

EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

SECTION OF THE CPA

CANADIAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION



SOCIÉTÉ
CANADIENNE
DE PSYCHOLOGIE

EXTRÉMISME ET TERRORISME

SECTION DE LA SCP

Newsletter of the CPA Section for the Study of Extremism and Terrorism Summer 2015



TERRORISM
HAS NO
RELIGION

**Theory, Evidence and Translation:
The CPA Section for the Study of Extremism and Terrorism**

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CPA is an ideal intellectual home for individuals with scholarly credentials who share an interest in better apprehending important topics broadly related to behaviour. In its attempt to develop as an empirically based discipline, Psychology has followed the requisite signposts in producing explanatory explanations that can be supported or perhaps more importantly refuted by evidence. Additionally, Psychology has branched out “horizontally” from traditional behavioural domains including perception, cognition, motivation, emotion and motor processes to more focused applied areas such as clinical, developmental, and environmental psychologies and related extensions such as the psychology of consumer behaviour. With the advent of technologies affording study of the living and working brain, Psychology has begun to fulfil its potential of integrating with the biological sciences by mapping information processing to neuroanatomical, psychopharmacological, epigenetic and genetic substrates. Beyond knowledge acquisition for its own noble sake, much of psychology’s utility lies in application of Psychology to enhance human welfare.

In 2009, at the insightful urging of Professor Wagdy Loza, a small group of individuals petitioned CPA to begin a Section dedicated to objectively obtain a better appreciation of extremism and terrorism as a topic within Psychology’s landscape, and how this domain impacts Canada and Western society. Since its inception, the Section has mounted meaningful symposia at CPA’s Annual Conventions that have been typically well attended and valued by most present. To further knowledge about contemporary extremism and terrorism, individual Section members have published scholarly papers, made media presentations, spoken to interested groups, written newspaper pieces and letters to better inform the public about the root causes, manifestations and extent of extremist “thinking,” politicization of ideology, the appeal and blandishments of the radicalization process, and psychological processes invoked by frank terrorists.

An objective appraisal of the state of the world shows clearly that understanding the roots of extremism and terrorism and the various mechanisms and processes through which it is spread is no longer simply an academic indulgence. As extremist mythology and dogma have become actualized into powerful social, political and military movements, the need for an active research and knowledge translation hub is critical. I see the following domains as necessary points of scholarly inquiry and dissemination, although of course the list is far from exhaustive:

1. How do proponents of extremist ideologies of the left and right process information differently from those in the broad centre?
2. What are the fundamental ideological bases for extremist thinking of the left and the right?
3. How is it that left and right extremists appear at least to promote similar outcomes?
4. What is the rationale for politicization of religion?
5. How has extremist ideology come to occupy “centre-stage” rather than remaining “fringe”? In other words, how has the actual moderate centre been displaced and made to appear far right?

6. How do extremists co-opt mainstream media?
7. How does Political Correctness inhibit critical analysis?
8. What role does elicitation of emotions play in “short-circuiting” reason and examining historical reality in neutralizing effective opposition to extremism?
9. What do many of today’s youth find attractive in extremist ideologies that translate into terrorist behaviours?
10. What must be done to develop effective counter-measures to internet appeals to radicalize our youth embody?
11. What must effective counter-measures to global extremism and terrorism embody?

Looking back on the minutes of our first Section Business Meeting at the CPA Annual Convention in Montreal in 2009, it is clear that we have grown and matured from infancy to what I would call (abstractly of course), a hopeful adolescence. However, we still have some maturing to do before we have attained “adulthood” when we accept responsibility for addressing the psychology behind the daunting set of extremist ideological challenges that a) confront our collective well-being and b) are within the purview and competence of psychology and psychologists. In the intervening years, the Section symposia at CPA have featured distinguished foreign and domestic experts on psychological underpinnings of extremism and terrorism including Ariel Merrari (of Tel Aviv University) who discussed personality aspects of (primarily unsuccessful) suicide bombers and members of Canadian agencies charged with countering the insidious (e.g., CSIS, RCMP) who presented data about the extent of the threats we in Canada have faced since 9/11 and earlier.

