Rise and kill first: extreme overvalued beliefs, archetypes, and the devolution of identity

J. Reid Meloy PhD and Tahir Rahman MD

Abstract

Four out of five targeted attacks, including terrorism events, are preceded by a fixation in the attacker, an intense preoccupation with a person or a cause. Such pathological fixations are fueled by obsessions, delusions, or most commonly, *extreme overvalued beliefs.* The authors define the latter term, researched and refined from the original work of the 19th century German psychiatrist Carl Wernicke; and focus on their manifestation in acts of terrorism with two simplistic, binary, and absolute self-identities: that of a *Victim* and that of a *Warrior.* These identifications occur in sequence, first as a Victim and then as a Warrior, and are supported by archetypal undercurrents that appear collective and universal in human psychology. However, in this context the Warrior archetype manifesting as a "pseudocommando" becomes deviant and dangerous, since noncombatants are targeted. The risk assessment of these devolving identifications is embedded in the TRAP-18, a structured professional judgement instrument developed by the first author. Research has demonstrated that sequential emergence of these identities correlates strongly with terrorism and underscores their importance in mitigating the risk of targeted violence, whether from an extremist group or lone actor. Terrorism cases serve to illustrate these phenomena, including the mass

shooter Nidal Hasan, the bomber Timothy McVeigh, and the assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. These cases highlight how fixations, extreme overvalued beliefs, and the transformation into a Warrior identity are central to the progression toward violence in targeted terrorist attacks.

Acknowledgments

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"All the gods, all the heavens, all the hells are within you."

Joseph Campbell

Terrorism is politically motivated violence directed toward noncombatants. Most acts of terrorism are targeted or intended violence, and such actors progress along a pathway to violence (Fein et al., 1995) which has been studied in depth and detail over the past half century (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2014, 2021). Among the pre-offense warning behaviors for such attacks is pathological fixation, which is defined as "any behavior that indicates a preoccupation with a person or a cause that is typically accompanied by social and occupational deterioration" (Meloy et al., 2012, p. 265). Cumulative research indicates that fixation is present in 80% of targeted attack cases, including cases primarily motivated by ideology (Meloy & Rahman, 2020).

Fixation, in turn, is driven by one or more cognitive-affective drivers, including obsessions, delusions, and extreme overvalued beliefs (Meloy & Rahman, 2020). The first two are well known to clinicians, but for the nonclinical reader, obsessions are *unwanted*, *intrusive* thoughts that often heighten anxiety and distress; while delusions are fixed, false, and often bizarre beliefs signaling the presence of a psychosis which can come in many forms, ranging from mental disorders such as schizophrenia, to drug-induced conditions such as amphetamine-induced psychosis, to metabolic disorders such as Wilson's disease. Delusions are idiosyncratic, not shared by others, and usually accompanied by other signs of mental illness. Both obsessions and delusions are medically treatable.

The third cognitive-affective driver of fixation—and most common among terrorists--are extreme overvalued beliefs. Such beliefs are not medical conditions, but are *shared by others* in a person's cultural, religious, or subcultural group. The beliefs are often relished, amplified, and defended by the possessor of the belief. Over time, such beliefs grow more dominant, more refined, and more resistant to challenge. The individual has an intense emotional commitment to the belief and may carry out violent behavior in its service. The linguistic form of an extreme overvalued belief is simplistic, binary and absolute, demonstrating a *pathostability*, in contrast to the sociocultural *pathoplasticity* of the content of the belief (Meloy & Rahman, 2020; Rahman, 2018; Rahman, Xiong et al., 2018; Rahman et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2020; Rahman & Abugel, 2024).[1]

Extreme overvalued beliefs are deeply infused with confirmation bias: evidence contrary to the belief is minimized, dismissed, derogated, denied or completely disbelieved (Kahneman, 2011).   In popular parlance, data which challenge an extreme overvalued belief are considered "fake news." In fact, most ideologies are replete with extreme overvalued beliefs, and do not yield to contrary evidence, critical thinking, or the scientific method.   Professions that rely on empirical data, such as journalism, intelligence, law enforcement, and science are casually dismissed by adherents of these beliefs. The more fundamentalist or extreme the ideology becomes, the more suffused it is with extreme overvalued beliefs as tenets that cannot, should not, and will

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[1] We do not claim that all terrorists are motivated by extreme overvalued beliefs, nor that all individuals with extreme overvalued beliefs will commit an act of terrorism.   However, the pathostability of form and the pathoplasticity of content would strongly suggest that such beliefs transcend the boundaries of any one particular ideology or terrorist group.

not be questioned. The fate of an apostate or heretic is punishment, excommunication, or even death, underscoring the rigidity and danger of such belief systems.

