

Community Cohesion and Countering Violent Extremism: Interfaith Activism and Policing Methods in Metro Detroit

Allison D. Miller^{a1}

^aPhD Student, School of International and Public Affairs at Virginia Tech

Abstract

Areas within Metro-Detroit, USA have been called “Shariaville” or labelled as containing “no-go zones” and yet the area lacks a definitive issue with radicalization. This article examines this gap between perceptions and reality of Metro Detroit by reflecting upon notions of community as experienced by community members and how that connects with ongoing debates regarding the role of community in countering violent extremism (CVE). Based on fieldwork conducted in Metro Detroit, this paper outlines two overlooked mechanisms that strengthen a multicultural community. This includes interfaith dialogue and activism as well as an emphasis on community methods. This article argues that mechanisms that strengthen community cohesion builds resilient societies which then remain uninterested in radicalization. Metro Detroit was chosen as the basis for this work due to its extremely diverse ethnic and religious populations, yet relatively low numbers of radicalized community members. Ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with key community members indicated a strong network of interfaith organizations and activism within Metro Detroit. Furthermore, law enforcement prioritizes policing at the community level while respecting the cultural norms and values of the diverse population. This article suggests that building on processes such as interfaith dialogues and effective community policing creates contexts within communities where violent extremism becomes less of a concern.

Article History

Received May 18, 2018

Accepted June 26, 2018

Published June 29, 2018

Keywords: Countering violent extremism, Metro Detroit, Interfaith, Policing

Introduction

Catherine leaned across the pew to face the young woman sitting next to me wearing a hijab and said “if there ever is a Muslim registry, I will convert and wear a hijab too.”² The woman she was talking to—Amal—responded by saying “I appreciate that, but make sure it is a blue one so that it matches your glasses.”

¹ Corresponding Author Contact: Allison Miller, Email: ahern09@vt.edu, PhD student in Planning, Governance, and Globalization, School of International and Public Affairs at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061, USA

² All names in this article are pseudonyms

This moment occurred during an Interfaith Thanksgiving service held on November 22nd, 2016, in Metro Detroit's Oakland County. During this time, we were encouraged to turn to the people sitting next to us and share what we were thankful for. Amal had just previously expressed her gratitude for having the opportunity to be in a social setting where she felt safe and welcome after the outcome of the 2016 Presidential election which was won by Donald Trump. One of his most controversial and prominent campaign pledges was the call for “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States” (Liptak, 2017). With the conversation turning towards recent politics, Catherine had chosen to interject an opinion she clearly held dear. I was caught off guard by the conversation as it is not necessarily commonplace to hear that said to Muslim people, more specifically from a person of Jewish faith. In this moment, it struck me that these two women had found common ground on the experience of shared persecution and used it not as a tool of further division, but rather as a tool of fostering solidarity.

The Thanksgiving service was led by five people—a male and female Rabbi, an Imam, a Pastor, and a Priest. The Pastor spoke to the congregation about how his interfaith friendships were some of the most treasured he has ever had. Most notably during his speech to the congregation he said “who knew that by coming together in this time, in this place, in this country, that we'd be being brave.” He was referring to the increase in hate crimes in recent years in the United States and the type of social atmosphere that these hate crimes can create (Levin, 2016). In this sense, he was acknowledging that people in a multicultural community coming together is now described as brave—even though this should be a natural occurrence in a diverse community. He made it clear that religious tolerance was a priority in his community.

The main research question that this article seeks to address is how community cohesion can build relationships and decrease marginalization so that potential extremism becomes unlikely. This article is specifically examining interfaith activism and dialogue as well as policing methods. This concept operates on the notion that when an individual feels that he or she is part of a community then he or she will act in the best interest of that community, thus not commit acts of violence.

Metro Detroit serves as an ideal framework for how community cohesion can and should be promoted and structured. It has done remarkably well at establishing strong community organizations that provide its members with invaluable resources that allow them to engage in local community actions and interact with each other. In other words, “Detroit is exceptional...because of the power of a local community—with its own local history and political culture—to insulate itself from a national public culture that sees Arabs (and Muslims) as a problem and has difficulty separating ‘good’ Arabs from ‘bad’” (Team, 2009, p. 71).

It is important to note here that the interpretation of community stems from bell hooks when she writes a critique and therefore her variation of Martin Luther King’s *beloved community*. She writes “*beloved community* is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.” (hooks, 1995, p. 265).

History and Demographics

Detroit is a former industrial powerhouse that was once one of the most prosperous cities in America and the symbol of the American Dream. The automotive industry took root there, building the first Model T in 1908. Hundreds of thousands of people flocked to Detroit during the first half of the 21st century in order work in industrial and automotive industries (Eisenbach, 2008). Immigration to Detroit has been a staple of its diversity starting as early as 1914 when Syrians started arriving after Henry Ford raised the daily salary to five dollars (Team, 2009). However, fast forwarding to the early 2000s, portions of the city of Detroit had become something completely different, resembling a scene of a post-apocalyptic science fiction movie. Warehouses that once served as integral parts of the industrial success are now vacant, overgrown, and crumbling. City blocks are abandoned, houses are boarded up, and graffiti covered. It has suffered severe and complex crises, ranging from White Flight, political unrest and corruption, and high crime rates. Detroit had quickly deteriorated due to

economic contraction, social and spatial abandonment, and loss of demographics (Smith & Kirkpatrick, 2015).

This is changing. In late 2016, the *Toronto Star* published an article that proclaimed Detroit to be America's greatest comeback story (Bain, 2016). In it was mentioned the vibrant and thriving urbanization through local art efforts. There are also expansive efforts underway for community planning with innovative creative entrepreneurship. People from all over the country are returning or relocating to Detroit in an effort to rebuild and reclaim a lost city.

I am not naïve enough to believe that Detroit is once more a thriving American city, but I am optimistic enough to believe that it is on its way. I also cannot claim that Metro-Detroit is a perfect model for what community cohesion looks like; similar to many urban areas across the United States there are still blatant cases of racism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia. However, I do aim to emphasize the role that interfaith activism and dialogue as well as effective policing efforts have to play in working towards creating a cohesive community.

The City of Detroit is situated within what is considered Metro-Detroit, which consists of Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties. These counties range drastically in socio-economic status, ethnic demographics, and land structure between rural and urban settings. Metro-Detroit is known for an extremely large population of immigrants and their descendants and thus has been hailed as a city built by immigrants.

