldviews/opinions of the world. At the base of the OP are individuals who are neutral in political beliefs and do not participate in political causes. These individuals are apolitical and detached from any form of political engagement in their nation. The next level of the OP are those who hold political beliefs and are passionate about a political cause but do not actively justify violence. While these individuals do not justify violence, they are somewhat sympathetic to those using varying methods to induce social and cultural change. A prescient example of this are leaders in the Republican Party who, in recent years, have chosen to turn a blind eye and not renounce the actions of those who hold far-right extremist beliefs and are willing to use violence to achieve their social and political goals.

Higher yet in the OP are those who justify violence in defense of political beliefs or causes. Former President Donald Trump's speech after the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017 fully encapsulates the "justifier" mentality at this level of the OP when he stated that there were "very fine people on both sides" of the events that resulted in the death of a counter-protester, Heather Heyer, at the hands of a violent far-right protester in Charlottesville Virginia.

At the top of OP are those who not only justify violence but feel a personal and moral obligation to take up violence as a means to achieve the fruition of the political, social, and cultural cause they believe in. Essentially, those at the apex of the OP believe that they have a personal calling to achieve political and social change at any cost. Figure 2 below offers a visual depiction of the Opinion Pyramid.

Figure 2
Two Pyramid Theory of Radicalization: Opinion Pyramid (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017)

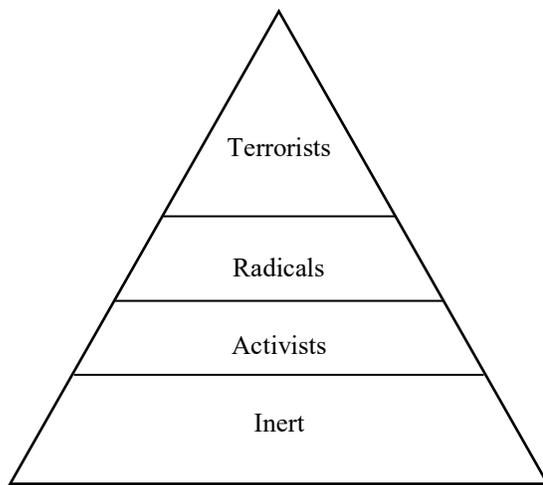


The Action Pyramid. While the OP is built upon worldview and personal opinion, McCauley and Moskaleiko's (2017) second pyramid, the Action Pyramid (AP), is built upon one turning their deeply held opinion into action. At the base level of the AP are those who are inert in their involvement in a political cause. These individuals do not participate in the political process, nor is there a desire to. The next level of the AP are those who lawfully participate in the political process to achieve social and political change. These individuals are commonly known as activists. Higher yet in the AP are those who take illegal action to achieve their social and political goals. These individuals

can be classified as radicals and are willing to pursue violence to ensure the success of their political, social, and cultural agendas. Finally, at the top of the pyramid are those who not only use illegal actions to achieve their goals but specifically target civilians to instill fear and gain control. McCauley and Moskaleiko (2017) classify these individuals as terrorists. Figure 3 below provides a visual depiction of the Action Pyramid.

Figure 3

Two Pyramid Theory of Radicalization: Action Pyramid (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017)



Central to McCauley and Moskaleiko's (2017) two pyramid theory of radicalization is the slippery slope philosophical framework that serves as a lens through which to view the pyramids. McCauley and Moskaleiko's (2017) slippery slope conceptualization posits that small involvements in political conflict and violence can create a new force that quickly moves an individual toward radicalization in thought and deed. The slippery slope framework sees radicalization as a process that is not static but is perpetually building upon itself.

The Internet, Social Media, and Video Games: Fertile Soil for Radicalization

The internet has exacerbated the radicalization process for White nationalists (Koehler, 2018). The internet has become a key source of misinformation and propaganda of extremist talking points (Behr et al., 2013). With the advent of unregulated message boards like StormFront, 4Chan, and 8chan, the internet acts as an 'echo chamber' where individuals find their ideas supported and parroted by other like-minded individuals (Behr et al., 2013). Additionally, the internet allows radicalization to occur without physical contact. Simi and Futrell (2006) found that physical and virtual spaces are not entirely separate spheres but rather closely intertwined. Additionally, Simi and Futrell (2006) found that the internet has only accelerated radicalization in the digital era, with a majority of respondents (n= 61) stating that their internet usage has significantly contributed to their activism in far-right politics.

Early evidence in the study of radicalization suggested that the internet was not a substitute for in-person meetings, serving only to complement in-person communication (Wolfgang, 2021; Koehler, 2018). With the rise of Facebook and other social media platforms, the dissemination of far-right White supremacist and nationalist talking points and memes has served as a recruitment tool for the ideology without needing in-person rallies or events. Internal research at Facebook revealed that two-thirds of the time an individual joins an extremist Facebook group is due to a Facebook recommendation (The Wall Street Journal, 2021). It is estimated that over two million individuals were radicalized into some form of QAnon and White nationalist thinking through Facebook's recommendation algorithm (The Wall Street Journal, 2021). While it is not suggested that each of the aforementioned two million people will join a violent extremist group, social

media is a platform where the first steps on a journey of radicalization can be taken without connecting to anyone or any group in person.

The use of the internet for radicalization has only increased during the time of COVID-19 (Davies et al., 2021). The spread of misinformation regarding wearing face masks and vaccinations has served as a proxy for severe political polarization and a gateway to the adoption of far-right extremist thinking. According to former White supremacist and nationalist leader Christian Picciolini (Yousef, 2020), moments of crisis are fertile soil for radicalization. With the rise of COVID-19, public health restrictions, and the uncertainty curated by the pandemic, the proverbial "pump is primed" for a surge in the radicalization of future White nationalist extremists (Davies et al., 2021).

In addition to the internet, far-right extremist groups have weaponized video game platforms to recruit and disseminate White supremacist and nationalist talking points. In a recent study conducted by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) (Davey, 2021), four online gaming platforms, Stream, Twitch, Discord, and DLive, were analyzed to explore the online strategies of the far-right. The investigation found links to violent terrorist organizations throughout the United States and Europe (Davey, 2021). Online gaming platforms act as a community hub for individuals affiliated with far-right White nationalism to come together to socialize, communicate, and have fun with online friends in a space that offers the appearance of banality. Due to the innocuous nature of online gaming platforms, they have served as a field for recruiting young men and women. Using online gaming platforms to recruit young individuals provides an opportunity for the far-right to shape the thinking of the next generation during a critical stage of their

social identity development. More study is needed to explore how online gaming platforms create a virtual space for White nationalism.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and Radicalization

Research on radicalization has primarily focused on one's mid-life adoption and exercise of far-right extremist ideology rather than the totality of their life story. However, emerging research is beginning to explore the correlation between early childhood experiences and later membership in a far-right extremist hate group. Through new research, it is becoming clear that understanding childhood trauma's role in an individual's radicalization into far-right hate is imperative.

In a recent study, Windisch et al. (2020) found that sixty-three percent of their study's sample (n=91) had experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACES) in the first eighteen years of their lives. This is compared to fifty-five percent of a comparison "high risk" sample and sixteen percent of the U.S. general population. Of note in the study is the percentage of participants who stated they had experienced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Forty-eight percent of respondents said they had experienced some form of physical and emotional abuse at the had of a caregiver (Windisch et al., 2020). Fifteen percent of those who stated they had experienced physical and emotional abuse and neglect discussed a lack of basic physical needs, including adequate food, clothing, medical care, and/or safe shelter. Windisch et al. (2020) also found that twenty-eight percent of respondents stated they had experienced sexual abuse. When combined with the loss of a caregiver (68% of respondents), caregiver substance misuse (66% of respondents), caregiver mental illness (47% of respondents), and caregiver incarceration (32% of respondents), the impacts of the

aforementioned adverse childhood experiences are only amplified. ACES serve to create an unstable foundation in one's life that, in the right ethos, can lead to one choosing a path of hate and extremism. Essentially, one's mid-life journey to radicalization cannot be separated from their past, and as such, it must be considered when working with those seeking to exit a life of hate and membership in a hate group.

Although this study is of import, deeper statistical analysis is needed. Windisch et al. (2020) simply presented the mean of their study's sample. The study did not conduct any further analysis that would have offered a more robust exploration of this phenomenon. For example, a t-test exploring the means between different groups in the sample (i.e., men and women, class, violent and non-violent, etc.) would shed light on whether one's gender and ACES score are correlated. Additionally, a hierarchical regression could be conducted to determine which adverse childhood experiences are more predictive of future radicalization.

Disengagement and De-Radicalization

Just as radicalization is a unique journey for each individual, so too is one's journey out of extremism. Research on disengagement from violent extremism is a relatively new field of inquiry. Compared to the related field of radicalization, little effort has been made to understand how individuals disengage or de-radicalize from far-right extremism.

A significant obstacle to understanding terrorist disengagement is that existing research lacks conceptual clarity due to a lack of research in the field. For instance, researchers consistently use "disengagement" and "de-radicalization" interchangeably

(Horgan, 2009). However, the two phrases, while related, describe two very different paths away from far-right extremism.

According to Ebaugh (1988), disengagement can be defined as the "process whereby an individual "no longer accepts as appropriate the socially defined rights and obligations that accompany a given role in society" (p. 2). Disengagement does not mean an individual renounces their adherence to an extremist ideology. Instead, they choose to and/or are no longer motivated to be an active participant in a group or participate in group activities (Windisch et al., 2016). Alternatively, de-radicalization can be defined as the process of change of an individual's belief system and worldview. In so doing, individuals reject an extremist ideology and embrace mainstream values and norms (Conner & Gill, 2019). As such, de-radicalization can be viewed as distinct from disengagement because it suggests a transformation in the individual's worldview and paradigm. In essence, de-radicalization involves a change in belief, while a change in behavior characterizes disengagement.

Theories of Disengagement and De-Radicalization

Although research surrounding disengagement and de-radicalization is limited, both Koehler (2017) and Barelle (2015) have sought to engage in a theoretical discussion about the phenomena. Even with their contributions to the body of knowledge on disengagement and de-radicalization, there remains a lack of conceptual and theoretical foundations for de-radicalization work (Horgan & Alteir, 2012; Horgan & Braddock, 2010). Both Koehler's (2017) and Barelle's (2015) focus on disengagement and de-radicalization outside of the United States, with Koehler examining Europe and Barelle highlighting foreign terrorism in the Middle East.

De-Radicalization as "Re-Pluralization." Koehler (2017) conceptualizes de-radicalization as a process in which an individual begins to accept a pluralization of political concepts and values. Koehler (2017) posits that through radicalization, an individual's political ideology is de-pluralized as they begin isolating themselves from others who think differently than themselves and increasingly find themselves in an ideological echo chamber. Re-pluralization occurs when an individual begins to become disillusioned by the use of violence to achieve their political agenda. According to Koehler (2017), disillusionment resulting in re-pluralization is the direct impact of one's cognitive dissonance from external events.

While Koehler's (2017) premise and conceptualization touch on a significant aspect of de-radicalization, political ideology, it lacks in its ability to provide a holistic picture of an individual's journey out of an extremist lifestyle. Koehler's (2017) conceptualization views the individual as a purely political being rather than from a biopsychosocial perspective. While political ideology is a significant element of one's life in far-right extremism, it is not the sole factor at play in an individual's journey in and out of a life of hate.

The Pro-Integration Model. Barelle (2015) conceptualizes disengagement and de-radicalization as social integration. The model has five social domains: social relations, coping, identity, ideology, and action orientation. Barelle (2015) posits that those de-radicalizing from a far-right extremist ideology feel the most connected in mainstream society when they make significant social changes in each one of the social domains. The model is progressive with primary focus given to social engagement. Barelle (2015) establishes three levels of engagement: minimal engagement, cautious

engagement, and positive engagement. While the model is built to be non-linear, Barelle (2015) suggests that when individuals reach the stage of positive engagement, they are healthily connected to mainstream society, suggesting an endpoint.

While Barelle's (2015) Pro-Integration Model is an excellent addition to the field of disengagement and de-radicalization, one critique is warranted. The Pro-Integration Model is built on the premise that social engagement is the primary factor impacting an individual's ability to reconnect to mainstream society. While it can be argued that humans are social creatures, primarily focusing on social engagement without paying attention to one's biology and psychology only tells part of the de-radicalization story. One's psychology and biology significantly impact their social engagement capability.

Push and Pull Factors

To better understand the process in which one either disengages or is de-radicalized requires examining the multi-faceted social environment of the individual leaving a life of hate. To discuss the social environment and its impact on a change of behavior or the renunciation of extremist beliefs, early researchers developed a conceptual framework that categorizes the factors within a group that pushes an individual towards exiting and the pull factors outside of a group that draws an individual away from active group membership. The Push/Pull framework has served as a foundational work in disengagement and de-radicalization studies.

Reckless (1969) first defined push factors as adverse group organizational elements that prompt individuals to reflect on and reconsider their active membership in an extremist group. For example, a member of a far-right extremist group may grow dissatisfied with the organizational leadership of the group. Additionally, disillusionment

with the group's core values and "social contract" may push individuals to contemplate their choice of membership. Finally, for some who sought membership in the group to achieve their political and social goals through violence if needed, a sense of disillusionment with the group's inaction to pursue their expressed cause may lead to a reevaluation of membership to join a more active group.

Reckless (1969) defined pull factors as elements outside a group that prompt an individual to exit a group. Pull factors are biographically positional in that they restructure an individual's social identity that was once socially and psychologically immersed in an extremist group requiring utmost loyalty (Vergani et al., 2018; Windisch et al., 2016). For example, an unemployed group member may be pulled away from group activities and membership by the promise of a steady job. Additionally, getting married or having a child could pull a member away from activities and membership to focus on their new family.

The Push/Pull framework of disengagement and de-radicalization closely resembles a core practice framework within social work, Human Behavior in the Social Environment (HBSE). HBSE views society and all surroundings influenced in some way by humans including relationships, institutions, culture, and physical structures, as the primary context in which behavior and cognition are shaped (Van Wormer, 2017). As such, changes in the social environment serve as instigators of change within the individual. To borrow the words of Reckless (1969), the social environment can either push or pull an individual toward new behavior and cognition.

Push and Pull Factors in Foreign Terrorism, Cults, and Street Gangs

The body of disengagement and de-radicalization literature focused on U.S. White nationalist extremism is limited. As such, literature from parallel fields of foreign terrorism, cult, and street gangs were critically analyzed to explore push and pull factors. While White nationalism is predominately racially and politically driven, differing it from foreign terrorism, cults, and gangs, examining the factors that pull or push an individual from the three may provide a direction and foundation for future research.

Foreign Terrorism. For former foreign terrorist actors, the most salient push factor for their exit from the terrorist cell was disapproval of violence being used to achieve hegemonic power in a region or to elicit fear in average civilians (Windisch et al., 2016; Hwang et al., 2013; Alonso, 2011; Kassimeris, 2011; Ashour, 2009). For many former terrorist cell members, witnessing violent acts and being the targets of violence themselves as a cell member led to a decision to end their association with the terrorist cell and network (Windisch et al., 2016; Hwang et al., 2013; Alonso, 2011; Kassimeris, 2011; Ashour, 2009). Cell members' absolute rejection of violence is a clear marker of the beginning of their disengagement and de-radicalization journey.

Disillusionment was also a notable push factor that drove individuals to end their association with terrorist groups (Windisch et al., 2016; Hwang et al., 2013; Alonso, 2011; Kassimeris, 2011; Ashour, 2009). Disillusionment can be defined as the cognitive dissonance that occurs when one's idealized expectations are incongruent with their everyday reality (Casserly & Megginson, 2009). For some, joining a terrorist cell was a means to secure protection for themselves and possibly their loved ones (Horgan, 2019). However, rather than finding the safety they expected, they and their loved ones became

targets of violence, with numerous members reporting their families being used as leverage against them as a means to ensure loyalty. For others, joining a terrorist cell was a way to join in the fight against religious, ethnic, and cultural enemies (Horgan, 2019). Disillusionment occurred when cell members realized that it was often their fellow members and not the religious, ethnic, or cultural "other" who became the primary target of violence for the cell (Horgan, 2019).

Regarding pull factors, the most significant cause for leaving a militant terrorist cell or network was establishing a family (Windisch et al., 2016; Hwang et al., 2013; Alonso, 2011; Kassimeris, 2011; Ashour, 2009). Marriage, the birth of a child, and new familial responsibilities served as the strongest motivator for leaving a life of hate and terrorist affiliation. In addition, obligations to new relationships, be it with a new spouse or child, served to restructure the priorities of these individuals leading to their disengagement and/or de-radicalization from the terrorist cell or network.

Cults. Disillusionment emerged as the most common push factor that led to former cult members' disengagement from a religious sect (Windisch et al., 2016; Coates, 2013a; Coates, 2013b; Matthews & Salazar, 201; Coates, 2011; Buxant & Saroglou, 2008). The difficulty of navigating through the deconstruction of familial roles (i.e., mother, father, wife, husband), an absence of education and/or work, coercion to disclose stigmatizing information, and a lack of satisfaction living "off the social grid" served as an impetus for exit from the sect (Windisch et al., 2016; Coates, 2013a; Coates, 2013b; Matthews & Salazar, 201; Coates, 2011; Buxant & Saroglou, 2008). Also of note, emotional and psychological fatigue was seen as a motivator for exit and change. Feelings of alienation, spiritual confusion, deception, manipulation, and inconsistencies

in sect teachings were often noted as root causes for emotional and psychological fatigue. Said fatigue served as the open doorway to an awareness that the idealized expectations one had of life in the sect were not aligned with reality (Windisch et al., 2016; Coates, 2013a; Coates, 2013b; Matthews & Salazar, 2011; Coates, 2011; Buxant & Saroglou, 2008).

Regarding pull factors, social relationships, primarily the family, emerged as the most salient draw away from membership in a religious cult. Studies have shown a strong correlation between family affinity and a member's willingness to stay active in a religious cult. Sect members with a high affinity for family who were not associated with the cult were more likely to disengage from the group than sect members who have fractured familial ties (Windisch et al., 2016; Coates, 2013a; Coates, 2013b; Matthews & Salazar, 2011; Coates, 2011; Buxant & Saroglou, 2008).

Street Gangs in the United States. Much like former terrorist actors, violence emerged as the most common push factor that led to former gang member's disengagement from the group (Windisch et al., 2016; Weerman et al., 2014; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Moloney et al., 2010; Moloney et al., 2019). Personal fear of being the target of violence from not only warring gangs but their own group served to propel and speed their exit. Also, maturation was a distinct cause of disengagement from gang life. Becoming an adult and shouldering new responsibilities pushes members away as their time and energy become more focused on work and family rather than gang activities (Windisch et al., 2016; Weerman et al., 2014; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Moloney et al., 2010; Moloney et al., 2019).

Regarding pull factors, much like former cult members, family emerged as the most common motivator of disengagement from a gang. Familial relationships, whether with parental figures, a new spouse, or a new child, dramatically increase the cost and risk of participating in gang activities. As more time is spent with family members at home, time on the street is significantly reduced.

Notably, becoming a new parent was the primary familial relationship that led members to reassess membership and association with a gang and its activities. For many former gang members, worry about the safety and security of their new child and envisioning a life without them due to possible incarceration was a significant cause for disengagement and de-radicalization from gang life (Windisch et al., 2016; Weerman et al., 2014; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Moloney et al., 2010; Moloney et al., 2019).

Becoming a parent forces both a restructuring of life and priorities that prompt many members' disengagement and de-radicalization process.

Disengagement and De-Radicalization Programs In Western Europe

Since the mid-2000s, several Western European nations have developed comprehensive counter-radicalization strategies seeking to de-radicalize or disengage far-right extremists and prevent the radicalization of new ones. Germany, Denmark, and Norway have the most extensive counter-radicalization initiatives. The success of these nations' disengagement and de-radicalization programming offers an example of the power of an all of government commitment to combatting far-right extremism. The programs of each nation also serve as a model of what disengagement and de-radicalization programming in the United States could look like if the U.S. were willing to not only acknowledge the threat White nationalism poses but work seriously to combat

it. Western European nations were exclusively explored due to having a close resemblance to the social and political fabric of the United States.

Germany. Germany has been more concerned with combating far-right extremism than any other European country. This is due to the nation's direct experience with fascism. In 2021, Germany codified an 89-point action plan to counter violent extremism (P/CVE) and develop more programs focused on disengagement and de-radicalization. The 89-point plan also included one billion euros in funding for new measures to be put in place. Germany's plan incorporates a multidimensional approach by the Ministry of the Interior that includes civic education to reinforce fundamental liberal democratic values and attempts to foster interfaith and political dialogue. The German government has also enacted broader policies to improve integration and social cohesion within German society.

In Germany, attempts have also been made to counter and refute extremist ideologies, narratives, and messaging (Daugherty, 2019; Koehler, 2018; Bjorgo & Horgan; 2009). In tandem with these initiatives, several de-radicalization programs that support those hoping or attempting to leave extremist groups have also been created. A mixture of private and government-funded social worker-led projects conducting de-radicalization programming in the nation include *EXIT Germany* and the *Violence Prevention Network (VPN)* (Daugherty, 2019; Koehler, 2018; Bjorgo & Horgan; 2009). *EXIT Germany* is unique in its programming as there is a heightened focus on teens and children. Programming in Germany has seen success in working with those leaving a life of hate and reintegrating into society (Daugherty, 2019; Koehler, 2018; Bjorgo &

Horgan; 2009). Daugherty (2019) found that with a focus on teens and young adults, exit programs seek to stop the problem before it occurs.

After the events of January 6, 2021, at the United States Capitol, the Biden Administration has sought to learn from Germany and its approach to countering violent extremism through disengagement and de-radicalization programming. However, there has not been a serious attempt to draft legislation or consider funding to address the threat White nationalist extremism poses to the nation. As Germany shows, attempts to disrupt extremism may be ineffective without the legislative and financial power of the federal government.

Denmark. In 2007, the Danish government introduced new legislation to tackle the threat of White nationalist extremism while also attempting to improve the levels of reintegration of former extremists back into society. The *Polarization and Radicalization Action Plan* defined radicalization as the "willingness to strive for far-reaching changes in society (possibly in an undemocratic manner) to support such changes or persuade others to accept them." The legislation provided funding for disengagement and de-radicalization programming focused on: 1) identifying those vulnerable to radical messages and reaching out to individuals at risk of slipping away from Danish society and legal democratic order through radicalization, 2) disruption of extremist networks through effective law enforcement, and 3) weakening the pull of radicalizing agents by prosecuting those that seek to promote extremist ideologies and narratives. The legislation and subsequent programming have successfully engaged potential recruits for far-right extremism (Daugherty, 2019; Koehler, 2018; Bjorgo & Horgan; 2009).

Koehler (2018) posits that Denmark has seen success in its work of delegitimizing extremist groups as well as their ideology. Additionally, Koehler (2018) notes that Denmark's programming has helped those disengaging from an extremist group dismantle their radical ideology, which builds the foundation for full de-radicalization. While there seems to be initial success in erecting barriers to radicalization, there is not enough data to determine the true success of disengagement and de-radicalization programming in the nation. Both Koehler (2018) and Daugherty (2019) cite a need for the Danish government to establish transparent standards and legal guidelines for establishing, executing, and evaluating disengagement and de-radicalization programming.

Norway. In 1995 and 1996, the strength and power of neo-Nazi skinhead groups in Norway reached their zenith. While exact numbers are not known, it is estimated that over 300 individuals were active in one of the many extremist groups in the nation (Daugherty, 2019). The threat of far-right extremism became very clear to Norwegians on February 6, 1996, when 78 members of a far-right extremist group were arrested in the Nationalist House in Oslo (Daugherty, 2019). The raid of the Nationalist House unearthed a large cache of weapons and White nationalist propaganda. Most of those arrested that day were under 18 years old, with many being 13 years old or younger (Daugherty, 2019). Many of the parents of these teens and children were unaware of their engagement with the group. As was the case in 1996, Norway's extremist population is very young. The average age of a group member in Norway is 19.

In response to the arrests made on February 6, 1996, the Norwegian government took a proactive approach to counter far-right radicalization and participation in extremist

groups, especially regarding youth. Through the nation's Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Children, the Leaving Violent Youth Groups were established. The disengagement and de-radicalization program has three objectives: 1) aiding and supporting youth who want to disengage from extremist groups, 2) supporting parents whose children are involved in far-right groups, including by establishing local parent support networks, and 3) developing best practices on working with young people in violent racist groups (Daugherty, 2019). Project Exit focuses on working at the local level to empower community leaders and officials with best practices to serve the youth and families in their sphere of influence.

Although Norway has seen success in working with families and youth engaged in White nationalist extremism, there is a lack of focus regarding adults seeking to exit a group. A myopic focus on a small population subsection creates a gap in services for others seeking to leave a life of hate. Additionally, Project Exit is not directly countering the radicalization of adolescents. Children may have been radicalized by one of their parents in some instances. If there is not equal attention paid to the de-radicalization of children and the de-radicalization of adults, the nation may never uproot the causes of radicalization.

