# Why Should We Care What Extremists Think? The Contribution of Emic Perspectives to Understanding the "right-wing extremist" Mind-Set

## Hilary Pilkington[1] (ID)

## Abstract

This article considers the implications of the mainstreaming of 'right-wing extremism' for what, and whom, we understand as 'extreme'. It draws on ethnographic research (2017-2020) with young people active in movements routinely referred to in public and academic discourse as 'extreme right' or 'far right'. Based on interviews, informal communication and observation, the article explores how actors in the milieu understand 'extremism' and how far this corresponds to academic and public conceptualisations of 'right-wing extremism', in particular cognitive 'closed-mindedness'. Emic perspectives are not accorded privileged authenticity. Rather, it is argued, critical engagement with them reveals the important role of ethnographic research in gaining insight into, and challenging what we know about, the 'mind-set' of right-wing extremists. Understanding if such a mind-set exists, and if it does, in what it consists, matters, if academic research is to inform policy and practice to counter socially harmful practices among those it targets effectively.

[1]Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

**Corresponding Author:**
Hilary Pilkington, Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, Arthur Lewis Building, Oxford Rd, Manchester, M13 9PL, UK.
Email: hilary.pilkington@manchester.ac.uk

## Introduction

> [. . .] the word extremist is just, to me doesn't matter anymore. Because they're classing everyone as an extremist, you know what I mean. [. . .] obviously, they'd probably class me as a right-wing extremist. Which is pathetic, 'cause I'm not. But they are just throwing that word about now. It's like the 'racist' word – it just doesn't mean nothing to me anymore. Someone calls me a racist, I couldn't give a flying fuck, to be fair. (Dan[1])

Dan is a 23-year-old activist described by a leading anti-hate politics campaign organization in 2018 as one of the UK's leading "faces of hate."[2] The reflections in this article on the contemporary state of understanding of "right-wing extremism"[3] start from his articulation of the disjuncture between etic and emic[4] understandings of the concept. While no one research participant is "typical" of a studied group, amidst the heterogeneity of attitudes, opinions, and forms of action encountered in this study of an "extreme right" milieu,[5] this excerpt from one of many conversations with Dan captures a consistent assertion by research participants that they are not who we think they are. Despite his weary dismissal of the object of the study—"right-wing extremism"—Dan participated in, and contributed to, the research over a 3-year period. His statement that he no longer gives "a flying fuck" what people call him thus belies his own reflection on, and commitment to informing, how we understand the views he and others in the milieu express, the movements with which they affiliate and the actions they take.[6]

The recent "mainstreaming" of far-right extremism makes engagements with the far-right more fluid and frequent (Miller-Idriss 2020, 46). The rise of the alt-right[7] has shown the ability of white supremacist movements to use media and technology "to take their message mainstream" (Daniels 2018, 64) and extremist ideas to become normalized through explicit or implicit incorporation into the communication of mainstream politicians (Miller-Idriss 2020, 48). This has consequences for our conceptualization of extremism since, as Simi and Futrell (2015, 7) state, "by definition, extremists operate on the margins of society and face repression from those in power." The response to date has been to extend the concept of "right-wing extremism" with little attention to what "extreme" means when it refers to increasingly everyday phenomena in which "ordinary" people engage. This is, at least in part, a product of the paucity of research on extremism within sociology,

anthropology, and other disciplines that study the "everyday" and whose interpretivist, epistemological principles embrace an "emic" perspective. Academic debate remains dominated by, on the one hand, the focus in political science on what constitutes "right-wing extremism" in terms of its ideological content and appeal, and, on the other, the concern of psychologists with isolating personality traits or cognitive styles associated with the extremist "mind-set."[8] There is a body of work that critically deconstructs the political framing of notions of "extremism" and "radicalization" (Kundnani 2012; Kühle and Lindekilde 2012). However, this work has been exclusively concerned with "Islamist"[9] extremism and focused on documenting the consequences for Muslim communities of the application of these concepts in the development of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policy and practice (Thomas 2016; Abbas 2019; Pilkington and Acik 2020).

This article brings new insight to this critical perspective on extremism, radicalism, and radicalization through its focus on right-wing, rather than "Islamist," extremism. It argues that the ethnographic approach, which not only elicits but explores, challenges, and interrogates emic representations of social phenomena is crucial for informing our understanding of how social actors engage with "right-wing extremism." It builds on past ethnographic and interview-based studies of "extreme-right" groups but draws on new ethnographic research in the UK to challenge some core assumptions about the "right-wing extremist" mind-set. It uses interview and observational data to tease out actors' understandings of "right-wing extremism" and how these relate to etic understandings of what and who is extremist. The aim is not to simply counterpose etic understandings of extremism with an "insider" view. As Titley (2019, 33) argues, regarding public debate on what constitutes racism, etic understandings are also filtered through "scripts of denial" about racism. Rather emic and etic perspectives are considered as constantly in tension and engaged with one another. This matters because extremism, like other "deviant" behaviors, is the product of the interaction of all actors involved, not just those deemed deviant (Becker 1997, 183). Awareness of etic categories—which label groups and individuals "extremist"—leads to deviance disavowal but also to reflection. Both responses shape understandings and presentations of self by milieu actors and mean we should neither accept emic understandings as authentic "insider" views nor view them solely as an ideological delusion for critical deconstruction. Recognizing, rather than dismissing, disjunctures between emic and etic understandings of attitudes and behaviors within these milieus is essential also to develop effective policy and practice engagements with actors in them. The failure to do so may lead to the diversion of attention to those inaccurately identified as on a trajectory to violent extremism whilst failing to recognize, and mobilize the

agency of, those who act in radical milieus but practice strategies of non-radicalization or maintain open-minded engagements with the world and whose experience could inform and enhance policies and practice of countering violent extremism.

The article starts by outlining the existing theory and research findings from sociology, social, personality and political psychology, anthropology, and political science to establish what, and how, we know about the "right-wing extremist" mind-set and the contribution qualitative, especially ethnographic, studies of "right-wing extremism" make to the field. After situating the empirical study from which the emic understandings of contemporary "right-wing extremism" are elicited, the article explores how actors in the milieu understand and relate to extremism. This explication demonstrates not only dissonance between emic and etic understandings of extremism but also a reflexive engagement with those external discourses. In the subsequent section, analysis of this reflection, and the situations encountered by milieu actors, is interpreted as indicating not only an instrumental self-distancing from the "extremism label" but an openness to ambiguity, disagreement, and dialog that challenges contemporary understandings of the "right-wing extremist" mind-set.

## Beyond the "authoritarian personality": Ethnography and "right-wing extremism"

Contemporary understandings of "right-wing extremism" are rooted in evolving theories of the relationship between authoritarianism and a range of social and political attitudes (Adorno et al. 1950; Altemeyer 1981), in- and out-group preferences or prejudice (Allport 1979, 9), and cognitive (in) capacities such as dogmatism (Rokeach 2015) and intolerance of ambiguity (Frenkel-Brunswik 1949). These theories identify a set of characteristics sufficiently co-varied to indicate a general way of seeing the world. Adorno et al. (1950) found nine traits constituting a basic personality dimension that they called the authoritarian personality (Duckitt 2001, 42) and viewed as an indirect measure of ethnocentrism, anti-Semitism, and racism (Martin 2001, 2). Following criticism of the F scale devised to measure the authoritarian personality (*inter alia* because most items on the scale were measures of social attitude and ideological belief rather than of behavioral patterns or personality traits), when the theory was revived by Altemeyer (1981), it was significantly revised. Altemeyer's Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) scale drew on just three of the original traits associated with the authoritarian personality (Duckitt 2001, 42) and remains widely used to measure authoritarian attitudes, ethnocentrism, and (generalized) prejudice[10] toward out-groups and

minorities. Today the covariation of specific characteristics—submission to in-group leaders, endorsement of hierarchical social structures, conformity to social conventions, and aggression toward out-groups—are considered to define a distinctive way of engaging with the world that constitutes RWA (Roets and van Hiel 2006, 235; Womick et al. 2019, 1057). RWA is considered a successful predictor of ethnic prejudice, nationalism, political and economic conservatism, and right-wing political party preference (Roets and van Hiel 2006, 235).