The two communities that receive significant amounts of attention for their populations are undoubtedly Dearborn and Hamtramck. Dearborn houses large populations of Americans of Lebanese, Yemeni, Iraqi, and Palestinian backgrounds of which the majority are Muslim (Team, 2009). Hamtramck, which was traditionally Polish, has now become a municipality composed of a many different ethnic groups. The diversity in Hamtramck is so great that while driving down Joseph Campau Street one can see eighteen foreign flags flying next to two American flags. These flags—from Bosnia, Yemen, Bangladesh, Poland, Romania, Russia, Armenia, Mexico, Ukraine, Albania, Iraq, Croatia, Ethiopia, Turkey, Lebanon and Macedonia—represent the largest populations of people that have resettled in Hamtramck (Rose, n.d.). Symbolic to adopting some version of a collective American

identity, these flags are replaced once a year on the Fourth of July with an American flag. Arab and Muslim immigration populations and patterns can be best understood in the context of economic and political instability that has occurred in the Middle East (Howell & Shryock, 2003). The populations represent unusual inversions of their native countries demographics. For example, there are less than 5% of Christians in the Arab world but they account for roughly half of the population within Metro Detroit Arab populations (Howell & Shryock, 2003).

As previously stated, Metro-Detroit is quite expansive and covers three counties. It is expected that there will be individuals who are strongly against the Arab and Muslim populations rooted in this area. I argue that this sentiment is largely created and enforced by the Arab and Muslim perception in the media. I acknowledge that there are people, even significant populations within some suburbs of Metro-Detroit, who advocate for policies such as the recent travel ban, tightening immigration, and the prevention of further Arab and Muslim representations within society. This is where the core of this analysis is particularly useful due to the fact that it is arguing that movements such as interfaith workshops and diversity training can bring these individuals to the table in a meaningful way.

Methodological Approach

This article utilizes an ethnographic approach in order to gain a more comprehensive perspective on the role of engagement in creating community cohesion. This approach allows for personal engagement with community members in order to create an understanding of how the members of Metro Detroit come to make sense of their actions. By hearing from members of this community about their insights on interfaith dialogue, policing methods, and violent extremism, a new perspective regarding how intercultural dialogues work to create meanings will emerge. This approach allows for a study of the conditions of possibility which can contribute to the reduction of social problems, including radicalization, but does not presume a linear causation model.

The research for this study was conducted in November and December 2016. I conducted seven interviews with key religious leaders, a Michigan State police officer based in Metro Detroit, and members of the community including a lawyer and educator. Experiences of participant observations are drawn from an interfaith Thanksgiving service and an interfaith event for local seventh graders.

In order to find individuals to interview, I began with basic internet searches on both professional websites and social media platforms. The majority of the religious and policing institutions have a presence on social media so this was often the best way to ensure getting an actual response. However, the interfaith community in Metro Detroit is relatively well networked and this led to seeking out interviews based on recommendations of leaders. All interviewees had ethical consent forms presented to them which were subsequently explained. All interviewees were aware that their names would be changed, and identities protected, and though most did not genuinely seem concerned with this it has been upheld. Interviews were conducted in houses of worship, police stations, coffee shops, and offices. Given the sensitivity of discussing violent extremism, it was important that the interviewee feel comfortable in the interview setting. Allowing an interviewee to select the venue for interviewing also can help balance the power differences that exist between researcher and researched.

The interfaith and policing institutions are of great importance for those studying CVE efforts for a number of reasons. The interfaith institution is highly unexplored in its relation to CVE. The interfaith community provides a platform for understanding how bridges can be built against odds, how to address the needs of a diverse population, and how to create a resilient community. Though interfaith leaders may not be aware of it, they have the toolkit that is necessary to counter violent extremism, even if doing so is not their goal.

Various policing institutions within Metro Detroit is essential because of their proactive role in maintaining a positive community presence. While keeping in mind that Metro Detroit is composed of three counties, there are policing institutions that have been able to harness that critical balance between addressing community needs while enforcing laws.

Many policing efforts aim to form a relationship with the interfaith community, establishing a network of support for one another and an route for open communication.

There have been few scholars who have examined issues within the field of violent extremism and terrorism by approaching it ethnographically. This article fills a gap that exists between ethnography and violent extremism by examining community institutions that are essential in combatting violent extremism. Ethnographic field research is defined as the study of groups and people in their everyday lives (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Central to this type of research and this article are two methods that are part of ethnographic research; participant observation and interviewing. Participant observation occurs when a researcher enters a social setting, gets to know the people within it, and observes what is happening (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Relatedly, interviewing is useful when the subject is willing and able to describe aspects of social life (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

Ethnography involves reflexivity. Reflexivity is “a conscious experiencing of the self both as inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself” (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). Interviewing community members and being involved with community events requires constant reflexive self-discussion regarding what I learned, how it can change me as a researcher, and the power that comes with possessing the position to be a producer of knowledge. Many portions of this fieldwork invoked strong emotional reactions. Emotion in research is contested (Blee, 2002; Behar, 1996). Blee addresses this when she writes that “researchers often talk informally about the emotional side of doing fieldwork, but it is a subject rarely discussed in print. Pondering one’s own emotional state may seem narcissistic—yet it also can be analytically revealing” (Blee, 2002, p. 14). As a researcher, I believe that emotional is an integral part of my work, and thus there are periodic discussions of emotions and thought processes throughout this article.

It may be an unconventional practice to insert the self into research within the field of terrorism studies. However, this does not mean that doing so is not justified or necessary. Terrorism research may benefit greatly by an increased awareness and acknowledgement of the researcher in the process of the research if that individual is involved in fieldwork.

Reflection is a tool that can serve as an instrument to understand the limitations within the data (Venkatesh, 2012). Venkatesh writes that “the use of the first person is more than a cute convention or a self-deprecating call for attention. It is more than just an assertion of fieldworker chutzpah or blind ignorance of a world-out-there...scholars are turning to the self in order to discover not only truths about their own experience but about the world out there” (Venkatesh, 2012, p. 5).

