Parental reaction towards radicalization in young people

Elga Sikkens, Stijn Sieckelinck, Marion van San and Micha de Winter

Utrecht University, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Department of Pedagogical and Educational Sciences, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Correspondence:
Elga Sikkens, Utrecht University, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Department of Pedagogical and Educational Sciences, PO Box 80140, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands.
Email: e.m.sikkens@uu.nl

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on radicalization from a parenting perspective; we propose an approach that sees radicalization as a possibility in adolescent development, and as part of the interaction with the adolescent's social environment and socialization. The aim of the study is to discover how parents react when their adolescent develops extreme ideals. Using 55 in-depth interviews with young people who have extreme ideals and their parents, the parental reactions towards these ideals are explored. Subsequently, the reactions are categorized according to two dimensions (control and support). This study shows how parents struggle when confronted with radicalization and shift to less demanding responses due to powerlessness, dissociation and parental uncertainty.

PARENTAL REACTION TOWARDS RADICALIZATION IN YOUNG PEOPLE

In *Young People's Perspectives of being Parented in Critical Situations*, Murray (2013) considers how parents respond in a critical situation as when children violate the law. A different critical and very topical situation that parents can encounter during the upbringing of their children is radicalization. How do parents react to the radicalization process of their child which touches upon their family life as well? Do parents try to influence the radicalization process their children are undergoing, and is that even possible? Parents have a certain parenting style (Maccoby & Martin 1983), but it is debatable whether this style is (still) sufficient and advisable when radicalization causes a rift between the parent and child. In this study, we use interviews with young people who have extreme ideals and their parents in order to explore what happens within families and to the parenting when a family is confronted with radicalization.

The research took place in Belgium and the Netherlands. After the 9/11 attacks, the murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a young Muslim, and the murder of right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn by an animal activist, polarization increased in both of these countries. Feelings of relative deprivation, injustice and exclusion may have led young people to radicalize (Moghaddam 2005; Borum 2004; Veldhuis & Staun 2009). The Dutch and Belgian governments aimed to identify radicalization and reduce the risks associated with it. However, identifying radicalization is hard, partly because no agreement exists on how to define radicalization.

Scholars often distinguish between violent and cognitive radicalization (Bartlett *et al*. 2010; Vidino & Brandon 2012). McCauley & Moskalenko (2008, p. 415), for example, define radicalization as a 'dimension of increasing extremity of beliefs, feelings and behaviours in support of intergroup conflict and violence' while Vidino and Brandon (2012, p. 9), for example, define cognitive radicalization to be 'the process through which an individual adopts ideas that are severely at odds with those of the mainstream, refutes the legitimacy of the existing social order, and seeks to replace it with a new structure based on a completely different belief system.' Veldhuis and Staun (2009, p. 4) notice that 'although radicalisation has increasingly been subjected to scientific studies, a universally accepted definition of the concept is still to be developed.' Some scholars even argue that radicalization does not exist, but is a term constructed by media, government and security agencies (Neumann 2013). According to Mandel (2009), radicalization is 'relative, evaluative, and subjective'. He states that being radical is always in comparison with something else, for example the law or tradition, and therefore is subordinate to an individual's perspective. Whether an action or an individual is called 'radical' depends on these comparisons. Mandel (2009) argues that the term radical could be used (for example by authorities) to refer to something that is undesired or is

even a threat to the community. However, by simply considering adolescents and their ideals to be dangerous, one overlooks that ideals – even radical ones – are part of a democratic discourse, and that some idealistic young people simply want to be actively involved in their communities (Sikkens 2014).

In order to do justice to the relative meanings of radicalization, we constructed the following definition: radicalization is *the process through which an adolescent or young adult develops ideals that are severely at odds with those of their family and/or the mainstream*. In our research, we consider the development of extreme ideals to be part of the (normal) development in adolescence, influenced by interaction with the adolescent's social environment and socialization (Van San *et al.* 2010). Ideals – even extreme or radical ones – do not inherently have to be a danger to society, but could also help to shape society (for example, the black power movement) and help shape identity. Extreme ideals by themselves do not pose a threat, but an obsessive passion for ideals may do. Someone with extreme passion is often not critical towards his or her own ideas and does not reconsider his or her thoughts, even when there is reason to do so. In the most extreme cases, the too-passionate idealist becomes immoral, blind to other people's interests and harmful to him or herself. It could therefore be desirable that a counterbalance be provided by parents or teachers in case the extreme ideals are at odds with the democratic constitutional state (Sikkens 2014).