The specific relationship between authoritarianism and cognitive functioning has been a focus of concern within the psychology of terrorism. Central to this field has been Kruglanski's (2004, 56–58) understanding of closed-mindedness as a motivated cognitive style that guides how individuals relate to, and process, new information and the potential uncertainty it brings. Closed-mindedness inclines individuals toward the search for clear-cut knowledge, avoidance of uncertainty and intolerance of ambiguity, and of challenges to one's worldview. It is driven by the proclivity to attain, and maintain, closure; a heightened need for closure leads to a "seizing" and "freezing" on available information and on judgments that information implies (Kruglanski and Orehek 2012, 4; Kruglanski and Webster 1996, 263). Closed-mindedness is tested, as a rule, by the "need for closure" measure, comprising five dispositions: preference for order, structure, and predictability; desire for secure and stable knowledge; desire to reach swift and firm decisions; sense of discomfort with ambiguity; and an unwillingness to have one's knowledge challenged (Webster and Kruglanski 1994, 1049). While "need for closure" is identified and measured at the individual level, its constituent dispositions are considered important to the formation and maintenance of extremist groups. Such groups offer individuals high in "need for closure" a firm and shared vision of the world that reduces uncertainty, demonstrates strong in-group bias, and exerts pressure to reject outsider views (Kruglanski and Orehek 2012, 4–5 and 12). Such excessive group-centrism underpins Berger's (2018, 44–48) definition of contemporary extremism as the belief that an in-group's success or survival is integrally connected to the need for hostile action against an out-group.

Contemporary understanding of the "right-wing extremist" mind-set rests on the association between cognitive "need for closure" and "right-wing authoritarian" personality traits. Roets and van Hiel (2011, 350) find a number of studies show "need for closure" to be strongly related to racial prejudice and generalized prejudice; individuals satisfy their need for quick, firm, and stable knowledge about the world by resort to essentialist categorization and authoritarian ideologies. However, findings on the relationship between cognitive style and right-wing attitudes remain inconclusive (van Hiel et al.

2016, 523). For some, the evidence to date "warrants the conclusion that (at least in the general population) right-wing conservatism is positively related to dogmatism and intolerance of ambiguity; uncertainty avoidance; fear of threat, loss, and death; system instability; and epistemic needs to achieve order, structure, and closure" (Jost et al. 2003, 383). Others argue that such motives are found equally among those on the Left (Greenberg and Jonas 2003, 376) and that extremists of all ideological persuasions are cognitively more authoritarian, rigid, and intolerant of ambiguity than moderates (van Hiel 2012, 168–170). Van Hiel's study of right-wing and left-wing extremist actors, as well as "moderates," suggests moderates differ from extremists in their cognitive styles but that there is no universal extremist type (ibid., 196–197). Moreover, the scales employed in the study yield the greatest internal consistency with the "moderates," highlighting the danger of developing theories of extremism by extrapolating results from more moderate samples to extremists (ibid., 188, 198). Thus, while the literature from psychology continues to assert that there is a distinctive cognitive style—closed-mindedness—associated with right-wing, conservative social, and political attitudes, there is disagreement about whether this cognitive style is common to all "extremists" or just those on the right and significant doubt about its validity even for right-wing extremists.

While the importance of conducting studies with "true extremists" is noted (van Hiel 2012, 199), the debate on RWA has paid scant attention to the findings of qualitative studies, or emic understandings, of extremism. Theoretical typologies and their categories are pre-constructed (by the researcher) before, as Martin (2001, 16) puts it, being put into the mouths of respondents and deployed to interpret their psychology. Moreover, since these studies are designed to "catch" those high in the traits assigned to RWA, when they fail to conform, this is explained by cognitive inconsistency or irrationality (ibid.), rather than a disjuncture between etic and emic understandings of the categories. Indeed, those "high" in authoritarianism are criticized for thinking "you are talking about somebody else" (Altemeyer 1988, 316 cited in Martin 2001, 19) when they do not recognize themselves in the categories designed to describe them, when this should be taken "as a critique of the typologizers not the typologized" (Martin 2001, 19). An exception to the rule is Stenner's (2005) theorization of what she terms 'the authoritarian dynamic', which draws on survey, experiment and 40 in-depth interviews (with survey respondents scoring highest and lowest on measures of authoritarianism) data. On the basis of her findings, Stenner (2005, 2-4) confirms the existence of a fundamental "predisposition to intolerance" but argues that this should not be conflated with the "attitudinal and behavioural 'products'" associated with it. Rather, she argues, these various components

respond differently under different conditions and she identifies conditions of normative threat as a crucial factor in accounting for variation in expressions of intolerance (Stenner, 2005, 8, 80-81).

Allowing actors "to speak for themselves" (Blee 2009, 19) is central to providing a way out of the impasse in understanding "right-wing extremism" to which studying it from a distance has led. Ethnography is uniquely positioned to do this not only because its method affords access to the "true extremists" but because "the racist mind" is best studied not with pre-designed categories but "using their [respondents'] own words to let others see their meaning" (Ezekiel 2002, 52). The ethnographic focus on understanding "the sense the person's life makes to that person" (Ezekiel 1995, xix) reveals that what is shared by actors in "extreme right" milieus is not necessarily a set of social and political attitudes but the meanings they attach to life. Such meaning may be found in bonds of friendship and loyalty generated in the everyday, and ostensibly non-ideological, practices of the group (Pilkington et al. 2010, 49, 230; Pilkington 2014, 86). In this way, ethnographic accounts of extremist right-wing movements, which appear to coalesce around ideas and ideologies, reveal the importance of cultural practices and the bonds they create not only to normalizing far-right attitudes and actions but withstanding the consequences that membership in such movements brings (Blee 2007, 124). These consequences (including stigma, marginalization, and physical attack) are one reason for the often hidden nature of extreme right communities and the importance of seeing how these worlds look from the "inside." Simi and Futrell (2015, 4) paint a stark portrait of the difference between the homes of extreme-right activists that, externally, "blend into their neighborhoods" while, on the inside, "swastikas decorate the walls, white power literature lines the bookshelves, family pictures are full of Aryan symbolism. . .." In this context, concealment is essential for survival and open expression of beliefs, coordination of activities, and the emotional bonding that reinforces white power identity become confined to closed or hidden "Aryan free spaces" where group members are able to "openly celebrate their mutual bigotry and hatred" (ibid., 6). It is access to these backstage spaces where group solidarity affords the appreciation of "the unsavoury 'unperformed' aspects of its own backstage behaviour" (Goffman 1990, 133) that distinguishes the ethnographic account. Ethnographers' access to hidden or exclusive spaces—activists' homes, parties, and BBQs (Simi and Futrell 2015), music festivals (Virchow 2007), basement gyms (Pilkington et al. 2010), rallies and concerts (Toscano and di Nunzio 2019), informal gatherings, pre- and post-demonstration get-togethers (Pilkington 2016; Busher 2016)—has provided important insights into how groups function away from the public gaze (Blee 2009).

