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Brenton Tarrant: the processes which brought him to engage in political violence

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Introduction

Individual radicalisation is a complex and bespoke process influenced by multiple factors and variables, meaning every individual follows their own path to terrorism and political violence. This paper will endeavour to demonstrate and explore some of the constitutive factors and processes in Brenton Tarrant's path to radicalisation prior to his infamous Christchurch Mosque shooting in which 51 people lost their lives.

The case of Brenton Tarrant is pertinent and salient to study because just as he took inspiration from Breivik, the man who perpetrated the 2011 Norway attacks, Tarrant's manifesto and attack are being discussed, idolised, and taken as inspiration in far-right discussion boards across the world (Makuch, 2020). This is concerning due to the current cycle of far-right politics, with mainstream media giving air time to right-wing personalities and the surging popularity of far-right populist parties, particularly in Europe (Campbell, 2019). In Tarrant's home country of Australia xenophobic and racist sentiments and non-lethal or verbal attacks are commonplace; furthermore, it is predicted that mass-casualty attacks will rise because white nationalists feel empowered by these cultural trends and climate (Muller, 2019). To prevent future terrorist instances, it is important to understand what factors brought Tarrant to commit violence. Radicalisation literature tends to neglect group and environmental approaches that could explain individuals' engagement in political violence; this paper seeks to redress this by discussing cultural context and group dynamics in relation to social movement theory (SMT), plus relevant individual and psychological concepts.

As a lone actor, although Tarrant was not actively recruited by a *group*, he identified with a wider in-group which might have been a source of motivation for him and could have influenced his switch from thought to action. Through his travels and online connecting with the far-right social movement Tarrant was socialised into increasingly extreme beliefs and underwent a process of self-radicalisation arising from a plethora of overlapping processes. Factors that may have contributed to his engagement in terrorism and political violence include personal circumstance resulting in him having the means and opportunity to do so, a broader culture conducive to, and tolerant of, far-right ideology, and connection and interaction with the internet community. These factors and processes facilitated both Tarrant's cognitive and behavioural radicalisation, culminating in his decision to engage in political violence.

This paper explores the processes by which Tarrant came to political violence; firstly it outlines who Tarrant was, his beliefs and the attack; then the difference between Tarrant's cognitive and behavioural radicalisation is conceptualised. From there the paper explores the lone actor puzzle using two lone wolf profiles: 'caring-compelled' and 'disconnected-disordered' (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2014). Discussion then turns to Tarrant's online radicalisation, looking to see whether several processes and factors associated with online communities, funnelling and streams may have pushed his beliefs to the increasingly extreme. It is argued that his engagement in online forums exposed Tarrant to extreme arguments and materials, and members of the far-right community, all of which contributed to making his thoughts more extreme. However, it was his strong emotional reaction to circumstances in 2017 which made him believe he had a personal responsibility to act and led to his engagement in political violence.

Brenton Tarrant

Born in 1990 Tarrant was the second child of Sharon (teacher) and Rodney Tarrant (fitness fanatic and garbage man). He was raised in Grafton, a small city with a slightly older, poorer

and whiter population than average for Australia, and where 87 percent of residents are Australian-born (O'Malley, Barlass and Begley, 2019). According to family, school and work peers, Tarrant was smart, "odd, largely solitary and prone to poor practical jokes"; he displayed lacklustre social skills (O'Malley, Barlass and Begley, 2019: no pagination). His parents divorced when Tarrant was a child. Following a knee injury Tarrant became interested in the gym, becoming obsessed with it (O'Malley, Barlass and Begley, 2019). In 2010 Tarrant's father died after struggling for three years with mesothelioma. Tarrant had been living with his father through this time and supposedly spent increasing amounts of time online. Tarrant had no interest in university (Tarrant, 2019), instead he worked at a gym, and received a monetary settlement following his father's death. Now free from constraints of time and money Tarrant started travelling, visiting sites of European-Ottoman and Christian-Muslim battles around Europe and Asia, plus other sites significant to the far-right including Serbia (whose previous ultra-nationalist leader Slobodan Milosevic perpetrated the Bosnian genocide) and France (with the largest Muslim population in the West) (Walden, 2019). Tarrant settled in New Zealand and joined a rifle club (Munn, 2019).