This research can best be understood by applying the theoretical framework of grounded theory. Charmaz argues that constructivist grounded theory is able to celebrate firsthand knowledge of empirical worlds, given that constructivism acknowledges multiple social realities, acknowledges the mutual creation of knowledge, and attempts to provide interpretive understandings of the subject’s meanings (Charmaz, 2000). Furthermore, grounded theoretical analysis results in a story that is about people, their social processes, and the situations that they are in (Charmaz, 2000). Grounded theory treats causality as suggestive and incomplete, which ultimately leaves the theory open to continual refinement (Charmaz, 2000). Finally, the role of the researcher in grounded theory is one of importance. Charmaz states that “the viewer is then part of what is viewed rather than separate from it. What a viewer sees shapes what he or she will define, measure, and analyze” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524).

Key Concepts

Defining “community” at a micro or local level has been contested within scholarly debates. Kenney and Roudometof conceptualize the notion of community as units of belonging in which the members share moral, expressive, or cognitive meanings which create a sense of group and personal identity (Kennedy & Roudometof, 2002). They also argue that communities are organic; they are constantly being reconstructed and membership is not necessary, however members are responsible for constructing the various social relationships that exist within a specific community (Kennedy & Roudometof, 2002). Individuals who exist in a geographically specific community may not feel as though they are a member and this

marginalization is responsible for creating a fragmented community that makes individuals susceptible to legitimizing alternative worldviews, such as violent extremism. In simpler terms, individuals in a community need to share a sense of belonging in order to prevent extremist views from taking root.

Fostering a sense of belonging within a community can be particularly difficult when the community is multicultural. Furthermore, given the rise of Islamophobia in the West, promoting the notion of community can be even more challenging (Gallup, n.d.). One approach of understanding multiculturalism is through two different frames; as a fact and as an ideology. As a fact, multiculturalism can be understood as the presence of people with diverse ethnic or racial existing in a single polity (Citrin, *et al.*, 2001). As an ideology, multiculturalism is defined as a political response that assumes cultural differences, regarding beliefs, values, habits, and observances accompany the demographic diversity (Citrin, *et al.*, 2001). This article is primarily concerned with the idea of multiculturalism as it pertains to demographic facts regarding a specific population as well as the creation of a public discourse that recognizes diversity.

The role of social or societal cohesion within a community is important to consider when examining CVE approaches. A strong sense of societal cohesion may actually render CVE approaches and programs unnecessary. Social cohesion can thus be defined as the quality of interaction between members of a given community (Dragolov, 2016). Taking this approach leaves room for understanding that there may be different levels of social cohesion occurring within different communities. Dragolov offers three different foundations that should be considered when analyzing the quality of interactions and relationships amongst members of a community. First, how resilient social relationships are within a horizontal network of members and groups in society. Second, positive emotional ties that individuals have towards their community and the institutions within. Third, focusing on the common good of the community through actions and attitudes of individuals (Dragolov, 2016).

Within this framework, individuals serve as the micro level focus in a macro level community. Friedkin furthers this analysis by arguing that social cohesion theories must be grounded in explaining individuals' group membership, attitudes, and behaviors, and then

how this is distributed amongst the group (Friedkin, 2004). Furthermore, social networks within communities need to be studied more as a method for understanding how individuals develop their attitude or behavior (Friedkin, 2004). Social cohesion can then be understood as examining the relationship individuals have within a community, how that relationship is formed and distributed, and the quality of that relationship. With this definition, there is room to analyze whether a community fosters a high or low level of social cohesion by examining member attitudes and behaviors especially what they themselves consider to be community-building practices and cohesion.

Perceptions of Community

When I first began reaching out to potential interviewees, I was also inadvertently exploring the community networks, nonprofits, and religious establishments that exist in Metro Detroit. Fostering a sense of community cohesion in such a diverse community is directly impacted by the strength and number of nonprofits in existence. Communities with weak or a lack of community based nonprofits are more likely to have a lower level of cohesion.

For the purpose of clarity, I will introduce the individuals that were interviewed by listing their pseudonyms and a brief description below.

- Abigail is an educator at a Metro Detroit educational institution.
- Rabbi Jonah is in charge of Social Action at a Temple in Metro Detroit.
- Imam Omar is an Imam at one of the many mosques in Hamtramck. His interview was translated by a member of the mosque named Yasser, who also participated in the same interview.
- Officer Smith is a Michigan State Police Officer in Metro Detroit.
- Linda is a prominent interfaith activist involved with several different interfaith organizations and initiatives in Metro Detroit. She is of the Jewish faith.
- Reverend Betty is a pastor and social worker that is involved in interfaith work across the globe.
- Marwan is a Dearborn lawyer and political activist.

There are complex intricacies within communities in Metro Detroit that create a multi-level community. For example, there is a Jewish community within the greater community of Metro Detroit. This could be said for any type of sub-group based on their identity, sexual orientation, religion, race, etc. These individual communities also have varying levels of cohesion. The Jewish and Muslim communities are strong and can be brought together by the interfaith community. A person can also belong to multiple communities, such as being a part of both the Jewish and interfaith communities. It became evident throughout speaking to the individuals I interviewed that there are micro and macro communities. For example, a micro community could be the members of the Hamtramck Muslim community compared to the macro Metro Detroit Muslim community. These communities are interconnected and complex as members may identify with more than one micro community. For example, when asking Rabbi Jonah to define his interpretation of community, he responded by saying:

to the community of Metro Detroit or the Jewish community? Because obviously I serve both in the role of religious leader of this Jewish community and then there is sort of a global Jewish community out there where I have a role (Jonah, 2016).

However, the important thing to note is that it is important to foster a sense of inclusion in the macro community of Metro Detroit and that these various micro communities play a role in doing so. The individuals that I interviewed had fairly similar sentiments on what community is. Through these multiple yet similar perspectives, the way in which community is viewed becomes clear. I also asked them what their role in the community is and how this impacts the levels of cohesion in the community.

Reverend Betty defined community in quite an interesting manner. She utilized Martin Luther King's concept of beloved community as the framework for how she views community. Betty said that:

My main thing is just love, which means showing up, being present, and being selfless and dedicated to my neighbor's success...I really love the idea of the beloved

community, that we create a space where everyone is welcome and cared for. I was recently reading about urban planning and how when communities work for the elderly and children they work for everyone. It is kind of a rule of thumb in urban planning and I've been thinking about that a lot in terms of community. I find community threatened when people draw lines and exclude people, and corruption, this can make the community break down (Betty, 2016).

Betty was the only person who mentioned the idea that community can be threatened. This reaffirms the idea that community cohesion exists and that it operates on a fluctuating system. In her definition, she made it clear that cohesion can decrease when community members start to exclude people and create boundaries. Cohesion can also decrease because of political and social corruption.