While the view from the inside has revealed the affective as well as ideological dimensions of activism, it has rarely led researchers to question that their object of study is "right-wing extremism." Blee (2002, 2) states explicitly that the beliefs of the racist groups she studied were "not just extreme variants of mainstream racism, xenophobia, or anti-Semitism" while Simi and Futrell (2015, 3) juxtapose the "extremism" of their research participants to "a wider society that vilifies their radical belief." As "right-wing extremism" appears increasingly mainstream, however, so ethnographers' understandings of what constitutes extremism are challenged as a result of the diversification in movements studied, the inclusion of actors on the "periphery" as well as in the "core" of extremist right-wing movements (Miller-Idriss 2017, 214) and actors' greater confidence in rejecting etic descriptors of them as "extremist." The reflexive engagement with external representations of them as "extreme right," "racist," and "Islamophobic" was a key finding of Pilkington's (2016) ethnographic study of activists in the English Defence League (EDL) whose slogan at the time—"not racist, not violent, just no longer silent"—articulated the dissonance between emic and etic understandings of their views and actions. The study found rationalized and emotional dimensions of activism to be deeply entwined and epitomized in the emic understanding of EDL activism as standing "loud and proud" in order to be heard in an external political realm governed by a "politics of silencing" (ibid., 229). In a similar vein, Shapira's (2013, 17) study of the Minutemen patrolling the US–Mexico border argues that to understand these actors ideologically is to understand them poorly. In practice, these self-styled border force militia have complex views that include, but cannot be reduced to, elements that are racist and anti-immigrant and it would be wrong to see them "unequivocally" as extreme right (ibid., 18).

The mainstreaming of the "extreme right" also means that emic perspectives are themselves increasingly a product of actors' reflexive engagement with etic categories. This presents new challenges for ethnographers to reflect critically on what extremism means, inside and out. An interesting example is Kühle and Lindekilde's (2012, 1608) interrogation of the concept of "radicalization" through "listening and respecting how the actual target groups reflect on the phenomenon." They do this through the study of a friendship-based Muslim milieu in the Danish city of Aarhus referred to by those outside it as the city's "radical" Muslim milieu. They find that this etic understanding conflates key distinctions within interviewee narratives and argue that the failure to reflect their complex opinions (e.g., on terrorism) means that the etic discourse of radicalization, envisaging "a slippery slope from individual violent sympathies to membership of groups and engagement in collective

violence," could hinder rather than facilitate the identification and prevention of radicalization (ibid. 1621). In this article, I argue that a similar excavation of emic concepts of extremism is necessary for the "extreme right." This is neither to accept at face value denials of "extremism," "racism" or intolerance by actors nor to normalize the attitudes or behaviors they exhibit. It is to argue that the consistent dissonance between who is "classed" as a "right-wing extremist" (see opening citation) and who thinks of themselves as such should not be dismissed as a smokescreen but explored to allow a more nuanced picture of how "extreme right" activism is lived out. The analysis of the empirical findings, first, outlines emic understandings of "extremism" before exploring specifically whether actors in the studied milieu display closed-minded dispositions associated with the "right-wing extremist" mind-set.

## Context and Method

This article draws on the study of a right-wing extremist milieu in the UK conducted by the author as one of 19 case studies undertaken for the Horizon 2020 Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality (DARE) project. An ethnographic approach[11] was employed to understand young people's everyday encounters with, and responses to, radicalizing messages in both "extreme-right" and "Islamist" milieus. The milieu studied for this article consists of individuals active in movements, organizations, or campaigns in the UK associated in public discourse with the "far" or "extreme right." Research participants reported contact with a total of 32 movements but all had been active in, affiliated with, or attended events of at least one of: the EDL,[12] the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA),[13] the British National Party (BNP),[14] Britain First,[15] Generation Identity (GI)[16] or Tommy Robinson support groups.[17] While this milieu does not consist of a single organization or network, all research participants had some connection to at least one other participant (see: Pilkington 2020, 15–18).

I engaged in the milieu and with its participants from December 2017 to March 2020 undertaking participant observation and conducting one or more semi-structured interviews with 20 individuals. Field research commenced after an informal meeting with a young man, first encountered as an EDL activist, during which he agreed to participate in the research.[18] I followed this research participant into his milieu—attending events, meeting some of his friends, following him on social media, and making new contacts. Two further "snowballs" were started subsequently by direct messaging (via Twitter) a core member of a movement of interest, in one case, and via a "gatekeeper" known from earlier research in the other.

Key socio-demographic characteristics were recorded for all participants (see: Author 2020, 180–182). Due to the focus on "youth" of the overall project, participants were younger than the wider "extreme right" scene; three quarters were under the age of 30, with the rest in their thirties. Fifteen participants were men and five were women, which is broadly reflective of the gender composition of the wider scene. At the time of the interview, most research participants were in employment; nine full-time and three part-time. Three were occupied in an unpaid capacity (volunteering, activism, or caring). Four were unemployed of whom two had been unable to find employment since release from prison and one for health reasons. One was in full-time education. Ethnic homogeneity was high; all participants were born in the UK and all were white (two beings of mixed White European heritage). Five said they had "no religion." Of the 15 who declared a religion, five were Protestant, five were Catholic, four declared an "other" Christian faith, and one said they were pagan.

The final data set consists of 100 sources including: 61 field diary entries; 25 audio and five video interview transcripts; and nine text documents received at observed events. All materials were uploaded into an NVivo version 12 database for coding and analysis employing open and axial coding. Twenty-five of the field diary entries pertain to participant observations at events related to what milieu activists call "patriotic" causes. One diary entry and five video interviews relate to a series of mediated dialog events organized with a total of six participants from the UK "extreme right" and "Islamist" milieus studied in the DARE project.

While privileged access to the group ensues from my shared whiteness with research participants, this is not an "insider" ethnography; in terms of age, gender, occupational status, and political viewpoint, I was an outsider. Of these aspects of positionality, my university employment was the most troubling for milieu members as it placed me within the dominant and ideologically hostile liberal elite. For some, this perceived threat was exacerbated by my desire to engage "close up." One potential participant responded to my initial contact by stating, "There's naturally no possibility of us allowing non-members to participate in, or observe, our actions" saying such observation "would just feel like reducing our Movement to a petri dish" (Field diary, 24.08.2018). Some of those who agreed to participate did so because they felt they were already so publicly exposed that they had "nothing to lose" while others may have perceived some potential benefit from the researcher recording "their lives and thoughts" (see: Blee 2002, 11). Paul, in particular, was conscious of his presentation of self—after mistakenly discarding his chewing gum in my empty cup as we sat in a café together, for example, he joked that he had already blown his intention to be as "uncontroversial and

moderate" as possible even before the interview had begun (Field diary, 24.05.2019). Thus, in arguing below that the evidence from this study demonstrates research participants attached significant value to engaging in dialog with "others," we need to take into account both the element of self-selection in the sample—those who took part were those open to having their views challenged—as well as that interviews are interactions in which performers tend to conceal those elements that do not fit the idealized versions they have of themselves (Goffman 1990, 56). It was clear to me throughout our discussions, for example, that Paul used the opportunity not so much to get his message out but to hone his performance to a different audience than that with which he routinely engaged. At the same time, my direct engagement with him demonstrated that he was willing to have his arguments challenged and respond without becoming angry or frustrated. It is not argued, therefore, that all members of the milieu are open-minded or that there were no other, backstage, spaces in which they would behave differently than they had in those in which I encountered them. Rather, it is suggested, that such dispositions were sufficiently present to lead us to question that right-wing attitudes and activism are always associated with cognitive "closed-mindedness."

