Right-wing Extremism in New Zealand: Dialogues with those who left

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Right-wing Extremism in New Zealand: Dialogues with those who left

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ABSTRACT

Right-wing extremism has been the subject of many studies over the years, especially in contemporary times in which many commentators have argued there is a global resurgence in support for the extreme-right. Despite this, very few studies have been conducted on the extreme-right in New Zealand and previous studies are very outdated. Of the international studies that have been conducted on right-wing extremism only a small minority are empirically based as most scholars prefer to avoid the many challenges and difficulties which accompany empirical inquiry in the subject. Furthermore, only a minority of previous empirical studies have focused on lives of the individuals who come to join the extreme-right. This thesis examines why and how individuals come to join extreme-right groups, what motivates them to stay within these groups, and why many of them eventually come to leave. These questions were investigated by conducting a qualitative method of inquiry into the life histories of six former New Zealand right-wing extremists. A number of social factors were identified as having influenced the participants to join, stay within, and eventually leave extreme-right groups in New Zealand. These social factors were not uniform across all the participants who were also determined to be generally influenced by a combination of factors rather any singular factor. The influencing affect that these social factors had on the participants can be understood with several theoretical explanations which were applied to the findings. Furthermore, the study gave rise to some new theoretical ideas which can improve upon how involvement in right-wing extremism is understood and aid future inquiry into the subject. Overall the study enhances our understanding of individual involvement in right-wing extremism and provides insight into the extreme-right scene in New Zealand.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Socko the cat, who tragically passed away the day after it was submitted. Her frequent visits and demands for attention were at times a welcome respite from the long tedious hours of work that were required to complete this thesis. She is sadly missed.

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Firstly, I would like to thank the study participants for trusting me with their life stories. Quite simply this thesis would not be possible without their cooperation. I wish them well in their lives and hope they continue to strive for peace and happiness. With deepest gratitude I express my thanks to my father and brother. Without the support of my father I would not have been able to undertake post graduate study and complete this thesis. My sincere thanks to Professor Alan France for his supervision and guidance. Also I would like to thank the Sociology Department at the University of Auckland, including the post graduate students both current and former. Many people inadvertently provided me with knowledge and inspiration which culminated in this thesis. And lastly, I must acknowledge the New Start Programme at the University of Auckland, which has provided early school leavers such as myself an opportunity to undertake higher education.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGT   Age-graded theory of social control
B&H   Blood & Honour
BM   British Movement
BNP   British National Party
CF   Consent Form
ECT   Ethnic competition thesis
EDL   English Defence League
ERG/s   Extreme-right group/s
GST   General strain theory
KKK   Ku Klux Klan
LCP   Life-course perspective
NCEA   National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NGO/s   Non-government organisation/s
NF   National Front
NSWB   North Shore White Boys
NZNF   New Zealand National Front
PIS   Participant Information Sheet
PPDS   Push, Pull, Drag, Shove
RAC   Rock Against Communism
RWE   Right-wing Extremism
RWR   Right Wing Resistance
SCT   Social control theory
SDH   Social disintegration hypothesis
SLT   Social learning theory
TAP   The Authoritarian Personality
UAHPEC   University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee

INTRODUCTION

Like it or not, the far right is sexy. Emotive, conflictual and colourful, it ticks all the boxes for newsworthiness (Bale, 2012: 256).

Right-wing Extremism (RWE) has undergone a global resurgence with the rise and success of many extreme-right politicians, organisations, and movements in Europe and elsewhere in contemporary times. Much of this resurgence has been driven by a wave of Islamophobia in the wake of high profile terrorist attacks conducted by Islamist extremists and the migrant refugee crisis in Europe, in addition to older anxieties over multiculturalism and the rapidly changing ethnic demographics of many Western nations. This climate has bolstered support for the existing extreme-right and given rise to many new extreme-right organisations and movements within the previous decade (Vieten & Poynting, 2016). Growing levels of extreme right sentiment can be observed in the 2016 election of Donald Trump to the office of President of the United States and the successful Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom during same year, which has initiated the withdrawal of Britain from the European Union, as well as many other less publicised extreme right political successes in Europe and elsewhere. Furthermore, the emergence of extra-parliamentary extreme-right organisations such as the English Defence League (EDL) as well as a string of high profile terrorist attacks conducted by right-wing extremists such as Anders Breivik and Dylann Roof is further testament to this growing sentiment. Following international trends, extreme-right groups in New Zealand such as the New Zealand National Front (NZNF) and Right Wing Resistance (RWR) have become increasingly active in recent times and have enjoyed an increased level of membership. Despite this, very little is known about the individuals who come

to join these groups, the context of their involvement, and why most of them eventually leave.

The focus of this study

The focus of this study is on individual involvement in RWE, specifically in the form of white nationalism and neo-Nazism, within the New Zealand context. By this it is meant individuals involved with groups such as the New Zealand National Front (NZNF), Right Wing Resistance (RWR), and racist skinhead groups. Mainstream political parties and organisations such as the New Zealand First Party, which are considered by some commentators to be extreme-right are outside the scope of thesis and will not be examined. The approach taken by this study is a life history analysis of six individuals who were previously involved in extreme-right groups in New Zealand. In particular, the study focuses on the context of their lives and their motivations as they joined, stayed in, and eventually left RWE. As sociologists are acutely aware, concepts that are central to extreme-right ideology such as 'race' and 'white' can be deconstructed and heavily critiqued and challenged. The concept of a 'white race' is flawed and this has proven to be problematic even for right-wing extremists themselves at times. However, there is already a large body of literature that has emerged out of the social sciences dedicated to analysing and challenging extremist ideology, as such an analysis of extremist ideology is outside the scope of this study. Within this thesis ideological concepts such as the aforementioned and other right-wing extremist ideology are referred to in places, however, they should be read with the insight and understanding that they can and have been critiqued and challenged.

Why the topic was chosen

The topic of this thesis was chosen because we know little about contemporary RWE in New Zealand or the individuals involved. This is because existing research is very scarce, sparse, and dated, consisting of only two empirical studies (Addison, 1995, 1996; Spoonley, 1986, 1987b) conducted to date, the most recent of which is over two decades old. In addition to this a few books on gangs (Dennehy & Newbold, 2001; Gilbert, 2013; Payne, 1997) briefly discuss skinheads while another study (Van Leeuwen, 2008) analysed right-wing extremist ideology focusing on the publications of a local extreme-right author. The lack of local research is in part due to the fact that RWE in New Zealand is comparatively less significant than many other Western nations and subsequently may be perceived to be less of a threat. Despite this it is still a source of harm for communities, victims, families, and right-wing extremists themselves. Furthermore, some authors have argued that the study of RWE in places where has been less successful 'is of the utmost importance because it can provide counterfactual evidence for theories explaining the success of the extreme right' elsewhere (De Lange & Mudde, 2005:481). Another reason the topic was chosen was due to my personal connection to subject, being a former right-wing extremist myself. As such this has given me an insider perspective of RWE and has affected the research in a variety of ways, which will be discussed further in the methodology chapter. By undertaking this research project, I have aspired to make further sense of my own previous involvement in RWE. This thesis is intended to make a modest contribution to literature by providing further insight into the involvement of individuals in RWE and an update extreme-right scene in New Zealand.

Thesis Overview

The following is an overview of the chapters of this thesis and a brief summary of their respective content matter. Chapter 1 was the result of a literature review conducted in order to determine what previous research can tell us about RWE and its prevalence in New Zealand. It begins with a discussion of terms and concepts and provides a working definition of RWE so that we have a clear understanding of what exactly it is we are examining. This is followed by an investigation on historical RWE in New Zealand up until contemporary times to determine what we can learn from the past. After this the chapter reviews what previous research can tell us about individual involvement in RWE in terms of joining, staying, and leaving. More specifically why and how they do each of these instances as well as the processes and problems that are involved in doing so.

There have been many different ways in which researchers and theorists have previously understood and theoretically explained individual involvement in RWE. Chapter 2 reviews the most prevalent of these theories and investigates their advantages and limitations as well as their utility for this study. Over time older theoretical explanations have fallen out of favour while newer theories have emerged out of more contemporary research. I will examine early socio-psychological theory, more contemporary political party focused theory, and some criminological theory. Following this I will discuss the rise of research on disengagement from RWE and other similar subjects as well as some more versatile social constructionist and masculinity theory. And finally, I will turn to some influential recent theories in the form of the *push and pull* framework as

well as John Horgan's (2014) 'arc' framework, both of which I have drawn on heavily in this thesis.

Chapter 3 will detail the methodology that has been used in this study. I will begin this by discussing some of the challenges that researchers face when studying RWE as well as my personal connection to it and how this thesis was conceptualized. Following this I will outline the design of this research, the ethical concerns that arose and the steps taken to negate them, who the participants were and the steps which were taken to recruit them, how the interviews were conducted and transcribed, and finally how the data was coded and analysed.

The findings from the interviews and observations conducted in the study are presented in Chapter 4 and are organised according to the themes of joining, staying, and leaving. Firstly, the backgrounds of the participants are analysed in order to determine why and how they become involved in RWE. Following this, the lives of the participants as engaged right-wing extremists are evaluated to discover why they wanted to stay involved, what it was like, and what kind of disadvantages their engagement entailed. Finally, the aspect of leaving is explored to determine why and how the participants left, the problems they had in doing so, and how their lives have changed since leaving.

Chapter 5 is a discussion on the findings of the study in which I engaged with some of the theory discussed in Chapter 2 in order to help explain the findings and endeavour to answer the research questions. In the second half of the chapter I critique both the push and pull framework and the arc framework by discussing some of their limitations and some ideas on how some of these

limitations can be overcome. Here I suggest that our understanding of RWE can be enhanced by expanding the push and pull model to include 'drag' and 'shove' factors, drawing on both a life course theoretical approach and Bronfenbrenner's (1994) *ecological systems theory*, and by using a simplified version of Rusbult's (1980) *investment model*. Furthermore, I introduce a synthesized three-dimensional model of engagement which can be used to understand the level of engagement of right-wing extremists. The thesis closes with the overall conclusions of the study and their implications followed by my critical reflections on the study, suggestions for future research, and final thoughts.

CHAPTER 1: RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN REVIEW

Fascism resembles pornography in that it is difficult — perhaps impossible — to define in an operational, legally valid way, but those with experience know it when they see it (Laqueur, 1996:6)

To begin our study we first must conduct an inquiry into existing literature in order to determine what we already know about the subject. This chapter begins by examining the concepts and terms used to explain RWE and how it has been defined and then investigates the history of RWE in New Zealand. Following this the chapter discusses what existing research can tell us about individual involvement in the extreme-right.

What is Right-wing Extremism?

Right-wing extremism (RWE) is by no means an easy thing to understand let alone define. Many terms have been coined and used over the years, such as extreme-right, far-right, radical-right, and populist radical-right, all of which are favoured by different authors who often interpret them differently (Mudde, 2017; Wolfreys, 2013).[1] In fact entire books have been written in discussion of the best terminology and definition to use and to date there is still no universal consensus (De Lange & Mudde, 2005; Hainsworth, 2008; Ignazi, 2003; Mammone, Godin, & Jenkins, 2012; Mudde, 1996; Rydgren, 2007; Schain, Zolber, & Hossay, 2002). Cas Mudde (2017) defines the extreme-right as sharing

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[1] For the purposes of this study right-wing extremism or the extreme-right is used to mean all of these terms.

'a core ideology that combines (at least) three features: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism', while 'additional core ideological features, such as anti-Semitism or welfare chauvinism', may also be present (4). He explains that:

> *Nativism entails a combination of nationalism and xenophobia [and] is an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native (or 'alien') elements, whether persons or ideas, are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state (Ibid.).*

Traditionally nativism has been the basis for hostility towards immigrants and ethnic minorities such as Jews and more recently Muslims in many Western countries. In New Zealand nativism has traditionally been directed against Pacific Islanders, Asians, and increasingly in contemporary times Muslims. Mudde explains that '[a]uthoritarianism refers to the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely' (Ibid.). And finally, populism is defined as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite,' and argues that politics should be an expression of the [general will] of the people" (Ibid.). The key thing in populist discourse is *who*, exactly, is the *pure people*.

Within this broad classification, a 'main ideological distinction' allows us to differentiate between two subgroups – '*state nationalist*' and a more radical '*ethnic nationalist*' forms of RWE (Mudde, 2000:181-2). For the former, national identity is 'defined on the basis of a civic (and more flexible criterion)', while for

the latter it defined according to 'a (rigid) ethnic criterion' (Ibid.). In other words, ethnic nationalism holds that only individuals that meet a certain ethnic or racial criteria belong to a particular nation. This study is primarily concerned with this ethnic nationalist form of RWE, which manifests in many Western nations including New Zealand in the form of *white nationalism* and *neo-Nazism*. White nationalism is an ethnic nationalist ideology that is centred on the idea that white people are a race (Swain & Nieli, 2003). Often it is pan-nationalistic in the sense that nationality for white people transcends multiple existing nation states in which white people are native or are a majority. *Neo-Nazi* is used to describe extreme-right groups 'that explicitly state a desire to restore the Third Reich […] or quote historical National Socialism […] as their ideological influence' (Mudde, 2000: 12). Neo-Nazism might also be considered form of white nationalist ideology. Both white nationalism and neo-Nazism have been traditionally justified by a belief in white supremacy, the idea that the 'white' or 'Aryan' race is superior to others.

When we think about RWE one of the first things that comes to our minds is political parties and politicians, especially in contemporary times with the success of extreme-right politics across the Western world, even though RWE extends beyond the political arena. Despite this, nearly all European authors that have written on RWE have focused 'exclusively on political parties', while only a minority expand out beyond parties to include other organisations and subcultures (De Lange & Mudde 2005:480).[2] One researcher who has taken a more comprehensive perspective of RWE is Tore Bjørgo (2009) who understands that:

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[2] The reverse seems true in the United States given the different political system and subsequent lack of extreme-right political parties.

The extreme right-wing scene constitutes a multitude of organizational types, ranging from political parties and formal organizations; counter-cultural youth scenes (such as skinhead gangs); various forms of networks and milieus; and groups established for the purpose of terrorist and combat activities (30).

One important reason for understanding the extreme-right in this way is that research has found that individuals often belong to multiple organisations at the same time (Blee, 2004; Weinberg, 1998). Some authors from Europe (Klandermans & Mayer, 2006; Minkenberg, 2003) and the United States (Berlet & Vysotsky, 2006) understand the extreme-right as a social movement constituted of the different types of organisations as Bjørgo describes, hereafter extreme-right groups (ERGs). In fact, right-wing extremists often understand themselves and their ERGs to be part of some worldwide movement (Swain & Nieli, 2003). As such this thesis understands the extreme-right to be something akin to a social movement comprised of ERGs of different types. Therefore some contemporary examples of ERGs include the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), various neo-Nazi skinhead groups, the British National Party (BNP), and the Golden Dawn in Greece.

While terms and definitions are useful to inquiry it needs to be stated that most right-wing extremists do not identify themselves as thus, some do not even identify as being 'right wing' (Klandermans & Mayer, 2006). The veteran New Zealand extreme-right activist and writer, Kerry Bolton (2006), frequently uses the terms 'nationalist', 'patriot' and 'right-wing' to describe both himself and his associates. Similarly, a senior member of the New Zealand National Front (NZNF)

described members as 'nationalists' in a radio interview (Kumagai, 2015). Furthermore it can be difficult to define organisations as ERGs because some organisations are vague about their ideology, or as some commentators claim they "do not show their true face 'front-stage', i.e. to the general public, but reserve it for the 'back-stage', i.e. the real supporters" (Mudde, 2000:168). Also many ERGs consist of a variety of different members that vary in terms of ideology, sometimes there may even be internal factions. For example, the EDL is often considered to be an ERG although its membership includes individuals from ethnic, religious, and sexual minority groups as well as more traditional right-wing extremists who adhere to white nationalism and neo-Nazism (Pilkington, 2016). One thing is clear, RWE is constantly changing and evolving, at least on the surface.

Right-wing extremism in New Zealand until now

New Zealand has a long history of RWE, although ERGs have only ever remained a very marginal part of its society.[3] According to Paul Spoonley (1987b), after the Second World War up until the early 1960s RWE in New Zealand was largely 'confined to very specific groups and reproduced via a cultural underground', it was something that was not discussed publicly and largely restrained due to public stigma associated with fascism in the wake of the war (67). He argues that a downward turning economy and subsequent austerity of the late 1950s along with international changes such as the decline of the British Empire, the Cold War and perceived threat of communism, and the growing influence of 'non-white' countries, gave rise to variety of different ERGs in the 1960s. These early

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[3] This history will only be mentioned in passing due to space limitations, see the respective sources for a more detailed perspective.

groups were organised around such themes as the continuation of the British Empire and stronger ties between predominantly white commonwealth countries, anti-communism, and support for white-minority led governments in countries such as Rhodesia and South Africa. In this same period, New Zealand first saw the emergence of neo-fascist and explicitly racist groups such as the National Socialist Party, National Front (NF), and KKK. Along with the international changes previously mentioned, Spoonley (1987b) attributes their emergence to 'the arrival in New Zealand of migrants from Britain or other parts of the British Empire who were seeking a refuge from "racial problems"', and the maturation of a younger generation who 'had little understanding of the issues of Nazism' and were subsequently less inclined to see Jews as victims due to 'the actions of Israel' (73).

New ERGs of this kind continued to emerge into the 1970s, often being established by key members of older groups which had disintegrated. Leading extremists proved adept at exploiting contemporary New Zealand social issues and in the wake of the increasing momentum of protest in opposition to the Springbok Tours, a pro-tour organisation was formed called the Association Defending South African Tours. The organisation involved veteran right-wing extremists including Colin King-Ansell who was a 'prominent member of many of the pro-Springbok rugby tour demonstrations held in Auckland in 1981' (Ibid.: 156). Spoonley (1987b) explains that:

> *At the end of the 1970s, [ERGs] encompassed a broad range of political issues and they involved many more people than 10 years before. Their style ranged from the tactics of imported neo-fascism to traditional conservative pressure group politics. They attracted different generations*

and, depending on the groups in question, they had different class bases
(75).

At the end of the 1970s the skinhead subculture began to emerge in New Zealand which had a significant impact on the local extremist scene. The working-class youth skinhead subculture originally emerged in England during the late 1960s, although it wasn't until 'the skinhead revival of the late 1970s', after the emergence of punk, that 'right-wing politics became fashionable and were embraced by increasing numbers of skinheads' (Brown, 2004:158). Some skinheads in the UK were attracted to the politics of the NF and British Movement (BM), which Brown argues was largely due to the '[e]conomic decline, scarcity of jobs, and increased immigration' which 'intensified latent racist and right-wing attitudes in British society' (Ibid.:162). Shortly after the skinhead subculture emerged in England it spread overseas to Europe, the United States, and the rest of the world.

The skinhead subculture in New Zealand has its origin in local subculture called the 'boot boys', the name originated from a gang of punks in Auckland called 'The Boot Boys'.[4] Boot boys emerged out of the local punk scene of the late 1970s and were essentially harder punks 'that did not look so outrageously colourful and weird' (Addison, 1996:93). Although not skinheads *per se*, they were influenced by British skinheads through the migration of people and importation of fashion styles. The skinhead subculture in New Zealand largely emerged out of the earlier boot boy and punk scenes later when subcultural music and publications started to be imported on a larger scale when its commercial potential was realised by retailors. While early boot boy and

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[4] This gang inspired the New Zealand film *Queen City Rocker* (Morrison, 1986) in which boot boys are depicted.

skinhead groups weren't particularly racist and often included Māori, they did flirt with fascist politics and ideologies which was expressed in the music of local boot boy and skinhead bands (Spoonley, 1987a). The boot boy subculture eventually declined in the early 1980s giving way to the skinhead subculture.

Beginning in the late 1970s the NF and BM in the UK had started to use punk music to spread its political message and widen its appeal to younger generations by forming punk bands with its younger members and organising musical concerts called 'Rock Against Communism' (RAC), the name of which later described a musical genre of this type (Forbes & Stampton, 2015:10).[5] In the early 1980s the leader and singer of the skinhead band *Skrewdriver*, Ian Stuart Donaldson, was instrumental in forging a connection between the skinhead subculture and RWE (Brown, 2004). The band had a particularly strong influence as it had been very popular with the skinhead community prior to rebranding itself as openly and explicitly neo-Nazi, with its songs espousing neo-Nazi and white nationalist ideology, and subsequently paved the way for many other neo-Nazi bands and musicians. Music of this kind came to be known as 'white power' music and today encompasses a wide range of musical genres and is used by ERGs to both disseminate ideology and as a source of funding (Langebach & Raabe, 2013).[6]

From 1979 and into the 1980s some New Zealand skinheads started adopting racist ideals and neo-Nazism vehemently due to the influence of imported skinhead music. Soon after there were reports of skinheads being involved in

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[5] The NF's strategy of embracing the punk subculture originated in Leeds, England, where it was particularly successful for a while.
[6] The KKK had also used music for propaganda purposes in the 1960s but it did not have as great an influence on younger generations (see – Messner, Jipson, Becker, & Byers, 2007).

racially and ideologically charged criminal activities such as violence, arson, and vandalism. Spoonley (1987a) observed that one skinhead group in Palmerston North spent 'their free time studying Nazi material' and 'National Front publications', and identified politically 'with Colin King-Ansell's Auckland-based National Socialist White People's Party' (Ibid.:105). Their other activities included menacing ethnic minority communities which 'culminated in an attack on the local Unemployed Rights Centre', deemed to be too Maori, 'and the home of a local Jewish family' (Ibid.). In Christchurch the first neo-Nazi skinhead group to emerge was the 'United National Front Nazi Party, otherwise known as the United Skinheads', the name of which exemplifies the merging of ideology with subcultural skinhead gang (Addison, 1996:100).[7] The group was involved in a violent war with two rival non-racist skinhead gangs called the 'Christchurch Skinheads', who 'had some Maori members', and 'The Firm', both of which ended up disbanding (Ibid.). The more violent United Skinheads were principally a prison gang early on, which is where most of their members were recruited, and subsequently most of the group were incarcerated at any one time (Ibid.).

In the 1980s and into the 1990s some of New Zealand's 'whiter' motorcycle gangs also acquired a 'white power' culture to various degrees, either due to skinheads obtaining membership (Addison, 1996; Dennehy, 2000; Dennehy & Newbold, 2001; Gilbert, 2013) or in opposition to the larger predominately Maori 'ethnic gangs', such as Black Power and the Mongrel Mob, and their increasing politicisation (Payne, 1997). Some motorcycle clubs, particularly in the South Island, have been affiliated with skinhead gangs and use them as 'feeder groups' (Addison, 1996; Gilbert, 2013).

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[7] This group was also featured in the book *Staunch* (Payne, 1997).

When the Australian film, *Romper Stomper* (Wright, 1992) was released it had a large impact on the RWE and the skinhead scene in New Zealand. Addison (1996) wrote of the film:

Ironically, it is hailed by skinheads as an icon of their culture, and the justifications of anti-Asian violence that are brandished throughout the movie are reiterated by young New Zealand skins with vehemence (102).