Substantial literature exists on the influence of parents and parenting on radicalization (Duriez & Soenens 2009; Epstein 2007; Hopf 1993; Post 1984). But how does radicalization affect parenting? The vast majority of studies in the literature on parenting and radicalization have focused on trying to show how parenting shapes children's (extreme) ideals, but it is likely that parents also change their behaviour in response to the radicalization of their children. Little attention has been given to these reciprocal dynamics within families when they are confronted with radicalization. This study's objective is to answer the question of how parents respond to the radicalization process of their children. Furthermore, two sub-questions will be answered: (i) Does the parental reaction towards the development of ideals change during the radicalization process? This question is posed because we would like to explore whether the radicalization process influences parental reaction. (ii) Do parents react to radicalization in accordance with the general parenting style they used prior to the radicalization? This question is posed because one would expect a permissive parent, for example, to respond in a supportive and non-controlling manner towards the

development of extreme ideals, and a parent with an authoritarian parenting style to respond in a controlling way.

This paper is based on explorative qualitative research and aims to generate hypotheses about the dynamics within upbringing when families are confronted with radicalization. To achieve this goal, we will first discuss some previous research on parenting styles and the reactions of parents towards problem behaviour in general and radicalization in particular. Then, in the methodology, we will discuss how we categorized the different parental reactions towards radicalization. What these reactions entail is presented in the results section. The discussion section deals with some remaining thoughts.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Parenting styles

In the existing literature, four different parenting styles are often distinguished: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and neglectful (Maccoby & Martin 1983). Authoritarian parenting is described as being a restrictive, punitive style. Permissive parents are warm and nurturing, and, as opposed to authoritarian parents, place few limits or controls on their children. Authoritative parenting is a style that encourages adolescents to be independent but still places limits and controls on their actions. Neglectful parenting is a style in which parents are scarcely involved with their children and place few demands or controls on them (Maccoby & Martin 1983). Authoritative parents are both strict and nurturing towards their child. This combination of warmth and connectivity between parent and child, and also the acts of setting boundaries and giving instructions would be the most optimal in upbringing (Maccoby & Martin 1983). An affective parental interaction with the child would help their (moral) development (Smetana 1999). Moreover, it is through discipline encounters that parents help their children to establish prosocial moral internalization (Hoffman 2000).

Parental reactions

Not a lot is known about the reactions of parents towards radicalization, but quite a body of research has been conducted on the reactions of parents towards adolescents who show deviant behaviour. Murray (2013), for example, shows that parents can change to a more punitive parenting style when confronted with offending behaviour by their child. Yet, Kerr *et al.* (2009) found that parents often disengage when

their adolescent starts to show problem behaviour. One would expect parents to increase their monitoring as soon as they notice that their child is involved in deviant behaviour, but instead, Kerr *et al.* (2009) showed that most parents give the child more autonomy. They explored whether parents monitor their adolescents less because they feel that their children have reached a certain age where they need to be more autonomous. However, their data suggested that it is more likely that parents decrease their monitoring because they are intimidated by the behaviour of their child or because they are emotionally excluded by the child. This is in accordance with earlier research on parental responses towards deviant behaviour. Stice & Barrera (1995), for example, found that parents might become less supportive and controlling towards their children because they are scared of their aggressive behaviour. Baumrind & Moselle (1985) suggest that parents might disengage from their deviant children because of their antisocial identities. This study will explore how parents respond to radicalization. Perhaps parents respond in a similar manner towards radicalization as they do towards deviant behaviour.

Van San *et al.* (2010, 2013) interviewed approximately 20 radicalized adolescents and young adults in the Netherlands about their ideals. Their research showed that most parents in this study did not respond to or intervene in the radical behaviour of the child. The dominant reaction was an indifferent one, in which the parents considered the ideals to be the child's own choice. Yet, the moral development of ideals requires monitoring and debate (Smetana 1999; Van San *et al.* 2010, 2013), but many parents do not know how to handle strong ideals and potential radicalization: a so-called 'parental uncertainty' seems to exist (Van San *et al.* 2010).

Becker (2008) found the same uncertainty and lack of response in *abandoned* ('*verlassene*') families [translated by the authors]. Becker's study focused on the interaction and communication between young people that have extreme-right ideals and their parents. In *abandoning* ('*verlassene*') families, politics and ideology are not discussed and the parenting style can be characterized as indifferent; parents have trouble with setting boundaries. Similar to the findings of Van San *et al.* (2010), in this type of family, the parent holds the child responsible for his or her own choices. Lobermeier (2006, p. 67) found comparable parenting practices within the families of right-wing youngsters: their upbringing could be characterized by a lack of control and permissiveness ('*Konsequenzenlosigkeit*').