U.S. Response to Domestic Far-Right Extremism

Following September 11, 2001, former President George W. Bush declared war on terrorism. In response to this declaration of war, the Bush Administration created and launched a new governmental agency, the Department of Homeland Security, whose primary focus was to ensure the security of the American homeland. Since 9/11, the primary focus of Homeland Security in the United States has been foreign terrorist threats

to the American People. The war on terror has, to this day, remained focused on the perceived threat of violent Islamic extremists. Despite reports that far-right terror poses a more significant threat to the United States than Islamist extremism post-9/11, the nation remains committed to its P/CVE strategy. Unfortunately, this commitment has ensured that efforts to engage and counteract domestic White nationalist violent extremism are missing from the United States' strategic plan. As a result, the United States remains ill-equipped to stand against the threat posed by domestic White supremacist and nationalist extremism.

In response to 9/11, the United States adopted a preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) framework to confront the threat of terrorism. P/CVE is an intelligence strategy enacted by national governments that work to recruit community leaders, social workers, teachers, and health providers in assisting governmental agencies in identifying individuals who are at risk of engaging in violent extremism. P/CVE has existed in the United States since the inception of the Department of Homeland Security after the attacks on the World Trade Centers on September 11, 2001. While Homeland Security often presents P/CVE as a "soft" means of counterterrorism, documents obtained by the Brennan Center for Justice (2019) through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request shine light on the true nature of the strategy. Brennan Center for Justice (2019) discovered numerous instances of ethically "grey" intelligence-gathering practices, the surveillance of individuals who were not suspected of wrong-doing, the recruitment of informants within White nationalist extremist groups, and the recruitment of community leaders to promote governmental messaging about foreign and domestic terrorism. Viewed through a Foucauldian lens, P/CVE is an institution that uses surveillance and

propaganda, or the "gaze," to wield power over the population (Foucault, 1995). Through the use of the "gaze," practitioners who serve in helping positions and rely on a rapport to assist their clients, students, and patients are forced to break trust as an arm of the carceral state (Foucault, 1995). P/CVE is a surveillance and intelligence gathering strategy that masquerades as community outreach programming.

P/CVE strategies have not proven effective (Patel & Lindsay, 2018). This may be due to the false paradigm the strategy was built upon, mainly that there is a well-defined, one-size-fits-all process of radicalization that leads to violent extremism. Like a fingerprint, the process of radicalization is unique to each individual. As radicalization is a unique path, so too is disengagement and de-radicalization. P/CVE turns individuals into monoliths, ultimately resulting in ineffective pre-radicalization and disengagement and de-radicalization services that do not explore the unique mosaic of a person's environment.

Social workers looking to engage in disengagement and de-radicalization work should not be engaged in P/CVE strategies employed by the state. P/CVE programming does not honor the dignity and worth of the individual, nor does it work to protect human rights and fight against social injustices. Instead, studies have proven that P/CVE strategies and programming are discriminatory and stigmatizing in their practice. Studies have also shown that P/CVE strategies and programming are divisive and destructive to the communities they target (Patel & Lindsay, 2018).

The U.S. has a brief history of funding programming to combat far-right domestic hate ideologies and groups. In 2015, the Obama Administration allocated \$400,000 in grant funding for the non-profit organization Life After Hate. Life After hate is one of

only a few non-profit organizations in the United States actively working with those seeking to disengage and de-radicalize from hate and extremist groups. Unfortunately, the grant funding from the Obama Administration was short-lived as the Trump Administration receded all funding allocated for the fight against domestic terrorism only two years later (Reeves & Caldwell, 2017). The Trump administration chose instead to focus attention and funding on combating foreign Islamic terrorism despite the evidence that the vast majority, sixty percent, of terrorist activity occurring in the U.S. is being performed by domestic far-right extremists (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2021).

The response of the United States to what is seen by the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies to be the greatest threat posed against the American homeland is severely lacking. The inaction of the United States is the direct result of falling disproportionately behind other nations in acknowledging the dominance of White supremacy in its institutions and history (Guess, 2019). Inaction to the rise of far-right White nationalist extremism can also be attributed to the normalization of White nationalist talking points and policies in the U.S. (Guess, 2019). Since the election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States, the social, cultural, and political Overton window has shifted to the right. It is hard to comprehensively and effectively respond to the threat of domestic far-right extremism when many of the movement's ideological elements guide the design and implementation of foreign and domestic policy.

Since Trump's inauguration in 2017, White nationalist thinking has influenced immigration policy. Policies banning Muslims from entering the United States and those

forcing the separation of children from their families at the U.S. southern border are rooted in White nationalism. It can be stated that during the Trump presidency, White nationalists felt they had an ally in the White House (Guess, 2019). A nation ignores a threat that it is sympathetic to. Groups like the Southern Poverty Center and the Anti-Defamation League seeking to combat hate are optimistic that the new Biden Administration will make responding to the threat of White nationalist extremism a top priority.

Gaps in Knowledge

There are numerous gaps in knowledge regarding disengagement and de-radicalization from White nationalist extremism. First, research regarding radicalization is somewhat outdated. Even radicalization research that is only a few years old may miss the mark in discussing the current reality of radicalization in the United States. The perpetual sophistication of far-right radicalization techniques and the fluidity and evolution of technological social connectivity requires the contemporary study of radicalization paths. This is especially true concerning COVID-19, the critical race theory "debates," and the rise of anti-government sentiment.

Second, research on extremism has predominantly focused on radicalization rather than disengagement and de-radicalization (Windisch et al., 2016). This is understandable as exploring how an individual is radicalized and identifying preventative measures would place a hurdle in the radicalization process and stunt it before it manifests into a problem. However, individuals are being radicalized, and thus more research is needed to better understand the journey out of far-right extremism. Additionally, research is necessary to explore the push/pull factors that initiated

disengagement and/or de-radicalization from White nationalist extremism. Studies comparing the push/pull factors of White nationalist extremists to cults and street gangs will also be beneficial to understand better the role group dynamics and biographical positionally impact one's decision to disengage and/or de-radicalize from White nationalist extremism.

Third, research on disengagement and de-radicalization from far-right extremism has primarily focused on men. Due to the gendered lens by which organized hate is viewed, it is expected that women would be an underrepresented sample within studies that have been conducted and shared in the academy. However, women have and continue to play a significant role in the far-right extremist movement. Thus, more research is needed to better understand their lived experience of radicalization, life in White nationalist groups, and disengagement and de-radicalization from a life of hate. Comparing women's lived experiences to those of men will aid in developing specialized programming to meet the unique needs of each.

Fourth, previously identified gaps in knowledge have highlighted the need to better understand the phenomena of disengagement and de-radicalization and the lived experiences of those exiting White nationalist extremism. While greater understating of the disengagement and de-radicalization process is greatly needed, there is also a need to operationalize said research to develop and test rehabilitative programming for individuals seeking to exit the far-right extremist movement in the United States. Research regarding disengagement and de-radicalization programming has predominantly occurred in Western European nations. Yes, the United States has much to learn. It would benefit from adopting much of the disengagement and de-radicalization

infrastructure of Western European programming. Still, the uniqueness of the United States' needs regarding White nationalist extremism demands contemporary research explicitly focused on the rehabilitative needs of Americans seeking to exit organized hate.

Fifth, more research is needed to understand better the number of active-duty military and law enforcement personnel within the ranks of White nationalist extremism. In addition, both quantitative and qualitative studies are needed to explore how military and law enforcement personnel are recruited. Finally, intervention research is required to craft a disengagement and de-radicalization response to this growing threat.

Finally, more research is needed to better understand the role social work and social work practitioners can play in the journey out of far-right extremism. Although social workers are uniquely educated and situated to engage those exiting a life of organized hate, little is known about the profession's perceptions of or appetite for engagement with those leaving a life of hate. In many European nations, social work practitioners serve on the front lines against radicalization and are the primary providers of services and care for those exiting far-right domestic extremist groups. This is not the case in the United States, nor is it known if practitioners would consider working with this population.

Chapter III: Research Methods

In reviewing the literature, it is evident that more research that explores the psychological and social processes involved in one's journey out of far-right extremism is needed. A theoretical conceptualization that considers factors beyond ideology and social engagement is also needed to provide a glimpse into the nuanced, complex, and deeply personal journey out of far-right extremism. While studies (Koehler, 2017; Brelle, 2015) have been conducted to establish a theoretical framework to understand the process of de-radicalization, each was focused on populations outside of the United States, primarily Western Europe and the Middle East. Studying the lived experience of de-radicalization for former domestic extremists is a much-needed area of study.

This study will add to the knowledge base of the burgeoning field of disengagement and de-radicalization studies. By engaging in this much-needed area of study, this study hopes to be able to explore the psychosocial processes involved in the journey out of far-right extremism. Additionally, this study will aid in cultivating a better understanding of former extremists' perceptions of social work and how the profession and practitioners were or were not present in a participant's disengagement and de-radicalization journey.

A proposed model of the psychosocial processes involved in the journey out of far-right extremism could be tested and, if revealed to be accurate and accessible, would greatly benefit practitioners from a wide variety of disciplines seeking to provide services

and care to this population. Psychosocial processes and factors that either promote or impede one's journey out of a life of organized hate and a far-right extremist ideology will be the foci of this study. As such, this study seeks to answer the following research question: What are the psychosocial processes involved in the disengagement and de-radicalization journey of former far-right extremists, and how do they develop in society?

Qualitative Methods

A study's research methods should always be driven by the research question(s). As such, the research question(s) will guide a researcher on whether quantitative or qualitative methodologies should be utilized. Qualitative research aims to understand and explain participant meaning-making concerning a phenomenon (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Additionally, qualitative research methods are best suited for studies that aim to explore and seek to understand better a population's perceptions, attitudes, and processes (Glesne, 2010). Creswell (2014) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based upon methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human challenge. Through qualitative methods, the researcher seeks to build a complex and holistic picture of a population's lived experiences regarding a phenomenon as they analyze words and language, report detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. Additional considerations for conducting qualitative studies include the breadth and complexity of knowledge available about a given topic. Exploring understudied and complex phenomena lends itself to the use of qualitative methods.

Qualitative methods are appropriate and needed for this study as the research question and this researcher are seeking to study the phenomenon of disengagement and

de-radicalization from far-right extremism and its many nuanced and complex psychosocial processes. Qualitative research methodologies have been an ideal tool in the burgeoning field of disengagement and de-radicalization research and will provide a platform for the voices of participants to be heard. Qualitative methods will help capture the uniqueness and nuance of each person's psychosocial journey out of hate (Windisch et al., 2016).

Grounded Theory

Since its inception in 1967, grounded theory has become a respected and well-utilized approach for conducting qualitative research. Influenced by symbolic interactionism and ethnographic methods, Glaser and Strauss (1967) sought to establish a rigorous and trustworthy approach to develop theory grounded in qualitative data. Padgett (2008) notes that although there was a falling out between Glaser and Strauss, the grounded theory approach to conducting qualitative research survived and has continued to grow in popularity despite its founders separating their work. After their falling out, both Glaser and Strauss continued to work and publish the grounded theory approach.

New approaches to utilizing grounded theory have emerged throughout the academy in recent years. For example, Charmaz (2014) adapted grounded theory to fit within a constructivist paradigm. Clarke (2005) adopted grounded theory to fit within a post-modernist epistemological paradigm. Of note, neither of grounded theory's founders, Glaser or Strauss, accept other iterations of the approach as true grounded theory. Despite their epistemological differences, each iteration of grounded theory utilizes a similar inductive coding process and the interlacing of emerging theoretical ideas and concepts to analyze qualitative data. Simultaneously, grounded theorists from each approach, seek to

not allow inductive reasoning and emerging concepts to constrain or even drive emerging findings from data (Padgett, 2008).

Ultimately, grounded theory aims to construct theory rooted in the data without overlaying any preconceived or implicit ideas atop the data (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory, according to Padgett (2008), has made both the pursuit and construction of theory not only respectable but also a desirable outcome for qualitative researchers. One way in which grounded theory is unique among a wide variety of qualitative research methods is its view of priori knowledge. Grounded theory favors emerging themes and categories over situating data in already existing ideas and theoretical frameworks. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that a review of the literature should be avoided until after data were analyzed, thus avoiding the imposition of a previous theory upon the construction of a new one. Charmaz (2014) argues, however, that the avoidance of conducting a literature review may not always be practical for researchers. Having a less rigid view of the literature review, Charmaz (2014) argues that researchers should be mindful of the earlier theoretical conceptualizations of a phenomenon and not assume that they offer automatic codes for analysis. Instead, a literature review can be a cautionary starting point from which data can be viewed (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) stresses that researchers must be cognizant of priori knowledge and protect against it both overtaking the data and driving analysis. As such, a combination of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) and Charmaz's (2014) was taken to account for priori knowledge of disengagement and de-radicalization. A review of the literature was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the history of both White supremacy and domestic extremism in the United States, pathways to radicalization, disengagement and de-radicalization programming both

domestically and abroad, and the United State's response to domestic extremism thus far. However, literature surrounding the themes that emerged from the data was not reviewed until after analysis.

Grounded theory is also unique in its approach to data analysis. The process of data collection, analysis, and theory development in constructivist grounded theory occur iteratively. Iterative data collection and analysis occur until theoretical saturation, the point at which additional data adds no further insight into a new theory. The iterative nature of grounded theory means that the researcher is in a constant state of comparison of data and emerging ideas. Through constant comparison, the abstraction of a researcher's analysis evolves as one compares data with data, data with code, code to code, code to theme, theme to theme, and theme with theoretical concept (Chamez, 2014).

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory approach provided the framework for this research. Constructivist grounded theory allows researchers to discover or construct theory from both systematically obtained and analyzed data using comparative analysis and the co-construction of knowledge. According to Charmaz (2014), the constructivist grounded theory approach differs from Glaser and Strauss' objectivist grounded theory approach. As objectivists, Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocated for neutrality and passivity of the observer in conducting grounded theory research. However, constructivists, like Charmaz (2014), assume that the researcher's values, priorities, and actions affect how they approach data analysis and the inductive process. While both approaches are inductive, Charmaz (2014) notes that researchers

cannot remain neutral and passive. Constructivist grounded theory acknowledges that subjectivity is woven throughout analysis while simultaneously seeking to ensure the voice of a participant and their experience is the primary focus. Charmaz (2014) posits that objectivity in research is not attainable. As such, constructivist grounded theory enables researchers to study a phenomenon and/or process and discover new theories grounded in collecting and analyzing real-world data while also considering their positionality. Constructivist grounded theory stresses the positionality of the researcher as rooted in the epistemological assumption that there is always a level of subjectivity present when conducting research.

To date, there has not been a study utilizing grounded theory in disengagement and de-radicalization studies. Additionally, a theory of disengagement and de-radicalization has yet to be explored. As such, constructivist grounded theory will enable this researcher to examine and conceptualize latent social patterns and structures within the disengagement and de-radicalization journey through constant comparison and induction. In essence, adhering to the strictures of grounded theory will aid this researcher in constructing a theoretical understanding of disengagement and de-radicalization that is "grounded" in the data.

Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory approach was also chosen due to the alignment of the approach's philosophical underpinnings with the researcher's, mainly a constructivist paradigm. Constructivism is built upon the assumption that there are multiple realities, and knowledge and meaning can only be co-constructed. A constructivist epistemological approach is needed in this study as the researcher seeks to understand and explore a particular phenomenon in the lives of individuals who are part

of a community he does not share membership. Constructivism is a movement away from positivism as it highlights relativism and subjectivity, a needed framework for a nuanced study such as this. Subjectivity will allow this researcher to acknowledge their positionality within the study in addition to the accounts provided by participants (Charmaz, 2014).

Approaching the study through a constructivist lens allowed the researcher to co-construct knowledge as a means of exploring the phenomena of disengagement and/or de-radicalization from far-right extremism. Each participant brings unique knowledge and understanding to the study based on their experiences relating to their highly personal disengagement and/or de-radicalization journey (Charmaz, 2014). The constructivist epistemological nature of the study provided a platform to honor the narratives shared by participants while simultaneously allowing for the expertise and positionality of the researcher in the field of disengagement and de-radicalization studies.

Constructivist grounded theory aims to garner abstract understanding of a phenomenon with the cognizance that analysis is situated in a specific time and place with unique circumstances and participants. Thus, a constructivist grounded theory approach is appropriate to gain a deeper understanding about the psychosocial process involved in one's journey out of far-right extremism. By employing a constructivist grounded theory approach, this researcher sought to and was able to develop a theory to describe the lived experience of former extremists who exited a life of hate and the psychosocial elements at play on their journey.

Sampling and Sample Size in Constructivist Grounded Theory Studies

Determining the number of interviews to conduct is difficult in any qualitative research study. Constructivist grounded theory studies are not free from this sampling conundrum. Charmaz (2014) notes that questions surrounding sampling and sample size in grounded theory studies are based on three problematic assumptions. First, there is an assumption that an absolute number of participants to answer a research question can be known (Charmaz, 2014). Second, Chamez (2014) posits that there is an assumption that a researcher can make that "magic" number known. Last, there is an assumption that if a definitive sample size were determined and stated by the researcher, other researchers would agree that the determined and reported sample size is valid (Charmaz, 2014). Chamez (2014) notes that qualitative researchers utilizing constructivist grounded theory to develop a new theoretical conceptualization of a phenomenon will likely not know an exact sample size until initial analysis begins.

Rather than focusing on sample size, Charmaz (2014) points to theoretical saturation as a benchmark for researchers to look to in developing a new theory. Although Charmaz highlights the importance of theoretical saturation rather than a predetermined sample size, they offer suggestions to help determine a potential sample size. For example, Charmaz (2014) suggests considering increasing one's sample size when researching controversial topics, constructing complex conceptual analysis, and discovering unexpected or provocative findings. Charmaz (2014) also suggests that a larger sample size may be needed if participant interviews are the only means by which the researcher collects data.

While determining an initial and exact sample size is impossible when seeking to construct a new theoretical framework or conceptualization of a particular phenomenon, estimating a sampling range can occur. Both Padgett (2008) and Morse (2000) suggest that grounded theory studies have between 15 and 30 participants. Creswell (2014) recommends the same sampling range but suggests that the number of participants needed could reach up to 60.

Considering the recommended guidelines (Creswell, 2014; Padgett, 2008; Morse, 2000) and Charmaz's (2014) suggestions, this researcher sought to recruit 15 to 20 participants. Ultimately, theoretical saturation was obtained at 18 participants, allowing this researcher to stop after 18 in-depth interviews. Charmaz (2016) notes that theoretical saturation occurs when themes are robust enough that no new thematic properties emerge. Additionally, Charmaz (2014) provides guidelines researchers can follow to ensure saturation was indeed obtained. This researcher followed Charmaz' (2016) guidelines by ensuring that they defined, compared, and explained the relationships and variation between, within, and among themes.

Participant Recruitment

Recruitment of participants began by developing and cultivating relationships with key informants who currently work closely with former far-right extremists. Relationships with key informants were developed on the social media platform Twitter. Informants interested in aiding in participant recruitment were sent an email and/or a direct message via Twitter detailing the nature of the study, assistance sought by the researcher, inclusion and exclusion criteria, confidentiality measures and precautions being taken by the researcher, and how findings from the study will be disseminated. See

Appendix C for informant correspondence. Upon agreement to serve as a formal informant, they were asked to distribute an information sheet about the study to potential participants. See Appendix B for the study information sheet/informed consent. The information sheet given to potential participants also contained the scope and aim of the study, inclusion and exclusion criteria, confidentiality measures and precautions being taken by the researcher, how findings from the study will be disseminated, and the researcher's contact information.

Upon contact with potential participants, this researcher ensured that the study eligibility requirements were met. To be eligible to participate in this study, potential participants must meet two inclusion criteria. The first criterion was that they were 18 years old or older. The second was that they must identify as someone who has either disengaged or de-radicalized from far-right extremism. Eligibility was discussed with potential participants via email or phone. After confirming eligibility, a virtual Zoom interview was scheduled with the new participant.

In addition to utilizing informants for recruitment, snowball sampling was also employed. Snowball sampling is a strategy in which current participants are asked to either provide researchers with the names of people they know who meet study eligibility or distribute the researcher's contact information to interested parties (Gleason, 2010). As such, after each interview was completed, participants were asked if they knew of others who might be interested in participating in the study. Participants who believed they might know of other potential participants were asked to distribute this researcher's contact information to interested individuals. Ten participants contacted this researcher upon hearing about the study from a fellow former extremist.

This researcher recruited participants and conducted interviews simultaneously. As Charmaz (2016) notes, this is a distinct advantage of conducting qualitative rather than quantitative studies as new elements can be added to the study while gathering data or even late into analysis. Recruitment of participants occurred until theoretical saturation was achieved, as noted previously.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews via the Zoom virtual meeting platform were utilized to ensure the research question was answered. At the onset of each interview, this researcher reviewed the information sheet and consent form with participants, explained their rights as participants, and answered any questions they may have had about the nature of and their participation in the study. As this study was considered exempt by the Indiana University Internal Review Board, verbal consent to participate was secured. Additionally, each interview's audio was recorded, with additional verbal consent obtained by each participant.

Interviews were conducted using an interview guide (see Appendix A). The interview guide consisted of predetermined questions that were pilot-tested with two informants and two former far-right extremists. Interview questions were asked regarding one's radicalization and disengagement and de-radicalization journey. Additionally, questions were asked regarding the push and pull factors that lead to embarking on a journey of disengagement and/or de-radicalization. Questions exploring participants' perception of social work and its presence, or lack thereof, in their disengagement and/or de-radicalization journey were also asked. Finally, demographic questions were asked of participants. Upon completion of the interview, participants were asked if they agreed to

be contacted again if the researcher needed clarification, had further questions, and for the purposes of member checking. Additionally, participants were thanked for their time and willingness to participate. When the interview was concluded, the researcher transcribed the recorded audio of the interview, and initial coding commenced. It was important for this researcher to undertake transcription as it provided another opportunity to become acquainted with the collected data.

As the interviews were semi-structured, participants were allowed to expand on their experience beyond the initial question posed (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The semi-structured interview approach also allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up questions to explore concepts, language and experiences further as they arose. Exploration of concepts and language is prominent in the constructivist grounded theory research framework (Charmaz, 2014). The shortest interview lasted forty-one minutes, with the longest lasting a little over two hours. The average interview for all eighteen participants was sixty-four minutes.

Constructivist Grounded Theory Data Analysis

Data were analyzed within Charmaz's (2014) constructivist ground theory framework. As such, this researcher engaged in four iterations of coding; initial, focused, axial, and theoretical. An example of the coding process is provided in Figure 4. Coding data in qualitative research allows the researcher to dissect the data and label and define it. Within the constructivist grounded theory approach, the researcher constructs codes based upon what is being seen in the data rather than approaching the data with predetermined codes. MAXQDA 2022, qualitative data analysis software, was used in the

initial coding phase of this study. Focused, axial, and theoretical coding was done by hand.

After each interview was conducted, the researcher transcribed each recording. The researcher then began to engage in initial coding (Charmaz, 2014). During initial coding, data were briefly summarized line by line. Summarization of data occurred sparingly in this phase to identify general themes within the data set. Line-by-line initial coding helped improve the interview guide as this researcher began to ask participants more focused follow-up questions regarding their journey out of far-right extremism.

During the initial coding stage, the researcher began to write both analytic and reflective memos. Memos contained thoughts about emergent themes and categories and served as a mechanism for comparison of data (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) posits that memo-writing is a pivotal step between collecting data and constructing a new theoretical framework. The practice of memo-working welcomes the researcher to have an analytic dialogue with their data and emerging themes and concepts. For this researcher, memos frequently formed the starting point for defining and discussing the properties of themes that emerged in the data and the creation of the proposed model. Memo-writing occurred at each stage of data analysis.

Focused coding is the second major phase of constructivist grounded theory analysis. In this phase, the researcher uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sift through large amounts of data, finding similarities and connections between codes and deciding which codes make the most analytic sense. Focused coding also advances the theoretical and conceptual direction of analysis (Charmaz, 2014). However, the focus coding process is not always linear, as some data requires the researcher to rethink earlier

data and render codes more explicitly. In addition, the researcher will review previous data for words, phrases, and concepts that may have been missed or initially thought of as unimportant (Charmaz, 2014).

For the focused coding stage of analysis, this researcher utilized software to help count frequency of coded. However, initial codes were explored for similar phraseology before doing so. An example of this occurred when exploring participants' different feelings and emotions when they began their journey out of far-right extremism. Codes like "feeling alone," "feeling alone and isolated," and "feeling isolated" were deemed to be very similar, and all assigned one new code, "feeling alone." Once similar codes were combined, code frequencies in MAXQDA 2022 were run across multiple participants to determine relevance and import.

