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## Exploring People's Perceptions of Precursors to the Development of Radicalisation and Extremism.

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### **Abstract**

The aim of the research was to explore perceptions of factors that may influence individuals to become radicalised. A semi-structured interview was carried out with 30 participants (15 = males, 15 = females) recruited in equal numbers from a U.K. and a U.S. university. Transcripts of the interviews were then analysed using thematic analysis. There was a high degree of agreement on likely precursors to radicalisation across the two groups with lack of identity, lack of social integration and loss of significance being the main factors. Some respondents identified that they believed that there may be personality types or vulnerabilities (e.g., mental health issues) that increased the likelihood of radicalisation. Overcoming these issues was the basis of counter radicalisation proposals with a strong emphasis on educational initiatives. Participants from the two countries were largely in agreement apart from their views relating to local communities and indicators of radicalisation. These factors are discussed in relation to prevention and intervention strategies.

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### **Introduction**

The terrorist attacks of 11th September, 2001 (known as 9/11) in the U.S. influenced the way in which terrorism is perceived in the West. Although the nature of the threat already existed prior to this event, 9/11 remains the day when the context changed considerably, an incident that marks how many people go about their everyday lives (de Londras, 2013). Recent attacks in the U.K. and Europe (e.g., Westminster, Manchester Arena, London Bridge, Nice and Berlin) were all claimed to be part of the Islamic State's (ISIS) plan to transfer violence to

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the West. Such attacks have heightened people's concerns awareness/sensitivity to radicalisation and terrorism and given greater prominence to the notion of who becomes radicalised and how society can prevent this.

However, one particular challenge in this area is the difficulties with terminology. Young et al. (2013) pointed out that there is an unhelpful assumption that the various terms used (extremist, radical, terrorist, fundamentalist) are interchangeable, but actually lack definition and precision in usage. Similarly, Pruyt and Kwakkel (2014) make the point that "there is no agreed definition of, nor theory with regard to radicalisation" (p.1). They suggest such terms will acquire meaning and also shift in meaning depending on the current mainstream beliefs. It may therefore, be important to examine the meaning that the general population attach to such terms, in determining their perceptions of the precursors to the process of radicalisation.

The U.K. has been familiar with the threat of terrorism groups predominantly arising from the ongoing conflicts of different separatist organisations. The nature of the terrorist cause has shifted from being primarily political, for e.g., The Irish Republican Army (IRA) as having historically been associated with terrorism, to the more generally disruptive fear inducing attacks of ISIS. Alongside the attacks, through media reports we have become aware of a number of British citizens travelling abroad to fight with groups such as ISIS. This has prompted attempts to understand how individuals become attached to such causes and proceed to conduct fatal attacks on fellow citizens. Much of this has focussed on Muslim/Islamic terrorists with the use of terms like extremism and radicalisation of views. For example, when four men detonated suicide bombs on London's transport network on 7 July, 2005 (known as 7/7), there were questions about the involvement of 'Al-Qaeda' (another terrorist group) in motivating these men to carry out the attack through the process of radicalisation. As the perpetrators were all born in the U.K. and British citizens this raised issues of nationality, integration and identity.

In attempting to understand and describe the process of radicalisation, McCauley and Moskalenko (2014) developed a two-pyramid model distinguishing radicalisation to opinion

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and radicalisation towards action. This model highlights the gap between opinion and action since many more individuals can be categorised as having radical opinions than those who then commit violent acts. Understanding why this relatively small group move to action and what differentiates them from those who do not may be a critical component of countering the radicalisation process. Schmid and Price (2011) attempted to distinguish between the vulnerable individual susceptible to radicalisation from those seeking a cause and acting in accord with their own beliefs and those of the organisations they seek to support. The most influential of the models of radicalisation is that proposed by Moghaddam (2005) in his “Staircase to Terrorism” where he outlines four steps of development on this pathway. This model describes a movement from a perception of unfairness through to the development of a moral code. The final two stages involve seeing terrorist acts as legitimate and ultimately committing a terrorist act. There is much support for Moghaddam’s model although Lygre et al. (2011) question why some people move from one stage to the next, but not everyone moves through the stages.