> A lapsed 17th century Polish Jesuit named Casimir Liszinski wrote a secret treatise proposing that it was humans who created God rather than the other way around…Liszinski's crime was heresy—the contradicting of God's word. Heresy comes from the classical Greek word *haireomai*, "to choose," and has been one of humanity's most savagely punished crimes. As the bishop of Kyiv noted with satisfaction, he was to have his tongue torn out with red hot tongs for having offended God, his hands roasted slowly at a fire for having written against God, and then he was to be burned alive and his ashes shot out of a cannon. The punishment was cruel even by church standards of the day, and a royal commutation reduced it to mere "beheading and burning" (Junger, 2024, p. 126).

Four hundred years later, another apostate was threatened with hanging. The January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol was punctuated by the presence of a gallows constructed
early that morning by rioters—evoking the "day of the rope" imagery from the *Turner Diaries,* a white supremacist novel that portrays the execution of those deemed traitors to a militant anti-government cause (Pierce, 1978). The refusal of Vice President Mike Pence to overturn the certification of the 2020 election results—thus denying Donald Trump a second term--was met with chants of "hang Mike Pence."   This outcry

reflected the fate prescribed to all "apostates" who betray their cause, first in line before the novel's depictions of the hanging of Jews and people of color.

But what of the history of extreme overvalued beliefs? The German neuropsychiatrist Carl Wernicke (1906) was the first to describe "overvalued idea." Similar to the French term, "idee fixe," which originated at the beginning of the nineteenth century in connection with monomania (Goldstein, 2002), Wernicke argued that it was possible for any belief to become overvalued, particularly when reinforced by intense emotional experiences. These experiences often initiate or amplify the belief over time, leading to its pathological entrenchment.

For instance, a subject with a personal grievance—usually composed of loss, humiliation, anger and blame—who feels angry and alienated from society, might become an anti-abortionist. Such behavior might help to initially decrease his anxiety and depression as his new vicarious identification with the unborn becomes a source of clarification and inspiration; he finds those who believe as he does on the internet a source of community and likemindedness, discovering both those he loves (other true believers), and those he hates (the abortion clinics and their doctors). Over time this preoccupation becomes a new and dark self-identity, and his sense of victimization devolves into an overvalued belief with an intense emotional fervor that he is now a soldier or warrior for his particular cause, substantially increasing his risk of targeted violence (Meloy et al., 2015).

On Nov. 27, 2015, Robert Lewis Dear Jr., a 57 year old male, carried out a mass shooting at a Planned Parenthood Clinic in Colorado Springs, Colorado, killing three and injuring nine individuals. Dear was subsequently arrested after a five hour standoff.

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The *New York Times* reported that a "number of people who knew Mr. Dear said he was a staunch abortion opponent," that one "person who spoke with him extensively about his religious views said Mr. Dear had praised people who attacked abortion providers, saying they were doing 'God's work,'" and that in "2009, Mr. Dear described as 'heroes' members of the Army of God, a loosely organized group of anti-abortion extremists that has claimed responsibility for a number of killings and bombings" (Faucett, 2015). Appearing in court to be arraigned, Dear interrupted the proceedings multiple times, shouting "I am guilty, there is no trial. I'm a warrior for the babies"[2] (Wagner, 2015). One woman reported, "He believed he was doing God's will, and I'm sure he probably wanted to die in the process of carrying out what I'm sure he thought was right" (Faucett, 2015).

Dear's background included multiple criminal offenses, multiple marriages, domestic violence, drug abuse, an unstable work history, impoverished income, and a fervent religious commitment to Christian apocalypticism. Dear remains hospitalized in federal custody, continuously found incompetent to stand trial since the mass murder (T. Gray, personal communication, December, 2024).

There are multiple pre-offense behaviors for acts of terrorism, theorized and empirically validated in the Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18; Meloy, 2017; Allely & Wicks, 2022), a structured professional judgment instrument developed by the first author.[3] The TRAP-18 consists of two main components: eight

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[2] Note the simplistic, binary, and absolute construction of this last sentence. The pathoplasticity when focusing on content (great variations according to the subculture) and pathostability when focusing on form (simplistic, binary, and absolute) are illustrative.

