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The Etiology of Radicalization

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Terrorism is typically distinguished from other forms of violence by its motivational component; its motivations ostensibly are to advance political, ideological, or religious objectives. A willingness to use violence (particularly against civilians) in service of those objectives is regarded as a reflection of extremism. The process by which extremism—in ideas or behavior—develops is commonly referred to as "radicalization."

What is Radicalization?

Social scientists have had a long-standing interest in why people become terrorists, but only within the past 15 years has the term "radicalization" been so widely used in the scholarly literature (Helfstein, 2012; Kruklis, 2014; Richards, 2015; Schmid, 2013). Despite the surge in scholarly attention, however, as Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) have noted, "radicalization is a research topic plagued by assumption and intuition, unhappily dominated by 'conventional wisdom' rather than systematic scientific and empirically based research" (p. 889). Indeed, there seems to be little consensus among researchers or policymakers even about how to define the concepts of "radicalism" and "extremism" (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2009; Sedgwick, 2010). How we define those problems, however, has profound implications for how we understand and address them.

Neuman (2010), for example, drawing in part from *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought*, offers a politically focused view on extremism:

> Extremism can be used to refer to political ideologies that oppose a society's core values and principles. In the context of liberal democracies this could be applied to any ideology that advocates racial or religious supremacy and/or opposes the core principles of democracy and universal human rights. The term can also be used to describe the methods through which political actors attempt to realise their aims, that is, by using means that show disregard for the life, liberty, and human rights of others.

This definitional scheme merges the concepts of ideology and behavior. The approach is understandable and not uncommon, but it can confuse, rather than clarify, the underlying constructs. There is no question that radical or extreme ideologies are important to study and understand. However, terrorism requires behavior. Many—perhaps most—people with radical ideas and violent justifications do not engage in terrorism. So, we need to understand how and when extremist ideology and behavior are connected—and also potentially when they are not (Klein, 2015; Taylor & Horgan, 2006). The study of radicalization will be improved by understanding both the connections and the distinctions.

The UK's Home Office (2011), in its CONTEST counterterrorism strategy, defines radicalization simply as:

> … the process by which people come to support terrorism and violent extremism and, in some cases, then to join terrorist groups.

McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) focus more on its mechanisms and group dynamics in defining radicalization as:

> Increasing extremity of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the in-group (p. 416).

Most recently, Crossett and Spitaletta (2010) attempted a broadly reaching review of psychological and sociological concepts in radicalization. They defined radicalization as:

> … the process by which an individual, group, or mass of people undergo a transformation from participating in the political process via legal means to the use or support of violence for political purposes (radicalism) (p. 10).

The ideological–behavioral distinctions are important to bear in mind. Klandermans (1984), in the study of social movements, has distinguished between the concepts of *consensus mobilization*, referring to the process of convincing people to support a movement's ends and means, and *action mobilization*, which involves getting people to act through those means to achieve the desired ends. I have attempted previously to parse the ideological and behavioral elements by referring to *radicalization* as the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs, and to *action pathways* as the process of engaging in terrorism or violent extremist actions (Borum, 2011c). The action reference harmonizes with Klandermans' concept of "action mobilization." These terms and concepts are probably imprecise and inadequate, but as this chapter seeks to describe the etiology of radicalization, the ideological–behavioral distinctions are important to bear in mind.

An inquiry into the etiology of radicalization should focus on *how* people come to think what they think, and, ultimately, how they progress—or not—from thinking to action. This requires a broad, multidisciplinary view of the problem that can address the roles of micro-level (individual) and macro-level (societal/cultural) factors (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986; Veldhuis & Staun, 2009), and account for the fact that different pathways and mechanisms operate in different ways for different people at different points in time, and perhaps in different contexts (Bokhari, Hegghammer, Lia, Nesser, & Tonnessen, 2006). There may be no grand framework for radicalization, but social science theories and conceptual models may contribute to a better understanding of the process (Crossett & Spitaletta, 2010).

