

# The Violent True Believer: Types, Vulnerabilities, Interview Techniques

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# The Violent True Believer

✱ “An individual committed to an ideology or belief system which advances homicide and/or suicide as a legitimate means to further a particular goal.”

- JR Meloy, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, July, 2011

# A Typology of Violent True Believers (FBI BAP, 2002)

- ✦ Unwavering
- ✦ Affiliative
- ✦ Opportunistic
- ✦ Criminal
- ✦ Betrayer
- ✦ Psychotic
- ✦ Fledgling

# 1. Unwavering Violent True Believer

## ☀ Description

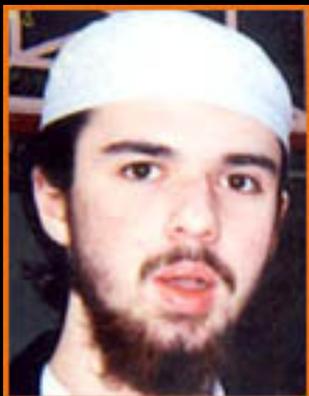
- ☀ Hard core, rigid, deeply held beliefs
- ☀ Absolute belief in righteousness of cause
- ☀ Deep sense of his own perfection
- ☀ Irrational fear of imminent assault
- ☀ Warrior mentality
- ☀ Superior IQ, educated
- ☀ Condemns unbelievers
- ☀ Command and control position



## 2. Affiliative Violent True Believer

### ☀ Description

- Anxious and dependent
- Primarily a follower
- Idealizes others
- “Black sheep” of family, angry at them
- History of depression or suicide
- Grandiose fantasies to join martyrs
- Feels disappointed and damaged by others from his past



# 3. Opportunistic Violent True Believer

## ☀ Description

- Filled with self importance
- Joined to meet selfish needs
- Wealth, power, control, property
- Likes to dominate subordinates
- Appears autonomous
- Needs attention and admiration
- The cause is himself
- May be quite charismatic

# Abubakar Shekau—Boko Haram



# 4. Criminal Violent True Believer

## ☀ Description

- ☀ The “berserker” of the group
- ☀ Criminal history
- ☀ In severe cases, a psychopath
- ☀ Sensation-seeker
- ☀ Likes violence and cruelty
- ☀ Only interested in action, fearless
- ☀ Immediate gratification wanted
- ☀ A loner, no attachments

