

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:       REMAINING VIGILANT AGAINST DOMESTIC TERRORISM:  
                              MAKING MEANING OF COUNTERTERRORISM IN A  
                              NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Thomas G. Campbell III, Master of Arts, 2011

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The purpose of this study was to understand how publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism and the counterterrorism messages from the Department of Homeland Security's *See Something, Say Something* counterterrorism campaign, and if that meaning impacted their intention to act on these messages. Using the Situational Theory of Publics as the primary theoretical framework, this exploratory study took a qualitative approach; conducting in-depth interviews with both college students from a large Mid-Atlantic State University (young adult publics), and Department of Defense employees (government publics). Findings reveal that participants became more involved with the campaign messages as the problem began to impact them directly. Additionally, young adult public participants are not actively seeking out counterterrorism information, while it is a part of the day-to-day routine for government public participants. The study shows that understanding how publics are impacted by terrorism, will affect how they view and process counterterrorism messages.

REMAINING VIGILANT AGAINST DOMESTIC TERRORISM:  
MAKING MEANING OF COUNTERTERRORISM IN A NATIONAL AWARENESS  
CAMPAIGN

by

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DEDICATION

To my Aunt Jill and the thousands of other innocent victims whose lives were cut short on 9/11. And to my fellow Soldiers who did not come home with me.

Lost but not forgotten...

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. **My wife and my boys** – For your undying love and support throughout graduate school and my Army career. I am in awe of your strength in doing the toughest job in the world - the wife and children of a Soldier. I look forward to our continued journey as this chapter closes, and a new one begins.
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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

### **Overview**

We live in a world where terrorism is a daily threat. While Americans have lived with the threat of terrorism on their soil from mostly right-wing extremists (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005) for some time, the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11) from Islamic terrorists has brought the issue to the forefront. While the threat from right-wing extremists is still very much alive, Americans are now dealing with the threat of homegrown terrorism from Islamic extremists due in large part to the growth and availability of online tools and forums aimed at vulnerable audiences (young people in particular) within the American border (Seib & Janbek, 2011). Some parts of the country are certainly more desirable targets than others, but the threat is real for everyone. Finding ways to combat this threat is a daily challenge that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) faces.

Efforts to prevent terrorist attacks have substantially increased. The fiscal year 2012 budget request from DHS is 57 billion dollars, an increase of more than 34 billion dollars from 2002 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2011; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.a). Of the 57 billion dollars, more than 1.5 billion directly support counterterrorism efforts including imaging technology for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), canine teams and additional security personnel at airports, and working with state and local authorities with various training and security programs. Interestingly, the budget makes no mention of communication programs or the campaign itself. Recently, however, President Obama signed a national-security directive

that requires the government to more effectively communicate with communities during terrorist incidents (Ambinder, 2011).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to understand how publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism and the messages from the DHS *See Something, Say Something* counterterrorism campaign, and if that meaning has impacted their intention to act on these messages. Through a qualitative approach, I examined (1) how publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism; (2) how publics make meaning of the campaign messages. This qualitative study consisted of individual interviews with college students at a Mid-Atlantic State University and Department of Defense (DoD) employees.

### **Background on DHS**

Prior to 9/11, there had been recommendations on Capital Hill to establish an agency for homeland security. The security activities that DHS is now responsible for were once overseen by more than 40 federal agencies, and funds were appropriated by more than 2,000 separate Congressional accounts. When a member of Congress presented a bill to create such an agency in March of 2001, his efforts seemed to fall on deaf ears (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.b). Not surprisingly, following the 9/11 attacks, efforts to create DHS were brought to the forefront. After the establishment of the Office of Homeland Security, the Homeland Security Council, and Homeland Security Advisory Council by Executive Orders from President Bush, as well as several more months of political dealings, DHS was finally established by the Homeland

Security Act of 2002 on November 25, 2002 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.b).

### **The DHS mission and its interest in community policing.**

The mission of DHS “is to ensure a homeland that is safe, secure, and resilient against terrorism and other hazards” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.c).

Fundamental aspects of the agency’s mission include: preventing terrorism, securing the borders, enforcing immigration laws, protecting cyberspace, and ensuring a quick recovery from disasters (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.c). A few of the agency’s most essential functions include working with authorities from the local to the federal levels as well as private entities “to strengthen the borders, providing for intelligence analysis and infrastructure protection, improving the use of science and technology to counter weapons of mass destruction, and creating a comprehensive response and recovery system” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.d., p. 4).

In the context of counterterrorism efforts, DHS identified police-community relationships as a key component of its response to terrorism (Friedmann & Cannon, 2007). Similar to neighborhood watch programs, the best way to fight crime or terrorism in this case may be to empower the citizens (Homeland Security Institute, 2006). Often referred to as community policing, this is quickly becoming a dominant approach, although similar neighborhood watch programs have been around since the 1960s (USAonWatch, n.d.). Contrary to the trend in the 1980s and 1990s where paramilitarism policing was taking hold (Weber, 1999), community policing is designed to be a collaborative effort between the local police and the community to engage in problem-solving; it is seen as proactive whereas the traditional means of paramilitarism are seen as

reactive (Friedmann & Cannon, 2007; Murray, 2005). As Briggs (2010) observed: “Communities are the long-term solution to terrorism, but they need to grow into this role organically and in a way that doesn’t merely serve to open up divisions and tensions elsewhere” (p. 981).

Community policing, however, is not without controversy. In 2007, for example, the UK launched the Prevent campaign which “seeks to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism both in the UK and overseas” (Home Office, n.d., para. 1). Like *See Something, Say Something* (described in more detail below), the UK emphasized the importance of local authorities and the community in carrying out counterterrorism efforts. However, the campaign failed to address right-wing extremism, causing confusion amongst local authorities and community groups in carrying out the policies. As a result, the campaign was seen as a means for the government to disguise intelligence collection efforts, and a listless effort in involving the community (Briggs, 2010). Additionally, community policing efforts were viewed by many as oppressive, racist, and in which true community involvement was never achieved (Klausen, 2009; Ministry of Defence, 2010). In a recent speech made by Pauline Jones, the Minister of State for Security for the UK, Jones stated that the UK will focus counterterrorism efforts on all forms of violent extremism (“UK and US Approaches,” 2011). Interestingly, in a recent Washington Post article (Smith, 2011) DHS eliminated many of their personnel that study rightwing domestic terrorism. This decision was sparked by a 2009 DHS report which warned of the rise of such forms of domestic terrorism. This included anti-abortion and anti-immigration terrorism, and the elimination from reports of terms such as white supremacist and Christian identity. Conservatives complained that this report was an

attack on conservative beliefs. This despite the findings of a recent DHS report which concluded that “a majority of the 86 major foiled and executed terrorist plots in the United States from 1999 and 2009 were unrelated to al-Qaeda and allied movements” (para. 9).

**Background on the “See Something, Say Something campaign.”**

In July 2010, DHS launched the *See Something, Say Something* campaign. The campaign originated with the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), which had introduced the slogan in a similar campaign in 2002. The slogan was developed on September 12, 2001, by a New York City (NYC) ad agency. Soon after, it was adopted by the NY MTA who posted signs with the slogan and a hotline for reporting suspicious activity on trains and buses throughout the city. After trademarking the slogan, the NY MTA granted permission to 54 organizations at home and abroad the right to use the slogan in their own public campaigns (Alpert, 2010; Daly, 2010; Fernandez, 2010).

Evidence of the campaign’s impact on the public could be seen in the 1,944 tips provided to the NYPD hotline in 2006 (Soffin & Padilla, 2007). In a more recent event, New York City Times Square street vendor Lance Orton alerted police to a smoking Nissan Pathfinder parked in Times Square on May 1st, 2010. This smoking car turned out to be a car bomb (Daly, 2010; Fernandez, 2010). Fortunately it malfunctioned and never detonated (Baker & Rashbaum, 2010). The street vendor’s vigilance potentially saved lives, to which he credited the *See Something, Say Something campaign* (Daly, 2010; Fernandez, 2010). DHS began to take notice of the campaign’s positive impact in New York City and adopted the campaign slogan as a national awareness campaign in

July 2010, with the goal of “making people more aware, but also providing them with the tools they need to take action if they see something suspicious” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2010b, para. 36).

In the nation-wide campaign, DHS stated that its aim is to make the public more aware of tactics used by terrorists, keep the public more informed of threats, empower the public to report suspicious activities to the proper authorities, and work closely with state and local authorities as well as community groups to fight crime and terrorism (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2010b). As in the UK, however, efforts being made by some local authorities under the auspices of DHS and the campaign have been the subject of criticism. For example, the Metro Transit Police in the District of Columbia (DC) recently began random bag searches at DC metro stations. Some complained that the searches were a waste of time, while others feared they would lead to racial profiling (Tyson, 2011). On NYC’s subway, similar searches were being conducted when the campaign was still a NY MTA campaign. Civil liberty groups complained that the random searches were ineffective, fed off of peoples’ fears, and unconstitutional (Powell & Garcia, 2005). The argument as to whether or not these searches are effective can be debated, given that there have been no successful attacks on an American subway system since 9/11, but there is no direct evidence to support their effectiveness (Metzger, 2006). As for the constitutionality of the searches, courts have upheld the rights of police to conduct these searches, thereby declaring them constitutional (Martin, 2007).

### **Research Problem**

By now every American should understand the very real threat of terrorism in this country. So why then, would there be resistance to these efforts made by the government

to protect its citizens? Is it a general mistrust of the government? Do people feel too inconvenienced? Is the message not getting through? All of these are very real possibilities. What makes the *See Something, Say Something* campaign especially difficult is that the key public is American citizens. This is an extremely heterogeneous public consisting of several racial and cultural backgrounds. According to the Census Bureau's 2010 Census Data, the racial make-up of the 3.7 million people living in the US is as follows: 72.4 percent are white, 12.6 percent are Black, almost 5 percent are Asian, 16.3 percent are Hispanic, and 6.2 percent are some other race. Knowing and understanding the dynamics of these various publics is an important factor to ensuring a successful campaign (Smith, 2009). Understanding how various publics make meaning of counterterrorism can lead to more effective message strategies, increase public awareness, and help in the fight against domestic terrorism.

### **Organization of Thesis**

Following the introduction chapter, this thesis includes: a literature review of (1) counterterrorism communication, (2) the situational theory of publics, (3) and successful campaign planning. I then provide my research questions, followed by a description of my qualitative research methodology, my sample, and the procedures used for my data analysis. Finally, I present and discuss my results, theoretical and practical implications of my findings, as well as limitations and proposals for future research.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This section will synthesize literature from various fields, adding to the limited research on contemporary counterterrorism campaigns. To provide a strong foundation for my research, I will review literature that has canvassed counterterrorism communication. Next, I will review the relevant literature on the situational theory of publics to expand upon the importance of identifying and understanding publics. Since this study seeks to make meaning of messages in the context of a national awareness campaign I will then briefly review literature on the components of successful campaign planning.

### **Counterterrorism communication**

DHS defines international terrorism as acts of violence that endanger the lives of others, violating the laws of any nation, in order to influence government policy or ability to function. Additionally, international terrorism must take place outside of U.S. territory or include multiple nations as staging grounds. Domestic terrorism includes the same acts of violence, but must be committed within U.S. territory (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2008, p. 13).

The *See Something, Say Something* campaign is a terrorism prevention communication campaign. DHS hopes that by reaching out to the public, they can prevent another terrorist attack from happening (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2010b). Obviously DHS personnel cannot be everywhere at all times. So, they have decided that one of the best measures to help prevent such a crisis from occurring is to make the public more vigilant. A repeated theme of the campaign is that “homeland security begins with hometown security” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2010a,



para. 2; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2010c, para. 2). DHS is relying on communities and citizens to work with local law enforcement, similar in nature to neighborhood watch programs.

Neighborhood watch programs have existed in the U.S. since the 1960s. In 2002, the National Sheriffs Association (NSA), the Department of Justice, and other previously established programs, launched USAonWatch as a response to the events of 9/11. The program partnered with and revitalized all various neighborhood watch programs throughout the country (USAonWatch, n.d.). Christopher Tutko, the director of the Neighborhood Watch Program for NSA, reported that in the state of Virginia, neighborhoods watch programs “have crime rates 40 percent lower than those neighborhoods without such a program” (Morse, 2009). In the U.S. there is a growing interest in community policing within the Muslim community specifically.

The Homeland Security Institute (2006) conducted a study that included a thorough review of all relevant literature on community policing in general and within Muslim communities. The authors noted that community policing can improve relations with Muslim communities in the U.S., reduce the likelihood of radicalization of Muslim youth, provide information on possible attacks, as well as form relationships with people in the community that can provide insight into the Islamic world. Most notably, the authors find that the Muslim community is generally open to the idea. Muslims view such interaction with law enforcement as an opportunity to have some control over their own environment, perform their duties as members of the community, and as a means for making their own concerns known. However, if communities have a fear of or are not actively engaged by the police, they will be less likely to work with them (Murray, 2005;

Reisig & Giacomazzi, 1998). As Seib and Janbek (2011) argued “the West or other outsiders cannot bring an end to terrorism that attaches itself to Islam. Only Muslims themselves can do that” (p. 106). This begins by building a relationship of trust and cooperation with Arab and Islamic-American communities (Lyons, 2002; Friedmann & Cannon, 2007).

Communicating counterterrorism messages is a daunting task. O’Hair, Heath, and Becker (2005) argued that organizations responsible for safeguarding Americans from terrorism must understand the public perception of the situation. Further, they pointed out that for the organization to communicate with the public about terrorism, the message must be effective, clear, and concise. Speaking in the context of biodefense (but applicable to many counterterrorism messages), Kreps et al. (2005) argued that messages should be both accurate and communicated so as to avoid confusion from its recipients. Additionally, Aldoory (2001) conducted a study consisting of focus groups and interviews to determine antecedents to involvement, in the context of women and health communication. She found that participants did not become as involved with messages if messages were contradictory. A Homeland Security Institute report (2009) argued that when messages providing information about preparing for an emergency reach the public, they are often without survival information. One of the major challenges facing this requirement is the lack of coordination between the various emergency management departments. The very serious shortfall in this failure is that when multiple messages along with multiple sets of instruction are relayed to the public, widespread confusion can result.

Source credibility plays an important role in the overall credibility of the terrorism message. The faces of the organization should be experts and should be “trusted...and credentialed information sources,” (Kreps et al., 2005, p.193). Trust has been identified in several studies as one of the most important components when relaying information to the public regarding health and bioterrorism events (e.g., Eisenman et al., 2004; Meredith, Eisenman, Rhodes, Ryan, & Long, 2007; Pollard, 2003; Shore, 2003). Shore (2003) put it best when he defined trust as “an unwritten agreement between two or more parties for each party to perform a set of agreed-upon activities, without fear of change from either party” (p. 13). Trust, therefore, has implications for competence and believability (Kreps et al., 2005; Shore, 2003).