To appreciate the importance of the work that Betty does, it is necessary to have a mental picture of what she looks like. She is a petite Caucasian woman, probably approaching or in her 60s and has a generally inviting and warm nature to her. However, through listening to her speak and hearing her stories, it is clear that she can be, when necessary, a force to be reckoned with. Betty is involved in some extremely important work, such as teaching English to refugees and immigrants, and conducting conflict resolution workshops on a global level. As for how she views her role in the community, she said:

My role in the community, as a police chaplain, as a nonprofit leader, I am vocal in the media. When people want to do an activity or bring the community together...people see me as an organizer and convener, someone that can be an advocate if necessary. Because I've been in the community long enough, people see me as someone to talk to if someone else needs talked to and they don't know how to do it. I get called on a lot to be a mediator. As far as cohesion, people know my values and concerns. Sometimes I will get asked to show up at places so people will behave better. People know I am a pastor so they won't swear in front of me, and people just behave better when I am around, I don't know why that is (Betty, 2016).

While the conclusion to that statement was humorous in nature, it highlights the importance of having a person in a community like Betty. She is a person that everyone knows that they can rely on and also a person that can serve as third party during a contentious event. Having a mediator is extremely valuable in a community as culturally diverse as Hamtramck because it provides a safe and neutral outlet for reaching resolutions when there are disagreements or disputes.

Rabbi Jonah identified himself as being a member of the Jewish community, Metro Detroit community, and global community. He also went as far as breaking the Jewish community into different groups based on their denomination. He acknowledged that the Jewish community has very challenging divides regarding things such as religious understandings and political values. He identified that there are far right and far left beliefs within Judaism and that the people on opposing sides rarely talk to one another, even though they share a common identity regarding things such as being Jewish, the Hebrew language, having a shared history, or sharing a connection to Israel and the people of Israel. Rabbi Jonah is a Reform Jew so he is on the far left of the spectrum. He said the people of his Temple can be viewed as people who take a liberal approach to being American and Jewish in equal parts. However, the more Orthodox Jews in Metro Detroit are significantly different and though they can have a shared identity, such as being “Michiganders,” if they start to dig any deeper the sense of a shared community based on religion can begin to dissolve.

Rabbi Jonah is the Rabbi in charge of Social Action at his Temple. This involves active membership in several different initiatives that the Temple is involved with. For example, he is in charge of overseeing a food pantry that bimonthly donates 12,000 pounds of donated food to 150 families in the community. Rabbi Jonah explained that there are food pantries located throughout Detroit, but once in the suburbs they are smaller in number. He said that “well we know our neighbors and if someone lost a job that likely means they are struggling to put food on the table, even if they live in a bigger house. We partnered with another organization and did not expect much turnout. The first week we had forty families and the second a hundred. These are Jews and non-Jews that live in the community.” This is one essential example of the kind of necessary foundational aspects that a healthy community

needs to serve its members. On the surface, the importance of a food pantry may be overlooked. However, a community that comes together and donates food in order to feed other members of their community is sending an important message of support and inclusion. In regards to social cohesion, Rabbi Jonah explicitly stated that he believes one of the biggest challenges is the relationships between the Jewish and Muslim community. He said:

Prior to 9/11 there were dialogues happening, there were things going on where people were saying ‘we can’t live this way, this is not a healthy community.’ Post 9/11 those conversations stopped, absolutely stopped. The Muslim community became insular, the Jewish community became insular. There was no conversation and there were all sorts of excuses. People put all sorts of red flags out and said ‘unless this happens I cannot be a part of the conversation.’ I was one of those people. I said ‘unless somebody is willing to say Israel has a right to exist, I am not going to have the conversation.’ And the Imams disappeared, there were none. There was not a single religious leader in the Muslim community that would say this publicly. At that point, everybody stopped talking and it was absurd. I am now beginning to feel that this is changing and we are at a turning point right now (Jonah, 2016).

Acknowledging that there can be aspects within a community that challenge the concept of cohesion reaffirms that cohesion is not a fixed measurement. As Rabbi Jonah points out, significant world events may directly impact the level of social cohesion. The goal is to find a way to overcome these challenges, which Rabbi Jonah discussed in his segment regarding interfaith activism. No community will be flawless in its essence, but it is desirable to consistently reassess what could increase the level of cohesion and then take the steps necessary to arrive at that point.

Rabbi Jonah is not the only religious leader within Metro Detroit that situates a religion as a sub-community. When speaking with an Imam in a Hamtramck mosque, it became apparent that he also situated himself first as a member of the Muslim community,

and then as a member of larger society. For this interview, I travelled to the mosque and came in right as Friday prayers were coming to an end.

Imam Omar spoke very limited English, but it was often easy to read emotions on his face. When I asked him for how he defined community, he said “when somebody comes to speak to me about community, I view it as the Muslim community. When someone comes to speak to me about society, I take it in the broader context.” Imam Omar was the only person to give an answer that viewed the Muslim community as a separate entity within a greater society. This could be explained in a number of ways, such as the fact that Hamtramck has a large Yemeni population who are able to have all their basic needs met within this one small city. Another reason could be that Imam Omar just views Metro Detroit as a larger society and the Muslim community exists within this society. This is not necessarily a negative viewpoint, it is just a different one. However, during the interview when we were discussing the meaning of community Yasser referred to a verse in the Quran. The verse reads:

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Aware (Quran 49:13).

Yasser and Imam Omar both agreed that this verse means that there are different people and tribes within their community and that they should know one another. This reinforces that they can exist as Muslims within a Muslim community but that the community is a space in which they should get to know others.

This particular mosque is involved with interfaith events and sponsors community gatherings to teach interested members about Islam. When asked about how his role impacted community cohesion, Imam Omar said:

There are a lot of things that we do together. We have had many times where we have had to deal with the city, whether its roads or sanitation, where we have met with other

places, local churches, local groups. Every year we host an interfaith event, for the last four years, where Jews, Christians, the Mayor, Judges, the Fire Chief all come. We invite them during Ramadan, we have a dinner, we talk to them, any questions they have we try to answer. We have groups of university students which come. We discuss what Islam is and answer questions. Whenever we can work with other people to benefit society, we try to do that (Omar & Yasser, 2016).

