

FEMME FATALITIES: A STUDY OF THE MOTIVATIONS OF  
FEMALE SUICIDE TERRORISTS

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for Departmental Honors in  
the Department of Political Science  
Texas Christian University  
Fort Worth, Texas

May 2, 2014

FEMME FATALITIES: A STUDY OF THE MOTIVATIONS OF  
FEMALE SUICIDE TERRORISTS

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## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to determine the motivations of female suicide terrorists. Based on a variety of existing literature, I develop three hypotheses. The first two hypothesize about the motivations of the female suicide bombers (ideology and personal experiences); the third hypothesizes about a necessary factor, but not motivation, for the attack (group attachment). To study this, I look at five women in the Palestinian Israeli conflict who were successful in their suicide attacks. Within each case, I do a content analysis of all available data regarding the women. Upon completion of the research, I determine that the motivations of female suicide terrorists are not singular, but rather a combination of multiple motivations as well as facilitating factors.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my committee for your help throughout this process. Dr. Meier, thank you for stepping up and filling the third spot on my committee. Dr. Carter, thank you for not only serving on this committee, but also for your dedication to teaching; your classes have always been some of my favorites. And finally, Dr. Bouché: thank you for inspiring me to choose this topic and for all of your encouragement along the way. You have taught me more than you know, and I cannot wait to use that knowledge in my future endeavors.

Thank you to my family for allowing me to attend TCU and study what I am passionate about. I would not be where I am today without your support.

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## INTRODUCTION

Terrorism is a tactic with a long history and an issue extensively studied by scholars across many fields. The interest in terrorism increased after the attacks on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent start of the “War on Terror.” With the beginning of a global campaign to end terrorism, the importance of understanding the techniques and incentives of terrorism increased. One method used by terrorists is suicide bombing, which dates as far back as the Crusades (Atran, 2003); however, modern suicide terrorism is generally accepted as beginning in 1983 with truck bombings in Lebanon (Speckhard, 2008). The employment of suicide bombs by terrorist organizations is a deeply studied topic within terrorism research, and Kruglanski, et al. (2009) argue there are two reasons for this. First, people are interested in suicide terrorism because they genuinely do not understand why someone would commit such an act. Second, it is important to understand the motivations of suicide bombers in an effort to prevent these attacks.

The scholarship on suicide terrorists has focused primarily on the motivations of males who commit this act. This lack of study of female suicide terrorists comes from the belief that women play a passive role in terrorist organizations, and are therefore less important in the examination of suicide terrorism (Jacques and Taylor, 2008). Men are generally viewed as the leaders of extremist organizations and the associated attacks. This view of men in the leadership role has led to a heavy emphasis on men in the literature regarding suicide terrorism (O’Rourke, 2009). This focus on the motivations of male suicide terrorism tends to overlook the fact that women have acted as suicide bombers

throughout history, and women's suicide attacks has been an increasing trend. Between the years 1985 and 2006, 220 women acted as suicide bombers globally, making up about fifteen percent of total suicide bombers (Bloom, 2007). This number has increased recently with 100 of the 220 occurring in the new millennium (O'Rourke, 2009). This increasing trend creates an interesting area for inquiry, especially given the contradictory research showing that women are the peaceful gender. Research regarding women and peace find that women have more positive attitudes toward peace and are less likely to support violence than men (Maoz, 2009). Moreover, Middle Eastern women are generally expected to refrain from involvement in activities outside the house (NCAF, 2012). These two findings, along with the increasing numbers of female participation in suicide attacks leads to the central puzzle to be examined: given the peaceful nature of females, why are women increasingly acting as suicide bombers?

Both from strategic and tactical standpoints, there are clear advantages to using females to conduct suicide attacks. First, women often volunteer for these acts without targeted organizational recruitment (Cunningham, 2003), making it a low cost investment on the part of a terrorist group. Second, the image of females as naturally nonviolent is an advantage when carrying out attacks. Women are not considered to be as great a threat as men, and are therefore able to penetrate tight security easier than a male could (Cunningham, 2003). A third benefit of using women in terrorist plots is the psychological effect they have on society. Because females are seen as the peaceful sex, it is much more shocking, and receives more media attention, when a woman carries out a suicide attack. Through this increased

attention, the terrorist organization is achieving one of its many goals: psychological terror (Speckhard, 2008). Finally, women are more effective than men in terms of the lethality of their attacks. A study of five terrorist organizations using female suicide bombers shows that the average casualty count of female suicide attacks is 158 percent greater than that of men (O'Rourke, 2009).

While there are clear strategic and tactical reasons terrorist organizations view women as low-cost, effective weapons, scholarship regarding the motivations of female suicide bombers remains scant and underdeveloped. The result is a body of research that lacks systematic methodology and produces conflicting results. The present study seeks to partially resolve these issues by testing competing hypotheses that ultimately produces a comprehensive picture and fresh outlook on the motivations of female suicide terrorists.

I will proceed first by developing a theory for the motivations of female suicide terrorists that is grounded in extant literature. I then discuss my methodology, which is a combination of case study and content analysis. Specifically, I discuss the case selection of five female Palestinian suicide bombers, and the content analysis procedure in which I systematically analyze all available data for each of the five cases. I discuss the results in the context of the theory, as well as the implications, and avenues for future research.



## THEORY DEVELOPMENT

### **Connection to an Ideology**

Suicide bombing, a method of terrorism, seeks to achieve certain ideological goals. Suicide terrorists often attach to religious or political beliefs and commit acts of violence in the name of these ideological convictions (Atran, 2003). A religious belief that martyrdom leads to paradise in the afterlife as well as protection of one's family by Allah are often cited as motivations for committing an act of suicide terrorism, and the research supports the idea that connection to religious beliefs is a factor in the decision to become a suicide bomber (Kruglanski et al., 2009).