Pollard (2004) examined six national surveys, with more than 15,000 respondents, both before and after the 2001 anthrax attacks, to understand how the public obtained information and how they perceived information sources during a bioterrorist incident. The study concluded that on the national level, the CDC was viewed as the most trusted source, most likely given credibility as health officials and scientists. Interestingly, if an event occurred locally, respondents indicated trusting local health officials more. While the trust shifted to the local level, having a health official was still shown to be important.

Race, culture, and ethnicity (among other demographics) pose several challenges with regards to trust when communicating with the public about bioterrorism and other crisis events (Kreps et al., 2005). Meredith et al. (2007) conducted focus groups with 75 African American adults using a bioterrorism scenario to elicit responses. Participants were stratified into four groups based on age and socioeconomic status. Honesty from public officials, and consistency of the message from multiple sources were the dominant

themes. However, unlike other studies mentioned above, participants in this study did not believe that public and government officials were looking out for them, but rather would lie or withhold information. As a result, participants were more likely to turn to personal care takers.

Similarly, Eisenman and colleagues (2004) analyzed data from a survey of adults in Los Angeles County, looking at race and ethnicity to determine trust in public health departments during bioterrorism events. African and Asian-Americans who reported living in unsafe areas were less likely to trust public health officials. African-Americans in general reported viewing efforts during such terrorist events as being unfair towards them. Also, Asian immigrants who did not speak English feared that compliance with messages would result in deportation.

In a final example, Aldoory and Van Dyke (2006) conducted six focus groups to examine how audiences make meaning of media coverage surrounding a bioterrorism attack. One of their key findings in the area of race, ethnicity, and culture was that participants would feel closer to the event if the victims looked like them (e.g., same race). These findings have tremendous implications for counterterrorism efforts by public and government officials. Breaking through barriers and preconceived notions based on race, ethnic, and language differences is as challenging as it is important.

Trust and credibility are two overarching factors that play an important role in communicating counterterrorism messages with the public (Eisenman et al., 2004; Kreps et al., 2005; Meredith et al., 2007; Pollard, 2003; Shore, 2003). How and by whom the message is relayed has an impact on its effectiveness. The characteristics of the public will also effect communication. Little research has been done to understand how the

public makes meaning of contemporary counterterrorism messages within counterterrorism communication campaigns. As just discussed, some studies have looked at how the public views the communication process primarily during simulated bioterrorism events and how publics make meaning of news coverage of terrorist events (e.g. Aldoory & Van Dyke, 2006; Pollard, 2003), but no found studies have examined the effects of a counterterrorism communication campaign on how publics make meaning of counterterrorism and subsequent behavioral intentions. Understanding how publics make meaning of such messages can help determine how to best segment them in order to make the campaign messages more successful in reaching the public. The following section will examine the situational theory of publics. This theory offers a thorough understanding of publics and how public relations practitioners can effectively segment them in order to experience more success in their practices (Grunig, 1997; Toth, 1996).

### **Situational Theory of Publics**

The situational theory of publics was developed by James E. Grunig in 1968 to help practitioners understand publics and their opinions. He then spent the next 30 years testing, improving, and expanding the theory along with colleagues and graduate students (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Grunig, 1997). The theory provides public relations practitioners with the tools necessary to segment publics in a more effective manner (Grunig, 1997; Toth, 2006), by explaining why and when people communicate (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Grunig, 1997; Kim & Ni, 2010). By determining how publics behave and subsequently communicate that behavior, public relations personnel can learn how to effectively relate with these publics (Grunig & Repper, 1992).

In the developmental stages of the theory, Grunig (1997) selected a definition of publics: Publics form around a shared problem or issue as it relates to an organization (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Grunig, 1997). Smith (2009) argues that publics share interests and characteristics and are typically cognizant of the situation and the relationship between them and the organization. Once publics recognize a shared problem, they organize in an attempt to force organizations to change or the government to place regulations on the organizations (Grunig, 1997).

The foundation for the theory is laid by three independent variables that predict communication behavior: level of involvement, problem recognition, and constraint recognition, (Aldoory & Sha, 2006; Aldoory & Van Dyke, 2006; Grunig, 1997). Level of involvement is how involved people feel with the situation. How important is the problem for an individual? Do they feel personally and emotionally attached to the problem? This variable argues that if someone feels a connection to an issue or message, they are more likely to give it due diligence (Aldoory & Sha, 2006; Aldoory & Van Dyke, 2006). Problem recognition is when people recognize a problem and stop and think about how best to act (Grunig, 1997). If a situation does not appear to need improvement then people will not think about the situation. Constraint recognition is when people believe that there are challenges that constrain their ability to act. If people think that they can do little to address the problem, then they will not communicate about it (Aldoory & Sha, 2007).

Two dependent variables are impacted by the three independent variables: active and passive communication behavior, or information seeking and information processing; two types of communication behavior (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Grunig, 1997).

Information seeking is when a person purposefully seeks information about a particular issue. Information processing is when a person intentionally or unintentionally attends to a message and continually processes it (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Grunig, 1997). Cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral effects were later added to the list of dependent variables (Toth, 2006). The theory helps to explain when they will likely occur and in which publics they most often occur (Grunig, 1997). Aldoory and Sha (2007) summed these dependent variables up well when they argued that “this active communication [information seeking] leads people to develop more organized cognitions, hold attitudes about a situation, and engage in behaviors to do something about the situation” (p. 341). Summing up the theory as whole, Kim and Grunig (2011) stated that when a person recognizes a problem, perceives that they can do something about it, and feels involved with it, they will likely look for information about the problem and later attend to that information. If a person does not feel the problem involves them, then they will not seek information about it (Grunig, 1997).

The theory is similar to the fundamentals of marketing segmentation in that it provides criteria for effectively segmenting publics (Grunig, 1997). It uses the public’s perception of a situation and their ensuing behavior in order to segment them effectively (L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). The theory itself, however, has roots in theories of economics and psychology, decision and communication behaviors (constraint recognition), as well as uses and gratifications theories; all of which contributed to the development of the independent and dependent variables (Grunig, 1997). While the three independent variables discussed earlier have stood the tests of time, a fourth independent variable, referent criterion, was originally included but later removed. Grunig (1997)

defined it as a “solution carried from previous situations to a new situation” (p. 11). However, in subsequent studies it did not have conclusive effects on communication behavior (Aldoory & Sha, 2007), and it was abandoned while the cognitive and attitudinal variables discussed earlier were added (Grunig, 1997).

Grunig and Hunt (1984) identified what Smith (2009) called “four stages of publics” (p. 60). Following Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) definitions of nonpublics, latent publics, aware publics, and active publics, Smith (2009) further identified apathetic publics:

- *Nonpublics*: Have no issue with the organization.
- *Latent publics*: Have a common issue with the organization, but do not realize it.
- *Apathetic publics*: Have a common issue with the organization, realizes it, but does not care.
- *Aware publics*: Have a common issue with the organization, understand its importance, but lacks the organization to become active.
- *Active publics*: Have a common issue with the organization, and are actively engaged with the organization with respect to it.

Smith (2009) further argued that public relations activity can influence the movement of a public from latent to aware, or aware to active. However, a nonpublic can become a latent, apathetic, or aware public without such influence. This highlights the importance of considering all publics when planning a campaign.

Situational theory of publics identifies four segmented publics based off of active and passive communication behavior (Grunig & Repper, 1992).



- *All-issue publics*: Publics which are active on all issues.
- *Apathetic Publics*: Publics which are inattentive to all issues.
- *Single-Issue Publics*: Publics active on only one issue or minute subset of issues that deal with a small segment of the population.
- *Hot-Issue Publics*: Publics active on a single issue that deals with almost everyone in the population and that has been accompanied by heavy media coverage.

As mentioned in the previous section, no found studies have looked at the effects of a counterterrorism communication campaign on how publics make meaning of counterterrorism and subsequent behavioral intentions. However, the Aldoory and Van Dyke (2006) study discussed earlier in this chapter did examine how publics make meaning of media coverage surrounding a simulated bioterrorism attack; using the situational theory of publics as a theoretical framework. Some of their participants stated that media coverage had a significant impact on problem recognition. The media would have to show the event to be a problem for them to take it seriously. In addition to this coverage, other factors that affected problem recognition included: authority of the source releasing the information; previous knowledge on the topic by the participant; how heavily the media covered the attack; and how personally involved the participant felt. As predicted by the situational theory of publics, a few participants stated that once they recognized a problem they would act on it because they felt their level of involvement was high while their constraints were low.

Several factors affected the participants' level of involvement. If the bioterrorism attack was closer to their own neighborhood or to those of their loved ones, then the

participant felt more affected by the event. Additionally, if the participants could relate closely with the victims, then they felt more involved. Shared risk or shared involvement was the final factor discussed that affected level of involvement. Similar to the findings from the Pollard (2004) study discussed earlier in this chapter, participants felt closer to the event if local officials were also affected. They felt as though these officials would be more concerned with their local area than federal government officials. This provided them with a sense of comfort and security.

With regards to constraint recognition, Aldoory and Van Dyke (2006) found physical, cognitive, and affective constraints. They also found that the lack of access to media was an important physical constraint; something that should be considered when using various media types to get the messages of a campaign to the public. Of particular interest was the “information overload” finding (p. 356). Participants could only process so much information. Once they felt they could no longer do so, they either stopped seeking it out or delegated that responsibility to others within their social network. Additionally, media sensationalism of possible bioterrorism threats only served to raise fear and anxiety among the participants. As a result, participants preferred to remain unaware of potential threats.

Aldoory, Kim, and Tindall (2010) delved further into the concept of shared involvement or experience, building upon the Aldoory and Van Dyke (2006) study. Their experiment was based on a simulated bioterrorism attack on the U.S. food supply. They sought to determine if perceived shared experience with media portrayals and news spokespersons would have an impact on various cognitions: concern, personal involvement, and the urge to learn more about the situation. All of these, they argued, are

important factors that influence behavior change. Further, they tested information gaining as a dependent variable. Referring to a study presented by Kim and Grunig (2007), they argued that “in today’s mediated global environment, information processing and information seeking are often fluid and overlapping, creating for a public information gaining” (p. 135).

They found that perceived shared experience with victims could possibly have an impact on problem recognition and information gaining about the problem. Further, perceived shared experience with both the victims and the spokespersons in the news could cause people to feel more involved. Therefore, they argued that perceived shared experience has the potential to be an antecedent variable that should be examined for the situational theory of publics. Additionally, they found some support suggesting that information gaining may be a more appropriate variable for the mediated global environment as it currently stands.

This study will also consider internal publics. I believe that internal publics (government employees for this research project), will likely provide a different perspective on terrorism and counterterrorism and the efforts of DHS through their campaign than external publics. McCown (2007) examined internal publics using the situational theory of publics as a theoretical framework. The study researched a small college regarding potential changes to their benefits as employees and outsourcing of certain functions to determine if internal activism would develop from a lack of effective internal public relations practice. Additionally, the author sought to determine the communication strategies administered by employees and organizational leadership as well as subsequent changes to internal public relations practice. Preceding and during the

time period of this situation, the college public relations department worked closely with external publics but did little to work with internal publics. Ultimately McCown (2007) found that employees did organize as an activist public as a result of the poor internal public relations. As predicted by the situational theory of publics, when participants became cognizant of a problem with the organization, they became more involved, sought information about the problem, and subsequently organized to address their problem.

### **Situational theory of problem solving.**

As an extension, rather than a replacement, of the situational theory of publics, the situational theory of problem solving was recently introduced by Kim and Grunig (2011). The theory offers a new, more generalized, dependent variable: communicative action in problem solving. This variable expanded upon the information seeking and information processing dependent variables. This new dependent variable incorporates several active and passive communication behaviors, and includes four new sub-variables: information forefending and permitting (Information Selection) and information forwarding and sharing (Information Transmission). Also included are the two original dependent variables, information seeking and attending (formally referred to as processing) grouped together under the umbrella of information acquisition (Kim & Ni, 2010). This new variable assumes that people use communication as a purposeful means for solving problems.

Situational motivation in problem solving was added as a mediating variable between the original three independent variables and communicative action in problem solving. The situational theory of problem solving assumes “that most human behavior is

motivated by problem solving” (Kim & Grunig, 2011, p. 123). The three independent variables increase the need to solve the perceived problem or situation, thereby motivating publics to act.

The theory also reintroduces and redefines referent criterion. Problem recognition was also redefined. Referent criterion as an independent variable, directly impacts the new communicative action variable. This variable influences publics’ active and passive communication behavior through their history of success in managing problems of a similar nature (Kim & Grunig, 2011). This history could come from a previous situation, or a person could improvise one in the early stages of a new problematic situation (Kim & Ni, 2010). Problem recognition, as defined in the situational theory of publics, is when people recognize a problem and stop to think about how best to act (Grunig, 1997). Problem recognition was redefined as “one’s perception that something is missing and that there is no immediately applicable solution to it (Kim & Grunig, 2011). Kim and Grunig (2011) argued that involvement recognition (previously level of involvement) and constraint recognition could also affect if a person stops to think about how best to act.

### **Crisis communication and publics.**

A campaign that seeks to keep the public vigilant in order to prevent a terrorist attack is ultimately trying to keep a crisis situation from developing. A crisis causes disorder and confusion, and exposes “the inadequacy of existing assumptions” (Sellnow, Seeger, Ulmer, 2005, p. 169). It is a situation that has gone awry. However, a crisis is much more complex than that. How stakeholders view and understand the situation and how that impacts their decisions is just as significant (Gilpin & Murphy, 2008). Thus, an organization does not necessarily decide if they are in a crisis, but rather, stakeholders

determine whether a crisis is occurring. Stakeholders have certain expectations of organizations in crisis. They want to know that the organization is doing everything it is supposed to be doing before, during, and after crises. In addition, when a situation arises that has the potential to cause a crisis, stakeholders want to know the organization is prepared to handle the crisis and return to a normal state of affairs as quickly as possible with minimal damage (Coombs, 2012). Those expectations are based on societal norms and values. When those expectations are violated by the organization, a crisis can ensue.

Publics, as you recall, form around a shared problem or issue as it relates to an organization (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Smith, 2009). A stakeholder is a person or group of people who can either have an impact on an organization's mission and objectives or be impacted by an organization (Coombs, 2012; Smith, 2009). Sandman (2003) argued that publics may not care much, whereas stakeholders "have a stake in the issue" and know it (para. 5). This is not to imply that publics are to be ignored in a crisis. Smith (2009) described how easily publics can move between the various stages. It is critical to understand the nuances of stakeholders and publics in this context, and the importance in considering them both in a campaign such as this.