Some young people, who after watching the film, idolised the characters and sought to mimic them, subsequently becoming neo-Nazi skinheads. Inadvertently, the soundtrack of the film, in which commercial musicians mimic a white power skinhead band, became very popular amongst neo-Nazi skinheads, both new and old. Addison (1995) suggested that the film may have had a strong effect in New Zealand due to the close proximity to where the film was set, Australia, and the fact the lead actor was a New Zealander. Furthermore he suggests that it coincided with an anti-Asian sentiment amongst the public at the time:

The Government had been selling off previously State owned enterprises predominantly, it appeared, to the Japanese, and Asians had been moving to New Zealand for the last few years with the aid of new immigration laws, buying expensive new property and cars. This led to relatively rich suburbs such as Howick, of Auckland being newly labelled 'Chowick,' indicating a publicly racist leaning, definitely not limited to the skinhead population (Ibid.:87).

In the early 1990s a very violent skinhead gang called the Fourth Reich emerged, the name of which may have been inspired by a song from Romper Stomper. The gang 'was formed in Christchurch Prison' and had 'a small following in Christchurch, Nelson, Greymouth, Timaru and Dunedin' of 'highly mobile and violent' members, some of which were mixed race (Dennehy & Newbold, 2001:189). Similar to the earlier United Skinheads, the majority of members were incarcerated at any one time. The gang rose to national attention after some high profile racially motivated murders committed by members of the group. In Auckland a skinhead group called Unit 88 was active in the late 1990s in which Colin King-Ansell was once again involved. The group later disbanded after threats from gangs, primarily the Head Hunters motorcycle club who had especially taken exception to the use of the number abbreviation '88'.[8] Some of the former members of Unit 88 may have gone on to join the Hammerskins which was founded by Kyle Chapman in the late 1990s, growing to have 'a small but highly organised presence in Otaki, Hawke's Bay, Hamilton, Auckland and Christchurch' (Ibid.:188-9).[9]

By the early 2000s, Chapman had left the Hammerskins and resuscitated the moribund New Zealand National Front (NZNF), which has since remained relatively small but active until the time of writing.[10] Chapman later left the group in "2004, allegedly due to the social impact his NZNF activities were on his children at school", after which the group has undergone multiple leadership changes (Van Leeuwen, 2008:86). Veteran activist Kerry Bolton, who had been a prominent figure in many earlier ERGs, was secretary of the group for a short

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[8] 88 standing for HH – 'Heil Hitler' for neo-Nazis while for the motorcycle gang it stands for 'Head Hunters'.
[9] The Hammerskins declined after the departure of Kyle Chapman from the group in the early 2000s after which its membership has been largely centred in Wellington.
[10] The NZNF has existed since 1967 in various forms, having been led by different individuals, and alternated between periods of activity and inactivity (Addison, 1996; Spoonley, 1986).

time and later left due to internal disputes. At the time of writing the NZNF is run by neo-Nazi skinhead Vince Stephens and Colin King-Ansell (Anthony, 2011; Kenny, 2014, New Zealand National Front, 2017).

In 2009 Chapman again resurfaced after having established the Right Wing Resistance (RWR), an ERG predominately composed of skinheads, which subsequently grew to rival the NZNF in terms of membership and activism (Hume, 2009). Since its formation RWR has received media attention for conducting vigilante 'street patrols' (Steward, 2009), invading a political meeting with masked camouflage wearing members, and most recently when a man was stabbed at an RWR house party (Sherwood, 2016). In 2016 Chapman announced on the RWR's blog (http://rwrnz.blogspot.co.nz) that he was no longer leader of the group. The blog also reveals that after his departure the group has fragmented and declined, although it remains active. While the NZNF and RWR are the two largest groups, the contemporary extremist scene also consists of a number of smaller ERGs which includes skinhead groups such as the Aryan Legion, Blood and Honour (B&H), Celtic Warriors, Chaos Skins (Shadwell, 2016), Hammerskins, Kaos Skinheads (separate to the similarly named Chaos; Plowman, 2009), Ruthless Boot Boys (Clarkson, 2009, 2015), and the Southland Skinheads (Farrar, 2012).[11] Some of these groups are more criminally orientated rather than ideological. Although traditional 'non-racist' skinheads do exist in New Zealand (see – "Straightening out skinhead beliefs", 2010), it is likely that most skinheads are of the neo-Nazi or white power variety. This is because the original skinhead subculture has declined since the 1980s due to changing

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[11] While it can be difficult to find public records of some of these groups most of them can be identified by their presence on social networking websites. Like the Hammerskins, B&H is an international organisation. The Chaos Skins may have started out as a non-political/ideological group which changed later as newer and younger members began to adopt a neo-Nazi white power image.

musical tastes amongst youth, the departure of individuals due to maturation, and the fact that the subculture has become increasingly synonymous with violence, racism, and RWE, causing many non-racist skinheads to drop out. This is coupled with the fact that the neo-Nazi or white power skinhead has grown to become a separate subculture which continues to attract individuals, some of who adopt the subculture after adopting the ideology or becoming involved in an ERG.

By conducting this inquiry into the history of RWE in New Zealand we can identify several themes. Firstly, RWE in NZ has emerged as a result of the transference of ideology through the migration of individuals and the importation of ideological artefacts such as literature and music, particularly from Britain. As such many local ERGs have been modelled on similar overseas organisations. Furthermore, extremist ideology and subcultures have been inadvertently transferred and made popular through films such as Romper Stomper. Secondly, as Spoonley (1986, 1987b) observed, many of the ERGs that have existed in NZ can be connected through a lineage due to the transference of members. ERGs tend to only last a short time before disbanding after which some members will occasionally go on to form new groups. The most prominent local ERGs have been formed by the same key individuals, notably long time extremists such as Colin King-Ansell, Kerry Bolton, and Kyle Chapman. The groups often decline after the departure of these key individuals. Thirdly, as discussed earlier classifying ERGs into typologies is problematic, this is especially so in New Zealand where many contemporary ERGs have characteristics of multiple group types. For example, the NZNF is generally considered to be a political party but at times it shares many similarities to that of a skinhead gang. For the most part ERGs in New Zealand have been exclusively or predominately

male, Spoonley (1986) argues this is due to that "[m]ale supremacy and aggression are central themes" in expressions of neo-fascism (191).[12]

Fifthly, as observed by Spoonley, RWE in New Zealand is both a working class and a middle class, or 'petty bourgeoisie', phenomenon. This is reiterated in international research where different ERGs and extremist scenes vary between being predominately middle class and predominately working class, changing across different regions and groups (Klandermans & Mayer, 2006). However, Spoonley (1986) observed that, at the time he was writing, in New Zealand neo-fascist expressions of RWE is a working-class phenomena in which 'the key activists not only come from the working class but they continue to reflect working class sentiments' (180). Similarly, Addison (1996) found that Christchurch skinheads were of a working class socio-economic status. In some international contexts, neo-Nazi skinheads have been found to be of middle-class status in the United States (Hamm, 1993) and come from middle-class or petty-bourgeoisie family backgrounds in Scandinavia (Kimmel, 2007). There is no public data on the number of extremists in New Zealand or the size of ERGs, as such we can not ascertain whether RWE has increased or decreased in New Zealand. However, it is very clear that ERGs still exist in New Zealand society today and judging by their presence in news media reports within the last decade they may be larger and more active than previously, even if only modestly.

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[12] Some exceptions of exclusively female ERGs such as the 'Valkyries' (Dennehy & Newbold, 2001), which was mainly formed by the Hammerskins as an organisation for their female supporters and partners, and the 'Noble Maidens' which only ever had a few members.

Joining

The question of why anyone would want to become involved in RWE is often difficult for many people to understand given the sacrifices and disadvantages that come with being involved, and the simple fact of being around people that many consider unsavoury. In reality ERGs have been found to 'fulfil certain fundamental social and psychological needs' of the individuals that join them (Bjørgo, 2009:31). Empirical studies on RWE have found that individuals join ERGs for a variety of different reasons, or combination of reasons. Some commonly reoccurring reasons have been identified as sympathy for the ERG's politics and ideology, negative experiences with other ethnicities or militant anti-racists, the influence of peers or family, protection against bullies or perceived threats, looking for somewhere to belong, looking for excitement and action, to release anger or frustration, and to acquire status and identity (Aho, 1988; Barrelle, 2014; Bjørgo, 2009; Blee, 2002, 2004; Bubolz & Simi, 2015; Fangen, 1999; Gadd, 2006; Kimmel, 2007; Stern, 2014). Often the acquisition of extremist beliefs and ideology happens after individuals have joined an ERG or community, rather than before, and the context surrounding joining has been found to differ between individuals (Bjørgo, 2009; Schafer, Mullins, & Box, 2014; Wåhlström, 2001).

How they join

How exactly individuals become involved in RWE varies significantly and often 'how' they get involved is related to the reasons 'why' they get involved. Commonly individuals are introduced to ERGs through people they already know such as 'friends or older siblings', while '[g]irls frequently get involved as

girlfriends' (Bjørgo, 2009:33). Previous studies have identified schools (Bjørgo, 2009; Braunthal, 2010; Horgan, Altier, Shortland, & Taylor, 2016) and prisons (Blazak, 2001; Gadd, 2006; Stern, 2014) as reoccurring spaces where individuals are exposed to RWE and subsequently join ERGs. Usually individuals who join ERGs in these spaces are looking to fit in with a group at school while in prison they may join for protection. Alternatively, individuals may already be part of a social group which immerses itself into RWE collectively. A racist skinhead gang in the United States called *Public Enemy Number One* has its origin in a group of youths who shared a common interest in punk music (Simi, Smith, & Resser, 2008), while in another study a former right-wing extremist discussed being part of a group at school which collectively adopted RWE (Horgan, Altier, Shortland, & Tayler, 2016).

Some individuals may be exposed to RWE due to the of the recruitment efforts of the ERGs themselves, for example, through dissemination of propaganda or exposure in news media and subsequently seek out the ERGs themselves. Right-wing extremists are constantly producing propaganda in the form of literature, websites, film media, and music (Bjørgo, 1998; Lööw, 1998b; Simi & Futrell, 2010). Through the ease of access to RWE that the internet provides individuals can become ideologically engaged in isolation without joining an ERG or even meeting other extremists, ultimately becoming a 'lone wolf' (Strømmen & Stormark, 2015).[13] This can be observed in the lone wolf terrorists David Copeland, Anders Behring Breivik, Dylann Roof, and Thomas Mair, however, only a tiny minority of right-wing extremists engage in terrorism, including those who are isolated (Archer, 2013; Berntzen & Sandberg, 2014; Lambert, 2013).

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[13] 'Lone wolf' is commonly used within the RWE community to refer to ideologically engaged individuals who are not involved in ERGs and may not socialize face to face with other extremists. Within the media and academia it generally refers to extremists who carry out terrorist attacks individually.

Weinberg (2013) differentiates between two kinds of lone wolves, those that become extremists due to 'prolonged exposure to racist websites' and those that emerge out of ERGs to which they previously 'belonged for some period' (24). Sometimes individuals or even groups adopt RWE after being influenced by popular culture, such as films which feature skinheads or neo-Nazis. As discussed earlier, Addison (1995, 1996) observed that in New Zealand the fictional film *Romper Stomper* influenced many young people, who after idolising the fictional characters adopted RWE.

Processes of joining

When individuals become involved in RWE they undergo processes of socialization, education, and radicalization that largely happens simultaneously. As Bjørgo (2009) explains, on a social level individuals undergo two processes that happen simultaneously 'inclusion and socialization into a new reclusive and stigmatized community, and severance of ties to the 'normal' community outside' (33). In his studies, Bjørgo (1998, 2009) observed that as individuals become more immersed in RWE, they start to spend more time around other extremists while at the same time other people, such as old friends or even family members, often start to distance themselves from the individual once their involvement in extremism becomes apparent. This stigmatization of individuals who are getting involved often serves to push them further into RWE. As such isolated individuals may spend more time socializing virtually over the internet with other extremists and spend less time socializing face to face with non-extremists (Koehler, 2014). What exactly individuals are socialised into and how far removed they become from mainstream society varies, depending on

the individual, their level of engagement, and their social connections to other extremists.

Part of the socialization process involves learning and acquiring extremist beliefs and knowledge. In Goodwin's (2011) study on the BNP, one of his participants described that the members 'learn from each other' and that after joining he adopted some the other's 'concerns' as his own (155). Furthermore, studies have identified that a process of self-education often takes place as individuals become involved in RWE. Traditionally this involved acquiring and reading extremist literature such as books (Aho, 1994), while in more contemporary times this has been revolutionised with the internet and subsequently 'the self-education process has been made markedly easier and perhaps more common' (Schafer, Mullins, & Box 2014: 187). As individuals become more immersed in RWE, they often undergo a process of *radicalization*, which McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) describe as 'change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the ingroup' (416). We should keep in mind, however, that different individuals have different experiences of these processes.

Problems with joining

Research has identified various factors which hinder individuals becoming involved in RWE. Some individuals may experience negative sanctions and disapproval from parents and peers (Fangen, 1999). Preventative and intervention efforts from both government and NGOs, such as media campaigns or programmes in schools, can also serve to impede involvement (Bjørgo & Carlsson, 2005; Ramalingam, 2014). Violence and harassment at the hands of

militant anti-racist activists or other groups and unwanted attention from authorities have also been found to dissuade or scare off individuals (Bjørgo, 2009; Kimmel, 2007). However, some studies have found that violence and harassment can serve to push individuals further into RWE and increase ingroup solidarity (Bjørgo, 1998, 2009; Fangen, 1999, 2003).

Factors which hinder joining can also come from within the ERG or extremist community. Some individuals may be put off the lack of trust given to newcomers and 'become disappointed that they are not immediately admitted to the inner core of the group where the more secretive and alluring activities are going on' (Bjørgo, 2009:33). Others may be put off by a real or assumed requirement that they must commit violent crime to assume membership. Bjørgo (1998) also referred to a 'considerable variation in the ways newcomers are received' by different ERGs, in that some groups try to recruit as many members as possible while others do not accept new members (237). This suggests some individuals may be inhibited by the recruitment policy of the ERG itself. Inhibiting factors coming from within RWE have received very little attention in literature and have largely been overlooked in previous studies. Bjørgo (2009) observed that in some cases both kinds of inhibiting factors can serve to dissuade individuals from getting further involved and result in them leaving after only a short time with a minimum level of engagement.

Staying

Determining who exactly is 'engaged' in RWE can be problematic. As Bjørgo (2009) explains, this is because many ERGs and extremist 'scenes do not have formal memberships, and many [individuals] have joined for purposes other

than political activism' (30). He makes 'a distinction between bounded and unbounded groups' and explains that extremist subcultures and scenes 'are generally unbounded in the sense that the boundaries are relatively fuzzy, and that it is not clearly defined who is inside and who is outside' (Ibid.:31). This is because often extremist subcultures and scenes include individuals who sit on the margins, 'who sympathize or share some elements of opinions or style', socialize with extremists, and 'drift in or out' (Ibid.). The presence of individuals on the margins within RWE was similarly observed by Fangen (1999). In contrast, membership in bounded groups is more rigid and generally requires official recognition of some kind by the leadership of the group. Studies have identified a range of different roles or positions that individuals can take within RWE which is largely dependent on an individual's disposition and the type of ERG they may be involved in. Furthermore individuals can also transition between roles. Some of these roles include political contestation and activism, producing and disseminating propaganda, intelligence activities, being involved in violence and criminal activity, leadership and organisational roles, or merely taking part in social activities (Bjørgo, 2009; Blee, 2002; Fangen, 1999; Goodwin, 2011; Simi & Futrell, 2010).

Typologies of engaged individuals

Researchers have attempted to categorize the different kinds of individuals engaged in RWE into typologies. Helmut Willems (1995) conducted research on violence committed against foreigners in Germany and identified 'four types of perpetrators' which he differentiated based on attitudes and motives: *right-*

wing activist, *ethnocentric youth*, *criminal youth*, and *fellow traveller* (170).[14] As Bjørgo (2011) observes, each of the different profile types differs 'in terms of political/ideological motivation, organisational affiliation, socio-economic background, education, criminal records, and the use of violence' (278). However, Bjørgo argues that 'a problem with typologies or profiles based on static ideal types is that many individual activists do not fit in, or they fall between the ideal types and become indistinct' (Ibid.).

Alternatively, he advocates using a new model partly based on Willems' typologies consisting of four 'dimension or continuums' (Ibid.:279). These dimensions include their level of ideological or political motivation, their status in the group, how well they are socially integrated into society, and their level of sensation seeking. Understanding engaged individuals in this way allows us to account for the great variability amongst individuals engaged in RWE as well as how individuals change over time. For example, a person may start out with a low level of ideological and political motivation and this may increase over the course of their involvement in an ERG. Alternatively they may start with a high level of sensation seeking which decreases over time. These changes are directly related to the processes of joining, being involved, and leaving.

Why do they stay?

The reasons why individuals stay are often related to the reasons why they join ERGs and scenes in the first place. If an individual did not receive any benefits from being involved it is unlikely they would stay. Just as the sense of community

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[14] This study focused on all violence committed against foreigners, rather than that committed by right-wing extremists specifically, however, the way in which individuals were categorized is relevant to this study.

and belonging is a reason why some individuals join ERGs, it is also a reason to stay. Bjørgo (2009) identified that stigma associated with RWE, as well as external threats, creates a sense of solidarity amongst engaged individuals and subsequently brings members closer together. Many of the more organised ERGs are acutely aware of the importance that a sense of community and belonging is to the commitment of its members and foster this belonging through initiatives such as leisure activities and social events (Bjørgo, van Donselaar, & Grunenberg, 2009; Blee, 2002, 2004, Goodwin, 2011). Political events such as rallies and demonstrations can further strengthen the sense of belonging and cohesion amongst extremists, particularly in cases where there is opposition from opponents, such as anti-racist groups. This has been observed by Pilkington (2016) in her ethnographic research on the EDL. For the more militant ERGs, engaging in violence collectively also has a similar effect (Bjørgo, 2009; Fangen, 1999, 2003; Pilkington, Omel'čenko, & Garifzânova, 2013). Members of ERGs, especially smaller subcultural groups, have a heavy reliance on each other and this fosters very close bonds not unlike a family.

The internet has given rise to an extreme-right virtual community which also plays a role in maintaining the engagement of individuals. Research has found that extremists use the internet to communicate and socialise with other extremists, which fosters a group identity and plays an important role in maintaining their commitment (Caiani & Borri, 2014; Simi & Futrell, 2010). This is particularly important given the overwhelming oppositional social pressure that extremists experience, especially for more isolated individuals. Robert Futrell and Pete Simi argue that the persistence of right-wing extremists is reinforced by a collective identity and 'free spaces' (Futrell & Simi, 2004; Simi & Futrell, 2010). They explain that free spaces are places were extremists can

gather in private, 'meet with one another, openly express their extremist beliefs, and coordinate their activities' and immerse themselves in extremist culture (Simi & Futrell, 2010:2). Free places include homes, clubhouses, private extremist communities, extremist events and shows, and also virtual online places on the internet. They argue that 'use of free spaces helps them overcome isolation, despair, and hopelessness, which might otherwise sap their devotion to' their extremist views and subsequently reinforces their identity as extremists (Ibid.:5).

Simi and Futrell noted how extremists often furnish their private living spaces with extremist symbols such as flags, portraits, banners and other extremist symbols and adorn their bodies with extremist clothing and tattoos which serves as a constant reminder of their extremist views. With the use of the internet individuals can purchase a wide range of 'white power' merchandise such as literature, music, clothing, flags, and other artefacts from online retail distributors, often run by ERGs (Lööw, 1998a; Simi & Futrell 2010; Zeskind, 2009). A number of researchers have observed how extremists reinforce their views by listening to 'white power' music that is produced by ERGs, the song lyrics of which are a constant stream of extremist propaganda (Ibid.).

Reinforcing engagement through religion

For individuals who adhere to an extremist religion of some kind, their commitment is constantly reinforced and justified through their religious belief and practice, this is especially common in the United States (Michael, 2003; Weinberg, 2013). Religions commonly used by extremists include Identity Christianity, neo-paganism such as Odinism, and the more recently established

white supremacist Creativity religion. Identity Christianity, an extreme interpretation of Christianity, understands Europeans or whites to be the chosen people of god, and Jews as the offspring of Satan, and is particularly common amongst right-wing extremists in the United States (Michael, 2003; Zeskind, 2009). Odinism or Asatru, which worships old Germanic gods such as Wotan or Odin are particularly attractive to extremists and have become increasingly adopted in recent years (Camus, 2013; Goodrick-Clarke, 2002; Weinberg, 2013). Creativity which was founded by an eccentric recluse, Ben Klassen, is essentially white supremacy which has been bottled and rebranded as a religion (Michael, 2009). The adherents of some religions such as Christian Identity and Odinism may even believe that they are doing the work of God or Gods through their extreme-right activism, including violence, and that they will be rewarded for their sacrifice, similar to many Islamic extremists (Blazak 2001; Michael, 2009; Weinberg, 2013). Extreme-right religions often idolise extremists who sacrifice for the cause as martyrs. According to Weinberg (2013), some extremist religious groups have prison outreach programs 'involving letter-writing and personal visits' to reinforce the commitment of incarcerated extremists and reach out to new potential converts (25). However, not all extremists subscribe to a religion or use religion to justify and reinforce their RWE.

Rewarding commitment

For leaders and others of high status in ERGs or the extremist community there are often greater rewards and benefits. Leaders and senior members often have a degree of power that their position affords such as control over other members, recognition from other extremists and supporters, and fear from enemies and the public. Other benefits include attention from potential

romantic partners and financial rewards. As such there is a greater incentive for leaders and others in senior positions to stay involved. Furthermore, ERGs are known to reward the commitment and activism of select members with incentives such as leadership roles or other positions of seniority, and greater influence over the affairs of the group. Goodwin (2011) found that the BNP introduced 'a Voting Membership scheme' to reward and encourage the loyalty and activism of members (96). Some of the more organised ERGs may even be able to offer paid employment for some members.[15] Some incentives may be prospective in the case that the group achieves some level of success whether in elections or other activities. As such these rewards encourage individuals to stay.

Leaving

Most people who join ERGs and become involved in RWE eventually leave. Research has identified that ERG's have a high turnover rate of members, however, this rate 'varies strongly from group to group' (Bjørgo, 2009:46). Like joining, determining when exactly an individual has stopped their involvement in RWE or left an ERG can be difficult. This is because after individuals end their membership in an ERG they may continue to maintain social connections to their former groups and adhere to extremist ideology (Bjørgo, 2009). As such there is a level of ambiguity in literature around the concepts such as a 'disengagement' from RWE and this parallels understandings on leaving gangs and desistance from crime. Aho (1988) understands that voluntary disengagement, or what he

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[15] Political parties may obtain positions in government after successfully contesting elections which senior members may aspire to have. Other types of ERGs, that are well organised, may have the ability to offer paid employment to select individuals as a result of funding through donations or from the proceeds of subsidiary companies that profit from the sale of extremist merchandise.

labels as 'disaffiliation', from ERGs takes place on two different levels, 'a belief dimension and a social-communal dimension' (161). Disengagement on the belief dimension involves an individual disaffiliating with extremist ideology, while the social-communal dimension involves an individual leaving an ERG and the cessation of social connections to extremists. These processes do not necessarily happen at the same time, and as discussed earlier, individuals have different levels of ideological engagement while involved in RWE. Aho found that 'of these two dimensions the most important causally seems to be the social-communal' as disengagement on the belief dimension generally takes place after disengagement on the social-communal dimension (Ibid.). Bjørgo (2009) similarly found that generally it is 'more common that beliefs change after leaving the group, and as a consequence, rather than before, and as a cause of leaving the group' (37). This is perhaps not surprising given the loss of factors which reinforce commitment to RWE and that it mirrors joining in that individuals usually come to adopt extremist beliefs after they have joined ERGs, as discussed earlier.

