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THESIS

BRAND CALIPHATE AND RECRUITMENT BETWEEN THE GENDERS

by

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September 2016

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13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

Since the declaration of the Islamic State (IS) in 2014, men and women have been recruited to join the Caliphate in numbers surpassing those recruited by al Qaida. This variance in recruitment volume is likely attributable to the online propaganda campaign, Brand Caliphate. This thesis looks at the recruitment of women and asks if Brand Caliphate specifically targets females with its messaging, and if so, is the messaging effective?

Based on a textual analysis of Brand Caliphate's propaganda, it appears IS tried to deliver messaging targeted toward females. However, six case studies of radicalized females suggests the recruitment of these women does not appear to be directly attributable to the targeted messaging. There is, however, evidence that most of the female recruitment studied linked to online radicalization and Brand Caliphate's broader messaging.

All of the women studied did initially look online for information regarding IS. This initial outreach served to identify them as targets for radicalization by IS recruiters, who continued to persuade the females through direct online communication. Ultimately, a sense of belonging to a community, even if it exists online, served as a more powerful draw to potential recruits than the targeted messaging of Brand Caliphate.

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BRAND CALIPHATE AND RECRUITMENT BETWEEN THE GENDERS

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

Since the declaration of the Islamic State (IS) in 2014, men and women have been recruited to join the Caliphate in numbers surpassing those recruited by al Qaida. This variance in recruitment volume is likely attributable to the online propaganda campaign, Brand Caliphate. This thesis looks at the recruitment of women and asks if Brand Caliphate specifically targets females with its messaging, and if so, is the messaging effective?

Based on a textual analysis of Brand Caliphate's propaganda, it appears IS tried to deliver messaging targeted toward females. However, six case studies of radicalized females suggests the recruitment of these women does not appear to be directly attributable to the targeted messaging. There is, however, evidence that most of the female recruitment studied linked to online radicalization and Brand Caliphate's broader messaging.

All of the women studied did initially look online for information regarding IS. This initial outreach served to identify them as targets for radicalization by IS recruiters, who continued to persuade the females through direct online communication. Ultimately, a sense of belonging to a community, even if it exists online, served as a more powerful draw to potential recruits than the targeted messaging of Brand Caliphate.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abayas/Aba	An Arabic term for a loose, cloak-like garment or cover worn by Muslim women; similar to a burqa
Al-Hayat Media Center	The foreign language media center of IS
Al-Khansaa Brigade	The all-female police force/religious enforcement used to patrol women living in the Caliphate
Brand Caliphate	The extensive media and propaganda marketing conducted by IS
Burqa/Burka	An Urdu term for a loose, cloak-like garment or cover worn by Muslim women; similar to Abayas
Caliph	The leader of the Muslim community, or Caliphate and successor to the prophet Muhammad
Caliphate	The area under control by the Caliph
Dabiq	The highly stylized propaganda magazine published by IS
Dawlah	A reference to the state or government; the Caliphate
Deen	An individual's religion
Dua	Prayer; act of supplication
Fitrah	Instinct; common sense within Islam
Hadith	A recording of the words and actions of Muhammad
Hijab	A veil that covers the head and chest worn by some Muslim women in public or around non-mahram men
Hijrah	Jihad by immigration, based on the historic flight of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina to escape persecution
In Group	The social identity theory process of categorizing people as belonging to a group of "us" or "them"; the "in" Group is perceived to experience preferential treatment by others in the same group, known as the in-group bias
IS, ISIS, ISIL or Daesh	Interchangeable titles used to refer to the Islamic State
Jihad	The religious duty of Muslims to maintain the religion; the act of striving; the physical war against unbelievers
Koran/Quran	The central religious text of Islam
Kafir/Kuffir/Kufr	An unbeliever; someone who does not believe Muhammad is the final messenger and rejects Allah (slang "kuffs")

Mahram	A Muslim male who is an unmarriageable kin to a female Muslim; a female Muslim may be publicly escorted by her mahram or remove her hijab in his presence
Muhajirah	One who has made the hijrah or journey to the Caliphate
Mujahideen	Plural for *mujahid*; a group of individuals engaged in waging jihad
Niqab	A cloth that covers the face, except for the eyes, worn by some Muslim women in public or around men non-mahram men; part of the hijab
Shahada	The first of the five pillars of Islam; the testimony or declaration of faith that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah
Sharia/Shariah Law	Islamic law derived from Muhammad via the Sunnah and Quran; regulates public behavior, private behavior, and private beliefs
Shirk	The sin of polytheism, or worshiping anything other than Allah (god)
Sunnah/Sunna	The tradition of Islamic law, based on the verbal transmissions of the words and behavior of Muhammad
Takfiri	The act of a Sunni Muslim accusing another Muslim of apostasy
Takfiri doctrine	The reasoning used to justify violence against non-Muslims to purify the world of unbelievers
Ummah/Umma	The Muslim community

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Within a short period of time, the terrorist organization the Islamic State (IS), also referred to as ISIS, ISIL, and Daesh, has arguably surpassed al Qaida (AQ) as the number-one terrorist threat to U.S. interests, and has been firmly implanted in the U.S. vernacular. As early as January 2015, 70 percent of Americans identified IS as the biggest challenge facing the United States in the Middle East, and the topic of U.S. policy toward IS has been prevalent in the 2016 presidential elections campaigns.

The Islamic State, originally known as Al Qaida in Iraq, broke allegiance from AQ after the death of Osama bin Laden; however, it continued to follow the AQ recruitment doctrine. Reporting from individual recruits indicates IS uses many of the techniques authored and practiced by AQ in its manual *A Course in the Art of Recruiting.* However, AQ recruitment numbers look stark when compared to those of IS. As of September 2015, approximately 25,000 foreign fighters have traveled to fight in Syria or Iraq, a number that tripled in less than a year. United States Government officials continue to estimate the IS fighting force at 20,000–30,000 despite losses from airstrikes estimated at over 10,000, as well as deaths from its ground war offensive.

The foreign fighter surge is not limited to men, with steady stories in the media of young women deserting their families to join IS. Although overall numbers for female recruits are uncertain, within the United States, there have been 66 arrests of IS supporters between January 2014 and September 2015. Ten of those arrests were women. Those cases only represent the number of potential female recruits in which law enforcement intervention resulted in an arrest. The numbers to do not reflect intervention not resulting in arrest or cases where the female was successfully recruited.

How is IS achieving success beyond that of AQ in their recruitment of foreign fighters when they are using the same recruitment manual? The most obvious distinction is the prominent use by IS of the internet and social media specifically. IS has infiltrated the internet, exploiting the technology to spread their message and reach out to those susceptible to radicalization. Sasha Havlicek, director of the think tank Institute for

Strategic Dialogue, has coined the phrase "Brand Caliphate" in reference to the IS online marketing machine.

In conducting a textual analysis of the messaging being disseminated by, or on behalf of, the official IS media wing al-Hayat Media Center, it can be argued that IS has developed targeted messaging toward the genders. Evidence exists to indicate Brand Caliphate attempts to tailor the messaging to appeal to the intended audience, with propaganda varying from gruesome calls to jihad for potential male recruits, to calls to join the sisterhood and raise little Islamic Cubs under the protection of the Caliphate geared toward potential female recruits.

A subsequent study of six cases of recruited, or near-recruited, females surprisingly offered no indication that their radicalization was affected by Brand Caliphate's targeted messaging. In fact, no evidence could be discovered to indicate the women were ever even exposed to the specific propaganda. However, the females examined in the case studies did appear to be affected by the overall marketing of Brand Caliphate, with emphasis on the trendy, jihadi cool status IS has worked to cultivate. Some of the women even showed a positive response to the more traditional male-targeted propaganda. The singular trend that did emerge is despite what peaked the initial interest of the female recruit, ultimately their radicalization was more influenced by the interpersonal communication between the potential recruit and an IS recruiter, despite the fact all of the communication occurred in an online environment. Additionally, the recruits seemed to express a sense of isolation, self-imposed or otherwise, which was alleviated by a sense of belonging to IS.

Consequently, there is evidence to indicate that although there is targeted messaging by Brand Caliphate toward the genders, the broader narrative of Brand Caliphate as being "cool" resonates more with potential recruits. Further, the branding of IS is key for a potential recruit to take the initial steps toward radicalization; however, personal communication remains an important factor in their continued successful radicalization.

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It goes without saying that I would like to thank my colleagues in cohorts 1501/ 1502. I can say without hesitation that as much as I learned from the classes in this program, I learned more from each of you. I am humbled.

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Thank you to my squad and colleagues. You guys covered for me during many long absences and listened patiently and feigned interest when I returned from IRs and told you what I learned.

Thank you to Chris Bellavita. I cannot imagine how many theses have a section with someone thanking you. You care. It is hidden behind the snark. Miss you I will.

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My little man, Jack. I missed a chunk of your young life. I hope some day it will make sense, and you will know this was really for you.

Kip. Thank you. For everything. I love you.

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I.   INTRODUCTION

ISIL blends traditional media platforms, glossy photos, in-depth articles, and social media campaigns that can go viral in a matter of seconds…No matter the format, the message of radicalization spreads faster than we imagined just a few years ago. Social media has allowed groups, such as ISIL, to use the internet to spot and assess potential recruits. With the widespread horizontal distribution of social media, terrorists can identify vulnerable individuals of all ages in the United States—spot, assess, recruit and radicalize…Your grandfather's al Qaeda, if you wanted to get propaganda, you had to go find it. Find where Inspire magazine was and read it. If you want to talk to a terrorist, you had to send an email into Inspire magazine and hope that Anwar al Awlaki would email you back. Now all that's in your pocket. All that propaganda is in your pocket, and the terrorist is in your pocket. You can have direct communication with a terrorist in Syria all day and night, and so the effect of that—especially on troubled minds and kids—it works! It's buzz, buzz, buzz, buzz, buzz. It's the constant feed, the constant touching, so it's very, very different and much more effective at radicalizing than your grandfather's al Qaeda model.

—FBI Director James Comey
July 2015 Congressional Testimony[1]

A.   PROBLEM STATEMENT

How has the Islamic State's (IS) online marketing and establishment of "Brand Caliphate" affected the radicalization and recruitment between the genders? Is there messaging from Brand Caliphate that targets and/or appeals to women as opposed to men, and if so, has that affected the number of women who have been recruited to join IS?

In this thesis, I analyze the online marketing of the Islamic State through the use of textual analysis of its propaganda. The focus of this assessment is on targeted messaging toward each gender and the effect of Brand Caliphate on the radicalization and

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[1] *Threats to the Homeland.* United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. October 8, 2015. Washington, DC (statement of James Comey,
Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation), http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/hearings/threats-to-the-homeland2015.

recruitment between the genders. I study six cases of women who were recruited, or near recruited, to IS to determine if targeted messaging toward women does exist, and if so, did it influence their radicalization.

B.   BACKGROUND

Within a short period of time, the terrorist organization the IS, also referred to as ISIS and ISIL, has arguably surpassed AQ as the number-one terrorist threat to U.S. interests, and has been firmly implanted in the U.S. vernacular. As early as January 2015, 70 percent of Americans identified IS as the biggest challenge facing the United States in the Middle East,[2] and the topic of U.S. policy toward IS has been prevalent in the 2016 presidential election campaigns.

The Islamic State, originally known as Al Qaida in Iraq, broke allegiance from AQ after the death of Osama bin Laden; however, it continued to follow the AQ recruitment doctrine. Anecdotal stories of individual recruits indicate IS uses many of the techniques authored and practiced by AQ in its manual *A Course in the Art of Recruiting.*[3][4] AQ recruitment numbers from inception in 1988 through July 2015 are estimated to be in "the low thousands."[5] These recruits are believed to be mostly men, reflected in an April 2008 audio recording of AQ leader Ayman al-Zawahiri stating that a woman's role is limited to caring for the homes and the children of AQ fighters.[6]

AQ recruitment numbers look stark when compared to those of IS. As of September 2015, approximately 25,000 foreign fighters have traveled to fight in Syria or

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[2] Shibley Telhami, "America Public Attitudes Toward ISIS and Syria," Brookings Institute, January 8, 2105, https://www.brookings.edu/research/american-public-attitudes-toward-isis-and-syria/.

[3] "A Course in the Art of Recruiting," accessed October 25, 2015, https://ia800300.us.archive.org/32/items/ACourseInTheArtOfRecruiting-RevisedJuly2010/A_Course_in_the_Art_of_Recruiting_-_Revised_July2010.pdf.

[4] Pamela Engel, "Here's the Manual That Al Qaeda and Now ISIS Use to Brainwash People Online," Business Insider, accessed July 6, 2015, http://www.businessinsider.com/the-manual-al-qaeda-and-now-isis-use-to-brainwash-people-online-2015-7.

[5] Daniel L. Byman, "Al Qaeda's Growth and Recruitment Strategy," Brookings Institute, December 7, 2010, http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2010/12/07-al-qaeda-byman.

[6] Associated Press, "Al Qaeda to Muslim Extremist Women: Stay Home, Raise Kids," Fox News. May 31, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/story/2008/05/31/al-qaeda-to-muslim-extremist-women-stay-home-raise-kids.html.

Iraq, a number that tripled in less than a year.[7] Although it is not possible to tell how many of those individuals traveled to fight for IS versus other active groups in the area (pro-Syrian, al Nusra Front, etc.), United States government officials continue to estimate its fighting force as steady at 20,000–30,000 despite losses from airstrikes estimated at over 10,000, as well as deaths from its ground war offensive.[8]

The foreign fighter surge is not limited to men, with a number of stories in the media of young women deserting their families to join IS. Although overall numbers for female recruits seem amorphous, the Saudi Ministry of Interior reported at least 46 Saudi women traveled to Syria between 2011 and September 2015.[9] The Obama administration estimates the volume of foreign fighters traveling to Iraq and Syria as approximately 1,000 per month, with more than half of the U.S. recruits believed to be under age 25.[10] Within the United States, there have been 66 arrests of IS supporters between January 2014 and September 2015—10 of those arrests were women.[11]

How is IS achieving success beyond that of AQ in their recruitment of foreign fighters when they are using the same recruitment manual? The most obvious distinction is the prominent use by IS of the internet and social media specific ally. IS has infiltrated the internet, exploiting the technology to spread their message and reach out to those susceptible to radicalization. Sasha Havlicek, director of the think tank Institute for Strategic Dialogue, has coined the phrase "Brand Caliphate"[12] in reference to the IS

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[7]John Katko et al., "Final Report of the Task Force On Combating Terrorist and Foreign Fighter Travel," *Congressional*, September 2015, 12.

[8] Ibid.

[9] "More than Forty Saudi Women Have Joined ISIS in Syria," ARA News, accessed October 25, 2015, http://aranews.net/2015/09/more-than-forty-saudi-women-have-joined-isis-in-syria/.

[10] Kimberly Dozier, "Generation ISIS The Western Millennials Stocking the Terror Army: Obama Officials Acknowledge That 1,000 Foreign Fighters a Month Are Still Traveling to Iraq and Syria—and More Than 50 Percent of U.S. Recruits Are under the Age of 25," Daily Beast, September 28, 2015, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/28/generation-isis-the-western-millennials-stocking-the-terror-army.html.

[11] Katie Zavadski, "The United States of ISIS: More Popular Than Al Qaeda Ever Was," Daily Beast, September 11, 2015, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/11/the-united-states-of-isis.html.

[12] Katrin Bennhold, "Britain Is Losing Against ISIS Recruitment Tactics," *New York Times,* July 29, 2015.

online marketing machine. How this internet-based marketing strategy and propaganda onslaught is effected between the genders remains unclear and requires exploration.

1.   Atmospherics—The Internet as a Propaganda Tool

A significant amount of research and publications exist examining the evolution of terrorism with the advent of the internet. In a study conducted by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in January 2013, Zelin and Fellow[13] define the four phases of the evolution of jihadi media. Phase 1 began in 1984 with traditional hardcopy print media, sermons, and videotapes. This evolved into phase 2 in the mid-1990s, with the establishment of top-down, or domain-based, websites, run by jihadi organizations. In the mid-2000s, this transitioned to phase 3 and the use of interactive forums. By the end of the 2000s this ultimately led to phase 4 and the use of social media platforms. The emergence of social media, also referred to as Web 2.0 applications, has created new opportunities for creating online communities, uniting like-minded users and sharing content.[14] Zelin and Fellow find a correlation between each stage of this evolution, and the adoption of a new medium for the distribution of information. This evolution was seen by Noguchi and Kholmann, who assert in a 2006 report that they found "90 percent of terrorist activity on the internet takes place using social networking tools."[15] For the purpose of their assessment, they define terrorist activity as researching and coordinating attacks, global expansion of their propaganda, recruitment communicating with supporters and sympathizers, and fund-raising.

In a trend that defies Coopers law by exhibiting exponential growth,[16] between 2000 and 2011, internet connectivity in the Middle East grew by approximately 2000 percent, compared with a worldwide growth during the same period of 480 percent. In

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[13] Aaron Zelin and Richard Borow Fellow, "The State of Global Jihad Online," *Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (January 2013):4.

[14] Geoff Dean, Peter Bell, and Jack Newman, "The Dark Side of Social Media: Review of Online Terrorism," *Pakistan Journal of Criminology* 3, no. 3 (2012): 107.

[15] Gabriel Weimann, "Terror on Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 16 (2009): 46.

[16] Coopers law states that the improving ability of wireless networks to utilize spectrum and transmit information doubles every 2.5 years. Richard Bennett, "The Growing Demand for Spectrum," High Tech Forum, accessed July 6, 2015, http://hightechforum.org/the-growing-demand-for-spectrum/.

Pakistan alone, this number skyrocketed 15,000 percent for the same date range.[17] Although most technologically savvy Middle Easterners have nothing to do with Islamic extremism, the misnomer of the jihadist as an archaic entity, eschewing a modern world, is an inaccurate depiction of the state of affairs. As Dr. Manuel R. Torres Soriano, professor of foreign policy and conflict processes at the University of Pablo de Olavide en Sevilla, pointed out:

> Muslims are obliged not only to wage the jihad against the enemies of Islam by taking up the sword (carrying out acts of violence) but also by using the pen (through communication and propaganda). This notion has found increasing favour in terrorist narrative in tandem with the spread of new information technologies, particularly the internet.[18]

This concept of waging online jihad is mirrored by Ashlee Woods, who similarly states, "The War on Terror is a different kind of war. From the beginning, it has been both a battle of arms and a battle of ideas…The War on Terrorism is both a conventional arms war and a transnational ideological movement."[19] The internet has provided a free, easily accessible, and widely available medium to facilitate implementation of this movement.

2.   The Knowledge Gap—Consensus and Debate

Experts agree that the internet provides unique opportunities for terrorist organizations. The ease and anonymity provided through an online medium assists with recruitment, fund-raising, propaganda, internal communications, and training.[20] There has been a lack of discussion and evidence of IS specifically or successfully using the

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[17] John Curtis Amble, "Combating Terrorism in the New Media Environment," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 5 (May 2012): 341, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2012.666819.

[18] Manuel R. Torres Soriano, "Between the Pen and the Sword: The Global Islamic Media Front in the West," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 5 (November 2012): 769, doi:10.1080/ 09546553.2011.643934.

[19] Ashlee Woods, "Terrorists and the internet," *NATO Security through Science Series E Human and Societal Dynamics* 22 (2007): 271.

[20] Catherine A. Theohary et al., *Terrorist Use of the internet: Information Operations in Cyberspace* (Congressional Research Service, Washington, DCDiane Publishing, 2011), 597, http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Oqj50TAhhyoC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=%22Some+agenci es+favor+monitoring+and+surveillance+of+potentially+harmful%22+%22reintroduced+in+some+form+in +the+112th+Congress.+(See+Congressional%22+%22warfare+can+be+defined+as+the+use+of+informati on+technology+and+content%22+&ots=LFMfGTxuCw&sig=CYBRNr9jsueC8T0fo9Nmd02cy9s.

internet as a fund-raising tool. In fact, IS has managed to become one of the richest terrorist organizations in history without having to solicit funds, instead financing their campaign through a combination of seized funds from the Bank of Iraq, oil production on seized lands, and various criminal activities, including credit card fraud, hostage ransoming, extortion, and sales of stolen antiquities.[21] Instead, the internet is where IS has demonstrated proficiency, using online resources and social media sites in particular in its recruitment and propaganda toward the genders. Woods explains the process in which terrorist groups accomplish this online:

> Typical extremist websites' propaganda packages include articles condemning the West, biographies of terrorists killed in battle [or as suicide bombers], biased accounts of the current war, and religious justification for the activities, transcripts of speeches, songs celebrating jihad, public statements from the group, and motivational films [often beheadings, war tapes, bomb detonations, etc…]. Terrorist organizations prey upon and advertise to disenfranchised youth globally by offering a "community-environment" in which recruits can become part of a larger ideological movement. The internet environment facilitates this community feeling and terrorist organizations intentionally use technology to create a sense of global connectedness.[22]

Noted forensic psychologist and terrorism expert Marc Sageman is frequently quoted as having stated, "the internet is now the place disenfranchised youth go to get radicalized instead of the mosque…[terrorists] don't even need the mosque now."[23] However, David Tucker, former professor in the Naval Postgraduate School's (NPS) Department of Defense Analysis, challenges this point. Not only does Tucker call into question Sageman's lack of supporting documentation, he also provides an interesting counterpoint, arguing that the internet has played a role in recruitment and propaganda for terrorist groups, but this has not replaced offline, face-to-face communications and is

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[21] Ashley Fantz, "How ISIS Makes (and Takes) Money," CNN, accessed June 18, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/19/world/how-isis-makes-money/index.html.

