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Disengagement from Ideologically-Based and Violent Organizations: A Systematic Review of the Literature

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Disengagement from Ideologically-Based and Violent Organizations:

A Systematic Review of the Literature

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Abstract

Research on disengagement from violent extremism is an emerging field of inquiry. As compared to the related field of radicalization, there have been fewer studies of disengagement. Further, little effort has been made to conduct a large scale, systematic review of what is currently known about disengagement from violent extremism. This type of meta-literature assessment can play an important role in terms of informing strategies and programs designed to facilitate exit. To help fill this gap, our project systematically examines the disengagement literature to determine the range and frequency of various exit factors identified in previous studies. We also rely on parallel literatures such as exit from street gangs, mainstream religious groups, cults, and nonviolent social movements to build a robust sample of studies that assess the extent to which group exit factors may generalize across different populations.

Keywords: disengagement, exit, systematic review, terrorism, street gangs, social movements

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Introduction

Far more is known about why people join ideologically-based and violent organizations than what is known about why they leave them (Hunter, Shortland, Crayne, & Ligon, Forthcoming). Research on disengagement from violent extremism is a relatively new field of inquiry. As compared to the related field of radicalization, little effort has been made to conduct a large scale, systematic review of what is currently known about disengagement from violent extremism (for an exception see Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013). This type of meta-literature assessment can play an important role in terms of informing strategies and programs designed to facilitate exit (Ashour, 2009; Schulze, 2008). To help fill this gap, our project systematically examines the disengagement literature to determine the range and frequency of various exit factors identified in previous studies. We elaborate on Dalgaard-Nielsen's (2013) systematic review of terrorism disengagement by adopting a Campbell literature review methodology, a broader geographic range of studies, and several parallel fields of study (i.e., gang, cults, etc.) for comparative purposes.

Over the past several decades, the focus on violent extremism has grown rapidly across multiple disciplines such as sociology (Blee, 1996; Simi & Futrell, 2015), psychology (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011), criminology (Simi, Sporer, & Bubolz, 2016); organizational psychology (Ligon, Simi, Harms & Harris, 2015); IT innovation (Derrick, Sporer, Church & Ligon, Forthcoming); and political science (Asal, Gill, Horgan & Rethemeyer, 2015). While greater focus on recruitment and entry into violent extremism characterizes the research in this area, there has been an increasing number of studies that examine disengagement from both violent ideological and non-ideological groups some of which date back several decades (Aho, 1988; Barnett, Blumstein, & Farrington, 1987; Bubolz & Simi, 2015; Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Kassimeris, 2011; Decker, Pyrooz & Moule, Jr., 2014; Thornberry, 1998, 2003; Vigil, 1988, 2010; Weerman, Lovegrove & Thornberry, 2015). In fact, several recent studies related to both disengagement and deradicalization have drawn wide attention and have likely helped influence greater focus on this area of research (e.g., Ashour, 2009; El-Said & Harrigan, 2012; Gunaratna & Bin Ali, 2015; Koehler, 2016). The recent growth in disengagement research suggests this is an opportune time to assess the current state of knowledge in this area.

Goal of the Present Effort

The goal of the present study is to assess the current state of knowledge on the topic of disengagement or exit from ideologically-based and violent organizations by reviewing the scholarly literature across a variety of academic disciplines. Literature reviews play an important role in the epistemological growth of all scientific fields. Often, the empirical and theoretical literature on any given area of study is broad and interdisciplinary in origin and focus (Hackett, Amsterdamska, Lynch & Wajcman, 2008). Due to the scope and growth of scientific knowledge, it is often necessary to identify the accumulation of knowledge as well as gaps in the literature and summarize this information into a collective body of work (Feldman, 1971). The general goal of a literature review is to gather past research, summarize major issues and disseminate the information generated by a large number of individual studies.

There are many different types of literature reviews including integrative reviews, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, meta-syntheses, and qualitative reviews (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Without literature reviews, large amounts of the research are at risk of being ignored which compromises our collective knowledgebase. As such, researchers may find themselves inappropriately calling for the examination of certain factors that have previously been studied and analyzed. Through the use of literature reviews, researchers are better able to capture the complexity of a given topic area and provide the most relevant methodological and theoretical techniques applicable to their field of study.

For the current study, we rely on a Campbell systematic literature review (Farrington & Petrosino, 2001), which requires a thorough, objective, and reproducible search of a range of sources to identify as many relevant studies as possible. In an attempt to summarize this body of literature, we examine multiple areas of empirical literature such as exit from street gangs, religious cults, and violent and nonviolent social movements. Throughout this review, we highlight the utility of a multidisciplinary approach to determine the range and frequency of various exit factors identified in previous studies. By doing so, we aim to build a robust sample of studies that assess the extent to which exit factors may generalize across different populations and ideologically-based organizations.

