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Unfairness and Radicalization

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Abstract

This article reviews the relationship between people's perceptions of unfairness and their tendencies to think, feel, and act in radicalizing ways. Various theories of radicalization processes are reviewed that examine key aspects of the psychology of perceived unfairness. The review shows that experienced group deprivation and perceived immorality are among the core judgments that can drive Muslim radicalization, right-wing radicalization, and left-wing radicalization. Symbols of injustice, the legitimization of revolutionary thought, and the experience of unfair treatment can also increase radicalization. The review also examines core moderators (e.g., uncertainty and insufficient self-correction) and mediators (e.g., externally oriented emotions) of the linkage between perceived unfairness and core components of radicalization (e.g., rigidity of thoughts, hot-cognitive defense of cultural worldviews, and violent rejection of democratic principles and the rule of law). The review discusses how the study of unfairness and radicalization contributes to a robust and meaningful science of psychology.

Contents

1. PERCEIVED UNFAIRNESS FEELS REAL AND HAS REAL CONSEQUENCES

This article focuses on people's perceptions of unfairness and on how these perceptions can play pivotal roles in various processes of radicalization. Perceptions of unfairness include judgments of horizontal group deprivation, vertical group deprivation, perceived immorality, symbols of injustice, the legitimization of violent revolutions, unfair treatment, and general impressions that things are not right. Insight into these perceptions of unfairness can help to explain why sometimes Muslims with fundamentalist religious beliefs or people who strongly identify with right-wing or left-wing politics can be tempted to engage in violent extremism and be sympathetic to terrorist acts.

This article reviews evidence that these unfairness perceptions threaten people's sense of who they are and jeopardize their beliefs of what the world should look like. Furthermore, these perceptions feel real and genuine to those who constructed the related judgments, and they entail a combination of what people think and what they feel. Due to their hot-cognitive and self-relevant quality, these perceptions that are felt to be real can have real consequences: They can fuel people's radical beliefs, extremist behaviors, and support for terrorist acts. This article reviews how this fueling process takes place.

I propose that unfairness-inspired fueling of radicalization is especially likely when people feel uncertain about themselves and when they are insufficiently able to control their self-centered

impulses—for example, their emotional reactions of anger toward those who are different from them. As such, personal uncertainty and insufficient self-correction can dramatically enhance rigid thinking, strong defensive reactions toward different cultures or subcultures, and violent rejection of law and democratic principles.

I discuss below strengths and limitations of current insights into the unfairness–radicalization linkage. This discussion will reveal how the psychological study of unfairness and radicalization can spur the field of psychological science to embrace more fully both thoughtful conceptual analysis and qualitative empirical studies. This could lead toward a more balanced treatment of theory development and research methodology, and hence a more mature science of psychological research.

2. RADICALIZATION PROCESSES

A crucial aspect of any review on radicalization is how to define the concept. In general, radicalization is a process by which an individual or a group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo (Wilner & Dubouloz 2011). Radicalization is not necessarily bad. For example, there are persons or political parties who have adopted very radical ideas but have combined these ideas with a pacifist ideology that has restrained them from violent extremism. Gandhi's nonviolent struggle against British rule is a good example of this. Furthermore, sometimes radical thoughts are necessary to create desperately needed societal changes (Israel 2011). Thus, radicalization can be both violent and nonviolent, although most of the current academic literature focuses on radicalization into violent extremism (Borum 2011a, Schmid 2013).

Here I define radicalization as a process of growing willingness to pursue and/or support radical changes in society (in an undemocratic manner, if necessary) that conflict with or could pose a threat to the democratic legal order (Van den Bos 2018). Thus, radicalization can be viewed as a process in which people move from staying within the law (as in the case of activism) to deliberately breaking the law (as in the case of extremism), to possibly using violent means (as in the case of violent extremism). The ultimate endpoint of radicalization on which I focus is terrorism, which is defined here as the engagement of individuals or groups in ideologically motivated violence or other destructive acts against persons, property, or the fabric of society (Neth. Gen. Intell. Secur. Serv. 2009).

The issue of radicalization may be a contested concept. After all, radicalization can mean different things to different people and has different connotations in different contexts. This is probably one of the reasons why there is no universally accepted definition of radicalization in the research literature. Furthermore, studies on radicalization (and associated concepts such as activism, extremism, and terrorism) are easily biased toward the status quo. This is important in part because when studying radicalization or working on interventions to prevent radicalization or induce deradicalization one frequently works together with governmental powerholders (De Graaf 2017).

There are multiple pathways that constitute the process of radicalization. These pathways can be independent but are usually mutually reinforcing (McCauley & Moskalenko 2008). Many, but certainly not all, of these pathways include the perception that things are unfair and not right. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that several of the radicalization theories that have been proposed over the years pay special attention to the issue of perceived unfairness. Here I review core theories of the unfairness–radicalization linkage and also pay appropriate attention to other relevant variables, such as moderators and mediators of the linkage and core components of radicalization.

Radicalization has been around for many years in many different forms. Examples include right-wing radicalization in Nazi Germany in the 1930s and elsewhere (see, e.g., Hoffman 1982,

Klandermans & Mayer 2006, McVeigh 2009), left-wing radicalization in the 1960s and 1970s with movements such as the Rote Armee Fraktion (Aust 2009; see also Gurr 1970, Runciman 1966), and Muslim radicalization following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and other attacks (see, e.g., Emerson 2002, Kepel 2017, Roy 2017, Sageman 2008). This review cannot be exhaustive nor can it be extensive: There are too many instances of radicalization out there and too many theories to review them in detail. Indeed, how to understand and possibly counter radicalization are matters of intense debate, and the literature on radicalization and counter-radicalization is quite scattered across different approaches to the topics.

Therefore, an important aim of the current review is to bring together different theories on radicalization and unfairness and other relevant variables from the psychological literature. In doing so, I will rely on an earlier review of these issues (Van den Bos 2018) that serves as an organizing framework for the current article (for other reviews, see, e.g., Bongar et al. 2007, Moghaddam 2005, Rahimullah et al. 2013, Reich 1990, Victoroff & Kruglanski 2009). In this way I hope that this article will provide a good overview of important theories and relevant insights and will give the reader a firm understanding of the relevant concepts and empirical studies conducted on radicalization and perceived unfairness.

In what follows, I first review core theories of radicalization that situate the topic of unfairness and radicalization in a broader context. I discuss how these theories address perceived unfairness but also include other psychological and sociocultural variables that are important in explaining radicalization. After distinguishing a number of different approaches to the subject, I zoom in on unfairness perceptions and review how several perceptions of unfairness may be related to radicalization. I also discuss relevant moderators and mediators of the unfairness–radicalization linkage and review core components of radical thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Taken together, these reflections should give the reader a better understanding of the pressing and multifaceted societal phenomenon of radicalization. This will also enhance insights into possible ways to counter radicalization.

