

Can the complex nature and determinants of radicalisation be reduced to four simple psychosocial antecedents?

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Abstract

Terrorism has been ascribed to a diversity of explanations and causes. Some researchers maintain that, over time, individuals construct a radical narrative of their lives to accommodate traumas or difficulties. Other scholars propose that cognitive biases may underpin these ideologies. Furthermore, some researchers ascribe radicalisation to the social context in which individuals are embedded. This paper shows that all three accounts, as well as other purported causes of radicalisation, can be reduced to four antecedents: an unclear worldview, distrust towards cooperation, a feeling of impending threat or uncertainty, and a limited sense of personal worth. Specifically, to resolve these impediments, individuals are especially attracted to dogmatic leaders as well as people who belong to their community, seem isolated from society, or espouse an aggressive orientation—exemplifying some of the hallmarks of terrorist cells. In addition, when these impediments are rife, individuals do not experience a sense of meaning in their lives. Their lives seem erratic instead of predictable. These individuals, thus, merely attempt to enhance their emotional state rather than strive to accumulate knowledge, skills, and other resources. They perceive negative feelings as entirely unfavorable and, hence, seldom experience a blend of unpleasant emotions and pleasant emotions. Yet, these ambivalent states activate two or more cognitive systems concurrently, enabling individuals to construct adaptive narratives of themselves and tempering any cognitive biases. Accordingly, an aversion to ambivalent emotions might underpin some of the inclinations that expedite radicalisation.

Introduction

A diverse array of perspective has been applied to characterise individuals who participate in radical, violent pursuits, such as terrorism. Some theorists have focused upon the narratives that individuals construct to describe themselves (e.g., Moghaddam, 2005; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Taylor & Horgan, 2006; Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010). In particular, according to this perspective, many individuals experience a diversity of traumatic or distressing experiences, such as social exclusion and economic hardship. To accommodate these events, some individuals develop a desirable and communal purpose or perspective, perhaps committing to helping disadvantaged or marginalised communities (for mechanisms, see Pennebaker, 1993). In contrast, other individuals formulate ideologies, attitudes, and beliefs that diverge from mainstream standards, often becoming more radical and aggressive over time (Moghaddam, 2005; Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010).

Nevertheless, as other researchers emphasise, to embrace these radical beliefs and violent ideologies, individuals also need to demonstrate many cognitive biases. That is, these radical perspectives tend to entail assumptions that contradict many observations in daily life. Hence, to overlook these contradictions, the cognitive processes of individuals must be biased (Beck, 1999). For example, to justify indiscriminate violence (Bandura, 1999), these radical individuals might underestimate the emotional intensity and suffering that members of broader population experience (for determinants of these beliefs, see Detert & Trevino, 2008; Jackson & Gaertner, 2010).

However, these radical and aggressive narratives, even if reinforced by cognitive biases, will seldom translate to violent behavior unless individuals become entrenched in a broader social network (Crenshaw, 1990; Sageman, 2004, 2008). Terrorist cells often comprise approximately 8 people. Typically, the individuals within these networks had formed relationships with each other before they embarked on this radical and violent endeavor, often through family or friends (Sageman, 2004, 2008). An association with members of radical collectives or cliques, therefore, is a key predictor of subsequent terrorist behavior (see also Jackson, 2006).

In short, perpetrators of terrorism, or other forms of militant extremism, have often formed a radical, rather than communal, narrative in response to a diversity of difficulties. Second, they demonstrate patent cognitive biases. Third, they have often formed associations with members of radical, violent collectives.

This diversity of characteristics might, at first glance, imply that many of the antecedents or causes of radical, violent ideologies are multifaceted and perhaps inexplicable. Indeed, researchers have uncovered a multitude of contexts, conditions, characteristics, and events that might expedite the radicalisation process and increase the likelihood of terrorism (e.g., Awan, 2008; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Fair, 2008; Krueger, 2008; see also Bjorgo, 2005). However, as this paper demonstrates, the causes of these three main hallmarks of terrorists—a radical ideology, severe cognitive biases, and associations with radical individuals—may all emanate from a set of four antecedents. In particular, four key factors seem to underpin each of these characteristic features of radicalisation: an unclear worldview, distrust towards cooperation, a feeling of impending threat or uncertainty, and a limited sense of personal worth.

