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# Terrorism—A (Self) Love Story

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## *Redirecting the Significance Quest Can End Violence*

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*Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concepts of self-love (amour propre) and love of self (amour de soi même) are applied to the psychology of terrorism. Self-love is concern with one's image in the eyes of respected others, members of one's group. It denotes one's feeling of personal significance, the sense that one's life has meaning in accordance with the values of one's society. Love of self, in contrast, is individualistic concern with self-preservation, comfort, safety, and the survival of self and loved ones. We suggest that self-love defines a motivational force that when awakened arouses the goal of a significance quest. When a group perceives itself in conflict with dangerous detractors, its ideology may prescribe violence and terrorism against the enemy as a means of significance gain that gratifies self-love concerns. This may involve sacrificing one's self-preservation goals, encapsulated in Rousseau's concept of love of self. The foregoing notions afford the integration of diverse quantitative and qualitative findings on individuals' road to terrorism and back. Understanding the significance quest and the conditions of its constructive fulfillment may be crucial to reversing the current tide of global terrorism.*

**Keywords:** terrorism, significance quest, motivation, self-love, love of self

**T**he topic of terrorism might seem ill-suited for a collection of articles devoted to psychology's positive contributions to conflict resolution. Terrorism, everyone knows, is the incarnation of the bad, the vile and the ugly, the epitome of the evil that men do. What is this sordid topic doing in a collection of essays devoted to the enlightened, humane, and hopeful ways of dealing with human disputes? In this article, we argue that the same motivation that when properly directed may uplift humans to their most constructive conciliations may, when misguided, plunge people into mutual destruction, savagery, and mayhem. Consistent with the general tenor of this special issue of the *American Psychologist*, then, we propose that understanding the motivational force potentiating terrorism may show a way for rechanneling it in a positive direction, paving the way to peaceful conflict resolution and harmony in intergroup relations (Staub, 2013, this issue).

This motivational force is what we have called the *quest for personal significance* (Kruglanski, Chen, Dechesne, Fishman, & Orehek, 2009) and what Jean-Jacques Rousseau labeled as *self-love*, or *amour propre* in French. Rousseau's *amour propre* denotes self-love that depends on the opinions of others. It is a "passionate need to 'count,' or to 'be someone'" (Neuhouser, 2008, p. 31), to be recognized, to matter. Though highly consequential in human affairs, the quest for significance isn't all there is. Rousseau insightfully juxtaposed *self-love (amour propre)* with *love of self (amour de soi-même)*. Though sounding nearly identical, the two concepts profoundly differ. Self-love is about counting and mattering by standards of the normative social reality to which one subscribes, leading the "good life" in accordance with one's group's values. In contrast, love of self is about self-preservation, security, survival, comfort, and pleasure, in short, about "taking care of number one" and gratifying one's individualistic needs and desires (see Table 1).

At times, the quest for significance may override self-preservation motives, inspiring individuals to make personal sacrifices for collective causes. At other times,

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*Editor's note.* This article is one of eight in the October 2013 *American Psychologist* "Peace Psychology" special issue.

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Work reported in this article was supported by Center for the Study of Terrorism and Behavior (CSTAB) Grant 2012STO61CS0001 from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and by Minerva Grant N00014130054 from the Office of Naval Research, both to Arie W. Kruglanski (principal investigator) and co-principal investigators.

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self-preservation goals may prevail, leading persons away from collective, significance-bestowing pursuits. Often, too, these two goal types may be in conflict so that an overriding commitment to one may require suppression of the other (Shah, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2002). We develop this theme later on in this article. Our main purpose, however, is to offer a theoretical analysis of two opponent psychological processes: radicalization—becoming a terrorist—and deradicalization—leaving terrorism behind. These are described subsequently, following a thumbnail sketch of psychological research on modern terrorism.

The present article builds on our earlier work on terrorism’s motivational underpinnings (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2009; Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006; Kruglanski, Gelfand, & Gunaratna, 2012; Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011), yet it goes beyond it in a number of important respects: Primarily, it juxtaposes the motivational forces behind radicalization with those behind deradicalization. It further clarifies the relations between ideology and violence and elaborates on conditions in which nonviolent ideologies offer a roadmap to personal significance. Finally, and not least in importance, it describes previously un-

reported empirical findings pertinent to the present theory.

## Psychological Research on Modern Terrorism

Social scientists’ interest in modern terrorism dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, when a wave of bombings, hijackings, and kidnappings catapulted the subject to the top of the world’s concerns. This interest spiked following the tragedy of 9/11/2001, the Bali bombing of 12/10/2002, the Madrid bombings of 3/11/2004, the London bombing of 7/7/2005, the Mumbai attack in 2008, and the innumerable suicide bombings in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last decade. It is generally recognized that the problem of terrorism is not going away anytime soon and that it constitutes a serious threat to world security and stability. The study of terrorism is proceeding apace around the world; numerous institutes and centers have sprung up devoted to research on the topic, and the number of conferences, symposia, and publications on terrorism and political violence exhibits an accelerated growth curve.

### What Terrorism Is Not

It seems fair to say that, thus far, psychological research on terrorism has yielded clearer knowledge about what terrorism is *not* than about what it *is*. We know now that terrorism is not a kind of psychopathology. We know now that terrorists aren’t crazy, even though their activities are extreme by general standards. We know that a specific personality profile that characterizes a terrorist does not exist; terrorists come in all shapes and forms psychologically speaking. We also know that situational factors such as poverty, political oppression, or poor education aren’t the “root causes” of terrorism, though both personality and situation can contribute to terrorism in some circumstances (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006; Merari, 2010).

### What Terrorism Is

In contrast to the emerging agreement about what terrorism is *not*, there is less consensus about what terrorism *is*, and what causes it. Some authors suggest it is personal states (e.g., of trauma, shock, and anger) that push individuals into terrorism’s arms (e.g., Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2005), that ideology is epiphenomenal to terrorists’ behavior (e.g., Sageman, 2004, 2008), and that ideology serves as an after-the-fact rationalization of undertaken actions

**Table 1**  
*Properties of Self-Love Versus Love of Self*

Self-love	Love of self
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the quest for significance</li> <li>• the need to “count,” to “be someone”</li> <li>• the sense that one’s life has meaning in accordance with the values of one’s society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• concerns with comfort, self-preservation, and security</li> <li>• survival of self and loved ones</li> </ul>



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(Bjørge & Horgan, 2009; McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2011). Others emphasize the motivating role of ideology (Gunnaratna, 2005) and the “sacred values” that it represents (Ginges, Atran, Medin, & Shikaki, 2007). Yet others put stock in terrorism’s social networks (Bakker, 2006; Hegghammer, 2006; Noricks, 2009; Sageman, 2004, 2008) and highlight the interpersonal ties that bond terrorists together.

Our own approach has been that all of these factors matter and that each plays an important, though not an exclusive, role in prompting terrorism. Needed at this point is a theory that integrates them and elucidates how they interlock and work in concert. In what follows, we sketch an outline of such a theory and present some initial evidence for its postulates.

### **The Quest for Significance (*Amour Propre*) Theory of Radicalization**

Our theory departs from a basic assumption that, like most human behaviors, terrorists’ behavior too is goal driven. Simply put, terrorist behavior is the *means* through which the individual pursues some *goal*. Admittedly, this isn’t much of a revelation. Goal-directed behavior isn’t unique to terrorists. It isn’t even uniquely human. It is pretty much how most animals behave. What makes humans somewhat special is that our behavior is socially grounded. Humans are social beings. More importantly yet, humans are cognitively social. Ants, bees, wasps, and so forth, though highly social too, do not think much. Humans do. Our goals and means have meaning that is socially determined: It is anchored in cultural norms and values that our group upholds. The application of those general values to engender specific motivation unfolds dynamically via a *social process* in which persuasion and social influence play a crucial role.