Contributions of Social Science Theories

Numerous social science theories have been invoked over the years to explain the underlying causes, concepts, and processes of how people come to be involved with radical groups and movements (Crossett & Spitaletta, 2010). Collectively, these theoretical applications have helped to frame the discussion; identify or clarify key concepts and distinctions; and illuminate variations as well as common patterns in the mass-, group-, and individual-level processes.

Mass/Macro-Level Processes

Focusing on the mass/macro-level, in the 1940s, social movement theory (SMT) proposed that change-oriented movements typically arose from irrational processes of collective behavior occurring under strained environmental conditions (what sociologists would call *strain theory*), producing a sentiment of discontent within a population (Zald & McCarthy, 1987). The prevailing wisdom was that individuals would "join" such a movement because they passively succumbed to these overwhelming social forces.

By the 1980s and 1990s, however, SMT's focus had shifted from the passive effects of societal strains to examining the rational and strategic dynamics that operate within groups to support the survival and growth of the movement. Klandermans and Oegema (1987), for example, suggested that the key tasks for all social movements were to form mobilization potential (developing the movement's human resources so that different people within the same set of beliefs come to assume different roles and take different kinds of actions); form and motivate recruitment networks; arouse member's motivation to participate; and remove barriers to participation (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987). *New social movement* (NSM) theory, which focuses more on macro/structural processes, and *resource mobilization* (RM) theory, which focuses more on contextual processes such as group dynamics, contributed significantly to SMT's evolution.

Group-Level Processes

Focusing more on the group level, theoretical and empirical contributions from the field of social psychology—a sub-discipline concerned primarily with relationships, influences, and transactions among people, and particularly group behavior—have expanded and refined the body of knowledge on group-related dynamics.

- *Group polarization*: Individual opinions and attitudes become more extreme in a group context. As group members discuss positions and attempt to come to consensus, group opinions and attitudes become more extreme than those initially held by its individual members (Isenberg, 1986; Myers & Lamm, 1976).
- *Groupthink*: This refers to a group dynamic in which group members attempt excessively to reach an agreement, to the point where the need for consensus overrides the goal of making the most appropriate decision (Esser, 1998; Janis, 1982). The result is that group decisions are more biased and less rational than individual decisions (Tsintsadze-Maass & Maass, 2014).
- *Intergroup (in-group/out-group) bias*: Group perceptions are affected in a self-serving way by group membership. People tend to identify, attribute, and classify behaviors of

members from their own groups more positively than those outside the group ("out-group"), who they identify as having more negative traits and behaviors (Mullen, Brown & Smith, 1992; Verkuyten & Nekuee, 1999).

- *Intergroup competition*: There often exists an implicit "competition" between groups, even among those who share affinity with a cause/idea. Potential members may perceive groups that are more extreme to be more committed and, therefore, more attractive (Cikara, Botvinick & Fiske, 2011; Rabbie & Wilkens, 1971). Moreover, when a group experiences threat or adversity from an outside competitor, two dynamics often occur: (1) cohesion within the in-group tends to increase (often along with increased in-group compliance), and (2) group attrition occurs among the less-committed (and often less extreme) members (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008).

- *Intragroup competition*: Perceived threat and adversity also may come from competing factions *within* a given group. Sometimes these factional struggles create "splinter" groups that compete (and sometimes fight) with one another about which is more committed and extreme (Goldman, Stockbauer & McAuliffe, 1977; Jennings & Roelfsema, 2008).

- *Deindividuation*: Studies in social psychology have demonstrated that individuals (and individual group members) often feel less responsible and/or less morally accountable for "group" actions (Diener, 1979; Postmes & Spears, 1998). This may lower some of the social/psychological barriers to members taking extreme (including violent) action (McCauley & Segal, 1987).

- *Group norms*: Groups have a set of internal norms—implicit and explicit expectations for what/how individual members can think and how they can behave—that guide and control its members (Feldman, 1984; Terry & Hogg, 1996). In general, when groups are more cohesive, more isolated, or invoke high costs for dissent, group conformity is even stronger and conditions for compliance/obedience are elevated (McCauley & Segal, 1987).