The value added by the situational theory of publics is that communication behaviors are related to the situation at-hand (Toth, 2006), and when people perceive a problem that they can relate to "information consumption becomes systematic" (Kim & Grunig, 2011, p. 122). Planners can determine if publics are active or passive and thus decide how to best segment them into specific publics (Kim & Grunig, 2011). There are several types of publics, and segmenting them is essential to better understanding them, and in turn have success in relating with them (Rice & Atkin, 2009). The situational

theory of publics provides a well-established theoretical framework for understanding, analyzing, and segmenting publics.

### **Successful Campaign Planning**

There are many factors to consider when planning a campaign that can make it a resounding success or a complete failure. Within each of these factors are tasks to complete, within those tasks there are subtasks, and within those subtasks there are explicit tasks and implied tasks, and so on and so forth. Providing all of the best practices to conducting a successful campaign would likely prove to be a daunting task that would extend well outside the scope of this research. However, there are some very basic steps that can be taken to ensure that a campaign is well on its way to success.

First and foremost, the campaign planner must conduct research. Smith (2009) referred to this as formative or strategic research: “The systematic gathering of information about issues and publics that affect organizations” (p.17). It can be difficult to find a starting point for planning, if the planner fails to complete this crucial task. Formative research includes an analysis of the situation as well as key publics (Smith, 2009). Analyzing the situation includes understanding the circumstances surrounding the organization and the behaviors of the publics that the overall campaign strategy will attempt to reach (McGuire, 1989; Rice & Atkin, 2009; Smith, 2009). Also, what kind of campaign is it? Does it seek to create awareness, instruct, educate, or persuade the publics (Rice & Atkin, 2009)? What are the current and past issues facing the organization involved? An issue is “a trend, dilemma, or development that affects an organization’s position and performance” (Thomas, Shankster, & Mathieu, 1994, p. 1253). How has the organization managed these issues? An organization performs issues

management by anticipating an issue and addressing it accordingly, before it becomes a crisis (Smith, 2009). Coombs (2012) defined a crisis as “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders” which can harm the organizations ability to function and bring about negative results (p. 2). All of these facets should be considered when analyzing the situation.

Analyzing and researching key publics can be a much more complex task. An organization cannot choose their publics. As stated earlier, publics form around a shared problem or issue as it relates to an organization (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Smith, 2009). Campaign planners can utilize the practice of segmentation for analyzing publics. This involves the identification of sub audiences or publics. Demographic information previously identified may be useful as well as media usage and socioeconomic factors. Doing so can assist campaign planners in focusing resources in the appropriate places (Rice & Atkin, 2009). Grunig and Repper (1992) discussed two types of variables used to segment audiences: inferred and objective. Inferred variables can measure individual views, beliefs, and values, whereas objective variables measure demographic and social data. When segmenting publics, inferred variables, they argue, are more useful because “the people in them exhibit the desired differential response” and thus provide for a better prediction of the sought after outcome (p. 131). When segmenting publics, more emphasis should be placed on a deeper understanding of the respective publics, instead of simply relying on characteristics that exist on the surface (Walker, 2006).

Establishing the campaign strategy is the next step. The strategy is the overall plan for the campaign. Campaigns are most effective when they are grounded in theory. Campaigns are more than merely an application of basic communication practices



through a single strategy. Many approaches should be applied which incorporate the use of several channels for communicating. The application of theory allows for such an approach (Rice & Atkin, 2009). Where does the organization see itself going, and how does it intend to get there? This step includes the development of goals and objectives, as well as messages and message strategy. A goal is a general statement without any measurable outcomes, which includes the issue at-hand, and defines the end state for dealing with the issue. Objectives are measurable statements that help organizations reach their goals. They should be developed from information found during formative research, particularly when it comes to publics. They are clear and concise, achievable, and include a timeline (Smith, 2009).

Planners should then develop a message strategy. This goes back to understanding what kind of campaign is being developed as this will impact the type message design. Is the goal to persuade or create awareness? Or is to create a dialogue between the organization and the publics (Smith, 2009)? Atkin (2001) identified three types of messages: awareness, instruction, and persuasion. Awareness campaigns are designed to create awareness among publics. Atkin (2001) also identified two message strategies for doing so: information seeking and sensitization. Information seeking messages raise the public interest and cause them to seek more information. Sensitization messages make the public aware of ongoing issues identified in the campaign. Instruction messages help provide publics with the necessary tools for achieving the desired outcome. Message that are intended to persuade, provide the public with reasons why they should accept and incorporate the recommendations made by the campaign.

Selecting tactics for executing the campaign is the next step. Tactics are the bread and butter of the process and a means for implementing the overall strategy (Botan, 2006). Again, it is important that the publics are taken into consideration throughout the process (Smith, 2009). Formative research should have provided information about the publics as to what media they use most frequently, when they use it, for how long, and how often; this information should help campaign planners understand which channels are going to be most effective in reaching their target publics. Resources would be wasted when implementing tactics if they did not have a good grasp of this information (Rice & Atkin, 2009). As Rice and Atkin (2009) noted, “Campaigns must make their messages available through a variety of communication media that are appropriate for the target audience” (p. 446). Regardless of how the message is relayed to the public, credibility plays an important role. Just as in relaying counterterrorism messages to the public, sources should be viewed as trustworthy and competent (Atkin, 2001).

Finally, campaign planners must implement the campaign and conduct summative evaluation. They should first put together a formal written plan. The plan should include all of the components identified above, as well as a detailed timeline, budget, and evaluation criteria. Evaluation measures the outcomes of the campaign, and should be based off the objectives (Smith, 2009).

Campaign planning is a deliberate, time consuming task. The steps provided here are the overarching tasks that should be completed in order to conduct a successful campaign. Several subtasks and implied tasks exist between the lines of each of these tasks. What this section does demonstrate is that a lot of quality work goes into planning

a campaign, of which is the identification and analysis of key publics is the foundation for success (Smith, 2009).

### **Summary**

The literature on counterterrorism communication, the situational theory of publics, and campaign planning demonstrate the importance of effective communication with publics in a terrorism prevention campaign. Understanding publics and how to most effectively communicate with them is important to the campaign's success. While counterterrorism communication has been researched, little, if any, research has looked at the effectiveness of contemporary counterterrorism communication campaigns in the U.S. or abroad. Through this study I hope to gain an understanding of how segmented publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism, the counterterrorism messages from DHS, if they perceive a problem, and if they intend to act on these messages.

### **Research Questions:**

Based on the literature on counterterrorism communication, campaign planning, and the situational theory of publics, the following research questions are proposed to guide the data collection and analysis of this thesis:

RQ1: How do publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism in general?

RQ2: How do publics make meaning of the *See Something, Say Something* campaign messages?

### Chapter 3 – Methods

I conducted twenty-five in-depth interviews to answer the research questions. Qualitative research is a way to interpret the data through the eyes of the participants, while filtering “the data through a personal lens” (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). Through this exploratory study, I examined how publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism and the counterterrorism messages from the *See Something, Say Something* counterterrorism campaign. I also looked at how the messages of the campaign impacted their perceptions of terrorism and counterterrorism, as well as subsequent potential actions. Using a grounded theory approach to analyze the data, I looked for patterns, concepts, themes, and ideas that emerged from the data (Berg, 2009; Potter, 1996; Strauss, 1987). In this chapter I will describe the data collection method that I used in this study. Additionally I will also discuss the procedures, sampling technique, and how the data was ultimately analyzed. Lastly, I will discuss how I addressed the issues of validity and reliability as well as reflexivity in this study.

#### **In-depth Interviews**

Qualitative interviewing seeks to understand the perspectives and opinions of the participants (Creswell, 2003). “Interviews allow the researcher to understand the meanings that everyday activities hold for people” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 145). It is important to the success of the interview, that the researcher conveys that the participant’s perspectives and opinions are important and valued (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). By using a list of predetermined questions, the interviews in this study took on the form of semi-standardized interviews. However, the interviews were not so structured that the interviewer was afraid to digress from the main questions, or modify some of the

wording as necessary (Berg, 2009). Follow-up questions were used throughout the interview in order to obtain more depth and richness in the answers provided by participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin (2005) identify three key features that all qualitative interviews have in common: (1) they build on a naturalistic, interpretive philosophy; (2) they are extensions of ordinary conversations; and (3) interviewees are seen as partners in the study (p. 12). Interviewees should be seen as conversational partners, and as such, should be allowed to exercise some control over the interview by taking it in the direction they think it needs to go or even by modifying some of the questions or probes. It is important that the interview process allow this to happen if the interviewer is to draw out rich depth and detail from the interviewee (Berg, 2009; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005).

Qualitative interviewing, like any other research methodology, comes with its share of cautions and criticism. An interviewer may be nervous before the interview begins. He or she can overcome this anxiety by learning about their interviewee. Spend some time before the interview begins having a small conversation with the interviewee. This will help them both relax (Berg, 2009; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005). Further, throw-away questions, such as demographic questions or questions about the person's line of work or family life, may be asked at the beginning of the interview to help ease into the process. These questions may or may not be relevant to the study, but are useful nonetheless (Berg, 2009).

Researcher bias can cause the interviewer to distort the information and thus tarnish the data. If asked, the interviewer should express his or her opinion, but in a manner that is nonjudgmental. To overcome this, the interviewer should acknowledge

their biases, confront them, and keep them in mind throughout the process in order to help prevent them from creating a slant in the research (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005).

**Sample.**

In order to examine how the messages would impact various publics, interviews were conducted with both internal and external publics. For this study, internal public participants were Department of Defense (DoD) employees. I operated under the assumption that DoD employees are more in-tune with issues of national security and can therefore provide a different perspective on the topic than other publics. I used both a purposive and snowball sampling technique for the recruitment of internal publics. Initially, I established contact with a government Public Affairs Officer at a local military installation asking first for permission to conduct the study at the installation, and then for their participation. I then utilized a snowball sampling strategy by asking them to recommend others who may be interested in participating (Potter, 1996). This process was repeated with other known contacts on the installation until data saturation was reached.

The external public participants came from a Mid-Atlantic university. For this study, an external public is considered any person who does not work for a government agency. A convenience sampling strategy was used for these participants. Students were recruited from communication department classes at the university. Berg (2009), however, cautions against this technique, which is used often in research. Often research is conducted on characteristics or processes to which college students have no basis for providing information. Berg (2009) recommends that if college students are to be used as research participants, they should be relevant to the purpose of the research. In this study,

the college students who were recruited as participants attend a university near a major metropolitan area with significant amounts of mass transit systems which has been targeted by terrorists in the past through large-scale attacks. Mass transit is heavily targeted by DHS as a part of the *See Something, Say Something* campaign. A total of 25 participants, 15 external public and 10 internal public, participated in this study.

### **Procedure.**

The interviews began with some basic demographic questions followed by a few questions that sought to understand how participants make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism. Starting with these questions assisted me in providing some context for the remainder of the conversation. Following these questions, participants read two DHS press releases regarding the campaign, followed by a viewing of the *See Something, Say Something* campaign video. After the video was complete, the remaining questions were asked in order to provide information on how they make meaning of the campaign messages. An interview protocol was used (Appendix A). After each interview I wrote a memo as a means of reflection, and to determine if adjustments to the protocol were necessary. Minor adjustments to the protocol were made during the course of the data collection process. One such example were two questions in the protocol asking if participants felt compelled to be more vigilant after viewing the messages, and if they felt the campaign messages gave them the tools to do so. A prepared probe question was added that asked how those feelings and the newly acquired tools compared to how they felt before being made preview to the campaign messages. This question was only asked of participants who were not aware of the campaign. It was added after some participants would discuss this during their interviews without necessarily being asked, which would

often touch on constraint recognition by the participants. I soon realized that this was something important that needed to be asked of every participant. All participants agreed to be recorded under the auspices that confidentiality would be maintained by not including names in the research report. The interview protocol was pre-tested with two communication graduate students before the first interview with external publics was conducted.

### **Analysis.**

Detailed transcriptions were created by the researcher, including everything from grammatical errors to profanity. H.J. Rubin and I.S. Rubin (2005) recommend including the level of detail that will be analyzed. This could include laughter, gestures, pauses, and *um*'s. I recorded long pauses in the transcriptions. Excessive use of *um*'s and *uh*'s were not included. The transcriptions were completed within five to seven days following the interview.

The next step of analysis was coding. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), grounded theory coding involves three steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. I began with open coding; which means that I coded the data as I went through each transcript, identifying concepts and themes that emerged from the data (Berg, 2009; Strauss, 1987; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The major challenge faced with this type of coding is that changes in what codes mean may occur from document to document, so recoding may be necessary (Berg, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I found throughout the coding process that I needed to go back and recode on several occasions. I then used axial coding to fit the data into categories that were identified from open coding.



Selective coding was subsequently used to explicate a story “from the interconnection of the categories” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008, p. 98).

The unit of analysis used throughout this process was each question (Berg, 2009). I slightly modified the recommendation of Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) to organize my data. Themes were identified, collapsed, and even recoded in some cases. The final themes were transferred onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet into their respective categories. From there, I was easily able to look across the data and identify similar themes and color coded those themes accordingly. I also tracked the frequency in which a theme was used. Frequency of the appearance of a theme was maintained not for quantifiable purposes, but to give a snapshot of its prevalence (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After coding was complete, and the themes present in the data were determined, I used the data to determine how internal and external publics make meaning terrorism and counterterrorism, the campaign messages, if those messages are effective in getting the public to act, and how publics would react to a terrorist event that could directly impact them.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Qualitative research differs greatly from quantitative research. As qualitative researchers we believe in the value of subjectivity and interpretation in our research. However, we do agree that standards for research must be set. As Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) stated, qualitative research cannot be the research methodology of “anything goes” (p. 77). Validity and reliability, used in quantitative research, have been adopted by many qualitative researchers as a means for defending their research results (Cassell & Symon, 1994). Validity is whether or not the research examines the

phenomena it set out to examine (Kvale, 1995). Potter (1996) argues that validity is made up of two parts: internal and external. Internal validity deals with the accuracy of the measurements of the data. External validity addresses the issue of generalizability (Potter, 1996). Due to the small sample size, it is difficult to generate a sample that represents the population (Potter, 1996). M.L. Smith (1987) disregarded the idea completely, on the grounds that it is impossible to be objective, and the data “cannot be verified by appeal to external criteria” (p. 176). The researcher wants to understand the phenomena within the context being studied.