METHOD

This section will first discuss the way the data was collected. Second, it will give insight into our analysis and the way we categorized the parental reactions. The sample included both young people with extreme ideals and their parents, because we were interested in the interaction between parent and child during the radicalization process. Moreover, in our pilot study we found that parents of young people with extreme ideals were difficult to find, but could be contacted through their children (Van San *et al.* 2010). The study consists of 35 cases in total, consisting of 32 interviews with adolescents and young adults, 20 interviews with parents and three interviews with siblings.

Respondents – adolescents and young adults

This qualitative field research consists of interviews with 32 adolescents and young adults. Twenty-five adolescents or young adults had ideals that were at odds with the ideals of their families and/or the mainstream in society at the time of the interview. The other seven interviewees were former radicals, which meant that they no longer had ideals that clashed with the ideals of their parents or the mainstream. It should be noted that the research was not limited to individuals who engaged in violent radicalization, but extended to groups and individuals who have yet remained (and will remain in most instances) non-violent in their radicalization process.

The age of the respondents we interviewed ranged from 16 to 33 years old, with a mean of 21.8 years old. As there exists growing evidence that processes of radicalization among widely divergent groups show parallel developments (Van San *et al.* 2010; Gielen 2008; Stern 2003), this study focuses on respondents with extreme-right, radical Islamic and extreme left-wing ideals. Sixteen out of the 32 young people had strong Islamic beliefs, with 11 of them being converts. Six respondents sympathized with right-wing or national socialist ideologies. Five respondents are or were involved in environmental or animal rights activism and five respondents supported anarchism or socialism (for an overview, see Table 1). Eighteen of the adolescents and young adults were male, and 14 were female.

Respondents – parents and siblings

We interviewed 20 parents and three siblings. Siblings were interviewed in the cases that we were not permitted to speak to the parents. Most parents were approached through their children because the adolescents and young adults were easier to find than their parents.

Table 1 Overview ideologies young respondents

Ideology	Number of young respondents
Islam (of which converted to Islam)	*16 (11)*
Right-wing	*6*
Environment/animal activism	*5*
Anarchism/socialism	*5*

The parents we interviewed came from different backgrounds. The research included both low-income and high-income families, and married and divorced parents. In some families there were problems with alcohol, drugs, sickness and/or depression.

In 20 cases, the parents had different ideals than their children. This, for example, could mean that the parent was an atheist while the adolescent converted to Islam. In 15 cases, the parents had ideals that were in line with the ideals of the child, although usually more moderate. The parents of extreme right-wingers would in some cases, for example, vote for right-wing parties.

Process

For this study, in-depth interviews were conducted using prepared topic lists. The majority of our respondents were recruited on Facebook: we created a neutral 'researcher Facebook account.' On our profile, we explained our roles as researchers and overtly described what the study was about. Subsequently, we searched Facebook to find young people (between 15 and 30 years old) who were very explicit on their profile about their ideals. The adolescents and young adults were approached if their profiles, for example, showed adulation of martyrdom, white supremacy, or anti-government claims. We also joined ideological groups on Facebook and approached active members in order to recruit participants for this study.

Next, we sent potential respondents a private Facebook message to ask them for an interview about their ideals. In this message, we explained who we were and the purpose of our research. We did not use Facebook to interview the respondents, but asked them via private Facebook messages to meet in person because of the lack of privacy that Facebook offers; everything that is posted on the website is subsequently owned by Facebook or could be read by a third party. By interviewing our respondents offline, we made sure that no one would have ownership of the interviews which could lead to our interviewees being harmed.

The interviews were held in a face-to-face setting and took place at locations chosen by the respondents. All of the interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. In order to guarantee anonymity, all information that could lead to a participant's identification was deleted.

Constraints of sample selection

As we found our young respondents through social media, most parents were approached via their son or daughter. This may have caused a selection bias as it was often difficult to get the adolescent or young adults' consent to speak to their parents. We were more often able to speak to the parents when the child and the parents agreed on the ideology. However, if they disagreed, this often meant that the parent and child had a troubled relationship, which made it difficult for us to contact the parent because the young respondent would not permit it. Sometimes, we solely spoke with the parent because the child, for example, had left the country to fight in Syria.

Another potential bias in the research group was caused by using Facebook for recruitment: only potential respondents who had a public Facebook profile could be found. People who kept their profiles private ensured that their profiles could only be seen by friends. A researcher who does not belong to the circle of friends could not see such a profile page and therefore could not see what, if any, ideals are being propagated on a particular Facebook page. One would imagine that people with extreme ideals would keep their profiles private, so as not to be discovered by the police or secret services, leaving the researcher with less extreme public Facebook profiles. However, we found the contrary to be true; we found that the majority of the radical left-wing and Muslim youth had made their Facebook profiles public.