Why do they leave?

Previous studies have identified a number of reoccurring factors which influence individuals to leave ERGs or disengage from RWE, often these factors are related to the reasons why individuals stay and get involved in the first place. Firstly, disillusionment with the leadership or other members of the ERG, or its direction has been found by studies to be a reoccurring reason why individuals leave (Altier et al., 2017; Barrelle, 2014; Bjørgo, 2009; Kimmel, 2007). This may stem from an individual's perception that the other group members are not living up to their expectations by not adhering to ideological values, abusing drugs and

alcohol, or engaging in criminality. This is especially true if the transgressing individuals are leaders or senior members. The participants in Kimmel's (2007) study discussed becoming disillusioned with widespread alcohol abuse by other members and the fact that a group leader was dating an ethnic minority. Secondly, negative social sanctions such social isolation from incarceration, unwanted attention from authorities and militant antiracists, and criminal prosecution have also been found to influence individuals to leave (Bjørgo 2009). Depending on the level of engagement, extremists usually experience high levels of pressure, hardship, and emotional drain (Barrelle, 2014). After time this can lead to an individual becoming burnt out to the point that they can no longer take the pressure, and subsequently serve to push them out of RWE. The loss of status within the movement or an ERG can be a strong catalyst for departure for many extremists, particularly if they held some kind of high position or leadership role within the group in which the option of leaving may be more attractive than taking a subservient position or lesser role. Alternatively, some individuals may be forced to leave the group unwillingly. In some cases, ERGs have been found to disband on their own from either internal politics or the departure of members (Bjørgo & Carlsson, 2005). Commonly disengaging individuals long for a normal life, feeling that 'they are getting too old for what they are doing', and prioritize other aspects of their lives such as careers or families (Bjørgo, 2009). The prospect of a relaxed life away from the pressure and the many hardships which come with engagement in RWE is attractive to individuals wanting to leave. In some cases, extremists may meet a new partner who serves to encourage them to leave RWE. Furthermore, the stigma association with involvement in RWE, as well as the time required impedes an individual's career prospects, in which they may choose to distance their self from RWE. Similar to joining, leaving an ERG has been found to be

usually the result of a combination of reasons, rather than any one singular reason (Barrelle, 2014; Bjorgo, 2009). Furthermore, in a recent study on disengagement based on autobiographical accounts, Altier and colleagues (2017) have found 'that push, rather than pull, factors more commonly explain voluntary disengagement decisions' (326). This suggests that push factors may be more influential in influencing individuals to leave RWE, at least in cases of voluntary disengagement.

How do they leave?

When individuals do decide to leave, there are a variety of different ways in which they do so, each of which has its advantages and disadvantages (Bjørgo, 1998, 2009). Firstly, an individual may make a public break from the group by either announcing their disengagement in news media, defecting to opposing antiracist groups or NGOs, or by cooperating with authorities. Bjørgo (1998) observed that this strategy is quite common amongst high profile leading extremists. Alternatively, in some international settings extremists may utilize the help of 'exit programs' run by government or non-government 'Exit' organisations (Barrelle, 2014; Kimmel, 2007).[16] These organisations are often founded and run by former extremists and actively work to undermine extremism, facilitate disengagement, and provide services to help disengaging individuals leave (Bjørgo, van Donselaar, & Grunenberg 2009; Christensen, 2015, 2015b; Demant, Wagenaar, & Van Donselaar, 2009). Some individuals may leave their ERG or discontinue their activism while maintaining their ideology, beliefs, and even some social ties. In some situations, individuals leave ERGs to either

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[16] Exit is the name of NGO organisations established in countries such as Germany, Sweden, and more recently the USA (see – Life After Hate 2017). 'Exit organisation' is commonly used by writers to describe organisations of this type.

form or join a more moderate and less stigmatised group, which is less likely to draw the ire from other extremists. Other extremists quietly walk away from RWE, gradually reducing their involvement. This is especially easy for individuals who have remained low key and their activism is not publicly known. Some situations and individual circumstances which result in being socially isolated from other extremists, such as incarceration, have been known to make it easy for individuals to disengage (Horgan et al. 2016). Bjørgo (1998) observed that on some occasions ERGs may disintegrate and disband on their own, providing an easy opportunity for individuals to leave and groups of extremists may even disengage collectively. Generally, the less time individuals have been involved the easier it is for them to disengage and it is easier to leave unbounded groups as opposed to bounded ones (Bjørgo, 2009).

Problems with leaving

Research has identified that once an individual begins a process of disengaging from RWE or an ERG various problems can arise to impede their departure. Firstly, as discussed earlier there are many positive benefits about being involved in an ERG and individuals are likely to have invested sunk costs into their involvement, as such this can make it hard to walk away. Furthermore, there may be negative sanctions from some ERGs as a consequence of leaving. Studies have found that some individuals who leave ERGs have been threatened and victimised in a variety of different ways (Barrelle, 2014; Bjørgo, 2009; Kimmel, 2007). Additionally, individuals leaving ERGs lose the protection that the group provides against former enemies, such as militant anti-racist groups, the members of which may not know or even care that the individual has disengaged (Bjørgo, 2009). There may be negative sanctions from the

authorities and criminal justice system, and disengaging individuals may 'fear that former comrades may tip off the police, or that the police may put the defector under pressure to inform on accomplices' (Ibid., 41). In some cases, harassment by police may continue well after an individual has disengaged, particularly for people who had been in higher positions or who have been convicted of politically motivated crime. Another challenge for disengaging individuals is that they may not have any other place to go, particularly if the bridge burning process of entry has been extensive and their relations with family and former friends have been severed (Bjørgo, 2009; Barrelle, 2014). Some individuals may have difficulty gaining employment, let alone meaningful employment, especially if their identity as an extremist is well known, they have a criminal record, or they have visible racist tattoos. Disengaging individuals need to overcome challenges such as these and for others they may serve to dissuade and even prevent them from leaving. However, we should keep in mind that these problem are different in every individual context and vary depending on their level of engagement and the ERGs they have been involved with. Now that we have an understanding of RWE and its prevalence in New Zealand along with the aspects of joining, staying, and leaving, we can turn our attention to the ways in which the extreme-right has been theoretically explained.

CHAPTER 2: THEORIZING RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM

The Other lies at the heart of radical right politics, and for the radical right, which understands the world in terms of struggle, in terms of "us" versus "them," the Other is translated into "the Enemy" (Ramet, 1999:4)

A wide range of theoretical explanations has been developed and utilized over time to explain why individuals join and support extreme-right groups and movements. This chapter provides an overview of the most prominent of these theories, their limitations, and their usefulness in this particular study.[17]

Socio-psychological theory

Early theoretical understandings of why individuals support or become involved in RWE emerged in response to the rise of fascism in the twentieth century and had a socio-psychological basis (Holbrook & Taylor, 2013; Mudde, 2010). The most famous of these early works was *The Authoritarian Personality* (TAP; Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). Based on Freudian psychoanalytic theory it understands that a predisposition towards fascism can be explained in terms of personality traits which have been shaped by dominant racist cultural attitudes, repressed sexuality, and the influence of domineering parents. Within the work, Adorno and colleagues developed a personality test called the 'F Scale' which was used to measure the 'authoritarian personality' or rather an individual's predisposition towards fascism. In a way, the theory was

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[17] For the sake of brevity, I am unable to provide a full comprehensive summary and discussion of every theoretical argument that has been used to explain RWE.

an attempt to pathologize RWE as an mental illness or deficiency which needed to be overcome. TAP has proven to be very inspiration in the social sciences, although it has been 'criticized heavily on theoretical and methodological grounds' (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003:339). Bauman (1989) criticised the authors for having 'carefully eschewed the exploration of all supra- or extra-individual factors that could produce authoritarian personalities; nor did they care about the possibility that such factors may induce authoritarian behaviour in people otherwise devoid of authoritarian personality' (153). The theory has since fallen out of favour as it has not been supported by later research and the idea that involvement in RWE "was a knee-jerk reaction to 'unconscious urges and unmet psychological needs' appeared far from convincing, as did the suggestion that the millions of citizens who have joined fascist and extremist parties over the years have all suffered from psychological abnormality" (Goodwin, 2011:140). However, the F Scale model aspect of the work did receive some empirical support and has been continually developed, most notably by Altemeyer (1981). Essentially the TAP is of limited use in understanding contemporary RWE, especially given the fact that not all contemporary right-wing extremists are authoritarian. We know this because many ERGs have been found to have a hostility to central government and might even be classified as anti-authoritarian (Mudde, 1996). As Mudde (2010) points out, research on post-war RWE 'was heavily influenced by studies of historical fascism' in which 'the pathology approach' was dominate and very influential on later theoretical work (1169).

Political party focused theory

Perhaps the largest number of theories on RWE have emerged out of the political science discipline in order to understand why individuals support and vote for extreme-right political parties.[18] One of these prominent theories is the *social disintegration hypothesis* (SDH), also known as the *social breakdown thesis*, which was first presented by Arendt (1973 [1951]) to explain the rise of totalitarianism in the twentieth century by focusing on isolation and alienation. Based on the concept of *anomie*, it argues 'that traditional social structures, especially those based on class and religion, are breaking down' and that '[a]s a result, individuals lose a sense of belonging and are attracted to ethnic nationalism' (Eatwell, 2003: 50). Therefore, getting involved in RWE and joining ERGs replaces the sense of belonging individuals have lost and increases their self-esteem. The SDH has received little empirical support as studies have found that many supporters and members of ERGs are not isolated and are well integrated socially (Goodwin, 2011; Eatwell, 2005; Fennema, 2005). Klandermans and Mayer (2006) found that '[i]f [right-wing extremists] are isolated or marginalized, it is not so much the cause of their activism but more often a result of it' (269). It needs to be stated, however, that most of these studies were conducted on political parties, which likely consist of more sociable individuals rather than other types of ERGs such as skinhead gangs or militant organisations.

A similar commonly used theory is the '*losers' of modernization thesis* (Betz, 1994). This theory asserts that individuals who have been disadvantaged with

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[18] For a good summary and discussion of these political party focused theories see Eatwell (2003) and Rydren (2007).

post-industrial social changes in society such as globalization and the decline of traditional industry are attracted to RWE. Individuals, particularly from the working class, harbour 'feelings of alienation' and 'pessimism about their future economic prospects' and are drawn to ideology and politics 'that promise to halt this disruptive change, return to a bygone era, protect their position in society and punish mainstream politicians' (Goodwin, 2011, 98). While many studies have found a correlation between being a 'modernization loser' and supporting extreme right political parties, other studies have found that support comes from both losers and winners of modernization (Flecker, 2007; Mudde, 2007). Furthermore, some commentators have pointed out that even if the majority of extremists are modernization losers, they are only a very tiny minority when compared to the modernization losers who do not support RWE (Mudde, 2007).

Another prominent theory, the *ethnic competition thesis* (ECT) postulates that individuals turn to RWE 'because they want to reduce competition from immigrants over scarce resources such as the [labour] market, housing, welfare state benefits, or even the marriage market' (Rydgren, 2007).[19] Studies have found that the ECT is consistent with the attitudes exhibited by the members of many ERGs and is a main ideological theme in their discourse (Goodwin, 2011; Rydgren & Ruth, 2011). As researchers have pointed out, the ECT asserts that RWE should be more prevalent in settings with a high proportion of immigrants and that ERGs will receive support and membership primarily from the demographic that is 'most likely to be confronted by competition from immigrants', primarily 'lower educated, unskilled, males' (Rydgren & Ruth, 2011: 210). However, 'Rydgren (2008) showed that voters living in areas with many

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[19] The ethnic competition thesis is based on the *racial threat hypothesis* developed by Blalock (1967). A similar variation of theory is *realistic group conflict theory* (see - Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

immigrants were significantly more likely to vote for the radical right in Denmark and the Netherlands, but not in Austria, Belgium, France or Norway' (Rydgren & Ruth, 2011: 210). One limitation with the ECT is that it doesn't explain how individuals come to acquire an identity as a member of the group which they deem to be under threat.

Criminological theory

Given the resemblance that ERGs in New Zealand have with gangs, as well as the fact some ERGs can be classified as gangs outright, it will be prudent to investigate criminological theories that have been used to explain why individuals join gangs and engaged in criminal behaviour.[20] It needs to be restated, however, that while some extremists and ERGs commit crime, many do not. The first such theory, *social control theory* (SCT) has its origin in the work of Hirschi (1974[1969]) which explains that when an individual has a low connection to social institutions, such as family, school, and work, they have less stake in conforming and are more likely to engage in deviant behaviour such as joining a gang (Densley, 2015).[21] Hirschi explains that there are four elements which constitute the social bond – *attachment* to others, *commitment* to following the rules, *involvement* in conventional and legitimate activity, and *belief* in a conventional value system. SBT is well supported empirically and has been used to explain a variety of different criminal and deviant behaviours (Shoemaker, 2010).

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[20] For a good summary of these theories see Densley (2015).
[21] Social control theory is also known as *social bond theory*.

A similar theory which has also been used to explain why individuals join gangs is *general strain theory* (GST; Agnew, 1992). The theory understands that individuals engage in criminal or delinquent behaviour in order to escape from or reduce their strain. Expanding on the earlier work of Merton (1938) and Durkheim (1951), Agnew (1992) explains that strain occurs due to the 'actual or anticipated failure to achieve positively valued goals', the 'removal of positively valued stimuli', and the 'presence of negative stimuli' (74). Under the presence of strain, and with a lack of conventional coping mechanisms, individuals cope with their strain through criminal and delinquent behaviour. GST has received some empirical support (Agnew, 2006). Furthermore, while Agnew focuses on criminality and delinquency specifically, by harking back to Merton's work we might also understand that strained individuals cope with strain by rejecting and replacing mainstream goals and values for an alternative value system in which individual success may be perceived to be more easy to obtained, such as those consistent with a particular gang or ERG.

Thirdly, *social learning theory* (SLT) has been used to explain how behaviour and attitudes are learned from observing others, especially parents and other role models (Bandura, 1977). This theory can be used to explain how individuals come to acquire racist or extremist ideology, perhaps having learned it from role models such as parents. Akers (1985) applied SLT to criminality to show that an individual is likely to engage in criminal or deviant behaviour if they observe others in their group engaging in such behaviour, they observe the others receiving positive rewards for such behaviour, and the others are perceived be of high status. SLT has been 'employed extensively to explain delinquency' and, to a lesser extent, gang membership (Winfree & Freng, 2015).

Understanding disengagement

Early research on RWE has been based on the assumption that involvement in extreme right movements and groups is enduring, as such, the aspect of leaving has been largely eschewed (Aho, 1994; Bjørgo, 1998; Barrelle, 2014). This is accentuated by the fact that the majority of research on RWE, particularly from the political science discipline, has been primarily concerned with the reasons why individuals join and support ERG, much less so why they leave or discontinue their support. It was only really in the 1980s that researchers have started to conduct research focusing primarily on the reasons why individuals leave RWE. This has increased quite significant in the previous two decades coinciding with an increase interest in disengagement and deradicalization in wake of high profile terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe by Islamic and right-wing extremist terrorists. Given the lack of historical focus, theoretical work on disengagement remains comparatively underdeveloped. However some theories have been used by researchers in order to explain why individuals disengage from RWE and leave ERGs.

Enemy images deconstructed

Some early theoretical work on disengagement emerged from James Aho's (1988, 1994) research on disengagement from ERGs in the United States. Adopting a social constructionist approach, Aho (1994) investigated the way in which ERGs construct others as an enemy which he defines as 'the human other who threatens community life and against whom the polis takes up arms' (10-11). ERGs construct images of other ethnicity or minority groups as enemies

which individuals adopt when they come to join such groups. He argues that through the adoption of common enemies ERGs achieve in-group solidarity. As Bjørgo and Horgan (2009) explain:

> *Aho's study demonstrates how these socially constructed enemy images can also be deconstructed. He shows that social encounters on the individual level with members of 'enemy' groups whose behaviour does not conform to the relevant stereotypes can sometimes shatter these constructs. Empathy and sympathy from other outsiders may also aid individuals to divest themselves of the enemies in their minds (10).*

Therefore, positive interactions with others, especially those deemed to be enemies, can lead to individuals changing their views and subsequently leaving an ERG and disengaging from RWE. However, the theory does little in the way of explaining why individuals come to join ERGs in the first place.

Masculinity theory

RWE is largely understood to be a prominently male phenomena and research has reaffirmed that there is generally always a higher ratio of males compared to females, although this ratio varies across different locations and groups (Fangen, 2003; Klandermans & Mayer, 2006). Despite only making up a minority within RWE females occasionally fill leadership positions and have been found to have important roles in some ERGs (Blee, 2002, 2017). Furthermore, the existence of exclusively female ERGs has been documented by researchers (Fangen, 1997). However, given the fact that most ERGs are predominately male and many others are exclusively male and hyper-masculine in nature, some

researchers have drawn on masculinity theory in order to explain involvement in RWE.

In her research on skinheads in Norway, Fangen (2003) understands that the right-wing extremist 'skinhead subculture provides an atmosphere which is attractive to young boys who long for acceptance and the feelings of honor, power and excitement' (208). By drawing on the work of Raewyn Connell (2005[1995]), Fangen understands that:

> *Even though the kind of masculinity constructed among right-wing skinheads resembles the hegemonic masculinity portrayed in Hollywood movies and in the propaganda of the military and war, the expression of such masculinities among young working-class men is a manifestation of what Connell calls the assertion of protest masculinity (208).*

As Fangen explains, protest masculinity is an 'exaggeration of masculine conventions' and 'the response to the feeling of powerlessness' (208). According to Connell (2005[1995]), it 'is a collective practice and not something inside the person' and '[t]hrough interaction in this milieu, the growing boy puts together a tense, freaky facade, making a claim to power where there are no real resources for power' (111). Fangen (2003) found that generally those who get involved in extremist subcultures 'have little to lose by entering it' and '[t]hey have problems in achieving the same feeling of honor by their performances in other more conventional areas' (208). Therefore, adopting the extremist skinhead subculture and joining subcultural ERGs allows males to feel a sense of power and importance whereas, according to Fangen (2003), on their own 'they feel vulnerable, and worth nothing' (209).

In a similar study, Kimmel (2007) conducted an investigated on right-wing extremists in Scandinavia who had left RWE through a masculinity theoretical lens. He argued that 'participation in neo-Nazi groups was a rite of passage for alienated and insecure adolescent males' and that '[t]heir commitments were to a masculinizing project, not a National Socialist ideology' (Ibid.:216). Essentially he argued that the participants in his study adopted RWE and joined ERGs primarily in order to achieve a masculine identity or a sense of manliness. After achieving this sense of identity, they eventually left RWE behind. There are a few problems with the study, firstly, his participants have become involved in RWE in early adolescence and disengaged usually only a short time after and it is therefore questionable whether they have really been 'engaged', at least to the extent that many others would have been. Furthermore, he eschews the fact that other studies (Bjørgo, 2011; Willems, 1995) have identified that engaged individuals differ in terms of their adherence to ideology. As such ideology may have been less important to his participants than it would be to others who have gone on to have longer careers in RWE. None the less, it does seem to suggest that some individuals may get involved in extremist subcultures as part of some kind of 'rite of passage'.

Life-course theory

Involvement in RWE can also be investigated with the life-course perspective (LCP), which is a 'broad framework for studying lives over time' within structural, cultural, and social contexts that has been applied to a wide variety of different human behaviours (Sweeten, 2010:807). Sampson and Laub (1997[1993]) explain that two concepts exist within LCP, firstly, trajectories refer to the

patterns of behaviour over the life course, while transitions, which are 'embedded in trajectories', refer to life events over the life course such as marriage and having a child (8). They explain that '[t]he interlocking nature of trajectories and transitions may generate turning points or a change in the life course' (Ibid.). In their research on criminality, Sampson and Laub (2005) identified that '[s]everal turning points were implicated in the process of desistance from crime, including marriage/spouses, military service, reform school, work, and residential change' (17). From their research, they 'believe that most offenders desist in response to structurally induced turning points that serve as the catalyst for sustaining long-term behavioral change' (Sampson & Laub, 2003:149). This led to the development of their age-graded theory of informal social control (AGT; Sampson & Laub (1997[1993], 2005). In its revised form, AGT understands that persistence and desistance of crime across the life course is affected by 'social controls, routine activities, and human agency' (Sweeten, 2010:811). An application of the theory to RWE would suggest that life events, such as marriage, having a child, gaining employment would act as turning points that encourage individuals to disengage.

Push and pull framework

Many contemporary empirical studies conducted on individual involvement in RWE have understood that the process of transitioning into or out of a social environment, such as an ERG or RWE, is influenced by the prevalence social forces which can be differentiated as either 'push' or 'pull' depending on their effect. As Tore Bjørgo (2009) explains:

'Push' relates to negative social forces and circumstances which make it unattractive and unpleasant to remain in a particular social environment, whereas 'pull' refers to factors attracting the person to a more rewarding alternative (36).

This push and pull framework was first used by Aho (1988) to describe social forces which push and pull individuals both in and out of RWE, however, it has been more often used to explain the process of leaving, given the current emphasis by studies on disengagement. Research has found that often it is a range of different push and pull factors that work in conjunction to influence an individual to either join or leave an ERG, rather than any singular factor (Aho, 1988; Altier et al., 2017; Barrelle, 2014; Bjørgo, 1998, 2009; Bjørgo & Carlsson, 2005). In his research on disengagement from ERGs, Bjørgo (2009) has identified factors that work against push and pull factors impeding an individual's transition out of RWE, which he refers to as 'factors inhibiting disengagement'. We might also use the term 'inhibiting factors' to refer to social forces that impede an individual's transition into RWE.

In an article written on disengagement from terrorism, including that of RWE, Altier and colleagues (2014) highlight some of the limitations of this existing push and pull framework and argue that '[s]ignificant promise for moving beyond [it] is found in Rusbult and colleagues' *investment model* from psychology and Ebaugh's research on *voluntary role exit* from sociology' (647). They explain that:

The push/pull framework […] remains descriptive and underdeveloped. For instance, it is difficult to determine why a certain push or pull factor

may cause some terrorists to leave, but not others. Further, how do multiple, interacting push and pull factors influence the likelihood of disengagement? […] Finally, the framework says little about how individuals leave their terrorist role (Ibid., 650)

The *investment model* that they suggest alternatively using was developed by the psychologist Caryl Rusbult (1980) and grew out of her research to understand why individuals remain committed in romantic relationships. Essentially it is a 'framework for predicting the state of being committed to someone or something, and for understanding the underlying causes of commitment' (Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2012, 218). The model can be represented as the following formula:

Commitment = satisfaction – alternatives + investments

Rusbult (1983) explains that *commitment* refers to the likelihood that an individual will remain in a relationship, *satisfaction* is how satisfied they are with the relationship, *alternatives* refers to the perceived quality of alternatives of being out of the relationship, while *investments* are the sunk costs the individual has put into the relationship. Satisfaction is determined by the actual rewards and costs in contrast to the expected rewards and costs. As Altier and colleagues (2014) show, this can be understood with the following formula:

Satisfaction = actual(rewards – costs) – expected(rewards – costs).