This paper will first describe these four antecedents as well as illustrate impediments that provoke these problems. Next, this paper will show how these four antecedents ultimately compromise the capacity of individuals to integrate diverse cognitive mechanisms, culminating in radical perspectives and biased cognitive processes. Finally, the paper will demonstrate these four antecedents encourage individuals to form associations with people who often belong to radical, violent collectives.

Antecedents to radicalisation

An incoherent worldview

Four factors are especially germane to the formation of radical, violent ideologies and, ultimately, the perpetration of terrorist acts. Interestingly, each of these four factors have been shown to impede a sense of meaning or purpose in life—an impediment that some scholars contend is the primary motivation of terrorist activity, such as suicide bombing (Kruglanski, Chen, Dechesne, Fishman, & Orehek, 2009).

The first factor is an unclear worldview—an impediment that precludes a sense of future purpose (for a discussion, see Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Rosenblatt, Veeder, Kirkland, & Lyon, 1990). In particular, some individuals have constructed a definitive worldview—a set of assumptions about the values, objectives, and standards of society. Other individuals, in contrast, have not constructed a definitive worldview. They might, for example, sometimes feel that cooperation and altruism are cherished by society, but then recognize that only competition and aggression is rewarded. Because of these contradictions, individuals cannot commit to a specific purpose or endeavor (for evidence, see Landau, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Martens, 2006). They cannot ascertain which pursuit or achievement will be valued in the future. They cannot formulate an inspiring set of goals or aspirations.

These incongruous worldviews, thus, compromise a sense of purpose—one of the four needs that Baumeister (1991) maintains is central to meaning. Furthermore, these incongruous worldviews undermine symbolic immortality, also critical to meaning, according to the meaning maintenance model (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006; see also Proulx & Heine, 2006, 2008, 2009). That is, if the values, objectives, and standards of society are uncertain, individuals cannot be certain their achievements will be valued after they die. They do not feel their contributions will be meaningful after their death.

The most obvious source of these incongruous worldviews is exposure to diverse and conflicting ideologies. Individuals exposed to strict religious dogma as well as progressive societal values may experience this incongruity. Nevertheless, many factors may exacerbate the implications of these contradictory perspectives. If individuals are often bombarded with pressing duties, they are seldom granted opportunities to consider more abstract, intangible, concepts (for evidence, see Schmidt & DeShon, 2007). If these reflections are obstructed, individuals are not as able to reconcile conflicting ideologies (cf, Freitas, Clark, Kim, & Levy, 2009).

Aversion to cooperation

The second factor revolves around an aversion or distrust towards cooperation. Some individuals are reluctant to form mutual, communal relationships. They feel that, in general, they may be exploited (for an interesting measure of this distrust, see Berg, Dickhaut, & McCabe, 1995). They are, instead, more inclined to behave competitively, striving to outperform or undermine other people. According to Baumeister (1991) this neglect of communal values precludes meaning. Similarly, this distrust can hinder any sense of belonging, also integral to meaning (Heine et al., 2006; see also Stillman, Baumeister, Lambert, Crescioni, DeWall, & Fincham, 2009).

Recent trends, rampant in many communities, could provoke this aversion to cooperation. Some individuals of minority communities in particular are frequently exposed to members of mainstream society, but seldom interact with these people. These members of mainstream society are thus perceived as an out-group. Incessant exposure to members of out-groups tends to negative stereotypes instead of trust (Smith, Miller, Maitner, Crump, Garcia-Marques, & Mackie, 2006). This distrusting, competitive mindset becomes especially accessible.