In summary, our quest for significance framework highlights three fundamental elements whose interaction determines terrorists’ behavior. These are (a) the *goal* that the terrorist is striving to attain, (b) the violent *means* whereby he or she seeks to attain it, and (c) the *social process* that binds the goal and means together. This conceptual framework is useful in allowing one to move forward by highlighting the critical questions about the psychology of terrorism and by suggesting hypotheses as to possible answers.

### **The Goal Issue: What Motivates Terrorists?**

The quintessential question that our framework poses concerns the goal issue; it addresses the all-important matter of terrorists’ motivation. The literature on this topic has been extensive, to be sure, and it has produced a long list of possible sources of motivation, including honor, trauma, humiliation, heaven, devotion to leader, vengeance, group pressure, even feminism (Bloom, 2004; Gambetta, 2005; Stern, 2004). These are all true and valid in a sense, but at a deeper level they represent, we submit, special cases of a broader, unifying motivation, the *quest for significance* mentioned earlier. The quest for significance refers to a general motivational force beyond mere survival; it has been recognized by psychological theorists under various labels such as *competence* or *effectance* (in White’s 1959 classic; see also Elliot & Dweck, 2005) and *achievement*, *self-esteem*, *mastery*, and *control* motivations (see also Fiske, 2004; Higgins, 2012). The crucial thing is that effectance, esteem, competence, achievement, or control are defined socially or culturally (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003). That is exactly what the significance quest represents: It is attainment of what the culture says is worth attaining, the kind of competence that the culture values, or control over outcomes that the culture deems worthy, and for which one is accorded the admiration of others who matter to oneself. One’s sense of personal significance affords one self-love in the eyes of others, members of one’s reference group, just as Rousseau envisioned it. To summarize, then, we view both the quest for significance (Rousseau’s notion of *self-love*) and the quest for survival, comfort, and self-preservation (Rousseau’s *love of self*) as universal human motives that manifest themselves differently in diverse sociocultural contexts. As we will see, these motives can occasionally give rise to goal conflicts, whereas at other times they can be concomitantly gratified by “multifinal” pursuits (Kruglanski, Köpetz, et al., 2012; Kruglanski et al., 2002).

**Awakening the quest for significance.** As with any motivational force, the quest for significance needs to be specifically activated in order for it to affect behavior (for discussion, see Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007; Morsella & Bargh, 2011; Moskowitz & Grant, 2009). Even the most zealous idealists do not “seek significance” all of the time; they, too, occasionally engage in self-preservation activities, attending to their physiological needs, their security, comfort, and so on. In our theory, and in specific reference to terrorism, the quest for significance can be

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awakened in three general cases, those of (a) *significance loss*, (b) the *threat of significance loss*, and (c) the opportunity for *significance gain*. We consider them in turn.

**Significance loss.** A loss of significance can arise for diverse reasons, such as failure in an important pursuit or a severe humiliation; this applies to the Chechen widows who were rendered powerless, and hence were demeaned and humiliated, by having their significant others wrested from them by the Russian forces (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2005). It applies also to Muslim immigrants to Europe, who feel considerable disrespect and often a rabid “Islamophobia” on the part of members of the host community (Kruglanski, Crenshaw, Post, & Victoroff, 2007; Sageman, 2004). “Rousseau vividly describes the violent physical and ‘involuntary’ effect of his own wounded *amour propre*, when ‘*anger and indignation take possession of my senses: flashing eyes, an inflamed face, trembling limbs, a throbbing heart . . . and reasoning can do nothing about it*” (Neuhouser, 2008, p. 71).

The propaganda tapes of Al Qaeda and affiliated organizations (whose contents we have been analyzing) often use *group grievance*, the suffering and humiliation of Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo, or Palestine, to enrage all Muslims and make them feel humiliated. Consider a quote on this point from Abu Yahya Al-Libi (2009), a major Al Qaeda propagandist:<sup>1</sup>

Jihad in Algeria today is your hope with permission from Allah in redemption from the hell of the unjust ruling regimes whose prisons are congested with your youths and children if not with your women; [regime] which thrust its armies, police, and intelligence to oppress you, for which they opened the doors to punish you. . . . So add your efforts to theirs, add your energies to theirs. . . . And know that their victory is your victory. Their salvation is your salvation (Al-Libi, 2009, lines 142–148).

As may be seen, then, Al-Libi makes salient for his listeners their social identity as Muslims, which in turn renders the humiliation and disempowerment of other Muslims the listeners’ own humiliation and significance loss. This latter strategy is not unique to Islamist terrorists, as individual and group grievances appear to be a potent catalyst for terrorists’ motivation in diverse social contexts (Adib-Moghaddam, 2005; della Porta & Rucht, 1995; McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2011). As Zartman and Khan (2011) put it, “They (i.e., the collective grievances) color personal perceptions of individual hurts and provide the setting for individual feelings of helplessness that lead to violence” (p. 28).

**Unrelated significance loss.** Of interest is that significance loss may arise for reasons other than a grievance ascribed to a known enemy or culprit. University of Texas political scientist Ami Pedahzur (2005) cited examples of Palestinian suicide bombers who were apparently pushed to their desperate activities by stigma, ostracism, and loss of self-respect (i.e., severe significance loss) for reasons completely unrelated to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: a woman who had suffered stigma because she was infertile, another one stigmatized because of a divorce, yet another one accused of an extramarital affair, a boy diagnosed with HIV—each was ready to sacrifice all for a cause to erase their significance loss, even though their humiliation had little to do with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as such.

**Threat of significance loss.** The quest for significance can be aroused also when one faces a threat of significance loss should one fail to comply with the normative pressure to engage in terrorism. Ohnuki-Tierney (2006) recently analyzed Japanese Kamikaze pilots’ letters and personal diaries. It turns out that many of them valued life and were reluctant to die; unlike the Islamic shahids, they expected little in the way of paradise and its ostensive pleasures as a reward for dying for their country. Rather, they seem to have been actually pressured into “volunteering.” Their sense of shame had they refused the mission as well as their honor and solidarity with fallen comrades were, apparently, what prevented them from evading their tragic assignment.

Hayashi Ichizo, a *tokkotai* pilot (Kamikaze) who died on his mission on February 22, 1945, wrote in a letter to his mother two days before his final flight, “I find it so hard to leave you behind. . . . I want to be held in your arms and sleep . . . [Yet] all men born in Japan are destined to die fighting for the country. You have done a splendid job raising me to become a honorable man” (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2006, p. 173).

**Significance gain.** Finally, significance loss and threat of loss are not the sole circumstances in which a significance quest would be awakened. Another major circumstance for arousing such a quest is opportunity for a *significance gain*.

<sup>1</sup> Killed by a drone attack in Pakistan in June 2012.

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The opportunity for significance gain may often come about in the context of a significance loss. This potentially applies to the radicalization process that occurs in prisons. The incarceration experience is typically humiliating and significance reducing. It renders the individual highly vulnerable to radicalization arguments that promise a quick reversal of his or her abject social standing and the conferral of a hero's status that begets others' worship. Ali Ammar (Ali La Pointe), the famed Algerian guerilla leader,<sup>2</sup> used to live a life of petty crime before he was radicalized in prison by members of the Front de Liberation Nationale (the FLN). Richard Reid, the infamous "shoe bomber," converted to Islam in a British prison, whereas Jose Padilla, the so called "dirty bomber," was converted in an American one. Christian Ganczarski, responsible for the Djerba bombing off the coast of Tunisia, and Pierre Richard Robert, implicated in terrorist attacks in Morocco, were criminal recruits to jihadism with prison backgrounds. Other wretched circumstances, not just prison, may foster dreams of grandeur and prompt the seizing of opportunity for significance gain. A prominent example of someone from such circumstances is Velupillai Prabhakaran, the revered leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), with a cult status to his followers, who prior to his LTTE career had been an ex-smuggler and a member of the low fishermen caste in the Tamil community.

