

How Extremism Hijacks the Mind

Part One



Introduction

Parents For Peace is a non-governmental public health nonprofit empowering families, friends, and communities to prevent radicalization, violence, and extremism.





Worried about a loved one being radicalized? Call our toll-free helpline 24/7 at 1-844-49-PEACE (1-844-497-3223)

The Helpline: A Free Confidential Resource



Extremism is on the rise

According to the FBI, domestic terrorism investigations have more than doubled since 2020.





Our typical approach to extremism

- We demand for more rigorous law enforcement involvement
- We blame each other (or more accurately, our political opponents)
- We hate the hater
- We go after those who share some attributes with the perpetrators (skin color, religion, or gender identity)
- We engage in rituals, preach and pray
 - Keep vigil
 - Je suis Charlie
 - "Never More!"
 - "Hate has no place here" here signs.

**And yet extremism
continues to spread
like wildfire in the
world**



My Story









WHY SOME PEOPLE HURT THEMSELVES AND OTHERS?

Why I became a psychotherapist



Boston Marathon Bombing

APRIL 15, 2013

Paris, January 7, 2015 Charlie Hebdo Attacks





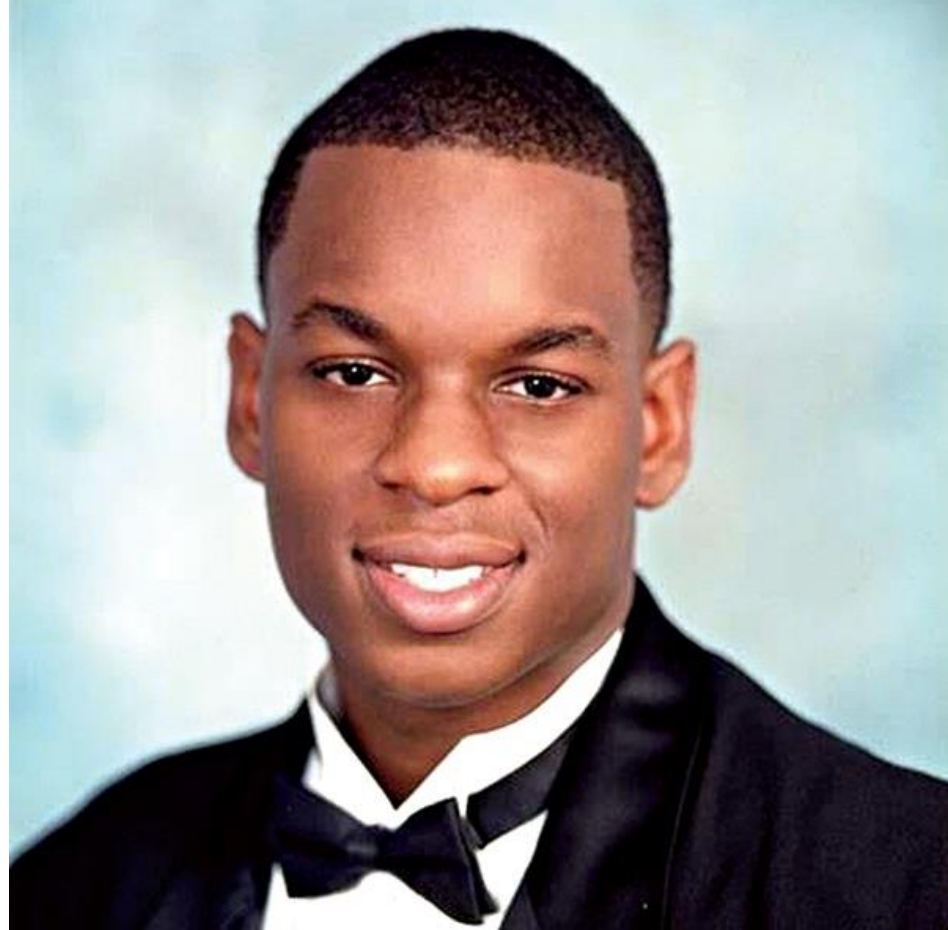
Who are these monsters?

How did they become such monsters?





I met a father



Melvin's son: Carlos

On June 1, 2009, while driving to work in Memphis, Melvin Bledsoe received a phone call

Little Rock Shooting





Suspect arrested in Arkansas recruiting center shooting

updated 8:17 p.m. EDT, Mon June 1, 2009

My conversations with other families of extremists



Troy Kastigar



Sabri Bin Ali



Nicole Mansfield

My conversations with other families

- The families seemed ordinary.
- Most of these families had never had anything to do with the Middle East or even Islam.
- How could their children kill and die defending something so foreign to them?

Muslim Family, Extremist Son



In the one family that *was* Muslim, the mother had tried, but failed, to deradicalize her son.

I also spoke to former extremists

Arno Michaelis

FORMER SKINHEAD



Mubin Shaikh

FORMER ISLAMIST





What I found out motivated me to establish the helpline as a resource for families and individuals struggling with extremism.

