
Searching for Satisfaction: A Review of the Social Motivators of Seeking Extremist Group Membership

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INTRODUCTION

Terrorism is a strategy used by many groups throughout the history of conflict.¹ The contemporary world notes the birth of terrorism through the public and far-reaching attacks on the World Trade Centers on September 11, 2001.² Since this date, there has been a considerable amount of research done in attempts to understand not only modern terrorism and methods but also, its goals and how to prevent its global spread. The purpose of this research, however, is intended to present a discussion surrounding the internal radicalization of individuals towards extremist groups through social theories. The research strives to discuss how social theory is further refined via cognitive complexity and social identity complexity. A wide aperture of inclusion concerning extremist groups is maintained in order to fit a broad-spectrum approach of intergroup conflict through group formation fundamentals. Such an aperture encompasses nearly all modern groups that advocate an extreme controlling view underscored by justified violence against non-members and members alike. The ultimate goal of this research is to provide an understanding based on social psychology principals to the strategic and intelligence practitioner on which the analysis of specific groups and cases may be further applied.

The aspects that make membership in a particular group desirable while making membership in others less desirable is a core concept grounding the discussion. It is postulated that core social motivators will shed insight into the initial motivations to join violent extremist groups. The conversation at hand is a back to basics approach following a large body of research attempting to articulate the motivations of a lone wolf or homegrown terrorists who may have never had direct contact with a violent extremist group.

There are two distinct schools of thought often employed when considering the motivators for joining an extremist group the 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' approach. These both refer to the methods by which the potential member is recruited. A top-down approach refers to groups actively seeking membership while a bottom-up strategy deals with individuals seeking membership. The recruitment-based approach highlights individuals who are already psychologically primed or socially searching for a diversified membership. These categories may offer considerations when planning intelligence operations to counter a specific threat, but they do not fit for psychological understanding. Applying a top-down or bottom-up approach skips past both implicit and cognitive motivations of the individual.

McCauley and Moskaleiko introduced an approach that articulates radicalization across three distinct levels; individual, group, and mass public.³ This research will focus on the first of these levels, the individual. At the individual level, potential members are individually motivated to seek out or join extremist groups. Granted every person joins a group, extremist or not, for a variety of specific reasons. The authors go on to note several potential causes for individuals to join such groups. These include personal and political grievances, following other family members example or lead, and even thrill-seeking.⁴ While these are excellent examples of specific motivations for joining, they skirt around a core motivational need for group membership that could be applied across all groups.

AT THE CORE - CATEGORIZATION, AND GROUPS

This research broadly discusses two distinct groups those who subscribe to a western ideology and those who subscribe to a radicalized ideology. The primary focus of the following discussion is on theoretical underpinnings that may form a basis of motivation to join the latter of the two. When this research refers to western ideology or progressivism, it is referencing the idea that the governing body should strive to affect the population in a manner that promotes an enhanced quality of life for all members under its prevue.⁵ Conversely, radicalized ideology or violent extremism is one that focuses on groups or governments acting in an intolerant and violent way that limits the quality of life for those under its rule.⁶ These two definitions may be considered overly broad in some regards. However the scope of this work is broad and the definitions were selected accordingly.

A terrorist organization like any other organization is, at its most basic core, a group. Groups are nothing new in the history of human evolution; humans have formed and sought out membership in groups for centuries. Therefore, treating terrorist groups like a new development of social evolution can lead to various skewed or ill-defined counter-terror methodologies. Many of the success attributed to the continued existence and evolution of humankind is based on the notion that humans are social creatures.⁷

Such groups are formed by both the slightest and most salient traits available. Social identity theory forms the backbone for describing the group joining process. Individuals will self-identify what traits they deem

important and which ones they do not. These traits form the basis of group membership or exclusion. These traits are often implicitly selected, and the subsequent categorization is driving individuals into groups will occur automatically based on traits perceived as most desirable.⁸ Implicitly driven categorization has the ability to influence decisions and perceptions of the individual without cognitive engagement. Formation of baseline perceptions can lead to conflict or unfairness over the simplest of tasks. Such conflict is further explained by the minimal group paradigm. Which demonstrates that groups will come into conflict with minimal differences and no real resource at risk.⁹

Social identity complexity advances the notions of social identity to include membership in multiple groups. The theory notes that a person will have varying degrees of group membership that ranges from intimacy to loose associations.¹⁰ With each step from one degree to another, the categorization becomes larger and more inclusive. However, the individual may not necessarily perceive the broader inclusivity of the more general groups when asked for cognitively define its membership.¹¹ Such an instance might lead an individual to believe that the majority of protesters are similar in racial makeup to themselves.