These group-related dynamics have been applied specifically to the study of terrorist/extremist collectives and their behavior.

Individual-Level Processes

Concerning the role of the individual in the radicalization process, perspectives from the social and behavioral sciences have evolved considerably. From some of the earliest efforts through the 1970s, the role of the individual in terrorism was assumed to emanate from a mental or personality abnormality. These early analyses often offered "clinical" explanations for terrorism. Similarly, attempts were made with sanguinity to identify a unique terrorist profile. Empirical research on these questions, however, has firmly debunked the notion that only "crazy" people engage in terrorism and has yet to reveal a meaningful and stable terrorist profile (Borum, 2004; Crenshaw, 1992; Horgan, 2008; Humaidi, 2012; Ruby, 2002; Silke, 1998; Victoroff, 2005). Fortunately, with very few exceptions, most contemporary social scientists studying terrorism have moved past these early, naïve assumptions.

A more recent line of inquiry looks beyond psychological or psychiatric abnormality, to explore how otherwise normal mental states and processes—built on characteristic attitudes, dispositions, inclinations, and intentions—might affect a person's propensity for involvement with violent extremist groups and actions. Reframing the "psychology of terrorism" in this way, it is suggested that an individual's mindset and worldview establish a psychological "climate" (Figure 1.1), within which various vulnerabilities and propensities shape ideas
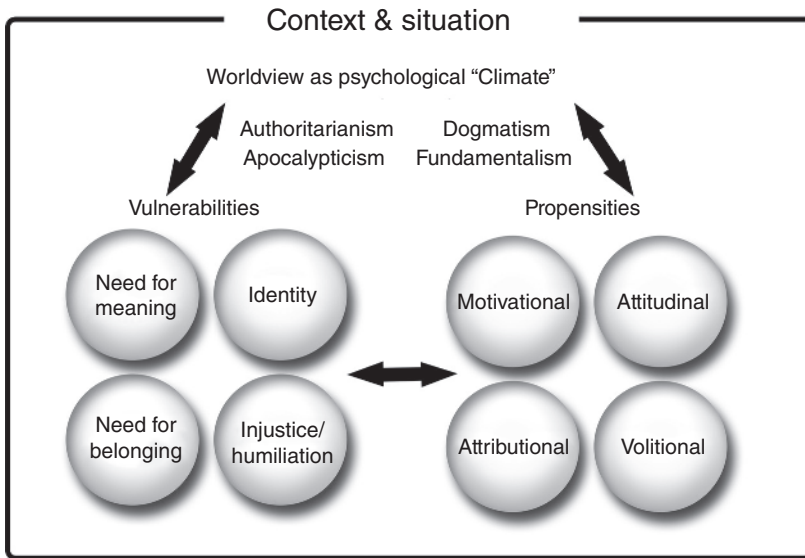
Figure 1.1   A Psychological Model of Radicalization Processes

and behaviors in ways that can increase the person's risk or likelihood of involvement in violent extremism (Borum, 2014; Weenink, 2015).

Worldviews encompass the ways in which we make sense and meaning of the world and our experience in it (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003; Sire, 2004). They can be both drivers and products of psychological propensities that may increase receptivity to extremist ideology and perhaps to justifications for terrorist violence. Four non-independent worldview factors in particular—authoritarianism, dogmatism, apocalypticism, and the fundamentalist mindset—are recurring themes in the literature on extremist violence (Gregg, 2016).