After focused coding was completed, axial coding was conducted. Axial coding allowed for the creation of sub-themes that defined the attributes and properties of major emerging themes. Axial coding allows the researcher to bring the data that has been fragmented through line-by-line initial coding back together (Charmaz, 2014). In the initial coding stage of analysis, varying psychosocial processes were seen within each participant's coded lived experience. Through the process of focused coding, this researcher was able to combine numerous processes discussed by participants that were similarly worded or coded. As the psychosocial processes of participants were explored deeper through axial coding, it was evident that there were distinct themes that emerged as significant elements of one's journey out of far-right extremism. It was through axial coding that not only significant themes emerged but also their unique properties.

The final stage of analysis was theoretical coding. Theoretical coding in grounded theory is for developing a theoretical conceptualization rather than sampling for population representation (Tie et al., 2019). Through theoretical coding, this researcher began theorizing collected data and focused codes as well as determining potential relationships between themes that emerged in the focused coding stage (Chamaz, 2014). Theoretical coding is central to constructivist grounded theory approach as it aids in conceptualizing an evolving theory. As the data was viewed as a whole in the thematic coding phase, this researcher not only saw relationships between and a process connecting themes but a burgeoning model as well.

Through theoretical coding, the proposed model that will be presented in Chapter IV and can be seen in Figure 5 took shape. Clustering and mapping of concepts were used to provide a starting point for the visualization of the connection and process between themes to capture the psychosocial processes involved as one navigates through their journey out of far-right extremism. Realizations about the connectivity of themes and the proposed model were discussed with peers, committee members, and a select group of participants. Memo-writing served as an additional space for personal dialogue and analytic reflection to flesh out the proposed model of the psychosocial journey out of far-right extremism.

Throughout this phase of analysis, as the proposed model began to form, this researcher returned to interview transcripts to compare the model to what participants shared about their experiences when embarking on their journey. Returning to transcripts for comparison ensured that the proposed model was indeed grounded in the data and that it was not the mere representation of a small handful of participants but was true to the

lived experiences as shared by participants. Also, constant comparison of data and codes was employed to ensure that the proposed model was grounded in the data. Following Charmaz (2014), comparisons were made within individual interviews as well as across all interviews conducted at each stage of analysis. Additionally, comparisons were made between data collected early on in the study and data collected later. Constant comparison served to test the strength of a theme and its identified properties and characteristics. Engaging in constant comparison also helped as the model grew and went through numerous iterations in the coding process.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Rigor and trustworthiness is essential for qualitative research. The rigor of a study is found in its ability to address threats to trustworthiness such as reactivity, researcher bias, and response bias. This researcher employed numerous methods to address threats to trustworthiness.

A reflexive journal was kept throughout the study. This researcher is conscious that he is exploring the impacts of a phenomenon within a group with which he does not share membership. This researcher is committed to employing critical reflexivity as part of this study. The reflexivity journal also provided a platform for this researcher to examine and grapple with any implicit and explicit biases and wrestle with his own Whiteness in light of the data. Additionally, the reflexive journal provided a space to examine any preconceived notions rooted in priori knowledge about the journey out of far-right extremism. Entries were written after each interview as a means to not only process through any analytic and theoretical rumination but also personal emotions and

thoughts about what was heard from participants who shared openly about their experience as an extremist.

An interview guide was also utilized for this study. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that were pilot tested for their relevance and ability to elicit dialogue from participants. Pilot testing and interviews also allowed this researcher to receive feedback and consultation from peers versed in qualitative research methodologies as well as those considered experts in the subject matter being studied.

This researcher also employed an audit trail to combat threats to trustworthiness. An audit trail provides details around data analysis and interpretation and often focuses primarily on the process of analysis, induction, and synthesis of raw data (Charmaz, 2014). Study materials such as coded transcripts and memos written during data collection, coding, and analysis were also included in the audit trail. The audit trail for this study was shared with a senior researcher and chair of the dissertation committee. The audit trail was also shared with a fellow doctoral candidate for their review and input.

This researcher also engaged in the practice of member checking to work toward trustworthiness. Member checking was critical due to the nature and subject matter of the study, as it helped to guard against researcher bias. Transcribed interviews, coded data, and the burgeoning theoretical model was shared with several participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their articulated experience (Brit et al., 2016).

Peer debriefing and support were sought at each stage of this study. This researcher met with two fellow Ph.D. candidates individually to discuss the study, progress made in analysis, and gain perspective from those not connected to collected

data. Each individual assisted this researcher during the coding process and as the prosper model began to take shape. At each stage of the coding process, codes and emerging themes were shared with peers. Un-coded portions of interviews were shared with peers for them to code as well. Coded transcripts were compared and found to be in agreement. The proposed model emerging from this study went through several iterations due to peers' feedback received throughout the theoretical coding process.

Finally, this researcher has sought to provide a rich and thick description of each step taken from the start to the finish of this study. It is hoped that by offering a detailed and robust description of each phase of the study, readers will be able to enter into the research context and come to their own conclusions regarding the transferability of the study's findings and the proposed model (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, this researcher sought to collect rich data that offer a glimpse into participants' complex and nuanced lived experiences. Charmaz (2014) notes that rich data is elicited through asking reflective questions during interviews. Therefore, to reflect the richness of data, the findings of this study will contain numerous direct quotes from participants so the reader can walk through the analysis process with this researcher and determine for themselves the transferability of each theme, the proposed model, and the study as a whole (Creswell, 2014).

Evaluating Constructivist Grounded Theory Studies

Charmaz (2014) outlines four criteria that build upon each other by which constructivist grounded theory studies can be evaluated. Evaluative criterion offered by Charmaz (2014) includes; credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. Chamaz (2014) notes that a healthy and robust relationship between credibility and originality

amplifies the study's resonance and usefulness. Each criterion complements the traditional measures of rigor and trustworthiness in qualitative research.

According to Charmaz (2014), credibility is achieved when a researcher both becomes intimately and deeply familiar with the phenomena being studied and secures sufficient data to merit the researcher's interpretation of the data and the claims they make. Additionally, Charmaz (2014) notes that credibility is achieved when there are clear and logical connections between themes that emerged from the data through analysis. This researcher fulfilled each element of credibility through the 18 participant interviews conducted, reaching theoretical saturation, and engaging in thorough data analysis and rigorous memo-writing.

Originality is achieved through the presentation of new themes and insights and a new theoretical conceptualization of the data (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) also notes that originality is seen through the cultivation of a theory that has social and theoretical significance and either challenges, expands, or re-defines current concepts surrounding the phenomena being studied. This researcher was able to meet the demands of originality by developing a new model that conceptualizes the psychosocial processes involved in the journey out of far-right extremism. Additionally, the proposed model challenges earlier conceptualizations of disengagement and de-radicalization by confronting language and approaching the phenomena through a humanistic and constructivist lens.

As discussed by Charmaz (2014), Resonance is seen through clearly defined themes that represent both the fullness of the phenomena being studied and the voices and lived experiences of participants. This study provides not only an in-depth look at the

psychosocial processes involved in participants' journeys out of far-right extremism but also the complexity, nuance, and uniqueness of each participant as they walked their deeply personal path. As a result, this researcher collected rich data on the complexity of one's journey out of a life of hate and extremism, thus meeting Charmaz's (2014) criterion of resonance.

Finally, Charmaz (2014) points to a study's usefulness as an evaluative criterion. Usefulness consists of offering interpretations of the data that individuals can put to use in their daily lives. Additionally, usefulness can be measured by how a study contributes to the academic knowledge base and its ability to positively impact society (Charmaz, 2014). This study meets this criterion as it not only contributes to the academic knowledge base regarding disengagement and de-radicalization but also provides insight and a model that practitioners can employ in any field who seek to work with and provide services for those seeking to exit a life of hate and extremism. The findings from this study can also positively impact society as they offer new insight and tools to directly confront the growing threat of domestic far-right extremism in the United States.

Ethical Research

Ethics must be at the center of any research study. Researchers must make every effort to conduct themselves and their study ethically. Ethical research ensures that participants' voices and their involvement in the study are honored and respected. Multiple measures were employed in this study to ensure it was conducted both ethically and responsibly.

First, this study was submitted to the Internal Review Board (IRB) of Indiana University. Approval and exempt status was received from IRB in January of 2022.

Indiana University's IRB reviewed the interview guide used for the semi-structured interviews, recruitment materials, and informant emails. IRB also reviewed how this researcher would ensure participant confidentiality and how data would be stored and protected.

Second, intentional steps, approved by IRB, were taken to ensure participant confidentiality. Participant names and identifying information were removed from all transcripts and files. A numeric code was assigned to each transcript to ensure anonymity. All data were stored on an encrypted and password-protected external hard drive that was only accessible to this researcher. Finally, all audio recordings of interviews were destroyed after they were transcribed, verified to be accurate, and no longer needed for analysis. Third, although this study was deemed exempt by Indiana University's IRB, verbal consent to participate was obtained for each participant. Consent was sought only after participants were each walked through this study's information sheet, participant rights were reviewed, and time was taken to answer any questions. Additionally, verbal consent was obtained to record the audio of the interview from each participant.

Fourth, while member checking was employed as a tool for analysis, the practice also ensured that each participant and their story was accurately portrayed in both analysis and the study's findings. After each interview was transcribed, a copy was sent to the participant to review for accuracy. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to add to their transcript, clarify statements, or even redact items they did not wish to share.

Finally, ethical research demands that the researcher consider whether the benefits of studying a phenomenon outweigh the cost of participation. This researcher concluded that seeking to better understand the psychosocial processes involved in one's journey out of far-right extremism can provide significant benefits to those seeking to begin their journey yet do not know where to start, practitioners seeking to provide services for former extremists, and the larger American society as far-right domestic extremism remains the gravest threat it is facing. Interview questions asked of participants were personal and could trigger some unpleasant emotions. However, participants willing to participate in such a study as this had committed to dismantling the systems they once were active participants in. Despite this commitment, resources were provided to participants if help was needed after the interview to process any emotional distress. As such, the benefits of conducting this research far outweigh the cost of participation.

Chapter IV: Findings

The findings of this study emerged from over 3,500 coded items from 18 transcripts. These findings help answer the research question: What are the psychosocial processes involved in the disengagement and de-radicalization journey of former far-right extremists, and how do they develop in society? Throughout the constructivist grounded theory coding process, it became evident that significant psychological and social factors and processes influenced participants' journeys out of far-right extremism. Additionally, contextual elements were identified that challenged the current academic language regarding disengagement and de-radicalization and offered new terminology that better-captured participants' lived experiences. Themes also emerged that pointed to moments in time that sparked a desire for participants to begin their journey out of far-right extremism. Finally, themes also illustrated the existential space participants found themselves in as they began to take their first steps in cultivating a new sense of who they were in the world and how they related to and engaged in a multicultural society they had once rejected. Ultimately, the themes that emerged from the data coalesced to form a theoretical model that will be presented at the end of this chapter.

Participant Demographics

Before exploring the findings of this study, it is essential to examine the individuals who generously gave their time and emotional energy to participate in this research. This study consisted of data from 18 participants (see Table 2) who were over

18 years of age and self-identified as former far-right extremists. Nine participants identified as male, four as female, four as gender non-conforming/non-binary, and one as transmasculine. The age of participants ranged from 24 to 54, with a median age of 35 years old. The number of years in and out of the far-right extremist movement varied. The years participants spent in far-right extremist movements ranged from 6 months to 25 years, with a median of 4 years of involvement. The number of years participants had been out of the movement ranged from 9 months to 15 years with a median of 4.5 years.

Table 2
Participant Demographics

	n
Gender Identity	
Male	9
Female	4
Non-Binary	4
Trans-Masc	1
Age	
18-25 years old	3
26-35 years old	6
36-45 years old	6
45 years and older	3

Table 2 (continued)
Participant Demographics

Education	
Junior High	1
Some High School	2
High School Diploma	4
Some College	9
Bachelors Degree	2
Number of Years in Extremism	
Less than 1 year	2
1 to 5 years	10
6 to 10 years	3
10 to 15 years	1
15 years or more	2
Number of Years Out of Extremism	
Less than 1 year	3
1 to 5 years	11
6 to 10 years	2
10 to 15 years	2

Identifying Major Themes

Numerous themes emerged from the data that was collected. Identified themes were not independent of themselves but rather interconnected. While some themes that emerged helped paint a picture of some of the psychosocial processes involved in the journey out of extremism, other themes provided a context in which said psychosocial processes occurred. Additional themes offered a glimpse into factors that impacted one's

journey out of far-right extremism. Many of the identified themes were not independent of themselves and instead influenced or were interconnected to each other in varying degrees. The relationship between the themes found will be explored as each one is discussed in greater detail. The relationship between themes identified through a constructivist grounded theory coding process served as the foundation and backbone of the proposed model around participants' journey out of extremism (see Figure 5) that will be presented at the end of this chapter. Before presenting the proposed model of the journey out of extremism, themes that emerged from the data will be examined and explored. Identified themes are shown in Table 3 and will be discussed in greater detail throughout this chapter.

Table 3
Themes and Definitions

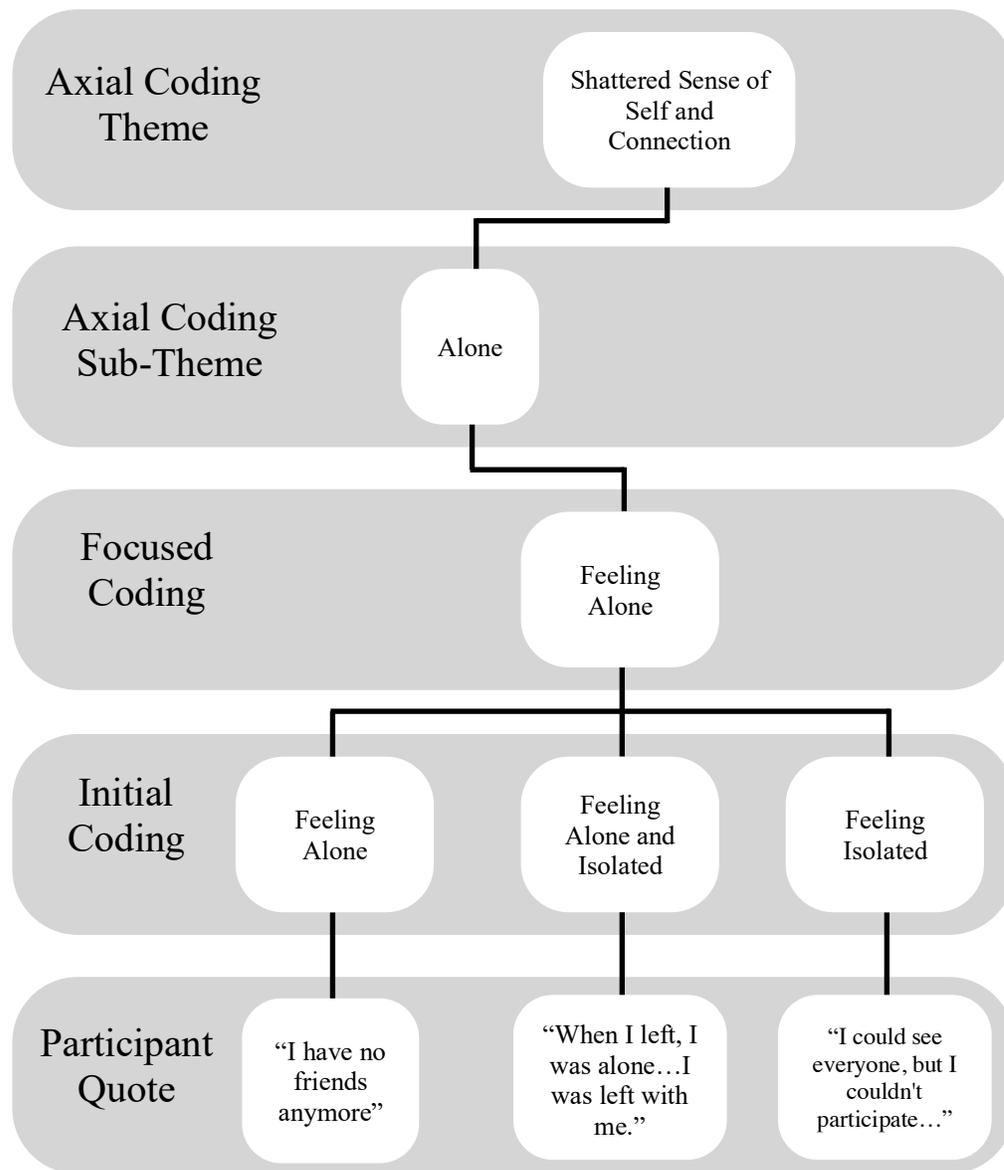
Theme	Sub-Theme(s)	Definition of Theme
Diverse Journey	Gender Identity Like an Addiction Disillusionment	A unique and deeply personal journey out of far-right extremism.
Awakening the Conscience	Biographical Event Encountering the “Other” Disillusionment	Self-reflection regarding one’s extremist ideology induced by events, encounters, and/or disillusionment.
Shattered Sense of Self and Connection	Ideology = Identity Alone	Feeling unable to understand who they are personally or in relation to others and society.

Table 3 (continued)
Themes and Definitions

Theme	Sub-Theme(s)	Definition of Theme
Post Extremist Traumatic Stress (PETS)	The Movement as Trauma Traditional PTSD Symptomatology Factors Impacting PETS	Traumatic stress resulting from participation in far-right extremism.
Social Factors Influencing the Journey	Empathy Peer Support	Social factors that either accelerate or hinder one's journey out of far-right extremism.
"We Need Help"	Lack of Appropriate Services	Expressed need for rehabilitative services.
Perceptions of Social Work		Perceptions of the profession of social work and practitioners.
Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection	Reckoning with the Past Unlearning Hate Atoning for the Past	Developing both a new identity outside of the far-right extremist movement and ways to connect to others and society.

Some themes had sub-themes that also emerged through the constructivist grounded theory coding process. Figure 4 illustrates the manner in which this researcher identified emerging themes and their sub-themes guided by each participant's own words. To better demonstrate the coding process, this researcher chose one theme as an example, "Shattered Sense of Self and Connection," and one sub-theme, "Alone." For the sake of simplicity, some aspects of the "Shattered Sense of Self and Connection" theme, like the sub-theme "Ideology = Identity," have been left out of the figure.

Figure 4
Example of Coding Process



Defining Far-Right Extremism

Before discussing the themes that emerged in the data, it is essential to allow participants to define what far-right extremism is. Numerous participants highlighted that far-right extremism was an umbrella term that includes individuals and groups with a wide array of political, social, cultural, and religious beliefs. One participant shared,

Far-right extremism is a blanket or umbrella term, I would say, to kind of catch everything that would encompass premises, ideology and misogyny with the ultimate end goal of violence for the sake of what they believe is preserving the White race and creating an ethno state.

Similarly, another participant shared, "It's sort of like a junk drawer term. It covers a wide range of beliefs."

One participant discussed the ideological underpinnings of far-right extremism by sharing that "far-right extremism has its foundation in nativism, ultranationalism, and authoritarianism." In discussing the foundation of far-right extremism, this participant was sharing that although there may be many groups and different expressions of extremism, they are all rooted in the same nativist, ultranationalist, and authoritarian ideological framework. Another participant shared that far-right extremism is also foundationally White supremacist in nature. They shared, "Far-right extremism is just a euphemism for violent White supremacy that people like to use because they don't like to, you know call attention to the fact that White people can be violent supremacists."

In addition to nativist, ultranationalist, authoritarian, and white supremacist underpinnings, participants were quick to note that an important fixture of the far-right was misogyny. Both male and female participants shared that the far-right extremist movement was misogynistic. One female participant shared, "The whole movement is misogyny. It is a way for white men to be who they want and get what they want, no

matter what." A male participant shared, "The movement is built for men. White nationalism is not just about White people, but White men in particular. Sure, women have a place, but the movement is built for men." In order to define far-right extremism, participants felt compelled to discuss misogyny as a pillar of the movement.

Another participant highlighted that far-right extremism is not only an ideology but actions taken to take that ideology to its ultimate logical end. They shared, "I think far-right extremism is taking one's far-right ideology and applying it to like the absolute conclusion by any means necessary." Similarly, another participant highlighted that acting upon one's ideology, particularly taking harmful action against non-White individuals, is an important part of defining far-right extremism. They shared, "Far-right extremism is a process through which people become indoctrinated and radicalized into a far-right worldview and ideology that is harmful to other races." Another participant highlighted that far-right extremism is taking action but added an important nuance: both the ideology and the measures taken to enforce the ideology are outside the social mainstream. They shared, "Far-right extremism are the steps taken beyond the boundaries of what could be considered First Amendment protected activity, like when people start advocating for and committing violence and dehumanizing people of different races."

In summary, participants defined far-right extremism as an umbrella term encompassing individuals and groups with a wide array of political, social, cultural, and religious beliefs. The ideology is rooted in nativism, ultranationalism, authoritarianism, misogyny, and white supremacy in which individuals and groups take harmful steps outside of the social mainstream with the ultimate end goal of violence to preserve the White race and create a White ethnostate.

Diverse Journey

“Diverse Journey” emerged as a key contextual theme in the data collection and analysis process. Although the theme of “Diverse Journey” has other themes that precede it in the model, it is important to examine it at the onset of this chapter as it and its sub-themes provide context and nuance to both the lived experience of participants and how preceding themes are connected. “Diverse Journey” was a contextual theme in that it provided a lens through which all other themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data could be viewed. In discussing their lived experience of exiting a life of hate and far-right extremism, participants described it as a journey that was complex, unique, nuanced, and deeply personal. Participants expressed that by viewing this aspect of their life as a journey, “it feels more human” and “feels way less sterile.” One participant shared,

I feel like I am on a journey that I um was embarking on instead of some um like clear step by step-by-step process. It was not cut and dry. There were ups and downs and moments I turned around instead of taking the next step.

Similarly, another participant stated, “When I decided to leave, it felt like I was walking on some like journey or um quest.” A final participant summarized their lived experience of exiting a life of hate and extremism by sharing, “When I decided to start walking away, I slowly started to go on the journey I am on right now to rediscover myself and the world around me.”

In using the term journey to describe their lived experience, participants were conceptualizing their knowledge through a different lens than the framework that has been established in academia and the P/CVE field around disengagement and de-

radicalization, primarily that of a linear two-step process with a definitive ending at which an individual is "de-radicalized." In describing their journey out of far-right extremism, participants moved away from a linear framework to describe their experience choosing language that allowed for ambivalence, fluidity, steps forward and backward, fluctuation and lifelong learning. One participant shared,

Coming out of it is, I mean, it's an ongoing journey, I'm still in the process of doing it and it has been over 5 years. Without seeing this like a journey you cheapen the emotional and psychological labor that goes into taking each step and the feelings of guilt when you take a step or steps backward.

There was a near universal rejection among participants around the language of disengagement and de-radicalization used to frame and describe the complex and nuanced journey out of far-right extremism. For example, one participant stated, "I only relate to the terms disengagement and de-radicalization because that is all we have, but they do not even begin to describe what I went through when I left that life behind." Similarly, another participant stated, "I feel like the words being used are trying to make something that is complex into something simple so everyone can say they solved the puzzle." An additional participant's interpretation was that societal discussion about the terms disengagement and de-radicalization was frustrating because "...de-radicalization is a failing concept, individuals cannot have their minds changed for them. You are learning as you are walking this journey. Every day you are learning and confronting something new."

In their rejection of the general language around the terms disengagement and de-radicalization and choosing to use the term journey to describe their lived experience, participants expressed dissatisfaction, discontentment, and disappointment around society

and academics framing a deeply personal, unique, and nuanced part of their life experience in and exit from far-right extremism in simplistic ways. Rather, participants recounted that rebuilding their lives and cultivating a new sense of self and connection, like a journey, was highly unpredictable and filled with twists and turns. One participant summarized it this way,

I have been out of the movement for over 15 years, and I am still learning. I still struggle with intrusive thoughts sometimes and they are unpredictable. There is no end date to this journey and um to suggest otherwise is ignorance. There is no “one size fits all” either. What worked for me and helped me on my journey may not help the slightest for someone else. Even though like I have stepped away from the groups I was a part of, I am not fighting for a race war and accepting of others, I am still learning and changing and growing in my own way.

It was evident that while there may have been some similarities in each participant’s journey out of far-right extremism, the terms disengagement and de-radicalization was strongly viewed as insufficient in its ability to capture any participant’s journey. Each journey out of far-right extremism was described as diverse, unique, complex, varied, multi-faceted and complicated. As such, the researcher of this study has utilized the term journey to describe lived experiences of those who have left far-right extremism.

Gender Identity

“Gender Identity” emerged as a sub-theme from the data as participants discussed and described how their gender identity impacted their journey out of far-right extremism. This sub-theme provided an additional layer of nuance to the “Diverse Journey” theme by highlighting how participants not only viewed themselves on this

journey, but how they accessed services and what services were available when they began their journey, and importantly how gender identity influenced this.