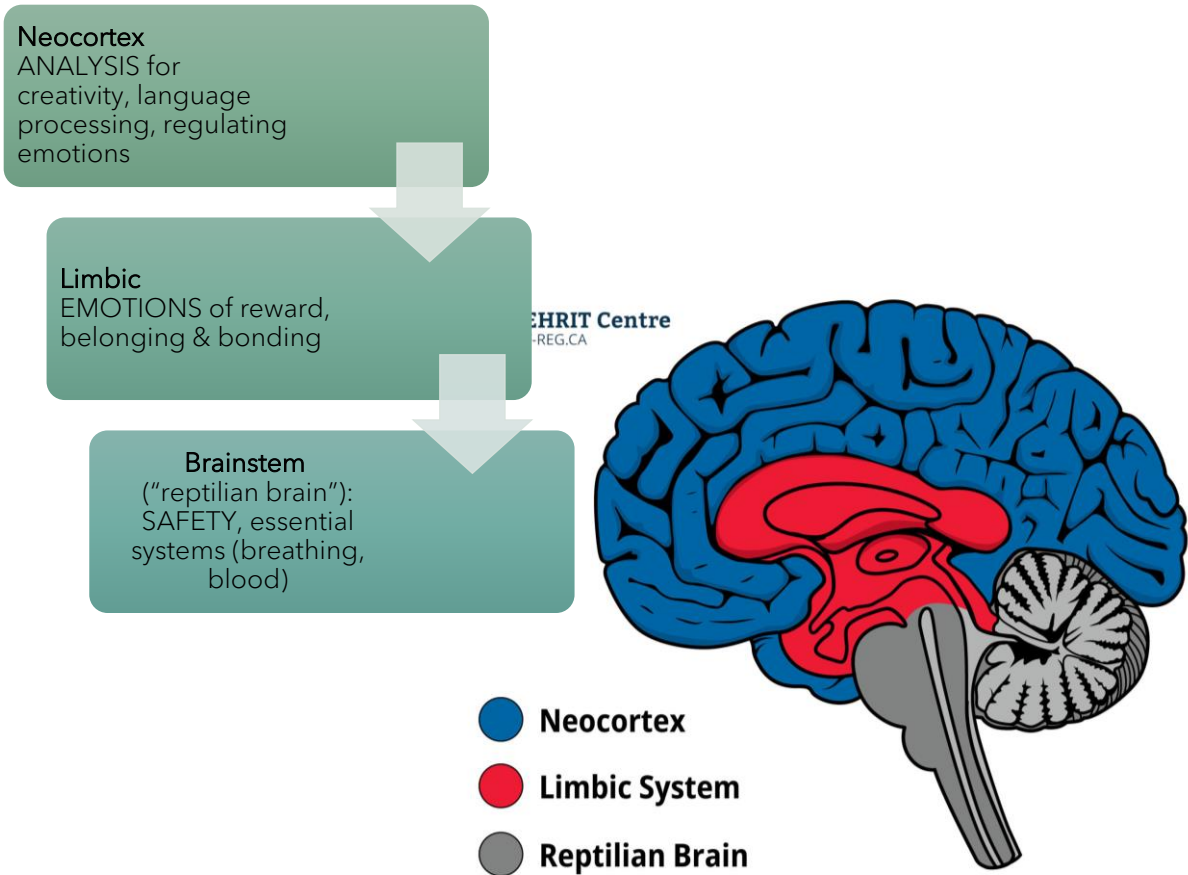
Radicalization Process





1. Vulnerabilities

- Adolescent Vulnerabilities
- Environmental Vulnerabilities



Adapted by The MEHRIT Centre from Paul MacLean's 1960s Triune Brain Model

1.1 Adolescent Vulnerabilities

- Neo-cortex does not fully develop until 25 resulting in the impairment of rational decision-making and poor emotional regulation
- Idealism and the desire to be a hero and find meaning in a complicated and alienating world (Messianic Stage)
- The desire to form a new identity independent of one's parents and defying boundaries

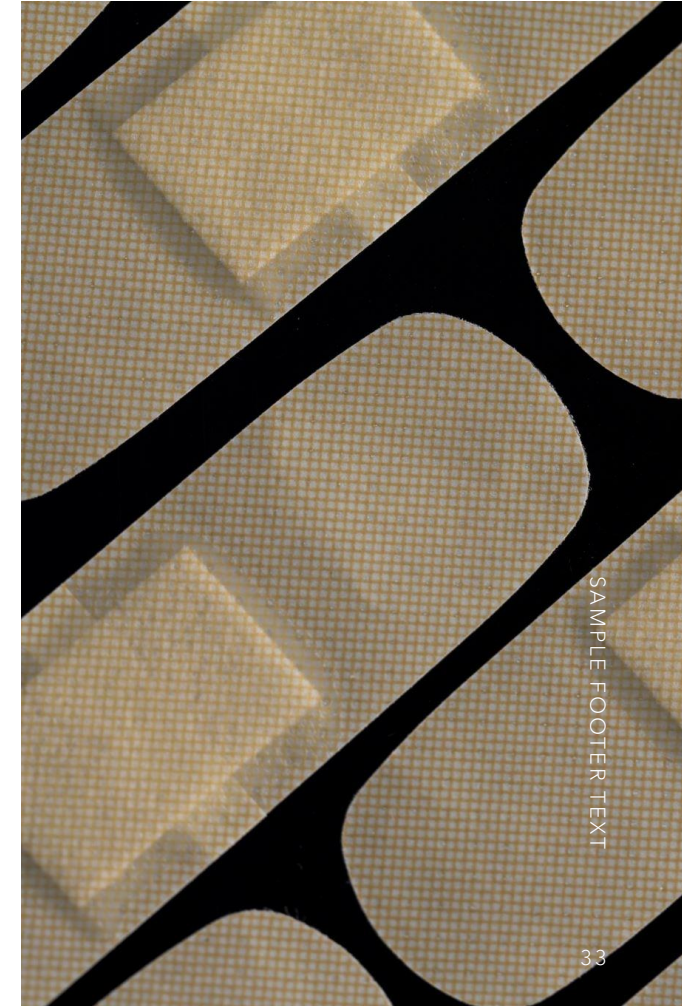
Adolescent Vulnerabilities: Identity Crisis