For those who did participate, the most important factor in maintaining their involvement was feeling listened to without prior judgment; as Dan put it, "even if she [the author] doesn't agree with you, she'll tell you, 'Look. . .' And I like that." There is a danger that listening in this way requires dissimulation on the part of the researcher—the outward portrayal of sympathy to the cause (Simi and Futrell 2015, 135) or "instrumental and temporary suspension" of one's own political views (Fielding 1981, 5)—while being interpreted by research participants as validation of their views. Such instrumental, if not deceitful, rapport building, has been criticized on ethical grounds (Duncombe and Jessop 2002; Smyth and Mitchell 2008) while Blee (2018, 13 and 18–19), who describes her research as "studying the enemy," draws a clear line between seeking to understand the world through the eyes of others and developing "an emotional tie" to activists. In my own experience, sustained presence in the milieu has afforded natural moments of mutual support, concern, and care and reduced reliance on artificially, or deceitfully, generated rapport (Pilkington 2019, 30). My approach has been closest to what Ezekiel (2002, 52) describes as "candor"; being open with participants about who you are and using the disagreement that ensues as a starting point for engagement. This approach is facilitated by the open access of potential research participants to information about the researcher. When deciding whether or not to engage with me, those I approached often sought confirmation that I was trusted by other, respected people, in the milieu. Others

"googled" me, sometimes even on their phones as we talked, in order to check out my public profile and what I had published already. Between our first and second meeting, for example, Billy challenged me on the use of the term "far right" in a newspaper article discussing a book I had co-edited, as I had presented myself to him at the initial meeting as someone who wanted to listen to, rather than label, movement participants. This illustrates the way in which both researcher and research participants anticipated, and experienced, challenges from each other on their self-presentation; in this instance, the research participant's challenge sparked an interesting discussion about etic and emic understandings of right-wing extremism.

## "Not far right, just right": Emic Understandings of Extremism

Extremism is understood by milieu members to exist across the political spectrum but as being ascribed disproportionately to right-wing actors. Research participants frequently complain that left-wing extremism is ignored while even mainstream or centrist views on the Right are misrecognized as "radical" or "extreme." Perhaps reflecting the "mainstreaming of the extreme" noted above, participants considered their own views to be not "far," "extreme," or "radical" right-wing but as in the "center," "middle" or even "pretty liberal." Adam, who organizes a "grooming gangs" awareness group frequently labeled "far right," thinks of his group as "clap bang in the middle" in terms of the left/right spectrum while Will (an Identitarian movement activist) says his views have consistently reflected a "center-right to right" position. Thus, research participants positioned themselves as "right wing" whilst rejecting the assumption that this meant they were "far right." Mikey states "I don't consider myself far right, and the organization [the DFLA], we actively condemn it." However, he hesitates to say publicly that he is even "right wing" because "in this day and age that term signifies someone that's racist, like ultra-patriotic" (Mikey).

The expression "I'm not far right, just right" (Johnny) is deployed frequently within the milieu, confirming that actors identify themselves in relation to others' perceptions of them. This play on words resists the equation between right wing and far right whilst simultaneously making claims to moderation and truth. In contrast, only a small number of research participants recognize their views as radical. Most notably, Jacob is critical of others on the Right for a lack of discipline (in relation to their lifestyles) and calls himself "proper far right" in contrast to those such as "Tommy Robinson and his followers" whose deployment of "anti-authoritarian" arguments against Islamization come from a left- rather than right-wing position.

Extremism is a relational concept in emic as well as etic understandings. Research participants often explain what extremism means to them by placing themselves in relation to others' views and actions or contrasting their activism to movements or parties they consider to be "extreme," "radical," or "far right." National Action, Combat 18, and the National Front are described in this way due to their association with neo-Nazism:

> Nazism. Neo-Nazism. Nazi like, that's extreme in my opinion. Just you know, when you're willing to align yourself with someone who, a group that killed, you know, six and a half million people, innocent people. [. . .] sooner we get rid of neo-Nazis, the better. (Jermaine)

At the time of interview, Jermaine had left the movement in which he had been involved, following a referral to the counter-extremism "Prevent" program by his college, and was embarking on counter-extremism work himself such as giving talks to peers about his route into activism. Racist attitudes or behaviors are considered "extreme" also.[19] Cara says she avoids using BNP material because it is "racist" while Dan describes GI as "too extreme" because they are "white racist" (Field diary, 18.03.2018). Johnny uses the example of racially defined immigration restrictions—"where they don't want anybody that's not Christian or [. . .] anyone that's a different colour"—to illustrate what he considers "extremist."

Where emic understandings of extremism are associated with a particular content or threshold, milieu members almost uniformly view extremism as related to behaviors not ideas (or their expression). As Gareth puts it "[. . .] the line gets drawn from not what people say, it's from what people do." Gareth believes the biggest threat to society currently is the erosion of "free speech," complaining that this leads to "censorship, censorship, censorship, and no dialogue's being created from it." Seeking to demonstrate his recognition that everyone has equal right to speak, but revealing his non-recognition of deliberative inequalities (Titley 2019, 152), he states, "Do I believe in Sharia law? Absolutely not. [. . .] But do people have a right to say, 'I support Sharia law'? Yeah. Otherwise you are the tyrant just like the people who are calling you a Nazi to shut you down."

The relationship between ideas and behaviors is a key issue in the study of terrorism and (violent) extremism (Horgan 2012; McCauley and Moskalenko 2017). For Kruglanski and Orehek (2012, 12), attitudes, opinions, and beliefs (as well as behaviors) warrant designation as "extremist" where such attitudes differ from established norms and have potentially dangerous consequences. In contrast, among actors in the milieu studied here, "extremism" is generally attributed only to the use, threat, or provocation of violence to impose ideas:

[. . .] opinions aren't extremism. But they [extremists] try to bring about their opinions, and they try to express their opinions through violence, through terror. So you can be somebody who believes in multiculturalism. But if you go around stabbing people who don't, you are an extremist. You can believe in an absolute Islamic caliphate. That's not really extremism. Extremism is going out and blowing somewhere up, because you believe in the caliphate. I can believe in, you know, you can have people who believe in the Third Reich or Adolf Hitler. Now that's not extremism until you start attacking people and imposing your will on others. (Paul)

However, within the milieu, there is a spectrum of positions and, for Will, ideas alone can constitute extremism if violence is implicit in the ideas promoted: "if you're a neo-Nazi and you believe that there's going to be a war between the different races. That can't be a simply radical opinion because there is no like peaceful way that's going to happen." (Will). A number of respondents also suggest that actions of aggression and intimidation that fall short of violence—such as posting offensive leaflets to homes of immigrants—are "too extreme" to be justified (Billy).

Etic conceptualizations of extremism that milieu members perceive as failing to acknowledge the spectrum of positions on the Right and misrecognize their (non-violent) activism as "far right" or "right-wing extremism" have emptied the signifier "extremist" of meaning. As Robbie puts it: "If I'm far right, then, you know, it's not an offensive word. It's become so loosely thrown around, that it's, there's no point even saying it now." Billy says that the descriptors "extreme" or "radical" are automatically applied to the Right such that "anyone right of Lenin seems to be a radical" while Paul believes the continuum of organized opinion has become so skewed to the Left that "traditionalist" or "nationalist" views—"things that would have been normal twenty, thirty years ago"—are now branded as extreme.

Paul, who takes particular exception to the UK government's definition of extremism, which measures it against the approval of a government-determined set of "values" rather than what he considers to be the "fair" marker of violence or non-violence, considers himself to be not only non-extremist but "anti-extremist." He substantiates this with reference to video materials he has made and promoted against groups like National Action, which he calls a "terrorist group," with the aim of discouraging radicalization amongst vulnerable "younger nationalists." He is furious that the material had been "taken down" by YouTube. A similar frustration is expressed by other research participants, especially those affiliated with the DFLA: "One of our logos is: 'Against all extremism' and that includes obviously the usual suspects, things like IRA, Islamists, but also far-right groups like National Action. We just basically condemn extremism in all its forms." (Mikey).