2.1. Staircase Approach

An important model explaining how radicalization can end up in terrorism is the staircase approach by Moghaddam (2005). The model portrays six different floors and how people can move from one floor to the next. Moving up, each floor contains fewer people, thus providing a staircase-shaped, pyramidal model that culminates with those who commit terrorist acts.

On the ground floor, people psychologically interpret their material conditions. What matters most in this interpretation process are perceptions of fairness, and feelings of fair and just treatment tend to dominate (Tyler 2006). Perceived deprivation (Runciman 1966) can be prevalent among some people on the ground floor, and those people are the most likely to move on to the higher floors in the model.

On the first floor, people are motivated by the options they see to fight the unjust situation they perceived on the ground floor. Whether or not they perceive those options as available to them depends on whether they see possibilities for personal mobility to improve their situation and on their perceptions of procedural justice. A key factor affecting perceived procedural justice is whether people receive or are denied opportunities to voice their opinions in decision-making processes (Tyler & Huo 2002).

On the second floor, people experience displacement of aggression. This can be because they have been denied voice opportunities or other meaningful participation in decision making, which has led them to excessively blame the other.

On the third floor, terrorist organizations arise as a parallel world with its own morality. Because of this parallel morality, people involved in the organizations feel that they are morally engaged and that their actions are justified (Bandura 1999).

On the fourth floor, people are part of a tightly controlled group where they have been socialized into the traditions, methods, and goals of the terrorist organization. This floor is characterized by solidification of categorical thinking and the perceived legitimacy of the terrorist organization.

On the fifth floor, people are being psychologically prepared to commit acts of terrorism. Social categorization and the exaggeration of the differences between the ingroup and the outgroups increase the psychological distance between the two types of groups. This distance is needed to sidestep inhibitory mechanisms that can prevent the actual engaging in terrorist acts.

Importantly, Moghaddam (2005) is careful to point out that the majority of people are on the ground floor. This is why Moghaddam proposes that trying to prevent terrorism is very important. To achieve this, counterterrorism can focus on long-term solutions for improving the conditions on the ground floor. Furthermore, it helps to understand how people psychologically interpret these conditions: Once we understand how people perceive what is going on in their worlds, we can do something about it. We then can also start to combat possible misperceptions. One way to implement long-term solutions is to focus on supporting contextualized democracy through procedural justice, including opportunities to voice opinions in important legal and political issues (Tyler & Lind 1992).

2.2. Trigger Approach

Feddes et al. (2015) note that radicalization tends to be a nonlinear and dynamic process (see also Feddes et al. 2013, McCauley et al. 1989). Growing radicalization does not necessarily need to develop in continuous ways, so that people would slowly but gradually move from sensitivity to orientation, followed by membership and finally extremism. After all, sometimes the radicalization process takes some time, whereas at other moments it takes place very rapidly. Furthermore, some people radicalize, but a lot more people do not. To answer why this is the case, Feddes et al. study defining events that spur processes of radicalization. Insight into the factors that trigger people to move from one phase or stage to another helps to understand how the process of radicalization unfolds.

Based on existing models of radicalization (e.g., Borum 2011b, Moghaddam 2005, Sageman 2008, Schmid 2013), Feddes et al. (2015) state that although the radicalization process is not the same for everyone, it is possible to identify four stages in which people (*a*) become sensitive to radicalization, (*b*) orient themselves to the particular type of radicalization that appeals to them, (*c*) become members of radical groups, and (*d*) show extremist action. The move from the first to the second stage is a crucial step in any radicalization process. Furthermore, in the third stage, where further ideological thinking and indoctrination take place, people may increase their willingness to view violence as permissible. If people build up more positive attitudes about violence, this increases the chances that they will take the step to violent extremist actions.

Trying to understand why people move from one stage to the next, Feddes et al. (2015) distinguish two types of trigger factors: factors that have a direct effect on growing or attenuating radicalization and factors that do not have direct effects but that have a moderating influence on the direct effects. Triggering factors are assumed to be concrete events that provide the final push to move from one phase to another. The authors also distinguish root factors, which they define as more structural or long-term circumstances that underlie radicalization and that have a high chance of leading to growing radicalization. Perceptions of unfairness and injustice can be viewed

as root factors that underlie instances of radicalization. Furthermore, because the experience of unfairness can be emotionally upsetting, it can serve as a turning point that spurs radicalization.

Feddes et al. (2015) identify three levels at which these effects can take place. Each level has its own triggering factors. Triggering factors at the micro or personal level include people's identity, perceived relative deprivation, feelings of exclusion and humiliation, and experiences with discrimination and racism. Micro factors also include confrontation with death, problems at home, the loss of a job, dropping out of school, and confrontations with authorities. Triggering factors at the meso level involve social processes in one's direct social environment. These include social networks that can push people to become a member of an extremist group. Cutting ties with other people or social groups, being exposed to propaganda, getting married to someone belonging to an extremist group, or participating in a training organized by the group are other meso factors. Triggering factors at the macro level are events at the national or global level. These include, for instance, conflicts between Israel and Palestine or between the Syrian government and Sunni Muslims. Observing that one's group is being attacked or is not well supported by a government is another macro trigger.

Feddes et al. (2015) propose a topology consisting of individual differences and associated motives that can strengthen or weaken the effects of the triggering factors. One type that is relevant for the current purposes includes people motivated by a quest for justice that they feel is denied to themselves and/or their own group. Justice seekers are particularly sensitive to events or other triggers pertaining to unfairness done to themselves and/or their group.

Events related to relative deprivation are of special importance for justice seekers, for example when they perceive that they themselves (individual deprivation; see Crosby 1976) or their own cultural group (group deprivation; see Runciman 1966) are disadvantaged and deserve better (Kepel 2004, Moghaddam 2005, Van den Bos et al. 2009). Justice seekers are assumed to be especially sensitive to trigger factors at the micro, meso, and macro levels that affect them or their group.

2.3. Goal-Achievement Approach

Kruglanski and colleagues (2014) adopt a goal-oriented approach to the study of radicalization, which they define as a movement in the direction of supporting or enacting radical behavior. Making significant progress toward the attainment of one's goals motivates human behavior. The focal goal to which political radicals and terrorists commit is labeled the quest for significance. This quest is the fundamental desire to matter, to be someone, to be respected (Kruglanski et al. 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014).

Respect is a central part of the literature on fair treatment (Tyler & Lind 1992). Respect and fair treatment are so important because they signal to people that they are full-fledged and valued members of their group, subculture, or society (Lind & Tyler 1988). The quest for significance is also important in processes of cultural worldview defense, which may moderate the unfairness–radicalization linkage.

In the Kruglanski model, the reason for terrorist acts is a disproportionate commitment to goal attainment, which is realized by engaging in extreme behavior and by devaluing or forcefully suppressing alternative goals. Thus, radical behaviors undermine other goals that matter to most people. For instance, living is among the most important goals that people have. The behavior of suicide bombers is inconsistent with this ultimate goal, as they kill themselves in the name of their terrorist organizations (Kruglanski et al. 2014).

