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Captivated by fear

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Chapter Four

A Theory of Prisoner Radicalization

The body of literature on prisoner radicalization has expanded rapidly over the past years. Much of the work that has been done launches from the assumption that prisons provide fertile soil for radicalization and then sets out to identify factors in the prison context that may make inmates susceptible to violent extremist thought. Brandon (2009b), for example, identified several 'push' and 'pull' factors associated with the risk of radicalization among inmates, including conversion to Islam, gang dynamics, perceived hostility and discrimination by staff or other prisoners, and recruitment. Hamm (2011a; 2013) maintains that radicalization is largely driven by one-on-one proselytizing efforts by charismatic extremist leaders, who actively seek to recruit vulnerable inmates into radical prison gangs. Throughout the literature, factors that are frequently mentioned in association with prisoner radicalization include overcrowding, experiences of discrimination, harsh confinement conditions, gang dynamics, and charismatic leadership (e.g., Brandon, 2009a; 2009b; Cuthbertson, 2004; Dunleavy, 2011; Hannah, Clutterbuck & Rubin, 2008; Neumann, 2010; Spalek & Wilson, 2002).

Although progress has been made in identifying the prison conditions that may be relevant in causing radicalization, much is uncertain about how and why such conditions are supposed to be associated with extremist outcomes. After all, it is not prisons (or prison conditions) in themselves that cause inmates to radicalize: if that were true radicalization would be the rule rather than the exception. Rather, prison conditions can activate social and psychological mechanisms that may, under certain circumstances and for certain individuals, induce a shift toward extremist attitudes and behavior that is then interpreted as radicalization. To assess whether the risk of radicalization is indeed as serious as is generally assumed, it is therefore

important to develop and test theories that specify the underlying mechanisms whereby factors in the prison context may result in radicalization (or other outcomes) and discuss the conditions under which and for whom these mechanisms are likely to be activated or not.

Such models have been developed regarding radicalization among non-confined populations, but not with a specific emphasis on prison populations. As a prominent example of such efforts, Kruglanski and colleagues (2009) developed a theory that explains suicide terrorism as an attempt to obtain or maintain a sense of self-significance in the face of adverse experiences like relative deprivation, humiliation, or discrimination. In this view, such experiences can trigger a quest for self-significance, which people may seek to achieve by fulfilling a meaningful role in the existence of a larger collective. When an ideology is available that justifies or even encourages suicide-terrorism as a means to obtain self-significance, the probability of violent extremist attitudes and behaviors increases. Although Kruglanski and colleagues' model is very useful in explaining violent extremist acts in general and suicide terrorism in particular, it is not designed to explain radicalization within a prison setting and does not specify whether or how specific confinement conditions may induce inmates toward extremism. As yet, much is unknown about when, how, and for whom prisoner radicalization is more (or less) likely to occur. Consequentially, it is also unclear which detention strategies may or may not be an effective means to contain the risk of prisoner radicalization.

As a first step to filling that knowledge gap, in this chapter I unfold a theoretical model that aims to specify the social and psychological mechanisms behind prisoner radicalization, as well as the institutional, social, and individual conditions under which these mechanisms may be activated. Specifically, taking stock of relevant theoretical and empirical knowledge produced in the fields of criminology, sociology, and social psychology, I will develop an argument that explains prisoner radicalization as an unintended by-product of inmates´ attempts to cope with threats to or deficits in fundamental individual needs by joining an inmate group (see Figure 4.1).

In short, I will argue that in prisons where certain individual needs are threatened, inmates may become dependent on membership of a group in order to obtain the necessary means to satisfy those needs. In turn, this dependency might induce extreme identification with the group's norms and values and can induce inmates to assimilate almost completely with the group's identity. This can lead to the emergence of cohesive subgroups that may polarize toward extreme (and sometimes extremist) attitudes and behaviors in order to compete with and emphasize distinctiveness from other groups. When certain conditions are present, specifically a shared

sense of group-based humiliation and identification with a charismatic ideological leader, the probability of extremist groups and radicalization of some – but not all – individual inmates increases. Overall, I suggest that the probability of prisoner radicalization may be lower than is often assumed, but that *if* inmates radicalize it may occur with more intensity and speed than in the outside world.