However, not all ideological motivators are religious; some suicide attacks are a result of political beliefs. Existing literature suggests that suicide terrorists feel a connection to a political cause and carry out the attacks in response to that belief (Jacques and Taylor, 2008; Kruglanski et al., 2009). The results of a survey by Kruglanski et al, show that those who support political and religious goals over individualistic goals (such as education or raising a family) are more likely to support attacks against the United States (2009). Sometimes these ideological beliefs overlap. A suicide bomber will act in defense of a political belief, but use religious beliefs as justification for carrying out the attack (Speckhard, 2008). Whether it be religious, political, or both, it is widely accepted that suicide terrorists connect to ideological beliefs, which act as motivators for committing a suicide bombing.

Additionally, psychological research shows that the need to attach oneself to a cause or belief is part of human nature. As a part of reaching self-actualization,

humans must feel significant, and this is often accomplished through connecting with an ideology. Suicide terrorists not only connect with the ideology, but also commit violent acts in the name of this belief in hope of being part of a larger cause (Kruglanski et al., 2009). Existing research on terrorists shows that a search for identity often leads people to this desire to connect with a larger cause, such as extremist beliefs (Borum, 2004).

Besides fulfilling the need for personal identity, connection to an ideology allows terrorists to justify their actions. As Jerrold Post (2009) observes, because of these ideological beliefs, suicide bombers see their actions as martyrdom instead of suicide. For example, suicide is routinely prohibited in Islamic religious texts, however radical Islamic groups interpret passages in the Koran to allow martyrdom for one's religious beliefs. The psychological research, along with the existing literature regarding the motivations of suicide terrorists as a whole leads to the first hypothesis that females will follow this trend.

H<sub>1</sub>: Female suicide terrorists are motivated by connection to an ideology.

### **Personal Experiences**

While psychological experts admit that all humans have a need for interdependence, studies show gender differences arise in the type of interdependence necessary (Baumeister and Sommer, 1997; Gabriel and Gardner, 1999). Gabriel and Gardner used an established Twenty Statements Test, in which participants were asked to complete twenty statements beginning with "I am," to study the gender difference in interdependence types. The study found that both women and men are heavily interdependent, but women focus more on personal,

dyadic relationships, while men are more prone to loyalty to a large group (1999). Supported by this study is an overarching theme in the research regarding the motivation of female suicide terrorists that women take part in suicide attacks for personal reasons. Often, a personal tragedy will lead women to become involved in terrorist organizations and act as suicide terrorists (Cunningham, 2003).

O'Rourke's research shows that about one-third of female suicide bombers have lost a family member in conflict (2009). Witnessing violence by the opposition is another factor that is considered to predispose women to become suicide terrorists (Bloom, 2007; Jacques and Taylor, 2008). Additionally, experiencing trauma or unrest due to occupation or violence by the opposition is often shown to be a motivation for female suicide terrorists (Jacques and Taylor, 2008). Existing research in the field of female suicide terrorists, along with the supporting psychological research regarding interdependence patterns in females leads to the second hypothesis.

H<sub>2</sub>: Female suicide bombers are motivated by personal experiences.

### **Group Attachment**

Another important proposed motivation present in the research on suicide terrorists is the connection to a group. This differs from connection to an ideology in that ideology refers to beliefs and causes whereas a group is an organization of people. Attachment to a group is viewed as a motivation to commit an act of suicide terrorism for a few reasons. A study by Allison Smith (2008) showed that, compared to non-terrorist organizations, terrorist organizations focus on strengthening affiliation within their organization more than strengthening affiliations and

relations with other groups. A more intense focus on the members of the group leads to a deeper connection among the group, and therefore more behaviors in connection to the group. The Social Identity Theory proposes that a high level of identifying with a group involves a high level of favoritism towards that group and a maximization of differences between one's group and other groups (Hogg, 2006). This powerful connection to a group helps justify actions against others.

Membership in a group not only justifies violent acts, it also helps individuals achieve the psychological need for belongingness (Baumeister and Sommer, 1997; Gabriel and Gardner, 1999). In the aggregate, each individual's need for belonging leads to the development of a collective identity among all the group members. Groups begin to prioritize group goals over individual goals (Jacques and Taylor, 2008) and view themselves as prototypical of the group rather than as an individual (Cross and Madson, 1997). These deep group connections lead to self-sacrifice in the name of the group (Kruglanski et al., 2009; O'Rourke, 2009; Speckhard, 2008).

Beyond self-affirmation and the need for belonging, however, there are also practical benefits for suicide terrorists to join a group, including the financial and tactical support the group provides the bomber (Jacques and Taylor, 2008; Rosenberger, 2003; Speckhard, 2008). Other benefits extremist organizations promise suicide bombers is immortality, which is communicated as being a reward for prioritizing the group (Kruglanski et al., 2009).

Although existing research supports the idea that group membership motivates terrorist actions, I propose that this differs for women. Existing research on female suicide terrorists specifically, does not cite evidence that connection to a

group motivates women to commit acts of suicide terrorism. Furthermore, Middle Eastern society follows a patriarchal system that keeps women from participating in life outside of the house (Al-Khalifa and Al-Khalifa, 2007). According to traditional Islamic culture, a woman's role is in the house. Besides the societal affects on women, the legal structures in many Middle Eastern countries prevent female involvement in political organizations (NCAFP, 2012). Given these societal and legal restrictions on female activity outside the household, women are not able to have high levels of participation in groups. This, along with the fact that terrorists rarely act alone, leads to the third hypothesis (Kershaw, 2010):

H<sub>3</sub>: Group membership is a facilitating factor, not a motivation, for female suicide terrorists.

The existing literature seeks to define one specific motivation for female suicide terrorists. Jacques and Taylor (2008) propose that personal motivations are more likely than large group or ideological motivations for women. O'Rourke (2009) disagrees with this conclusion and says that the primary motivation for both men and women is loyalty to an ideology. This pattern of selecting one primary pattern of motivation is consistent throughout the literature. While each of these (ideology, personal experiences, and group attachment) independently may motivate and help women to commit acts of suicide terrorism, the more realistic approach is one that paints a comprehensive picture that combines these different but related motivations.