Kruglanski et al. (2014) note that a terrorism-justifying ideology typically contains three essential ingredients, which are related to issues of unfairness, injustice, and immorality. The first

element is grievance against the injustices and harms supposedly suffered by one's religious, national, or ethnic group. The second element is related to the culprit assumed to be responsible for the perpetrated harms. For example, in the minds of radicalized Palestinians, the United States, Israel, or Jews may be responsible for harm done to their group. The third element is terrorism, which is depicted as a morally warranted and significance-promoting method of removing the dishonor created by the injustice and for which the implementer is accorded reverence and appreciation from the group.

In addition to the motivational component of the quest for personal significance, which defines the goal to which one is committed, and the ideological component, which identifies the means of violence as appropriate for this goal's pursuit, the social component describes the social processes within groups and networks through which the individual comes to share in the violence-justifying ideology and proceeds to implement it as a means of significance gain. Kruglanski et al. (2014) propose that when the core beliefs of a group make up a shared reality that reflects important grievances suffered by the group, this often leads to violent attacks against the alleged perpetrators as a way to redress the presumed injustice.

2.4. Individual, Group, and Mass Approaches

An important issue in the psychology of radicalization and unfairness is to distinguish appropriate levels at which processes of radicalization take place. For example, McCauley & Moskalenko (2008) differentiate between individual, group, and mass levels of political radicalization (see also McCauley & Segal 2009).

At the individual level, people may feel that they are personal victims. For example, suicide terrorists often note revenge for attacks on their loved ones as a motive for self-sacrifice. Individuals may also hold important political grievances that may move them to individual radical action and violence. Moreover, individuals are often recruited to a terrorist group via personal connections with existing terrorists.

At the group level, strangers who discuss political issues in a group setting tend to show increased agreement about the issue at hand and to shift toward the extremity of the average group opinion. Political radicalization often takes place in isolation and under threat, resulting in strong cohesion among the group members and in the societal isolation of terrorist cells. Members of extremist groups tend to trust only one another. They depend on one another for their lives in fighting the enemy, and this extreme interdependence produces extreme group cohesion. The resulting group's consensus about value and morality acquires enormous power, including the power to justify and even require violence against those who threaten the group. Groups can also be in competition for the same base of sympathizers and can gain status through more radical actions in support of the cause. Intergroup competition can also be seen when different terrorist groups compete over who can claim credit for a particular suicide terrorist attack or who is successful in obtaining power over a certain state. Within-group competition and differences of political opinion can also produce intense conflict and personal animosities.

At the mass level, group members become more extreme in their negative perceptions of one another, particularly when group conflict involves prolonged violence. This tendency can become so extreme that the enemy is no longer seen as human. In conflicts with states and outgroups, radical groups also tend to value those who gave up their lives for the cause and hence cherish the memory of their martyrs. Issues such as identification, patriotism, and nationalism are also very important at the mass level. For instance, the September 11, 2001 attacks and other outgroup threats resulted in increased patriotism among US citizens, increased support for the US president, and a general bolstering of American values.

The account by McCauley & Moskalenko (2008) is an example of an approach to radicalization in which experiences of injustice and perceptions of unfairness are not core propositions. Nevertheless, at least some of the mechanisms these authors identify are connected to perceived unfairness, such as those related to personal victimization and political grievances. Moreover, when discussing social movements they reflect explicitly on the role of unfairness and injustice, noting that

> radicalization of many kinds may be associated with a syndrome of beliefs about the current situation and its history: We are a special or chosen group (superiority) who have been unfairly treated and betrayed (injustice), no one else cares about us or will help us (distrust), and the situation is dire—our group and our cause are in danger of extinction (vulnerability). (McCauley & Moskalenko 2008, p. 416)

2.5. Individual and Socialization Approaches

Focusing on the individual and socialization dynamics of jihadist terrorism, Kepel & Rougier (2016) propose that strong feelings of injustice are often coupled with self-efficacious individuals and enabling environments. For example, ideological activists are motivated by idealism and a strong sense of justice and often take a leading role in terrorist enterprises to fight for these ideals and against the injustices observed (Expert Group Violent Radic. 2008). These individuals are often resourceful, educated, and well integrated in their communities. Young people can also look for collective recognition and adventure. People can also be frustrated about important events in their lives (see also Folger 1977). When coupled with a history of delinquency or other personal difficulties, this can lead them to engage in different paths of radicalization that ultimately can lead to militancy and terrorism.

A shared sense of injustice about how the constituencies that the terrorists claim to represent are treated is an important (but certainly not the only) factor in processes of radicalization, especially when this is coupled with social or societal exclusion and real or perceived humiliation among those constituencies. Ideology plays an important role in this process, both as a factor that motivates behavior and as a factor that inhibits moral concerns. This is especially true in the case of jihadist Salafist ideology, which divides the world into two antagonistic parts. In this respect, there is an analogy between European nationalist, right-wing, and left-wing terrorist groups in the 1960s and 1970s and Muslim extremists today who find in jihadist ideology useful rhetorical narratives to justify purely criminal acts that otherwise would lack any support from their own group or large parts of society.

Within several Muslim communities there are widespread feelings of inequity and injustice and a very acute sense of marginalization and humiliation. These perceptions and feelings are often underestimated by Western observers. This widespread feeling of humiliation and uncertainty rests upon an array of specific local circumstances. As with earlier forms of radicalization in the 1960s and 1970s, this shared perception offers fringe groups an opportunity to justify their recourse to terrorism. Radicalization into terrorism indeed often begins when people interpret or frame some unsatisfying event, condition, or grievance as being unjust and not fair. The injustice is blamed on a target policy, person, or nation, and the responsible party is then denigrated and often demonized, which provides a justification or impetus for aggression (Borum 2011a,b).

3. UNFAIRNESS PERCEPTIONS

The literature on radicalization is huge. Various scientific disciplines offer many different explanations of the concept and incorporate several important variables in doing so (see, e.g., Bongar et al. 2007, De Graaf 2010, Moghaddam 2005, Rahimullah et al. 2013, Reich 1990, Victoroff

& Kruglanski 2009). Several explanations do not include fairness concerns in their analyses of radicalization. For example, Wilner & Dubouloz (2011) do not examine perceptions of unfairness or injustice but focus almost exclusively on learning processes, as they assume that terrorists have to learn how to behave as a terrorist. Despite some exceptions, however, many psychological approaches to radicalization pay at least some attention to judgments of unfairness as pivotal variables in processes of radicalization (Feddes et al. 2015, Kruglanski et al. 2014, McCauley & Moskalenko 2008, Moghaddam 2005, Van den Bos 2018). What do these judgments entail? The next section reviews unfairness perceptions that seem to have a special role in various radicalization processes.

3.1. Horizontal and Vertical Group Deprivation

People who perceive that they or their group are deprived of important goods in society—whether money, justice, status, or privilege—may join social movements with the hope of redressing their grievances. Thus, relative deprivation is a potential cause of social movements and societal protest (Klandermans 1997). Extreme perceptions of relative deprivation may lead to political violence and terrorism (Gurr 1970, Merton 1938).