Moreover, in almost half of our sample, it was reported that there were problems at home like alcoholism, loss of a spouse/parent, sickness, depression, divorce, etc. This percentage seems rather high compared to the general population and a selection bias might be at stake. However, a problematic home situation might be conducive to radicalization in some cases.

Ethics

The people we interviewed were quite suspicious about the government, institutions and researchers. It was therefore impracticable to let them fill out a written informed consent form. However, all our respondents gave verbal consent to participate in our research and

to audio record the interview. We anonymized all interviews in order to reduce any possible harm to the respondents by changing the interviewee names and leaving out details that could identify them. Furthermore, all participants were informed that they could contact us at any time for further questions and could terminate their participation in the research whenever they pleased. Two respondents made use of this possibility. The research received ethical approval from the Faculty Ethics Review Committee of the Utrecht University.

Steps taken during analysis

To obtain researcher triangulation, two researchers conducted the interviews and analysed the data. One researcher started the analysis by openly coding four interviews with adolescents and their parents. The themes and topics we asked about provided areas of focus for the researchers during the interviews. The second researcher tried to code the interviews with the same labels, resulting in a more reliable list of open codes. Some of the most obvious labels were the reactions of parents to their children's ideologies. Axial coding was performed for further analysis of the different kinds of reactions. Subsequently, in 55 interviews (both with adolescents and parents), we coded all remarks that related to parents, parenting and the reactions of parents to their children's ideals.

Inter-rater reliability was obtained through the repeated coding of the interviews by a second researcher (kappa was 0.89 after disagreements in coding were discussed and consensus was reached), and by individual classification of the parental reactions by the two researchers.

Categorization of reactions

In previous studies, scholars have explored the use of two dimensions to categorize their research findings on parenting (Baldwin 1948; Baumrind 1991; Maccoby & Martin 1983). In this study, we used the two dimensions 'control' and 'support' to categorize the parental reactions towards radicalization that we found in our interviews (see Fig. 1). Control in this research means: the amount of rules, monitoring and control that the parent displays (Schaffer 2009). We define support as follows: the amount of support, warmth and affection that the parent displays, and whether the parent tries to see things from the perspective of the adolescent (Schaffer 2009; Bonnet *et al.* 2012).

We emphasize four different parental reactions towards radicalization: *discuss* (high control and high
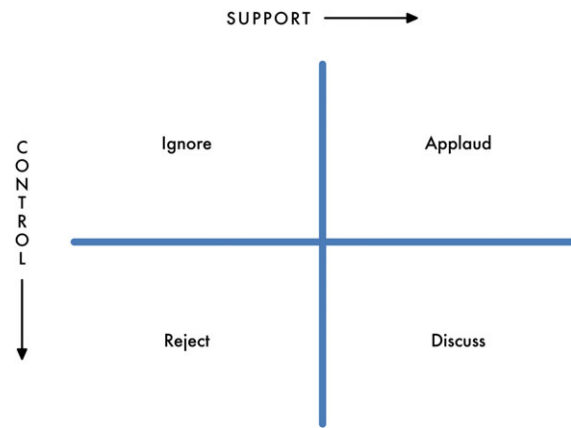

Figure 1 Model on parental reactions towards radicalization. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

support), *reject* (high control but no support), *applaud* (high support but no control), and *ignore* (no control and no support). *Ignoring* the ideals of the adolescent implies that parents do not set any boundaries or exercise any control, even though they do not support the ideologies of their children. Reacting with *applause* means that parents support the ideals and do not set any boundaries with regard to the ideals. *Rejecting* the ideals means that parents are unsupportive of their children's ideas or actions and are not open to dialogue about the ideals of their children. A reaction is labelled as *discuss* if the parent is open to dialogue about the ideals of their children (supportive), but still sets boundaries regarding their children's idealism.

To obtain information about the reactions of parents towards radicalization, we asked the young people and their parents about how the father and/or mother reacted when the child expressed his or her ideals for the first time. We also asked how the parents reacted towards the ideals now, at the time of the interview. Furthermore, young respondents and their parents were asked about the parental sentiments towards the ideals and whether any boundaries were set regarding the pursuit of those ideals. We used their answers to categorize the parents' reactions according to the two dimensions: 'control' and 'support.' If, for example, parents proclaimed that they detested their child's ideology or that they hated the way their child was dressed, this was categorized as *reject* by the researcher. A second researcher categorized the parental reactions again, to obtain inter-rater reliability.