[3] There are several other assessment instruments available for use in counterterrorism work, such as the VERA and ERG 22+, but none have the demonstrated and published independent scientific validity of the TRAP-18.

proximal warning behaviors—pathway, fixation, identification, novel aggression, energy burst, leakage, last resort, and direct threat—and ten distal characteristics which, unlike the proximal warning behaviors, do not predict an attack. The distal characteristics instead provide fertile ground for the motivation and movement of some individuals to preparation and planning for an attack.

In this chapter, we elaborate on the two risk indicators within the TRAP-18 that focus upon identification, or the generation of a new self-identity: the distal characteristic of Personal Grievance and Moral Outrage, and the proximal warning behavior of Identification. The TRAP-18 (Meloy, 2017) defines the distal characteristic of Personal Grievance and Moral Outrage as follows:

> The joining of both personal life experience and particular historical, religious, or political events. Personal grievance is often defined by a major loss in love or work, feelings of anger and humiliation, and the blaming of others. Moral outrage is typically a vicarious identification with a group which has suffered, even though the terrorist usually has not experienced the same suffering (p.26).

The proximal warning behavior of Identification is defined as follows:

> A psychological desire to be a "pseudocommando" (Dietz, 1986); have a "warrior mentality" (Hempel,

Meloy & Richards, 1999); closely associate with weapons

or other military or law enforcement paraphernalia;

identify with previous attackers or assassins;

or identify oneself as an agent to advance a particular

cause or belief system (p. 15).

We embed these two devolving sequential identities within the Jungian concept of the archetypes, specifically the progression from Victim to Warrior and its variants (Warrior, Hero, Martyr, Soldier, Savoir: WHMSS). While archetypical in nature, this manifestation is a deviant and dangerous expression given the targeting of innocents.

Jung described archetypes as fundamental, universal patterns embedded within the human psyche, shaped by intergenerational experiences across history. He wrote, "There are as many archetypes as there are typical situations in life. Endless repetition has engraved these experiences into our psychic constitution, not in the form of images filled with content, but at first only as forms without content, representing merely the possibility of a certain type of perception and action" (Jung, 1979, p. 99).   He further elaborated, writing, "Archetypes are the riverbeds which dry up when then water deserts them, but which it can find again at any time. An archetype is like an old water course along which the water of life has flowed for centuries, digging a deep channel for itself. The longer it has flowed in the channel the more likely it is that sooner or later the water will return to its old bed" (Jung, 1981, p. 395). Throughout history warriors have been celebrated as heroes or symbols of strength, honor, outlaws, sacrifice, and martyrdom. However, in the terrorism context, there is often an inflated and shadow aspect to the

archetype; it may remain tethered to reality, but it is distorted and suffused with projections onto and into those who are perceived as the "enemy" that pose an imminent, existential threat to the terrorist—and therefore must be eradicated. More often than not, the targets are unarmed civilians. To illustrate this framework, we analyze three terrorist attackers, Nidal Hasan, Timothy McVeigh and Lee Harvey Oswald.

Nidal Hasan: the Victim Archetype

On November 5, 2009, Army Major and psychiatrist Nidal Hasan killed 13 and injured 32 of his fellow soldiers who were unarmed at the time. As we shall see, his worldview became increasingly framed by a narrative of the Victim archetype-- rooted in a collective identity, imbued with religious extreme overvalued beliefs and personal loss. A collective victim identity arises when members of a group identify with a shared experience of harm, whether real, perceived, historical, or ongoing. This can include colonization, war, discrimination, or systemic inequality. Even when an individual has not personally experienced harm, the collective narrative of victimhood becomes part of their identity. For Hasan's case, his perception that Islam and Muslims worldwide were being attacked by Western forces led him to adopt the identity of a victim—not as an individual, but as part of the global Islamic community.