Social identity complexity is an important addition to the backbone of social identity theory to this research. The theory showcases how individuals have multiple social identities that often co-exist while interacting with one another. The intergroup interaction and mixing of social identities to contribute to an individual's overall identity further the notion that there is a range of motivators that can lead an individual to join a radicalized group. The theory also demonstrates that it is common for individuals to gain and lose social groupings as their identity evolves. This observation is key in considering why an individual may leave a group in favor of another, possibly socially unpopular one.

Considering outright cross-cultural perceptions outlined in the definition of each group in this study, there is a significant opportunity for conflict. Most often, the lay western perspective of those who join terrorist organizations describe them as crazed psychopaths inexorably committed to a flawed cause.¹² Such perceptions close the door on further understanding of a group's purpose as well as a true understanding of the core issue underlying the conflict.¹³

BELONGING AND OTHER SOCIAL MOTIVES

Maslow described five basic human needs that encompassed not only physical but also psychological needs for sustainment and growth. The

basic levels encompass requirements for physiological and safety needs. Only after these needs are fulfilled can an individual address the higher needs of belonging, self-esteem, and actualization.¹⁴ Unlike Maslow's basic needs, these higher psychological needs are impossible to achieve without social interaction and group membership. These core psychological needs form the basis of why individuals join groups. These needs are most often fulfilled by an individual's immediate social network those most available to them. Failing to meet an individual's needs said individual would seek out the fulfillment of these needs with a group that will.¹⁵

Fiske has provided many in the psychological community consider the core motivators to seeking out membership. Fiske's widely agreed upon theoretical concept of group formation lays out five core motivators as the basis of all motivations for social interaction and grouping. These motivators are the reasons that individuals are members of certain groups while leaving others. Social grouping is an ongoing fluid dynamic. The introduction of modern technology and hyper-connectivity offer many options for individuals to belong to nearly any number of groups. Fiske's motivators can be considered the core of why an individual may choose one group over another. Unfortunately, these same motivators also lay the foundation for intergroup conflict. These core motivators and motivators simply provide encouragement to form, join, and leave various social groups.

These social motivators include - belonging, understanding, controlling, enhancing self, and trusting.¹⁶ Each one of these serves as a motivation to join and be a part of a larger group. Belonging refers to membership based on the shared traits of in-group members. Individuals who are not members are assumed to have different traits automatically. This presumed difference can create conflict amongst groups who value different attributes. Understanding furthers the discussion on belonging as a trigger to intergroup conflict. With the expression of varying traits, individuals are less likely to understand the differing point of view and value system of the out-group. Understanding such underlying attributes of culture give the individual a sense of control over their environment. This sense of control is related to the self-expressive function of attitudes and the methods used to express status by a group, be it by clothing, possessions, or actions.¹⁷ These two value systems may be different amongst groups.

Trust is the key to maintaining membership in a group. This motivation discusses how an individual must perceive the group as compassionate towards their needs. An individual must feel that a group will provide for

them and allow them the opportunity to grow and fulfill higher needs and motivations. It should be noted that without the desire to belong there is no need to trust in an alien group for individual development. Furthermore, the fulfillment of self-enhancing benefits can only come about once belonging, and trust having been established.

Of the noted five social motives, belonging can be considered the primary motivation that fuels the desire to join a group (any group) and trusting is, in turn, the strongest influence in maintaining that relationship. This motivation is also an integral part of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The inference is that individuals need to belong in order to survive. Without belonging, none of the social motives are attainable nor are any of Maslow's higher orders.¹⁸ It is explicitly noted the social motive of 'belonging' is the core motivation on which all other social interactions are built. When considering individuals who may distance from a core social identity in favor of other groups the motivation to belong to a particular group has diminished.

Core motivators and needs provide tools necessary for individuals to seek out membership. A group must offer either all of the attributes discussed or at least the promise of them for an individual to join. Exactly how these attributes are viewed is inherently different depending on the individual's identified culture. Cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism each inform the motivation to belong differently.