Schils and Pauwels (2016) developed a model to explain political/religious violence based upon an online survey with 6,020 participants in Belgium. They identified that perceived injustice and lack of social integration are an initial part of a causal chain that leads to extreme moral beliefs and a sense of alienation leads to the perception that authorities have no legitimacy and therefore can exercise no constraint on their actions. Lyons-Padilla et al. (2015) surveyed 198 Muslims between the age of 18-35 years who had settled in the U.S.A. Key factors identified were a sense of marginalisation and a loss of significance (belongingness, meaningful existence), which were exacerbated by any experience of discrimination. These factors were related to an extreme interpretation of Islam and a sympathetic view of jihad. Bhui, Warfa, and Jones (2015) surveyed 608 individuals of Muslim heritage living in two cities in the U.K. They were attempting to measure as the outcome variable sympathy for violent radicalisation and terrorism. Overall, the level of expressed sympathy was low (2.4%) but the views expressed by this small group were extreme. The negative findings of this survey reported that sympathy with radical viewpoints

was not associated with poor mental health, social inequality or poor education. It was also discovered that young people born in the U.K. and currently in education were more likely to express sympathetic views – albeit a small proportion of the total.

Qualitative research has been utilised within this area to identify detailed, rich opinions about the process of radicalisation. Ahmed (2016) interviewed a mix of Canadian Muslim Community Leaders and current student groups. The findings showed that the perceived need to defend their religion appeared to draw individuals towards radicalisation (as if reinforcing their position) and thus further away from mainstream society. Similar findings emerged from Abbas and Siddique's (2012) study, which involved leaders of a South Asian (Muslim) population in the U.K. This study found that social identity was a key issue in terms of both a perceived lack of it with established social institutions, and a more positive pull to the identity conferred by adherence to the Islamic religion. This was often signalled by greater use of traditional features of religiosity (beards, dress). Many saw this as a reaction to negative media portrayal of Islam and a sense of defiance (see also Awan, 2012).

A paper by Lynch (2013) focused on the vulnerability of Muslim youth to processes of radicalisation following attacks in the U.K. by alleged followers of Islam. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a broad sample of Muslims. Although issues of identity and integration were mentioned, there was also an issue in relation to the concept of inter-generational conflict. Many believed that their parents had sacrificed identity and a knowledge of their religion in pursuit of integration and acceptance. This group believed that their greater endorsement of Islamic belief reflected a greater security in their position in society and was not a rejection of British values.

Similar studies have been conducted in Australia, with Grossman and Tahiri (2015) exploring perspectives on radicalisation and extremism. The sample included community leaders from a range of Muslim and non-Muslim groups, (various religions) and government representatives with a role to try to understand radicalisation. Some of the key themes to emerge were a lack of clarity about the link between radicalisation and extremism. Participants were however more consistent identifying social exclusion, discrimination and

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marginalisation as important drivers of radicalisation. Barrelle (2015) also in Australia adopted a relatively rare approach of interviewing 22 extremists (returned) about their perspective on radicalisation. The dominant themes in this work, whether as potential causes of radicalisation or attempts to return after engaging in extremist activity, were identity and integration into wider society.

The studies mentioned here identify a set of related issues in the path towards radicalisation but they might be labelled as contextual drivers rather than individual characteristics. Qualitative methods appear to have highlighted a number of potential precursors that go beyond the “expected” set of factors. An underlying drive towards more qualitative methods is illustrated by the work of Young et al. (2015) who demonstrate the misunderstanding and confusion that exists around the language used in discussing radicalisation and extremism. This suggests that in-depth, explorative methods are needed to try to understand just what people mean when using such terms. As such, this research project aims to address this gap by exploring how individuals understand such terms, and whether this influences the way in which they believe radicalisation occurs and intervention may be implemented.

Although there is some commonality in the factors identified there are also some differences. It is not clear how far these differences derive from different cultural settings. The studies have been located in several countries (U.K., U.S.A., Australia, and Netherlands) but have not specifically compared the views identified by different populations. Winterbotham and Pearson (2016) looked at the reaction of Muslim mothers to a community-based intervention in five countries - Canada, U.K, Germany, France and Netherlands. They report quite similar responses. Mudde (2005) compared views of extremism in Central/Eastern Europe with Western Europe, and Akbarzadeh (2013) suggested that the reaction to a deradicalization programme varied by ethnicity, culture and social conditions even though all participants were living in Australia.