Kvale (1995) argues that validity hinges upon the “quality of craftsmanship” (p. 27). Researchers, he suggests, must constantly check, question, and theoretically interpret their findings. It is important that the researcher avoid “biases that may invalidate qualitative observations and interpretations” (Kvale, 1995, p. 27). Thus, it is important for the researcher to acknowledge biases they bring to the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2003; Potter, 1996). Kvale (1995) offers a series of tactics for increasing validity:

checking for representativeness and for research effects, triangulating, weighing the evidence, checking the meaning of outliers, using extreme cases, following up surprises, looking for negative evidence, making if-then tests, ruling out spurious relations, replicating a finding, checking out rival explanations, and getting feedback from informants (p. 27).

Additionally, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that linking the data to prior theory is a means of achieving internal validity. Doing so also allows for a theoretical interpretation of the data as recommended by Kvale (1995). Potter (1996) recommends a review of

literature that illustrates how other scholars have “defined certain characteristics” that the researcher may use in their study (p. 230). This helps lend credence to the study.

I implemented a series of steps to increase the validity of this research study. Before I even began collecting data, I took the time to be reflexive in order to acknowledge any personal biases that could have impacted the study. Reflexivity, explained in greater detail in the next section, was also maintained throughout the study through the use of memos. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to remain flexible during the interview process and follow-up on any surprises as recommended by Kvale (1995). Additionally, if I did not feel as though I had a thorough understanding of the participant’s perspectives, I would ask for clarification in order to ensure accuracy. This study also uses a theoretical framework as its guide for data collection and analysis. As the data was analyzed, I returned to the literature review time and time again, in order to determine how the data can contribute to the theories that guided this study.

Reliability is concerned with being able to apply the same procedures in a future study and arrive at the same conclusions (Yin, 2009). This can be achieved, Yin argued, by ensuring that the study is well documented, and operationalizes as many steps in the research process as possible. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) refer to this as an “audit trail” (p. 78). The researcher should provide enough information as to their procedures for collecting and analyzing data, and making their data available for other researchers to examine. Following these standards, interview protocols were used and maintained, including variations to the protocols that were made throughout the research process. All other documents throughout the data collection and analysis process have been maintained by the researcher as well. It is available for other scholars to review, short of

any information that identifies the individual being interviewed. This includes interview notes, memos, transcriptions, and recordings.

It is important to note that not all qualitative researchers agree that these quantitative standards should be applied to qualitative research. For example, Denzin (2009) argued that more flexible guidelines should be used that are not based on quantitative criteria. Further, Denzin addressed accusations that somehow qualitative research cannot be considered credible because the perspective of the researcher can impact the results. He argued that quantitative researchers can have the same impact through an analysis of their evidence, as they decide what is and what is not evidence. Kvale (1995) offered a warning about taking the issue of validity too far in qualitative research. While he acknowledges that as scholars, we must take a critical attitude of the research claims of ourselves and of others, it must not be allowed to permeate our research. Doing so could lead to what Kvale (1995) referred to as *validity corrosion*. “By continually seeking valid proof, the quest for certainty and legitimate foundations may erode the very foundation that one is attempting to fortify” (Kvale, 1995, p. 37). Further, Corbin and Strauss (2008) argued that qualitative data can tell many stories. Although I may interpret the data in one way, another researcher may see something different. Another researcher may also draw conclusions that differ from my own. While the raw data is the same, “what is different is the prism through which the analyst viewed the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 50). Thus, the argument can be made that applying the quantitative standard of reliability to qualitative research will not yield the same results from researcher to researcher and should therefore not be applied.

### **Reflexivity**

A researcher who practices reflexivity is one that acknowledges his or her place in the social world that he or she is examining (Berg, 2009). Reflexivity requires that a researcher “have an ongoing conversation with [themselves]” (Berg, 2009, p. 198). One way I achieved this was by doing a memo after each interview. I used the memo as a means of reflecting on each interview. I discussed my feelings about the interview, any surprises that may have arisen during the interview, re-acknowledged any biases I have to ensure they were not interfering with my analysis, and review the protocol to determine if adjustments needed to be made. Memos “reflect a more personal account of the course of the inquiry” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 123).

In the spirit of reflexivity, I also acknowledged up front, how my current occupation could have had the potential to impact my analysis of this research study. I am a thirty year old, white male who is currently on active duty in the U.S. Army. My father was in the Army for 26 years, so I have been around the Army lifestyle all of my life and I love every aspect of it. I consider myself to be an extremely patriotic person. As such, I view national security as an important issue in this country, and feel it should continue to be a top priority for the government; hence my interest in this campaign. Before I began the study, and at some points during the data collection, I acknowledged that not all of my participants felt this way. Some things were said that were contradictory to my views on the issue. As a qualitative researcher, I understand the value in subjectivity and personal interpretation. Thus, it was important that I remembered that my participants have their own unique views and this only served to improve the overall quality of this research study.

## Chapter 4 – Results

The data show that the publics I interviewed for this study make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism in a variety of ways. The data also show that how publics view these concepts vary by external and internal publics (undergraduate students and DoD employees in this case). Variables such as personal experiences, professional experiences, career field, and even age in some cases, impacted how publics make meaning of not only terrorism and counterterrorism in general, but also the messages of the campaign. There were a total of eighteen common themes between the two types of publics on how they view terrorism and counterterrorism, and how they made meaning of these messages. However, there were certainly differences in how these messages impacted participants' feelings about terrorism and counterterrorism, their role in the effort, and their ability to be effective. The development of certain types of publics as defined by the situational theory of publics was also present as participants were asked questions about terrorism near their hometown, but in some instances, tended to vary between external and internal publics. Below each theme is discussed as related to the study's research questions.

### **RQ1: How do publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism in general?**

Research question one sought to determine how publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism. Participants were first asked what they thought about when they hear the words terrorism and counterterrorism. Dominant themes emerged, while outlying themes provided additional perspectives. The majority of participants gave a multitude of responses which fit into several themes. The majority of participants

chose to provide their views of what a terrorist looks like, although this was generally not a solicited response. Other responses showed the effects of media portrayal of terrorism, current events, geographical location, participant age, and whether they were an internal or external public.

*Terrorism as an attack.* The majority of participants described some sort of attack when talking about terrorism. What differed between the two publics was how they described the attacks. There were 15 external public participants in this research; eleven of them described an attack when asked about terrorism. Of those eleven, nine of them described it with one or two words. “Bombings” or “Suicide bombing.” Another common response was to use the dates of a major terrorist attack: “9/11” or one participant mentioned the “7/7 London bombings.” One participant described it as a physical or emotional attack, while another described it as an attack on American soil.

Of the ten internal public participants, seven of them also described some sort of attack. Some described the attacks in a general sense, with no specifics; saying things like “bad guys hurting us” or “attacks on homeland.” Only two participants used similar phrases to that of external publics to describe terrorism such as “9/11” or “explosions,” while two other participants gave more of a text book definition of terrorism. Not surprisingly one of those participants has a position in the security realm with the federal government. He observed: “Any kind of politically or ideologically motivated attack or ideologically motivated attack on, uh, either governmental or nongovernmental entities meant to provide more of a statement above and beyond the actual impact of the, whatever kind of attack it is.” The other participant, who works in the operational field with the government, described it as “overt and covert actions against uh, it would be

another country or another entity. It would be to one strike terror, and to try to get a point across using a harsh, terrorist violence, rather than calmer, rational speaking.”

*Anyone could be a terrorist/Terrorist profiles.* While these themes are two separate themes, it is important that the prevalence of them be described under the same heading so as to better put them into perspective. Only five of all the participants specifically said that anyone could be a terrorist. Only one participant from the external publics touched on this theme. A twenty year old female student felt it was wrong to only think of people of Middle Eastern origin as terrorists, saying that any group of people could be a terrorist. “I know that there are people that mainly put Middle Eastern’s for um, [inaudible] terrorist attacks and so on. But I don’t believe that there should be a word that only places that certain group.”

The other four participants who initially touched on this theme came from the internal public category. Age seemed to be a factor for two of the participants who both work in public affairs for the government and who were over the age of forty. As one of them noted: “Terrorists, I don’t know how old you are, but since I’ve been a kid that word has been thrown around, so I don’t think anybody really my age thinks of it in one particular, you know, type of person.” The other participant described an expanded view of terrorist groups:

The terrorism of today, the Middle Eastern, well it’s not even, the Islamic terrorists that have grabbed the headlines. But, growing up as a child in the 70s and 80s I remember the IRA and, and every night in the news the bombings in England. And even, even the attacks in Germany, uh, and Italy. And when Colonel Roe was killed in the Philippines.



While only one participant from the internal public touched on the theme, eleven of the fifteen participants felt that terrorists fit a certain profile. One participant, a twenty year old female student, pointed the finger at the reality of the times for her reasoning of profiling:

I grew up, you know, during 9/11 and all that, so it's been sort of jammed in our heads. I can't not think Middle Eastern, Osama Bin Laden, when I think of terrorism. It's pretty much one of the first things I think of. But that's only just because it's what we've been exposed to so much.

A twenty-two year old female student had a similar reasoning: "It was made so public and hyped-up around the time of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, and that's why I associate that word with you know, is, like, fanaticism, and Islam, and the Middle East."

Other participants pointed the finger at the media. One such participant, a twenty year old, female student stated: "Media portrays it to usually, when they say 'terrorist,' they're always referring to, it's like they're always referring to Islamic groups." Another participant, a twenty year old female student mentioned: "I believe it's more the media, what they put out. For example on the news, and you know, magazines and stuff that makes us feel that oh, the Middle Easterners are terrorists."

Interestingly, while only three of the internal public participants specifically touched on the theme anyone could be a terrorist, only one of the participants specifically stated that terrorists fit a certain profile. This participant, a fifty-four year old female Military reservist felt that "Whether it's fair or not, I think of an Arabic type of individual. Because what's like in our face is... normally they're from that ethnic group." When asked what she meant by "in our face," she stated she was referring to the media.

After being exposed to the campaign messages, however, four of the external public participants and the one internal public participant who initially felt that terrorists fit a certain profile felt differently. One participant, a thirty-three year old student, who almost seemed embarrassed to admit that she thought only of Muslims when thinking of terrorism, now admits that stereotyping “Muslim people is not right; maybe thinking also about our own people that live in this country that could be also a terrorist people.” Another participant seemed to realize that only viewing terrorism as a foreign, Middle Eastern threat, was wrong. “There’s different forms of terrorist and that it can be even within people who are American or U.S. citizens. They don’t have to be foreigners. It can be anyone. It’s diverse.” When it came to internal publics, only one of the participants felt that terrorists have a certain profile. After being exposed to the campaign messages, this participant had a change in her point of view. She now felt that “It can be from different ethnic groups...It can be anybody.”

*Counterterrorism as a military/war effort.* This was the most dominant of the counterterrorism themes with ten participants touching on this theme when asked about counterterrorism. This theme was more dominant among the external public in which eight of the fifteen participants used this theme to describe counterterrorism. One twenty-two year old male student described counterterrorism as “Defense against terrorists. So defense organizations such as Navy Seals, the U.S. military defense.” Another participant, a nineteen year old male African-American student, studying Computer Science described it as “Special Forces, like Black OPS, Navy Seals. People who are specially trained to counter terrorist groups and extremists.” Most described counterterrorism using the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. One such participant, a

nineteen year old female student, said: “I say counterterrorism, kind of how we, the U.S., went over to Iraq. I felt like that was in response to the plane occurrences [9/11].” The current wars were also used by two internal public participants. One such participant, a forty-one year old male, who has served multiple tours in Iraq said: “Well that’s, that’s interesting because I’ve done three tours in the last four-and-a-half, five years over in Iraq, so I, when I hear counterterrorism I just think to the COIN [counter-insurgency] mission and what we’ve been doing overseas.”

*Counterterrorism as government policies/regulations.* Nine participants described some sort of government policy or regulation as a form of counterterrorism. This theme was again more dominant among external publics, with nearly seven of them touching on it, while only two internal public participants did. All participants who described this theme, however, mentioned airport security as a form of counterterrorism. One of the external public participants, a twenty year old female student described it as: “Maybe like homeland security with the airports and regulations that they put on for that.” A fifty-five year old female DoD employee, working in human resourcing, felt it included “Heightened security measures, um, in all locations; schools, and airports, and computers.”

*Counterterrorism as public awareness and reporting.* This theme was described by four internal public participants when discussing counterterrorism, while none of the external public participants mentioned it. This was not surprising given the government’s requirements for annual anti-terrorism/force protection training, and the position of some of the participants who touched on this theme. Half of those participants work in a security role for the government. One of them described counterterrorism as:

When people are reporting anything that they see that is suspicious would be counterterrorism. I mean the way I look at it would be counterterrorism. Because you're providing information to the appropriate authorities, they can either determine that it is or is not a, a viable threat. And so you're countering that, their ability to do their action that they want to take.

Another participant was a public affairs specialist who was already well aware of the campaign prior to the interview. This participant saw this campaign as an important piece of the counterterrorism effort, and had a lot of faith in its effectiveness:

It's changed a lot of thinking. Not even here for federal employees, but just the nation overall. It's made people a lot more assertive and aware of their environment. And so I think people are, instead of just putting their headphones on and getting on a train and going, they're actually paying attention to everything around them now.

*Counterterrorism as a media effort.* This was an outlying theme among the participants with only two participants describing it during their responses. This theme was used from a participant from both publics, but interestingly, they saw the media's role in counterterrorism in a completely different light. The participant from the external public said the media can display "different types of messages. By, I mean, even just things on commercials or any types of advertisements that display those types of messages. Anything can help with even the psyche of a person. And also just, it emphasizes." Whereas that participant saw the media as having an active role in getting counterterrorism messages out to the public, the participant from the internal public saw the media as denying access:

During the event, if the law enforcement are doing their job correctly, there would be a media blackout on the event itself, uh, and its relationship to a terrorist effort. One of the things that you use in a counterterrorism mode is to deter them, or restrict their ability to the media.

*Responsibility for counterterrorism.* After participants were exposed to the campaign messages, they discussed who they felt shoulders the responsibility for counterterrorism efforts. This question was asked to see if the collaborative effort messages of the campaign were resonating with the participants, and if they saw that as an important factor in DHS' counterterrorism efforts. Seventeen participants felt it was important that DHS make a collaborative effort with other state and/or local authorities. Some participants expressed the importance of having citizens play a role in this collaborative effort. Seven participants felt that the sole responsibility for counterterrorism efforts lies at the federal level. Others expressed collaboration between federal agencies, but still expressed that it should remain at the federal level. One participant wanted to create an entirely new entity for counterterrorism efforts; a special forces type of unit in order to avoid full-scale wars.

