The Psychology of Radicalization

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We present a psychological model of radicalization. The radicalization process involves an individual moving toward believing and engaging in activities that violate important social norms (e.g., the killing of civilians). Radicalization can be understood as extreme commitment, wherein the most radicalized individuals are extremely committed to their goal, albeit to the detriment of other goals and concerns. Our model identifies three crucial components that lead to this extreme commitment: (1) the motivational component that identifies the goal to which the individual is highly committed (the quest for significance), (2) the cultural component that defines the role of group ideologies in identifying violent means as appropriate in goal pursuit, and (3) the social component that identifies the group dynamics through which an individual comes to endorse the group ideology. Empirical evidence consistent with the model will be presented, and implications for deradicalization will be discussed.

The specter of terrorism that threatens world stability and security has become an unfortunate defining characteristic of our times. Although terrorism is not a new phenomenon, the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the U.S. forced the issue to the fore of public consciousness. Subsequent attacks across the globe, in, for instance, Bali, London, and Madrid, brought with them the realization that the threat of terrorism is not an isolated event. The European Union generally, and Germany specifically, have seen their fair share of increasing threats within their boundaries, including but not limited to the right-wing extremism movement[1]*, increasing Salafi movement*[2]*, and large-scale incidents, such as the 2011 attacks carried out in Norway by Anders Breivik, and responsible for 77 casualties.*[3]

In response to the attacks on 9/11, the United States, along with allies in NATO and around the world, engaged in a global war aimed directly at eliminating the threat of terror. Efforts based both abroad and on home soil in Western nations have borne impressive fruit. The former have included the elimination of major Al Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden in 2011, dismantling of organization infrastructures, and strict economic and financial sanctions on nations that sponsor or support terror groups. Efforts at home have also been undertaken to increase security, prevent future attacks, or impose legislative and legal changes to hopefully "improve" the litigation and processing of terror suspects.[4]

Despite these accomplishments, experts disagree as to whether the world is actually a safer place today than it was on the eve of 9/11. And in some ways efforts to defeat terrorism have backfired and the global wave of radicalization seems to be swelling rather than receding. Indeed Islamic violent extremism and radicalization seem on the rise in the Middle East, the Maghreb, Africa, and Asia. It thus appears, that no matter how many operatives are killed or captured, scores of others seem willing to take their place. It is, perhaps, as Mitt Romney stated during the 2012 Presidential debates: "We can't kill our way out of this mess." Like the mythical hydra that could grow multiple heads in place of those that were decapitated, so too are terrorist outfits appearing in response to every defeat they are dealt. This suggests that a different approach must be taken toward reducing terror. It suggests that we must understand the process through which normal individuals turn to extremism and violence and come to perceive it as an appropriate course of action. Through this understanding, we can prevent future radicalization, or determine the best methods for deradicalizing those who already espouse radical views. This is the goal of the present article – to elaborate upon a theoretical and empirically supported analysis of radicalization into violence. We begin by first defining radicalization, and then proceed to outline a theory of violent radicalization based on significance quest theory,[5] *and discuss the implications of this theory for deradicalization efforts.*

I. Radicalization as extreme commitment

We define radicalization as a process whereby one moves to support or adopt *radical means* to address a specific problem or goal. A radical means is a means that moves one toward fulfilling his or her focal goal while simultaneously undermining other goals and concerns. The suicide bomber serves as a perfect example: in detonating his explosive vest and murdering countless individuals, he has accomplished his goal, but has done so at the expense of his life. He moved to one goal – becoming a martyr for a cause – but to the detriment of other goals – here his life and all the goals that can be accomplished while still alive. The man who drinks profusely to drown his sorrows (focal goal), while at the same time leading him to neglect his family at home (alternative goals) serves another example. As does the woman who forces herself to regurgitate food to attain a flattering figure (focal goal), while simultaneously doing damage to her body and health (alternative goals). This exclusive commitment to a single goal that is detrimental to other goals is also seen in a statement made by a member of the suicide cadre of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam:

"Family and relationships are forgotten in that place. There was no place for love... That means a passion and loyalty to that group, to those in charge, to those who sacrificed their lives for the group... Then I came to a stage where I had no love for myself. I had no value for my life. I was ready to give myself fully, even to destroy myself, in order to destroy another person."

We perceive of endorsing radical means as commitment, because the process of suppressing or inhibiting alternative

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[1] *Köhler*, ZIS 2014, 450.
[2] *Abou Taam*, ZIS 2014, 442.
[3] *Bannenberg*, ZIS 2014, 435.
[4] *Zöller*, ZIS 2014, 402.
[5] *Kruglanski et al.*, Political Psychology 30 (2009), 331; *Kruglanski et al.*, American Psychologist 68 (2013), 559; *Kruglanski et al.*, Political Psychology S1/35 (2014), 69.

goals and concerns, is driven by one's commitment to a focal goal.[6] We infer from this process, that with increasing commitment to one's goal, we should see increasing willingness to inhibit alternative concerns, perhaps to the point where one is willing to forgo concerns such as health and safety.

The greater the imbalance between one's commitment to focal goals and commitment to other goals, the greater the degree of radicalization. This portrayal is consistent with the pyramid model of participation in terrorism.[7] The base of the pyramid represents the masses of passive supporters of terrorism. These individuals passively support the cause, but have not forgone other goals for the sake of fulfilling the goals of the terrorist organization. As one moves toward the apex of the pyramid, individuals become more radicalized and increasingly more willing to subdue their alternative concerns to a single minded pursuit. Above the passive supporters exists a group of individuals who are active in the organization, but fulfill administrative or non-fighting roles. Further up the pyramid exists those individuals willing to fight, and finally, the suicide bombers willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause. At every step one places greater predominance on the focal goal, and thus becomes increasingly radical in the cause. A consequence of this is that, even though entire populations are subjected to the same objective circumstances, the number of individuals participating also decreases with every step,[8] as fewer and fewer people are willing to subvert other goals for a single cause.