- Major disruption to your sense of who you are
- Self-doubt leads to a desperate need for clarity
- Pangs of pain that you feel an intense need to numb
- Everyone experiences identity crises, but some might have additional vulnerabilities that might make them find extremism appealing
- Neurological vulnerabilities (e.g., ASD, addiction problems, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder)



1.2 Environmental Vulnerabilities

- Unaddressed trauma and moral injury
- Weak boundaries
- Social media
- Learned Victimhood






2. Recruitment

- 2.1 Recruitment Process
- 2.2 Seduction of Ideologies
- 2.3 Recruiters

2.1 Recruitment Process

- 
1. Seduction
 2. Indoctrination
 - Addiction
 - Depravation
 - Isolation
 3. Action Phase
 - Instruction
 - Becoming a recruiter
 - Ongoing Control



2.1 The Seduction of Extremist Ideologies

- Ideologies provide a community, identity, and purpose
- Acknowledge the injuries, giving microphone to the pain
- Offer a quick solution to numb the pain
- Provide a clear target to blame (scapegoating)
- The individual begins to identify with the ideology

2.2 Indoctrination

The individual increasingly adopts the extremist ideology, viewing it as absolute truth and accepting a narrative of 'us versus them'.

During this phase, the individual often cuts ties with their old life and forms new relationships with fellow extremists.

The individual becomes addicted to hate.



Hate acts like an addictive drug

REVENGE-SEEKING IS ADDICTIVE



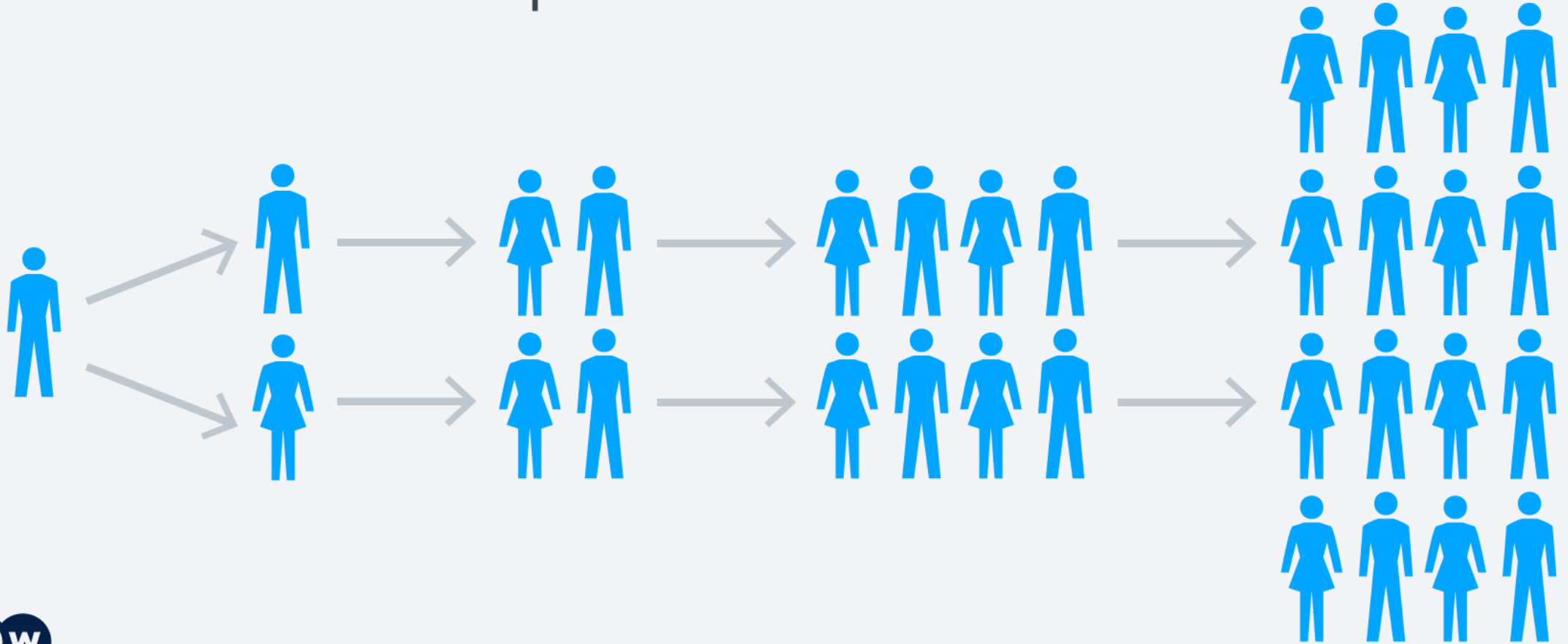
2. 3 Who are the recruiters?