The classification stemmed from both the young respondents' and parents' narratives in cases where we interviewed both. In most cases, their narratives tallied and the researchers categorized their answers into the

four categories. In a few cases, the stories of the young respondent and his or her parent did not match. In those cases, the full family context brought forward in the interviews was considered, and the researchers independently categorized the answers into the four reaction categories and discussed any differences in categorization until agreement was reached.

Categorization of parenting styles

In order to compare the reactions of parents with the parents' parenting style, we operationalized parenting styles by categorizing the interview data into the following dimensions: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful (Maccoby & Martin 1983). To establish the parenting style of the parents, we asked the young respondents and their parents about the quality of the relationship between parent and child, rules and boundaries that applied in their households, parental support and parental monitoring. We also asked whether the parents were strict or permissive and whether the young people and their parents discussed ideals and other topics. We then coded all remarks on upbringing under the following codes: rules (remarks on rules that apply in the household and on parents being strict or non-strict), relationship (remarks on the relationship between parent and child), support (remarks on parental support), monitoring (parents being informed about the adolescents' whereabouts) and discussion (ability to talk to parents). We then used the coded data to analyse whether the parents were controlling/non-controlling and responsive/non-responsive as defined by Maccoby & Martin (1983) and accordingly classified their parenting style as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive or neglectful.

RESULTS

This section will present how parents responded to radicalization according to the young respondents and their parents. During the study, we found that parents can react in multiple ways, and their reactions can change over time. Some parents' initial reaction would, for example, be to discuss the ideals, but they then would start ignoring the ideals when the ideals became more extreme. Moreover, the parents we interviewed did not always react towards the ideals of their children in a way that corresponded with their previous parenting styles. Parents possibly change their reactions because they feel that their usual parenting styles are not sufficient to cope with radicalization.

Shifts in parental reactions

During our interviews, we found that parents can react in multiple ways, and their reactions can change over time; a shift in parental reactions seems to take place within many families that are confronted with radicalization.

In our sample, the respondents were between 10 and 19 years old (average 15) when they first engaged in their chosen ideology. Radicalization took place at an average age of 16.7. Roughly three different timescales can be distinguished in the radicalization process. In some cases, the radicalization was immediate and the young person became extreme within weeks. In other cases the radicalization was a step-by-step process that lasted for years. A third timescale we came across in our study shows that some people became engaged in an ideology, gained in-depth information for years, and after a sudden turning point in their lives radicalized quickly. Parents usually changed their reaction towards the ideal development of their child as soon as they noticed their son or daughter becoming more extreme. The stories of Chiara and Redouan below illustrate this: their parents initially applauded their embracement of Islam, but as soon as they noticed their child becoming extreme in his/her beliefs they changed their reaction. Parents also changed their reaction when they noticed that their reaction did not have the desired effect. The mother of Tijmen (see below), for example, tried to discuss her son's views at first but noticed that he would only retort more strongly. She then ignored his extreme right proclamations.

It appears that many parents, just like Tijmen's mother, move away from discussing the ideals and start to ignore the ideals. There were also parents who shifted from applauding or rejecting the ideals to ignoring, as seen in the case studies of Chiara and Redouan. Apparently, parents become less demanding towards their children, as the parental reactions move to a less controlling, ignoring reaction. Parents who shifted to ignoring their children's ideals were often led by *powerlessness*: parents did not have 'the tools' to respond to the radicalization of the child. These mothers and fathers were not unresponsive towards their children's ideals, but they did not know what to look out for or how to handle (control) these ideals, and stood on the sidelines when their children became more and more fanatical, as illustrated by Tijmen's case study. Moreover, from our study, it appeared that parents sometimes *dissociate* themselves consciously or unconsciously from the child and his or her ideas and actions. Chiara's mother, for example, consciously dissociated herself from the radicalization of

her daughter because she feared conflict. In other case studies, parents struggled with problems of their own (alcoholism, loss of a spouse, depression, divorce, etc.) and may have unconsciously dissociated themselves by losing sight of their child and his/her ideals due to struggling with these troubles.

Evidently, the parents in our study struggled with the radicalization of their children. This becomes even clearer when we consider their parenting styles together with their parental reactions, as these do not always match.

Parental reactions compared with parenting styles

The parents we interviewed did not always react towards the ideals of their children in a way that corresponded with their general parenting styles. Parents possibly change their reaction because they feel that their usual parenting styles are not sufficient to cope with radicalization. The parenting style that we, for example, noted in Redouan's family seemed to be at odds with their response to their son's ideal development. Their general parenting style used to be permissive, but they rejected Redouan's ideals as soon as his ideals no longer matched their own. Moreover, they avoided discussions with Redouan about his ideology. This case study shows that the parenting style and the parental reaction towards extreme ideals do not always correspond.