In their recent analysis of 19th century Russian anarchists, Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalkenko (2011) discussed the *risk and status* mechanism of radicalization illustrated by the story of Alexander Barannikov, a member of the terrorist People's Will (Narodnaya Volya) organization. According to those who knew, what attracted him to terrorism were the bravado, courage, and daring which when displayed in pursuit of the group goals promised

considerable boost to his status and self-esteem in the eyes of his comrades, considerably feeding his self-love in Rousseau's sense of the word.

Ehud Sprinzak (2001), the late Israeli terrorism expert, discussed in this vein what he called the "megalomaniacal hyper-terrorists," the likes of Ramzi Yousef (the man behind the 1993 World Trade Center bombing), Shoko Asahara (leader of Aum Shnrikyo and architect of the 1995 sarin gas attack in a Tokyo subway station), Timothy McVeigh (the 1995 Oklahoma City bomber), and Osama bin Laden.<sup>3</sup> According to Sprinzak, these are "self-anointed individuals with larger-than-life callings . . . and with insatiable urge to use catastrophic attacks in order to write a new chapter in history" (Sprinzak, 2001, p. 73). Accordingly, Sprinzak proposed to include them in a "great men" theory of terrorism.

But the goal of significance gain via terrorism and martyrdom can be less high-blown and exalted. It could be inculcated early in the socialization process or "bred in the bone" (Post, 2006). Some years ago, the Egyptian daily *Ruz al Yusuf* (of August 18, 2006) published a report about the Hezbollah Shi'ite youth movement known as the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts. These children range in age from 8 to 16 years, number in the tens of thousands, and are indoctrinated with the ideology of radical Iranian Islam. According to *Ruz al Yusuf*, the objective is "to train [a] high caliber Islamic generation of children who would be willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of Allah (awlad istishhadiyyun)" (Al-Hakim, 2006).

To be sure, the tactic of indoctrinating young children into martyrdom and heroism on behalf of their group isn't unique to Hezbollah. Hamas is operating summer camps in which approximately 100,000 boys and girls participate each year. These "summer camps" include extremist Islamic indoctrination, paramilitary training, as well as social activities, all geared toward creating a large pool of future recruits to the ranks of Hamas militants. The Basque ETA too has been known to target young children for purposes of ideological indoctrination and the creation of future cadres of ETA fighters (Reinares, 2011). Psychologically, then, the inculcation in children of heroic themes represents a terrorist organization's attempt to create an opportunity for immense significance gain in the eyes of young children to be attained via martyrdom for their group's cause.

### **Motivational Exclusivity**

In basic motivational research in social psychology, we often find that when one's commitment to a given goal is enhanced, alternative goals are inhibited and suppressed (Bélanger, Lafrenière, Vallerand, & Kruglanski, 2013; Shah et al., 2002). In this manner, increased commitment to the significance quest goal may banish from mind goals in the self-preservation category. Thus, whereas Maslow's (1943) theory suggests that satisfaction of the baser (physiological, safety) needs is a precondition for activation of the higher needs

<sup>2</sup> Immortalized in Gilo Pontecorvo's classic film *The Battle of Algiers*.

<sup>3</sup> Anders Behring Breivik, suspected perpetrator of the July 2011 Oslo massacre, is a recent addition to this infamous list.

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(love, esteem, self-actualization), our theory suggests that the opposite may also occur and that activation of the higher needs may lead to actual suppression of the lower needs. The following is the testimony of a former Black Tamil Tiger, a member of the elite LTTE suicide squads whom one of us (M.H.) recently interviewed in Sri Lanka:

Family and relationships are forgotten in that place. There was no place for love. . . . That means a passion and loyalty to that group, to those in charge, to those who sacrificed their lives for the group. Then I came to a stage where I had no love for myself. I had no value for my life. I was ready to give myself fully, even to destroy myself, in order to destroy another person.

In this vein too, research by Scott Atran, Jeremy Ginges, and their colleagues suggests that individuals who have become radicalized to Jihad are unlikely to abandon extreme violence against the enemy in order to save a whole family or village from punitive destruction by the adversary. Ginges and Atran (2009) reported the results of a representative survey with 1,260 Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza carried out in December 2005 and January 2006. In the context of the survey, respondents were asked,

What is the position of Islam in your opinion regarding the bomber who carries out the bombing attack (which some call martyrdom attacks while others call suicide attacks) killing himself with the aim of killing his enemies. Does Islam allow such action?

Forty-three percent of those who responded “yes” to this question (83.5% of all respondents) also responded “no” to the following two items:

Would it be acceptable to forego/postpone martyrdom if there were a significantly high chance that the chosen martyr’s family would be killed in retaliation?

and

What if the bombing attack led to the destruction of olive trees and the bombing of his home town and school and the death of the students. Would it be acceptable to forego/postpone attack in this case?

These results suggest that for radicalized individuals the goal of following the dictates of Islam, and thereby gaining significance, is of the highest order, trumping other goals, including protecting one’s family and safeguarding the lives of others in one’s community. Of interest, redressing the injustice and removing the perceived loss of significance (to oneself and one’s group) through highly risky behavior (such as that involved in terrorism) are consistent with Kahneman and Tversky’s (1979) prospect theory, which postulates a proclivity toward risk seeking for the removal of losses.

### **The Role of Ideology**

In and of itself, having a goal aroused in oneself is not enough for a behavior to take place. One also needs to find a *means* to that goal. Typically, such a means is provided by a terrorism-justifying ideology. It is the ideology that tells an individual what to do in order to attain significance. Such ideology does not come out of thin air; it is generally grounded in the shared reality of one’s group. An ideology is a collective belief system to which an individual subscribes. When the group is under (real or imagined) threat from its enemies, the ideology defines defense of the group as the pre-eminent task (Zartman & Anstey, 2012), for which glory (in the form of hero or martyr status) is the supreme reward. We thus assume that ideology is relevant to radicalization because it identifies such radical activity as violence and terrorism as means to personal significance and justifies it on moral and effectiveness grounds. We assume these functions to be common to any terrorism-justifying ideology, whether it be an ethno-nationalist ideology, a socialist ideology, or a religious ideology.

**Ideological structure.** Typically, the bare bones elements of a terrorism-justifying ideology are threefold: There is a *grievance* (injustice) perpetrated toward one’s group (religious, national, ethnic, gender related, etc.), there is a *culprit* portrayed as responsible for the injustice, and there is a *morally warranted* and *effective* (hence, significance promoting) *method* of removing the dishonor created by the injustice—namely, terrorism—for which the perpetrator is accorded reverence and appreciation from the group. The “ideology” need not be more complicated than that. Yet, upholding some such belief schema is essential because terrorists’ actions (as all human actions) have rhyme and reason in the actor’s eyes, even if others may disagree and consider those unacceptable, irrational, and warped.

**Moral warrants for terrorism.** A major challenge to terrorist ideologies are the injunctions against violence toward innocents that are common to most cultures and religions. To cope with the challenge, terrorist ideologies strive hard to justify the mayhem. Typically, this has been accomplished in two ways: through *semantics* and through *rhetoric*. The semantic approach involves language

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that delegitimizes the targets of one's violence (Bandura, 1999; Bar-Tal, 1990), often by denying them human properties and portraying them as disgusting inhuman creatures (e.g., cockroaches, rats, pigs, or apes) that do not merit the consideration extended to people (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Haslam, 2006).

The *rhetorical* approach involves setting premises that imply either the necessity of violence against a specific target or the allowability of violence under specific circumstances. The necessity of violence is premised on the notion that the enemy's responsibility for harm (to one's group) is fixed rather than malleable and stems from the target's essential nature (Dweck & Ehrlinger, 2006; Halperin, Russell, Dweck & Gross, 2011; Medin, 1989; Yzerbyt, Rocher, & Schadron, 1997). Such presupposition portrays destruction of the enemy as an exclusive method of defense against the inevitable evil that he or she may contemplate.