# Abu Zaraqawi—ISIS father



# 5. Betrayer Violent True Believer

## ☀ Description

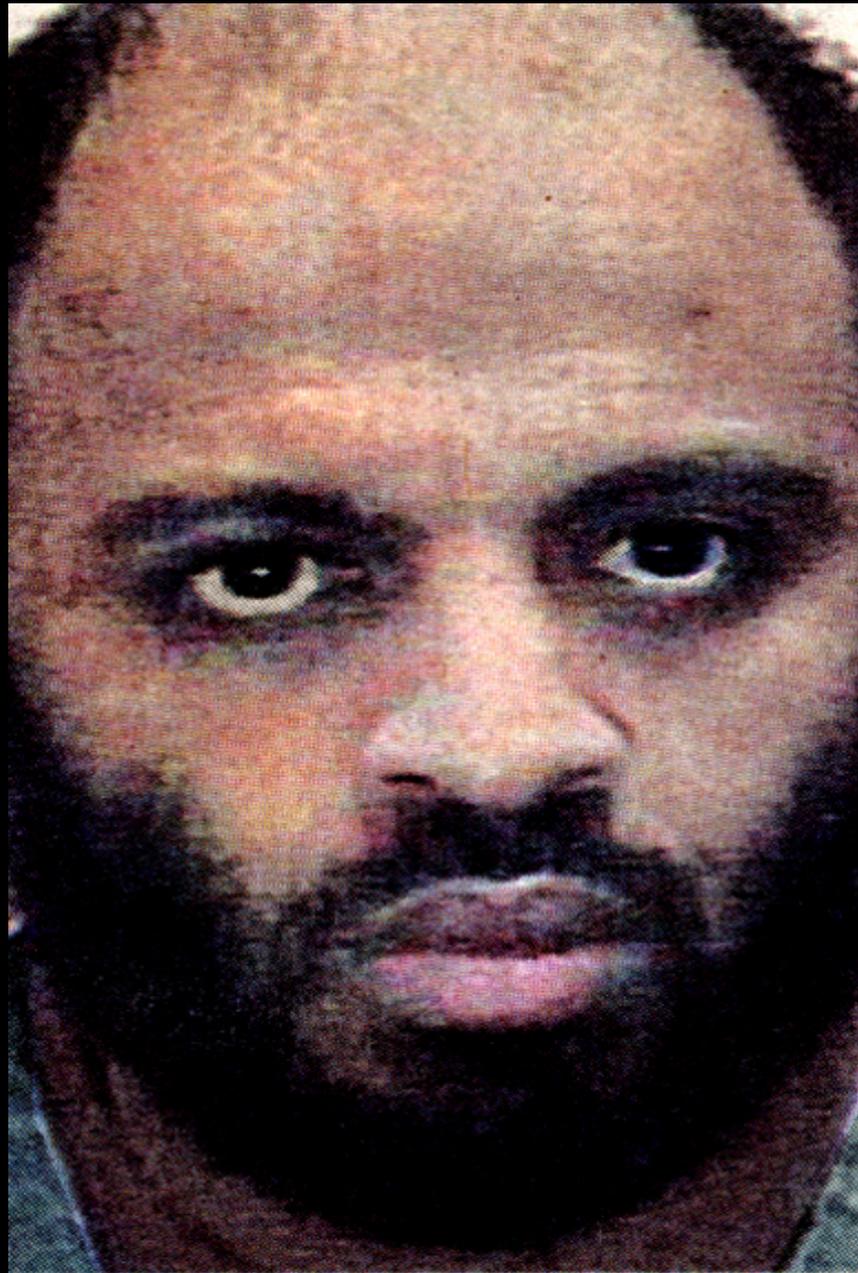
- ☀ Knows whom he hates
- ☀ Wants to retaliate and betray
- ☀ Feels victimized by past events
- ☀ Generally passive but angry
- ☀ Loves duping or conning others
- ☀ Fearful of direct aggression
- ☀ Presents as arrogant
- ☀ Inadequate and low self esteem