In the next section, we differentiate the conceptual meaning of disengagement and deradicalization, which are often applied interchangeably among scholars. Next, we examine

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the need for investigating exit from ideologically-based groups as well as the methodological approach utilized throughout the current study. Following this, we present both commonalities and notable differences across each of the studies that focus on disengagement. In addition, we highlight themes that occur both within a particular study (e.g., published book) and across multiple studies (e.g., published book and peer-reviewed articles). Finally, we conclude this article by discussing areas of future research as well as theoretical and practical implications.

Conceptual Clarity: Disengagement versus Deradicalization

A major obstacle to understanding terrorist disengagement is that existing research remains devoid of conceptual clarity. For instance, researchers consistently use "disengagement" and "deradicalization" interchangeably (Horgan, 2009a). This is problematic because these concepts may have unique underlying mechanisms that distinguish each trajectory. For purposes of the present study, we define disengagement as, "the process whereby an individual no longer accepts as appropriate the socially defined rights and obligations that accompany a given role in society" (Ebaugh, 1988, p. 3). Disengagement does not mean individuals renounce the belief system, but rather, they are no longer motivated to participate in group activities (e.g., meetings).

Alternatively, we define deradicalization as "the process of changing an individual's belief system, rejecting the extremist ideology, and embracing mainstream values" (Rabasa et al., 2010, p. xiii). Deradicalization implies the individual has rejected the ideological belief system, and thus, no longer adheres to the ideologies that characterized a particular group. As such, deradicalization should be viewed as distinct from disengagement because it suggests a transformation in the individual's world view. In this way, deradicalization involves a change in belief; whereas, disengagement is characterized by a change in behavior.

While an individual may renounce the group's belief system, there exist situations in which the individual remains active in the group (e.g., displays movement related symbols, attends meetings) but changes his or her commitment to the belief system. Alternatively, it is also possible for an individual to disengage from an ideologically-based organization while remaining committed to the belief system. For instance, a person who disengages from far-

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right extremism may continue to condemn race-mixing but no longer attends group meetings or participates in movement activities (e.g., hikes, marches, rallies).

Although disengagement and deradicalization processes overlap in several ways, the current effort focuses on factors leading to disengagement. We are specifically interested in the various "push" and "pull" factors that lead to changes in behavior such as family responsibilities, disillusionment, or lack of satisfaction (Reckless, 1961; Reiss, 1951). From a methodological standpoint, however, we examine the ways in which deradicalization and disengagement are defined and applied across the sample. In the next section, we discuss the various ideologically-based and violent organizations examined as well as the methodological approach utilized in the current study.

Ideologically-Based and Violent Organizations

Ideologies are sets of ideas based on beliefs, experiences, and education that aim to delineate an issue and offer solutions to any associated problems (Snow, 2004; Freeden, 1998, 2007). Ideologies are biased, illusory, or misleading because they present partial or incomplete realities, and those versions of reality represent some societal interests while obscuring others (Xiaobo, 2011). Social movements, like many other social groupings, rely heavily on a unifying ideology for group solidarity, maintenance, and growth (McVeigh, 2009). What remains to be understood, however, is the process of shedding these ideological belief systems as the individual disengages from the group.

In order to capture the scope of disengagement literature, the current review relies on parallel literatures from a wide range of disciplines and topic areas. Specifically, we examine disengagement from (1) terrorism, (2) street gangs, (3) mainstream religious groups and (4) cults/new religious movements and social movements. By examining both violent and non-violent groups as well as ideological and non-ideological groups, we can better identify the similarities and differences underlining the disengagement process.

First, we examined studies within the field of terrorism research. Examples of terrorist groups comprise a wide range of extremist ideologies such as the far-right (e.g., Silent Brotherhood, Covenant, Sword, and Arm of the Lord), far-left (e.g., Rode Jeugd, Black

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Liberation Army) and religiously-based organizations (e.g., Islamic State). The underlining characteristic among terrorist groups is the use of violence as a means to communicate political grievances and achieve political goals.

Street gangs are the second area of focus in our review. The existence of a criminal purpose is the predominant factor which distinguishes street gangs from other kinds of organizations (Jankowski, 1991; Yablonky, 1959). Street gangs are characterized as an ongoing organization of individuals who share a common identity such as Bloods, Vice Lords, Latin Kings or Black P. Stones (Klein, 1995; Thrasher, 1927). While recent studies suggest an overlap between violent extremism and generic criminal offending (see Simi, Sporer & Bubolz, 2016), we treat street gangs as separate from terrorism and other groups because they lack an ideological belief system that unifies members.

The third category is comprised of studies related to cults/new religious movements and social movements. This category refers to religious, spiritual, or social communities that occupy a peripheral place within society (Wright, 1984, 1986). Often, the belief system of these groups is regarded by others as "deviant" or unusual and/or challenging the status quo. Such beliefs often center around racial and gender equality (e.g., Civil Rights Movement, LGBTQ community) or religious and spiritual issues (e.g., Hare Krishna or Scientology). In some situations, social movements rely on violence as a strategy but this occurs less often than terrorist groups or street gangs, and is not expressly condoned by a formal leadership authority or within the group's mission (Ligon, Hunter, & Mumford, 2008; Mumford, Espejo, Hunter, Bedell-Avers, Eubanks, & Connelly, 2007).