Consider the following quote from the anti-Tutsi newspaper *Kangura*:

A cockroach cannot give birth to a butterfly . . . A cockroach gives birth to another cockroach . . . The history of Rwanda shows us clearly that a Tutsi stays always exactly the same, that he has never changed. (cited in Bar-Tal & Hammack, 2012, p. 31)

The *allowability* premise pertains to the notion that at times of war, killing enemy combatants is legitimate, and the distinction between combatants and civilians is unsustainable because civilians are potential combatants (they could be recruited or conscripted, thus becoming combatants in effect). Furthermore, civilians bear the responsibility for their government's activities; in this sense they aren't exactly neutral or innocent and hence they constitute legitimate targets for attacks (Ganor, 2002). Both the semantic and the rhetorical justifications of terrorism aim at portraying it as a morally

justifiable, noble, enterprise likely to confer considerable significance on its practitioners.

**Effectiveness-based justifications.** To warrant a sense of personal significance—and to elicit the admiration of others—one's actions must have a fair chance of success. Abject failure only deepens the humiliation and augments the enemy's felt superiority. Accordingly, terrorist propagandists have typically intoxicated their listeners with glamorous success narratives that spelled out the effectiveness of violent struggle and of the inevitable demise of the group's adversary. A well-known narrative, offered by the Russian anarchists of the late 19th century and echoed by the leftist terrorists of the 1970s and 1980s, was that terrorism would reveal the state's impotence and provoke it to excessive countermeasures contrary to its stated values, thereby unmasking its hypocrisy and paving the way to a revolution.

A similar logic underlies Carlos Marighella's manual for the urban guerilla, adopted as "gospel" by urban militants in Europe and South America. A different rationale for the efficacy of terrorism, grounded in the presumed weakness and degeneracy of the West (Buruma & Margalit, 2004), was articulated by Sayyed Hassan Nasserallah, the leader of the Hezbollah, in his "spider web" theory about the mere appearance, but hardly the reality, of Western (Israeli) potency. A similar justification was offered by Osama bin Laden, who in a 2003 sermon stated,

America is a great power possessed of tremendous military might and a wide-ranging economy, but all this is built on an unstable foundation which can be targeted, with special attention to its obvious weak spots. If America is hit in one hundredth of these weak spots, it will stumble, wither away and relinquish world leadership. (reported by Ignatius, 2005, p. A21)

In summary, then, a terrorism-justifying ideology is critical in setting up a belief system that glorifies violence against one's group's detractors and portrays it as an effective and worthy way of making a supreme contribution to one's community that merits vast veneration in the eyes of others and hence provides a profound sense of one's social significance (Rousseau's self-love).

## The Road to Terrorism: From Self-Love to Others' Hate

An important aspect of our theory is that it suggests a functional trajectory from significance quest arousal to terrorism. The goal comes first; that is, the quest for significance is awakened by some circumstance. In response, one initiates a search for means to that goal by turning to one's group hoping for acceptance and respect<sup>4</sup> and embracing its shared norms and values. Because one's sense of significance is grounded in the shared reality of one's group, an immediate response to an awakened significance quest is turning one's attention to the group and focusing

<sup>4</sup> Of interest is that the group in question might be mythical, imaginary, or created expressly for the purpose of the struggle; such possibly was the case with Anders Breivik's invocation of the Knights Templar as a group on whose behalf he committed the July 2011 Oslo massacre.

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on what the group norms demand in a given circumstance.<sup>5</sup> To put it differently, arousal of the significance quest may immediately evoke the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) in that group membership affords one a sense of significance or of “meaning through dedication to an important cause” (Zartman & Anstey, 2012, p. 8). Consequently, the individual is directed toward significance-bestowing pursuits in accordance with the group’s norms and values.

This *collectivistic shift* occasioned by the significance goal has two immediate consequences: (a) the *empowerment effect* (hence, gain in felt significance!) on seeing oneself as part of a larger, stronger entity and (b) the *sacrifice effect*, the normatively based readiness to follow the group norms and/or act on its behalf no matter the price. Consequently, when the group’s ideology is terrorism-justifying, it may prompt the support of violence/martyrdom on the group’s behalf. On the contrary, when the group’s ideology is tolerant and benevolent, it may foster conciliatory and prosocial behaviors. These relations are depicted in Figure 1.

### **Empirical Evidence: On the Failure–Collectivism Relation**

Recently, bits and pieces of evidence have been emerging that are relevant to our theory’s assertions. Consider the notion that loss of significance (e.g., due to personal failure) invites a collectivistic shift,<sup>6</sup> that is, a greater attunement to one’s group and its norms and values. In an Internet survey of 12 Arab countries and Pakistan and Indonesia carried out by the University of Maryland’s START center (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism), we found that participants reporting lower life success, and hence presumably

suffering significance loss, tend to self-identify more strongly as members of collectivities (nation or religion) than as individuals (Kruglanski, Gelfand, & Gunaratna, 2012).

Evidence consistent with this proposition was obtained also in several experimental studies carried out at the University of Maryland (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011). In one experiment, participants wrote an essay describing a personal failure experience or a personal success experience. Subsequently, their national identification as Americans was assessed. As expected, participants in the failure condition reported significantly stronger identification with their nation than did participants in the success condition.

In another experiment, participants were given positive (success) or negative (failure) feedback concerning their performance on a task (of remote associations), and their interdependent self-construal was assessed via the Singelis (1994) scale. As predicted, participants in the negative feedback condition professed a more interdependent self-construal than did participants in the positive feedback condition.

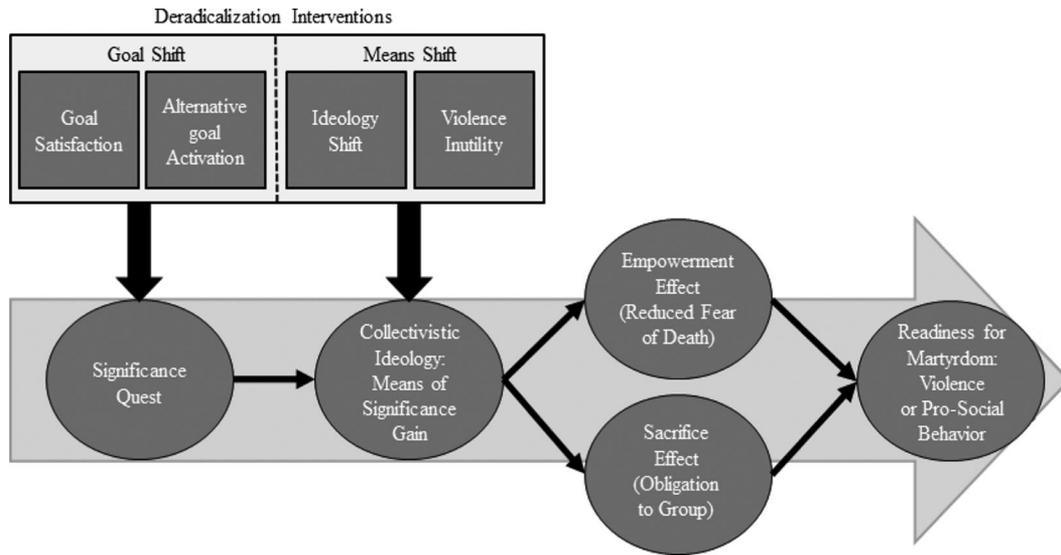
In a subsequent study, participants were randomly assigned to write about either a time in the past when they succeeded on an important personal goal or a time when they failed at such a goal. Participants then completed self-report measures of independent and interdependent self-construal (Singelis, 1994). Consistent with the results of the former study, participants in the failure condition scored significantly higher on the interdependence scale as well as significantly lower on the independence scale than participants in the success condition.