Gender identity had great significance because some participants described it as a key element that drew them into the far-right extremist movement initially. Due to the misogynistic nature of far-right extremism and the emphasis adherents often place on the traditional patriarchal gender and family roles, highlighting gender identity as a sub-theme is important and paramount.

Male Gender Identity. A majority of participants in this study identified as male (n= 9). While male participants did not discuss that being a male impacted their journey out of far-right extremism, they identified misogyny as a dominant element of the ideology. For example, one participant stated, “I think I was drawn to the power I could have as a man in the movement.” Similarly, another participant stated, “I bought into the lie like that as a man, I was better than women. I don’t believe that now, but like it is something I have definitely had to unlearn.” Echoing this, another participant shared, “The movement is built for men. White nationalism is not just about White people, but White men in particular. Sure, women have a place, but the movement is built for men.” A final male participant did not mince words when they simply stated, “Misogyny is the movement.”

Numerous male participants discussed feelings of power due to their gender identity. One male in particular, who identified as a former Incel (young males that consider themselves unable to attract women and are thus hostile toward them) stated, “When I joined Atomwaffen, I hated women. The group cheered my hatred.” Additionally, another participant shared, “I did not feel respected in many parts of my life

as a man, the movement gave that to me. I could demand power and respect because I was at the top of the food chain." While misogyny and participation in a misogynistic system was identified, a distinction must be made. Misogyny can be the vehicle by which power could either be obtained or wielded. This distinction is critical as it highlights a deeper psychosocial need within those that are drawn to far-right extremism or an extremist ideology. Focusing on misogyny alone while merited due to it perpetuating the oppression of women and gender minorities only paints half of the picture. Attention must be paid to the desire for a sense of power and dominance.

While the finding that misogyny was a core tenant of the far-right extremist ideology was not surprising to the researcher, the finding that male participants acknowledged and discussed it at length was informative and revealing. Identifying and naming misogyny revealed a level of critical reflection about the ideology and the far-right extremist movement.

Female Gender Identity. Four participants (n=4) identified as female in this study. While female participants also identified misogyny as a core element of a far-right extremist ideology and many groups, some shared that women play a significant role "behind the scenes" of many far-right extremist groups.

...a lot of people don't they don't see females as being a part of or involved at all. And the women's role within it as a whole is actually a very big part. Whether it's you know they're used as a recruitment tool or to keep the family unit and to train the young children in the ideology so that they'll become adults and be involved. Without women, the whole thing would crumble. We are tasked with creating the welcoming community being sold to new recruits. The truth is though, we are commodities in the movement.

Participants also discussed a paradoxical belief often present in far-right extremist groups. Although women are viewed as "weaker," ironically, they are also deeply valued

because they are seen as "carriers of the next generation of pure European heritage." One participant said,

It's really weird, on one hand you are worshipped as the carrier of the next generation of pure, a pure European blood line, but you are also brainwashed to think that men were superior and that women have a bad memory and couldn't control themselves. I was just this weeping woman with no strength whatsoever who needed a man to take care of me.

For this participant the cognitive dissonance of simultaneously being valued for their childbearing ability and being brainwashed to believe they were also inferior to men began to sow seeds of doubt about the movement.

For some female participants, the concept of traditional conservative family norms and gender roles was appealing. One participant shared, "I liked the idea of my husband providing for his family and me staying home to raise children." Similarly, another participant shared,

Initially my pull was toward traditional family values and gender roles and finding a White social identity for me and my future family. I was focusing on my in group, not exclusion or hatred toward others.

Two female participants (n=2) discussed sexual and physical assault that they had experienced in the far-right extremist groups they had been involved in. One participant discussed the first time their group's leader physically assaulted her. "I walked into a party and out of nowhere, (name redacted) turned around and said to the guys, "This is how we treat our women," and then "he open hand slapped me so hard across the face that it left a bruise." She continued by sharing, "I was stunned and humiliated. I was

speechless. This was not about family values but about making weak men feel superior and good about themselves.” Another participant discussed the sexual assault she had experienced. She shared,

There were so many sexual assaults that had happened to me there. I kept it to myself because I didn't get pregnant. I was tricked into thinking that it wasn't really sexual assault, I was really good breeding stock and that was extremely valuable. I questioned it every time it happened. Was it really sexual assault? Did I deserve it? Because that's the whole purpose of being a woman, to pleasure a man and have babies.

Similarly, another participant shared, “I was raped multiple times at different parties. I was told it wasn't rape since it was my job to have children for the movement and to secure the future of the White race, and at first, I believed it.” In addition to being victims of both physical and sexual abuse, several female participants discussed confronting distrust of other women that was curated in the far-right movement as they began their journey out of far-right extremism. Some female participants reported that males within the far-right movement sowed distrust between women as a method to isolate them and ensure male power, superiority, and dominance. One participant explained,

I recently got an email from a woman who said that she is trying to leave the movement, but that she doesn't know if she can talk to me because she was convinced that women are inferior... But like when I left the movement, I felt the same way where it was like, I know I can only talk to a woman because only a woman would understand this. But we're all against each other, so I was trained to not trust women.

Similarly, another participant stated, "I have been out of the movement for almost five years, and I still question my worth and value as a woman." Involvement in far-right extremist groups had led to some women experiencing poor self-esteem, self-doubt, and

internal questioning of their self-worth even after they had left far-right extremist movements years before.

Confusion and ambivalence were shared as one female participant discussed the intense internal turmoil that presented itself when she had to make a choice about her reproductive health. She faced an intense internal psychological and emotional struggle when seeking an abortion due to life-threatening health challenges. Even though she had been out of the far-right movement for over five years, she was frustrated that she still struggled with invasive, intrusive thoughts, which led her to feel guilt and shame.

She shared,

While I knew, obviously for every reason, that was what I was supposed to be doing medically, I couldn't stop the intrusive thinking in my head that I'm "perfect breeding stock," "my genetics are amazing," "the blood running through my veins is the purest blood."

This participant went on to share that while speaking with her healthcare provider, the past voices and comments from different men and women from the far-right movement entered her mind. She shared, "I could hear them all saying that it would be a shame if I ever had an abortion and I would absolutely go to hell and that I would absolutely be worthless and a waste because of it." It was evident that although much time had passed, the indoctrination that she went through in the far-right movement would rear its face at different points, much to the frustration and bewilderment of the participant. She shared,

It's hard not to have some of these thoughts even if I don't believe them now. They were hammered into my brain for so long. Multiple times different men would tell me that, "When they took over, I would be the

first participant in the new “Lebesborn program” because I would breed the perfect master race.”

Female gender identity added an important layer of complexity to the already complex journey out of far-right extremism. While only two participants discussed physical, emotional, and sexual assault that they had experienced while in far-right extremist groups, their stories illuminated experiences that were deeply personal and traumatic. Unlike men, women embarking on the journey out of far-right extremism also had to cope with the strong sense of emotions around gender invalidation and gender dehumanization that they faced and were still recovering from. For female participants, subjugation indoctrination due to their gender had taken an additional emotional toll, which required a lot of healing. One participant summed this sentiment up by sharing,

I held an alt-right women’s retreat with the intention of building relationships and recruiting. Instead, we talked through all the toxicity and trauma of the movement. I was surrounded by capable, intelligent, genuinely caring women. We felt like we were wasting our time being the foot soldiers of these organizations. We couldn’t in good conscience try to draw women into a movement where they’d be subjugated, threatened, and demeaned by unstable men. The movement attracts these types. I know, I was one of them. This makes leaving so much harder.

Transmasculine Gender Identity. One participant (n=1) identified as transmasculine. While this individual identified misogyny as a core ideological construct within the far-right extremist ideology, they also discussed how misogyny and hatred of seeing themselves and others seeing them as female partially fueled their entrance into the far-right extremist movement. They stated, “I hated being a woman. I hated people seeing me as a woman, so I think that fueled my entrance and exit.” In describing their

entrance, they suggest that they leveraged the far-right movement's embrace of misogyny as a vehicle to "justify my body dysmorphia." They shared, "The movement taught me that women were weaker and who would ever want to be a woman? It gave me language and space for hating my assigned gender."

While misogyny was a doorway into the far-right extremist movement, it was also their doorway out. They shared,

I didn't really have a tight knit group of friends. You know, people that I considered friends anymore, so it was hard for me to kind of fit in when I went to college. But that was what helped me make new friends who challenged my beliefs.

The establishment of a new social network not only challenged their far-right extremist ideology but also allowed this participant to affirm their gender identity. In so doing, they connected to a support group that became a fixture in their journey out of extremism. In discussing the trans support group, they shared,

I joined the trans peer support group on campus. They really helped just kind of find a place for me to fit in and definitely talking to other queer people, you know, queer people are pretty liberal and pretty leftist, helped a lot to sustain me on my journey out.

This participant's journey is of note as it suggests that for some individuals, the draw of the misogynistic nature of far-right extremism and the emphasis adherents place on the traditional patriarchal gender and family roles may be a mechanism by which some individuals deal with internal conflicts surrounding their gender identity. This finding only serves to amplify the diverse and varied journeys experienced by participants, illuminating not only the complexity of why an individual might be drawn to

far-right extremism and a far-right ideology but also the complex factors that may also be present as they try to leave a life of hate and extremism.

Like an Addiction

The sub-theme, “Like an Addiction,” emerged from the data. Participants used the word addiction to describe their embrace of far-right extremist ideology. They used the language of “addiction” in two different ways. First, participants discussed how they were “addicted” to elements of the far-right movement and ideology. One participant shared, “I was addicted to it. I was addicted to the feeling of power I had.” Similarly, another participant described their experience by stating, “The best way I can describe it is I feel like it's mostly like an addiction. I was basically addicted to being an extremist.”

A final participant shared by stating,

The movement is like a drug. You're addicted to the validation of your people. You become addicted to, oh, I sent this edgy tweet and I'm going to post it on this and then everyone in the movement is going to be like, “Wow, you really owned that guy.” And you become addicted to feeling like you're a part of it because the rest of your life is falling away from you. That is the only thing you have. And so, you seek that satisfaction tenfold because there is no other recourse for you.

Participants recounted being “addicted” to a sense of power, significance, affirmation, and connection to others in the far-right extremist movement. Their draw to these feelings was significant and illustrated how participants were “addicted” to feelings, emotions, and sentiments rather than the actual movement itself.

Participants also used the language of addiction in equating their journey out of extremism to that of someone “fighting an addiction.” One participant shared, “I have often described it much like you know an addict coming out of an addiction and how like leaving is like cutting off that addiction and not everybody can do it all at once.”

Similarly, another participant shared, “The experiences of formers and the experiences of addicts wanting to be clean do actually seem to line up, I know it did for me.” A final participant shared,

I talk about journeying out of the movement like this. I’m a former alcoholic and I often want to drink when I’m angry, when I’m depressed, when I’m horny, when I’m sad, when I’m happy. Drinking is always the go to. And in the same way, as I left, I had to develop new ways of mitigating conflicts. I have to do that now with the movement. And I... it's constantly in my mind. I'm never going to drink. I have come to accept that I'm an alcoholic and that if I drink even a drink, that drink is going to exponentially multiply. One drink will become two then fast forward to eight and sixteen. And before I know it, I'm an alcoholic again. And I look at all of these toxic behaviors or patterns or beliefs I had in the movement...it's something I have to just accept I was, and I cannot be and work to mitigate.

By using the language of addiction to frame their journey, participants also confronted the notion of the two-step process of disengagement and de-radicalization that has a definitive end date adopted by many academics and professionals in the P/CVE field. Addiction, as a framing mechanism, implied a complex journey of ideological deconstruction and identity reconstruction rather than a singular moment in time when one is no longer radicalized.

By using the language of addiction, emphasis appeared to be taken away from the overly simplistic term of de-radicalization and placed instead on critical self-examination as a means to cultivate a new sense of self and connection outside of the movement as well as the addictive draw and grip of camaraderie with other far-right members, praise and acceptance from other far-right members which they had to confront within themselves to heal.

Awakening the Conscience

Every participant discussed an event or series of events that sparked critical self-reflection and an awakening of the conscience that prompted the beginning of their exit journey from far-right extremism. Participants recounted that at various times, they had been confronted and challenged in a way that pushed them to examine themselves regarding the extremist ideology they had adopted, their participation in the promulgation of hate, and how they had dehumanized others.

For some participants, an awakening of the conscience through biographical life events, encountering those they had dehumanized and “otherized,” and disillusionment induced an immediate response and decision to disavow their extremist ideology and participation. For example, one participant shared an encounter with a Jewish man and stated,

It felt like someone threw cold water on me and woke me up from a dead sleep. I was waking up from a bad dream. I had grown so numb and dehumanizing others was like, it was like breathing, it was like like, second nature. It woke me up and I knew had to change.

The participant was describing a Jewish employer who knew of his identity as a neo-Nazi and still chose to hire him. He felt that someone cared for him and did not judge him, which made him realize that he had dehumanized someone that was genuinely humanizing him.

Another participant shared a similar response when they discussed viewing the footage of a mass shooting at a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, where fifty-one Muslims were murdered with another forty being injured at the hands of an avowed White supremacist, and the response of members in their group to the shooting.

It was like like it grabbed me and shook some sense into me. I could see the world a little more clearly and just how far I had fallen down the rabbit hole. I immediately began to feel ashamed for how I had been viewing and treating people and for participating in something that celebrated fifty-one people losing their lives.

Multiple participants pointed to events like the racially motivated mass shootings in Christchurch as a “wake-up call” about the dire violent consequences of far-right extremist ideology and the acts of terrorism it can lead to. For many participants, seeing the footage of terrorist activity exposed that the far-right extremist ideology is not simply a political exercise but creates circumstances that can lead to bloodshed and ruthless violence. One participant recounted,

On Telegram I watched videos of the dude who drove his car into those protestors at Charlottesville. Something broke in me and I thought to myself that this is not what I signed up for. I signed up to protect White people’s rights not to drive a car into people.

For others, their conscience awakened over a more extended period. One participant described "a gradual deconstruction" of their extremist ideology and participation in far-right extremism due to negative experiences with the far-right group they had joined. Similarly, one participant highlighted that the awakening of their conscience and their preceding exit occurred gradually, as "I began to slowly question it all one at a time." Another participant framed an awakening of their conscience as a "progressive journey" that occurred bit by bit. They stated, "It didn't happen overnight. I mean, it happened pretty fucking progressively. Something was chipping away at it every day until I made the choice that I needed to be done."

The theme, "Awakening the Conscience," had three sub-themes that emerged from the data. Each sub-theme, "Biographical Events," "Encountering the "Other," and “Disillusionment,” explored a different pathway that led to an awakening of the

conscience for participants and ultimately served as an impetus to begin the journey out of far-right extremism. While each sub-theme could stand as an independent indicator or cause an awakened conscience, they were also connected. For example, various participants also pointed to biographical events, like a new romantic relationship or a new job, that caused them to engage and encounter someone they previously held prejudice and racist stereotypes about that induced an awakening of their conscience.

Biographical Events

Participants elaborated on and discussed various biographical events that occurred which led to an awakening of their conscience. Biographical events were specific and significant life events that impacted the biopsychosocial development of a participant, primarily toward initiating a journey out of extremism. Biographical events that contributed to developing an awakening of the conscience will be explored further below.

College. One participant discussed how their decision to go to college served as a conscience-awaking biographical event.

...just like deciding to go to college and like meeting people and learning more about the world, like how things actually work. That was the like biggest contributor at the time, just being around new people, having them call me out on stuff. College really did like open my eyes and like showed me the truth of what I bought into.

Similarly, another participant pointed to the decision to go to college as a factor in helping them "see the world differently." In discussing their college experience, they stated, "I began to go to college and like it was there that I basically realized that a lot of what I'd been reading in these groups and believing was like just not true." Participants pointed to the college environment as critical to confronting the online "echo chamber" of far-right extremism they had placed themselves in. College put them in contact with

people who, as one participant stated, "...thoughtfully challenged my thinking and ideology." Participants who described college as the biographical event pivotal to awakening their conscience skewed towards being younger in the sample.

Romantic Relationships. Some participants pointed to the development and pursuit of new romantic relationships with others that led to a shift in their thinking. One participant discussed a new romantic relationship with a woman whose race and ethnicity would usually be factors that would trigger prejudice or racism towards. They shared that instead, it became an awakening catalyst. Regarding the impact of this relationship, they stated,

I started a relationship with a Jewish woman, who was the last person I would have ever been attracted to at that point of my life and realized that I cared more about her than I cared about all that stuff and so that was kind of like the pivot point like an ah-ha moment.

Similarly, another participant recounted that meeting and choosing to be in a relationship with their now-husband, who was not a part of "the movement," served to spark an awakening of their conscience. They stated,

My choice to date and ultimately marry a man outside of the movement and group really opened my eyes to just how toxic the movement is. He helped me understand that I could apply all the values I held outside of the realm of White identity politics and extremism.

Romantic relationships were central in illuminating how a powerful sense of social connection with whom one considered "the other" can counter extremist ideology and even racism and prejudice. Moreover, romantic relationships outside the far-right ideological ethos exhibited a similar quality to the biographical event of going to college in that they both created a space that challenged far-right extremist racial and ethnic

prejudicial tropes and the echo chamber created through complete immersion in far-right extremist ideology.

Death of a Family Member. Some participants recounted the death of a family member with whom they had a close sense of connection as a biographical event that sparked an awakening of their conscience. Due to their grief and emotional processing of the death of their family member, they began to examine their involvement in far-right extremism. One participant recounted, "My grandmother had just passed, and I was very close to her, and it was that's kind of what broke me was realizing that she then, she had no reason to be proud of me." Similarly, another participant, in discussing the death of their mother, shared,

I like really isolated myself from my old friends and family for the group. My mom tried to reach out and talk to me, but I like never listened. She never gave up on me. About a year in my mom died unexpectedly. It really shook me and I started to like think of everything she kept saying to me...

The death of a family member with whom one had a powerful sense of connection resembles the power of relational connection exhibited in romantic relationships to counter one's extremist ideology. Relational connectivity to others led participants on an emotionally and psychologically deeper level of self-examination that challenged what multiple participants described as "shallow talking points" of far-right extremism and its ideology.

Biographical events like the death of a family member or even involvement in a new romantic relationship were often coincidental and unexpected, unlike participants making the conscious choice of going to college. The coincidental nature, and thus, unpredictability, of such unforeseen biographical events did impact participants.

However, for others, social and relational connection led to an awakening of the conscience.

Encountering the "Other"

The sub-theme of "Encountering the "Other" emerged as participants described instances in which they encountered an individual or individuals from a racial or ethnic group toward which they had held dehumanizing, prejudicial, and racist thoughts. For some participants, their encounter was rather general, such as visiting another country. For others, their encounter(s) were more intimate and occurred with an individual or individuals either one-on-one or in a small group.

One participant, in describing how their new job required traveling across the globe and working with individuals of other nations, stated,

I went to South Africa, went to North Africa, I went to the Middle East, I went to Asia, East Asia, I went to all of these different places. None of my concepts matched reality. Some of the realities were grim. My time in Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq and other places like in Qatar. These places aren't exactly the first choice on your relocation or vacation list, but the people still didn't match the negative stereotypes of their behavior. The people, still, despite such a difference in culture, were still people. At the end of the day, once you strip away the religion and everything, they're still people and literally like me. And I think that was instrumental in realizing, as cliché as it is, that dehumanizing them just wasn't possible anymore.

The experience of traveling for their job removed this participant from the group that had helped establish an extremist ideological echo chamber and with whom they had spent a vast majority of their time. The participant went on to say that by "traveling and working with those I had dehumanized," the "carefully curated groupthink" and the "voices of group members were silenced."

Other participants recounted more intimate and individual encounters with those they had dehumanized that served to awaken their conscience. For example, in discussing an instance where they were hospitalized for alcohol poisoning, one participant shared their being taken care of by a Somali nurse.

He got me like my blanket and water and all this shit. He took fucking good care of me. He was fucking cool. He was a real nice fucking guy. How could I hate this guy who took care of me like that?

Similarly, another participant recounted the day they found out they were a father for the first time, specifically highlighting their choosing to share the news with Black cell mates rather than their Aryan friends. They shared,

I remember two of the Black dudes. They were the first people I told I had a kid when I had my daughter when I was in prison like I didn't tell my Aryans or my White friends, nope, the first two people were fucking Black dudes. They were always asking about my baby's mom and how she was doing. They cared. They didn't fit what I thought Black men were.

Another participant discussed seeking employment but was unable to secure a job due to their criminal record. After searching for work for a "lengthy amount of time," they were hired by "a guy who turns out to be a Jewish guy." He went on to describe the impact the man had on his ideology by stating,

I worked for him, and he was just a really good down to earth human being who was just kind and real and so funny. Just a good dude and never cared that I was a neo-Nazi. And he never said he wanted me to change nothing. He just worked with me a lot and he had a bunch of other people. He also hired another neo-Nazi at the same time. He had two neo-Nazis at one time working for him. No bullshit. He is nuts, but me and him worked together a lot and I just remember he didn't fit not one of those stereotypes. Like he would say, "oyvey" all the time right you know, but all these bad stereotypes I had come to you know, like he was just a good man who truly cared about you. Like if you told him you were going through something, he would remember, and he bring it back up and just a good good man. And so that was where I was like OK like what am I doing?

Again, it must be noted that some instances in which participants encountered those they had held racial stereotypes about were entirely coincidental and often random. Due to the insular nature of far-right extremist groups and the veracity of the racist ideology, willful and meaningful engagement with non-White individuals or groups was not sought. Encounters were often unplanned and coincidental. It is important to note that such unintentional encounters often disrupted and challenged a participant's ideological far-right perspective.

Disillusionment

The sub-theme, "Disillusionment," emerged from the data as participants discussed different factors that pushed them to begin questioning their own individual and far-right community's belief structure when their idealized expectations of far-right extremism became incongruent with their everyday experiences within the group or the larger far-right community. Disillusionment, as described by participants, ultimately sparked an awakening of the conscience. Participants described three pathways that cultivated doubt within them and fostered a sense of disillusionment: emotional fatigue, negative group dynamics, and rejection of violence.

Emotional Fatigue. Numerous participants pointed to the immense weight harboring hate, resentment, and prejudice placed on their shoulders. In recounting their emotional fatigue, one participant stated,

If you are subscribing to a worldview based on hatred of others it's really hard to have any kind of love for yourself or anyone you know. It is exhausting and it takes its toll on you. You get to a point where something has to change.

Similarly, another participant pointed to the level of hate required to be a member of a far-right group and the toll it took on them by sharing, "I was dedicating myself to the

movement, but it's like, I was not well. All of this hate... something had to change like I can't sustain this anymore." They continued by saying, "That's when the questions came." Finally, another participant described the level of emotional fatigue that led to tiny seeds of doubt being planted.

But I would say like it changed me in so far as the emotions of it because, like when you're in with like Atomwaffen and everything revolves around like violence and I began to think ... it's like hey, instead of hating and hurting people maybe can I like, can I just like help them... whoa isn't that a nice thought?

Emotional fatigue pointed to the human emotional toll and tolerance level that participants had to sustain and manage to be adherents to a far-right extremist movement and its ideology. Of course, this "tolerance level" was subjective. Still, it did highlight an important nuance when exploring the psychological and social process that often led to an awakening of the conscience and a burgeoning journey out of far-right extremism.

Negative Group Dynamics. Participants highlighted inconsistencies and negative dynamics within their far-right groups or the broader far-right extremist movement as another important factor that triggered a sense of disillusionment. In discussing these inconsistencies they had encountered with group members, one participant recounted,

I continued to run into mentally unstable individuals, and it just became glaringly clear how fucked up the whole thing was. It seems self-evident to outsiders, but I was shocked to run into these people and they believed like they believed, like they were like the "superior race." It was all like a fucking joke. How could you not question that?

Similarly, another participant began to question their group's legitimacy and ideology when attending an event at their group's leader's home. They stated, "I was starting to piece it all together, this isn't nothing new it's the same tired shit."

Other participants highlighted unhealthy group dynamics as a contributing factor to their disillusionment and an awakening of the conscience. One participant shared that "...a good part of the reason that I left was cause the hypocrisy and infighting and backstabbing was just, you know, it got to be too much to reconcile with the supposed message of, you know, brotherly love." Another participant echoed this by sharing,

My faith and my trust in the group and our beliefs was shaken each time I saw the infighting and the backstabbing and the paranoia. I finally decided to leave when a couple guys in the group beat me up pretty hard because they thought I was Antifa.

Another participant described the overwhelming sense of paranoia within far-right groups. He shared that "It was like I was mentally waged war against every single day.... I was fucking miserable."

To best understand the disillusionment brought on by negative group dynamics, it must be situated within the broader context of the expectations members faced when joining a far-right group, and/or expectations of the larger far-right community. One participant stated, "When you enter the group, people sort of tell you the idea of "racism" is a myth, the focus is on European solidarity...solidarity." Another participant discussed that they had been "searching for brotherhood" when they joined a far-right extremist group but quickly saw that they had been "sold a false bill of belonging." Unmet expectations of some participants in far-right groups, in terms of the solidarity and brother/sisterhood they sought, led some to be more receptive to the relational and social connection/interactions they had with those they had once dehumanized.