Individualistic cultures will view group membership as an opportunity to demonstrate their unique attributes in an accepting environment where other individuals will assist in the further development of these attributes.¹⁹ A collectivist culture, however, will view belonging as an opportunity to contribute to and share in the success of a group.²⁰ Trust also follows similar principals where the individualistic society expects the group to serve their individual betterment while the collectivist holds trust that the group will succeed as a whole.²¹ The more radicalized an organization is, the more it needs its members to subscribe to a collectivist mindset in order to survive as an organization. The radicalized organization relies on the individual to find personal significance in the goals and methods of the group.²² Even in homegrown attacks, the lone wolf exhibits a collectivist mindset by assimilating to the selected group's norms and ideals.

Signs of the assimilation can be seen on social media pages as well as self-styled pictures and videos that all flaunt slogans and clothing indicative of the selected group. It is common for individuals subscribing to a specific extremist organization to create videos of themselves wearing hoods or masks that cover their faces making a pledge of support sitting on a

carpet in front of a banner or flag while holding a weapon of some sort. Alternatively, individuals who do not subscribe to an organized group, but rather a prevailing ideology will exhibit behaviors associated with that ideology. This identifies the ideology as a group-in-fact. The subscribing individual is attempting to how their adopted ideology defines the group in which they have chosen to join.

Individuals will seek to satisfy psychological needs through core social motivators. Individuals are exposed to a significant number of influence every day. In the modern digital world these ideas are conveyed through printed media, the internet, movies, social networking, and advertisements. With this level of interconnectivity it is very easy for individuals to be exposed to numerous ideals. Western cultures offer access to an unfettered number of these and other sources of information increases the ability of an individual to find, and identify, with a select group that best address their psychological needs. Radicalized groups, however, tend to actively manage the information they allow to enter into their sphere of control. As socio-cultural, geographic, economic, political, and vulnerability factors merge individuals will be finally faced with a pro-social or radical-social orientation.²³ This is the first step in the self-actualization process, often designated the 'pre-radicalization' phase.

Once an individual has decided to join a group psychologically they are a member of the identified group. The individual's social identity has expanded to include attributes of the newly assimilated social structure. If there is unresolvable conflict, with other groups, the individual is a member of distancing and alienation from the original group will occur. Remaining a member of the new group is imperative for the integrity and development of the individual. To fulfill the psychological needs an individual must enhance and sustain membership. Belonging is the core motivator to join a group following the core principal of Maslow's hierarchy and Fiske's motivators the new group must provide the individual with the perception of a positive impact on life satisfaction less risk losing the individual as a member.

SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP AND LIFE SATISFACTION

Sustaining membership is just as critical to maintaining the human condition as belonging to a group is.²⁴ Without sustained membership, an individual cannot continue to grow nor fulfill their core psychological needs. There are many ways individuals signal their continued commitment to a group. The most striking and most universal is

assimilating to a specific form of physical appearance.²⁵ Many groups have identifiable trademarks that make it easy to identify in-group members from out-group members, the more formal the group, the more codified the appearance of the individual members. Continued group membership is a direct representation of the self-enhancing need of social motivation.²⁶

Group membership is significant in the development of personal identity and personality.²⁷ Having grown up in an individualistic society the chances of experiencing loneliness is high, approximately one in four.²⁸ This is significant, as loneliness has been linked to both mental as well as physical well-being.²⁹ Radicalized groups and ideology exploit loneliness through group activities and interactions. Often groups will indoctrinate potential members through the promise of becoming part of something greater or by living on through example to others. In both cases the individual is placed on a pedestal as a pillar of the community, someone to be like. The goal is to increase the appealing nature of the group through acceptance and thus an enhanced life experience. The number of groups or the size of the group required to stave off loneliness and satisfy belonging will vary from individual to individual. Anderson stated that the strongest indicators of loneliness are subjective.³⁰ A lack of life satisfaction stemming from a group an individual will begin to feel distanced a less like a true member of the group. This distancing increases the individual's desire to belong and frees the individual to search out another, more meaningful, group.