The study will build upon the potential insights offered by qualitative methods but attempt to add clarity to areas of ambiguity or confusion, specifically a) identify how

respondents understand the relevant terminology, b) document what they are as precursors to radicalisation and c) what therefore they suggest as counter-radicalisation initiatives. It will in addition look at whether there are embedded culture perspectives in the understanding of potential precursors to radicalisation by comparing sample populations from the U.K. and U.S.A.

## Methodology

### *Design*

In order to fully appreciate and understand the components of radicalisation, the current study used qualitative methodology to explore the research question. The data were collected via in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The analysis sought to identify differences in understanding of the terms, what factors were identified as being perceived to lead to extremism/radicalisation and what initiatives were considered useful in addressing this issue.

### *Material*

An interview schedule was devised with open-ended questions to understand how and why radicalisation occurs. Interview questions were structured with the primary aim to explore how people may view the path to these beliefs, about what can lead to extremism and radicalisation and to gain insight into how these interrelated terms are understood by sample populations in the U.K and U.S. Finally, the interview assessed views about possible interventions or processes that might prevent individuals becoming radicalised. Some examples of the questions asked in the study were: 1) What do you see as factors that might influence an individual to become radicalised? 2) Do you think there are types of individuals particularly vulnerable to becoming radicalised? and 3) What strategies do you feel society might employ to stop fundamentalist views developing?

### *Participants*

The sample consisted of participants recruited from institutional volunteer requests through the two universities based in the U.K. or U.S. Of the 30 students, there were equal number of females and males, who were between 21-65 years old. Ten of the participants identified as (Roman Catholic), 7 (Christian), 5 (Muslim), 2 (Atheist), 2 (Spiritual), 1 (Hindu), 1 (Agnostic), 1 (Kardecist), and 1 (Druze). The student population were studying a wide range of subjects – Psychology (N=10), Computer Science/Information Technology & Applied Maths (N=8), English/Art (N=4), Social Sciences (N=5) and Veterinary Science/Medicine (N=3). Although this is therefore a relatively well-educated sample and thus potentially more aware of current affairs the group had no direct experience of studying terrorism.

### *Procedure*

The study was approved by the author's University Ethics Committee, adhering to university guidelines. Interviews in the U.K. were conducted face to face, whilst in the U.S. they were via Skype and by arrangement with each individual. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour. Before the interview consent was obtained from U.K. students face to face and for U.S. sample consent was through a completed email form. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with appropriate written consent from participants. This was then subject to Thematic Analysis to identify key common themes and also areas of discrepancy between sample populations. Participants were advised of the confidentiality of their responses and of their right to withdraw. No payment was given to any participant.

To differentiate participant responses, each participant was given a code for identification. Thus, for the U.K sample the participants were labelled P1 UK and so forth and the US sample were labelled as P1 US and so forth.

### *Data analysis*

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The Thematic Analysis method as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was chosen in order to reveal a range of perspectives and meaning. The strength of this approach as argued by Braun and Clarke (2006) is particularly appropriate when the topic area is relatively new and under-researched and also that the data is not to be fitted into a pre-determined framework. The data was analysed using thematic analysis in order to allow the researcher to develop multiple interpretations of the data. The analysis therefore, was inductive, seeking themes and patterns in the data from the words of the respondents. The analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis. This process involved production of interview transcripts, familiarisation with the data through repeated reading, before creating a set of initial codes that identified interesting features. These codes were then grouped and themes were identified. The themes were then defined and named before the write-up (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For example, 76 initial codes were developed, these were then restructured into meaning of statements in the interview transcripts. Similar categories were then grouped to form content areas, and these were then labelled as sub-themes. Finally, the set of 24 sub-themes were themselves refined into common areas to become the seven over-arching themes. These were then allocated names and are reported below (in the Results section). However, there was one exception to this where Qu.1 explored the participants understanding of particular terminology relating to violent extremism and as such was based on the process described by Moghaddam (2005), and therefore had pre-determined knowledge categories.

## Results

The analysis revealed seven overarching themes, and twenty-four sub-themes. They were: 1) Confusion about Meaning of Extremism Related Terms (four sub-themes - Acts of violence, extreme thoughts, false beliefs, literal interpretation); 2) Indicators of Radicalisation (three sub-themes - Changed behaviour, isolation from family and friends, joining radical groups); 3) Perceived Precursors of Radicalisation (three sub-themes - Injustice, social identity and deprivation); 4) Personality Type (three sub-themes - Vulnerable people, disposition, mental

health issues); 5) Internet/Social Media (four sub-themes - Global access, radical platforms, major influences, media distortion); 6) Local Community (three sub-themes - Community reporting, local leaders, religious direction); and 7) Countering Radicalisation (four sub-themes - Education, role models, positive messages, social media campaign). The overarching themes and sub themes are presented in Table 1: Table of Themes at the end of this study.