Rejection of Violence. Numerous participants pointed to moments of violence they witnessed, primarily vicariously, that highlighted the means of violence required for the ideological ends of far-right extremists and groups. In recounting watching live

footage of the Oklahoma City Bombing in April of 1995 at the hands of far-right extremists Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, one participant shared,

The Oklahoma City bombing was a big thing... the bombing was a moment where I knew that I knew before they even caught Timothy McVeigh, that was he was a White supremacist mother fucker. I just knew it. I thought I was gonna know who it was... I did... I knew. Right before they caught him... I knew that I was going to know who it was. And I was watching that fireman running down the street with that dead little girl and thinking this might be one of my old homies. And it was...he did this. Fucking horrendous, horrendous, and the next day I went to the FBI. So that event changed me, it awakened something in me.

The participant did not know about the plan to conduct the Oklahoma City bombing but had a gut feeling about who might be involved. This event was a sort of wake-up call that this was a trajectory they could have easily found themselves on.

Another participant recounted viewing the live stream of the mass shooting in a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019 at the hand of a White Supremacist as a moment that led them to question their beliefs and the far-right group that they had become a part of.

It was Christchurch...for whatever reason, I think part of it because you know it was live-streamed like a game. It brought the reality of what this really was... it was like you hear about the aftermath of it, but the reality of what really took place doesn't hit and I think it did with Christchurch because it was live-streamed and everything. And because. You know? You were...you couldn't rationalize it away because you were upfront and faced with what the reality of what was really happening was and you couldn't be as disconnected from it.

This same participant went on to share that in addition to the violence they had witnessed and rejected, their group member's response to the shooting served as an additional impetus that awakened their conscience. They shared that they "...were disgusted when I watched members of the group openly celebrate and cheer on the killer." They continued,

by sharing, "Did they not see what I just saw? How can you be happy about so much death?"

One participant discussed the impact and effect the death of a counter-protester by suicide had on their conscience.

I think what caused me to wanna leave was that guilt that was relating to that activist that committed suicide. Like even to this day I carry a lot of guilt and like I kind of get choked up whenever I think about her. I never interacted with her directly, but I knew of her and you know, we've been on opposite sides of the protests like went on during confrontations. And so, I still kind of have her in the back of my mind that I think about like almost daily like. Yeah, I like I get choked up thinking about her. I feel responsible in a way and that is not who I want to be...

Similarly, another participant recounted attending the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and how the murder of counter-protestor Heather Heyer impacted them. They said,

The Unite the Right rally happened, and Heather Heyer was murdered and I was just kind of that's when I texted my mom and I was just like, look, you might not hear from me for a while. I don't know if you hear from me ever again, but like, I have to get out. I don't know how I'm going to do this. I don't know what I'm going to do, but I have to get out.

Of note, participants' rejection of violence illuminated that membership in a far-right group or adherence to a racist, misogynistic, and prejudicial ideology is not absolute and does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, it highlights that some participants entered into a far-right group or adopted a far-right ideology for various reasons beyond the articulated end goal of the movement to have a violent race war that will lead to the formation of a White ethnostate. As such, there were differing nuances in a participant's motivation to enlist in a life of hate. One major reason was also for the desire of solidarity and a sense of brother/sisterhood.

Shattered Sense of Self and Connection

When participants experienced an awakening of the conscience resulting from biographical life events, encountering those they had "otherized" and/or disillusionment, they often described entering an existential space in which their world, social network, and identity were seemingly "shattered." The theme, "Shattered Sense of Self and Connection," emerged from the data when participants described how the impact of a fragmented awakened conscience affected every aspect of their lives.

One participant described this shattered sense of self and connection: "It felt like I was looking at myself in a shattered mirror. Everything was broken and fragmented. I felt fractured mentally and emotionally. I had no idea who I was or how to relate to others."

Similarly, another participant discussed their "shattered" space by sharing,

When I entered the movement, I had to create like a new identity. When my world and ways of thinking were challenged, it was like someone threw a huge rock at a mirror. Everything shattered and like I could no longer see myself or the world clearly.

Another participant discussed feeling mentally fractured after an awakening of their conscience. In recounting this space at the onset of their journey out of extremism, they shared, "It went from fractured to a world beyond fractured where there was no semblance of security, safety, or stability in my life." While this participant did not specifically use the term "shattered" in describing their identity and connectivity in light of an awakened conscience, the term "fractured" serves as a way to describe a vivid picture of the existential crisis of identity and social connection participants experienced.

This theme was significant as it highlighted a very crucial moment in the journey out of far-right extremism. A shattered sense of self and connection was a psychosocial consequence of embarking on a journey out of far-right extremism. Participants described

feelings of vulnerability and ambivalence in this "shattered" space. One participant shared, "I don't know like how many times I thought to myself, is it worth it? Should I really leave? I thought about going back often." Another participant stated, "I mean...it felt like I was walking around with an open wound that could easily be re-infected if it wasn't taken care of properly." Over three-quarters of participants recounted that this shattered mental and relational space was "one of the hardest things I had ever done, I almost didn't survive it," which served to highlight the gravity of these pivotal internal psychosocial developmental moments on a participant's journey out of extremism.

The theme, "Shattered Sense of Self and Connection," has two sub-themes that emerged from the data: "Ideology = Identity" and "Alone." Each sub-theme, while independent, are also interconnected. Each sub-theme and their interconnectivity will be discussed below.

Ideology = Identity

The sub-theme, "Ideology=Identity," emerged as participants discussed the enmeshment of a far-right extremist ideology and their identity. In describing this enmeshment, one participant stated, "It's not just leaving a group or a movement or friendships even, it's like it's really who you are as a person." Similarly, another participant stated, "Everything in my life was so specific, tailored extremely tailored to one very specific lens. You are the ideology, and the ideology is you. Everything is tailored ...what you eat, when you sleep, all of it." Discussing the extent to how the ideology they adopted and their identity became linked, one participant shared,

It's the only world I knew. It's how I handled conflict. It's how I developed interpersonal relationships, extra-personal relationships. It's how I achieved financial stability. It was everything. Everything... how I did menial, unthinkable tasks like how I wipe m my butt to how I do the

dishes to the partners I seek to where I live. Every aspect of my life was managed by that part of my life.

Participants made clear that there was never a line of separation between ideology and identity during their time as a far-right extremist. Rather they were one and the same. The person was the ideology, and the ideology was the person. This offered a glimpse into the complex experiences of participants exiting a far-right group and illuminated that an awakening of the conscience did not simply "shatter" their worldview or political lens; it "shattered" them as human beings. When a participant doubted the ideology, they doubted themselves. In essence, an awakening of the conscience to the dehumanization of the racialized and minoritized "other" opened a door for the dehumanization of themselves per se.

Alone

"Alone" emerged as a sub-theme as participants discussed not only experiencing a "shattered" sense of self but also a shattered sense of social and relational connectivity. Numerous participants recounted that when they entered a far-right group or became radicalized into a far-right extremist ideology, many isolated themselves from their families and/or their previously established social networks. One participant shared, "I slowly isolated from my community and the people that I cared about... my own family even." Similarly, another participant stated, "So what do you? What do I do now? Like I have no friends anymore because I dropped everybody when I got involved."

With an awakening of the conscience, participants encountered a severed and "shattered" sense of connection. Nearly every participant recounted feeling alone when they chose to abandon their far-right extremist ideology or exit a group they had invested in. One participant encapsulated the "shattered" sense of connection of feeling alone and

isolated when they shared, "I really had no one I socialized with that wasn't involved in some way or another in these groups I was a part of so when I left, I was alone... I was left with me." Similarly, another participant described feeling alone by sharing: "I felt like I was in a glass box. It was like I could see everyone, but I couldn't participate." In discussing the relational loss that was experienced, one participant stated,

And when you walk away from them..that's it. Your entire quote-unquote support system, like everything is just kind of gone. You kind of don't know where to go or what to do. Except you know you're not supposed to be a part of this and you don't want this anymore. So now you're left over here wondering OK, what do I do now? Where do I go now?

Multiple participants shared that contemplating the loss of the social network they had cultivated in far-right groups served as one of the greatest hurdles they encountered at this stage in their journey out of far-right extremism. One participant shared,

It was an issue for me. It was a stumbling block. It was something that slowed the process down. The whole social aspect of it, because over the past two years I did develop genuine and sincere relationships with people that at the time I would, you know, consider friends like we would you know, talk and do stuff that wasn't even you know politically related. So that was a huge issue for me leaving. It's like if I were to cut them all off today, what, how, what will like what will I do with my life? Cause like I said my whole social network started to be only these people.

Similarly, another participant recounted, "My biggest fear was being alone, and I knew that if I left, that would be exactly what happened. That was by far the hardest part for me."

Notably, some participants pointed out that some in the far-right extremist movement will leverage the shattered sense of social connection as a strategic and psychological tool to manipulate people from leaving. In discussing this internal and group dynamic, one participant stated,

I thought to myself, where are you going to go? Who's going to accept you? You know...and that is one of the lines that the movement will use a lot of times. Well, they see you as a Nazi and they're always going to see you as a Nazi, so you might as well stay. Like at least you're part of something.

This quote only underscores how pivotal this moment was in the lives of participants at the onset of their journey out of extremism. Raw feelings of vulnerability and ambivalence due to an existential shattered sense of self and connection and how those are engaged by former extremists and those they may or may not seek out for help have the potential to accelerate or stunt movement on the journey out of an ideological life of hate.

In discussing these feelings of being alone and isolated with no social support system if they left far-right groups, participants were sharing that leaving a far-right group was emotionally very challenging due to the toll it had on their own identity.

Post Extremist Traumatic Stress

The theme, "Post Extremist Traumatic Stress" (PETS), emerged from the data as participants discussed their mental well-being when choosing to exit a life of hate and the psychological factors and processes influencing their journey out of a far-right extremist movement. As participants went into greater detail about their journeys, a connection surfaced between their psychological processes, trauma experienced both inside and outside of the far-right extremist movement, and the symptomatology of PTSD resulting from traumatic stress as articulated in the DSM-5. Unique contextual elements and additional psychological dynamics required a new conceptualization of the traumatic stress experienced by participants both during their time in and journey out of the far-right extremist movement.

It must be noted that while participants reported experiencing the symptomatology of PTSD, this theme is by no means diagnostic. Nor is its emergence in the data implying a mental health diagnosis is necessary. Instead, the emergence of the "Post Extremist Traumatic Stress" theme offered a conceptualization through which participants' psychological processes can be viewed. Also of note is the near universality of this theme. Regardless of demographic factors, participants reported experiencing some or all the elements of the PETS theme.

The Movement as Trauma

Participants identified their participation in the far-right extremist movement as either a traumatic event or a series of traumatic events resulting in traumatic stress. Participants correlated being a part of the far-right extremist movement with trauma. One participant shared, "My time in the movement was deeply traumatic, there are still... 5 years out...lasting effects of being part of a movement like that." Similarly, another participant shared, "The whole thing was trauma, but I also think it was many different and smaller traumas and then just many different like extended times of feeling triggered over and over again." Another participant discussing their experience in the far-right extremist movement noted, "I would definitely say that if you didn't have trauma going in, most likely you have some level of trauma coming out."

Unique to participants was not only an identification that their participation in the far-right extremist movement was traumatic but that there was a hesitancy to discuss their experience with others due to a fear of their trauma being justified by others as a natural consequence and result of their participation in the far-right extremist movement. For example, one participant shared, "I do think it was trauma, but it's... I don't really talk

about it because I so many people doubted me for so long." Similarly, another participant shared, "I think I was traumatized, but I've never really talked about it. Who would believe that the neo-Nazi experienced trauma?"

As discussed in a previous theme, female participants described instances of physical, emotional, and sexual assault that they experienced during their time in the far-right extremist movement. While female participants noted the trauma of the far-right extremist movement itself, they also highlighted the assault some experienced as a significant contributor to their traumatic stress. For example, one female participant shared, "I don't know if you have heard that phrase "death by a thousand paper-cuts," but that is what it was like in the movement. It was trauma on top of trauma on top of trauma." Similarly, another female participant noted, "The entire movement was traumatizing, but I will never forget the moment I was raped and gaslit to believe that it was my privilege to preserve the White race."

Traditional PTSD Symptomatology

Participants discussed their journey out of the far-right extremist movement and reported experiencing the traditional symptomatology of PTSD, primarily a depressed mood and isolation, hyper-vigilance, hyper-arousal, and intrusive thoughts and memories.

In discussing symptoms of depression that they experienced, one participant shared,

There were days I literally couldn't get out of bed I was so depressed. I couldn't think at all. I just... and I didn't want to be around other people because I felt like I couldn't stop thinking about it all, I felt like I had to really think about it all. I wasn't sure if I had done the right thing or not leaving.

Similarly, another participant shared,

I was very depressed. Yeah, I would think that would be probably the best way to describe it. I was very alone. I didn't want to be near people. I was

typically a pretty optimistic person, or I try to like be. I've been through a lot of different things in life and so my things that I've always done is you just you keep you keep it moving you keep it moving forward and eventually it does get better or whatever. And it was very difficult to see that silver lining during those times. It was very dark. And I think I was depressed.

Numerous participants noted that a depressed mood was often associated with feeling the emotional and existential weight of a shattered sense of self and connection. For example, one participant stated, "I think I was depressed because I was alone, and I didn't know who I was outside of the movement." It was as though they felt desolate, wandering in a desert in search of something all alone.

Hyper-Vigilance. Multiple participants also discussed feeling like they were in a state of constantly assessing potential threats around them. Essentially, participants described feelings of hyper-vigilance. Unique to participants, however, was the perceived threat that many of them felt they faced by exiting an extremist group. Some recounted feeling paranoid. One participant recounted faking their death to avoid being found, while another described moving over ten times across the U.S. One participant shared that they did not leave their home for almost three years because they feared retaliation for leaving their group. In discussing feelings of hyper-vigilance, one participant shared,

Like, in the beginning I was terrified of everyone, everything. I went to live with my aunts, my aunt and her wife, and they are very European and so they don't have blinds on their windows and I remember not being able to leave my room convinced that someone would see me like I was very, very anxious all the time. I couldn't step outside to take a walk, I couldn't do public transportation, I couldn't do anything. It was awful.

Similarly, another participant recounted a time when hyper-vigilance and intense paranoia interrupted the time they spent with their brother to rebuild their relationship as a result of leaving the far-right extremist movement. She shared,

My brother drives a white car and he drove us there to grab coffee. For some reason in the parking lot there was a white car that caught fire. And I immediately had a panic attack. I locked myself in the bathroom for 20 minutes.

The threat many participants faced were genuine. One participant recounted, "All I could think about was how when I was at parties, they would say that if you ever leave or betray us, remember that we've bombed Antifa before." Leaving the far-right movement led to a real sense of fear, anxiety, and concern about their safety. Similarly, another participant shared,

When I left, I started getting harassing phone calls and text messages from unknown people. I got a couple death threats. Somebody "SWATed" me. And you know, then and even now, its really like it's just always that thing that's kind of like always hovering over you, it never leaves.

Hyper-arousal. Some participants also recounted experiencing moments of emotional intensity and reactivity in addition to heightened anxiety. Essentially, these participants were describing experiencing hyper-arousal. One participant shared,

I would often like have complete just fucking emotional and meltdowns out of nowhere. I would space out and it was like reliving all of the pain I had caused and all of the pain I had experienced.

Similarly, another participant recounted a time in which they were overwhelmed by a flood of emotions triggered by a flashback from their time in a violent extremist group.

They shared,

It was like it hit me out of nowhere. I didn't know what to do. It felt like I was having a heart attack. All I could see was... I can't go into it even now. All I could see was something I was a part of that I don't think I will ever forget.

This heightened moment of panic and anxiety shared by a participant above illustrated the intrusive thoughts and memories many participants described that they still go through to this day. Participants also described intrusive thoughts that occurred

periodically, from thinking unwanted racist and misogynistic thoughts they once held to recalling actual events that occurred in the past. For example, one participant shared, "Out of nowhere I will have these thoughts pop in my head about hurting Jewish or Black people. It's triggering and takes quite a bit of time to recover from." Similarly, another participant shared, "There have been times....like I was having dinner with friends and I spaced out and all I could see was that day in Charlottesville. It felt so real that I could almost smell it." They appeared haunted by flashbacks of their past.

Factors Impacting PETS

Shame and Guilt. While feelings of shame and guilt can be a part of a formal PTSD diagnosis, numerous participants discussed experiencing the emotions in a very subtle and salient manner. Primarily, participants noted feeling shame and guilt for their promulgation of the far-right extremist ideology and violence. One participant shared,

It is still a hard thing to deal with knowing that I was disseminating a message that people were killing over, that it was causing people to see others as less than human. It is paralyzing and the shame and guilt is unbearable sometimes.

Unique to participants was their description of experiencing feelings of deserving the trauma they experienced and the trauma of shame and guilt due to their past involvement in far-right groups. One participant shared,

I never talked about the trauma I experienced in the movement because I sort of felt like I deserved it. I felt so much shame and guilt that I was ever a part of something so toxic. I guess I felt I deserved everything I got.

Nuanced feelings of shame and guilt add an additional layer of complexity to addressing the traumatic stress experienced by those journeying out of the far-right extremist movement. Living with shame and guilt was very painful for participants; there was clear regret, inner turmoil, and remorse over their past support of far-right extremism.

Victim and Victimizer Dichotomy. A factor to PETS that appeared unique to participants was a duality that numerous participants described as both a victimizer as an extremist and simultaneously a victim of the movement. In discussing this dichotomy, one participant shared,

I never felt like I could tell anyone if I was having a bad or rough day. You know, I could never. I was not allowed to cry. I was not allowed to feel because I did, it was just like, Yeah, but you chose to be in. This was your choice. You hurt people, you can't hurt yourself.

Similarly, another participant shared their experience in a support group in which this juxtaposition was present. Group members told them, "You're not a victim; you're a victimizer," to which they replied, "I am a victimizer, but I am a victim of a like cult that led me to these behaviors."

Some participants pointed to the victim and victimizer dichotomy as one of most challenging hurdles they had faced in working through the trauma of their past involvement in far-right extremism. One participant noted, "You can't move on if you don't figure out how to like accept that you are both the villain and the villain's victim." It was evident that reconciling this dichotomy was pivotal for participants moving forward in their journey of self-healing.

Compounding Trauma. Some participants discussed that the trauma they experienced due to being a part of the far-right extremist movement was compounded on top of unresolved trauma and traumatic stress they had carried before they even entered far-right extremism. In some instances, these participants noted that unresolved trauma led them into the movement. One participant shared, "It was trauma that got me into the movement, and it is trauma that got me out." Similarly, another participant shared,

I had years of compounding traumas and issues and things within myself and identity crises and all of these things that I had not dealt with at all that made me vulnerable to what the far-right was offering. When I left, I had to not only deal with that but new pain as well.

The layering of new trauma and traumatic stress from the movement atop unresolved trauma and traumatic stress from the past was frequently mentioned.

Social Factors Influencing the Diverse Journey

The theme, “Social Factors Influencing the Diverse Journey,” emerged from the data as participants discussed various social connections and engagements that accelerated their journey out of extremism due to their presence or potentially slowed it due to their absence. Participants recounted that as they embarked on their unique and complex personal journey from the existential space of a shattered sense of knowing and connection while experiencing feelings of vulnerability and ambivalence. They shared key factors that influenced their journey out of far-right extremism, almost propelling and pushing them toward cultivating and forging a new sense of self and connection.

“Social Factors Influencing the Diverse Journey” had two sub-themes that emerged from the data: “Empathy” and “Peer Support.” These sub-themes will be explored in greater detail below as each influenced a participant's journey out of far-right extremism.

Empathy

Empathy emerged as an important influence on participants' journey as they discussed that it not only accelerated their journey but also allowed them the emotional and social space to cultivate a new sense of self and connection outside the ideological confines of far-right extremism. In describing the influence empathy had on their journey at a moment when they were feeling emotionally vulnerable, one participant shared,

I was just vulnerable to anything, any kindness, caring, any foundation that I could put my foot on for a moment. It's like going from being underwater...you know, it's swimming or floating to to being on dry land. The empathy I experienced from people when I started this saved my life. It like helped me keep going.

Similarly, another participant shared, "I was so grateful to people, to society in general, for giving me a second chance. People's empathy really helped keep me moving forward."

During a time when participants felt a shattered sense of self and connection at the onset of their exit journey out of far-right extremism, numerous participants recounted that empathy was a powerful force that welcomed them into a space of critical self-reflection and self-examination. Participants described what could best be described as experiencing a type of cognitive dissonance when they felt empathy from another person. One participant shared, "Here was another human being offering me the very thing I had denied so many others because they were not White. That helped me really see just how messed up everything I had been a part of was." Similarly, another participant shared,

I don't deserve it. I have done and believed some very very hateful things, but when others have looked beyond my shit and see me, see that I am trying it gives me energy to keep confronting my shit and fighting for something more.

Participants never demanded empathy from others in their discussion; rather, numerous participants expressed a sense of wonder and awe at the empathy that they had received. For example, one participant shared, "I still can't believe that anyone cared", while another stated, "I should have been tossed aside and left to rot, I didn't deserve it. I don't think I would be here if it had not been for the empathy of others."

There was a shared sense among participants that empathy for a former-far-right extremist is counterintuitive and perhaps will not make sense to others. In a politically

polarized society like the United States at this present time, humanizing the dehumanizer appears seemingly irrational. This is especially true given the looming threat of racially and ethnically motivated far-right extremism is rising nationally and globally. However, the significance of empathy as an influencing factor cannot be understated. Just as hatred can serve as an accelerant for entrance into the far-right extremist movement, empathy was an accelerant for the journey out of far-right extremism.

While it is unknown what trajectory a participant's journey out of far-right extremism may have been like without the presence of empathy by others, its presence had a significant influence on participants. Empathy and humanization, being seen as a human first, disrupted the internal psyche of multiple participants and illuminated a path forward. It gave them hope. It was something that many internally craved. One participant summed it up this way by sharing,

I think, humanization is something... I crave.. I crave to be seen as a human. I think all formers do. That's what keeps us out is that we're human for once. We're human in a human world. Empathy reminds us of what we gave up and lost in the movement, our humanity and a respect for the humanity of others.

Experiencing empathy was not seen as an excuse for accountability. Numerous participants expressed that they should have been held accountable for their past beliefs and actions in far-right extremism. Empathy, as described by participants, "is not defining an individual by their past." Instead, it was acknowledging an individual's humanity first, and that being the starting point for accountability. Empathy was also not an endorsement of abhorrent views or behaviors. Rather, for participants it helped to frame interventions on how to assist them. "Empathy," one participant shared, "gives us an example to follow of something many of us have never experienced in our lives."

Peer Support

Peer support emerged as a key factor that influenced participants' journey out of far-right extremism. Participants recounted that engaging with others who had embarked on a similar journey provided an example that change was indeed possible. One participant stated,

I definitely found talking with someone who they who has experienced themselves in these groups really helps because the problem is like I've spoken to, you know therapists or whatever, but people that are not in these I guess environments and don't really understand it.

Similarly, another participant shared, "Seeing the example of other people being able to talk about this and then being able to talk about it myself was so helpful."

For some participants, they were connected to other "formers" through programs like Life After Hate and Hands of Eir. For others, however, participants found connections on their own as they reached out to former associates who, too, had decided to leave far-right extremism. It was unclear which pathway to engagement with a former far-right extremist was most impactful. However, the data demonstrated that peer support produces seemingly positive outcomes for those that have experienced it on their journey out of far-right extremism.

Connecting with other "formers" created a sense of solidarity among participants that discussed their experience as there was a shared language and an intimate understanding of what being in a life of hate truly entailed. One participant recalled, "It's funny... the thing I was looking for in a group I found outside of it when I began to meet with other guys that left." One participant pointed out that when they connected to another "former," they "...shared a common language, and I didn't have to explain the

entire movement to them." Having a peer that they could relate to was key. In addition, mutual support by other former far-right extremists proved valuable.

While participants shared that engaging with others who have walked a similar journey as themselves was beneficial, there was a resounding acknowledgment by participants that peer support alone was insufficient to replace professional rehabilitative services. Rather, participants pointed out that due to a general lack of trust in institutions among those in the far-right, peer support can potentially serve as a doorway for those exiting to get help and support. One participant shared,

I would have never saw a therapist, ever. How do you just go in and sit down with someone and be like yeah, so you know...yeah, I was just, you know I was a Nazi? But talking with others, I began to see that there was a lot of trauma I had been avoiding, trauma that only got worse in the movement. I decided to go.

Some participants reported not engaging with other "formers" on their journey out of far-right extremism because no opportunity presented itself. However, the support was deeply meaningful for those who did have encounters with peers. The importance of peer support must be considered in regard to exploring one's journey out of far-right extremism toward cultivating a new sense of self and connection.