Condemnation is expressed across the milieu for all forms of "terrorism," which retains a distinctive place in both etic (Beck 2015, 12) and emic understandings. For milieu members, terrorism was morally indefensible and far removed from their own repertoire of action. Expressing his anger at the exposed plot by Jack Renshaw (of the proscribed group National Action) to murder a Member of Parliament, Dan states:

> [. . .] he's a mentally ill terrorist, that's what he is. He is, there's no beating around the bush there. And people who defend them then, they're the same, aren't they? You can't defend a terrorist. Doesn't matter if he's on the Right or Left, does it, he's a terrorist. (Dan)

That actors exogenously identified as "right-wing extremists" do not recognize themselves as such is not a new finding. However, this study suggests that the non-recognition of self as "right-wing extremist" by those active in milieus understood as such is widespread and reflects a significant disjuncture between emic and etic understandings of "right-wing extremism" that should not be seen simply as evidence of "right-wing extremist" actors' inconsistency, irrationality or deviance disavowal. In the following section, we consider specifically whether milieu actors demonstrate traits of cognitive closed-mindedness associated with the right-wing extremist mind-set.

## "I never really had no far right mind-set": Openness and Closedness to Ambiguity, Disagreement, and Challenge

Etic understandings of RWA, and its psychological roots, permeate emic understandings through terms such as "far right mind-set." Jermaine distinguishes himself from (some) others in the milieu by reflecting that he "never really had no far right mind-set." Such in-milieu differentiation is conceptualized in Schmid's (2013, 9–10) distinction between "extremists" as closed-minded (single-minded, black-or-white thinkers who are intolerant and prefer giving orders over dialog) and "radicals" as open-minded (accepting of diversity and believing in the power of reason rather than dogma). The terms "extremism" and "radicalism" were not treated separately in the discussion of emic understandings above because research participants in this study (with one exception) used them interchangeably and viewed both as pejorative labels (wrongly) applied to them, or as describing "others." However, given that the ethnographic approach of this study was not designed to "test" for specific psychological dispositions related to open- or closed-mindedness, Schmid's distinction is useful for identifying indicators of these

outlooks in naturally occurring narratives and behavior. Below, interview and observational data are used to explore openness and closedness of milieu actors to ambiguity, disagreement, and dialog with out-group members.

Closed-mindedness is viewed as inclining individuals toward extreme attitudes because they are clear cut and unambiguous and afford generalizations that permit certainty and assurance (Kruglanski and Orehek 2012, 13). This leads to a tendency to "seize and freeze" on one's personal perspective and remain relatively impervious to the opinions of others (ibid., 14). In this study, however, research participants generally see the willingness to expose their own views to challenge as a positive quality. In sharp contrast to the discomfort with ambiguity associated with "need for closure" (Webster and Kruglanski 1994 1050), Tonya admires her friend Alice (also a research participant) for her capacity to relate to people from both the "far right and the far left" and see things as "not black and white." This capacity of Alice is itself borne of her own varied career in political activism. After becoming disillusioned with her initial engagement with left-aligned groups—Black Lives Matter and a feminist group working on issues of domestic violence—Alice began to see herself as "stuck in a left-wing, social justice warrior-type bubble" and feel able "to judge the group that I was involved in from the outside and change my mind about it." However, she says, she still speaks "to quite a few lefties" (Alice) and that they are "fine." Tonya herself thinks labels of "left" or "right" are unhelpful and alienate people from one another. This does not mean that openness to challenging one's own perspective is characteristic of the whole milieu, however. Tonya also explains that she had stopped attending rallies and demonstrations because of her frustration with others in the movement. She found attending those events simply validated her views; now she sought contact with those who had different and challenging views because "it's just so much more fun and engaging. The conversation lasts longer [. . .]" (Tonya).

Gareth also sees the capacity to change your mind as a vital human quality. Both he and his friend Dan had participated in the mediated dialog with young people from an "Islamist" milieu (see Context and Method) motivated by, Dan explains, the desire to challenge himself: "[. . .] you could talk to someone and before you know, youse are getting on. [. . .] That's what I just want - to test myself. That's what I'm doing this for – to challenge my views a bit." Dan's desire to "test myself" is indicative of the awareness among milieu actors of etic understandings of them as closed-minded and a conscious desire to both challenge that assumption and to present himself as willing to challenge it. That such reflexivity can also result in the instrumentalization of openness to challenge is exemplified by Jacob who promotes openness to alternative views as a way to enhance "the movement":

[. . .] once I've found someone's position, then I'll start coaching them [. . .] I'll ask questions like, 'Okay, what do you think [is] the strongest argument your opponent has on that topic?' And I'll try and encourage empathy, because I want to expand people's thinking. [. . .] For self-development purposes. [. . .] the movement is full of conspiracy theorists. [. . .] And I believe [. . .] that it's not good for their self-development. It's not good for the movement in general, because they come across as crazy, obsessed people. (Jacob)

Research participants' consistent expression of their openness to disagreement could be interpreted also as an instrumental positioning of themselves against "political correctness" or "snowflake" culture. This is voiced often as a conviction that "even though you obviously strongly disagree with what another person thinks, you can still respect the individual for having a different belief to you" (Mikey). Research participants recognize that these principles are not adhered to uniformly by milieu members, however. Jason recalls being frustrated at people on his own "side" whom he had witnessed "yelling" at people with different views. In response, he says, "I went over and apologised myself to the people, 'cause I don't care, we have different views - we need to embrace that and stop trying to pull people down. You don't make yourself shine brighter by putting out other people's lights." Moreover, individual responses are situationally determined. Dan, notwithstanding his consistent expression and display of openness to engagement with those with opposing views, says he gets frustrated and angry when "the Left" shout "racist" and "Nazi" at him. This was observed at a Tommy Robinson election rally where Dan responded to taunts of "Nazi scum off our streets" by large numbers of people protesting against the rally by climbing on a wall, unfurling his flag, and shouting abuse back (Field diary, 19.05.2019). At a pro-Brexit rally, I attended during fieldwork, I also observed the limits to tolerance of opposing views by demonstrators affiliated with the DFLA (although not participants in this study). As I stood next to them, they began to be verbally aggressive to another young man in the crowd after he had made a comment suggesting he was pro-Remain:

[. . .] others (West Ham football fans) tell him to 'f*** off' if he thinks that. The guy tries to argue that you don't need to agree with everything that is said to be at the rally but the football lads are not listening and continue to call him a 'c***' until he eventually moves away. After that, they start talking among themselves and establish that among them are West Ham and Millwall fans and laugh about how the DFLA has brought them together and that they never would have thought that could happen. (Field diary, Brexit Betrayal demo, 29.03.2019)

In interpreting both these exchanges, it is important to note that while for Kruglanski (2004, 56–58) one characteristic of closed-mindedness is aggressive intolerance toward any challenge to one's own worldviews from members of out-groups, the "need for closure" is not a stable personality disposition but potentially affected by a wide variety of situational circumstances. Thus openness to difference and challenge may be tolerated, even celebrated, in situations of the binding power of opposition to a bigger "other" (when opposing football firms come together within the DFLA to oppose Islamist-inspired terrorism) while having a representative of an "other" (a "Remainer") within what had been thought of as a "safe space" (a pro-Brexit rally) is not. It is to how milieu actors respond in situations in which they are challenged by engagement with "others" that we now turn.

In our first interview, Dan recounted how his initiation of dialog with an Imam at his local mosque had left him wanting more:

> I had the Imam of me local mosque out, speaking to him one-on-one, and he was an all right fella – shook me hand. Speaking to him outside the mosque, and he agreed with me like. He said, 'Do you know, I think you're right what you're saying.' [. . .] all it takes is a little discussion [. . .] That's why I've always said to you Hilary, I'd like to actually sit opposite a radical Muslim or someone with thoughts of being radical and have a talk with them, and just find out why, why it is he feels that way [. . .] (Dan)

This openness to dialog with the "out-group" appears to directly contradict the association of closed-mindedness with reduced empathy to others during interpersonal interactions (Kruglanski and Orehek 2012, 12–14) but was found to be reciprocated by individuals in the parallel study of the "Islamist" milieu conducted (see Context and Methods). This precipitated a series of mediated dialogs organized by the researchers and facilitated by conflict resolution practitioners, which brought together three participants in each milieu (see Hussain et al. 2019). While interview and observational material from these events include greater reflection on dialog than might have occurred otherwise, the participating individuals (Dan, Gareth, and Mikey) are not outliers in this milieu. Moreover, these were not artificial scenarios devised by the researchers to "test" for a particular psychological trait. The expression of the desire to engage in dialog came from the research participants; the researchers simply provided a mediated space to explore and challenge their own proclaimed openness.