A sense of impending threat and uncertainty

The third factor relates to a feeling of impending threat or uncertainty, in which the world often seems unpredictable and even dangerous (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003). That is, some individuals often sense that a problem or complication is looming, manifested as anxiety and agitation (Higgins, 1987). This anticipation of threat tends to emerge because their environment seems too chaotic and unpredictable, transcending their control or influence (Laurin, K., Kay, A., & Moscovitch, D. (2008). Hence, this feeling of impending threat or

uncertainty corresponds to an impaired sense of control, identified by Baumeister (1991) as a key determinant of meaning. Furthermore, this feeling the world is too chaotic and unpredictable most likely coincides with a need to cultivate structure, clarity, and closure—a need that also underpins meaning, as defined by the meaning maintenance model (Heine et al., 2006).

According to recent accounts of modern capitalism, developments in the dynamics of investment and the operations of corporations have augmented instability, amplifying uncertainty and diminishing predictability (e.g., Sennet, 2006). That is, organizations frequently transform their operations, usually to accommodate unforeseen changes in the market and industry. Hence, the roles and responsibilities—as well as the status and conditions-of employees often fluctuate erratically. Individuals are, therefore, often subjected to unexpected demands and unfortunate complications (see Frank, 1995). Their life feels unpredictable and their sense of control may dissipate.

Self worth

The final factor is a limited sense of personal worth. To illustrate, from the perspective of terror management theory, this limited sense of personal worth, experienced as a diminished self esteem, emerges when individuals feel their qualities and character diverges from the standards and values of their society (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986). They do not, therefore, feel they can contribute to a purpose that is valued by society. Indeed, both Baumeister (1991) and the meaning maintenance model (Heine et al., 2006) assume that self esteem facilitates a sense of meaning.

Many events can impair this sense of worth. The burgeoning interest in the genetic causes of human behavior, for example, may inadvertently compromise this sense of worth. When individuals feel that genetic or biological forces constrain their behavior, their sense of free will dissipates. They do not feel they can improve their qualities or enhance their value to society (e.g., Baumeister, Masicampo, and DeWall, 2009). Individuals feel they will never be able to contribute to domains in which knowledge or ability is deficient. Their sense of worth thus might dissipate

Personality systems interaction theory

Personality systems interaction theory, developed by Kuhl (2000), and validated by many studies (e.g., Kazen, Baumann, & Kuhl, 2003; Kuhl & Kazen, 1999), can be invoked to

explain how these four impediments obstruct a sense of meaning. Furthermore, this theory, when coupled with the socio-emotional selectivity hypothesis, also demonstrates how an impaired sense of meaning can culminate in radical and violent behavior.

According to personality systems interaction theory, four cognitive systems regulate the decisions, preferences, and behaviors of individuals: intention memory, intuitive behavioral control, object recognition, and extension memory (Kuhl, 2000). Each of these systems coincides with a discrete emotional state.

To illustrate, when individuals feel dejected, representing unfulfilled aspirations (Higgins, 1987), intention memory is activated (Kazen & Kuhl, 2005). This system formulates plans, comprising a sequences of actions that individuals would like to execute in the future (Goschke & Kuhl, 1993), intended to fulfill these aspirations.

As soon as these plans are feasible, individuals experience a sense of excitement (Higgins, 1987). This excitement inhibits intention memory and activates intuitive behavioral control instead (Kazen & Kuhl, 2005). Intuitive behavioral control executes the plans, initiating the sequence of actions the individual had previously formulated (Kuhl, 2000).

If the plan does not unfold as anticipated, individuals might experience an imminent sense of threat, manifested as anxiety or fear (Higgins, 1987). These emotional states prime the third system, called object recognition (Kuhl, 2000). This system orients attention to potential threats, initiating inclinations that are intended to resolve these complications, such as fleeing rapidly (Baumann & Kuhl, 2003).