The interview with Imam Omar shed light on other aspects of community that might not necessarily be what is initially considered when discussing community cohesion. While community focus tends to zero in on relations among members, it is important to consider things that bring those people together. Oddly enough, in Hamtramck, it can be something as small as getting community members involved in addressing road conditions to the city. It might seem of little importance, but in reality it provides community members with a common goal to work towards, which is bettering the appearance and safety of the community. It also provides a way for people to engage in dialogue and get to know one another.

The rest of the people interviewed shared similar sentiments about community. Linda, an interfaith activist, was a person I was told time and time again that I needed to talk to. The interfaith community in Metro Detroit is networked quite well, with different organizations and leaders knowing one another. Linda defined community as:

To me community, my community, is Metro Detroit. When I look at community it is all the contacts I have made over the years which are so important to me. But community is also the people out there that I don't know very well and we may differ very greatly on our politics, but one of the things I really want to do—well I feel like my community is preaching to the choir and I have found a lot of people in my choir and I am very happy with all those people—but I want to start making an effort to reach out to people who are different from me or think different from me. Especially after this election (Linda, 2016).

When speaking about her role in creating community cohesion, Linda said that:

Well luckily, I know when my name comes up, people say “Oh yeah, Linda, she is involved with interfaith” so I get a lot of referrals. I feel good about that because at least I am known for trying to bring people together, different faith traditions together. I am not trying to pat myself on the back, but I do feel like for all the years that I have put into my passion in some way it has made a difference. There are initiatives that are out there working.

The perception of both community and community cohesion are critical in challenging violent extremism and the various circumstances that allow it to take root in a community. How individuals perceive their role in a community will contribute to their overall perception of that community. When addressing the role of community in preventing radicalization and violent extremism, all my interviewees agreed in some variation that *feeling* like a community member is important. Linda said:

If you’ve never had a conversation with a Muslim and then you hear ‘oh look they are all extremist Muslims that are doing horrific things’ but there are extremist Jews in Israel who I don’t particularly care for because of how they treat others, their views on Arabs, their views on women... I think you need to sit down at the table and have a conversation, one on one, break bread, and then you see that they are not the enemy, they are human. It is that fear that is taking over all of us (Linda, 2016).

Although not new, this re-emerging culture of fear is exactly why fostering community cohesion is of extreme importance in terms of preventing violent extremism. The presence of fear in society creates a legitimized space for irrational acts to emerge. Strong communities will be cohesive enough to either deter such acts or stand in solidarity when they do happen. A culture of fear also will marginalize individuals who already feel marginalized, which could potentially lead to radicalization toward violent extremism. Hemmingsen addresses this when

she writes that “the experience of being rejected and feared can be humiliating and ostracizing... but there are other ways to deal with the experiences...it can also be narrated as an experience of being an important and awesome individual whom others fear and would never dare challenge” (Hemmingsen, 2010, p. 196). Marginalized members may experience the feeling of being rejected and feared and then interpret it as them being important and unchallengeable. This process could lead to self or group radicalization, so it is necessary for communities to have a stronger framework of inclusion that aims to make all members feel welcome and valued through various platforms.

Interfaith Dialogue and Activism

Metro Detroit has an expansive interfaith movement that is key to bringing together various community members for community events. Kate McCarthy addresses this type of occurrence when she writes that “around folding tables in church basements, synagogue libraries, or community centers in cities and towns across the country, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Mormons, Baha’is, Buddhists, Unitarians, Sikhs, and others come together on a regular basis to learn about each other, coordinate soup kitchen staffing, lobby local leaders on social justice issues, organize multi-faith prayer services, coordinate staffing of prison and hospital chaplaincies, or respond to a community crisis” (McCarthy, 2007, p. 85) This is the type of community-based work that can counter violent extremism because it is bringing people together to do things for the good of the collective. It imparts a sense of belonging.

A leading interfaith nonprofit located in Metro Detroit is doing something highly innovative and arguably vital in terms of solidifying a cohesive and tolerant community within a multicultural community. There is an initiative referred to as Religious Diversity Training that began as a way to teach Metro Detroit children about the many religions in this area. At first, this program began teaching only seventh graders who learn world religion, but it quickly spread to a second program that was tailored for adults. The adult program was

created due to the demand and inquiries of parents who were accompanying their children on these religious diversity field trips. The program essentially takes groups of seventh graders to different religious sites—such as a Hindu Temple, an Islamic Center, or a Jewish Temple—and for the entire day children are completely submerged in another religion while learning about historical and modern teachings.

I had the opportunity to attend one of these events take place at a Temple. The group of students who attended were Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Christian and various other religious and non-religious groups. The day was spent learning about the Jewish religion and culture and also in engaging with and breaking down stereotypes. One of the event organizers began by asking the students what they thought of when they heard the word Jew. Various students responded by saying Hebrew, Kosher, Holocaust, Old Testament, Jesus, Star of David, Hanukkah, and Anne Frank. Rabbi Jonah also asked them what they expected to see a Rabbi wearing, to which they responded by saying “wearing a black little hat” “wearing a robe” “being barefoot” and “having a beard.” This interaction between roughly 100 seventh grade children, event organizers, and Rabbis from the Temple provided the children with a safe place to explore a religion and culture that might be different from their own. This training is successful largely because it is directed towards children who are learning about world religion in school. Therefore, the children are likely going to be more receptive to learning about religions by experiencing a first-hand account of them.

The Religious Diversity Training that day also incorporated key themes that are methodologically integrated into how the training works. The organizers and religious leaders put a lot of focus on what kind of commonalities exist among different religions. For Jews and Muslims, these commonalities often delved into the fact that both religions have faced periods of displacement, forced migration, and intolerance within the international community. What this essentially does is encourage the children to find common ground with one another stemming from experiences of discrimination. The importance of this cannot be emphasized enough, especially when considering the larger context of CVE efforts. If an individual has radicalized to the point of legitimizing violent extremism, it is possible that he or she has experienced something that has led to feelings of marginalization (Hemmingsen, 2010). If

children can be taught at a young age that there are other people outside of their own religion being marginalized, it can be a powerful mechanism to increase cohesion and discourage a feeling of isolation. The interactions between different religions also builds up a practice of interaction and dialogue that can be helpful if and when individuals experience isolation and alienation.

Another thing that was emphasized was music in religion and the children enjoyed this portion of the training. They had the chance to listen to a Cantor sing in Hebrew and many of them drew comparisons to the music of their own religion and culture while expressing how fundamental music was in their life. The Cantor of this Temple described his position as bringing music to the community and bringing music to prayer. This resonated with these children because they adopt similar practices either through worship or at home. During the session with the Cantor, the children eagerly were flipping through the prayer book and seemed genuinely curious about the Hebrew written in it.