In a discussion prior to his participation in the mediated dialog, Gareth explains the importance of engaging with those with whom you do not anticipate agreement: "it's through disagreement and dialogue is where like you can have your beliefs changed. [. . .] it's always nice to have the possibility

of someone changing your mind." He goes on to insist that it is vital you do not enter any discussion "closed-minded" because that way "you don't create a discussion but an argument" (Gareth). All three participants in the mediated dialog said they were entering the process open-minded. Within minutes of first meeting each other, however, a disagreement (over the relationship between Islam and ISIS) had started between Dan and one of the Muslim participants (Mo John), which led Dan to fear that, as he put it, "this is gonna go tits up." However, in this case, the situation—a space for non-judgmental interaction created by the dialog event in which participants trusted and, more importantly, felt they were trusted—allowed the participants to work through their initial positioning. After taking the opportunity to speak to each other again during a break, Dan explains, "I spoke to him outside, when I was having a smoke, and he was just like me. [. . .] he was Muslim, followed the religion and that, but everything about him was me, so. . . I liked him, to be honest." Another critical moment was observed when each of the participants was given a few minutes to express directly to the others something that was important to them. Mo John chose to recite a call to prayer. It had a visceral impact on Dan who says, as he listened, "My heart was going like mad all the way through." Later, he explains the contradictory emotions the experience brought: "I can't describe what the feeling was when I was listening to it. Part of me wanted to jump up and scream, but part of me was like, 'That's actually peaceful, like a peaceful sound.' I liked the sound." (Dan). This powerful reaction must be understood in the context of Dan's own trajectory into activism, which was linked to his reading of the Qur'an (shortly after the murder of Lee Rigby in May 2013). This new association of the Qur'an with a 'peaceful sound' did not change the fact that, as he puts it, "I don't agree with Islam," but it gave him a new reference point for understanding what it, and Islam as a faith more broadly, means.

Openness to dialogs—sometimes expressed more mundanely, as "having a conversation"—was found across the milieu studied. By this is meant a readiness for open and honest engagement with an "other," with whom you anticipate disagreement, and in which you not only demand to be heard, but are open to listening. Tonya insists that what interests her is the exchange of views, not the opportunity to change people's minds. As she puts it, "[. . .] people think I'm trying to convert or change their mind or whatever. It's like, 'No, I just want to have a conversation. This is what I find interesting.'" (Tonya). For Tonya, talking about politics with people allows you to see "how their minds work" and this, she says, is what she finds interesting: "I don't have any agenda [. . .] I like to get into debating – that's just my thing" (Tonya). The call for dialog was the single most frequently mentioned response to radical messages among the research participants in this study.

When asked what he thought would make a better society, Gareth replied, "More discussion. More people sitting down listening to each other, rather than standing on each side of a barricade [. . .] shouting at each other, getting nothing done."

However, milieu members also reported negative attitudes to dialog, usually related to past experiences of attempts to engage. Cara, an elected council representative at the time of interview had agreed to a "frank conversation" with people at the Islamic Centre, at the invitation of the BBC but, afterwards, felt she had been "lied to." At the more everyday level, Robbie says that he now avoids discussing political issues with people because they do not respect you enough to hear you out before they tell you, "you're wrong." He describes an encounter at a New Year's Eve party when someone asked what "DFLA" on his badge meant: "After I finished my explanation, he says, 'No, you're just a bunch of racists. Racists, far right. Don't talk to me. Blah, blah, blah.' Gave me a load of abuse." (Robbie). Dan also reported push back from the wider milieu after his participation in the mediated dialog; the posts he made about the event generated a mixed response including criticism for engaging at all (Field diary, 21–30.01.2019). Dan's reaction, however, was to regret neither participating nor making public his engagement but anger at his own milieu for not recognizing the importance of finding a dialogic way out of what he considered a critical situation: "Tbh its making me hate how naïve and negative some people are! I still feel the same way I do about Islam and that wont change but the last thing I want is a full blown war with people and thousands if not millions of lives lost [. . .]" (Text message in Field diary, 21–30.01.2019).

By definition, those who took part in this study were open enough to engage with the researcher despite her "otherness" while individuals who refused to participate in the research did so precisely because they saw "nothing for us to gain by creating a dialogue with you" (Field diary, 24.08.1018). However, the consistent claim, and demonstration, of willingness to expose their own views to challenge by research participants, it is suggested here, invites us to revisit some assumptions about the association between closed-mindedness and "extreme right" activism.

## Conclusion

Seventy years of study of the "right-wing extremist" mind-set notwithstanding, the relationship between cognitive style and political ideology remains uncertain (van Hiel et al. 2016, 523). Much of the conceptualization of the right-wing authoritarian or extremist personality has been based on general population samples, employed etic categories to measure traits such as

closed-mindedness that do not reflect actors' self-understandings and failed to engage with the findings of qualitative studies of extremist milieus. Where the disjuncture between etic and emic understandings of RWA is acknowledged at all, the failure of those high in this trait to recognize themselves in its description is treated as evidence of irrational or contradictory beliefs or dismissed as instrumentalist or self-delusional.

The deployment of emic categories is also a challenge in ethnographic studies of extreme right actors and milieus, where the role of the ethnographer as giving voice to the socially marginal through the representation of "insider accounts" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 124) may be read as a statement of "whose side we are on" (Becker 1967). Of course, all ethnographers must negotiate disjunctures between emic and etic representations of the phenomenon studied and seek some form of "synthesis" of them (O'Reilly 2005, 116). In the study of contentious phenomena or "distasteful" groups (Esseveld and Eyerman 1992, 217), however, such a "synthesis" is problematized by the heavy domination of the field by etic categories, their politically laden nature, and (with the exception of the category of "terrorism") a fundamental divergence between etic and emic understandings of what and who is "extremist."

So why should we care what extremists think? From their exploration of the application of the concept of "radicalization" to ideas and behaviors in "radical" Muslim milieus, Kühle and Lindekilde (2012 1609) conclude that the ethnographic virtues of analyzing and respecting "emic" categories are crucial for understanding the process of, and possibilities for preventing, "radicalization." These "virtues" lie not in privileging the "authenticity" of emic categories, but the opportunity afforded to capture the dissonance between etic and emic categories as the researcher navigates their shifting insider/outsider position. The findings of this study suggest that how to talk about socially harmful ideas and beliefs is an important challenge for ethnographers as right-wing extremism becomes increasingly mainstream.

Taking emic understandings of right-wing extremism seriously raises important questions about the validity of some of the key traits attributed to the "right-wing extremist" mind-set. The article presented findings on the openness of members of the milieu studied to ambiguity, disagreement, and dialog (with the "other"). This was far from universal across the milieu and ethnographic study remains limited to the situations and dynamics observed and the often ambiguous and situationally dependent narratives recounted by research participants. Nonetheless, the findings invite us to revisit the association of "closed-mindedness" with actors in contemporary "right-wing extremist" milieus or, at least, pay more attention to how such openness and closedness are subject to situational influences and external cultural factors

(Kruglanski and Webster 1996, 266; Onraet et al. 2011, 194; Stenner 2005). As we navigate a period of the "mainstreaming of the extreme," it is vital we have not only a clear conceptual understanding of what constitutes "right wing extremism" but one that carries validity; that is that corresponds to the real-life properties of the social phenomenon it seeks to describe. As has been learned from interventions with, inter alia, drug users, and sex workers, it is essential to address people such that that they recognize themselves and their experiences. The failure to adopt such an approach with "extremists" will not only discourage their engagement but diminish the opportunity to benefit from their situated knowledge to inform better policy and practice to counter extremism.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

## Funding

## ORCID iD

Hilary Pilkington  https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4041-430X

## Notes

1. Research participants are referred to throughout by pseudonyms.
2. This source is not referenced to protect anonymity of the research participant.
3. The terms "right-wing extremism" or "extreme right" are used in inverted commas where the object of study is referred to in general. When talking about the specific milieu studied, the term "right-wing" is used (reflecting the self-identification of most participants) except where participants themselves use "extreme-right" or "far-right." When citing secondary literature, the terms (e.g., "far right"

and "white supremacist") used by the authors to describe the movement, milieu, or individual are employed.