Once these problems have been resolved, individuals experience a sense of contentment (Kuhl, 2000). This emotional state activates extension memory. When this system is activated, individuals experience powerful intuitions or hunches about how to proceed (Hodgkinson, Langan-Fox, & Sadler-Smith, 2008). In essence, these intuitions incite courses of action that align to the enduring values of individuals and social norms of the broader society (for evidence, see Baumann & Kuhl, 2005).

To clarify, each choice that individuals reach is either rewarded or penalized by family, friends, and other figures. In an setting, whenever extension memory is activated, inclinations that were reinforced in similar contexts to the immediate environment are primed intensely; inclinations that were not reinforced in similar contexts are primed negligibly or even inhibited (Kuhl, 2000; Moss & Wilson, 2010). After some delay, a particular subset or blend

of inclinations will prevail, experienced as an intuition. Thus, in one sense, these intuitions will prime courses of action that, in general, are rewarded and thus desired by most constituents in society (Moss & Wilson, 2010).

Personality systems interaction theory and meaning

This theory can explain how the four determinants of radical, violent behavior—an unclear worldview, distrust towards cooperation, a feeling of impending threat or uncertainty, and a limited sense of personal worth—also compromise a sense of meaning. First, when the worldviews of individuals seem incompatible, the standards, norms, and values of society do not seem incontrovertible. Individuals cannot be certain which pursuits or accomplishments will be cherished in the future (Greenberg et al., 1990). They do not feel committed to a particular set of aspirations. Hence, they do not feel motivated to formulate a definitive set of plans to fulfill some purpose. The operations of intention memory are thus inefficient.

Second, when individuals feel a sense of distrust towards cooperation, they do not feel as inspired to pursue the plans they formulate or the purpose they decide to pursue. Specifically, in a cooperative environment, individuals are naturally motivated to fulfill the needs and preferences of people in their immediate and extended networks. That is, in cooperative settings, by definitions, individuals who can satisfy the needs of people now will tend to receive some return in the future (e.g., Twenge, Zhang, Catanese, Dolan-Pascoe, Lyche, & Baumeister, 2007). Extension memory is thus activated to initiate courses of action that comply with these preferences (Baumann & Kuhl, 2005). Indeed, consistent with these premises, circuits in the right prefrontal cortex underpin both these cooperative tendencies (Kuhl & Kazen, 2008) and the hallmarks of extension memory (Baumann, Kuhl, & Kazen, 2005).

However, in competitive environments, extension memory is thus not as beneficial and, thus, is instead inhibited. Individuals are not, therefore, motivated by the concatenation of inclinations that have been reinforced in the past. They do not feel as energised or inspired to execute their plans (Kuhl, 2000). A distrust towards cooperation, therefore, inhibits extension memory and curbs the motivation of individuals to persist with their plans or objectives

Third, if individuals experience an impending sense of threat or perceive their environment as uncertain, they feel a persistent sense of anxiety or agitation (Higgins, 1987), activating object recognition (Kuhl, 2000). Object recognition confines attention to more immediate

threats. Inclinations that were reinforced by people or constituencies that are not immediately salient are not primed (Baumann & Kuhl, 2003). Thus, extension memory is inhibited, compromising a sense of inspiration (Baumann & Kuhl, 2005).

Finally, when individuals experience a limited sense of personal worth, they do not feel confident they can implement their plans or objectives. They perceive these objectives as unfeasible. Dejection is never entirely supplanted with excitement (Higgins, 1987). Individuals continue to refine their plans, never entirely committing to these pursuits (Baumann & Kuhl, 2005). Accordingly, when self esteem is severely impaired, individuals never feel entirely committed to an enduring plan or purpose.

In short, each of these four determinants affect the operation of one, or more, of the cognitive systems that are integral to the construction of meaning. Conversely, once these determinants subside, individuals become more likely to feel inspired and committed to a specific plan or purpose, experienced as an enduring sense of meaning (for related evidence, see Hicks, Cicero, Trent, Burton, & King, 2010).

