

Do we really need “counter narratives”? –
And what is a “narrative” anyway? –

Current challenges and mis-/understandings
about “deradicalisation” through the internet and
media

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- “Counter-messaging” and “Counter-arguments” we need, for sure!
- “Argument/message” and “narrative”
= two totally different things!
- What is a “deradicalising narrative”?
How to produce and employ it properly?
- “European Platform of Deradicalizing Narratives” (EDNA)
Who’s talking?– practitioners(researchers)!

Challenge:

- Young radicalised people: are highly distrustful, difficult to engage, resistant, idiosyncratic, dangerous – quite likeable –, sometimes nearly paranoid
- Good-practice *derad interventions* are quite intense/complex – as intense as psychotherapy
- First-line *practitioners* know this (RAN)

What do first-line *practitioners* think about on-line deradicalisation?

- “One cannot deradicalise on-line! This is impossible!” “Don’t even try!”
- “Media people and academicians – they don’t know the first thing about actual derad work!”

Current misunderstandings about “deradicalisation” and “deradicalising narratives” – on-line or off-line (1)

- (1) “No need to worry too much about how an impactful derad narrative looks like” !??

- They are self-evident:
 - a credible *messenger/* individual (a ‘former’, family, victim, ‘charismatic’/moderate community member etc.),
 - *some* statements about the reality of extremism
 - *authenticity* of statement,
 - *emotional* charge etc. ... That will do!

Current misunderstandings about “deradicalisation” and “deradicalising narratives” – on-line or off-line (1b)

- In fact,
 - (i) we don't know yet what a derad narrative is,
 - (ii) how to acquire appropriate audio-visual material,
 - (iii) and how to employ it practically in interventions;
 - (iii) plus, some narratives have back-fired totally.

Current misunderstandings about “deradicalisation” and “deradicalising narratives” – on-line or off-line (2)

□ (2) “The close analysis of extremists’ websites/ social media will teach us how to deradicalize”
!??

□ Learning from extremists ? – Counter-radicalise with ‘good’ content ? – Brainwash for a good cause?

In fact, (i) media analysis won’t be very helpful and

(ii) it makes us overlook other more valuable resources:

The research about good-practice derad interventions.

Current misunderstandings about “deradicalisation” and “deradicalising narratives” – on-line or off-line (3)

- (3) “We need to *counter, counter, counter, ...*
... counter-arguing is key” !??
- United Nation's Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (UN-CTITF):
A “counter-*narrative*” has an “effective comprehensive *message*” which “*dismantles and counter-argues* against *every dimension* of the extremist narrative”.

(“Counter-narratives” employ “*persuasion, ideology, logic, fact*”.)

Have you ever argued with an extremist? – How was it?

In fact, practitioners know – and research has shown:

“You must *not argue* with a radicalized person!”

“You must *never counter!*”

“Extremists feed on being countered!”

“Do not try to win the argument.” - Or do we maybe have to avoid argumentative discourse entirely?

(In any event, even in open-process narrative group work, arguments, messages, thoughts, ideology, religion/ politics turn up naturally – but are clearly de-prioritized.)

(4) “Counter-narratives may in particular employ *humor*” !??

- In fact, ridiculing the other wont be helpful. It does not deradicalize. On the contrary!

- Extremists don’t have much sense of humor anyway (which makes them be extremist).

(However, in open-process narrative group work, moments of laughing together [about oneself!] occur; this is, no doubt, very valuable but rare, and entirely different from ridicule.)

(5) “Counter-narratives may employ *victims*’ testimonials” !??

- Victims’ testimonials are key for prevent and awareness work!
- However, radicalized people don’t react well to issues of victimization – because they are victimized themselves, and in strong mental denial of it.

(In open-process narrative interventions issues of victimization come up frequently and are most valuable, but may not be pushed for.)

Are there solutions ?

Are there solutions, methods – so that we may create *deradicalising narratives* ?

If you don't want to argue, debate, counter, ... employ humor, ... or focus on victim testimonials ...

... what else is left to do?

□ **Become *narrative* !**

Facilitate narrative *exchange* ... story-telling, co-narrative *processes* ...

How to do this? What is a narrative?

- A first-hand account of a *personally lived-through experience* (event, other actors, conflict, solution ... emotional color, identity investment, subjective meaning etc., and a targeted audience).

The narrative is given *voluntarily*, in a *safe* non-threatening space, in an interactive *open-process*, ... it encompasses details, personal perspective ... and is open to questions ...

What follows from this definition of narrative?

- You *cannot counter* or argue with a narrative!
What a relief! –
 - Narratives are what *deradicalizes*, because they are beyond countering, beyond right or wrong.
So we may leave the endless circle of countering others and being re-countered ...
 - Extremists *don't do narratives*!
There is no such thing as an *extremist narrative* really!
- **Hence, never use the term counter-narrative again!**

How to do this? – How to do / become narrative?

→ Good-practice derad research can tell us!!

Good-practice derad interventions ...

- are “(co-) *narrative*” by nature (linguistically)
- work on a “*relational/ inter-personal*” basis
- rely on “*trust, confidentiality, and commitment*”
(however, they do include “challenge and *confrontation*”)

Good-practice derad interventions ...

- mostly build on *group-dynamic*,
- follow an “*open-process, exploratory*” dynamic
- is “*participatory/ empowering*”
- needs to be delivered “from *outside* any statutory institutions”
- by *particularly trained* facilitators

On-line derad interventions ... ?

- Now, how to do this on-line?

Almost impossible !? – Yes and no!

“European Platform of Deradicalizing Narratives”
(EDNA, 2013/14)

Drawing from interdisciplinary narratology and research
on good-practice derad interventions!

For now, three general guidelines only:

- (1) Observe the principles of good-practice derad (“narrative”, “relational”, “open-process”, “trust/ commitment” etc.),
- (2) Put main emphasis on the off-line embedding of ‘the video/ content’
 - the 80-20 principle (80% resources to the off-line)
- (3) Take a different approach altogether:

Don’t say we are doing an internet project – we need interviews, videos!

Rather say, we offer an intervention of hate-crime/ extremism prevention for specific client groups – it also, among other things, includes training in story-telling, (narrative) interviewing and AV media production.

Work closely with existing interventions and practitioners.

Topics / issues that usually come up in narrative, open-process interventions:

Every group has its own issues! But the following issues come up regularly:

- “biographical and social circumstances – life-world issues”,
- “dysfunctional family dynamics”,
- “domestic violence and/or denigration/ deprivation”,
- issues of “group coercion”, “power relations”,
- also issues of “friendship/loyalty” versus “dependency/ subjugation”,
- “gender issues” (manliness, homosexuality),
- matters of “politics or religion” (the personal side of it),
- “fictional media narratives”,
- most important: the violent act narrative, instances of violent perpetration



Thanks for listening !!!

Post-scriptum: How to get best-research?

- Get all different research approaches together.
- “Practitioner-mainstream” all your activities (also “NGO mainstream” them!).