The perceived quality of alternatives is determined in a similar way with rewards compared to costs. Since it was first published by Rusbult, psychologists have

continued to extend and develop the investment model. Goodfriend and Agnew (2008) have demonstrated how *investments* can be expanded to include not just sunk costs but also desired plans for the future, the latter of which they found to have a stronger effect on commitment than the former. As Altier and colleagues (2014) suggest, the model can be used to explain why individuals remain committed to RWE and ERGs.

There are some limitations with using the model, firstly, it places a high emphasis on agency and it tells us nothing about individuals leaving ERGs involuntarily, despite having high commitment. Furthermore, while the model is only meant to predict the likelihood of commitment, individuals do not necessarily re-evaluate their involvement in RWE constantly, nor are they always motivated purely by reward. Their decisions to remain within an relationship is not always rational, or what others deem to be rational. After all many people would question the rationality of the decision to get involved in RWE in the first place. Thirdly, it neglects or de-empathises the social factors which shape and influence commitment. For example, when applied to romantic relationships, the model fails to recognise the socio-cultural factors that shape and influence what and whom we find attractive, who we should be in a relationship with, and whether we should be in a relationship at all; let alone how we understand commitment in relationships. Research on social relationships has found that others, such as parents and peers, have an influence on the commitment (Agnew, Arriaga, & Wilson, 2008), as does the influence of subjective norms (Etcheverry & Agnew 2004; Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006). This illustrates that social factors, which are not accounted for in the investment model, do indeed influence commitment and as such are likely to also affect the

commitment of individuals to RWE. Therefore the investment model is of limited use in understanding involvement in RWE.

The second theory that Altier and colleagues suggest using, *role exit theory* was developed by Helen Ebaugh (1988) to explain and understand how individuals exit roles such as an employee, member of the clergy, partner in a relationship, or alcoholic. As Altier et al. (2014) point out, it is similar to the investment model in that it recognises 'the importance of satisfaction, investments, and alternatives in shaping leave decisions' (651). Essentially the model understands that individuals exit roles by going through a series of linear phases which Ebaugh (1988) labels as first doubts, seeking alternatives, the turning point, and creating the ex-role.

This model can be applied to individuals involved in RWE. For example, the model would suggest that an individual would first experience doubts bought on by things such as changes in the ERG, changes in other relationships, or events, which result in them emitting 'ques suggesting to themselves and others that they are dissatisfied' (Altier et al., 2014: 651). This would then cause them to seek alternatives to their role as a member in an ERG and weigh their options. When the individual is no longer satisfied with their life involved in RWE and understand their self to have viable alternatives, such as lifestyle outside of RWE in which they can focus on their careers or other aspects of their lives, they will undergo a turning point and decide to leave. Upon leaving the ERG an individual will need to create a new identity, which 'is marked by significant adjustments to self-other interactions, such as learning how to effectively present oneself and 'ex' status', […] negotiating and establishing intimate relationships, shifting social networks, and relating to former group members' (Ibid., 652).

There are a few problems and limitations with this model, some of which are addressed in a scathing review by Loïc Wacquant (1990). Firstly, he critiques the linearity of the stages, as do Altier et al. (2014), suggesting that some individuals may skip some stages, especially in cases where individuals leave roles involuntarily. Secondly, Wacquant (1990) questions whether we are not 'constantly exiting from roles and entering new ones' and 'whether the process of role exit can be as neatly separated from the continual process of role re-entry and management' (401). This raises an interesting point as research has found that individuals often change roles while remaining engaged in extremist organisations and movements and subcultures (Bjørgo, 2009, 2011). For this reason the model could be useful for understanding how individuals change roles while engaged in an ERG, but may be less useful in understanding disengagement. This is because extremists can move between roles which are more or less pro-social while remaining engaged, appeasing any doubts about their engagement. In fact, some individuals may adopt different roles which are increasingly moderate during their pathway out of extremism. The third main problem and perhaps the most important is that, like Rusbult's investment model, role exit theory largely ignores the external social factors that influence exiting roles, and shape roles themselves (Wacquant, 1990). Ebaugh's model allows us to delve deeper into the psychological processes involved in disengagement from RWE, but as Wacquant so vehemently demonstrates, it 'constricts and narrows inquiry' into disengagement (Ibid.:401). Despite the limitations of Rusbult's investment model and Ebaugh's role exit theory, they can help us to understand the commitment of individuals to RWE.

Involvement, engagement, and disengagement

As discussed earlier, the majority of studies on involvement in RWE have focused on the aspect of becoming involved in RWE or joining an ERG, while in the previous three decades there has been a number of studies focusing exclusively on disengagement from RWE and ERGs. Some studies have focused on both joining and leaving simultaneously, however, they have tended to emphasis on only one of these aspects. In a study on the life history of one former right-wing extremist, Horgan and colleagues (2016) demonstrate that an individual's relationship with RWE, in terms of joining, staying, and leaving, can be investigated simultaneously by drawing on Horgan's (2014) 'arc' of terrorism framework. In this way, individual involvement in RWE can be understood to comprise of three basic phases: *involvement*, *engagement*, and *disengagement*. 'Involvement' denotes the phase upon which an individual is joining or becoming involved. Investigation into this phase seeks to understand the context surrounding an individual's transition into RWE and why they became involved. 'Engagement' denotes the phase upon which an individual has become an extremist and is engaged in extremism. Examination into this phase seeks to reveal what engagement entails and more specifically why individuals stay involved in RWE. 'Disengagement' denotes the phase upon which individuals transition out of extremism and subsequently leave. Inquiry into this phase seeks to investigate the context surrounding the leaving process and ultimately understand why individuals leave RWE, how they did so, the difficulties they overcame, and their lives after having left. There are some benefits in investigating individual trajectories through RWE in this way, firstly, it is beneficial to investigate all aspects of an individual's career in RWE to increase our overall understanding of the subject. Secondly, it allows us to investigate

whether the factors which lead to individuals joining, staying, and leaving RWE are related. We will return to these theories later in Chapter 5 and apply them to the findings of the study, the next chapter outlines the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

I am convinced that we can face them best by studying them without prejudice, learning from them and resisting them by being radically different, with a difference born of a continuous struggle against the evil which they may embody most clearly, but which dwells everywhere and so ever within each of us (Havel, 1988, as cited in Mudde, 2000).

This chapter explains in detail the conceptualization and methodological processes used in this study. Firstly I discuss some of the challenges of researching RWE along with my personal connection to the topic and how the thesis was conceptualized. Following this, the design of the research is explained along with the methodological processes that were employed. There were ethical considerations that needed to be made for the study, these concerns and how they were addressed are next discussed. Finally, the recruitment and interviewing phases are discussed along with the transcription and data analysis processes.

Researching right-wing extremism

Conducting empirical research on RWE is by no means an easy task, rather it is wrought in difficulty for a variety of reasons (Bailey 2016; Christensen, 2015; Simi & Futrell 2009, 2010). The fact that right-wing extremists make up a very insignificant part of the population makes them difficult to locate and access. This is further complicated by the fact that many individual extremists and ERGs are secretive and endeavour to maintain a low profile (Simi & Futrell 2010). A further complication is that right wing extremists are often deeply suspicious of

researchers and other individuals attempting to collect information about themselves, their associates, and their organisations (Ibid.; Goodwin, 2011). They are weary that any information they may give may be used to make themselves and their organisations look bad as well as potentially placing themselves and others in trouble. This makes collecting data on the RWE community particularly challenging. Some of the more politically aspiring ERGs may provide access to researchers but there is often an agenda behind doing so, such as the aspiration it would result in publicity for the individual or organisation and that they will be portrayed in a positive way, subsequently serving to benefit their goals (Bailey, 2015). As such researchers need to be aware that engaged right-wing extremists often do have an agenda, in which case the data that they allow to be collected from themselves and their organisations may be slanted. Researchers have reported that there are attempts by those in ERGs to cover up what happens 'back stage', often this is something that they are experienced in doing (Mudde, 2000). For researchers conducting research on ERGs and engaged individual extremists there is always the threat of violence, particularly when dealing with the more violently inclined groups such as skinhead organisations (Simi & Futrell, 2009). These are some of the reasons which make researching RWE both challenging and unappealing to researchers.

Some of the aforementioned challenges can be avoided by conducting research on former right-wing extremists, however, this too can be challenging in similar and different ways. Locating former extremists is also often a problem for researchers, perhaps even more so than locating engaged extremists. This is because when individuals disengage from RWE, their contact with their former associates is often severed and they usually distance themselves from RWE and

assimilate back into mainstream society (Bjørgo, 2009). Rarely do they publicise their identity as former right-wing extremists and commonly keep it secret from those around them. Furthermore, unlike engaged extremists, disengaged extremists rarely congregate in specific groups or spaces. As such, former right-wing extremists are a very small hidden population. An exception to this is 'Exit' organisations which exist in some international settings, as discussed in Chapter 1, where disengaged or disengaging right-wing extremists congregate. These kinds of organisation can provide researchers with relatively easy access to both disengaged and disengaging right-wing extremists. It is not uncommon for researchers to travel overseas to countries with well-established Exit organisations, such as the Swedish *EXIT* organisation, to access research populations rather than seeking to research populations in their native countries (see – Christensen, 2015; Barrelle, 2014; and Kimmel, 2007).

Conceptualizing this research thesis

This research project was largely inspired by my own personal experience with RWE. As briefly mentioned in the introduction, I was personally involved in RWE from my mid-teens up until my early twenties during which I was a grassroots member of two different ERGs. I must emphasize that I have since disengaged from RWE and no longer subscribe to extreme right ideology or values. Several years have passed since my disengagement from RWE and the start of this research thesis. While my personal involvement with RWE will not be investigated in this thesis, it has given me personal insight into RWE and a first-hand perspective of an individual trajectory through it. Within the thesis, where specified, I will use my personal insight and understanding to clarify and provide an enhanced understanding of the subject. While this marks the first time I have

publicly revealed myself as a former right-wing extremist, it is essential that I do so in order that the influence that it has on this research can be made transparent and understood. These influences and the effects that they have had on the various phases of this research will be discussed in further detail in the following relevant sections.

In conceptualizing this research thesis, I knew I wanted to do something on RWE in New Zealand, largely out of a desire to utilise the knowledge I had acquired from my own previous involvement for some socially beneficial purpose. This was especially so given that existing research on RWE in New Zealand is very scarce and dated, as has been discussed in the first two chapters. Initially I had considered doing some kind of ethnographic research and interviewing individuals who are currently engaged in right-wing extremism or alternatively doing autoethnographic research based on my own personal experience. After consulting with my supervisor I decided to do qualitative research on individuals who, like myself, had left right-wing extremism behind. This was partially due to the safety concerns of my supervisor around the concept of researching engaged right-wing extremists. It was then decided that the research project would focus on understanding individual trajectories through RWE. This was partially inspired by my own desire to make further sense of my own trajectory through RWE by learning about the experiences of other people who had trodden a similar path in life to myself.

The aim of this research project was to explore individual trajectories through RWE. In particular, why individuals become involved in RWE and join ERGs, why they stay involved, and why they eventually leave. It sought to understand the context of the lives of individuals and any influencing social factors during these

phases of their involvement in RWE. Initially the research sought to explore why individuals join and leave, later this was expanded to also include why they stay. The inclusion of this third question was largely influenced by previous studies (Barrelle, 2014; Goodwin, 2011; Klandermans & Mayer, 2006).

Research design

Given the aims of this research thesis, a qualitative method of inquiry was chosen and utilised. Many previous empirical studies on RWE have utilized qualitative methodologies due the small size of the target research population, the difficulties in accessing this population, and the breadth of data that qualitative methods can generate about a subject which is largely obscure. However, quantitative methods are used occasionally, particularly when investigating extreme-right political parties and the support they receive from voters. This study utilised a grounded theory approach to research, both methodologically and theoretically. Grounded theory is an inductive approach to research which seeks to find or discover theory from the analysis of qualitative data (Creswell, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A grounded theory development and practice was appropriate given the scarcity of local literature on the subject and the theoretical ambiguity that exists in international literature. Additionally, experts on the subject have noted that much of the literature on RWE tends to be driven by an ideological or political agenda, as such, data can be skewed in order to support this agenda, which ultimately detracts from a clear and accurate understanding of the subject (Bailey, 2016; Bale, 2012). One requirement of grounded theory research, and something that is often a challenge for researchers, is that '[t]he researcher needs to set aside, as much as possible, theoretical ideas or notions so that […] analytic, substantive

theory can emerge' (Creswell 2007:67-8). As such, when researching such a provocative and evocative subject such as RWE, a grounded theory approach is beneficial because it helps to negate any ideological agenda that seems to come preordained with some ideological driven approaches to sociological research. However, it must be stated that at times the study diverged from the systematic grounded theory process advocated by classical grounded theorists, most notably in the fact that a literature review was conducted early in the research process, before the collection and analysis of data. Generally, experts on grounded theory advise conducting the literature review after the data collection and analysis processes in order to avoid being influenced and constrained by earlier theoretical understandings (Charmaz, 2006; Covan, 2007; Kelle, 2007). However, the literature review process of this research was conducted before, during, and after the data collection and analysis processes. Despite this, I have endeavoured to remain impartial and keep an unbiased open mind in regards to theory throughout this study.

Despite the difficulty of gaining access to the former right wing extremist population, for the reasons outlined earlier, my own previous involvement with RWE and the connections I had to individuals who similarly left, afforded me a high level of access that most other researchers would not have enjoyed. The study used a combination of snowball sampling and theoretical sampling. It was decided to utilise my existing connections to recruit four research participants and from these four initial participants recruit further participants through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was chosen for its convenience as well as its effectiveness in locating hidden and rare populations (Yingling, 2015). After the sample was recruited and data started to be collected, a process of theoretical sampling directed the data collection process. The criteria for

participation in the study was that participants had to have previously been an official member of an ERG and actively involved in RWE, and are now no longer a member of an ERG or actively involved in the extreme-right scene. All of the research participants were paid a twenty-dollar voucher as compensation for taking part in the study which I funded out of my own pocket.

The qualitative data in this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with the research participants. This method has been employed by similar studies on the subject and was chosen for the flexibility it affords grounded theory research and the fact that it allowed a greater depth of discussion on the subject (Barrelle 2014; Bryman 2008). Furthermore it fostered a level of reliability in that the same approach was taken with each participant and served as a kind of checklist to ensure that all the topics were discussed. The interview questions were designed to gain an understanding of the lives of the individual participants at the different stages of their involvement in RWE (see appendix C). When constructing the interview questions I drew inspiration from previous international and local studies on RWE (in particular see – Klandermans & Mayer 2006; Addison, 1995, 1996). The interview questions were structured to reflex a natural progression through RWE. For example, questions about their life prior to their involvement in RWE were asked towards the beginning of the interview schedule while questions about their life afterwards were at the end. I made sure the questions were set out in plain language in order to maximise clarity and understanding of the questions. The questions were generally broad and open ended in order to allow the participants to share their experiences candidly with minimal restrictions (Bryman, 2012). I excluded from the interview schedule direct questions about sensitive topics such as criminal activity or incarceration. It was decided with my supervisor early on that if the research

participants had such experiences and wanted to share them, they would. I also excluded direct questions regarding the inner workings of the ERGs which participants had previously been members. After the collection of the initial set of interview data, follow up interviews were conducted to generate new data. Since I had prior associations with some of the research participants, I had existing knowledge about their personal lives, putting me in a precarious position as a researcher. I made an ethical decision to only use data in the study that had been collected during the interviews with the participants and from observations made while conducting them.

It needs to be stated that this is only a small exploratory study on individual involvement in RWE in New Zealand. Due to the small scale of the study and the sampling methods utilized we have to be careful not generalise beyond the scope of the study and understand the findings as representative of the entire population of right-wing extremists, both current and former. Furthermore the findings are heavily dependent on the authenticity of the responses given by the research participants. Yet the study has provided some valuable insight into an obscure subject and paved the way for future research.

Ethical concerns

When conducting social research, it is vital that ethical concerns be taken into consideration in order to respect the rights of others, especially when it involves human participants (Curtis & Curtis 2011; Iphofen, 2009). As Sieber (2009) explains, '[t]here is a practical, as well as moral, point to this' because '[u]nless all parties concerned are respected, it is likely that research questions may be inappropriately framed, participants may be uncooperative, and findings may

have limited usefulness' (106). For example, if steps were not taken to protect the privacy of the research participants, the number of participants that could be recruited and the data that could have been collected would have been severely limited. As such steps were taken during the study to address specific ethical concerns. Firstly, to ensure that informed consent was given by the participants to take part in the research they were supplied with a participant information sheet (PIS), informed of the conditions and risks of the study, and required to sign a consent form (CF). Furthermore the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study up until two weeks after receiving, or being offered, the transcript of their interview.

Privacy was a significant ethical concern that needed to be addressed during the study. Other than the initial four research participants which were directly recruited, I refrained from contacting any other potential participants directly. This meant that when snowball sampling I used existing participants or other potential participants as intermediaries to request permission from new potential participants that I may contact them directly. This was to ensure that the privacy of individuals was respected. The third concern was around the confidentiality of research participants. There was a concern that there would be repercussions for the research participants should they be identified. I assured the research participants that I would take all reasonable precautions to maintain their confidentiality but given the relatively small size of the RWE community and population of former right-wing extremists, participants were informed that complete confidentiality could not be guaranteed. The precautions taken involved keeping the research data and consent forms separated and securely stored, as well as assigning pseudonyms to the research participants. In instances where the data has been used or published, identifying

features have been omitted and in some places specific terms have been replaced with more generalised terms. For example, generalised terms such as 'blue collar' or 'white collar' were used to describe the occupations of participants and names of other individuals or specific places, such as schools the participants attended were omitted. The fourth concern for the wellbeing of the research participants was that their involvement in RWE might have included stressful experiences and as such there was a potential for psychologically and emotionally distressing events to resurface during the interviews. In order to mitigate this risk I supplied the participants with information on counselling services. As the research involved human research participants, it required ethical approval from the University of Auckland. This involved submitting an application to the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC). The initial application required some minor revisions to both the application itself and the documents to be used in conducting the research – the PIS and CF (see – appendix A & B). After these revisions ethical approval for the research project was granted by the UAHPEC on 29th of June 2016 (see – appendix D).

Recruiting participants

Despite my early optimism, I encountered a number of difficulties during the recruiting process. While I had originally aimed to recruit eight to ten research participants, despite my best efforts I was only able to recruit six. Considering I was based in Auckland for the duration of the study, and due to time and financial restraints as well as work commitments, I was unable to travel and largely restricted to recruiting participants in Auckland. The recruiting process began with myself contacting individuals whom I had been previously associated

with during my own engagement with RWE. These individuals I had known to have previously disengaged, some of which had done so before I myself had disengaged, while others had disengaged after me. Most of these former acquaintances that I approached were happy to take part in the research, while others that I approached did not want to be involved. I was unable to locate and contact some individuals I considered recruiting. The most helpful participants were ones in which I had the closest associations with in the past, and their helpfulness was probably related to a wish to help me out because of this fact and due to a level of trust which they already had in me. Two other individuals that I approached initially did not want to take part, perhaps largely due to the fact that even though I had met them during my engagement with RWE, I never really knew them on a personal level, and as such their trust in me was limited. One of these individuals was female while the other was male. Both expressed interest at first but quickly loss interest when it was mentioned that participation would involve a recorded interview and the signing of a consent form. I contacted both of these individuals on two more occasions after the first attempt at recruiting them and after had no further success I decided to cease my recruitment efforts. One of the individuals stated that they did not want to be associated with their past and that they had family members who did not know about their historical involvement in RWE. While the other gave no reason for their reluctance to take part in the study I suspect their reasons were similar to the first individual. By utilizing my existing connections, I was able to directly recruit four research participants.

From this original population I endeavoured to recruit other individuals through snowball sampling of which I had no prior associations. I had limited success in recruiting other new participants indirectly through the participants I had

already recruited or had attempted to recruit. One participant informed me that two potential participants that they contacted weren't interested, while another participant was happy to give me the details of some potential participants but did not want to contact the individuals on my behalf. As such I was restricted by the ethical boundaries set for me in that I could not contact these participants directly. In some other cases participants suggested individuals that were already participants in the study. On other occasions participants recommended individuals who were still engaged within RWE or in which case I had doubts about the authenticity of either their involvement or their disengagement, something my personal insight afforded me. Despite these difficulties two more research participants were recruited into the study.

Sample profile

A total of six former right-wing extremists were recruited and interviewed as part of this study (see – appendix E for a table containing some information on the participants). All six of the participants had been immersed in the neo-Nazi subculture and ideology to various degrees and had been an official member of at least one ERG. All of the participants were male and at the time of interviewing they ranged in age from early twenties to early thirties. Of the six participants, three were born in New Zealand, while three had been born overseas. All of the participants had been active in RWE in Auckland, while two had also been active in Christchurch. All six of the participants had been members of the NZNF, although not necessarily at the same time. Additionally, three of the participants had also been members of at least one other ERG, including one participant who had been a member of several different ERGs. Within these ERGs all of the participants had been grassroots members, while

two participants had also obtained senior positions in some of the groups. All the participants were no longer involved in RWE or members of any ERGs.

Conducting the interviews

The interviews were scheduled with the participants at a time of their convenience and were conducted at a venue that was selected for the privacy and comfort it afforded. One of the interviews was conducted extramurally with a participant located in another city with the use of Skype, a video communication application. Two of the interviews were conducted at the participants' individual private residences while three of the other interviews were conducted in a parked vehicle, owned by either myself or the participant being interviewed, after having first met at a public place. I found parked vehicles to be ideal spaces in which to conduct the interviews due to the privacy, comfort and informal setting they afforded, which ultimately made the participants more relaxed and conversational. The interviews were recorded with a digital sound recorder and ranged in duration from about twenty to forty minutes. After conducting the interviews, I noted down any observations that I had made. On some occasions after the interviews, participants would open up and provide further insight into the questions that they answered during the interview, which was also compiled into notes. For convenience follow up interviews were conducted via phone conversation or through instant messaging services and were not recorded.

Successful qualitative interviewing requires a degree of skill, as such I utilised a variety of techniques to enhance the interview process (Brinkmann, 2013; Bryman, 2012; Olson 2011). This included building rapport with interviewees

prior to the interview, giving them my whole attention and listening attentively, allowing them time to think and talk uninterrupted, and maintaining a level of sensitivity. Occasionally techniques such as probing, prompting, steering, and remaining silent, were utilised in some instances in order to encourage interviewees expand upon their responses. When conducting the interviews none of the participants were particularly forthcoming with their experiences. Most of the participants gave short concise answers for many of the questions, pausing afterwards and waiting for me to continue my questioning. As a result conducting the interviews almost felt like I was conducting an interrogation at times. Some participants were more conversational than others, and all generally tended to become more uninhibited as the interviews progressed. In these circumstances it was beneficial that the interviews were structured with easy to answer demographic questions at the beginning. At times some of the participants had difficulty expressing themselves verbally and providing a detailed description of their experiences. The fact that the participants were being recorded was a noticeable cause of unease for most of the participants to various degrees. Some of the participants were acutely aware of this fact throughout the interview and were cautious with their responses. One particularly cautious participant requested to see the interview schedule prior to the interview and, much to my disappointment, crossed out some of the questions stating that, not only did they not want to answer them, they also did not want me to ask them in the first place.