At our Section Sponsored Symposium last year in Vancouver, we showed a rivetting video by Dr. Andrew Bostom. Two colleagues attended who I did not recognize, and I introduced myself and welcomed them to the event, and suggested that they sign up as section members. After a few minutes of the talk, these two got up and left the room. They missed a lively discussion. However, within a few weeks, I was called by CPA’s Associate Executive Director and informed that CPA received an informal complaint about Dr. Bostom’s talk (presumably alleging that it was “Islamophobic”), and a firm request that I send the URL to CPA so that it could be evaluated by “Head Office.”. This of course represented a first in my 25 years of involvement with CPA. Of course I complied. A date was set for a SKYPE interview after CPA reviewed the potentially offensive (and certainly Politically Incorrect or “PInc”) content. I am pleased to report that our subsequent SKYPE interview was one of the high points of my quarter of a century involvement with CPA. The CPA executive folks decided to circulate the URL to the entire CPA Board of Directors who watched it. Their decision: Bostom’s video was not at all Islamophobic but factually described over-the-top antisemitism emanating from Iran. This restored my faith in my CPA colleagues who, when push came to shove, chose the principled rather than politically expedient decision. I am providing the URL in question so you can judge for yourselves:

This incident highlights a fundamental question that is frequently raised but rarely analyzed and rationally addressed. How do we deal, on one hand, with Muslim extremism, extremists and terrorists that we must soundly defeat if we are to continue living our lives replete with freedom and the host of meaningful rights that have evolved in western society since at least the Magna Carta and, on the other hand, accept our many fellow Canadian Muslims who abhor the excesses of extremist ideology that are the bane of peace and love across much of today’s world?

A Section Newsletter is hardly the place for a comprehensive, detailed, nuanced and balanced exposition of how to rationally address this complex ethical and emotion-laden issue that includes our cherished values of religious freedom and separation of church and state. I will suggest a short and preliminary answer that could be a starting point for a fuller discussion. Religious freedom should definitely apply to all religious groups in terms of their beliefs in a creator, revelation and ritual practices pertaining to their internal set of observances. However, all religious bodies in democratic multi-cultural societies such as ours must extend equivalent status to other religions, and to non-believing agnostics and atheists, despite their obvious and intrinsic disbelief in alternate versions of fundamental dogmas. This means that no group can seek to impose its beliefs, sensitivities, morals, ethics or behavioural norms on those who chose not to accept them; even nominal co-religionists. No group should advocate any for any policy that suggests special or preferred status or special treatment in society. Consequently, we should never question anyone's right to eat Halal, pray 5 times a day, fast during daylight during the month of Ramadan, etc. However, we must resist granting special status to any religion in terms of exemption from critical analysis or questioning. I do not see this as Islamophobic; I would not want to grant such preferred status to irrational extremist belief groups regardless of their specific religion or creed. I think that those who oppose this suggested distinction do so in service of an extremist ideology that cannot tolerate objective analysis because in its extreme version, it cannot stand rational scrutiny and it is that fear that is transformed to anger and ultimately terrorism that plagues the globe from the Philippines to the Middle East to North America. Indeed one resorts to force only if one cannot convince through the combination of documented facts and logic. This may be one significant psychological root underlying extremist information processing and resultant terrorism.

The section also had a very successful Convention in Ottawa, in June. Professor Loza delivered an excellent and well-attended Pre-Convention Workshop that received the highest possible ratings across the board from all of its attendees. The two Section Symposia were very well attended and generated some interesting and provocative discussions. Since many of our members were not in Ottawa for the Convention, we will post a number of those Power Point presentations on our Section Website in the near future (one available in this Newsletter). You will be advised of these posting by email.