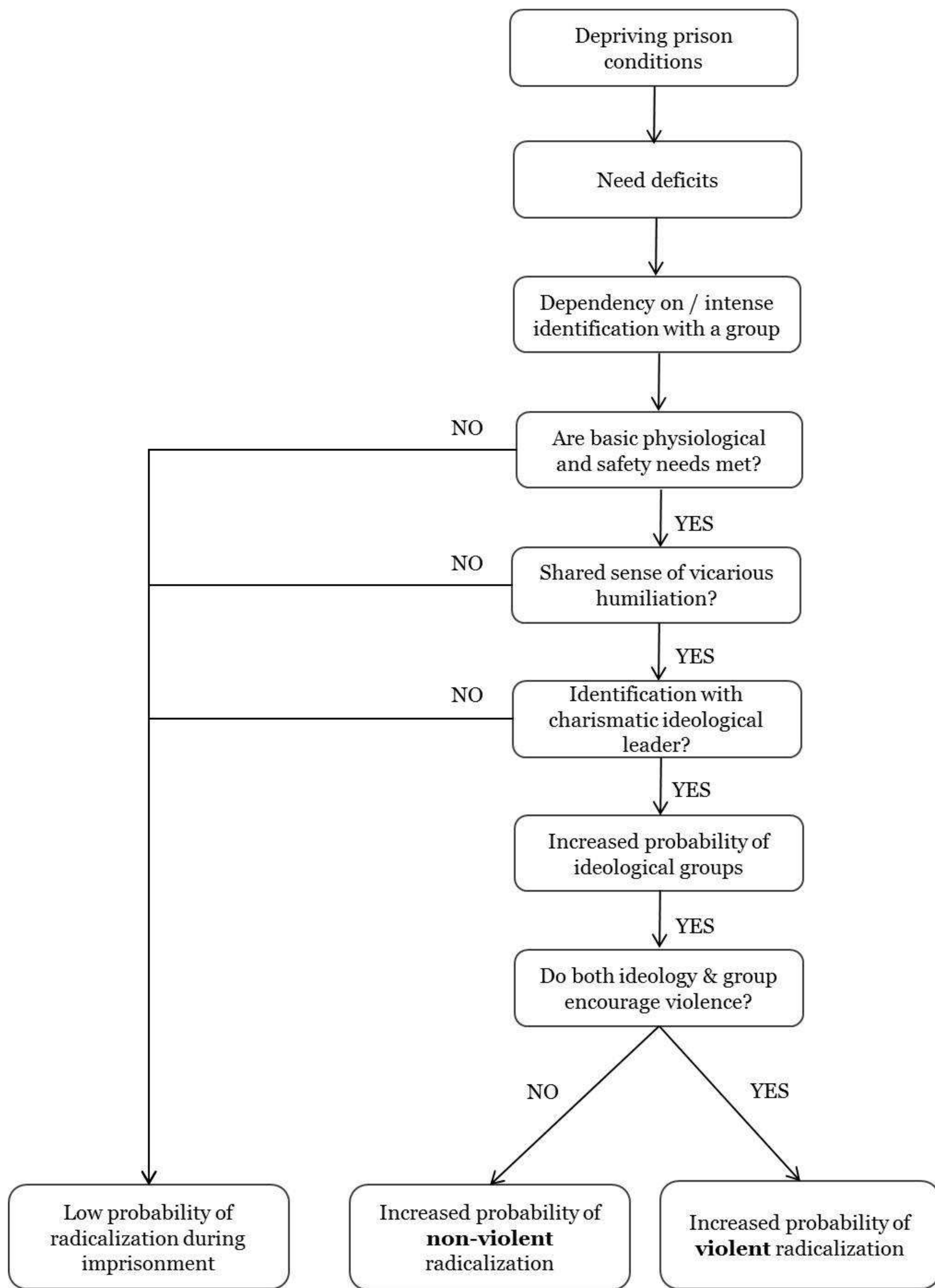

Figure 4.1. *Theoretical model of prisoner radicalization*

Radicalization as a By-Product of Attempts to Satisfy Needs

Imprisonment as a Threat to Individual Needs

Upon entering the prison system, inmates are likely to experience deprivations in several domains of their lives. Sykes (1958; Sykes & Messinger, 1960) famously described how the ´pains of imprisonment´, such as deprivation of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy, and security, can be a source of frustration and deviancy among inmate populations.