# 6. Psychotic Violent True Believer

## ☀ Description

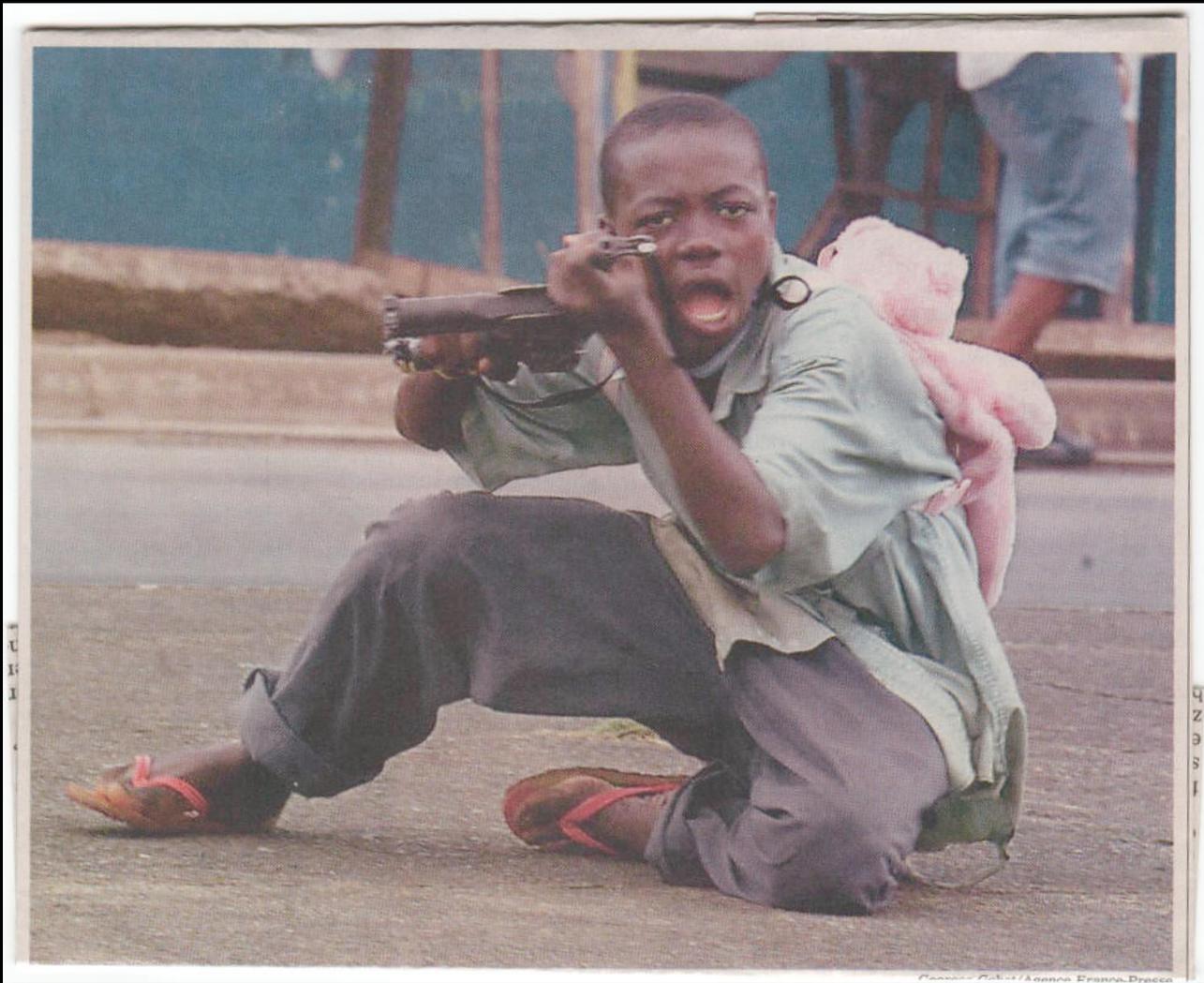
- ☀ Major mental disorder
- ☀ Schizophrenia or bipolar disorder
- ☀ Religion melds with delusion
- ☀ Falls apart when stressed
- ☀ Beliefs become more bizarre
- ☀ May disregard personal hygiene
- ☀ Will be sidelined, marginalized by cell
- ☀ May be exploited by criminal type



# 7. Fledgling Violent True Believer

## ☀ Description

- ☀ Child or adolescent
- ☀ May become one of six other types
- ☀ Immature and inexperienced
- ☀ Indoctrination
  - Learns from parents or teachers
  - Intensive programming or brainwashing
- ☀ Personal suffering
  - Physical abuse or neglect
  - Family suffering through actual oppression



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# Interviewing the Violent True Believer

## ☀ Preparation

### ☀ Selecting the interviewer

- Use the same person to interview across time
- Don't use multiple interviewers
- Think about the reasons for selection
- Transference is always present
- Demographics of interviewer
- Skill level of interviewer
- Experience of interviewer

# Interviewing

## ☀ Preparation

- ☀ Do your homework before the interview
  - Knowledge of culture, society, religion, politics
  - Knowledge of personal data and intelligence
  - Why?
    - Establishes rapport
    - Useful to detect deception or manipulation
    - Information grid may track information