### Overarching Themes

#### *Confusion about Meaning of Extremism Related Terms*

It was apparent that none of the respondents had a clear sense of the nature or meaning of these terms (fundamentalism, extremism, radicalisation and terrorism). They were variously used interchangeably with one term (any one) being used to cover the whole topic.

“Sorry don’t understand what fundamentalism means” (P8 UK, P10 UK, P2 US, P6 US)

“Isn’t extremism and radicalisation mean the same thing” (P1 UK, P12 UK, P9 US)

“Extremism when you take certain things from the book” (P12 UK, P15 UK, P8 US)

“Radicalisation? Well with somebody that is radical it is because that is also that they just take one position”. (P9 UK, P11 US)

Not only were respondents unable to differentiate the terms but had no sense of individuals moving from one stage of radicalisation to the next. Although, there is really no expectation that individuals would have been able to articulate the meanings and definitions, this does suggest an issue of over inclusive labelling. If a media report uses any of these terms do readers conflate meaning and when government strategies talk about countering radicalisation one might wonder if these strategies have incorporated prior stages of fundamentalism and extremism. Clearly there could be implications for the efficacy of intervention strategies.

### *Indicators of Radicalisation*

This is a theme that emerges almost exclusively from the U.K. based sample perhaps reflecting concerns about recent attacks in Europe and U.K. and government calls to report changes in behaviour from individuals, particularly within the Muslim community. Respondents mentioned aspects such as individuals who stop listening to music or Western “pop”, stop watching entertainment programmes on television, change their dress including acquiring beards if male, seem to isolate themselves from their family and break ties with old friends.

“Not really confident on their own, nor sociable”. (P1 US, P3 UK)

“Isolate themselves from family, break relationships with old friends and make new ones, and change the way they start dressing”. (P13 UK, P14 UK)

“Say more about problems in the world and go to mosque a lot – the Islamic dress but could be good Muslims, how do we know”. (P6 UK)

In contrast, the U.S. sample did not mention such individualised changes in behaviour talking more about social issues relating to integration.

“So, it has to do with how you are raised”. (P6 US)

### *Perceived Precursors of Radicalisation*

In contrast to the previous theme where individual changes in behaviour were mentioned this theme looked more for social and contextual explanations as to why an individual may become radicalised.

Respondents talked of individuals lacking social and personal identity, perhaps searching for something because of a sense of isolation. Some described such individuals as outcasts.

“Yes, I think lack of integration in society is a big issue. I think they, it’s that individual that tends to be the outcast or that lack of integration of society, whether it’s

a simple individual or if it's a family unit are not integrating into society or that lack of integration provides a conduit I think for them to become radicalised". (P6 UK)

They are also described as people who do not fit in and similarly that they feel their issues are not being dealt with - as if they don't exist.

"Don't listen to what you try to say and like some people would go the extra mile to be heard and they feel like the only way to change or the only way to attract attention is like through these acts of terrorism, basically". (P11 UK)

They talk of individuals not having a group to which they feel that they belong.

"Extreme movements (such as ISIS) seem to listen, understand and agree with them. They can offer comradeship, even money, membership of a group fighting for a cause as to the "outcast" this can seem attractive." (P8 US)

Some respondents identified a set of related factors such as economic deprivation, lack of education and peer pressure to become part of a movement or vision of the future.

"So, when basic needs of people are not met, it can definitely cause you to be radical when you weren't before". (P1 US)

"Lack of education is like the root of many problems in our society. And depending on the education level of this person, they are going to be more susceptible to become radicalised or to be able to be more easily recruited to these groups". (P13 UK)

Respondents talked about how social influence impacts upon radicalisation such as persuasion by peers towards action or advocacy of extreme ideologies.