As shown above, ideological beliefs provide a justification and motivation for an act of terrorism. Personal experiences serve as the catalyst or final straw for the

suicide bombing. Group attachment provides practical support for the attack.

Because the subjects of this field of research are human, there can be no absolute conclusion. However, it is more realistic to consider these three ideas as connected instead of competing. While it is interesting and helpful to look at each hypothesis alone, it is much more practical to acknowledge the complexity of human psychology and the motivations and necessary factors behind the attacks.

Psychological studies of human motivation show that it is intricate and multidimensional (Weiner, 2013). Ignoring the inherent plurality of motivations is a disservice to the study. Instead, the three hypotheses should be seen as separate but concurrent. Acknowledging that the three factors may coexist is necessary for the advancement of this research.

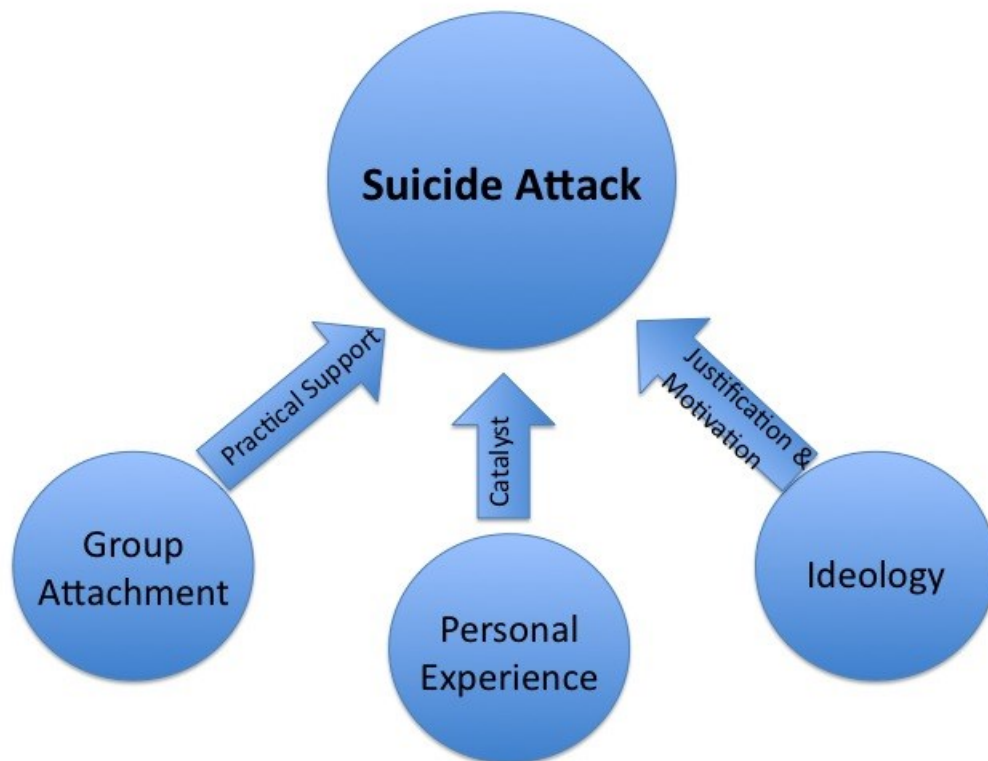


Figure 1: Connection of Hypotheses

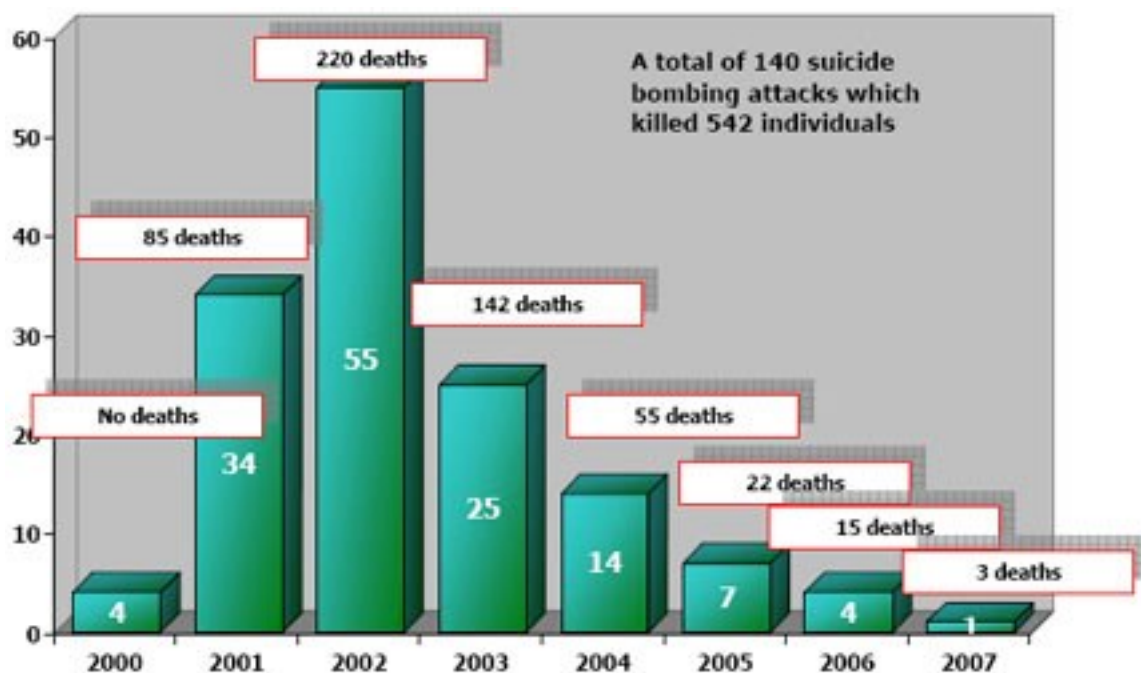
## METHOD

Previous research on the personal motivations of female suicide bombers has been based largely on nonsystematic analysis of anecdotal evidence (e.g., Bloom, 2007; Cunningham, 2003), including quotes of the women from suicide videos (Hasso, 2005), statements from political leaders and reporters (Hasso, 2005), and interviews with families of suicide bombers (Speckhard, 2008). This research approach differs in that I perform content analysis in a case-study setting. Doing an in depth content analysis in the framework of a case study of a small number of women has two distinct advantages. First, it allows for a more thorough analysis of all data for each woman. This will then lead to more accurate results. Second, looking at all available data on each subject will give a broader context of each woman. For example, many of the farewell videos left behind are very scripted and may not contain the entire background of the woman's life. Therefore, including additional information from her family and friends will allow for a better insight into her thoughts leading up to the event.

