

Jes Zoglman
Honor Seminar: Terrorism
Spring 2011

Overview:

Through the emphasis of the Social Identity Theory this paper will look at the dynamics of a gang member and how it is a form of terrorism in the United States. Social Identity Theory is a general theory of self that can be examined through three different components, the concept and bases of identity, the activation of identities and identity salience, and the cognitive and motivational process. The identity is constructed when a person acknowledges that he/she belongs to a social category or group. Social categorization and social comparison are two methods that are incorporated in the process of obtaining a social identity. Self categorization is a process in which the self impulsively categorizes, classifies, or names itself, as an object would be, in ways that relate to other social classifications. Self comparison is the process of self identity that allows an individual to categorize him or herself as the in-group, by having similarities, and sees others as the out-group because they differ from his or her self identity. After the self identity is obtained by an individual, the bases of that identity take ones perception and involvement to the next level; the group's view is now the basis of that identity, it is *who* one is. From there self identity advances to identity salience, which is the activation of one's identity based on the situation that arises and focuses on the characteristics of situations. Identity salience ties the social requirements of the situation characteristics and the individual interaction. Finally, the cognitive process, also known as depersonalization, is when an individual sees him or herself as the in-group prototype rather than as an individual. This final component of the Social Identity Theory pulls together all the discussed aspects of group membership and displays the ultimate enhancement of what being a gang member or terrorist entails. It is through similar processes of self identification, group based identification, actions and behaviors of an identity, and the cognitive decision making of what group membership includes and the motivations for group membership that display gang members as close comparisons to terrorists.