An in-depth report by Poppe (2018) entitled, "Nidal Hasan: A Case Study in Lone-Actor Terrorism," was generated based on primary source documents as well as

collateral sources, and ultimately, an interview with Hasan himself. Her conclusion is that Hasan's actions were rooted in his religious beliefs. He was born in Arlington County, Virginia and his parents emigrated from the West Bank before he was born. The family was Muslim, but not devoutly religious. This all changed after Hasan's mother died from a prolonged cancer diagnosis. He began to worry about her soul in the afterlife. His mother had started to become more religious before her death and Hasan worried about her ability to attain a place in Paradise. He believed that his mother would be condemned to hell because his parents owned a store which sold alcohol-- forbidden in Islam. This made her a victim of American culture which demoted her from reaching heaven. The fear of this terrible fate could be erased by performing pious actions— including the killing of perceived enemies of Islam. He relished radical Islamic scholars who became martyrs, like Sayyid Qutb, and sermons of the radical Anwar al-Awlaki, a US citizen living in Yemen. Such sermons often encouraged fear and feelings of victimhood.

During his psychiatry residency training, his focus on religion intensified to the point that he decided to stop socializing and put all his energy into religious studies. He would constantly bring up religion in conversations and believed in the legitimacy of suicide bombers. He believed that Sharia law transcended the U.S. Constitution and that suicide bombers were rewarded with 72 virgins in heaven. He eventually began to accept that he needed to do something to help the resistance efforts of his Muslim brothers. Despite never being in an actual war zone himself, Hasan gave a presentation during his psychiatric residency entitled, "Why the War on Terror is a War on Islam." He believed that the U.S. military was engaged in an unjust war. It is clear from Poppe's

analysis that Hasan shared a radical ideology with others and that he relished, amplified and defended those beliefs (Rahman & Abugel, 2024). The archetype of Victimhood applies vicariously to him because despite the fact that neither he nor his family were victims of any war, he believed that the U.S. was at war with Islam, and thus him (Post et al., 2009). He met the "Personal Grievance and Moral Outrage" distal characteristic of the TRAP-18 (Meloy & Genzman, 2016).

In this case, the Victim archetype (Wilkinson, 1996) manifested as a lens through which Hasan interpreted personal tragedy, radical ideological fixation, and a devolving self- identity as part of a global conflict. Poppe's analysis reveals that Hasan's self-perception as a victim was central to his radicalization, ultimately shaping his identity and actions in ways that are tragically emblematic of the destructive power of this archetype when left unchecked and denied by others close to him. The Victim archetype further devolved into a self-identity, or identification as a Warrior or Soldier for the cause of Islam: in the months prior to the 2009 mass murder upon arrival at Ft. Hood in Texas, Hasan passed out business cards wherein he identified himself not as a Major in the U.S. Army, but as SoA, a Soldier of Allah (Meloy & Genzman, 2016). In his subsequent criminal trial, his vicarious identification with the perceived aggression by the United States against Islam was further evident in his attempts to enter a "defense of others" plea. He identified the "others" as his brothers the Taliban, men whom he had never met. The military tribunal rejected this defense.

Timothy McVeigh: The Warrior-Hero-Soldier Archetype

On April 19, 1995, Timothy McVeigh carried out a mass attack using an ammonium nitrate fertilizer and nitromethane truck bomb, killing 168 men, women, and children in the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. It remains the singular domestic terrorism event in the history of the United States. McVeigh was executed by lethal injection following his federal sentence of death on June 11, 2001, exactly three months before 9/11.

McVeigh had served with distinction in the U.S. Army, and received the Bronze Star for his performance in combat during Operation Desert Storm. He had enlisted as a young man, born and raised in Upstate New York, an avid hunter and firearms enthusiast throughout his adolescence. The fantasy of becoming a soldier was long held by McVeigh, even communicating to his younger sister, Jennifer, that he wanted to be the "ultimate warrior."[4] Despite his success in combat in the U.S. military, McVeigh failed the selection process at Ft. Bragg to become a Green Beret, and returned to Ft. Riley in Kansas to finish out his military career, both disillusioned and humiliated. He was a soldier adrift, yet the fantasy as a Warrior remained.   McVeigh became more itinerant, traveling throughout the Midwest and Southwest, selling military and other paraphernalia at gun shows, including the *Turner Diaries*, and intermittently staying with his eventual co-conspirators, Terry Nichols and Michael Fortier.