The cases I selected are five Palestinian female suicide bombers. I chose to examine this question in the context of the Israel-Palestinian conflict for a few reasons. First, I needed a set of cases from a specific geographic region in order to minimize variation along cultural and political lines. In other words, I needed to isolate the motivations along gender lines while holding conflict and culture constant. Second, a more practical concern is that this conflict is one that has seen the most use of female suicide terrorists. Specifically, from 1985 to 2006, sixty-seven females planned or carried out acts of suicide terrorism in the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict (Speckhard, 2008). Additionally, this conflict is ongoing, so this research will have practical implications for the future.

A total of eight Palestinian women committed acts of suicide terrorism between 2000 and 2006. I select five of these eight Palestinian women.<sup>1</sup> This is the time period of the Second Intifada, the uprising in which female suicide bombers appeared for the first time in this conflict. During this time period, suicide bombing in the Palestinian Israeli conflict increased altogether (see Graph 1), as did the activity of female suicide bombers.



Graph 1: Increase in Suicide Bombing (From Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs website)

Some of the women who committed acts of suicide terrorism between these six years were excluded from the analysis. The first, Wafa Idris, although the most famous of Palestinian female suicide terrorists, will not be included due to some

<sup>1</sup> The attacks of female suicide bombers during the Second Intifada only occurred between 2002 and 2006; however, in an effort to be comprehensive, the dates of the entire uprising are included.



doubt as to whether or not her true intention was suicide bombing or simply to plant a bomb and walk away. The other two, Zainab Abu Salem and Hiba Da'arma, simply did not have enough information available to do a complete analysis. However, the sample of five chosen is representative of the eight given their age, marital status, and connection with a political organization (Schweitzer, 2006). The average age of the subjects chosen is 21.8 years, which is consistent with the average age of 21.67 for the remaining three. Of the five women studied, three were single, one engaged, and one married. This is a similar ratio of single women to the three not studied in that of those three two were single and one was divorced.

The first of the five women studied is Andaleeb Taqataqah who killed herself and six Israelis outside an outdoor market on April 12, 2002. Immediately following the attack, the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade claimed responsibility (Laub, 2002). Taqataqah worked at a textile factory, and according to her father, talked about love and marriage like other twenty year olds (Hendawi, 2002). The Taqataqah family expressed pride in her actions, but sadness in her death, and turned their house into a memorial and shrine for her (Farrell, 2002).

Reem al-Riyashi, the second subject, killed four Israelis in her suicide attack on January 14, 2004 at the Erez crossing security checkpoint connecting Israel and the Gaza Strip. Her husband, and father of her two children, drove her to the site of the bombing (Jaber and Mahnaimi, 2004). Al-Riyashi, twenty-two, was not only the first mother to commit an act of suicide bombing, but also the first women to do so for Hamas (Habboush, 2004). Following the attack, the Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade claimed joint responsibility with Hamas (Charen, 2004). Three

years after the attack, a video was released of her four-year-old daughter expressing the desire to be like her mother (Kalman and Siemaszko, 2007).

The third subject is Ayat al-Akhras, eighteen, who killed two people and wounded more than twenty-five at a supermarket in Jerusalem. This suicide attack took place on March 29, 2002. al-Akhras was also a member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, although her family was not aware (The Associated Press, 2002). She was scheduled to graduate high school with impressive grades and marry her fiancé not long after the attack (Leung, 2003). The al-Akhras family lived in a refugee camp in the middle of the conflict, and Ayat witnessed her neighbor being shot to death by Israeli soldiers the same month as the attack (Shipman, 2002).

Suicide bomber Dareen Abu Aisheh will serve as the fourth case study. On February 27, 2002 she detonated explosives at a military checkpoint in the West Bank. Her life was the only one lost, however four people were injured. Days before the attack, the twenty-one year old girl debated with her uncle about the morality of suicide bombing (Williams, 2002). After being turned down by religious groups because she was a woman, Abu Aisheh also looked to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade for support (Daraghme, 2002b).

Finally, Hanadi Jaradat is the fifth subject of study. A devout Muslim, Jaradat was devastated by the recent killing of her brother by Israeli troops (Daraghme, 2003). The twenty-seven year old was days away from completing her training to become a lawyer (Dan, 2003a). Despite her bright future, she killed nineteen people at an Israeli restaurant on October 4, 2003 with the help of Islamic Jihad (Burns, 2003).

For the content analysis, in an attempt to grasp a more complete understanding of each suicide bomber, I will look at all media available regarding the women of interest.<sup>2</sup> I developed a search protocol in which I systematically searched for key terms in six different databases in a specific order.<sup>3</sup> The six databases, in the order in which they were searched, included: the Middle East Media Research Institute, Access World News, Al Jazeera, Google, Lexis Nexis, and YouTube. Upon identifying the search results, I analyzed the content in a specific order starting with first-person statements regarding motivations. Commonly, suicide bombers leave videos before carrying out the attack, and I conducted a content analysis of these videos or transcripts first.<sup>4</sup> Four of the five women studied had videos available. I noted each time the suicide terrorist mentions a motive, including ideology, group attachment, and personal motivation. Second, I content analyze third-person stories or quotes about the attacker.<sup>5</sup> I analyze articles, videos, and any other media regarding the attack or the female and organized the content in each of the following content categories: *religious ideology*, *political ideology*, *political revenge*, *group membership*, and *personal revenge*.<sup>6</sup> The *ideology categories*, along with *political revenge*, will be used to test the ideology hypothesis. To analyze

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for the sources used for each subject.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B for the search procedure used.