4. The terms "emic" and "etic," emanating from linguistic anthropology, are used here in line with their adoption in the social sciences to distinguish between concepts and categories rooted in actors' self-understanding and "insider accounts" ("emic") and those devised and deployed by external, scientific or policy/practice communities ("etic") (Whitaker 2017; Sieckelinck et al. 2019, 677).

5. A milieu is understood as the people, physical and social conditions, and events in which someone acts or lives. An "extreme right" milieu is considered a space where radical/extreme messages are encountered—online or offline—via the presence of recruiters and/or people who have participated in radical/extreme activities.

6. Dan's reflections are returned to in the empirical section of the article including those arising from participation in a process of mediated dialogs (see Context and Method).

7. A term used to describe individuals, platforms, and alternative media promoting a wide range of white nationalist views whose central tenet is that "white identity" is threatened by multiculturalism and left-wing political correctness, egalitarianism, and universalism.

8. By "mind-set" is meant not the substantive content of ideas, attitudes, or behaviors but how "extremists" engage with the outside world and approach situations they encounter.

9. "Islamist" is used here to indicate a range of ideological positions rooted in the interaction between Islam and politics and is counterposed to "Islamic," understood as relating to Islam as a body of religious thought.

10. Out-group hostility or prejudice constitutes an individual personality attribute if prejudice is generalized that is, individuals are negatively oriented to more than one out-group (Duckitt 2001, 41).

11. By this is meant that each study involved "direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives (and cultures)" (O'Reilly 2005, 2).

12. The EDL was founded in 2009 as a response to Islamist (al-Muhajiroun) activism in Luton. Drawing on the football hooligan network, it initially mustered 2–3,000 at demonstrations (2009–2013) and held smaller, regional rallies throughout the fieldwork for this study.

13. The DFLA emerged in April 2018 after a split in the FLA over alleged misappropriation of funds by the FLA leader. The movement formed after a series of Islamist-inspired terrorist attacks in the UK (March–June 2017) and its first two marches in London attracted tens of thousands of demonstrators.

14. The BNP was founded in 1982 by former National Front leader, John Tyndall. In the 1990s, it became the UK's main extreme right party, having success in local elections and the 2009 European Parliament elections. The party imploded following the 2010 general election.

15. Britain First was founded in May 2011 by former BNP activists including current leader, Paul Golding. Golding has faced a series of prosecutions and convictions for public order offenses and religiously aggravated harassment.
16. GI is part of the wider European Identitarian movement rooted in the French *nouvelle droite* intellectual tradition. The UK branch was established in 2017 but has suffered repeated infiltrations and internal ruptures.
17. Tommy Robinson (Stephen Yaxley-Lennon) was co-leader of the EDL until October 2013. He currently styles himself as a "citizen journalist" conducting campaigns on issues such as Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). In 2018, he was imprisoned on charges related to live streaming outside a court during a CSE case leading to numerous local and national support rallies.
18. Written informed consent was obtained prior to commencing fieldwork and revisited informally throughout the research.
19. For a discussion of emic understandings of concepts such as "racism," "anti-Semitism," "multiculturalism" etc., see Pilkington 2020, 82–97)

## References

Abbas, Madeline-Sophie. 2019. "Producing 'Internal Suspect Bodies': Divisive Effects of UK Counter-terrorism Measures on Muslim Communities in Leeds and Bradford." *British Journal of Sociology* 70 (1): 261–282. Retrieved March 19, 2021. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1468-4446.12366

Adorno, Theodor W., Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford. 1950. *The Authoritarian Personality*. New York, NY: Norton.

Allport, Gordon W. 1979. *The Nature of Prejudice*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Altemeyer, Bob. 1981. *Right-Wing Authoritarianism*. Winnipeg, Canada: University of Manitoba Press.

Altemeyer, Bob. 1988. *Enemies of Freedom: Understanding Right-wing Authoritarianism*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Beck, Colin J. 2015. *Radicals, Revolutionaries and Terrorists*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Becker, Howard. 1967. 'Whose Side Are We On?' *Social Problems* 14 (3): 239–247. Retrieved May 16, 2021. https://academic.oup.com/socpro/article/14/3/239 /2924993

Becker, Howard. 1997. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Berger, J. M. 2018. *Extremism*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press.

Blee, Kathleen M. 2002. *Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Blee, Kathleen M. 2007. "Ethnographies of the Far Right." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 36 (2): 119–128. Retrieved March 19, 2021. https://journals.sage-pub.com/doi/10.1177/0891241606298815

Blee, Kathleen M. 2009. "Access and Methods in Research on Hidden Communities: Reflections on Studying U.S. Organized Racism." In *Critical Issues in Researching Hidden Communities*, edited by S. Ashe, A. Fraser, and T. Piacentini, 10–27.

University of Glasgow: eSharp. Retrieved March 19, 2021. https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_134466_smxx.pdf.

Blee, Kathleen M. 2018. *Understanding Racist Activism: Theory, Methods, and Research*. London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Busher, Joel. 2016. *The Making of Anti-Muslim Protest: Grassroots Activism in the English Defence League*. London: Routledge.

Daniels, Jessie. 2018. "The Algorithmic Rise of the 'Alt-right'." *Contexts* 17 (1): 60–65. Retrieved March 19, 2021. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1536504218766547

Duckitt, John. 2001. "A Dual-process Cognitive-motivational Theory of Ideology and Prejudice." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 33: 41–113. Retrieved March 19, 2021. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0065260101800046

Duncombe, Jean, and Julie Jessop. 2002. "'Doing Rapport' and the Ethics of 'Faking Friendship'." In *Ethics in Qualitative Research*, edited by M. Mauthner, M. Birch, J. Jessop, and T. Miller, 108–123. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Esseveld, Johanna, and Ron Eyerman. 1992. "Which Side are You on? Reflections on Methodological Issues in the Study of 'Distasteful' Social Movements." In *Studying Collective Action*, edited by M. Diani, and R. Eyerman, 217–237. London: Sage Publications.

Ezekiel, Raphael S. 1995. *The Racist Mind: Portraits of American Neo-Nazis and Klansmen*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Ezekiel, Raphael S. 2002. "An Ethnographer Looks at Neo-Nazi and Klan Groups: The Racist Mind Revisited." *American Behavioral Scientist* 46 (1): 51–71. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0002764202046001005

Fielding, Nigel. 1981. *The National Front*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Frenkel-Brunswik, Else. 1949. "Intolerance of Ambiguity as an Emotional and Perceptual Personality Variable." *Journal of Personality* 18 (1): 108–143. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1949.tb01236.x

Goffman, Erving. 1990. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin Books.

Greenberg, Jeff, and Eva Jonas. 2003. "Psychological Motives and Political Orientation—The Left, the Right, and the Rigid: Comment on Jost et al. (2003)."' *Psychological Bulletin* 129 (3): 376–382. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2F0033-2909.129.3.376

Hammersley, Martyn, and Paul Atkinson. 1995. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge.