The final area of focus included mainstream religious groups such as Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Islam, Mormonism, and Protestantism. While these groups have a strong ideological identity, they are not typically associated with the promotion of violence to achieve their ideological objectives. In their study to account for violence among ideological groups, Mumford and colleagues (2008) identified a number of variables that distinguished violent from non-violent ideological groups, such as leader extremism and condoning violence, group righteousness, organizational indoctrination regarding the use of violence, and high levels of environmental conflict. However, to isolate disengagement from ideologically extreme groups, it is critical to compare disengagement literature from this non-violent ideologically mainstream sample.

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Methodology

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Based on Campbell's recommendations for conducting a systematic review, our task was to locate, and more specifically, examine research evaluating the scope of disengagement literature. To do this, we first identified an area of interest and determined which studies would be included for analysis. For purposes of the current study, we defined the area of interest as disengagement from terrorism, street gangs, cults/new religious movements and social movements and mainstream religious groups.

This systematic review incorporated qualitative, quantitative and mix-methods studies meeting the following inclusion criteria: (1) the study examined factors contributing to the disengagement process[5], (2) the study was published in peer-reviewed academic journals and books and (3) the study reported original empirical research. As such, theoretically-based studies and meta-analyses that summarized a series of studies were excluded. If the same dataset was used across multiple studies, the research question and/or focus had to be different or it was excluded from the analysis. In order to capture the scope of disengagement literature, we did not specify a time frame in which a study had to be published. While most studies examined physical exit from an ideologically-based or violent group (n = 114; 89%), a small portion of studies (n = 14; 11%) focused on the individual's change in belief system while remaining involved in group activities. Due to the current focus on disengagement, these 14 studies were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria.

Search Strategy

Researchers gathered studies using online library catalogs and research databases at the authors' universities. These databases were accessed using internet-based search engines

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[5] Although desistance and disengagement overlap to some extent (Altier, Thoroughgood, & Horgan, 2014; Mullins, 2010), the focus of the current article is on the exit from ideological groups rather than the cession of an individual's criminal career.

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such as *JSTOR, Lexis Nexis, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Google Scholar, PsychINFO* and *Sociological Abstracts*. Searches were conducted using synonyms and combinations of the following search terms: "disengagement," "defection," "deconversion," "desistance," "disillusionment," and "deradicalization." We also searched using broader terms such as, "exit," "leaving," "getting out," "departure," and "withdrawal" to identify all studies that investigated any process related to disengagement. Truncation of terms was used to capture variation in terminology. This search was augmented with a review of the bibliographies of related articles. In addition, reference lists of selected studies were screened for other relevant studies. We intentionally included studies from a diverse range of fields to achieve a higher level of understanding and knowledge (Britten et al., 2002).

Coding and Analytic Procedures

The synthesis broadly followed the outline of thematic analysis as described by Thomas and Harden (2008). Once researchers completed the systematic search for articles, each study was read and coded to identify prominent findings. All papers were read and coded by two raters to allow for negotiation and reflection of each paper's content and to reduce any potential sources of bias. Sample entries were content analyzed based on the methodological rigor of the study (e.g., use of language, reported sample size) as well as the major findings in regards to exit (e.g., factors impacting exit, length of time to exit, specific variables examined). Content analysis can offer quantitative insights within a discipline that can be evaluated and then used to offer evidence-based recommendations for future directions. While the research team initially identified these measures of interest, new items were created and modified as the coding process developed.

Coders independently reviewed the coding sheets in reference to the articles and noted patterns that emerged within each study. Reviewers then looked for similarities and differences between codes in order to group them into themes and subthemes where appropriate. The themes were concise, to give the reader a sense of what the theme is about, and contained enough data extracts to support the contention for the given theme (Noblit & Hare, 1988). The next step in the data synthesis was to reveal the parallels between the

studies, indicating those that may be shared, those that stand in opposition to one another, or those that represent a cohesive argument that accurately answers the questions we were posing.

Following these steps, major themes and subthemes were then identified through a joint effort among all members of the research team. Codes were then listed in STATA with supporting evidence in the form of quotes written alongside them. Finally, researchers compared similar themes and synthesized findings in terms of the major themes and subthemes. Where there was disagreement present in studies (e.g., opposing views on contributing factors leading to disengagement), the potential underlying meanings for this were inferred by the researchers, taking into account the sample, setting and type of research conducted. In the next sections, we present findings from the systematic literature review.
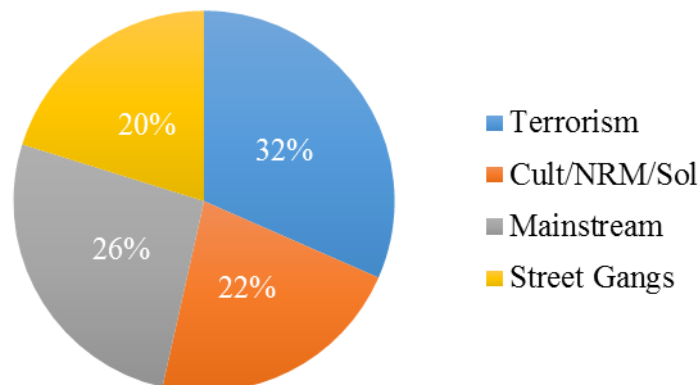
Findings