Receptivity to ambivalence

Personality systems interaction theory, however, cannot alone explain why this limited sense of meaning may translate into radical, violent behavior. However, this framework, when coupled with the socio-emotional selectivity theory, does uncover some telling insights. According to socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1993), when individuals perceive their roles, objectives, and interests as enduring rather than transient—sometimes called an unlimited time horizon—their primary motivation is to enhance their knowledge, skills, reputation, networks, and other resources (e.g., Carstensen, 2006). That is, they want to accumulate the resources that are needed to thrive in the future (e.g., Charles & Carstensen, 2004).

In contrast, when individuals feel their roles, objectives, and interests may be transient—sometimes called a limited time horizon—they cannot be certain which resources are needed to thrive in the future (Carstensen, 1995). Therefore, their motivation to accrue knowledge, skills, and other resources wanes. They will instead, therefore, become motivated to optimise their immediate state (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999). They seek experiences that elicit positive emotions. They also shun contexts that may evoke negative or mixed feelings.

Many studies have validated these premises. For example, when individuals are exposed to conditions or report characteristics that compromise the longevity of their roles, objectives, and interests—from old age to forthcoming career transitions—their attention tends to be directed towards only positive stimuli (e.g., Carstensen & Fredrickson, 1998; Carstensen & Mikels, 2005; DeWall, Visser, & Levitan, 2006; Fung & Carstensen, 2003, 2004). Furthermore, when individuals strive to experience only positive emotions, they shun dissonant, incompatible, or conflicting states, such as ambivalent attitudes or mixed feelings (see Brown, Asher, & Cialdini, 2005; Newby-Clark, McGregor, & Zanna, 2002).

Taken together, these premises imply that a sense of meaning is likely to evoke an aversion to mixed or ambivalent emotions—often defined as a combination of positive and negative feelings (Larsen, McGraw, & Cacioppo, 2001). That is, when individuals experience a sense of meaning, they feel committed and inspired by an enduring purpose or pursuit (Britt, Adler, & Bartone, 2001). Their roles, objectives, and interests seem durable, and hence a motivation to accrue resources is induced (Carstensen, 2006).

In contrast, when individuals experience no sense of meaning, their activities do not cohere to form an enduring purpose. Their life, roles, and pursuits seem erratic. They become motivated to enhance their emotional state (Carstensen, 2006). In short, the four purported determinants of radical, violent behavior are likely to culminate in a discomfort with negative states and an aversion to ambivalence.

Radical versus communal narratives

This aversion to ambivalence may underpin many of the tendencies and behaviors that underpin radical, violent ideologies. Specifically, according to process models of radicalisation (e.g., Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Taylor & Horgan, 2006), individuals often formulate increasingly radical and violent narratives to accommodate a diversity of traumatic or distressing experiences from social exclusion to economic hardship (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010; for group process models, see Reicher, Haslam, & Rath, 2008).

To illustrate, some Muslims might ascribe an inability to secure a job to rampant prejudice, avowing to avenge these injustices. If then rejected by members of their own religious congregation, they might equate moderate Islam with mainstream society, thus assuming a more extreme ideology, and so forth. Some individuals however, in response to distressing events, do not formulate these radical perspectives. They might develop a narrative that is

perceived as communal and acceptable by the broader community. They could, for example, utilise legitimate economic and legal avenues to support marginalised communities.

A sense of meaning at one time, however, might increase the likelihood that individuals embrace an acceptable, rather than radical, ideology or narrative subsequently. To demonstrate, as socio-emotional selectivity theory indicates, if individuals experience a sense of meaning, their primary motivation is to accrue knowledge, skills, and other resources (Carstensen, 2006). They do not merely attempt to optimise their emotional state. Consequently, they embrace the difficulties and dissonance that such growth and development entails. They accept, rather than shun, ambivalent emotions, such as a blend of dejection and contentment.

