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Radicalization and Terrorism

In regard to terrorism, the progression of radicalization is both enigmatic and fascinating. Although there is not an explicit and clear motive for one to commit acts of terrorism, observing the development of radical ideals, (specifically online), can give salient insight into why these acts are committed, as well as their implications. Indubitably, this process is multifaceted and hypercomplex; yet understanding it can help counterterrorism efforts, as well as develop a framework to prevent further radicalization early-on. In the journal article, *Online radicalization: Profile and risk analysis of individuals convicted of extremist offences by Kenyen et al. (2023),* Johnathan Kenyen aims to comprehend this phenomena, assessing the pathways to radicalization on the internet of 235 individuals. Indeed, it would be wise to examine Kenyen's results –doing so will enable an ample comprehension of who is likely to be extremists online, the extent of radicalization, as well as how much influence the internet exerts upon those with drastic and eclectic ideologies.

Kenyen's outline and aim of the study is fourfold. First, Kenyen aims to introduce the degree of radicalization online through the identification of those convicted with extremist offenses. Second, to investigate whether certain individuals are more susceptible and liable to online radicalization, while also examining what crimes these individuals are likely to do. Thirdly, to apprise the discussion regarding the internet and its influence upon radical ideals. Lastly, to study and reflect upon the behavior exerted from individuals radicalized via the internet, and how that differs from individuals radicalized in other ways. Successively, let us

examine the literature review within the journal (supplemented by these four positions) in order to develop a better foundation to understand Kenyen's research.

The literature review within this journal covers various studies and methods of research regarding extremist profiles –however, these are rather problematic, challenging, and unassertive. Kenyen explains that a prominent study conducted by *Russel and Miller (1977)* suggests a profile for those who are likely to commit extremist offenses: 22-25 years old, white, male, unmarried, educated, with radical political philosophies. While this profile may seem promising in helping understand extremism and terrorism, a few impediments deem it elusive: many who fit this profile do not commit acts of terrorism, and those who do commit acts of terrorism do not fit this profile…Furthermore, an examination of this study can exploit an intriguing fact: despite attempts to do so, there has been no single profile that has been applied to those who commit acts of extremism and terrorism. Additionally, academia rarely considers those who radicalize via the internet, as there is a proclivity to overlook this phenomena.

Indeed, the literature review seems to be baffling already, but there is more. It is an established datum within the field of terrorism and extremism literature that the "tool" perspective is widely accepted over the "syndrome" view. That is to say, terrorism is used as a means to an end to push political ideologies, religious beliefs, ultimatums, and more. However, the literature review within Kenyen's journal insinuates that cognitive disorders such as schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, schizoid disorder, as well as autism play a role in radicalization and internet use –alluding to the syndrome perspective which flies in the face of the tool perspective. Kenyen's literature review does well in describing how various studies attempt to profile extremists, as well as how these studies can paradoxically contradict one another. While this literature review may seem problematic, it raises an interesting point on the

need for research regarding internet radicalization. Let us then consider the methodology of Kenyen's study and its inferences.

The methodology of Kenyen's study involved the following. The participants were 211 males, and 24 females. The mean age was 29, with over 2/3 living in the UK. Interestingly, 169 of the 235 identified within the *Islamist Extremist* category. With this in mind, the study had three main sections: radicalized online (internet group), radicalized offline (face-to-face group), and the hybrid group where radicalization took place on and offline. Each participant engaged in a profiling using the ERG22 + —Extremism Risk Guidance– where each assessment focused exactly how the individual came to commit the offense. The individual's radicalization pathway, socio-demographic variables, and offending history were all respectively taken into account, and each were examined and filtered into one of three radicalization pathways mentioned earlier. Furthermore, to ensure consistency throughout the study a coding system was used and applied to each variable. Each variable passed through 2-3 "coders" (authors and co-authors) within the study. That is to say, gender was coded into "male and female", and prior offending history was coded into "yes or no" and so on. Interestingly, illness/personality disorder was coded and present within the population sample to large extent –and albeit this isn't the main point of the study, it is worth mentioning as it gives evidence to the syndrome-view of terrorism/extremism, as we will see later. Keeping this method in mind, we now have an ample basis to further understand Kenyen's results and primary findings of the study.

The results of the study were fascinating and thought-provoking. Let us begin with a brief overview of the statistics and population. Keep in mind that the population (n=235) was divvied into three categories: radicalization online, radicalization offline, and radicalization through a hybrid setting, online and offline. 29 cases were radicalized online (12% of participants), 93

cases were radicalized offline (40% of cases), and 113 cases were radicalized through the hybrid option –48%. Most people radicalized offline and within the hybrid option, interestingly, as online radicalization was achieved by 12% of cases.