A total of 114 articles fulfilled the search criterion for inclusion in the current study (see Appendix A for full list of articles). The sample included both qualitative (n = 67; 59%), quantitative (n = 22; 19%) and mixed methods articles (n = 25; 22%). In terms of the specific methodological approach, researchers utilized a wide array of data collection techniques including interviews (n = 78; 48%), survey data (n = 33; 19%), case studies (n = 15; 9%), participant observation (n = 15; 9%), biographies (n = 12; 7%) and other (n = 14; 8%) such as official court documents, program evaluations and open-source coding.

[For a detailed list see Appendix A at the end of this article]

Of the 114 studies, 100 (88%) were published in peer-reviewed journals and 14 (12%) were published books. Of the peer-reviewed journals, 16 (16%) were published in criminology and criminal justice journals; 5 (5%) in psychology; 17 (17%) in sociology; and 62 (62%) were published in specialty journals such as the *Journal of Media and Religion, Studies of Conflict and Terrorism* or *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*.

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Figure 1: *Distribution Of Topic Area Across Sample*

As Figure 1 illustrates, the distribution of the topic areas across the sample was relatively equal with terrorism (n = 36; 32%) accounting for the bulk of the sample followed by mainstream religious groups (n = 30; 26%), cults/new religious movements and social movements (n = 25; 22%) and finally, street gangs (n = 23; 20%). Among the terrorism category, far-right (n = 15; 42%), jihadi (n = 15; 42%) and far-left (n = 6; 16%) ideological groups comprised this classification. The higher number of terrorism studies suggest how powerful the "terrorism discourse" and "culture of counterterrorism" have become across Western societies where the fear of terror is consistently ranked as a top concern among the general public. This trend seems to have also impacted both academic resources and research agendas.

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**Figure 2:** *Number of Articles/Books Published per Year*
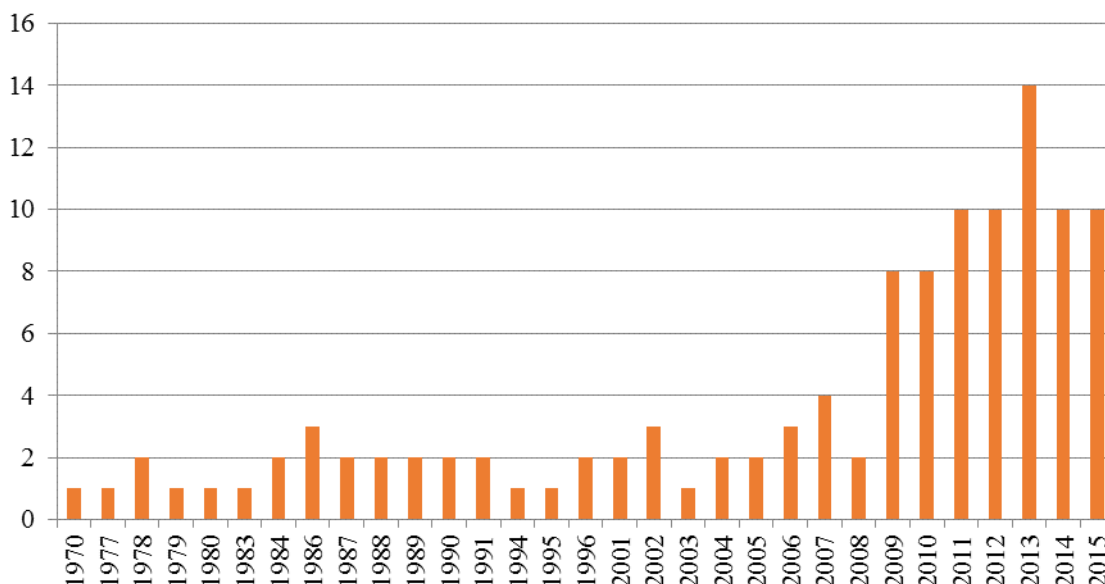
Between 1970 and 2015, there were a total of 114 studies examining exit from ideologically-based organizations. As Figure 2 illustrates, the overwhelming majority (n = 86) of these studies were conducted after September 11, 2001. When each topic area is broken down by group, results indicated that 97% (n = 35) of terrorism studies, 96% (n = 22) of street gang studies, 60% (n = 18) of mainstream religion studies and 44% (n = 11) of cults/new religious movements and social movement studies were published following the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Potential reasons for disengagement growth overtime, and specifically in 2009, may be accounted for by the publication of two major empirical contributions (see Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Horgan, 2009b) that drew attention to this issue and thus other scholars to this topic. Additionally, increases in government funding and efforts to understand deradicalization processes may account for increases in the focus of disengagement research.