Vulnerabilities

Recruitment

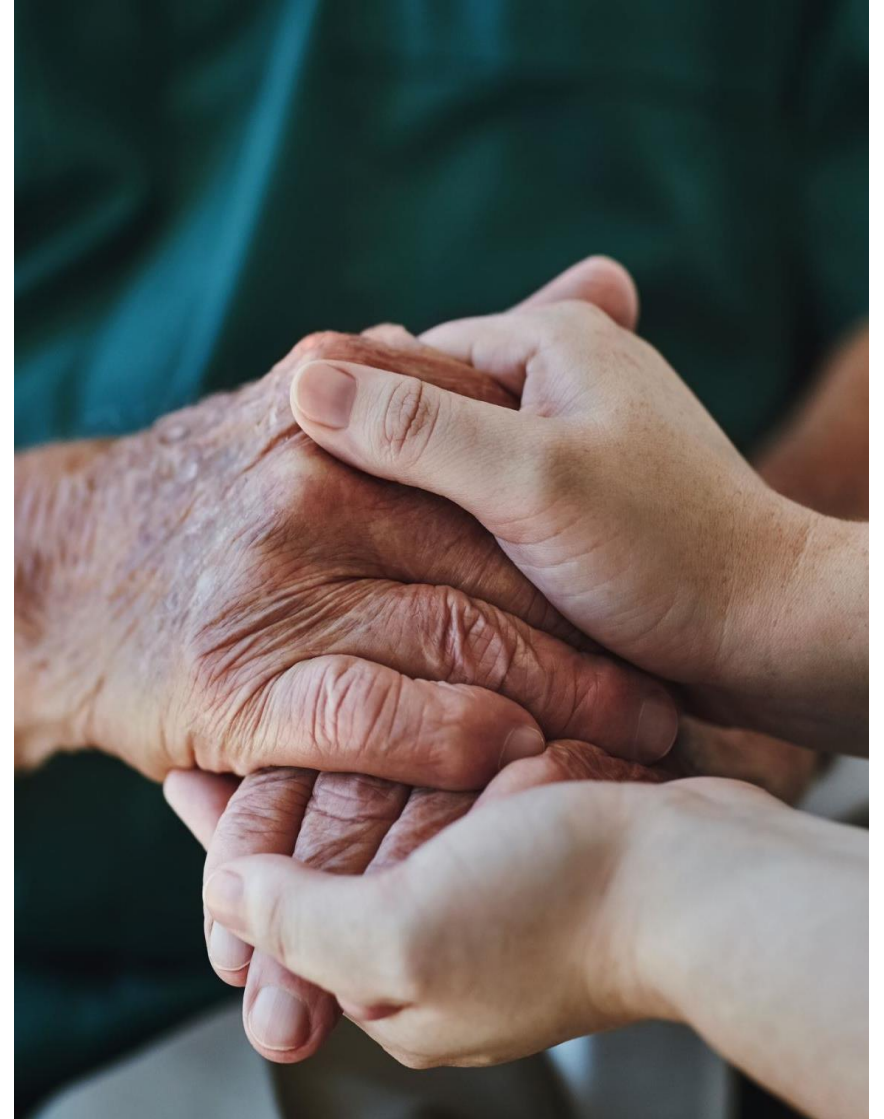
Action

Recruiters are fully-fledged extremists: The infected become infectors



2.3.1 Typical Recruiters

- Extremist recruiters can come from any walk of life. But radicalization often involves the exploitation of personal relationships, trust, and influence:
 - Teachers and professors
 - Community leaders
 - Clergymen
 - Social Workers and psychologists
 - Celebrities
 - Families (parent, an older sibling)
 - Friends
 - Romantic partners