Not only does increasing commitment lead to increasing radicalization via the subversion of alternative concerns, but greater commitment is inferred when others witness radical behavior. Terrorist organizations are in a situation of asymmetric conflict, and therefore do not have the resources to win their political goals on the battlefield. Instead, they rely on actions that strike fear into the entire population, and attempt to convince their adversaries that unless their demands are met, the people will not be safe. Some experts propose that suicide bombings are especially effective in this regards because they signal intense commitment to the cause – they instill a sense that because these individuals were willing to give their own lives, that nothing can be done to stop them.[9] Couple with the fact that suicide attacks tend to be more lethal than other forms of attack,[10] this signaling of intense commitment is perhaps why suicide attacks have increased considerably as the weapon of choice among terrorist organizations.

[6] *Shah/Friedman/Kruglanski*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 83 (2002), 1261.

[7] *McCauley/Moscalenko*, Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us, 2010.

[8] *Sageman*, Understanding terror networks, 2004; *ibid*, Leaderless Jihad: Terror networks in the twenty-first century, 2008.

[9] *Pape*, Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism, 2004.

[10] *Hassan*, Suicide Bombing, 2011.

II. The Process of Radicalization

To return to our definition of radicalization, radicalization is the process whereby one moves to support or adopt radical means to address a specific goal. The discussion has only focused on radical means and commitment. In the following sections, we outline how this commitment is formed. We propose that three factors comprise the radicalization process that leads to intense commitment to radical means. The first factor exists at the individual level, and represents the radical individual's motivation. This factor identifies the goal the individual is trying to achieve through radical means. The second factor is group ideology, and approaches radicalization from the cultural level. This factor acknowledges that an individual's choices are determined by the cultural milieu in which he or she is embedded. And finally, the third factor approaches radicalization from the social level, and understands it as a process steeped in group dynamics. Each of these factors will be discussed in turn.

1. Motivation: The Quest for Significance

The motivational factor addresses the individual's goal or reason for radicalizing. It is important to note that we are focused not on the goals of the terrorist organizations, but the goals of the individual terrorists that motivated them to join the ranks of other violent extremists. The goals of the organizations are easier to identify; they tend to be religious or political in nature, for instance, the removal of occupying forces from one's homeland,[11] or the institution of an Islamic Caliphate (i.e., as is the case with militant groups that currently control much of Northern Iraq and Syria). A panoply of reasons, on the other hand, have been proposed to explain individual motives of individual terrorists, including, but not limited to honor, humiliation, injustice, vengeance, social status, monetary benefits to the family, loyalty to a leader, and desire to enter heaven.[12]

Although surface features of these individual motives are clearly different, we conceive of many of these motives as being driven by the same underlying or abstract motivational force. We have labeled this force the quest for significance.[13] This quest represents the fundamental human need to matter – to be someone, to be respected in the eyes of others, to achieve, to earn a sense of value or self-esteem.[14]

[11] *Pape* (fn. 9).

[12] *Bloom*, Political Science Quarterly 199 (2004), 61; *Gambetta*, Making sense of suicide missions, 2005; *Stern*, Terror in the name of God, 2004.

[13] *Kruglanski et al.*, Political Psychology 30 (2009), 331; *Kruglanski et al.*, American Psychologist 68 (2013), 559; *Kruglanski et al.*, Political Psychology S1/35 (2014), 69.

[14] *Becker*, The birth and death of meaning: A perspective in psychiatry and anthropology, 1962; *Deci/Ryan*, Psychological Inquiry 11 (2000), 227; *Fiske*, Social beings: Core motives in psychology, 2010; *Frankl*, Man's search for ultimate meaning, 2000; *Higgins*, Beyond pleasure and pain: How motivation works, 2012; *Maslow*, Psychological Review 50 (1943), 370; *White*, Psychological Review 66 (1959), 297.

Each of the previously identified motives can be perceived as specific instantiations of the significance quest. Consider the following recasting of several of these motives. Honor and social status are simply different words that denote earning value, respect, or significance. Vengeance can easily be viewed as striking back at a perceived detractor or source of humiliation in an effort to restore one's sense of significance. Loyalty to the leader, alternatively, can be viewed as an individual devoting himself to, what is in his eyes the "ultimate authority", so that the leader may bestow him with feelings of significance. This was certainly the case for members of elite squads of suicide members within the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who were often granted the honor of dining with their leader, Villupilai Prabakharan, prior to their suicide missions.

As is the case with other motivational forces,[15] the motivation to earn significance is not dominant at all times, and will only influence behavior after it has become activated. Significance quest theory identifies three conditions for such arousal.[16] The first of these is significance loss, wherein an individual feels insignificant as a result of some form of humiliation, dishonor, or shame. If this humiliation occurs because of, or is directed at one's personal circumstances, we would label it as individual identity significance loss. Any personal failure or transgression against an important social norm can suffice. *Pedazhur's* description of individuals who joined the ranks of suicide bombers as a result of suffering stigma within their community, for instance, through infertility, an HIV positive diagnosis, or divorce, is a clear example of how individual loss can motivate radical behavior.[17] Likewise, this characterization applies to the Chechen "black widows" who were rendered powerless, and thus demeaned and humiliated by having their significant other wrested from them by Russian forces.[18]

When the humiliation occurs as a result of one's group identity or category membership, it is labeled as social identity loss of significance. In these circumstances, the individual is not specifically attacked, but attacks are levied at groups to which the individual belongs. Given the importance of group identity to one's personal feelings of worth,[19] these actions can have a profound motivating influence on the individual. This type of loss may be acutely felt by Muslim immigrants to Europe who encounter widespread disrespect, if not rabid "Islamophobia" on part of native populations in their host countries.[20] The humiliation of one's group and the trampling of its sacred values[21] may engender a considerable significance loss felt by all members of the group (e.g., all Muslims). Indeed, this is often skillfully exploited by terrorist propagandists of Al Qaeda and its affiliates.