At our annual Section Business Meeting, we were able to recruit a Student Representative and Section Newsletter Editor in one person; Kimberly Hall. We welcome her to a spot on the section executive and look forward to quarterly Newsletters. Perhaps section Members could submit candidate suggestions for the meaningful naming of our Section Newsletter.

Along with the successes, we still have a number of challenges to face as a Section. From my perspective, the primary challenge we face is that although we are centered on the arguably the most pressing topic for behavioural scientists in the early 21st century, there are few active researchers in Psychology Departments across Canada or anywhere in the Western World who have active and funded research programs exploring the psychology of extremism, terrorism, radicalization, the effects of the media approach to covering extremism and terrorism, philosophical foundations of extremism, and individual differences in susceptibility to extremist ideologies. Clearly our task has just begun. We need our members with their factual knowledge and research skills to step up and become involved in research into this critical topic and in translation of basic knowledge into policy suggestions so that our Western society and civilization (with all of its remediable warts) prevails over extremist ideologies of what are commonly referred to as the left and the right. Well researched and thought out contributions to our next Newsletter are encouraged.

A Psychological Perspective of the Lone-Wolf Phenomenon

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The terrorist attacks in Canada last October shocked the nation and democracies around the world. These separate attacks, within days of each other, saw two soldiers killed and a gunman storming the Parliament building where Parliamentarians were within feet of the crossfire. These incidents have led to many questions. The primary question is: What do these terrorists hope to achieve? To provide a context, it must be noted that the majority of contemporary terrorist acts are linked to extremist ideologies, beliefs, and attitudes originating in the Middle-East. The ultimate goal of these terrorists is to help establish a “true” Muslim state (Caliphate) and, eventually, impose pure Islamic societies across the entire world governed by a strict application of Sharia law. The perpetrators feel that Jihad (holy war) is the means to achieve this ultimate goal. Extreme religious ideologies play a central role in radicalizing potential terrorists and recruiting and indoctrinating them into the foundational extremist ideology. The Islamic State (IS), previously called Islamic state of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) clearly exemplifies this ideology.

The next question is: How do extremists implement their agenda? Two complimentary approaches exist. The most public is of course terrorism whose mechanism involves creating fear by undermining public confidence in the established government, disrupting routine activities, and inflicting as much physical and psychological damage as possible. The goals of terrorism are to intimidate and thereby coerce governments and civilian populations to accept the extremist ideological demands to change their behaviour in service of the extremists' political interests. One step in infiltrating societies is to radicalize susceptible youth, effectively bringing them into the extremist camp.

In light of the radicalized, “homegrown” terrorists, a third important question is: What personal characteristics might be used to identify those individuals who are most susceptible to extremist propaganda and blandishments? Although terrorist organizations recruit people at all levels of competencies for an array of organizational purposes, for the most part, “expendable” terrorists tend to be naive rigidly devout in advocating jihad to non-Islamic candidate converts.

Participating in terrorist acts provides those with incomplete or unfulfilling senses of self with a more gratifying identity, and feelings of self-actualization, fulfillment, status, power and direction; a way out of their routine, unsatisfying and often meaningless lives, being replaced by a highly honoured and even glorious name, camaraderie and sense of community. This singular act serves their aspirations to become a “somebody”.

What predispositions render potential terrorists vulnerable to such outreach programs? The thinking style exhibited by many ideologically-driven terrorists has been described as rigid, primitive and unsophisticated. They over-simplify complex issues and conceptualize solutions in a concrete, absolutist, biased and prejudicial manner, effectively filtering out any opposing ideas or even facts. This cognitive style severely limits options to false dichotomization; right or wrong, good or evil, and the proverbial black or white. Their analytical and abstract thinking is constrained. Is atypical information processing limited to atypical cognitions? Unfortunately, the answer to this question is no. Extremists and their derivative terrorists embed their beliefs within intense emotional systems. Consequently, feelings and emotions of terrorists have been described as impassioned, filled with disappointment, frustration, fear, disgust, anger and hatred toward all those not sharing their precise ideological beliefs. This extends not only to other faiths but to variants within their own faith.