Yet another study investigated the possibility that after failure, participants would prefer to work in a group rather than alone. To test this prediction, we first had participants engage in playing a video game on the computer. They were told that performance on this task had been demonstrated to be a reliable predictor of intelligence and future life success. The video game was rigged so that participants were randomly assigned to either succeed or fail at the task. Following this task, participants were told that they would engage in another task with the chance to win a reward (a chocolate bar). They were told that they had the option of working alone on this task or working in a group. Participants in the success condition were significantly less likely to elect to work in a group than were participants in the failure condition. It seems, then, that failure not only shifts the individual’s mindset from an independent way of think-

<sup>5</sup> Such a group could be a formal organization or an informal network of like-minded friends devoted to a common purpose (Sageman, 2004, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Our present evidence concerns primarily the consequences of a *significance loss*, though a similar process should apply to other sources of arousal of a significance quest, namely the threat of loss and an opportunity for a significance gain. These implications could be profitably pursued in future research.

**Figure 1**  
The Processes of Radicalization and Deradicalization



ing to an interdependent way of thinking but also fuels efforts to engage in collective action.<sup>7</sup>

**Collectivism and fear of death: The empowerment effect.** Concerning empowerment, there is mounting evidence that activating or making salient one's collective identity reduces one's fear of death, which, according to terror management theorists (Arndt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Simon, 1997; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Simon, & Breus, 1994) as well as philosophers such as Ernest Becker (1962) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762/1968), represents anxiety about nonexistence—arguably the ultimate form of insignificance! In one relevant study (Orehek, Sasota, Kruglanski, Ridgeway, & Dechesne, 2011, Study 1) participants were asked to circle either singular first-person pronouns (*I, me, my*) or collective pronouns (*we, us, ours*). In previous research (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Oyserman & Lee, 2008) this manipulation effectively instilled in participants individualistic versus collectivistic orientations, respectively. We found that participants exposed to the collectivistic orientation scored lower on a scale of death anxiety (Templer, 1970). Another study (Orehek et al., 2011, Study 2) used a joystick methodology (Fishbach & Shah, 2006) to implicitly assess participants' attitudes toward death as a function of their exposure to individualistic versus collectivistic priming (via the pronoun technique described above). Previous research had established that the speed of pulling the joystick toward oneself is proportionate to one's approach tendency toward a given stimulus, whereas the speed of pushing the joystick away from oneself is indicative of one's avoidance tendency.

We found that under collectivistic (vs. individualistic) priming, participants pulled the joystick faster toward themselves, and pushed it away more slowly, in response to death-related words, indicating stronger approach and or lesser avoidance of death, as would be predicted by the empowerment effect hypothesized in our theory. Identical results obtained when a different manipulation of collective versus individualistic identity was used, specifically, requesting participants to think of what made them similar to their family and friends (known to induce an interdependent or collectivistic orientation) or about what made them different from their family and friends (known to induce an individualistic orientation, cf. Orehek et al., 2011, Study 4; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991, Experiment 1).

In another conceptual replication (Orehek et al., 2011, Study 5), we employed yet another operationalization of self-construal. Participants read a story about a Samarian warrior. In the independent condition, the warrior was interested in personal reward and prestige. In the interdependent condition, he was interested in loyalty to the group. In the no-prime condition, participants were not presented with reading materials of any

<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, it might be argued that participants in the failure condition had their self-efficacy lowered and as a consequence preferred to join a group (rather than working individually) because they saw the group as helpful in their striving for goal attainment. In a sense, however, this interpretation echoes our notion of the *empowerment effect* that group membership affords. Feeling low in efficacy (hence in significance) thus orients individuals to help-seeking, which typically (though not invariably, perhaps) is social and dependent on others.



**Jo Sasota**

sort. It was found that whereas participants in the independent and control conditions didn't significantly differ—those in the interdependent (and in this sense collectively minded) condition exhibited a significantly lower death anxiety (Templer, 1970).

**The sacrifice effect.** Having one's collective identity activated may result not only in a sense of empowerment and a reduced fear of death but also in a greater readiness to undertake risks and sacrifices on behalf of one's group. In a study by Orehek and colleagues (2011, Study 5), participants primed with plural versus singular pronouns expressed a greater readiness to sacrifice their lives (throw themselves in front of a trolley to save others in a hypothetical scenario) for fellow group members, though not for strangers.

Convergent evidence for these findings comes from the work of Swann and his colleagues (Swann, Gomez, Dovidio, Hart, & Jetten, 2010), who reported several studies in which individuals who were more (vs. less) "fused" with their group were more willing to sacrifice themselves (in a trolley scenario) for the sake of the group, more strongly endorsed fighting for the group, donated more money for a group cause, and put more effort in performance on the group's behalf.

The readiness to fight and make sacrifices on the group's behalf assumes support for such a fight to begin with. In an Internet survey conducted by the University of Maryland's START center in 12 Arab countries and Indonesia and Pakistan and in representative face-to-face research conducted in Egypt, Morocco, Indonesia, and Pakistan, we found that individuals who self-identified more strongly in a collectivistic manner (as members of their religion or their nation) rather than as individuals tended more strongly to support the killing

of American civilians (Kruglanski, Gelfand, & Gunaratna, 2012).

### **From loss of significance to martyrdom.**

If personal loss of significance invites a collectivistic shift, which in turn encourages individuals to fight and make sacrifices on the group's behalf, it follows that suffering a loss of significance, feeling bad about oneself, should augment those tendencies (Zartman & Anstey, 2012). Several of our findings support that idea. In a recent survey we conducted with detained former members of the Sri Lankan terrorist organization LTTE, we found that (a) the degree to which they felt anger in the last few weeks, (b) the degree to which they felt shame in the last few weeks, and (c) how often they felt insignificant were all significantly correlated with the willingness to engage in violent actions and with support for armed struggle against the Sinhalese majority. These findings suggest that a loss of significance (Rousseau's *amour propre*) may prompt support for violence on behalf of one's group.

A loss of significance can occur in various ways. One circumstance in which a considerable significance loss may occur for young unmarried men in a traditional culture is when they entertain sinful thoughts on matters forbidden by their religion. If our theory is correct, arousal of such thoughts may ultimately encourage support for sacrifice and martyrdom for one's group, which are means designed to restore their sense of significance. Recently, we carried out an experimental study that put this idea to experimental test (Bélanger & Kruglanski, 2012). Specifically, we had religious participants exposed to sexual stimuli (scantly dressed women in a Victoria's Secret ad) that were assumed to arouse forbidden thoughts and hence sexual guilt. We first assessed intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity via an appropriate scale (Allport & Ross, 1967). Participants then looked at sexual stimuli or neutral stimuli, and we measured their sexual guilt with the Revised Mosher Sexual Guilt Inventory (Mosher, 1998). We also assessed their support for martyrdom for an (undefined) social cause, including items such as "Under the right circumstances, I would sacrifice my life for an important cause" and "I would be willing to renounce all my personal wealth for a highly important cause." Those exposed to the sexual stimuli who were intrinsically religious evinced more pronounced sexual guilt. What is more intriguing, they evinced greater support for martyrdom as assessed by our scale. Finally, in the sexual stimuli condition the relation between intrinsic religiosity and support for martyrdom was mediated by sexual guilt (our proxy of significance loss), lending support to our theoretical prediction.

### **Quest for Significance and Prosocial Behaviors**

The findings above suggest that when an individual's quest for significance is aroused, the individual may support self-sacrifice, martyrdom, and violence in order to gain significance. Recall, however, that this is driven by a violence-justifying ideology that the individual subscribes to.