[22] Woods, "Terrorists and the internet." 272–273.

[23] Ibid. 273.

not as revolutionary as Sageman claims.[24] In light of the findings detailed in the conclusion of this thesis, Tucker's argument is almost prescient, touching on the importance of interpersonal communication in the radicalization process.

In a June 2015 article in the *Guardian*, Servin and Vamos echoed Tucker's assertion, stating, "No amount of clicking can ever substitute for showing up at a place."[25] Woods take a different stance, describing the terrorist use of the internet as an innovative resource for researching possible targets:

> Deemed a vast digital library, the internet offers valuable information to terrorist organizations. Critical information pertaining to important facilities and networks is available on the internet. Any person, terrorist or otherwise, can freely roam the internet and gain access to such information as maps, diagrams, and operations.[26]

What is the motivation for IS to change the recruitment paradigm and attract significant numbers of women to the cause? Veryan Khan, editorial director of the Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium advises

> there's a priority for the Islamic State to attract females because it offers stability. If you want people to see you as a nation, a legitimate state, it's important to attract females and have them start families. It's not like women are an afterthought. This is a strategic move.[27]

Through the following textual analysis of the propaganda marketed by Brand Caliphate, an attempt will be made to determine if there is in fact targeted messaging and propaganda aimed at women for the purpose of recruitment. Additionally, through an examination of several case studies, an effort will be made to determine if this targeted

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[24] David Tucker, "Jihad Dramatically Transformed? Sageman on Jihad and the internet," *Homeland Security Affairs* 6, no.1 (January 2010): http://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/25056, 5. Tucker states: "Internet images sometimes appear to assist if not initiate the movement to extremism. Chat rooms play a role but rarely are the place terrorists first meet; face-to-face contact predominates. Mosques and other physical gathering places figure more prominently than the internet…the internet appears to be a useful but by no means a transforming or even dominant means of mobilizing recruits for extremism."

[25] The Yes Men via Creative Time Reports, "Technology Supports Movements. But Only Risk-Takers Make Political Change | The Yes Men," *Guardian*, accessed June 20, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/12/technology-political-movements-risk-taking-change.

[26] Woods, "Terrorists and the internet." 274.

[27] Kate Storey, "The American Women of ISIS," *Marie Claire*, April 22, 2016, http://www.marieclaire.com/politics/a20011/western-women-who-join-isis/.

messaging does exist, is it what new female recruits are actually exposed to and responding to.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. THE ISLAMIC STATE

The Islamic State, emerging from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's al Qaida in Iraq , has evolved and established its own identity in the last 11 years. The history of Zarqawi and his relationship with first al Qaida (AQ) leader Osama bin Laden, and following his death, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is well documented in numerous publications. Many of these take a fact-based approach to recording the history of these relationships and their effect on the split of the two groups, while others are more thoughtful in the nuances of these relationships. In particular, Mary Anne Weaver's 2006 article, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi," published in the *Atlantic*,[28] verges on a social identity theory foundation to understanding the distinction between IS and AQ. Once this dynamic and interplay of personalities is understood, a broader understanding of IS becomes possible. Much of the research about the group focuses on easily obtainable open-source reporting and re-reporting failing to delve into the nuances of this particular fundamentalist version of Islam, and in particular, Sharia law. This type of data collection, void of much meaningful analysis, can be seen by the Soufan Group's Richard Barrett, whose report *The Islamic State*[29] provides an excellent resource for facts but falls short of addressing implications. This is in stark contrast to Jay Sekulow, a lawyer whose book, "The Rise of ISIS: A Threat We Can't Ignore,"[30] seems to be full of the author's personal bias and contains little factual information.

A few publications successfully provide an in-depth and thoughtful discussion about the Islamic State. The most notable is another piece published in the *Atlantic.* In March 2015, Graeme Wood published a one-of-a-kind article, "What ISIS Really

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[28] Mary Anne Weaver, "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi," *Atlantic*, August 2006, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/07/the-short-violent-life-of-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/304983/.

[29] Richard Barrett, "The Islamic State" (The Soufan Group, November 2014),. http://soufangroup.com/the-islamic-state/.

[30] Jay Sekulow, *Rise of ISIS: A Threat We Can't Ignore* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

Wants,"[31] which incorporates his personal interviews of IS supporters. Wood uniquely identifies the tenets of the Caliphate, providing insight to the group's ideology. In doing so, Wood also illuminates the motivation and goals of IS. This examination of the base of the IS belief system serves as the foundation for beginning to understand the psychology behind the effective recruitment and radicalization of IS supporters. Perhaps surprisingly, publications in the scholarly realm tend to focus on the Islamic State in relation to U.S. and international policy implications, such as the University of Western Sydney's Andrew Kelly, in his article in *Flinders Journal of History and Politics.* There are a few notable exceptions offering analytical insight into the Islamic State, but these examples seem to straddle the line between scholarly journals and news media. The *Atlantic* articles mentioned earlier would fall into this category, as well as Conor Meleady's piece, "New Caliphate, Old Caliphate" published in London's *History Today.*

B.   TERRORIST USE OF THE INTERNET

There is a large volume and wide array of research and analytical products assessing the evolution of terrorism alongside the internet revolution. Some of the findings from this research are quantitative and quickly become outdated as the technology continues to advance, online platforms continue to evolve, and access to the platforms increases. There are also a number of research pieces that assess the use of the internet by terrorists from a more interpretive perspective, examining the trends and implications of an online society and the opportunities that presents to the modern terrorist organization.

Ashlee Woods's 2007 article "Terrorists and the internet,"[32] despite being several years old on a topic of emerging technology, was a trailblazer in identifying the various ways terrorist organizations can exploit the internet. Woods sets the standard for parsing out online resources for terrorist propaganda, fund-raising, recruitment, networking, and information flow. She also introduces the concept of psychological warfare as a legitimate online tactic. These themes are frequently repeated, and at times expanded

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[31] Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *Atlantic*, March 2015.

[32] Woods, "Terrorists and the internet."

upon, in many subsequent publications. One notable update to Woods's research comes from Manuel Torres Soriano, a scholar who is well known and respected in the community of Islamic Extremism research. Torres Soriano's 2012 publication, "Between the Pen and the Sword: The Global Media Front in the West,"[33] digs into the effect of terrorist organizations pushing their agenda through jihadist propaganda. The article also begins to bridge the gap in exploring the relationship between propaganda and radicalization and recruitment. A similar article, "The Dark Side of Social Media: Review of Online Terrorism"[34] also published in 2012 in the nascent Pakistani National Police Academy's journal *Pakistan Journal of Criminology,* continues this examination by looking at the movement from jihadist web forums to social media, and the subsequent effects on homegrown violent extremists (HVE). Aaron Zelin of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy adds a relevant foundation for assessing the evolution of online jihadism in his article "The State of Global Jihad Online."[35] Zelin develops a framework for tracking the development of online terrorist activity, establishing a four-phase incremental sophistication of terrorist communication that coincides with the available technology. Zelin's unique research establishes phase 1 as traditional printed material and video tapes. This then transitioned into phase 2, comprised of top-down or domain-based websites in the mid-1990s. By the mid-2000s, this had been largely replaced by interactive web forums in phase 3. Finally, the web forums were supplemented in the late 2000s by the introduction and mass adaptation to social media in phase 4. This progression nicely overlaps other existing research to provide context to the relationship between the escalation of the technology and the escalation of the propaganda.

The harmony breaks down and discourse becomes evident in the research when we begin to examine the ultimate effects of the internet on terrorism. In a very public disagreement, David Tucker criticizes terrorism expert Marc Sageman. In his 2008 book *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century,* Sageman asserts that

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[33] Torres-Soriano, "Between the Pen and the Sword."

[34] Geoff Dean, Peter Bell, and Jack Newman, "The Dark Side of Social Media: Review of Online Terrorism," *Pakistan Journal of Criminology* 3, no. 3 (2012): 103–22.

[35] Aaron Zelin and Richard Borow Fellow, "The State of Global Jihad Online" (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2013).

beginning in 2004, terrorist interactions ceased to occur face-to-face and instead began to occur online. He argues that the internet has replaced the mosque as the social gathering point for terrorists, both in a social aspect as well as for logistical purposes.[36] Tucker takes a thoughtful and methodical approach to dismantling Sageman's hypothesis by taking a close look at the cases Sageman provides as evidence.[37] Tucker insinuates that Sageman presented the data in such a manner to give the appearance of supporting his claims. This very public debate depicts opposing points of view on the topic and represents a divide in the assessment of how the internet has affected terrorism. The research seems united and consistent in acknowledging the growing use of the internet by terrorists; however, debate remains regarding how it is used and to what level of success.

One additional outlier in the research comes from David Benson's 2014 article, "Why the internet Is Not Increasing Terrorism,"[38] published in *Security Studies.* Benson presents a counterargument to the majority of available research, positing "although access to the internet has increased across the globe there has been no corresponding increase in completed transnational terrorist attacks…the internet is not a force multiplier for transnational terrorist organizations."[39] Benson claims there is little empirical data to establish a causal relationship between the internet and terrorist attacks. Benson expresses an unpopular opinion, backing himself into a corner by correlating the growth of terrorist organizations with the completion of transnational attacks, while many other researchers broaden the aperture of terrorist activities beyond attacks, and include the previously mentioned categories of fund-raising, recruitment, etc. It seems unlikely, even if we use Benson's metric of a completed transnational attack, that this lack of correlation between internet usage and transnational attacks will remain the case in the next several years.

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[36] Tucker, "Jihad Dramatically Transformed?"

[37] Ibid.

[38] David C. Benson, "Why the internet Is Not Increasing Terrorism," *Security Studies* 23, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 293–328, doi:10.1080/09636412.2014.905353.

[39] Ibid.

C.	THE ISLAMIC STATE'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In contrast to the prevalence of literature surrounding the broader exploration of terrorist use of the internet, there is a small but emerging collection of available research specifically addressing the use of social media by the Islamic State. Much of what is available comes in the form of anecdotal press reporting. There is some value in exploring and collating this material; however, the challenge lies in parsing out circular reporting and identifying credible sourcing. Examining this information may prove useful in collecting data about incidents, but will not likely provide analytical or evaluative insight.

Playing off of the aforementioned Woods article, the National Defense University duo of Heather Vitale and James Keagle apply the foundations to their piece "A Time to Tweet, as Well as a Time to Kill: ISIS's Projection of Power in Iraq and Syria."[40] In this comprehensive paper, Vitale and Keagle identify the four areas of IS online power as military, economic, political, and informational, echoing the findings of Woods minus the aspect of fund-raising. They also break down the structure of IS's use of social media, evaluating the hierarchy of their usage. Vitale and Keagle examine the multi-leveled use of social media, from the official IS media centers to central leadership down to operatives and supporters. Brandeis University professor Jyette Klausen complements this research by examining the role of feeder accounts to disseminate propaganda to large audiences, tackling the aspect of distribution methods.

Perhaps the most comprehensive empirical piece is the Brookings Institute's landmark study, published and briefed to Congress in March 2015, titled "The ISIS Twitter Census."[41] The research focused on the timeframe of September to December 2014 to quantitatively catalog the Islamic State's use of Twitter. The study explored the volume of accounts linked to Islamic State supporters, as well as an evaluation of the geography and gender of users. This evaluation contained an analytical component, as

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[40] Heather Marie Vitale and James M. Keagle, "A Time to Tweet, as Well as a Time to Kill: ISIS's Projection of Power in Iraq and Syria," *Defense Horizons*, no. 77 (2014): 1.

[41] J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter." Brookings Institute, March 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-isis-twitter-census-defining-and-describing-the-population-of-isis-supporters-on-twitter/.

assignment of region and gender is based on non-specific information provided by the user in their profile. (For example, if the user has the title "Umm" she is identified as female.) This unscientific method is necessary as a result of operational security requirements put in place by the Islamic State to limit identifying information, including banning the use of the GPS function on Twitter. The study identified approximately 46,000 accounts linked to the Islamic State, not all of which were active simultaneously. Notably, it was further determined that most IS social media activity can be attributed to a small group (numbering 500–2000) of "hyperactive users" who Tweet in "concentrated bursts of high volume."[42]

Juxtaposing the empirical with the analytical, Catholic University of Milan professor Marco Lombardi provides a lengthy evaluation of the Islamic State's online communication as an asset in his study, "Islamic State Communication Project."[43] Lombardi accomplishes this through multiple case studies, digging into the intended versus actual online messaging and comparing it with the actions taken by the group. He provides case examples across social media platforms. This paper is significant in its evaluative examination of online communication and the effect of violent content on recruitment and radicalization. Lombardi's analysis may help connect the missing piece on the psychology of recruits and the process of radicalization despite exposure to extreme propaganda.

D.   THE ISLAMIC STATE'S RECRUITMENT

There is a general consensus that the Islamic State has taken the principles present in the AQ recruiting manual and modified them for use online. This is perhaps most succinctly articulated in the July 2015 *Business Insider* article titled "Here's the Manual That Al Qaeda and Now ISIS Use to Brainwash People Online."[44] This piece, coupled with the Brookings Institute's 2010 report "Al Qaeda's Growth and Recruitment

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[42] Berger and Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census."

[43] Marco Lombardi, "Islamic State Communication Project," *Security, Terrorism, Society International Journal,* January 2015.

[44] Pamela Engel, "Here's the Manual That Al Qaeda and Now ISIS Use to Brainwash People Online," *Business Insider*, accessed July 6, 2015, http://www.businessinsider.com/the-manual-al-qaeda-and-now-isis-use-to-brainwash-people-online-2015-7.

Strategy,"[45] provides the foundation of modern terrorist recruitment practices. These publications highlight the significant aspect that although the medium may have changed due to the application of the internet, the basic process of recruitment is largely unaltered. If anything, the practice is merely simplified, expedited, and conducted en masse. The majority of the available literature asserts or implies that IS has exponentially outperformed AQ in the category of recruitment, with particular success in recruiting and radicalizing disaffected youth. One notable dissenting voice in the crowd comes from University of North Carolina communications professor Cori Dauber,[46] who argues that too little is known about the recruitment process and the evolution to radicalization to say with any certainty that this is attributable to the online shrewdness of the IS. Dauber argues that absent direct personal interviews with the radicalized individuals, and a more substantial review of the online propaganda, we cannot establish as fact a cause-and-effect relationship.

In addition to the analytical material regarding recruitment, there is an ever-growing pool of case studies documenting individual accounts and personal experiences with IS operatives. This literature appears to come primarily from journalists and takes on one of two perspectives: either the journalist is functioning in a covert capacity and interacting directly with the IS recruiter, or the journalist is interviewing an actual potential recruit regarding his or her experience. Many of the articles provide little insight or information of value, relying instead on the sensationalism of the reporting by focusing on targeting or tactical information obtained in the online exchange with the IS operatives.

There are some notable exceptions. In her June 2015 *New York Times* piece titled "ISIS and the Lonely Young American,"[47] Rukmini Callimachi looks at the personal experience of an isolated 23-year-old woman in rural Washington, her secret conversion to Muslim, and her gradual radicalization. The story is told through a series of interviews

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[45] Daniel L. Byman, "Al Qaeda's Growth and Recruitment Strategy," *The Brookings Institution*, December 7, 2010, http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2010/12/07-al-qaeda-byman.

[46] Cori Dauber, "ISIS and the Family Man," *Small Wars Journal,* July 1, 2015.

[47] Rukmini Callimachi, "ISIS and the Lonely Young American," *New York Times,* June 27, 2015.

with the target and her family, as well as Callimachi's review of the logged online communications. This account is substantial, detailing the mindset of the target as well as the various tactics the recruiter and his associates employed to gradually radicalize and convert the target. This piece provides needed insight into the psychology and vulnerability of potential recruits. It may also illuminate some distinctions between genders as it pertains to tactics of recruiters and traits of potential recruits.

Another noteworthy case study is the book *In the Skin of a Jihadist: A Young Journalist Enters the ISIS Recruitment Network,*[48] authored by a French journalist using the pseudonym Anna Erelle. Despite the author infusing the narrative with additional and unneeded personal details and dramatic effects, the crux of the story is chilling. Erelle details her undercover relationship with a high-level IS commander, Abu Bilel al-Firanzi, which occurred in the months leading up to the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate in June 2014. In documenting her exchanges with al-Firanzi, we witness the persistent, controlling, and at times berating manner in which she is treated. We are also provided a glimpse into the male/female relationships and the status of women in the Islamic State and as defined by Sharia Law. Perhaps most revealing in this story is the underlying, and at times blatant, sexual overtones of the recruiter toward the female target. This book provides a unique glimpse into the dichotomy present in the recruitment of young females. There is an overlapping and sometimes opposing duality of extreme traditional values and practices mixed with sexual urges.

E.   THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RADICALIZATION

Very little research looks directly at the psychology behind the recruitment and radicalization specifically associated with IS. The most relevant research is found in a pair of articles published by journalist Katrin Bennold in the *New York Times*. In the articles, Bennold looks at the phenomena of female recruitment and radicalization in Britain. In her August 2015 article, "Jihad and Girl Power: How ISIS Lured 3 London

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[48] Anna Erelle, *In the Skin of a Jihadist: A Young Journalist Enters the ISIS Recruitment Network* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015).

Girls,"[49] she focuses on the high-profile travel of three Muslim teenage girls from London to Syria to marry and support IS in February 2015. Through interviews of family members and friends, Bennold is able to enlighten on the social aspect of the recruitment process. The article follows shortly after her July 2015 article, "Britain Is Losing Against ISIS Recruitment Tactics."[50] In this article, Bennold examines the idea of "Brand Caliphate" and the marketing success of IS. She is also a lone voice in identifying the important distinction between the view of the Islamic State as a terrorist organization versus the view of the Islamic State as a Caliphate, or independent state actor. We see this dawning realization in one of Bennold's interviews:

> "You wouldn't join a terrorist group unless you agreed with it 100 percent," one senior British official said. "But you can be 100 percent behind the idea of a state and still disagree with some of the things it does." That extends the pool of potential recruits well beyond those who condone beheadings, he said.[51]

In both articles, Bennold broaches the concept that IS has obtained a type of rock star status, and the draw for young people to the group is verging on trendy. She further identifies the uniqueness of the female recruit, establishing the radicalization as a form of empowerment in the eyes of the recruit, who feels shunned and misunderstood in modern Western society.

Bennold's articles dovetail with the work of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, which has published a two-part research series evaluating the draw of women to IS. The first article, "Becoming Mulan: Female Western Migrants to ISIS,"[52] was published in January 2015 and begins to examine the aspects of female travel to the Caliphate and the reality of life once the recruit arrives. The institute's follow-up piece, "Til Martyrdom Do

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[49] Katrin Bennhold, "Jihad and Girl Power How ISIS Lured 3 London Girls," *New York Times*, August 17, 2015.

[50] Katrin Bennhold, "Britain Is Losing Against ISIS Recruitment Tactics," *New York Times*, July 29, 2015.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Carolyn Hoyle, Alexandra Bradford, and Ross Frenett, "Becoming Mulan: Female Western Migrants to ISIS," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, January 2015, http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ISDJ2969_Becoming_Mulan_01.15_WEB.pdf.

Us Part: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon,"[53] is perhaps more applicable, expanding on the first piece and looking at the "push" and "pull" of factors involved in recruitment and dispelling the myth that women are traveling to the Caliphate for the purpose of becoming a jihadi bride. In the papers, the authors ultimately conclude that a broad profile of at-risk females cannot be determined, and females who are susceptible to radicalization are so due to a myriad of diverse reasons. The research was conducted in cooperation with the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), which in January 2009 first addressed the issue of online radicalization in their policy piece, "Countering Online Radicalisation."[54] Although this research predates the current IS-saturated environment and focuses primarily on suggested countermeasures, the document provides a needed baseline and counterpoint for understanding the current state of affairs. In the beginning of the paper, the authors cite research that indicates, "While the internet provides a convenient platform for activists to renew their commitment and reach out to like-minded individuals elsewhere, it is largely ineffective when it comes to drawing in new recruits."[55] During the same timeframe, the Department of Homeland Security published a counterpoint research paper titled, "The internet as a Terrorist Tool for Recruitment and Radicalization of Youth,"[56] which aptly identifies the internet as a "radicalization accelerant." In June 2015, the ICSR followed up with a brief article, "The Roots of Radicalisation: It's Identity Stupid,"[57] which sets the tone for social identity theory's role in the dynamic of radicalization. The article's author, Shiraz Maher, begins to link aspects of the process of radicalization to broader

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[53] Erin Marie Saltman and Melanie Smith, "Till Martyrdom Do Us Part Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, May 2015, http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf.