"Social political environment you live in. for e.g. If you don't have a good set of values and you are lost and anti-social you will look for someone to be with who will get that. Also, on your own religious or political beliefs". (P2 US)

“Misguidance and persuasion techniques are used by radical groups. They may feel that the person that is giving them this information actually knows what they are talking about and they're an educated person and, therefore, what they've said must be accepted and must be true”. (P14 UK)

“It's when a person is persuaded from the truth, for e.g. the truth may be twisted and their mind-set is changed to sort of more they want to be more active and also inflict more damage or perhaps put a point across in a more negative way rather than a constructive way”. (P4 UK)

Many making these comments also point to the family context as another sociological variable. Many young people experience the pressures and it may be that the family can offer a supportive buffer and hence prevent individuals taking the path to radicalisation, or if they endorse the more extreme views can reinforce decisions to become more active in pursuit of extreme goals.

### *Personality Type*

Just as many respondents suggested societal contextual explanations there were others who seemed to offer a more fatalistic approach arguing that it is down to the existence of personality type.

“I would say probably a lot of it would have to do with the person's personality. Like they have the right personality type that could happen. I don't really think many mild-mannered people out there would be easily radicalised”. (P14 US)

“I would say people who have like bipolar tendencies or who have anger issues in particular. I think a lot of it just has to do with personality type”. (P1 UK)

“Feel they don't fit in, are vulnerable individuals, I think, and maybe have mental health disorders”. (P15 UK)

This was linked in some cases with a reference to mental health issues (unspecified) but implying that those influenced towards radicalisation lacked some form of mental strength to resist arguments.

#### *Internet/Social Media*

This was a strong theme around which there was a fair degree of consensus amongst the whole group. The clear view was that access to the Internet and the many social media sites makes this medium a major source of influence, particularly on younger people, and hence a powerful contributor to radicalisation.

“If you want to make a point and attract people to your organisation it’s so easy because people usually don’t have critical thinking. People believe what they read on the internet”. (P7 UK)

“Yes, I think definitely one of the biggest things – draws people online and can pinpoint anyone that has extreme views”. (P9 US)

The area of debate was more around whether the access or content to the internet/social media should (or could) be controlled. The sense was that people would like to see controls, but really weren’t sure how it could be done and then as they spoke were confronted with a control on free speech which they largely rejected. This decision is perhaps summed by this respondent.

“So, I don’t think so, no. I know it’s tough because like we touched on before it’s a very good was of spreading propaganda at the end of the day and the problem with that is if you start to restrict that then you get into a whole lot of other issues in restricting information and freedom of speech”. (P11 UK)

#### *Local Community*

This was another theme where there appeared to be some differences between the U.K. and U.S. There was in the U.K. a strong sense that the local community should do more to identify

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potential radicals and alert the authorities. This may again reflect the current concerns with the U.K. population and the U.K. government. The focus as a consequence has tended to be on how these populations should manage/control their own dissidents.

“It’s really important for the mosques to get involved, especially younger and more aware Imams”. (P14 UK)

“I think local communities should come together and talk about what would happen if someone attacked us now. Communities should raise the importance of the whole topic”. (P2 UK)

“Individuals should listen and try to stop or tell someone if they are concerned”. (P5 UK)

In contrast, the U.S. respondents appeared to take a rather more ‘big picture’ approach. They discussed processes of integrating immigrants, seeing how best they could find employment and learn languages.

“I think the best way would be to try to tell them how to assimilate as soon as possible because the sooner you assimilate the sooner you are going to find a job”. (P7 US)

Even in the U.K. when there is support for identifying potential threats there are complications. A Muslim interviewee felt that many in the community (Muslim) do not want to get involved and feel concerned about being identified to the wider group.

“Locals don’t want to get involved. They want to keep their distance. They’re worried if they get involved they will get flagged up themselves”. (P13 UK)

### *Countering Radicalisation*

The longer-term purpose of understanding how people see processes of radicalisation is to develop some form of intervention, prevention or counter-radicalisation strategy. Many respondents perhaps unsurprisingly mentioned factors that were rather like a mirror image of the precursor factors identified earlier (better integration into society, more diverse

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communities, better jobs and less deprivation for certain groups). However, there was an overwhelming view that counter-radicalisation strategies necessarily involve some kind of educational intervention. Several forms and models were mentioned but nearly all relate to educational processes.