<sup>4</sup> All of the videos analyzed had English translations available either in the form of transcripts or subtitles.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that much of what will be analyzed will not be the voice of the subject, but rather the voice of family members, friends, and leaders of extremist organizations. In a culture where females are generally oppressed, information directly from the subjects is rare. However, all of the information is helpful and much of what is reported is from people who had a close relationship with the subject and can therefore provide insight into her thoughts leading up to the attack.

<sup>6</sup> I also included *gender ideology* and *personal unhappiness* as content categories because they have been analyzed in other studies; however, they were not commonly mentioned and are therefore excluded from this analysis.

the personal experience hypothesis, the *personal revenge* category will be the most important. *Group membership* will be used when considering the group attachment hypothesis.

## RESULTS

### **Subject 1: Andaleeb Taqataqah**

Andaleeb Taqataqah, the twenty-year-old Palestinian who acted as a suicide bomber in an outdoor market in Jerusalem, demonstrates well the connection of all three hypotheses and the theory developed above. Of the data coded, approximately 68.2% falls into the ideological categories<sup>7</sup>; specifically, the political ideology content category. In her farewell video, she wore the traditional checkered Palestinian headgear showing her solidarity with the Palestinian political cause (See Image 1).



**Image 1: Andaleeb Taqataqah (Hasso, 2005)**

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix C for data tables of the content analysis.

The data regarding Taqataqah repeatedly discusses her desire to join the fight against the Israelis and become a political activist. She felt a strong desire to fight back against the Israeli occupation, and this connection to a political cause not only motivated, but also justified her actions. As she stated in her farewell video, Andaleeb saw her body as “a barrel of gunpowder that burns the enemy” (Farrell, 2002). In a time of conflict, she saw herself as a necessary weapon and allowed that to justify the decision to become a suicide bomber.

Besides living in the middle of the conflict, as many do, Andaleeb Taqataqah personally experienced hardship and tragedy as a result of the fighting. Her sister reported the pain Andaleeb felt upon watching children and pregnant women being shot at Israeli security checkpoints; she also said that the weeks leading up to the attack were filled with an increase in Taqataqah mentioning her horror at the things she witnessed (Farrell, 2002). Additionally, she had been unable to work for the three weeks before the attack because of road closures by the Israeli army. As a provider for her family, this lack of income affected the whole family (Hendawi, 2002). These specific incidents occurred shortly before her attack appear to be the catalyst behind her going through with the act. While Taqataqah clearly felt a connection to the political ideology of the Palestinian cause, and expressed a desire to join the fight, it was not until she personally experienced tragedy and hardship that she chose to actually commit the act of suicide terrorism.

In this attack, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade claimed responsibility immediately following the attack. Eighteen point two percent of the data coded fell into the group connection content category. Indeed, she did have a connection to a

group as hypothesized; however, this connection was not strong and therefore did not likely serve as a motivation. In fact, members of the Al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade did not immediately know the identity of the bomber ("Palestinian woman," 2002). This represents her lack of integration with the group, which would be necessary to fit into the Social Identity Theory supporting the idea that group attachment serves as a motivation. Instead, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade served as necessary support in her mission.

In the case of Andaleeb Taqataqah, looking at the three hypotheses as concurrent instead of separate is advantageous. She felt a connection to the political ideology of the Palestinian cause, which created the initial motivation to join. However, her breaking point occurred when she was personally affected by the conflict; at this time, her political ideology not only motivated but also helped justify her planned actions. Her connection to a group provided practical support in the way of providing supplies and talking to the media after the attack. Together, these three separate concepts worked together to motivate, justify, and support this act of suicide terrorism.

### **Subject 2: Reem al-Riyashi**

Reem al-Riyashi is an outlier in many ways. She was the first mother to commit an act of suicide terrorism as well as the first female to act for Hamas. She also does not completely fit the theory developed in this paper. Fifty six point eight percent of the data coded fits into the ideology categories, specifically religious ideology. In terms of the ideology hypothesis, her results serve as positive support. In her farewell video, she says, "It was always my wish...to knock on the doors of

heaven with the skulls of Zionists” (Habboush, 2004). Additionally, she reportedly believed that this act would lead to her becoming one of 70 nymphs to welcome her husband to heaven when he died and was known to give lessons on the Koran (Jaber and Mahnaimi, 2004). The data regarding al-Riyashi shows that she was a very religious person who connected with the extremist ideology and belief that an act of suicide terrorism is martyrdom. Her religious beliefs led to her desire to participate in the religious war, and the promises of her ideology justified her actions. From here, the results for Reem al-Riyashi depart from the proposed theory.

In the data analyzed, no personal experiences were coded. Because this subject was so unique in her motherhood and connection with Hamas, it is possible that the media coverage (and therefore the majority of the data collected and analyzed) focused only on those aspects of her life. In other words, the absence of a mention of a personal experience does not necessarily mean there actually was the absence of a personal experience. However, given the data, Reem al-Riyashi does not provide support for the hypothesis that a personal experience motivates one to commit an act of suicide terrorism.