[54] Tim Stevens and Peter R. Neumann, "Countering Online Radicalisation: A Strategy for Action," International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, January 2009, http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/1236768491ICSROnlineRadicalisationReport.pdf.

[55] Ibid., 13.

[56] Catherine Bott, "The internet as a Terrorist Tool for Recruitment and Radicalization of Youth," White paper. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Science and Technology Directorate, April 24, 2009, http://www.homelandsecurity.org/docs/reports/internet_Radicalization.pdf.

[57] Shiraz Maher, "The Roots of Radicalisation: It's Identity, Stupid," International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, June 23, 2015, http://icsr.info/2015/06/icsr-insight-roots-radicalisation-identity-stupid/.

psychological theories. She argues, "strip away all the grievances and myriad individual triggers that might drive an individual to join an extremist group and you find underlying issues of identity and belonging."[58]

Outside of the previous referenced material pertaining to IS, there exists a vast amount of material available regarding different psychological theories and frameworks to radicalization. Some notable standouts in the field include the husband and wife research team of Alex Wilner and Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz, who take a transformative learning theory approach to understanding radicalization in their research titled "Transformative Radicalization: Applying Learning Theory to Islamist Radicalization."[59] In this paper, they argue that there are identified triggering factors in individuals, which lead a potential recruit to reflect upon their personal belief system and ultimately make a decision about altering their behavior. Another theory-based approach of note is found in William Costanza's doctoral thesis for Georgetown University, "An Interdisciplinary Framework to Assess the Radicalization of Youth Towards Violent Extremism Across Cultures."[60] In this technical research paper, Costanza argues there is no "casual paradigm" of radicalization, and instead uses positioning theory and discursive psychology to understand "how radicalization may occur at the individual level in various sociocultural contexts as a product of lived experience."[61]

An alternate and popular framework is found in the work of Georgetown University professor Fathali Moghaddam and his 2005 publication "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration."[62] In this paper, he takes a social identity theory–based examination of the individual escalation into full radicalization through a

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58 Maher, "The Roots of Radicalisation: It's Identity, Stupid."

59 Alex S. Wilner and Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz, "Transformative Radicalization: Applying Learning Theory to Islamist Radicalization," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 5 (April 20, 2011): 418–38, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2011.561472.

60 William Anthony Costanza, "An Interdisciplinary Framework to Assess the Radicalization of Youth Towards Violent Extremism Across Cultures," 2012, https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/557679.

61 Ibid.

62 Fathali M. Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration," *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2 (2005): 161–69, doi:10.1037/0003-066X.60.2.

series of consecutive steps or "stairs" of increasing commitment to terrorism. Moghaddam explains, "terrorism can best be understood through a focus on the psychological interpretation of material conditions and the options seen to be available to overcome perceived injustices."[63]

Challenging the tendency to define the radicalization process in linear terms, the Naval Postgraduate School's Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins have developed a puzzle-based approach to examining radicalization.[64] Hafez and Mullins assert

> The attempt to shift the focus away from profiling extremists to profiling the radicalization pathways they take…has failed to yield a conclusive model of radicalization…we have the piece of the puzzle, but we lack the representative image that informs us how best to put them together. The pieces of the puzzle consist of grievances, networks, ideologies and enabling environments and support structures. Each piece of the puzzle can come in a different representation just like similarly structured jigsaw puzzles could reveal diverse images once their pieces are interconnected.[65]

What is left to be determined is the applicability of these models when the radicalization and commitment is to a group that supporters identify as a legitimate government entity.

F.   ANALYZING THE DATA

Jeffrey Bardzell, associate professor of informatics at Indiana University Bloomington, states, "Discourse analysis is a scientific and empirical strategy of textual analysis."[66] For the purpose of this thesis, the terms "discourse analysis" and "textual analysis" will be used interchangeably. The amount of available, detailed, and academic literature regarding discourse analysis is massive. There is also a large array of frameworks and methods available to conduct the type of analysis required by this thesis.

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[63] Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism," 161.

[64] Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 11 (November 2, 2015): 958–75, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2015.1051375.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Jeffrey Bardzell, "Discourse Analysis vs. Close Reading," *Interaction Culture*, March 24, 2009, https://interactionculture.wordpress.com/2009/03/24/discourse-analysis-vs-close-reading/.

Narrowing the scope of the framework to using a textual-analysis approach still left many available options. Ole B. Jensen, professor of urban theory at Aalborg University in Denmark discusses the numerous available discourse analysis frameworks and methods:

> The question is, whether it is possible to make a coherent approach to discourse analysis on the background of these various and very different theoretical and analytical approaches? There exists many incommensurabilities at the ontological level of the theories.… So it is maintained that a discourse analysis is an analysis of the power-rationality configuration of particular practices and meaning-relations. The agents and institutions must be considered, as well the hermeneutic practice of interpreting documents and actions.[67]

In an effort to refine the search for a useful and workable framework, I searched for examples of textual analyses similar to content and medium as this thesis. The results yielded a study conducted by Professor Esther Solis Al-Tabaa from the University of Texas at El Paso. In her article, "Targeting a Female Audience: American Muslim Women's Perceptions of al-Qaida Propaganda," Al-Tabaa examines the effect of al-Qaida's propaganda on women using textual analysis.[68] Al-Tabaa selected the framework designed by Dr. Garth Jowett, University of Houston, and Victoria O'Donnell, Montana State University, in their popular book *Propaganda and Persuasion.*[69] In this book, Jowett and O'Donnell detail a 10-step framework for conducting discourse analysis of propaganda.[70] This framework ultimately provided a rigorous but scoped method to apply in this thesis, focusing on propaganda as the form of communication being evaluated.

G.   CONCLUSION

A review of the literature indicates there is a significant volume of literature available regarding IS and its use of the internet and social media as a propaganda and

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[67] Ole B. Jensen, *Discourse Analysis & Socio-Spatial Transformation Processes: A Theoretical Framework for Analysing Spatial Planning* (Newcastle, UK: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1997).

[68] Esther Solis Al-Tabaa, "Targeting a Female Audience: American Muslim Women's Perceptions of Al-Qaida Propaganda," *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no. 5 (2013): 10.

[69] Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Thousand Oaks, CA,SAGE Publications, March 4, 2014).

[70] Ibid.

recruitment tool. There is a growing pool of research surrounding how this use affects recruitment. Further, there is a vast amount of broad-based research regarding the psychology of radicalization and recruitment, but there is very little data specific to the successful recruitment strategy of IS. A number of products have been published that begin to explore the recruitment of women as IS supporters and operatives, but an information gap exists in exploring the differences in this process between men and women.

Much of the available literature approaches the topic of radicalization and recruitment from different backgrounds and frameworks; however, there appear to be two common themes between the research and analysis. The first is that there is no profile of a potential recruit. Radicalization is not a one-size-fits-all process. The second is that there is a social aspect to being susceptible to recruitment. Whether this comes in the form of perceived injustice or isolation, the underlying draw is a sense of belonging and community.

In this thesis I use the background and context outlined earlier to conduct a textual analysis, providing a foundation and framework in which IS propaganda can be evaluated and ultimately making a reasonable determination as to the likelihood that targeted propaganda toward the genders exists. Further, through the examination of select case studies of recruited or near-recruited females, I will examine how or if this propaganda relates to their radicalization. By knowing if there is targeted propaganda toward the genders and what role it plays in the radicalization of women, we can better tailor an effective response to mitigate further instances of radicalization.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

This is an evaluation of the effect of the Islamic State's online marketing machine on their recruitment and how their messaging has affected this recruitment by gender. This leads to two questions: Is there in fact targeted messaging toward females being disseminated by the IS propaganda machine, and if so, does that targeted messaging influence the radicalization and recruitment of females to IS?

B. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Evaluating data as amorphous and voluminous as the propaganda disseminated by IS creates numerous challenges. Patrick von Maravic, professor at Zeppelin University in Germany, highlights the "consequences of researching difficult-access problems for doing multi-method research."[71] Von Maravic focuses on the difficulty of conducting research on a subject who is not cooperating with the evaluation. He explains the problem as resulting in

> scientific inquiry that follows the conventional paradigm of professionalism, transparency, and replicable research reaches its limits when confronted with the active resistance of phenomena that do not like to be observed, understood, or critically approached. From this flows, the necessity to think about interdisciplinary, collaborative, and investigative modes of research that come with various prices.[72]

Acknowledging the limitations presented by von Maravic when analyzing a terrorist organization, this thesis will focus on using textual analysis of IS propaganda. Professor Alan McKee of the University of Technology in Sydney, Australia, examines the definition of textual analysis, describing it as

> a methodology—a data-gathering process—for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and

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[71] Patrick von Maravic, "Limits of Knowing or the Consequences of Difficult-Access Problems for Multi-Method Research and Public Policy," *Policy Sciences* 45, no. 2 (June 2012): 153–68, doi:10.1007/ s11077-012-9147-9.

[72] Ibid.

subcultures make sense of who they are, and how they fit into the world in which they live…when we perform textual analysis on text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text…in order to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them.[73]

This thesis will use the 10-step plan of propaganda analysis developed by Dr. Garth Jowett, professor of communications at the University of Houston, and Dr. Victoria O'Donnell, professor emeritus at Montana State University-Bozeman.[74] Jowett and O'Donnell published the sixth edition of their popular book, *Propaganda and Persuasion,* in 2014, which was First published in 1986.

In determining a model for use in conducting textual analysis of IS propaganda, I located prior academic research conducted on the propaganda of al-Qaida. When authoring her research and analysis for her paper "Targeting a Female Audience: American Muslim Women's Perceptions of al-Qaida Propaganda," Professor Esther Solis Al-Tabaa of the University of Texas at El Paso used the Jowett and O'Donnell model.[75] In his 1999 review of Jowett and O'Donnell's model, Dr. Phil Harris of the Centre for Corporate and Public Affairs at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School highlights the popularity of the model. Harris identifies the Jowett and O'Donnell's approach as "almost the standard text in the area."[76] He highlights the model as particularly useful in providing "insight both into the reality and evil of how propaganda can be used as a powerful communication tool."[77]

Through the use of Jowett and O'Donnell's 10-step model, I will analyze IS propaganda, focusing primarily on the messaging distributed by their official al-Hayat Media Center, to determine if they are producing targeted messaging toward potential female recruits.

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[73] Alan McKee, *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide* (London, UK:SAGE Publications, 2003).

[74] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion.*

[75] Al-Tabaa, "Targeting a Female Audience."

[76] Phil Harris, "Propaganda and Persuasion Book Review" (Manchester Metropolitan University Business School, 1999), www.phil-harris.com/wp-content/uploads/Phil-Harris-bookreviews_JCM1.pdf.

[77] Ibid.

C. CASE STUDIES

This thesis will then attempt to determine the effect of the IS propaganda machine, referred to throughout as Brand Caliphate, on individual females who were recruited or near-recruited to IS. Cases will be selected based on available open-source material containing sufficient information regarding the females' online activity and insight into any possible exposure to Brand Caliphate. Through an examination of these females and their stories of recruitment, we will attempt to determine the role and affect, if any, of Brand Caliphate in their radicalization.

D. LIMITATIONS

There are significant limitations that must be acknowledged in this thesis. In particular, when examining the case examples, this thesis is limited to publicly available reporting. Much of this information is collected from the subjects directly or others who they knew. Due to potential embarrassment, biases, and societal perceptions, the reporting may not be wholly accurate. The existence of additional online activity by the subjects in the case examples cannot be ruled out. Without full forensic examinations and exploitation of their electronic devices, we cannot have a true, unbiased view of their online activity. Further, there is no way, forensically or otherwise, to account for direct communications occurring in either direct online video calls or encrypted messaging. There is also no method by which to verify that the online accounts attributed to the individuals examined in the case studies were truly owned and used by them alone. For the purpose of this thesis and conducting the analysis contained within, the information evaluated is presumed to be credible. As a consequence of this limitation, the textual analysis can only be applied to the propaganda disseminated by, or on behalf of, IS through al-Hayat Media Center. The textual analysis cannot be directly applied to the women in the case studies, as there is insufficient available information to conduct the analysis.

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IV. EVALUATING THE PROPAGANDA

A. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Analysis of IS propaganda must be conducted prior to determining whether or not a cause-and-effect relationship exists between the distributed messaging of Brand Caliphate and the number of females recruited to join IS. Does IS produce intentional, targeted messaging toward women for the purpose of facilitating their radicalization? In the absence of direct acknowledgment from the purveyor of the propaganda, in this case IS leadership, the best available method to make a determination is through textual analysis of the propaganda itself.

Dr. Manuel R. Torres Soriano, professor of foreign policy and conflict processes at the University of Pablo de Olavide en Sevilla, describes the calling by Muslims to jihad:

> Muslims are obliged not only to wage the jihad against the enemies of Islam by taking up the sword (carrying out acts of violence) but also by using the pen (through communication and propaganda). This notion has found increasing favour in terrorist narrative in tandem with the spread of new information technologies, particularly the internet.[78]

This concept of waging online jihad is mirrored by Ashlee Woods, who similarly states, "The War on Terror is a different kind of war. From the beginning, it has been both a battle of arms and a battle of ideas…The War on Terrorism is both a conventional arms war and a transnational ideological movement."[79] The internet has provided a free, easily accessible, and widely available medium to facilitate implementation of this movement.

Experts agree that the internet provides unique opportunities for terrorist organizations. The ease and anonymity provided through an online medium assists with recruitment, fund-raising, propaganda, internal communications, and training.[80] There

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[78] Manuel R. Torres Soriano, "Between the Pen and the Sword."

[79] Ashlee Woods, "Terrorists and the internet," 271.

[80] Theohary et al., *Terrorist Use of the internet: Information Operations in Cyberspace*, 597.

has been a lack of discussion and evidence of IS specifically or successfully using the internet as a fund-raising tool. In fact, IS has managed to become one of the richest terrorist organizations in history without having to solicit funds, instead financing their campaign through a combination of seized funds from the Bank of Iraq, oil production on seized lands, and various criminal activities, including credit card fraud and hostage ransoming, extortion, and sales of stolen antiquities.[81] However, IS has become proficient at using online resources and social media sites in particular in its recruitment and propaganda through the establishment of Brand Caliphate. Woods explains the process in which terrorist groups accomplish this online:

> Typical extremist websites' propaganda packages include articles condemning the West, biographies of terrorists killed in battle [or as suicide bombers], biased accounts of the current war, and religious justification for the activities, transcripts of speeches, songs celebrating jihad, public statements from the group, and motivational films [often beheadings, war tapes, bomb detonations, etc…]. Terrorist organizations prey upon and advertise to disenfranchised youth globally by offering a "community-environment" in which recruits can become part of a larger ideological movement. The internet environment facilitates this community feeling and terrorist organizations intentionally use technology to create a sense of global connectedness.[82]

In their article published in the Institute for National Strategic Studies' *Defense Horizons* journal, Vitale and Keagle assess IS's skillset in handling "the dissemination of information and propaganda is perhaps its greatest strength, and strongest contribution to its growth of power."[83] They further assert that through their use of social media "as a weapon of war," IS campaigns have "the benefit of being widespread and multidimensional, bearing a massive effect."[84] This chapter will examine the content and intent of this propaganda, and what, if any, separate effect it has had on women.

Jowett and O'Donnell developed a 10-step plan that identifies the following categories of consideration when conducting propaganda analysis:

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[81] Fantz, "How ISIS Makes (and Takes) Money."

[82] Woods, "Terrorists and the internet." 272–273

[83] Vitale and Keagle, "A Time to Tweet, as Well as a Time to Kill."

[84] Ibid.

- identification of ideology and purpose

- identification of context

- determining the propagandist

- investigation of the structure of the organization responsible for the propaganda

- identification of who is being targeted

- understanding of the media techniques used by the propagandist

- analysis of any special techniques used to increase the desired effect

- analysis of audience reaction

- identification and analysis of counterpropaganda

- completion of an assessment and evaluation.[85]

The cumulative collection of IS propaganda available for consideration of such analysis is staggering. The implementation of a constant social media presence by recognized IS media centers, as well as contributions from operatives, sympathizers and those simply finding IS to be an online trend to contribute to, creates a sample size of data beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, the following propaganda analysis will apply Jowett and O'Donnell's 10-step process and will focus primarily on communications issued from or sponsored by the recognized IS media center, al-Hayat Media Center, which functions as the official purveyor of Brand Caliphate and is considered "the central body of all ISIS's media endeavors."[86]

1.   Step 1—The Ideology and Purpose of the Propaganda Campaign

The purpose of Brand Caliphate is simple. The propaganda campaign is intended to control the narrative. In doing so, the group is able to define their image and the story line, regardless of the facts. Landon Shroder writes about this on Vice News, suggesting

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[85] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion,* 270.

[86] Jett Goldsmith, "How the Islamic State's Massive PR Campaign Secured Its Rise," *Bellingcat*, February 11, 2015.

Brand Caliphate has allowed IS to "situate themselves at the center of a worldwide conversation on religion, politics, and war" and suggests the frequently violent content:

> has a twofold propaganda value: IS is not only defining exactly who they are, but who they are not as well, which resonates with a select group of people who equate extreme violence with power. More importantly, the brutality automatically narrows down the viewing audience, allowing the message to specifically target those who might be susceptible to radicalization.[87]

In controlling the narrative, IS has accomplished a campaign of steady recruitment. This has either come in the form of radicalized supporters willing to travel to Syria to conduct jihad or local sympathizers willing to conduct attacks in their region or simply express their support via social media.

All of the propaganda, narrative, and resulting recruitment are part of a larger effort to support, maintain, and legitimize the establishment of the Caliphate. In his article in the *Atlantic*, investigative journalist and contributing editor Graeme Wood states, "The reality is that the Islamic State is Islamic. Very Islamic." Wood continues:

> much of what the group does looks nonsensical except in light of a sincere, carefully considered commitment to returning civilization to a seventh-century legal environment, and ultimately to bringing about the apocalypse. The most-articulate spokesmen for that position are the Islamic State's officials and supporters themselves. They refer derisively to "moderns." In conversation, they insist that they will not—cannot— waver from governing precepts that were embedded in Islam by the Prophet Muhammad and his earliest followers.[88]

Brand Caliphate's sophisticated use of propaganda is merely a means to an end; a tool with which to assist in the ultimate goal of a prophesized apocalypse brought on through jihad. Jowett and O'Donnell make a distinction between two types of propaganda: integration propaganda, which "attempts to maintain the positions and interests represented by 'officials' who sponsor and sanction the propaganda messages," and agitation propaganda, which "seeks to arouse people to participate in or support a

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[87] Landon Shroder, "The Islamic State's Propaganda War," Vice News, July 14, 2015.

[88] Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," 3.

cause."[89] Through the al-Hayat Media Center, IS appears to be pursuing both of these motivations.

There are various motivations for targeting females for recruitment to IS through propaganda. The most obvious purpose for targeting women for recruitment is to maintain the population of the Caliphate. Women are seen as necessary to procreate and are often viewed as rewards for jihadist fighters, who may maintain multiple families with multiple wives.[90]

Mia Bloom, professor of communication at Georgia State University, suggests an additional and less obvious purpose for a targeted propaganda campaign toward women. Bloom claims terrorist organizations in general, and IS in particular, will continue to see more women recruits because

> every single group at the outset always says "we don't need women." Then at some point they actually do. They use women strategically if they're having a problem recruiting men. Because society has rigid perceptions of masculinity, they taunt the idea of women doing the fighting and men staying at home, shaking in their boots, to provoke a response. So when you start recruiting women, you tap into another 50 percent of the population, but you also guilt and shame men into stepping up.[91]

Although IS does not seem to be plagued by low male-recruitment numbers, Bloom argues the motivation remains. As IS suffers losses due to coalition military strikes, the importance to replace and maintain the number of male fighters remains a priority. Recruiting women may be a means to an end; motivating other male recruits and offering opportunities for population growth through procreation.

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[89] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion,* 271.

[90] Eric Tucker, "How ISIS Is Recruiting a Growing Following of Young Women," PBS, December 6, 2015, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/how-isis-is-recruiting-a-growing-following-of-young-women/.

[91] Mia Bloom, "Why ISIS Is Recruiting Women," Vice, accessed July 12, 2016, https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/why-isis-is-recruiting-women.

2. Step 2—The Context in which the Propaganda Occurs

Jowett and O'Donnell describe this step as assessing "the climate of the times…expected states of the world social system…the prevailing public mood." They further stress the need to provide historical context in an effort to more accurately analyze propaganda. What is the environment that has allowed, and even fostered, a group such as IS to flourish?