Because they often experience a combination of these emotions, intention memory, a system that coincides with dejection, and extension memory, a system that coincides with contentment, can be activated either simultaneously or, at least, in close succession (Kuhl, 2000; for evidence of the benefits of ambivalent emotions, see Fong, 2006). Intention memory enables individuals to construct a coordinated sets of plans and assumptions (Kazen & Kuhl, 2005), representing a personal narrative or ideology. Extension memory ensures that choices of individuals largely align to the diverse standards and preferences of the various constituents in the broader community (for other benefits of this system, see Bolte, Goschke, & Kuhl, 2003). When these two cognitive systems are coordinated effectively, the various intentions and plans that individuals form are generally consistent with the prevailing needs and norms of mainstream society. The narratives and ideologies are adaptive and acceptable (cf., Baumann, Kaschel, & Kuhl, 2005).

In contrast, if individuals experience a limited sense of meaning, their primary motivation is to optimise their emotional state, culminating in an aversion to ambivalent emotions. Accordingly, the operation of intention memory will seldom overlap in time with the activation of extension memory. When these individuals cultivate their plans or ideology, norms and preferences of their society do not constrain their intentions and cognitions (e.g., Baumann et al., 2005). They may formulate a plan or perspective that diverges markedly from societal conventions. Indeed, in this dejected state, individuals become more likely to embrace unfamiliar tenets and perspectives, augmenting the appeal of radical ideologies (Wood, 2010).

Cognitive biases

Many of the observations and experiences of individuals, however, may challenge these radical perspectives. They might receive assistance from a neighbor they hardly know, challenging the assumption that mainstream society is depraved and immoral. In response to these events, the radical beliefs of some individuals might abate. However, the radical beliefs of other individuals apparently persists, even in the midst of contradictory evidence. Hence, to withstand this evidence, some individuals must also invoke cognitive biases (for seminal examples, see Tversky & Kahneman, 1971, 1973, 1974)—assumptions that reconcile these contradictions.

Interestingly, a limited sense of meaning, and the concomitant aversion to ambivalence, increases the magnitude and likelihood of these biases, reinforcing extremist and belligerent ideologies. That is, when individuals experience positive or negative emotions in isolation, instead of a combination of these feelings, many of the traditional biases are amplified.

Status quo

To illustrate, if individuals experience unadulterated positive emotions, such as contentment, they often eschew risk. That is, they tend to prefer courses of action that maintain their present state or status, shunning the alternatives in which the ramifications are uncertain (e.g., Winkielman, Schwarz, Fazendeiro, & Reber, 2003). Accordingly, in this content state, individuals will tend to demonstrate biases that reinforce the status quo (for a description of this bias, Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988). They might, for example, be susceptible to the existence bias, in which they cherish only practices or objects that have persisted over many years (Eidelman, Crandall, & Pattershall, 2009; for evidence of this association between positive emotions and aversion to unfamiliar concepts, see Griskevicius, Shiota, & Nowlis, 2010).

Accordingly, only the sacred seems moral. These individuals may, therefore, be inclined to reject every modern development, reinforcing their aversion to mainstream society. In contrast, when individuals experience ambivalent emotions, their need to maintain this state dissipates and hence this undue aversion to modern society subsides.

Dehumanization

Second, if individuals experience negative emotions, such as unadulterated dejection, they demonstrate a different series of biases. In this state, only intention memory is activated (Kuhl, 2000). When individuals formulate intentions, they cannot envisage the precise feelings, scenes, sounds, or smells in the context in which they will implement these plans (see also Kuhl & Kazen, 1999). These intentions, therefore, tend to be abstract—devoid of sensory or affective details (cf de Vries, Holland, & Witteman, 2009). Thus, when individuals feel dejected, they are not as attuned to rich, emotional information. Indeed, evidence shows that, in this negative state, individuals overlook the complex and multifaceted experiences of other people (e.g., Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006).

