

DOES THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT FOR INMATES ASSIST THE U.S. IN
EFFECTIVELY CONTROLLING TERRORIST RECRUITS WITHIN PRISON?

By

Ronald Zimmermann
A Thesis
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of
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Criminology, Law and Society

Committee:

_____ Director

_____ Department Chairperson

_____ Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

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Does the Current Environment for Inmates Assist the U.S. in Effectively Controlling
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Arts at George Mason University

by

Ronald Zimmermann
Bachelor of Science Criminal Justice
Georgia College and State University, 2006

Director: Danielle S. Rudes, Professor
Department of Criminology, Law and Society

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Fairfax, VA

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my loving wife, Jamie, and my two wonderful children, Taylor and Alexander.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many friends, relatives, and supporters who have made this happen. A special thank you to my loving wife, Jamie, for helping to keep me focused. And, a debt of gratitude to Drs. Danielle S. Rudes, Christopher Koper, and Allison Redlich as members of my thesis committee. They were of invaluable help throughout the process.

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Abstract

DOES THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT FOR INMATES ASSIST THE U.S. IN EFFECTIVELY CONTROLLING TERRORIST RECRUITS WITHIN PRISON?

Ronald Zimmermann, M.S.

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Danielle S. Rudes

This thesis analyzes the prison environment and the potential for terrorist inmates to recruit fellow inmates. While incarcerated, inmates often face distortion and feel the need to belong. Terrorist prisoners sometimes capitalize on these feelings to further their beliefs. If the prison environment creates an environment where feelings of isolation abound, terrorists will be able to complete their mission successfully. If the prison environment provides a feeling of accomplishment and a method for inmates to contribute to their families, that need of belonging is not, or is at least less, present. The prison environment can contribute to the ease in which a terrorist recruits. Although this occurs in the U.S., it is not a strictly American problem. For example, the Israeli and European prison systems, although different from each other, experience similar phenomena. As such, radicalization methods and successes occur in various ways in various prison systems worldwide.

Introduction

Terrorism is a threat to U.S. national security. Terrorists do not recruit only within their country of origin. They also recruit within the U.S. Terrorists use many of the freedoms and avenues available to U.S. citizens as a way of spreading their ideology. This includes, but is not limited to, places of worship, legitimate businesses that act as fronts for supporting terror, and correctional institutions where terrorists regularly inhabit. Prison inmates are in an environment that ostracizes them, often leaving them abandoned by and isolated from family and friends. U.S. correctional institutions are an ideal environment for terrorists to radicalize and recruit due to their ability to practice their beliefs however they choose. In prison, a terrorist recruiting group can provide other inmates protection and a means of communicating within and outside of prison (Pistol, 2003). The benefits of joining an in-prison group often help inmates counteract one major drawback of prison life: the deprivation of liberty. The way a person is treated in prison has significant impacts on the way the prisoner acts while incarcerated and post-release (Opperman, 2014). Terrorist organizations use prisons to recruit new members while providing advanced training to existing members (Cuthbertson, 2004). Law enforcement fears prisons are a fertile breeding ground for the spread of radical Islam—one prominent terrorist ideology in the U.S. In October 2003, the Federal Bureau Investigations Executive Assistant Director of Counterterrorism / Counterintelligence, John Pistole,

called U.S. correctional institutions a viable venue for radicalization and recruitment (Cuthbertson, 2004). As such, counterterrorism is a U.S. priority. The U.S. wants to disrupt, dismantle and prevent possible terrorist actions. Prison has been identified as an area that has potential to foster terrorist radicalization. Prisons are a place to explore new beliefs and associations (Bjelopera, 2013). This largely descriptive thesis begins to explore what we limitedly know (to date) about prison radicalization in the U.S., Israel and Europe while providing a framework for future theory-building around the issue of radicalization in prisons. While the thesis does not attempt hypothesis formation, this work offers some research-informed speculation due to the limited amount of research on the subject of prison radicalization. This paper will serve as a springboard for future research on the topic of prison radicalization and/or theory development. Broadly, this thesis considers the following research question: *Does the current environment for inmates assist the U.S. in effectively controlling terrorist recruits within prison?*

Literature Review

Prior research on prison life and radicalization/recruitment detail many important theoretical and conceptual insights. This review of prior literature begins with transformative learning theory as a way of explaining what we presently know (theorize) about information translation. Next, importation theory is another way radicalization/recruitment occurs. Outside of the U.S, Israel and the European continent also handle radicalization/recruitment within their correctional systems. Within the U.S., inmate organization and overcrowding are potentially important factors to consider. Finally, how terrorists recruit, motivate, train, and retain members is assessable by looking at patterns of recruitment and radicalizations within existing cases where key details are public (no longer classified).

A prisoner's daily schedule and/or cell location are exploited by terrorists to recruit from within the prison walls. Many prisons are affected by overcrowding. This creates challenges to provide constant oversight for all prisoners. Multiple factors cause a person to radicalize. The transformative learning theory and importation theory help explain why prisoner radicalization occurs. The cases discussed here do not fit wholly into one of the theories discussed and lend themselves to being explained by both theories together as a hybrid theory between importation theory and transformation learning theory.

Theoretical Framework

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory helps explain prison administrators' understanding of prisoner vulnerability. This theory provides a framework for understanding how changes occur in a person—such as a person incarcerated in prison—but more specifically it helps explain how adults learn and adapt to new environments. This theory may explain the behavioral changes a prisoner undergoes leading to their vulnerability to radical extremism while in custody. People generally use pre-existing habits to make sense of current crisis. If a person's pre-existing habits fail to help make a connection to the situation, then the individual may become confused/distorted. The individual reacts to the distortion by exploring new experiences and self-reflection. The perspectives gained from the experiences and self-reflection help create new behaviors, roles and relationships. This transformation helps the individual adapt to the new environment and to get past the initial crisis that sparked this whole transformation (Mulcahy, Merrington, & Bell, 2013). During this process, the individual is more susceptible to persuasion and manipulation. Therefore, extremists look out for signals that a person is going through this cycle of doubt and then uses this vulnerable time to recruit them. Hamm (2013) notes that prisons encourage transformative phenomena among inmates. The influx of inmates raises the desire for group identity and spiritual guidance. Frenzied prison life in the U.S. (due at least in part to exponential prison growth and overcrowding) makes correctional institutions an ideal environment for encouraging terrorism (Hamm, 2013).