Looking at this question from a broad perspective, we gain insight into the context in the second edition of *Dabiq* magazine, which addresses its target audience of Muslims by chiding them for any perception of Western values and the concept of free choice. It states,

> until we return to the correct state of Islamic affairs, it's upon us all to work together to eradicate the principle of "free choice,"…Rather, we must confront them with the fact that they've turned away from the religion, while we hold onto it, grasping its purity, its clarity, its comprehensiveness, without any blemishes due to shirk…and that we are completely ready to stand in the face of anyone who attempts to divert us from our commitment to making the religion of Allah triumphant over all other religions, and that we will continue to fight the people of deviation and misguidance until we die trying to make the religion triumphant.

This quote provides a succinct synopsis of the context of the current world environment as perceived by IS, and in doing so also provides insight to their motivation. The group espouses disdain for concepts viewed as highly valued by most Westerners, including moderate Muslims. Statements such as these clearly define the IS In Group, setting the standard and expectations of those who choose to align with the group. During the October 2015 Women in the World summit, Sara Khan, founder of the women's human rights organization Inspire, stated, "The issue of identity is central in all of this; that Muslims don't belong."[92]

This idea of a lack of belonging becomes more complicated when evaluating the context in the framework of targeting women. The context for women contains different considerations and nuances beyond that of simply being the brand of devout Muslim

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[92] Robert Wainright, "ISIS Has Understood the 'Female Factor' Better than the West, Expert Says, *New York Times—WITW*, October 9, 2015.

described earlier. Henry Gass notes in the *Christian Science Monitor* that IS "appeal[s] to young Muslim women to turn their backs on the West for a more 'authentic' life."[93] Gass's explanation overgeneralizes a very complicated scenario.

Christian Science Monitor staff writer Warren Richey has expressed an understanding of the more complicated factors surrounding women and radical Islam. He states

> they aren't just fulfilling what they see as a religious duty. Their motives also reflect a counterculture revolt among Muslim women and girls who refuse to live as second-class citizens in the west…For them, it is suddenly both dangerous and cool to be a particular kind of Muslim. And that attraction can be irresistible.[94]

Dr. Erin Saltman of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue echoes this, describing a "subculture punk movement" that is "secretive…empowering…against tradition and norms…you can see a bit of youth counterculture involved."[95] Brand Caliphate has become trendy. As paradoxical as it seems, the draw for young women to have the freedom to practice their brand of Islam outside of the scrutiny of Western judgment is powerful. Whether perceived or legitimate, the perception of being an outsider in the Western world is a motivating factor and the decision to support IS is repeatedly described as empowering in this context.

Norwegian journalist Mah-Rukh Ali cautions us about possible implications of empathizing with the experiences of potential recruits. Ali urges, "there is a real danger that the humanizing effect of seeking reasons behind the brutalities can ultimately play directly into ISIS's own propaganda, by creating an empathetic quality, a sense of understanding that serves to encourage potential recruits to join."[96]

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[93] Henry Gass, "What If ISIS Were Run by Women? In Mississippi, a Glimpse," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 30, 2016.

[94] Warren Richey, "What Draws Women to ISIS," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 1, 2015.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Mah-Rukh Ali, "ISIS and Propaganda: How ISIS Exploits Women," Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2015, https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Isis%20and%20Propaganda-%20How%20Isis%20Exploits%20Women.pdf.

3. Step 3—Identification of the Propagandist

Vitale and Keagle identifies IS's "masterful understanding of effective propaganda and social media use, producing a multidimensional global campaign across multiple platforms."[97] The al-Hayat Media Center is the hub of these communications and propaganda. Due to the nature of IS and a lack of transparency into its actions, it is assumed the al-Hayat Media Center answer to and are funded and sanctioned by IS central leadership.[98] Al-Hayat Media Center is responsible for the production and distribution of the highly styled videos and magazines published on behalf of IS and holds accounts associated with leadership on Twitter for official announcements.[99] The center is also a hub of information, with a scrolling visual effect on its homepage highlighting supportive Tweets.

In an attempt to legitimize the organization and provide brand recognition, the Center's logo closely resembles that of the legitimate Qatari-based network news organization, al Jazeera; see Figure 1.[100] Al-Hayat Media Center is supplemented with numerous other IS media efforts, including al-Battar Media Group, the al-Furqaan Foundation, and many other local sites; however, it is the al-Hayat Media Center that is seen as the primary source for targeting Westerners for recruitment and radicalization.[101] When discussing Brand Caliphate, A. Agron of the Middle East Media Research Institute points out, "little is known about the inner workings of the ISIS media complex, however, it can be assumed that it is the senior ISIS officials who wield the power, functioning as the puppeteers pulling the strings and manipulating the online activists."[102]

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[97] Vitale and Keagle, "A Time to Tweet, as Well as a Time to Kill."

[98] Jared Cohen, "Digital Counterinsurgency," *Foreign Affairs.* 94 (2015): 52.

[99] Vitale and Keagle, "A Time to Tweet, as Well as a Time to Kill," 7.

[100] Steve Rose, "The Isis Propaganda War: A Hi-Tech Media Jihad," *Guardian*, October 7, 2014, sec. World News.

[101] Cohen, "Digital Counterinsurgency"; Vitale and Keagle, "A Time to Tweet, as Well as a Time to Kill," 7.

[102] A. Agron, "Online Women Activists of the Islamic State—Where Are They Now?," MEMRI—Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor, April 18, 2016, http://www.memrijttm.org/online-women-activists-of-the-islamic-state-where-are-they-now.html.

Figure 1. Left: Al Jazzera Logo[103]; Right: al-Hayat Logo[104]

We should exercise caution in making the assumption that the IS propagandist, even when produced, directed, distributed, or sanctioned by Al-Hayat, is a male. Although restricted in their freedoms within the Caliphate, the voice and influence of females on Brand Caliphate remains unknown. Amy Wharton, professor of sociology at Washington State University, argues that we tend to have a bias in assuming patriarchy, or at least patriarchal roles, within an agency.[105] Acknowledging this bias as present, it can simply be said the internal workings, and the role of women within Al-Hayat, remain a mystery.

4. Step 4—The Structure of the Propaganda Organization

Al-Hayat (meaning "the Life") is just one arm of a multi-tentacled media outreach campaign. Jared Cohen, adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, details this in his article in *Foreign Affairs*. Cohen notes

> ISIS resembles something akin to a corporation. On the ground in Iraq and Syria, a highly educated leadership sets its ideological agenda, a managerial layer implements this ideology, and a large rank and file

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103 Source: "Aljazeera Logo English," Al Jazeera, digital image, accessed July 13, 2016. http://logok.org/al-jazeera-logo/.

104 Source: "Al-Hayat Media Center English Logo," Al-Hayat Media Center, digital image, accessed July 13, 2016. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Al-Hayat_Media_Center-english-logo.png.

105 Amy S. Wharton, "Structure and Agency in Social-Feminist Theory," *Gender and Society* 5, no. 3 (September 1991).

contributes fighters, recruiters, videographers, jihadist wives, and people with every other necessary skill. This hierarchy is replicated online, where ISIS operates as a pyramid consisting of four types of digital fighters.

Cohen identifies the top of the digital hierarchy as the central command of their operations. Although not stated outright, this can be equated to the al-Hayat Media Center as the entity who is highly organized, "gives orders and provides resources for disseminating content."[106] He then describes the hierarchy's second level as pushers of the propaganda, the individuals responsible for the mass dissemination of the material. Specifically for IS, this translates to a small army of Twitter users.

Evidence of this second level activity can be found in a landmark study published in March 2015 by the Brookings Institute. The study charted statistical data associated with IS Twitter accounts dating from September to December 2014. During that period, the study identified at least 46,000 Twitter accounts that were used by IS supporters, although all of the accounts were not active simultaneously. The institute was further able to determine that most IS social media activity can be attributed to a small group (numbering 500–2000) of "hyperactive users" who Tweet in "concentrated bursts of high volume." This finding supports the claims of Vitale and Keagle, who studied IS hashtag campaigns (with a focus on the campaign #AllEyesOnISIS) and found that approximately "20 percent of the tweet volume in a given period belongs to a base number of users."[107]

Cohen identifies the third level of the hierarchy as the radical sympathizers, those who are persuaded by the propaganda, whom he identifies as the "digital fighter."[108] This group will be further examined in step five, the target audience.

Cohen describes the final level of the hierarchy as "non-human…programmable army," or artificial automated accounts. These are false accounts created by members of the second tier for the purpose of mass dissemination and the misperception of a greater volume of contributors than actually exists. This is accomplished through the use of

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[106] Cohen, "Digital Counterinsurgency."

[107] Vitale and Keagle, "A Time to Tweet, as Well as a Time to Kill," 8.

[108] Cohen, "Digital Counterinsurgency."

technology, including Twitter bots. Twitter bots are, according to the *New Yorker*, "essentially, computer programs that tweet of their own accord."[109]

5.   Step 5—The Target Audience

Determining the target audience for Brand Caliphate and al-Hayat Media center can only be supposition at best, without confirmation from the producers of such material as to their intended audience. Jowett and O'Donnell identify the target audience as "the audience most likely to be useful to the propagandist if it responds favorably."[110] The term to parse out of this definition is the word "favorably." It must be considered that there are in fact two target audiences intended to have a favorable reaction to the material distributed by IS—one being potential recruits or sympathizers, the other being the enemies of IS. Moreover, for each of the groups, the term "favorable" necessarily means something different.

For example, in September 2014 IS released their 55-minute-long video titled *The Flames of War: Fighting Has Just Begun.* The opening scene is shown in Figure 2. The video is narrated by an IS fighter speaking English, in what sounds like an American dialect. The film depicts the gory siege of what is now the IS capital city of Raqqah, from the Syrian Army, which at one point is shown digging their own graves before being shot and falling into the pit. At the conclusion, Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi refers to the United States as the "defender of the cross" and claims the group will force the United States into "direct confrontation."[111] Clearly, the "favorable" response by the target audience to this particular piece of propaganda would be to intimidate, or possibly incite, the United States and its Western allies. However, a secondary targeting effect was seen as the video served to entice IS recruits and supporters. For example, former Illinois national guardsman Hasan Edmonds and his cousin Jonas Edmonds both pled guilty in December 2015 of a plot to attack the Joliet Armory with small arms in support of IS, hoping to kill up to 150 people. In online conversations with an undercover FBI agent,

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[109] Rob Dubbin, "The Rise of Twitter Bots," *New Yorker*, November 14, 2013.

[110] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion,* 275.

[111] Ryan Mauro, "ISIS Releases 'Flames of War' Feature Film to Intimidate West," *The Clarion Project*, September 21, 2014.

Hasan Edmonds was quoted as saying he and Jonas would travel to the Caliphate, or else they would "bring the ***flames of war*** to the heart od [sic] this land with Allah's permission" (emphasis added). The reference to the propaganda video provides evidence that the material had two target audiences. What remains unclear is whether this was intended by IS or a fortuitous unintended consequence.

Figure 2. Flames of War[112]

There is another side of Brand Caliphate, which appears intended to appeal to females. One viral Twitter account depicts armed jihadists with cats.[113] The account, the "Islamic State of Cats," is just one of numerous accounts on Facebook and Twitter that attempt to depict the softer side of the Caliphate (see Figure 3). It remains unknown, but appears likely, whether these accounts are being directed from IS leadership as part of their official media campaign.

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[112] Source: "Flames of War ISIS New Video Released," Al-Hayat Media Center, digital image, December 8, 2014. https://sungermedia.wordpress.com.

[113] James Vincent, "'I Can Haz Islamic State Plz': Isis Propaganda on Twitter Turns to Kittens and Lolspeak," *Independent News*, August 21, 2014. http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/isis-propaganda-on-twitter-turns-to-kittens-and-lolspeak-i-can-haz-islamic-state-plz-9683736.html.

Figure 3.   ISIL Cats[114]

6.   Step 6—Media Utilization Techniques

IS has demonstrated a proficiency for using numerous platforms in various ways. Beyond their saturation of Twitter, IS uses the application as a distribution method to push out copies of their official propaganda produced through al-Hayat Media Center. Newly published items, including issues of *Dabiq* and Hollywood-like videos, are initially posted by al-Hayat Media Center and then mass-distributed by Cohen's second-level hierarchy, often via Tweeting and re-Tweeting the attachments.

Tweeting and re-Tweeting allow for saturation of various types of media to a large audience. From the magazines to stylized scripted videos resembling a *Frommer*'s

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[114] James Vincent, "Islamic State of Cats," *Independent,* digital image, August 21, 2104. http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/isis-propaganda-on-twitter-turns-to-kittens-and-lolspeak-i-can-haz-islamic-state-plz-9683736.html.

guide video to copies of key IS personnel giving speeches, the propaganda is produced and distributed via social media to Cohen's third-level hierarchy. This is in addition to those susceptible to radicalization, including women. As Vitale and Keagle assess:

> ISIS employs its communications and social media campaigns in an exceptionally professional and sophisticated manner. Its propaganda, recruitment, and information operations are well conceived, slickly produced, and strategically circulated. The group has constructed interdependent networks for fast, real-time responses, and…displays a clever understanding of the media, allowing for innovation, manipulation, and exploitation of the message. The group's immensely effective digital jihadist campaign set the new precedent for Islamic groups worldwide.[115]

7.   Step 7—Special Techniques to Maximize Effect

Jowett and O'Donnell break this section into several suggested subcategories, identifying examples of identifiable techniques as "links to values, beliefs, attitudes, and past behavior patterns of the target audience."[116]

a.   *Source Credibility and Opinion Leaders*

The propaganda disseminated by the al-Hayat Media Center, by virtue of their status as the official media representative of IS, is instilled with credibility. The material published by the center is sanctioned by IS leadership and represents their official outreach. This provides an innate reliability to the information being produced. Indeed, propaganda originating from al-Hayat Media includes actual propaganda from IS leadership, including videos and statements from individuals believed to be high ranking in the organization. IS spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani regularly uses al-Hayat Media Center as a mechanism to release messages to supporters.[117]

When specifically examining the targeting of women, often the credibility of the sourcing—and in fact the opinion leaders—comes from other women within the organization. For example, in February 2015 IS published a manual online titled *Hijrah*

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[115] Vitale and Keagle, "A Time to Tweet, as Well as a Time to Kill," 6.

[116] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion,* 280.

[117] Daniel Milton and Muhammad al-' Ubaydi, "CTC Perspectives—Al-Adnani's Paradox: Projecting Strength While Feeling Fear," October 16, 2015. https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/ctc-perspectives-al-adnanis-paradox-projecting-strength-while-feeling-fear.

to the Islamic State, designed as an English language "how to" guide for Westerners who want to join IS.[118] Listed in the manual are three online accounts to contact for assistance in traveling to Syria. One of them, Umm Waqqas, is believed to belong to a woman. She is thought to have been one of the contacts with whom three Denver teenage girls maintained online prior to departing in October 2014 in an attempt to travel to Syria and join IS.[119] German authorities at Frankfurt International Airport ultimately intercepted the teens after one of their fathers contacted the FBI.[120]

The evolution of women recruiting women online appears to legitimize the recruitment process. After all, who is more credible to a possible female recruit than someone who has already had the same experience? In an insightful article published in the Colorado College independent newspaper, author Jackson Paine notes:

> The social media aspect of the IS recruitment effort opens what had been a male-dominated world to females. Women who have joined IS are fluent users of social media and ready and available to help others seeking guidance and reassurance on their path to the Islamic State…The bonds that are forged in daily online communications can be both empowering and liberating for young Muslim women.[121]

b.   *Group Norms*

Jowett and O'Donnell explain this area of analysis as "beliefs, values, and behaviors derived from membership in groups."[122] Graeme Wood tackled this question in his article, describing IS group norms

> Virtually every major decision and law promulgated by the Islamic State adhere to what it calls in its press and pronouncements…."the Prophetic methodology," which means following the prophecy and example of

[118] "Hijrah to the Islamic State: ISIS Updates Its Manual for Foreign Fighters," Crethiplethi, n.d., accessed April 17, 2016. www.crethiplethi.com/hijrah-to-the-islamic-state-isis-updates-its-manual-for-foreign-fighters/intelligence-terrorism-information-center/2015/ .

[119] Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, "ISIS in America" (George Washington University, Program on Extremism, December 2015):21.

[120] Ibid., 21.

[121] Jackson Paine, "Why Do Women Join the Islamic State and Other Jihadist Organizations?," *Catalyst*, September 5, 2015, http://catalystnewspaper.com/featured/why-do-women-join-the-islamic-state-and-other-jihadist-organizations/.

[122] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion,* 281.

Muhammad, in punctilious detail…Denying the holiness of the Koran or the prophecies of Muhammad is straightforward apostasy….many other acts can remove a Muslim from Islam…selling alcohol or drugs, wearing Western clothes or shaving one's beard, voting in an election…being lax about calling other people apostates. Following takfiri doctrine, the Islamic State is committed to purifying the world by killing vast numbers of people.[123]

Wood's article and assessment of IS's brand of Islam has not gone without criticism. Caner Dagli, a professor of religious studies at the College of the Holy Cross, penned a response, also published in the *Atlantic*. Dagli argues that Wood depicts the IS interpretation as literal to Islamic texts and authentic Muslims, leading one to wonder what that makes Muslims who do not adhere to the IS brand of ideology. Dagli clarifies, "What distinguishes the interpretive approach of groups like ISIS from others is not its literalism…but its narrowness and rigidity; for the adherents of ISIS, the Quran means exactly one thing, and other levels of the meaning or alternate interpretations are ruled out *a priori*. This is not literalism. It is exclusivism."[124]

You do not need look far to discover the expected behaviors of women who belong to or wish to join IS. In January 2015, IS's female police squad, Al-Khansaa Brigade, published a guide via al-Hayat Media Center for females living in the Caliphate. The document details the schooling requirements for young girls, with a focus on religious studies, science, and Arabic. It speaks out against Western cultural influences and encourages needed skills such as cooking and sewing. With regard to marriage, the guide states, "It is considered legitimate for a girl to be married at the age of nine. Most pure girls will be married by sixteen or seventeen, while they are still young and active." After marriage, women are expected to stay in the home and care for the children. They are allowed to leave the house under certain "exceptional" circumstances, if properly covered up. These include "jihad by appointment," studying religion, and if they are

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[123] Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants."

[124] Caner K. Dagli, "The Phony Islam of ISIS," *Atlantic*, February 27, 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/what-muslims-really-want-isis-atlantic/386156/.

functioning as a doctor or teacher under Shariah guidelines. If this work does call the woman from the home, it may not do so for more than three days a week.[125]

In a blog titled *20 Lessons We've Learned After Hijrah,* one individual identified as Mother U wrote

> Being here has taught me to reconnect with the fitrah [inherent nature] as women, wives, mothers and even daughters…Being in a non-Muslim society contaminates your mind whether it be with a sexualized view of women or feminist ideals of how women should and shouldn't be, whether we think it has affected us or not.[126]

Both the blog posting and the manual serve to define the social norms, or boundaries, for women, by women. By having a female present these limitations, this propaganda potentially gains greater credibility with susceptible females.

c.   *Reward and Punishment*

The concept of reward and punishment can be very black and white when considered through the lens of Sharia Law. Jowett and O'Donnell highlight the idea of using "threats and physical inducements toward compliance."[127] The social norms highlighted earlier and spelled out in the strict interpretation of Islam set out the expectations. The propaganda pushed out by IS highlights the consequences of both adhering to and failing to abide by these rules. Adherence leads to rewards including an eternal life in paradise. Propaganda includes text and images depicting a utopian life in the Caliphate. The al-Hayat Media Center plays a role in the production of tourist-like videos, depicting children smiling in the sunshine of the Caliphate. The ads could be mistaken for Disney timeshare videos at first glance, until the camera zooms in on a toddler, who is holding a firearm.[128]

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[125] Charlie Winter, "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade" (Quilliam (translation and analysis of Al-Khanssaa Brigade Manifesto), February 2015).

[126] Richey, "What Draws Women to ISIS."

[127] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion,* 282.

[128] Goldsmith, "How the Islamic State's Massive PR Campaign Secured Its Rise."