# Interviewing

## ✦ Preparation

### ✦ Define approach and direction

- How many times can he/she be interviewed?
- What is the goal of the first interview?
- What should approach of interviewer be?
- Strategic or tactical information likely false
- Behavioral information
  - Useful to establish baseline
  - Use in subsequent interviews

# Interviewing

## ☀ Preparation

### ☀ Location of the interview

- Transportation route to place of interview
- Safety and security during interview
- Use of props
- Service of food
- Artifacts, symbols, evidence in room
- Do not allow psychological escape
- Cognitive dissonance

# Interviewing

- ✦ Placement Before and After Interview
  - ✦ All of us are hard-wired to bond
  - ✦ Traumatic bonding (“Stockholm Syndrome”)
  - ✦ Isolation useful to increase attachment
  - ✦ Self-disclosure: true or false?
  - ✦ Awareness of interviewer’s attachment
  - ✦ Cross-talk monitoring

# Interviewing

## ✦ Establishing Rapport

- Smile
- Listen carefully
- Find something in common
- Mirror the interviewee, test it
- Avoid blunders
- Read Advanced Interviewing Techniques by Jack Shafer and Joe Navarro
- Read The Black Banners by Ali Soufan

# Interviewing

## ★ The Line of Questioning

- ★ Patience and flexibility
- ★ 2-3 hour increments
- ★ Avoid predictability
- ★ Do not terminate early due to resistance
- ★ Confessions vs. admissions
- ★ Open-ended and nonjudgmental Qs
- ★ Do not challenge religion or beliefs

# Interviewing

- ★ The Line of Questioning (cont'd)
  - “Tell me more”—show admiration
  - Terrorist vs. soldier
  - Repeat questioning useful
  - Three step approach
    - Create a doubt about his beliefs
    - Offer a potential reward for cooperation
    - Ask God (Allah) for guidance of the interview and the interviewer and interviewee as a team

# Interviewing

## ☀ Emotion

- Always present and influences thinking
- Stress reactions: freeze, flight, fight, appease
- Universal emotions: happiness, fear, anger, disgust, sadness, and distress
- Rules of display differ among cultures
- Don't react to emotional tirades
- Maintain calmness and control

# Interviewing

## ✦ Calibration

- ✦ Measurement of typical behavior
- ✦ When lying or telling the truth
- ✦ Asking control questions
- ✦ Individual differences abound
- ✦ Look for deviating behavior when individual lies

# Interviewing

## ☀ Deception and Manipulation

- ☀ No absolute, infallible way to detect
- ☀ Emotion is not a determinant of lying
- ☀ Slips of the tongue and tirades
- ☀ Know behavioral clues to deceit
- ☀ Understand your own biases
  - Eg, confirmatory, availability
- ☀ Most effective means are comparing facts across multiple sources of data

# Interviewing

- ✦ Deception and Manipulation (cont'd)
  - ✦ Most common mistake: being misled by the special skill you think you possess to detect lying and deceit.

# Interviewing

- ✦ Countermeasures
- ✦ Specific cultural issues
- ✦ Continuity of data collection
- ✦ Teamwork
  - ✦ “Almighty God says, ‘And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which Allah stretches out for you, and be not divided among yourselves.’”

# Interview Approaches to the Seven Subtypes

## ★ Unwavering True Believer

- Adapt a student's stance toward subject
- Tolerate tirades and look for admissions
- Compliments need to be done carefully
- Acknowledge cultural differences
- Confrontation and threat will usually not work
- The most difficult type to interview

# Interview Approaches

## ★ Affiliative True Believer

- Warm, affectionate, yet dominant approach
- Older male interviewer familiar with family dynamics and culture of subject
- Consistently visit with subject to establish a bond
- Beliefs are secondary to desire to be attached to others and/or powerful group

# Interview Approaches

## ★ Opportunistic True Believer

- Use flattery in a direct way
- He needs admiration and attention
- Will be sullen and angry when “narcissistic” supplies are not provided
- Identify his unmet desires: money, self-importance, power, control, an audience
- May respond to direct offers