In some instances, the threat of significance loss is enough to awaken the quest. Here are included instances where failure to act could induce feelings of insignificance, thereby motivating action aimed at preventing these feelings. Japanese Kamikaze pilots of World War II are an interesting example.[22] In letters to loved ones, these pilots indicated that they did not want to die, nor did they expect heavenly rewards for their suicidal missions. Yet had they refused the mission, unbearable shame and humiliation would have befallen them and their families. It is such avoidance of significance loss that apparently motivated them to fly to their death.

Finally, some may pursue terroristic means because of the opportunity for significance gain they provide. These individuals do not view these means as a way to restore or prevent loss of significance, but are merely drawn by the allure of significance gain that may come, for example, through earning martyrdom or hero status as a result of their actions. Indeed, this was the primary motivation for those that *Sprinzak* labeled as "megalomaniac hyper terrorists;" individuals like Muhammad Atta, Bin Laden, Ramzi Yussuf, Ayman Zawahiri, and others who earned "greater than life" stature in the terrorist community.[23] A different example of the opportunity for significance gain is what *Post* has called the "breeding in the bone" of suicide bombers; this concept refers to the inculcation in children in kindergartens, and summer camps of the Palestinian Hamas, or in the "Imam al-Mahdi scouts" of the Lebanese Hizballah of the notion that they should all strive to become Shahids, and that this will bring them untold glory and significance.[24]

Within the German context, we see evidence for this among those who joined the extreme-right.[25] Interviews were conducted with individuals who were at one point leaders within Neo Nazi organizations. In these interviews, it was clear that these individuals did not perceive instances of significance loss as the motivating influence to join the organizations. Indeed, *Köhler* identifies the most important motivation for entry as the "desire for expression;" they joined the ranks because they thought these groups would enable them to express themselves, and to collectively "exist for a thing."

2. Group Ideology: Narratives that identify the means to significance

With the significance quest awakened, individuals are left to select the means through which they will attain this goal.

[15] *Kruglanski et al.*, Psychological Review 2014, 367.
[16] *Kruglanski et al.*, Political Psychology S1/35 (2014), 69.
[17] *Pedazhur*, Suicide terrorism, 2005.
[18] *Spekhard/Akhmedova*, Journal of Psychohistory 33 (2005), 125; *Speckhard/Paz*, Talking to terrorists: Understanding the psycho-social motivations of militant Jihadi terrorists, mass hostage takers, suicide bombers and martyrs to combat terrorism in prison and community rehabilitation, 2012.
[19] *Tajfel/Turner*, in: Worchel/Austin (eds.), Psychology of Intergroup Relations, 1986, p. 7.
[20] *Sageman* (fn. 8 – Understanding); *Kruglanski et al.*, Psychological Science in the Public Interest 8 (2008), 97.
[21] *Atran*, Talking to the enemy: Faith, brotherhood, and the (un)making of terrorists, 2010.
[22] *Ohnuki-Tierney*, Kamikaze diaries: Reflections of Japanese student soldiers, 2006.
[23] *Sprinzak*, Foreign Policy 1127 (2001), 72.
[24] *Post*, The mind of the terrorist: The psychology of terrorism from the IRA to Al Qaeda, 2006.
[25] *Köhler*, Journal EXIT-Deutschland – Zeitschrift für Deradikalisierung und demokratische Kultur 2014, 307.

These means are thus bound by the culture in which one lives. Although these individuals are searching for ways in which they can earn uniqueness and significance, they do so through means that are not unique, but socially shared and based in cultural ideologies that are external to the individual. Importantly, becoming a member of a violent, radicalized group is but one means toward achieving significance. Indeed, it is a means that by definition comes at the cost to other important goals and values. This is likely why many individuals experience the hardships of significance loss or the allure of significance gain, but choose culturally-prescribed alternative means that do not lead them to become radicalized (i.e., becoming a famous actor, doctor, or athlete).

Social psychological evidence from terror management theory supports this notion. In these studies, participants are reminded of their deaths. For the current purposes, these death reminders can be perceived as the ultimate loss of significance or sense of meaning. Research has found that in response to these reminders, people show increased endorsement of their cultural beliefs. Many times this is reflected in negative behavior that is reminiscent of how a violent extremist may respond – they become increasingly derogatory toward individuals who are dissimilar or belong to a competing outgroup.[26] However, this reaction depends on whatever norm is made salient in the situation.[27] If prosocial norms are salient, individuals become more prosocial. The same is true when pacifism or conservatism are salient. In one study, for instance, German students primed with pacifism words (e.g., peace, diplomacy, harmony, etc.) become more likely to endorse peace-promoting organizations like the Red Cross or Amnesty International after being reminded of their death. Other research has found that when participants affirmed their belief in the value of tolerance, this prevented them from derogating a dissimilar other in response to a death reminder.[28] Similarly, exposing Christians to Jesus' compassionate teachings (e.g., "Love your neighbor as yourself") or Shiite Muslims to compassionate verses from the Koran (e.g., "Do goodness to others because Allah loves those who do good"), eliminated violent and aggressive attitudes in response to death reminders.[29]

Still, this means that violent extremism remains a viable option for those highly committed few if it is presented as a culturally prescribed means for achieving significance. Typically, this occurs through a terrorism-justifying ideology that instructs individuals what must be done to attain significance. An ideology is a collective belief system to which group members subscribe. When the group is under (real or imagined) threat, the ideology defines the group's defense as the pre-eminent task, rewarded by glory and veneration.[30] The group's continued existence and well-being are typically among the most *sacred values* to the group members[31]; protection of these values by all means possible is individuals' utmost duty rewarded by the group's respect and recognition.