Alternately, IS has saturated online media with horrific images of what happens to those who do not comply. There are too many images and videos of soldiers and journalists being beheaded or shot execution-style to list. Video of the execution by burning in a public square of a captured Jordanian pilot in early 2015 was released and picked up by the international news media. More intimate videos and photos are regularly released depicting executions of members of the Caliphate who have broken the rules. These include throwing men from the roofs of buildings for being homosexual to beheading a 16-year-old boy for missing Friday prayer.[129]

In discussing IS propaganda postings, Brandeis University professor Dr. Jytte Klausen highlights the increasing brutality witnessed on IS associated accounts beginning in early 2014, juxtaposed against images from a "normal" life:

> After the insurgents moved into Iraq, the content became increasingly gruesome. In April "Abu Daighum al-Britani," a British fighter with ISIL, used Twitter to circulate a screenshot made using Instagram of himself holding a severed head. By August, Twitter had served up stills from videos of ongoing beheadings, severed heads on fence posts, rows of crucified men hung on crosses on a platform in a dusty town like an image from a bad movie, and even a picture of a seven-year-old Australian boy holding a severed head offered to him by his father. The execution of James W. Foley provoked the American public and brought the United States into the conflict. The pictures of violence starkly highlighted the role played by social media in contemporary terrorist tactics. But it is not all brutal horror on Twitter. Tweets of cats and images of camaraderie bridge the real-life gap between Strasbourg, Cardiff, or suburban Denver, and being in a war zone.[130]

As previously mentioned, within the Caliphate women are responsible for the monitoring and punishment of other women. Established and announced in February 2014, prior to the official declaration of the Caliphate, the Al-Khansaa Brigade is a group of females who carry out these tasks.[131] Known as the "moral police" or the "morality

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[129] "Boy, 16, Beheaded by ISIS after Failing to Appear for Friday Prayers," *Jerusalem Post*, March 6, 2016.

[130] Jytte Klausen, "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 1–22, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2014.974948.:4

[131] "Al-Khansaa Brigade (Islamic State / IS—Female Unit / ISISF)," Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium, February 2014, http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/al-khansaa-brigade.

enforcement brigade," the female policing unit is a prominent fixture in Raqqa.[132] In an article published in the *Atlantic,* Senior Editor Kathy Gilsinan recounts the story of a teenage female as told to the local investigative publication *Syria Deeply*, describing how she was "snatched from the street by a group of armed women for walking without an escort and wearing her headscarf incorrectly."[133] She explained how one member of the brigade pointed a weapon at her, and how she was quizzed about her knowledge of Sharia Law.[134]

Former *Times* magazine Middle East correspondent Azadeh Moaveni reported an interview of three Al-Khansaa Brigade defectors in the *New York Times.* In the article, Moaveni details moment when one of the young women watched two family friends whipped as punishment for wearing abayas, or black robes, that were considered too tight.[135] The girl described the incident, stating

> officers took the women into a back room to be whipped. When they removed their face-concealing niqabs, her friends were also found to be wearing makeup. It was 20 lashes for the abaya offense, five for the makeup, and another five for not being meek enough when detained.[136]

As a part of her piece in the *Atlantic*, Gilsinan interviewed Norwegian Defence Research Establishment expert Thomas Hegghammer regarding the effect of social media on female support of IS. Hegghammer stated, "many of them are eager to portray themselves as strong women and often make fun of the Western stereotype of 'the oppressed Muslim woman'…On social media at least, I think we can speak of a nascent 'jihadi girl power' subculture."[137]

Moaveni's interviews shed further light on the recruitment process for women. Highlighting personal experience of women inside the Caliphate, the former Al-Khansaa

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[132] Kathy Gilsinan, "The ISIS Crackdown on Women, by Women," *Atlantic*, July 25, 2014.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Azadeh Moaveni, "ISIS Women and Enforcers in Syria Recount Collaboration, Anguish and Escape," *New York Times*, November 21, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/22/world/middleeast/isis-wives-and-enforcers-in-syria-recount-collaboration-anguish-and-escape.html?_r=0.

[136] Moaveni, "ISIS Women and Enforcers in Syria Recount Collaboration, Anguish and Escape."

[137] Gilsinan, "The ISIS Crackdown on Women, by Women."

Brigade members recall being allowed only to use the internet for specific reasons, one of which was in the capacity of a recruiter to "woo new fighters and foreign women to Syria."[138] This reporting directly from Al-Khansaa Brigade defectors provides insight and correlation to an organized effort by Caliphate leaders to coordinate an online presence of women recruiting other women.

d. *Visual Symbols of Power*

Visual symbols of power are prominent throughout IS propaganda. As already mentioned, the al-Hayat Media Center's official logo was designed to be nearly identical to that of the news organization al Jazeera. However, the more prominent and recognizable symbol is that of the black-and-white Islamic State flag, as shown in Figure 4. Having mastered the branding aspect of Brand Caliphate, the logo emblazoned on the flag has become instantaneously recognizable and associated with IS. It is typically clearly displayed in official IS propaganda as well as in the online postings of IS supporters. A March 2015 study by the Brookings Institute found that "the most common profile picture was easily the iconic black and white flag used by ISIS in its official documents and propaganda." The next most common imagery involved Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Caliph of the Caliphate.[139]

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[138] Moaveni, "ISIS Women and Enforcers in Syria Recount Collaboration, Anguish and Escape."

[139] Berger and Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census."

Figure 4. Islamic State Flag[140]

Brand Caliphate has also manipulated the visual symbols of power to appeal to women. By using images to depict anti-IS forces as the aggressor, beating down the pious Caliphate, they may be attempting to elicit a more feminine or motherly response of empathy toward the Caliphate. Brand Caliphate often includes graphic images of the aftermath of bombing attacks by government forces, including the United States[141] By using these images of power, often depicting mutilated villages and children, Brand Caliphate crafts the narrative, labeling themselves as the underdog (David) to the unbelievers(Goliath) who are oppressing them. This type of imagery and symbol of power likely appeals to stereotyped responses in both genders, evoking in men anger and a desire to fight and in women, sorrow and a desire to protect.

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[140] Source: "Islamic State Flag," Cleveland Council on World Affairs, digital image, accessed July 13, 2016. http://www.ccwa.org/pocast-01/.

[141] Jamil Walli, "Analyzing ISIL's Propaganda," (master's thesis, Linnaeus University, 2015), http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:820361.

8. Step 8—Audience Reaction to Various Techniques

Jowett and O'Donnell explain this area of analysis as examining "the behavior of the target audience…the audience's adoption of the propagandist's language, slogans, and attire…Over time, does the propaganda purpose become realized and part of the social scene?"[142] The success of IS propaganda has already been discussed in previous sections, including the establishment of Brand Caliphate. The findings of the IS Twitter census, noted above, is further indication of the reaction by the target audience to the propaganda. Regardless of the brutality, or banality, of the material being published, IS appears to maintain a loyal following. This is observed in the estimated numbers of IS supporters remaining constant despite suffering massive losses. For example, in September 2014, the CIA estimated the number of IS fighters on the ground in Iraq and Syria at 20,000-31,500.[143] Contrast this with Pentagon statements from January 2016, where estimates of IS fighters in Iraq and Syria remain between 20,000-30,000.[144] These estimates are perhaps underwhelming until it is factored in that the Pentagon further estimates the U.S.-led coalition strikes have killed approximately 20,000 IS fighters.[145] If accurate, this means that their recruitment is matching their losses. These numbers provide strong evidence to indicate Brand Caliphate has successfully marketed the IS brand. How much of these numbers reflect female recruitment remains vague. One anonymous U.S. intelligence official commented in February 2015 that the U.S. government does not "break things down by gender"; however, the number of women is "not insignificant."[146]

To obtain an approximate idea of the number of female recruits, in March 2016 the think tank New America, led by journalist and author Peter Bergen, examined 604 militants from 26 Western countries who—based on credible reporting—were believed to

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[142] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion,* 285.

[143] AFP, "ISIS Driving up Fighter Numbers in Iraq, Syria: CIA," *Al Arabiya*, September 2014.

[144] Aaron Kliegman, "ISIS Has Almost Same # of Members as When Airstrikes Began," *Washington Free Beacon*, January 6, 2016, http://freebeacon.com/national-security/pentagon-isis-has-almost-same-number-of-members-as-when-u-s-airstrikes-began/.

[145] Kliegman, "ISIS Has Almost Same # of Members as When Airstrikes Began."

[146] Robert Windrem, "ISIS By the Numbers: Foreign Fighter Total Keeps Growing," *NBC News*, February 28, 2015.

have traveled to Iraq or Syria to fight with IS or similar Sunni jihadist groups. Their findings indicate women are "represented in unprecedented numbers," with one in seven of their dataset identified as female. They further break down the numbers, indicating the average age for the full dataset is 25, whereas the average age for women is 22. Further, one-fifth of their sample is teenagers, "of whom more than a third are female."[147] More importantly for the purpose of analyzing the effects of propaganda, New America's analysis found that over one-quarter of the data set had either been active on known online jihadist sites or are believed to have been radicalized due to their online interaction. Interestingly, the study does note that person-to-person recruitment remains active as well.[148]

Not everyone agrees with the premise that the static numbers of fighters are a consequence of successful IS media campaign. Professor Cori Dauber of the University of North Carolina argues to the contrary, claiming we are establishing a cause-and-effect relationship when all we have established is a correlation. Dauber claims, without directly interviewing each recruit, that we cannot know with certainty their personal motivations. Dauber states:

> It is widely acknowledged that ISIS is enormously sophisticated in its use of Social Media. It is also widely acknowledged that they have had great success recruiting fighters from around the globe. The problem is that there has been a tendency to assume, with no evidence, that the two phenomena are linked, and to make further assumptions about how they are linked.[149]

Although Dauber makes a valid point, she also fails to offer alternate explanations for the high recruitment numbers. Conceding the point that the effect of propaganda cannot be definitively identified as the culprit in IS's successful recruitment, it remains the logical explanation. The analysis conducted in the following case examples indicates the effect of propaganda is more nuanced.

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[147] *Peter Bergen et al., "ISIS In The West: The Western Militant Flow to Syria and Iraq" (New America, March 2016),* https://www.newamerica.org/documents/1432/ISP-Isis-In-The-West_2015.pdf.

[148] Ibid., 3.

[149] Dauber, "ISIS and the Family Man."

Erick Stakelbeck, in his book *ISIS Exposed: Beheadings, Slavery and the Hellish Reality of Radical Islam,* discusses the draw of Brand Caliphate. He cites as a point of reference the *Rolling Stone* August 2013 cover that features Boston Marathon bomber Dhokthar Tsarnaev. He explains it is the Western audience who doubled the regular sales of *Rolling Stone's* Dhokthar issue that IS has successfully tapped into with their propaganda. Stakelbeck explains

> If you're eager to give Islamic jihadists the rock star treatment for your impressionable young readers, it doesn't get any more cutting edge than ISIS—masters of social media and thoroughly plugged into the Millennial generation. From severed heads rolling to Rolling Stone: a natural progression for ISIS in today's morally depraved media climate…Memo to ISIS: jihadi cool sells here in what used to be known as Western civilization.[150]

This draw to Brand Caliphate and "jihadi cool" is not limited to men. Women are also susceptible, although it may not be for all of the same reasons. Stakelbeck discusses this, describing the Caliphate drawing "the vulnerable, the impressionable, the lonely, the desperate, the troubled, the sinister, the violent, and the psychotic" as leaving Western societies to travel to the "valley of lost souls." He explains that it is "men and women alike, who are drawn to the Islamic State's audacious violence, dark vision, and online bravado as to a magnet."[151]

9.   Step 9—Counterpropaganda

In December 2013, the Department of State initiated its own social media campaign to counter the onslaught of online jihadist propaganda. Dubbed the "Think Again Turn Away" campaign, the project is run by the Center for Strategic and Counter Terrorism Communications digital outreach team.[152] A campaign image is shown in Figure 5. Since June 2014, efforts have focused on counter-messaging toward IS and Brand Caliphate in social media. The Think Again Turn Away account on Twitter

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[150] Erick Stakelbeck, *ISIS Exposed: Beheadings, Slavery and the Hellish Reality of Radical Islam* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015):130.

[151] Stakelbeck, *ISIS Exposed: Beheadings, Slavery and the Hellish Reality of Radical Islam*, 93.

[152] "The State Department Is Fighting with ISIL on Twitter," *Defense One*, accessed June 20, 2015, http://www.defenseone.com/technology/2014/06/state-department-fighting-isil-twitter/87286/.

engages individual Twitter users posting pro-IS rhetoric with links to anti-IS material and news stories. In March 2016, the Think Again Turn Away Tumblr account highlighted the IS assassination of 81-year-old Syrian archeologist and head of antiquities Khaled Assad, who refused to evacuate during the IS siege of the ancient city of Palmyra in an effort to protect the 2000-year-old artifacts.

The campaign has been widely recognized as a failure. In September 2014, *Time* magazine reporter Rita Katz described the program as "ineffective" and argued the campaign actually "provides jihadists with a stage to voice their arguments—regularly engaging in petty disputes with fighters and supporters of groups like IS…arguing over who had killed more people while exchanging sarcastic quips."[153] The *New York Times* echoed this assertion more recently in a June 2015 report, labeling the Obama administration's efforts against the IS "message machine" as "dismal."[154] The State Department stands by the program, labeling their counter-messaging a "pillar of the strategy to defeat the group;" however, Obama administration officials acknowledge IS is more "nimble" at spreading their message.[155]

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[153] Rita Katz and Cathy Bussewitz, "The State Department Is Fumbling on Twitter," *Time*, 29:16, -06-20 08:04:45 2015, http://time.com/3387065/isis-twitter-war-state-department/.

[154] Mark Mazzetti and Michael R. Gordon, "ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War, U.S. Concludes," *New York Times*, June 12, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/13/world/middleeast/isis-is-winning-message-war-us-concludes.html.

[155] Mazzetti and Gordon. "ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War."

Figure 5. "Teddy Bear"[156]

In May 2016, the Global Engagement Center was created to take over the efforts of the State Department. Reporting from July 2016 indicates the U.S. government is becoming more effective at controlling the narrative, with significant results. In the last two years, Twitter traffic attributed to IS-linked accounts has been reduced by 45 percent.[157] This drop has been attributed to the refinement of government techniques, including messaging in Arabic instead of English, and using the Muslim community to disseminate the messaging.[158] Research by the Associated Press indicates pro-ISIS Twitter account followers have dropped from an average of 1500 followers in 2014 to

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[156] Source: Department of State, Global Engagement Program, "Teddy Bear," *Associated Press,* digital image, July 9, 2016. http://bigstory.ap.org/article/21c9eb68e6294bdfa0a099a0632b8056/ap-exclusive-islamic-states-twitter-traffic-plunges.

[157] "ISIS Twitter Traffic Plummets as Counterterrorism Officials Step up Their Social Media Game," Associated Press, July 9, 2016, http://www.cbc.ca/beta/news/world/isis-social-media-1.3671791?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=New%20Campaign&utm_term=%2ASituation%20Report.

[158] "ISIS Twitter Traffic Plummets as Counterterrorism Officials Step up Their Social Media Game."

just 300 in 2016.[159] Although there appears to be significant progress in controlling the narrative, U.S. government efforts have focused on Twitter, and the possibility exists that the bulk of online communication has moved to other social media applications, including encrypted applications.

10.   Step 10—Effects and Evaluation

Jowett and O'Donnell identify the most important consideration when evaluating propaganda as whether "the purpose of the propaganda has been fulfilled."[160] They further clarify that when determining the effectiveness of the propaganda, the evaluator should consider both "the achievement of goals but also the means through which the goals were adopted."[161]

Using this 10-step model, it can be argued that IS does in fact have targeted messaging toward females. This appears to be a smaller portion of the larger IS Brand Caliphate marketing machine. In the next chapter, this thesis examines several cases of female recruitment in an effort to determine if Brand Caliphate's targeted messaging toward women played a role in their radicalization.

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[159] "ISIS Twitter Traffic Plummets as Counterterrorism Officials Step up Their Social Media Game."

[160] Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion.*

[161] Ibid.

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V.   CASE EXAMPLES

As previously noted, University of North Carolina professor Cori Dauber cautions against assigning a cause-and-effect relationship between propaganda and radicalization, arguing we cannot declare the relationship with certainty without direct feedback from the radicalized individual.[162] In this section, I will examine six cases of women who radicalized in support of IS. The cases have been selected based on the availability of material providing insight to their exposure to propaganda, and the effect it had on them. Having taken an analytical look at the propaganda itself in the previous section, this section will now examine the effects this propaganda has had on select females, as well as propaganda being dispersed by females in support of IS. Having established that IS does have targeted messaging toward females, these cases will be examined to determine if this messaging ever reaches the intended audience of potential female recruits, and if so, what effect it has on them. Does this targeted propaganda account for the numbers of females radicalized in support of IS?

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162 Dauber, "ISIS and the Family Man."

A.   AQSA MAHMOOD—THE TRAILBLAZER

Figure 6. Aqsa Mahmood[163]

Aqsa Mahmood's story and radicalization took place during the infancy of Brand Caliphate, thereby reducing her exposure to the propaganda machine and any messaging targeting females. What makes her story unique is her later contribution to the creation of that targeted messaging. After being radicalized and having traveled to Syria, Mahmood became a popular trailblazer for other females teetering toward radicalization. Her personal experience and her willingness to put her personal story into the greater narrative through her blog gave her credibility among females considering joining IS.

Aqsa Mahmood is often considered the pioneer of radicalized female IS supporters. Her story begins in the 1970s, when her father left Pakistan for Glasgow to become the first Pakistani cricket player in Scotland.[164] He settled with his wife in an upper middle-class neighborhood and sent their children to private school. Aqsa enjoyed high school, listened to the music of Coldplay, and read Harry Potter and the Hunger

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[163] Source: Handout Photo, "Aqsa Mahmood," Business Insider, digital image, accessed July 13, 2016. http://www.businessinsider.com/r-alabama-woman-joins-islamic-state-in-syria-media-2015-4.

[164] Ashley Fantz, "The Story of a Scottish Girl Turned ISIS Recruiter," CNN. February 24, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/23/world/scottish-teen-isis-recruiter/.

Games.[165] She was an average teenage girl, studying diagnostic radiography at Glasgow Caledonian University before joining IS. Aqsa traveled to Syria in November 2013, prior to the declaration of the Caliphate in June 2014 and before Brand Caliphate became trendy. Reports indicate that she was married to a jihadi fighter soon after her arrival in Syria.[166] Aqsa's family claims she became a "bedroom radical" who was ultimately radicalized through her online activity, including watching sermons and contacts through social media.[167] They also blame her online relationship with English-based fanatic Adeel Ulhaq for exposing their daughter to radical ideology.[168]

Investigation after her departure indicates Aqsa was active on radical Muslim chat forums, spending increasing amounts of time in her bedroom at home radicalizing online and limiting her socialization in the community. Aqsa was described by her family as deeply disturbed by the increasing conflict in Syria, and expressed a desire to assist in some way, although her radicalization came as a surprise to them.[169]

Aqsa created a Tumblr blog in the spring of 2013, prior to her departure to Syria.[170] The blog, titled "Diary of a Muhajirah" went viral in the jihadi community.[171] This, in combination with her Twitter and Facebook accounts, became the social media platforms Aqsa used to voice threats against the West and to encourage others to join the cause. Her early presence and her actions served to elevate her as a source of propaganda for other potential female recruits.[172] Contents of her blog include various types of pro-IS

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[165] Fantz, "The Story of a Scottish Girl Turned ISIS Recruiter."

[166] Fantz, "The Story of a Scottish Girl Turned ISIS Recruiter."

[167] Atika Shubert and Bharati Naik, "How a Glasgow Girl Became an ISIS Bride," CNN, September 5, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/05/world/europe/isis-bride-glasgow-scotland/.

[168] Gavin Madley, "Parents of Scottish Jihadi Bride Aqsa Mahmood Tell of Devastation," Mail, February 21, 2016, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3457741/Heartbroken-hopeless-Parents-Scottish-jihadi-bride-Aqsa-Mahmood-tell-devastation-losing-ISIS-brainwashing.html; in February 2016, after they assisted a colleague travel to Syria with the intent to possibly follow him later, Abdeel Ulhaq and two associates were convicted of helping in the preparation of an act of terrorism.

[169] "Aqsa Mahmood: How Did Scot Become Jihadi Bride in Syria?," *Week News*, accessed June 3, 2016, http://www.theweek.co.uk/people/islamic-state/60274/aqsa-mahmood-how-did-scot-become-jihadi-bride-in-syria.

[170] Fantz, "The Story of a Scottish Girl Turned ISIS Recruiter."

[171] Agron, "Online Women Activists of the Islamic State—Where Are They Now?"