Importation Theory

Related theoretical insight for explaining how/why terrorist recruitment works in prison comes from the work of renowned scholar, Useem (2009). He argues that the harsh reality of being behind bars for years damages inmates' sense of well-being and personhood. Inmates do not create a life from scratch once they enter prison. Their values and behavior patterns come with them into prison (Useem & Clayton, 2009). Using importation theory, Useem notes, inmates who are not terrorists when they enter prison still may bring terrorist thoughts with them to prison (2016). Useem also suggests that religion is a potential source of division or unity within a prison. An inmate's imported social life is the main determinant of inmate culture. In one study, Dhami, Ayton and Loewenstein (2007) considered whether importation theory applies to prison behavior or if behavior was indigenous to prison. They surveyed 712 federally sentenced, adult male prisoners from three different security levels on the West Coast of the U.S. Over half (n=474) had a high school education, almost half (n=340) had been in prison before and almost 80 percent (n=568) had an intimate relationship. The prisoners completed a four-part survey that asked questions about their life in prison, their offense and sentence, what they wanted to do after release and their life outside prison. This data was collected by a trained researcher. To analyze the data, researchers used analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) to measure effects of time in prison and inmate's quality of life before they were in prison across five dependent variables (regime, thoughts, emotions, contact and misconduct). The researchers used an alpha level of .05 and a Pillai's trace as the multivariate statistic.

Time spent in prison was divided among three equally sized groups of two years or less, 2.01-5 and then more than 5 (Dhami, Ayton, & Loewenstein, 2007). The study revealed the quality of life that a prisoner had before incarceration affected their happiness significantly and that the longer they were in prison the more feeling of hopelessness set in. Also, time spent in prison, as well as quality of life prior, affected prisoners' exchange with family and friends. The study considered these findings using a variety of different demographics including: race, current offense, most serious past offense, age, time of sentenced served, number of past offenses, age first imprisoned and cumulative time in prison. Importation theory, as well as indigenous approaches, explained adjustments to prison life, even after controlling for different factors. The study noted that adaptation boiled down to the individual inmate, who is human and a complex being, regarding whether they will adapt positively or negatively to prison.

Importation theory suggests inmates bring their values and culture into prison with them. Lahm (2008) states the defining characteristic of this model is the importance variables such as religion or violence have outside of prison. Terrorists jailed for criminal activities often spread their ideologies in prison (Cuthbertson, 2004). Jailed terrorists already have a network and are disciplined to recruit and train inmates they believe are suited to work in a terrorist organization and to join their network (Cuthbertson, 2004). According to Cuthbertson many terrorists are unidentified and unmonitored by prison authorities. If prisoners are calm, authorities are reluctant to interfere with their daily routines (Cuthbertson, 2004). Since terrorists are disciplined and trained, they remain calm and are left alone. This provides the perfect pathway for terrorists to recruit.

Terrorists do not let the length of sentencing influence their decision to recruit an inmate. If a recruit has a short sentence, this may mean that the individual can be trained and back out in society where they can continue spreading the word radicalizing others on the outside in a short period of time (Cuthbertson, 2004).

How other countries organize prisons

Radicalization occurring in prison is not isolated to the U.S. French officials have reported that majority of the terrorist communication in French prisons represents radical Islamic views. A report from the U.S. Director of National Intelligence reported that more than 15 percent of the individuals released from Guantanamo have returned to terrorism (Boz & Ophir, 2013). For this study, the places, along with the U.S., were chosen due to the extent that their country (Israel) and the continent of Europe experience terror/terrorism related events. With the terror/terrorism events, there are times when there is no one to arrest or incarcerate, however when a terror action is prevented or a suspect is able to be apprehended they will be put into the corrections system. How these places handle these cases will now be examined.

Israel

Israel is continuously plagued by radical Islamic terrorism in prison. Israel categorizes inmates as either criminal or security prisoners. This paper focuses on security prisoners. In the mid-1970's the security inmates started organizing themselves according to their affiliation with a Palestinian faction. The prisoners hoped to use this strength and coordination against prison guards. The number of security inmates increased to around 4,000 due to the increase of arrests associated with the 1987 Intifada

(couple words here to explain what Intifada is). In the early 1990s, the end of Intifada occurred and started a political peace process. Intifada erupted again in September 2000 and by 2003 the Al-Aqsa Intifada had been raging for three years (Boaz & Ophir, 2013).

Security prisoners became the primary type of inmates in the Israeli prison system (Boaz & Ophir, 2013). As inmates organized themselves based on their beliefs, the Al-Aqsa Intifada became the main prison group (Boaz & Ophir, 2013). The depth of influence and recruitment ability grew with every arrested member. The Israeli Prison Service incarcerates the largest number of non-local resident security inmates of any national security prison system (Boaz & Ophir, 2013). Although the gap between where security inmates live and the place of incarceration was small within the Israeli Prison Service, the cultural gap with respect to the inmate's upbringing and what needed for de-radicalize inmates was substantial. Prior to incarceration, the inmates were subjected to incitement against and hatred of Israel. Due to the strength of this incitement, rehabilitation efforts were rarely effective once the inmate returned to their residence (Boaz & Ophir, 2013). Israel does not have official policy regarding de-radicalization however, they have many measures to help reduce the radicalization. From 1967 to 2004 most security inmates were sent to military-police facilities (Boaz & Ophir, 2013).

Europe

European prisons implement a divide and conquer strategy to help prevent the spread of terrorism (Cuthbertson, 2004). European prisons house African and Middle Eastern prisoners together, which allows recruiters to recruit people with the skills needed to further their terrorist network (Klein, 2007). New "maximum security" prisons

hold dangerous, terrorist inmates. The goal is to increase security and limit inmates' ability to causes problems among the general prison population (Cuthbertson, 2004). Prisoners are also segregated by separating committed terrorists from inmates who have renounced their extremist associations. Prison officials treat the terrorists according to the criminal acts they committed, rather than according to the ideological beliefs that inspired them (Cuthbertson, 2004). These steps help prevent the spread of radical peer pressure and protect some inmates from murderous reprisals by former comrades (Cuthbertson, 2004).

In Europe, even inmates charged with serious crimes have the same privileges of movement and association within the prison as other prisoners who are not subject to extra surveillance. The European model of corrections emphasizes rehabilitation and vocational training, not punitive punishment. If a large group of people are incarcerated together, there is a tendency to house them together. It is not unusual for a cellblock's population to be overwhelmingly African and Middle Eastern in origin. Religion offers a place of friendship and mutual support. One drawback of this model comes to the young men who are disconnected and become captive for those extremist Islamic views.