At the time of the attack, Tarrant self-identified as an eco-fascist and racist, but also ascribed to the ethno-nationalist Identitarian movement which advocates 'ethno-pluralism' whereby ethnic groups are regarded as equal but should be separate (Murdoch and Mulhall, 2019). Tarrant (2019: 18) summarises his beliefs as "ethnic autonomy for all peoples with a focus on the preservation of nature, and the natural order". This translates into anti-immigration and anti-Islam sentiments reflected in theories of the 'great replacement' (the title of his manifesto) which refers to the cultural and ethnic replacement of white Europeans by 'third world colonisation' arising from disproportionate birth rates and mass immigration (Moses, 2019). The election of "internationalist, globalist, anti-white, ex-banker" President Macron confirmed to Tarrant that politics was not the solution and he had to act; Tarrant believed he and members of the far-right had "divined the race laws of history that only they understand" and that whites "seduced by consumerism … could not be relied on to vote for their racial salvation" (Tarrant, 2019: 8; Moses, 2019: 203).

After two years of planning, on March 15th 2019 during Friday Prayer Tarrant entered and opened fire at the Al Noor Mosque and the Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch killing 51 people and injuring 49. Throughout the attack Tarrant played far-right anthems from his car stereo; and it was later found that the gun's magazines were covered in names and terms significant to the far-right movement. Prior to commencing his attack Tarrant circulated his 'Great Replacement' manifesto online and the attack was livestreamed on Facebook. Tarrant was captured within twenty minutes of beginning his attack.

Before standing trial court-ordered mental health assessments found Tarrant was fit to stand (Bayer, 2020); so far there is no evidence to suggest Tarrant had documented mental illnesses at the time of the attack. A notable challenge in understanding Tarrant's thoughts, emotions, motivations and actions is the limited available evidence; there remains only his subjective manifesto and remnants of his online activities, with a notable deficiency of alternative confirmed narratives or corroborating evidence. Some internet content he uploaded has since been removed, hence there is room for scholars and the media to conject what underlay the Christchurch attack. This discussion can only draw from Tarrant's subjective narratives and the limited trail of evidence left, plus the speculations and opinions of commentators and scholars accessing this same information. For this reason, the discussion that follows is necessarily limited in its validity and scope.

Conceptualising Tarrant and his violence

Tarrant has been labelled by many as a terrorist; his violence considered an act of 'terrorism' rather than a generic 'crime'. Tarrant is the first to be prosecuted under New Zealand's Terrorism Suppression Act 2002 (Stoakes, 2019). Tarrant's 'Great Replacement' manifesto is testament to the political motivations of his violence, but why Tarrant may or may not qualify as a 'terrorist' is open to debate. This reflects the supposed lack of a universal definition of 'terrorism' and the word's oft pejorative use (Ramsay, 2015). This discussion will not engage in this definitional debate, nor will it provide a definition, since the term can be applied to heterogeneous phenomena that bear little resemblance to each other; this could obscure the issue at hand (Ramsay, 2015). Additionally, as the purpose of this case study is to explore contributing factors which led Tarrant to engage in violence a definition would be extraneous, adding little analytical utility; what is important here is that his violence was politically motivated.