Perhaps one of the most awakening experiences of this training was being able to witness a mock Jewish wedding. The children were unanimously excited to be participating and watching as seven boys and seven girls were picked to play out the roles in a traditional Jewish wedding. The Rabbi explained how Jewish weddings work and the children actually acted out a wedding and the entire audience was enjoying this. I specifically watched a group of Muslim mothers' reactions to this, and their laughter and smiles indicated to me that they were both learning and enjoying the spectacle. Though it was designed to bring different children together to show them how their faith may do weddings differently, it also allowed the children to see a part of Jewish culture. At the end, I overheard a parent saying that "everybody needs to do this" in reference to the training.

As previously mentioned, this program grew so large that the demand for an adult version followed shortly after the creation of it. There is now the option for adults to complete this Religious Diversity Training. Though the methodology is similar, the subject matter is at a deeper level and the goal is to increase awareness of each other's religions and counter stereotypes. In terms of CVE, this is an under-developed method to approach how to successfully combat potential violent extremism. If adults are willing and wanting to attend

this type of training, they are likely going to be taking it home to their children and teaching them about it as well. This naturally creates a trickledown effect of disseminated information which focuses on inclusion, tolerance, and cohesion. This serves as an example of how interfaith dialogue can be used as a tool to combat extremism, even if extremism is not what is being discussed. By having religious leaders and community members engage in dialogue which leads to some type of relationship or understanding, common ground can be reached. This assists in decreasing the level of marginalization that occurs. If interfaith activism and programs are given the resources and tools to model what is happening in Metro Detroit, it could prove to be an incredibly useful approach to let the community counter violent extremism in a holistic manner.

During my interview with Reverend Betty, she said something that supports my argument on the importance of community cohesion. She was sharing a story about visiting a church in Columbus, Ohio which has a large population of Somali Muslims. She said:

I went to speak in a church and they were just down the road from this huge residential complex that houses a lot of Somalians. The people in this church told me ‘we do not like them, we do not want anything to do with them. They are aggressive, they are mean, and they treat our kids bad in school.’ And I said to them ‘shame on you! You are just down the road from these people who need to be welcomed into your community and people act out in response to what they receive.’ So I just totally shamed them and said ‘how can you not care? In the name of Christ, love your neighbor! That is a pretty major teaching of Jesus.’ And they said ‘oh, we did not really think of it like that’ (Betty, 2016).

Reverend Betty also mentioned that she would look for radicalization more in areas like Columbus where the people live in a suburban area but are totally isolated without something such as basic transportation. She spoke about how people in that situation have a responsibility to engage with the people who are isolated by doing something like a picnic or a potluck in order to get to know the culture and to invite the isolated groups to be part of a

larger community. She also said she offered to come down and teach her Columbus counterparts and mentioned that “all you have to do is show up with a pan of food and knock on a door!” (Betty, 2016). This exemplifies the importance that an interfaith activist can have in a multicultural community. If one person can bridge the gap between different cultures, it could open the door for more productive and inclusive dialogue.

Law Enforcement and Citizens: Methods of Policing

The role of law enforcement in CVE efforts is becoming a more contentious topic. There is push back from local community leaders that believe that law enforcement involvement often criminalizes people who may be otherwise innocent. Discussion is occurring about whether CVE efforts can be connected with entrapment because of occurrences such as placing informants within Muslim communities or emotionally manipulating vulnerable individuals.

The most high-profile case regarding violent extremism in Metro Detroit was recently settled. As of April 5th, 2017 Khalil Abu Rayyan was sentenced to five years in prison on federal firearm charges, which is significantly higher than federal guidelines that call for 15 to 21 months in prison (Brand-Williams, 2017). Rayyan is a 22 year old from Dearborn Heights that talked about attacking a local church and claimed to support ISIS. Rayyan recently was at trial for two gun charges and marijuana use but has not been charged with any terrorism related crime (Warikoo, Detroit Free Press, 2017). Rayyan’s case drew media attention due to the allegations of federal police using methods of entrapment. Two separate FBI agents, who posed as love interests, were involved in Rayyan’s case and are being accused of emotionally manipulating an already vulnerable man (Warikoo, 2016). Rayyan appeared to be depressed and had spoken of suicide over the phone to who he thought was a 19 year old Iraqi-American, but who was actually an undercover FBI employee (Warikoo, 2016). Rayyan was not able to get the mental health help that he needed, and instead was allegedly pushed towards considering how suicide for a larger religious cause would be a more legitimate approach (Warikoo, 2016).

The role of the FBI in Metro Detroit when it pertains to CVE efforts has community members worried. There is concern from local Muslim leaders who believe that “they have nothing to hide but are concerned about the FBI going after young men who might be mentally unstable or have emotional problems who can be manipulated” (Warikoo, 2016). During the interview with Marwan, he mentioned the Rayyan case. As a lawyer, he has knowledge of the mechanics of the case. He stated that Rayyan was not charged with terrorism and implied that the informants capitalized on his mental instability by manipulating him and pushing a violent extremist narrative and agenda. He said:

At first it was alarming to think that there was someone in our community that wanted to kill thousands of Christians...but it turned out at the end of the day that he did not really want to kill anyone. He was just trying to impress her [FBI informant] by saying ‘I’m this, I’m a tough guy’ and he was just looking for a female friend (Marwan, 2016).

Though there may be wider concerns regarding law enforcement in the United States, steps are being taken in Metro Detroit to build bridges. Officer Smith is a Michigan State Police Officer who is involved in media and public affairs. His interview demonstrates how local police may be better equipped to deal with CVE because they are involved with the community as well. Officer Smith spoke about the primary concerns of local law enforcement in Metro Detroit and he expressed that while radicalization via social media is not high on the list, it is still important. He claimed, however, in reality violent crime is the primary focus. He stated that community members are not going to be concerned about the threat of a radicalized terrorist carrying out a violent act but instead that they are more concerned about members of their own community committing violent crimes (Smith, 2016).