According to a statement made by Rep. Peter King on *Terror Inmates: Countering Violent Extremism in Prison and Beyond* (2015) those who attacked Charlie Hebdo in France were radicalized in prison.

While European and Israeli models differ on how they organize inmates, especially those who are terrorists or suspected terrorists, the U.S. does not make this same distinction with inmates. The U.S. does not separate or segregate inmates unless the

inmate is unruly or a high security risk to themselves, other inmates or the correctional staffs. The inmates mostly stay in general population where they are interspersed and exposed to other radical ideologues such as gangs or other hate groups.

U.S. methods for inmate organization

Custodial corrections systems (i.e., prisons and jails) take men and women who are already demonstrating poor decision making skills and severely restrict their opportunity to improve these skills (Schriro, 2010, 2000). Daily organization for inmates varies depending on the facility's supervision level (i.e., supermax or that of a lower security institution.) Although a prisoner may receive opportunities to improve their trade skills or earn a degree while in prison, the way s/he spend their free time is crucial to their long-term success (Schriro, 2010, 2000). Schriro pioneered one approach to working with inmates while they are incarcerated. In the Parallel Universe (so dubbed by Schriro) inmates' daily schedule is typically organized to maximize the effectiveness of his/her free/non-programmed time. Schriro (2010, 2000) tells us that in Arizona's Parallel Universe self-improvement, community betterment and family reunification are important components of inmates' custody time (Schriro, 2010, 2000).

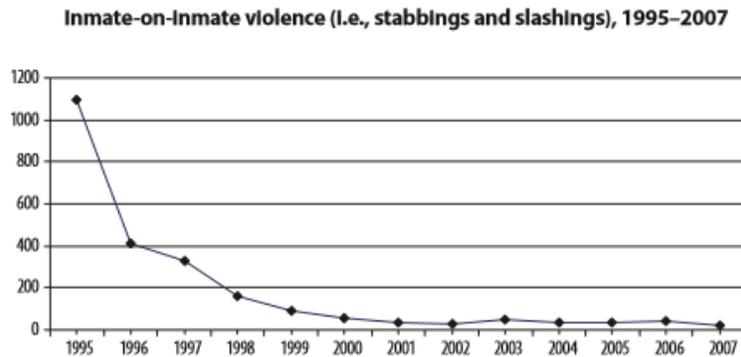
Additionally, several external factors contribute to the prison environment/culture. From 1995 to 2007, inmate on inmate violence decreased in New York. In a *New York Times* article, Scott Shane (2011) notes that a federal prison in Colorado houses more men with terrorism convictions than Guantanamo. Financial resources represent one potential reason for this as there is over a \$700,000 difference between housing at the two locations. The Colorado prison has units with Muslim-majorities with under-concentrated

surveillance by prison officials. At the Supermax prison convicted terrorists go to one of two special units allowing prison officials to limit visits and phone calls (Shane, 2011).

Overcrowded Prisons and Mis-trained Guards

Two practical issues related to terrorist recruitment in prison include: overcrowding and staff training. First, U.S. prison systems are often overcrowded. The stretched resources and reduced supervision/security that regularly accompanies overcrowding may prevent improvement in inmates' behavior which can lead to post-release reoffending. This differs from the European prisons, as discussed above.

Second, correctional officers (guards) working in many U.S. prisons are often under-, un- or mis-trained to appropriately handle all the issues related to the complexity of terrorist recruitment in penal environments. Cuthbertson (2004) notes that prison guards rarely preside over Muslim religious services and when they do, guards often lack the ability to understand the message. The guards do not know if the inmates are exposed to radical anti-U.S. ideas or ones that professes peace. The training for prison guards does not include courses to allow them to learn various languages. Detainees in American institutions in Cuba, Afghanistan and Iraq are nearly all Muslims and trapped in system where there is great abuse. Both the innocent and guilty are denied legal relief which only furthers them to turn to radicalization (Cuthbertson, 2004).



Note: This figure is based on data from Horn (2008b)

Figure 1 Inmate-on-Inmate Violence

Muslim Demographics in the U.S.

Approximately 2.3 to 3 million Muslims live in the U.S. (Useem & Clayton, 2009). A survey that included 1,050 Muslims was conducted in 2007. Overall, Muslim Americans viewed the U.S. society favorably. Seventy-one percent of Muslim Americans felt that if you worked hard you could get ahead in the U.S. (Useem & Clayton, 2009). While Muslim Americans favored the U.S., there were still some that viewed some forms of terrorism against the U.S. as justified. Additionally, seven percent of Muslim Americans felt that suicide bombing against civilian targets were sometimes justified in the defense of Islam. One percent of Muslims Americans in this study felt that suicide bombing against civilian targets was often justified in the defense of Islam (Useem & Clayton, 2009). With a Muslim population of three million, that is 30,000 Muslims who support suicide bombing. This survey, however, did not report on the non-Muslim population. However, in the same year the University of Maryland’s Program on

International Public Attitudes asked similar questions to the U.S. citizens. Five percent of U.S. citizens saw attacks on civilians as often justified and 19 percent saw attacks as sometimes justified (Useem & Clayton, 2009). It appears that the Muslims in the U.S. reject the attacks on civilians more often than the general public.

Educating a prisoner does not guarantee that s/he will not become a terrorist. Data from 172 individual international terrorists. Sixty-two percent of individual international terrorists attended college (Useem & Clayton, 2009). The completion rates were not given. The mere statement of “had attended college” is vague and can mean anything from taking one class or completing a degree. In two other studies, Palestinian suicide bombers who attacked an Israeli target in Israel were more educated (on average) than the Palestinian population. Most suicide bombers are not “social losers.” Many of them are well-educated with favorable economic futures. This leads one to wonder why suicide bombers take their own lives. As previously stated, radicalization is not about oneself. Suicide bombers have strongly identified with their nation and feel that they are sacrificing their lives for their nation’s good (Useem & Clayton, 2009). While education levels did not appear to be a factor among international terrorist, educational backgrounds of male inmates helped to explain the low level of jihad radicalization in some prisons. Obtaining data to develop a sound conclusion poses problems within itself.

Terrorists’ recruit, motivate, train and retain new members

Islamic radicals use sophisticated methods to recruit and train and yet, terrorists often do well recruiting/training in prisons. They are regularly able to spot, assess and encourage potential recruits to follow their path (Mulcahy, Merrington & Bell, 2013).