Horgan, John G. 2012. 'Discussion Point: The End of Radicalization?' *National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)*. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://start.umd.edu/news/discussion-point-end-radicalization

Hussain, Ajmal, Hilary Pilkington, Kelly Simcock, Jon Nicholas, Harriet Vickers, and Lee Rogerson. 2019. "Talking Our Way Out of Conflict: Critical reflections

on 'mediated dialogue' as a tool for secondary level CVE." Commission for Countering Extremism. Retrieved March 21 2021 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/talking-our-way-out-of-conflict)

Jost, John T., Jack Glaser, Arie W. Kruglanski, and Frank J. Sulloway. 2003. "Exceptions That Prove the Rule - Using a Theory of Motivated Social Cognition to Account for Ideological Incongruities and Political Anomalies: Reply to Greenberg and Jonas (2003)." *Psychological Bulletin* 129 (3): 383–393. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2F0033-2909.129.3.383

Kruglanski, Arie W. (2004) *The Psychology of Closed Mindedness: Essays in Social Psychology*, New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Kruglanski, Arie W., and Edward Orehek. 2012. "The Need for Certainty as a Psychological Nexus for Individuals and Society." In *Extremism and the Psychology of Uncertainty*, edited by M. A. Hogg, and D. L. Blaylock, 3–18. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Kruglanski, Arie W., and Donna M. Webster. 1996. "Motivated Closing of the Mind: 'Seizing' and 'Freezing'." *Psychological Review*, 103: 263–283. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2F0033-295X.103.2.263

Kühle, Lene, and Lasse Lindekilde. 2012. "Radicalisation and the Limits of Tolerance: A Danish Case-Study." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38 (10): 1607–1623. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1369183X.2012.681475

Kundnani, Arun. 2012. "Radicalisation: The Journey of a Concept." *Race and Class* 54 (2): 3–25. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0306396812454984

Martin, John Levi. 2001 "The Authoritarian Personality, 50 Years later: What Lessons Are There for Political Psychology?" *Political Psychology* 22 (1): 1–26. Retrieved March 21 2021. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/0162-895X.00223

McCauley, Clark, and Sophia Moskalenko. 2017. "Understanding Political Radicalization: The Two-Pyramids Model." *American Psychologist* 72 (3): 205–216. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://doi.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Famp0000062

Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. 2020. *Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. 2017. *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Onraet, Emma, Alain van Hiel, Arne Roets, and Ilse Cornelis. 2011. "The Closed Mind: 'Experience' and 'Cognition' Aspects of Openness to Experience and Need for Closure as Psychological Bases for Right-wing Attitudes." *European Journal of Personality* 25 (3): 184–197. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1002/per.775

O'Reilly, Karen. 2005. *Ethnographic Methods*. London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Pilkington, Hilary, and Necla Acik. 2020. "Not entitled to talk: (Mis)recognition, inequality and social activism of young Muslims." *Sociology*, 54(1): 181–98. Retrieved March 21 2021 (https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0038038519867630)

Pilkington, Hilary, Elena Omel'chenko, and Al'bina Garifzianova. 2010. *Russia's Skinheads: Exploring and Rethinking Subcultural Lives*. London and New York: Routledge.

Pilkington, Hilary. 2014. "'My whole life is here': Tracing journeys through 'skinhead.'" In *Youth Cultures in the Age of Global Media*, edited by D. Buckingham, S. Bragg, and M. J. Kehily, 71–87. London: PalgraveMacmillan.

Pilkington, Hilary. 2016. *Loud and Proud: Passion and Politics in the English Defence League*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Pilkington, Hilary. 2019. "'Field observer: simples': Finding a place from which to do close up research on the 'far right.'" In *Researching Far-Right Movements: Ethics, Methodologies, and Qualitative Inquiries*, edited by E. Toscano, 23–40. London and New York: Routledge.

Pilkington, Hilary. 2020. "Understanding 'right-wing extremism': in theory and practice." DARE Report on Young People's Trajectories through Anti-Islam(ist) and Extreme Right Milieus (UK). Retrieved March 21 2021 (http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d7.1_uk_1.pdf)

Roets, Arne, and Alain van Hiel. 2006. "Need for Closure Relations with Authoritarianism, Conservative Beliefs and Racism: The Impact of Urgency and Permanence Tendencies." *Psychological Belgica* 46 (3): 235–252. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://www.psychologicabelgica.com/articles/abstract/10.5334/pb-46-3-235/

Roets, Arne, and Alain van Hiel. 2011. "Allport's Prejudiced Personality Today: Need for Closure as the Motivated Cognitive Basis of Prejudice." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 20 (6): 349–354. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0963721411424894

Rokeach, Milton. 2015. *The Open and Closed Mind: Investigations into the Nature of Belief Systems and Personality Systems*. Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books.

Schmid, Alex P. 2013. "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review." *ICCT Research Paper*. The Hague, the Netherlands: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. Retrieved March 21, 2021. http://www.icct.nl/app/uploads/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf

Sieckelinck, Stijn, Elga Sikkens, Marion van San, Sita Kotnis, and Micha De Winter. 2019. "Transitional Journeys Into and Out of Extremism. A Biographical Approach." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42 (7): 662–682. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2017.1407075?journalCode=uter20

Shapira, Harel. 2013 *Waiting for José: The Minutemen's Pursuit of America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Simi, Pete, and Robert Futrell. 2015. *American Swastika: Inside the White Power Movement's Hidden Spaces of Hate*. Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield.

Smyth, Lisa, and Claire Mitchell. 2008. "Researching Conservative Groups: Rapport and Understanding across Moral and Political Boundaries." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11 (5): 441–452. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13645570701401636

Stenner, Karen. 2005. *The Authoritarian Dynamic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thomas, Paul. 2016. "Youth, Terrorism and Education: Britain's Prevent Programme." *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 35 (2): 171–187. Retrieved March 21, 2021. http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/26700/3/Paul%20Thomas%20ILJE%20special%20issue%20article.pdf

Titley, Gavan. 2019. *Racism and Media*. London: Sage Publications.

Toscano, Emanuele, and Daniele di Nunzio. 2019. "The Dark Side of the Field. Doing Research on CasaPound in Italy." In *Researching Far Right Movements: Ethics, Methodologies and Qualitative Inquiries* edited by E. Toscano, 90–106. London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Van Hiel, Alain. 2012. "A Psycho-political Profile of Party Activists and Left-wing and Right-wing Extremists." *European Journal of Political Research* 51 (2): 166–203. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.01991.x

Van Hiel, Alain, Emma Onraet, Howard M. Crowson, and Arne Roets. 2016. "The Relationship Between Right-wing Attitudes and Cognitive Style: A Comparison of Self-report and Behavioural Measures of Rigidity and Intolerance of Ambiguity." *European Journal of Personality* 30 (6): 523–531. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1002/per.2082

Virchow, Fabian. 2007. "Performance, Emotion, and Ideology: On the Creation of 'Collectives of Emotion' and Worldview in the Contemporary German Far Right." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 36 (2): 147–164. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0891241606298822

Webster, Donna M., and Arie W. Kruglanski. 1994. "Individual Differences in Need for Cognitive Closure." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 67 (6): 1049–1062. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2F0022-3514.67.6.1049

Whitaker, Emilie M. 2017. "Emic and Etic Analysis." In *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, edited by in B.S. Turner, 1–2. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118430873.est0640.

Womick, Jake, Sarah J. Ward, Samantha J. Heintzelman, Brendon Woody, and Laura A. King. 2019. "The Existential Function of Right-wing Authoritarianism." *Journal of Personality* 87 (5): 1056–1073. Retrieved March 21, 2021. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jopy.12457

## Author Biography

**Hilary Pilkington** is Professor of Sociology at the University of Manchester and Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. She has conducted ethnographic research on youth and youth subculture, youth political participation, activism, and extremism and published, in addition, on using ethnographic research methods in contentious research and meta-ethnographic synthesis. She is currently the coordinator of the H2020 DARE project (http://www.dare-h2020.org/).