The connection that a researcher has to a subject as well as their familiarity of it influences the data collection process (Olson, 2011). The fact that I had a connection to the research participants meant that they were comfortable with me, and therefore it is likely they were more open with me during the interview

process than they would have been with someone unfamiliar to them. However, in some instances it is possible that this may have had the reverse effect in that the participants I had prior relationships with may have been less inclined to reveal some details about themselves to me than they would to someone they were indifferent towards. Furthermore when conducting an interview with the youngest participant I felt that in some instances their responses may have been motivated by a desire to impress me, rather than being necessarily genuine. My own familiarity to the subject may have meant that I had overlooked questions that an unfamiliar researcher may have asked, although it is likely it would have been burdensome to the research participants if they had to explain everything extensively.

Transcribing

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed by myself without the use of any transcription software. When researchers transcribe interviews themselves it can have the added benefit of bringing them closer to the data (Bryman, 2012). Naturalized transcriptions of the recordings in their entirety was compiled in order to preserve as much data as possible (Davidson, 2009). This involved incorporating in the transcripts various aspects of the recorded such as pauses, incomplete words, laughs, yawns, and overlapping conversation. On a few occasions some words were inaudible and marked as such, particularly during overlapping parts of conversation. However the loss of these words did not detract from a clear understanding of the data. After each recording was transcribed it was checked against the audio recording once again and any inaccuracies were corrected. Once the transcription was complete the audio recordings were destroyed and I contacted each of the participants and

enquired as to whether they would like to receive a copy of their interview transcript. None of the participants expressed any interest in receiving a copy of the transcript and all declined my offer.

Coding and data analysis

The data was analysed through processes synonymous with grounded theory. As Lichtman (2014) explains, in grounded theory the processes of collecting, coding, and analysing data are 'multidimensional rather than linear' (106). Accordingly, the analysis of data started early in the data collection process and as data was coded and analysed, new questions and theoretical ideas arose which required the collection of new data, resulting in a back and forwards process. Coding is understood to be the core process in grounded theory (Bryman, 2012; Holtan, 2007; Lichtman, 2014). As Charmaz (2006) explains it, '[c]oding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data' (46). Coding the research data consisted of two phases as advocated by Charmaz (2006). The first phase utilised initial coding on a line by line basis, which consisted of breaking down the data into parts so that it may be categorized, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences (Saldaña, 2009). In some instances, this involved In Vivo coding which was particularly useful for right-wing extremist subcultural, ideological, and group related terms, or other data that could not easily be labelled. The second phase consisted of focused coding which involved identifying significant codes, the development of categories, and the identification of themes. These two phases were conducted multiple times as new ideas and concepts emerged during the data collection and analysis processes and were sometimes conducted simultaneously, rather than sequentially.

The qualitative data analysis software NVivo was used to organise, code, and analyse data. One of the benefits of using NVivo, which is often reported by other researchers, is that along with greatly assisting in the organisation and coding of data, it allowed me to visualise, explore, and understand the data in ways which manually coding would not have afforded (Bazeley & Jackson 2013). Much has been written about the importance of the use of memos in the process of research, especially when utilizing a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lempert, 2007). Throughout the duration of this research I maintained a research journal in the form of a very extensive, digital word document in which I stored notes, ideas, and memos concerning the research. Occasionally these were handwritten and later added into the research journal, or alternatively created and stored within NVivo.

There comes a point while conducting research when the collection and analysis of data needs to cease in order that the research may be written up. In grounded theory the collection of data usually ends when categories become 'saturated' and 'gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights' (Charmaz 2006: 113). When claims, propositions, and theoretical ideas emerged out of the data I had collected and analysed, and I was satisfied that sufficient data had been collected to support them, data analysis and collection ceased. Now that the methodology of the study has been outlined, the next chapter presents the findings.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

A lot of people are in it as a reaction to something […] I'd say most skinheads have had negative experiences with ethnics in their life that have influenced them (Frank, study participant).

This chapter presents the findings of the study which are organised in a similar way as Chapter 1. Firstly the findings in relation to joining are presented in terms of why and how the participants joined and the problems they incurred doing so. Following this are the findings on the aspects of staying, more specifically why the participants stayed, what it was like for them to do so, and what negative aspects staying entailed. And finally the findings on leaving are presented – why and how the participants left, the challenges they had to overcome, and how their lives have changed since leaving.

Joining

> *It was more when I saw my [school] teacher on Stormfront (an extremist website) that I thought ah ok (Brian, study participant).*

Why did they join?

The factors which influenced the participants to get involved in RWE have been divided into push and pull with the former being examined first beginning with an investigation into the family backgrounds of the participants. Of all the participants only Eric described having an immediate family member, his brother who was already involved in RWE, as being racist. This has been

observed in other studies in which individuals have been commonly found to be introduced to RWE by siblings (Bjørgo, 2009; Bjørgo & Carlsson, 2005). Despite not describing his father as being racist now, Frank stated that he had been racist 'when he was younger'. Similarly, Alex recalled his Father making disparaging remarks about ethnic minorities when he was quite young. Both of the South African participants had extended family members still living in South Africa which they described as racist. Frank described an uncle as being *'definitely'* racist while Brian had a *'semi-racist'* uncle. None of the participants reported their parents as being supportive of their involvement in RWE . The parents of the participants were described as being *'not really political'* and varied in having voted for both left and right-wing political parties. Conrad described his parents as being *'politically correct'* and *'very anti-racist'*. Interestingly, four of the participants came from single parent homes, primarily as a result of divorce. This is similarly observed in other studies which have found that extremists regularly come from troubled backgrounds, including 'broken homes' (Barralle, 2014; Bjørgo, 2009; Kimmel, 2007).

Researchers have identified a number of hardships that South African migrants experience as a result of migration to New Zealand (Winbush & Selby, 2015). Both of the South African study participants reported experiencing culture shock, loss of culture, and economic hardship as a result of migrating to New Zealand at a young age with their families. Conrad explains:

I learned to speak Afrikaans to start off with […] I forgot [it] straight away as soon as I came to New Zealand […] We were quite poor to start off with, like in South Africa we had everything set up and like we knew everything

there […] coming to New Zealand was a better choice, but it's hard starting off I guess.

School experiences differed amongst the participants. Conrad described the problems at school that he experienced:

In high school I got bullied quite a lot, especially by ethnics […] after like I got into a fight with this black kid I started to lose friends and I kind of became a loner.

Conversely, Alex reported being *'quite a popular kid at school'* who was *'quite sociable'* and had *'a big group of friends'*. Most of the other participants described their experiences at school as being relatively *'normal'*, at least prior to having become involved in RWE. Academic achievement at school also varied with one participant, Eric, leaving with the highest NCEA level three qualification, while Frank left with no qualifications, the rest of the participants fell somewhere in between the two levels.

Negative experiences with ethnic minorities, usually violent, were reported by most of the participants as having been an influence to get involved in RWE:

'In my early teens [I was] violently attacked by ethnic groups, should I say, Maoris […] There was like an ethnic gang in the area that kind of tried to stand people over and that. [It] made me have to stand up for myself, fight back' (Frank).

Similarly, Brian mentioned group fights that took place between different ethnic groups at his school, *'Islanders versus Maori or whites versus Asians'*, in which he was involved. Eric recalled being *'jumped'* by *'Islanders'* while drinking in a park in the city centre at night with his friends and having their alcohol stolen. Other studies have similarly found that negative experiences with ethnic minorities commonly influence individuals to get involved in RWE (Aho, 1988; Bjørgo, 2009).

Negative attitudes towards multiculturalism were also commonly cited by the participants. Multiculturalism was a source of apprehension for two of the migrant participants, who described what they perceived to be a failure of multiculturalism in their native countries. Thinking of his birth town in the UK, Alex had this to say:

> *'It's pretty multi-cultural now. You see schools that used to be all white, or areas that used to be all white and now there won't be a single white kid that's in that whole entire school [...] you can drive for twenty minutes and you won't see a single white person [...] it's completely like Indian and Muslims and that now.*

Reflecting on the changes that took place in South Africa after the end of apartheid, Davey stated that *'they were going to stop institutionalised racism but that didn't happen, it just became racism to a different colour'* and questioned *'who wants to become a second rate citizen in yet another country like what happened before'*. Similarly, when Frank was asked if immigration was an influence, he stated: *'Asian immigration was one of the main reasons and then later on Muslim immigration'*. He later revealed that this was driven by the

belief that: *'Asians don't assimilate into our culture at all […] we are losing our whole identity as Kiwis'* and that *'Muslims should not be allowed in [because they are] a threat to our security'*.

Resentment of a perceived double standard when it comes to 'white people' and racism as well as rebellion against 'political correctness' was revealed as an influence by some of the participants:

> *Maoris can be proud of being Maori or they can be proud to be black and join like black pride groups and when you do it if you are white you get called a racist, and we always found that was bullshit, it pissed us off you know (Alex).*

This was reiterated by Brian: *'I hated when someone told me I was being racist for having pride in my culture and I still do to this day'*.

Media was reported as being an influencing factor by some of the participants. Davey stated that he was influenced by: *'politic stuff I was reading in the news'*. Films featuring skinhead characters were also found to be an influencing factor:

> *Interviewer: What about movies like Romper Stomper, did they have much of an influence?*

> *Frank: Only as a teenager.*

> *Interviewer: Do you think Romper Stomper had much of an influence on the skinhead scene?*

> *Frank: Yes. I think so […] definitely some people tried to… emulate Hando.*

This finding is reminiscent of Addison's (1995, 1996) research in which he found skinheads to be heavily influenced by the film *Romper Stomper,* as discussed in Chapter 1. However, for others like Alex films may not have been an initial influence: *'Nah, I didn't watch them until after [I got involved] then I heard about them'.*

Some of the participants revealed other things going on in their lives at the time they were getting involved in RWE which may have been an influence. Brian said he had been '*experimenting with alcohol et cetera*' before and during the time he started getting involved in RWE, while Frank said his personal circumstances at the time included *'heavy drug and alcohol abuse'.* Conrad stated that his *'mental health was quite bad at the time'* when he started getting involved. Barrelle (2014) observed that many individuals who get involved in extremism suffer from mental health issues and substance abuse.

The research also identified a number of pull factors that influenced individuals to get involved in RWE. Many of the participants revealed that the *sense of belonging* that ERGs provided served to pull them into RWE. This was especially true for the participants coming from troubled backgrounds or who had a lack of friends. As Alex explains:

> *A lot of people … they come from troubled backgrounds and this and that and they find it as like a way […] [to] have like, family or fit in, find*

somewhere to belong kind of thing. And […] that's what they are looking for.

Brain explained how it was when he first got involved:

Just a group of friends [that] started drinking together […] [I] didn't really have any of that during school, [I would] pretty much stick to myself really.

Most of the participants idolised and admired prominent extreme-right figures as well as the older members of ERGs. As Conrad stated: '*I kind of looked up to National Front kind of people, I envied them'.* While Alex recalled that when he first learned about the history of the KKK he '*thought these guys are bad-arse*' and wanted to be like them.

From the perspective of some of the participants, getting involved in ERGs was a way in which to increase their status. Alex stated that he: '*wanted to be like the white power leader of New Zealand'*. Conrad explained that it gave him '*positivity*' and made him feel better about himself. Joining an ERG and getting involved in RWE could have also served as a way to release anger and frustration that many of the participants experienced prior to becoming involved. After coming out of a bad romantic relationship, Eric stated that he '*needed to funnel that hate somewhere'*. For Alex the violence and trouble that often goes hand and hand with RWE was something that drew him in, he stated he was looking for '*aggro'* or trouble at the time.

As might be expected, some of the participants were sympathetic to extreme-right ideology and politics and this influenced them to join an ERG. Joining an

ERG was a way in which they could work towards bringing about social change that they perceived to be ideal and oppose things that they perceived to be negative such as multiculturalism. Davey stated that he got involved in an ERG and RWE for *'political reasons'* and described it as something that he found *'new'*, *'interesting'* and *'exciting'*. However, it does seem that for the most part the extremist ideology and politics that the participants came to acquire, developed after they started becoming involved in RWE through processes of socialisation and learning, rather than having existed beforehand. These processes of socialisation can be illuminated by examining how the participants go involved in the following section.

How did they join?

For most of the participants the internet was the way in which they sought out and made initial contact with ERGs and other extremists. Alex explains how he used the internet to meet people and get involved:

> *I just [kind of] jumped on the internet and went on like Stormfront and you know like [an instant messaging application] and things that. And just like made a few friends off that, and that's how I got involved.*

The *Stormfront* website was commonly referred to by the participants. Surprisingly, Brian claimed to have been referred to it by a school teacher:

> *I got a website from a previous teacher that I used to have at school […] it was called Stormfront. I met a friend there who was with the National*

Front and so I ended up meeting up with him and then meeting up with his friends.

The interviews revealed that usually a period of time elapsed between when the participants first started using the internet to visit extremist websites and correspond with other extremists and when they first met up with other extremists face to face and join ERGs. Frank explained how he got involved:

I would have been fourteen or fifteen when I first started […] going on Stormfront. And it was only when I turned about eighteen [that] I actually […] met people [and] identified myself as a skinhead.

Alex talked about how he and a 'like-minded' school friend started getting into RWE at the same time and formed a group themselves:

I had like a little crew and that, we called ourselves Shore's Orion Skinheads. And the Orion stands for our race is our nation. And then we joined [the] National Front.

Eventually Alex and his associates used the internet to link up with other nearby extremists and join a more established ERG. Unlike the other participants, Eric did not seek out extremists through the internet but rather came into direct contact with them through a sibling. He explains: *At first it was just cause I was living with my brother, and I met them and they were cool, hung out with them and stuff.*

When asked about what his school friends thought about him getting involved in RWE and starting an ERG, Alex explained: *A few of my friends […] they kinda joined the crew after I started it off […] the other friends I just kinda cut them off you know.* Similarly, Conrad said that, despite having a lack of friends in school, he still had a couple of friends outside of school and that he *'kind of got them to be racist'*.

Factors that inhibited joining

Existing research has found that parents can be an inhibiting factor (Bjørgo, 2009). Most of the participants stated that their parents were unaware that they were becoming involved in RWE or the extent of their involvement, at least initially. When asked if his parents knew about his involvement in various ERGs, Alex had this to say:

> *They didn't know what was going on […] they'd just see me leave the driveway and I'm going off to hang out with my friends […] or they'd just see me talking on the internet, they wouldn't know who I'm talking to or what I'm up to.*

However, when Conrad discussed his association with the NF he stated that his parents *'really didn't like it at all'*, indicating that they may have tried to inhibit his involvement in RWE.

Partners, like parents, can also play a role in inhibiting an individual's entry into RWE. Alex described having a girlfriend who was unsupportive of his increasing involvement in RWE:

Alex: She absolutely fucking hated it didn't she.

Interviewer: So she wasn't very supportive of you?

Alex: Nah, not at all she was constantly criticising it aye.

However, not all partners act as inhibiting factors, some partners may be supportive of an individual's involvement in RWE or even be involved themselves, in these cases the partner can influenced them to get further involved. Alex mentioned that after later leaving the girlfriend who was critical of his involvement in RWE, he met a girl who was supportive of his involvement:

I met a girl through the white power scene at one of the parties we were at [...] who was like real supportive of it and pretty keen on it herself. [We] listened to bit of [white power] music together.

Brian talked about some of the problems he had at school when it became known he was getting involved in RWE:

At one point there was probably a group of maybe fifteen to twenty people, used to always wait for me after school, just cause they knew of me as a skinhead, or something. But yeah, didn't really phase me though, it was just more of the teachers that I had problems with.

Conrad also stated that he would have liked to get more involved in the NF than he was able to at the time, this indicated that perhaps there were inhibiting factors coming from within the group that prevented him getting more involved.

In summary a range of different factors served to push and pull the participants into RWE, while other factors served to inhibit their entry. Generally, the participants sought out ERGs through the internet. One adopted it collectively with some school friends, while another was introduced to it by a sibling. Sometimes the reasons 'how' they got involved was related to 'why' they got involved. Figure 1 depicts the number of participants who attributed a particular social factor as having influenced them to join an ERG and become involved in RWE. The occurrence of social factors detected in the backgrounds of the participants which may have also influenced them to join are depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 1 – Bar chart of joining influencing factors
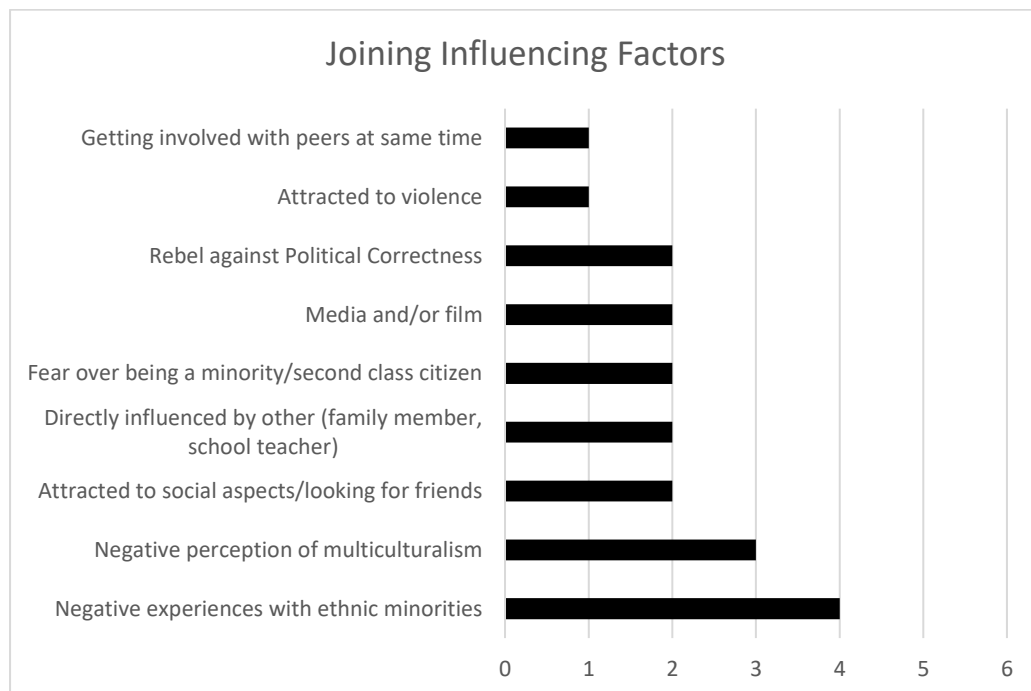
Figure 2 – Bar chart of background joining influencing factors
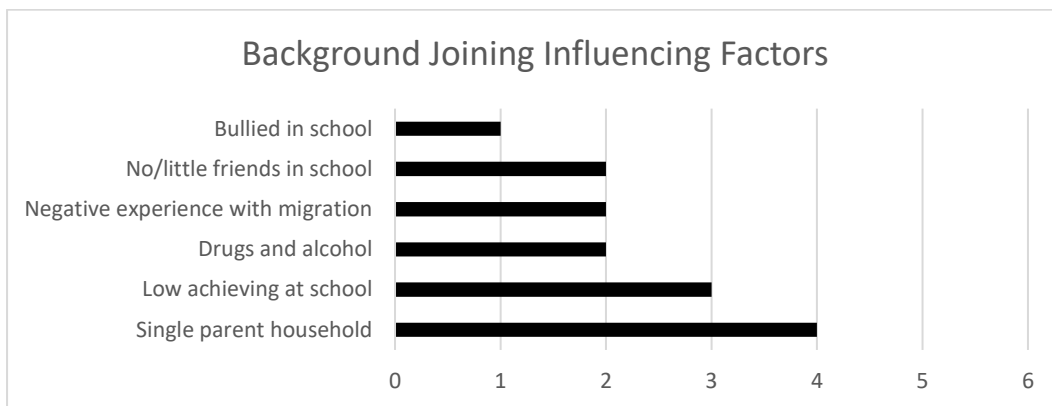
Engagement

> *It was always a good laugh […] Yeah it was fucking definitely the fun days mate. (Alex)*

Why did they want to stay?

All of the participants referred to the positive social aspects of being involved as well as the friendships and sense of belonging they found within ERGs, as being strong motivators to stay. Alex explained what it was like for him being part of an ERG:

> *It kinda just made you feel good I guess, like, it made you feel [like] you got backup or made you feel you had strength in numbers. You're hanging around likeminded people, it was always a good laugh when you were on the piss together, or you wanted a bit of trouble, you know. I was kinda looking for quite a bit of aggro back then. […] [If] you get in aggro, you'd have each other's backs.*

When he was asked what made him want to stay in an ERG, Frank responded: *'just the brotherhood […] and the social side of it'*. He explained that: *'there would always be parties on the weekends and […] alcohol was flowing and, yeah, even females'*. Other studies have found that the social aspects and belonging that ERGs provide, to be a powerful motivator for individuals to stay (Goodwin, 2011). As discussed in Chapter 1, the leadership of ERGs themselves are aware of this and foster a sense of community and belonging in order to maintain the commitment of their members.

When the participants were asked how important their group and associates were to them, Brian, Eric, and Frank all described them as having been *'very important'*. Alex described his group and associates as being the most important thing after his career and girlfriend. For Conrad and Davey they were less important, indicating they did not have quite as strong a bond with their groups or other extremists. In Conrad's case this may have been because he wasn't involved as long or on the same level as the other participants.

Only one participant, Davey, indicated that the *'politics'* was something that made him want to stay by stating that *'learning about politics'* was a positive aspect of being involved and that *'hanging out in a group and bitching about politics'* was something which he found *'interesting'*. The occurrence of factors which the participants identified as having made them want to stay within their respective ERGs are depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Bar chart of staying influencing factors

Staying Influencing Factors

Factor	Value
Liked the violence/trouble	1
Liked the political aspect of it	1
Leadership asperations/wanted to increase status	1
Made them feel positive	1
Like meeting other people	2
It was fun/something to do	4
Enjoyed the social aspect	6
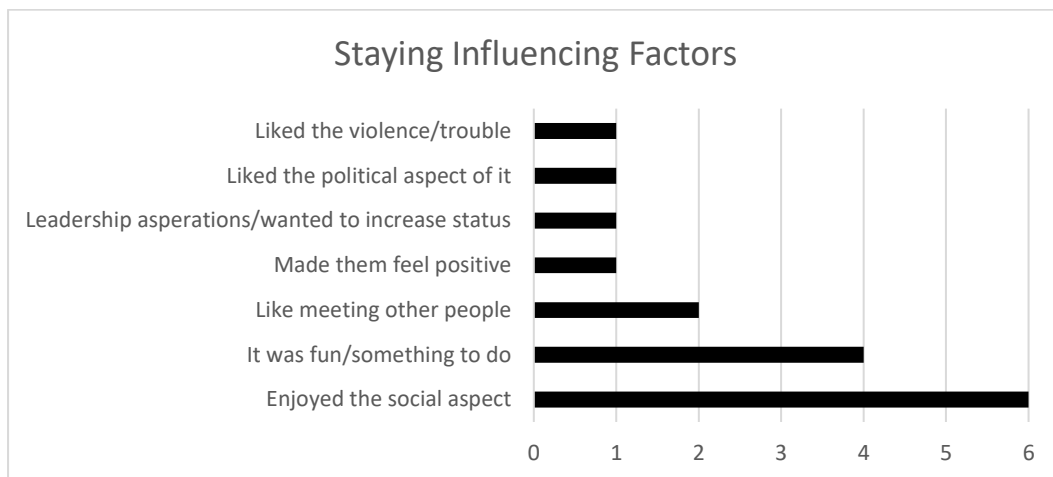
What is it like in the 'scene'?

