**The Role of Self-dehumanisation in Radicalisation to Peaceful and Violent Political
Activism**

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Abstract

Taking the significance quest (Kruglanski et al., 2014) approach to radicalisation, this dissertation examined if self-dehumanisation could explain why some people turn to violent radicalism and others to peaceful activism to restore significance in life. I hypothesised that significance loss induces self-dehumanisation which subsequently warrants political violence. Study 1, a cross-sectional online study ($N = 183$), tested the mediating effect of self-dehumanisation on the relationship between significance loss and radicalism/activism. Study 2, an experimental online study with a between-subjects design ($N = 264$) where significance loss was manipulated using a recall task examined the causal links between significance loss and radicalism/activism, additionally testing the moderating effects of group vs. individual significance loss on this association. Study 1 demonstrated positive links between significance loss and peaceful activism, violent radicalism and self-dehumanisation. Dehumanising oneself was negatively related to peaceful activism; no support was found for its association with violent radicalism intentions. Study 2 showed the causal role of significance loss in enhancing peaceful activism and violent radicalism. The moderating effect of group vs. individual significance loss was not supported. This dissertation contributes to knowledge on the mechanisms of radicalisation, demonstrating self-dehumanisation's activism-suppressing role for the first time.

Keywords: Significance quest theory, radicalisation, self-dehumanisation, political violence, activism

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The Role of Self-dehumanisation in Radicalisation to Peaceful and Violent Political Activism

Politically motivated violence is a threat to our security and well-being, no matter the ideology of its perpetrators. There is some agreement on why people radicalise, the main driving factors being different social hardships which cause people to seek for significance in life (Kruglanski et al., 2014). However, it is unclear why some people turn to violent radicalism in their quest for significance and others to peaceful activism. These mechanisms still untangled, the strategies of preventing violent extremism often treat all forms of radicalisation, e.g., resisting oppressive regimes or inequalities embedded in the society, as part of a conveyor belt to political violence (Bötticher, 2017; Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009). Abbas (2018) argues that this can be counterproductive because it stigmatises certain communities, reinforcing marginalisation which is indeed a risk factor for violent radicalisation. He warns that treating all radicalisation as a definite security risk can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. For that reason, it is crucial to examine the mechanisms of radicalisation towards political violence, distinguishing it from peaceful activism.

Many people go through some sort of aversive social experience, a significance loss, which is found to trigger violent radicalisation (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011; Webber & Kruglanski, 2018). Yet, only a few choose violent means to restore significance and meaning. This dissertation advances knowledge on radicalisation by examining why people turn to political violence instead of peaceful activism. In the following section, I will first elaborate on the importance of distinguishing between violent and peaceful political activism and then discuss different social psychological approaches to radicalisation. Finally, I will explain why self-dehumanisation might play a role in radicalisation. The aim of this dissertation is to examine the indirect effect of significance loss on violent and peaceful political activism intentions through self-dehumanisation.

The Importance of Distinguishing Between Violent and Peaceful Political Action

There is little consensus in the terminology around radicalisation, extremism and terrorism. Academics and governments too often conflate these terms (Schmid, 2013; Sedgwick, 2010). This not only makes understanding the phenomena more difficult, but might also influence people's perceptions of threats to security. What many definitions of radicalisation seem to have in common is that it includes a move away from mainstream political attitudes and the goal of profoundly changing the society (Bötticher, 2017; Kruglanski et al., 2017, Schmid, 2013). Many governments' and security agencies'

definitions emphasise the use of violent means to achieve this change (Schmid, 2013). On the contrary, other authors (Moskalenko & McCauley 2009; see also Bötticher, 2017; Schmid, 2013) find it important to further distinguish between violent and peaceful radicalism, suggesting that not all radicalisation necessarily leads to political violence.

