



A Psychological Analysis of Terrorist Upbringing

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INTRODUCTION

There is a collectively agreed upon schema that society has continued to reinforce, believing that those who radicalize are mentally ill, psychotic, depressed, and helpless. This, however, is a fallacy.

The majority of terrorists would be hard to distinguish from regular individuals in society if both groups were to complete social-cognitive examinations and have the results analyzed. IQ and executive functioning, among many other traits, would be relatively the same (Rikken, 2018).

1970	The "golden age of terrorism." Benchmark for when the world began seeing greater numbers of terrorist attacks (more people radicalizing), a bulk of which came from the Middle East.
2014	Numbers reached a record high of 44,490 fatalities from acts of violence in 2014 (Roser, Nagdy, & Ritchie, 2013). Today, the number of individuals joining terrorist ranks is still increasing.

We must build upon a solution framework that actively works toward reducing the number of people who become terrorists, by studying terrorists in the Middle East and their radicalization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Inquiry Approach



Collection Tools/Data Collected



Execution Plan



CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSIS

Motive and vulnerability stand out as the key psychological factors that propel radicalization. They tend to revolve around perceptions of injustice, identity, belonging, and justifications for violence. There is almost always a desire for vengeance and to remediate an injustice or perceived wrong. Identity foreclosure is a way that strikes at one's susceptibility to radicalizing as one attempts to fix a damaged self. Similarly, radical extremist groups fulfill the desire for belonging in individuals who have faced a lifetime of rejection.

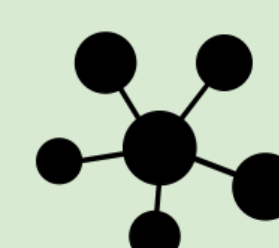
Additionally, past findings have emphasized the trait of narcissism in terrorists, who experience an overvaluing of self and devaluing of others. Narcissistic rage generally results from a childhood trauma, such as emotional humiliation or consistent physical abuse, which damages their self-concept. The natural retaliation to eliminate "this fear and create a more tolerable self-image, such individuals feel the need to 'kill off' their view of themselves as victims" (Borum, 2004), leading to acts of extremist violence.



An emphasis must be placed around **motive** and **vulnerability** and the trait of **narcissism** in regards to studying these radicalization factors and building a solution

Research Weaknesses

Limited data



Questions for future study

In order to combat the trait of narcissism and increased vulnerability, what can be done to raise awareness about the effects of child abuse? Reduce it?

DATA AND FINDINGS

Key Motivations and Vulnerabilities

Motive and Vulnerability are the key psychological factors that propel radicalization. They revolve around perceptions of injustice, identity, belonging, and one's justification for violence.

Injustice (Motive): An "economic, ethnic, racial, legal, political, religious, and/or social" (Borum, 2004), grievance is perceived as "unjust."

Identity (Vulnerability): Most extremist ideologies detract from the complexities of the world and allow individuals to have a sense of identity and belonging (identity foreclosure), which they couldn't achieve otherwise.

Belonging (Motive and Vulnerability):

Those who have faced a lifetime of rejection will find a sense of belonging in terrorist groups, which offer a sense of connectedness and affiliation, attractive traits for someone who has faced a lifetime of rejection.