The participants' discussions of their experiences of being involved in RWE provides some valuable insight on the extreme-right scene in New Zealand. When asked about the activities of the groups he was involved with, Frank stated: *'The National Front, it was more politically aimed, so […] flag day was the main event. But RWR was more about, activism and actually getting out there and doing things'*. But even the political activities of ERGs have a strong social aspect to them, as Eric explains:

> *I think a lot of people probably think [it's] all political and all that. But really it's mostly, like, we were just hanging out and having fun […] We would go to Wellington for Flag Day but it was more like a holiday and more like just a time to drink and stuff, you know?*

When Frank was asked what he and his associates would spend most of their time doing together as a group, he stated: *'well skinheads being skinheads, on the weekends we would drink, socialise'*. Brian discussed what it was like for him

living at a flat with other members of his ERG: *'pretty much, every single day we'd always be drinking […] probably about fifteen people, or so, would come around every day'*. When asked if there was any violence, Frank stated:

'There is always violence with skinheads drinking, but yeah if you're, you know, out there and you're wearing club gear there is always going to be other people, especially ethnic groups, that are gonna have a problem with it. Or basically, yeah, any ethnic people really'.

The prevalence of violence and crime is likely dependant on the type of ERG that an individual may be involved with, whether a political organisation, skinhead group, or racist youth group. But at times it is not so easy to distinguish between these different types of groups, nor the types of individuals involved within them. Most ERGs in New Zealand have skinhead members and skinheads have held leadership positions even in the more politically orientated NF and RWR, as discussed in Chapter 1. As Davey says: *'some people want to join right-wing [extremist groups] just to do violent things or gang related things'*. Sometimes there are disagreements amongst the members of ERGs over the direction of the group, as Davey explains:

There is internal politics […] like, some organisations have a political arm, and some have a militant arm, and like those two will clash cause the politicians want to do something diplomatic and the violent side of the group want to go out and do shit.

Sometimes internal politics and disagreements within the group can result in factions of members breaking off to form new ERGs. Frank talked about a regional branch of the NF that broke off and became autonomous:

> *'It was the National Front [and then they broke off and changed their name] to basically just become more of a social skinhead club. But, no, they are definitely more like a gang, some of them have got motorcycles and, yeah, they're capable of extreme violence'.*

Infighting or violence amongst the members of ERGs is also quite common, especially the skinhead groups. As Frank explains: *'there's a lot of infighting in the skinhead scene, always has been always will be'*. When asked if there was any violence between the members of the same ERGs, Frank responded: *'Yeah quite often, any dispute [...] was normally sorted with violence'*.

Rivalries and conflicts between different ERGs are also common:

> *In Christchurch there's a lot of infighting [...] one stage when RWR was the largest organisation, basically every other group was jealous of that and didn't like them. [...] There's always clashes of egos, the people running groups, you know, are commonly egomaniacs (Frank).*

Frank described the role he had within his last group: *'I would be involved in all security aspects... including retaliation'*.

The participants discussed some differences with the scene in Auckland compared to Christchurch:

What I notice when I went from Auckland, where there's more people, that didn't have anyone growing up like that, and just went into it of their own accord […] compared to when I went to Christchurch and people […] just get into it because [their] group of friends are into it and […] follow this call to say [I] hate niggers and everything else like that. Fuck it, I found it quite stupid. […] [There] was just too many idiots that kind of hated people that were exactly like them, in a way (Eric).

When Frank was asked if there was a difference between RWE in Auckland and Christchurch, he responded:

Yeah, huge difference. I think [the] Auckland scene, now is dead, but even ten years ago it was a lot smaller, but the people were not as criminally minded as people in Christchurch. Christchurch has got a huge scene, but a lot of it is criminals and druggies and alcoholics (Frank).

Although dated, Addison's study (1995, 1996) reflected the finding that crime and substance abuse is common in the Christchurch skinhead scene, and that many of his participants cited substance abuse as the cause of crime. Christchurch has a reputation for having a lot of skinheads and part of the reason for this may be due to the migration of skinheads from elsewhere in New Zealand, who move down there to get more involved in the 'huge scene' along with the fact that it is perceived to be a relatively 'skinhead friendly' city.

Interviewer: *Would you say Christchurch is more skinhead friendly?*

> *Frank: Yes, definitely. […] [You can] walk around with your stuff on and I rarely had any problems, and yeah, hardly ever. Obviously a lot of people were disgusted but no one went out of their way to say anything.*

Part of this may be due to the fact that Christchurch has a history of skinheads and people have become desensitized to their presence. Frank elaborated further when he was later asked why it was common for skinheads to move down to Christchurch:

> *I don't know if that's true so much because there's a lot of areas that have got their own scene. Even places up north, like New Plymouth and Wellington. […] Even though Wellington has probably died a bit, but yeah I mean Invercargill has still got a lot of skinheads there. I mean Christchurch is the prime place in New Zealand but a lot of skinheads […] don't belong to a group, they are just skinheads […] it's just [an] identity to them really. They shave their head and they may wear boots or a bomber, it's quite a common thing. [That's why] it's a lot more widely accepted in Christchurch than anywhere else because there is a history of [skinheads] […] I think [the] only thing that's really frowned upon is the organised groups.*

Frank attributes his decision to move to Christchurch to wanting *'a change'* but also because: *'I was sick of Auckland though there was too many Asians and ethnics'*. Although he said that the bigger scene in Christchurch was *'one of a host of reasons'* and that he *'definitely had contacts there'* before he moved.

The beliefs of the participants at the time of their involvement in RWE were revealed to be relatively similar, all centred around race or ethnicity. Alex described himself as having been a '*white nationalist*' and said that being part of his ERG meant that: *'you are proud to be white, you stand up for you beliefs, and you can handle your own on the street'*. Conrad said he believed in *'segregation'*, while Eric described himself as having been *'racist'* and his beliefs as *'right-wing'* and *'anti-immigration'*.

Davey described his beliefs as having been *'in line with Donald Trump's beliefs'* in which he wanted to *'control immigration'*. He elaborated further:

> *If you have to bring in people from a certain ethnic background just make sure they don't want to kill us before you bring them in, that's all. But it was nothing radical, there was no like, let's gather people up and put them in a concentration camp. Like no one does that anymore.*

Frank described his beliefs as initially being *'white power'* which he described as a *'belief in white supremacy'* which changed over the course of his involvement: *'into white nationalism and just white pride really'*.

All of the participants described their beliefs as being important or very important to them during the time. Alex described his beliefs as being '*majorly*' important and said that: *'it was a part of who I am, you know'*. However, after Eric had described his beliefs as having been *'very important'*, he later stated *'I don't think I took it as seriously as others would have'* suggesting he was more moderate in belief and action compared to his associates.

Most of the participants recalled that they had doubts about their beliefs and involvement in ERGs during their involvement. When asked whether he had doubts about his beliefs, Alex stated *'no, not at all'*, however he said he had doubts about being a member of the ERGs, especially the NF because: *'I never really thought they were going to go anywhere or really like achieve anything […] It was more just about like meeting likeminded people'*. Davey stated that: *'everyone has doubts […] cause, like, everyone's going to tell you you're wrong'*. Eric expressed having doubts after having positive interactions with ethnic minorities:

> *I mean, you know, you go to like the diary or something and [they say] please, thank you, they're all nice. And you think, well why do I hate them […] and even sometimes in the city I [would] talk to a cool as Asian or something and just think […] I don't hate them, so why do I, you know.*

Disadvantages of engagement

The participants revealed some disadvantages that came with being engaged in RWE. Gaining criminal records and getting caught up in violence and crime was a negative aspect reported by two of the participants. As Frank explains:

> *Just always being in court and […] in the system in some degree. At the [skinhead] flat it was probably like that for five years where I had charges continuously. […] I had years of not working because I was pretty much unemployable.*

Similarly, Brian stated: *'I was looking at prison back then, just doing pretty stupid shit really'*. Frank also said that he required '*regular hospital visits*' as a result of being involved in violence. He also stated that he felt that he: *'became a lot more violent [...] just from stuff that I've seen [...] in the scene and that, especially in Christchurch because there's some extremely violent people in it'*.

Harassment by militant anti-racist groups was reported by two of the participants as being a negative aspect of being involved. Alex talked about *'getting exposed on the internet'* with photographs of him posted on websites and being stalked: '*[having an old] man following you and your missus around at all times as well, especially when your missus wasn't involved, so I was getting quite a bit of grief of the missus'*. Davey had an interesting perspective on it:

> *There is still a communism versus fascism sort of subculture conflict that happens. So basically when you became associated with right-wing extremism [...] [it] meant you had the anarchist and the communist and whatever you know it of the left-wing automatically becoming your enemy. So, well, if you weren't expecting that, it becomes a surprise and affects you cause now there's actually people wanting to hunt you down and make your life miserable [...] and you don't know about it until you're already waist deep in it.*

However, harassment of this kind can also serve to reinforce commitment to an ERG and strengthen ingroup solidarity. Alex explains the effect that it had on his ERG: *'all the ones who weren't really into it, just semi into it, they all disappeared [...] [it was] just the hard core ones that stuck around cause we were all like good mates, there was probably only about four or five of us'*. In situations like this

the loss of more moderate members may result in the ERG becoming more extreme.

Harassment and unwanted attention from law enforcement was also revealed to be a negative aspect of involvement:

> *It only became clear later on how […] everything worked, like, when three or more people get together, legally you can classify them as a gang. […] You can call yourself a political group, the police won't call you a political group. I mean, hell, the Greens call themselves a political group […] and the police are still authorised to gather intelligence and harass them and do whatever the hell they want to them. And, you know, they're the Green party and they're meant to be about peace, love, and saving whales (Davey).*

The stigma associated with RWE can have a large isolating effect on individuals involved, as can the actions of fellow group members, as Brian experienced: *'I lost a lot of friends due to a few altercations between my [new friends in] the scene and people from my school'*. Subsequently, individuals become more reliant on their ERG and fellow members. Brian also reflected on the difficulties of being the youngest member of an ERG in the following discussion:

> **Brian**: *Being the youngest one of the group […] you had to do whatever you were told otherwise you would be bitched at for the next month… or years.*

> *Interviewer: Must have been hard being the young one in the group, that's for sure?*

> *Brian: Oh yeah.*

Leaving

> *I'm right-wing still. But I'm not like, you know, extreme right-wing. (Alex)*

Why did they leave?

A number of factors internal to ERGs were identified as having 'pushed' the participants out of the group and subsequently RWE. The first of such factors was disillusionment with the leadership and direction of the group. Frank gave an explanation for why he decided to leave one of the ERGs he was involved in: *'I didn't really like the direction that everything was going in and, yeah, disagreed with some senior members, so I left'*. Brian talked about one of the things that he did not like about the leadership of an ERG he was member of: *'I didn't really like listening to, to authority, in a way. That's them to me'.* Alex explained how a leadership change in the National Front resulted in him leaving the organisation: *'Once [the leader] left, then like all the other people that supported him, all the locals they all left […] that's kinda when I stopped being National Front'*. Similarly, Brian talked about having doubts about his membership in an ERG due to a leadership change: *'it did get quite splintered and so [I] wasn't too sure what was going to happen really, and who was going to be the leadership'*. When leaders or other members start leaving ERGs this can disillusion other members. Speaking of the state of his ERG when he made the decision to leave,

Eric stated: *'I believe it was starting to fall apart anyway because people were moving to other cities and stuff'*. Disillusionment with the prospect of success was a factor for Davey who discussed the state of his ERG when he left: '*It wasn't growing in numbers, it was losing momentum*'.

Disillusionment with other members or their behaviour was also reported to be an influence on disengagement. Davey also became disillusioned by the fact that there '*were different elements inside the group*' whose involvement '*wasn't about politics*', but rather '*it was about other things*' such as violence, crime or as he states '*gang related things'*. Travelling down to Christchurch to meet other extremists who did not live up to his expectations had a profound effect on Eric. He describes the behaviour of some of the people he met: *'not trying to work, and just selling weed out of their house and selling drugs to kids and shit'*. He explains this behaviour disillusioned him because he had previously associated it with ethnic minorities: *'because the main thing I hated was like, Islanders on the dole, and Maoris on the dole and shit like that'*. Along with his shattered expectations, the criminality of other members also caused Eric to reconsider his involvement RWE: *'I didn't really want a criminal record or name to myself'*. Brian revealed that he had become disillusioned by other members of ERGs who did not meet his racial expectations which he found to be hypocritical: *'one of my main issues [was with] other people in the scene as well, who were […] trying to claim who they weren't'*. What he was referring to is illustrated in the following discussion with Frank:

> **Interviewer:** *Did you ever meet any people in the scene that were part-Maori or mixed race?*

Frank: Yep, definitely. Yeah there was a couple of members that [...] I had suspicions about that have been confirmed since then. [...] I don't know, not many people really had an issue with it. In Christchurch anyway. I think maybe you will find some places up North they might have a different view. Other groups will have different views. But I think it's quite common in Christchurch. [...] I'd say that all the groups in Christchurch have had members that have got [...] some Maori blood, or perhaps their partners are Maori.

Perhaps surprisingly the extreme-right scene in New Zealand has been known to consist of mixed race individuals of Maori heritage (Gilbert, 2013) and Pacific Island heritage (Munro, 2012), although it is certainly uncommon. This occurrence has also been reported in a study conducted in Sweden (see – Stern, 2014).

Problems with other group members were reported by the participants as a reason for leaving ERGs, in particular the infighting amongst group members and between rival ERGs, discussed earlier. Frank discussed being subjected to violence from the other members of one of the skinhead groups he was involved with: *'I was attacked by members of a group and that made me leave'*. Brian talked about how he left an ERG after *'getting narked on'* to the police by another member who *'made a statement'* against him.

Disillusionment with the extreme-right ideology or lifestyle due to the negative aspects that engagement entailed, that were discussed earlier, served to influence the participants to leave their ERGs. Eric indicated that disillusionment with the ideology may have been a factor in influencing him to leave when he

recalled having doubts after positive interactions with ethnic others. Brian and Frank indicated that their disillusionment with a criminal lifestyle and the violence which came as a result of their involvement in RWE influenced them to disengage. While Davey may have been influenced by his experiences of being harassed by militant anti-racists and police.

Along with the aforementioned push factors, other factors were identified which pulled the participants out of RWE. For some of the participants, as they got older, they prioritised other aspects of their lives, such as careers and partners, which played a role in their disengagement:

> *Half the crew moved to Christchurch to become more involved because it was a bigger scene down there and just I had other priorities that took more of a bigger role in my life, you know, like I [started a business] and I got a girlfriend who wasn't white power or into that at all, I was getting quite serious with her at the time. That's just […] progress and just kinda didn't have any mates into it anymore and just moved away from it all, you know (Alex).*

Similarly, Brian stated: *'I just wanted to, kind of try get my life on track really'*. While Frank talked about wanting to concentrate on his career and *'staying out of trouble'*. Eric talked about *'employment and study'*, being things he aspired to do, which he felt his involvement and association with RWE would *'damage'*. Partners were found to also influence some of the other participants besides Alex. Frank talked about having '*a new girlfriend'* that *'kinda influenced'* him to leave his ERG, while both Alex and Brian talked about having girlfriends who

'*hated*' them being involved in RWE. The occurrence of social factors that the participants attributed to making them want to leave are depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Bar chart of leaving influencing factors

How did they leave?

There were different ways in which the participants left their ERGs. In the cases in which the participants voluntarily left it usually involved some kind of official renunciation of group membership by notifying the group and other members. When Frank left his last ERG, he explained it involved him handing in all his 'club gear' or clothing with the insignia of the group. Disappearing or abruptly cessing association with the group and maintaining a distance, was how Eric left. Although as discussed earlier he recalled that at the time his group was starting to disintegrate anyway. For Alex, whose group had disbanded, it largely involved a decision not to join, or even start, another ERG. He explains his attitude at the time: *'I wasn't motivated anymore, I just couldn't really be fucked anymore, you know'*.

After having disengaged, all the participants in the study maintained some kind of social ties to at least some of the other members of the ERGs they were involved in, whether those members were still engaged or had similarly disengaged. These social ties varied in level of connectedness. Alex explained the social ties he has to some of his former associates:

> *I've got a couple who are lifetime friends, you know, like we've kinda done everything for each other, […] kinda made lifetime friends that I'm always going to be friends with.*

When Brian and Frank last left, they continued to maintain cordial relations with their former ERGs and continued to socialise and take part in social activities with their former groups, at least initially.

Problems with leaving

The research identified a number of challenges or inhibiting factors which made it difficult for the participants to disengage from RWE and leave their ERGs. The close bonds and friendships with other individuals inside their groups made it difficult for the participants to leave. When Frank decided wanted to leave his group, this was made difficult by others who tried to encourage him stay: *'it was like pressure from people at the top who wanted me to stay and also people that were members that wanted me to stay on board'*. This was made all the more difficult for Frank who stated that he did not have any friends outside of the ERG at the time. For Brian leaving was difficult because he was living with another member of the ERG at the time.

The threat of violence can make it difficult for some individuals to leave an ERG. Alex admitted that: *'when people wanted to leave NSWB, we were quite aggro towards them, wanted to bash them kind of thing'*.[22] Frank also discussed the threat of violence for some people leaving ERGs:

> *If you left […] there's definitely a threat of violence, but with most groups, I mean, if someone is going to leave you can't really do anything about it. I mean I've had people try and talk me into staying, but I mean if you've made your mind up nothing's going to stop you.*

Disengaged individuals may also be under the threat of violence from their former associates. After he left the group which violently attacked him, Frank stated: *'if I ran into them I was probably under the threat of violence'*. Davey's experience was quite different, stating that when he left *'it was fine'* and expressed that: *'[it] isn't a gang you literary can walk away'*. Similarly, Brian stated that after he left: *'there was no animosity towards me'* and that *'they still had a lot of time for me'*. Research on the EDL in the UK has similarly found that individuals can leave without any problems (Pilkington, 2016). As Pilkington explained this may be due to the perception that leaving was not necessarily understood to be permanent, but rather something akin to taking time off.

Criminal records and offensive tattoos can be a problem for some individuals after disengaging. As discussed earlier Frank's criminal record had made him unemployable. He also discussed having problems at work due to offensive

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[22] NSWB stands for 'North Shore White Boys', a racist youth group Alex was involved in.

tattoos: *'I've covered up my tattoos and that cause I've had [previous] issues at [work] about having swastikas and that. [laughs] Not everyone likes them'.*

How have their lives changed between now and then?

Most of the participants reported continuing to identify as 'right-wing' and expressed that their beliefs had become more moderate. Eric identified as being more apolitical, but said he still tended to vote for a mainstream right-wing party. Alex had other priorities in his life now and when asked how his life had changed he stated: *'I just can't fucked with that anymore […] just kinda my life's changed. […] I'm right wing still, but I'm not like, you know, extreme right wing'.* Davey stated that: *'now I don't care about politics, I care about money'.* He expressed a more positive attitude towards multiculturalism and Asian immigration, despite being critical of Islamic immigration which he understood as *'very incompatible [with] Western civilisation'.*

Brian still had social connections to his former ERG, despite not wanting to re-engage, and discussed visiting them: *'I went to go see them last year as well, I went to their club house and they all had time for me. But it's just not my thing anymore, for myself'.* Frank, who was the most recently disengaged of the participants continued to identify as a *'white nationalist'* and said he continued to *'support any group in New Zealand unless they're white supremacist'.* When asked why he didn't support white supremacist groups he stated:

> I don't have white supremacist beliefs anymore […] I have always been able to get along with Maoris. But other certain people or groups, yeah, they wouldn't see it my way.

He was the only participant who reported taking part in a political activity since leaving his group: *'I went to the last white pride march as a supporter'*. He did however express having recent doubts about his beliefs: *'I've got Polynesians at work that I get along with and I always despised Islanders and now I've realised that some of them are actually, you know, decent people'*. For Frank who claims to be *'still on the fringes'*, re-engagement is an issue, he discussed being drawn back into it: *'because a lot of friends of mine became members and stuff like that [and I have] started associating with club members again. [...] The reason why I have come back into the scene at times is because of the social aspect of it'*. As the findings revealed there were a number of social factors which influenced the participants to join, stay, and leave their respective ERGs. These factors varied across the participants although there was some level of uniformity. In the next chapter we discuss these findings and how theory can allow us to make sense of them.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

There is widespread agreement in the literature that the upsurge of radical right-wing activities has to be seen in the context of a combination of global and domestic structural change ... There is less agreement, however, on the exact link between right-wing mobilisation and sociostructural change. (Betz, 1999, as cited in Mudde, 2007:201)

A number of themes have emerged from this study, in this chapter the most common of these themes will be discussed in relation to the aspects of joining, staying, and leaving. I will seek to make sense of these themes by drawing on existing theoretical explanations. Following this some limitations of both the push and pull and arc frameworks are discussed as well as some of my suggestions on how these limitations can be overcome.

Why they joined

As we can see from the previous chapter, a variety of different factors influenced the participants to join ERGs and get involved in RWE and the participants tended to be influenced by a combination of factors. The first common theme to emerge was that most of the participants described having negative experiences with other ethnicities, generally violent, which they attributed as a factor leading to their involvement in RWE. Similarly the two participants that did not report having these experiences, Alex and Davey, reported having negative experiences with other ethnicities on a larger scale, through their experiences with multiculturalism in their birth countries. By drawing on Aho's (1994) social constructionist approach we might understand that these negative

experiences led the participants to construct an image of people of other ethnicities as enemies which subsequently led them down a pathway into RWE in which they joined ERGs and found solidarity in face of their perceived common enemies. While it seems likely these negative experiences with other ethnicities did contribute to their decisions to get involved in RWE in some way, it is not clear whether the participants have sought to justify their involvement in RWE by emphasising these particular experiences over other factors which may have had an influence. The participants' emphasis of negative experiences with ethnic others may also be influenced by the right-wing extremist ideology that they acquired after joining ERGs which in turn may have led them to give new meaning to their previous experiences.

For some of the participants their racist and extremist behaviour and attitudes have been learned from others. Firstly, Brian had been introduced to RWE through a school teacher while Eric had been introduced to it through his sibling. For Alex, the seeds of his racism and aversion to multiculturalism may have grown out of the disparaging remarks his father had made about people of other ethnicities when he was a child, however, it is likely it needed to be fed before it could blossom into RWE. For all of the participants the acquisition of extreme-right ideology occurred out of a learning process which takes place through the use of the internet and the process of socialization which occurred once they join an ERG. In this regard, we might draw on social learning theory (Akers, 1985; Bandura, 1977) and apply it to RWE in the same way it has been applied to criminal and other deviant behaviour. Such an application would suggest that the participants adopted racist and extremist attitudes and engaged in related behaviour when they observed other members of the ERG which they perceive to be of high status, receiving positive rewards for displaying such attitudes and

engaging in such behaviour. Examples of such rewards could have included praise from other group members and admiration from sympathetic female associates.

Given that four of the participants came from single parent households (Brian, Davey, Eric, and Frank) and two participants discussed having little to no friends at school (Brian and Conrad) suggests that joining an ERG allowed the participants to find a sense of belonging they otherwise would not have had. We might explain this with the use of the social disintegration hypothesis (Arendt, 1973 [1951]), which would suggest that given the breakdown of traditional social structures, particularly family, the participants lost a sense of belonging. By getting involved in RWE and joining ERGs the participants replaced the sense of belonging that they had lost and subsequently increased their self-esteem. In Alex's case he was quite sociable with many friends in school and did not come from a 'broken home', however, he may have joined to replace a loss sense of community belonging that resulted from his migration to New Zealand and the many extended family members that he had left behind. Furthermore, an application of social control theories would explain that since most of the participants had a low connection to the social institutions of family and school, they had less stake in conforming with the status quo and subsequently engaged in what we might understanding to be deviancy in the form of RWE and immersed themselves in a new social institution in the form of an ERG.