*Terrorism as a domestic problem.* Sixteen participants said they did not feel threatened by domestic terrorism. Reasons between the publics differed, however. Twelve of those participants came from the external publics. A majority of the external public participants attributed it to not experiencing it directly. For example, as one eighteen year old female student observed: "I never really truly experienced it since it was just on TV it never really seemed that real to me." Similarly, a twenty year old female student stated: "I don't see it all the time around me. It's not something that's

hitting me at home all the time.” One participant placed their faith in the government: “I figure the government is doing what it can to prevent it.” The remaining four participants came from the internal public. One of the public affairs participants felt people were more aware of their surroundings after 9/11 and do a good job of watching out for one another and reporting information. This participant was also well aware of the *See Something, Say Something* campaign before this study which may have had an impact on her personal assessment of the threat of domestic terrorism. Another participant, who works in the security field with the government, gave a response that one would generally expect from a security expert who is likely well aware of threats that exist in their immediate vicinity: “I’m not aware that there are agents, or I should say actors out there who are willing to uh, conduct those acts and make me a target.”

A minority of the participants, only four of the twenty-five, said outright that they do feel threatened; once again displaying problem recognition. Half of these participants were from the external public, while the other half came from the internal public. Their reasoning, however, differed greatly. The external publics related their feelings to specific situations. One participant, a twenty year old female student said that “I’m always scared when I’m riding the Metro in D.C. I do feel threatened sometimes. Cause when you’re such a, I guess you could say I feel like D.C. would be a target. So I get scared sometimes.” The other participant, a nineteen year old female student described feeling threatened when in an airport “and I see something fishy occurring that doesn’t make sense.” Internal publics related their feelings to the overall threat posed by individuals. One of the internal public participants, a forty-four year old female who works in the operational field stated: “I mean look at Timothy McVeigh and look at some

of that; it is out there.” The other participant, who was also the only participant from the internal publics to have a profile for a terrorist, had some very strong convictions that people who migrate to this country do not assimilate to our culture and become true Americans, and for that reason there is a threat of domestic terrorism.

While only four internal public participants said they do not feel threatened, another four of them said that while they do not feel threatened directly, they recognize that a threat does exist. One such participant, a female government employee who specializes in security said “because I work for the government, there’s always a chance that a domestic terrorist is going to target my installation, my organization. So I could be caught up in that.” Another female participant working operations for the government mentioned “there is a certain level of fear you can be an innocent bystander to domestic terrorist activity; collateral damage.” While these participants do not feel a direct threat, they recognize that one does exist, displaying what the situational theory of publics refers to as problem recognition.

After being exposed to the campaign messages, a majority of participants expressed changes in their feelings about the threat of domestic terrorism. The majority of external public participants who expressed a change felt that domestic terrorism is a threat, while it was hardly mentioned by internal publics. This is not surprising, however, given that six internal public participants already recognized the threat of domestic terrorism prior to being exposed to the campaign messages. All participants who discussed this theme showed the possible impact that this campaign could have on problem recognition. Whereas they did not recognize it as a threat prior to being exposed to the campaign messages, it now seemed to be something they took seriously. A twenty

year old female student who initially did not feel a threat because she had never experience it, was surprised by how sophisticated some domestic terrorists may be:

It made me more concerned about what could actually be taking place...I don't really look into details of somebody leaving a bag on the ground. They talked about having like rehearsals. I never thought about that in depth, how far they can go in planning these procedures. I never thought about it. So it makes me more worried.

Another participant, nineteen year old male student, who initially felt more threatened by foreign terrorism, had a change of opinion.

Before I saw the video and read the documents, I saw we basically had domestic terrorism under somewhat control. But now I can see there's like different, varying factors that could possibly lead to a more dangerous situation then we anticipated.

Others said the messages "makes it seem like it's more common." "It makes me feel like it's more possible." "It just kind of freaked me out."

Before being presented with the campaign messages, only four of the internal public participants said they did not feel threatened by domestic terrorism. After seeing the video and reading the press releases, only one of those participants reported changing their feelings towards domestic terrorism. The participant, a fifty-five year old female government employee, who works in Human Resources, responded: "Yeah. Um, just reading some of these and watching the video to see different things happening in the, right here where we live, yeah."



After being presented with the campaign messages, two of the original twelve external public participants who said they did not feel threatened by domestic terrorism continued to hold fast on their position. While some participants seemed to be fearful of certain places within a metropolitan area such as Washington, D.C., one participant, a twenty-two year old female student had a different point of view. “I live in the city. If I reported everything that looked suspicious I would be on the phone 24/7. Because people are weird. You don’t know what they are doing. People forget bags at the bus stop.”

Interestingly, five of the internal public participants said they had no change whatsoever in their feelings about domestic terrorism because of their position with the government. As one participant working in the security realm noted: “Um, no, but I think I’ve had about thirty year’s exposure to this kind of stuff.” One would expect an employee working in the security realm to have such a point of view, but this theme was also present among other types of employees as well. One such employee, who works in the operational field, stated: “No, because it’s, it’s what I’m used to seeing. It’s what; it’s very similar training we already receive. So it’s, it’s at the level I’m used to.”

As participants were presented with the idea of an attack occurring in or near their hometown, changes in their feelings about domestic terrorism were evident. Many of the external public participants, however, seemed to have more of an emotional attachment to the prospect of such an event; five such participants felt such an event would make it more personal. One participant, a twenty six year old female student said, “Yeah, because now it’s about me, and not some other person. So it’s much more personal if it’s closer...because now I feel more ownership for the safety of others.” Another participant, a twenty-two year old male student, expressed concerned for people in his

hometown: “Because it happened in my hometown, so, just because it’s right near my home. You have that sort of pride that you want to help people with whatever resources they need because it happened right near your home.” Such responses show that many of the internal public participants reached a higher level of emotional involvement as an attack occurs in their hometown.

Four of the external public participants described feeling as though such a scenario makes it seem more real. One participant, a nineteen year old male student, who had earlier expressed a deep love for the well-being of his community, described feelings of fear: “This could happen to me. It’s not just something that happens on T.V. far away in a distant land that no one’s heard of.” Another participant, a twenty year old senior, described such a scenario as making terrorism: “...feel more real. More like its hitting me if it’s near my hometown. It’s more...it’s more impactful then if it’s just in some random place.”

The majority of internal public participants seemed to have a continued effect from their professional experience; as was expected. Half of the internal public participants seemed not to be swayed by such a scenario; saying that such a scenario does not make them feel any different about the threat. Many of them long recognized that there are threats out there, and that such a possibility exists. One such participant, an employee in the operational field for the government said that the idea does scare her saying: “but I’m aware it’s there and it could happen. I’m already aware so I don’t feel differently.” One of the public affairs specialists again stated that she is already “aware that it can happen anywhere. It’s not just these key cities that we have across the states.” Another public affairs specialist, who had talked about his multiple tours to Iraq, felt that

such an experience of living day in and day out with terrorism has seemed to turn him off to the threat of domestic terrorism; at least near his hometown. Interestingly, he had mentioned the D.C. sniper attacks that had occurred nearby in 2002. He seemed to have some concern about his personal safety at that time. So while he says he does not feel different, earlier comments provided a different insight.

A minority of the participants, three of the twenty-five, stressed the point that they would not allow their lives to be ruled by fear. One such participant, a thirty three year old female student, who did feel a threat, said she felt safe in her neighborhood, and she was “not going to live [her] life all the time thinking about terrorism.” A DoD employee working in the operational field had said that he is “a firm believer that when it’s my time to go, it’ll be my time to go...So from that aspect I’m not going to live my life in fear.” This participant said he did not feel a threat of domestic terrorism. However, similar to another internal public participant, he had expressed the concern he felt during the D.C. sniper attacks due to its proximity to him and his family, and its apparent randomness.

**RQ2: How do publics make meaning of the *See Something, Say Something* campaign messages?**

Research question two sought to determine how publics make meaning of the counterterrorism messages from the *See Something, Say Something* campaign and to what extent that impacted their thoughts and feelings about terrorism and counterterrorism. Themes emerged about how the publics view the message in general and about how they view their role in the campaign. Additionally, some direct questions about the threat of terrorism were asked to examine the development of publics, its impact on the independent variables of the situational theory of publics and problem solving, issues of

trust and credibility in relaying messages about a terrorist event, and to briefly examine the importance of shared risk or experience as previously researched (Aldoory, Kim, & Tindall, 2010; Aldoory & Van Dyke, 2006). Finally, because this is a public awareness campaign, participants were asked what they thought DHS could do to better get their message out to the public.

*Counterterrorism as a citizen's responsibility.* Nineteen participants mentioned this theme during their responses; making it the most dominant theme of RQ2 in how participants made meaning of the overall messages from DHS. The theme was relatively equal in its prevalence between both publics. Participants who touched on this theme also displayed a moderate level of involvement, and in some cases low constraint recognition, as described by the situational theory of publics. One twenty-six year old student participant seemed to recognize that she needs to be involved because the authorities cannot do it without the assistance of the public: "It's not just some guy in a uniform who's definitely looking out for it. It's you at the mall, if you work for the federal government at the federal government buildings." Another participant recognized her responsibility as a citizen, and that she has the ability to do something about it:

First of all, the beginning of the video like explained there are three thousand or whatever billion people living here. You know? Including me. I was like okay, I live here so, um, I have my responsibility as well to play in whatever is happening in this country. So, don't be afraid if you see something that is wrong. No matter what it is, if you think that something is wrong, just do your part. Just call the law enforcement.

One of the internal publics' participants working in the security realm felt that the regular citizen can be an effective tool in counterterrorism efforts:

It's good to get the information out to the public. To know, to let them know that their eyes and ears are a big help to targeting or, or determining who might be a terrorist cell, or somebody that's involved in something that shouldn't be happening.

Some participants seemed to recognize that DHS is giving the citizens the power and the ability to do something. One such participant, a twenty-two year old female student felt it was especially important that people not feel helpless:

I think that it's good mainly for the reason that it makes people feel like they can do something, that they don't feel helpless; which is a really big aspect of combating terrorism...if you feel like you can do something about a problem, then you're less likely to feel that way.

*Raise awareness/increase vigilance.* This was the most dominant theme among the participants with sixteen of them discussing the theme. This is not surprising given that it is a goal of the campaign. One fifty-two year old male participant who works in security for DoD summed it up: "Well, I think their intent is truly to increase the awareness of the public." Another fifty year old participant who also works in security saw value in the context of special events:

So by giving them, um, information on the upcoming Super Bowl and holiday season, I think was the other one, um, it's just like a reminder to say, be on the lookout. If you're going to be at these venues then, you know, look for things that might be suspicious.

Another participant compared it to the neighborhood watch program: “They’re trying to raise awareness...the government can’t be everywhere all the time and can’t watch every person...So it’s just kind of using the civilians to, kind of uh, what’s it called? Um, neighborhood watch type thing.”

*Personal awareness.* This was the most dominant theme among participants, with eleven of participants indicating that they felt they would be more aware of their surroundings. This indication that they would increase their personal awareness shows that they seem to feel a level of involvement with the campaign’s efforts. One twenty-two year old male student felt the campaign has “compelled me to just look around and just be more conscious about if I see something suspicious and I should report it.”

Another participant, a thirty-three year old student, realized that being more vigilant is important to her own safety as well as that of others:

Yeah, I think I’ll, I will try to be more vigilant. You go to the mall, or you take the metro, you just have to be vigilant about the people. Who you sitting with? Who has what? It’s going to be a tough job, but hey, we all want to be safe.

The majority of government employees already felt they have a sense of awareness because of their duties with the government; six of the ten internal public participants discussing this. Participants did not seem to feel that they should not be involved, but more so that they have already achieved a necessary level of awareness. Again, this is not surprising given the training requirements imposed by the government. One such participant, an employee working public affairs, felt that her professional duties keep her well aware of the threat. “Because I do public affairs here, and I work real close

with our AT [anti-terrorism] folks, and our provost marshal office, um, and getting the word out there...I'm confident that I can relay some key messages about the campaign." These participants did feel a renewed sense of awareness as opposed to being equipped with new information on how and what to look for. One such participant in the operational field said that she felt "anytime you see something like that, you, your awareness becomes renewed." A participant who works in human resources said that she doesn't "think it gave me, it showed me anything new. I just think it uh, increased my awareness."

*Counterterrorism as a personal responsibility.* Nine participants expressed a sense of personal responsibility for counterterrorism efforts following the messages of the campaign. It was far more present in external publics, with seven of the nine participants coming from the external publics, while only two came from internal publics. External publics appeared to have much more of an emotional attachment than internal publics. One such participant, a twenty year old student, recalled past situations where she should have said something. "It just made me feel kind of guilty...There are times I could have called. And I don't know. I don't think anything came out of those two incidents, but doesn't mean that it couldn't have." Another participant, a nineteen year old student, talked about his concern for his community. "I do love my community and I do want to, as an American, I feel I should have some responsibility seeking out, not seeking out but keeping an eye out for threats that could harm anyone." One other participant, an eighteen year old student, seemed to understand that it was about more than her own safety. "It teaches me to like, look at my surroundings more and not only care about myself, but the well-being of others as well."

Internal public participants generally felt that they needed to be more aware of their surroundings, but didn't seem to have the emotional attachment to this sense of responsibility that the external public felt. One participant said, "Yes it, every time I go through an antiterrorism briefing or whatever, it always makes me feel like I need to pay more attention to things." Another participant expressed similar sentiment.

It's kind of like, hey, a wake up call...Again, we get too preoccupied, you know, uh, uh, what we do in our day-to-day activities, and I think everyone could improve on attention to detail with their surroundings. You know, it helps to have a reminder of that.

*Self-Efficacy.* Most participants expressed a sense of empowerment from the *See Something, Say Something* campaign messages, indicating that they could have a positive impact on counterterrorism efforts, thereby showing low constraint recognition. Nineteen of all participants expressed direct feelings of self-efficacy. One example came from the twenty year old female student who expressed feelings of guilt for not saying something in the past when she could have: "Cause I have been on the Metro and thought things were suspicious, but I've just gotten nervous and gotten off Metro instead of doing something about it. But I guess now I'll take action or call."

Other participants felt the campaign's messages gave him new tools to work with in knowing what to look for, and how to do something about it. One such participant, a nineteen year old male student said that:

Before the campaign I felt like there wasn't much I really could do. Maybe like a citizen's arrest. That's the most I thought I could do. But now they've given me



the tool. Like, they've pointed out some things I could report to my poli [did not finish sentence]. I can look for suspicious activity.

Another participant, an eighteen year old female student, expressed similar sentiments: "Like I'm more open, like I have more sense of knowledge of what's going on...what tools I should use and how to prepare myself."