Such deprivations can cause threats to or deficits in a variety of fundamental individual needs. One such category of needs include social needs, which are related to people's relationships to other persons. For instance, imprisonment may cause deficits in social needs like the need to belong (e.g., Peacock & Theron, 2007), which reflects a pervasive drive to form and maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In prison, inmates are excluded from society and from frequent interactions with family or loved ones on the outside, which may threaten the stability and continuity of such relationships and may erode their quality as sources of emotional support, belonging, status, and affection (e.g., Klein, Bartholomew & Hibbert, 2002; La Vigne, Naser, Brooks & Castro, 2005).

In a similar way imprisonment may also threaten epistemic needs, which are related to the way individuals process information and construct knowledge, such as the need for structure (e.g., a structured and predictable environment) and the need for cognitive closure (e.g., unambiguous information and firm answers to questions, Kruglanski 2004; Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009; Kruglanski & Webster, 1991; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Prison communities are often characterized by high levels of chaos and violence, regulated by complex systems of formal and informal rules that differ substantially from the outside world (Duffee, 1989). Especially for first offenders, imprisonment may be a disorienting and confusing experience that undermines the need for a structured and predictable environment. In that light it is not surprising that many prisoners experience feelings of disorientation, anxiety and loneliness upon entering the prison system and face existential questions about the meaning and purpose of life (e.g., Maruna, Wilson & Curran, 2006).

In some prisons, the confinement conditions may also cause (severe) deficits in basic physiological needs such as food, water, sleep, and a safe and secure environment. In many

countries, penitentiary services lack financial and material resources to detain inmates under humane and safe conditions[22] (ICPS, 2014). As a result inmates may be housed under divesting circumstances, including high levels of violence and misconduct, poor hygiene, and inadequate access to food, drinking water, or medical care. Overcrowding, in particular, is perceived as an important cause of physical deprivations (e.g., shortage of food and living space), social deprivations (e.g., conflicts and violence between inmates), and epistemic deprivations (e.g., chaos and ambiguous norms) (e.g., Haney, 2006).

Deficits in fundamental needs can have profound consequences for people's well-being. Research has linked failure to satisfy needs to an array of aversive and pathological consequences like depressions and anxiety disorders (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000). People are thus naturally inclined to seek fulfillment of fundamental needs. Kruglanski and colleagues (Kruglanski et al., 2009) discuss a range of needs that may be relevant in driving the motivation for suicide terrorism, which they capture in an overarching need for self-significance. In this chapter I prefer to disentangle the underlying needs and will discuss social, epistemic and physical needs separately in order to examine how confinement conditions can interfere with various types of needs differently and thereby trigger different social and psychological mechanisms of radicalization vis-à-vis other outcomes.

Groups as Resources for Need Satisfaction

For inmates, an important challenge is to adjust to life in prison and to minimize or compensate for deficits in social, epistemic and physical needs. A prominent way to do so is to seek affiliation with a social group, which can provide the necessary resources for needs satisfaction. Studies on inmate communities have long recognized that inmates tend to congregate in subgroups that are formed along shared characteristics like race, religion, nationality, region of origin, association in crime, or previous incarceration experiences, and that these groups fulfill important functions for their members (Caldwell, 1956; Camp & Camp, 1985; Clemmer, 1940; DelLisi, Berg & Hochstetler, 2004; Lyman, 1989). In fact it stands to reason that in prison, more so than in the

[22] The United Nations prescribed international standards for good principles in prison management and the treatment of prisoners, which are formalized in the United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. See for detailed information about prison systems around the world the World Prison Brief; ICPS (2014).

outside world, social groups may monopolize the available means for inmates to satisfy individual needs.