We also found a pattern which shows that especially authoritative parents do not react towards radicalization the way one would expect (namely, by discussing the ideals with the child). The case study of Tijmen illustrates this, as he could discuss anything with his parents except for his extreme right ideals.

Three illustrative case studies

Using three case studies, we will illustrate how parents may respond to the radicalization process, how this reaction can change over time and how the parental reaction does not always match the general parenting style. All the names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

REDOUAN

Parenting style

When Redouan (16) turned 16 years old, he developed a renewed interest in Islam. Within the following six months, he became more and more extreme. His parents raised him according to Islam, but Redouan felt that he did not live according to Islamic rules as he was more interested in 'music and girls and stuff'. Redouan grew up in a Dutch–Moroccan family of eight. He felt that he was spoiled by his parents as there were no rules he had to comply with. Doing well in school and being polite were the only two conditions for being allowed to go out wherever and whenever he wanted.

Radicalization process

Redouan's sudden return to Islam was prompted by the guilt he felt towards Allah. He claimed not to have been influenced by peers, although Redouan is part of a large Salafi network. He started to read books about Islam and visited lectures in the mosque. His parents, friends and people in the mosque responded with applause to Redouan's return to religion. It did not take long before Redouan started to give lectures in mosques and through the Internet. Redouan accepted the Salafi ideology and now feels that the 9/11 attacks were 'American and Zionist propaganda' and that he would like to be part of an Islamic State (IS).

Parental response

Redouan's parents were happy with the renewed interest of their son in their religion and responded with applause. However, the support subsided as soon as his parents noticed that their son proclaimed a different ideology. Redouan's father is a practising Muslim but keeps away from Salafism and extremism. His parents rejected his interactions with Salafi youth who support the jihad in Syria. His parents were afraid that Redouan would end up in jail and prohibited him from being in touch with his Salafi contacts. However, Redouan kept contacting them online through his lectures because, according to Redouan, 'they can kill the messenger, but they can never kill the message'.

Communication between Redouan and his parents became difficult. Redouan tried to explain his beliefs to his parents but they had no sympathy for the ideals and avoided any discussions. They tried to ignore his ideology.

CHIARA

Parenting style

Chiara (19) was raised by her mother. Her father beat her mother, and they fled to a women's shelter when she was two years old. Chiara showed problematic behaviour as a child. She could not be kept in check at

school and was referred to special education. Youth Care was also involved with the family because Chiara's behaviour became more and more problematic. 'I couldn't get her to go to school. She just did as she pleased,' said her Mother, who did not dare to confront Chiara. 'I was always very careful because she could easily get mad'. When Chiara was 11 years old she started to hang out with the crowd and would sometimes stay away an entire night without her mother's knowledge. Chiara was diagnosed with a borderline personality disorder. At the same time, her mother was struggling with her own health and depression. Chiara was referred to surrogate family homes several times, but her mother would always retrieve her after a few days.

Radicalization process and parental response

When Chiara was 18 she converted to Islam. At first her mother was pleased because the problematic behaviour ceased: she quit drinking and smoking, and her mother did not have to worry about her daughter going out at night. Shortly after the conversion, Chiara started to wear a veil, and these veils quickly became longer. Three months after her conversion, Chiara started to wear a niqab. Her mother was frantic and tried to convince her daughter that she could also be a good Muslim without a niqab, but she did not prohibit it. Her mother said, 'I thought the more I go against it, the worse it'll get'. Her mother worried because she noticed that her daughter was becoming more extreme, for example, openly supporting the jihad in Syria. Her mother heard that Chiara was in touch with a Syrian fighter and started to get scared. However, she did not contact the police because she did not want to cause a scene, and feared a fight. 'What do you do? And I still feel guilty about that… I trivialized it.' Although her daughter became more extreme in her beliefs and she knew that her daughter was easily influenced by men, she trivialized the situation. Her mother believed that Chiara would never leave her, until she suddenly disappeared to Syria.

TIJMEN

Parenting style

Tijmen (26) grew up with his mother and two sisters in a multicultural neighbourhood. He only saw his father at weekends. Tijmen's sister Marloes described their upbringing as balanced. Their mother gave them confidence by stimulating them a lot, and their parents 'were there for us'. Tijmen recalls their upbringing as

permissive, with his parents being 'ex-hippies'. Nonetheless, there were rules in the home.