In the fall of 1992 and spring of 1993, moreover, his fantasy was reignited and magnified by two events: Randy Weaver, an ex-special forces soldier and his family were confronted by federal agents in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, attempting to serve a warrant,

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[4] First author's case file. Dr. Meloy was retained by the US Attorney General and served as a consulting expert in the trials of both McVeigh and his co-conspirator, Terry Nichols. Again, notice the simplistic, binary, and absolute phrase, "the ultimate warrior."

resulting in gunfights that caused the death of Weaver's wife and son, and a federal

agent; and six months later a siege involving the Branch Davidian compound and

federal agents in Waco, Texas ended with a fiery conflagration that claimed the lives of

77 men, women, and children. These two catastrophes crystallized the anti-government

"Patriot" movement in the United States at the time, and provided for McVeigh an

explicit cause for which he could once again activate as a soldier—but this time against

his own government. This militant right wing movement burgeoned, and with it

McVeigh's belief that the USG was an occupying force within his own country,

warranting both a retaliatory strike for the deaths of citizens and a pre-emptive attack

against the enemy within.

The proximal warning behavior of Identification often manifests in "identity

claims" (Gosling, 2009) that adorn the subject before and even during his terrorist attack

(Meloy et al., 2015). McVeigh idolized the U.S. founding fathers, in particular Thomas

Jefferson, and envisioned himself as "the first hero of the second American Revolution"

(first author's case file). The grandiosity of his fantasy was evident on the t-shirt he

wore *during* the bombing, with a quotation from Jefferson himself: "the tree of liberty

must from time to time be replenished with the blood of patriots and tyrants." The full

flowering of McVeigh's pathological narcissism, buttressed by the archetypes of both

Warrior and Hero, culminated in the Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995, a minor

holiday called Patriot's Day, but one with enormous significance for the anti-government

militias in the United States: the date in 1775 when the first shots were fired at

Lexington and Concord which began the American Revolution.

Here are McVeigh's own words explaining his conscious motivation in an authenticated letter he sent two months before his execution to *Fox News*:

April 26, 2001 Letter to *Fox News*

I chose to bomb a federal building because such an action served more purposes than other options. Foremost, the bombing was a retaliatory strike; a counter attack, for the cumulative raids (and subsequent violence and damage) that federal agents had participated in over the preceding years (including, but not limited to, Waco.) From the formation of such units as the FBI's "Hostage Rescue" and other assault teams amongst federal agencies during the '80's; culminating in the Waco incident, federal actions grew increasingly militaristic and violent, to the point where at Waco, our government - like the Chinese - was deploying tanks against its own citizens. Knowledge of these multiple and ever-more aggressive raids across the country constituted an identifiable pattern of conduct within and by the federal government and amongst its various agencies. For all intents and purposes, federal agents had become "soldiers" (using military training, tactics, techniques, equipment, language, dress, organization, and mindset) and they were escalating their behavior. Therefore, this bombing was also meant as a pre-emptive (or pro-active) strike against these forces and their command and control centers within the federal building. When an aggressor force continually launches attacks from a particular base of operation, it is sound military strategy to take the fight to the enemy.

Additionally, borrowing a page from U.S. foreign policy, I decided to send a message to a government that was becoming increasingly hostile, by bombing a government building and the government employees within that building who represent that government. Bombing the Murrah Federal Building was morally and strategically equivalent to the U.S. hitting a government building in Serbia, Iraq, or other nations. Based on observations of the policies of my own government, I viewed this action as an acceptable option. From this perspective, what occurred in Oklahoma City was no different than what Americans rain on the heads of others all the time, and subsequently, my mindset was and is one of clinical detachment. (The bombing of the Murrah building was not personal, no more than when Air Force, Army, Navy, or Marine personnel bomb or launch cruise missiles against government installations and their personnel.)

After the bombing, McVeigh was surprised and disappointed that the American people did not rise up against their government (Michel & Herbeck, 2001).

Research linking the Victim and Warrior Identifications

Anecdotal cases are intriguing, but is there research that indicates the devolution of the self-identity hypothesis advanced in this chapter, in particular its relationship to a terrorist attack? Research that validates this hypothesis is twofold: first, studies have demonstrated that Victim self-identity, as defined by the Personal Grievance and Moral Outrage distal characteristic of the TRAP-18, precedes any proximal warning behavior, including Identification as a Warrior, Hero, Martyr, Soldier or Savior (WHMSS) in the risk

assessment of a terrorist attack; and second, studies have demonstrated that the Warrior-Hero self-identity, as defined by the proximal warning behavior of Identification in the TRAP-18, is quite often a correlate of a terrorist attack, as well as postdictive of an attack in some studies.