[172] Ibid.

propaganda, ranging from anti-Bashar al-Assad material to pictures of jihadist fighters, and even photographs of wounded children.[173] Most of her blog posts are followed by numerous entries of her supporters "liking" her posts, and many reposts of her entries.[174] A snapshot of her Tumblr page is shown in Figure 7.
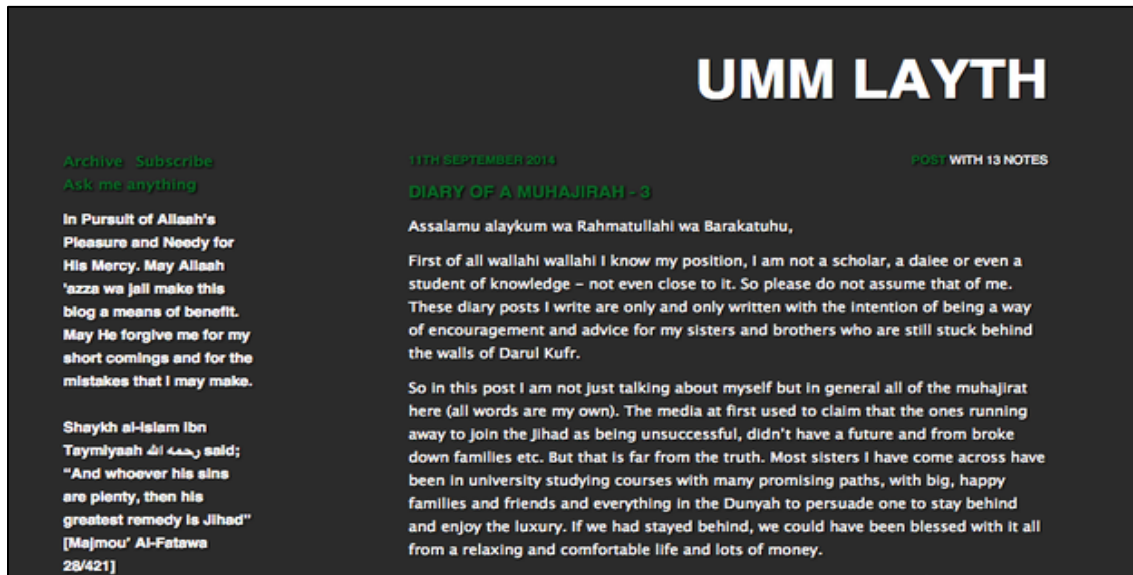

Figure 7. Aqsa Mahmood's Tumblr Page[175]

Many of her entries espouse hatred of the West. However, the posts that seem to resonate the most with other females are the ones in which she appears to speak frankly about the sacrifice of leaving your family in support of the cause. She warns recruits that leaving the safety of your family is difficult, claiming, "The family you get in exchange for leaving the ones behind are like the pearl in comparison to the shell you threw away into the foam of the sea."[176] She admits the first phone call you make to your family once you arrive in Syria is the most difficult thing you will ever do, leaving you feeling "cold

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173 Fantz, "The Story of a Scottish Girl Turned ISIS Recruiter."

174 Ibid.

175 Source: Aqsa Mahmood, "Aqsa Mahmood's Tumblr Page," BuzzFeed, digital image, September 11, 2014. https://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/inside-the-online-world-of-the-women-of-isis?utm_term=.xvgJ2xJ3r#.fo3DL5DnN.

176 Fantz, "The Story of a Scottish Girl Turned ISIS Recruiter,"

hearted." Nevertheless, she justifies the experience, asserting, "as long as you are firm and you know that this is all for the sake of Allah then nothing can shake you."[177]

Aqsa's prominence online and recognition as a recruiter ultimately resulted in her being blamed for the radicalization of three British girls—referred to as the Bethnal Green schoolgirls—Shamima Begum, Amira Abase, and Kadize Sultana, who traveled to Syria in February 2015.[178] Aqsa's parents claim Aqsa did not assist the girls, and she denied even knowing their identities.[179] Press reporting at the time indicated Shamima Begum attempted to communicate with Aqsa via Twitter prior to their departure; however, Aqsa told her parents that she did not respond to Begum.[180] Regardless of whether she had direct contact with the Bethnal Green girls or not, the fact that one of them solicited contact with Aqsa indicates the influence she had on them. Personal contact was not necessary, Aqsa's propaganda—her message, conveyed through her blog—was sufficient to serve as a factor in the girls' decision to radicalize and travel to Syria.

Aqsa's blog is a metaphor for IS propaganda, wavering between angry anti-Western threats and thoughtful family commentary. On September 11, 2014, Aqsa allegedly posted:

> Know this Cameron/Obama, you and your countries will be beneath our feet and your Kufr will be destroyed, this is a promise from Allah swt that we have no doubt over. If not you then your grandchildren or their grandchildren.[181]

On the same date, Aqsa allegedly also posted:

> The media at first used to claim that the ones running away to joining the Jihad as being unsuccessful, didn't have a future and from broke down families, etc. But that is far from the truth. Most sisters I have come across

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[177] Fantz, "The Story of a Scottish Girl Turned ISIS Recruiter."

[178] Leslie Burt, "Aqsa Mahmood," Counter Jihad Report, March 4, 2015, https://counterjihadreport.com/tag/aqsa-mahmood/.

[179] James Cook, "Glasgow 'Jihadist' Aqsa Mahmood Denies Recruiting London Girls," BBC News, March 16, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-31908202.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Agron, "Online Women Activists of the Islamic State—Where Are They Now?"

have been in university studying courses with many promising paths, with big, happy families and friends and everything. If we had stayed behind, we could have been blessed with it all from a relaxing and comfortable life and lots of money.[182]

Interestingly, despite Aqsa's elevated status as a female Jihadi in the Caliphate and her viral following online, she does not appear to have posted to her blog since summer 2015.[183] It is unknown if something has happened to Aqsa, or if her silence is indicative of a different strategy for IS propaganda. Regardless, her role as a trailblazer for potential female recruits remains immortalized online in her original targeted messaging.

B.   HODA MUTHANA—THE PUPIL BECOMES THE MASTER

Figure 8. Hoda Muthana[184]

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182 Fantz, "The Story of a Scottish Girl Turned ISIS Recruiter."

183 Agron, "Online Women Activists of the Islamic State—Where Are They Now?"

184 Source: Hoover High School 2012 Yearbook, "Hoda Muthana," AL.com, digital image, 2012. http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2015/04/meet_hoda_muthana_the_quiet_gi.html.

The following case example details the story of Hoda Muthana. Muthana provides a unique and perhaps surprising perspective on the effect of Brand Caliphate. Born and raised in the United States in a Muslim household, Muthana did not appear to be swayed by the violence contained in much of the IS propaganda. After becoming fully radicalized and traveling to Syria, Muthana has herself become a source of propaganda; however, instead of messaging about "raising her cubs" in the Caliphate, Muthana has been outspoken in advocating violence in the United States. Eschewing more traditional female roles within Brand Caliphate, Muthana is a story of radicalization that neither responded to the targeted propaganda toward women nor does her fully radicalized voice contribute to targeted messaging of women. Instead, she now contributes to the larger Brand Caliphate propaganda machine.

In the early-1990s, Mohammed Muthana and his wife fled from Yemen to the United States where they became naturalized citizens and watched from afar as their country was torn apart by civil war.[185] Their youngest daughter, Hoda, was born in the United States, graduating from high school in Hoover, Alabama, where those who knew her described her as quiet, kind, and reserved.[186] After graduation, Hoda attended the University of Alabama, studying business, until November 2014 when she deceived her family and fled to Syria to join IS.[187]

In an online interview conducted by BuzzFeed News Organization with Hoda after her arrival in Syria, she explained how she secretly obtained the money for her travel by enrolling for her college courses using her parents' money, and then immediately withdrawing from the classes. She then used the refunded tuition enrollment to fund her trip to the Caliphate. Hoda completed the deception by telling her father she

[185] Ellie Hall, "Gone Girl: An Interview with an American in ISIS," BuzzFeed, April 17, 2015, https://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/gone-girl-an-interview-with-an-american-in-isis?utm_term=.fqEewVezx#.eoEW34Wm7.

[186] Jon Anderson, "Hoover Woman Joins ISIS: Meet Hoda Muthana Who Fled U.S. to Syria," AL.com, April 21, 2015, http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2015/04/meet_hoda_muthana_the_quiet_gi.html.

[187] "Hoda Muthana," *Counter Extremism Project*, accessed June 2, 2016, http://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/hoda-muthana.

was going on a school trip to Atlanta, and instead traveled to Syria and joined IS. Hoda admits IS members she met online she assisted in the logistics of her travel.[188]

Perhaps ironically, both Hoda and Mohammed agree that Mohammed was a strict parent. He did not allow his children to have a cell phone while in high school, gifting them one upon their graduation. By both accounts, it was this device that ultimately led to Hoda's radicalization. Mohammed details his regular review of Hoda's phone, finding only indications she had been studying Islam and become more devout—a source of pride for Mohammed, who is deeply religious. However, what he failed to notice were the radical videos Hoda was watching on YouTube and her secret Twitter account in which she began communication with IS followers, gaining a large following herself for her increasingly radical comments.[189]

An associate of Hoda from the Hoover Muslim community had access to her online activities and watched as Hoda's tenor became more extreme. With regard to Hoda's travel and support of IS, the associate stated, "I just kind of expected it from her," even if her parents did not.[190] Hoda herself discussed her growing allegiance toward IS and her self-imposed isolation: "I literally isolated myself from all my friends and community members the last year I was in America," she said, explaining that she did not want to associate with anyone who did not share her interpretation of Islam, an interpretation that she said demanded every Muslim move to ISIS-controlled territory. "As I grew closer to my deen, I lost all of my friends, I found none in my community that desired to tread the path I was striving for."[191]

Mohammed sees this as the time IS radicalized his daughter, "I believe she [sic] been brainwashed…She's not that kind of girl. They brainwashed her."[192] Hoda's family

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[188] Hall, "Gone Girl: An Interview with an American in ISIS."

[189] Hall, "Gone Girl: An Interview with an American in ISIS."

[190] Ibid.

[191] Ibid.

[192] Ibid.

believed she was radicalized online over a period of approximately one year.[193] Hoda did not specify the precise propaganda she was exposed to beyond admitting to watching YouTube videos and using social media, including her secret account on Twitter. Through this Twitter account Hoda met and communicated with known IS members, including Aqsa Mahmood, who previously left her home country of Scotland to travel to Syria in support of IS.[194] Aqsa Mahmood is widely recognized as a female recruiter for IS.[195]

Approximately one month after her arrival in Syria, Hoda was married to Australian IS fighter Suhan Abdul Rahman, who went by Abu Jihad al-Australi, leading Hoda to adopt the moniker Umm Jihad.[196] Hoda denied being forced to marry, and instead fully immersed herself in the ways of IS, becoming a propagandist herself.[197] In March 2015, Hoda Tweeted an image of Abu Jihad's corpse on the battlefield and stated, "May Allah accept my husband, Abu Jihad al-Australi. Promised Allah and fought in the front lines until he obtained shahadah…And never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allah as dead."[198] Reports from Syria soon after indicate Hoda continued to offer unwavering support to IS, joining the Al-Khansaa Brigade and becoming prolific on Twitter, espousing anti-U.S. sentiment and encouraging violence toward the West. A snapshot of one of her Tweets is shown in Figure 9. Her Tweets included threats toward President Obama and requests for funds to assist IS.

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[193] "Alabama Woman Joins Islamic State in Syria: Media," Reuters, accessed June 2, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-security-alabama-idUSKBN0NC0OR20150421.

[194] Hall, "Gone Girl: An Interview With An American In ISIS."

[195] Fantz, "The Story of a Scottish Girl Turned ISIS Recruiter."

[196] "American ISIS Member Joins Women's Clique in Syria," *Middle East Media Research Institute*, April 22, 2015, http://www.memrijttm.org/content/view_print/blog/8383.

[197] Hall, "Gone Girl: An Interview with an American in ISIS."

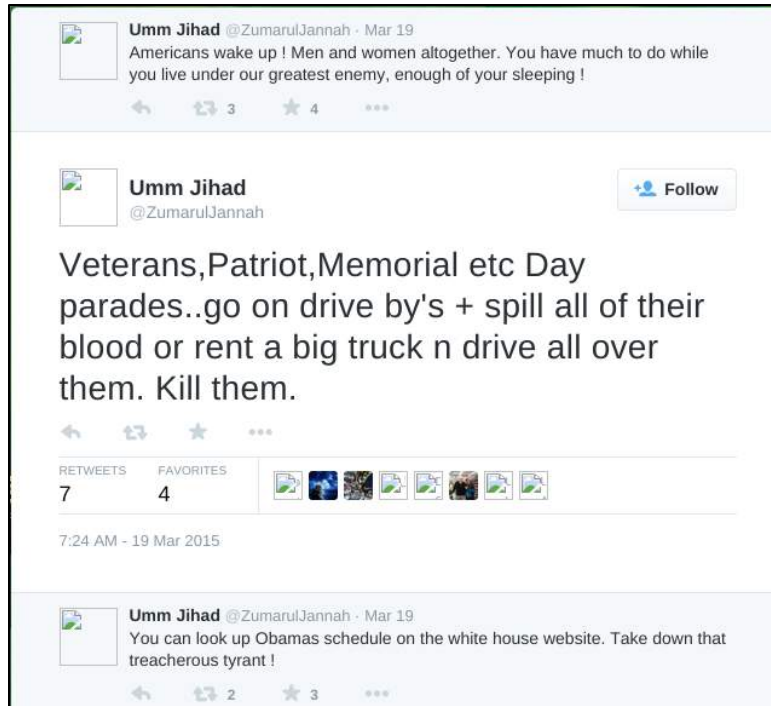[198] "American ISIS Member Joins Women's Clique In Syria."

Figure 9. Hoda Muthana's Tweet[199]

Whatever propaganda Hoda was exposed to online was significant and powerful enough to change her from a "kind" high school student to a bloodthirsty advocate of IS. As the cycle of propaganda and radicalization continues, Hoda has now become the purveyor of the propaganda. Who better to speak to the life of a female in Syria than a female in Syria? Who better to judge Muslim females for not traveling in support of the Caliphate than a female who did? Hoda's actions and her gender lend her voice and her pro-IS message credibility. Much as Aqsa Mahmood's did before her.

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[199] Hoda Muthana. "Hoda Muthana Tweet," Heavy, Digital image, March 19, 2015. http://heavy.com/news/2015/04/hoda-muthana-isis-hoover-alabama-buzzfeed-umm-jihad-zumarul-jannah-father-mother-parents/.

C. JAELYN DELSHAUN YOUNG—THE SELECTIVE BELIEVER

Figure 10. Jaelyn Delshaun Young[200]

Examining the story of Jaelyn Delshaun Young reveals a young and impressionable female who was clearly seeking and open to the propaganda available regarding IS. In this case, Young was exposed to both sides of the messaging, those by Brand Caliphate, which she chose to accept, and those providing an anti-IS narrative, which she chose to discount. Young appeared to absorb the material that fit into the narrative of IS she had created for herself and reject any propaganda or information that provided a contrary story line, such as news reports of IS atrocities. This perception by Young of skewed reporting against IS served to motivate her to right the perceived wrong, and ultimately fueled the process of her radicalization, providing a righteous motivation.

In August 2015, Jaelyn Young and her fiancé, Muhammad Dakhlalla, were charged with providing material support to terrorists when they attempted to travel to Syria in support of IS. Young was 19 years old at the time of her arrest, the daughter of a police officer in the Vicksburg, Mississippi, police department and a school administrator. Young graduated from her high school with honors; she was a cheerleader

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[200] Source: Associated Press, "Jaelyn Delshaun Young," *New York Post*, digital image, 2012. http://nypost.com/2015/08/11/young-mississippi-couple-charged-with-attempting-to-join-isis/.

and a member of the homecoming court. She was attending Mississippi State University as a chemistry major at the time of her arrest.[201]

Reports indicate that Young, raised in a Christian household, was already considering converting to Islam when she met Dakhlalla, who is from a prominent family in the local Muslim community.[202] The two began dating in November 2014 and by March 2015, Young had announced her conversion and began to wear a burqa in public.[203] Dakhlalla reports that after her conversion, Young began to distance herself from non-Muslims, including her family and friends, believing that "spending time with non-Muslims would be a bad influence."[204]

It was after her conversion and her self-imposed isolation that Young began to delve into IS propaganda. Dakhlalla claims Young began watching YouTube videos about Islamic law, pro-IS videos, and videos of radical pro-IS cleric Anjem Choudary.[205] Soon after, Young began to express distaste for the way Muslims are treated in Britain and the United States and to express hatred toward those she deemed "immoral."[206] This was demonstrated when Young expressed support of IS after watching a video of a Muslim being thrown from a building to his death for alleged homosexuality.[207]

Dakhlalla was recorded in criminal proceedings as explaining:

After watching pro-ISIL videos on a regular basis, Dakhlalla and Young felt that the U.S. media was presenting a biased picture and refusing to acknowledge the good they thought that ISIL was doing in some parts of the world. Dakhlalla and Young were bothered greatly by the coverage of

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[201] "Jaelyn Young," Counter Extremism Project, accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/jaelyn-young.

[202] Associated Press, "Jaelyn Young to Plead Guilty to Terrorism Charge: Mississippi Woman Planned to Join ISIS," AL.com, March 29, 2016, http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2016/03/jaelyn_young_to_plead_guilty_t.html.

[203] Ibid.

[204] United States v. Jaelyn Delshaun Young and Muhammad Oda Dakhlalla, Criminal Complaint No. 3:15MJ32-SAA https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/Young%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Engel, "Here's the Manual That Al Qaeda and Now ISIS Use to Brainwash People Online."

[207] Ibid.

ISIL in Western media, in light of the fact that the couple viewed ISIL as liberators of areas of Syria and Iraq.[208]

Young appeared to be actively seeking out IS propaganda and was not deterred by the violence contained within. It does not appear that Young was either exposed to or sought out any differentiated propaganda based on her gender. Reporting by her partner, Dakhlalla, indicates Young researched pro-IS videos and provided her own justifications to the violence she witnessed there. However, there is evidence to indicate Young experienced some potential gender-based bias through her exposure, and she simply chose to discount the information as not being factual. For example, in an online conversation with an undercover FBI agent in June 2015, Young stated with regard to Dakhlalla's intentions upon arriving in the Caliphate:

> He wants to help with the media group and really wants to correct the falsehoods heard here. U.S. has a thick cloud of falsehood and very little truth about Dawlah makes it through and if it does then usually the links are deleted (like on youtube and stuff). Dakhlalla says a lot of Muslims are caught in their doubts of IS bc of what U.S. media says and he wants to assure them the U.S. media is all lies when regarding Dawlah. After he sees change in that, he wanted to join the Mujahideen.[209]

When exposed to Brand Caliphate, Young appeared to simply categorize the material into the items she could justify and accept, identifying them as reality; or the items she could not find palatable, labeling them as a misinformation campaign by the U.S. government. Through continued exposure, Young's tolerance for violence and ability to accept and even celebrate IS violence increased, with her expressing excitement over the news of the July 2015 attack in Tennessee by IS supporter Muhammad Abdulazeez in which five service members were murdered.

In another conversation, Young summarily dismisses the idea that sex slavery is permitted in the Caliphate, stating, "the kuffs are reporting that IS has a sex slave trade business for girls as young as 1–9 years old…these ppl believe it too. I can not wait to be in Dawlah. These likes are so toxic, I am getting very angry at them for believing such

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[208] *United States v. Muhammad Oda Dakhlalla.*

[209] Ibid.

stupidity."[210] Rather than acknowledge the potential of her travel to Syria being something other than her expectations, Young falsely identified contrary information as part of a larger counter-propaganda campaign.

Although both Young and Dakhlalla describe Young as the mastermind of the plan to travel to Syria, it remains unclear how much of an effect Young's relationship with Dakhlalla influenced her radicalization, and vice versa. The possibility exists that the effect of the propaganda was amplified when applied to more than one person at a time, allowing each recipient to validate the material to the other, and discouraging any natural skepticism. What does appear to be indisputable is that exposure to the propaganda helped shape the version of Islam Young chose to pursue. In this particular case study, the potential recruit was exposed to competing narratives, or propaganda, and chose to discount the material that challenged her hermeneutics. Instead, Young filtered the anti-IS material she was exposed to in such a way to justify her belief system by deeming it lacking in credibility.

D. SHANNON MAUREEN CONLEY—THE BRIDE

Figure 11. Shannon Maureen Conley[211]

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[210] "Jaelyn Young Criminal Complaint."

[211] Source: Arvada West High School, "Shannon Conley Yearbook Photo," CPR, digital image, accessed July 13, 2016. http://www.cpr.org/news/story/arvada-teen-faces-sentencing-over-terror-plot.

Shannon Maureen Conley is a case of a mentally ill female who sought information online. Although there is no documentation indicating she was ever directly exposed to Brand Caliphate's targeted messaging toward females, there is information that she was affected by the broader messaging of the Caliphate as a victim. Further, depicted as socially awkward, Conley seemed motivated by the romance of becoming a jihadi bride. Conley's unhealthy commitment to her online boyfriend, combined by her mental illness, led her to make increasingly poor decisions toward radicalization despite the intervention of law enforcement.

In September 2014, 19-year-old Shannon Conley, a trained nurse's aide from Arvada, Colorado, appeared in the U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado and pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization.[212] How does a teenager in Colorado go from a Christian suburban nurse's aide to wanting to become a radical Muslim convert, hoping to assist with jihad?