To summarize briefly and concisely, it should be noted that a significant relationship was found within all results of this study, as each variable was significantly paired with another in some way. In respect to age and method of radicalization, a significant relationship was found. Those who were younger, (within the category of "up to and including 25"), were more likely to be radicalized offline and online. In respect to prior offending history, those who radicalized offline were more likely to have a prior [violent] offending history. To continue, a significant relationship was found between mental illness, personality disorder and the primary method of radicalization. For 36 cases of the 235 population, the presence of some type of disorder was existent, where online radicalization cases showing a higher population than face-to-face radicalization groups and the hybrid setting. In regards to the violent/non-violent index, a significant relationship was found in respect to method of radicalization. Those who pursued radicalization offline were more likely to have committed a violent index offense than those who radicalized through online and the hybrid setting. To continue, another significant relationship was found within the data set. Social connection and primary method of radicalization had a correlation worth noting: those who radicalized online were 53.61 times more likely to be alone than those radicalizing via other routes. This is absolutely salient to take into consideration, as those who engaged in online radicalization displayed a higher prevalence of a mental disorder as well. If we combine these two observations, it should come as no surprise that these individuals were susceptible to radicalization efforts and the indoctrination therein.

Lastly, there are some final significant relationships to bring to light. As mentioned before, political ideologies were a crucial aspect to radicalization efforts, as 169 individuals identified with Islamic Extremism. Those who radicalized online were more likely to fall into this category than other methods of radicalization. Within the years of 2015-2017, 100% of cases radicalized online were Islamic Extremists…Why is up for debate. However, this may be due to Islamic radicalization efforts being implemented at an earlier stage, as well as actions of monitoring being taken online. Finally, we must consider the relationship between engagement ratings and capability to commit terrorism and the primary method of radicalization. A meaningful connection was found between intent and capability to commit terrorism and method of radicalization. Intent ratings were presented for 184 of 235 individuals, and overall capability ratings were present for 189 of 235 individuals. Paradoxically, those who radicalized via the internet were lowest on intent, capability, and engagement with a terrorist group and cause, whereas those who radicalized offline, the opposite.

These results are salient to aid in understanding internet radicalization, mental disorders, as well as internet radicalization's influence upon individuals. If we wish to better combat terrorism and stop radicalization from the start, we must consider these findings and their implications. Although the internet did not play a substantial role in radicalization, it is possible that it exerted enough influence, (especially upon those who are alone and with personality/mental disorders), to engage in extremist behaviors and indoctrination. Consequentially, there are certain takeaways that should be reflected upon to conclude the aims of this study and its products.

For conciseness and to be brief, I will summarize these discussion findings in bullet points/numbers.

1. The results of this study cemented the fact that individuals radicalize through both online and offline means. Furthermore, these results have provided better insight into extremist profiles and where certain individuals fall into in regards to pathways to radicalization.

2. The individuals that belong to each respective pathway to radicalization are considerably different in terms of socialization, offence histories, as well as socio-demographic profiles.

3. Those who are more susceptible and vulnerable to online radicalization are younger males and females who suffer from personality disorders. These individuals are also more likely to be loners and have a history of non-violent offenses. These people engage in non-violent Islamic extremism.

4. In opposition to pillar number three, those who are most likely to radicalize via offline engagement are socially connected males who have a violent history. These individuals do not display personality disorders or antisocial behaviors, yet have more multicomplex and complicated ideologies/manifestos to which they engage in violent behavior.

5. Those who radicalized within the hybrid method were more likely to support Islamic extremism, and were male. These individuals were primarily radicalized offline, and had less chance of history of violence.

6. The three different pathways to radicalization all differed in terms of capability, intent, and engagement for terrorism and extremist behavior. Offline contact with other extremists strengthened the individual's sense of identity, while also placing said identity in the cause of the group.

7. Those who radicalized online had little intent for violence as well as capability for drastic harm. Considering this, it would be fair to say that offline meetings with those who share

similar extremist philosophies increases the likelihood of capability and intent for violence. Online and offline exposure has the most momentous and substantial effect on individuals, as both are needed for a "successful" radicalization.

8. Face-to-face contact is an important asset for radicalization and indoctrination. When individuals engage in this, as opposed to online radicalization, they are more likely to commit violence and be capable of terrorism/extremism.

Taking these eight pillars into consideration, there are copious amounts of information and implications we can extract from this study.

I think that the role of internet radicalization should be heavily considered. Kenyen accurately portrays internet radicalization as a way for those who are more anti-social and less violent to engage in a cause they find important without any repercussions. These individuals do not have a desire for real-world violence, or at least, do not have the qualities/potential necessary to engage in such acts. In return, they grandstand their ideologies and beliefs online to where they can fit the part –all bark, no bite so to speak. That being said, we shouldn't dismiss these individuals as undangerous altogether. Although they score lower on intent and capability for violence and acts of terrorism, rehabilitation and counterterrorism measures can still be taken against them, as their potential for violence is still very probable. These individuals can still promote others to commit acts of violence, which is detrimental and dangerous in of itself.

While this study was comprehensive, multifaceted and manifold in nature, while also accurately profiling those who engage in radicalization, there can still be room for further research and improvement. Kenyen et al. did an excellent job of deepening our understanding of the profiles and traits necessary for radicalization, but I think that another research question can be proposed. If I were to do a follow up study, I would ask the question if the individuals who

were antisocial loners ended up committing acts of terrorism. Think of it as a long-term study, or follow-up study ten years later. These individuals scored low on the potential and capability for acts of violence –however, we shouldn't dismiss them as undangerous and nonthreatening. If there were a way to see if these individuals did engage in violence post hoc internet radicalization, it could give crucial insight into the influence the internet asserts upon individuals as well as the role personality disorders play in terrorism.