Many terrorists experience a need for feelings of excitement, adventure, power, and belonging to a close network of like-minded friends that they could not achieve through other avenues. Others have suggested that terrorists have problems with their personal lives (e.g., inability to hold a job, failure to join the military, a failed marriage, addiction, or dissatisfaction with personal needs/ objectives). Dissatisfaction and rage could also result from perceived insult and frustration, perceptions that they themselves have been humiliated, threatened or aggrieved; are without help as victims of an injustice, otherwise impotent with no hope for success; feelings of alienation and exclusion; and the ubiquitous feeling of being victimised.

How do extremists and terrorists manage inconsistencies between reality and their own shortcomings? One basic and prevalent mechanism is to externalize the blame to others, thereby never having to deal with these uncomfortable realities internally. A favourite variant is to perceive that their in-group are victims of satanic and intrinsically evil and un-G-dly political systems that oppress them. In turn, they project and dehumanize their victims and describe them as infidels, conspirators and oppressors absolving themselves of any guilt. Indeed they impose an

inversion of reality by perceiving themselves as “freedom fighters” and “revolutionaries.”

A different question has been raised regarding the possibility that extremists and terrorists are mentally ill. Some have suggested that the behaviour of terrorists can only be explained by mental illnesses such as psychotic states, psychopathic or sociopathic, narcissistic, paranoid, borderline, or passive-aggressive personality disorders. However, interviews with many terrorists have not found evidence of any acute mental illness. The acutely mentally ill tend to be incapable of carrying out the detailed planning and execution of terrorist operations, although this does not preclude terrorist handlers from manipulating the frankly mentally ill to donning suicide vests and carrying out their grisly tasks.

The preceding questions address issues that are somewhat remote from the average citizen. A question that touches all of us is: What roles do the Internet and social media play? Unfortunately, the Internet allows the Middle Eastern ideology espoused by terrorists to grow exponentially in Western countries. Broad exposure to extremist ideologies has facilitated terrorist groups’ abilities to remotely convert and recruit our own youth to their cause. They take advantage of various online forums and systems to facilitate the radicalization and training of new recruits, planning and coordination of activities, and the mobilization of members.

In the Canadian attacks, available information indicates that one of the perpetrators had converted to Islam and both had access to extreme Islamic material through the Internet and social media, which played a critical role in shaping their radicalized attitudes and behaviour. It appears that the inability to obtain passports to join other Islamic fighters may indirectly have contributed to the attacks at home. Both were reportedly angry with the Canadian government for joining the fight in Iraq. This position completely ignores the “Toronto 18” group whose planned terrorist attack on the Canadian government preceded Canada’s defensive participation in Iraq by almost half a decade. Overall, their adherence to an extreme ideology, coupled with personal difficulties or frank personality disorders, seem to serve as the primary triggers for extremist beliefs and terrorist behaviour, rather than any acute mental illness.

Acknowledgment: Many thanks to Dr. David Nussbaum for his review and helpful comments

Terrorism and Extremism; A Student Perspective

Kimberly Hall, B.A. Psych.

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Section Newsletter Editor and Student Representative

For this month's newsletter, I will introduce myself to you. My name is Kimberly Hall, a young French Acadian from New Brunswick. I am very pleased to be the new Newsletter Editor and Student Representative for the Extremism and Terrorism Section. While I graduated last year with a Bachelor in psychology at the Université de Moncton, I am currently doing a M.Sc. in Investigative and Forensic Psychology at the University of Liverpool in England. Extremism and Terrorism is a field that I am passionate about. In fact, I undertook a research project with one of my undergraduate professor, Dr. John Tivendell, where we looked at decision-making process of terrorism experts, which only reinforced my interest in the subject. I have had the privilege to meet Dr. Nussbaum and Dr. Loza during the 2015 Annual CPA Convention last June in Ottawa where they offered multiple presentations and symposiums on Extremism and Terrorism.

