TRUST

COMMUNITY

LEARNING

INFORMATION

FREEDOM

COMPASSION

CONNECTION

MINDBRIDGE

The Implicit Bias Project

Countering Extremism Directive (IBP — CED)

DEVELOPED BY

Laura Ligouri & Sheila Baldenweck

Table of Contents

Growing Extremism in Maine

For over two decades the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has been tracking high-profile hate groups, militia and extremist organizations throughout the United States. The SPLC defines hate groups as

"an organization or collection of individuals that – based on its official statements or principles, the statements of its leaders, or its activities – has beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people… The organizations on our hate group list vilify others because of their race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity – prejudices that strike at the heart of our democratic values and fracture society along its most fragile fault lines."

Hate groups maintain an active presence within the state of Maine. According to the 2021 annual report issued by the SPLC, 4 known hate groups publicly practice within the state, 3 of which are active state-wide. This number represents a noticeable and steady increase from 2 known groups in 2019 rising to 3 known groups in 2020 and now 4 active groups within Maine. This increase in activity is also reflected in hate crime statistics for Maine. An annual report issued by the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program notes a major increase in bias-related hate crimes in the state, showing an astounding 337% increase in reported hate crimes between 2019 and 2020 alone.

However, while these numbers are jarring, what is perhaps most worrisome is the acts of hate and violence that go unreported or unnoticed. For example, in other parts of the country, hate groups appear to be on the decline. However as Cassie Miller, representative from the SPLC, recently detailed for News Center Maine, "What we're seeing is actually the opposite, that extremist groups are declining because the ideas that mobilize them now operate so openly in the political mainstream." As a result, Miller continues, "in more rural areas such as Maine, members are attending city council and school board meetings in order to intimidate local officials."

A common misconception when thinking about growing extremism within the United States is that extremism or the promotion of extremist sentiments is due to a few "bad guys." This position conceptually isolates the presence of extremism to a select few individuals, negating the way in which extremist sentiment becomes diffused within a community and avoiding responsibility for contending with this growing threat. What was once considered extremist sentiment found only at the fringes of society have reached the mainstream within the United States. Sociopolitical fears and economic insecurities are exploited to promote extremist sentiment and belief.

In Maine, it is noticeable that recruitment to white nationalist organizations almost completely overlaps with rural regions suffering from the highest poverty rates in the state. Washington County, where 18.3% of the population falls below the poverty line, is home to one of the four hate groups identified by the SPLC. Piscataquis County with the second highest poverty rate in the state (17.5%) was recently identified by Beacon journalist Kathryn Harnish as potentially providing sanctuary to white extremist groups,

"Piscataquis County has already delivered its invitations to these folks with its passage of a Second Amendment Sanctuary County resolution on June 15 – the first county in New England to declare such a position."

This comes with no small amount of alarm as online white extremist groups discuss the possibility of the "Great Maine Migration," a popular discussion topic within extremist online platforms exploring the possibility of relocating entire extremist organizations to the pine tree state. A recent article by Vice News describes activity by neo-Nazi individuals and groups (such as the Nationalist Socialist Club-131) within Lewiston following coverage of the group by The Sun Journal in September of this year. These forums are currently being tracked by the Counter Extremism Project, a nonprofit and non-partisan international policy organization formed to combat the growing threat from extremist ideologies.

This trend has become overwhelmingly apparent to Mindbridge as our anti-bias and anti-racist workshops have taken place for the last five years throughout the state.

Mindbridge is a Maine-based nonprofit organization that uses neuroscience and psychology to support human rights. To achieve basic human rights — including the right to life, liberty, free speech, health, and education — we must address both historic and contemporary ways in which bias, racism, discrimination, and rising extremism are used to undermine them. Mindbridge applies the vast realm of psychology and neurobiological research to these ends. Importantly, our work focuses on understanding the way in which implicit, unconscious mechanisms underlying and motivating bias and explicit forms of discriminatory behavior converge with structural and social elements to propel forms of racialized violence. Our work seeks to leverage insights gained from applied psychological and neurobiological research to develop more impactful and long-lasting forms of interventions. There exists an extensive literature on the psychology of extremism, very little to which is being directly applied within the United States towards deradicalization efforts. Further still, this literature has not yet been widely applied to the development of interventions within communities. This report is one step forward in filling that gap.