The analyzed data regarding Reem al-Riyashi focuses heavily on her involvement in Hamas, and her connection with the organization. As hypothesized, this subject does have a connection to a group. However, she departs in that the group likely served as more of a motivation than hypothesized. In this case, the subject actually had a deep attachment to a group, which led to the development of group ties and discrimination against “others,” as proposed in the Social Identity Theory. Instead of simply supplying explosives, reports say that Hamas carefully

trained her for the attack, even giving her a handler from the military wing. Furthermore, authorities believed a leader in Hamas personally ordered the bombing (Jaber and Mahnaimi, 2004). In these ways, Reem al-Riyashi had much closer ties with the organization than her peers. While the group did provide support, she also identified deeply with Hamas and therefore was motivated to carry out actions for the organization.<sup>8</sup>

Reem al-Riyashi, the second subject in this study, differs from her peers as well as the theory developed above. However, in some ways she supports the theory. As hypothesized, she has a deep connection to an ideology, specifically her religious beliefs. These beliefs served as motivation and justification for her decision to become a suicide bomber. After the first hypothesis, she begins to stray from the theory. In the data analyzed, there is no reported personal experience that served to catalyze the attack. A possible explanation for this comes from her connection to Hamas. More so than others studied, al-Riyashi developed a shared identity with the group that resulted in her desire to wage war against the enemies of Hamas. With this group attachment serving as more than practical support, a personal experience may not have been a necessary catalyst to motivate the attack.

### **Subject 3: Ayat al-Akhras**

Although being younger than the average age of the five subjects studied, Ayat al-Akhras provides support for each hypothesis as well as the connection of the three. Forty seven point one percent of the data analyzed fits into the ideology

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<sup>8</sup> Again, it is important to consider that, given her unique qualities as a mother and Hamas supporter, the full story is not told by the media. It is possible that other factors were overlooked in an effort to focus on these distinctive characteristics. Despite these limitations, the research will consider the data available.



categories, especially political ideology. A common theme throughout the information regarding al-Akhras is her dedication to the Palestinian cause. Family and friends are repeatedly quoted saying she became a suicide terrorist for the people of Palestine (Leung, 2003). Leading up to the attack, she expressed frustration with the lack of action by other Arab nations in the conflict (Shipman, 2002). Al-Akhras felt a strong association with the political ideology central to the conflict. Her passion for the Palestinian cause and desire to participate in the conflict motivated her to commit an act of suicide terrorism.

An additional motivation is observed when considering her personal experiences before the attack. A few years prior to the attack, while living in a refugee camp in the middle of the fighting in the West Bank, her brother was wounded by Israeli soldiers (Shipman, 2002). Still living in the Bethlehem refugee camp weeks before the attack, Israeli soldiers shot her neighbor and Ayat discovered him fatally injured (Schmittroth, 2002). Experiencing and witnessing tragedy at the hands of Israeli soldiers enraged al-Akhras and further motivated her to participate in the war against the enemy.

Only once in the data collected is Ayat al-Akhras's connection with the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade mentioned. She does not appear to have strong ties with the group, and therefore her attachment to an organization may not have served as a motivation to commit the attack. However, the participation of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade did serve as practical support. For example, the group helped her prepare a farewell video prior to the attack (The Associated Press, 2002). While the group's contributions were necessary, they were not motivators for Ayat al-Akhras.

When looking at the entire story of Ayat al-Akhras, her attack, and the events leading up to the attack, it is apparent that more than one factor played a role in the bombing. Her longstanding devotion to the Palestinian cause motivated her to join the war against the Israelis. Then, the wounding of her brother and killing of her neighbor served as catalysts and final motivations to commit the attack. Her connection with the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade helped in the preparation and provided practical support to actually carry out the attack. These factors alone do not give enough reason to become a suicide bomber, but together they explain why and how Ayat al-Akhras became a suicide terrorist.

#### **Subject 4: Dareen Abu Aisheh**

Dareen Abu Aisheh felt strongly that it was her duty to fight against the enemy and gain freedom from the Israelis (Williams, 2002). She regularly discussed her passion for the political cause of the Palestinians, with 42.9% of the data analyzed fitting into the ideological categories. In her farewell video, she wore the Palestinian flag as a shawl (See Image 2) (Daraghmeh, 2002a).



**Image 2: Dareen Abu Aisheh (Hasso, 2003)**

The data on Abu Aisheh demonstrates her continued support for her political ideology as well as her desire to participate in the conflict. This connection to an ideology alone, however, does not completely explain the attack.

It was her personal experiences and connections to the tragedies of Palestinians that finally motivated her to go through with the attack. Two months before the attack, her cousin died in the conflict and one-month prior she witnessed Israeli soldiers wounding a pregnant woman. She left a suicide note where she discussed her personal sadness for all of the mothers who had lost sons to the Israelis (Williams, 2002). These personal experiences leading up to the attack deeply affected Abu Aisheh and provided motivation to commit an act of suicide terrorism.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade provided the belt of explosives used for the attack. However, it is reported that she considered other options before turning to this particular group for support (Daraghmeh, 2002a). This demonstrates a lack of connection to the group and the pure necessity of group involvement. While Dareen Abu Aisheh was not a member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade and did not identify with the organization, she would not have obtained the explosives without the help of the group. Feeling a strong connection to her political ideology and personally affected by the conflict, Abu Aisheh decided to become a suicide terrorist; the involvement of the organization only served as practical support.

#### **Subject 5: Hanadi Jaradat**

Hanadi Jaradat grew up very religious and dedicated to her prayer and study of the Koran. She fasted twice a week and frequently expressed support for the

Islamic Holy War. Her religious ideology turned extremist, and she believed that becoming a suicide bomber was God's will for her (Burns, 2003). Not only did this motivate her to commit an act of suicide terrorism, but also by believing it was God's will, this justified her act. However, the data analyzed on Hanadi Jaradat does not support that her ideological beliefs alone motivated her actions.

A common theme throughout the data is the tragedy experienced by Hanadi Jaradat. Months before the attack, Israeli soldiers killed her cousin and brother. A surviving brother said that this experience pushed her over the edge and caused her to commit the attack (Daraghmeh, 2003). More recently than these killings, Jaradat asked the Israelis to allow her father to seek medical help for a liver disease; the Israelis rejected her request (Burns, 2003). The killings of her family and rejection of medical care for her father, all by Israeli soldiers, motivated Jaradat to take action against those who were hurting her family.