However, once an individual has joined a group and experiences reciprocity, they will then identify with the group and assimilate salient traits of this group as their own. When encountering foreign groups the individual will judge them based on idealized traits of their own or central group.³¹ This categorical process is the basis of in-group and out-group interactions and explained by Tajfel's Social Identity Theory.³²

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND COMPLEXITY THEORIES

Categorization and bias are hallmark traits of human cognitive processing. They aid in the identification, classification, and individual survival of threats. The stronger the threat, the more robust the bias can be.³³ Bias can also serve a positive role for humans; it allows for the avoidance of dangerous situations or creatures. Bias can also lead to socially hindering traits including prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination. These traits can break down the basis of social interaction and equality amongst populations through sexism, racism, discrimination of sexual orientation, elitism, etc. The social interaction of individuals can be viewed from a

group perspective.

Social identity theory rests on the premise that individuals will follow the core social motives to identify with a group that shares common traits that the individual deems important in fulfilling their psychological needs. Because of the individual then judges other groups, out-groups, based on these traits, and categorizes them as either non-threatening or threatening.³⁴ This judging and categorization provide the foundation for disparagement between reality and perceptions of the out-group.³⁵ These disparagements are first displayed as prejudices or feelings about an out-group. Stereotyping follows when these feelings inform categorization based on the misinformed notions of out-group traits. These characterizations of differences inform actions by the in-group that actively exclude (discriminate) the out-group from inclusion and opportunity.³⁶ Social complexity theory notes that individuals are not limited to a singular group membership. Individuals will follow the same process noted by social identity theory while assimilating a multiplicity of groups into their identity.

Each of the groups discussed herein advocates entirely different models of group membership. Strictly speaking, in terms of cultural dimensions progressive western ideals are largely individualistic and indulgent with low power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Radicalized terror groups, however, have opposite orientation in these dimensions collective with high uncertainty avoidance and power distancing with a low indulgence ratio.³⁷ Individuals subscribing to a progressive western ideal are more likely to feel empowered to peruse group relations of their choice that will benefit them as an individual. This contrasts individuals within radicalized terrorist groups who are more likely to feel obligated to join a group, which benefits from their membership by the instruction of a much higher authority.³⁸ It is important to note that conditions that lead an individual to join a radicalized terrorist group are not limited to ideological realization or self-identification. Persons may join these groups through coercion and force or even for economic gain. Lastly, subscribing to an ideology, like those felt by public shooters, as a group-in-fact follows self-empowerment lines of motivation.

THE INEVITABILITY OF CONFLICT

The Minimal Group Paradigm was discovered while investigating intergroup discrimination. The original experiment involved constructing groups with minimal in-group identification or bonding. Participants were asked to assign one of two given numbers to other individuals.³⁹

Depending on the phase of the study, these others were either members of an out-group, an in-group, no group, or a combination of in or out-group membership. The first step was to homogenize the participants as much as possible in order to remove any potential learned in and out-group prejudices or social constructs.⁴⁰ To do this young boy from a primary school of whom were all familiar with one another was asked to estimate the number of dots displayed on a screen and were grouped according to who overestimated or underestimated the dots. The researchers were keen to point out to the participants that either of these conditions was perfectly normal and had no factor in academic or intellectual superiority. In reality, the researchers placed the boys into secondary groups in an arbitrary and random fashion. The exercise in estimation was intended to give each group a purpose or common attribute of membership. It was at this point individuals were asked to assign numbers to two classmates, one from the same group as the assigner (in-group), and another from the other (out-group). The results highlighted whenever possible; the boys would assign the higher number to members of their group while assigning lower numbers to the out-group individual.

These results challenged what was, at the time, the current perceptions of intergroup conflicts. It was theorized that conflicts primarily arose from processes that would elicit threat from one group to another.⁴¹ The threat could come in many forms including military might, religious perceptions, access to resources, power, historical precedence, etc. These sources of conflict are a tangible measure of interpersonal and intergroup competition for survival.

What the minimal group paradigm demonstrated was how groups could find themselves in an 'us,' or 'me,' versus 'them' categorical situations without the existence of a real intergroup threat. This experiment demonstrated that merely creating the simple impression of categorization could lead to discrimination and conflict.⁴² It is arguable, however, that according to this experiment there was no conflict amongst the two groups until the introduction of something that could represent value. In this case, it was a series of random numbers. Influencers, such as the randomly generated groups, form implicit attitudes which in turn affect the individual in a similar manner.⁴³ Implicit attitudes are ones formed in a sub or pre-conscious state and express themselves automatically. It is hard to categorize or understand implicit attitudes, as their formation and expression are automatic. The minimal group paradigm demonstrated that implicit attitudes form for a variety of reasons, even extremely simple ones that have no cognitive motivation on the holder.