- *Authoritarianism*: As conceptualized by Altemeyer (1996), authoritarianism is characterized by a rigid, dualistic cognitive style and intolerance of ambiguity. It is a stable, learned, social attitude with three facets: submission to authority, staunch conventionalism, and anger and aggression toward out-groups (Hetherington & Suhay, 2011, p. 547). It has been linked to a range of traits and attitudes that are consistent with militant, extremist ideologies, including opposition to democratic values, civil rights and liberties, and human rights (Seipel, Rippl, Kindervater, & Lederer, 2012).
- *Dogmatism*: The modern idea of dogmatism was pioneered by Rokeach (1954), who defines it as comprising: "(a) a relatively closed cognitive system of beliefs and disbeliefs about reality, (b) organized around a central set of beliefs about absolute authority which, in turn, (c) provides a framework for patterns of intolerance and qualified tolerance toward others."
- *Apocalypticism*: Apocalypticism or apocalyptic thinking "locates the problem of evil in time and looks forward to its imminent resolution" (O'Leary, 1994, p. 6). Apocalyptic thinkers perceive death as a collective event and believe that history—past and future—is determined, and that they have a blueprint (from writings or teachings) about how it will unfold.

- *Fundamentalist mindset*: The fundamentalist mindset is characterized by dualistic thinking, paranoid ideas, an apocalyptic orientation, focus on a charismatic leader, and a totalized conversion experience (Galen, 2011; Rogers et al., 2007; Strozier, Terman, Jones, & Boyd; 2010; Strozier & Boyd, 2010b).

These worldviews can both reflect and potentiate individuals' mindsets and their characteristic traits and behaviors. A particular worldview or mindset does not necessarily cause radicalization or violent extremism, but it can create or enable vulnerabilities and propensities to affiliate with extremist groups or to become involved in terrorism in various ways.

Psychological vulnerabilities or "need" states often create an opening that can increase a person's receptivity to imposed ideas, influence, and sometimes even to seeking alternative worldviews. They can shape attitudes toward a particular class of victims/targets, volitional control over their impulses and behaviors, or their appraisals of threats and grievances (Ramswell, 2014). Three specific psychological vulnerabilities have been commonly observed among violent extremists: (1) a need for personal meaning and identity; (2) a need for belonging; and (3) perceived injustice/humiliation (Borum, 2004, 2011a, 2011b).

Psychological propensities—pertaining to motivation, attributional style, volition, and attitudes—can also affect the likelihood or nature of a person's attraction to radical ideas or involvement with violent extremism. Motivationally, people can be affected both by "push factors," which are often grievance-related, and "pull factors," which are often material or expressive perceived incentives (Horgan, 2008). Attributional styles are based on "explanations people generate regarding the causes of positive and negative events in their lives" (Penn, Sanna, & Roberts, 2008, p. 409)—whether those events are driven by themselves, by others, or by situational factors. Volitional propensities comprise the nature and degree of control that persons have over their emotions, motivations/needs, thoughts, impulses, and behaviors to achieve functional goals (Hautzinger, 1994; Kuhl, 1994).

Attitudes comprise a person's internal appraisals of people, objects, events, and issues that predispose them to respond favorably or unfavorably. Attitudinal propensities that might increase risk of radicalization or involvement in violent extremism include those that endorse the legitimacy and effectiveness of terrorism (and violence more generally) as a tactic (Brand & Anastasio, 2006; Felson, Liska, South, & McNulty, 1994; Heimer, 1997; Markowitz & Felson, 1998; Polaschek, Collie, & Walkey, 2004; Stankov et al., 2010); those pertaining to grievances and injustice (Chernick, 2004); external threat (Lerner & Keltner, 2000, 2001; Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, & Fischhoff, 2003); sensation seeking (Baumeister & Campbell, 1999; Katz, 1988; Woodworth & Porter, 2002); and disinhibition (Bandura, 1990, 2004; Sykes & Matza, 1957).

Integrating Factors at Multiple Levels

Decades ago, Lofland and Stark (1965) described an approach to extremism that integrates social, psychological, and situational factors. Their "World-Saver" model blended the traditional, deterministic, sociological "strain" factors with the more dynamic principles of social influence. In their model, the authors parse their contributing factors into the categories of "predisposing conditions" and "situational factors." "Predisposing conditions" comprise acutely felt tensions, occurring in a religious problem-solving perspective, leading one to self-define as a religious seeker. The tensions traditionally reflect general strain factors such as stressors, losses, and thwarted expectations. "Situational factors" comprise

the remaining four: exposure during a turning point in life; affective bond with the group; neutralizing attachments outside the group; and exposure to intensive interaction within the group. In the model, these four factors are posited to predict why a convert connects to one particular group, instead of another. Though Lofland and Stark (1965) conceived of this model nearly a half-century ago as they sought to explain enlistments into a relatively small West Coast cult, its conceptual utility offers a framework for understanding how individual factors interact with situational/contextual factors throughout the radicalization and engagement process.