Precision of Methods Reporting

Conceptual clarity. As Figure 3 illustrates, researchers relied on a variety of separate, but closely, related terms for the domains of disengagement and deradicalization. The most
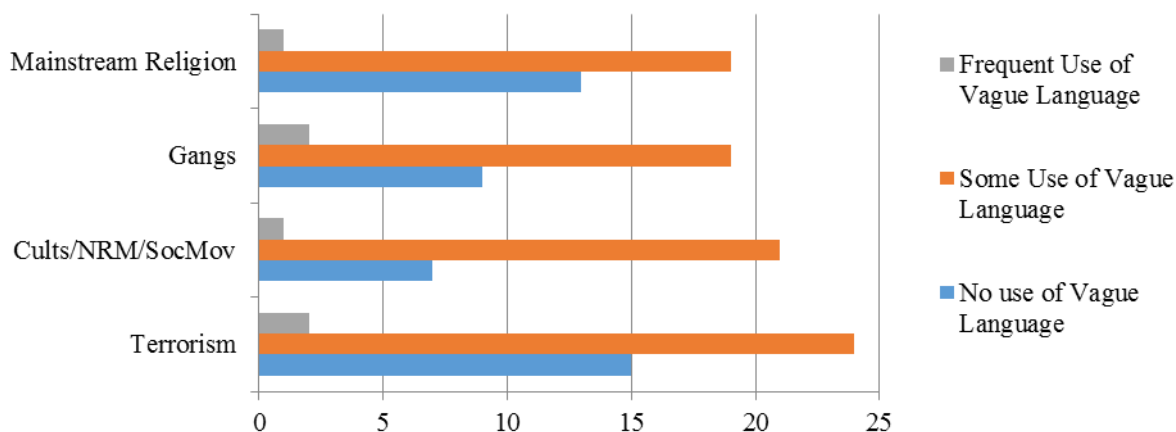
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commonly used terms identified throughout the literature review included "disengagement" (n = 22), "disaffiliation" (n = 15), "desistance" (n = 11), and "deconversion" (n = 9). In several cases, the literature used alternative definitions established by the research team in regards to disengagement and deradicalization. When applying our definitions, we found that 46% of studies focused solely on disengagement and 54% of the study relied on a combination of disengagement and deradicalization.

Figure 3: *Specific Focus Regarding Exit*
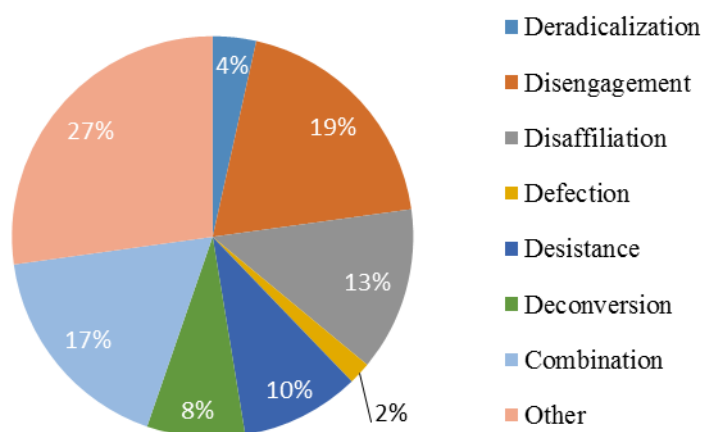
Sample reporting. In terms of sample size, representation ranged from one participant to 48,499 participants. While most studies provided a sample size, 15 studies (13%) did not report the number of participants examined in their study. We also coded each article in terms of the sample characteristics. In roughly a quarter of the studies (n = 25; 26%), specific demographics were not reported such as gender, age, socio-economic status, and location of residence. Furthermore, each article was analyzed in terms of the sampling method utilized. A portion of the sample (n = 29; 22%) did not include a description regarding the ways in which participants were recruited, approached, or selected.

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Figure 4: *Use of Language to Report Findings*

Precision of terms. In conjunction with reporting the sample size, we also examined the researchers' use of language when presenting their findings. This is particularly important for qualitative articles, which have historically been criticized for their use of imprecise or vague language. In doing so, researchers coded each article noting terms or phases previously determined to represent vague or ambiguous language such as "some," "many," "several," or "few." Figure 4 presents the distribution of language used across each topic area. Overall, most studies included a mixture of vague language and specific frequencies. In the next section, we focus on specific group types and discuss disengagement themes that emerged within each topic area.

Disengagement Themes Within Each Group Type

To understand the motivation for disengagement from ideologically-based and violent organizations, it is necessary to examine both environmental and social conditions surrounding participation in collective groups. Previous research suggests various "push" and "pull" factors have the potential to impact both entry and exit processes (Reckless, 1961; Reiss, 1951). In terms of exit, push factors refer to adverse organizational characteristics that leads someone to reconsider their continued involvement with the group. For example, an individual may exit a group due to lack of satisfaction with organizational leadership or disillusionment with the group's belief system.