Therefore, in this state, individuals often assume that members of other communities do not experience rich, intense emotions. They might perceive members of other communities as devoid of affective depth or compassion (e.g., Haslam, 2006; Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, & Bastian, 2005; Haslam, Bain, Loughnan, & Kashima, 2008). They also underestimate the heterogeneity of these communities (Kammer, 1982).

When individuals dehumanise other communities, they can justify the perpetration of violent acts (Bandura, 1999). They can maintain these individuals will not experience any genuine pain or suffering anyway. The costs of this violence, therefore, are trivialised.

Again, ambivalent emotions most likely to temper this pernicious bias. The positive states elicit a cooperative mindset, increasing the capacity of individuals to empathize (Mast, Jonas, & Hall, 2009, curbing this dehumanization of victims (for evidence, see Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006).

Spreading of alternatives

Third, once individuals commit to an intention, intuitive behavioral control is activated and excitement ensues. This commitment elicits a phenomenon called spreading of alternatives (see Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2002). Specifically, the attention of individuals become oriented towards the benefits of their choices and the drawbacks of alternatives (for the neural underpinnings, see Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, Fearn, Sigelman, & Johnson, 2008). If they commit to a radical, violent cause, these individuals might, for example, confine their attention to the people who will benefit from terrorist acts. They glorify their own collective and demonise everyone else.

This mechanism evolved to prevent vacillation. If the benefits of choices do not become more salient, individuals might shift their preferences soon after reaching a decision, culminating in indecision and ultimately stagnancy (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995). Nevertheless, in contrast to unmitigated excitement, ambivalence tempers this spreading of alternatives. A trace of dejection reorients the attention of individuals to some of the drawbacks or complications of their choices, inducing a sense of humility and awareness (for underlying mechanisms, see Isen, Shalcker, Clark, & Karp, 1978; Kenealy, 1997)

Threat

Finally, unmitigated anxiety can also evoke some destructive biases. This emotional state activates object recognition, biasing attention to potential threats and complications (Kuhl, 2000). Problems and hazards become more conspicuous. The world is perceived as a threatening, competitive, and dangerous place, motivating a state of war and an emphasis on injustice, all of which can promulgate hostility and ultimately violence (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003). Ambivalent emotions, in contrast, may activate extension memory in concert with object recognition, priming a more cooperative orientation.

Social networks

A narrative that diverges from the mainstream, coupled with pronounced cognitive biases, will not always translate into violent inclinations or certainly not terrorist ideologies. The same motivations and inclinations could provoke other courses of action, such as cybercrime rather than overt violence. The precise narrative that individuals construct will, at least partly, be informed by insights they receive from social contacts (Krebs, 2002; Rothenberg, 2002) or the media (e.g., Douglas, McGarty, Bliuc, & Lala, 2005). Individuals who, for some reason, are averse to communities that promulgate militant extremism may not be as exposed to terrorist ideologies. They might cultivate alternative perspectives instead.

Thus, to understand the source of terrorism, the conditions or characteristics that attract people to social networks that embrace these destructive ideologies need to be delineated (for an analysis of social networks, see Atran, Magouirik, & Sageman, 2008; Hicks, Larson, & Memon, 2007). Again, however, the factors that impede a sense of meaning—an unclear worldview, distrust towards cooperation, a feeling of impending threat or uncertainty, and a limited sense of personal worth—are likely to explain this attraction.

To illustrate, if individuals perceive their worldviews as contradictory, they are unable to commit to a specific purpose in life (Greenberg, 1990). Consequently, they do not demonstrate spreading of alternatives (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995; for underlying mechanisms, see Jonas, Greenberg, & Frey, 2003). They will instead be aware of the benefits and drawbacks of diverse standards and objectives. This conflicting information evokes a state of dissonance (Festinger, 1957, 1958, 1964)—a state that is especially aversive if individuals are motivated to enhance their emotions rather than accrue resources (Brown et al., 2005).