Studying factors driving the militant Islamist radicalization process in Europe, Precht (2007) also examined the combined influence of historical and dynamic situational factors. He describes the three major groupings as (1) *background factors*, which include personal struggles with religious identity, experiences with discrimination, and lack of social integration; (2) *trigger factors*, to include people—such as a mentor or charismatic leader—and events—such as policy actions—that might provoke or incite either antipathy or activism; and (3) *opportunity factors*, which account for an individual's degree of access and likelihood of exposure to extremist ideas or adherents in physical and virtual spaces within her or his sphere of activity. Precht (2007) concludes that:

> Largely, homegrown terrorism can be viewed as a sociological phenomenon where issues such as belonging, identity, group dynamics and values are important elements in the transformation process. Religion plays an important role, but for some it rather serves as a vehicle for fulfilling other goals. A common denominator seems to be that the involved persons are at a crossroad in their life and wanting a cause.

In 2008, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), aggregating the opinions of experts convened to study the "hearts and minds" aspect of radicalization, developed a multi-level framework of factors based on "three overlapping, but distinct elements that motivate individuals to becoming radicalized or committing terrorist acts": (1) the ideas of the radical narrative that provide a filter for understanding the world; (2) the sociological factors that compel an individual to embrace this radical narrative; and (3) psychological factors, characteristics, pathologies, and triggers that may prompt an individual to use violence to promote or consummate this narrative.

While demographic and socio-economic factors, according to the report, do not emerge as strong predictors of radicalization, feelings of shame and humiliation often serve to forge a bond between a vulnerable individual and a charismatic leader, and catalyzes acceptance of the radical narrative and its associated values and attitudes (also see Braddock, 2015).

More recently, Kruglanski and colleagues (Kruglanski, Gelfand, Bélanger, Sheveland, Hetiarachchi, & Gunaratna, 2014) developed a model of radicalization centered on the quest for personal significance. This framework has three components. The *motivational* component defines and drives the individual's goal, which the authors argue is the "quest for personal significance." The *ideological* component determines the proper means to achieve that goal (i.e., through violence). And the *social process* (including group dynamics) component arbitrates how the individual comes to embrace the goal and justify the means.

According to the authors, the significance quest typically is "awakened" or activated either by a loss of significance (e.g., humiliation), an anticipated or threatened loss of significance, or the potential for significant gain. The drive for significance unites the many motivational themes highlighted in other terrorist typologies, such as seeking revenge, status, and identity (Venhaus, 2010).

Common Elements in Integrated Models

The common mechanisms among these (and similar operational) frameworks appear more frequently than any unique elements (Borum, 2011b). This suggests that operational and social science researchers may fundamentally agree on the key factors in the radicalization process, but conceptually parse those factors in different ways. Common factors most frequently noted include the following:

Predisposing life experiences: These are typically historical factors, meaning they precede, but do not directly cause, the shift toward a violent extremist ideology. These include experiences that may be more distal or enduring, such as exposure to discrimination and sociological "strain" factors. These correspond to Lofland and Stark's "predisposing conditions" (and to the situational factor they describe as "exposure during a turning point in life"); to Precht's "background factors" and "trigger factors"; to CSIS' "sociological factors," and to Kruglanski's "significance loss."

Activating situations: These include experiences that may be more proximal and acute, such as a particular state policy or action. These correspond to the situational factor that Lofland and Stark describe as "exposure during a turning point in life," to Precht's "trigger factors," and have some affinity with CSIS' "sociological factors" and Kruglanski's actual or anticipated "significance loss." Opportunity factors may affect the likelihood of exposure. These may drive grievances that enhance motivation to engage in extremist action.