First, groups may be an important source of the means to satisfy social needs like the need to belong and the need for status and affection. Affiliation with a group presents inmates with opportunities to develop and maintain social relationships with other inmates, which can provide sources of belongingness, identification, status, emotional support, and friendship (e.g., Wood, Alleyne, Mozova & James, 2013). Buentello, Fong, and Vogel (1991) describe the process of group formation among prisoners and suggest that ´new´ inmates are likely to seek associations with other inmates to overcome feelings of fear and isolation and to find guidance in adjusting to life in prison. Initially, social relationships with other inmates are sporadic and sustained by a desire for belongingness, social support, and uncertainty reduction, not by commitment to a group (Buentello, Fong & Vogel, 1991). Over time, a loosely tied clique of inmates may come to define itself as a group and start to develop shared norms and behavioral guidelines for its members. As identification with the group intensifies, individual members are likely to assimilate to the group´s defining characteristics and attitudes (social identity theory; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and may become increasingly likely to rely on the group as a provider of resources to satisfy needs.

Second, groups may play an important role in satisfying epistemic needs, by creating a structured environment and offering direction in managing threats and uncertainties and achieving closure and meaning (e.g., Kruglanski, Pierro, Manetti & De Grada, 2006). Skarbek (2012) writes that especially in prisons with large inmate populations, inmates cannot rely on the institution to govern social interactions between inmates. Informal social norms that apply for the entire inmate community are also unlikely to work, because monitoring norm compliance and sanctioning defection is difficult to organize in large populations. To create order in an otherwise chaotic, unpredictable and hostile environment, inmates congregate in smaller groups that regulate the behavior of their members in interactions with others and provide protection and direction in conflicts over resources or status (Skarbek, 2012). This way, group membership can also contribute to reducing subjective uncertainty about individuals' self-concept and social environment and provide guidance as to which behavior is approved or sanctioned (see Hogg, 2001).

Thirdly, groups may become the sole proprietors of the available resources to satisfy physical needs and of goods and services that would otherwise be beyond an individual inmate's reach.

Research on prison gangs shows that such groups often run a clandestine market in contraband products like drugs, alcohol, money, cigarettes, jewelry and food (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Guenther, 1975; Kalinich & Stojkovic, 1985). Inmates without group affiliation are often unable to participate in (large) exchanges and run the risk of being threatened and robbed (Irwin, 1980; Skarbek, 2012). As such, especially in prisons where multiple groups compete over status and scarce resources, inmates may be forced to join a group to secure valued goods and gain protection against the threat of danger from other inmates (e.g., Buentello, Fong & Vogel, 1991; Duffee, 1989).

Dependence and Assimilation

The crux to explaining radicalization is that inmates may become dependent on their group to provide the means for needs satisfaction (and thus to secure their well-being during imprisonment), which can lead to intense identification and assimilation with the group´s defining norms and values.

Dependency on the group can be the result of a combination of push and pull factors. Individual members may be pushed into the group because of depriving prison conditions, which 'drive' individuals toward groups to obtain the necessary resources for needs satisfaction. At the same time, individuals may also be pulled into the group because they lack alternatives and are unable to leave the group (e.g., due to security reasons), or change group membership. When individual movement from one group to the other is impossible, group boundaries are impermeable (see Ellemers, Van Knippenberg & Wilke, 1990; Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, De Vries & Wilke, 1988).

There are several reasons why inmate group boundaries may be impermeable. For example, the ingroup may have a low status and its members may be stigmatized, discriminated and rejected by members of other groups, which makes it difficult to transfer to a high-status group especially when groups are based on stable characteristics such as race or ethnicity (see for a discussion Verkuyten & Reijerse, 2008). In some prisons, group boundaries may be impermeable because groups have polarized toward extremes in order to distinguish themselves from other groups, such that the ideological or attitudinal distance between groups may be too large for individual inmates to exchange one group for the other. In order to emphasize its unique identity vis-à-vis other groups, a group may adopt rather extreme positions on relevant dimensions (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, behaviors), in directions displaced away from outgroups (e.g., Moscovici &

Zavalloni, 1969; Hogg, Turner, & Davidson, 1990). The larger the distance between groups, the more difficult it becomes to switch group membership. Threats from rivaling groups may also cut off possibilities for individual members to leave the group. In his study of gang violence, Decker (1996) argued that the threat of violence (and retaliation against perpetrated violence) strengthens the ties among gang members and increases closeness and solidarity of the gang, and prevents members from leaving the group. Ultimately, external pressures may cause prison groups to take the form of a lobster-trap: it is relatively easy to become affiliated but once inside, it becomes progressively more difficult to leave (see Lindenberg, 1986).