Ideology is relevant to radicalization because it identifies radical activity (such as violence and terrorism) as the means of choice to the goal of personal significance. This function of means suggestion, appears central to any terrorism justifying ideology regardless of its specific content, whether it be ethno-nationalist ideology, socialist ideology, or religious ideology.

Most terrorism justifying ideologies identify three essential ingredients: a grievance, a culprit, and a method. The first step is the identification of a grievance, that is, an injustice or harm that has been suffered by the group. Once the grievance has been identified, the ideology blames an outgroup as responsible for perpetrating the aforementioned grievance. And finally, the ideology must provide a solution to this problem; it must identify a morally warranted and effective method for cleansing one's group from this dishonor. The terrorism justifying "ideology" need not be more complicated, and these three ingredients are sufficient in convincing entire societies to rally around the flag of their culture and mercilessly annihilate other human beings. Yet, upholding some such belief schema is essential because terrorists' actions (as all human actions) have rhyme and reason in the actor's eyes, even if others may disagree and consider those unacceptable and irrational.

In some cases, the grievance could be real, and a direct result of actions by a threatening outgroup. In other cases, these ideologies serve the function of scapegoating an enemy outgroup. Scapegoating is a process in which the frustration of individual[32] or collective needs[33] or feelings of evil, vulnerability, and inferiority[34] are transferred into another being – in this case, an antagonizing outgroup. It is then believed that by destroying this outgroup, one is simultaneously vanquishing the evil plaguing one's ingroup, and thereby returning the world to a safe, moral place. Indeed, the componential elements discussed above as necessary in terrorism justifying ideologies, are also spoken of as essential components of a scapegoat ideology.[35] Far-Right extremists (Neo Nazis) appear to espouse this latter form of ideology, wherein foreign and non-foreign cultural groups are scapegoated as the cause of collective suffering and violence against these groups is

[26] *Greenberg et al.*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 58 (1990), 308.
[27] *Jonas et al.*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 95 (2008), 1239.
[28] *Greenberg et al.*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 63 (1992), 212.
[29] *Rothschild/Abdollahi/Pyszczynksi*, Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 45 (2009), 816.
[30] *Zartman/Anstey*, in: Zartman/Anstey/Meerts (eds.), The slippery slope to genocide: Reducing identity conflicts and preventing mass murder, 2012, p. 3.
[31] *Atran* (fn. 21).
[32] *Staub*, The roots of evil, The psychological and cultural origins of genocide, 1989.
[33] *Tajfel*, Human groups and social categories, Studies in social psychology, 1981.
[34] *Allport*, The nature of prejudice, 1954.
[35] *Glick*, in: Dovidio/Glick/Rudman (eds.), On the nature of prejudice, Fifty years after Allport, 2005, p. 244.

justified as a mechanism for restoring the Fourth Reich to a place of significance.

Once the grievance and culprit have been identified, the most difficult purpose of terrorism justifying ideologies is the moralization of terrorism and killing. This is because these ideologies are attempting to construe acts that are normally illegal and immoral amongst most of the world's cultures and religions as legitimate forms of violence.[36] Typically, this is accomplished through semantics and rhetoric. Semantically, it involves delegitimizing the targets of violence, and categorizing them in ways that preclude them from standards of normative and acceptable behavior.[37] These strategies include denying the targets of human characteristics and portraying them as dehumanized creatures such as cockroaches, rats, serpents, or apes.[38] Other strategies include outcasting them as groups that are destructive to society – murders, thieves, psychopaths.[39]

The rhetorical approach involves setting premises that imply either the necessity of violence against a specific target or the allowability of violence under specific circumstances. The necessity of violence is premised on the notion that the enemy's responsibility for harm (to one's group) is fixed rather than malleable and stems from the target's essential nature.[40] Such presupposition portrays destruction of the enemy as an exclusive method of defense against the inevitable evil that he or she is bound to perpetrate.

The allowability premise draws on the argument that at times of war killing enemy combatants is legitimate[41], and the distinction between combatants and civilians is unsustainable because civilians are potential combatants (they could be recruited or conscripted, thus becoming combatants in effect). Furthermore, civilians are said to bear the responsibility for their government's activities; in this sense they aren't neutral or innocent hence constituting legitimate targets for attacks.[42] Both the semantic and the rhetoric justifications of terrorism aim at portraying it as a morally justifiable and noble, hence conferring considerable significance on its practitioners.

And finally, if one is to perceive the means prescribed in the ideology as a potential mechanism for significance, that individual must believe that the means has a high likelihood of success. Abject failure only makes matters worse, and only deepens the humiliation. Terrorist propagandists have typically spun glamorous success narratives for their audiences that spelled the effectiveness of violent struggle and of the inevitability of the adversary's demise. A well-known narrative, articulated by the Russian Anarchists of the late nineteenth century and echoed by the leftist terrorists of the 1970s and 1980s, was that terrorism would reveal the state's impotence and provoke it to excessive, morally unacceptable, countermeasures, unmasking its hypocrisy and paving the way to a revolution. We see this logic in Carlos Marighella's mini-manual for the urban guerilla, or in effectiveness justifications offered by Osama bin Laden:

"America is a great power possessed of tremendous military might and a wide-ranging economy, but all this is built on an unstable foundation which can be targeted, with special attention to its obvious weak spots. If America is hit in one hundredth of these weak spots, it will stumble, wither away and relinquish world leadership."[43]

3. The Social Process: Group Dynamics of Radicalization

One must not forget, however, that ideology constitutes a shared reality.[44] Ideologies are "hopeful mystifications" or "social illusions" that can undergo validation through social consensus.[45] People do not turn blindly to specific ideologies, but turn to those ideologies that are anchored in shared group beliefs. As such, commitment to ideology is fostered through social connections and the considerable group pressure that is placed on the individual when those surrounding him espouse his ideological views. Indeed, those individuals that are most committed – the suicide terrorists willing to sacrifice their lives for the cause – appear to be most susceptible to the gravitational like pull of social influence.[46]