2.3. 2

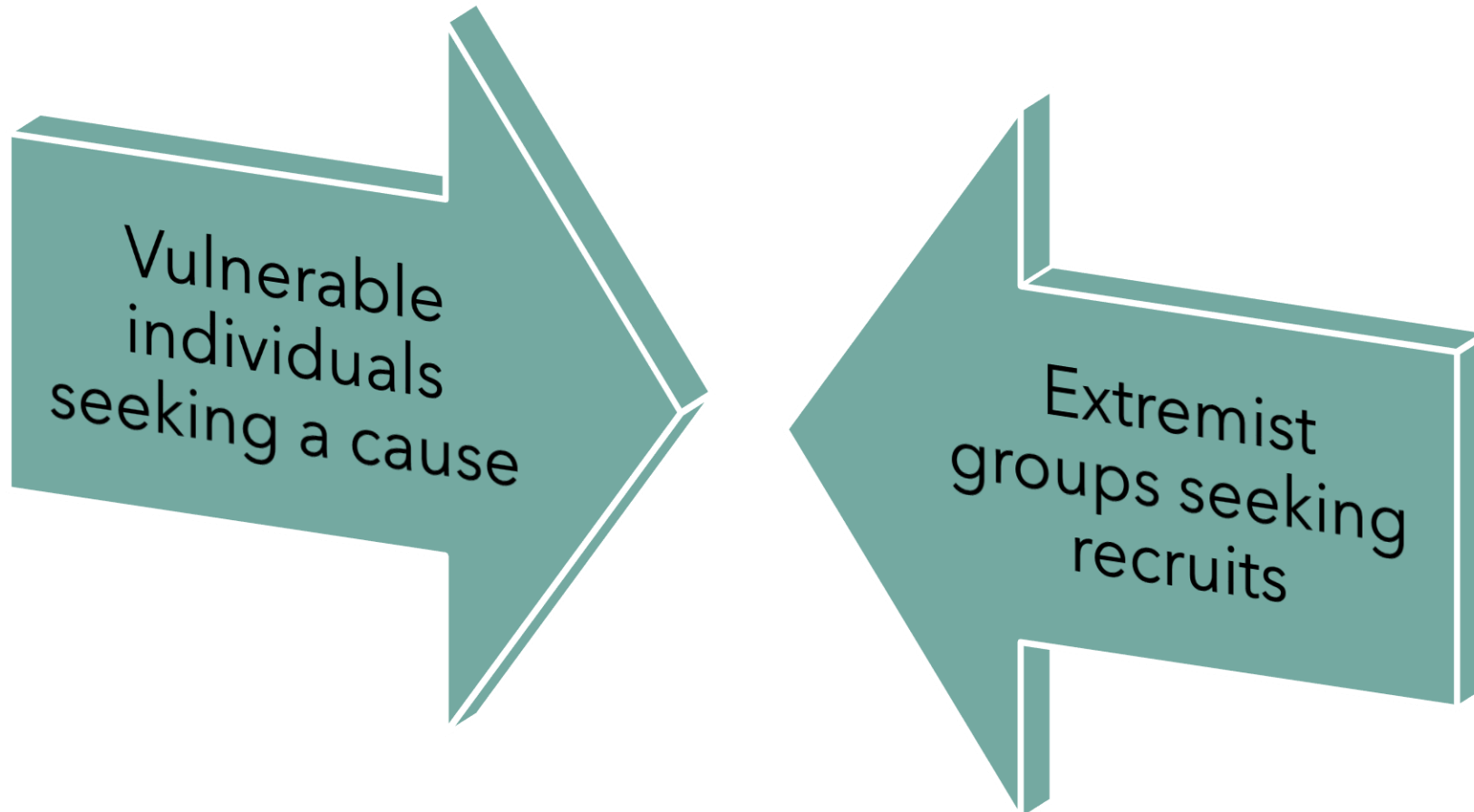
What's in it for the recruiters?

- For the most part, recruiters are true believers who want to spread their group ideology at whatever the cost.
 - They want to grow their ranks.
 - They want to amplify their impact.
 - They seek validation for their cause.
- But there might also be some personal benefits
 - Power and recognition
 - Sexual gratification
 - Money
 - Validation

2.3.3 The New Age of Extremism Recruitment

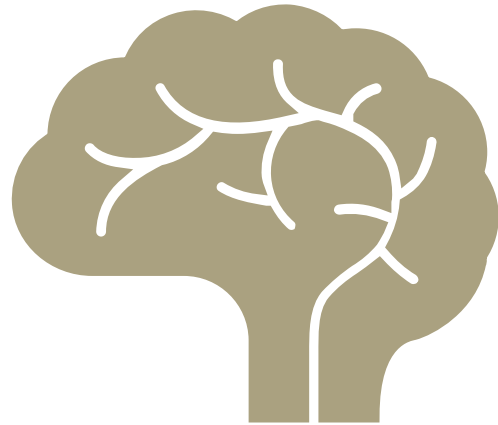
- Increasingly, there might not always be a typical recruiter for every individual.
- Thanks to the Internet and social media, recruitment has become more democratic.
- Extremist material, including manifestos, can circulate in internet forums, where young extremists radicalize each other.

Extremist Courtship: The Mutual Attraction



Break





How to Treat Extremism as a Disease

Part Two

Status Quo: Law Enforcement Approach

- Violent extremists need to be held accountable for their actions.
 - Public safety
- However, law enforcement cannot singlehandedly prevent extremism
 - Extremism itself is not illegal. It's not illegal to subscribe to conspiracy theories, convert to a new religion and become more religious.
 - Extremist cases can only be prosecuted when there is concrete evidence for plan to harm.
 - Use of informants that exacerbate radicalization
 - Few families voluntarily call the police on their loved ones – even when there is a risk of violence.