I would recommend to any students interested in this particular field to become a member of this section. E & T is a delicate and relatively new subject in psychology, therefore opportunities related to this field are particularly hard to find and rare (from my personal experience as a student). Being an active member of this section and attending conferences such as Annual CPA Conventions are great opportunities for students to get to know professionals in the field and acquire a broader knowledge on the matter.

The repercussion related to terrorism can be very devastating, as we have seen all around the world and more so here in Canada in recent years. Therefore, efforts in tackling terrorism should be a priority.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter and the ones to come. Please feel free to contact any of us if you have further questions or recommendations.

See below for a copy of the Pre-Convention Workshop done by Dr. Wagdy Loza at the 2015 Annual CPA Convention in Ottawa.

Sincerely,
Kimberly

PREVENTION OF AND INTERVENTION WITH HOME GROWN TERRORISM

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INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

- Religious terrorism is not unique to one religion or to one region
- Huge difference between following a religion and being extremist/terrorist.
- The majority of the recent terrorism related to **POLITICS**.
- Terrorists killed & caused unbearable miseries to their co-religionists than to any other religion.

- October, 2014: Michael Zehaf-Bibeau killed Cpl. Nathan Cirillo (National War Memorial), in Ottawa & stormed of Parliament Hill.
- October, 2014 Martin Rouleau after being radicalized: Struck the two CAF members with his car
- Hiva Mohammad Alizadeh & Misbahudeen Ahmed, Sentenced in 2014.
- May 2015: 10 teens arrested while trying to leave Trudeau airport to join ISIS
- June 2015: 2 convicted of terrorism in BC.

- **One of the 10 teens'** father accused Charkaoui to be responsible for radicalizing his daughter.
- Charkaoui is teaching Au Centre Islamique de l'Est de Montreal.
- Police suspects that Charkaoui is linked to other teenagers who have tried to leave the country for Syria this Spring.
- Charkaoui was detained for several years under an Immigration Certificate for suspected terrorists activities until 2009. 2014: obtained Canadian citizenship. (La Presse newspaper, 2015-05)

A poll of Ottawa, 2011, 430 majority from Lebanon (McCauley et. Al.)

- Approve of the Muslim Brotherhood organization **19 %**
- All governments would be better if they were ruled under the Caliphate **9 % agree**

National Post, May 25, 2015

- **Khorasan group**: a terrorist faction operating in Syria that had been set up by the senior al-Qaida leadership to recruit Westerners, train them and send them **back to North America and Europe** to conduct bombings.
- Khorasan Group **deploying Canadians back home**, now trained to make bombs.

2014: around 130 Canadians have traveled to fight with groups like ISIS, 80 have returned home.

CHARACTERISTICS OF Home-Grown (HG) Extremists & Terrorists

Demographic Characteristics of HG

- Age: 18-30, average 21.
- Male , one female in France
- 2nd generation immigrants, with their parents
- Country of birth: majority born in Islamic country where extremism is prevalent.
- Majority citizens
- Originally Muslim or Converted
- Some middle class, well educated parents or themselves
- Joined for Jihad & to revenge for perceived insult or aggression against Islam

- Spoke native language
- Some spent time in jail
- Small percentage: personal reason
- Majority attended same mosque & prayer groups
- Non declared mentally ill (NCR)

Some HG terrorists, not jihadists but join because:

Abnormal characteristics/ traits: Problems with
Identity Emotions

Assertiveness Self-esteem

Feelings of inferiority Lacking Empathy

Lacking feelings of guilt

Sadistic/ aggressive tendencies

(Derive pleasure from beheading, raping, crucifixions, slavery, massacres),

Narcissism,

Need for belonging,
comradery, etc.