This report offers a brief overview of the psychology of extremism. Here we provide an initial synthesis of the literature: orienting the discussion on the growing extremist sentiment within the United States. We then explore the path of deradicalization: highlighting lessons from clinical psychology and methods we might utilize within our own communities. Finally, we offer a brief discussion on future avenues of work Mindbridge is considering. This is an active area of exploration and a topic that cannot be approached by one organization alone. In part, this report is being developed to begin a discussion within Maine, local area organizations, and state agencies. We hope this work helps to deepen the understanding of growing extremist sentiment within the state and catalyze collective efforts within our communities.

Definition of Terms

Radicalization

Radicalization – the process through which an individual or group adopts an increasingly extremist set of beliefs and aspirations that may include a willingness to condone, support, facilitate or use violence to further political, ideological, religious or other goals (Adapted from United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights)

McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) offer a definition of radicalization that is both functional and descriptive. From a functional point of view, the authors define radicalization as an enhanced preparation for intergroup conflict that develops a proclivity for violent engagement. From a descriptive point of view, radicalization refers to a change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that justify intergroup violence and the demand for sacrifice in defending the own group.

Working from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's definition of radicalization, Bott et al. (2009) describes radicalization as a process by which individuals and collective bodies embrace extremist beliefs that support violence as a method to affect societal change. Similarly, Misiak and colleagues (2019) define radicalization as a process by which individuals adopt extreme political, social and religious ideation that leads to mass violence acts. In this paper I will define radicalization simply as a process by which people develop extremist ideologies and beliefs (Borum, 2011). This definition denotes a dual process whereby socio-ecological and situational influences encourage adoption of extremist beliefs. While a complete conversation on contributing socio-ecological factors within the literature on international terrorism and violent extremism is beyond the scope of this paper, I will touch on contributing factors within domestic terrorism and right-wing extremism within the United States to help situate the relationship between situational influences and their psychological manifestations.

Extremist Beliefs

Extremist Beliefs – underlying beliefs or convictions that seek to fundamentally transform or replace societal structures through often rapid or revolutionary acts that may come at the cost of human rights.

Trip and colleagues (2019) define extremist beliefs as an underlying conviction that stands in opposition to the fundamental values of society, the laws of democracy and universal human rights by advocating the supremacy of a particular group (racial, religious, political, economic, social etc.). This distinction is important because for Trip and colleagues, extremist emotions and behaviors need not be directly related to overtly violent acts but may be expressed in more covert forms of behavior that "show contempt for life, freedom, and human rights" (p. 2).

👥 Deradicalization

Deradicalization - a process of encouraging a person or group with extreme political, social or religious views to adopt more moderate, less extreme and potentially harmful positions on issues

Finally, deradicalization refers to a fundamental change in one's beliefs and thoughts regarding violent extremism towards a more moderate orientation (Shi & Shi, 2001). This concept is related to but differs from that of disengagement. The latter refers to a behavioural change in one's actions towards non-violence where the individual or community no longer chooses to participate in violent action (Horgan, J.G., 2009). It's worth noting that the distinction between the terms is often rooted in the socio-political climate of the environment within which extremism and radicalization is taking place The distinction between these terms is also rooted in the socio-political as well as psychological climates of different countries where the objective of violent extremist rehabilitation may vary (Noor, & Hayat, 2009), as a result understanding terms and the way in which they are applied give a specific context, is important. This essay will utilize the definitions described above and situated within the U.S. context.

Orienting the Context

The shift towards mainstreaming extremist ideology within the United States has occurred through a complex process beginning with the destabilization of individuals and communities through a combination of:

- Environmental factors (i.e., poverty rate, income inequality, pressure stemming from upcoming election cycles suggestive of shifts in power)
- Exposure to extremist ideology (i.e., social media recruitment, most especially during times of perceived social isolation), and
- Subsequent reinforcement by members of their community.

Attempts to intervene in extremist ideology within the United States have primarily taken the form of government surveillance methods, community policing, and online targeting of specific ideological groups (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022). In reference to the latter, Tim Mak, National Public Radio correspondent, called attempts to root out extremism online a "game of whac-a-mole" where "deplatforming" sites of extremist ideology and recruitment are only followed by a new site or platform emerging elsewhere. Activists within the social justice and human rights arena have often tried to meet this threat through protests and counter-narrative media campaigns. However, Aldon Morris, professor of sociology and African American studies, points out that while the pandemic energized movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), it simultaneously provoked a dangerous backlash where "social justice movements energized counter movements that are determined to halt progressive changes to American society" (2022, p. 66).