The perception that one's group is being deprived plays an important role in both right-wing and Muslim radicalization. For example, research on extreme right-wing attitudes in the Netherlands showed that right-wing respondents whose families had lived in the country for several generations felt that their group was deprived of important material and immaterial goods. Moreover, they perceived Muslims as newcomers in the country who were taking away these goods (Van den Bos et al. 2009). This can be labeled as an instance of horizontal group deprivation.

According to the same study, experiences of group deprivation also played an important role among Muslim citizens in the Netherlands as they felt deprived of important goods, lamenting, for example, how important symbols of their religion were treated in Dutch society compared to those of other religions. Interestingly, the Muslim respondents were focused not so much on right-wing groups but rather on important authorities in society to which they attributed their group deprivation (Van den Bos et al. 2009). This can be called an instance of vertical group deprivation.

Of course, perceived vertical deprivation can also take place among right-wing respondents and horizontal deprivation among Muslim citizens, and both groups can also experience individual (as opposed to group) deprivation (Crosby 1976, Runciman 1966). However, for the moment I conclude that both horizontal and vertical deprivation seem to play an important role in the psychology of right-wing and Muslim radicalization, respectively (for more details, see Van den Bos 2018).

The notion of perceived relative deprivation is important for our understanding of radicalization processes, because it shows that it is not only or primarily people's objective circumstances or absolute deprivation that determines injustice-based grievance, but it is especially the relative injustice as perceived by individuals or groups compared to other individuals or groups. Thus, people's perceptions of their social conditions are key to the understanding of the radicalization process.

Because these perceptions depend on the referent of the comparisons that people make (Stouffer et al. 1949), individuals from radical groups who are themselves relatively well-off may show extreme levels of grievance and resentment. This is because they can become frustrated when they imagine improving their conditions but in reality do not get access to a good job or high societal status (Crosby 1976).

Although perceptions may be biased, they can have real consequences on people's behaviors (Thomas & Thomas 1928). Therefore, to understand radical behaviors we need to take seriously people's perceptions of unfairness, including their perceptions of horizontal and vertical group

deprivation. Once we understand what is perceived to be wrong, we get hold of a major antecedent of why people may engage in radicalization processes.

3.2. Moral Concerns and Moral Righteousness

Another concern that motivates radicalization processes is morality. For example, left-wing radicalizing individuals in the Netherlands indicate that how the government is treating people who seek asylum or how commercial companies are treating animals is morally wrong (IVA 2010, Neth. Gen. Intell. Secur. Serv. 2010).

Morality and moral concerns are strongly related to the essence of who we are as humans (Haidt 2012). We want to be moral beings (Cramwinckel et al. 2013), and moral concerns drive our behavior, in part because we have elaborate reasoning skills and sophisticated cognitive skills that allow us to come to important conclusions about what is right or wrong.

Perceiving that things are morally wrong upsets us, in part because these immoral events threaten our notion that we live in a world that is understandable and predictable (Van den Bos et al. 2015) and evoke strongly felt moral emotions. After all, core emotions such as anger and disgust are strongly associated with important moral codes of how to behave (Rozin et al. 1999).

Feelings and moral emotions also provide meaningful input for how to interpret moral issues (Haidt 2001). For example, in many circumstances information about moral issues is not available or is too complex to digest in all its nuances. Feelings and emotions then serve as important sources on which people build their moral judgments (Van den Bos 2003). Thus, when a certain situation feels right, one infers that the situation probably is morally right; when another event makes someone disgusted, they tend to conclude that the event in all likelihood is wrong [see also Hume 1951 (1739)].

Morality is important for its own sake, not only because of evolutionary concerns, but also because we deeply and innately care about morality and about what is right (Greene 2013). Moral concerns thus motivate people to approve or disapprove of certain behaviors. People can feel mandated to take firm stances with regard to important moral issues (Skitka 2002). Therefore, people may protest and fight against what they see as morally wrong. This morality-based opposition clearly has yielded behaviors that are important and good for society at large.

This being noted, people sometimes behave too much in principled ways. For example, we may not only adhere to certain political or religious beliefs but can also be convinced that these beliefs are right, and thus that other points of view are wrong. This may lead to the denigration of those other views without appropriate attention to their validity (Haidt 2012). Focusing on our own moral values and extensive reasoning processes on why these values are valid and honorable can lead us to overlook the possible importance of other viewpoints.

Judgments of morality may lead to feelings of moral righteousness (Haidt 2012). In fact, individual moral righteousness has been observed in the Netherlands with respect to left-wing radicalization pertaining to asylum and animal rights. Individuals fighting for these rights felt justified and entitled to do something about these issues, even if this meant breaking the law or acting in antidemocratic or even violent ways (IVA 2010). Thus, because perceptions of moral righteousness are deeply felt, they can legitimize violent behavior that violates core democratic values (Van den Bos 2018).

Perceived moral superiority and strong group identification may help people to downplay the rule-breaking behavior of ingroup members (Iyer et al. 2012). Moral superiority may also underlie people's inclination to think that others are influenced by egoistic considerations whereas they themselves are more influenced by considerations of right and wrong (Peters et al. 2004). Related to this, people may be tempted to engage in processes of moral disengagement in which they

convince themselves that ethical standards do not apply to them. People do this by rethinking or reframing their own destructive behavior as being morally acceptable, something which is achieved by inhibiting mechanisms of self-condemnation and not thinking in moral terms about immoral conduct (Bandura 1999).

3.3. Symbolic Interactions

One of the reasons why perceptions of unfairness and injustice are so important in various radicalization processes is that unfairness is an important symbol that signifies how society at large is looking at one's cause and at the group to which one belongs (Lind & Tyler 1988, Pretus et al. 2018). This fits with the theory of symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969, Mead 1934) and with the notion that how fairly societal authorities are treating an individual or group is an important signal of how much the authority is valuing and respecting the individual as an important, full-fledged member of society or the group of which the person is a member (Tyler & Lind 1992).

Related to this, important stimuli such as flags, banners, or iconic photographs can also function as symbols of injustice or justice. These symbols can serve important functions in processes of radicalization. For example, symbols, memories, and myths are key in perceiving injustices and led to radicalization among North-African Muslims living in Britain (Githens-Mazer 2008). This is because these stimuli communicate a history that recognizes past injustices committed against the group with which one identifies. The symbols also connect those past injustices with contemporary individual experiences of deprivation and other current forms of injustice.

These perceptions of injustice can persist over generations. For example, Irish Americans who had been living away from Ireland for three to four generations, and who may have had little to no contact with the indigenous Irish population, still felt compelled to provide monetary, moral, and physical support to the Provisional Irish Republican Army (Githens-Mazer 2008). And left-wing extremists have perceived societal authorities as important symbols of inhumane societal policies, which therefore needed to be attacked (Aust 2009).