In this dissertation, I embrace the distinction between peaceful and violent political activism for several reasons. Firstly, suggesting that all ideologies which deviate from the political mainstream lead to extreme violence tends to construct acts of peaceful resistance and criticism as the first steps towards violent extremism (Abbas, 2018). Prevent, the British national policy to counter violent extremism, is a telling example of why this approach is problematic. The strategy was built on identifying and reporting individuals based on a list of characteristics considered to indicate the risk of extremism (Home Office, 2019a) and it is widely criticised for amplifying Islamophobia (e.g., Abbas, 2018; Kundnani, 2014; Nagdee et al., 2017). Despite a downward trend of referrals for suspected Islamist radicalisation since 2016 and a rise in referrals for suspected right wing extremism (Home Office, 2019b), young Muslims have been disproportionately targeted by Prevent for many years (Abbas, 2018). The second reason for questioning the concept of radicalisation as a conveyor belt to extreme violence stems from studies on the mechanisms of radicalisation which provide evidence supporting the idea that beliefs divergent from the moderate political mainstream do not necessarily lead to violent action (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Jensen, et al., 2018, Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009).

Moskalenko and McCauley (2009) suggest a framework which distinguishes between radicalism - readiness to engage in illegal and violent political action - and activism - readiness to engage in legal and peaceful political action. Schmid (2013) warns that tying the definition of radicalisation to law is not without problems because both mainstream political thought and lawfulness differ from one society and time to another. He argues that what is considered moderate in one society, like advocating for equal rights or democracy, might be different enough from the political mainstream to be deemed illegal in others, e.g., in authoritarian regimes. Therefore, radical is relative (Schmid, 2013; Sedgwick, 2010). In the United Kingdom, where the present study recruits its sample from, democracy and rule of law can be considered the norm in relation to which radicalisation is examined, so I find Moskalenko and McCauley's (2009) framework appropriate.

In this dissertation, I use the terms violent radicalism and peaceful activism to distinguish between radicalisation towards violent and non-violent political activism (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009). The same concepts could also be referred to as non-

normative and normative collective action where norms are defined in the wider society (see Tausch et al., 2011). Even though I also review studies which examine radicalisation towards extremism or terrorism, I do not aim to make inferences about extremism in this dissertation. I follow definitions which consider extremism to be characterised by an additional element of dogmatism and willingness to totally disregard individual freedoms in addition to the goal of fundamentally changing the society which extremism shares with radicalism (Bötticher, 2017; Schmid, 2013). This dogmatism is not reflected in my operationalisation of political violence. However, violent radicalism and extremism share their means to a goal, so considering them similar - at least from the viewpoint of security - could also be justified.

Why Do People Radicalise?

There is no dominant theory about the causes of radicalisation. Earlier explanations tended to place the reasons of political violence inside individuals by looking for abnormal personality profiles or mental illness (reviewed by Horgan, 2003). Webber and Kruglanski (2018) note that the lay audience too might have a tendency to favour these essentialist and pathologising approaches because it provides them comfort, confirming that the propensity for terrorism is uncommon or abnormal. An increasing pool of evidence suggests otherwise, regarding people who resort to political violence as psychologically “normal” and not ascribing extreme violence to any particular personality profiles (Crenshaw, 1981; Horgan, 2003; Horgan 2008; Post, 2010; Victoroff, 2005). There now seems to be agreement about exploring the causes of violent radicalisation in social terms as a more appropriate approach (Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2018; Ozer & Bertelsen, 2018; Webber & Kruglanski, 2018).

Radicalisation researchers' common focus on social forces still leaves room for various different models. In one of the earlier influential conceptualisations, radicalisation to terrorism was described through the metaphor of a narrowing staircase: ground floor represents perceptions of injustice and the final step the terrorist act itself (Moghaddam, 2005). This theory suggests that most people stay on the ground floor, some climb up by looking for solutions, justify violence and finally get recruited into terrorist organisations. According to Moskalenko & McCauley (2009), the staircase model describes a conveyor belt to political violence which is unjustified because radical opinion and violent action are just one “floor” away from each other in the staircase model. Hence, the staircase model, similarly to public discourse on radicalisation, implies that all anti-establishment social movements constitute a security threat because they can lead to violent radicalism.

Moskalenko & McCauley (2009) provide empirical evidence to support the claim that the difference between peaceful activism and violent radicalism is not simply the intensity of commitment to the cause. The authors argue that non-violent and violent activism should rather be considered different dimensions, not steps on the same continuum. In their later paper, they introduce the two-pyramids approach (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017) which distinguishes between radicalisation of opinion and radicalisation of action. Further support for the two-dimensional approach to radicalisation comes from research by Becker and Tausch (2015) and Tausch et al. (2011) who distinguished between normative and non-normative collective action. Tausch et al. (2011) findings suggested that perceived low efficacy and contempt predict non-normative action, whereas group's perceived high efficacy and anger predict normative action. This supports the notion of violent radicalism and peaceful activism being rooted in different causes.