The data indicates that most of the participants came from backgrounds which could be described as lower-middle class. However, all of the participants apart from Alex experienced downward socio-economic mobility through either parental divorce or migration from South Africa. Being the exception to this

trend, Alex, whose family migrated from the UK, might be understood to had experienced a slight increase in socio-economic status as the result of favourable currency exchange rates, in stark contrast to the two South African participants. Getting involved in ERGs might be understood as a way in which the participants could alleviate the negative aspect of their downward socio-economic mobility and improve their status. Furthermore half of the participants (Brian, Conrad, and Frank) reported a low level of academic achievement at school. By drawing on general strain theory (Agnew, 1992) we might understand that that in the presence of strain such as their families downward economic mobility as well as the failure to achieve in school, the participants coped by immersing themselves in RWE and joined ERGs. In doing this the participants largely rejected mainstream goals and values and replaced them with alternative goals and values consistent with right-wing extremist ideology. Within this new ideological outlook success may have been understood by the participants as achieving the socio-political agenda of the ERG and obtaining a leadership or high status position within the group. Both are related as the success of the ERG generally means a higher status of the group members.

In summary the differences across the participants in terms of background and influencing factors makes it difficult to apply an overarching theoretical explanation for why they joined. However, by drawing on Aho's social constructionist approach we can understand that the previous negative experiences the participants had with ethnic others allowed them to construct images of them as enemies. Becoming a right-wing extremist involves a process of socialization and learning, which can be understood with social learning theory. The social disintegration hypothesis and social control theory are the

most viable theoretical explanations for why the participants became involved in RWE. Put simply, the participants joined ERGs to find a sense of belonging and to cope with strain that had incurred in their lives.

Why they stayed

The findings identified multiple positive aspects about being involved in RWE which made the participants want to stay. A reoccurring positive factor across all of the participants was revealed to be the social aspect of being involved. Essentially the new friendships they made, the sense of belonging their groups provided, and all the social activities which their involvement entailed were the primarily reason they wanted to stay involved. This was the case even when they did not specifically join for these social reasons. The second most reoccurring positive aspect was that four of the participants stated that being involved was fun and something for them to do and occupy their time. Positive aspects such as these were counteracted by the negative aspects of being involved which were also discussed by some of the participants. These included getting caught up in violence and crime and subsequently obtaining criminal records, harassment by law enforcement and militant anti-racist groups, as well as being stigmatised as a member of an ERG.

We can understand the decision of the participants to remain involved in ERGs and committed to RWE by drawing on the investment model outlined in Chapter 2. An application of the model to the life histories of the participants suggests that the likelihood that they remained in an ERG was determined by their level of satisfaction with their involvement, which is determined by the balance of the positive factors in contrast to the negative factors listed above, minus the

alternatives for them should they leave, plus the sunk costs that they had put into their involvement as well as the future goals and plans of the group they would miss out on. However, we know that Alex and Frank had left ERGs involuntarily and as discussed earlier a limitation of the investment model is that it can not be used to investigate these cases. Despite this we might understand that the reason why the participants stayed was generally because the positives of doing so outweighed the negatives.

Another important finding of the study was that the participants each had a unique experience of being involved in RWE and that they were engaged in different ways. To help us understand the differences in the engagement of the participants we can use Bjørgo's (2011) dimensions of radicalising actors which was introduced in Chapter 2. As reflected in the first dimension of the model, we know there was a difference amongst the participants in regards to their individual adherence to extreme-right ideology and politics. For example, we know that Davey had a high level of ideological and political motivation while Eric did not take the ideology and politics as seriously. There was a difference in the status or position of the participants within their respective ERGs and this is represented by the second dimension of the model. Alex and Frank had higher status or leadership positions in ERGs while Brian and Conrad had low status and could be described as followers. The third dimension on the model allows us to account for difference in the level of social adaptation or marginalisation of the participants. Reflecting this difference the study found that Alex was well socially adapted in contrast to Conrad who was socially marginalised, having described himself as a 'loner'. The fourth and final dimension of the model represents different levels of sensation seeking. This allows us to account for the difference between Alex, who displayed a high level of sensation seeking in that

he was looking for trouble and violence as part of his engagement, in contrast to Davey who enjoyed having meetings in which his associates and himself would discuss politics. We might argue that the latter incurs a lower level of sensation seeking than that the former. Furthermore we might understand that, as Bjørgo explains, individuals change over time and so too then does their position on the different dimensions within this model. For example, we know that Frank started his involvement in RWE as being high on sensation seeking and less ideological or political, as a teenage skinhead. Later he became less focused on sensation seeking and more ideological in the middle of his 'career' in RWE. Towards the end of his engagement he had lost interest in getting into trouble, displaying a low level of sensation seeking, and had also become less ideological which coincided with his disengagement.

Why they left

Leaving was revealed to be influenced by a combination of different social factors, just as it had for joining and staying. The three most common factors which influenced the disengagement of the participants was revealed to be disillusionment with the leadership or direction of the group, disillusionment or problems with other members of the group, and other aspects in the lives of the participants becoming more important. Drawing on Ebaugh's (1988) role exit theory we might understand that disillusionment gave rise to doubt for the participants which in turn caused them to consider an alternative lifestyle out of RWE in which they could focus on other aspects of their lives. After determining these alternatives to be better they underwent a turning point and subsequently disengaged. The disillusionment that the participants experienced may have stemmed from maturation and the realisation that their goals and that of their

ERGs were unobtainable or else their goals had changed. All of the participants got involved in RWE as teenagers, usually in their mid-teenage years, and most of the participants had disengaged by their late teens or early twenties, with the exception of Frank who disengaged at the age of thirty.

This is reminiscent of the age-crime curve in that both the incidence and prevalence of criminal offending by individuals has been found to rise sharply in early adolescence to peak in the late teens, after which offending begins to drop significantly and continue to decline over the life course of individuals (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Moffitt, 1993). Many researchers on gangs have identified that 'gang membership mirrors the life-cycle of criminal behavior, with the pattern of onset, persistence, and desistance being compared to joining, active membership, and leaving', and that individuals often join gangs in adolescence and the likelihood of active gang membership declines as they age (Carson & Vecchio, 2015:259). Furthermore, as discussed earlier, individuals can move into more pro-social and mature roles within the RWE scene. As such we should be cautious in acknowledging the similarity with gangs and crime.

Acting as a pull factor, an increasing prioritisation of other aspects of the lives of the participants was found to influence and coincide with disengagement. However, the findings suggest that this had less of an influence than push factors such as the disillusionment previously mentioned because some of the participants only prioritised other aspects of their lives after they had left. While two of the participants (Brian and Frank) attributed romantic partners as being a direct influence to leave, Davey discussed his career becoming more of a focus only after he had already left. Furthermore, being part of an ERG did not seem to prevent Alex from having a strong focus on his career or partner, even when

his first girlfriend was very critical of his involvement. It was only after Alex's group disbanded and he subsequently disengaged that he discussed having another girlfriend that did not like RWE, indicating that she may have been more of an influence discouraging him from re-engaging and joining another ERG. This suggests that 'alternatives' outside of the group or pull factors were less of an influence for participants in leaving than the factors which pushed them out of the group in the first place. This finding is reflected in a recent study conducted on the prevalence of push and pull factors in the disengagement of individuals from groups which are labelled as 'terrorist' by the United States State Department, which includes some ERGs. The study found that 'push factors are more commonly experienced and cited as playing a large role in individuals' decisions to exit than pull factors' (Altier, Boyle, Shortland, & Horgan, 2017:324). This study indicates that pull factors have played more of a role in maintaining the disengagement of the participants, rather than initially drawing them out of ERGs in which push factors or negative aspects of being involved has been more influential. None the less it is clear that multiple push and pull factors have worked in conjunction to influence the participants to leave ERGs and disengage from RWE.

Some of the participants discussed experiencing doubts about their involvement which factored into their decision to disengage. Eric discussed experiencing doubts about his beliefs as a result of positive interactions with individuals of other ethnicities, which he partially attributed to his decision to abandon RWE. Returning to Aho's theory (1994) on the social construction of enemy images we might understand that in Eric's case the positive interactions he had with members of his socially constructed enemy group, which did not conform to his stereotypes, led to the deconstruction of the ethnic other as an enemy in his

mind and gave rise to his disillusionment with extreme-right ideology. Frank also attributed positive interactions with ethnic minorities to having changed his beliefs, however, this happened after he had already left his ERG. This suggests that while the deconstruction of enemy images can influence some individuals to disengage, for others it may be something that happens after they have already begun to disengage and subsequently help facilitate and maintain their disengagement.

As discussed in Chapter 1, determining when exactly an individual has disengaged is problematic and whether they have left the group can be difficult. This was observed in the study because it was revealed that after having officially ceased their membership in their respective ERGs, both Brian and Frank continued to maintain social ties to their former groups. In Franks case this included going along to an annual 'white pride' event as a 'supporter'. Furthermore half the participants (Alex, Brian, and Frank) had each been a member of multiple ERGs, that is they had left one group and later joined another. We might turn our attention back to Aho (1988) who, as discussed earlier, understands that disengagement takes place on two different levels, a belief dimension and a social-communal dimension. Understanding disengagement in this way allows us to account for the difference in the way the participants have disengaged. For example, the study found that Eric had disengaged ideologically and socially unlike Brian who had disengaged ideologically but less so socially.

We can draw on desistance theory to help make further sense of this. In their research on desistance from crime, Farrall and Maruna (2004) differentiate between *primary desistance*, when an individual ceases to commit crime, and

secondary desistance, in which they have adopted a new pro-social identity as a former criminal. By applying these concepts to involvement in RWE would suggest that we might consider Eric who was no longer involved in extreme-right groups or activism and had undergone a pro-social identity transformation as having undergone secondary desistance. In contrast to this Frank might be considered to have undergone something akin to primary desistance since he had left his group and ceased his involvement by his own accord, although this is arguable since he attended a white pride event as a supporter and felt as if he was getting drawn back into it. But the key point to be made here is that by drawing on desistance theory we might consider someone to be fully disengaged once they have undergone a pro-social identity transformation as a former right-wing extremist.

McNeill (2016) developed a third term, tertiary desistance to describe a shift in an individual's sense of belonging to a community and acceptance of their change by others. Other studies have found that recognition by others that one has changed is important to individuals who are disengaging from RWE and that a failure to find a sense of belonging and receiving recognition of their change can inhibit an individual's disengagement (Barrelle, 2014). While belonging and acceptance from a community is certainly an important aspect for individuals undergoing disengagement, it is not clear if classifying it as a level of desistance is very useful. This is because it is heavily reliant on factors outside an individual's control, such as the compassion of a given community. For example, whether criminal or extremist, some individuals may never be able to shed the stigma of their past and find recognition of their change in others and subsequently find belonging in their communities. And of course, different members of the of the community are going to recognise whether or not any

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change has taken place differently. Furthermore, many individuals not engaged in crime or extremism have a low sense of belonging to their communities.

However, it is still problematic differentiating between the disengagement of individuals with these two or three levels of desistance, and some of these problems have been addressed by Bottoms and colleagues (2004) in regards to desistance from crime. The first problem is that many of the participants had disengaged from ERGs but still harboured some of their old beliefs, albeit more moderate. And secondly, it suggests that the participants would have to undergo some kind of identity transformation to truly have disengaged from RWE, in addition to ceasing to be involved in extreme-right groups and activism. However, it is not clear how we determine whether an individual has undergone an identity transformation, nor is an identity transformation any guarantee that an individual will remain disengaged throughout their life. We might point to the fact that theorists on criminal desistance 'have argued that definite desistance only occurs with death' and this may be similar to involvement in RWE (Kazemian, 2007:9). However, this author would prefer to believe otherwise.

Despite the problems with the concept of tertiary desistance, Nugent and Schinkel (2016) argue that there are 'three spheres of [criminal] desistance' and they "propose using the terms 'act desistance' for non-offending, 'identity desistance' for the internalization of a non-offending identity and 'relational desistance' for recognition of change by others" (568, 570). They "argue that this terminology describes and differentiates between the different aspects of desistance better than 'primary', 'secondary' and 'tertiary' desistance, as it does not suggest sequencing in time or importance" (Ibid.:570). Drawing on this new theoretical conception would suggest that the participants might be considered

fully disengaged when they had undergone act desistance and discontinued their extreme-right activism and involvement in ERGs, identity desistance in that they have undergone a transformation in which they no longer identify as extreme right, and relational desistance in that this change is recognised by others.

Limitations of contemporary understanding of right-wing extremism

Some questions have emerged from the findings pertaining to the way that involvement in RWE, and other related subjects, has been understood within recent literature. Firstly, the findings from this study suggest that individual involvement in RWE is much more dynamic than traditional linear stage-based models and frameworks recognise. For example, John Horgan's (2014) 'arc' framework of involvement, engagement, and disengagement is convenient way to frame research questions and to organise findings, however, we have to be cautious in understanding that individual involvement in extremism does not necessarily mirror these three linear stages. In reality an individual may move in and out of extreme-right groups and scenes and their level of engagement with RWE may fluctuate over the course of their life. Some of the participants in this study experienced doubts causing them to question their ideology, or they were forced to leave their ERG due to circumstances against their will. At times they left ERGs and disengaged from RWE only to get back involved and join new ERGs at a later date. Furthermore, while all of the participants had officially ended their membership in ERGs at the time of the study, aspects of ideology and social connections still lingered in various degrees. Moreover, an individual may start to get involved in RWE only to discontinue their involvement due to inhibiting factors, in contrast to another individual who becomes engaged much more

extensively going on to have a long career as right-wing extremist. In cases such as this it may be more appropriate to understand the former as having not fully engaged, rather than understanding them both as having undergone the three general linear stages of involvement, engagement, and disengagement. This is reminiscent of Wacquant's (1990) criticism of role exit theory, in that one might consider an individual who starts to become involved in RWE but fails to fully engage as having skipped the stage of engagement.

Secondly, the study illuminates that RWE is best examined and understood in its entire context, from the point of first getting involved until the point of having last disengaged, if not wider. While traditionally research has ignored the disengagement aspect of RWE, contemporary research has had a strong focus specifically on disengagement or leaving while marginalising the aspects of joining and staying. It is important to observe involvement in RWE in its entire context because the reasons why individuals initially become involved are related to the reasons why the stay and eventually leave. This is reflected in the findings of this study. While it may be less convenient, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of involvement in RWE by examining individual trajectories in their entirety. Thirdly, echoing the call of Minkenberg (2003), RWE needs to be examined in all of its manifestations, including those 'beyond the realm of party politics' (149). This is important because extremist individuals are often embedded in extremist subcultures and multiple organisations and networks. Furthermore, sometimes ERGs purporting to be political parties may transcend party politics. This is especially evident in New Zealand where some ERGs have traits reminiscent of a political party, a subcultural skinhead group, a criminal gang, and even a militant group simultaneously, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Towards a new theoretical framework

Researchers have acknowledged the limitations of the theoretical frameworks and models in which RWE has been traditionally investigated, analysed, and understood. As discussed earlier, Altier et al. (2014) have highlighted the limitations of the existing push and pull framework which is commonly used, while Eatwell (2003) has called for a model which recognises the wider contexts in which individuals are embedded: micro, meso, and macro. The following is my suggestions in which the existing frameworks can be enhanced and then utilised to improve our understanding of RWE and benefit future research.

As Bjørgo (2009) and other researchers have observed, it is clear that there are inhibiting factors which work against the factors that push and pull individuals in or out of RWE. Just as we can differentiate between push and pull factors, we can also differentiate between two kinds of inhibiting factors: *drag factors* and *shove factors*. Both of these two new categories of factors are mirror images of the push and pull factors as defined by Bjørgo (2009) as discussed in Chapter 1. *Drag* refers to the positive or rewarding social forces and circumstances, which influence an individual to remain within a particular social environment. In contrast *shove* refers to the negative or non-rewarding social forces and circumstances which hinder the transition to an alternative social environment or make such a transition seem unattractive and unpleasant. By building upon push and pull in this way and expanding our perspective we get the push, pull, drag, shove (PPDS) model.
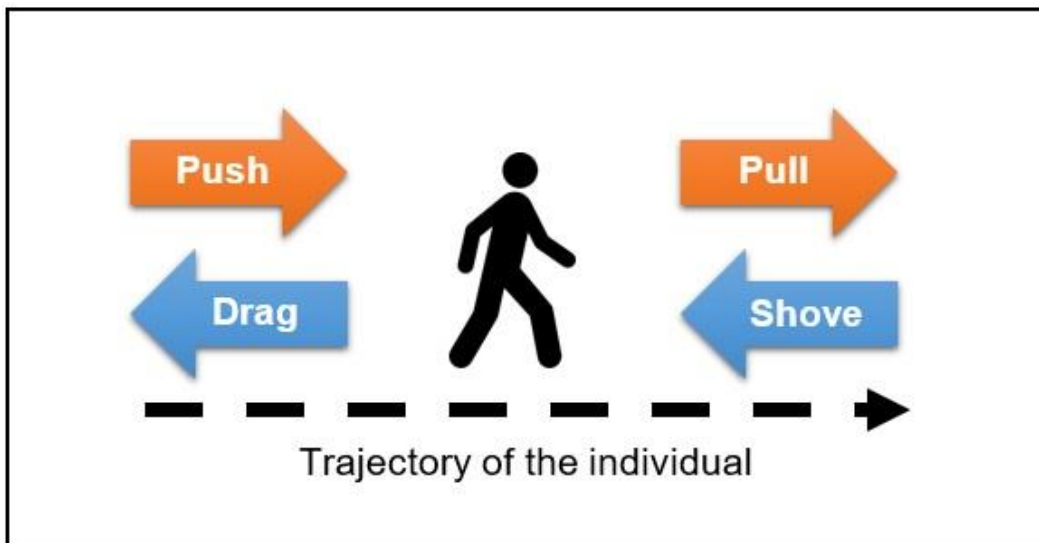
Figure 5 – Push, pull, drag, shove model

Figure 5 depicts the model and demonstrates how these different types of factors work in conjunction to influence the trajectory of an individual. One drawback of the model is that in some circumstances it may be difficult to classify a particular factor. This is because some factors may serve to both push and pull or shove and drag depending how they are interpreted since different factors are intrinsically related to one another. For example, living with another member was a drag factor in the disengagement for Brian because it was his connection to the ERG which provided him with a place to live. It also served as a shove factor because it meant that when he wanted to disengage he needed to find somewhere else to live.

This model can be used to understand the incidence of becoming involved in RWE and reversed to understand the incidence of disengaging. For example, we can apply this model to the factors which influenced Brian to leave the last ERG he was involved with and disengage from RWE. Brian became disillusioned with the leadership of the group and the other members, one of which had informed on him to the authorities, all of which served as push factors. In contrast his new

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girlfriend who did not like his involvement in RWE along with the desire to straighten his life out acted as pull factors. The social aspect of being involved in the group made him want to stay and acted as a drag factor. Furthermore, the fact that Brian was living with another member of the ERG at the time made disengaging challenging as he did not have anywhere else to live and subsequently acted as a shove factor. Having a place to live also served as a drag factor as it was a benefit of being a member of the ERG, illustrating how the different PPDS factors are all related.

As this study has found, different factors influence different individuals and the level of influence that these different factors have also varies between individuals. In other words there is no universal reason why every individual joins, stays within, and leaves ERGs. We need to keep this in mind when using the PPDS model. However, the study has identified commonly occurring factors which have influenced the study participants. Another important thing to keep in mind is that new factors can emerge and existing factors can increase or decrease in their level of influence over time. In Brian's case, it was only after he became invested in a romantic relationship that his new girlfriend acted as a pull factor. During this same time the dragging influence of the positive social aspect of being involved in his group had waned due to the problem he had with another member. These social influences along with others can be classified according to the PPDS in order to understand the instance of Brian's disengagement.

By drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's (1994) *social ecological model* we can further expand upon the PPDS model to recognise and understand influence of individuals in a wider context. While I am unable to explain Bronfenbrenner's

model in detail in this thesis due to space constraints, he understands that 'the ecological environment is conceived of as a set of nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls' which he identifies as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, and the chronosystem which encompasses the dimension of time (Ibid.:39). By using the PPDS model in conjunction with the social ecological model we might recognise different factors and the micro, meso, exo, and macro levels which push, pull, drag, and shove and subsequently influence individuals in relation to RWE.

Integrating the investment model

Rusbult's investment model, despite some of its limitations outlined earlier, can be used in conjunction with the PPDS model to help us account for agency and predict the likelihood that an individual will either become engaged in RWE or disengage from it. The PPDS factors in the model are directly related to the various components of the investment model. For example, satisfaction is determined by the actual rewards and costs compared to the expected rewards and costs. The rewards of the investment model are synonymous with drag factors, while the costs are synonymous with push factors. Similarly, the alternatives of the investment model are synonymous with pull factors while the costs are synonymous with shove factors. Investments are derived from either the drag or shove factors with future plans acting as a drag factor while the loss of sunken costs acts as a shove factor. Given this we can translate the components of the investment model or we can alternatively use a simplified model:

Likelihood of change in commitment = (push + pull) – (drag + shove)

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Using this model a positive figure indicates the likelihood one will leave a social environment while a negative figure indicates the likelihood one will remain. When using this simplified model we need to keep in mind that PPDS factors and their influence vary across different individuals and there really is no one size fits all solution to the question of why individuals remain in a social environment. As such we can really only predict the likelihood that individuals will engage in or disengage from RWE. Determining the likelihood of commitment in this broader way allows us to avoid some of the limitations of Rusbult's model which were discussed earlier. It allows us to recognise the social factors which shape the agency of individuals and we can account for changes that happen irrespective of agency, which the investment model does not recognise or allow. For example, individuals may be pushed out of a social environment against their will, or alternatively prevented from transitioning to an alternative social environment against their will. At the same time the model is simplistic enough that it does not constrict analysis and understanding, as Wacquant (1990) cautions against.