In our interviews with Muslims in the Netherlands, we often heard our interviewees remark how important the Sugar Feast is to them. This feast celebrates the end of the fasting period of Ramadan. Our Muslim respondents noted how much they longed for the Dutch government to stand up for the Sugar Feast and make this an official holiday (Van den Bos et al. 2009). One implication that may follow from these observations is that when thinking about how to prevent radicalization, or how to counter it once it has occurred, it might be a good thing to pay close attention to justice-related symbols and the symbolic quality of justice-related communication (Van den Bos 2018).

I want to note explicitly here that, personally, I do not approve of adherence to extreme ideological thinking. Rationally, I find religion absurd (Van den Bos 2011). Thus, I observe that there have been (and probably will be) many appalling human atrocities that are fueled by extremist religious views and/or justified by radical ideological views (Hogg 2005; see also Norenzayan 2013). This being said, as a psychologist I acknowledge the important psychological functions that religion and other ideologies can serve for those believing in them (Allport 1959, Batson et al. 1993, Baumeister 2002, James 1902, Van den Bos 2018). Using those insights can help us understand, prevent, and fight radicalization (see Van den Bos 2018).

3.4. Legitimizing Violence as a Means to a Just End

Perceptions of unfairness and injustice done to one's group, ideology, or religion can help to justify and legitimize violence committed for the best of the group, ideology, or religion. Indeed, the notion of just wars (Walzer 1977) is often used to portray violence as a means to a just end and as

a defense against the actual and symbolic violence of the enemy. Furthermore, the enemy's ends and the enemy's defense against the revolutionaries' violence are typically described as unjust.

In a study among 22 leaders of violent twentieth-century revolutions, Martin et al. (1990) show that these leaders used unfairness and injustice perceptions to support and legitimize the violence committed. Content analyses of the speeches and writings of these leaders indicated that the leaders used claims about injustice to delegitimize the status quo system of reward distribution, to justify bloodshed, to assess the balance of power, and to envision a perfectly just future. Thus, perceptions of injustice play a role in how leaders of revolutionary movements look at the past, the present, and the future.

When looking at the past, the leaders mentioned issues of perceived injustice when criticizing the status quo. A distributive justice rule that was often mentioned referred to too much inequality between groups (Martin et al. 1990). Inequality is indeed among the core justice principles held by people (Layendecker 1981, Messick 1993).

When looking at the present, perceptions of injustice are used in attempts to mobilize people and other resources for revolutionary purposes. The possibility of violence or even bloodshed can be justified in this process (Martin et al. 1990). This potential usage of violence can have great symbolic qualities for the people involved in the revolutionary movement (Bourdieu 1977a,b).

When looking at the future, revolutionary movements envision a vision of perfect justice. An important goal can be the decrease in inequality of material, ideological, and emotional outcomes (Martin et al. 1990). All this suggests the importance of notions of injustice to understand support for and legitimization of revolutionary ideas and movements as well as the possible radicalization processes associated with them (Van den Bos 2018).

3.5. Unfair Treatment and Democracy

A concept that plays a key role in the social psychology of unfairness judgments is the notion of perceived procedural injustice or unfair treatment (Van den Bos 2015). Moghaddam (2005) argues that because most people who are radicalizing are on the ground floor of his staircase model (see above), it is probably best to focus on those unfairness judgments that matter most at that level and hence to keep people from experiencing unjust or unfair treatment. This can be done by promoting democracy.

Of course, democracy is not a simple thing, especially not when applied to counter-radicalization (see Van den Bos 2018). With this caveat in mind, Li (2009) presents findings that suggest that democracy can in fact reduce terrorism. This is because democratic participation increases the political efficacy of citizens as well as their levels of satisfaction with the government. Democracy also reduces grievances and it thwarts terrorist recruitment. Public tolerance of counterterrorist policies is also raised because of democratic participation. These findings seem to fit the results obtained by Tyler et al. (2010) indicating that the perceived procedural justice of police activities is the primary factor shaping the legitimacy of the police and the willingness to cooperate with them among Muslim Americans in New York City.

Democratic societies offer access for citizens to seek recourse to their grievances. Furthermore, democratic rules ensure the nonviolent resolution of conflicts of interest. Hence, groups in democratic societies are more likely to consider nonviolent alternatives that are easier to pursue than terrorist activities to further their interest. However, Li (2009) also points out that democracy in itself is not a panacea to counter terrorism. Institutional checks and balances that are fundamental in democracy can create frustration among marginal groups. Furthermore, the nature of institutions in open societies and the proper functioning of the rule of law (Mak & Taekema 2016) imply that governmental agencies and officials trying to intervene in radicalization processes are

not above the law but should try to prevent and counter radicalization while obeying the law and important legal principles, even when this implies that they feel they are fighting radicalization with one hand tied behind their back (Van den Bos 2018).

Paying appropriate attention to the specific psychological mechanisms involved in various societies and to how these mechanisms affect the behavior of various individuals and groups is crucial in this respect. Perceptions of procedural fairness may serve a pivotal role in these mechanisms (Moghaddam 2005, Tyler et al. 2010), although this hypothesis needs to be tested carefully in future research, paying attention to the relevant differences among the mechanisms at play in different societies and with respect to different instances of radicalization.

4. MODERATORS OF THE UNFAIRNESS–RADICALIZATION LINKAGE

What we have reviewed thus far is evidence that perceived unfairness can fuel radicalization processes. However, perceptions of unfairness in general are not sufficient to spur people into developing radical thoughts, extreme feelings, and violent behaviors. It is therefore important to pay explicit attention to variables that moderate the unfairness–radicalization linkage and can strengthen or weaken the relationship between the two.

4.1. Uncertainty and Other Threats

A review of the research literature suggests that when the experience of unfairness is coupled with uncertainty and other threatening information (such as information that the cultural norms of one's group are violated), this is likely to exacerbate the radicalization process (Van den Bos 2018). Thus, I argue that unfairness perceptions can serve as pivotal antecedents of enhanced radicalization, especially when people feel uncertain about themselves and live in insecure conditions or find themselves in unpredictable situations in which they or their group or culture are threatened.

This is not the place to review in detail the large literature on uncertainty (for earlier reviews, see, e.g., Arkin et al. 2009; Hogg 2007; Van den Bos 2007, 2009; Van den Bos & Lind 2002, 2009). After reviewing the research literature, Van den Bos (2018) proposes that the experience of personal uncertainty instigates a spontaneous startle response. The startle reflex represents an organism's response to the unexpected and intense stimulation that the experience of personal uncertainty and other psychologically threatening information entail. The startle response that is associated with personal uncertainty can lead to uncomfortable and aversive feelings (Hogg 2007).

The startle reflex is a relatively primitive response produced by subcortical regions such as the amygdala, and its intensity is influenced by the organism's emotional state (Grillon & Baas 2003). Individual differences in how strongly or weakly people tend to react to uncertainty in emotional concerns moderate the linkage between startling reactions to personal uncertainty and uncomfortable and aversive feelings (Greco & Roger 2001).