Instead, the debate which needs exploring is the issue of 'radicalisation' which comprises much of the literature concerning individuals' paths to violence and "like terrorism, is in the eye of the beholder" (Neumann, 2013: 878). Being 'radical' is understood as rejecting the status quo; 'radicalisation' is the processual development of extremist beliefs and ideologies; and 'action pathways' refer to the process of engaging in violent extremist actions (Bartlett and Miller, 2012; Borum, 2011). As there is an important distinction between radical thought (cognitive radicalisation) and extremist behaviour (behavioural radicalisation), this paper will explore what processes brought Tarrant from radical thoughts to engaging in extreme action. A common misconception is that there is a positive relationship between cognitive and behavioural radicalisation, that the apex of cognitive radicalisation is the precursor to inevitable behavioural radicalisation; scholars have shown this to be false as cognitive radicalisation represents just one pathway to extreme behaviour, not all so-called terrorists are motivated by extremist ideas (Neumann, 2013; Borum, 2011). Indeed, most individuals who hold 'radical' views never resort to extreme action thus there must be more determining factors than just radical ideology (Borum, 2011; Neumann, 2013; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2014). Nonetheless, Tarrant was politically motivated *and* held extremist views and so, as Neumann (2013) argued, it is impossible to separate political beliefs from political actions; that ideological sophistication is not a litmus test for cognitive radicalisation's relevance; and that any attempt to understand an individual's 'action pathways' must examine the social movements and countercultures from which they emerged.

A step-change from radical thought into violent action is not inevitable, but it did occur in Tarrant's case; this is the crux of what this paper aims to explore - what processes and factors caused Tarrant to go beyond radical thought and to engage in extreme behaviour. Before doing this, it is important to examine the specifics of Brenton Tarrant and the Christchurch shootings, hence discussion now explores the notion of Tarrant as a lone wolf.

The Lone Actor Puzzle

The major challenge in understanding Tarrant's action pathways to violence is the fact that he supposedly planned and orchestrated the attacks alone. Typically, scholars have explained why individuals overcome the 'free rider problem', and make personal sacrifices for a cause, through rewards and punishments in small groups, or state power and love of comrades (Olson, 1965; Moskalenko and McCauley, 2011; 2014). This explanation does not work for lone actors who commit political violence; because Tarrant acted alone, something else must explain why he took violent action on behalf of others.

The discussion that follows explores potential explanations, including using SMT which focuses on groups and social movements in which individuals are actively recruited into activism and persuaded to be violent for a cause. Yet Tarrant and other lone wolves prove difficult to understand in SMT terms as arguably there was no active recruitment process, instead it was more passive and insidious; some have termed this as self-radicalisation (Munn, 2019). Yet something *did* move Tarrant from radical thought to radical action even if he was not actively 'radicalised' and recruited by an organisation. One explanation of such behaviour is given by McCauley and Moskalenko (2014: 69) who proposed a profile of a lone wolf terrorist as either 'caring-compelled' individuals "who strongly feel the suffering of others and feel a personal responsibility to reduce or avenge this suffering", or 'disconnected-disordered' individuals "with a grievance and weapons experience who are social loners and often show signs of psychological disorder". In Tarrant's case both categories can be applied although neither categorisation fits perfectly.

For disconnected-disordered lone wolf terrorists, McCauley and Moskalenko (2014) propose the common characteristics include grievance (political or personal), depression, unfreezing (a situational crisis of personal disconnection or maladjustment), weapons experience and social isolation. Most of these are present in Tarrant's case. Tarrant saw himself (as a white individual) under threat from the 'great replacement', meaning the gradual replacement of white people by immigrants, in other words 'third world colonialism' (Moses, 2019) (*personal and political grievance*). The death of Tarrant's father represents a major personal loss and arguably left Tarrant with less to lose (*unfreezing*); his grandmother also speculated that living with his father through the illness must have impacted him (speculative *depression or mental disorder*) (O'Malley, Barlass and Begley, 2019). New Zealand gun laws also meant that Tarrant was legally able to acquire automatic weapons and he joined the local rifle club (w*eapons experience).* Tarrant also anecdotally lacked social skills and was termed a 'loner' (*socially isolated*). Taken together, the importance of means and opportunity to move from radical thought to action is clear; grievance provides a motive, weapons experience provides the means, and depression, social isolation and unfreezing would lower the opportunity cost of violence (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2014).