One participant, a fifty-four year old Military Reservist recognized her ability to do something through the success stories of others. Referring to the attempted car bombing of New York City's Times Square, she mentioned: "That guy that saw that car down there in New York City; if he hadn't questioned that, oh yeah, somebody's car's broke down, you know...that's how things are going to happen; day-to-day things that are um, commonplace."

Others from the internal public participants recognized that perhaps the best tool for self-efficacy is to abstain from activities that could be targeted. One of those participants, a fifty-two year old DoD employee working in security discussed: "But really, just understanding that if you don't go into areas that are high crime, uh, you reduce risk. If you don't engage in activities of high threat, you're probably not going to encounter terrorism." Another DoD employee, a fifty year old male participant working operations, when talking about the upcoming 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, discussed:

I'm thinking about the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11 is coming up. Well, I'm going to stay at home. I mean, yes they're commemorative events to remember that, and to me those are targets. And that's not something I want to subject my family to.

*Effectiveness of DHS.* Participants generally indicated that DHS is doing an effective job. The majority of participants, thirteen of twenty-five, felt DHS is effective at combating domestic terrorism. Many of the participants felt DHS is effective because of the lack of significant attacks on the United States. One participant, a twenty-six year old female participant, summed up the responses to this question: “I guess lack of news is good news.” Others associated recent success stories to their effectiveness, such as the killing of Osama Bin Laden (or the breaking up of a recent plot to attack Soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas. Eight of the participants felt DHS was making an effort but could do more. Some based their analysis on the fact that they have never heard of this campaign until now, and feel DHS is not getting the message out. One of those participants felt they were doing well in the tactical side of combating terrorism, but needed to step up their efforts when it came to informing the public of what it is they do to keep them safe. Others felt they were being held back by politics or they were trying to figure out how best to be effective without taking away an individual’s constitutional rights. Three participants seemed unsure of DHS’ effectiveness. They either felt that they do not know enough about what DHS does to gauge their effectiveness, or it’s too early to measure their effectiveness because DHS cannot release all of their success stories. Finally, one participant felt that DHS is not effective. Her sole reasoning for this assessment was her lack of faith in the job they are doing at securing the border with Mexico. She feels that the border is an open gateway for illegal immigrants, thus making it easy for terrorists to cross.

Four participants, who either felt DHS was making an effort, or were seemed unsure of their effectiveness, also expressed concern over the interpretation of what it and what is not suspicious. They felt that DHS should do more to explain behaviors that would qualify as suspicious. One such participant, a twenty year old female student, said that “everyone has different perspectives on what is suspicious and what it not, and I think that’s a big issue that this campaign should definitely highlight.” Another participant, a nineteen year old female student, said she feels “like that they have to know exactly what to look for. Because what’s suspicious to me may not be especially suspicious to you.”

*Sources used for information about terrorism.* When it came to information about current threats, thirteen said they would turn to government sources. Most reporting that they felt the government would have the most information. Internal public participants would primarily seek out co-workers who specialize in the security realm. Eight participants would look for information via news outlets. Participants did not specifically speak of sources they view as credible, but instead most participants wanted to go to news sources that they were familiar with, or were the most popular, or focused on a wide variety of issues. Seven participants would turn to the internet. Most of those participants put faith in the Google search engine, saying they would go there to search for information. One participant specified that she would use Google specifically as an outlet to seek out more credible sources; although when asked about how she defines a credible source, she was not really able to provide a clear answer, only saying she would search for multiple news outlets in order to avoid bias.

When it came to finding information about an attack near one's hometown, participants expressed a desire to turn to additional sources. A majority of participants, seventeen, said they would turn to news sources to get information. Many of those participants expressed that they would go to national or international media outlets. Some felt a particular news source has the best information, or the most up-to-date, or they like a particular media personality. Fewer participants in this scenario, only five, would turn to government sources. All of those participants except for one came from internal publics. This is not surprising given that government employees likely would be made privy to more information than a regular civilian. External publics seemed to have the most faith in the news. Communicative action in problem solving, as defined in the situational theory of problem solving (Kim & Grunig, 2011), could be seen when participants were put in this scenario. Four participants expressed a desire to talk to local law enforcement, while two others would get in touch with family and/or friends, and yet another two would utilize social media sites to get information; which normally involves communicating with people you know or are at least familiar with. Three internal public participants would seek out personnel in the security realm for information. One participant would seek out people in the local community. A total of twelve participants expressed a desire to communicate with someone directly in order to get information about an attack in or near their hometown.

*Complacency as a challenge for counterterrorism.* This theme was present in some of the internal public participant's responses, four of them discussing it. This is not surprising given that this is a term commonly used in government anti-terrorism/force protection training. Participants seemed to be concerned that people in this country are

complacent and fail to pay attention to their surroundings. For that reason, they thought that getting this message out was all the more important. A public affairs specialist said the campaign is “good because we’re a really complacent nation...we have blinders on, you know?” A security specialist felt that “people go through their lives in an oblivious state to where they don’t really appreciate the freedoms that they truly have and get to exercise; and understand that there are people out there who want to exploit those freedoms.”

*Factors that affect meaning.* Participants raised some concerns during the course of the interviews that could have an impact on how they make meaning of the messages and their subsequent actions. First, participants had a wide variety of suggestions for how DHS can more effectively communicate their message to the public. Many felt that the video, while informative, is too long for most people to watch all the way through. Many of them suggested television advertising as an effective means for getting the message out to the public. One participant, a twenty-two year old female student offered this suggestion: “You know, like a 30-second, like any advertisement that you see in between shows or something like that.” Some also suggested posters and flyers on buses and the Metro. Some participants felt that going to college campuses would be effective. A twenty year old female student participant felt that DHS “going onto college campuses would really make a difference. Because I know that adults are more likely to tune into the news or read newspaper magazine on what the governments doing.” A couple of participants suggested working with the local community through seminars, or getting established with groups that people are already familiar with. One such participant, a fifty-four year old military Reservist put forth that such advice:

You know, there are already established groups of people. Like homeowner's associations...or community activity groups, or FRG's [military family readiness groups]...I mean there are different groups already established that, that people trust. And if you can get those groups to disseminate information from a group or entity that they are already familiar with and/or trust, it might make more sense to, or be more productive.

One participant, a forty year old security employee for DoD, had an interesting opinion on how to best get the message out. He thought putting a human face on the message would be effective.

I think that if you have actual victims of terrorist incidences providing that message, if you have uh, local police chiefs, fire chiefs, people who have a dog in the fight basically, uh, if there were to be an incident in the local population, um, I think that would be a lot more effective. I think even if you interviewed some of the people that, like interview this gun shop owner that uh gave the tip that led to the arrest of this latest wannabe terrorist. Um, I think getting some perspective from him or her, I'm not even sure what the person was, I think that would be interesting to the general public...and [would] catch your attention more than some policy wonk at the top spewing something that you may or may not necessarily tune into.

Second, nine participants expressed a desire to see success stories or thought the campaign was effective because of success stories. One participant, a fifty year old DoD employee in the operational realm, thought the public should be made aware of their effectiveness. "If the public is aware, is made aware of the results of their actions and

their involvement, uh, to me, I think that it would be better received.” A twenty-two year old female external public participant could not recall any successes that DHS has had with this campaign.

When it comes down to it, have we ever really had an instance where some random civilian has reported something suspicious...that’s led to the preemptions of a violent terrorist attack? Cause I don’t remember anything in the news about that. So I don’t even think that we have a precedence on which to say this will be effective in any type of physical way. Some participants, three total, thought the messages would be more effective if people saw the ramifications of not reporting.

Another participant, a twenty year old male student, on the other hand, was familiar with recent success stories and thought it was telling of DHS’ effectiveness.

Yeah I mean, there’s been, well the Fort Hood shooting and 9/11, but uh, I’d say they’ve been effective. Like if they stopped that Texas Tech one through ordering the fertilizer and the Time Square bombing. So I...and the Time Square Bombing was a citizen, right, notifying, so yes, I’d say they’ve probably been effective.

Three participants, all from the internal public, felt that showing ramifications of not reporting may also be effective. A forty-four year old participant working operations discussed: “I think it needs to show what happens if you don’t report; follow that trail a little further.” Another participant, a fifty year old DoD employee working operations, suggested using real life scenarios to make people feel guilty for not reporting information.

They could play a guilt card on the public as well from the standpoint that you know, through investigations it was determined that these key indicators, had the public been more aware of the things to look for, or getting involved, it's quite possible that these things could have been avoided. It's not a guarantee. But these things could've been avoided; or at least minimized.

Finally, while the messages of the campaign tell people to contact their local law enforcement, it doesn't seem that that message is resonating with some of the participants. Six participants expressed concern that they did not know who to contact if they saw something suspicious. "The video isn't actually telling you who to contact or where to go. It's just telling you that you need to tell somebody." Another participant expressed a similar concern: "Who would you call? I mean, it's a federal campaign. Would you call Homeland Security? Would you call your local police?" This is important because publics could interpret this as a constraint.



## Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusions

Using a qualitative approach, the purpose of this study was to understand how publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism and the counterterrorism messages from the DHS *See Something, Say Something* counterterrorism campaign, and if that meaning impacted their intention to act on these messages. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-five participants. The participant pool was composed of fifteen external public participants (college students) and 10 internal public participants (DoD government employees) (See table 1 for a demographics breakdown of participants). Using a grounded theory approach to analyze the data, this study used the situational theory of publics as its primary theoretical framework including additional variables that have been proposed and studied through various research studies, as well as the recently proposed supplemental theory, situational theory of problem solving.

While I set out to understand how external and internal publics made meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism and the campaign messages, what I found was that internal publics as operationalized in this study were not internal publics to the campaign at all. I conducted this study under the assumption that DoD employees were more in-tune with issues of national security. This appeared to be true among the participants in this study, but what was not considered was whether or not they would be internal publics to the campaign itself. The majority of these participants were unaware of the campaign and therefore cannot be considered an internal public. Therefore, the study became a comparison of two segmented external publics: government and young adult publics. Future research is needed to determine whether true internal publics would consume and share the campaign messages differently.

Results indicate that government and young adult publics have varying views on the concepts of terrorism and counterterrorism. Young adult publics appear to be more influenced by stereotypical views of what constitutes a terrorist, which they often attributed to the media and society. This was not surprising given that the mean age of young adult public participants was 22. Many of these participants would have been around 12 years old at the time of the 9/11 attacks. Those events are what these participants have likely been largely exposed to from a young age from both the media and society in general. Government public participants, on the other hand, described terrorism in a more general sense or gave a definition of terrorism that was more closely aligned with the definition from DHS. This was expected given the professional training requirements of DoD employees.

Young adult public participants do not seem to be actively seeking out information on domestic terrorism and counterterrorism, as only one of them had ever heard of the campaign, and only three had mentioned hearing or seeing messages while riding the Metro, or in using the airport; though they seemed to be passive in their processing of the messages. This is likely due to most of the participants not feeling threatened by domestic terrorism because they have not directly experienced it. Additionally, young adult public participants initially viewed counterterrorism as a military or war effort, and likely felt there was little they could do to contribute. This concept stood out among the rest, and is perhaps one of the most important themes that should be taken away from this study. These participants likely felt little involvement in domestic counterterrorism efforts because they felt counterterrorism efforts were only made by the government through military means. They did not recognize that they can

support the government's counterterrorism efforts to prevent domestic terrorism. Government public participants are not necessarily seeking out the information, but are exposed to it on a regular basis through information boards, signs at installation gates, and DoD training requirements. While the majority of them were not aware of the campaign, most of them recognized that domestic terrorism is a threat. Also, the majority of DoD employees recognized that the public has a role to play in counterterrorism efforts.

All-in-all, the messages from the *See Something, Say Something* campaign were well received. Participants came to understand the messages through concepts such as: *awareness; vigilance; citizen responsibility; citizen empowerment; personal awareness; personal responsibility; and self-efficacy*. However, the reported impact of the messages varied between government and young adult public participants; seemingly having a somewhat greater impact on young adult publics than on government publics. This appears to be due largely to the difference in personal life experiences, professional experiences, and once again, training requirements as DoD employees.

### **Theoretical Implications**

*Situational Theory of Publics*. The situational theory of publics helped guide the data analysis in this research study. While some themes were generally not surprising, other themes emerged which can assist in explaining how publics make meaning of counterterrorism messages from DHS, and its impact on their intent to act on the messages.

Before young adult public participants were aware of the campaign, few of them recognized domestic terrorism as a threat or a problem. Most of them felt that because

they had not experienced it, or because it was not in the media all of the time, that it was not something to be worried about. As discussed previously, it is probable that the media and society in general have played a role in problem recognition, particularly among young adult publics. Participants had initially expressed a lack of problem recognition because they felt that the messages they had been exposed to regarding terrorism in this country focused so heavily on the events surrounding 9/11, that it seems participants were unable to see any other type of terrorist threat to this country. Therefore, they felt terrorism is not something that affects them directly, because perhaps, it is a threat that only comes from outside the borders of the United States.

After being exposed to the campaign messages, many of those participants expressed a change in their feelings about the threat of domestic terrorism, saying now that they recognized that it is in fact a threat. Some of these participants associated terrorism with Middle Easterners, or Islam. After being exposed to the messages many of them recognized that other threats exist that they had never considered, challenging their own preconceived notions of domestic terrorism. Problem recognition, then, appeared to be effected by these campaign messages. Exposure to counterterrorism messages increased problem recognition amongst young adult publics, and could likely produce hot-issue publics.

The majority of government public participants, on the other hand, felt that domestic terrorism was a threat prior to being exposed to campaign messages. This was likely due to their personal and professional experiences. Some participants work security for DoD, and it is their business and their responsibility to be aware of all threats in their immediate area, and to be able to warn others of these threats. Other participants

have served many years with the government, and have been exposed so heavily to similar material, that, while they may have never seen or heard these messages, they are very similar to other messages they have been exposed to through training requirements with DoD. Aldoory and Van Dyke (2006) found that problem recognition in a food bioterrorism scenario was affected by previously held knowledge about food safety issues. It seems the same factors are at work in this study. Government publics in this case tend to be very knowledgeable on domestic terrorism issues through experience and training. Anti-terrorism/force protection training not only appears to impact problem recognition, but could also produce an active public amongst DoD employees.

Level of involvement for participants appeared to be affected by a number of factors: feelings of guilt, past experiences, and shared involvement or shared experience. Shared involvement, as discussed by Aldoory and van Dyke (2006), included: personal responsibility, as well as both geographical and emotional proximity to an attack. Some participants felt a higher level of involvement because of feeling guilty for not saying something when they should. One participant expressed feelings of guilt if she did not say something, and something did happen, while another participant recalled situations in which she should have said something, did not, and now felt guilty for not doing so. Government public participants in particular called upon past professional and personal experiences for increased levels of involvement. Many of them already felt involved due to their experience and training as DoD employees. Others felt that their job requirements make them involved. Some are required to brief security information; others work closely with security personnel, while others have been deployed to a war zone and recall the requirements to remain vigilant on a daily basis.