When it comes to Metro Detroit, there is still a degree of segregation that occurs. This can be challenging when trying to discuss how people integrate into their community. It can also be challenging to integrate individuals into a larger community when their primary identifying community provides them with all the resources that they need, such as the

aforementioned Jewish community in Metro Detroit. Regarding integration, Officer Smith commented that:

I think we are ahead of the game compared to other areas, but I think that it would be foolish for us to say that everything is just great. It's not, there is racial tension in the Metro Detroit area, we see every once in a while where something will rise up...and every time there is a terrorist attack people look towards Dearborn. So I think we are ahead, we talk about it. We aren't afraid to talk about race, we have to talk about things like this, about religion, understanding someone's religion (Smith, 2016).

In regard to this, understanding the community that law enforcement is responsible for policing is vital. If an officer does not understand the members of the community he or she is assigned to, problems can arise. In Metro Detroit, there are religious and cultural aspects that need to be taken into consideration when engaging with the community members. When I asked Officer Smith about the relationship with law enforcement in Metro Detroit and their community members, I asked specifically about Hamtramck and Dearborn. He agreed that the relationship between law enforcement and the community is overall positive. He said:

You have to get into the neighborhoods. You have to talk to people and when something bad happens you cannot just curl up and say you are not going to talk about it...You will see this with the Detroit Police Department. They hold precinct meetings, they have Neighborhood Police Officers, and they have Community Service Troopers. Their whole role is to deal with the community, to speak with them and find out what they need. We did Light up the City, where we just went around neighborhoods and gave them lightbulbs to put in their front porch. At the time when a trooper is giving someone a lightbulb, they also get to talk to them about what is going on in their neighborhood (Smith, 2016).

Officer Smith also spoke about how law enforcement gets involved with the community in ways that might not seem obvious. He stated that:

There is a huge heroin epidemic here, just like across the country. Last month we went into an Arab community and spoke with them about heroin because it is something that is just not talked about in their community. If you are a female and you are involved with heroin or another drug, you cannot go seek treatment because it is disrespectful and embarrassing to the family. So sometimes you have to go in there and say culture is important, but you need to allow people to get treatment (Smith, 2016).

This statement authenticates the fact that local law enforcement is aware of the ways in which culture can impact not just the community, but the ways in which families within the community operate. This is a necessary foundation if law enforcement truly wants to engage in a positive manner with the communities that they serve. Officer Smith also stated that law enforcement officers receive training that makes them more sensitive to the cultural and religious aspects of their community. It is a dynamic of relationship building that should not be overlooked or underestimated in multicultural communities, especially in terms of creating a more cohesive community. This approach to conducting law enforcement operations acknowledges that communities do not have to abandon cultural norms and values in order to exist in a multicultural community. Community policing is an intercultural effort that brings together different groups of people by getting them to engage on a more personal level. It shifts attention away from thinking of radicalization as concentrated on individual motivations and goals, to an overall focus on community-building by engaging different stakeholders.

Overall, Officer Smith had a fairly positive perception on the relationship between law enforcement and community. His personal views reinforced the argument that in order to create a more cohesive community, it is critical for law enforcement to engage on a community level. This can be complicated in a multicultural community, but as he stated, Metro Detroit is further advanced and takes steps to engage with the community they serve.

Neighborhood Police Officers who are tasked with actually getting to know the members of a community may alleviate other tension that multicultural communities can experience with law enforcement officers.

During the interview with Imam Omar, I asked him what the relationship was like between law enforcement and the Muslim community as well as religious leaders. He said that:

There is mutual respect, we do not have any issues. People might get tickets and say ‘oh it’s because I am Muslim’ but other than that there is never anything major. We even have a Chaplain at the Police Department. The Police Chief did a lot of stuff for the Muslim community to close the gap. As Muslims, the Prophet teaches to respect authority. We always follow authority, as long as the authority does not tell us to do something against Gods commands (Omar & Yasser, 2016).

Marwan also spoke about how the community handles what they perceive to be threats. He spoke on his personal involvement with Federal law enforcement over threats he had received from people outside of Metro Detroit. He also stated that:

The understanding in the community is that we cooperate. If there is something in the community we find out, we inform the FBI or the local police. Whether it’s a threat against the community, or a threat within the community. Either way, if someone is trying to attack our community we inform the police. We have a pretty good working relationship as far as that. I would not be surprised if every single family in Dearborn has somebody that has contact with either the FBI or local police that they could reach out to and say ‘hey, I want you to keep an eye on this person.’ Sometimes the informants do prey on the weak in our community and those are the sad parts. And sometimes, instead of going after real threats, our government spends money and resources on these people who have kind of no desire or ability to perform acts of terrorism and only have that because they have been pushed into it (Marwan, 2016).

This statement again substantiates the notion that the role of federal law enforcement can create a slippery slope within the community. Marwan seemed to agree that the FBI can play some role in CVE, but that their role can become less transparent and of concern when it comes to their involvement with vulnerable youth. Again, methods of community policing could help to avoid such instances of possible entrapment because the officers in charge are going to know the community member and they would know more about his or her mental stability. Community policing in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services would be best equipped to deal with individuals like this by providing them with the medical assistance that they need rather than arresting them.

Literature Review

There has been a steady increase within the scholarly literature that focuses on the role of community in CVE. The literature that focuses solely on the United States is limited given that CVE is a relatively recent approach within domestic counterterrorism strategy. CVE strategy began in the United States in August 2011, under the *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States* strategy (Ambrozik, 2018). Since then, there has been mixed results regarding CVE implementation and there a number of individuals and organizations that oppose CVE. This article addresses such skepticism above by discussing the slippery slope that can be created when federal entities become involved in what should be community-based. It is necessary to listen to the community feedback regarding such occurrences in order to address concerns surrounding CVE.

In the United States, implementing CVE strategies is theoretically the responsibility of the public (Ambrozik, 2018). Though this may be the case, concerns over how CVE is being carried out seem legitimate due to the campaign pledges made by Donald Trump and the subsequent actions that have been taken surrounding immigration policies. A significant amount of federal CVE strategy focuses on engaging Muslim-American communities and groups. (Bjelopera, 2014). This focus can inadvertently make individuals, organizations, and communities feel targeted. Ensuring that CVE is a genuine community effort that is as

disengaged from the federal government as possible is of key importance. Focusing on interfaith organizations and partnerships could prove to be an innovative approach towards CVE, without actually needing to brand it as so.