The pool of candidates is like a revolving door in prison. Approximately 300 federal prisoners in the U.S. are serving sentences for terrorism related charges (Mulcahy, Merrington & Bell, 2013). Terrorists are often undetected due to the activities of prison gangs and extremist religious groups. Technological advancements are helping prison personnel detect terrorist activity (Mulcahy, Merrington & Bell, 2013). The physical and emotional trauma a prisoner experiences makes them more vulnerable to extremists' influence over their way of thinking. When a person is incarcerated, it is possible for the new inmate to lose their individual identity and become vulnerable. Terrorist take advantage of this confusing time for new inmates (Mulcahy, Merrington, Bell, 2013). Dunleavy (2011) wrote that Imams with radical viewpoints have ready access to convert inmates who are lonely, young and vulnerable to learn anti-Western Islam. Other traits Imams might look for are inmates who feel that they are oppressed or targeted because they are a minority. They see these individuals as open to using violence especially against those perceived as "doing them wrong," which in this case is the government.

Patterns of Recruitment & Radicalization in U.S. Prisons

Presently there are four primary and known patterns of recruitment: the net, the funnel, the infection and the seed crystal (Mulcahy, Merrington & Bell, 2013). The net pattern occurs when the target population is equally engaged, as in all of the members are reading the same book or attending the same meeting. The funnel pattern occurs when incremental steps are taken, by the recruiter, when they feel the target is a prime target. The individual has to undergo a significant transformation in identity for this pattern. The infection pattern occurs when a trusted agent is inserted into the target population to rally

potential recruits through direct personal appeal. This pattern is successful where most inmates are not extremists. The seed crystal pattern occurs when the target is very difficult to access and is very remote. As of today, this pattern is most successful in prisons (Mulcahy, Merrington & Bell, 2013).

Likewise, there are also four stages to explain the process of radicalization: pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination and jihadization (Mulcahy, Merrington & Bell, 2013). Pre-radicalization occurs when individuals are placed in an environment that allows them to be receptive to extremism. There are two motivations for people who are receptive to extremism: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic radicalization occurs when the person is motivated by a personal crisis, discrimination or alienation. The individual's current religion could also be a motivator if they feel dissatisfied. Extrinsic motivation can be any external factor that is negatively affecting the individual's attitude and belief. These negative factors can include economic, ethnic, and social deprivation. The negative factors make individuals feel that changing faith is the answer to their current perception of deprivation (Mulcahy, Merrington & Bell, 2013).

Self-identification occurs when the individual identifies themselves with a particular extremist case. Once the individual identifies themselves with this case, it essentially changes their religious beliefs and/or behaviors. A new character begins to form based on the radicalized ideologies. Once the character is formed, more exposure to those ideologies will strengthen their connection with the ideology. Indoctrination furthers the mindset and readiness for action. An individual may accept the radical ideology but they still might be unclear on how to participate. Small groups and

individual participation helps the recruit to recognize potential jihadist. A critical element in this stage is the knowledge, skills and leadership from the senior members. This stage is highly volatile and very emotional for the recruits. Over time, confidence increases and the individual's mind fills up with the ideology and they feel they only want to stand up for what they believe in is through violence. Jihadization is the final stage. In this stage, the individual engages directly with terrorist activities with the intention to inflict damage to the enemy. During this stage the individual loses connection with themselves. The role identification is so strong that the individual is incapable of doing something for themselves (i.e., leaving the group). The four stages do not have to occur chronologically. Individuals progress at different paces through the radicalization process (Mulcahy, Merrington & Bell, 2013).

Dunleavy (2011) wrote that the Central Intelligence Agency working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation described a four-step path for embracing the extremist form of Islam. Step one includes giving the potential recruit a sense of belonging and meaning to their new life. The next two steps include the conversion to Islam followed by the indoctrination to the radical ideology of Islam. The final step involves an actual terrorist act or plot of attack. Dunleavy noted that these are not hard and fast steps, a person can come in and out these steps at different places (Dunleavy, 2011). This four-step path process expands the overlap of role identity theory and framing theory (Smith, Snow, Fitzpatrick, Damphousse, Roberts, Tan, Brooks & Klein, 2016).

Identity theory is focused on allowing people have a sense of togetherness (Snow, 2001). Identity theory allows a group to have a shared definition of collectiveness.

Identity theory allows the group to share real or perceived experiences or attributes while simultaneously having a contrast against a real or perceived threat (Snow, 2001). This can be seen in the four-step process of radicalization as giving the potential recruit a sense of belonging, which is the start. Framing theory focused on two key concepts which are diagnostic and prognostic. This direct attention to *how* an issue or problem is stated, who is to blame and what is the plan for dealing with the problem (Smith et al, 2016). Diagnostic framing attempts to address a problem of a system of government or social life; in our case that is radicalization and our correctional institutions (Snow & Byrd, 2007). Using diagnostic framing the question that is attempted to be answered is “What went wrong” and “Where do you place blame” (Snow & Byrd, 2007). In prognostic framing you attempt to address “What has to be done” (Snow & Byrd, 2007). While identity theory is seen from the perspective of the prisoners and those being radicalized, framing theory is seen from the perspective of the correctional institution as well as the intelligence community attempting to answer the framing questions.

Methodology and Research Strategy

This research examines the current unclassified information and research on the culture/environment within Israeli, European and the U.S. prisons while providing several theoretical explanations for why and how in-prison terrorist recruitment occurs. The current, and somewhat limited, research focuses on the organization of inmates and their daily prison schedule, while considering the possible motivation behind prisoners' radicalization. Using a qualitative design, this project uses a case study approach for understanding what we presently know about how terrorist recruiting occurs in prison. The next section describes the methods used to gather and analyze data to describe and understand ways environmental/cultural factors produce or interact with terrorist radicalization.

Case Studies

First, this case study-framed project considers the prison environment and any radicalization events occurring in each country/region's prison(s). Gathered from four available cases, these studies may not generalize to other countries' prisons. However, because scant research considers this topic, this exploratory look into cross-national prison radicalization yields a descriptive starting point for future research on this and related topics. Using a content analysis approach, each case study was reviewed ten times and coded for key variables related to theories of prison culture including the importation

and indigenous models. As such, each case study was coded for terrorism, terrorists and radicalization. Then, an overall assessment based on codes for each case determined the strength of each theory in explaining prison life/radicalization.

A semi-grounded theory approach guided data collection and analysis where by I began coding with a basic theoretical framework in mind, but allowed the data to formulate the basis for the analysis as it evolved. Multiple iterations of data collection (i.e., interviews) was completed. Once I developed the plan to concentrate on human behavior instead of the physical location of prisoner cells, I narrowed my research focus and select specific experts as potential people to interview. Many journals and articles, that I had access to, were written with similar theories, therefore I felt that my research/data collection had reached saturation.