Research shows that high levels of dependency on the ingroup, for instance due to impermeable group boundaries, can lead to very intense identification and corresponding behaviors (Ellemers, Van Knippenberg & Wilke, 1990). Social identity approaches (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) posit that people aim to see the group to which they belong as positively distinct from other groups, because group membership largely determines how they define and think about themselves and the world around them. When they cannot leave their group, people tend to identify more strongly with the group and to see it in a more positive light, so as to maintain a positive self-concept (Ellemers, Van Knippenberg & Wilke, 1990). As a result they will be more likely to assimilate to the group's norms and shared characteristics, and to derogate and discriminate members of other groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Gaertner and Insko (2000) for instance found that among men, dependence on the ingroup enhanced ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination. In a similar vein, Stroebe and colleagues (2005) found that individuals who were dependent on the ingroup were inclined toward ingroup-favoring strategies.

When identification with the group reaches extreme levels, individual members can become willing to go to great lengths to defend the group or prevent being rejected from it. Studies by Swann and colleagues (Swann, Gómez, Huici, Morales & Hixon, 2010; Swann, Jetten, Gómez, Whitehouse & Bastian, 2012) showed that identity fusion, an extreme form of assimilation with the group, could foster "exceptionally high levels of extreme behavior", such as willingness to fight or die for the group (Swann, Gómez, Sevle, Morales & Huici, 2009). In prison, it is often found that inmates are willing to accept substantial personal risks and engage in self-harming acts, such as violent initiation rituals, attacking outgroup members or challenging prison authorities, in order to be allowed to join or remain in the group.

The overall result of such processes of dependency on and identification with groups may be that the inmate population clusters into several highly cohesive subgroups, which compete with each other over scarce resources and polarize on relevant characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors in order to emphasize their own unique identity vis-à-vis other groups. For example, groups may seek to distinguish themselves by being more extreme, more violent, more religiously or ideologically devout than other groups, or by adopting distinctive initiation rituals or defining characteristics like tattoos or clothing. For some groups, an extremist ideology may serve as a defining characteristic that distinguishes the ingroup from outgroups and facilitates identification and the formation of close ties among group members. This does not necessarily mean, however, that individual members are ideologically radicalized and motivated to engage in violent extremist activities. Inmates can have several reasons other than ideological commitment to join (and identify with) an extremist group, including protection or access to physical resources, and may feel closely connected to other group members without necessarily adhering to the group's ideological objectives or strategies. The question that requires exploration, therefore, is under which conditions inmates may be susceptible to supporting and enacting violent extremist ideologies.

Openness to Violent Extremist Ideologies

For inmates, membership of an ideological group may have benefits above and beyond other groups. In prisons that are characterized by an overcrowded, chaotic and violent inmate community, deficits in epistemic need may arouse a heightened need for structure, closure, and ways to deal with threats and uncertainty (see Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). In order to make sense of their environment, inmates may be inclined toward simplistic black-and-white reasoning and may be more open to belief systems that create structure and order, contribute to reducing uncertainty and managing threats, disambiguate complex information, and offer behavioral guidance in social situations (see for a discussion on the functions of ideology Jost, Frederico & Napier, 2009). Studies have for instance shown that situationally induced need for cognitive closure can lead to closed-mindedness and a tendency toward conservative ideologies (e.g., Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski & Sulloway, 2003; Kossowka & Van Hiel, 2003).