Significance Quest as the Underlying Motivation

But what is the root cause of radicalisation? Empirical studies and theories of violent radicalisation identify aversive motivational states as the underlying force. These include perceived injustice or discrimination (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011; Moghaddam, 2005; Tausch et al., 2011), dissatisfaction (Horgan, 2005), humiliation (Webber & Kruglanski, 2018) or uncertainty about one's identity (Hogg & Adelman 2013). Kruglanski et al. (2014) propose a framework of radicalisation which captures what these different findings and models seem to have in common: the general loss of significance (LoS) as the trigger of radicalisation.

The significance quest theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2014; Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011) explains that unjust humiliating experiences motivate people to search for ways to restore significance in life. This is driven by humans' very universal need for meaning (Heine et al., 2006; Park, 2010), belonging (Baumeister et al., 2007; Stillman & Baumeister, 2009), competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000) or control and feeling good about oneself (Fiske, 2010). SQT has recently been referred to as the "3N" model of radicalisation (Webber & Kruglanski, 2017) where *needs* represent the individual motivation to restore significance, *narratives* stand for violence-justifying ideologies which identify the culprit, and *networks* describe group processes and social influence. Seeking significance drives people to radicalisation because both violent and non-violent radical movements can provide meaning and belonging (Borum, 2014).

Recent studies provide empirical support for the connection between LoS and radicalisation. Some specific significance quest activators, e.g., humiliation and shame (Mahfud & Adam-Troian, 2019; Webber et al., 2018) and social alienation (Belanger & Moyano et al., 2019) have been tested in experimental studies. Moreover, observational research has linked *anomia* (a construct used in sociology for generalised feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and social alienation) to political violence (Adam-Troian et al., 2020) and LoS among actual extremists to the use of violence (Jasko et al., 2016). Evidence supporting SQT comes from studies on various different samples, both culturally and in terms of people's ideologies. Therefore, the key strength of SQT is its wide scope.

Nevertheless, it is clear that significance loss is far more common than violent radicalisation. Why do some people choose peaceful means over violence to restore significance? Webber and Kruglanski (2017) outlined the role of ideology and social networks in addition to the individual quest for significance but they recognise that social networks only partially explain why some people choose violence and others peaceful means. Moskalenko & McCauley's (2009) two-dimensional measurement of radicalisation (Activism and Radicalism Intentions Scale - ARIS) affords the distinction between violent and peaceful political action but their theory lacks causal pathways to the two different forms of political action (Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2018). This dissertation aims to introduce a mechanism that could explain the relationship between loss of significance and different forms of political activism. In the next section, I will elaborate on the potential role of self-dehumanisation in radicalisation.

The Role of Self-dehumanisation

Dehumanisation occurs when people fail to attribute humanness to others (Haslam, 2006). Self-dehumanisation, on the contrary, describes seeing oneself as less than human (Bastian et al., 2013; Bastian & Haslam, 2010). Haslam (2006) proposed two different forms of dehumanisation: animalistic and mechanistic. He argued that likening the other to animals, animalistic dehumanisation, means denying them rationality, logic, self-control and moral sensibility which create the human uniqueness (UH) dimension of humanness and make people uniquely human compared to other species. He argued that mechanistic dehumanisation, i.e., likening the other to inanimate objects, occurs when the other is denied warmth, emotion, agency and depth which belong to the human nature (HN) dimension of humanness. However, the understanding of self-dehumanisation remains far less elaborate.

What has to happen for people to deny humanness to themselves? While studies have examined dehumanisation of different races and ethnicities (Costello & Hodson, 2014; Vaes & Paladino, 2010), social class (Loughnan et al., 2014), dehumanisation of people with mental illnesses (Boysen et al., 2020), refugees (Bruneau et al., 2018) and medical patients (Vaes & Muratore, 2013), self-dehumanisation has received relatively little attention in research. It has been shown to follow immoral behaviour (Kouchaki et al., 2018) and ostracising others (Bastian et al., 2013). Bastian & Haslam (2010) found that belonging might be so central to the human experience that being socially excluded can result in a reduced perception of one's own humanness. Moreover, self-dehumanisation has been shown to be induced by powerlessness (Yang et al., 2015). Both powerlessness and social exclusion are captured in the concept of significance loss (Kruglanski et al., 2014), so it is possible that the loss of significance in life can induce self-dehumanisation.