Predisposing vulnerabilities: These are typically psychological or psychosocial vulnerabilities or "need" states (e.g., need for belonging or personal meaning) that can push an individual to seek an alternative worldview or increase his/her receptivity to imposed ideas and influence. These vulnerabilities can also stimulate or intensify motivations for radical involvement. These have affinity with Lofland and Stark's "predisposing conditions," CSIS' "psychological factors," and correspond directly to Kruglanski's concepts of "significance loss."

Social and group dynamics: These are social factors that (a) facilitate an individual's engagement and intensification with a radical group or collective, its ideology, and corresponding narrative, and (b) facilitate adoption and intensification of the collective's in-group–out-group ethos (e.g., the narrative about the out-group adversary and the need to defend against the threat that they pose) (Thomas, McGarty, & Louis, 2014). These correspond primarily to social psychological factors and parallel Kruglanski's "social processes."

Ideology/narrative: Ideology operates as a collective narrative about the nature of a grievance and who is responsible (blameworthy) for it. The radical narrative articulates with social and group dynamics to affect the individual's attitudes toward extremist action and his/her behavior (Braddock, 2015). The ideology element is more explicit in some frameworks and more implicit in others, but corresponds distinctly to CSIS' ideas of the radical narrative that provide a filter for understanding the world and to Kruglanski's "ideological component."

How Radicalization Develops Parameters of the Radicalization Process

The radicalization process does not unfold in the same way for all people. The mechanisms will vary even among those who may be exposed to the same factors and conditions. Radicalization occurs through a process, typically either through gradual escalation, or as a

series of discrete actions or decisions that prime an individual for what should occur at the next level. While the exact mechanisms and sequences of these changes are matters of some debate, it is certainly clear that different pathways and mechanisms operate in different ways for different people. McCauley and Moskalenko (2010) note that:

> There are many paths to radicalization that do not involve ideology. Some join a radical group for thrill and status, some for love, some for connection and comradeship. Personal and group grievance can move individuals toward violence, with ideology serving only to rationalize the violence. (p. 89)

Radicalization is variously described in the literature as evolving through phases, stages, or just by escalation. Radicalization, of course, does not equate with terrorism. Most people who hold radical ideas do not engage in terrorism, and some terrorists are not driven primarily by their ideologies. The distinctions between those who choose not to not engage in extremist violence, although they believe violence to further a cause is justified or even mandated, and those who do engage in extremist violence—whatever the depth of their belief about the justification for it—is an important, but empirically unsettled question.

Arie Kruglanski and his colleagues (2014) have proposed that radicalization exists as a continuum, and distinctions between those who believe in the justification for violence to further a cause and those who actually engage in that type of violence are simply a matter of "degree."

> A person who merely supports the idea of terrorism while going about her/his everyday business (hence attending to the panoply of her/his other goals) is thus said to be less radicalized than a person who actually joins a terrorist organization. In turn, a noncombatant member of a terrorist organization, an office clerk, a cook, or computer expert whose life in the organization allows various alternative pursuits is less radicalized than a fighter who actually takes up arms and actively risks life and limb for the cause; in these terms, the most extremely radicalized individual is the suicide bomber ready to sacrifice all for the cause… (p. 71).

Empirically, however, it is unclear whether systematic and significant differences may exist between the believers and the doers. If such differences do exist, they may involve differing social psychological mechanisms, pertain to individual characteristics (e.g., vulnerabilities and propensities), and/or relate to contrasting life experiences, situations, or group dynamics.

Nature and Progression of the Radicalization Process

Since September 11, 2001 (9/11), numerous articles, reports, and papers have presented characterizations and conceptual models of the radicalization process (see Borum, 2011b, for a review), particularly as it relates to militant jihadism. None of them yet has a very firm social-scientific basis, and notably few of them have been subjected to any rigorous scientific or systematic inquiry.