The minimal group paradigm outlines how humans are psychologically primed for intergroup conflict. Our psyche is built on the concept of known versus unknown. In order to comprehend the unknown our brains will automatically apply known attributes in a categorical manner. This application of experienced or previous knowledge is the basis of bias and 'us' versus 'them' or 'in' versus 'out' groups.

REDUCING CONFLICT WITH INTEGRATED THREAT THEORY

A study of immigrants to Spain and Israel noted that participants perceived stereotypes to be accurate representations of out-group members.⁴⁴ This is an example of how perceptions shape an individual's reality. Social categorization has the ability to alter perceptions of individuals attempting to follow social motivators to fulfill basic psychological needs. The negative impacts of poor perception can erode satisfaction of in-group membership.

The notion of reducing conflict between progressive and extremist ideals is a difficult one to justify, particularly when the extremist ideals at hand are those that promote wanton violence and oppression against others. For the purposes of this research, the reduction of conflict pertains to reducing the internal struggle noted by social complexity theory through an unfulfilled need to belong. The goal of the theoretical interventions proposed is for the objective of reducing and preventing defections to extremist ideology.

Despite the mounting differences and conflicting ideas that underpin progressivism versus extremism, there is an opportunity to reduce conflict between the two. Social identity complexity recognized that individuals have a multiplicity of intertwined psychological memberships. Social identity complexity offers a pathway to break this chain of categorical delineation between individuals in favor of a more inclusive in-group rather than an exclusive one.

According to integrated threat theory, in-groups will feel threatened by out-groups through a combination of four pathways. These pathways influence prejudice and include realistic threat, symbolic threat, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotyping.⁴⁵ When polled the most influential category is intergroup anxiety followed by negative stereotyping which was mistaken by participants for realistic threat.⁴⁶ The implications of this research imply that foundational attitudes influence in-group and out-group designation based on notions assumed to be true. Such influences

are driven by a lack of intergroup communication. The conflict could theoretically be eliminated by targeting the formation of realistic threat and anxiety against out-groups. As discussed throughout this research the cultural divide between western progressive ideology and an ideologically radicalized terrorism is multi-faceted. The largest hindrance to reducing conflict is the willingness and preference for radicalized terrorism to employ violent methods that contribute directly to a perception of a realistic threat for out-group members.

Therefore, the question remains how to best redefine or re-categorized these two groups in a non-threatening manner. This is a problem more complex than can be fully addressed in a short theoretical review. However, a prominent theory that falls in line with social identity theory and integrated threat theory involves isolating and defusing the source of violently harmful ideology while simultaneously highlighting the positive attributes associated with progressive ideals.⁴⁷

Two pathways offer methodologies to reduce threat caused by either group, progressivism or extremism. The first pathway is direct contact. First as conceptualized by Allport, contact hypothesis postulates that increased contact with an out-group will reduce anxiety and negative evaluations.⁴⁸ Interpersonal contact with individuals involved with or sympathetic towards extremist organizations is likely to prove problematic in several ways. If the individual is seeking out membership chances are they will do so covertly as not to be subject to legal ramifications. Secondly, drastic interventions posed by direct or group contact run a risk of being seen as further justification for their departure from the in-group. Lastly, pertaining to individuals already involved in extremist groups, direct contact would place all parties involved at increased threat of harm.

The vivid and realistic methods of information sharing in today's modern world has led to the revision of contact hypothesis and introduction of parasocial contact hypothesis. This expanded hypothesis postulates that the multitude of mass-mediated communication outlets can provide similar effects as interpersonal contact might.⁴⁹ This alleviates many of the concerns noted for direct interpersonal contact. Studies using popular television shows featuring homosexual individuals as a form of parasocial contact have demonstrated reduced anxiety and prejudicial orientation following exposure to ten of the episodes.⁵⁰ The principals demonstrated by parasocial contact theory provide an excellent methodology for reducing anxiety and stereotyping towards progressive ideals.