Although at first glance Tarrant appears to fit this disconnected-disordered category, research for this paper has found no evidence of psychological disorder and he was found mentally fit to stand trial. It is therefore appropriate to explore whether McCauley and Moskalenko's (2014) 'caring-compelled' category fits Tarrant. In this category, the move from radical thought to action occurs through a dual-pyramid mode in which individuals with an unusually strong capacity to feel others' sufferings experience an emotional reaction that converts the political into a personal moral obligation; this moves them to the apex of McCauley and Moskalenko's (2014) 'opinion radicalisation pyramid', and also to the top of the 'action radicalisation pyramid'. Two psychological explanations of why caring-compelled individuals may override the free-rider problem are: 'strong reciprocity', whereby punishing 'bad' people becomes an expression of societal altruism; and 'group identification' where an individual identifies with an in-group they perceive as being victimised and feel anger towards the perceived perpetrators (Moskalenko and McCauley, 2011; 2014). In Tarrant's case, he was already a radical before his attack, but his decision to do the shooting could arguably come from a feeling of personal responsibility to act, as demonstrated by his manifesto entries regarding the Islamist Stockholm attack, World War Two memorials, French immigration levels and Macron's election in 2017. Tarrant said he "found [his] emotions swinging between fuming rage and suffocating despair at the indignity of the invasion of France" (referring to the immigration levels) (Tarrant,

2019: 8), demonstrating a strong emotional reaction. In other words, and according to the caring-compelled type, the group he self-identified with (whites) were deemed under attack and it was his personal responsibility to do something about it. Yet, the evidence suggests Tarrant's altruism was not completely about empathy and feeling the suffering of others, but about protecting the group he identified with from 'white genocide'. Therefore, Tarrant fits neither category perfectly demonstrating the difficulties associated with narrowly defined profiles.

Despite McCauley and Moskalenko's (2008; 2011; 2014) theories which endeavour to explain lone actors' self-sacrifice in relation to the free-rider problem, it is important to point out that although Tarrant acted alone and was not a member of an organisation per se, he was a member of a community by virtue of his social media presence, through which his posts earned him rewards and punishments via social pressures, and he received attention, gratification or respect. Thus, SMT remains relevant for Tarrant because he did not act in a vacuum, he was enabled and constrained by a wider social movement, ideology and culture; as Neumann (2013) would argue his action pathways must be viewed in the context of the social movement and the countercultures from which they emerged. To be complete, exploration of Tarrant's engagement with political violence must include examination of the internet's role, the wider transnational far-right movement and culture, and whether it enabled and constrained him towards increasing extremism.

'A dark social web': online 'radicalisation'

In his manifesto Tarrant claimed the internet was responsible for his belief system's development as "you will not find the truth anywhere else"; allegedly the internet broke the hold of the corporate and state media allowing "true freedom of thought and discussion" (Tarrant, 2019: 17, 36). These assertions contain an element of truth as the internet has allowed relatively unregulated and transnational communication; indeed, the far-right movement and its associated terrorism supposedly have successfully "draw[n] even more oxygen from the internet" than Islamist movements, with much of the communicating and organising happening online (Campbell, 2019: no pagination). Between 2012 and 2016 Berger (cited in Campbell, 2019) found that American white-nationalist movements grew their follower-base by over 600%. Thus, any study of white nationalist attacks necessarily includes examination of the internet's role in engagement action pathways. Of particular interest are forums such as Channel, 4chan and 8chan representing extremism 'breeding grounds' where "anonymous users trade ostensibly ironic memes, jokes and discussions laced with racism and misogyny" and where users have learnt to exploit algorithms and social media weaknesses to distort public perception and gain a disproportionally loud voice (Campbell, 2019: no pagination). For Tarrant, his online world and travels represented a mutually reinforcing cycle, each feeding into and bolstering the other, making online communities and the social ties an important aspect of his path to engagement.