# Interview Approaches

## ★ Criminal True Believer

- ★ Short term gratification the key: money, drugs, excitement, power, sex
- ★ Most dangerous of all types for affective (reactive) violence during interview
- ★ Don't spend time trying to bond
- ★ Will be physical and muscular
- ★ Positive rewards that focus on creature comforts

# Interview Approaches

## ☀ Betrayal True Believer

- Look for ways to admire him, and mirror his passive-aggressive style
- Empathize with his belief that others have betrayed and wounded him in the past
- Be careful to not injure his self-esteem
- Help him plan a satisfying way to screw those who betrayed him
- Be wary of his manipulations of interview

# Interview Approaches

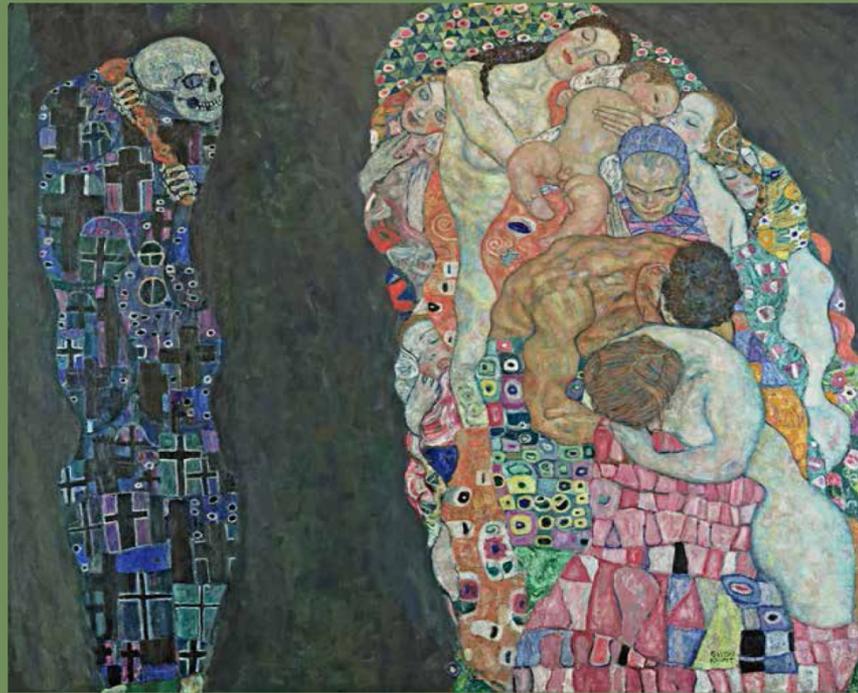
## ★ Psychotic True Believer

- He yearns for safety from exploitation
- Isolate from others and psychiatrically treat
- Gratitude will contribute to bonding
- Has many fears, including his fear of others, his inability to cope with moderate stress, and his uncontrollable thoughts, feelings, and perceptions