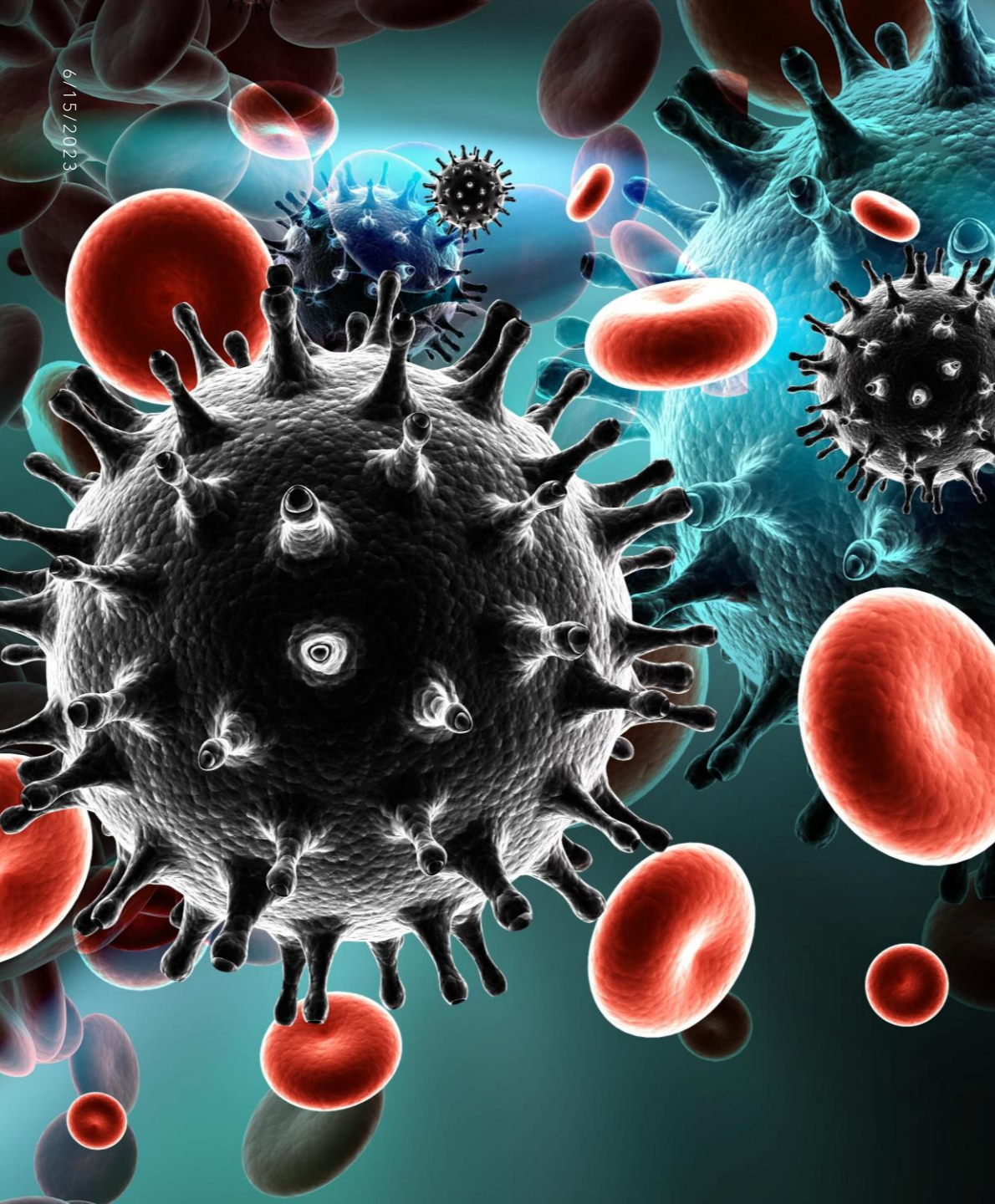
Lessons from the AIDS pandemic

Tremendous stigma surrounded HIV, which seemed to be a marker of 'depraved' homosexuality.

As a result, the virus spread for years among people too ashamed to seek help as American society struggled to address the deadly challenge. As a result, few resources were allocated for diagnosis or treatment.

But Americans finally developed the maturity to overcome moralizing to focus on effective public health solutions.