Online communities: Social Network Ties and Framing

Relating his online communities to SMT, and in line with McAdam's (1986) theory, Tarrant has already been shown to be 'structurally' and 'biographically available' due to his loner status and flexible job. His few ties and constraints preventing involvement in activism could have made him more inclined to engage, but his online forum activities meant he had also developed online social network ties (McAdam, 1986; Snow et al, 1986). So, despite being alone in planning and orchestrating his attack, he *did* have social network ties within a pre-existing

ideological milieu; this is an important factor in determining mobilisation. According to Snow et al (1986: 789) social phenomena are structured according to socio-spatial factors, rather than being random or the function of social-psychological predispositions; this also applies to inherently social and group-based social movements. Therefore, it is relevant to study social networks and their ties in relation to Tarrant's mobilisation. Snow et al (1986) argue that recruitment is more likely to occur where there are social ties to the movement, and the network channel represents the richest source of recruits; this combined with structural availability and ideological commitment makes an individual more likely to become a movement constituent. How much face-to-face interaction Tarrant had with movement members on his travels is unsubstantiated, however his participation online provided a process of ongoing interaction through which he was provided with benefits and reasons to remain a member, and was drawn further into the community and belief system.

Quek's (2019: 3) opinion piece raises the relevant point that the internet and social media allows those with extreme ideologies to find like-minded communities and opportunities for "camaraderie and communication" and this can ultimately drive and enable cognitive radicalisation. Singer, a think-tank expert on the weaponisation of social media, (cited in Campbell, 2019: no pagination) seems to support this point, asserting that like ISIS, the far-right target "lost and angry young men" giving them a sense of fellowship whereby they feel understood and appreciated. Within these communities, 'group polarisation' is likely whereby strangers brought together to discuss risk-taking or political opinion will increasingly come to agreement on the opinion at issue, with the average group opinion shifting to the extreme favoured by members before discussion (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008). Put differently, when a group of individuals with similar values discuss an issue, an internalised shift towards more extreme opinion is produced; this offers psychological underpinning to increasingly radical perspectives within groups. It is both possible and likely that this occurred with Tarrant in the online discussion board communities in which he participated and would have contributed to his increasingly radical views, moving him up the 'opinion radicalisation pyramid' (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2014).

The culture of forums like 4chan also lends support to this argument; at their darker points these forums are full of holocaust denying, racist and misogynist posts disguised as jokes and irony (Kirkpatrick, 2019). Such messages and 'humour' are propagated through memes and 'shitposting', whereby endless posts are flooded onto the forum to mock and confuse; they can desensitise the audience and foster extremism through repetition; they act as recruitment filters by inviting those who 'like' particular posts to more extreme discussions (O'Malley, Barlass and Begley, 2019; Moses, 2019). Having claimed "memes have done more for the ethnonationalist movement than any manifesto", Tarrant (2019: 47, 45) talks about using 'shitposting' to provoke specific behaviour, by using "edgy humour and memes in the vanguard stage and to attract a young audience" to appeal to "the anger and the black comedic nature of the present"; eventually showing the reality of the movement's thoughts and intent for the future. It would be reasonable to assume that Tarrant was party to this process.

In appealing to the supposed anger and black humour of their audience by 'shitposting', the far-right online movement arguably attempts to align their frame and worldview with less radical elements of the community, using it to draw in followers by presenting an extreme world view supported in mainstream media. Neglect of these environmental influences and group approaches represents a shortcoming of radicalisation literature, this is problematic because global culture impacts the credibility of extremist frames and their potential to resonate (Muller,

2019; Benford and Snow, 2000). To address this issue the discussion recognises cultural factors within framing, such as the local white nationalist community, ultra-right-wing politicians and media personalities, which influenced and empowered Tarrant, and give credibility to far-right extremist frames (Muller, 2019). The relevance of this is exemplified by Tarrant's vocal online support of the leader of the anti-Islam white nationalist United Patriots Front, Blair Cottrell (O'Malley, Barlass and Begley, 2019).