# Interview Approaches

## ★ Fledgling True Believer

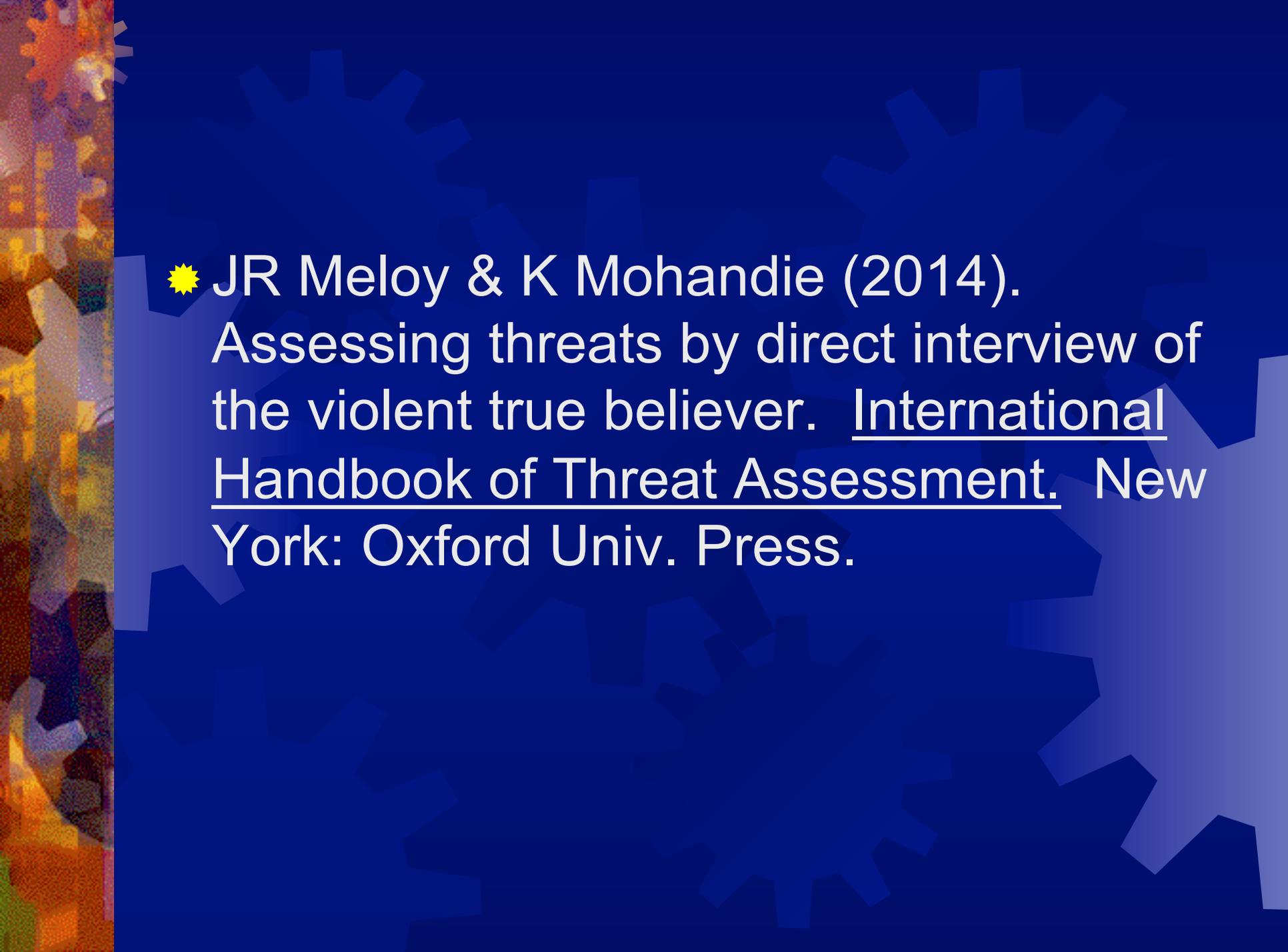
- Still a child or adolescent despite beliefs
- Needs safety, security, stimulation, love, and attention
- May be impulsive and grandiose
- May harbor private fantasies of heroism
- Needs consistent supervision, attention, and control from a caring adult



# INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF THREAT ASSESSMENT

EDITED BY **J. REID MELOY** AND **JENS HOFFMANN**

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- The background is a dark blue gradient with several large, semi-transparent gear icons scattered across it. On the left side, there is a vertical strip with a colorful, abstract pattern of gears in shades of orange, yellow, and brown. A small yellow starburst icon is positioned to the left of the first line of text.
- ★ JR Meloy & K Mohandie (2014).  
Assessing threats by direct interview of  
the violent true believer. International  
Handbook of Threat Assessment. New  
York: Oxford Univ. Press.



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