Radicalization process

At high school, Tijmen and his friends were a minority, and they were bullied for being 'kaaskoppen' [cheese heads: an ethnic slur directed at Dutch people]. When Tijmen was 15, he saw African children scare away a white child from the playground he used to play at, and Tijmen started to search for 'white power' on the Internet. He joined an online right-wing forum and eventually met some forum members in real life at a gathering. His mother and sisters noticed that Tijmen had changed. He would utter his frustration during dinner about being the only white person on the tram, views that his mother and sisters did not share.

Then Tijmen was suspended from high school for proclaiming Nazi beliefs, and he continued his far-right activities against his parents' wishes. The situation became unbearable and Tijmen left home when he was 17. He gradually climbed up the ladder in the Neo-Nazi world and became an active member of Blood & Honour and Combat18.

Parental response

According to Marloes, she and Tijmen could talk to their parents about anything. However, Tijmen could not talk about his extreme right-wing ideals with his mother as it was not something that his mother could relate to. When Tijmen started to proclaim his extreme right views at home, Tijmen's mother tried to explain to Tijmen that you cannot denigrate a whole group; however, this transpired to be counterproductive as it caused Tijmen to proclaim his views even more strongly. According to Tijmen, his mother and sisters then held their tongue when he started talking about his ideology. Tijmen feels that this may have been part of the problem as he felt he could not share his frustrations with anyone.

When Tijmen was suspended from school for proclaiming Nazi beliefs, Tijmen's mother called her ex-husband for help. Tijmen's father forbade Tijmen to visit any more extreme right-wing webpages, threatening to close down the Internet connection. After that, everything happened very quickly. Marloes found out that her brother was still an active member on extreme right-wing forums and her mother gave Tijmen a choice: to quit or leave the house. Marloes said, 'I think she expected Tijmen to stop. But he left.' After that, there was hardly any contact.

Marloes explains that her parents did not know what to do or how to handle the situation. They felt powerless. 'What can you say? You can't just keep someone like my brother at home.'

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this study, young people with extreme ideals and their parents were asked how parents reacted when they were confronted with radicalization. It is important to note that the study was based on a relatively small sample (55 interviews), and one should be careful before generalizing these first findings. Yet, these case studies could feed into new theory and could help the direction of future research. The main finding in this study is that parents often change their reactions towards extremist ideals during the radicalization process and respond differently than one would expect from their general parenting style. We argue that this is the case because parents struggle with the radicalization and do not know how to handle the new situation.

This study shows that most parents shift to ignoring the extreme ideals of their children, which seems to support the findings of Van San *et al.* (2010, 2013) and also corresponds with the studies on responses towards deviant behaviour (Baumrind & Moselle 1985; Kerr *et al.* 2009; Stice & Barrera 1995). According to Van San *et al.* (2013), this lack of response could possibly lead to radicalization, because an adolescent's search for meaning in life should be guided by a parent.

Of course, it is understandable that parents do not know how to react, as they are struggling with the radicalization of their children. It is also possible that parents change their reactions because they feel that the situations need different approaches to their normal child-rearing styles. Just as Murray (2013) found in her research on parental responses towards offending behaviour, our study demonstrates that parents sometimes react in a different manner than one would expect from their general parenting styles. It also shows that parents sometimes change their reactions during the radicalization process. It is important to consider these dynamics within families if we want to learn more about how parenting and radicalization possibly intertwine.

The findings of powerlessness and dissociation indicate an uncertainty within these parents who do not know whom to turn to for support. It is important to overcome this uncertainty because earlier research by our research group shows that to prevent young people from becoming extreme in their ideals, caring educators are needed who are genuinely interested in the adolescents' views, but who also provide the necessary counterweight by setting boundaries when needed and showing alternative perspectives (Van San *et al.* 2013).

To overcome parental uncertainty towards approaching extreme ideals, (professional) support must be in place. Many parental support groups already exist in Germany (e.g. Recall – mit Eltern gegen rechts!; Die Berliner Elterninitiative; and Die EXIT-Elterninitiative), providing information and resources to families. Preliminary evaluations exist on these programmes and the support groups seem helpful, but more research is needed to pinpoint the best practices among these support groups. This research is urgent, as many support programmes for parents are currently being developed due to the rise of IS and the increase in young people leaving for Syria to join the jihad. It would therefore be fruitful to explore best practices among existing support groups to find the best possibilities to help parents overcome their uncertainties when confronted with children who hold extreme ideals.

REFERENCES

Baldwin, A.L. (1948) Socialization and the parent–child relationship. *Child Development*, **19**(3), 127-136.