Indeed, it is not uncommon for prisoners to experience religious or spiritual conversion during imprisonment (Clear et al. 2000; Clear & Sumter, 2002): adopting a belief system can help inmates redefine themselves as devoted believers rather than as criminals, imbue power and meaning to the prison experience, deal with shame, and restore a sense of control over the future

(Maruna, Wilson & Curran, 2006). Conversion rarely leads to violent outcomes, however (e.g., Hamm, 2009; 2011b). According to Hamm, in most cases prison conversions (to Islam or extreme right-wing faiths) "actually did more good than harm and sometimes even served a de-radicalization agenda" (Hamm, 2011b, p. 4). Individuals who are prone to violent radicalization (and to posing a security threat) may distinguish themselves from the majority of the inmate population on other factors, such as a sense of vicarious humiliation and identification with a charismatic leader.

Vicarious Humiliation

One of the factors that may increase susceptibility to violent extremist ideologies could be the experience of humiliation, in particular the kind of humiliation that is experienced vicariously on behalf of (members of) ones group. Humiliation is frequently forwarded as a driver behind violent radicalization, in particular among Muslims, and several authors have suggested that the contemporary Islamist threat is largely the result of a widely shared sense of humiliation among Muslims around the world (e.g.,Stern, 2003; Veldhuis & Staun, 2009). In some cases radicalization may be driven by personal experiences of humiliation like rejection from the community or damaged honor (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2009), in others, it may be rooted in the belief that the ingroup (e.g., Muslims) are dominated and humiliated by an outgroup (e.g., the West) (e.g., Pape, 2006). Research showed that vicariously experienced humiliation, in which not the self but others with whom one identifies are victimized, can trigger emotional reactions that are equally intense as those experienced in response to personal humiliation (Veldhuis, Gordijn, Veenstra & Lindenberg, 2014). Inmates may seek to attribute their imprisonment or the way they are treated in prison to discriminatory policy and may interpret their situation as yet another signal that the government seeks to humiliate members of their group. Traditionally, extremist prisoners and their confinement conditions have been central in the narratives of violent extremist movements like the IRA (Gormally, McEvoy & Wall, 1993; McEvoy, 2001) and the Muslim Brotherhood (e.g., Kepel, 2002), who have successfully framed the governments' prison policies as unfair and discriminating with the aim to mobilize public support for their political causes.

Experiences of (vicarious) humiliation or rejection can thwart social needs, such as the need to belong (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995), but can also undermine epistemic needs for a comprehensible and structured environment that is free of threats and uncertainty (see for an elaboration Kruglanski et al., 2009). This way, experiences of humiliation may create a fertile

ground for violent extremist interpretations of religions and ideologies, because such ideologies provide a cognitive framework of norms, attitudes, and beliefs that explains how things are, why things are the way they are, and/or how things should be different from how they are (see for a more general discussion on ideology Jost, Frederico & Napier, 2009). Embracing a violent extremist group may thus be a way for inmates to deal with humiliation that comes above and beyond the deprivations caused by imprisonment, and to pursue the satisfaction of social and epistemic needs in the face of adversity.

Identification with Charismatic Leadership

The probability that feelings of vicarious humiliation lead to radicalization may increase substantially when recognized by and shared with others. To channel experiences of humiliation in an ideological narrative and guide the formation of a group identity that revolves around shared humiliation and ideological commitment charismatic leadership may be essential. The literature on prisoner radicalization repeatedly emphasizes the importance of charismatic individuals (e.g., Brandon, 2009b; Warnes & Hannah, 2008; see for a more general elaboration on charisma and terrorism Hoffman & Dawson, 2014). From his studies in prison, Hamm (2007; 2009; 2011a; 2011b; 2013) concludes that charismatic leaders play a key role in recruiting other inmates for violent extremist purposes. In Hamm's words (2008, p. 17-18), "charismatic leaders targeted the most vulnerable – inmates who had spent or will spend much of their lives incarcerated under maximum security and who no longer had contact with family. Angry and embittered by their circumstances, these inmates often adopted anti-authoritarian attitudes and were easily pressed into a gang, where they met an inmate leader who promised hope. Indeed, I discovered that charismatic leadership was more important than other commonly cited factors associated with prisoner radicalization."