A second pathway involves active participation by the individual in question. Cognitive manipulation is a process in which an individual

accepts a reality that is different than what they perceive.⁵¹ In an experiment of college students, London and Nisbett asked participants to do a boring task for 20 minutes.⁵² Either the researchers rigged a clock to display the passage of 10 minutes or 30 minutes when in actuality 20 minutes had passed. When participants rated their boredom after completing the task those who perceived a shorter time lapse had higher incidents of boredom than those who perceived a greater time lapse.⁵³ Administration of placebo drugs is a similar stimuli to the clock experiment. This altering of an individual's state of perception can psychologically reduce pain or trigger other emotions.⁵⁴ Cognitive manipulation, as a process, well suited to reinforce the positive attributes of progressive ideals particularly with groups that might be otherwise inaccessible.

Applying cognitive manipulation methodologies to prevent stereotype formation and enhance satisfaction takes individual commitment to achieve, note in the preceding studies the individual was unaware of the manipulation. An active method for employing cognitive manipulation is increased cross-categorization of one-group attributes to ones of the other group that resonates with both individuals. This increases favorability towards the individual and reduces stereotypes.⁵⁵ Theoretically, speaking Cognitive Manipulation methodology offers a pathway that can overcome the social categorical shortcomings developed by the poor satisfaction of a group. The exact methodology for application of such a technique is outside the scope of this theoretical review, but an area prime for future research to explore.

CONCLUSION

Both parasocial contact and cognitive manipulation offer promising pathways by which to reinforce or weaken, as appropriate, the need to belong. Social motivators and individual needs for survival will drive persons to seek out categorical membership in groups. In order to maintain membership groups need to meet the satisfaction level of its members. The fulfillment of reciprocity is attainable through both groups with explicit membership and categorical idealism.

Motivation surrounding the desire to obtain group membership comes from a desire to achieve some form of life satisfaction. Members are motivated to join other groups when the individual's current in-group does not meet the individual's need to belong. When considering social motivators and social identity and complexity theories as baselines, a theoretical construct in which membership in radicalized groups or

groups-in-fact may become appealing. Use of indirect means such as those identified by parasocial contact hypothesis offers a strong pathway to reduce the effectiveness of individuals seeking or who are already members of extremist groups. Active means of reinforcement, such as cognitive manipulation, offer a comprehensive pathway to reinforce membership of individuals to progressive ideals.

The research presented here has used terrorism and terrorist groups as a core identifier of divergent extremist organizations. However, the desire to belong to a counter-culture group outside of the individual's core social surrounding culture is not limited to violent or extremist type groups. One may even consider individuals who perpetrate public shootings as an individual who has subscribed to a divergent ideology motivated by the need to belong. The application of the theories highlighted within this research on those who commit terror like, but not terrorist inspired attacks, is an excellent area for future research to investigate.

The summation of the outlined motivators led to the inclusion of integrated threat theory as a unifying explanation of conflict arising from the core motivators for group membership and the defining limits of a particular group. The stereotyping drive underlying integrated threat theory is not limited to only in-group evaluations of an out-group. If an individual is experiencing low satisfaction with their inherent, or selected, in-group, they may begin to subscribe and distance themselves from stereotypes levied on their in-group. Eventually, this will lead the individual to abandon their in-group in favor of another group. In the context of this review, ideologically divergent groups may offer the satisfaction the individual seeks.

The potential of an individual abandoning of an in-group in favor of a radicalized group or ideology are low. However, this research has identified the need for life satisfaction as a core motivational pathway based on social grouping in which disenfranchised individuals may follow to achieve satisfaction. The employment of parasocial contact and cognitive manipulation techniques may offer significant opportunities to increase the satisfaction of group membership thereby reducing the potential individuals may join radicalized groups or subscribe to an extreme ideology. This research has presented a motivational map based on the psychological need to belong, which may provide the core stimuli when individuals subscribe to a radicalized ideology.

Ultimately individuals striving to achieve some form of life satisfaction, but unable to attain such within their current social identity may seek out more extremist views as a means to obtain satisfaction. Cognitive

manipulation offers an intriguing approach for combating radicalization of individuals. Such an approach, however requires active participation from the individual and would only be best suited to aid in maintain group membership. Once an individual has become implicitly alienated from a group cognitive exercises may only delay the departure. Parasocial contact hypothesis offers a significant route to maintaining and shaping satisfaction perception of group membership, particularly with the proliferation of digital media.

Further research into the application of parasocial contact with regard to maintaining and deriving life satisfaction of at-risk or radicalized individuals is an area that warrants further research. Such an approach would dispense with circumstantial motivators for radicalization and focus on the core psychological underpinnings of human social behavior.

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