Framing theory posits that individuals identify with a movement when they accept how the movement frames events, global contexts and phenomena; this is done through core framing tasks and discursive processes which endeavour to reach frame alignment (Benford and Snow, 2000). Australian culture has been argued as being conducive to right-wing sentiments, emboldening white nationalists and reinforcing their beliefs enabling the far-right community to frame themselves within mainstream Australian culture and discourse. In framing terms, increased credibility and saliency has raised the resonance of far-right discourse (Benford and Snow, 2000).

To highlight the potential for framing processes to contribute to Tarrant's eventual engagement in political violence, Tarrant's membership of the Identarian movement must be acknowledged; this group pushes a narrative of victimisation and perceived threat. To recruit young members, the movement adopted the language of gamers and their online forums, casting white people as victims of historical injustices and their members as courageous warriors taking up arms to defend their people; the community also uses nostalgic narratives of a time when they need not fear alleged social, cultural and political threats posed by immigrants (O'Malley, Barlass and Begley, 2019; Quek, 2019). Movement members use Islamist extremism and minority group crime rates to leverage fear and anxiety (Quek, 2019); such narratives enable movement members to further stoke fear, which in turn they use to reinforce the worldview of white people being under attack and in need of protection. Australian culture supposedly condoning ultra-right sentiments bolsters the movement's discursive processes and core framing tasks; this culture provides a base of right-wing sentiments amplified and perpetuated through 'shitposting' so they permeate public discourse and become relatively normalised. This demonstrates how framing theory can somewhat explain how engaging with the online far-right community could have resulted in Tarrant adopting and ultimately violently enacting the movement's ideology (Muller, 2019).

Funnelling and Streams

Online far-right community members actively frame and perpetuate a worldview in line with their values; the result is content funnelling, but another important funnelling feature occurs too. This refers to how social media algorithms create echo chambers through continuously personalising content. Social media was built to learn as we use it, meaning when you view content, the algorithm will provide you with similar content and tailors your feed according to what you view and interact with. The platform collates data based on users' interests, goals and beliefs; the result is content which resonates harmoniously with users' worldview (Munn, 2019). Whilst helpful and intuitive, this also has a dark negative externality in relation to right-wing extremism as social media seems to be unintentionally framing; by learning the social, cultural and ideological connections between content it presents a seemingly natural sequence of ideas to incrementally expose users to, and make them accepting of, increasingly extreme ideas (Munn, 2019). Social media users see the world through this personalised lens and continue to consume this filtered content taking them further down the worm hole; clearly this has implications for online self-radicalisation. Through this accurate and instantaneous

personalisation of content social media creates an echo chamber which facilitates cognitive radicalisation, not only by reinforcing extant views, but also by amplifying them and generating new ones (Pariser, 2011). Perhaps this is what happened with Tarrant, potentially nudged from the middle-ground to more extreme views by social media which learnt and filtered what he consumed online.

'Group polarisation' and social media funnelling create a similar impact on opinion forming. Whilst funnelling arises from algorithms, group polarisation arises from what McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) call 'relevant arguments theory' in which within a pool of culturally determined arguments one side is favoured; this means when an individual assesses their own view they do so in relation to other arguments within that pool, since the arguments all come from the same cultural pool, the alternative arguments will mostly be in the same direction as their own. The result is that "individuals are rationally persuaded by the imbalance of new arguments heard in discussion" (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008: 422) and individuals, such as Tarrant, interacting on forums rife with far-right narratives and discussions, consume arguments from the more extreme elements of their value system and may slowly shift to extremes.