Also consider *Sageman*'s work on "Leaderless Jihad".[47] He writes how alienated and frustrated Muslims find camaraderie and social support in a mosque where other Muslims assemble. It is specifically where teachings at the mosque are of the extremist kind, that radicalization might happen. Friendship groups may be created around extremist ideas emanating from the Imam's preaching. Because radical values may be out of step with the majority of Muslims in the community, the friendship group coalescing around radicalism may be increasingly isolated from the community at large. Thus, "With the gradual intensity of interaction within the group and the progressive distance from former ties, they [members of the group] changed their values. From secular people they became more religious. From material rewards, they began to value spiritual rewards, including eventually

[36] *Archer/Gardner*, in: Aronson (ed.) Readings about the social animal, 1992, p. 327.

[37] *Bandura*, Personality and Social Psychology Review 3 (1999), 193; *Bar-Tal*, Journal of Social Issues 46 (1990), 65.

[38] *Bandura/Underwood/Fromson*, Journal of Research in Personality 9 (1975), 253; *Castano/Giner-Sorolla*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 90 (2006), 804; *Haslam*, Personality and Social Psychology Review 10 (2006), 252.

[39] *Bar-Tal*, Journal of Social Issues 46 (1990), 65.

[40] *Dweck/Ehlinger*, in: Deutsch/Coleman/Marcus (eds.), The handbook of conflict resolution, theory and practice, 2006, p. 317; *Halperin et al.*, Journal of Conflict Resolution 55 (2011), 274; *Medin*, American Psychologist 44 (1989), 1469; *Yzerbyt/Rocher/Schadron*, in: Spears et al. (eds.), The social psychology of stereotyping and group life, 1997, p. 20.

[41] *Archer/Gardner* (Fn. 36), p 327.

[42] *Ganor*, Police Practice and Research 3 (2002), 287.

[43] *Ignatius*, The Washington Post 13.7.2005, p. A21 ("Winning a battle of wills").

[44] *Hardin/Higgins*, in: Sorrentino/Higgins (eds.), Handbook of motivation and cognition (Vol. 30), 1996, p. 28.

[45] *Becker*, The denial of death, 1973; *Greenberg/Pyszczynski/Solomon*, in: Baumeister (ed.), Public self and private self, 1986, p. 189.

[46] *Merari et al.*, Terrorism and Political Violence 22 (2009), 87.

[47] *Sageman* (fn. 8 – Jihad).

otherworldly rewards. From the pursuit of short term opportunities, they turned to a long term vision of the world".[48]

A similar process can be seen in the Salafi movement in Germany.[49] *Abou Taam* discusses how recruitment processes are aimed at younger individuals that are susceptible to identity crises. They are thus recruited into the movement through newly created networks of organization that lead to the formation of a group identity, and the dissolution of their individual identity, as their previous, non-extremists social ties disintegrate. Likewise, the networks and contacts made within extreme right organizations were referenced as critical in accelerating commitment to the organization, and movement up the ranks within the organization.[50]

Moreover, immense social psychological literatures exist showing that group based decisions and behaviors tend to be more extreme or polarized than decisions that are made by an individual. Thus, understanding the group dynamics of radicalization, impart both an understanding of how networks help guide the individual along the radicalization pathway, and how, once committed, these groups are increasingly likely to favor extreme action.[51]

III. Pathways to Radicalization

The previous sections elaborated upon the three main components of radicalization. It is important to note that within the social sciences there appears to be a relatively considerable amount of agreement on these three processes.[52] For instance, *Walther*'s "three horsemen" of radicalization are eerily similar to those identified herein: perceptions of injustice, identification of a violence justifying ideology, and belonging to an ingroup. The current presentation has discussed these processes as if they happen in the temporal order in which they were described. That is, we discussed the process of radicalization as beginning with the quest for significance, which motivates search for or attention to means of significance. These are found in the collective ideology of one's group that also identifies the grievance or loss of group significance in need of redressing. If such ideology identifies violence and terrorism as the justifiable means to significance, individuals may support and commit to terrorism and violence.

Individuals may encounter these ingredients in different temporal orders defining distinct pathways to terrorism. It is thus possible that the process begins with social contact.[53] In these circumstances, individuals may initially be concerned with fulfilling their need for belonging.[54] Only after fulfilling this need through joining a given social network would one be exposed to the beliefs that its members share, including the ideology warranting their support for violence. Failure to conform to the group's extremist ideology thus becomes a threat of significance loss within the eyes of one's peer group, and motivates extremist behavior. *Köhler*'s interviews with Neo Nazis provide a case example of this process, at least for one of the individuals interviewed; when discussing entry into the extreme-right community this individual stated "If that had at the time been Greenpeace in the chat, maybe today I would be working for Greenpeace. It wouldn't have mattered then at all whether right, left, up, down. I wouldn't have cared at all".[55]

In a yet different instance, the individual may encounter the terrorism justifying ideology through various communication media (e.g., at an internet chat room or by exposure to extremist sermons by charismatic clerics) or recruiters for terrorist organizations. The specific order of events is largely irrelevant to the strength of the individual's commitment to the cause or the degree of her or his radicalization. The latter depends, instead, on the degree of significance loss ultimately experienced by the person, the individual's readiness to completely commit to the goal of significance restoration, and perceived avenues to that goal through violent or non-violent means.