“Should be compulsory for all children to be taught at a young age about radicalisation and extremism and what signs to look out for”. (P5 US)

“Teach more perspectives, have workshops for other races to talk in a calm atmosphere without forming opinions”. (P5 UK)

“Make children more aware and not susceptible to radicalisation processes”. (P12 UK)

“It’s a lack of education, especially when not mentioning terrorism”. (P9 UK)

“Education should start at a very early age, and there should be an international curriculum”. (P8 UK)

## Discussion

This study has demonstrated a number of findings. An important initial finding here is that respondents demonstrated no clear understanding of the terms relating to radicalisation, extremism, fundamentalism and terrorism. The imprecision is identified by Young et al. (2013) and Pruyt and Kwakkel (2014). This may well have important implications for the design of effective intervention strategies. McCauley and Moskalenko (2014) argue that there are bi-modal aspects to radicalisation, to opinion and to action. There may well be differences in the nature of counter radicalisation initiatives depending on the focus of the work. This confusion in terminology may be even more crucial as Borum (2011) questions the link between radicalisation and terrorism so interventions designed on an assumption of a pathway (Moghaddam, 2005) may in themselves be misplaced.

There is more consensus in the findings on the perception of precursors to radicalisation with lack of social integration, a sense of injustice, a lack of identity and a sense of seeking something better identified. Lyons-Padilla et. al (2015) perhaps summarise a lot of

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the material by describing those who join extremist movements as “on a quest for significance” (p.2).

A finding from the current data which is less well described in the literature is that of a precursor being a “personality type”. Respondents may be suggesting that there are individuals who are disposed to accept and believe extreme statements. Equally the use of the term personality type may be implying that such individuals are vulnerable, perhaps with mental health issues and therefore unable to withstand promises and propaganda. Such an explanation may account for some individuals but given the numbers involved in extremist movements worldwide it is unlikely to explain the majority of those individual choices to engage in terrorism.

Another important theme to emerge from the findings around perceived precursors is how far they might be said to be causal as opposed to associated characteristics of radicals/terrorists. Lynch (2013) highlights this issue by pointing to the fact that it is a small minority of Muslims who become radicalised whereas the “perceived precursors” – identity crisis, marginalisation, discrimination and transition within society are common experiences for many Muslims but who do not become radicalised. It is perhaps the case that several potential contributing factors can be identified but how any particular one operates in a specific case is not clear. As Dzhekova et al. (2016) state “there is a lack of consensus on root causes that lead to radicalisation” (p.2). A number of other studies have begun to suggest factors that may influence the movement towards radicalisation. Williams, Horgan and Evans (2016) point to the potentially powerful role of friends in either supporting or rejecting an individual’s apparent move towards extreme views. They also make an interesting link to a well-established behaviour known as “bystander apathy” (Darley and Latane, 1968) whereby the response to an individual espousing extreme views is that observers believe that someone will intervene, but actually no one does as they expect someone else to do it.

Even more recently Ambrozik (2018) in the U.S. and Taylor (2018) in the U.K. have highlighted the very significant role of local communities. In the case described by Ambrozik (2018) local community leaders were influential in combatting radicalisation, particularly

when using a facilitative leadership approach. In contrast, Taylor (2018) is concerned that the focus on the role of local communities can be counterproductive by transforming them (especially Muslim communities) into suspect and risky populations, and hence alienated.

The pre-occupation of participants here with various forms of educational practice as a preventative strategy has echoes in the findings of Grossman and Tahiri (2015). They suggest critical thinking skills as vital to this in being able to interrogate and refute extremist ideology. The intervention study by Liht and Savage (2013) served to reinforce this more specific and sophisticated approach to education. The comments by interviewees in this project certainly endorsed education as an intervention strategy. It seemed to be focussed on providing a more positive message about society, whether in practical economic terms such as finding work or in giving those potentially disaffected a stronger sense of personal values and belonging. A further strand of thinking was that relating to younger Muslims who wanted to assert their Muslim culture believing that older generations had suppressed them in pursuit of integration.

There was a clear view from all respondents that the internet/social media platform was a major factor in the process of radicalisation. A view supported by Awan (2017). It has been argued that radicalisation has been facilitated by the internet and the emergence and popularity of digital social networking (Stevens and Neumann, 2009; Koehler, 2015). Conway (2017) agrees that this is a common view but expresses her amazement at how little research has been done to understand how it is being used. She suggests that the internet may have differential access and influence by gender, by location and use of different platforms. Her view is that research to clarify these issues would lead to more targeted intervention.