Some of those efforts have focused on motivational typologies, while others have posited a sequencing of stages. McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) drew directly on established social psychological principles to produce a taxonomy of radicalization mechanisms (which they define as "the means or manner in which something is accomplished") at the

individual, group, and mass levels. At the individual level, they describe four mechanisms: *individual radicalization through personal victimization*, in which a person becomes radicalized as a result of some (perceived) harm or injustice perpetrated upon him/her or a loved one; *individual radicalization through political grievance*, where radicalization occurs as a result of some harm or injustice perpetrated upon, or threatening, a group with which the person identifies; *individual radicalization in joining a radical group—the slippery slope—* the mechanism by which a person first engages with a radical group or persons espousing a radical ideology and follows a progressive, though sometimes insidious, progression of subversive behaviors, sometimes culminating in terrorism; and *individual radicalization in joining a radical group—the power of love*, in which a person engages with a radical group or persons espousing a radical ideology because of social or emotional bonds to its members, and those bonds become the impetus for action on behalf of the group.

At the group level, they describe five mechanisms: (1) *group radicalization in like-minded groups*, based on the social psychological concept of group polarization, a dynamic in which discussion of the issues increase consensus and shift the "average" group opinion in a more extreme direction; (2) *group radicalization under isolation and threat*, based on the increase in group cohesion that occurs when the collective perceives that they are under threat; (3) *group radicalization in competition for the same base of support*, based on a phenomenon in which groups competing for the same class of members distinguish themselves and elevate their status by becoming "more radical" than the others; (4) *group radicalization in competition with state power—condensation*, based on a dynamic that occurs when groups act against the state, the state's repressive response to those groups escalate, consequences for protest increase, causing the less committed to drop out, "condensing" a small committed core that is highly radicalized; and (5) *group radicalization in within-group competition—fissioning*, a process that occurs when there is conflict within the group and those in the minority are marginalized or expelled.

At the mass level, McCauley and Mosalenko describe the final three mechanisms: (1) *mass radicalization in conflict with an out-group—jujitsu politics*, a characterization of group dynamics in which "outgroup threat leads reliably to increased group cohesion, increased respect for ingroup leaders, increased sanctions for ingroup deviates, and idealization of ingroup norms" (p. 426); (2) *mass radicalization in conflict with an out-group— hate*, a phenomenon that occurs when negative perceptions of the out-group escalate to the point where its members are dehumanized by the in-group; and (3) *mass radicalization in conflict with an out-group—martyrdom*, a phenomenon in which having members willing to die for a cause increases the cause's credibility and the martyrs consequently are revered and given increased status (see also Perry & Hasisi, 2015; Moskalenko & McCauley, 2012).

Taking a different approach, Venhaus (2010) sought to illuminate mechanisms of radicalization by focusing on the primary driving (or causal) motivation. He based his analysis on records and interviews with more than 2,000 "foreign fighters" seeking to affiliate with al-Qaeda-related movements. His overarching conclusion that "they all were looking for something … they want to understand who they are, why they matter, and what their role in the world should be. They have an unfulfilled need to define themselves, which al-Qaeda offers to fill." Referring to the potential recruits as "seekers," Venhaus (2010) categorized them into four primary types: (1) *The Revenge Seeker*, who is diffusely frustrated and angry and seeking an outlet to discharge that frustration or anger toward some person, group, or entity whom he or she may see as being at fault; (2) *The Status Seeker*, seeking recognition and esteem from others; (3) *The Identity Seeker*, compelled by a need to belong and to be a part of something meaningful, seeks to define a sense of self through group

affiliations; and (4) *The Thrill Seeker*, who is attracted to the group because of the prospects for excitement, adventure, and glory.

The categories represented in Venhaus' seeker typology or in McCauley and Moskalenko's mechanisms are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it is quite likely that multiple elements often exist in any given case, and that the relative importance of these dimensions of the individual change over time and across situations.