Self-dehumanisation induced by significance loss could subsequently warrant violent radicalisation. People generally condemn violence and are motivated to view their behaviour as moral (Bandura, 1999), so choosing violent means to restore significance requires something to warrant the violence. The connection between self-dehumanisation and violent radicalisation arises from findings by Kouchaki et al. (2018) which showed that immoral behaviour does not simply cause self-dehumanisation but that dehumanising oneself also leads to further immoral behaviour. Knowing that moral sensibility is part of our perception of humanness (Haslam, 2006), adopting violent means to restore significance could be warranted by perceiving oneself as less than human. In line with this notion, Bastian et al. (2011) found that denying humanity to others lead to perceiving them as unable to inhibit immoral behaviour. If one responds to significance loss by self-dehumanising, they might have a reduced sense of their own moral sensibility, interpersonal warmth, self-control and other human attributes which prevent harming others. Thus, when the need to restore significance is activated but the sense of one's own humanness reduced, violent radicalism could seem more attractive than peaceful activism.

The Present Research

While it is important to counter violent radicalisation, violent and peaceful political action are often conflated in the discourse on radicalisation. This can stigmatise certain communities which might consequently contribute to their violent radicalisation. Therefore, it is crucial to examine why some people further causes important to them through violent and

others through peaceful activism. In this dissertation, I aim to untangle the mechanisms of radicalisation by examining the role of self-dehumanisation in radicalisation.

SQT (Kruglanski et al., 2014) captures what different radicalisation theories and empirical findings have in common – significance loss as the trigger of radicalisation - but fails to explain different forms of political activism (violent vs. peaceful). Moreover, experimental evidence in support of SQT is still limited (Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2018). Moskaleiko & McCauley's (2009) two-dimensional measurement of radicalisation accommodates both peaceful and violent political action but lacks causal explanations for the two different paths. For the first time, this dissertation introduces self-dehumanisation as a possible mechanism which could explain why some people respond to significance loss with increased violent radicalism intentions and others with increased peaceful activism intentions.

In Study 1, a cross-sectional online study, I hypothesised that self-dehumanisation positively mediates the positive relationship between significance loss and violent radicalism intentions (H1) and that the loss of significance is positively related to peaceful activism intentions (H2).

In Study 2, I used an experimental design to test the causal relationship between loss of significance and different political action intentions. I manipulated two different types of significance loss: group-based vs. individual-based. I expected significance loss to enhance both radicalism (H3) and activism intentions (H4). Moreover, I hypothesised that the relationship between significance loss and radicalism intentions will be stronger in case of group significance loss (H5) and that the relationship between significance loss and activism intentions will be stronger in case of individual significance loss (H6).

Study 1

Method

Participants

The participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 34.57$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.64$, 116 women) were recruited on a crowdsourcing platform Prolific for £0.51 compensation. The survey was open for residents of the United Kingdom who were at least 18 years old. The required sample size $N = 183$ was determined using the A-priori Sample Size Calculator for Structural Equation Models (Soper, 2020), assuming medium effect size 0.3, power at 0.8, probability level at 0.05, eight latent and 47 observed variables. I excluded six observations from analysis because the

participant failed to provide a social group name and then opened up new places for participants until $N = 183$ was reached. The data was collected on 9th June 2020.

Procedure and Measures

Both Study 1 and Study 2 were granted ethics approval by the PPLS Research Ethics Committee at the University of Edinburgh. Participants responded to an online questionnaire, introduced as a study about emotions and political behaviour. After providing consent and demographic information, they completed the measures in the order they are presented below. Item order was randomised.

Loss of Significance. LoS was measured using a measure by Webber et al. (2018) which consists of three items (5-point scale; 1 = “Rarely or never”; 5 = “Very often”; $\alpha = .73$) about the frequency of feelings of “humiliation”, “shame”, and “people laughing at them” in daily life.

Self-dehumanisation. To assess self-dehumanisation, I adapted the 8-item measure (e.g., “I feel I lack self-restraint like an animal”, “I feel emotional, responsive and warm”; 6-point scale; 1 = “Strongly disagree”; 6 = “Strongly agree”; $\alpha = .80$) used by Bastian et al. (2013).