Importantly, membership in those counter movements seems to have come from individuals and communities originally in support of BLM themselves. In a review of available polling data, researchers Jennifer Chudy and Hakeem Jefferson (2021) highlight the volatility of white Americans' attitudes towards racial justice. Here the data shows a steady increase in support of BLM since 2018, culminating in a spike of support during the height of BLM, and then the way in which those same numbers plummet to below 2018 levels just one year later. In short, gains made in three years of progress suddenly and collectively failed.

> Attempts to counter or deter these processes are splintered, often heavily focused on policy and surveillance, with little to no effect. What is missing from many efforts is an approach that centers the humanity of those with whom we seek to change. Taking a human-centered approach means understanding the dynamic interplay of psychological, cultural, and environmental factors that make us human. In short: to change hearts and minds, we need to know how to access them.

The Role of Psychopathology

Before moving onto processes of de-radicalization, it is important to pause and note the way in which radicalization had, for some time, been conceived of as stemming from forms of psychopathology. For example, Simi and colleagues (2016) investigated the degree to which adverse childhood conditions and forms of psychopathology were present among members of violent white supremacist groups.

By means of life-history interviews, the authors found that mental health problems before/during extremist involvement were present in 41% of participants, a history of childhood trauma was highly prevalent among interviewees (physical abuse: 43%, sexual abuse: 23%, emotional and physical neglect: 41%), while the majority of participants indicated problems with alcohol and/or illicit drugs (73%). Similar conditions and expressions of psychopathology have been described in relation to individual or lone-actor terrorists versus group forms of terrorist activity. Corner and Gill (2015) found that the odds of having mental illness were over 13 times (OR = 13.49, 95%CI: 4.63 – 40.0) higher in lone-actor terrorists compared to group terrorists.

Lone-actor terrorists who had committed a violent act were almost 12 times more likely to have a diagnosis of schizophrenia-spectrum disorders and almost 46 times more likely to be diagnosed with mood disorders.

However, given this and other related research, investigators have been skeptical as to the causative role psychopathology plays within acceptance of extremist ideology and the willingness to engage in violent acts. In a relatively recent review of the literature, Misiak and colleagues (2019) performed a systematic review of studies examining the association between mental health characteristics and the risk of radicalization. The authors raised concerns regarding methodological limitations, sample representativeness, as well as the use of accurate diagnostic procedures and lack of standardized tools used for assessment of mental health. The authors concluded that available data does not support a predefined profile of mental health characteristics that makes individuals prone to develop radical beliefs and attitudes. While some personality traits might play a role in radicalization proneness, more research is needed in this field and that findings related to lone-actor terrorists cannot be compared to group-terrorists or to the general population.

Critics of a pathologized approach to understanding radicalization argue that causative theories of radicalization based on pre-existing pathology omit the normative processes by which individuals, communities, and even entire nations can come to endorse extremist forms of ideology (Marwick et al., 2022). In addition, some authors have suggested that it is not the pathology that drives individuals or communities to engage in violence, but rather experience with extremist ideology and radical behavior that gives rise to changes in cognition (Horgan, 2009). This process has been described as a "complex contagion," whereby individuals and communities experiencing uncertainty or real or perceived threat become vulnerable to extremist ideology and populist discourse (Kishishita & Yamagishi, 2020; Youngblood, 2020).
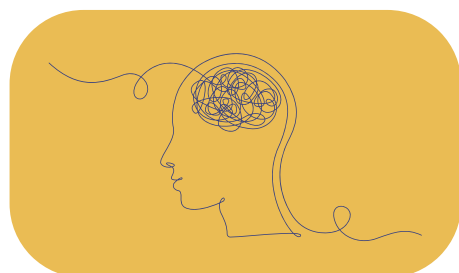
Psychology of Radicalization

⚠️✖ Integrated Threat Theory

Many psychological theories pertaining to the process of radicalization discuss perceptions, emotional reactions, and subsequent behavioral actions in relation to perceived deprivation.
For example, integrated threat theory (ITT; Stephan & Stephan, 2013) describes the processes by which an individual group member who, faced with deprivation (real or perceived) begins to believe that his group holds higher values, attitudes, standards, and beliefs than others. This process highlights the perception that the in-group members are more morally correct, virtuous, and generally superior than out-group members.