Authorities reportedly became aware of Conley in November 2013, when she was seen wandering around and taking notes about the layout of the Faith Bible Chapel campus in Arvada. Employees became concerned when they saw Conley's actions.[213] The church was the site of a 2007 incident where Matthew J. Murray killed two people and wounded three others before being killed by a security staff member.[214] After the November incident, Conley was interviewed by the Joint Terrorism Task Force and reportedly stated, "If they think I'm a terrorist, I'll give them something to think I am."[215] FBI agents continued to speak with Conley over the following months, attempting to direct her toward humanitarian work and encouraging her parents to talk to Conley about

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212 George Holloway, "Plea Agreement and Statement of Facts Relevant to Sentencing" (U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado, September 10, 2014) 1:14-cr-00163-RM, https://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/resources/4522014910135116370322.pdf.

213 Associated Press, "Colorado Teen Shannon Conley's Support of ISIS Raises Alarm about American Jihadists," CBS News, September 10, 2014, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/colorado-teen-shannon-conleys-support-of-isis-raises-alarm-about-american-jihadists/.

214 "Gunman Killed after Opening Fire at Church," CNN, December 9, 2007, http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/12/09/church.shooting/.

215 Associated Press, "Colorado Teen Shannon Conley's Support of ISIS Raises Alarm about American Jihadists."

more moderate beliefs.[216] During these conversations, Conley admitted her conversion to Islam and her online radicalization.[217] She described her conversion to Islam as occurring after researching the religion online, speaking with ISIS recruiters, and experiencing strong emotions about the mistreatment of Muslims globally.[218]

During her online conversion, Conley met 32-year-old Yousr Mouelhi.[219] In early 2014, Conley told her father she had a new boyfriend, and arranged a Skype conversation between them. Reportedly, during the web chat, Mouelhi and Conley requested her father's blessing to marry. Then they advised him that Conley "would be moving to Syria, where they would wed and spend their lives together. Their lives, they told him, would be dedicated to ISIS."[220]

During their online conversations, the pair came to recognize that they shared, "a view of Islam as requiring participation in violent jihad against any non-believers."[221] Conley agreed to travel to Syria and marry Mouelhi after receiving training in the United States that would assist them in their jihad.[222] To accomplish this, on September 7, 2013, Conley joined the U.S. Army Explorers with the intent of obtaining training in firearms and U.S. military tactics.[223]

Conley's father refused to allow her to marry Mouelhi. He eventually found a one-way airline ticket to Turkey in his daughter's name.[224] On April 8, 2014, Conley was

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[216] Associated Press, "Colorado Teen Shannon Conley's Support of ISIS Raises Alarm about American Jihadists."

[217] Robert Siegel, "How Did "Good Girls" From Colorado Get Recruited By ISIS?," All Things Considered, accessed June 10, 2016, http://www.npr.org/2014/10/22/358120443/how-did-good-girls-from-colorado-get-recruited-by-isis.

[218] Storey, "The American Women of ISIS."

[219] Holloway, "Plea Agreement and Statement of Facts Relevant to Sentencing."

[220] Storey, "The American Women of ISIS."

[221] Aaron Morrison, "Islamic State Recruit Shannon Conley To Be Sentenced On Conspiracy Charge In Colorado," International Business Times, January 23, 2015, http://www.ibtimes.com/islamic-state-recruit-shannon-conley-be-sentenced-conspiracy-charge-colorado-1792682.

[222] Holloway, "Plea Agreement and Statement of Facts Relevant to Sentencing."

[223] Ibid.

[224] Associated Press, "Colorado Teen Shannon Conley's Support of ISIS Raises Alarm about American Jihadists."

arrested at Denver International Airport as she attempted to fly to Turkey to meet with Mouelhi. Found in her possession at the time was a list of phone number that included Mouelhi, as well as documents verifying her U.S. Army Explorers certification, first aid/nursing certifications, a certification from the National Rifle Association, and a field first-aid manual.[225] A subsequent search of Conley's residence resulted in the discovery of recordings of Anwar al-Awlaki: books, articles, and propaganda for al-Qaida, IS, and jihad, as well as used, labeled firing targets.[226]

Conley may exhibit some outsider traits, having had her mental health called into question during her court proceedings. The U.S. district judge presiding over her case described her as "in need of psychiatric help…a bit of a mess…it doesn't seem like she gets it."[227] The prosecuting assistant U.S. attorney described Conley as "pathologically naïve."[228] At her sentencing, Conley still seemed unable to grasp the gravity of her situation and the violence associated with IS. Crying as she read her written statement, Conley stated, "Even though I supported a jihad, it was never to hurt anyone. It was always in defense of Muslims."[229] It is unclear how, exactly, Conley intended to act in support of jihad, while not inflicting harm.

Conley displays an example of a mentally ill young female who is easily manipulated by the broader Brand Caliphate propaganda, as well as the one-on-one interactions with her IS online boyfriend. The two-pronged factors of radicalization—the effect of Brand Caliphate propaganda combined with direct, interpersonal online engagement with a female recruit—is not unique. We see a similar scenario with Alex, the lonely Sunday school teacher.

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[225] Holloway, "Plea Agreement and Statement of Facts Relevant to Sentencing."

[226] Ibid.

[227] Kirk Mitchell, "Arvada Teen Jihadist Wannabe Sentenced to Four Years in Prison," Denver Post, January 23, 2015, http://www.denverpost.com/2015/01/23/arvada-teen-jihadist-wannabe-sentenced-to-four-years-in-prison/.

[228] Ibid.

[229] Ibid.

E.   ALEX—THE LONELY SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER

Figure 12. Alex[230]

Alex, like Shannon Conley, led a socially isolated existence. Her exposure to IS came from curiosity and her self-prompted inquiries. Although there is no proof that she was ever directly exposed to IS propaganda or Brand Caliphate's targeted messaging, she did appear motivated in her exploration by the broader, jihadi-cool concept formulated by Brand Caliphate. Her recruitment was then accelerated by her online social interactions and her deep desire to belong.

In June 2015, *New York Times* reporter and seasoned IS journalist Rukmini Callimachi published an article containing the exclusive story of a young woman in rural Washington State who was lured by the appeal of Brand Caliphate. Callimachi's story, titled, "ISIS and the Lonely Young American," tells the story of "Alex," a 23-year-old Christian Sunday school teacher and babysitter who lived with her grandparents.[231]

Callimachi came to know about Alex and her story from a tip from an online activist.[232] After contacting Alex and her grandmother, an agreement was made to tell

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[230] Andrea Bruce, "Alex," *New York Times,* Digital image, June 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/ 06/28/world/americas/isis-online-recruiting-american.html?_r=0.

[231] Callimachi, "ISIS and the Lonely Young American."

[232] Poh Si Teng, "Friends with ISIS: How to Tell One Young Woman's Story," *New York Times,* http://www.nytimes.com/times-insider/2015/06/30/friends-with-isis-how-to-tell-one-young-womans-story/.

Alex's story, on the condition that efforts would be made to protect their identities, although all parties understood the likely futility of the effort.[233]

Alex admits to suffering from loneliness in her rural community. She suffers from hand tremors and a "persistent lack of maturity and poor judgment" likely due to fetal alcohol syndrome. Her mother lost custody of her to her grandparents when she was 11 months old. Her grandmother described Alex as a "lost child" after she dropped out of college and spent most of her ample free time streaming movies and trolling the internet and her social media accounts.[234]

In August 2014, a seemingly unrelated event sent a series of events into motion. Alex learned of the beheading of journalist James Foley by IS. Moved by a sense of "horrified curiosity," she began researching the group, trying to understand the reason for their actions. What Alex found online surprised her—a group of online personas who politely responded to her inquiries. She developed rapport with the people she encountered, and spoke with them regularly to keep her loneliness at bay. The more questions she asked about their cause, the more they systemically exposed her to Islam.[235] As Callimachi astutely points out, this technique closely follows the advice given in the al Qaida recruitment manual, believed to have been adopted by IS.[236]

As Alex thought about Islam and what she saw in press reporting about IS, she decided she realized that "what people were saying about them wasn't true."[237] As she struggled to reconcile the information about God she was receiving from her new online friends with that she had always known in her church, her online IS mentor, Monzer Hamad, told her, "What you do not know is that I am not inviting you to leave Christianity. Islam is the correction of Christianity."[238] Soon after, Alex told Hamad, "I

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[233] Teng, "Friends with ISIS: How to Tell One Young Woman's Story."

[234] Callimachi, "ISIS and the Lonely Young American."

[235] Ibid.

[236] Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants."

[237] Callimachi, "ISIS and the Lonely Young American."

[238] Ibid.

can agree that Muhammad and Jesus are prophets and not God," to which he responded, "So what are you waiting for to become a Muslim?"[239]

In the ensuing months, Alex received gifts from her new, pro-IS online friends, including books on Islam. She made new pro-IS friends, and began to Skype regularly with a man who identified himself as Faisal Mostafa, an IS supporter living in England. They began to spend up to six hours a day talking on Skype, with the cameras turned off to protect her feminine modesty. Their conversations remained platonic, as he tutored her in the ways of Islam, eventually leading her to her secret conversation, occurring days after Christmas, as she completed her declaration of faith, or Shahada, on Twitter, so her new online friends could serve as her witnesses.[240]

By the end of January 2015, Alex was leading a double life. Around her family, she tried to act the same as she always had to limit any suspicions. But when alone or online, she wore the hijab, prayed on the prayer mat, and read the book on Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi that Mostafa had mailed to her.[241]

Eventually Mostafa found a husband for Alex, describing the man as older and unattractive, but a "nice muslim."[242] He began to pressure Alex, telling her it is considered a sin for a Muslim to remain with nonbelievers. Mostafa directed Alex to use her little brother, then 11 years old, as her mahram, and travel to Austria, where she would meet her future husband.[243]

Alex's plans ended due to her grandmother becoming concerned and taking action. She confiscated Alex's internet devices and contacted Mostafa online, who claimed his efforts to bring Alex overseas and marry her were a joke. He promised Alex's grandmother he would not communicate with her anymore. Alex's grandmother contacted the FBI, who downloaded all of her activity. Then, thinking the matter

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239 Ibid.

240 Ibid.

241 Ibid.

242 Ibid.

243 Ibid.

resolved, Alex's grandparents went on vacation. Alex logged back on to Skype, and contacted Mostafa. At the time of the article, the two were still secretly communicating.[244]

Callimachi's story of Alex highlights the ease and anonymity involved in recruitment, and the ability for Brand Caliphate to bypass concerned family members and establish almost intimate relationships with potential recruits. This all occurs in the privacy of their online world, from the comfort of their bedroom. When discussing this story and the phenomenon of radicalized young women via Brand Caliphate, Callimachi states:

> Their (IS) propaganda machine is so rich. You can find a step-by-step curriculum that takes you ever closer to this extreme ideology. And you can do this in the privacy of your own bedroom in rural Washington with your family watching Fox News in the other bedroom…with no one knowing until you are almost too far down that road.[245]

Another key aspect Callimachi's story showcase is the factor of social isolation with regard to recruitment. Alex had very few friends and close relationships, no one to guide her toward a course correction. The one time she did reach out to someone, the pastor in her local congregation, she was summarily blown off and sent on her way—reinforcing her isolation and doubt about Christianity.[246]

New York magazine reporter Jesse Singal captured this concept in a reflection of Callimachi's article:

> What's striking about this unusual story is just how normal so much of it is. A subset of young people always have and always will feel adrift or lonely or stranded or lacking a purpose. In this case, ISIS was, from its own point of view, in the right place at the right time to give Alex both the

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244 Ibid.

245 Marissa Lorusso, "The Story of One Young Woman's Almost-Recruitment from Washington to the ISIS Caliphate," Public Radio International, June 29, 2015, http://www.pri.org/stories/2015-06-29/story-one-young-womans-almost-recruitment-washington-isis-caliphate.

246 Callimachi, "ISIS and the Lonely Young American."

sense of connection to a social network and a larger sense of purpose that she desperately craved.[247]

For an awkward and isolated girl in rural Washington State, this social interaction, simple kindnesses and having someone spend time with her, was enough to convince her to abandon her religion, deceive her family, and nearly sacrifice the existence of her and her juvenile brother. Even after the curtain has been pulled back and her interactions with IS have been laid bare to her, Alex cannot help herself and continues to feel drawn to the contact. This draw likely goes beyond the effects of Brand Caliphate and speaks to a much larger, psychological pull and motivation to belong.

F.   THE DENVER 3

The three minor females from Denver who attempted, over a period of several months, to deceive their families and travel to Syria, is a stark example of the overall effect of Brand Caliphate. No information can be found to indicate they were exposed to targeted messaging toward women; however, it is clear by their messaging on their ghost accounts that they were exposed to and affected by the broader messaging of Brand Caliphate. And again, we discover an example of thwarted recruitment that leaves the potential recruit unconvinced that their failure to join IS is the desired outcome. In the case of the Denver 3, the girls were not socially isolated and desiring group acceptance. In fact, it remains unknown why their initial interest was generated.

On October 17, 2014, Umm Yassir, 16, and her friends, who were sisters, Umm Sufyan, 17, and Umm Suleiman, 15, departed Denver with the intent to join IS in Syria.[248] Earlier that morning, Umm Sufyan and Umm Suleiman, of Somali descent, told their father they were not feeling well and were going to stay home from school. Later,

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247 Jesse Singal, "What a Young ISIS Fan From Washington State Can Teach Us," *Science of Us*, June 29, 2015.

248 Ellie Hall, "Inside The Online World Of Three American Teens Who Allegedly Wanted To Join ISIS," BuzzFeed, October 26, 2014, https://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/inside-the-online-world-of-three-teens-who-allegedly-wanted?utm_term=.gwawz7wjJ#.oknEgMEVj.

they contacted him at his place of employment and told him they were going to go to the library. When he returned home that night from work, they were not there.[249]

On the same date, Umm Yassir, of Sudanese descent, left her house at 0630. Her father believed she was meeting the school bus, as she did all school mornings. Later that morning he received a call from the school saying Umm Yassir was not in class. He contacted her on her cell phone, and she told him she had just been running late for class. She was not home when he returned.[250]

Umm Yassir's father became concerned, even more so when he realized her passport was missing. After contacting Umm Sufyan and Umm Suleiman's father, it was determined that their passports were also missing, along with $2000 in cash from their home.[251] The fathers, fearing the worst, contacted local law enforcement, with the information eventually reaching the FBI, who put an international notice on their passports.[252] All three girls were stopped in Frankfurt International Airport by German authorities as they attempted to board a flight to Turkey.[253] The girls were briefly detained before being returned to their homes in Denver.[254]

Their families were described as "shocked" by their behavior, claiming all three girls had never caused any trouble.[255] However, it appears the girls' friends and associates at school were not surprised, and reported to school officials that morning

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[249] "Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office Offense Report," Run Away Police Report, (October 17, 2014), https://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/243901601?access_key=key-luderqtQz5qlo470uXCU&allow_share=true&escape=false&view_mode=scroll&campaign=4417&ad_group=ONLINE_TRACKING_LINK&keyword=Skimbit%2C+Ltd.&source=impactradius&medium=affiliate&irgwc=1.

[250] Ibid.

[251] Abby Johnston, "Three Denver Teenagers Trying To Join ISIS Were Apprehended & Sent Home By A German Airport," *Bustle*, October 22, 2014.

[252] Ben Brumfield, "3 Girls Skipped School to Sneak off and Join ISIS," CNN, October 22, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/22/us/colorado-teens-syria-odyssey/index.html?hpt=hp_t1.

[253] Johnston, "Three Denver Teenagers Trying To Join ISIS Were Apprehended & Sent Home By A German Airport."

[254] Ibid.

[255] Ibid.

Tweets the three had made indicating their intentions.[256] A spokesperson for the Cherry Creek School District, where the girls attended school, explained the belief that the girls were "victims of online predators," explaining:

> Our understanding, our belief is that they were recruited online. That's our belief based on information we have from various sources, including investigators…In most of these cases like this, it's not so much they want to fight with ISIS. They are promised they will have homes, be safe, have husbands and live within their religion.[257]

Other teenage friends of the girls reported after the fact that they noticed changes in their behavior, transforming from "carefree westernized high-schoolers" to so devoted to their religion that they isolated themselves from their friends and normal teenage interests.[258]

Officials familiar with the case relayed to reporters the belief that Umm Sufyan was the instigator, spending as long as two months online planning the trip; however, her research failed to trigger any law enforcement tripwires.[259] What would have certainly provided insight to the girls' intentions are their social media accounts. All of the girls were active on Twitter, with Umm Sufyan creating a second, secret shadow account with the handle of @CarrierOfSins, which she used for most of her communication.[260] Umm Suleiman followed her sister's lead, also creating a second, shadow account with the handle of "@_SlaveOfAllah_.[261] Umm Yassir used her own account, which seemed to indicate she was in communication with an account linked to an IS operative, Abu Aminah.[262] Umm Suleiman was similarly known to be in communication with a female IS operative, Umm Waqqas.[263] Umm Sufyan created a Tumblr page that contained

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[256] Carlos Illescas, Jesse Paul, and Tom McGhee, "Officials: Teen Girls Likely Recruited Online to Join Islamic State," *Denver Post*, October 22, 2014.

[257] Illescas, Paul, and McGhee, "Officials: Teen Girls Likely Recruited Online to Join Islamic State."

[258] Evan Perez, Pam Brown, and Ralph Ellisa, "U.S. Wants to Know How ISIS Recruited 3 Denver Teens," CNN, accessed June 22, 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/12/us/isis-teen-recruitment/.

[259] Brumfield, "3 Girls Skipped School to Sneak off and Join ISIS."

[260] Hall, "Inside the Online World of Three American Teens Who Allegedly Wanted to Join ISIS."

[261] Ibid.

[262] Ibid.

[263] Ibid.

hundreds of pro-IS posts, including reposts of blogs written by women who had previously been recruited to the Caliphate; see Figure 13.[264]
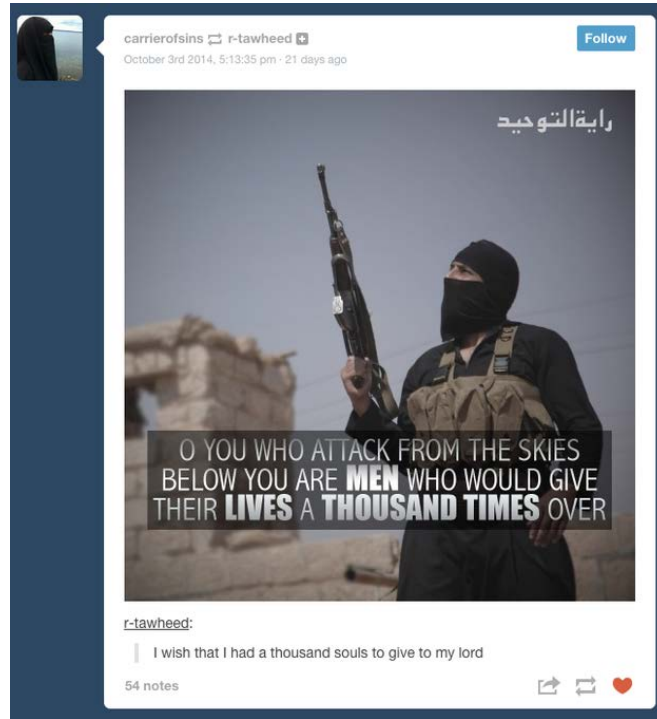

Figure 13. Umm Sufyan's Tumblr Page[265]

The girls remained apparently unaware of their permanent footprint online. After their return home from Frankfurt, Umm Sufyan and Umm Suleiman were interviewed by local police. They admitted their travel but refused to provide any further information, perhaps under the impression that the motive remained hidden. When questioned about their travel, the sisters advised simply that they traveled to Germany for "family" and refused to elaborate.[266]

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[264] Ibid.

[265] Tumblr. "Carrier of Sins.png." BuzzFeed, digital image, October 3, 2014. https://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/inside-the-online-world-of-three-teens-who-allegedly-wanted?utm_term=.ykeM4mM1j#.pwqEMYEXw.

[266] "Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office Offense Report."

A review over time of the girls' Twitter accounts depicts a slow and steady growing intensity and religiosity in their posts. As early as June 2014, Umm Yassir posted a message indicating her extreme leanings, stating, "Those who identify as 'gay' and 'Muslim' at the same time deserve death," followed by, "Muslims handing out apologies because of 9/11 are a disgrace to the Ummah."[267] By July 2014, the girls expressed increasing frustration with their family and friends, with Umm Yassir Tweeting, "Unsupportive parents are such a roadblock."[268] In September 2014, a month before their attempted departure, Umm Sufyan cryptically Tweeted, "when I die and if you guys hear of my death, it would be so much better for me if you guys made sincere dua for me than to tweet about me."[269] During the same timeframe, her sister, Umm Suleiman Tweeted, "My whole life has been a lie."[270] The day prior to their departure, Umm Suleiman remarked via Twitter, "I started to notice the people I called 'friends' weren't my true friends."[271]

Little is known about the girls since their return to Colorado. Press reporting indicates the girls' fathers received mixed feedback on social media for their actions and reporting their disappearance to the authorities. Some laud their proactive response, claiming their actions saved the lives of the teens. Others, more in line with the pro-IS ideology, believe the fathers showed themselves to be disloyal to the great cause, and aligned with the enemy, the United States.[272]

The girls received similar mixed feedback in social media.[273] Although all three have remained quiet about their experience and motivations since their return, a friend of Umm Suleiman posted and then deleted a Facebook message she claimed was from her. The post stated:

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[267] Hall, "Inside The Online World of Three American Teens Who Allegedly Wanted to Join ISIS."