**Keren Sharvit**

Clearly, not all ideologies are violence promoting. In fact, some ideologies are emphatically positive and prosocial. They affirm that to gain significance one needs to be kind, tolerant, and empathic. So, it is not the quest for significance as such that drives violence. In alternative instances, the ideology may inspire individuals to perform benevolent and unselfish behaviors.<sup>8</sup> Intriguingly, Rousseau seems to have anticipated this as well. In his terms, “the particular ways individuals seek to satisfy their *amour propre* vary widely depending on what opportunities for recognition their social institutions encourage and permit” (cited in Neuhouser, 2008, p. 158).

Work carried out under the framework of terror management theory suggests that when individuals’ mortality is made salient (known as the MS manipulation), thus threatening fundamental insignificance, priming individuals with positive values increases the likelihood of prosocial behavior. In an early experiment, having participants affirm their belief in the value of tolerance eliminated the effect of MS on the derogation of dissimilar others (Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Chatel, 1992).

More recently, Rothschild, Abdollahi, and Pyszczynski (2009) found in a Christian American sample that although a high level of fundamentalism was generally associated with greater support for military force, exposure to Jesus’ compassionate teachings (e.g., embodied in dictums such as “Love your neighbor as yourself”) plus an MS manipulation led fundamentalists to drop their support for violence to a level equivalent to that of less fundamentalist Christians. Similarly, for Shiite Muslims in Iran, death reminders generally led to more aggressive anti-Western attitudes. However, priming them with compassionate verses from the Koran (“Do goodness to others because Allah loves those who do good”) redirected the response to MS such that it led to reduced

hostility against the United States. In other words, when the quest for significance is awakened, whether a prosocial or antisocial behavior is enacted should depend on the ideology that identifies the means to significance. Producing a shift from a terrorism-warranting ideology to one that identifies alternative routes to significance thus seems essential to eliminating violence. This directly leads to the second part of our story addressing *deradicalization*.

## **Deradicalization: Turning the Significance Quest Around**

The same factors that *radicalize* individuals and turn them into terrorists, may, in reverse, *deradicalize* them and prompt them to leave terrorism behind. Recall that according to our analysis, terrorism on behalf of a collectivistic cause is a means that according to an ideology bestows significance on its perpetrators, hence attaining their goal in that regard. Accordingly, it seems plausible to assume that some factors that affect deradicalization may belong in the means category, whereas others may belong in the goals category. We describe them in turn (see also Figure 1).

### **Deradicalization via Means Shift**

As concerns means, deradicalization may occur because (a) violence is re-evaluated as morally reprehensible and hence likely to bestow ignominy rather than significance, or because (b) violence is perceived as an ineffective means to achieving one’s goal. Terror management theory researchers’ priming of norms of tolerance and compassion may reduce the support for violence precisely for those reasons. These effects occur in the real world, not just in experimental studies. Consider the following statement by a former member of the Basque ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna),<sup>9</sup> interviewed by Fernando Reinares (2011):

During the first months after I was incarcerated, I spent all my time systematically reading up on the Gospels . . . I gradually began to realize I was hearing and responding to the actual words of Jesus of Nazareth. . . Thanks to His grace, I underwent a profound and sincere *conversion* [italics added]. [It] required my *sincere repentance* [italics added] for . . . past behavior, especially activities relating to my prior militancy in ETA. (p. 800)

For this individual, then, violence lost its appeal as means of significance gain because of its, newly realized, moral unacceptability.

The argument that violent jihad is morally opprobrious constitutes a mainstay of the several deradicalization programs aimed at detained terrorism suspects in Muslim nations or countries with significant Muslim populations (Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Singapore, Indonesia, and Iraq). These programs, typically directed by governmental agencies (with their effi-

<sup>8</sup> A somewhat curious example of a significance quest directed toward (perceived) prosocial objectives is the Real Life Superhero movement ([http://www.worldsuperheroregistry.com/world\\_superhero\\_registry\\_gallery.htm](http://www.worldsuperheroregistry.com/world_superhero_registry_gallery.htm)). Members of this group don superhero costumes and perform what they deem to be useful community services (neighborhood patrols, handing out supplies to the homeless, and in some instances actual crime fighting through vigilantism).

<sup>9</sup> In English: Basque Homeland and Freedom.

cacy assessment mostly kept under wraps), aim to persuade the detainees, members of extremist Islamic organizations (such as the Jemmah Islamiyah, Al Qaeda, Abu Sayaaf, and others), that violence against unarmed civilians is contrary to the teachings of Islam and is explicitly prohibited by the Qur'an. This message is generally delivered by Islamic clerics who engage the detainees, over months and years, in a religious dialogue concerning the prohibition against (vs. permission for) violence against civilians.

Successful deradicalization occurred in Egypt, for example, in two major terrorist organizations, Jemmah Islamiyah (the Islamic Group, or IG) in 1997 (whose leaders published no fewer than 25 volumes of exhortations to their followers to abandon violence) and more recently, in 2007, Al Jihad (AJ), a terror organization whose one-time leader was Ayman al Zawahiri, the current leader of Al Qaeda (for discussion, see Kruglanski, Gelfand, & Gunaratna, 2012). The former emir (commander) of the AJ group of Egypt (1987–1993), Sayid Immam Al Sherif (Dr. Fadl), authored a volume titled *Document for Guiding Jihad in Egypt and the World*. Along with other AJ leaders, Al Sherif then conducted a tour of prisons to convince the organization's members to denounce violence.

Successful deradicalization also occurred in Algeria, where the Islamic Salvation Army (Arme Islamique du Salut, or AIS) abandoned violence in the period between 1997 and 2000. According to Ashour (2008),

The AIS had a consolidated, charismatic leadership that was willing to deradicalize. That leadership was influential enough to disarm the 7,000 militants that made up the organization, without causing any splits, as well as influencing several hundreds of militants from other smaller militias and factions. . . . Additionally, the AIS was able to interact with other armed organizations, FIS [Front Islamique du Salut] factions, moderate Islamist figures and political parties to support de-radicalization and reconciliation. (p. 2)

Thus, the moral argument that violence is unacceptable on religious grounds can delegitimize it as a means of significance gain. It is noteworthy that both in Egypt and in Algeria deradicalization occurred in a top-down fashion, flowing from leaders of the organization to the followers. Such a deradicalization process may differ from the case when the counterviolence argumentation is initially aimed at the followers, the relatively minor "foot soldiers," as in several major deradicalization programs (e.g., in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq). Possibly, the leaders are more initially entrenched in their proviolence views than the followers and hence more difficult to dissuade; however, once disabused of their extremist notions their influence over their followers may be considerable and the overall deradicalization impact may be substantial and enduring. In contrast, followers may be easier to turn around initially, yet their conversion may be shallower and less persistent, raising the prospects of recidivism. These matters could be profitably probed in future research.

Even if one did not reject violence on moral grounds, one might relinquish it if it seemed ineffective for advancing the group's goals, bound for failure, and hence unlikely

to bestow glory or significance on anyone. Consider the following statements by a former ETA member, after the Spanish parliament in the fall of 1979 ratified a Statute of Autonomy for the Basques (*Euskadi*) and allowed free elections to the Basque parliament:

Some others will insist that the primary goal ever since we first decided to take up the armed struggle was total independence [as opposed to mere autonomy] . . . . Anyway, no matter how you look at it, independence is not something that was ever going to be achieved by a handful of kill-happy morons, and believe me, because I got to know them well, you're not going to get very far at all, not far at all, down that path. (Reinares, 2011, p. 782)

In summary, deradicalization may occur if one comes to regard one's radical means as morally unacceptable, ineffective, or both.

### **Deradicalization via Goal Shift**

According to our means–ends theory, deradicalization can also occur if one's goals have changed. Specifically, (a) one could prevent or minimize conditions for arousing the quest for significance, (b) one could induce the sense that that the significance quest has been fulfilled already, and/or (c) one could activate alternative, self-preservation goals related to concerns of safety, comfort, and survival, that is, individualistic, self-centered goals that may override the goal of significance, which is dictated by concerns for social standing and respect from others.