To ameliorate this sense of dissonance, individuals are especially attracted to a dogmatic leader—a leader that depicts some activities as absolutely appropriate and all other activities as absolutely inappropriate. Indeed, as research shows, individuals who shun ambiguous contexts actually prefer dogmatic, autocratic leaders over other managers (Pierro, Mannetti, De Grada, Livi, & Kruglanski, 2003; see also Cohen, Solomon, Maxfield, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2004). Usually, these leaders impart a variety of beliefs that individuals can apply to abandon many conflicting tenets. Contradictions are, thus, resolved.

Second, if individuals are distrusting in general, they become more inclined to confine their social interactions with people who are very similar to themselves. To demonstrate, some individuals are very trusting. That is, they assume that most people will reciprocate favors. Consequently, they can form mutual relationships with a diverse range of people (cf., Gurtman, 1992). Other individuals, in contrast, are not very trusting. They feel they might be exploited. That is, if they assist a person one day, they might not receive any favor in return (Emerson, 1976; Gouldner, 1960).

These individuals, therefore, will confine their relationships to people who seem especially trustworthy. For example, people are more inclined to trust anyone with whom they share exclusive characteristics—that is, characteristics that are particular scarce (for mechanisms, see Pelham, Mirrenberg, & Jones, 2002). Accordingly, distrusting individuals might attempt to socialise with members of their minority only—such as particular ethnicity or creed.

Third, if individuals experience a feeling of impending threat or uncertainty, they seek a figure in their life who is very supportive and accessible. That is, this unremitting sense of threat often reflects an anxious attachment style, in which individuals incessantly feel they might be rejected or excluded (for determinants of this style, see Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1988). Because of this incessant

concern, individuals become especially sensitive to potential threats and problems. Their attention is attuned to subtle cues, like frowns (see Lopez, 2001; Lopez, Mitchell, & Gormley, 2002).

As research indicates, when individuals experience this anxious attachment, they experience an appreciable, often inordinate, motivation to seek the support of one key figure—such as a parent, partner, or friend (Mikulincer, Birnbaum, Woddis, & Nachmias, 2000). They covet a person who will be perennially available and accessible (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). They might, therefore, be especially attracted to a person who is unlikely to be distracted by other commitments. A person who is isolated from mainstream society, therefore, is particularly suitable. When exposed to these supportive figures, these individuals experience a sense of security instead of uncertainty (e.g., Baldwin, 1992; Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996; Baldwin & Meunier, 1999; McGowan, 2002).

Finally, when individuals experience a limited sense of personal worth, evoking dejection, they often experience the motivation to expand their resources—their status, competence, wealth, and influence, for example. According to self expansion theory (e.g., Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Aron, & Norman, 2001), to extend their resources, individuals are often motivated to form relationships with people who diverge appreciably from themselves (e.g., Amodio & Showers, 2005; Aron, Steele, Kashdan, & Perez, 2006). In essence, once they form these relationships, they feel a sense of ownership over the qualities and attributes of these other people (Aron & Fraley, 1999). They even confuse qualities they have developed with attributes these associates have acquired (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). Their motivation to accrue more resources is, in essence, fulfilled to some extent.

A limited sense of worth implies that individuals do not feel they have acquired the competence or power to execute their intentions, curbing their capacity to be assertive and aggressive (see Kirkpatrick, Waugh, Valencia, & Webster, 2002). They feel helpless rather than powerful. Accordingly, they might be especially attracted to people who seem powerful—to people who can impose their desires onto other constituencies. They might, therefore, be especially attracted to aggressive people, who epitomize this capacity to impose their needs.

In short, when individuals do not experience a sense of meaning, they shun ambivalence, and thus become more inclined to construct a narrative that diverges from the standards and norms of their broader society. They also entertain biases that promulgate and amplify these

ideologies. Finally, they become attracted to people who are dogmatic leaders, belong to their community, seem isolated from society, or espouse an aggressive orientation. Over time, a network evolves, in which the members are governed by a dogmatic ideology as well as detach themselves from the mainstream society and embrace violent means, often culminating in terrorist activity.

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