Interviews

To gain a better understanding of the radicalization in U.S. prisons, I electronically (via email) interviewed five of the six scholars with expertise in prisons and terrorism. The email exchanges served as written interview transcripts and formed the interview data coded and analyzed. Together, the interview transcripts composed three double-spaced pages with answers to a total of 17 unique questions. Five scholars responded: Dr. George Klein, Mr. Bert Useem, Dr. Karen Lahm, Dr. Mark Hamm and Dr. Dora Schriro. Dr. Hamm did not answer the questions I asked, instead he directed me to his book. Dr. Schriro agreed to answer questions, however once I sent the questions, a response was never received even after a follow up. Dr. Gary LaFree did not respond to the email. The scholars who responded provided permission to use their name and

information for this thesis and the Institutional Review Board approved this project without oversight. All scholars were selected based on various qualifications. These qualifications included peer-reviewed publications on topics related to and including terrorism and/or radicalization AND prison/jail. Instead of using a standard questionnaire, I used individualized questions based on the expertise of each interviewee—yet all interviews focused on terrorist recruitment in prison generally. Specifically, the questions focused on prison organization/schedules, theories, past experience and different religions and their possible after on prison inmates. Since the responses were detailed, follow up emails were not needed to the experts who responded. (See list of questions asked to each participant in Table One).

Dr. George Klein was a Behavioral Science Unit consultant with the Federal Bureau of Investigation for over 12 years and has worked on a number of cases as an expert witness. Dr. Klein wrote a paper discussing Islamic fundamentalist working with white supremacist in prison. He was asked five questions that focused on Islamic fundamentalist and white supremacists and the role that religion plays in inmate violence. He recommended that I speak with Mr. Bert Useem.

Mr. Bert Useem is the Head of the Department of Sociology at Purdue University. He was contacted based on Dr. George Klein's recommendation. Also, he authored an article, *Radicalization in U.S. Prisons*, used in this thesis. He was asked seven questions focusing on why Europe is having a radicalization problem however the U.S. is not, as well as radicalization inside and outside of prison.

Dr. Karen Lahm wrote a paper on importation theory. She is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of the Crime & Justice Studies Program at Wright State University. Dr. Lahm has studied prisons for over 15 years. She looks at the correlates of inmate violence and victimization as well as educational programming and its effects. Dr. Lahm was asked five questions relating the importation theory to inmate radicalization, as some scholars have referenced. She was not able to relate the two together as she was not familiar with the literature on radicalizing inmates.

Dr. Mark Hamm is a former prison warden in Arizona and currently a Professor of Criminology at Indiana State University. He has a variety of publications in the areas of terrorism, hate crime and prisoner subcultures. Dr. Hamm’s current research is along the lines of terrorist recruitment in U.S. and British prisons. As mentioned above, Dr. Hamm directed me to his book. He felt the book would be more helpful than him answering my questions through email.

Table 1 Interview Questions

Scholar	Questions Asked:
Dr. Burt Useem	<p>Describe your current position and past experiences as it relates to corrections.</p> <p>Have most of the facilities you’ve studied organized inmates in similar fashion? If so how was that?</p> <p>How have you seen inmate’s daily schedule organized?</p> <p>What role does religion play in inmate violence?</p> <p>In your article on Radicalization of U.S.</p>

	<p>Prisons you seem to use importation theory to describe how a person could become radicalized. Why did you use this theory?</p> <p>Others in the field of corrections and terrorism note that a lot of European countries have a radicalization problem, however that in U.S. correctional institutions do not see that. They say that the people who study Islam or become Muslim in prison do so for more of an identity or protection that a gang can offer. Do you see this as a phenomenon that will progress towards the European model of radicalization or no? Why or why not?</p> <p>Have you looked at any parallels to the radicalization of people in prison to those who are radicalized outside of corrections?</p>
<p>Dr. George Klein</p>	<p>Describe your current position and past experiences as it relates to corrections.</p> <p>Have most of the facilities you've studied organized inmates in similar fashion? If so how was that?</p> <p>How have you seen inmate's daily schedule organized?</p> <p>What role does religion play in inmate violence?</p> <p>In your article on An Investigation: Have Islamic Fundamentalists Made Contact with White Supremacists in the U.S. you talked how European prisons have become breeding grounds for Islamic fundamentalists, but not here in the U.S. Why do you think Islamic Fundamentalists in correction facilities have been unsuccessful in conducting a terrorism incident?</p>

<p>Dr. Karen Lahm</p>	<p>Describe your current position and past experiences as it relates to corrections.</p> <p>Have most of the facilities you've studied organized inmates in similar fashion? If so how was that?</p> <p>How have you seen inmate's daily schedule organized?</p> <p>What role does religion play in inmate violence?</p> <p>What if any theories would lead someone to become radicalized? Inmate radicalization is defined as an ideology that endorses the use of violence calculated to spread fear, disrupt the social order, and achieve political goals external to the prison environment (Useem & Clayton, 2009). Radicalization is not about the person themselves. Radicalization requires self-sacrifice for a broader vision of how the world should be.</p>

This research is conducted at the UNCLASSIFIED level. The classification can affect the outcome of the research due to information being above the UNCLASSIFIED classification.

Findings and Analysis

Case study analysis reveals some notable cases where prisons served as recruiting (and training) grounds for introducing and planning radicalization and terror events. In each case presented, individuals became radicalized in prison or soon there-after and after radicalization attempted to or have followed through with a terrorist plot and attack. While most of the cases occur in the U.S. were foiled or failed, the Madrid bombing case details how petty criminals became radicalized then followed through to commit an act of terrorism. The U.S. cases were chosen as they are the cases that are most often cited by Congressmen and the law enforcement community to show that radicalization is occurring and needing attention to stymie the growth of radicalization. The Israeli and European cases were chosen for the availability of information and their notoriety. Using a theoretical approach, the two theories of importation and transformative learning theory that were discussed as a blended theory in an attempt to help explain how the actions/inactions led to the radicalization.