Uncomfortable and aversive feelings can lead to defensive responses, whereby people react in extreme terms to different social issues. These extreme reactions are more easily instigated when people identify with entitative groups (Hogg 2004) with clear boundaries and extreme opinions. Highly entitative groups are well-structured groups with clear boundaries whose members interact and share group attributes and goals and have a common fate (Hogg 2014). Because highly entitative groups are the most effective at reducing self- or personal uncertainty, people strive to identify with such groups or strive to accentuate the entitativity of groups they already identify with when they feel uncertain about themselves (Hogg 2004, 2014). In short, under conditions of personal uncertainty it becomes attractive to identify with groups that adhere to extreme opinions.

Related to this is research by Rieger et al. (2017), who found that personal uncertainty and authoritarian attitudes shape the evaluation of right-wing extremist Internet propaganda. Rieger et al. observed that personal uncertainty increased group identification, so that participants had less aversion and were more persuaded by right-wing extremist videos addressing their national ingroup.

4.2. Insufficient Correction of Impulses

Unfairness perceptions alone do not necessarily lead to radicalization, nor is the combination of unfairness with personal uncertainty always sufficient to instigate processes of radicalization. Unfairness and uncertainty are more likely to lead to radicalization when combined with people's tendencies to correct for their self-oriented impulses in insufficient ways. That is, the experience of unfairness can trigger strong intuitive reactions, such as the emotion of anger. These impulsive responses can be corrected when people realize explicitly that this is an indication of growing radicalization. That is, if people have sufficient cognitive capacity (i.e., their working memory is not overloaded) (Van den Bos et al. 2006), are sufficiently motivated (i.e., they adhere to cooperative social values) (Van den Bos et al. 2011), and are exposed to repeated training of successful self-correction (see, e.g., Kawakami et al. 2007; see also Devine et al. 2012), then self-correction may lead to attenuated radicalization (Van den Bos 2018).

The fairness literature shows clear instances in which people find it difficult to correct for their egocentric impulses. That is, people need sufficient cognitive capacities and strong motivation to counter the hedonistic pleasure of receiving unfair yet advantageous outcomes (Van den Bos et al. 2006), to resist the temptation to keep believing in a just world by blaming and derogating innocent victims (Van den Bos & Bal 2016), to overcome their startling responses to potentially threatening outgroup others (D. Petrescu, K. Van den Bos, F. Klumpers & L. Kenemans, unpublished manuscript), and to persist in their activities of social coordination (Schelling 1960) and their prosocial tendencies (Van den Bos & Lind 2013, Van den Bos et al. 2011). There are clear examples of people being able to successfully correct for their first, self-centered impulses (Van den Bos & Bal 2016; Van den Bos et al. 2006, 2011), but there are also vivid cases in which this turns out not to be successful.

It may well be that future research will reveal that insufficient self-correction may play a role in various processes of human radicalization. This raises the issue of what people can do against insufficient self-correction. Specifically, in the case of individual-oriented forms of radicalization (such as important instances of left-wing extremism), cognitive control and conscious thought may be key (Baumeister & Masicampo 2010). In the case of group-based radicalization (such as important cases of Muslim and right-wing radicalization), the work on group-based stereotypes and prejudices may be especially relevant (see, e.g., Devine et al. 2012, Kawakami et al. 2007).

Related to this, Greene (2013) proposes that humans have an instinctive, automatic tendency to cooperate with others within their own social group. However, within-group morality can easily lead to between-group hostility (see also Insko et al. 1998). These processes can also play a role in group-oriented forms of radicalization (such as Muslim and right-wing radicalization), where the group often dictates norms of ingroup fairness and loyalty through processes of social identification, as well as in individual-oriented types of radicalization (such as left-wing radicalization), where the moral principles of the individuals are shaped by the individuals' subculture and associated cultural worldviews.

Greene (2013) argues that to counter these intergroup tendencies, people need to embrace a sense of morality that encompasses different groups and on which all humans can agree. This can

be very difficult to achieve but is not impossible, also in cases of violent past conflicts between groups (see also Staub 2011, 2015; Staub & Pearlman 2009; Staub et al. 2005). Related to this, Hodson (2011) reviews contact interventions among intolerant people, and he concludes that intergroup contact and friendships work well among intolerant and cognitively rigid persons by reducing threat and anxiety and by increasing empathy, trust, and outgroup closeness.

5. MEDIATORS OF THE UNFAIRNESS–RADICALIZATION LINKAGE

The research findings reviewed thus far suggest that when basic aspects of a person's life are perceived as unfair this can result in radical attitudes, especially when combined with sensitivity for personal uncertainty and insufficient self-corrections. An important assumption in this line of thought is that emotions mediate the linkage between unfairness and radicalization. In particular, externally oriented negative emotions such as anger and hate may lead people to develop intentions to engage in radical and violent behavior.

The association of unfairness perceptions with externally oriented emotions such as anger, resentment, and hate increases the likelihood of violent intentions and actual behaviors associated with radicalization (Van den Bos 2018). When unfairness perceptions are combined with internally oriented emotions such as fear, this increases the chances of intentions and behaviors that isolate people from society. Learned helplessness can also lead to isolation from society (Seligman 1972, 1975). Societal isolation can create lone wolf behavior, but more often than not, it is anger and other externally oriented behavioral tendencies that are needed for people to engage in violent and offensive behavior, such as extremist and terrorist acts (Van den Bos 2018).

The differences between different externally oriented emotions are also important. For example, Tausch et al. (2011) suggest that feelings of anger are associated with normative behavior (e.g., taking part in demonstrations and signing petitions), while contempt is associated with nonnormative behavior (e.g., destroying property or violence against humans). This suggests that the study of emotions can play a pivotal role in our understanding of the linkage between perceptions of unfairness and core components of radicalization.

6. CORE COMPONENTS OF RADICALIZATION

After having focused on perceived unfairness as an antecedent of radicalization, moderated by personal uncertainty and insufficient self-correction, and mediated by externally oriented emotions such as anger, resentment, hate, and contempt, it is time to zoom in onto what constitutes radicalization. McCauley & Moskalenko (2008, p. 416) note that "there are many possible meanings of radicalization, but most of the relevant distinctions can be represented with the usual social psychological distinctions among belief, feeling, and behavior." I agree with this observation and argue that it makes sense to break down radicalization into black-and-white or rigid thinking, startled feelings and associated defense of cultural worldviews, and violent rejection of democratic principles and the rule of law (Mak & Taekema 2016, Van den Bos 2018). These rigid thoughts, affective responses, and violent behaviors constitute important components of the psychology of radicalization.

6.1. Rigidity of Thought

Black-and-white thinking or rigidity of thought manifests itself in different ways. For example, people can be tempted to become rigid in their solving of various nonsocial tasks (Rokeach 1948, 1950); social rigidity can play up in people's personal beliefs and their need for social structure (Neuberg & Newsom 1993); rigidity is related to people's need to shield themselves from

unwanted thoughts (Rokeach 1960) and their need to know and understand things, sometimes leading to illusions of knowing (Fernbach et al. 2013).