Integrating life-course theory

Figure 6 – Hypothetical trajectory of an individual
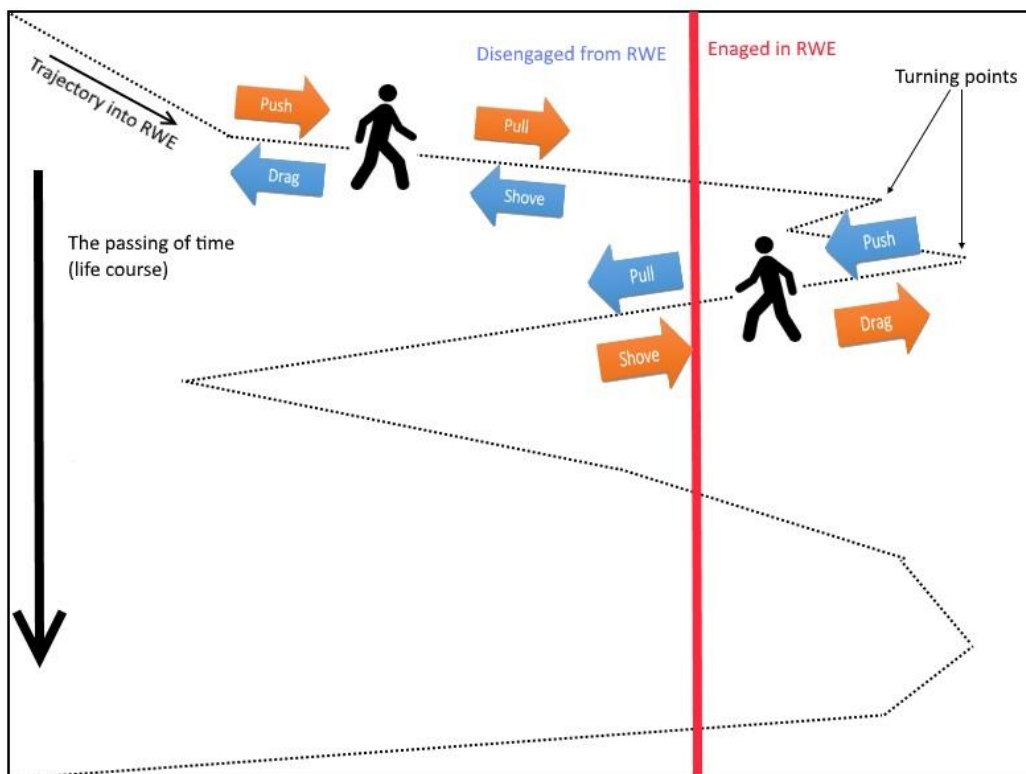
By using the model in conjunction with concepts from life-course theory we can investigate the influence of PPDS factors in relation to RWE over the course of individual lives. Figure 6 depicts a visual representation of this integrated model with a hypothetical life trajectory of an individual moving in and out of RWE. While turning points are generally used to refer to changes in an individual's life course which mark a decreasing relationship with crime, or in this case a decreasing level of engagement in RWE, they have been used here to describe both short term and long term changes in the life course that mark not only decreasing levels of engagement in RWE but also increasing levels. This is because I believe that if we are to have a comprehensive understanding of involvement in RWE, we need to investigate and understand not only the onset

of involvement but also the circumstances surrounding failed disengagement, in which a disengaging individual is drawn back into it. Transitions are represented on the model by the different PPDS factors, this is important because common life events such as getting married or having a child do not have a universal effect across all individuals. These events may have the opposite effect for different individuals and vary in their level of influence.

Three dimensions of engagement

By integrating the theoretical conceptions of Aho (1988), who understands disengagement to occur on a belief and a social-communal dimension, and Nugent and Schinkel (2016) who understanding that criminal desistance occurs on three levels – act, identity, and relational desistance – we can develop a synthesized model that allows us to measure an individual's level of engagement with RWE. I would suggest that disengagement from RWE can be understood as consisting of three dimensions: act engagement, ideological engagement, and social engagement. Act engagement refers to an individual's level of engagement in activism or rather activity related to RWE. Ideological engagement refers to an individual's level of engagement with extremist ideology and beliefs. And lastly, social engagement refers to an individual's level of social connectedness to other right-wing extremists and ERGs. Moving beyond a focus exclusively on the aspect of disengagement, we can use this model to represent and understand the engagement of individuals with RWE as it changes over the course of their life and differs between individuals. Figure 7 depicts a visual representation of the *three-dimensional model of engagement*.

Figure 7 – Three-dimensional model of engagement
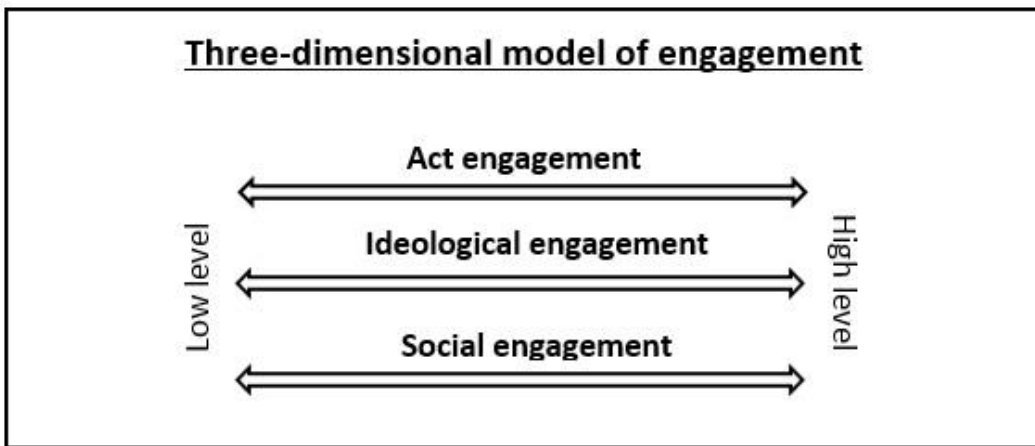
Each of these three dimensions of engagement can be determined by different variables. Act engagement can be determined by variables such as the frequency of activity and the type of activity, in terms of its extremity and how it affects others. For example, the act of conducting a terrorist attack in which people are killed would result in a much higher placement on the scale than the act of distributing extremist literature in letterboxes. Ideological engagement can be determined by the level of adherence to extremist beliefs and the type and level of extremity of those beliefs. This allows us to represent the difference between a non-ideological individual who has an aversion to Muslim immigration in contrast to an individual who has a fanatical dedication to the tenants of National Socialism, and subsequently a high level of ideological engagement. Social engagement can be determined by variables such as the strength of the bond that an individual has with other extremists, their level of connectedness to other extremists, any ERGs they may or may not belong to, and their status within those ERGs. This allows us to account for the difference between a high status leader of an ERG with many social connections and an isolated 'lone wolf'. While quantifying these variables is difficult, we do not necessary need to, but

rather recognise the difference in engagement across different individuals and that it changes over time.

Representing activity that is criminal on the model is problematic because what is 'criminal' changes across cultural boundaries and over time. Criminality is related to all three dimensions as a type of activity which is high in level of extremity and affects other people is likely to be criminal and would result in a high value of act engagement. At the same time a high level of ideological engagement would reflect that an individual's adherence to ideology transcends their adherence to that which is legal. In other words, their ideology is more important than law, indicating a willingness to conduct crime on behalf of their extreme-right ideology. Social engagement is related to criminality in a similar way as loyalty to other extremists or an ERG, and adherence to its rules, transcends the law of wider society. Hence a higher value on all three dimensions indicates a higher level of criminality, or willingness to commit crime.

While the model shares some similarity with Bjørgo's (2011) *dimensions of radicalising actors* the difference is that the three dimensions of engagement model allows us to represent and follow an individual's levels of engagement over the course of their career in RWE. As they begin their journey, their level of engagement increases, this continues to fluctuate over the course of their extreme-right career according to the influence of various social factors. For many individuals it will later decrease in conjunction with their disengagement. In contrast Bjørgo's model is designed to allow us to represent and discern the difference between the members of extremist groups so that we might determine their different motivations for remaining involved, it too allows for

the change that occurs over the course of their career. There are also some ethical considerations when understanding and analysing engagement in RWE with this three-dimensional model of engagement, firstly, at which point do we draw the line between what is an acceptable and unacceptable level of engagement in the extreme-right? At which point do we determined individuals to be officially engaged in or disengaged from RWE? These questions I am going to leave open for now. None, the less these new concepts and ideas could prove useful in enhancing the way in which RWE is understood and aid further inquiry into the subject. We will now move on to the conclusion of the thesis.

CONCLUSION

Three plagues, three contagions, threaten the world. The first is the plague of nationalism. The second is the plague of racism. The third is the plague of religious fundamentalism. [...] A mind touched by such a contagion is a closed mind, one-dimensional, monothematic, spinning round one subject only - its enemy (Kapuściński, 1992, as cited in Holbrook & Taylor, 2013).

The purpose of this thesis was to enhance our understanding of individual involvement in RWE and update our knowledge on the extreme-right scene in New Zealand. Primarily, it sought to investigate the reasons why individuals come to join ERGs, why they stay within them, and why many individuals eventually leave. The study identified a variety of different social factors which influenced the participants to join, stay, and eventually leave ERGs. It was determined that the participants were influenced by a combination of factors rather than any singular factor. While many social factors were revealed to be common across multiple participants, each of the participants was found to be influenced by different factors.

The findings revealed that the participants most commonly understood their own pathways into RWE to be influenced by previous negative experiences which they had with ethnic others. However, common social factors were also identified in the backgrounds of the participants as most had come from broken families and had experienced downward socio-economic mobility, which this study argues are likely to have been strong influencing factors. The social disintegration hypothesis and social control theory were determined to be strong theoretical explanations in answering why the participants became

involved in RWE and joined ERGs according to these factors. It was further revealed that all the participants wanted to remain within their respective ERGs due to the positive social aspects which the groups afforded them. This leads further credence to the two aforementioned theories which explain joining. That study indicates that voluntarily staying within the ERGs is largely determined by the positive aspects of their involvement in contrast to the negative aspects. Although in some cases the participants left ERGs involuntarily. The commonly occurring factors which the participants attributed to their decision to leave were revealed to be disillusionment with the leadership and direction of the group, and other group members. The findings also revealed that other aspects of the lives of the participants become more important and served to influence them to disengage. However, it is argued that this was something that happened during and after their disengagement rather than being an initial influence and subsequently something that reinforced and maintained their disengagement.

These findings are important as we have previously had little understanding on what influences individuals in relation to their involvement in RWE within New Zealand. Furthermore, the way in which individuals come to join, stay, and leave ERGs may be similar to the way individuals are involved in gangs, terrorism, criminal lifestyles, and other kinds of extremism. As such the findings of this study may be relevant to enhancing our understanding of these other subjects, especially given that there is already a lot of overlap in literature on these topics. In the thesis I have suggested that involvement in RWE can be understood best through an integration of the push and pull framework, life course perspective, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model, and Rusbult's investment model. Additionally, I have suggested we can expand upon the existing push and pull

framework to include 'drag' and 'shove' factors. This new push, pull, drag, and shove framework can also be used to understand a wide range of other subjects such as gangs, criminal lifestyles, terrorism, and migration. Furthermore, I have synthesized a new three-dimensional model of engagement from desistance theory and the work of Aho which we can use for an enhanced understanding of the way in which individuals engage with RWE over the course of their respective lives.

Critical reflections on the study

There are a number of limitations to this research in terms of both research design and my personal influence on the research process, as a former right-wing extremist. Firstly, the small sample size of the study and the fact that participants had largely grown up in the same location meant that this study should not be considered to be representative of the wider community of disengaged right-wing extremists in New Zealand. Secondly, since the data was collected through a life history qualitative methodology, its authenticity is heavily reliant on both the honesty of the participants and the accuracy of their recollections of their lives. Thirdly, as my supervisor continually reminded me throughout the research process, my insider perspective has meant that perhaps I have made assumptions in places and missed important information, or rather just not explored various questions in a more comprehensive way which an outsider research would have. Furthermore, space constraints within this thesis has meant that I have been unable to explain every aspect related to RWE in a comprehensive way, which may be a source of frustration and difficulty for some readers who are inexperienced in the subject. However, I feel confident that these limitations are outweighed by the advantages of this

research in terms of design and my personal insider status. Overall this study has provided valuable knowledge on a subject that is difficult to research empirically and as such it makes a modest contribution to both international and local literature on RWE.

Recommendations for future research

This study has identified a number of avenues that would benefit from future research. Firstly, a larger scale study of individuals who have disengaged from RWE would further enhance our understanding of the subject greatly. Although accessing and researching this population is difficult, future researchers may be able to identify and access disengaged right-wing extremists who have been featured in news media. It was only after I had already completed the design of this research that I became aware of a few individuals who had publicly discussed their prior involvement in RWE. The recruitment of such individuals would have offset the closeness of the sample and enhanced the research. Secondly, we know little about the contemporary extreme-right scene in New Zealand, some kind of ethnographic research would enhance our understanding immensely, although undertaking such a task would not be without its challenges. Thirdly, empirical studies on RWE tend to research either engaged or disengaged right-wing extremists, I am unaware of any studies in which both have been researched simultaneously. If such as study was conducted comparisons could be made between the two sets of data so that we can determine whether there is a difference in how engaged and disengaged individuals understand aspects of their involvement. Many previous studies have taken for granted a level of uniformity between the two.

Final Remarks

As has been discussed, this research project is very personal to myself in that part of the reason it was conceptualised was to allow me to make further sense of my own previous involvement in RWE. Certainly I have achieved this aim as since starting this thesis my understanding of the subject matter as well as my own previous involvement has increased substantially. However, as questions have been answered, many new questions have arisen that can only be answered with further inquiry. Furthermore, the design of this thesis has meant that I have barely had the chance to draw upon and utilise my own personal history and insight as a former right-wing extremist. I suspect, and hope, that for me this thesis only marks the beginning of a long journey in pursuit of enhancing our understanding of right-wing extremism.

I've climbed out of that sewer, and I will now tell you what's down there (Hasselbach, 1996:xii).

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

THE UNIVERSITY OF
AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau
N E W   Z E A L A N D

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Participant Information Sheet

Boots on, Boots off: initiation and desistance in far-right extremism within New Zealand

Researcher: Hayden Crosby
Supervisor: Professor Alan France

Researcher Introduction
My name is Hayden Crosby and I am a Masters student in sociology at the University of
Auckland, under the supervision of Professor Alan France. I am conducting research on far-
right activism focusing on the reasons why people get involved and why they leave far-right
movements.

Invitation to Participate in Research Project
You are invited to participate in this research because of your prior involvement in far-right
activism and the valuable insight you can provide. To find potential participants, like you, I
have contacted people I know who have been previously involved in far-right activism.
Additionally, I have used snowball sampling whereby current research participants, who may
have been recruited directly, are asked to identify additional potential participants who have
expertise or interests relevant to the research project.

This Project
Aims
The research aims to identify the causes which lead people to become involved in far-right
activism and the causes that lead them to later leave it behind.
Duration
This research project will continue until March 2017, however the data collection phase
should take no longer than three month.
Benefits
I expect that the results from this project will provide an enhanced understanding of far-right
activism in New Zealand.
Risks
One of the risks associated with this research is psychological/emotional distress. For you, as
a participant, this means that you may experience some psychological/emotional distress in
the case that any previous events that were psychologically/emotionally distressful to you
resurface in the interview. To manage this risk, you will be referred to counselling services
and the contact details will be provided to you.
Funding
This research project is entirely self-funded by the researcher, Hayden Crosby.

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Your participation

Voluntary participation

Your participation is voluntary and you may decline this invitation to participate without penalty.

Compensation

If you choose to participate, you will receive $20 upon your completion as a participant in the research project.

Project Procedures

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to arrange a time to meet with the researcher to conduct an interview in which you will be asked a set number of predetermined questions, which will be recorded. This semi-structured interview is expected to last no longer than 1 hour. You can choose to withdraw from participation at any time.

Data Storage, Retention, Destruction and Future Use

The data, that is the responses to the question you provide, will be collected with the use of a recording device during the interview. This data will then be transcribed and the recording will be permanently erased. The data will be coded in order to protect the identity of the participant. The transcribed data will be stored on a secure computer system at the University of Auckland for six years before being permanently erased.

Right to Withdraw from Participation

You can withdraw your participation at any time without giving a reason. You can also withdraw your data by two weeks after being sent the interview transcript without giving a reason.

Anonymity and Confidentiality/Confidentiality

The preservation of confidentiality is paramount. The information you share with the research, Hayden Crosby, will remain confidential. If the information you provide is reported/published, this will be done in such a way that its source cannot be identified, such as by changing personal identifiers such as age and geographic location. However, given the small size of the far-right community and the small number of people who have left, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Research Findings

A summary of the research findings will be made available to you, if you wish. In this case please provide contact details to the researcher.

CONTACT DETAILS AND APPROVAL

Researcher
Hayden Crosby
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Research Supervisor
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For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 ext. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 29-Jun-2016 for three years, Reference Number 017430.

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Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Department of Sociology
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand
socialsciences@auckland.ac.nz

Participant Consent Form

Project title: Boots on Boots off: pathways into and desistance from far-right activism within New Zealand.

Name of researcher: Hayden Crosby

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and I have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research.

- My participation is voluntary.

- I understand that the researcher will conduct an interview with me.

- I understand that the interview the researcher will conduct with me will be recorded with the use of a digital voice recorder.

- I understand that the information I provide will be reported/published, this will be done in such a way that its source cannot be identified.

- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time without giving a reason, and I can withdraw my data from the study up until two weeks after being sent the interview transcript.

- I understand that I will receive a $20 voucher upon my completion as a participant in the research project.

- I understand that data will be kept for 6 years, after which time any data will be destroyed.

- I understand that my participation in the research project is confidential and that my identity will be held in confidentiality by the researcher and the supervisor.

- I understand that I will receive a transcript of the interview I have conducted and will be able to comment on it, if I wish.

- I wish to receive a summary of findings, which can be emailed to me at this email address:

  _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 29-Jun-2016 for three years, Reference Number 017430.

Appendix C: List of Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself

   a. Where did you grow up?

2. Family background

   a. What is your family background?
   b. How close were you to your family?
   c. Were your parents very political?
   d. Were your parents racist?
   e. Where any of your family members racist?
   f. What did you parents do for an occupation/work?

3. Educational background

   a. Tell me about your schooling
   b. How would you describe what school was like for you?
   c. Did you do very well at school academically?
   d. What was your relationship like with your peers like, the other kids?
   e. How old were you when you left?
   f. What qualifications did you gain upon leaving?
   g. Have you done any training or study since leaving school?

4. Working background

   a. What is your current occupation?
   b. Can you briefly explain your working/career history?

5. **Entry** in RWE

   a. What was your involvement in white nationalist/right-wing (extremist) political activism?
   b. Who did you hang around?
   c. Were you a member of any groups?
   d. When did you first start getting involved in right-wing activism and groups
        i. How old were you at the time?
   e. What were your personal circumstances at the time?
        i. Were you working or studying?

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     ii. What was your living situation like?

     iii. Did you have many friends?

     iv. Did you have a partner?

     v. Did you have children?

  f. Do you think there were any trigger mechanisms that may have led to you joining these groups or getting involved in far-right activism?

     i. Things that may have happened to you?

     ii. Things going on in your life at the time?

     iii. Any global or social events that may have influenced you? (such as 9/11, London bombings, Asian immigration etc)

  g. How did you make contact with these people or groups?

     i. How did you find them or did they find you?

     ii. Did you have any friends or family already involved?

6. **Engagement** in RWE

  a. What was it like for you being involved in RWE?

  b. What were your beliefs at the time?

     i. How important were these beliefs to you?

  c. How important was your group and associates to you?

  d. In which ways did becoming involved in RWE/ the group affect you?

  e. Were there any positive aspects about being involved? (good things)

     i. Did you make new friends because of it?

     ii. Would you say it gave you something to do?

     iii. Would you say it gave you something to fight for and believe in?

  f. Were there any negative aspects of being involved? (bad things)

  g. Were you a skinhead? Did you consider yourself to be a skinhead?

  h. Did you have any idols at this time?

  i. Were there any people you admired and/or looked up to?

  j. Did you ever have any doubts about your beliefs at the time?

  k. Did you ever have any doubts about being part of the group?

  l. Did you ever consider leaving?

     i. Were there any things stopping you from leaving?

     ii. Were there any things that made you want to stay?

7. **Exit** from RWE

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a. When did you finally stop your involvement in RWE and group/s
  i. How old were you at this time?
b. Describe your personal circumstances at the time?
  i. Were you working or studying?
  ii. What was your living situation like?
  iii. Did you have many friends outside of RWE/the group?
  iv. Did you have a partner?
  v. Did you have children?
c. Do you think there were any trigger mechanisms that may have led to you leave these groups?
  i. (Such as things that may have happened to you, things going on in your life, things going on in the world at the time)
d. Did the process of you leaving just happen by itself or was it a gradual process?
e. When you stopped your involvement in far-right activism or left the group, how did your associates respond to you leaving?
  i. Were there any problems or troubles as a result of you leaving?
  ii. Did (or do you still) maintain contact with any of them after leaving the group/far-right activism?
  iii. Do you know if any of them also left?
f. How has your life changed between now and when you left the group/far-right activism?

8. Current political beliefs

    a. How would you describe your current political beliefs?
    b. Do you currently support any political parties or political groups?

9. Do you know anyone else who was involved in far-right activism or groups who may be interested in talking with me and taking part in this study?

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Appendix D: Ethics Approval Letter

Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Finance, Ethics and Compliance

THE UNIVERSITY OF
AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Level 10, 49 Symonds Street
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Extension: 87830 / 83761
Facsimile: 64 9 373 7432

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE (UAHPEC)

29-Jun-2016

MEMORANDUM TO:

Prof Alan France
Sociology

Re: Application for Ethics Approval (Our Ref. 017430): Approved

The Committee considered your application for ethics approval for your project entitled **Boots on, Boots off: initiation and desistance in far-right extremism within New Zealand.**.

We are pleased to inform you that ethics approval is granted for a period of three years.

The expiry date for this approval is 29-Jun-2019.

If the project changes significantly, you are required to submit a new application to UAHPEC for further consideration.

If you have obtained funding other than from UniServices, send a copy of this approval letter to the Research Office, at ro-awards@auckland.ac.nz. For UniServices contracts, send a copy of the approval letter to the Contract Manager, UniServices.

In order that an up-to-date record can be maintained, you are requested to notify UAHPEC once your project is completed.

The Chair and the members of UAHPEC would be happy to discuss general matters relating to ethics approvals. If you wish to do so, please contact the UAHPEC Ethics Administrators at ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz in the first instance.

Please quote reference number: **017430** on all communication with the UAHPEC regarding this application.

(This is a computer generated letter. No signature required.)

UAHPEC Administrators

University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee

c.c. Head of Department / School, Sociology
     Mr Hayden Crosby

Additional information:
1. Do not forget to fill in the 'approval wording' on the Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms, giving the dates of approval and the reference number, before you send them out to your participants.

2. Should you need to make any changes to the project,please complete the online proposed changes and include any revised documentation.

3. At the end of three years, or if the project is completed before the expiry, please advise UAHPEC of its completion.

4. Should you require an extension, please complete the online Amendment Request form associated with this approval number giving full details along with revised documentation. An extension can be granted for up to three years, after which a new application must be submitted.

5. Please note that UAHPEC may from time to time conduct audits of approved projects to ensure that the research has been carried out according to the approval that was given.

Appendix E: Sample Table

Sample of participants

Name, gender, age (at time of interview)	Age at start of involvement	Age at end of involvement	ERGs involved in	Highest position obtained in an ERG	Education level (current)	Occupation (current)	Location of extreme-right activism
Alex, male, late 20's	17	22-23	NF, racist youth group	Senior member	Medium	Blue collar	Auckland
Brian, male, mid 20's	15-16	20	NF, RWR	Grassroots member	Low	Blue collar	Auckland, Christchurch
Conrad, male, early 20's	13	17-18	NF	Grassroots member	Medium	Unemployed	Auckland
Davey, male, late 20's	15-16	19	NF	Grassroots member	Medium	White collar	Auckland
Eric, male, late 20's	19-20	21-22	NF	Grassroots member	High	Blue collar	Auckland
Frank, male, early 30's	14-15	30	NF, RWR, multiple skinhead groups	Senior member	Low	Blue collar	Auckland, Christchurch

Organisations: NF (National Front), RWR (Right Wing Resistance)

Education: low (no qualifications or basic school leaving certificate), medium (trade certificate or work training), high (university or tertiary training)

Occupation: Blue collar (trade job), white collar (office/services job)

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