Prison Radicalization Case Analysis: What We Currently Know

In December 2001, Richard Reid, also known as shoe bomber, was apprehended when he tried to detonate a bomb on an U.S. commercial flight. Richard Reid was incarcerated in Great Britain and is believed to have converted to Islam and radicalized by an Imam (Boaz & Ophir, 2013). Reid was imprisoned in the Feltham Youth Offenders

Institution twice once in 1992/93 and then again in 1995 (Ilardi, 2013). Reid also had other influences that extolled the virtues of Islam as his father converted when he was imprisoned in the 1980s. Based off of these factors we can see that Reid could have been pre-disposed to radical ideals/beliefs and Islam, which afforded him a culture and value system that is not congruent with that of a law abiding citizen. These actions could be seen as grounded in importation theory, but this does not explain the complete story of Richard Reid. Prison did not radicalize Reid, it served as the awakening and provided meaning to his life. This enabled him, upon his release, to seek out specific mosques that, combined with his experiences and reading, led him to commit to defending Islam with violence (Ilardi, 2013). While the radicalization did not occur in prison, prison allowed him be swayed and sensitized to the radical ideologies and teaching of Islam which can be explained by transformative learning theory. Using transformative learning theory along with importation theory can complete the picture of radicalization which started prior to Reid entering prison to the attempted attack.

While incarcerated in a California prison Kevin James became a converted Muslim. In prison, he was first influenced by the Nation of Islam, but soon found their teachings dull. Hamm (2008) notes that his initial influence by the Nation of Islam, which encompasses gang values, created an alternative perspective which, for many, leads to further radicalization. It was after this that became more aligned with Sunni Islam (Hamm, 2007). Hamm (2008) also noted that some prisoners are inspired by groups like Al-Qaeda, however that group is typically not in the radicalization process. While in prison, James preached that it was Muslims duty to violently target the enemies of Islam,

which include U.S. government (Hamm, 2007). Hamm noted that James was a charismatic guy who was very soft spoken. Another inmate in the same prison also converted to Islam, Levar Washington. The two men created a group called Jam'yyat Al-Islam Al-Saheed. The translation for this is "The Association of True Islam." The purpose of this group was to offer a complete understanding of the Islamic culture, Fiqh, Hadith, politics and spirituality without any interference (Useem & Clayton, 2009).

While in prison, these two men drafted a document called "Blue Print 2005" which, according to Hamm (2007), models the Qaeda training manual by setting up and recruiting programs for inmates disenfranchised by their country's policies. This document listed the dos and don'ts of their group. For example, several dos include: learning Arabic, acquiring two pistols with silencers, blending into society, and appointing a member to find contacts for explosives or learn to make bombs. At a later date, Washington was released from prison and was recruited into an al-Qaeda sleeper cell with two other men and pledged undying loyalty to James (Hamm, 2007, Austin 2009). The two men recruited by Washington, had no felony records and swore to alliance to Jihad in the Los Angeles area. While still incarcerated, James trained Washington and continued making decisions on operations. There was a plan to commit an act of violence, however these two men did not stick to the Blue Print 2005 document and ended up robbing a series of gas stations and being arrested (Austin 2009). These men were robbing the gas stations to fund their planned terrorist attacks. After a string of successful robberies, they began looking for bigger targets, which included military recruiting centers and the Israeli Consulate along with Jewish events in the area. No

additional data finds that these two men later spread their learning from the documents. However, their intent was causing damage even if they did not execute it. James and Washington were motivated toward terrorism by then President George Bush's Iraq war. Eventually all four men were detained and charged with "Conspiring to wage war against the U.S. Government through terrorism, kill armed service members, and murder foreign officials" (Hamm 2007). Washington followed what Hamm (2008) described as being a fresh convert that formed a small group and support network to support terrorist goals laid out by a leader upon release. This case details how the more salient and pervasive a terrorist's identity, the greater the propensity to violence (Smith et al., n.d.).

Kevin James shows that as a compliant inmate that one could formulate devious plans unbeknownst to prison officials. With James being a former gang member he brought with him into prison the values/morals that are typically found in gang members. He was also said to have been a charismatic person capable of swaying people to his paradigm. James was able to recruit Levar Washington who was a rival gang member to join him and help further his cause. These facts show that importation theory has a strong correlation to Kevin James.

While, he brought a lot of key traits to be successful into prison he lacked the radical ideology needed to be a leader who could plot and execute attacks. Looking for direction he joined the Nation of Islam, but found them to not be radical enough to suit his desires. He later joined the Sunni sect of Islam to meet this need. He was also seen as someone to be respected with regards to Islam as he had acquired a scar on his forehead from his devout praying. This was caused by his forehead being pressed against the

concrete of floor during prayers. The mark gave him credibility among prisoners who practiced Islam or looking to convert. The transformation from non-Muslim to a member of the Nation of Islam then the move to embrace the radical ideology of Sunni Islam shows that transformation learning theory can summarize this conversion that is not applicable to importation theory.

Another prison Islam convert is former Chicago gang member Jose Padilla who converted to Islam after time spent in custody in 1992 (Hamm 2007). Padilla left the U.S. for Afghanistan late 1998 where he met with senior Al-Qaeda officials to discuss conducting terror operations inside the U.S. (2004). While in Afghanistan, Padilla completed Al-Qaeda basic training which included instruction on various weapons, explosives, surveillance and religion (2004). In 2002, he was arrested under suspicion of attempting a “dirty bomb” attack (Ilardi, 2013). Once Jose Padilla converted to Islam he was soon associated with one of al-Qaeda’s top commander’s sons at the Sunshine Mosque in Florida (Committee on Homeland Security, 2011). Padilla then moved to the Middle East where he joined al-Qaeda. He became known as the “dirty bomb plotter.” Padilla later developed the “apartment bomb” in a quest to level multiple apartments in Manhattan. He is deemed one the most dangerous prisoners and least compliant in federal custody (Committee on Homeland Security, 2011). Padilla who was a former gang member brought with him to prison a history of violence with an interest in converting to Islam. According to John Mueller (2011), Padilla was motivated by personal grievances with the culture in America. Padilla was said to seek out acceptance by a group his entire

life due to him feeling insecure and his history and moldable character were strong factors towards his involvement with terrorism (Mueller, 2011).

Padilla's background and history as a Chicago gang member tells that he has a propensity for violence and not following the laws. He also was someone who sought acceptance, this made him vulnerable to radicalization. Importation theory fits these facts as being correlated by explanation. Also, his being vulnerable and expressing interest in converting to Islam allows transformation learning theory show that he the path he was guided/led to was to fill a void that could have been redirected elsewhere or at least to a non-radical Islam group like the Nation of Islam.