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Alternatively, pull factors refer to features outside of the group the individual finds attractive. For instance, he or she may be lured away from group activities by the promise or expectation to make money through steady employment or educational opportunities. Pull factors restructure the individual's "biographical availability" away from group activities towards family, work and personal obligations (McAdam, 1986, p. 70). It is important to emphasize push and pull factors work in conjunction with one another. That is, without the presence of push factors (e.g., lack of income), pull factors (e.g., steady employment) would likely be much less influential. In the following sections, we examine the most common push and pulls factors identified throughout the systematic literature review.

Terrorism

Violence (53%) emerged as a salient theme in 19 of the 36 terrorism articles reviewed. Violence refers to physical act(s) of aggression and/or psychological harm. This includes instances in which the individual does not agree with the use of violence or believes that violent action is no longer a viable means of political protest. Additionally, violence also included situations in which the individual witnessed violent action or was subjected to violence, which lead him or her to reconsider their continued involvement with the organization. In terms of the overall findings, disengagement emerged for many in regards to disapproval of the use of violence (n = 14; 38%) rather than being victimized while a member (n = 5; 14%). For a portion of these studies, the absolute rejection of violence functioned as a marker of disengagement.

We also identified disillusionment (n = 21; 58%) as a prominent factor pushing individuals away from extremist activities. Disillusionment is best understood as the realization that a consistent incongruence exists between idealized expectations and the everyday realities associated with those same expectations (Casserly & Megginson, 2009; Ebaugh, 1988). In other words, disillusionment occurs when there is a disjunction between expectations and reality. For example, an individual may join a group due to the expectation they will have protection but later become disillusioned by the reality they are at risk of victimization by fellow group members. Related to disillusionment, several other studies reported infighting between members (n = 7; 19%) and disloyalty among members (n = 6;

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17%) as factors contributing to the disengagement process. In these situations, violent extremists became disillusioned because they originally joined the movement to fight "racial enemies" but soon realized their own fellow members were the primary target of violence. Repeated violence between members may cause the person to become fatigued, exhausted or feel "burned out" (Bjørgo, 2011; Ross & Gurr, 1989). Overall, the combination of violence, disloyalty, lack of satisfaction and general disillusionment were found as reasons for leaving.

In addition to violence and disillusionment, physical confinement (n = 9; 25%) and fear of confinement in jail, prison, or mental health facilities (n = 2; 5%) were identified as contributing to the disengagement process. These factors underscore the negative consequences associated with the group's actions and effectively functioned as factors pushing these individuals away from terrorism related activities.

In terms of pull factors, the decision to exit from activism was primarily motivated by changes in the respondents' personal lives and not for political reasons. The influence of third party outsiders was extremely significant throughout the process of disengagement. In this way, social relationships (n = 20; 55%) emerged as the most prominent reason for disengaging from terrorism related activities. Social relationships refer to non-family members who are in close proximity to the individual such as friends, co-workers or neighbors. The strongest motive for leaving a militant racist or nationalist youth group was to establish a family with new responsibilities for their spouse and children. Obligations to these relationships restructured the individual's time away from group activities towards pro-social action. Finally, 8 out of the 36 terrorism articles attributed employment (n = 4; 11%) or education (n = 4; 11%) as triggering the disengagement process. By employment, we mean the prospect of being hired for a legal, legitimate job; whereas, education refers to the prospect of returning to or completing school.

Cults/New Religious Movements and Social Movements

Among members of cults/new religious movements and social movements, disillusionment (n = 17; 68%) emerged as the most common push factor leading to disengagement. Findings across the sample underscore the difficulty in changing wife and mother roles, lack of education and work, health concerns, struggling with being forced to

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disclose information members felt was stigmatizing and male dominated hierarchical roles within the group. Additionally, disengagement came about for many in regards to the lack of satisfaction with "underground" life.

Across this category, individuals leave for a variety of reasons and claim to experience multiple emotional problems because of their participation in these groups. Several studies discussed the "emotional exhaustion" related to membership. Within these studies, issues related to emotional fatigue included alienation, depression, spiritual confusion, deception, manipulative practices and inconsistencies in teachings. Thus, the ideal of the movement was destroyed, which created conditions under which members began to perceive an imbalance between their expectations and reality.

In terms of pull factors, social relationships (n = 7; 28%) were another factor that contributed to exit. These relationships were primarily centered around non-movement members who did not endorse the same belief system as the participant. In particular, family (n = 6; 24%) emerged as a pull factor leading the individual away from group activities. Strong correlations were identified between measures of family affinity and the individual's choice to stay. In this way, individuals who had close affinity with non-movement family members were more likely to disengage than individuals who share distant relationships with close relatives.