First, Meloy, Goodwill, Clemmow and Gill (2021) conducted a time sequence analysis of 125 terrorist attackers in North America and Europe utilizing the TRAP-18. This is a statistical method that allows for the organization of the eighteen risk indicators in a temporal relationship with one another. Personal Grievance and Moral Outrage, theorized as a distal characteristic (Meloy, 2017) was, in fact, found to precede all of the proximal warning behaviors, including Identification, in this sample. Time sequencing studies are rarely done, but have been found to closely correlate with operational management of high risk individuals. As Taylor et al. (2008) wrote, "Criminal acts and investigative decisions occur not as variables to be counted but as events to be understood within a larger sequence of events" (p. 54).

Likewise, another study (Goodwill & Meloy, 2019) using a different sample of North American terrorists, found through multidimensional scaling analysis that distal characteristics clustered further away from attack behavior than proximal warning behaviors. Such an analysis quantitatively plotted in two dimensional space the TRAP-18 indicators and their relationship to both the subjects and their terrorist attacks in a sample of both attackers and nonattackers (N=56).

Second, multiple studies have provided validation for the hypothesis concerning the devolution of self-identity in a subject who subsequently activates and carries out a terrorist attack. This hypothesis has been tested by comparing attackers and

nonattackers for TRAP-18 indicators that differentiated the two groups. The majority of studies that have used this comparative model have found that attackers were significantly more likely to show Identification as a proximal warning behavior, that is, self-identity as a warrior for a cause, than the nonattackers. The differences showed moderate to large effect sizes. These findings occurred in a variety of targeted attacker samples, including Sovereign Citizens in the United States (Challacombe & Lucas, 2018; Vargen & Challacombe, 2023); school shooters in Germany (Meloy et al., 2014); German prisoners (King et al., 2018); attackers of the U.S. Capitol on Jan 6, 2021 (Challacombe & Patrick, 2022); and North American lone actor terrorists (Meloy et al., 2019).

There Is also a lengthy clinical history in the psychoanalytic literature concerning identification with the aggressor, beginning with the work of Ferenczi (1928) and A. Freud (1936).   The theory that is advanced is that actual victimization is managed through unconscious identification with the victimizer, or aggressor, allowing interpersonal movement from a position of fearful submission to a position of safety through dominance of others, either in the present or in future relationships. This formulation is seen in clinical work with traumatized victims, and in the context of our hypothesis concerning the devolution of self-identity from Victim to Warrior (WHMSS), is an important clinical correlation (Meloy, 2018; Meloy et al., 2015).   Such identification may be further burnished by an association with a terrorist group or ideology and a collective identification with other true believers. This pathologically narcissistic inflation may have elements of both fantasy and reality.
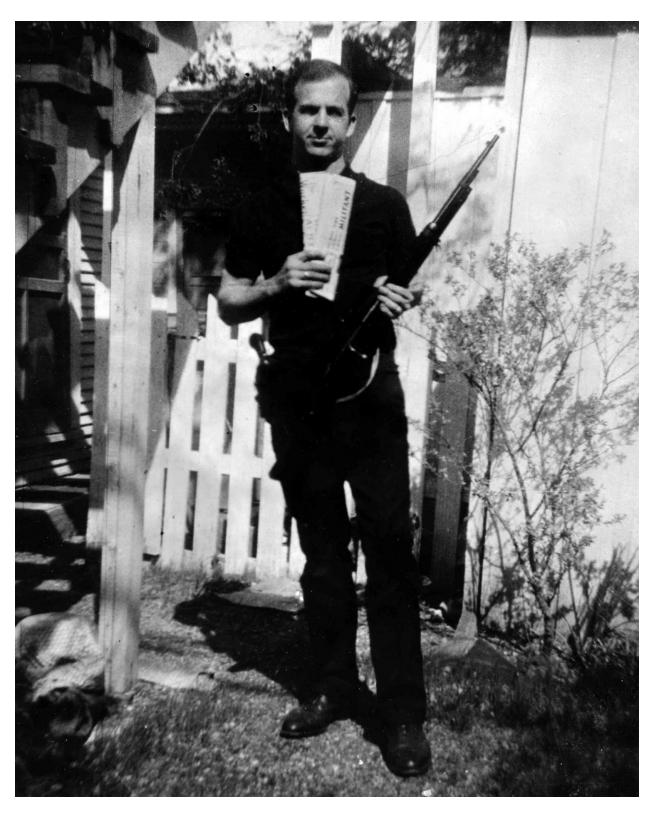
Lee Harvey Oswald: A Descent into Infamy

Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin of President John F. Kennedy, remains one of the most analyzed figures in American history. Oswald's self-identity as a Victim, and then his fantasy of becoming a Soldier and Hero, are archetypal undercurrents manifest in his self-perception as a political revolutionary and ideological warrior. He was clearly a lone actor terrorist.