Overall this study has demonstrated some novel effects. The findings discussed so far represent a good degree of agreement between the respondents, from the U.K. and U.S. However, the two groups differ on two particular Overarching Themes – Indicators of Radicalisation and Local Community. The first of these themes ‘Indicators of Radicalisation’ is clearly articulated in the U.K. with radicalised individuals providing behaviour and dress change patterns which suggest a developing attachment to a strong ideology. This was not

found in the U.S. and it may be that in this much larger population the level of diversity already in existence masks the change patterns noted in smaller, more homogenous populations. The U.K. may have smaller pockets of particularly Muslim communities and evidence of changing patterns, including isolation from friends and family may well be more observable in such communities. Another possible interpretation is that the U.S. may have more conflict related to historic (and current) black and white populations, rather than religious affiliation.

The second Overarching Theme where differences between the respondent groups became apparent relates to the 'Local Community'. In the U.K. the emphasis here was on whether members of the local community should be much more active in identifying and reporting suspicious behaviour with a view to early preventative action. In contrast, the U.S. respondents appeared to take a rather more 'big picture' approach. They saw the role of local communities as primarily about how best they might help integrate immigrant populations through employment and provision of language classes. This may reflect a different geography and demographic patterns where the U.S. has seen large influxes of migrant populations from many sources over many years. The U.K. on the other hand has developed quite separated sub-populations (especially Muslims) where they are cut-off and crowded into smaller physical areas. As a consequence, such populations can in the U.K. be seen as a problem, a source of future terrorists and hence having a responsibility to identify them. The larger U.S. communities do not seem to see reporting potential radicals as a responsibility of a particular population.

There are some important and distinct constraints on the conduct of research in the area of radicalisation as Reynolds (2017) points out, ethical issues are foremost. As he discusses accessing online information, even with ethical guidelines, can reveal important and very personal information about the user. He asks how this is compatible with other guidance about privacy and anonymity of many user platforms. A different sort of problem was reported by Scarcella, Page and Furtado (2016) in suggesting that of the majority of the tools

and instruments developed to assess potential for radicalisation very few met acceptable psychometric standards.

### **Limitations of Current Research**

The limitations of the project work conducted here may also act as suggestions to future (and improved) research in this area more generally. A key issue in research based on perceptions of an issue is how far the views can be said to be informed. One can probably assume that none of the respondents were terrorists or have encountered anyone who had become radicalised. Therefore, it seems likely that their views are based on any reading they may have done, both academic and popular and may therefore reflect a common possibly stereotypical view of the individual vulnerable to radicalisation. Whilst challenging ethically and practically exploring the process of radicalisation with those more directly linked with it may offer more insight.

As a qualitative study it was not possible to determine whether views expressed are in any way related to political or religious backgrounds. A large survey study may be needed to examine clear sub-group differences.

### **Implications of this Study**

The project has made an important contribution to our understanding of the process of radicalisation. The sample population is very diverse with respondents representing a large age range (21-65), many different nationalities and backgrounds (both cultural and religious). Therefore, the themes emerging from the transcripts could be argued to be more representative than many similar qualitative studies. Moreover, the commonality of view (themes) in the main suggests some common perceptions of the precursors to radicalisation. This wide-ranging sampling including sub-groups from the U.K. and the U.S. facilitated

comparison of views between countries. The particular differences observed in two particular themes may explain why approaches to countering radicalisation appear different. The focus in the U.K. is very much upon Muslims and Islamic radicalisation with particular populations the focus of initiatives. The U.S. approach has to date been more general and inclusive of various populations (Hispanic, Black Americans and Muslim).

The policy implication from these results might be classified into two categories, the first of these involved putting in place long term strategies to counter the growth of fundamentalist thinking. Thus, the findings suggest this will involve creating positive messages and role models of Muslim integration into wider society in a way that does not seem to threaten underlying beliefs. It is apparent too from some of the Muslim respondents that devising such content, appealing to Muslim youth and counteracting fundamentalist propaganda must come from within the Muslim community itself. The antagonism towards government's current 'Prevent' counter terrorism strategy programme suggests that top down, institutionalised initiatives will be difficult to sustain.

In the second more immediate concern of preventing dreadful terrorist events the overlap may be more with links to anti-criminal initiatives. Those convicted of terrorism have it seems often had a history of minor criminality, and this sense of injustice and that no one is listening suggest that it doesn't matter if criminality escalates to acts of terror was clearly articulated in the description of precursors to radicalisation. There is an inevitable resource issue but anti-terror forces claim to have foiled many plots and so closer scrutiny to those who demonstrate any of the 'Indicators of Radicalisation' may be necessary.