Can one ever prevent the arousal of the significance quest? Often one cannot, especially when the loss of significance stems from personal, idiosyncratic reasons. But occasionally one can evade its inflammation by steering clear of acts that humiliate the other. Greater attention to so-called "collateral damage," that is, the killing of uninvolved civilians, avoidance of insulting portrayals (the Danish cartoons come to mind), and avoidance of the kind of prisoner abuse that characterized the infamous Abu Ghraib incident, and that according to international opinions also characterized the treatment of inmates in the Guantanamo facility (Kull, 2007), could help forestall a massive quest for significance restoration that may push many toward terrorism.

Occasionally, deradicalization may happen when the significance quest appears to have been crowned with success; hence the goal of one's strivings has been fulfilled. For instance, according to Reinares (2011), quite a few members of the Basque terrorist organization ETA decided to leave the movement after autonomy for the Basques was granted. One former member interviewed by Reinares explained it as follows:

We reached this point where we had the Autonomy Statute, elections are held, and you say to yourself: okay. . . we got what we wanted, so what sense is there in going on shooting people and planting bombs? (Reinares, 2011, p. 782)

A different case of such gratification occurs when a person comes to feel that she or he has done enough for the cause already. Implicitly or explicitly, she or he may say to herself or himself: "The struggle may continue, but I have

done my share. My significance goal has been accomplished.” A former ETA member put it succinctly:

Look, though, my way of thinking about the armed struggle hasn't changed in the least. But I'd done my fair share, I'd given three years of my life to them as a militant, always at the expense of my personal life. (Reinares, 2011, p. 798)

Typically, the sense that one has done one's share coincides with the emergence of alternative goals outside the realm of the significance quest; typically, these may belong in the self-preservation and comfort category: Love relations, marriage, family, taking care of oneself, happiness, and comfort may play a role here.

Here is the testimony of another former ETA member on this point:

You say to yourself, shit, man . . . I better get myself a life, because time is running out . . . it's a matter of being that much older, and in my case, specifically of wanting to get married. . . . You are going on 40 years old, you're going to get married next year and you say to yourself well, shit, man, I mean at this stage of the game to go packing a piece . . . that would be a bit . . . because you just got to . . . shit . . . well, we've all got to live a bit. (Reinares, 2011, p. 796)

None of this is unique to ETA, of course. The emergence of alternative goals (in the self-preservation domain) appears in interviews with members of the Italian Brigade Rosse (Jamieson, 1990) and with former members of the provisional Irish Republican Army (Horgan, 2005). We (A.K.) recently interviewed a Muslim Filipino from the island of Mindanao, whose nom de guerre was Al Hamdi. Al Hamdi was high up in the Abu Sayaf organization, a Muslim terror group affiliated with Al Qaeda and the JI. He had left the organization, and now he is assisting in attempts to deradicalize his incarcerated colleagues. This is what he had to say:

It became awfully hard to be separated from my wife and the children, and always on the run . . . I missed being there for them and taking care of them, watching them grow up . . . I also missed my work as a teacher . . . my life was hectic and stressful . . . I had enough. (Al Hamdi, personal communication, February 2010)

## **Terrorist Rehabilitation: The U.S. Experience in Iraq**

Critics of the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the “coalition of the willing” often stress its negative impact on the global war on terror. For one, it shifted the focus away from the Afghanistan–Pakistan theater where the brunt of the struggle against al Qaeda should have been directed. Second, by destabilizing Iraq it encouraged an influx of jihadists into the country and inspired the founding, among other groups, of Al Qaeda in Iraq in 2003 by Abu Musab Al Zarqawi. Third, the inhumane treatment of detainees in the Abu Ghraib prison by U.S. military personnel, the news of which reverberated throughout the Muslim world, is generally thought to have played right into the hands of Al Qaeda propagandists, who used it to fuel virulent anti-American sentiment among Muslims that may have radicalized many.<sup>10</sup>

Less widely appreciated are the considerable efforts of the U.S. military to rehabilitate tens of thousands of suspected terrorists in Iraq who were incarcerated in various detention facilities (in Camp Bucca in Umm Qasr in Southern Iraq as well as in Camps Taji, Remembrance II, and Cropper in the center of the country). In the spring of 2007, all detainees in Iraq, regardless of the circumstances of their detention, were treated as enemy combatants. Yet in many cases, the arrests were arbitrary and based on questionable intelligence. The glaring unfairness of this situation created a considerable pool of resentment, breeding a sense of disenfranchisement and humiliation that was likely to be exploited by the few detained extremists.

Task Force 134 (TF-134), drawn from the coalition's military, was charged with detainee command and control, including the rehabilitation program. It was initially led by Major General Douglas Stone and was coordinated through General David Petraeus (for a detailed discussion, see Angell & Gunaratna, 2012). It included around 100 military attorneys and paralegals, mostly from the Navy and Air Force. TF-134 was charged with the determination of whether a detainee was an “imperative security risk” or an “enduring security risk.” Detainees in the former category were encouraged to participate in an extensive deradicalization program, whereas those in the latter category were assumed to be too extreme to be deradicalized and in addition to pose the risk of radicalizing others.

Was the approach to detainee rehabilitation taken by TF-134 psychologically sound? From the present theoretical perspective, the answer seems to be a “yes.” Several of its elements corresponded to ingredients of successful deradicalization as described earlier. Consider the policy of separating the extremist detainees from the general population of incarcerated individuals. Because of the arrestees' anger and humiliation they should be particularly vulnerable to persuasion by ideologies that promise a significance-restoring revenge. In this sense, the separation policy reflects an appreciation of the detainees' psychological state and the process of social influence that may affect them.

Appreciation of the social process and the anchorage of detainees' attitudes in the social networks in which they are embedded is reflected in the policy of involving the detainees' families in the rehabilitation process.<sup>11</sup> A major element of family involvement was the visitation policy implemented by the TF-134 early in 2004. Families were

<sup>10</sup> Consistent with this possibility, in the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib scandal, assaults on U.S. troops (mortar attacks or employment of improvised explosive devices, or IEDs) escalated dramatically, while in detention centers, riots, hunger strikes, disobedience and escape attempts increased in intensity and occurrence (Angell & Gunaratna, 2012, p. 54).

<sup>11</sup> Cultivating good relations with detainees' families and extending them financial and moral support has been a staple of the Saudi deradicalization program (Al-Hadlaq, 2011). Similarly, in Singapore there exists an extensive and effectively organized Interagency Aftercare Group that integrates Malay and Muslim groups (such as Yayasan Mandaki, the Association of Muslim Professionals, and the Taman Bacaan) whose aim is to provide assistance to families of detainees in the form of financial aid, professional training for the wives, and educational subsidies for the children (Angell & Gunaratna, 2012).

able to conduct weekly visitations in which they were permitted brief physical contact with their incarcerated relatives (primarily hugs and kisses with children and wives) and in which they could share with their family members whatever money they had earned though paid works in the detention facility.

Also important was that during the more extended (60 minutes in length) communication period, the detainees and their adult relatives (e.g., wives) were afforded time for “grown up” discussion while their children spent time at a special playground in which they played with unarmed American soldiers. As Angell and Gunaratna (2012, p. 197) described it,

It was incredible to witness the interaction and see how excited the children were to play with the American soldiers. At the conclusion of the 60-minute . . . part of the visitation, every visiting child was offered something to take with him/her. There was always an abundant supply of stuffed animals in addition to clothing, school supplies and toys from which to choose.

### **Alternative Routes to Significance**

Creating favorable (or lessening unfavorable) attitudes toward the United States on the part of detainees’ families represents good social psychology likely to contribute to inmates’ readiness to deradicalize. A more direct way, however, involves provision of alternative routes to personal significance (self-love) that do not call for sacrifices to one’s comfort and survival (love of self) goals as well as persuasion of detainees that the way of violence proffers shame and not significance. The TF-134 projects incorporated several programs designed to accomplish these objectives. Attendance at these programs was voluntary; they included educational courses in Arabic, math, and computer training (all taught by civilian contractors who had backgrounds in education) as well as art activities. Religious dialogues with moderate imams and civic courses were also offered.