This difference between in-group and out-group evaluation can establish a symbolic threat that supports violent attitudes. In addition to cognitive evaluations or distortions, the authors also describe the way in which perceptions of collective deprivation activates some of the following effects:

- Emotional uncertainty
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Anger
- A subjective sense of doubt in self-views, world-views, or n the relationship between the two

Trip and colleagues (2019) describe this as a "moment of maximum vulnerability" (p. 3) when extremist ideology offers a solution for this personal uncertainty by introducing meaning, order, and value.

ITT has been cited as a means by which to understand the components leading to prejudice and negative attitudes between groups by drawing distinctions between the following concepts: realistic threats (e.g. threats to physical well-being, economic or political power), symbolic threats (e.g. differences in values, perceived morality, or worldviews), and interactions between the two. And while these threat types are distinct, ITT also emphasizes that both real and perceived threats can give rise to and perpetuate negative stereotypes of the out-group. Both types of threats can promote intergroup anxiety (Croucher, 2017; Stephan & Stephan, 2013). ITT does not stand alone in this conclusion. Other theories have been used to help researchers, policy makers, and organizations understand the role of both real and perceived threat in the perpetuation of discriminatory and racist beliefs, judgments, and actions within the United States (Corenblum & Stephan, 2001). These include:

- Symbolic racism (Henry & Sears, 2002; Sears & Henry, 2003)
- Modern racism (McConahay, 1986)
- Social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 2012)
- The multicomponent approach to intergroup attitudes (Esses et al., 1993; Hinkle et al., 1989)
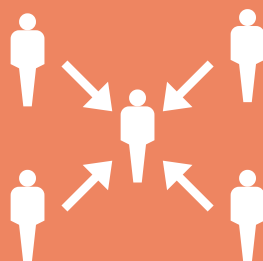
Rational Emotive Behavioral Psychotherapy - Radicalization

Drawing from ITT and other related theories, Trip and colleagues (2019) propose rational emotive behavioral psychotherapy (REBT) as a framework by which to understand the process of radicalization. REBT proposes three main intertwined aspects of human functioning:

Beliefs

Feelings

Behaviors

Inspired by the work of Walen, DiGiuseppe, and Dryden (1992), Trip notes the difference between inferential and evaluative beliefs. Inferential beliefs refer to the way in which people perceive reality: how they interpret individual and collective deprivation and the subsequent inferences that are made based upon those perceptions. These can translate into experiences of real and symbolic threat.

Here in Maine, realistic threats might refer to white-rural experiences of economic insecurity (deprivation). The resulting experiences or perceptions of social status threat then culminate in out-group discrimination and at times violence towards marginalized communities (Siddiqi et al., 2019). Importantly, Trip describes the role of evaluative beliefs or irrational beliefs. These beliefs are unconscious associations that are logically inconsistent, not supported by empirical reality, and tend to be antithetical to that group's stated goals and objectives.

For example, the role of a General Belief in a Just World (BJW) has been discussed in relation to engagement with racism and extremist ideology (Litam et al., 2022). BJW refers to the belief that the world is generally a just place where all people reliably get what they deserve, are treated fairly, and will be compensated for experienced injustices (Dalbert, 1999, 2009; Hafer & Sutton, 2016). Researchers have linked BJW to endorsement of meritocracies and to the denial of the existence of white privilege. Crucially, it is also associated with anti-Black discrimination (Knowles & Lowery, 2012; Onyeador et al., 2021). REBT understands irrational beliefs as being central to the experience of emotional distress, anger, anxiety, depression, and self-blame. For example, white communities who unconsciously endorse BJW and then experience sustained economic insecurity often must contend with unconscious associations of getting what they deserve. This then gives rise to heightened levels of self-directed anxiety and self-blame. In order to maintain a just world view (an irrational belief), blame for the perceived injustice or deprivation is misdirected outward against out-group members who are historically associated with violating the traditional white American values of hard work and independence. This is symbolic racism.

According to Trip and colleagues, this process gives rise to two main categories of irrational beliefs: low frustration tolerance beliefs (discomfort disturbance beliefs) and global evaluation of human worth (ego disturbance beliefs). In a somewhat similar tone to BJW, low frustration tolerance (LFT) refers to an unconscious belief stating that reality must be easy, effortless, perhaps pleasurable, and comfortable. This leads to an individuals' inability to withstand aversive internal and external states elicited by an aversive experience. Carleton (2016) argues that uncertainty intolerance contributes to general anxiety disorders where individuals are more likely to interpret ambiguous stimuli as threatening and therefore exacerbate their anxiety and engage in avoidant or reassurance-seeking behaviors. Indeed, online platforms promoting extremist ideology have used fear as a motivating agent to encourage uptake of extremist theories and recruit new members (Phadke & Mitra, 2020; Van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2019).