Oswald's life was characterized by a very unstable personal, academic, military, and work history. He was truly a victim. He was born to an emotionally unstable mother and an absent father, attended 11 different schools, was chronically truant, eventually placed in a boarding school given the failure of his mother to be able to control him, and warranted a formal mental health evaluation as an adolescent. At 17 he enlisted in the US Marines, but was court martialed. He had massive trouble building a successful career. He moved to Russia with the idealized fantasy of being welcomed as a hero, but was rejected by the KGB and attempted suicide. Returning to the U.S. he tried to assassinate General Edwin Walker in April, 1963, a staunch anti-communist. He missed. Marina his Russian wife insisted that they move to New Orleans. There, he contrived a doomed plan to hijack a plane to Cuba that was never attempted. He then tried to defect to Russia once more by traveling to the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City. He eventually moved back to Dallas and was briefly employed at the Texas Book Depository before the assassination (Posner, 1994; Bugliosi, 2007; Rahman & Abugel, 2024).

The famous backyard photograph of Lee Harvey Oswald holding a rifle, with a pistol on his hip and communist literature in his other hand, is a critical piece of visual and symbolic evidence in understanding his extreme overvalued beliefs and motivations. He had asked his wife Marina to photograph him and then made multiple prints at the photo shop where he briefly worked. The iconic firearms symbolize power and resistance. The magazines were more than just reading material for Oswald; they were tools through which he constructed and reinforced his identity as a victim of societal and systemic forces. He relished the ideology espoused in *The Militant* and *The Worker,* both communist magazines advancing a clear declaration of his political affiliations. They served to align him with extreme leftist, Marxist and anti-capitalist ideologies, reinforcing his self-identity as a heroic revolutionary (Rahman & Abugel, 2024).

Photo 1: Lee Harvey Oswald prior to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. (Photo in the public domain taken by his wife Marina).

Lee Harvey Oswald's rifle was a 6.5×52 mm Carcano Model 91/38 bolt-action

rifle. This Italian-made firearm was purchased by Oswald under the alias "A. Hidell" via

mail order in March, 1963 for $19.95, including a scope. With this rifle, Oswald saw

himself as a militant actor, armed and ready to use violence against those he viewed as

his ideological enemies, specifically fascists and imperialists. Oswald's stance in the

photo is confident, almost defiant and smug. This reflects his expression of the Hero

archetype, positioning himself as a soldier fighting for his extreme overvalued beliefs.

Oswald's wife, Marina, inscribed "Hunter of Fascists, Ha Ha Ha" in Russian on the back

of one of the prints of this photograph, mocking him. On the morning of the

assassination, November 22, 1963, Oswald left his wedding band in a cup on the

dresser in his wife Marina's room at Ruth Paine's home, where she was staying with

their children. They had argued over whether he could move back in with them.

Leaving his wedding ring behind is an example of Last Resort proximal warning

behavior, another indicator in the TRAP-18 defined as a violent action/time imperative:

the marriage was over, his family and marital ties were severed, and he could now walk

into history.   He had already constructed a sniper's nest in the School Book Depository,

and was now untethered from family responsibility—he could finally utilize his training

as a U.S. Marine and his expert marksmanship.

　　　The inscription and photo also represent his perceived victimization not only by

his wife, but by broader societal systems, such as capitalism or American imperialism,

which he equated with fascism. By branding himself a "hunter of fascists," Oswald

embraced the identity of an active combatant. This aligns with his belief that he was part

of a moral and ideological war, casting himself as a hero in his personal narrative

(Bugliosi, 2007; Posner, 1994; Rahman & Abugel, 2024). Much of Lee Harvey Oswald's

life was defined by advocating for Leftist causes, such as the common worker, often

seen as exploited by the wealthy and powerful. He relished and amplified those beliefs, which grew more resilient and resistant to challenge. Oswald harbored a grievance against both the American and Soviet systems. Oswald's beliefs were refined over time to form his own grandiose philosophy, selectively assembled from various Leftist sources. Norman Mailer in his epic book, *Oswald's Tale*, summarized Oswald the assassin's overvalued fixations, "he was above Capitalism, he was above Communism. Both! He had, as he would have seen it, a superior dedication, and the potential of a man like Lenin" (Mailer, 2007, p. 758). He believed he was destined to change the course of history, and may have done so.