Our theorizing also predicts that various psychological processes should intercede within these pathways to radicalization. Particularly important are the need for cognitive closure[56] and a shifting of focus to the norms and ideals that are important to the greater collective.[57] When one experiences a loss of significance, this should induce an inconsistency that is dissonant to a positive self-image.[58] This inconsistency is likely confusing and aversive, and thus induces a mindset where structure, order, and predictability are preferred. This should subsequently increase the appeal of extreme violent ideologies that tend to be low in complexity, and stress issues of control and power.[59] Likewise, a loss of significance should prompt individuals to orient themselves to the group, in what we term a collectivistic shift. For one, shifting to the collective and identifying as a group member is empowering.[60] It does also, however, open one up to the demands of the group, leading to a willingness to sacrifice on behalf of the group. Shifting should thus motivate a search for ideological solutions espoused within one's ingroup. In the section below we describe recent investigations into these processes.

[48] *Sageman* (fn. 8 – Jihad), p. 86-87.

[49] *Abou Taam*, ZIS 2014, 442.

[50] *Köhler*, Journal EXIT-Deutschland – Zeitschrift für Deradikalisierung und demokratische Kultur 2014, 307.

[51] *Walther*, ZIS 2014, 393.

[52] *Walther*, ZIS 2014, 393; *Dechesne*, ZIS 2014, 421.

[53] *Weinberg/Eubank*, What is terrorism?, 2006.

[54] *Baumeister/Leary*, Psychological Bulletin 117 (1995), 497.

[55] *Köhler*, Journal EXIT-Deutschland – Zeitschrift für Deradikalisierung und demokratische Kultur 2014, 325.

[56] *Kruglanski/Webster*, Psychological Review 103 (1996), 263

[57] *Kruglanski et al.*, Political Psychology 30 (2009), 331; *Kruglanski et al.*, American Psychologist 68 (2013), 559; *Kruglanski et al.*, Political Psychology S1/35 (2014), 31.

[58] *Aronson*, Advances in experimental social psychology 4 (1969), 1; *Festinger*, A theory of cognitive dissonance, 1957.

[59] *Smith*, The Relationship between Rhetoric and Terrorist Violence, 2013.

[60] *Swann et al.*, Psychological Science 21 (2010), 1176.

IV. Empirical Evidence

1. Significance loss and support for violence.

The basic premise of significance quest pertains to the end result – an awakening of the significance quest should lead individuals to become increasingly radical or extreme. Several studies thus examined if personal loss of significance would increase support for violent means. For instance, a recent survey conducted with detained former members of the Sri Lankan terrorist organization, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (or LTTE) found that several indices of significance loss were all significantly correlated with engaging in violent actions and supporting violent struggle against the Singhalese majority. These indices of loss included: (1) the degree to which detainees felt (1) anger or (2) shame in last few weeks, and (3) the frequency of their recently feeling insignificant.

A second empirical demonstration induced feelings of insignificance in religious participants by leading them to entertain "sinful" thoughts on forbidden matters.[61] Participants religiosity (i.e., intrinsic vs. extrinsic) was measured[62] prior to exposing participants to sexual (vs. neutral) stimuli (i.e., scantily dressed women in a Victoria's Secret advertisement) that were assumed to arouse forbidden thoughts and sexual guilt.[63] Results revealed that intrinsically religious participants exposed to sexual stimuli, reported a more pronounced sexual guilt, and more intriguingly, admitted a greater readiness to self-sacrifice for a cause.

These feelings of insignificance also appear to lead to radicalization within prisons.[64] Longitudinal surveys were conducted with alleged members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in a prison in the Philippines. Two waves of data were collected nearly two years apart to assess if imprisonment led to attitude change. The conditions within the prison represent an intense form of significance loss, given the disenfranchisement and humiliation experienced by the prisoners. Consistent with significance quest theory, support for Islamic extremism, dislike of the West, and support for violence in general, all increased over time.

2. Significance loss leads to a collectivistic shift

As previously discussed, feelings of insignificance, as introduced through experiencing a personal or group-based loss, are expected to invite a collectivistic shift, that is, greater orientation toward one's group and its norms and values. In an internet survey of twelve Arab countries, Pakistan, and Indonesia, carried out by Maryland's START center (National Center for the Study of Terrorism and the Response to Terrorism) that participants reporting *lower life success*, hence presumably suffering significance loss, tended more strongly to self-identify as members of collectivities (nation or religion) rather than as individuals.[65] This does not mean that religion/nationalism and failure are generally correlated, nor that religious/nationalistic individuals are generally those who fail in life. What it does suggest is that people whose lives do not appear to be going well, and who therefore experience insignificance, are disposed to embrace an ideology (whether it be a nationalistic, social or religious ideology) that promises significance if only one followed its dictates. Evidence that individuals whose sense of personal control has been wanting turn to God as an indirect way of control restoration has been adduced by *Aron Kay* and his associates.[66]

Empirical evidence drawn from experimental studies has also found that lowering personal significance promotes a collectivistic orientation.[67] In one experiment, after writing about a personal failure, American participants reported significantly stronger identification as Americans than participants who had instead written about personal success. Likewise, various other manipulations designed to induce personal loss of significance, relative to control conditions, have evinced higher interdependent self-construals, as measured via a self-report scale,[68] or an increased willingness to work in a group, as opposed to working alone.