In 2001, a principal conspirator in the Madrid training bombings, José Emilio Suárez Trashorras, was jailed for a drug offence in Spain. He was not religious or politically aware at the time of his conviction. At the same time, a young non-practicing Muslim Moroccan living in Spain, named Jamal Ahmidan, was convicted of a petty crime. Their conviction of petty offenses and drug offenses, shows that while not wholly serious offenses their values are in opposition to the rule of law lending credence to use importation theory to explain these actions. Once both men were imprisoned together, they embraced radical Islamic fundamentalist beliefs and were recruited into an al-Qaeda-linked Moroccan terrorist group, Takfir wa al-Hijra (Cuthbertson, 2004). Ahmidan gained leadership in the cell-block and once both men were released from prison they were absorbed into an Islamic organization that trafficked drugs to support the terrorist activities. Ahmidan went on to carry out the Madrid bombings. The change in becoming a practicing Muslim and a convert to Islam, plus the garnering of leadership within the

off-shoot al-Qaeda show that using transformation learning theory these actions show a moderate correlation to the actions. Trashorras supplied explosives and helped to plant the 13 backpack bombs, killing 191 people and injuring hundreds (Cuthbertson, 2004). Trashorras and Ahmidan show that although they were convicted of petty offenses, were able to be radicalized in prison, gain leadership experience, expand their own network and feel a part of something bigger than themselves and carry out a prolific attack. As noted in the interview with Dr. Klein, terror organization often target these petty criminals as they will be able to advance the outside organization's cause.

Early Indications of International Exploitation and Recruitment

Differences

Throughout the course of the research several key themes emerged in the research documents and through the correspondence with the scholars. These included: 1) Radicalization does not appear to be a problem in the U.S. for various reasons; 2) terror networks are exploiting and recruiting in European prisons, and 3) U.S. prisoner organization does not necessarily correlate to the crime exclusively and rehabilitation is needed.

In the U.S. there does not appear to be an Islamic radicalization problem as the people who join Islam in prison do this to form an identity or as a form of protection (Useem and Klein correspondence, 2016). However, there is a great deal of racial segregation and gang activity in American prisons. Dr. Lahm noted that inmates are organized based off what they have done or the programming that is needed. The people who are radicalized seem to be self-radicalized from the internet. In jail, religion has little

to do with their behavior, the groups are street gangs involved in mostly drugs and prostitution (Klein correspondence, 2016). Useem and Klein agreed that there is not a problem of radicalization in U.S. prisons, however there is a radicalization issue in Europe. Muslims in U.S. prisons do not appear highly political. For example, most agree that 911 was terrible. Muslim gangs in U.S. prisons are capitalists. Their hatred for the U.S. is kept to a minimum. Recent arrests of Muslim terrorist, lone wolves, come from self-radicalization from the internet (Klein correspondence, 2016).

Klein's reports that 80 percent of the prisoners in France are Arabs. While, this statistic alone does not show causality, it does show that a higher number of Arabs are incarcerated there than in the U.S. Radicals in Europe often recruit petty criminals who could further their cause on the outside like smugglers or credit card theft to help finance their attacks (Klein correspondence, 2016). An inmate's behavior can influence whether extra scrutiny is placed on an inmate (Lahm correspondence, 2016). In a case like Kevin James, for example, he did not draw the ire of security staff, so his behavior would be noted as "complying" with the rules and being a person that causes trouble. This would generally give him more freedoms than someone who is not as compliant.

Dr. Klein (2016) discussed the past couple of decades have seen an increase in the number of immigrants many of them Muslim immigrate to Europe. With mass immigration, came a lack of assimilation within the country's leading to higher crime rates with the Muslim demographic (Klein, 2007). In the correspondence with Dr. Klein he espoused the tactics radicals in European jails recruit and seek out criminals who were

picked up on petty charges such as credit card crooks or smugglers to help them finance their organization on the outside (2016).

In explaining the current case study descriptive findings, Table 2 below shows how a blended approach of using importation theory and transformative learning theory can help explain how/why the radicalization happened. This is done using the following scale: strong shows that the actions are highly correlated based off of how they are defined earlier in this paper, moderate shows that the actions are more than likely correlated and weak shows there is minimal correlation to the theory.

Table 2 Blending Theories through Case Studies

Cases	Transformation Learning Theory	Importation Theory	Explanation
Richard Reid	Moderate	Strong	Richard Reid is believed to be pre-disposed to radical ideals, beliefs and Islam due to his father converting to Islam in prison and his own previous stays in the correction system while a juvenile (Importation). While not radicalized in prison, prison served as the awakening where after release he sought out mosques who espoused the radical beliefs he was searching for (Transformative Learning).
Kevin James	High	Strong	Prior to incarceration Kevin James was already a known gang member. As an influential and charismatic person he was able to convert a rival gang member (Washington) to join his group to carry out an attack. He brought with him to prison a culture/values of leadership (Importation theory). While in prison he converted to the Nation of Islam and then Sunni Islam which is stricter (Transformative)
Jose Padilla	Moderate	Moderate	Prior to his incarceration Padilla was a Chicago gang member. He brought with him to prison a propensity for violence and a disgruntled attitude against the U.S.

			(Importation). Padilla expressed interest in converting to Islam and upon release met with senior Al-Qaeda members.
Jose Trashorras/ Jamal Ahmidan- Madrid Bombings	Moderate	Moderate	Trashorras and Ahmidan were both incarcerated as petty criminals with Ahmidan being a non-practicing Muslim. Their act of criminality shows the propensity to have skewed values and show non-conformity (Importation). Both were recruited and embraced radical Islamic fundamental beliefs (Transformative learning) which allowed them to be recruited into an Al-Qaeda affiliate and carry out the Madrid attacks.

Discussion

Research and interviews suggest that U.S. correctional institutions do not have the radicalization problem that European prisons are facing. This may be attributed to the gang's present in many U.S. facilities or the lack of terror suspects incarcerated in the U.S. Conversely when looking at Europe we see a mass influx of immigrants, which alone does not lead to radicalization, but when coupled with importation theory once can see that inmates are drawn to people who share their similar although sometimes skewed values.