This idea of gradually increasing far-right opinions through interconnecting social networks, framing and funnelling appears to fit Munson's (2002) theory of 'streams'. Munson (2002) claimed individuals were not drawn into the Pro-Life movement because of strong beliefs about abortion, rather many individuals initially participated due to contact with movement members at life turning-points. Such contact results in initial activism during which the participant's beliefs and values are developed and strengthened through interaction with other activists; subsequently, participation is stepped up (Munson, 2002). Belief and value development during interaction with other activists makes it important to understand with which part of the social movement individuals interact, because different elements of social movements have differing ideas of what constitutes the problem and how it should be solved; thus the individual's ultimate opinions will be influenced by who they interact with (important due to 'group polarisation'). Munson (2002) termed these movements as 'social movement streams' consisting of individuals and organisations grouped according to how they perceive the problem and its solution. During initial participation, belief progression is determined by the stream with which the first contact is made. Stream theory can be applied to this case study, with the death of Tarrant's father and increasing time online, representing a *turning point* which potentially resulted in *initial interaction* with individuals who held far-right values, and *expressions of support* for the movement and ideology. According to Tarrant (2019), he went through communism and anarchism before arriving at eco-fascism showing the evolving nature of his belief systems. Tarrant's travels to sites of significance to the far-right movement are arguably comparable to initial activism whereby he interacted both online and in person with other activists and developed his beliefs through conversation in line with 'relevant arguments theory'. Potential examples of online far-right streams are 4chan and the more extreme 8chan discussion boards (Munn, 2019).

This insidious combination of social media funnelling and framing, and Tarrant joining an online community stream meant that Tarrant "was encompassed by a seamless blend of recommended racist content and memetically racist humans - a dark social web" (Munn, 2019: no pagination). This facilitated his cognitive radicalisation and ensured he was at the apex of the 'opinion radicalisation pyramid' at the point he experienced his 2017 emotional reaction; in

2019 he moved to the apex of the 'action radicalisation pyramid' (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2014).

Conclusion

This research has explored the processes by which Brenton Tarrant became engaged with political violence; it endeavoured to avoid typical gaps in radicalisation literature by utilising individual, group *and* environmental approaches. This multifaceted approach has given rich insight into Tarrant's action pathways; it identifies factors which contributed to his engagement in political violence including personal circumstances resulting in means and opportunity, a broader culture conducive and tolerant of far-right ideology, and connection and interaction with the far-right social movement via the internet. It was noted that research can only use testaments of those who knew Tarrant, his manifesto and the salvaged remnants of his online presence.

Applying McCauley and Moskalenko's (2014) caring-compelled and disordered-disconnected lone wolf profiles to Tarrant highlights he sat somewhere between the two. Tarrant appears to fit the disordered-disconnected profile however, it is not a perfect fit because he does not seem to be mentally ill. On the other hand, the caring-compelled profile allows Tarrant's actions and beliefs to be read as inherently altruistic explaining his move up the 'action radicalisation pyramid' and from radical thought to action through a strong emotional reaction to the events of 2017. Yet, there is limited evidence to suggest Tarrant's altruism was motivated by an 'unusually strong' capacity to feel others' suffering. The inability to fit Tarrant perfectly into either category demonstrates that although helpful analytical tools, narrow theoretical profiles are necessarily limited, and that group and environmental factors require examination too.

Extant scholarship has shown that radical thought does not equate to extreme action, therefore Tarrant's movement up McCauley and Moskalenko's (2014) opinion *and* action pyramids needed exploration. Whilst McCauley and Moskalenko's (2014) profiles demonstrated what may have made Tarrant move from radical thought to action, online social network ties, framing, funnelling and streams all represent processes which can explain the pathway Tarrant took to the apex of the 'opinion radicalisation pyramid'. Despite Tarrant not necessarily being 'recruited' into political violence the use of SMTs is justifiable as despite being a lone actor in his attack, Tarrant was not radicalised in a vacuum; the internet allowed him to form social network ties and thus he was subject to group dynamics. The cumulative effect of online social networks, framing, funnelling and streams was Tarrant's socialisation to extreme beliefs through an increasingly all-consuming social network - whereby the content he viewed became increasingly funnelled by the underlying algorithms to create a version of reality that fitted his ideological perspective. Within this environment he received positive affirmation which reinforced his perspectives and created an increasingly dark feedback loop. Tarrant's decision to act was on the basis that he identified with a group which he perceived to be under threat. Tarrant thought he was one of the enlightened few and it was his responsibility to act to inspire others to do so too, like Breivik had done for him.

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