Rigid thinking about various stimuli (Rokeach 1948) and personal beliefs (Neuberg & Newsom 1993) may function to shield radicalizing individuals from unwanted information (Rokeach 1960), and the epistemic need to understand things may lead them to engage in illusions of knowing (Fernbach et al. 2013), because it may help them to derive meaning and plan their behaviors in purposeful ways (Kay et al. 2014). All this can culminate in rigid radicalization (Kruglanski et al. 2014, Van den Bos 2018). Just as social thinking is for doing [Fiske 1992, James 1983 (1890)], instances of rigid thinking (such as rigid shielding and illusory thoughts) serve the goal of giving meaning to the world and one's actions in that world. Thus, rigid thinking is for rigid doing (Van den Bos 2018).

In the case of extreme radicalization, cognitive structuring and rigid thinking can take the form of a quest for personal significance that can constitute a major motivational force pushing individuals toward violent extremism and terrorism. The perception of unfairness may trigger this quest for significance in important ways. Kruglanski et al. (2014) note that activation of the significance quest can happen (*a*) through a loss of significance or humiliation, corresponding to the psychology of unfairness; (*b*) through an anticipated or threatened significance loss, corresponding to the psychological construct of threat management; and (*c*) through an opportunity for significance gain, corresponding to the psychological construct of incentive (including the motivational force of the attainment of fair end states) (Van den Bos 2018).

Rigidity of thoughts is also related to extreme political beliefs, which can predict dogmatic intolerance, that is, the tendency to reject and consider as inferior any ideological belief that differs from one's own (Van Prooijen & Krouwel 2017). High levels of dogmatic intolerance have been observed among both left-wing and right-wing extremists in both the European Union and the United States (Van Prooijen & Krouwel 2017). Dogmatic intolerance was also associated with willingness to protest, denial of free speech, and support for antisocial behavior. This suggests that both left-wing and right-wing extremist views can predict dogmatic intolerance (Greenberg & Jonas 2003). Consistent with this, in a large cross-cultural sample, Hansen & Norenzayan (2006) found that the conviction that one's beliefs are the only true ones strongly predicted intolerance of other religious groups, but having religious beliefs per se did not.

Evidence that both left-wing and right-wing extremists adhere to rigid thinking styles and dogmatic intolerance is mixed, although it seems to suggest that cognitive closure and support for authoritarianism is more prevalent among those on the right than among those on the left (Jost et al. 2003). For now I assume that radical extremists both on the left and on the right engage in rigid and dogmatic thinking (Van Prooijen & Krouwel 2017), especially when they are prone to defend their group or the values of their subculture in extreme ways and have a tendency to groupthink to defend the values of their subculture (Tsintsadze-Maass & Maass 2014).

Dogmatic thinking is also prevalent among Muslim terrorists. Gawthrop (2011) argues that the ultimate goal of Islamic dogmatic views is to dominate over other religions and ideologies. Furthermore, he notes that the means for achieving that goal include multiple forms of jihad, namely the jihad of the tongue (speech), jihad of the pen (writings), jihad of wealth (financial support), and jihad of the sword (combat, combat support, and combat service support operations). Gawthrop puts forward that absent a moderating interpretation of the worldview, funding practices, and incitement to jihad of Sunni Islam, its dogmatic interpretations will continue to attract new generations of responsive, autonomous, and self-actualizing believers. Gawthrop's (2011) line of reasoning has been criticized, in part because the role of religion in dogmatic thinking is not entirely clear (see, e.g., Kossowska et al. 2017; see also Atran 2011). For now I conclude that rigid and dogmatic thinking seem to play a prominent role in right-wing, left-wing, and Muslim radicalization.

6.2. Hot-Cognitive Defense of Worldviews

Cultural worldviews constitute people's fundamental orientations on their immediate environments, the societies in which they live, and the world in which these societies have a place. These worldviews are humanly created, and transmitted beliefs about the nature of reality are shared by groups of individuals (Greenberg et al. 1997).

People tend to respond in startled ways when their worldviews are violated or threatened (D. Petrescu, K. Van den Bos, F. Klumpers & L. Kenemans, unpublished manuscript). These responses are associated with uncomfortable or aversive feelings and defensive responses, especially when people identify with entitative groups with radical opinions (Hogg 2004, 2005). Furthermore, perceiving that things are fundamentally unfair involves a threat to the worldviews of most people (Van den Bos & Miedema 2000, Van den Bos et al. 2005). These perceptions can lead to intense emotions and to what psychologists call hot cognition (Abelson 1963, Kunda 1999, Van den Bos 2007), a combination of cognitive perceptions and affective responses that can impact the radicalization process (Van den Bos 2018).

Individual differences in affect intensity can aggravate how people respond to issues that they think are unfair and unjust (Maas & Van den Bos 2009, Van den Bos et al. 2003). Thus, how people appraise or perceive a situation in terms of unfairness and injustice is one thing; how they respond in affective terms to these perceptions is another. It is the combination of cognitive perceptions and affective responses to these perceptions that I assume affects the radicalization process at three levels of analysis (Van den Bos 2018).

The first level of analysis comprises individual responses. Terror management theory notes that individual self-esteem functions to shelter people from anxieties and fears. As such, self-esteem functions as a protective shield designed to control the potential for feelings of anxiety and terror. When self-esteem is strong, this serves as a buffer and allows people to go about their daily affairs and act effectively in the world. When self-esteem is weak or challenged, this instigates various forms of defensive behavior aimed at bolstering self-worth through compensatory efforts (Pyszczynski et al. 2003, 2004). Furthermore, under self-threatening conditions people are more prone to be susceptible to feelings of superiority (e.g., Iyer et al. 2012), including feelings of moral superiority (Peters et al. 2004, Täuber & Van Zomeren 2012), which have been associated with various forms of radicalization (Van den Bos 2018). Self-esteem that is fragile or implicitly low is known to be associated with black-and-white thinking (Jordan et al. 2005) and defensive extremism (McGregor & Jordan 2007).

The second level of analysis includes group responses, including the buffering role of culture. For example, identification with extreme groups can be especially attractive under conditions of personal uncertainty (Hogg 2005, 2011, 2014). Furthermore, strong defenses of just-world beliefs typically take place when people are dealing with issues of personal uncertainty in delayed-return contexts or cultures (Bal & Van den Bos 2012). In these processes of hot-cognitive and radical worldview defense, issues such as group identification, patriotism, and nationalism are very important (McCauley & Moskalenko 2008). Radicalization may lead to feelings of group superiority. When these feelings of being part of a special group are coupled with the perception that one's group has been treated unfairly, this can lead to the impression that the situation is dire and that the group and its cause are vulnerable and in danger of extinction (McCauley & Moskalenko 2008). Thus, group identification explains why activists are likely to feel sadness and humiliation in response to group failures, joy and pride in response to group success, and anger and other negative emotions when confronted with enemies of their cause (McCauley & Moskalenko 2008).