Prisons where a sense of vicarious humiliation is widely shared among the Muslim inmate community may be fertile grounds for charismatic influence. Traditionally, scholarship has perceived charisma as a quality that can be possessed by an individual and focused primarily on the impact of leaders on their followers (see for a discussion Fiol, Harris & House, 1999). More recently, authors increasingly acknowledge that charismatic leadership is better conceptualized as a relationship between a leader and his followers (e.g., Shamir, House & Arthur, 1993). Klein and House (1995, p. 183) maintain that "charisma resides in the relationship between a leader who has charismatic qualities and those of his or her followers who are open to charisma, within a charisma-conducive environment".

Studies identified several personal characteristics that distinguish leaders who have the potential to form charismatic relationships with their subordinates, such as prosocial assertiveness, self-confidence, vision, moral conviction, and the use of strong, image based rhetoric (Emrich, Brower, Feldman & Garland, 2001; Klein & House, 1995). At the followers' end, personal vulnerability and uncertainty are often believed to make people more susceptible to charismatic influence (Klein & House, 1995; see also Hamm, 2013). Other studies (e.g., Shamir et al. 1993) suggest that followers may be open to charisma when their values and identities are congruent with their leader's vision. This view resonates with Hogg's (2001) argument that groups can attribute charismatic influence to individuals whom they perceive as prototypical for their group (see also Platow et al., 2006).

Charismatic relationships are particularly likely to emerge under conditions of crisis (e.g., Bligh, Kohles & Meindl, 2004). Aberbach (1995) argued that crisis situations breed uncertainty and alienation, which group members seek to eliminate by identifying with a charismatic leader. This way, identification with a charismatic leader is also connected to attempts to satisfy needs. In times of crisis or threat (e.g., humiliation), people are likely to experience a heightened need to belong (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and a need to reduce threat and uncertainty (e.g., Kruglanski, 2004), which can make them open to the influence of leaders who articulate a hopeful, goal-oriented vision to eliminate the threat. Studies showed that under conditions of external threat or pressures, an increased need for closure (e.g. quick and stable knowledge) can induce a suspension of elaborate reasoning among group members and encourages autocratic leadership structures, which opens the door for the group's leader to shape the group's normative framework and shared identity (see for example Pierro, Mannetti, De Grada, Livi & Kruglanski, 2003). The stronger that individual members identify with the group and its leader, the more they are likely to agree and comply with the leader's suggestions (e.g., Hogg, 2001). This way, charismatic extremist leaders can compel individual group members to conform to violent extremist attitudes and behaviors and thereby induce radicalization among inmates.

Satisfaction of Basic Physical Needs

It may be that there are circumstances under which prisoner radicalization does not occur, even when other necessary ingredients (i.e., high levels of dependency on and identification with the group, shared humiliation and identification with an extremist charismatic leader) are present. It stands to reason that basic physical needs will have to be met, at least to some extent, in order for inmates to take interest in violent extremist ideologies. Under extremely depriving

confinement conditions, with severe deficits in basic physical needs as a result, satisfying these needs is likely to absorb all attention and overwhelm the motivation to satisfy other needs like belongingness or a structured and predictable environment. In his hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1943) contends that individuals are only likely to focus attention and motivation on satisfying higher order needs when physical needs like food, water, and sleep are met. Such instances would (only) concern extreme cases of deprivation, where life in prison is a struggle to survive that leaves little room for 'luxury' goals like establishing and maintaining stable relationships or acquiring ideological knowledge.

If this is true, then the implication is that in prisons with extremely depriving conditions violent extremist groups may still emerge (e.g., as a result of inmates' dependency on group membership and/or groups' tendency to polarize away from other groups to maintain distinctiveness), but that these groups fulfill different needs for their members than under less extreme conditions. When life in prison is a struggle to survive, inmates may be motivated (or forced) to join an extremist group to obtain food, shelter, and protection, regardless of whether they identify and intrinsically adhere to the group´s violent extremist ideology or not. Such inmates may seemingly have radicalized and adopted violent extremist attitudes and beliefs, but such manifestations of extremism may reflect an underlying struggle to survive in prison rather than sincere ideological commitment.