"We Need Help"

The theme, "We Need Help" emerged from the data as participants discussed a perceived need for professional services and resources for those exiting a life of hate in far-right extremism. In addition, there was a resounding cry for help from participants when they discussed the need for services in the future and their own journey out of far-right extremism.

Participants were united in their willingness to do the hard psychosocial work of journeying out of far-right extremism but voiced a need for social services and resources. One participant shared, "We need others to help ourselves. Formers can't help themselves the entire way. We need help. And I think that, in almost every facet of life, formers need help. We need resources." Similarly, another participant shared,

We can't do that without the resources. Something as simple as just being able to go to the store in a tank top and not have to worry about our tattoos driving people out. You know, and we...and we can't do that without tattoo removal. We can't do that without people who are willing to help us help ourselves. We need help. We cannot do this ourselves.

Another participant shared, "I just needed help. I was trying to make sense of a world that had come crashing down around me. I have heard the same from others too. We just need help." Participants made it evident that there is a need for appropriate and relevant services that can meet those in the truly vulnerable existential space of a shattered sense of self and connection.

The theme, "We Need Help" has one sub-theme that emerged from the data, "Lack of Appropriate Services." This sub-theme will be explored will be discussed as it provides a snapshot of the perceived state of available services for those embarking on a journey out of far-right extremism.

Lack of Appropriate Services

There was a near-universal response regarding the lack of appropriate services for individuals journeying out of far-right extremism. While each participant acknowledged that there were indeed some programs built to engage those coming out of far-right extremism, they were also quick to note that the number of programs was insufficient to meet the pressing need. Additionally, participants pointed out that many available

programs are politically and ideologically driven. A limited number of available services equated to feeling left alone during a highly vulnerable moment of their personal journey for participants. In speaking about available services, one participant shared, "There was no support at all. I was by myself." Similarly, another participant noted,

I had to figure all of this out by myself. There was no one to help me take my first steps in what was like a brand-new world. My life was completely broken and I had to wade through those waters alone.

Another participant shared, "There hasn't really been legitimately safe and appropriate space for the types of conversations I need and needed to have." They continued by stating, "I still have not found a therapist that is able to meet me where I am... A therapist, a social support group, anything. And I find that it's actually getting worse as we are more polarized." This participant highlights the impact contemporary political polarization has on the provision of services to address the journey out of the far-right extremist movement. While there are organizations whose sole purpose is to work with individuals who are journeying out of far-right extremism, it is evident that there are not enough supports to meet a very pressing need. There is still a lack of appropriate services.

Some participants shared that although they had chosen to journey out of extremism, they were hesitant to work with organizations and programs that they perceived to be too ideologically driven. For one participant, engaging with an ideologically driven organization and program reinforced some of the same extremist thinking they sought to deconstruct. They shared,

Every organization at the time only further radicalized me. Every organization at the time seemed to be extreme left, not just left leaning, but like extreme left. So all of the rhetoric only seemed to be aggressive and further fulfill my biases. There were no organizations at the time that helped at all.

Similarly, another participant shared, "I was not interested in swapping one form of extremism for another. That is what it felt like I was being asked to do if I wanted help from some of the programs out there."

As previously mentioned, as one embarks on a journey out of far-right extremism, they are doing so from a shattered sense of self and connection. Some participants also have a sense of "distrust for anything that is trying to indoctrinate me." One participant shared, "I was very suspicious of anything that was trying to get me to adopt their way of thinking at the time. I had already done that and look where it got me."

This sub-theme is significant as it showed that there is not only a dire need for services but appropriate services that do not espouse extreme beliefs on either side of the political spectrum. Participants noted a need for services that challenge but do not force one to conform and adopt another ideology in exchange for the one they seek to deconstruct. While participants did not suggest that organizations and programming cater to or empathize with one's White supremacist/nationalist ideology, they did suggest that organizations need to provide programs or services to a unique population with complex, varying experiences and who feel very vulnerable. One participant noted,

The fact that we are reaching out for help shows a desire to change. We need a safe place to have the hard conversations. You do not have our minds changed for us, we just need support as we do that work ourselves.

Some participants also discussed that while there may be some services available, many are antiquated and thus seemingly ineffective. One participant shared,

I felt like I was begging people to talk to me and because they had all left in earlier iterations of movement, none of them were like tech savvy, the way that his movement is, none of them were sophisticated in their approach, the way this movement is. They couldn't really help.

Providing a specific example, one participant similarly noted,

I had one conversation with this guy who had an online forum for formers. It took me about four to six months to get into their online forum. It is a fucking joke of a forum. It is an AOL. It's like you have to go to a website. You have to do all these things, like it's completely outdated. It is meant for the White nationalists of the nineties, the "American History X" Nazis.

Something of note here regarding appropriate services is a recognition of how far-right extremism has evolved in its execution and presence while not shifting its ideology.

One participant stated, "It used to be punk shows and cross-burnings. Now it is Discord servers and social media." As such, numerous participants shared that services and organizations providing services must be willing and able to adapt to the ever-changing landscape of far-right extremism. In essence, what is beneficial today may not work tomorrow as the movement is in a constant state of flux and evolution. The far-right extremist movement in the United States is highly fluid rather than static. Organizations seeking to provide services to this population will need to be equally as fluid in how they engage and work with potential clients.

Perceptions of Social Work

The theme, "Perceptions of Social Work," emerged from the data as participants discussed their understanding of the social work profession and their interactions, or lack thereof, with practitioners on their journey out of far-right extremism. Participants' responses ranged from not understanding the profession or what work social work practitioners do with individuals and communities to having worked with several practitioners in the past and/or on their journey. However, most participants had a general understanding of the profession. "Perceptions of Social Work" is an important theme that

emerged from the data as it highlighted a disconnect between a population in desperate need of appropriate services and the practitioners that would be the primary providers of services. The theme of "Perceptions of Social Work" will be explored in three categories.

Unable to Define Social Work. Four participants (n=4) discussed not knowing or not having an understanding of the social work profession or the work social workers do. One participant stated, "I'm really not that familiar with really what they do." Similarly, another participant stated, "I have no idea what a social worker does, maybe work with kids?" Each of the four participants stated that they had never worked with a social worker in the past or as a part of the journey put of far-right extremism.

General Understanding of Social Work. Eleven participants (n=11) discussed having a limited to a general understanding of what the social work profession is or the work social work practitioners do with individuals and in the community. In defining social work, one participant shared, "I would define social work as basically a connection of works and work in jobs meant to help out people who are in rough situations and get them out of it." Similarly, another participant shared, "I would say its work dealing with helping others to navigate life or to interact with society. I think that's how I would define it. Another participant shared, "Social workers are literally the people holding hands to make a safety net. They make sure kids... for me, social workers' main job I think is to make sure the children are being fed and taken care of." Another participant discussed the work social workers do as, "They kind of go in between maybe the role of a therapist or psychiatric or psychological care. Obviously, they're not doctors, but they can still provide some level of support for people who are struggling." Of the eleven participants

with a general opinion of what social work is and does, none discussed working with a social worker during their journey out of extremism.

Worked With Social Workers. Of the eighteen participants (N=18) in this study, only 3 (n=3) indicated that they had worked with a social worker in their journey out of far-right extremism. One participant stated they worked with a social work practitioner, indicating that their interaction was not in a professional setting but as a friend. In recounting their experience, they shared,

One of my close friends is a social worker. He helped talk me through my journey without judgement or condemnation. He helped me explore what emotions, vacancies within myself, and social factors contributed to my participation in...essentially a cult, or a cult of personality in the case of Richard Spencer. It was helpful to receive empathy and not feel like a villainous person through this process. I think some people are afraid to leave because they're embarrassed and don't feel they'll be readily accepted by their friends and family again. Sometimes that's true, but with the help of a social worker you can regain your sense of reality and self-esteem.

It is evident that this participant's social work friend was practicing the profession's core values, and the interaction led to positive outcomes. However, when pressed if there were other practitioners that they had worked with along their journey out of extremism, they said they had not. Of the two remaining participants that reported that they had worked with a social work practitioner, one stated that it had been a positive experience. At the same time, the other recounted their experience by sharing, "I worked with five social workers. They had no idea what to do with me. Eventually, the social worker would say that they did not feel comfortable working with me or didn't have the training to help me." The individual who had a positive experience with a social work practitioner on their journey out of far-right extremism shared this,

He was able to paint such an offensive or bold image of what life could be, what life is, and present ways that I...and present like a paint by numbers. Like he never told me how I was going to do it... he told me ways I could choose to do it. And then from there I could choose those ways... I could choose the colors. And he gave me both the, you know, the picture and the the outline and the crayons. And he helped me color it in...

Social work practitioners can positively influence and play a role in one's journey out of far-right extremism. Practitioners who were willing to engage this unique population with dignity and respect were seemingly able to offer an enticing and positive image of what life outside of the far-right extremist movement could be.

When participants were presented with the NASW's definition of the profession, all eighteen stated that a social worker's presence would have been beneficial on their journey out of extremism. In addition, some participants pointed to therapeutic services as a need that social workers could meet. While the majority discussed connection to economic resources such as job and housing placement as a pressing priority and hurdle for those embarking on a journey out of far-right extremism.

The theme, "Perceptions of Social Work," revealed that there is a disconnect between those needing specialized services and those trained and able to provide them. This theme also illuminated that the social work profession and practitioners are not only needed but would be welcomed on the journey out of far-right extremism.

Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection

The theme, "Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection," emerged as participants discussed what they were ultimately journeying toward when exiting a life of hate from a far-right extremist movement. Participants discussed developing a new sense of self as they began to piece together what had been shattered, primarily their identity outside the far-right extremist moment and ideology. Participants also discussed

wrestling with themselves to develop a new sense of connection to a multicultural society that they had once rejected.

This theme is significant; however, it is incomplete by participants' own admission. Throughout this study, participants often mentioned that their journey is far from over as they continue to practice critical self-reflection and change. As such, the new sense of self and connection that they are cultivating is yet to be fully realized. One participant suggested,

I'm trying to find my place in America again. I am trying to find me again. I don't think there is a moment I'll arrive. I know it is something I will be working on until the day I die. I don't know though, isn't this normal life? Aren't we all trying to become better versions of ourselves?

While the destination cannot be defined as it is ever-evolving for participants, it is still important to briefly explore this theme as it illuminates the trajectory toward cultivating a new sense of self and connection.

In discussing their experience thus far, one participant shared, "Every day I am trying to figure out who I am in and where I fit." Similarly, another participant shared, "I don't know what the future has for me outside of the movement, but what I do know is that I can no longer see myself or others the way I have been anymore. I want to do better." While participants were unsure of their ideological future, there was a resounding rejection of the far-right ideology of their past and a commitment to a rehabilitative journey.

"Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection" has three sub-themes, "Reckoning with the Past," "Unlearning Hate," and "Atoning for the Past," that emerged from the data. Each sub-theme will be explored as they each provide a glimpse into the

multifaceted journey of participants and the path to cultivating a new sense of self and connection.

Reckoning with the Past

The sub-theme, "Reckoning with the Past," emerged as participants discussed coming to a point where they had to come to terms with both the far-right ideology and lifestyle they had adopted and the consequences of their choices. Numerous participants recounted that it was not until after they left that they even considered their past to be far-right extremism. One participant shared, "Now, I would definitely call it far-right extremism. At the time, I was trying to convince people that National Socialism, or NS as we called it back then, was something very different." Similarly, another participant shared,

I literally, really had to sit down and think about it and admit to myself that I was an extremist. I was a racist. Whether I liked it or not, this is what I had been a part of. This is what I had been spreading. And that's still difficult for me to deal with sometimes, but it was one of those things that literally like I had to come to terms with. For a long time I told myself that I wasn't part of it, but I finally had to admit it to move forward.

Often, it was through a reckoning with the past that a participant was able to begin healing from the past. Participants acknowledged that there was no way to move forward and reconnect with mainstream society without healing by first acknowledging and reckoning with their past involvement in far-right extremism. One participant shared,

When I first left I would always be like, well, you know I wasn't violent or anything like I never, I never physically attacked someone, so I never considered myself as extreme. And, you know, most people would not identify their beliefs as being extreme in the movement. It's not until someone acknowledges that they are extremists, or have these extremist mindsets that they are able to actually begin to change and heal.

Similarly, a participants discussed what they called a “coming to Jesus moment”,

When I left, I was very careful to use the very polite term identitarian because I had never committed a “hate crime.” I never committed an “act of violence” or anything like that, but I was promoting this ideology that led people down that path. In fact, I was a part of people going down that path very explicitly in a calculated way. So I would say that now, I was a far right extremist, although I did not commit those acts. And if you asked me back then, I would say I wasn’t. But the reality is I was. And until I looked at myself in the mirror and admitted it, I knew I couldn’t take any steps in the opposite direction.

It is evident that to cultivate a new sense of self and connection, participants had to acknowledge and have a reckoning with their past. It must be noted that participants shared that it was not until after they had "left the echo chamber" and after "some time had passed" that they were able to acknowledge their extremist past. Additionally, numerous participants discussed that even though they have been out of the far-right extremist movement for quite some time, they still have moments when they have to reckon with their past and grapple with feelings of intense self-deprecation for adopting a far-right ideology. As one participant aptly stated, "There are some days that I feel like such an idiot. How did I ever buy into that bullshit?"

Unlearning Hate

"Unlearning Hate" emerged as a sub-theme that numerous participants discussed when sharing how they are trying to "unlearn" the hate they had learned and embraced within the far-right extremist movement. One participant shared, "Part of coming out has been un-learning a lot of the propaganda you were fed and the hate that came from it." Another participant offered, "It wasn't until I was out for a while that I realized I had been fed so many lies about Jewish and Black people. I have had to re-educate myself."

When asked to expand how they were unlearning the hate that they had adopted as a norm, one participant shared,

I began to realize that a lot of what I'd been reading, seeing, and hearing in these groups was just not true. Colleges weren't brainwashing kids into being like these screaming social justice warriors who wanted to destroy everyone who wasn't part of them. And I forced myself to talk to people and realized these people who we were indoctrinated to hate actually aren't as bad as they wanna say they are. They're quite nice and friendly. I began to look more into the stats behind systemic racism, systemic sexism, et cetera, et cetera, and had begun to realize, oh crap, I'd fallen for a complete lie.

Similarly, another participant shared,

I started reading *The Root*, which is like a Black content social politics thing, and I basically was determined to read *The Root* and the comment section until I wasn't offended anymore. Just realizing that like these are, these are Black voices. This is what they go through and like, I need to get over this. And so I just read it and read and read and reading other people's perspectives until it didn't make me feel offended. I felt like I was learning and un-learning.

Of note, numerous participants discussed entering the far-right extremist movement for reasons that were not racist. Rather, hate and racism were accepted after membership. For one participant, they shared that they joined a group because they were seeking to feel powerful due to past sexual and physical abuse. Two participants shared that they were recruited and joined because they felt their skills, one in design and the other in investigative work, were being noticed and praised. Another participant discussed adopting a far-right extremist ideology because members of a far-right extremist group provided financial assistance when they could not buy food for their children. One participant recounted seeking answers after experiencing a traumatic event at work as their reason of motivation for joining a far-right group.

Per participants, hate is something one can be indoctrinated in. As such, hate is something one can deconstruct within their worldview and paradigm. Unlearning hate was a significant property of the theme "Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection," as hate was an impediment to connecting with a multicultural and liberal society. It was hard to embrace the mainstream society one has rejected without both acknowledging and unlearning the hate that divorced them from said society.

Atoning for the Past

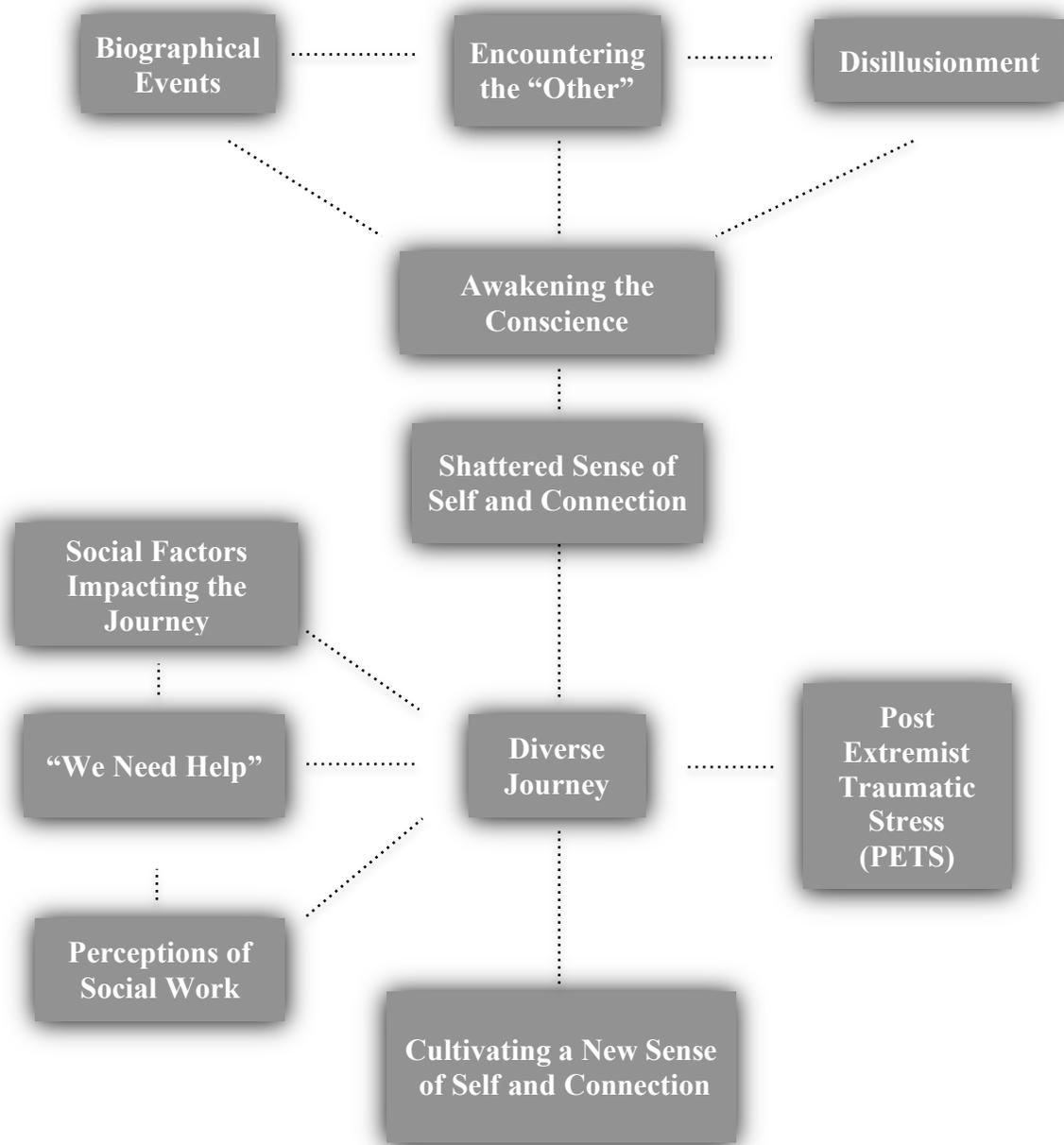
The sub-theme, "Atoning for the Past," emerged as numerous participants discussed feeling a need to "atone" for their past involvement in the far-right extremist movement. For some participants, atoning for the past meant working to become a healthy member of the society they had prior rejected. For others, atoning for the past meant becoming an activist against the very far-right movement they once participated in. Thirteen of the eighteen participants in this study acknowledged either establishing an organization to combat far-right extremist ideologies and provide services for those seeking to exit a life of hate, working with law enforcement and the FBI to counter domestic extremism, or going public with their story to expose the inner workings and recruitment strategies of far-right extremist groups. When pressed about why they engaged in these efforts, participants answered with a resounding, "We helped create the monster, so we have to be the ones to fight it."

A Proposed Model of the Psychosocial Journey Out of Far-Right Extremism

Figure 5 provides a visualization of the proposed model of the psychosocial journey out of far-right extremism. The model is significant as it provides a psychosocial lens through which the journey out far-right extremism can be viewed and understood.

While there have been some studies seeking to better understand disengagement and de-radicalization, none have done so focused on the psychosocial processes involved (Koehler, 2017; Barelle, 2015).

Figure 5
A Proposed Model of the Psychosocial Journey Out of Far-Right Extremism



The model emerged through the analysis of 18 in-depth semi-structured interviews with self-reported former far-right extremists. The model is comprised of the 8 themes and their sub-themes discussed throughout this chapter. The flow and connectivity of the themes will be briefly discussed below.

The model starts with the three different avenues by which an individual can experience an "Awakening of the Conscience; "Biographical Events," "Encountering the Other," or "Disillusionment." Please note that while there are lines connecting each of the sub-themes to "Awakening the Conscience," they are also connected to each other. An individual can experience one, or a combination of the three, leading to an awakening of their conscience. For example, for one participant, how they were treated in their group after experiencing an unintentional biographical event served to accelerate feelings of disillusionment they had started to feel toward both the group and the ideology.

Due to an "Awakening of the Conscience," an individual enters a psychosocial "Shattered Sense of Self and Connection." An individual's entire sense of self is "shattered" as their far-right ideology was synonymous with their identity and dictated every aspect of their life. Furthermore, an individual's connection to others is also "shattered" as they built their entire social network through relationships with others in the far-right movement. Having a "Shattered Sense of Self and Connection" leaves an individual feeling both physically and existentially "Alone" as they begin their unique journey toward "Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection."

From the place of a "Shattered Sense of Self and Connection," one embarks on a unique and deeply personal journey toward "Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection," free from far-right extremism. The journey out of far-right extremism is

diverse and is different for every traveler. Along this “Diverse Journey”, social, psychological, and institutional factors can either serve as catalysts or hurdles in an individual's journey toward "Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection." Socially, “Empathy” and "Peer Support" help an individual press forward in their journey.

Building connections with others who have walked a similar journey is an example of what is possible. Engaging those who have embarked on the journey with “Empathy” creates a space where individuals can begin to separate their identity from the ideology. Psychologically, individuals may be actively experiencing “Post Extremist Traumatic Stress”, which can hinder forward momentum toward “Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection.” To help meet individuals' psychosocial needs on their journey, relevant institutional support and resources are needed. Those on the journey out of far-right extremism are saying, "We Need Help." Support and resources may take the form of therapeutic services, creating peer support groups or connections to other former extremists, and help locate and secure housing, employment, and economic resources. Social workers could play a role in the provision of appropriate services that are lacked today.

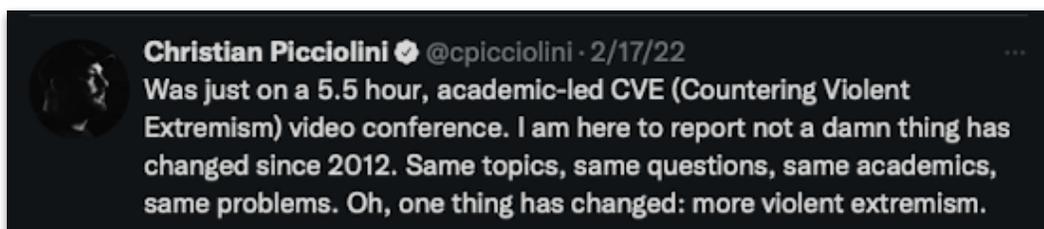
While the model is presented linearly, it is far from it. While there may be initial moments that prompt a decision to exit, while they are on the journey of “Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection,” new “Biographical Events,” “Encounters with the "Other," and “Disillusionment” may prompt a new “Awakening of the Conscious” and so forth. In essence, an individual may be walking simultaneous psychosocial paths in their journey toward cultivating a new sense of self and connection. Individuals can have and hold explicit far-right ideological thoughts. However, implicit ideological elements are

also at play. There may be a moment in which a dormant belief or worldview is confronted, and a concurrent journey ensues.

Chapter V: Discussion

In a tweet posted on February 17, 2022 (see Figure 6), former neo-Nazi skinhead Christian Picciolini shared that since 2012, nothing has changed in the academic field of Countering Violent Extremism. He notes that since that time, the only thing that has changed is that the United States has steadily seen an increase in violent far-right extremist activity. In a personal communication with Christian on March 17, 2022, via email, he reiterated that much of the research focuses on the same topics, asking the same questions, and finding the same problems.

Figure 6
Christian Picciolini Tweet



The goal of this researcher was and is not to castigate the significant work done by researchers focused on preventing and countering violent far-right extremism in the United States and abroad. Instead, this researcher aimed to approach the phenomenon of the journey out of far-right extremism from a new perspective, a psychosocial and humanistic lens. Rather than trying to study ways to prevent or counter violent extremism, this researcher sought to explore the psychosocial relationship participants had with the movement and its ideology.