There are a number of strands of thinking about countering radicalisation that may be informed by these research findings. Programmes that seek to highlight possible indicators of radicalisation need to know what it is the local community regards as possible signs, otherwise generic programmes could be targeted at irrelevant or unrecognised issue. This general awareness can clearly inform programme design but so too can more specific findings such as the potential role of inter-generational conflict.

Members of the community may themselves be unaware of the significance of particular changes in behaviour, so having these highlighted as possible triggers to radicalisation may help them make appropriate interventions. Finally, it is clear that the formulation of counter radicalisation policies and interventions has a cost and it may be valuable in garnering public support for such programmes to offer solid evidence about behavioural precursors.

Future policy must be evidence based and this therefore means that relevant research will be needed. The current findings point to likely areas of development such as more Muslim based samples, both male and female, as the latter in particular have been rather overlooked. It may be that such studies need to be longitudinal to document how attitudes and opinions are formed, when and where influences come from and how appropriate points of intervention may be identified. Alongside this it is going to be necessary to develop better metrics than currently exist that could be used as early indicators of potential to move towards more fundamentalist and radical thinking. Psychometric properties of validity and reliability will of course be vital in part for purposes of research and intervention but crucially to gain acceptance within local communities. Although enormously challenging practically it may be that studies will need to try to include more “radicals, fundamentalists, and terrorists” themselves rather than the perspectives from those outside the direct experience.

Programmes will need to be defined to address what Schmid (2013) describes as different levels of focus – Micro (the psychological, individual level) Meso (the social dynamic level), and Macro (the societal, structural context). Radicalisation is a complex process. This is powerfully, if somewhat depressingly, described by Viktoroff (2005) when he says “terrorist behaviour is probably always determined by a combination of innate factors, biological factors, early developmental factors, cognitive factors, temperamental, environmental influences and group dynamics. The degree to which each of these factors contributes to a given event probably varies between individual terrorists, between individual groups and between types of groups. Theories that claim the dominance of one of these influences over the others are premature since no studies have systematically examined more

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than one or two of these factors, let alone empirically examined one while controlling for the others” (p.34). Lyons-Padilla et al. (2015) concludes that perhaps the area needs to move from identifying a range of factors to calibrating more effectively the risk factors in a specific context.

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**Table 1: Table of Themes**

	<b>Overarching theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Sample</b>
1	Confusion about Meaning of Extremism Related Terms	Acts of violence	Violent acts designed to create fear	UK and US
		Extreme thoughts	Views that are outside what are regarded as normal	
		False beliefs	A belief that has no factual source	
		Literal interpretation	Taking ideas as having meaning irrespective of context.	

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2	Indicators of Radicalisation	Changed behaviour	Doing things that were not done previously	UK ONLY
		Isolation from family/friends	Withdrawal from social contacts	
		Joining Radical Groups	Participating in discussion of extreme actions.	
3	Perceived Precursors of Radicalisation	Injustice	A sense that a grievance is not being heard, or acted upon	UK and US
		Social identity	Feeling they have no position or role in society	
		Deprivation	Lack of economic power.	

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4	Personality Type	Vulnerable people	Individuals believed to be weak or incapable of resisting advocacy to extreme action	UK and US
		Disposition	People believed to have a personality type attracted to violence	
		Mental Health issues	Individuals disturbed by a psychiatric condition	
5	Internet/Social Media	Global access	Ability to reach people across the world	UK and US
		Radical platforms	Sites holding radical or extreme material	
		Major influences	Power of social media to influence individuals	
		Media distortion	thinking and behaviour	

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6	Local Community	Community reporting	A consistent inaccurate portrayal of a philosophy, fact or group	UK ONLY
		Local leaders	Leaders to provide advice and encouragement to prevent radicalisation	
		Religious direction	Religious figures to condemn terrorist activity	
7	Countering Radicalisation	Education	Provide content and strategies to counter radical narratives	UK and US
		Role models	Acts in ways to demonstrate opposition to extreme behaviour	
		Positive messages	Media to provide and offer attractive alternative	

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	of participation in society.
Social media campaign	Create sustained programmes to promote anti-terrorist thinking

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