Jones (2014; Jones & Morales, 2012) forwarded a similar argument in his analysis of prisoner radicalization in the Philippines, a country that suffers substantial problems from hazardous prison conditions and prison gang related violence. Jones reasoned that radicalized prisoners might need to leave their extremist views behind upon entering the prison system, because the depriving incarceration conditions may force them to join a non-ideological (e.g., ethnicity or clan-based) prison gang for protection and resources. This way, gang membership could provide violent extremist offenders with a non-extremist prison identity and a sense of belongingness, which can at least temporarily steer them away from violent extremism. In the words of Jones and Morales (2012, p. 220): "therefore, the integration of terrorist inmates into the gangs (…) may cause a psychological detachment from their militant past and result in a new attachment and a sense of belonging to a prison gang".

Conclusion

In this chapter, I aimed to discuss the conditions under which and mechanisms whereby prisoner radicalization may occur. Taking stock of literature in the fields of criminology, sociology, and social psychology I argued that the probability of violent radicalization might increase under conditions where inmates are dependent on group membership to secure the necessary means to satisfy fundamental individual needs, like the need to belong and the need for a structured and predictable environment. When the circumstances are such that inmates are forced to join and remain in a group, for instance because overcrowding and the threat of violence from other prisoners prevent them from leaving or switching group membership, this may induce extreme levels of identification and assimilation with the group's defining characteristics and give rise to the formation of polarized, rivaling subgroups. Under specific conditions, particularly feelings of vicarious humiliation and identification with a charismatic leader who is able to channel shared grievances into an ideological narrative and shape an extremist group identity, the probability of radicalization may increase. This is only likely to occur, however, when basic physical needs are met: in prisons with conditions of extreme deprivations and violence the motivation for ideological commitment may be overwhelmed by the need to secure necessary resources to survive. As such, I maintained that the threat of prisoner radicalization is not given but is only plausible when highly specific situational, social and individual conditions are met.

Problematically, little research is done to examine whether and to what extent such conditions and mechanisms are present in prisons around the world, so that it is wholly unclear how serious the risk of prisoner radicalization really is. Few theoretical models have been developed that aim to specify how violent extremism spreads through the prison system, and such models have not been tested empirically. As such, the overall conclusion should be that although existing research allows for the suggestion that the risk of prisoner radicalization may be smaller than is often assumed, or at least that it is only likely to materialize under very specific confinement conditions, a true understanding of prisoner radicalization can only be achieved through extensive theoretical and empirical scrutiny.

What does this mean for the validity of the rationale behind concentrating terrorism offenders in separate high security regimes as a means to prevent prisoner radicalization? Above all, it means that if our understanding of what causes and drives prisoner radicalization is poor, then our understanding of how it can be prevented – and thus whether concentration can be an effective

strategy – is inevitably also poor. As yet, we simply lack the empirical evidence to claim that such models are necessary to begin with, or under which conditions they may pose an adequate solution.

If anything, the available knowledge hints that housing terrorism offenders together may actually feed in to, rather than eliminate, potentially conducive conditions to radicalization. Concentration models are often accompanied by restrictive prison regimes for terrorism offenders (Neumann, 2010), a finding which certainly holds for the Netherlands, which may arouse feelings of discrimination and humiliation among the respective inmates and their support community and thereby fuel the frustration and anger that lies at the root of extremist violence. Moreover, by detaining potentially radicalized prisoners with like-minded peers the probability increases that a charismatic leader emerges and that the inmates flock together into a cohesive subgroup. Especially when a competing outgroup is salient, for instance the prison authorities or government, the group may polarize even further and adopt even more extremist attitudes. If such processes indeed occur, the ultimate result may be that concentration models run the risk of reinforcing rather than curbing the probability of violent radicalization, which could lead to an enhanced (or at least sustained) extremist threat. Such propositions require further empirical substantiation.

A more pressing question, however, and one that is still open, is whether the risk of prisoner radicalization is indeed as serious as is often assumed (and thus whether specialized prison policies for terrorists might be necessary to begin with). In the next chapter, I aim to take a step toward answering this question.