3. Collectivistic shift leads to extreme behavior

Having demonstrated a relationship between significance loss and shifting to the collective, research was undertaken to demonstrate that shifting to the collective is conducive to the perpetration of violent and extreme behavior. This was first demonstrated through research finding that shifting to the collective is an empowering process that reduces one's fear of death. Consistent with this notion, considerable evidence has found that making one's collective identity salient reduces one's fear of death. Consistent with the previous discussion of terror management theory,[69] as well as philosophers like *Ernest Becker*[70] and *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*[71] death represents the ultimate insignificance. As such, research utilized various manipulations designed to prime collectivistic concerns, such as task in which participants circled either singular (i.e., I, me, my) or plural (i.e., we, us, ours) pronouns[72], and a task in which participants wrote either about what made

[61] *Belanger/Kruglanski*, On sin and sacrifice, How intrinsic religiosity and sexual-guilt create support for martyrdom, Unpublished manuscript, University of Maryland, 2012.
[62] *Allport/Ross*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 5 (1967), 432.
[63] *Mosher*, in: Davis/Yarber/Bauserman/Schreer/Davis (eds.), Handbook of sexuality-related measures, 1998, p. 290.
[64] *Kruglanski et al.*, Political Psychology S1/35 (2014), 31.
[65] *Kruglanski/Gelfand/Gunaratna*, in: Mikulincer/Shaver (eds.), The Social Psychology of Meaning, Mortality and Choice, 2012, p. 203.
[66] *Kay et al.*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 99 (2010), 725.
[67] *Orehek et al.*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 107 (2014), 265.
[68] *Singelis*, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 20 (1994), 580.
[69] *Greenberg/Pyszczynski/Solomon* (fn. 45), p. 189.
[70] *Becker* (Fn. 14).
[71] *Rousseau*, The social contract, or principles of political right (Tozer, Trans.), 1762/1968.
[72] *Brewer/Gardner*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 71 (1996), 83; *Oyserman/Lee*, Psychological Bulletin 134 (2008), 311.

them unique or similar to their family and friends.[73] Across a series of studies, results indicated that these manipulations reduced participants' self-reported death-anxiety, and increased their willingness to approach death concerns.[74]

A reduced fear of death should bode well for increased extreme behavior – it should increase one's willingness to sacrifice themselves for the greater good of the group, and it should increase one's willingness to put themselves in harm's way, perhaps through violent action enacted against one's enemy. Indeed, research has identified a relationship between the collectivistic shift and both self-sacrifice and support for violence. *Orehek* and colleagues, for example, found that priming individuals with a collective identity, as opposed to an individual identity, increased their willingness to sacrifice their lives (i.e., throw themselves in front of a trolley to save others in a hypothetical scenario) for fellow ingroup members, but not for strangers.[75] Similarly, research by *Swann* and colleagues found that individuals that were highly fused with their ingroup, relative to those who were less fused, were more likely to engage in self-sacrifice for the group, more strongly endorsed the idea of fighting for the group, donated more money for a group's cause, and put more effort in performance on the group behalf.[76] And finally, surveys with individuals in twelve Arab countries, as well as in Egypt, Morocco, Indonesia, and Pakistan, found that self-identification in a collectivistic manner (as members of their religion or their nation), rather than as individuals, was related to higher support for the killing of American civilians.[77]

4. Loss of significance, need for closure, and extremism

The findings discussed thus far have focused on the collectivistic shift and its role in the radicalization process. Another set of studies analyzed cognitive closure as an intermediary between loss of significance and radical attitudes.[78] Studies were conducted among Muslim youth in Spain and Muslim terrorist suspects detained in a Philippine prison. Analyses revealed that feelings of humiliation and lost significance were related to various indicators of extreme attitudes (i.e., Islamic extremism, support for Sharia law), but that this relationship was mediated by need for cognitive closure. In other words, loss of significance increased extremism by way of increasing need for closure.

V. Significance Quest and Deradicalization

Ultimately, the goal of understanding the radicalization process is to use that understanding to implement measures aimed at countering radicalization or deradicalizing radicalized individuals. On the surface, then, deradicalization can be perceived as the opposite of radicalization. Per our discussion, radicalization can be described as having both (1) high commitment to the goal prescribed within the terrorism justifying ideology, and (2) high commitment to violence as the means through which this goal should be attained. This intense commitment to the above stated focal goal, should be accompanied by (3) reduced commitment to alternative goals and needs. If deradicalization is the inverse process, this identifies three specific mechanisms through which radicalization can be reversed: (1) reducing commitment to the goal, (2) reducing commitment to violent means for achieving the goal, or (3) restoring alternative goals and concerns. In what follows, examples of these mechanisms are discussed.

1. Reduced commitment to violent means

Reduced commitment to violent means could occur in several ways, each of which operates on a specific component of the terrorism justifying ideology. First, one could *reject violence on moral grounds*, after coming to perceive these violent means as immoral. Often times this occurs through accepting religious teachings that deride violence as morally reprehensible. A former member of the Basque ETA, for instance, successfully deradicalized after responding to the Christian gospels, converting to Christianity, and repenting for his prior militant behavior.[79] Other programs, many aimed at terror suspects in Muslim nations, utilize Islamic clerics to persuade detainees through teaching that violence against unarmed citizens is explicitly prohibited in the Koran. This is, in fact, a mainstay of several deradicalization programs in Muslim nations (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Singapore, Indonesia, Iraq).

Others could reject violent means, not on moral grounds, but because they come to view them as ineffectual for advancing their group's goals, and hence unlikely to bestow glory or significance. Consider the following statements by a former ETA member, after the Spanish parliament in the Fall of 1979 ratified a Statute of Autonomy for the Basques (Euskadi) and allowed free elections to the Basque parliament:

"Some others will insist that the primary goal ever since we first decided to take up the armed struggle was total independence [as opposed to mere autonomy]. […] Anyway, no matter how you look at it, independence is not something that was ever going to be achieved by a handful of kill-happy morons, and believe me, because I got to know them well, you're not going to get very far at all, not far at all, down that path."[80]

2. Reduced commitment to the goal

Again, there appear to be several routes through which reduced commitment to the goal could be achieved. The first is through the perception that one has *attained the significance*