Islamic Jihad took credit for the attack, but this group is barely mentioned in the data and there is no evidence that Hanadi participated in the organization, much less identified with it. Islamic Jihad provided the necessary help in preparing for the attack and addressing the media after the attack (Burns, 2003). The organization provided support, but not motivation. Her personal tragedies created the desire to become a suicide bomber, and her belief that it was God's will both motivated her and justified the action. Without each of these aspects, an explanation for the attack would be incomplete.

## **Discussion**

The existing literature seeks to determine one specific motivation for female suicide attackers. O'Rourke (2009) proposes that loyalty to one's community motivates a woman to become a suicide bomber. Contrastingly, Jacques and Taylor (2008), support the idea that females are motivated by personal experiences. Others contend that motivations vary based on the bomber, but still look for one motivation for each suicide terrorist (Bloom, 2007; Hasso, 2005). However, attempting to establish one motivation across the board is a disadvantage to this field of research. Humans are complex, therefore motivations are complex as well. As shown in the case studies, multiple factors contribute to one deciding to become a suicide bomber and carrying out the attack. Four of the five subjects demonstrate how ideology and personal experiences intersect to motivate a female to commit an act of suicide terrorism, and terrorist groups enter the picture primarily to provide tactical support for the attack. The outlier, Reem al-Riyashi, also illustrates that motivations are not singular. In her case, both her religious ideology and identity connection with Hamas motivated her action.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study of female suicide terrorists has much room for expansion, but is a field with important implications. Building off of the existing literature, this study sought to offer an alternative theory as to the motivations of female suicide bombers. Instead of the research focusing on solitary motivations, it is realistic to look at them as concurrent and complex. Though this field of study focuses on the

motivations, an unanswered question is what differentiates female suicide bombers from their peers who choose not to commit an act of suicide terrorism. Why do certain women carry out attacks while others with similar ideologies, experiences, and group connections remain not act? Despite the need for development in the research and the unanswered questions, the current study does provide important information for policy makers.

In the case of Palestinian suicide terrorists, the motivations largely stem from the conflict. Whether it be ideological beliefs regarding the conflict or personal experiences because of it, the cases in this study illustrate that the decision to become a suicide bomber is deeply rooted in the aggression between Israel and Palestine. As long as this violence continues, it is likely that females will continue to act as suicide bombers. A decrease in violence will be directly correlated with a decrease in suicide bombing. Since the building of the separation barrier around the West Bank, Israel has reported a significant decline in the number of suicide bombers (Steves, 2013). Policy makers should focus on a peaceful resolution to the overall conflict in hopes that these acts of violence will end. Also shown in this study is the importance of organizations. Without the support of militant organizations, the women would not have access to the necessary explosives. Looking to cut off the source of practical support for these female suicide bombers would be beneficial in the quest to end this trend. While these are important lessons from the research, the key significance of this study is the complexity of the issue of female suicide bombers and their motivations.

APPENDIX A: SOURCES USED FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS

**Subject 1 (Andaleeb Taqataqah)**

Farrell, S. (2002, April 17). Seamstress and student met in accident of hate. *The London Times*.

Hendawi, H. (2002, April 14). Woman's suicide bombing shocks her father, friends. *The Deseret News*, pp. A07.

Houston Chronicle News Services. (2002, April 13). Palestinian woman blows herself up, killing 6 people. *Houston Chronicle*, pp. 29A.

Laub, K. (2002, April 13). Outdoor market bombing retaliatory, Hamas says. *Tulsa World*, pp. 2.

**Subject 2 (Reem al-Riyashi)**

Charen, M. (2004, January 26). Propaganda driving women to kill. *The August Chronicle*, pp. A04.

Greenberg, J. (2004, January 15). Palestinian woman's suicide bomb at border kills 4 Israelis, injures 9. *The Chicago Tribune*.

Greenberg, J. (2004, January 16). Family irate relative used as bomber. *The Chicago Tribune*.

Habboush, M. (2004, January 15). Bomb-ma madness: she blows up and kills 4 Israelis. *New York Daily News*, pp. 7.

Jaber, H., & Mahnaimi, U. (2004, January 18). Husband took wife to suicide bombing. *The Sunday Times*, pp. 27.

Kalman, M. (2007, March 25). Tot pushed to be like bomber mom. *New York Daily News*, pp. 15.

Military performances, glorification of suicide bombings at graduation ceremony of Hamas youth camps. [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/4119.htm>.

McGreal, Chris. (2004, January 26). Palestinians shocked at use of suicide mother. *The Guardian*.

Reem Riyashi farewell Hamas website. [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRDuKzC23GI>

Toolis, K. (2006, September 16). Suicide bombers caught in the act. *Herald Sun*, pp. 35.

### **Subject 3 (Ayat al-Akhras)**

Leung, R. (2003, May 23). The bomber next door. *CBS News*.

Schmittroth, L. (2002, April 3). Suicide bomber born into despair. *Edmonton Journal*, pp. 13A.

Shipman, C. (2002, April 13). 2 teenage girls die in Mideast tragedy. *ABC News*.

Suicide statement video. [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1KakNCUn4A>

The Associated Press. (2002, March 30). Palestinian woman, 18, blows herself up at busy supermarket, killing two Israelis. *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, pp. 6.

Women in Gaza prepare to become suicide bombers. [Video file]. Retrieved from



<http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1840.htm>

#### **Subject 4 (Dareen Abu Aisheh)**

Daraghmeh, M. (2002, March 1). Second woman dies for cause. *The Advertiser*, pp. 29.

Daraghmeh, M. (2002, March 1). Woman suicide bomber rejected by Hamas. *The Independent*, pp. 18.

Hazboun, I. (2002, March 29). Teen girl is latest suicide bomber. *The Associated Press News Service*.

Williams, D. (2002, March 24). Suicide bombers driven by despair, 'inability to dream.' *The Miami Herald*, pp. 11A.

#### **Subject 5 (Hanadi Jaradat)**

Burns, J.F. (2003, October 7). The Mideast turmoil: the attacker; bomber left her family with a smile and a lie. *The New York Times*.