The Violence-Justification Process as Illustrated in Figure 2

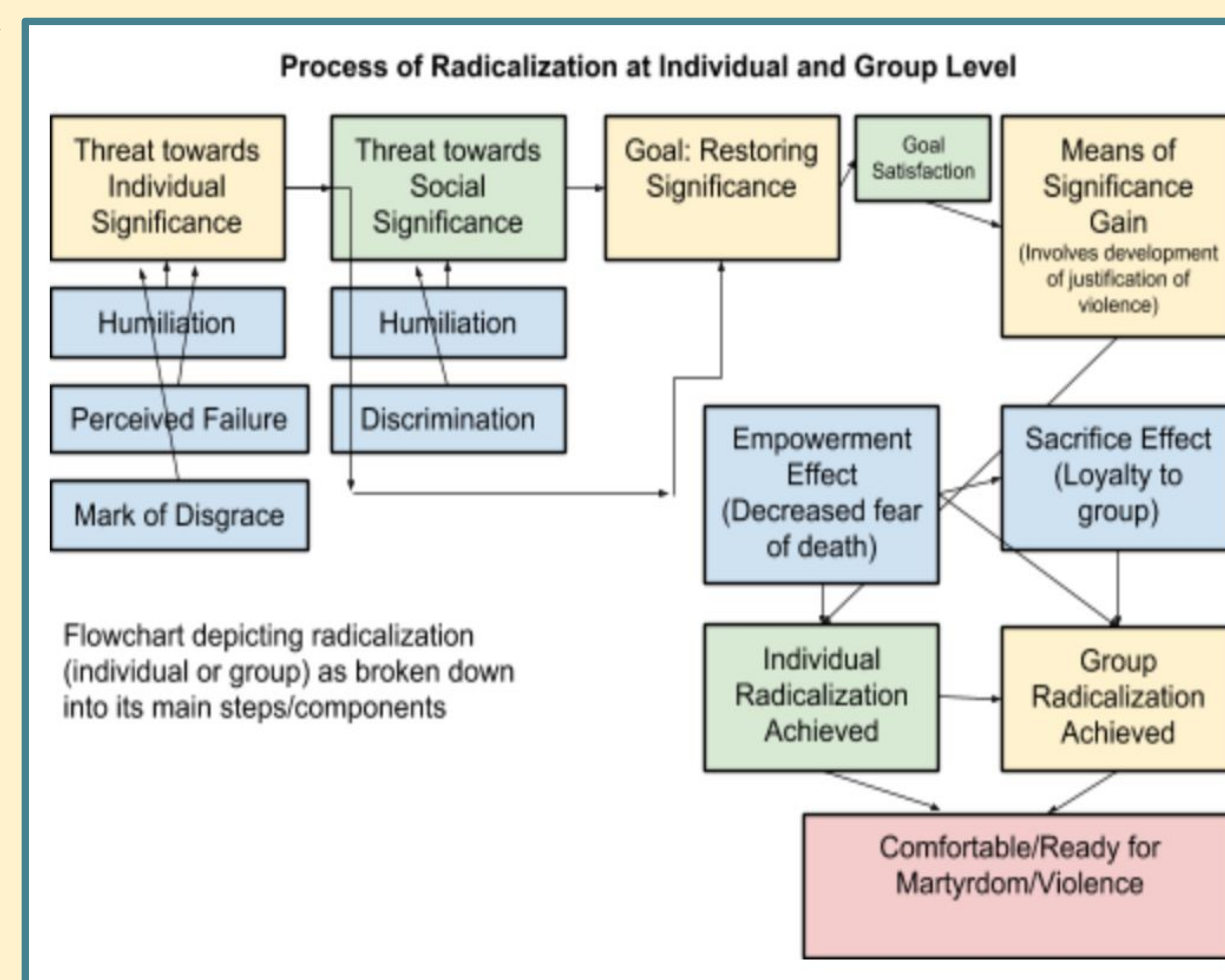


Figure 1: Flowchart depicting radicalization (individual or group) as broken down into its main steps/components

- "It's Not Right"**
The individual perceives some condition as aversive.
- "It's Not Fair"**
The individual perceives the aversive condition as unjust and therefore something must be done about it.
- "It's Your Fault"**
The individual attributes the "injustice" to someone. Whoever is at "fault" becomes resented by the individual.
- "You're Evil"**
Social and psychological barriers become broken, leading the individual to commit violence.

Radicalization: Ideological Development

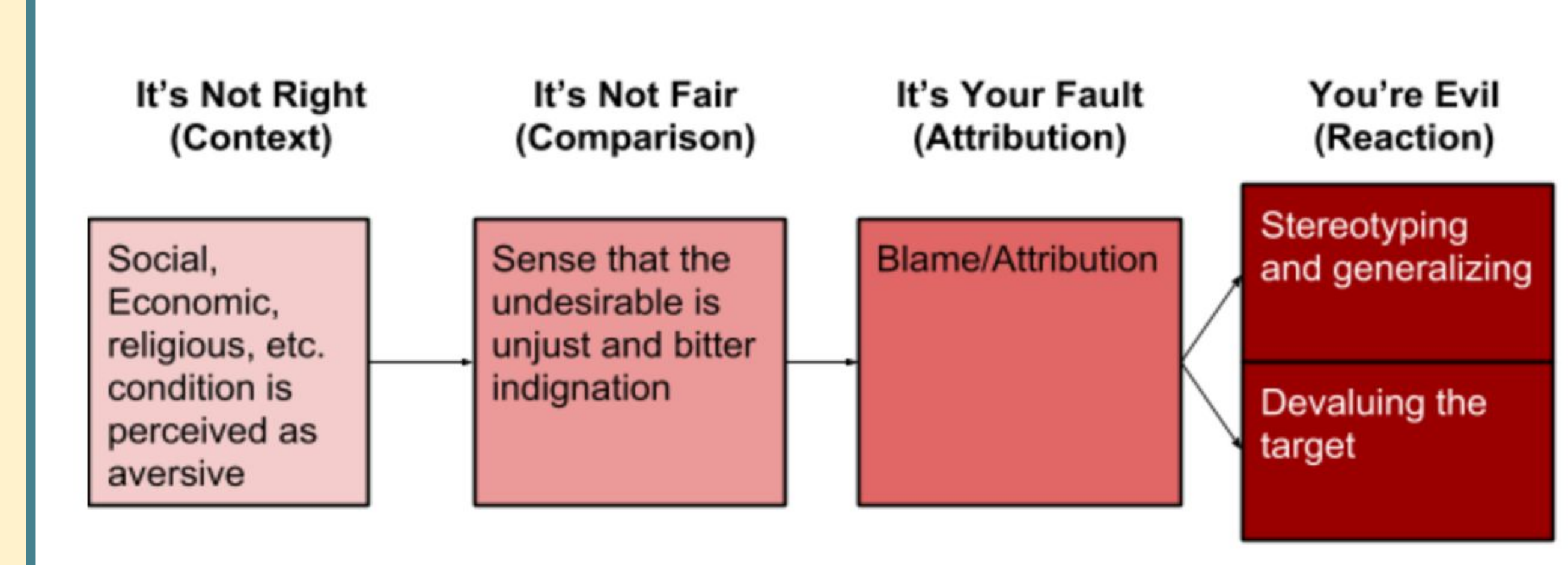


Figure 2: Flowchart depicting ideological development during radicalization

Narcissism: Pathological narcissism is an "overvaluing of self and a devaluing of others" (Borum, 2004) that can lead to "narcissistic rage." In the goal of significance restoration (see Figure 1) to "create a more tolerable self-image, [one will] commit violence in attempts to strengthen their own confidence and self respect" (Borum, 2004).

IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

These findings are important as they "break the barrier" in regard to current assumptions about terrorists as well as past research. They are distinguishable as they provide a more fine-tuned and specific approach for analyzing radicalization. Many studies discuss a broad range of reasons for radicalization which makes it hard to fine-tune a specific solution. The specific results that this research produced can help combat terrorist upbringing in the Middle East by offering a definitive area of study to build a solution framework off of.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

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