This study was conducted to answer the research question: What are the psychosocial processes involved in the disengagement and de-radicalization journey of

former far-right extremists, and how do they develop in society? Numerous disciplines have studied and explored multiple concepts that emerged through analysis. However, certain concepts have yet to be addressed in the literature thus far. The findings of this study and how they relate to the current literature will be discussed in this chapter.

Additionally, implications for social work practice and new paths for future research will be discussed.

Diverse Journey

As Christian (personal communication, March 17, 2022) noted, much of the research exploring radicalization, disengagement, and de-radicalization has occurred within a P/CVE and criminal justice framework. Through research conducted through this lens, the current language of disengagement and de-radicalization was formalized and adopted. Participants vastly rejected the language of disengagement and de-radicalization, opting to use the language of journey instead. Participants felt that their journey's uniqueness and its profoundly personal nature were lost in the language of disengagement and de-radicalization. P/CVE research and strategies can often turn individuals into monoliths, ultimately resulting in ineffective pre-radicalization engagement and rehabilitative services that do not explore the unique mosaic of a person's environment (Patel & Lindsay, 2018).

The language of disengagement and de-radicalization proposes a two-step process involved in a former far-right extremist reintegrating into mainstream culture and society. First, individuals decide to sever ties and walk away from involvement in organized hate; second, they enter a process of de-radicalizing from their extremist ideology (Conner & Gill, 2019; Windisch et al., 2016; Ebaugh, 1988). Participants noted, however, that de-

radicalization is a failing concept because individuals cannot have their minds changed for them; it is a personal quest of reckoning with their past and unlearning hate. Moreover, the term de-radicalization is especially problematic as it suggests that there is a moment in which an individual is “de-radicalized” without providing a measure of when someone is “de-radicalized” and who determines when and grants that categorization. On the contrary, participants discussed a very layered and nuanced journey that is unpredictable and without an end date.

Simply put, the framework of disengagement and de-radicalization is an oversimplification of a complex journey. Horgan (2019) notes that both disengagement and de-radicalization are devoid of conceptual clarity due to a lack of research in the field. It could be argued that there is a lack of conceptual clarity because of the lens by which researchers have approached the phenomena of exiting a life of hate, primarily a P/CVE and criminal justice lens.

Participants shared that there is more to their story than simply disconnecting from a group of far-right online communities and de-radicalizing from an ideology; instead, they are on a journey of cultivating a new sense of self and connection that begins in a vulnerable and shattered existential state of being. By utilizing the term journey, participants are relaying a sense of being both "en route" and "unfinished" despite how long they have been out of the far-right extremist movement. The conceptualization of exiting far-right extremism as a journey mirrors the work of numerous anthropologists who have studied the phenomena in varying contexts. In her study of the migrant journey from Central America to Mexico, Vogt (2018) notes a journey's complexity and fluidity as they are unpredictable and can stall due to

unforeseen psychosocial circumstances. Both Vogt (2018) and Beibler-Coutin (2005) conceptualize journeys on a historical continuum rather than as new quests one begins. Journeys are a continuation of psychosocial processes an individual has known all their lives (Vogt, 2018; Biehl & Locke, 2017). The irony that the journey out of far-right extremism mirrors the journey of migrants seeking refuge, asylum, and a new life in the United States from Central America and beyond is not lost on this researcher. There is something genuinely poetic in seeing just how connected humanity is despite the road they are traveling and the destination they hope to arrive at. Often, perceived enemies or threats are merely a mirror into what we do not understand about ourselves, thus providing a doorway to self-reflection and discovery for those willing.

Gender Identity. Gender identity influences one's journey greatly. While attention has been paid to the role White women have played within the far-right extremist movement and the misogyny it is built upon, little attention has been placed on gendered and sexual violence experienced by women in far-right spaces. (Darby, 2020; Blee, 2008; Blee, 2003). Unique to the findings of this study is the illumination of the physical, emotional, and sexual assault women in the movement experience and the trauma it inflicted. As Vogt (2018) notes in her study, gendered and sexual violence against women migrants is not simply the work of bad actors but structural by nature. So too is the gendered and sexual violence experienced by White women in the movement. Traumatic gendered and sexual violence adds an additional layer of complexity when discussing the journey out of far-right extremism. Latif et al. (2019) argue that White women may remain in a group long after becoming disillusioned due to concerns about their physical safety or the loss of monetary support they receive from the group.

However, missing from Latif et al.'s (2019) argument is an acknowledgment that the fear for their physical safety may be rooted in physical, sexual, and emotional violence prefacing any desire to exit, which is suggested by some female participants in this study.

Additionally, findings from this study briefly highlighted the experiences of non-binary and transgender participants. To date, no study has been identified exploring the lived experiences of LBTQIA+ individuals within and coming out of the far-right extremist movement and is needed. This is especially true regarding trauma an individual with a repressed or suppressed gender identity can endure as they seek to navigate oppressive systems.

Mele & Siegel (2017) suggest that individuals from an oppressed identity group may repress their identity to assimilate into the dominant group and avoid social stigmatization. Assimilation may even mean becoming an opponent of the same identity group they are a part of. However, Mele & Siegel (2017) point out that repression and assimilation can be correlated to increased traumatic stress as the individual, when standing in opposition to others in their identity group, is standing in opposition to themselves. This was evidenced in the findings of this study. Repression of one's gender identity served as a vehicle for radicalization and provided a platform for self-hatred that resulted in increased trauma.

Like an Addiction. In the discussion of their journey out of the far-right extremist movement, participants equated their experience to an addiction. Simi et al. (2017) echos these findings by suggesting that individuals fail to successfully disengage and de-radicalize from extremism and hate groups due to the addictive nature of hate. Kruglanski et al. (2015) discuss that the seeking of significance is a critical element of

radicalization aligning directly with the elements of the far-right participants shared that they felt addicted to, primarily power, connection, being accepted, and feeling a part of something bigger than themselves. While a connection can be made between that which participants expressed feelings of addiction toward and Kruglanski et al.'s (2015) significance quest theory, there have not been any imperial studies examining the addictive nature of these elements and their relation to an addiction to hate.

Although Simi et al. (2017) argue that hate is addictive, there is a failure to explore the long-term implications of addiction to hate and its treatment, primarily coping mechanisms and strategies to replace the hate being rejected and unlearned. Addiction is a complex self-organizing system; thus, treating it requires time and flexibility. Addiction is not static, and even if someone is “sober” for a substantial length of time, a simple trigger can disrupt the system (Miller & Carroll, 2011). For some participants, there were obstacles that either stilled or stalled their forward momentum. For others, the obstacle caused them to rethink their choice to exit. While they ultimately chose to remain on their forward path, obstacles as a part of rehabilitation and the journey out of extremism cannot be ignored. Viewing the journey out of far-right extremism as an addiction also confronts the connotation that de-radicalization is a process with an end date. Some participants noted fighting intrusive thoughts from their past years after beginning their journey.

Although many researchers consider addiction a disease, in the United States, it has been viewed through a carceral lens and criminalized (Sinclair-House et al., 2020; Miller & Carroll, 2011). So too has domestic far-right extremism. It is by no means being implied that those who commit acts of violent domestic extremism need not be held

accountable to the extent of the law. However, viewing hate as an addiction can broaden the scope for intervention and rehabilitation.

Awakening the Conscience

Participants recounted three different avenues that led to an “Awakening of the Conscience,” which ultimately helped to trigger their journey out of the far-right extremist movement; “Biographical Events,” Encountering the “Other,” and “Disillusionment.” New research is beginning to emerge that resonates with these concepts. Findings from Liguori and Spanierman (2021) support the findings of this study as they discovered that encounters and relationships with members of minoritized and racialized individuals and communities ultimately influence an individual’s decision to leave far-right extremist involvement. Additionally, Liguori and Spanierman (2021) found that disillusionment due to one out in the legitimacy of White supremacist communities and worldviews serves to help awaken the conscience.

The findings of this study are also supported in the literature surrounding push and pull factors in similar fields of inquiry, primarily research on street gangs, cults, and foreign terrorism. According to Windisch et al. (2016), disillusionment and biographical events are the leading push and pull factors contributing to an exit from street gangs and for members of foreign terrorist cells. Much like the findings of this study, disillusionment for members was birthed through negative group dynamics leading to a desire to exit (Windisch et al., 2016). Additionally, biographical events like a death in the family, a new relationship, or maturation activities (i.e., going to college) sparked an awakening of the conscience. Of note here, however, is the finding in this study of the acknowledgment that a biographical event can be experienced coincidentally,

intentionally, or vicariously with each equally having the potential of awaking the conscience. Disillusionment due to emotional fatigue was the leading cause of exit from a cult (Windisch et al., 2016). Windisch et al.'s (2016) findings mirror those of this study, as emotional fatigue was an impetus for disillusionment and an ultimate awakening of the conscience for some participants.

Shattered Sense of Self and Connection

Participants recounted that proceeding an awakening of the conscience, they felt that their sense of self and connection was shattered. Numerous participants recounted that the ideology they had been holding onto was equated to their very identity, their sense of self. Researchers have long held that ideology can become a proxy for one's identity (Koltko-Rivera, 2004; Higgs, 2008; Kniss, 1988). Higgs (2008) defines ideology as the summation of ideas that span a particular realm of social reference that develop a comprehensive belief system regarding social connections and relations. This can be seen in this study as numerous participants discussed that their far-right extremist ideology was more than a political leaning or agenda, but a means by which they structured their entire world. For participants, to lose faith in their ideology is to lose faith in themselves. To question their ideology is to question themselves. To have their ideology shattered is to have their sense of self shattered. Participants recounted an emotional vulnerability in this existential space of no longer knowing who they are in the world. A shattered sense of self and connection is the psychosocial proverbial trailhead from which participants embark on their journey out of extremism.

In addition to reporting a shattered sense of self, participants also recounted feeling a shattered sense of connection. Multiple participants shared that contemplating

the loss of the social network they had cultivated was one of the most significant hurdles they encountered at this stage in their journey out of far-right extremism. In discussing this feeling of being alone, reference was made to not only physical connection but virtual connectivity as well, in that some participants did not feel there was anyone to relate to in stepping away from a group and navigating through a shattered sense of self and ideological deconstruction.

Again, the findings of Liguori and Spanierman (2021) support participants' notion of feeling physically and existentially alone as they discussed noticeable shifts in social networks and feelings of isolation from their participants. DeMichele et al. (2021) note that as an individual comes to define and align themselves through a far-right ideological framework, they insulate themselves from interactions with non-extremist influences and only associate with other adherents to that worldview, making exiting extremely hard as these are some individuals only social connections. Numerous participants recounted this scenario and shared that contemplating the loss of the social network they had cultivated was one of the most significant hurdles they encountered at this stage in their journey out of far-right extremism.

Post Extremist Traumatic Stress

A key finding from this study is that of “Post Extremist Traumatic Stress.” Simi et al. (2017) posit that those seeking to leave extremism often carry a heavy weight of guilt, shame, and trauma for having inflicted harm on others. Purposely and intentionally harming another individual or even promulgating information and ideas that lead to someone outside of one’s sphere of influence can be traumatic. Freire (1972) notes that in the de-humanization and traumatization of others, we are, in fact, dehumanizing and

traumatizing ourselves. Trauma as a result of participation in the far-right extremist movement has been discussed broadly by both Simi et al. (2017) and Windisch et al. (2020). However, no study has been identified that moves beyond stating that trauma occurs in the movement and looks deeply at and describes the trauma and its resulting traumatic stress in the participants' journey.

The trauma of the far-right extremist movement is seen throughout the findings of this study. It is evident from the participants' lived experiences that the far-right extremist movement is driven and fueled by the traumatization of those within and outside of its ranks. The far-right extremist movement needs trauma to exist, whether through acts of domestic terrorism that seek to traumatize minoritized and racialized individuals and communities or acts of physical, sexual, or emotional violence directed toward its own adherents. Throughout this study, participants recounted how participation in the movement was traumatizing.

Numerous participants recounted experiencing the traditional symptomatology of PTSD. This finding alone is significant. However, it is the addition of the unique context in which said symptomatology is experienced and additional psychological elements at play that makes this finding genuinely prescient. For example, participants discussed intense feelings of shame and guilt in conjunction with their discussion of PTSD symptomatology they experienced. In their discussion of shame and guilt, Latif et al.(2018) fall short of exploring the emotion's influence on one's ability to process the traumatic stress incurred through participation in the movement. Additionally, numerous participants recounted a vacillation between feelings of being a victim and a victimizer and its influence on and ability to process the traumatic stress incurred through

participation in the movement. The addition of intense feelings of shame and guilt and the navigation of a victim and victimizer dichotomy provides a richer understanding of a psychological process beyond PTSD.

An additional element contributing to the uniqueness of PETS is the presence of past trauma and its influence on one's entrance into the far-right extremist movement. Simi et al. (2017) point out that most of those who become active in organized hate have an underlying mental health challenge or have a history of trauma that may or may not have been diagnosed or treated. Numerous participants recounted how untreated sexual and physical abuse and trauma made them vulnerable to radicalization. As Windisch et al. (2020) found that sixty-three percent of their study's sample (n=91) had experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACES) in the first eighteen years of their lives. This finding is compared to fifty-five percent of a comparison "high risk" sample and sixteen percent of the U.S. general population. A history of untreated trauma in concert with new traumatization from the movement adds an additional layer of involvement to PTSD, making the emergence of PETS salient in helping to explore the crystalline psychological nature and process influencing one's journey out of the far-right extremist movement.

Social Factors Influencing the Journey

Through analysis, two major social factors emerged that could significantly influence one's journey, either positively through their presence or negatively through their absence. First, numerous participants pointed to their connections with other former extremists as something that accelerated and provided forward momentum in their journey. Connection through peer support not only provided an example that the journey

out of extremism is possible but a space in which mutual understanding and language are shared. One participant noted that having a shared language was essential to their connection with a peer. Having someone to talk to who has literally “walked a mile in their shoes” and with whom much explaining of the past was not required offers something that could never be achieved through a therapy session (DeMichele et al., 2021).

Peer support is seen in disengagement and de-radicalization programming throughout the United States and abroad. Evidence suggests that peer support is a powerful tool in helping individuals leave extremist groups and a far-right ideology (DeMichele et al., 2021). However, there is much debate about to what extent former extremists should participate in one’s journey out of extremism (Horgan, 2021). While a debate discussing who is qualified to provide therapeutic services to this population is valid, it is evident that connection to a peer who is further along in their journey is beneficial and cannot be understated.

Additionally, peer support has proven to be an effective strategy in treating addiction, which is linked to the contextual theme of the “Diverse Journey” (Tracy & Wallace, 2016; Boisvert et al., 2008). The use of peer support in addiction treatment often results in increased perceived community membership, supportive behavior, self-determination, and quality of life; all of which Blee (2018) and Simi et al. (2017) relay are imperative for a successful exit out of organized hate (Tracy & Wallace, 2016; Boisvert et al., 2008).

Empathy. Participants noted that empathy was a key social factor that positively influenced their journey out of the far-right extremist movement. However, little to no

research has been identified that discusses empathy's role in one's journey out of far-right extremism. New research is emerging that is beginning to explore what it means to, though counterintuitive, humanize those who have dehumanized others as a means to disrupt extremist activity. Toro (2022) argues that terrorists, criminals, and extremists should not be reduced to singular identities. Instead, they should be viewed as complex and nuanced human beings. To understand an extremist's violence, we must first understand their humanity (Toro, 2022). Empathy, from a person-first approach, is to learn what it means to stand in another person's preverbal shoes and try to perceive the world as they perceive it (Toro, 2002). It must be noted here that empathy is not the same as sympathy. Sympathy is to think well of or feel for another. Empathy is also not an acceptance or justification of the beliefs of or the violent actions of others. Empathy need not be also devoid of accountability. According to Toro (2022), empathy is finding one's humanity and making that the starting point of engagement rather than the sum of their actions or ideology.

Throughout this study, this researcher has wrestled with the concept of empathizing with individuals who have withheld empathy from the most vulnerable. It is hard to rationalize empathizing with the individual who has openly identified as a White supremacist or Nazi. In analyzing the data of this study, however, this researcher has come to see that, more often than not, the former self-proclaimed Nazi was and is searching for meaning and connection. This is by no means meant to excuse anyone from personal responsibility. However, it can be far too easy to focus on the wake of destruction one has left in their path rather than see a fellow human being worthy of dignity and respect. Wheeler (2013) notes that world leaders, both historical and

contemporary, have used empathy as a means to defeat their enemy. This researcher finds the far-right extremist movement's White supremacist and nationalist ideology abhorrent. That is the enemy that must be defeated. First, however, the person must be separated from the ideology unless we are to find ourselves practicing the very de-humanization of another we say we despise.

“We Need Help”

Numerous participants noted a lack of appropriate services available throughout their journey out of the far-right extremist movement. Participants identified various needs, from therapeutic services to economic, employment, and housing resources. Some participants also highlighted simple needs like tattoo removal that, if accessible, would greatly aid their reintegration into mainstream society. An acknowledgment of the service vacuum identified in this field is supported in the literature. Today, only a few formal organizations provide services for those seeking to exit a life of hate in the U.S. (Horgan, 2021; Williams et al., 2016). These organizations and their programming are primarily operated by “formers,” or former members of hate groups who have de-radicalized from extremism. The efficacy of these programs is unknown as they lack monitoring, measurement, and evaluation (Horgan, 2021). Critics of disengagement and de-radicalization programming point to an absence of transparency in terms of sharing measures of success and rates of recidivism (Horgan et al., 2020; Koehler, 2017; Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009). Questions regarding what extent former extremists should be involved in rehabilitative programming if they lack formal education and training also abound. While a debate regarding transparency, oversight, what constitutes success, and best

practices in rehabilitative programming is warranted and needed, it is evident that something must be done to aid those journeying out of the far-right extremist movement.

Of note, participants pointed to what they felt were antiquated services designed to help a former generation of extremists. While not shifting its ideology, the far-right extremist movement has evolved in its execution and presence. Where White power rallies and concerts used to serve as the primary platform for recruitment and radicalization, social media sites and online forums like Youtube, 4Chan, and Discord have taken their place. Numerous participants shared that services and organizations must be willing and able to adapt to the ever-changing landscape of far-right extremism if they seek to be effective. What is beneficial today in terms of programming and intervention may not work tomorrow as the movement is constantly in flux. The far-right extremist movement in the United States is fluid rather than static. Therefore, organizations seeking to provide services to this population will need to be equally as fluid in their program development and execution.

There is a need for some manner of services and resources that can be offered to aid individuals as they journey out of the far-right extremist movement. If the United States is serious about combating the threat of domestic far-right extremism, attention must be paid to and funding granted for the development, implementation, and evaluation of rehabilitative programming. The U.S. need only look at its allies like Denmark, Norway, and Germany to see the power an all of government approach can have in disrupting the threat of far-right extremism.

Perceptions of Social Work

In a recent Master of Social Work course taught by this researcher, students were asked to enter the halls of the building the class was taking place and ask three strangers what they believed a social worker does. Answers ranged from party planning to therapy. The most prominent answer to the question of what a social worker does is that they take away people's children. The findings from this anecdotal study that served as a pedagogical attempt to showcase that the profession of social work has a bit of a public relations problem were eerily seen in this study. Most participants either could not articulate what a social worker is or does or had a limited understanding of their societal role.

Since its earliest days, social work has struggled to define itself. With its broad array of services and foci, the profession has worked in almost every social and future sphere in the United States, from policy making to child welfare and mental health. Goldstein (2000) notes that social workers have done a poor job of marketing themselves, with people believing that practitioners only hand out food stamps. This sentiment is echoed by Burghardt (2020), who suggests that social work has become such a broad profession that practitioners may never effectively control the narrative of their profession. It is of no surprise that participants in this study found it hard to define the profession or discuss what it is a social worker does.

There was a positive impact in two of the three instances in which a social worker was involved in a participant's journey. One participant's interaction with a social work practitioner occurred within the confines of a friendship rather than professionally while another's. The participant who had a negative interaction with a social worker was due to

the practitioner not feeling qualified to provide services due to the nature of the participant's presenting challenges. It can easily be argued that this practitioner was practicing in an ethical manner. This researcher would agree with that argument. However, a light must be shone upon why that practitioner did not feel qualified to provide services to a former extremist.

A final question remains in light of the findings of this study, where does social work fit in? There is an apparent vacuum of services needed that social workers are uniquely qualified to provide. However, while participants all stated that a social worker would have been beneficial to them on their journey, they had trouble articulating at what point and to what extent their presence would have aided them. Answering this question will be essential in charting a course forward in preparing and equipping future practitioners and determining where their services would serve their greatest good for those journeying out of the far-right extremist movement.

Cultivating a New Sense of Self and Connection

As participants recounted, when one begins a journey out of the far-right extremist movement, they do so from a shattered existential space of not knowing who they are or how to connect to the world. The journey participants are ultimately on is cultivating a new sense of self and connection. Findings from Horgan (2009) and Blee (2018) echo those of this study. Horgan (2009) suggests that for people to exit a life of hate successfully, they must be moving towards forming a new identity. Blee (2018) echoes this by arguing that many individuals entering and exiting a life of hate do so in search of place, connection, and purpose. While the findings of this study are supported by both Horgan (2009) and Blee (2018), they also provide a richer understanding of what

goes into the journey toward cultivating a new sense of self and connection, primarily a reckoning with and atoning for the past and the unlearning of hate.

Numerous participants discussed that while on their journey, there came a time in which they began to both reckon with and atone for their past. Multiple participants recounted not identifying the beliefs they once held or acts committed as extreme until after they had left the movement. This moment of reckoning with past involvement and coming to terms with a past identity can induce heightened feelings of shame, guilt, regret, and self-doubt. Latif et al. (2018) argue that a reoccurring theme among former extremists is an immense shame for acts committed in the past and a deep sense of regret for spending so much of their lives dedicated to advancing hate. The findings of this study echo those of Latif et al. (2018); however, of note is the emotional vulnerability participants recounted experiencing during this time on their journey and how it amplified the trauma they had experienced within the movement. In addition to reckoning with their past, numerous participants recounted taking steps to atone for it by actively fighting the same system they had been a part of. Liguori and Spanierman (2021) support this finding as they also found that the development of a new positive self-image was directly linked to standing against the movement they had held to build.

Another element in cultivating a new sense of self and connection is the unlearning of hate. In an address to the United Nations, Nelson Mandela famously stated that hate is something that is learned (United Nations Foundation). Blee (2003) echoes that sentiment but focuses on the radicalization of far-right extremists by arguing that most individuals do not join White supremacist groups due to the ideology; instead, it is a learned outcome of group membership. Sternberg (2003) notes that hate is developed

through the formations of negative stories about a target individual or community. Stories of hate that have been constructed through misinformation, Sternberg (2003) posits, can be disrupted and new stories developed that releases the once targeted individual or community from the crosshairs of one's hate.

While there are objects of hate that have long been fixtures throughout the history of the far-right extremist movement (i.e., Jewish individuals, Black individuals, immigrants, etc.), hatred for extremists and extremist groups is highly fluid. Hate in the far-right extremist movement is opportunistic and rooted in grievance. As White extremist individuals and groups experience new grievances, new objects of hatred will be adopted. A clear example is a rise in Asian hate crimes in the United States due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Anger surrounding public health measures and restrictions was focused directly on Asian individuals by many in the far-right extremist movement and the broader body politic due to the virus originating in Wuhan, China. Former President Donald Trump exhibited this hate fixation and opportunism by labeling the COVID-19 virus the "Wuhan Flu," thus helping to establish a new object of hate for far-right extremists and groups. Hatred birthed out of grievance can be unlearned as individuals begin to experience counter-narratives to the stories of hate they have adopted (Sternberg, 2003).

If hate can be learned, it can be unlearned. Participants noted that the unlearning of hate is a vital part of the journey out of the far-right extremist movement. However, the unlearning of hate may be easier said than done. Simi et al. (2017) argue that former extremists may struggle to let go of their commitment to hate as that commitment exhibits all of the properties of addiction.

Implications for Social Work

This study has numerous implications for social work practice and education by offering new insights into the psychosocial processes involved in the journey out of far-right extremism and perceptions of social work. First, social workers must better control the narrative of what the profession is and what it does. A majority of participants did not know or could not explain what social work is or what a practitioner does. When given the NASW definition of the profession, every participant believed that they would have benefited from the presence of a social worker on their journey. As previously noted, this is a historical problem that has plagued the field of social work since its earliest inception. This study exposed yet another portion of society who would greatly benefit from what the field offers but cannot see the profession as valuable to them.

This study serves as a call to action for practitioners to become active in this field of practice. Participants expressed a deep need for services and resources. Social workers are uniquely positioned, educated, and qualified to work with and provide services for this unique population. There is a service vacuum regarding rehabilitative services and programming in the United States for those seeking to exit a life of hate and extremism. Today, only a tiny handful of formal organizations provide services for those seeking to exit a life of hate in the U.S. These organizations and their programming are primarily operated by "formers," or former members of hate groups who have de-radicalized from extremism. Social workers can fill this vacuum as they have in so many other areas of need throughout history.