Oswald's story is thus a tragic fusion of personal instability, ideological radicalization, and an unrelenting desire to assert significance in a world he felt had victimized him. From a Jungian perspective, Oswald's inflation led to a dangerous loss of balance, as his ego became consumed by his archetypal identification. This psychological dynamic transformed his sense of victimhood—rooted in personal and societal grievances—into a misguided narrative of Warrior-Hero-Martyr-Soldier-Savior (WHMSS). Tragically, in seeking to validate his inflated self-image, Oswald ensured his place in history, not as a hero but as a symbol of destruction and infamy.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to demonstrate the relationship between extreme overvalued beliefs and the movement from self-identity as a Victim to identification as a Warrior-Hero-Martyr-Soldier-Savior (WHMSS) for a particular cause

or ideology. We have further described the collective archetypes associated with such identities, and presented cases to illustrate the means by which such identities can become dangerously perverse in the context of terrorism and its violence, by definition, directed toward noncombatants. We have provided empirical validation of our hypothesis through studies conducted utilizing the TRAP-18 risk assessment instrument.

Archetypes, although rarely discussed within the terrorism literature (Johnson, 2019), can be employed to analyze both the acts and the manifestos of such targeted attackers. These archetypes often include figures like the "soldier, hero or warrior" (who may perceive themselves as fighting a righteous cause), the "enemy" (necessarily demonized or dehumanized), and the "victim" (those perceived as oppressed or wronged).   The archetypes provide guidance for identifying, assessing, and managing the risk of such individuals in four ways:

Identity Construction: Terrorist manifestos often rely on the creation of strong "us vs. them" narratives, wherein "them" are characterized as posing an imminent, existential threat to "us" and hostile action must be taken (Berger, 2018). Archetypes can help identify how the terrorists construct their identities by invoking warriors, heroes, martyrs, saviors or soldiers (WHMSS), which can be central to justifying violence. In the TRAP-18, this identity construction moves from the distal characteristic of Personal Grievance and Moral Outrage (the Victim) to the proximal warning behavior of Identification (WHMSS).

Moral Framing: Manifestos of terrorists frequently frame their actions as morally justified or even necessary. By examining the archetypes present, analysts can assess how terrorist groups depict their cause as righteous and how they justify acts of terror through language. The sanctification of violence, especially by religious authority, will often create a more dangerous and imminent risk. This is assessed through the distal characteristic of Framed by an Ideology in the TRAP-18. Much work has been done concerning the linguistic analysis of terrorist manifestos (Kupper et al., 2022; Kupper & Meloy, 2021, 2023; Kupper, Cotti & Meloy, 2023; Meloy & Kupper, 2024).

Psychological Insight: Understanding the archetypes used by terrorists, whether consciously or not, can also offer psychological insights into their mindset. For example, identifying the Victim archetype can lead to a deeper understanding of the personal grievance of the subject of concern, his vicarious identification with a victimized group, and the degree to which these extreme overvalued beliefs are tethered to reality.

Predicting Behavior: By analyzing these archetypal dangers—their form showing *pathostability* and their socio-cultural content showing *pathoplasticity*--threat assessors, mental health professionals, intelligence analysts, law enforcement, and counterterrorism professionals can discern patterns, disrupt behaviors, and mitigate the risk of a targeted attack.

Carl Jung once wrote, "The unconscious is not just evil by nature, it is also the source of the highest good: not only dark but also light, not only bestial, semi-human,

and demonic but superhuman, spiritual, and, in the classical sense of the word, 'divine.'"

(1953/1985, p. 364). This dual nature of the psyche lies at the heart of human behavior,

where archetypal forces can inspire great heroism or, conversely, drive acts of

destruction. In the context of terrorism, this interplay becomes particularly pronounced.

The same internal archetypes that give rise to the Warrior, Hero, Martyr, Soldier or

Savior—figures associated with righteous action, sacrifice, and salvation—can become

dangerously distorted when fueled by extreme overvalued beliefs and the devolution of

identity.

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