Process Models

Some radicalization models suggest that the process progresses through a sequencing of stages. The accuracy and stability of the proposed stages, however, has not been rigorously tested. Walter Laqueur (2003) has said of terrorism that the quest for a "general theory" is misguided: "Many terrorisms exist, and their character has changed over time and from country to country." This seems to be equally true for the radicalization process itself, so no single model may adequately represent the process for all people.

Borum (2003) proposed an early, operationally driven four-stage model based on anecdotal evidence. The first part of the process involves framing some unsatisfying event, condition, or grievance (*It's not right*) as being unjust (*It's not fair*). The injustice is blamed on a target policy, person, or nation (*It's your fault*). The responsible party is then vilified—often demonized—(*You're evil*), which facilitates justification or impetus for aggression. The model was developed originally as a heuristic for law enforcement, not as a formal social science theory.

Moghaddam (2005) described a similar progression, but linked them more systematically to psychological constructs using the metaphor of "staircase" that ascends through five levels. The staircase "narrows" and fewer people ascend to each successive level, leaving a relatively small number of people who actually progress to the point where they engage in terrorism.

The initial step on the pathway to terrorism, according to the model, typically arises from feelings of discontent and perceived adversity (framed as "perceived deprivation"), which people seek to alleviate. When those attempts are unsuccessful, they become frustrated, leading to feelings of aggression, which are displaced onto some perceived causal agent (who is then regarded as an enemy). With increasing anger directed toward the enemy, some come to sympathize with the violent, extremist ideology of the terrorist groups that act against them. Some of those sympathizers eventually join an extremist group, organization, or movement that advocates for, and perhaps engages in, terrorist violence. At the "top" or final level among those who have joined are those who overcome any barriers to action and actually commit a terrorist act.

In 2007, based on a qualitative review commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Justice, Precht (2007) outlined a four-phase "typical pattern of radicalization" comprising *pre-radicalization*; *conversion and identification with radical Islam*; *indoctrination and increased group bonding*; and *actual acts of terrorism or planned plots*. He summarized the broad contours of radicalization in the following way:

> Radicalisation often starts with individuals who are frustrated with their lives, society or the foreign policy of their governments. A typical pattern is that these individuals meet other like-minded people, and together they go through a series of events and phases that ultimately can result in terrorism. However, only a few end up becoming terrorists. The rest stop or drop out of the radicalisation process at different phases.

Most of the conceptual models of radicalization implicitly characterize it as a "bottom-up" process of "joining," rather than a "top-down" process of recruitment. Sageman (2008) makes this point quite explicitly with regard to the militant jihadists he has studied, describing them as "young men chasing thrills, fantasies of glory and sense of belonging to group and cause" who mobilize through social networks. This is sometimes referred to as Sageman's "bunch of guys" theory of radicalization (Sageman, 2004). These collectives, he finds, often share a sense of global or local "moral outrage" and grievous personal experiences, and are driven more by anti-American and anti-Semitic sentiments than by deep Islamic doctrine.

Conclusion

While much about radicalization remains empirically unvalidated, it is clear that the process is multi-determined, and that its etiology often includes broad grievances that "push" an individual toward a radical ideology and the narrower, more specific "pull" factors that attract them. Many times, the factors are transactive (affecting each other). Some have ideological commitments that lead them to particular group affiliations, while others start with social or group affiliations that lead to ideological commitments. Socially facilitated entry is quite common, but certainly not universal. Beyond that, there is very little that is "typical" about radicalization into violent extremism. In fact, what is perhaps most striking about radicalization is its diversity—both in who becomes radicalized and how. Scholars have debated whether radicalization into militant Jihadism is a "bottom–up" process of "joining," or a "top–down" process driven by recruitment. The truth is that both mechanisms are active, and they operate differently for different people in different contexts—and sometimes even for the same person at different points in time. It is also clear that different pathways can lead to radicalization, and conversely, different persons on a shared pathway or trajectory may have different outcomes. Social science theories and models have helped to create a better conceptual understanding of radicalization and, in some cases, to promote more systematic and focused inquiry.

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