[268] Ibid.

[269] Ibid.

[270] Ibid.

[271] Ibid.

[272] Ibid.

[273] Ibid.

To everyone who backbited [sic] about me I thank you because you guys took my sins. And all the reasons you guys think we left couldn't be further from the truth! But that's on you guys to believe what you want I know the truth so does ALLAH.[274]

Left with this single item of alleged commentary on their actions, as well as their refusal to disclose information to the authorities when interviewed, it does not appear that the immediate mindset upon their return was remorse for leaving their homes and deceiving their families. Whatever radicalization occurred within the girls, taking them from radical Muslim to an IS recruit, seems to persist beyond the spontaneous act of traveling, and/or the intervention of loved ones and families. This is not atypical, as we witnessed with Alex, and even when prevented by outside forces from completing their recruitment, the draw to IS often lingers. Again, the inference here is that the process of recruitment speaks to a much deeper psychological need.

This chapter examined six cases of women who were recruited or near-recruited by IS. The presumption prior to examining these cases was that the radicalization and recruitment of women by IS was affected by Brand Caliphate's targeted messaging toward women. However, examination of the cases failed to determine any exposure to the targeted messaging toward women. Instead, the influence of the larger Brand Caliphate was prominent. An examination of these findings, conclusions, and possible implication for U.S. government policy follows in the next chapter.

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[274] Ibid.

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VI.   CONCLUSION

A.   FINDINGS

This thesis intended to make two determinations. The first is whether or not there is targeted messaging toward women contained within the propaganda disseminated by IS through their marketing machine Brand Caliphate. The second is to determine that if this targeted messaging toward women does exist, is it a factor in the radicalization and recruitment of women to IS?

Through the textual analysis of Brand Caliphate's messaging in using the 10 step model offered by O'Donnell and Jowett, a reasonable determination can be made that there is a concentrated effort by IS to develop propaganda with the intent of targeting potential female recruits. However, in the six case examples that followed, no evidence could be found that these females were affected by, or even exposed to, the specific targeted messaging. This conclusion is limited to the constraints of the available open-source material for the women in the case studies. The possibility exists that the women did have exposure to or were influenced by the targeted messaging and it went unreported. There is, however, evidence that the women in these case examples are responding to Brand Caliphate propaganda and the larger marketing effort by IS, but not specifically toward the targeted messaging toward women. These case examples are obviously a very small sampling of the women who have been radicalized by IS. The cases were chosen due to the availability of information regarding their online activities or exposure. To now apply the 10 step model to each specific case example would require additional detailed information regarding exactly what online material each individual was exposed to or sought out. Due to the sensitivity and taboo nature of aligning with the IS, this information is simply not available. This may be due to a number of reasons. The females in the examples may have used covert, alias accounts or encrypted communications to hide their online activities. In some instances, such as Hoda Muthana and Aqsa Mahmood, the women were successfully recruited and cannot be relied upon for accurate self-reporting. In the case of Alex in Washington State, her online communications were documented on her electronic devices. However, even this

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information is lacking, as much of her communication was conducted via video chats, and we must rely on her reporting, which may be biased due to the nature of the communication and the potential for embarrassment and scrutiny.

Although we can say that Brand Caliphate's targeted messaging toward women does not appear to affect the radicalization of these females, that does not discount the larger role of Brand Caliphate in the process. Each of the women who were examined initially sought information about IS through online channels. Many of them were ultimately recruited through personal interactions by other IS supporters or recruiters, making the actual process more about the interpersonal, social interaction online versus the marketing. However, the role of marketing and Brand Caliphate remains key in developing the initial interest in IS and the female's online probing for information, which ultimately leads to their identification for possible development and recruitment.

The outcome of the analysis in this thesis resulted in one additional key finding. Although targeted messaging does not appear to play a significant factor in the radicalization of women, one overarching theme has emerged—the overall role of discourse in the radicalization process. From the more obvious impact of the broader messaging of Brand Caliphate to the revamped counter-narrative of the U.S. government—the distinguishing characteristics of who plays the role of the propagandist and what medium he or she uses appears to have little impact. In fact, although beyond the scope of this thesis, the implication is that this messaging already exists, often unintentionally, within the systems the potential recruit regularly interacts. This extends beyond the internet; to family, community, and even government discourse. This naturally occurring messaging appears to have set the tone for the potential recruit, helping shape his or her receptiveness to the more intentional propaganda. Consequently, any strategy to counter the effects of Brand Caliphate on the recruitment of women (or men) must include a much broader strategy to address this messaging found within the social and family systems of the potential recruit. To be successful, the battle over controlling the propaganda must extend well beyond Twitter and should begin with the community.

## B.	OUTCOMES

### 1.	Tracking the Trend

In December 2015, George Washington University's program on extremism released their report *ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,* in which they examined IS recruitment in the U.S. and the role of social media in that process.[275] The report identifies IS recruitment in the United States as "unprecedented," with the profiles and motivations of recruits "diverse" and defying easy analysis.[276] The report highlights the role of social media in the radicalization of sympathizers, identifying approximately 300 U.S.-based individuals who were active on social media, engaged in disseminating propaganda, and engaged in "interacting with like-minded individuals."[277] The report details a trend of increased radicalization in the United States, asserting there has been a "recent surge" in recruits. The report further discusses a finding that echoes the results of this analysis:

> The role of social media in recent developments in the jihadist scene in America, as elsewhere, is central. Yet, it would be incorrect to overemphasize the impact of social media by considering it the sole medium of radicalization and mobilization for American ISIS supporters. A close examination of the individuals…reveals a significantly more nuanced reality in which the importance of social media, while present in virtually all cases, differs substantially from case to case. To be sure, cases of web-driven, individual radicalization have increased in frequency with the rise of ISIS.[278]

A dissenting, emerging argument indicates the Brand Caliphate machine has slowed since the end of 2015. The not-for-profit Middle East Research Institute (MEMRI) has argued the trend has shifted:

> The Group (IS) has repeatedly stressed that "half of jihad is media" to highlight how vital its online activists are in winning hearts and minds in

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[275] Vidino and Hughes, "ISIS in America"; the GWU program on extremism has updated the statistics monthly since the publication of their report. The June 2016 update identified 12% of the IS recruits in the U.S. legal system as female, and the average age of a recruit as 26, although this is not adjusted for gender.

[276] Ibid., 11.

[277] Ibid.

[278] Ibid., 26.

cyber space…Female ISIS members took on multiple roles as ISIS members, both online and in actuality…the women did their part by waging psychological warfare against their enemies, and by participating in promoting ISIS online…Women were actively involved in penning threats on their various social media accounts, and tried to instill fear in their opponents; they were an important cog in the ISIS propaganda machine.[279]

They argue that this model has evolved since late 2015, with the role of the online supporter shifting from within the Caliphate to those supporting from abroad. MEMRI goes so far as to assert that the content has shifted as well, moving away from blatant, organized threats and hashtag campaigns to subtler branding, such as imbedding comments within Western news feeds.[280] To be sure, MEMRI does not claim this to be a sign of IS weakening, instead they argue it is to be viewed as a conscious effort to show that "jihadi supporters are not an uncouth, uneducated bunch ill-informed about world affairs."[281]

This seems to be an oversimplification of the current IS media machine. Perhaps IS has begun to explore more sophisticated messaging and focus more on external supporters to do so; however, this is not a mutually exclusive situation, as they continue to produce videos and publications highlighting their brutality. IS continues the regular releases of their online magazine *Dabiq* and videos depicting assassinations are published on a nearly daily basis. On May 21, 2016, IS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani released one of many audio recordings continuing to call for attacks against the United States and the West, advocating supporters to make the month of Ramadan "the month of conquest and jihad," and advising them to "get prepared, be ready…to make it a month of calamity everywhere for non-believers."[282] Supporters of IS did not disappoint al-Adnani. The Centre for Research and Globalization has labeled the 2016 Ramadan as

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[279] Agron, "Online Women Activists of the Islamic State—Where Are They Now?"

[280] Ibid.

[281] Ibid.

[282] Immanuel Al-Manteeqi, "ISIS Spokesman Abu Muhammad Al Adnani Releases New Audio Message," Counter Jihad, May 23, 2016, http://counterjihad.com/isis-spokesman-abu-muhammad-al-adnani-releases-new-audio-message.

"the bloodiest Ramadan month in modern times."[283] To support their claim, the Centre detailed a list of 15 international attacks occurring between June 5 and July 5, 2016, resulting in 421 deaths and 729 wounded, most of which has been attributed to IS supporters.[284] Included in the body count are the 49 victims of the Orlando, Florida, Pulse nightclub shooting on June 12, 2016, which was the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history.[285]

2. The Results

Not known for their terrorism research, the magazine *Marie Claire* published a surprisingly insightful article titled, "The American Women of ISIS."[286] In the article, author Kate Storey asserts:

> ISIS is now pursuing a chilling new strategy: recruiting teenage girls online. It's not a fluke—it's because ISIS wants it that way. The group creates propaganda that specifically targets women, and sells them a different message from the one sold to men (though both are told it's their religious obligation to join the Islamic State). Men are marketed the chance to prove their faith by joining the fight; women are marketed the idea of sisterhood and the opportunity to marry a jihadi fighter, thus supporting the cause by raising the next generation of militants.[287]

Storey identifies a pattern of targeted messaging for women, but in her analysis she fails to acknowledge the surprising receptiveness women have shown to the male-targeted propaganda. In none of the information developed from the textual analysis of IS propaganda, or through an evaluation of the case examples, does it appear that women were dissuaded by the more gruesome imagery and violence-based propaganda produced by IS. Instead, it appears (anecdotally) that either radicalized women have embraced the

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[283] Joachim Hagopian, "The Bloodiest Ramadan Month on Record: ISIS Linked to Multiple Terror Attacks. But Who Is Behind ISIS?," Centre for Research on Globalization, July 11, 2016, http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-bloodiest-ramadan-month-on-record-isis-linked-to-multiple-terror-attacks-but-who-is-behind-isis/5535336.

[284] Ibid.

[285] Matt Vasilogambros, "Was Orlando the Deadliest Mass Shooting in U.S. History?," *Atlantic*, June 15, 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2016/06/orlando-deadliest-mass-shooting/487058/.

[286] Storey, "The American Women of ISIS."

[287] Ibid.

violence as part of the cause or they have dismissed the violence as part of a "misinformation campaign" by the United States to discredit IS and dissuade recruitment.

3.   The Psychological Factor

Getting to the root of why these women are susceptible to being radicalized is quickly becoming an industry for professional analysts and think tanks. Although theories vary, many come back to some sense of social injustice in their current environment and the perception of acceptance and belonging in their new group. During an interview with the *Denver Post,* Nader Hashemi, director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver, stressed this point, saying young recruits are discovered by "appealing to their emotional ties—their ethnic identity—and feelings of social justice," and that these young individuals are "searching for an identity, a cause, something bigger than themselves."[288] This theme, the identification with and membership within a group, was mirrored throughout the cases examined in this thesis. The circumstances for each individual recruit varied, but all seemed to be drawn to a sense of belonging. The impact of this connection to the group cannot be understated. In every case, at a key decision-making time for the potential recruit, the group membership held more influence than the female's family, friends, and/or local religious community.

Echoing this concept, Richard Barrett of the think tank The Soufan Group, explains, "The general picture provided by foreign fighters of their lives in Syria suggests camaraderie, good morale and purposeful activity, all mixed in with a sense of understated heroism, designed to attract their friends as well as to boost their own self-esteem."[289] This was validated during the textual analysis of IS propaganda—from the Islamic State of Cats account attempting to display a softer side of IS to the Flames of War video, highlighting their proud jihadists fighting the unbelievers.

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[288] Illescas, Paul, and McGhee, "Officials."

[289] Brumfield, "3 Girls Skipped School to Sneak off and Join ISIS."

There is debate among experts regarding the process of radicalization. In Georgetown University professor Fathali Moghaddam's article "The Staircase to Terrorism,"[290] he describes the staircase as discussing the central proposition that

> terrorism can best be understood through a focus on the psychological interpretation of material conditions and the options seen to be available to overcome perceived injustices, particularly those in the procedures through which decisions are made.[291]

Moghaddam details the staircase analogy as a series of floors, escalating gradually to full radicalization at the top of the staircase. He describes the ground floor as the "psychological interpretation of material conditions." Moghaddam identifies the key characteristics of this level as a sense of perceived injustice mixed with feeling of shame and frustration. This is followed by the first floor, which is the "perceived options to fight unfair treatment." The main components of the first floor involve "individuals' perceived possibilities for personal mobility to improve their situation and their perceptions of procedural justice."[292] The second floor increases to a "displacement of aggression." The third floor sees the potential recruit experiencing "moral engagement." Moghaddam explains this stage as the recruits becoming "disengaged from morality as it is defined by government authorities (and often by the majority in society) and morally engaged in the way morality is constructed by the terrorist organization."[293] At the fourth floor, closing in on fully radicalized, the potential recruit experiences a "solidification of categorical thinking and the perceived legitimacy of the terrorist organization." Finally, the staircase is complete, and the recruit reaches the fifth and final floor, "the Terrorist act and sidestepping inhibitory mechanisms."[294]

If we accept the Moghaddam's staircase premise, then the opportunity for government intervention with regard to radicalization, and in this instance, specifically women, should be focused on the areas surrounding the ground floor and first level of the

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[290] Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism."

[291] Ibid.

[292] Ibid.

[293] Ibid.

[294] Ibid.

staircase. It is at this point where the feelings of injustice and isolation appear to fester, leading to the potential recruits seeking for a sense of community and belonging.

Not all scholars agree that the process of radicalization and recruitment is as fluid and linear as depicted in the staircase analogy. Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) Associate Professor Mohamed Hafez and his associate and NPS alumni Creighton Mullins developed an alternate theory of radicalization, introducing the concept of the radicalization puzzle.[295] Hafez and Mullins explain the current environment

> The new generation of homegrown militants is ethnically diverse and technologically savvy, representing the successful diffusion of *jihadism* as a mobilizing ideology, but this diversity make it nearly impossible to offer a single paradigm that explains the universe of cases. Moreover, women are increasingly playing a role in Muslim radicalization, raising questions about the possibilities of gender-based variables that have not been previously considered when discussing a male-dominated phenomenon.[296]

Continuing with their puzzle metaphor, Hafez and Mullins identify four factors that influence radicalization: ideologies (both religious and political), grievances (both collective and personal), the individual's support structure and the environment that enables their recruitment, and interpersonal relationships and networks.[297] Each of these factors represents a piece of the puzzle, unique to each individual. How they fit together and the image that emerges cannot be generalized and is not a "uniform and linear process" as suggested by Moghaddam's staircase and similar metaphors. If we accept the puzzle metaphor as a foundation for policy exploitation, this provides more opportunities for government intervention and disruption along the radicalization process. Each piece of the puzzle allows for a possible point to influence the narrative and thereby alter the image that emerges as the pieces are put together.[298] As we saw depicted in the case examples, for the women who were stopped from completing their recruitment, most of the intervention occurred within the individual's support structure. For Alex and the Denver 3, family members intervened to derail their plans. In the case of Aqsa Mahmood

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[295] Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle."

[296] Ibid.

[297] Ibid.

[298] Ibid.

and Hoda Muthana, the realization by the social system that radicalization was occurring came too late. In the cases of Jaelyn Young and Shannon Conley, the intervention came from law enforcement, which was alerted due to their interaction with interpersonal networks—Young by her online activity and Conley by her odd behavior at the church.

As *New York Times* reporter Poh Si Teng observed, "For stories on Islamic State recruitment and jihadist movements in general, it's very important to suspend judgment to really get at the heart of what motivates people to do certain things."[299]

Offering a successful counter-narrative campaign that delegitimizes Brand Caliphate and removes the jihadi-cool vibe of their marketing strategy is an essential piece of any Unites States Government effort. Follow this with an effort to address the sub-text of isolation for potential recruits, and a sense of perceived injustice (particularly at the government level) may result in a significant reduction in the number of IS female recruits. Although beyond the scope of this project, the possibility exists that this same approach would also have a similar effect on the male recruitment numbers as well.

C.   POLICY IMPLICATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings highlight what has become a vicious cycle of recruitment. The propaganda develops the brand of the Caliphate. The messaging creates the rock star status, the jihadi cool of IS. It is largely this aura of trendiness that is the initial hook to a potential female recruit. The interest is piqued. Once the initial feelers are out there by the interested female, they are typically reeled in by the online interpersonal interactions with IS recruiters. Once the individual is successfully recruited, the radicalization is heralded on social media by IS and publicized by the international press, ultimately highlighting the effective recruitment. Thus, the act of having recruited, in particular a female, becomes part of the IS narrative, feeding back into the propaganda loop to serve as a draw to the next potential recruit. This paradigm may not be unique to the radicalization of women. Although outside the scope of this thesis, it is entirely possible, if not likely, that a similar feedback loop exists for males inspired to conduct localized acts of terror in support of IS. IS-inspired attacks receive a high level of media attention

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[299] Teng, "Friends With ISIS."

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and the individuals responsible for the attack are praised and marketed by Brand Caliphate. Potential male recruits may be influenced by this propaganda to conduct an act, knowing they will obtain absolution of their sins, paradise, and fame. This act can then, similarly, be used by IS in their propaganda to influence the next potential recruit, again highlighting a feedback cycle.

Any successful U.S. government counter-terrorism strategy must include a viable plan to interrupt this feedback loop. There appears to be two areas in which this can occur. The first is controlling the narrative. The Department of State has made strides in the area, but U.S. government efforts remain insufficient to date. Controlling the narrative will disrupt Brand Caliphate and diminish the initial interest or draw to the group. The second place to interrupt the feedback cycle is preventing the successful completion of the recruitment. Much like Alex, the lonely Sunday school teacher, intervention prevented her radicalization. Consequently, IS cannot market her conversion and use her to lure another young, isolated and disenfranchised female.

1.   Controlling the Narrative

The successful establishment of Brand Caliphate has resulted in a type of trendiness for jihad and IS. Katrin Bennhold of the *New York Times* documents the phenomena of jihadi cool:

> Teenage rebellion is expressed through a radical religiosity that questions everything around them. In this world, the counterculture is conservative. Islam is punk rock. The head scarf is liberating. Beards are sexy…The Islamic State is making a determined play for these girls, tailoring its siren calls to their vulnerabilities, frustrations and dreams, and filling a void the West has so far failed to address.[300]

Bennhold is correct. If the rock star status is the initial draw for potential recruits, then more energy should be focused on changing the narrative and the public perception of IS. By controlling the narrative and effectively removing the "cool kid" status from IS, it seems likely one consequence would be a reduction in the number of female recruits. With an effective counter-narrative that delegitimizes IS and removes the coolness factor,

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[300] Bennhold, "Jihad and Girl Power How ISIS Lured 3 London Girls."

it is reasonable to expect that recruitment would decline. The initial draw to connect with Brand Caliphate would be lost. Without the initial probing online, opportunities for the social interactions with IS recruiters would not exist. The waterfall effect would likely result in reduced numbers of recruits, including females. This pivot on U.S. policy for IS counter-narrative strategies may have already occurred. As previously discussed, the Associated Press has reported a significant reduction in IS-linked Twitter accounts, a trend attributed to a more effective approach to controlling the narrative by the U.S. government.[301] Even if U.S. government efforts are primarily focused on Twitter, the saturation of the messaging goes beyond the singular social media medium. Much as Brand Caliphate benefits from and cultivates the generalized, rock star perception of IS, the U.S. government is finally using similar tactics and resources to delegitimize IS.

2.   An Inclusive Community

Another policy implication can be found in the one commonality found among most female recruits—a sense of community. A consistent theme emerged from the case examples of female IS recruits. They were seeking a sense of community, or belonging, they claimed to be lacking in their home environment. How that community was defined varied from woman to woman, including feelings of isolation from their families, schools, friends, neighborhoods, or government. They lacked a sense of acceptance and belonging they felt IS could provide. Addressing this underlying sub-text could provide another opportunity for policy makers to influence the radicalization trend. Although outside of the scope of this thesis, the implementation of a community-policing model could be an effective mechanism to address the subtext and increase a sense of community.[302] By developing a robust community-policing model, communities may be better able to maintain a sense of acceptance and unity within, dissuading potential recruits' need to explore for an alternate community.

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[301] "ISIS Twitter Traffic Plummets as Counterterrorism Officials Step up Their Social Media Game."

[302] Nigel Fielding, "Ideas in British Policing: Getting the Best out of Community Policing" (University of Surrey, May 2009), www.police-foundation.org.uk/uploads/...policing/ ideas_community_policing.pdf.

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