Shared involvement or experience seemed to play a significant role in how involved participants felt about the campaign messages. Participant accounts from both publics expressed feelings of personal responsibility. In general, the messages appeared to have given them a sense of accountability to others; wanting to be involved in reporting suspicious activity because they recognized that it is not only them who will be affected by an attack. Participants described feeling a sense of responsibility or a sense of duty as an American citizen. Shared involvement became particularly evident when participants were geographically or emotionally tied to a terrorist event. Similar to what Aldoory and Van Dyke (2006) found, high levels of involvement became noticeable when participant's community, family, and friends were perceived to be at risk. One participant had continually expressed his love for his community and a concern for those in it. Other participants, when presented with the idea that an attack occurred in or near their hometown, expressed great concern for the well-being of their family and friends back home. The prospect of an attack suddenly became more real, and they had a personal stake in the outcome.

Others discussed personal experiences when 9/11 happened, due to their hometown being in close proximity to New York City or Washington D.C. Some participants had family and friends in the city at the time and spoke of their concern for them, and the idea of something happening like that again terrified them. This was particularly evident among young adult publics, but even some government public participants expressed similar sentiments. While some at first had said that being close to an attack did not make them feel different, they had gone on to share real-life experiences with the sniper attacks in the Washington D.C. area in 2002. As they talked about that

time, they expressed the fear and concern they had for themselves and their families. This supports the findings from Aldoory, Kim, and Tindall (2010) that shared experience “might be a worthy antecedent variable to examine for the situational theory of publics.” These findings also indicate that level of involvement seemed to have a direct impact on problem recognition, which supports the findings from Aldoory and Van Dyke (2006), that perhaps level of involvement should be further examined as an antecedent variable to problem recognition. Additionally, this supports findings from a study by Wise and his colleagues (2009), which examined how proximity of threatening health news would affect people’s processing of it. The authors argued that proximity to a threat impacts how susceptible one feels, and susceptibility affects how threatening news is processed. The closer one is to a threat, the stronger their response will be. They found that people would turn to news that is personally relevant, and would appropriate more of their cognitive resources to high-proximity health news.

The situational theory of publics posits that as levels of involvement and problem recognition increase, so to does information seeking (Aldoory & Sha, 2006; Aldoory & Van Dyke, 2006; Grunig, 1997; Toth, 2006). Findings in this study support the theory. As level of involvement and problem recognition increased, so to did the active communicative behaviors by young adult public participants in particular. When looking for general information on threats, most young adult public participants would be somewhat passive in acquiring information and selecting information domains, relying on one-way communication channels such as the news, or public government websites. When young adult public participants were faced with the idea of an attack occurring in or near their hometown, many more participants began to express a more active

communicative behavior. While most would still rely on news coverage, many more, including many of those who would turn to the news, expressed a desire to speak directly with someone they knew about the scenario.

Similarly, government publics were also more passive in their communicative behavior when looking for information on general threats, looking to similar sources that young adult publics would turn to. When asked about an attack in or near their hometown, more participants became active in their communicative behavior, wanting to talk directly to law enforcement, family or friends, or fellow DoD employees, particularly those in the security realm.

Government public participants continually expressed a low level of constraint recognition throughout the interview, while mental barriers appeared to be a significant factor in constraint recognition with regards to young adult public participants. Government public participants would often discuss how the messages were nothing new to them because it is similar to the required training they receive from DoD. Others would point to their years of experience working for the government, and that they were already well aware of what they can and should do if they see suspicious activity. It is something they have dealt with daily as government employees. While DoD employees did express feelings of self-efficacy, most of them did not feel different after viewing the messages; although they did feel a renewed sense of vigilance, which they felt was important.

Mental barriers appeared to have prevented young adult public participants from realizing the potential impact they could have on domestic counterterrorism efforts, and likely kept them from seeking information about counterterrorism efforts being made by



the government. Many participants expressed a lack of perceived self-efficacy in being able to do anything about potential threats. Others discussed a fear of saying something that they saw because maybe it was nothing, or because they simply did not know what suspicious activity looked like. The messages appeared to provide these participants with the knowledge of what to look for, the motivation to remain vigilant, and the courage to speak up when they see something out of the ordinary. These findings, along with the findings of increased levels of constraint and problem recognition, support the situational theory of problem solving, in that higher levels of involvement and problem recognition, and low levels of constraint recognition, increased participants situational motivation, which led to an increase in Communicative Action in Problem Solving. Young adult public participants demonstrated that when faced with the problem of domestic terrorism, they would actively seek out information (information seeking), attend to that information (information attending), through a domain in which they actively selected (information forefending).

*Framing Theory.* While framing theory was not being examined in this research study, evidence of the effects of framing was present in the data. In communication, framing is a way to provide information to audiences. It brings together information that is used to present a story to an audience in a manner that is designed to influence. A frame is “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Tewksbury and Scheufele, 2009, p. 19). Certain aspects of a message or situation are highlighted in order to make them more salient to the public. A framing effect then, is the resulting change in a decision from message exposure (Iyengar, 1991; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009).

When asked about terrorism, many participants displayed effects of episodic framing. Episodic frames are sometimes used for attribution of responsibility, which seeks to assign blame for an issue or problem to an organization or an individual (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Episodic frames are directed towards a particular event or individual, using concise, personal stories, in order to assign responsibility and blame for an event or series of events to an individual (An & Gower, 2009; Iyengar, 1991; Wallack, Dorfman, Jernigan, & Themba, 1993). The results of the data show that there may be some effect of episodic framing on individuals, particularly among young adult public participants. Participant accounts show that many relate terrorism to an attack; namely the events of 9/11, or suicide bombers, or other types of bombings. Again, given their age with respect to the events of 9/11, this was not surprising, and shows the possible effects of episodic frames being used by both the media and the government.

Framing effects were again evident when discussing counterterrorism. When asked about counterterrorism, participant accounts indicate that many see counterterrorism in the context of the *War on Terror*. Participants either mentioned the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan specifically, or they mentioned events that have occurred as a part of this effort, such as the killing of Osama Bin Laden, or CIA drone attacks. This *War on Terror* frame was again most prevalent among young adult public participants and was again not surprising given their age, in which most of them would have grown up with these wars. It was perhaps somewhat surprising not to see it more prevalent among government public participants. This could be due to the age difference. This could also be due to their training and experience as DoD employees, and that they recognize that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are but a small piece of the counterterrorism effort,

particularly when it comes to the threat of domestic terrorism. The United States has used the *War on Terror* frame since 9/11 to describe its efforts to combat terrorism. Some have cautioned against its use. As Corman and his colleagues (2008) argued, “you cannot go to war with a noun and hope to have a decisive victory” (p. 182). The *war* frame indicates that someone will be defeated at the end; to which terrorism never will be. It may also indicate that the government sees its efforts as a war, which could play into the hands of extremists, while isolating other publics who feel they are wrongly targeted by this war. The results of this study indicate a strong presence of the *War on Terror* frame with young adult publics, and something that DHS will want to strongly consider moving forward with this campaign.

*Trust and Credibility.* Issues of trust and credibility became important factors when participants discussed what sources they would seek out for information on threats or actual attacks. Participant accounts indicate that news and government sources would be the most heavily sought out source when participants wanted to get information on current threats or an attack that occurred near home. Participants felt that these sources would be the most informed sources available. Many government public participants would specifically seek out colleagues who work anti-terrorism or security; both publics indicating that government sources are viewed as credible, trusted sources among participants. Some participants would turn to news sources for information on current threats. It seems that participants trust news sources that they are familiar with, or that they feel focus on a wide variety of issues. Some government public participants would use foreign news sources as a way to get a balanced view on issues.

Interestingly, only two participants had mentioned seeing the media as having a role in counterterrorism. This is likely due to the majority of participants viewing counterterrorism as more of an effort being made by the government. It did not appear to be an issue of trust or credibility, as the majority of participants would look to the media for information about threats in general or near their hometown.

As level of involvement for participants increased, they appeared to put an increased faith for information in local sources, such as law enforcement officials, local community leaders, family and friends, or local colleagues as just discussed. These results support Pollard's (2004) findings in his study to understand how the public obtained information and how they perceived information sources during the 2001 anthrax attacks. Participants had indicated that if an event occurred locally, local health officials were trusted more than national health officials.

*Making meaning of campaign messages.* This study supports other literature on how publics make meaning of campaign messages. As previously noted, the goal of this campaign is to raise awareness and give people the tools they need to take action in the face of suspicious activity. (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2010b). Henderson (2005) argued that when a campaign has a goal of getting publics to take action, it must find a way to meet their needs. Several young adult public participants in particular expressed a desire to be involved, but felt that before being exposed to the campaign messages they did not know how. The campaign messages showed them what action to take when they saw suspicious activity, such as that displayed in the messages. After exposure, many participants felt they now had the know how to take action and felt compelled to do so.

Henderson (2005) and Tilson and Stacks (1997) argued that a two-way communication campaign is more effective than a propaganda approach in a crisis or issues management. Further, using both interpersonal communication and a promotional campaign can better increase knowledge and motivate publics to act. Additionally, Alcalay and Taplin (1989) argued the importance of community involvement in public communication campaigns; such as the use of local resources, leaders, and community members. Findings in this study support such arguments. As discussed previously, as participants became more involved in the messages of the campaign, they expressed more of a desire to communicate with local sources, and became more active in their communicative behaviors. Thus, two-way communication with local sources, while utilizing local community resources may be the most effective means for increasing knowledge of and getting publics to act on the messages of the *See Something, Say Something* campaign.

### **Practical Implications**

*Communicating counterterrorism messages.* This study provides some significant insights into ways in which DHS can more effectively communicate their counterterrorism messages. First, this study shows the importance of segmenting publics. It was apparent throughout the interviews that government public participants had a different perspective on terrorism and counterterrorism than the general public. Due to their positions with the government, it seemed that government public participants were already at the level of preparedness that the messages hoped to bring young adult public participants to. This potentially indicates that government public participants require an entirely different approach when it comes to counterterrorism communication. Given

that most government public participants had not heard of this campaign, it appears that DHS is allowing DoD to relay its own similar messages to their employees. While these messages appear to have a similar effect, it may be important for DHS to work more closely with DoD as to their campaign efforts. Government public participants, who work in the security realm, indicated that they do work with the local community and emergency personnel immediately outside the installation. If security and anti-terrorism personnel on the installation are aware that these efforts are being made in the civilian sector, they may be able to work more effectively in helping the local community get the messages out to the public. The local installation should have a vested interest in making the public in the local community more aware of their surroundings.

Second, this study demonstrates that an organization implementing a campaign such as this should plan and execute communicative strategies that target inactive publics. Hallahan (2000) offered inactive publics as a type of public not directly identified in the situational theory of publics. Inactive publics are “groups composed of individuals who possess comparatively low levels of knowledge about an organization and low levels of involvement in its operations” (Hallahan, 2000, p. 504). DHS is hoping to raise awareness and get people involved. Essentially, they are trying to get inactive publics to become active on issues of domestic terrorism, but not necessarily active in every aspect of DHS’s responsibilities. The results of this study indicate that young adult publics are not active on these issues. Publics have knowledge of the issue, and involvement with the organization (Hallahan, 2000). This is what makes them a public. Young adult publics displayed limited knowledge of these issues and limited involvement with DHS, thus making them inactive. Inactive publics typically do not seek out information on an

issue or about an organization. Thus, it becomes the responsibility of the organization to seek out and communicate with these groups. In order to make publics active on the issue, Hallahan (2000) argued organizations must motivate and enable inactive publics to focus on their messages. Additionally, they must afford them the opportunities to do so by using both two-way symmetric and one-way asymmetrical communication.

Third, this study indicates that the media and the government's framing of terrorism and counterterrorism are having an impact on how terrorism and terrorists are perceived. The majority of young adult public participants struggled to disassociate terrorism from the events of 9/11, the *Global War on Terrorism*, or Islam, including key figures associated with Islamic radicalism; some were even embarrassed to admit it. None of the young adult public participants were able to connect terrorism with other acts of domestic terrorism such as the Oklahoma City bombings, or anti-abortion terrorism, or environmental terrorism. While most recognized that DHS was making an effort to extinguish these views, and expressed a change in those feelings after being exposed to the messages, as the effects of these messages fade, and the presence of messages about the ongoing wars or Islamic terrorism continues, publics could possibly revert to their old feelings. This likely played a part in the counterterrorism as a military/war effort theme and lack of involvement as discussed earlier.

With regards to the campaign itself, participants felt that DHS should do more to get the message out to the public. All were receptive to the messages, but few had ever heard of the campaign. They felt DHS should utilize the media, television commercials, advertising on college campuses, using posters in public places, and using social media to relay their message. Publics also expressed a desire to see success stories from the

campaign. They want to see the faces of those who did see something, and did say something. Because publics felt more compelled to act as they became more involved with the problem, the messages may be more effective if the publics can relate with those who have been directly impacted by potential acts of terrorism or crime. As you will recall, DHS is ultimately trying to prevent a crisis from occurring. Stakeholders, and it could be argued that all residents of the U.S. are a stakeholder in this case, want to know that the organization is making every effort to prevent a crisis from occurring (Coombs, 2012). Being as transparent as possible is perhaps a good strategy for DHS to utilize.

*Public Relations/Public Affairs practitioners.* This study offers valuable understanding into how public relations and public affairs practitioners can more effectively engage their publics. First of all, it is crucial to conduct formative research and understand how your target publics make meaning of the subject so as to make the best use of available resources. As put forth by Rice and Atkin (2009), the results of this study indicate that predispositions of the different publics did impact how they made meaning of the campaign messages, which can subsequently effect how they are segmented. This is similar to what Grunig and Repper (1992) had referred to as inferred variables, which measure individual views, beliefs, and values. While objective variables such as demographics were not specifically analyzed in this study, inferred variable did seem to be an important factor for both publics; although some objective variables such as race and age could be a factor. As mentioned earlier, Public Affairs specialists can benefit from bringing together DoD anti-terrorism personnel with local community leaders, as well as law enforcement and other emergency personnel in the surrounding area of their installation, in order to work together to make the goals of this campaign a



mutual success. Finally, choosing the right tactics for getting the message out is of the utmost importance. Channel selection in this campaign does not seem to have been effective at this point, as few of the young adult public participants had heard of this campaign, and only a few government public participants had. When relaying a message to the public, particularly one of this nature, seeing is believing. In a campaign such as this, publics might not always be sure of themselves. If they have seen the success stories of others, and understand that they can have a positive impact, they may be more likely to act on the campaign messages.