Dan, U. (2003, October 5). Woman bomber's kin thrilled by atrocity. *New York Post*, pp. 005.

Dan, U. (2003, October 18). She ate, paid her check, then slaughtered 21 Israelis. *New York Post*, pp. 012.

Daraghmeh, M. (2003, October 5). Suicide bomber was driven by brother's death, family says. *The Seattle Times*, pp. A26.

Kessel, J., Ghosheh, S., Conover, B., Zippori, M., & Munayyer, W. (2003, October 5). Suicide bomber kills at least 19 in Israel. *CNN*.

Murphy, V. (2003, October 5). Mid-East cycle of vengeance. *BBC News*.

Toolis, K. (2006, October 7). Young, bright, and ready to blow herself to pieces. *The Advertiser*, pp. W07.

Women in Gaza prepare to become suicide bombers. [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1840.htm>

APPENDIX B: SEARCH PROCEDURE

To better understand the motivations of female suicide terrorists, several databases were searched for information regarding each subject. The following databases were searched: Access World News, Al Jazeera, Google, Lexis Nexis, MEMRI, and YouTube. Repeat entries and unhelpful results were removed and the remaining sources were studied. Below is a list of the search terms used for each database as well as the number of results for each search.

**Subject 1 (Andaleeb Taqataqah)**

<b>Search Term</b>	<b>Database</b>	<b>Results</b>
Mahane Yehuda Market Bombing	Access World News	251
Dates: 2002-2014		
Andaleeb Taqataqah	Access World News	22
Mahane Yehuda Market Bombing	Al Jazeera	1
Andaleeb Taqataqah	Al Jazeera	1
"2002 Mahane Yehuda Market Bombing"	Google	61,700
"Andaleeb Taqataqah"	Google	3,250
2002 Mahane Yehuda	Lexis Nexis	200

## Market Bombing

Andaleeb Taqataqah	Lexis Nexis	9
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Mahane Yehuda Market	MEMRI	0
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## Bombing

Andaleeb Taqataqah	MEMRI	0
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Mahane Yehuda Market	YouTube	20
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## Bombing

Andaleeb Taqataqah	YouTube	0
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**Subject 2 (Reem al-Riyashi)**

<b>Search Term</b>	<b>Database</b>	<b>Results</b>
Reem al-Riyashi	Access World News	35
Reem al-Riyashi	Al Jazeera	0
“Reem al-Riyashi”	Google	2,550
Reem al-Riyashi	Lexis Nexis	15
Reem al-Riyashi	MEMRI	2
Reem al-Riyashi	YouTube	226

**Subject 3 (Ayat al-Akhras)**

<b>Search Term</b>	<b>Database</b>	<b>Results</b>
Ayat al-Akhras	Access World News	171
Ayat al-Akhras	Al Jazeera	3
“Ayat al-Akhras”	Google	86,300

Ayat al-Akhras	Lexis Nexis	72
Ayat al-Akhras	MEMRI	1
Ayat al-Akhras	YouTube	106

#### **Subject 4 (Dareen Abu Aisheh)**

<b>Search Term</b>	<b>Database</b>	<b>Results</b>
Darine Abu Aisha	Access World News	1
Dareen Abu Aisheh	Access World News	75
Darine Abu Aisha	Al Jazeera	0
Dareen Abu Aisheh	Al Jazeera	0
“Darine Abu Aisha”	Google	1,810
“Dareen Abu Aisheh”	Google	1,120
Darine Abu Aisha	Lexis Nexis	0
Dareen Abu Aisheh	Lexis Nexis	22
Darine Abu Aisha	MEMRI	0
Dareen Abu Aisheh	MEMRI	0
Darine Abu Aisha	YouTube	121
Dareen Abu Aisheh	YouTube	5

**Subject 5 (Hanadi Jaradat)**

<b>Search Term</b>	<b>Database</b>	<b>Results</b>
Hanadi Jaradat	Access World News	389
Hanadi Jaradat	Al Jazeera	6
“Hanadi Jaradat”	Google	6,380
Hanadi Jaradat	Lexis Nexis	228
Hanadi Jaradat	MEMRI	5
Hanadi Jaradat	YouTube	63

APPENDIX C: CONTENT ANALYSIS DATA TABLES

**Subject 1 (Andaleeb Taqataqah)**

	<b>Hypotheses</b>		
	<b>Ideology</b>	<b>Personal Experience</b>	<b>Group Attachment</b>
<b>Number of Mentions</b>	15	3	4
<b>Percentage of Total</b>	68.2%	13.6%	18.2%

**Subject 2 (Reem al-Riyashi)**

	<b>Hypotheses</b>		
	<b>Ideology</b>	<b>Personal Experience</b>	<b>Group Attachment</b>
<b>Number of Mentions</b>	25	0	19
<b>Percentage of Total</b>	56.8%	0	43.2%

**Subject 3 (Ayat al-Akhras)**

	<b>Hypotheses</b>		
	<b>Ideology</b>	<b>Personal Experience</b>	<b>Group Attachment</b>
<b>Number of Mentions</b>	8	8	1
<b>Percentage of Total</b>	47.1%	47.1%	5.8%

**Subject 4 (Dareen Abu Aisheh)**

	<b>Hypotheses</b>		
	<b>Ideology</b>	<b>Personal Experience</b>	<b>Group Attachment</b>
<b>Number of Mentions</b>	6	4	4
<b>Percentage of Total</b>	42.85%	28.57%	28.57%



**Subject 5 (Hanadi Jaradat)**

	<b>Hypotheses</b>		
	<b>Ideology</b>	<b>Personal Experience</b>	<b>Group Attachment</b>
<b>Number of Mentions</b>	7	16	3
<b>Percentage of Total</b>	26.9%	61.5%	11.5%

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The Associated Press. (2002, March 30). Palestinian woman, 18, blows herself up at busy supermarket, killing two Israelis. *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, pp. 6.

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