Participating in terrorist acts **provides** them with a sense of self-actualization, fulfillment, status, power and direction; a way out of their routine life; a highly honored glorious name and camaraderie. They want to be “somebody”. /* ISIS

OFFER THIS */

Wearing a military uniform & carrying a gun, the possibility of being a military leader (**AMEER**) boost their egos & self-esteem.

Perceive themselves as “freedom fighters”, “revolutionaries”, wanting to “righting the wrong”

PREDICTING HG POSSIBLE?

HG Terrorism has a Very low base. Thus, very difficult to predict & prevent.

Watching a single suspect night and day can require a team of 25 people in a shift around the clock.

PREVENTION

- It is everyone responsibility, **not only** religious leaders.
- Educate the public re what to look for (prevention programs).
- parents to pay more attention when they notice change in their Children's behavior
- **Security:** Information collection, sharing, and regular security procedures
- **Security:** monitor travelling to **hot spots** & returning HOME
- **Security:** Monitor individuals accessing **extremists social media used** particularly those associating with large international terrorist groups

PREVENTION/2

Watch for Change of behavior

- Sudden conversion
- Excessive changing of appearance to look “Muslim”
- Spending too much time praying
- Stops activities that include mixing of sexes
- Ignoring school
- Becoming obsessed with political issues & grievances
- Developing “them vs. Us”
- Refuse to continue with old friends; new friends
- Change in eating habits: ex. refuse to eat French bread
- Stops listening to music or watching TV

PREVENTION & TREATMENT PROGRAMS

Concern

The consulting body for the decision makers of the government of Canada the majority of its members do not have expertise in extremism/terrorism.

Problems with existing Canadian PROGRAMS

- Not clear how the candidates are **identified**, referral and the selection process, program **content**; what is being actually **delivered**; what are the methods of delivery; what are the **qualifications** of the program designer(s) and delivery staff beside being a convert to Islam; how is the program designed; what are the program components;
- No independent content evaluation and objective outcome data

Treatment for Terrorists (T4T)

Known International Programs:

- Primarily Religious Programs FROM:

- 1. Egypt,
- 2. Saudi Arabia,
- 3. Singapore,
- 4. Indonesia,
- 5. Yemen,

- No solid evidence that any religious “treatment” works.

- Nothing available in CSC for treatment of incarcerated terrorists.

Problems with treating extremist offenders

1. They are convinced that they are behaving according to God's laws. Any successful treatment program is predicated on a wish to change on the part of the client/patient
2. Designing and implementing treatment programs requires special expertise; scarcely found in western countries
3. Not every sheek/imam is qualified as counsellor.

Challenges for Counsellors

- Counsellors may be rejected because “they do not understand”.
- Terrorists believe: they have the absolute truth. They have rejected some authoritative sheeks “Shuuk el-Sulta”
- May not accept female counsellors
- Many concepts are complicated and not easy to understand for counselors.
- Counselors will never be sure if the terrorist is being honest/genuine in his /* several terrorists completed programs but went right back once released */

Challenges for therapists/2

- May put the counsellor on the defensive side.
- May drag the therapists into political issues/ grievances of crusaders, Iraq, Afghanistan & the harm that is being constantly done by the west.

Treatment for Terrorists (T4T)

Suggestions:

- Design rehabilitation programs that consider the motivation, risk, needs, and responsiveness of each individual convicted terrorist
- Use Cognitive approach, less religious content & focuses more on targeting extremist beliefs, ideologies, attitudes, attributions, behavior, & thinking.
- Deal with the issues that are promoted by recruiters such as Jihad, establishing Kalifat political system, and cognitions about the groups of people whom terrorists/extremists are against.

Treatment for Terrorists (T4T)

- Program must include individualized counselling component that covers the specific needs of each terrorist/extremist.
- Program must include supportive follow-up / maintenance programs.
- Important to have **competent** program designers & delivery staff.

- Extremism is going to be with us be prepared .

Thank you

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