Street Gangs

Similar to terrorism studies, violence (39%) emerged as a contributing factor to desistance in 9 of the 23 gang studies. In these articles, participants discussed fear of being victimized or injured due to their membership in a street gang. Maturation (n = 4; 17%) also appeared to push individuals away from gang life. For these individuals, transitioning into adulthood required them to restructure their time and energy toward non-gang related activities such as work and childrearing. Additionally, fear of confinement (n = 2; 9%) or physical confinement in prison, jail, or mental health facilities (n = 1; 4%) was also identified as contributing to the exit process. Finally, disillusionment (n = 5; 22%) with group activities pushed youth out of the street gang. Among these studies, the lack of expected profit influenced some to terminate their involvement in gang life.

In regards to pull factors, 78% (n = 18) of gang studies identified family as a prominent factor leading to exit. The presence of personal relationships can be thought of as changes in "biographical availability," which increase the costs and risks associated with street gang participation (McAdam, 1986. P. 70). These studies underscore the importance of becoming a parent and the increase in amount of time spent at home rather than on the streets with fellow gang members. For many gang members, worrying about their children, worrying about whether they were doing the right thing, and worrying about the future accompanied their new role as a parent. On a related note, employment (n = 7; 30%) also changed the amount of time spent on the streets. In these situations, fear of losing their job due to criminal charges functioned as a pull factor away from gang life. Furthermore, employment also provided opportunities to support one's family with legal, steady income as opposed to illegal profits from criminal activities. Finally, education (n = 3; 13%) was identified as pulling gang members away from the street and gang activities. Similar to employment, these studies discuss the risk of losing scholarships if these individuals were caught doing illegal activities associated with the gang.

Mainstream Religious Movements

The most notable push factor for mainstream religious movements involved disillusionment (n = 17; 57%). For these individuals, the disengagement process centered around their perception that the church lacked tolerance and the inability to adapt to changing political or social climates (Niemela, 2007). In fact, growing impatience with traditional theologies and organizational styles prompted these individuals to either join more progressive religious groups or to abandon organized religion altogether. This included being influenced by the changing cultural values or finding that attendance at church was too high a cost in terms of their available time. This effect was particularly strong for young people.

We also identified maturation (n = 9; 30%) in several studies as a contributing factor to the exit process. For the current study, we defined maturation as directly related to the aging process where individuals begin to experience greater freedom of decision making including church attendance and the adherence to religious beliefs. As part of maturation,

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individuals begin to experience perceptions related to church attendance and adherence of faith associated with decreasing levels of relevance.

In terms of pull factors, family (50%) emerged as a prominent theme in 15 of the 30 articles related to exit from mainstream religion. By family, we mean kinship relations such as parents, siblings, or children as well as legal guardians (e.g., step-father, in-laws) who share a close bond with the participant. In terms of specific family relationships, parents (n = 9; 30%) were found to have a significant impact on an individual's decision to leave the church. In general, a shift in parental values had minimal influence on their child's church involvement. Rather, the decision to leave a mainstream religious movement was largely impacted by their parents' level of attendance. In these situations, when their parents stopped attending church, so did the children.

Furthermore, significant others (e.g., spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend) were also identified as impacting an individual's level of attendance at church and the investment one had in their religious practices. Overall, these studies found that church goers were more likely to disaffiliate in cases where their partners were non-religious (Te Grotenhuis & Sheepers, 2001; Need & DeGraaf, 1996). Finally, education (17%) was also identified in 5 of the 30 mainstream religious studies examined. Among these studies, researchers found the more educated an individual was, the more likely they were to become disaffiliated from their current church, change churches, or become non-religious. Overall, disillusionment, maturation, family, and marrying a non-religious spouse significantly increased the risk of becoming unchurched. Next, we present overarching themes that characterized the entire sample.

Exit Themes Across the Sample

In addition to reviewing the body of literature regarding each topic area, another objective of the current study was to identify similarities across each of these domains. By doing so, research aimed at understanding the complexity of exit from ideologically-based and violence organizations will be better able to develop theories related to disengagement and determine what factors might represent general social processes as compared to unique

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experiences related to a specific type of group membership. In the following sections, we present two prominent themes identified across the sample: disillusionment and relationships

Disillusionment

In terms of disengagement, the most common theme to emerge across the entire sample involved disillusionment. Studies that identified disillusionment as a push factor leading to disengagement discussed several contributing influences including a lack of satisfaction (n = 42; 37%) with the participants' current life situation, frustration with the group, their place in the group, or with the direction of the group. Additionally, these studies highlight how, in some organizations, members were encouraged to physically exclude themselves from "non-believers," including family and friends outside of the organization. Disagreement with group methods were not only prominent in studies of terror disengagement but also mainstream religious groups, gangs, cults/new religious movements, and social movements. Several studies (n = 27; 23%) illustrated how certain group methods were too violent, were hypocritical to what was preached, and/or resulted in negative attention to the organization. Victimization (n = 4; 4%), which involves psychological abuse or physical violence from fellow group members, also emerged as a contributing factor to feelings of disillusionment with the organization.

In addition, several studies related to gangs and cults/new religious and social movements studies found financial disillusionment (N = 8; 7%) as a contributing factor leading to exit. For instance, gang members reported dissatisfaction with the "gang life" that was supposed to provide money and material goods (Moloney, MacKenzie, Hunt & Joe-Laidler, 2009). Similarly, members of cults and new religious movements joined due to the prospect of living a "comfortable" way of life but were disappointed when health care services were withheld and were expected to provide manual labor in return for basic needs (e.g., shelter, clothing, food).