Global evaluation of human worth refers to a generalized evaluation and denigration of self as well as Other. Trip argues that most people practice conditional acceptance of self: perceived successes contribute to positive self-evaluations and negative experiences lead to self-condemnation. Trip suggests that an REBT approach can be effective in redirecting such irrational, global beliefs. REBT can develop individual's perceptions towards an understanding that unconditional self/other acceptance does not require perfection or a rigid world view. Rather it suggests an understanding of all people as imperfect, fallible creatures.
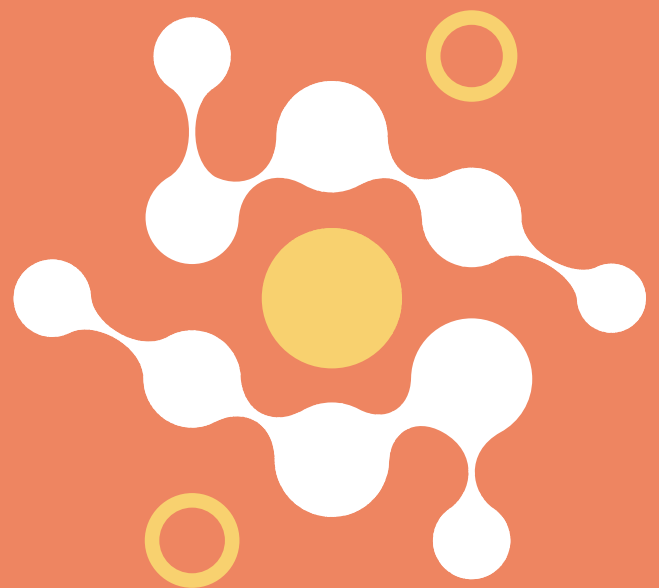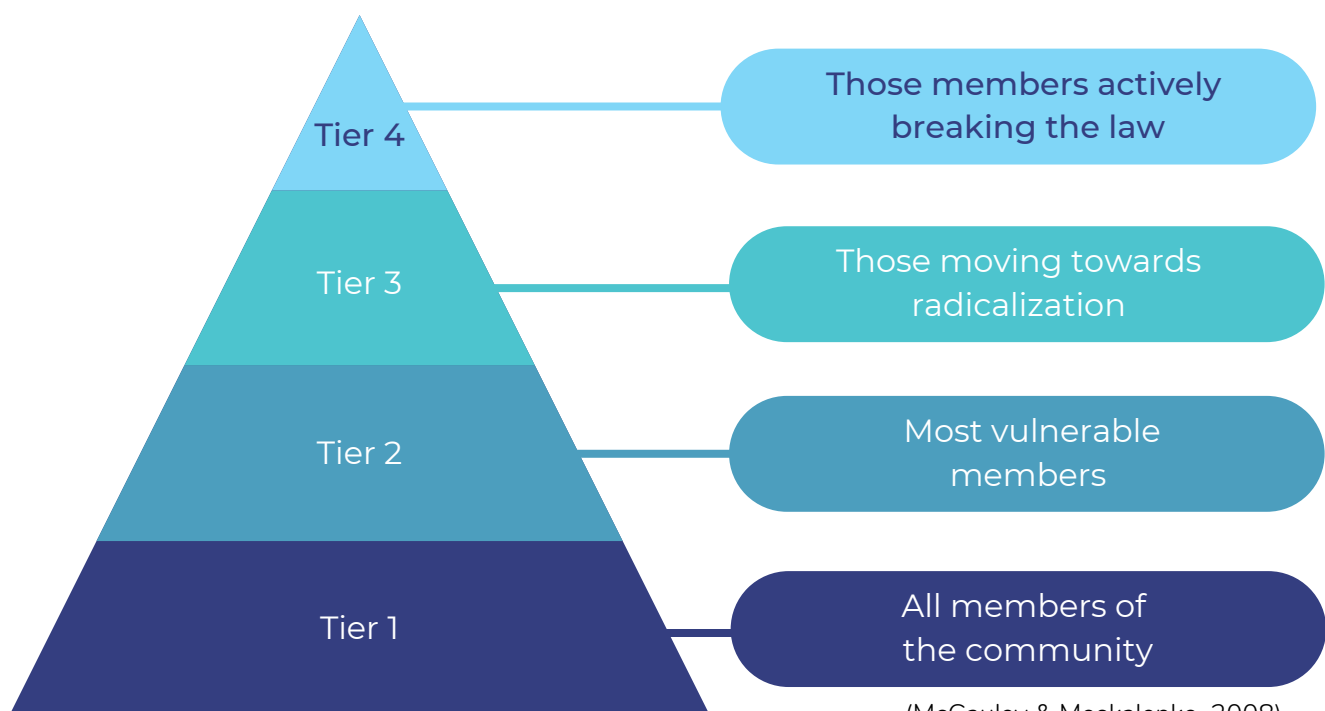
Deradicalization