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[73] *Trafimow/Triandis/Goto*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 60 (1991), 649.
[74] *Orehek et al.*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 107 (2014), 265.
[75] *Orehek et al.*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 107 (2014), 265.
[76] *Swann et al.*, Psychological Science 21 (2010), 1176.
[77] *Kruglanski/Gelfand/Gunaratna* (Fn. 65), p. 203.
[78] *Schori-Eyal/Kruglanksi*, Unpublished manuscript, University of Maryland, 2014.
[79] *Reinares*, Terrorism and Political Violence 23 (2011), 780
[80] *Reinares*, Terrorism and Political Violence 23 (2011), 780 (782).

goal. The motivating factor for joining a radical movement is to gain or restore significance. If one perceives that he has indeed gained significance through the movement, he is then free to reduce commitment to this goal, and thus the movement itself, and turn to previous concerns that were suppressed. This can also be seen in the remarks of another ETA member: "Look, though, my way of thinking about the armed struggle hasn't changed in the least. But I'd done my fair share, I'd given three years of my life to them as a militant, always at the expense of my personal life".[81]

Yet a second route could be perceived ineffectiveness of the movement as a whole. Just like one may come to view violence as an ineffective means, one could come to view the overarching goal of the movement as ineffective or impossible to fulfill. Interviews with deradicalized leaders of German right-wing extremists are informative in this regard.[82] These interviews revealed that the tipping point that led to eventual exit from the organization was the disappointment of ideals – these individuals came to realize that the ideals that inspired them to join the movement were not, and would never come to fruition. Consider the following exclamation:

"Yes! For me it was simply that in the moment what was in my head, what I wanted to make into reality, didn't work. It just didn't work. If you then think about such a comradeship and look at it, and look at the people, there's nothing. Somehow no one has… no one has his life under control, no one has a goal in any way or something else but they tell you then how it should work."[83]

3. Restoration of alternative goals

Radicalization is described as a process wherein extreme commitment to a focal goal leads to the inhibition of suppression of alternative goals. Thus, one way to combat this commitment is to reactivate these alternative concerns. This should cause the singular focus to recede as one comes to realize that cognitive resources need to also be devoted to these alternatives. This was bluntly expressed by another former member of the ETA:

"You say to yourself shit, man… I better get myself a life, because time is running out… it's a matter of being that much older, and in my case, specifically of wanting to get married. [...] You are going on 40 years old, you're going to get married next year and you say to yourself well, shit, man I mean at this stage of the game to go packing a piece… that would be a bit… because you just got to… shit… well, we've all got to live a bit…"[84]

VI. Discussion

These examples all represent viable ways in which significance quest theory could be implemented to the benefit of society. Although we recognize that there does not exist a single "silver bullet" that will be effective in all cases of deradicalization, conceiving of the radicalization process as a result of three intertwined processes – motivation, ideology, and the social process – provides an eye-opening look into a process that has, when viewed in terms of the individual cases of radicalization, been perceived as an individualized and inconsistent process driven by a multitude of motives.

Evident in the present account is the motivational focus. This should not be surprising as motivation is what delineates the actions of the extremist from the actions of the common criminal. German law, in fact, identifies terroristic action as offenses motivated by the goal of endangering the state. This motivation determines exactly how one is tried and for what punishments one will be dealt. This motivation determines whether establishing contact with unsavory individuals or obtaining the materials required to build a bomb are punishable by a minimum of six months in jail, or are legal, as on their own, the perpetration of these acts do not constitute committing a crime. Motivation is thus a crucial element at the core of extremism.

The legal consideration of motivation, however, differs dramatically from the motivation outlined within. The legal system, thus, considers the motives of the terrorist organizations as whole, be they religious or political in nature. Through this lens, the motives of the militant jihadist or the right-wing extremist are vastly different. The present analysis focused instead on a potential individual motivation that likely underlies one's decision to join the ranks of radical organizations, namely, the quest for significance. In our attempt, we have situated this motivation within the complex cultural and social processes that ultimately determine the organizational motives of harming the state (i.e., ideological narratives) and accelerate or decelerate each individual's movement through the radicalization process.

Throughout our discussion we have also aimed to situate radicalization processes specific to the German context within the significance quest framework. In this endeavor, we are grateful to the work of our colleagues (see current issue). There thus appeared to be examples of all three significance quest processes within the extremist groups that operate on German soil, specifically, the Salafi and right-wing movements discussed in this current issue. The work conducted with right-wing extremists was particularly informative. For one, the ideology espoused by these organizations has all of the necessary ingredients of a violence justifying ideology: the identification of grievances against one's ingroup, blaming of an outgroup for these injustices, and the justification of violence. Interviews with previous leaders within the movement also evinced support for significance gain as a critical motive for entering the movement, and group dynamics as important in accelerating one's commitment to and progress within the organization. And finally, the disappointment of ideals, which was cited as critical for eventual deradicalization, follows directly from the present conceptualization.

[81] *Reinares*, Terrorism and Political Violence 23 (2011), 780 (798).
[82] *Köhler*, Journal EXIT-Deutschland – Zeitschrift für Deradikalisierung und demokratische Kultur 2014, 307.
[83] *Köhler*, Journal EXIT-Deutschland – Zeitschrift für Deradikalisierung und demokratische Kultur 2014, 307 (336).
[84] *Reinares*, Terrorism and Political Violence 23 (2011), 780 (796).

These observations are promising and, when taken into consideration with empirical evidence and observations from terror organizations throughout the world, provide converging support for the significance quest model as a viable portrayal of radicalization. Moreover, these observations remind us that radicalization occurs in a variety of contexts. In the current political and media climate, discussions of radicalization are predominantly focused on Islamic terrorist organizations. The present discussion may serve as a reminder that the psychological processes that lead an individual to radicalize might be strikingly similar for the militant jihadist in the Middle East, as well as his counterpart joining the Salafi movement in Germany, and the militant youth who finds himself drawn toward Neo Nazi ideology. We believe that the current conception presents a theoretical and empirical account of radicalization that, with necessary resolve and resources, may lead to the implementation of effective strategies in the seemingly never-ending war on terror and extremism.