Bartlett, J., Birdwell, J., & King, M. (2010) *The Edge of Violence: A Radical Approach to Extremism*. Demos, London.

Baumrind, D. (1991) The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance use. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, **11**, 56-95.

Baumrind, D. & Moselle, K.A. (1985) A developmental perspective on adolescent drug abuse. *Advances in Alcohol & Substance Use*, **4**(3–4), 41-67.

Becker, R. (2008) *Ein normales Familienleben. Interaktion und Kommunikation zwischen "rechten" Jugendlichen und ihren Eltern.* Wochenschau Verlag, Schwalbach.

Bonnet, M., Goossens, F.A., & Schuengel, C. (2012) Parental intrusive-demandingness and responsiveness as moderators of the course of peer victimization in four- to five-year-old children. PhD thesis, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.

Borum, R. (2004) *Psychology of Terrorism*. University of South Florida, Tampa.

Duriez, B. & Soenens, B. (2009) The intergenerational transmission of racism: the role of right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation. *Journal of Research in Personality*, **43**(5), 906-909.

Epstein, G.S. (2007) Extremism within the family. *Journal of Population Economics*, **20**(3), 707-715.

Gielen, A.J. (2008) *Radicalisering en Identiteit: Radicale Rechtse en Moslimjongeren Vergeleken*. Aksant, Amsterdam.

Hoffman, M.L. (2000) *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*. Cambridge University Press, New York.

Hopf, C. (1993) Rechtsextremismus und Beziehungserfahrungen. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, **22**(6), 449-463.

Kerr, M., Stattin, H., & Pakalniskiene, V. (2009) Parents react to adolescent problem behaviors by worrying more and monitoring less. In: *What can Parents do? New Insights into the Role of Parents in Adolescent Problem Behavior* (eds M. Kerr, H. Stattin & R. Engels), pp. 91-112. Wiley, Chichester.

Lobermeier, O. (2006) *Rechtsextremismus und Sozialisation: eine empirische Studie zur Beziehungsqualität zwischen Eltern/Angehörigen und ihren rechtsorientierten Kindern*. Bildungsvereinigung Arbeit und Leben Niedersachsen Ost, Braunschweig.

Maccoby, E.E. & Martin, J.A. (1983) Socialization in the Context of the Family: Parent–Child Interaction. In: *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4, Socialization, personality, and social development* (eds P.H. Mussen & E.M. Hetherington), pp. 1-103. Wiley, New York.

Mandel, D.R. (2009) Radicalization: what does it mean? In: *Home-Grown Terrorism* (eds T.M. Pick, A. Speckhard & B. Jacuch), pp. 101-113. IOS Press B.V, Amsterdam.

McCauley, C. & Moskalenko, S. (2008) Mechanisms of political radicalization: pathways toward terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, **20**, 415-433.

Moghaddam, F.M. (2005) The staircase to terrorism: a psychological exploration. *American Psychologist*, **60**(2), 161-169.

Murray, C. (2013) Young people's perspectives of being parented in critical situations: teenage non-offenders and desisters speak out. *Child & Family Social Work*, **18**(4), 467-476.

Post, J.M. (1984) Notes on a psychodynamic theory of terrorism. *Terrorism*, **7**(2), 241-256.

Neumann, P.R. (2013) The trouble with radicalization. *International Affairs*, **89**(4), 873-893.

Schaffer, D. (2009) *Social and Personality Development*. Wadsworth, Belmont.

Sikkens, E. (2014) Extreme idealen en burgerschap. In: *Opvoeden in betrokkenheid*. (eds K. Jurrius & H. Torringa), SWP, Amsterdam.

Smetana, J.G. (1999) The role of parents in moral development: a social domain analysis. *Journal of Moral Education*, **28**(3), 311-321.

Stern, J. (2003) *Terror in the Name of God: why Religious Militants Kill*. HarperCollings Publishers, New York.

Stice, E. & Barrera, M. (1995) A longitudinal examination of the reciprocal relations between parenting and adolescents' substance use and externalizing symptomatology. *Developmental Psychology*, **31**(2), 322-334.

Van San, M., Sieckelinck, S. & De Winter, M. (2010) *Idealen op drift: Een pedagogische kijk op radicaliserende jongeren*. Boom Lemma, The Hague.

Van San, M., Sieckelinck, S. & De Winter, M. (2013) Ideals adrift: an educational approach to radicalization. *Ethics and Education*, **8**(3), 276-289.

Veldhuis, T. & Staun, J. (2009) *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, The Hague.

Vidino, L. & Brandon, J. (2012) *Countering Radicalization in Europe*. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, London.