Two questions provide an ongoing debate: 1) *Where is the most appropriate place to contain terrorists?* and 2) *What is the most effect way of doing so?* (Mulcahy, Merrington, Bell, 2013). There are two common strategies: isolation and concentration. Isolation separates the terrorists from each other. When a facility uses the concentration method the facility houses all the terrorists in one facility and specialized resources which

include staff of linguist and those who specialize in de-radicalization (Mulcahy, Merrington & Bell, 2013). If we isolate the terrorists, we are only encouraging them to form more of a bond when the opportunity presents itself. Isolating an individual is not going to change their mindset (Mulcahy, Merrington & Bell, 2013). In fact, some suggest that isolation gives individuals more time to brew their thoughts and plot their next move. On the other hand, if all terrorists house together, more problems may occur. The violence among the terrorist organizations would occur and the recruiting of more terrorist would be easier since they are all together. The ultimate way to decrease racialization is by changing human behavior, but this is difficult. Each person has something that drives them. Effort should be made to find the motivation and set the person up for success rather than putting them in a shelter to purely serve their time. Prisons may have missed opportunities to assist inmates in changing themselves for individual and community benefit.

President Obama's desire to shut down Guantanamo Bay Prison is a big attention-getter. This prison is the home of more than 240 of the world's most feared terrorists. Approximately 600 inmates have been released from Guantanamo Bay. The Department of Defense reports that nearly 5 percent of those inmates have become involved in terrorist activities again or are currently suspected of being involved (Austin, 2009). Many fear that if we transfer these terrorists to the U.S. it could turn into a breeding ground for terrorists.

Many people research prisons around the world. There are researchers who specialize in the radicalization process and terrorist activity. The difficulty arises when

trying to obtain information about how the prison operates and the problems within each prison. Wardens are often not willing to release the information in fear of public scrutiny. This leads to challenges to gather data to determine if a person was radicalized in prison or if some sort of relationship started before or after the individual serves their time. If the individual was radicalized in prison, the reason will vary from person to person. The operations within the prison would help researchers understand the reasoning. All of this is important information to help minimize radicalization and help the inmates become better societal citizens.

To address prison radicalization issues, it will take a lot of cooperation between governments, prison administrators, religious institutions and immigrant support groups as well as financial assistance. American prisons have experience with criminal gangs and some of those lessons are applicable to terrorist networks. Many Muslims in European prisons have little knowledge of the culture of the country in which they are imprisoned. A lot of them do not even speak the local language. This behavior will continue in the prison. The sense of security associating religious and ethnic confreres gives to a frightened and disoriented inmate plays into the hands of those who are excited to exploit the for their own purposes (Cuthbertson, 2004).

Stalling Radicalizers

Prison administrators, law enforcement officers, as well as the intelligence community often look at those who are being or are susceptible to radicalization as the problem to fix. There are several ways currently used to solve this problem. Allowing trained researchers to research these individuals. Researchers are trained to ask different

questions than those in the law enforcement community who are seeking answers to cases or leads for investigations. Researchers ask questions to further research or answer specific questions. However, another way to stall the radicalization is to possibly look at those people doing the recruitment and radicalization. Hamm (2008), discovered through his research that if there was one factor that was more important than others with regards to prison radicalization it was charismatic leadership. Hamm (2008) noted that there were several ways to help address radicalization, which include diversifying correctional personnel, provide the staff additional training as well as hiring more chaplains. Diversifying personnel by including more Muslim staff members. It is noted that with regards to religion, Islam is the fastest growing amongst U.S. prisoners (Hamm, 2008). These personnel would be able to attend the religious services and ensure that the Imam is not preaching a radical ideology. Those non-Muslim personnel can receive additional training on the Muslim faith as well what to look for with regards to recruitment of new members (Hamm, 2008).

While these can help address radicalization, there could be other ways to attack the problem. Schriro, (2010, 2000) has set up a “Getting Ready” program that creates a parallel universe that mimics the outside world and levying real world requirements on inmates. This program focused on attempting to alter inmate behavior and making inmates accountable for their actions. “Getting Ready” attempted to make inmates more marketable when they were released by them allowing them to attain a general equivalence degree (GED). The “Getting Ready” program provided the inmates with a sense of belonging and accomplishment. The program does not provide a decent paying

job to every inmate that does not earn it via earning a GED. This program gave the inmates something to do and something to strive for. An idle mind is a devil's workshop. The inmates should be kept busy and productive to help minimize their time to form together to cause harm. This study did not focus on prison radicalization, but could be used with transformative learning theory. When an inmate encounters a decision point, the inmate could decide to fall prey to those who are radicalizing them or be enrolled in a program like "Getting Ready."

Conclusion

The American prison system should invest significant resources in reaching out to incarcerated foreigners. Arizona's "Getting Ready" program invests time in their inmates' future and tries to better the prisoners for the betterment of the community. This type of outreach program should take into consideration the background and psychological status of each prisoner. This will take a little extra work up front however; this will help prevent the reoccurrence of the criminal act.

Prisons really do work. It locks up criminals and prevents them from harming the general public. However, prisons also fail. While it protects the general public, it does not change the behavior of the prisoner. Many people feel that prisoners should work, as in manual labor (Opperman, 2014). If we purely lock up a prisoner and then discharge them without proper steps taken to rehabilitate them, we are doing a disservice to the prisoner and to the general public. Prisoners who take part in activities, training and rehabilitation programs are less likely to riot than those prisoners who are locked up for 23 hours a day where the opportunity for behavioral change does not exist (Opperman, 2014). The prison environment is an incubator for creating a dedicated and hardened terrorist, offering ideal conditions for both the recruitment and radicalization of new members. Prison should still remain the place of punishment and the place where liberty deprivation occurs however the prison system should focus more on behavior change rather than manual labor.

Racialization makes an individual different from ordinary criminals. Both use violence to attain specific goals however terrorist use ideological and religious gains as motivation and criminals are driven mainly by material gain (Mulcahy, Merrington & Bell, 2013). A prisoner's vulnerability to radicalization does not stop once they are released from prison. Many individuals that are released from prison lack basic support. The extremists provide these individuals with the support and a sense of belonging. The behavior change has to occur with the prisoners and the prison administration. When violence is constantly occurring between the guard and prisoners, this only strengthens the bond between the prisoners.

Correlating an act of violence by someone in prison or just released from prison to an act from racialization is difficult. It is not possible to determine if a person would have been radicalized later in life. However, it is possible to determine if prison life is making it easier for a person to become radicalized. The prisons are asked to do a lot however, we cannot afford to let the prisons become breeding ground for radicalization and ultimately terrorism. The prison system needs to become more involved in the prisoner's life and provide positive models for the prisoners to learn from and follow.

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Biography

Ronald M. Zimmermann grew up in Georgia. He attended George College and State University, where he received his Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice in 2006. He went on to receive his Master of Arts in Strategic Intelligence from American Military University in 2014. He then received his Master of Arts degree from George Mason University in 2016.