Psychology of Deradicalization – Previous Findings

In their review of deradicalization processes over the decades, Suedfeld, Grunert, and Morrison (2020) cite four important points to consider within future programs: (1) the need for clear operational definitions differentiating between disengagement and deradicalization, (2) a need for unbiased methods for defining and measuring of success, (3) the need to incorporate relevant cultural and social factors into analysis and planning, and (4) the need to pay attention to the cognitive processes of radicalized individuals and of participants of deradicalization programs. This final point is most often omitted within processes seeking to inspire disengagement or deradicalization.

Most existing programs that seek to de-radicalize, counter extremism, and promote disengagement follow the Prevent Pyramid model (McCauley, 2022). This emphasizes the use of targeted, interventionist, and enforcement approaches. From this model, many deradicalization programs rely solely on self-reported achievements based on recidivism rates. As Saudfeld and colleagues point out, "how could objective 'success' be claimed if the rate is anything higher than zero?" (2020, p. 5).

Tier 4	Those members actively breaking the law
Tier 3	Those moving towards radicalization
Tier 2	Most vulnerable members
Tier 1	All members of the community

(McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008).

A growing body of work has begun to discuss the importance of the inclusion of psychology and of cognitive elements into deradicalization efforts. Studies of this relationship include attempts to analyze or create openness to alternative viewpoints in individuals espousing extremist ideologies (Dechesne, 2011; Garfinkel, 2007; Koehler, 2016; Kruglanski et al., 2010), as well as the inclusion of psychologists, rather than solely religious content-based interlocutors in programs (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Boucek, 2008; El-Said & Harrigan, 2020). It is worth noting, however, that this latter focused effort has been conducted almost exclusively within Saudia Arabia among Muslim-identifying individuals and communities. This approach has not yet been attempted among dominantly white Christianpopulations, which comprise the majority of religious and ethnic demographics found among those espousing extremist ideologies within the United States. Some recent publications have focused on individual attitudes and intentions, seeking to understand various risk and protective factors for different outcomes of radicalization (Wolfowicz et al., 2020). Other approaches have attempted to take a slightly different route, focusing on Emotionally Based Strategic Communications (EBSC) as a means by which to mitigate negative emotions and promote positive ones experienced by individuals exposed to radicalization processes (Ćosić et al., 2018).

  Others still have attempted to apply repertory grid techniques influenced by Kelly's personal construct theory (2019) to correct erroneous self-perceptions and to demonstrate that radicals' views of themselves and the world are open to reconstruction (Winter & Muhanna-Matar, 2020). Together this body of work suggests that there remains exceptionally promising work to do in the application of psychology to deradicalization efforts. However, each approach thus described takes a singular facet to focus upon. As previously discussed, the psychology underlying processes of radicalization are extremely complex, representative of both conscious and unconscious processes, real and symbolic perceptions, as well as cognitive and emotional elements, all of which exist within specific socio-cultural contexts. How can a psychology of deradicalization best address the full complexity of the task at hand?

Rational Emotive Behavioral Psychotherapy - Deradicalization

Trip and colleagues (2019) propose the use of REBT as both a means by which to understand processes of radicalization as well as its solution. Some social psychological and clinical psychological theories describe the way in which radicalized thinking produces an absolutist orientation to the world (Cohen, 2019). This kind of black and white perspective is argued to produce a preference for easy solutions for complicated problems, lending itself to the adoption of conspiracy theories and other forms of extremist ideologies (Jugl, 2022). In order to minimize absolutist thinking and make strides in deradicalization efforts, Trip and colleagues propose using REBT in educational contexts as a means of preventative treatment. There, it can introduce strategies for critical thinking and the development of coping skills. Previous research has shown the way in which REBT has had a powerful effect on decreasing dysfunctional behaviors and irrational beliefs (Trip, Vernon, & McMahon, 2007). A more recent meta-analysis by David and colleagues (David et al., 2017) reveals how changes in irrational and rational beliefs are highly associated with changes in outcomes, including emotional experience, dysfunctional behaviors, and cognitions. In addition, Trip and colleagues point to the use of REBT techniques to promote unconditional self-acceptance, particularly in relation to perceived negative life events and uncertainty. As such, Trip and colleagues argue for the utilization of REBT techniques in changing irrational and rational beliefs among radicalized or vulnerable populations.