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Relationships

Relationships were found to be the most prominent pull factor among each of the research areas. In order to refine the current analysis, we noted specific relationship categories to understand which relationships had the most influence on the exit process. Specifically, the relationship category was broken down into the following dimensions: (1) immediate relatives such as parents, siblings, and grandparents; (2) children, (3) spouses or intimate partners and (4) social relationships, which includes co-workers, friends, and neighbors.

Immediate relatives (n = 57; 50%) were identified as the most pervasive relationship attributing to exit. This influence stemmed from positive relationships with siblings or parents. Children (n = 16; 14%) emerged as the second most prevalent relationship impacting the exit process for all topic areas. For these individuals, the decision to leave was based on family obligations and time spent caring for children. Spouses (n = 12; 10%) also played a role in the exit process. For instance, the level of religiosity for the individual's non-religious significant other largely impacted the decision to leave a mainstream religious movement.

Across the relationship theme, we can begin to incorporate these findings into the broad criminological literature. Specifically, the data may simply represent further evidence of the contention by social-control theory that increased social bonds provide individuals a "stake in conformity" and ease them out of criminal lifestyles. In these situations, personal obligations, such as marriage and children, create interdependent systems of attachment or "social bonds" that connect the person to conventional society (Hirschi, 1969; Sampson & Laub, 1993). These attachments alter a person's routine activities, constrain unstructured socialization time, and have the ability to alter one's sense of self through cognitive transformation (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002).

Discussion

Our project systematically examines the disengagement literature to determine the range and frequency of various exit factors identified in previous studies. In doing so, we relied on parallel literature such as disengagement from terrorism, street gangs, religious cults, and nonviolent social movements to build a robust sample of studies and assess the extent to

which group exit factors may generalize across different populations. The results suggest several key themes regarding disengagement from ideologically-based and violent organizations.

In general, the majority of studies we examined relied on qualitative methodological approaches such as interviews and participant observation. Furthermore, the specific reasons for exit were found to occupy a broad range of factors including disillusionment with the group's belief system, the presence of positive social relationships (e.g., children, spouse) and disapproval of violent behavior. Based on information from the current study, scholars can better understand the primary reasons for leaving ideologically-based and violent organizations.

Limitations

While the current study relies on a systematic and rigorous methodological approach for reviewing disengagement literature, there are a number of methodological issues that could have important implications on the validity of our findings. For instance, although we critically appraised the studies in this review, we did not arrive at a consensus on what constitutes a 'high' quality study and whether studies should be weighted by design and quality. A lack of quality control has historically hampered research in systematic reviews both in terms of which quality criteria should be used and how that information should be applied to the review findings (Dixon-Woods et al., 2004; Sandelowski et al., 1997).

A further consideration relates to our decision to exclude non-peer reviewed research such as dissertations, conference papers and research reports. There is potential that a portion of research has been overlooked and is missing from the current analysis. However, as related to the previous limitation regarding quality control, we did not want to include research lacking a critical assessment by experts in each of the group areas examined throughout the current review.

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Theoretical and Practical Implications

The results of this study provide further insight regarding the disengagement process in several ways. First, the current study takes a significant first step in summarizing previous disengagement literature by offering one of the first systematic reviews of disengagement literature. The empirical insights gathered from previous studies of disengagement offer greater precision in terms of understanding the impact of social and psychological processes as they relate to a person's decision to leave these lifestyles.

Second, one of the most beneficial contributions of the current review is the identification of gaps in the disengagement literature. As we have illustrated, there are a variety of social and psychological factors influencing an individual's readiness to disengage from an ideologically-based movement such as personal relationships, disillusionment, and violence. Although a segment of the current analysis highlights the importance of disillusionment, future research should focus in greater detail on the different types of disillusionment and whether they represent unique pathways toward disengagement and deradicalization.

Future research should also consider Kruglanski and colleagues' (2014) claim that radicalization and deradicalization are "mirror processes." In the case of violent extremism, scholars should apply these questions to both the front end in terms of entering extremism but also to processes of indoctrination (i.e., learning the ideological belief system) and radicalization (i.e., escalation of commitment to violence). By understanding more about these mechanisms, we may not only understand disengagement more deeply but we can also appreciate how apparently different phenomena derive from common underlying processes.

Research on disengagement is necessary to inform strategies and programs designed to facilitate exit. In particular, findings from the current study can be used to inform the development of counter-messaging strategies. Based on our findings, intervention efforts should highlight the negative impact on their family and peer relationships that results from their involvement in extremism. In addition, these counter-messaging strategies could also focus on high rates of violence as well as hypocrisy within the group's leadership and among rank and file members. Finally, a more robust understanding of the factors that lead to

disengagement can help inform how intervention programs provide after-care to individuals in terms of addressing different needs such as trauma therapy.

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