6/15/2023

Hate thrives in darkness

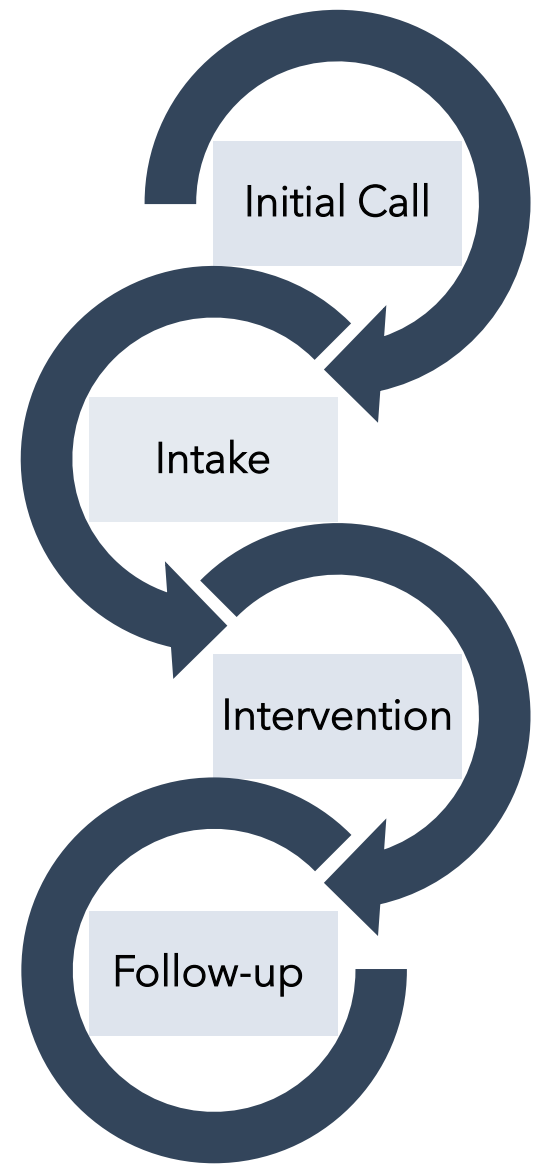
- Culture of fear, secrecy, and stigma around radicalization prevents many families from seeking help
- Families lack the resources for understanding and addressing extremism



Extremism is a complex problem that requires a whole-of-society approach.



PFP Helpline: An example of a public health approach



1. Helpline: Intake

- Intake protocol designed to gather as much information as possible on the individual of concern and acknowledges the complexity of the caller's situation.
- Goal: Make the caller feel understood, secure and establish a trusting relationship.
- After the call ends, the first responder refers the case to the interventionists and schedules weekly interventions with them.



2. Helpline: Intervention

- Interventionists
 - Educate the caller on violent extremism, the radicalization process and the different vulnerabilities that facilitate the grooming process.
 - Uses metaphors to explain the addictive nature of hate: “hate is a drug of choice” and comparisons with alcoholism or substance abuse
 - Provides a “toolbox” to the caller to help them deal with hateful language and behavior.
 - We coordinate other resources for helping the individual (therapist, psychiatrists, etc.)
 - We aim to help individuals disengage from extremist ideologies and reintegrate into society. We measure success by tracking key radicalization indicators, such as violent outbursts, extremist beliefs, time spent online, and levels of social isolation.



Healing Process

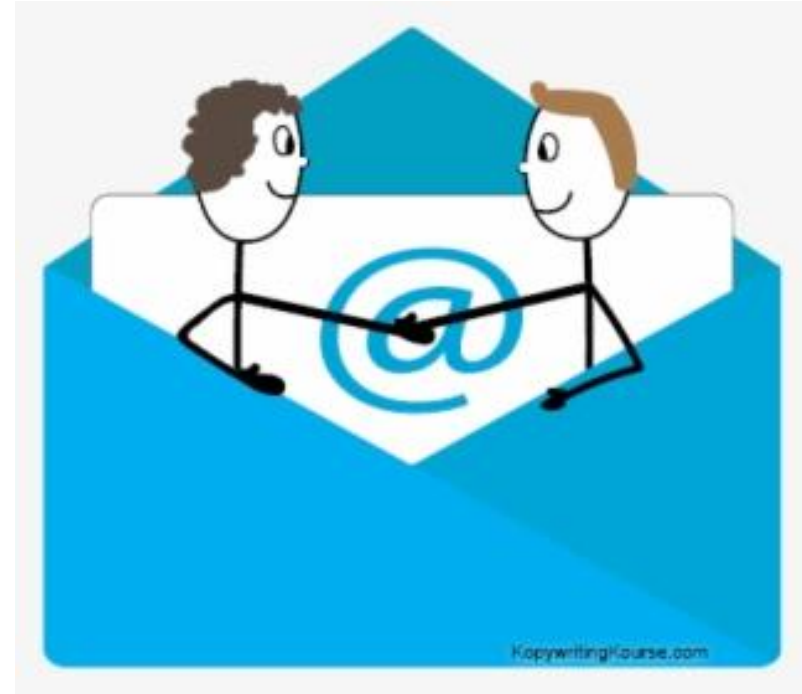
Recovery requires accountability & restoration

- Healing process requires recognizing injustice: Deep human need for reckoning
- Accountability means making up for initial mistakes that created identity crisis
- Need for the loved one to restore their integrity, regain power, heal their dignity
- Enables them to move on so the wounded ego is no longer in control.



3. Helpline Follow-Up

We keep a steady relationship with the people involved for a certain period to ensure that the individual of concern is on a healthy path to recovery.



4. Impact

- PfP has provided over 350 interventions (since Jan 2023) to intimate bystanders and individuals of concern.
- We have successfully off-ramped dozens of individuals in the past few years, including one involving a teenager from Massachusetts who was being recruited by a terrorist Islamist group online, a young man who had marched in Charlottesville, and a young woman from a Southern state who espoused Neo-Nazi beliefs.
- Our work has been profiled by NPR, Boston Globe, the Washington Post
- We actively collaborate with several institutions and organizations, including the University of Chicago, Georgia State University, Department of Homeland Security, National Institute of Justice, University of Southern California, and Harvard Chan School of Public Health. Several foundations, including the Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation, also support us.