However, while research has called for the application of methods intended to improve critical thinking skills among radicalized individuals (with some attempting to implement such methods via novel cell phone application-based methods (e.g. Jugl, 2022)) thus far no far-reaching educational or clinically-based methods have been tested. Further, while techniques intended to promote unconditional self-acceptance seem promising given existing literature on cognitive and emotive vulnerabilities implied in the radicalization process, there is the question of how such approaches would be maintained given the advent of social media and group-based influences to the contrary.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) rests on the fundamental assumption that one's beliefs, thoughts, actions, feelings and attitudes are learned and can thus be unlearned or changed in order to modify maladaptive thoughts and cognitive distortions (Hofmann, Asmundson, & Beck, 2013). This means that individuals trained in CBT, such as religious counselors, therapists, or reformed violent extremists (who are charged with undertaking rehabilitation work) can address individuals' thought-action-consequences linkage. Further, they can discuss plausible ways to respond in a non-violent or absolutist way (e.g., by encouraging perspective taking and critical thinking). Mostly performed in person, the use of CBT in violent extremist rehabilitation is known but exceptionally poorly documented (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). Thus, more research and empirical trials are needed to evaluate and validate this approach.

Shi and Shi (2001) argue not only for a CBT approach to deradicalization, but one that utilizes online means. The authors point to CBT's effectiveness in online treatment of conditions such as anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, panic disorder with agoraphobia, depression, as well as those who suffered from traumatic brain injuries. The authors further argue that online psychotherapy shares similar therapeutic factors of offline, face-to-face interventions, such as providing social support to clients, providing practical information or educational opportunities, the sharing of experiences, and engagement in advocacy efforts. In the context of radicalization, much of which takes place online, a noteworthy benefit of this approach is that it utilizes the very same method of engagement where individuals enter into radicalization processes in order to transform it. This allows helpers to overcome physical boundaries and engage with individuals who might not have otherwise had access to CBT therapies. Likewise, this protects the therapist from any adverse consequences due to engagement with a sometimes violent population.

Important in this process is the role of the therapeutic relationship as a potential catalyst for transformation. Individuals within the U.S. who are at risk of radicalization or who have already become involved in radicalized platforms and (at times) violent behavior, often exhibit heightened rates of anxiety and paranoia (Van der Linden et al., 2021). This tendency to place emphasis on negative experiences may push away those who might question or call attention to incongruent thinking or forms of extremist ideology. It may also make the implementation of deradicalization programming a difficult prospect. However, helpers trained in CBT can encourage interaction and model positive self-acceptance, and can work to provide support (Shi & Shi, 2001) in order to facilitate the kind of "cognitive opening" necessary to become receptive to a new way of thinking (Wiktorowicz, 2005). This in no way suggest an endorsement by the therapist of violent, discriminatory, or extremist views. Rather, it serves as a nonjudgmental platform by which individuals can slowly begin to engage with irrational thoughts and build capacities towards tolerating uncomfortable experiences.

Although Shi and Shi's writing took place in 2001, and others have since come to acknowledge the potential advantages of CBT approach to deradicalization efforts, no nation-wide study has tested for or assessed the direct implication of such an intervention on radicalized populations. Given existing research illustrating CBT's impact in cognitive and emotional processes directly related to radicalization, as well as its potential to be implemented successfully online, this feels like an important direction to pursue within the United States.

Implicit Bias Project – Countering Extremism Directive (IBP-CED):

This year Mindbridge launched a new component of the Implicit Bias Project: the Countering Extremist Directive (IBP-CED). This directive seeks to utilize the literature described above in a series of intervention efforts designed for the state of Maine. As this project is still in development, we offer a brief overview of its central components]

Component 1: Literature Review & Landscape Mapping

Literature review with a focus on:

1 Identifying proven strategies of extremist sentiment disengagement with a focus on U.S. applications

2 Fostering methods of community resilience so as to curtail further growth in extremist sentiment

Academics and human rights organizations active within the counter extremism fields often refer to individual or communal disavowal of previously held extremist sentiments and forms of action as "disengagement." In addition, these same organizations emphasize the need for reconciliation of those individuals within their respective communities. In sum this points to the need for fostering community resilience to extremist sentiment, both for the purposes of reintegrating community members and as a way to curtail the further spread of extremist sentiment. Work here would seek to ground efforts within evidence-based strategies while identifying partner organizations to continue development of the program.