How successful were these programs, one wonders? That depends on how one defines deradicalization. Between 2004 and 2008, the cumulative number of released detainees was 49,632, and the cumulative number of reinternments was 3,145, that is, 6.34%. There are also qualitative data to suggest that in some cases, at least, programs instituted by TF-134 had the intended effect. Angell and Gunaratna (2012, p. 376) noted the “significant reduction in violence and increase in intelligence that markedly took place after the initiation of the rehabilitation programs in 2007.” There were cases in which detainees pleaded to stay longer in the detention center to complete the educational classes they were taking. Occasionally, family members implored the center’s authorities to keep their loved ones in detention until their educational training was completed. And one detainee remarked,

When I was detained, I was surprised to hear that there is a school where I can enroll myself. It was an honor to participate. It was run by the American Army who supplied us with textbooks and stationary. I attended an 8 week course where I learned reading and writing and Q’uran reading. . . . My thanks to the education

program and my thanks to Allah. (cited in Angell & Gunaratna, 2012, p. 205)

These impressions are encouraging and probably contain a fair measure of the truth. They are no substitute, however, for careful empirical assessment of factors that contribute to successful deradicalization of terrorism suspects. We recently took a step in this direction in Sri Lanka, as described below.

### **Deradicalizing the Tamil Tigers**

As the U.S. experience in Iraq suggests, some alternative goals and means may emerge for detained individuals under the new circumstances of the detention context. Similarly, many of Reinares’s (2011) ETA interviewees changed their minds as a consequence of new relationships and ideas while in prison. Recently, we systematically tested this idea in a population of incarcerated members of the Tamil Tigers organization in Sri Lanka. For over 30 years, the Tamil Tigers organization (more specifically known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or LTTE) has been one of the most vicious organizations in the entire history of terrorism. It still holds the world record in suicide attacks launched by a single organization, whose victims were major political figures (including Rajiv Gandhi, the prime minister of India, Ramasinghe Premadasa, the president of Sri Lanka, and various ministers, generals, academicians, and journalists).

In 2009, in a decisive push to defeat the LTTE, thousands of the militants were killed and the remaining ones (12,000 or so) were detained in centers where various deradicalization efforts were implemented. Unlike the deradicalization programs in Muslim nations that highlighted the moral inadmissibility of violence against civilians and utilized theological arguments to make their point, the Sri Lankan program focused on equipping the detainees with alternative means to a meaningful existence. Specifically, detainees were assigned to various vocational education programs (including carpentry, construction work, electronics, as well as cosmetics and garment training for women).

We gained access to several thousand of these detainees and were able to administer to them a variety of attitude questionnaires and personality measures. Among these was a measure of positive attitude toward the camp’s personnel (e.g., “The staff treat me with dignity and respect”), positive attitude toward the rehabilitation program (e.g., “The rehabilitation program has helped me”), and support for armed struggle (e.g., “Armed fight is a personal obligation of all Tamils today”). These assessment instruments were administered on two separate occasions, once early on in the program and then 6–9 months afterward. We found that positive change in detainees’ attitudes (from Time 1 to Time 2) both (a) toward the camp’s personnel and (b) toward the rehabilitation program predicted a decline in their support for violent struggle against the Sinhalese, a major component of their terrorism-justifying belief system. Thus, it seems that the degree to which they came to

like and appreciate the personnel and the program affected their degree of deradicalization.

One interpretation of these findings, consistent with our theory, is the following: Realization, through interaction with friendly camp personnel, that the Sinhalese aren't the enemy who divested them of significance may have instilled the notion that striking against them isn't needed (hence isn't an effective means) for significance restoration. Furthermore, realization that the vocational training they received is a valuable tool whereby they can gain a respectful place in their society, and hence a sense of personal significance, may have further reduced their support for violent struggle as means to that end. It is of interest that the shift to a nonviolent means in this case is multipurpose, or *multifinal* (Kruglanski, Köpetz, et al., 2012; Kruglanski et al., 2002): By learning a useful vocation, and leaving violence behind, the erstwhile LTTE militants may have found a way to feel like productive, significant members of society as well as to gratify their concerns for love, security, and survival, thus being able to satisfy their quest for significance (Rousseau's *amour propre*) without giving up on other needs (in Rousseau's *amour de soi même* category).

## Conclusions

Understanding radicalization and deradicalization processes from a significance quest perspective offers policy-relevant guidance for the struggle against violent extremism. Our analysis implies the importance of convincing potential or actual recruits to terrorism (a) that violence is unlikely to confer significance, (b) that alternative means are available that are better suited to that purpose, and (c) that there exist legitimate concerns beyond significance that warrant attention. The first two implications pertain to Rousseau's *self-love* notion. They specifically call for deconstruction of the terrorism-justifying ideology and demonstration of its invalidity.<sup>12</sup> The third implication pertains to Rousseau's concept of the *love of self*. It calls for restoring or elevating individuals' concerns about their security, comfort, and enjoyment of life.

Deconstructing a terrorism-justifying ideology means counterarguing any and all of its component elements. It might require adducing cogent evidence that no injustice has been (or currently isn't being) perpetrated against one's group, that the presumptive culprit is innocent of the alleged harm, and most important, that violence isn't the proper method of redressing the injustice. Effective counterarguing of these propositions should undermine the belief that violence against the designated culprit is significance promoting.

Cogent counterarguing does not mean mere propaganda or "psychological warfare" divorced from realities on the ground; it generally requires action on the level of actual policy rather than mere talk, showing rather than merely telling. This likely necessitates political compromises and concessions (e.g., equitable treatment of disadvantaged minorities, respect for their aspirations for autonomy or statehood). It is actual policies, in the domains of

foreign and domestic policy, immigration programs, and educational campaigns, rather than vague promises that stand the chance of persuading embittered extremists to reconsider their militancy toward putative perpetrators of injustice. It is also true, however, that unexplained actions, even if benevolent and constructive, may be subject to hostile reframings and reinterpretations by one's opponents. Good deeds need to be seen as well as done. Communication and proper framings are as indispensable to effective dismantling of terrorist ideologies as are the actual conciliatory policies that they depict and interpret. The media have a significant role to play in this regard, but it is particularly important to enlist here the cooperation of members of the militants' community that have credibility to its publics and can effectively carry the message of conciliation.

Reducing individuals' commitment to radical activities as a means of fulfilling their significance quest allows the reintroduction of goals in the *love of self* category: concerns with one's family, career, material welfare, security, and so forth. Reactivation of these objectives may instigate the choice of nonviolent activities as multifinal means of achieving the significance quest that also serve alternative life concerns. Vocational education may prepare erstwhile fighters for productive reintegration in society; yet it is also important to set the conditions for their successful reintegration. For in the same way that individuals may radicalize and deradicalize, they may also reradicalize under the appropriate circumstances. In short, their reentry into the community at large and their encounter with their families and friends need to be carefully monitored and studied.

## Coda

The quest for significance, Rousseau's *amour propre*, is a distinctly human passion. Without it, Rousseau often emphasized, people would hardly be distinguished from beasts. The quest for significance is what makes us human, but it does so both for better and for worse. When combined with destructive ideologies, fanned by sweeping social forces, it can plunge us to the nadir of human possibilities, as exemplified by terrorism, yet when coupled with enlightened thought, it can lift us to the summit of our potential, creating great science, great art, and inspiring human relations. A major task of psychology is to lead the way toward the latter outcome.

<sup>12</sup> Assuming that it indeed is invalid. Alternatively, efforts are required to render it so, and it is important to make sure that those efforts show.

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