Regarding social work education, specialized preparation is needed if practitioners are willing to work with this population. Those exiting the far-right

extremist movement seeking services come with unique needs, requiring a greater depth of training for social workers. While formal education in best practices and evidence-based interventions are needed to work with this population, so too is training in and the practice of critical self-reflection. Working with this population will require social work practitioners to actively reflect on their biases toward the ideology former extremists are journeying away from is antithetical to the values and ethics of the profession.

While not all social workers will want to practice in this field, due to the growing threat of far-right extremism in the United States, social workers practicing in any field should be equipped with an understanding of domestic far-right extremism and some tools to engage the threat. Taking the curriculum and practice knowledge/experience a step further by incorporating training and content surrounding far-right extremism, White supremacy, and White nationalism could benefit future social work students, practitioners, and schools of social work.

The finding of Post Extremist Traumatic Stress has significant implications for social work practitioners and any field that is working either with or to understand the far-right extremist movement better. As the leading providers of mental health services in the United States, social work practitioners must be equipped to understand the psychological phenomena they may encounter with their clients. PETS offers a glimpse into the psychological symptomatology and dynamics a client who is a former extremist may be experiencing. PETS may also help practitioners determine appropriate interventions to employ with clients on their journey out of the far-right extremist movement. PETS is significant to other disciplines as it can provide a context and inform

those who may not have formal psychological training as they develop policies and seek to disrupt the threat of domestic far-right extremism.

Finally, this study has macro implications as well. As previously noted, the United States responds to domestic far-right extremism through a criminal justice and national security lens. Findings from this study reveal that while there is a need for law enforcement and national security agencies to be involved in this work, the journey out of the far-right extremist movement is primarily a psychosocial phenomenon. As such, findings from this study could serve as a new starting point for policymakers and agencies focused on preventing and countering extremism in the United States. Rather than focusing solely on criminal actions and punitive measures, investment in mental health and social development is greatly needed. In essence, engaging far-right extremism through a psychosocial lens will help protect the homeland as we seek to understand one's relationship with extremism on a deeper level.

Future Research

This study could be the catalyst for future research. One such study could be to recreate this study with new participants as a means to test the proposed model. It would be interesting to see what new participants' lived experiences would illuminate or help better focus within the model proposed in this study. In addition, testing the model could provide greater insights into the psychosocial processes of those journeying out of the far-right extremist movement.

Recreating this study with participants who identify with a specific gender identity may also be beneficial. It was evident throughout this study that gender identity was a factor that influenced and added layered complexity to the journey out of far-right

extremism. A study primarily focusing on male, female, non-binary, or transgender individuals would provide greater insight into the nuances of each gender identity's journey out of far-right extremism. Further comparative analysis between gender identities would also serve to illuminate the needs of each as they seek to cultivate a new sense of self and connection.

The presence of several non-binary and transgender participants suggests that more research is needed to explore gender identity development within the far-right extremist movement. In a personal communication via phone call with a former far-right extremist who identifies as non-binary, they illuminated that there are numerous individuals in the far-right movement who consider themselves members of the LGBTQIA+ community but are conflicted and experience cognitive dissonance with the ideology of the movement, fear of retaliation, and how to live authentically within their gender and sexual identity. A study exploring the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals within the far-right extremist movement is needed.

The theme, "Post Extremist Traumatic Stress," that emerged in the data is of great significance and warrants further testing. A future study with the primary focus on testing the conceptualization of PETS would pave the way for the development and testing of diagnostic assessments. Additionally, future research focused on PETS could aid in developing and testing interventions and evidence-based practices that can be employed when working with this unique population. Testing of assessments and interventions can occur through both quantitative and qualitative methods. Mixed methods would be recommended to capture reliability, generalizability, and nuance.

A final avenue for future research would be to focus on social workers' perceptions about working with this unique population as they journey out of the far-right extremist movement. While social workers could fill a service vacuum within this field, it is unknown if partitioners would be willing to work with this population. Often, social work practitioners are drawn to work with the victims of oppression rather than the oppressors. Empirical research, either through qualitative or quantitative means, is needed to gauge the field's perceptions of working with former extremists and their willingness to do so.

Limitations

This study does have limitations that must be acknowledged. Although this researcher employed numerous strategies like member checking, memo writing, and peer debriefing to increase the study's rigor, and while this study possesses a strong level of trustworthiness, it is a qualitative study and thus is not generalizable. Generalizability is not the primary focus of this study. Instead, focus was placed on gaining a better understanding of the psychosocial processes involved in the journey out of the far-right extremist movement. It is hoped that this study could be the launching point for such future research.

As participants were recruited through community gatekeepers, there is a possibility of selection bias in this study. Gatekeepers may have sought to recruit participants they favored or believed they had a good story to share. Former far-right extremists are a unique population to sample, and a reliance on trusted gatekeepers within the community was needed to obtain an acceptable sample size.

Another limitation to consider is that participants were asked to remember moments from their past lived experiences as they journeyed out of the far-right extremist movement. There is always the possibility that participants may have forgotten specific details that could help shape the narrative. There is also the possibility that participants may have forgotten certain events and experiences altogether that could have added deeper nuance to data analysis. Additionally, as the saying goes, "Hindsight is 20/20." In thinking back through biographical events, feelings of disillusionment, etc., participants may have placed a disproportionate emphasis on specific experiences rather than others as what prompted their journey out of the movement. Often, change occurs due to a combination of elements rather than a singular one. Highlighting one experience over another may shape a narrative and thus influence data analysis.

This study also has a conceptual limitation that must be addressed. Far-right extremism is a broad umbrella term with numerous types of groups, ideologies, access points, and expressions. One participant referred to "the far-right" as the "kitchen junk drawer." As this study utilized the broad far-right extremist terminology, nuance regarding ideology and expression of said ideology may have been lost. For example, some groups are primarily militant White, while others strongly focus on advancing White supremacy. In addition, some groups allow women to hold leadership positions while others reject the notion entirely. It is again hoped that this study can serve as a launching point for future research that focuses on specific groups or online communities.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand better the psychosocial processes involved in the journey out of the far-right extremist movement. Additionally, this study sought to better

understand the potential role social work could play in the disengagement and de-radicalization of far-right extremists seeking to exit a life of hate and extremism. Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory approach provided the framework for this qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews with 18 former White nationalist extremists recruited through community informants and snowball sampling were used to answer the research question: What are the psychosocial processes involved in the disengagement and de-radicalization journey of former far-right extremists, and how do they develop in society? To date, there has not been a study located utilizing grounded theory in disengagement and de-radicalization studies. Additionally, a theory of disengagement and de-radicalization has yet to be explored. This study sought to explore and conceptualize latent social patterns and structures within one's journey as a means to construct a theoretical framework better to understand one's journey from a life of hate. Study findings emerged from over 3,500 coded items from 18 transcripts. Eight themes emerged from the data, and a proposed model conceptualizing the psychosocial processes involved in the journey out of far-right extremism was introduced.

Exploring social work's role in the journey out of far-right extremism by former extremists is also extremely important at this particular moment in the history of the United States. The United States is a deeply polarized and divided nation politically, socially, and culturally. Some analysts have said that the polarization seen at this time may surpass what was seen during the days and years leading up to the Civil War. While it is easy to read the news and become alarmist about the potential of experiencing another civil war and possible mass atrocities, researchers are beginning to sound the alarm that all of the elements for both are present today in the U.S. (Hinton, 2021).

American exceptionalism shields our minds from thinking that events like the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, or apartheid in South Africa could ever happen here. However, the reality is that the proverbial pump is primed for something just like these events to occur. This is the ultimate dream and desire of far-right extremists, who are the number one threat to the United States today.

While we live in a polarized and divided time that has emboldened White nationalist extremism in the United States, there is hope. Blee (2008) points out that the 1920s KKK seemingly disbanded overnight. However, for various internal and external reasons, the group crumbled. Individuals and communities disavowed the Klan, and speaking about previous membership in the group became anathema. It can be hard to fathom this happening today as we witness the unsettling ascendancy of White nationalism again. However, extremist groups, although giving off the ere of strength, are incredibly fragile. What happened to the 1920s KKK can happen again. Social work has a strategic role in ensuring it does.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study voluntarily. Information from this study will be published or presented with your anonymity being protected.

This study seeks to understand the disengagement and de-radicalization journey of those exiting White nationalist extremism and the ways social work can aid in process.

Your participation in the study is vital in illuminating this unique and highly personal journey.

I am going to ask you a series of questions. If at any time during the interview you feel uncomfortable, we can stop. You do not have to answer every question. You can skip any question.

___ Do you consent to participate in this study?

___ Do you consent to me recording the video of this interview?

___ Do you consent to me recording the audio of this interview?

Demographic Questions

- 1) What is your age?
- 2) What is your gender identity?
- 3) What state do you live in?
- 4) Are you employed?
- 5) If yes, what is your profession?
- 6) What is your highest level of education?
- 7) How long were you involved in extremism?
- 8) What group(s) were you a part of?

Interview Questions

- 1) How would you define far-right extremism?
- 2) How would you define radicalization?
- 3) How would you define disengagement?
- 4) How would you define de-radicalization?
- 5) Please discuss your view of social and political institutions.

- 6) Please discuss your journey into far-right extremism.
- i. Were there any particular people that contributed to your entrance?*
 - a) If yes, please elaborate.*
 - ii. Were there any particular life events that contributed to your entrance?*
 - b) If yes, please elaborate.*
 - iii. Were there any particular on-line forums or domains that contributed to your entrance?*
 - c) If yes, please elaborate.*
- 7) Thinking back to your journey into far-right extremism, please describe your mental wellbeing.
- 8) Thinking back to your journey into far-right extremism, please describe your social network.
- 9) Please discuss your journey out of far-right extremism.
- i. Were there any particular people that contributed to your exit?*
 - a) If yes, please elaborate.*
 - ii. Were there any particular life events that contributed to your exit?*
 - b) If yes, please elaborate.*
 - iii. Were there any particular on-line forums or domains that contributed to your exit?*
 - c) If yes, please elaborate.*
 - iv. Were there any particular organizations that contributed to your exit?*
 - c) If yes, please elaborate.*
- 12) Thinking back to your journey out of far-right extremism, please describe your mental wellbeing.
- 13) Thinking back to your journey out of far-right extremism, please describe your social network.
- 14) In looking back at your journey out of extremism, please describe any experiences or challenges you faced (i.e., mentally, socially, physically, economically, spiritually, etc.).
- 15) In looking back at your journey out of extremism, please describe any thing that you felt that accelerated your exit (i.e., mentally, socially, physically, economically, spiritually, etc.).
- 16) How would you define social work?
- 17) Was a social worker a part of your journey?
- i. If yes, please elaborate.*

- ii. If no, thinking about your disengagement and de-radicalization journey, how would social work have benefitted your progress?*
- 18) What supports do you think would be helpful to address disengagement and de-radicalization?
- 19) What recommendations do you have for those seeking to disengage and de-radicalize from far-right extremism?

**Thank you so much for your participation!
May I contact you in the future?**

Appendix B

Informed Consent/Information Sheet

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Scientists do research to answer important questions which might help change or improve the way we do things in the future.

This consent form will give you information about the study to help you decide whether you want to participate. Please read this form, and ask any questions you have, before agreeing to be in the study.

TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY IS VOLUNTARY

You may choose not to take part in the study or may choose to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate, or deciding to leave the study later, will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled and will not affect your relationship with Indiana University.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study seeks to understand the disengagement and de-radicalization journey of those exiting far-right extremism and the ways social work can aid in process.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are over 18 years old and identify as a former far-right extremist.

The study is being conducted by Danny Carroll, a doctoral student at the Indiana University School of Social Work.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART?

If you agree to participate, you will be one of 15-20 participants taking part in this research.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE STUDY?

You will be asked to participate in an approximately one-hour Zoom interview in which you will be asked questions regarding the psychological and social journey of disengagement and de-radicalization.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF TAKING PART AND HOW WILL MY INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

Since this study only includes collection of information about you, a risk to you is a possible loss of confidentiality; although we will do everything possible to protect your information. Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. No information which could identify you will be shared in publications about this study.

Audio recordings and interview transcriptions will be stored on an external hard drive that will be password protected. The external hard drive containing audio recordings and interview transcriptions will be stored in a lock box that can only be accessed via lock and key. Only the researcher will be allowed access to interview recordings and transcriptions.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Indiana University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and any state or federal agencies who may need to access your medical and/or research records (as allowed by law).

For the protection of your privacy, this research is covered by a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health. The researchers may not disclose or use any information, documents, or specimens that could identify you in any civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other legal proceeding, unless you consent to it. Information, documents, or specimens protected by this Certificate may be disclosed to someone who is not connected with the research:

- (1) if there is a federal, state, or local law that requires disclosure (such as to report child abuse or communicable diseases);
- (2) if you consent to the disclosure, including for your medical treatment;
- (3) if it is used for other scientific research in a way that is allowed by the federal regulations that protect research subjects;
- (4) for the purpose of auditing or program evaluation by the government or funding agency.

A Certificate of Confidentiality does not prevent you from voluntarily releasing information about yourself. If you want your research information released to an insurer, medical care provider, or any other person not connected with the research, you must provide consent to allow the researchers to release it.

Additionally, by participating in this study, there is a risk of emotional discomfort resulting from the questions ask. You have the option of not answering questions if you choose. A list of mental health resources is provided in the case you do experience emotional discomfort.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

We don't expect you to receive any benefit from taking part in this study, but we hope to learn things that will help scientists in the future.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATION?

You will not be paid for participating in this study.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO PARTICIPATE?

There is no cost to you for taking part in this study.

WHO SHOULD I CALL WITH QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

For questions about the study, contact the researcher, Danny Carroll.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, to discuss problems, complaints, or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information or to offer input, please contact the IU Human Subjects Office at 800-696-2949 or at irb@iu.edu.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

If you decide to participate in this study, you can change your mind and decide to leave the study at any time in the future.

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT

In consideration of all of the above, I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records. I agree to take part in this study.

Appendix C

Leaving Hate: Social Work and the Journey Out of Far-Right Extremism

Study Number: 13881

I would like to invite you to assist me in conducting a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you and for the participants. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to facilitate this research.

WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT

My name is Danny Carroll, and I am a PhD candidate at the Indiana University School of Social Work. This study seeks to understand the disengagement and de-radicalization journey of those exiting far-right extremism and the ways social work can aid in process.

WHAT I NEED YOUR ASSISTANCE WITH

I am asking that you would please distribute my study information sheet to potential participants that may be in your sphere of influence. Eligible participants are those 18 years old and older who identify as a former White nationalist extremist.

WHAT TAKING PART IN THE RESEARCH WILL INVOLVE

Participants will be asked to participate in an approximately one-hour Zoom interview in which they will be asked questions regarding the psychological and social journey of their disengagement and de-radicalization.

WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO DATA FROM RESEARCH?

Identifiable data will be stored with encryption and password protection. Audio recordings and interview transcriptions will be stored on an external hard drive that will be password protected. The external hard drive containing audio recordings and interview transcriptions will be stored in a lock box that can only be accessed via lock and key. Only the researcher will be allowed access to interview recordings and transcriptions.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

Results of this study will be documented in the researcher's dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Results may also be published in academic journals and/or presented at academic conferences.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

For questions about the study, contact the researcher, Danny Carroll.

Thank you so much for your consideration!

Danny Carroll MSW
Doctoral Candidate
Indiana University School of Social Work

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Yousef, O. (2020). *Motive*. Episode 3, WBEZ Chicago.

CURRICULUM VITAE
DANNY W. CARROLL II

EDUCATION

Indiana University 2022 Indianapolis, IN	Ph.D., Social Work Ph.D. Minor, Anthropology <i>Research Interests:</i> social work's role in disengagement and de-radicalization from White nationalist extremism, White supremacy in social work practice and education, diversity, equity, and inclusion, critical Whiteness studies, de- colonialization of international social work practice and education
Indiana University 2019 Indianapolis, IN	M.S.W.
Indiana Wesleyan University 2016 Marion, IN	B.S.W

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

Adjunct Professor, School of Social Work
08/2020 – Present
Indiana University (IUPUI)

TEACHING

Course	Short Title	Format	Role	Term
<u>Indiana University</u>				
SWK 662	FISCAL MGMT, MKTG, RES DEV	Hybrid	Instructor	Fall 2020
SWK 661	EXEC LEADERSHIP PRACTICE	Online	Instructor	Spring 2021
SWK 661	EXEC LEADERSHIP PRACTICE	Online	Instructor	Summer 2021
SWK	DIVERSITY	Online	Instructor	Summer 2021

507

SWK 662	FISCAL MGMT, MKTG, RES DEV	In-Person	Instructor	Fall 2021
SWK 507	DIVERSITY	In-Person	Instructor	Fall 2021
SWK 661	EXEC LEADERSHIP PRACTICE	In-Person	Instructor	Spring 2022
SWK 600	WHT SUPR AND ANTI-RACIST PRACTICE	Online	Instructor	Spring 2022
SWK 519	COM/GLOBAL THEORY	In-Person	Instructor	Summer 2022

PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES

Carroll II, D. W. (Under Review). "We watched him die over and over again": Exploring the impacts of police brutality video footage on Black americans. Submitted to *Critical and Radical Social Work*

Carroll II, D. W., Presnell, J., & Kim, H. (Under Review). From color-blind to color-conscience: An examination of color-blindness in clinical social work practice. Submitted to *Journal of Social Work Education*

Bartholomew, J. B., Miller, K. M., **Carroll II, D. W.**, & Carlson, J. M. (In Press). Social work doctoral students and academic presentations: Results from a student-led PhD colloquium series. Submitted to *Perspectives on Social Work*.

Carroll II, D. W., & Khaja, K. (In Process). Leaving hate: Social work and disengagement and de-radicalization from White nationalist extremism. Submitted to *Journal of Social Work* (January 2022).

Carroll II, D. W., & Liguori, J. (In Process). Disengagement and de-radicalization as a human service challenge.

Khaja, K., & **Carroll II, D. W.** (In Process). White nationalism: From the perspective of muslim community leaders. Submitting to *Journal of Social Work* (January 2022).

PEER-REVIEWED PRESENTATIONS

Khaja, K., & **Carroll II, D. W.**, (2022) Teaching White supremacy online: Web-based harassment in addressing diversity. Oral presentation accepted for the Social Work Distant Education Conference, Virtual

Carroll II, D. W., & Khaja, K. (2021) White supremacy, White nationalism, and anti-racist social work practice: Development of a new course. Poster presentation accepted for the Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, Orlando, FL.

Carroll II, D. W., & Presnell, J. A. (accepted 2020, September). From colorblind to color conscience: An examination of colorblindness in clinical social work practice. Oral presentation accepted for the National Association of Social Workers Indiana Chapter Annual Conference, Indianapolis, IN.

Carroll II, D. W. (accepted 2020, May). Indigenous peace-building through a critical social work lens. Oral presentation accepted for the Macro Conference, St. Louis, MI

Carroll II, D. W. (accepted 2020, April). International peace-building: A new and promising frontier in macro social work practice. Oral presentation accepted for the Global Wellbeing and Social Change Conference, Millersville, PA

Carroll II, D. W. (accepted 2020, April). The intersection of social work and peace building. Oral presentation accepted for the KrocPeace Con, Notre Dame University, South Bend, IN.

Carroll II, D. W. (accepted 2019, April). Leveraging the skills of social workers in the delivery of rural health care. Oral presentation accepted for the Indiana Rural Health Association Annual Conference, French Lick, IN.

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

Carroll II, D.W. (2021) The Indiana Civil Rights Commission and the Indiana Consortium of State and Local Human Rights Agencies 46th Annual Indiana Consortium of State and Local Human Rights Agencies Conference

Carroll II, D.W. (2020) Decolonizing the classroom: From complicity to equality. Oral Presentation for the 2021 Plater Institute

Carroll II, D.W. (2020). Race-based trauma and traumatic stress: Implications on child development. Oral Presentation for the Indiana Youth Institute, Indianapolis, IN.

GENERAL PRESENTATIONS

Carroll II, D.W. (2021) “We watched him die over and over again”: Exploring the impacts of police brutality video footage on Black americans. Indiana University School of Social Work Doctoral Scholar Speaker Series

Carroll II, D.W. (2020) Structural White supremacy. Indiana University School of Social Work Doctoral Scholar Speaker Series

RESEARCH GRANT FUNDING

Title	Granting Agency	Role	Amount
Teaching White Supremacy, White Nationalism and Anti-Racist Social Work Practice: A Qualitative Study	Research Support Funds Grant (RSFG)	Co-PI.	\$25,000

PROGRAM & CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT APPOINTMENTS

Indiana University School of Social Work Course Designer and Content Expert

Co-Developed a new course, *White Supremacy, White Nationalism, and Anti-Racist Social Work Practice*, that will be offered Spring of 2021.

Indiana University School of Social Work, 05/2020 - 05/2021 Doctoral Scholars Speaker Series Director

Director of a monthly colloquium for social work doctoral students to present their research and present on topics related to their research interests.

Indiana University School of Social Work, 05/2020 - 05/2021 Social Policy & Research Communication Program Director

Director of a program designed for MSW and Ph.D. social work students to generate a set of knowledge translation products, from research findings, and translate them into policy briefs for perusal by legislators, stakeholders, and community members.

Indiana University School of Social Work, 05/2020 – Present Port Harcourt University Partnership Facilitator and Co-Developer

Facilitator for the partnership between the Indiana University School of Social Work and Part Harcourt University that is focused on the launch of an Afro-centric Bachelor of

Social Work program in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Responsible for facilitating communication between the two institutions and aiding in curriculum development.

CLINICAL PRACTICE

Inside Out “Your Voice, Your Story”, 09/19 – 01/2022

Therapist

Front-line provider for community-based mental health treatment teams. Responsible for triaging clients, developing individualized client treatment plans, providing long-term case management services, providing as-needed crisis intervention services, representative payee duties, assisting clients in completing daily living tasks, collaborating with other agencies, conducting agency trainings, and consultation with other service providers as necessary.

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Heart and Soul Free Clinic, 9/15 - 9/19

Executive Director

Key Job Duties & Accomplishments:

- Solicited donations on a one-on-one basis with a consistently high level of success:
- Successfully persuaded merchants, service providers and professionals to contribute services and finances in support of the free clinic’s initiatives.
- Developed, implemented and managed strategic plans and programs.
- Program evaluation
- Provided financial analysis and assistance for resource allocations, strategic planning and budget administration.
- Accurately tracked pledges and immediately acknowledges gifts.
- Recruited, trained, and managed volunteers.

LoveWell International, 1/14-PRESENT

Founder, Executive Director

- Lobbied the U.S. and various international governments to support programs focused on orphan care and prevention.
- Developed and maintained relationships with international partners that supported in-country development projects.
- Established the organization’s 501(c)3 status following all applicatory regulatory requirements.
- Provided funding to international partners to support their orphan care and prevention efforts.
- Engaged the community to facilitate fundraising and charitable giving initiatives.
- Developed, Implemented and managed strategic plans in support of nonprofit local and international goals.
- Provided adoption grants for international and domestic adoptions.
- Developed, implement and manage the 501(c)3’s organizational budget and associated financial reporting requirements.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Indiana University School of Social Work

Doctoral Scholars Speaker Series, Coordinator	2020 - 2021
Social Policy & Research Communication Program, Coordinator	2020 - 2021
Social Work Doctoral Student Association, Co-President	2020 - 2021
Social Work Ph.D. Committee, Member	2020 - 2021
MSW Community and Organizational Leadership Committee	2021 – 2022

Community

Hands of Eir, Board Member	2021 - Present
Partnership for a Healthy Hamilton County, Board Member	2017 – 2019
Peter's House, Board President	2010 – 2012
Peter's House, Board Member	2008 – 2010

National

Reviewer for <i>Advances in Social Work</i> (Professional Journal)	2020 – Present
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HIGHLIGHTED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Political Action and Legislative Lobbying	2018
National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) Indiana	
SAVI Community Information Data System Training	2017
The Polis Center, Indiana University	

PROFESSIONAL AWARDS & HONORS

Elite 50 Graduate Students	2022
Indiana University	
Jerry Power's Esprit Award for Excellence in Research and Inquiry	2021
Indiana University School of Social Work	
President's Diversity Fellowship	2019
Indiana University	
Queener Graduate Student of Excellence	2019
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis	
Consuelo W. Gosnell MSW Fellowship	2018
National Association of Social Work (NASW)	
Community Pillar Award for Family Success	2017
Hamilton County Community Foundation	
Lantern Award for Excellence in Non-Profit Leadership	2017
Westfield Chamber of Commerce	

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIPS

Council for Social Work Education (CSWE)	2019 – Present
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)	2014 – Present
Phi Alpha Honor Society	2019 – Present