Component 2: Development of state-wide survey to identify extremist ideology within the state.

Often attempts to understand or track the spread of extremist ideology are done through the use of proxy measures (e.g. voting records, social media posts). Additionally, often little is done to address growing extremism until a violent act has already occurred. Much in the vein of preventative medicine, this survey would allow Mindbridge to identify the presence of extremist ideology within specific regions of Maine. Importantly, in assessing any programming or intervention effort, surveys would allow researchers to track changes over time. Currently there is no survey of this kind that exists within the state of Maine.
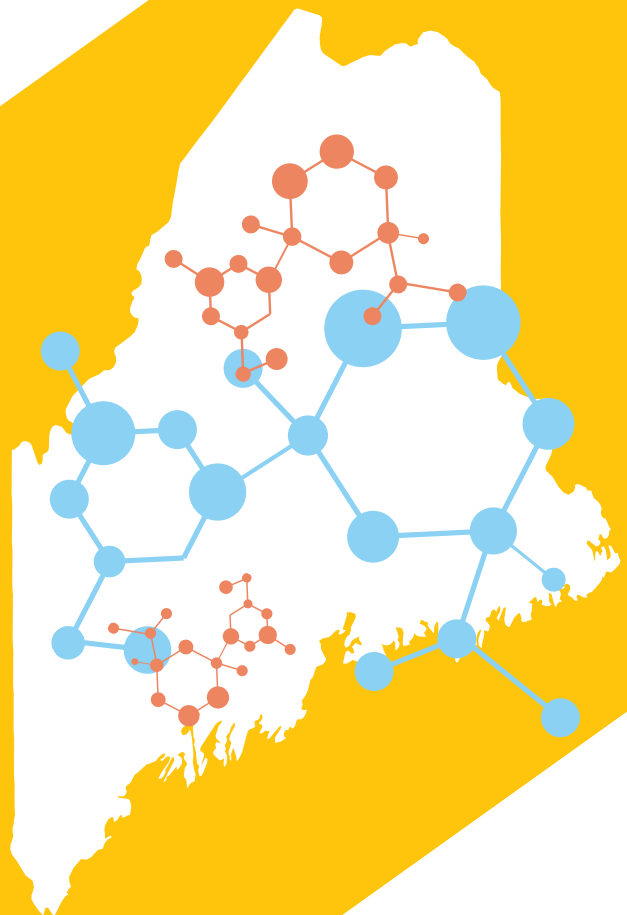
Component 3: Pilot Study – Developing Community-Based Interventions

Pilot studies are extremely important within the realm of psychology and violent extremism. All too often intervention efforts are hastily designed and implemented in order to counter an existing threat. However, without adequate preparation and research, these efforts often result in ironic consequences if not direct forms of harm to the communities they were intended to support. As a result, Mindbridge strongly advocates for the use of pilot studies. These studies help us test hypotheses and intervention techniques that are designed specifically to reduce the potential for harm.

Building on the work by Ellis and Abdi (2017), Mindbridge is developing a series of programming focused on increasing community resilience to extremist sentiment while simultaneously working with CBT techniques in mitigating sentiments as they currently exist within communities. Designs would be individualized to match the needs of specific regions and co-created in partnership with identified local area organizations and state agencies. Development of programming is ongoing. To learn more about the development of these programs or to become involved please email us at info@mindbridgecenter.org, subject: IBP-CED.

About Mindbridge

Mindbridge is a Maine-based 501-C3 nonprofit organization dedicated to transforming human rights work by integrating psychological and neurobiological applied science (www.mindbridgecenter.org). The Implicit Bias Project is one of Mindbridge's flagship programs, developing short and long-term training opportunities that leverage our inherent neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to change over time) to mitigate bias and discriminatory behavior. Insight from neuroscience and psychology are interwoven with social justice approaches to power and privilege to create a comprehensive process devoted to the dismantling of systemic oppression and harm. To learn more about Mindbridge, please visit us at www.mindbridgecenter.org.

Mindbridge