Assessing the effectiveness community-based interventions is a difficult task. Weine states that there is no solid evidence that can show that community-based intervention, including community policing, has been effective in countering violent extremism (Weine, 2012). However, community partnerships are understood to be of significant importance in the approach to implementing CVE strategies (Mack, 2014). Countering the radicalization process can often best be achieved by a combination of engagement and empowerment to individuals and groups at local levels (Mack, 2014). The role of community in CVE has to be just that—a genuine effort made by community partnerships, organizations, and leaders.

The role that interfaith dialogue and activism can have on countering violent extremism has been widely overlooked in academia. This seems to be a topic that is being more carefully considered by independent institutes and non-profits across the globe but less prevalent in academic literature on CVE. When attempting to find scholarship on this topic search results brought back various efforts from Kosovo, the Netherlands, and Pakistan. More notable is the result of a 2016 posting on the US Department of State's website for a \$600,000 grant for CVE and Interfaith programs in Tanzania (Funds for NGOs, 2016). This project was funded by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. The project description states that it sought organizations that could “mitigate religious tensions between communities and address drivers of marginalization that exacerbate religious tensions and may contribute to conditions that could lead to violent extremism in Tanzania” (Funds for NGOs, 2016). Similar to this, the Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) held a meeting in Vienna in April 2016 to discuss the role that interfaith dialogue had on CVE. Their conclusion was that “interfaith dialogue and co-operation are key to fostering cohesion and preventing violent extremism” (OSCE, 2016).

The lack of scholarship regarding interfaith dialogue as a method to counter violent extremism specific to the United States is concerning. It is evident that there is an understanding that religious leaders are key in countering violent extremism, but the dialogue

needs to also extend past the religious leaders and be inclusive of the community. Religious leaders in the interfaith circle are already often highly educated or experienced with conflict resolution and in agreement that their religion can foster community-building and coexist with other religions. Their work is important, but it is more important to consider how interfaith dialogue can bring together a group of diverse individuals and make them feel as though they are part of a broader community. Through this setting, extremist narratives can be challenged in a nurturing manner and with people that vulnerable individuals trust and have a relationship with.

Interfaith dialogue and organizations without the context of violent extremism have been critiqued, praised, and criticized through many different perspectives within academia. Criticisms often target the actual content of the dialogue, such as addressing the fears of non-Muslim Americans regarding Islamic extremism or contentious topics such as Jerusalem and who actually has legitimate claims to the Holy City (Smith J. I., 2007). However, this does not necessarily matter in the context of creating a cohesive community in the United States. If community members can coexist with one another and bond over other things, they do not need to agree on every topic. Rather, individuals are allowed to disagree with one another on things and they can still have relationships with one another despite this.

Interfaith organizations have a vast amount of diversity when it comes to purpose, missions, and activities (Todd, Houston-Kolnik, & Suffrin, 2017). This was evident in Metro Detroit given the interfaith activities geared towards feeding the community members or helping homeless community members. The scope of interfaith organizations and activists can often extend well past just strictly interfaith events, and often aim to expand services to vulnerable community members who may not even be of the same faith. In this regard, interfaith organizations and activists can be understood as actively attempting to empower community members regardless of that person's faith (or lack thereof).

Concerns and Limitations

It is necessary to address that this account is not fully representative of attitudes towards CVE and community engagement, but rather serves as a snapshot of the community of Metro Detroit. The interview with Reverend Betty highlights this best when she speaks about the attitude towards the Somali community in Columbus. She spoke about how her own religious community there was alienating the Somali population with no legitimate reason, and that the people within the church she attended had not even attempted to build a relationship with any Somali in their community. It is a limitation of this article that inclusion of data from other key cities was not possible. However, this is a direction for future research to consider. By repeating this study in a city like Columbus or Minneapolis different results could be possible which would allow for a more thorough understanding on how community engagement can counter violent extremism. It would also be necessary to analyze different community-based non-profits that are providing resources to community members as well as the strength, or lack thereof, of the interfaith community.

The size of Metro Detroit also is a limitation. It was not possible to incorporate all necessary viewpoints in the data collection to accurately depict three counties that drastically differ in demographic categories. Undoubtedly, this article represents individuals who have adopted a tolerant and inclusive way of life and there are certainly others in Metro Detroit who would detest this. A future study of these individuals would provide telling data regarding the breakdown of community and how this can impact individual empowerment.

Conclusion: Policy Implications and Future Research

The common themes of community, the role of law enforcement in community, and interfaith dialogue and activism are important to consider when analyzing CVE efforts. Though separate themes, they all can intertwine when it comes to building a more cohesive community in a multicultural demographic. For example, law enforcement can engage in community policing by being present at interfaith events, which happens in Metro Detroit.

Also, interfaith activists can engage and strengthen the community by providing necessities such as food pantries to individuals or families regardless of their religion. These are just two methods that can strengthen the overall community and make it a more cohesive place to reside in. The implications of such connections are that it should essentially make individuals feel less marginalized, and feel more welcome in their community, and therefore less likely to engage in or support violent extremism.

Metro Detroit is not a perfect community, but as Officer Smith said, they are ahead of the game. Interfaith activism and policing methods are two areas of community-building that deserve more attention from both scholars and practitioners. There appears to be a well-established network of individuals within Metro Detroit that are working continuously towards creating a more cohesive community. These networks are worth evaluating both structurally and socially in order for replication elsewhere.

Community-based research allows for the voices of people within the communities impacted by CVE to be factored into the discussion. Important conclusions can be drawn in relation to policy considerations. One of the most important considerations is the role of federal law enforcement. Local law enforcement is able to build relationships with members of the community, particularly key leaders. Federal law enforcement has the potential to create a sense of unease within the community. Desecuritized community-based methods would be more useful for counterterrorism efforts than the official branding and implementation of CVE programs by the Department of Homeland Security or the Department of Justice.

Community cohesion builds a sense of multicultural engagement and tolerance that goes beyond the security-related framing of CVE programs. Creating and implementing CVE programs through the DHS or the DOJ is in its very nature problematic for a number of reasons. First, it assumes that all potential subjects are or have the potential to be criminals and potential security risks that should be treated as such. Second, CVE efforts claim to be aimed at strengthening community, but this cannot possibly be true if individuals and communities feel that these programs are securitized from the start. Perhaps CVE should be reconsidered under the context of a joint effort between the Department of Health and Human

Services, the Department of Education, and/or the Department of Housing and Urban Development. These three departments would be more readily able to address the issues facing vulnerable communities in a unique and non-securitizing manner.

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ISSN: 2363-9849

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