5. Our Team

- Our staff come from various ethnic (i.e., American, British, Chinese, Cuban, Indian, Morocco, Pakistani, Somali) and religious (i.e., Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Protestant, Buddhist) backgrounds.
- They come from large cities and rural America and have diverse political backgrounds.
- Our team includes many individuals who have personally experienced severe forms of injustice, including racism, abuse, and domestic violence.





Pardeep Kaleka

Who are Peer Support Specialists?



“People who have been successful in the recovery process who help others experiencing similar situations. Through shared understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment, peer support workers help people become and stay engaged in the recovery process and reduce the likelihood of relapse.”

Substance Abuse and
Mental Health Services
Administration (SAMHSA)

Arno Michaelis

FORMER SKINHEAD



6/15/2023

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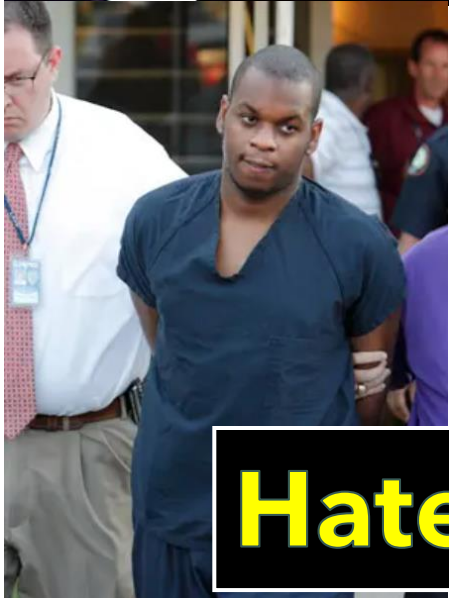
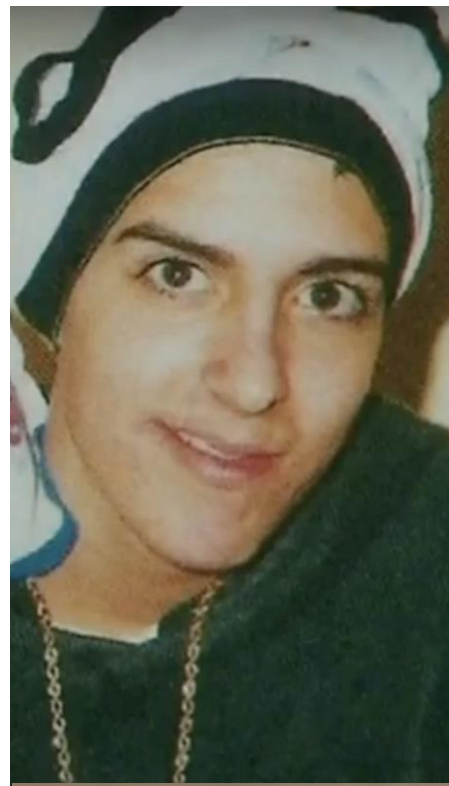
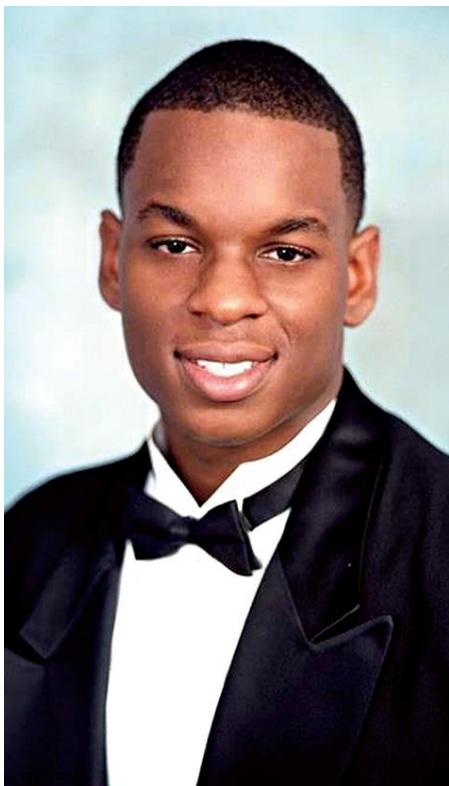
Chris Buckley

FORMER KKK GRAND WIZARD



Our approach

- Our team members are too familiar with the seductive allure of victimhood. They have witnessed the dangerous consequences of forming an identity centered around victimhood.**
- Most importantly, our team members understand that yesterday's victims can quickly become tomorrow's victimizers.**
- This understanding drives our approach to counter-extremism as we focus on disrupting the appeal of extremist ideologies and breaking the cycle of extremism and violence.**



Hate does not discriminate

What Remains to be Done: Raising Public Awareness

We must confront the human face of extremism.

Shame and stigma surrounding extremism do not help us.

Politicization of extremism only inflames the problem.

More frontline workers at schools and hospitals need to know about the resources for dealing with extremism as a disease.



**But hate can be
treatable**

Myrieme Churchill
Myrieme@parents4peace.org

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