### **Limitations**

This study provides some valuable insight on counterterrorism messaging, but does have some limitations that must be addressed. First, I was only able to interview a small number of participants due to limits on both time and available resources. Future research could include a larger number of interviews. Second, young adult public participants were limited with regards to their age range. The age range of the government public participants increased the overall age range for the sample, but was limited by types of publics. There were examples of age having an impact on how publics make meaning of the campaign messages. Future research could include sampling participants by age groups for a different perspective. This study sample is also limited by its geographical location. While the study took place near a major metropolitan area, a place that DHS appears to be targeting with this campaign, it does not consider how geographical location may impact how publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism and the campaign messages. Future research could include such an analysis.

Methodologically, the study is limited by only conducting one interview with each participant. Most participants had never heard of the campaign, and therefore the campaign video and other materials had to be presented to participants as a part of the interview. Naturally the information was fresh on their mind. Future research could include a quantitative or qualitative longitudinal study to examine the lasting effects of the messages on participants.

While this study did record variables such as race and gender, no questions were asked about how these variables may play a role in how the public makes meaning of the topic. Because a snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants, this study was not able to get large enough sample sizes of different racial groups, or enough of one gender or another to determine how such variables would impact participant's perspectives. Additionally, this study did not look at how political affiliation could affect meaning making of the messages. When DHS was founded in 2002, the world was not far removed from 9/11. Additionally, it was founded by a Republican President. Ten years have passed since 9/11, and a democrat is in the Office of the President, implementing his own policies and procedures. A mixed methods study that looks at how publics make meaning of the campaign messages with the participants stratified into their political affiliation may yield some interesting results.

Finally, this study did not use real life terrorist scenarios to determine how publics would be affected by such events. Instead, the publics were only asked about a hypothetical situation to determine how they would feel if an attack were to occur close to home. Future research could use actual terrorist events that have either occurred or have been foiled in order to get a more thorough analysis of its effects.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism and the messages from the DHS *See Something, Say Something* counterterrorism campaign, and if that meaning has impacted their intention to act on these messages. Using the situational theory of publics, this study provides valuable insight into an important topic that has been relatively unexplored. Additionally, this study looked at the variables of the recently proposed expansion of situational theory of publics, the situational theory of problem solving, to examine how the new variables, which are designed to augment the situational theory of publics, impacted how publics made meaning of these messages and subsequently acted after being exposed to them.

The study found that how publics make meaning of the concepts of terrorism and counterterrorism are effected by what type of public they are associated with. Other demographic issues such as age could possibly have an impact as well. Thus, segmenting publics using both inferred and objective variables could prove useful in getting these types of messages to the public. Young adult public participants in this study did not appear to be actively seeking out information about counterterrorism, as few had heard of this campaign and few of them felt terrorism was a threat to them. Using the right channels to reach the properly segmented publics could prove to be important moving forward. I also found that as the participants became more involved with the messages of the campaign and the problem began to impact them directly, they became more active in their communicative behaviors, as posited by both situational theories.

Now that tenth anniversary of 9/11 has come and gone, DHS could take this as an opportunity to reenergize and refocus their campaign efforts. In future campaign efforts,

DHS should consider some of the primary themes in this study. First, it is prudent to again point out that young adult publics predominately saw counterterrorism as a military or war effort. This is likely related to the *terrorist profiles* theme. The majority of young adult public participants felt terrorists fit a certain profile, such as “Muslim” or “Islam” or “Middle Eastern.” DHS should make a concerted effort to relay a different message. Young adult publics, similar to those of this study, need to be aware that threats of domestic threats terrorism can come from all corners of the country. The campaign messages are emphasizing that people should be looking for behaviors, and not a certain type of person. The messages did resonate with some of the participants who initially felt that terrorists fit a certain profile. DHS should continue to articulate this message, but should also seek new ways of relaying it to the public. Some participants in this study, young adult public participants in particular, discussed how they never even thought of Timothy McVeigh as a terrorist when they saw his image flash across the screen during the campaign video. In future messages, DHS could release statistics from other known terrorist organizations that exist within the U.S. aside from Muslim or Middle Eastern groups to continue to broaden publics’ understanding of who terrorists are. DHS could also work more closely with mainstream media to share stories of foiled and successful plots from these groups as well. This ties back into framing theory, and is known by some as framing for content; or obtaining access to the media and framing a story the way an organization wants it to be told in order to help influence the public (Wallack et al., 1993).

Second, DHS should consider the *counterterrorism as a citizen’s responsibility* theme. Publics want to be involved, responsible, and empowered. They want to be more

aware, and they want to feel that they can make a difference. The messages from the campaign video appear to be making publics feel this way. One way DHS could do more in this area moving forward is working closely with local communities. Many participants expressed more involvement as the potential for an attack became closer to home, and many wanted to talk to someone local about such an event. DHS should consider working closely with local officials and local community groups throughout the country; groups that are trusted by the community. This could give people more of a sense of responsibility and involvement for the well-being of those in their community. This study also indicates that many would still rely on news sources for information. Thus, DHS should work continue working closely with national as well as local media to ensure the story is getting out. Some young adult public participants expressed a desire to utilize social media in such a scenario. While DHS has social networking sites, they could recommend and provide guidelines so that all levels of government down to the lowest levels have social media where they could not only relay information, but use it as a two-way communication platform with local residents who have concerns during the course of the events. Government public participants seem to have many of their preferred channels in place. One participant, however, thought working with local community groups was a good approach for DHS to take, and offered some insightful recommendations. She felt that groups were already in place that people trust that could help in these efforts, such as Home Owner's Associations, or military Family Readiness Groups. Family Readiness Groups in particular have meetings on a regular basis to discuss issues concerning family members within the military unit. Such forums can help relay DHS' messages through an already trusted group, which can help further the trust in

DHS' efforts as a whole. Additionally, DHS could work more closely with DoD to facilitate communication with the community immediately outside installations nationwide. DHS and DoD are missing an important opportunity there.

Finally, DHS should consider some of the factors that affect meaning. Many participants felt the video was too long. DHS should think about developing similar messages that are shorter in length, and can be distributed through public service announcements, fliers, and posters. Additionally, publics in this study appear to want DHS to be transparent with their efforts. They do not want to be kept in the dark. DHS should share their successes with the general public. Many participants, young adult publics in particular, expressed concern that if they had not been a participant in this study, they would have never heard about the campaign. They have no reason to search for the messages, or go on DHS' website to search for information. One way to relay success stories is by stepping-up their social media efforts is to try to attract more followers to their Facebook and Twitter sights by working more closely with local government and communities. Some of the young adult public participants had suggested working with the college campus. This could prove useful, particularly on campuses in large metropolitan areas where students utilize public transportation on a regular basis. As previously discussed, there is the potential for the development of hot-issue publics amongst this inactive public.

In conclusion, the results of this study confirm that when preparing a public campaign, it is important to identify and research your key publics, determine what tactics will be most effective, using the most efficient channels. While reaching out to active publics may be effective, inactive publics should not be ignored. In this study,

inactive publics should be a priority for DHS, as government participants were already active to the level that DHS is trying to achieve. If DHS takes the necessary steps before launching campaign messages, they can make the most of their limited resources.

Table 1: Participant Demographics Matrix.<sup>1</sup>

Participant	Major/Government Position	Gender	Year in School	Age	Ethnicity
<b>Students (External Public)</b>					
Participant 1	Epidemiology	F	Graduate Student	26	Asian
Participant 2	Communication	F	Junior	33	Black – African
Participant 3	Journalism	F	Junior	20	White
Participant 4	Government and Politics	F	Junior	20	Middle Eastern
Participant 5	Communication	F	Junior	22	White
Participant 6	Family and Consumer Sciences	M	Senior	22	Asian
Participant 7	Education	F	Senior	20	White
Participant 8	Computer Science	M	Sophomore	19	Black
Participant 9	Education	F	Junior	20	Persian
Participant 10	Public Health	F	Junior	19	Black
Participant 11	Communication	F	Senior	22	East Indy/Asian
Participant 12	International Business	F	Sophomore	18	Black
Participant 13	Communication	F	Senior	22	White
Participant 14	General Biology	F	Junior	20	Asian
Participant 15	Communication	M	Senior	20	White
<b>Department of Defense Employees (Internal Public)</b>					
Participant 16	Public Affairs	F	N/A	41	Other
Participant 17	Public Affairs	M	N/A	41	White
Participant 18	Division Chief, Security	F	N/A	50	White
Participant 19	Security Specialist	M	N/A	40	White
Participant 20	Operations	F	N/A	44	White
Participant 21	Resource Management	F	N/A	55	White
Participant 22	Operations	M	N/A	50	White
Participant 23	Military reservist	F	N/A	54	White
Participant 24	Operational Management	M	N/A	61	White
Participant 25	Security Specialist	M	N/A	52	White
		F = 17			White = 14
		M = 8			Asian = 3
					Black = 3
					East Indy/Asian = 1
					Persian = 1
					Middle Eastern = 1
					Black – African = 1
					Other = 1

<sup>1</sup> The participant demographics matrix is a slightly modified version of the matrix used by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008).



## Appendix A: In-depth Interview Protocol

**Purpose:** to understand how publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism and the messages from the DHS *See Something, Say Something* counterterrorism campaign

RESEARCH QUESTION:

1. How does the public make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism in general?
2. How does the public make meaning of the *See Something, Say Something* campaign messages?

Name of Participant:

Title:

Date of Interview:

Time Started:

Time Stopped:

Pre Brief:

\_\_\_\_\_ Thank the informant for participating

\_\_\_\_\_ Introduce the study

Interview Questions:

1. How old are you? Year? Major/minor? (Government employees will be asked what their duty is as an employee). What is your racial identity?
2. When you hear the word “terrorism,” what do you think of?
3. Do you feel threatened by domestic terrorism? Why or why not?
4. When you hear the word “counterterrorism,” what do you think of?
5. Have you heard of the *See Something, Say Something Campaign*?
  - a. If so, please tell me your understanding of it.

*The interviewer will first provide press releases for the participant to read, followed by campaign video.*

6. What do you think about these messages from DHS?
  - a. What do you think DHS is trying to do with this campaign?

- b. Do you think the information is valuable? Why or why not?
  - c. Do the messages make you feel differently about the threat of domestic terrorism?
7. Do you think these messages effectively communicate terrorist threats to the American public? Why or why not?
- a. Do you think that DHS is effective in combating domestic terrorism? Why or why not?
  - b. Do you think DHS is focusing its counterterrorism efforts in the right place? Why or why not?
8. Do the messages in this campaign compel you to be more vigilant in your day-to-day life? Why or why not?
- a. Do you feel it provides you with the right tools to be more vigilant?
  - b. How does that compare to before you were aware of the campaign or its messages? (if applicable)
9. Does this campaign make you feel as though you need to be more aware of the terrorist threat? Why or why not?
- a. Where would you look for information on current threats?
  - b. If a terrorist attack did occur in or near your hometown, where would you turn for information on what happened?
    - i. Does the idea of an attack occurring in or near your hometown make you feel any different about the threat of domestic terrorism?
  - c. If DHS provided you with ways to prepare yourself for a terrorist attack, such as an emergency kit, would you do so? Why or why not?
10. Who should be responsible for counterterrorism efforts?
11. What do you think DHS could do to more effectively communicate their message to the public?
12. Is there anything important that you would like to share before we wrap up?

*I would again like to thank you for your participation today. Have a great day.*

### Appendix B: Consent Form

<b>Project Title</b>	Remaining Vigilant Against Domestic Terrorism: A Case Study of the See Something, Say Something Campaign
<b>Purpose of the Study</b>	<i>This research is being conducted by <b>Dr. Brooke Fisher Liu and Thomas Campbell</b> at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because we seek to understand your perspective on the topic. The purpose of this research project is study is to understand how publics make meaning of the messages from the DHS See Something, Say Something campaign.</i>
<b>Procedures</b>	<i>The procedures involve interviewing several undergraduate students and government employees in both individual and focus group interviews. These groups will be conducted in person at a date and time determined by you and the researcher. Individual interviews should last about one hour and will be audio recorded. The focus groups will last approximately one to two hours and will be both audio and video recorded. You may decline to be recorded and still participate in the study. Questions will focus on describing your ideas of terrorism and counterterrorism. You will also be exposed to campaign videos from DHS, and asked questions about your understanding and perspective of these videos messages. A few of the possible questions include: When you hear the word “terrorism” what do you think of? Do you believe you have a role in protecting your community from domestic terrorism? Why or why not? When you picture a domestic terrorist, what does that person look like? For undergraduate students, your Communication professor will offer extra credit for your participation.</i>
<b>Potential Risks and Discomforts</b>	<i>There may be some risks from participating in this research study with regards to potential for the loss/breach of confidentiality. However, every step will be taken to ensure this does not occur. All information will be kept confidential to which only the researchers involved will have access. Your name will not be identified or linked to the data you provide at any time.</i>
<b>Potential Benefits</b>	<i>This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about how publics make meaning of terrorism and counterterrorism, as well as the See Something, Say Something campaign messages. Further we hope this research will help DHS communicate more effectively with the public.</i>
<b>Confidentiality</b>	<i>Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing digital data on a password protected computer that only the researchers will have access to. Additionally, written data will be stored in a locked cabinet. Your name will not be included pre-focus group questionnaire or other collected data. A code will be placed on the questionnaire and other collected data. Through the use of an identification key, the researcher will be able to link your questionnaire to your identity, and only the researchers will have access to the identification key.</i>

	<p><i>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p> <p>Please initial:</p> <p>___ I agree to be audio and/or video recorded during my participation in this study</p> <p>___ I do not agree to be audio and/or video recorded during my participation in this study</p>
<p><b>Right to Withdraw and Questions</b></p>	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you are an employee or student, your employment status or academic standing at UMD will not be affected by your participation or non-participation in this study.</i></p> <p><i>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator, Dr. Brooke Fisher Liu at: 301-405-6524; 2130 Skinner Building, Office 2110, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Email: <a href="mailto:bfliu@umd.edu">bfliu@umd.edu</a>; or Thomas Campbell at 301-405-0759; 2130 Skinner Building, Office 0109, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742; Email: <a href="mailto:tcampbe2@umd.edu">tcampbe2@umd.edu</a></i></p>
<p><b>Participant Rights</b></p>	<p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a> Telephone: 301-405-0678</b></p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>
<p><b>Statement of Consent</b></p>	<p><i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</i></p> <p><i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i></p>
<p><b>Signature and Date</b></p>	<p><b>NAME OF SUBJECT</b> <b>[Please Print]</b></p>
	<p><b>SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT</b></p>
	<p><b>DATE</b></p>

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