The third level of analysis reveals how ideology and religion often serve important psychological functions that are of special relevance for radicalizing individuals and radical groups and

subcultures. Many genocides, pogroms, persecutions, and wars are inspired and exacerbated by ideological views (Hogg 2005). For example, the entire spectrum of radical and conservative ideologies diffused in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s emerged as a reaction to overwhelming uncertainty and fear of uncertainty (Hogg 2005). Similarly, Suny (2017) notes that the Armenian Genocide of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire was fueled by the extreme fear and uncertainty felt by the Ottoman ruling elite.

Religion can be a strong driver of radicalization processes, especially when strong religious affiliation (Ginges et al. 2010) is combined with high levels of personal uncertainty and insufficient correction of self-centered impulses. Juergensmeyer (2003, p. 249) rightfully notes that religion can give spirit to public life and can contribute to moral and prosocial behaviors, but at the same time "needs the temper of rationality and fair play that Enlightenment values give to civil society." If appropriate self-correction does not take place, then religion can lead to militant and violent behavior against those not believing in the same religion (see, e.g., Juergensmeyer 2003, Stern 2004). This is because religious ideologies are very effective at reducing uncertainty, giving people a clear identity, and addressing questions of existence, ultimate causality, and absolute morality (Hogg et al. 2010).

Most religions also subscribe to the just-world hypothesis—that is, that good things happen to good people (the just should be rewarded) and bad things to bad people (sinners should be punished; Furnham 2003)—and prescribe virtuous human behaviors such as altruism and generosity (Batson et al. 1993). There is a substantial literature that associates societal uncertainty with religious extremism (e.g., Batson et al. 1993, McGregor et al. 2008; see also Henrich et al. 2019). For example, Lewis (2004) argues that in times of strains, faltering ideologies, and other uncertain conditions, Islamic fundamentalism is especially appealing. Herriot (2007) defines fundamentalism as an attempt to prevent religious identity from falling victim to modernity and secularism. Modernity can create uncertainty, and this is a necessary condition for religious fundamentalism and for fundamentalist groups in general to flourish. Interestingly, fundamentalist groups do not fight uncertainty directly, but rather they react strongly to those aspects of secular societies that challenge their beliefs, values, and norms of behavior. In other words, under conditions of uncertainty, fundamentalist religious groups engage in strong and hot-cognitive processes of worldview defense.

6.3. Violent Rejection of Democratic Principles and the Rule of Law

A crucial step in any attempt to understand processes of radicalization is to determine when people will move from thoughts and feelings to action. The psychological process underlying the shift from thoughts and feelings to behaviors is not easy to decipher, and it may be even more difficult to understand in the case of radical thoughts, radical feelings, radical behavioral intentions, and radical behaviors (McCauley & Moskalenko 2008, Van den Bos 2018).

In this regard, a pivotal issue is understanding when people will move from legal and nonviolent behaviors to illegal and violent actions to achieve the outcomes that reflect their beliefs and feelings and what they see as the right cause (Van den Bos 2018). This is crucial, because it distinguishes radicalization that stays within the law from radicalization that basically views the law as irrelevant or as an obstacle to obtaining what is desired.

In part because radical and extremist beliefs as well as radical feelings may or may not be related to radical and extremist behaviors, different approaches to the study of radicalization have emerged in the research literature and in policy decision making. These perspectives focus on different endpoints (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015): That is, some approaches focus on radicalization of beliefs (cognitive radicalization), whereas others concentrate on radicalization of behaviors (behavioral radicalization).

What endpoint forms the focus of analysis has important consequences for the prevention of radicalization and the definition of the best way to approach counter-radicalization. Neumann (2013) notes that there is an Anglo-Saxon approach that tends to concentrate mainly on behavioral radicalization and a European approach that seeks to confront cognitive radicalization as well. Neumann argues that focusing on behavioral radicalization alone, as in the Anglo-Saxon approach, entails that freedom of speech is nearly absolute and that people can express their political views, even if extreme, as long as they do so by peaceful means. According to the European approach, extremist beliefs are problematic as well, and democracy has to be protected from extremist forces even before they become violent. European governments, therefore, do not leave counter-radicalization to counterterrorism but connect it to efforts to promote democracy and social cohesion (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015).

The rejection of democratic principles and principles of constitutional state law may underlie the transformation of radicalization into violent extremism. To understand why people start to reject these principles, it is important to understand the psychological process of delegitimization. Delegitimization is the psychological withdrawal of legitimacy, for example from an institution such as a state, from judges in a constitutional democracy, or from important principles of democracy in constitutional states. There is evidence that the delegitimization of government, law, and other societal institutions plays a crucial role in right-wing radicalization, left-wing radicalization, and Muslim radicalization (Ashour 2009, Sprinzak 1995, Van den Bos 2018).

Through processes of delegitimization, radicalizing persons distance themselves psychologically from politics, from societal institutions such as government and law, and from principles of democracy and open societies (Popper 1945). Key to understanding the ontogenesis of violent extremism and terrorism may therefore be people's rejection of constitutional democracy and the rule of law (Mak & Taekema 2016). After all, if one cannot be open-minded about different opinions or at least willing to tolerate them to the extent needed to make one's case heard through majority rule or other democratic rules, then one might easily get frustrated that their wishes and opinions are not put into action and might be more likely to take action to ensure that things will go as desired. Furthermore, violent extremism and terrorism constitute illegal acts, and not caring about the law can increase one's readiness to engage in them (Ashour 2009, Van den Bos 2018).

7. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

What we have seen in this article is that perceived unfairness can have an important role in Muslim radicalization, right-wing radicalization, and left-wing radicalization. This is especially the case when these unfairness perceptions are coupled with personal uncertainty and insufficient correction of externally oriented negative emotions such as anger, hate, and contempt. These insights can be used in the prevention and combating of radicalization (Van den Bos 2018).

In closing, I want to note that studying radicalization can be very difficult (Van den Bos 2018). People radicalize about different issues in different ways. The extent to which respondents are radicalized is also important. When studying radicalization, at least a minimum of radicalization is often present among research respondents. However, once radicalized, potential respondents may be difficult to get into contact with and may not trust the interviewer from a university or research institute, who may be seen as belonging to the status quo or to a group different than one's own. Furthermore, ideally one wants to study how radical beliefs transform into extremist behaviors, but it is often not doable to examine the actual engagement in extremist behaviors, and researchers therefore often resort to assessing sympathy for extremist behaviors among their respondents instead. In short, there are several difficulties when studying the topic of radicalization (Van den Bos 2018).

The study of radicalization is further complicated by the small and convenience samples these studies often entail. The nonlinear quality of modern radicalization processes may also constitute a problem for the linear and ahistorical psychological models that try to explain these processes (De Graaf 2010). Part of the solution to these and other potential problems may be found in careful conceptual analysis that should complement the empirical study of unfairness and radicalization (Van den Bos 2018). As such, psychology in general, and the psychological study of unfairness and radicalization in particular, are perhaps best viewed as a hub science bridging thoughtful conceptual analysis and careful quantitative and qualitative empirical studies, all oriented to a better understanding, prevention, and combating of extreme and violent forms of radicalization.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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