Activism and Radicalism Intentions. Participants’ intentions of political action were measured using Activism-Radicalism Intentions Scale (ARIS; 4-point scale; 1 = “Very unlikely”; 4 = “Very likely”; Moskaleiko and McCauley, 2009) consisting four items for non-violent and legal behaviours (e.g., “I would join/belong to an organisation which fights for my group’s legal and political rights”; $\alpha = .86$) and four items for illegal and violent behaviours (e.g., “I would participate in a public protest against oppression of my group even if I thought the protest might turn violent”; $\alpha = .87$). Participants were presented with the following instructions, adapted from Moskaleiko and McCauley (2009):

People care about many different kinds of groups, including the following: religious, economic, political, ethnic, national, gender and lifestyle groups. Please write the name of the particular group the most important to you (write a specific group name, e.g., Catholics, environmentalists, farmers, Conservatives, Scottish, lesbians).

Then, the instructions asked the participants to answer the statements about the group they specified.

Past Activism and Radicalism. To measure past activism and radicalism, I modified the eight ARIS statements and participants indicated if they had ever engaged in the described activities (“Yes” or “No”).

Negative Affect. I measured negative affect using the 20-item PANAS. Ten items measured negative affect (5-point scale; 1 = “Very slightly or not at all”; 5 = “Extremely”; $\alpha = .86$; Watson et al., 1988). Participants were asked to indicate to what extent they have felt a particular way, e.g., “distressed”, over the past week.

Global Self-esteem. To measure global self-esteem, I used the 10-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale (e.g., “I certainly feel useless at times.”; 4-point scale; 1 = “Strongly disagree”; 4 = “Strongly agree”; $\alpha = .86$; Rosenberg, 1965).

Results

I used R 3.6.3 (R Core Team, 2020) to analyse the data. Linear regression analysis showed that neither age ($p = .19$) nor gender ($p = .94$) influenced the strength of the link between LoS and radicalism. The effects of age ($p = .24$) and gender ($p = .91$) were nonsignificant also on the link between LoS and activism. Thus, the demographic variables were not included in further analyses. The five most frequently named social groups were environmentalists ($n = 22$), LGBTQ/lesbians/gays ($n = 8$), anti-racism/Black Lives Matter ($n = 8$), Labour party ($n = 7$) and Catholics ($n = 7$).

Planned Analyses

To test the hypotheses, I used structural equation modelling (SEM) with lavaan package 0.6-6 (Rosseel, 2012), using CFI and TLI > 0.95 , RMSEA and SRMR < 0.05 as the criteria for good fit between models and data in both studies. The standard $p < .05$ criteria was used in all significance tests in both studies. Because of the 4-point ARIS measurement and in order to correct for non-normal distributions of several variables, a weighted least squares–mean (WLSM) estimation was used in all SEM analyses, unless noted otherwise.

Before SEM, the measurement models of latent variables were examined using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The planned two-dimensional measurement model of self-dehumanisation showed poor fit (CFI = .82 , TLI = .73 , RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .07) with UH dimension standardised factor loadings ranging between .23 and .70. To avoid reporting a series of SEMs bound to show poor fit because of this, further analyses were conducted using only HN dimension measurement (CFI = 1.00 , TLI = 1.00 , RMSEA = .00, SRMR = .01).

To test H1 and H2, I first ran Model 1 with no indirect effects: a path from LoS to radicalism and a path from LoS to activism. The results showed an acceptable fit (CFI = .98 ,

TLI = .99 , RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .07). LoS predicted radicalism ($\beta = .27, p = .002$) and activism ($\beta = .25, p = .003$).

To test if self-dehumanisation positively mediates the positive relationship between LoS and radicalism intentions (H1), I fit Model 2, adding the paths for indirect effects on radicalism and activism through self-dehumanisation. Model 2 showed an acceptable fit (CFI = 1.00 , TLI = 1.00 , RMSEA = .03 , SRMR= .07). The results indicated significant positive relationships between LoS and both radicalism ($\beta = .28, p = .001$) and activism ($\beta = .32, p = .001$). LoS also predicted self-dehumanisation ($\beta = .25, p = .01$) and self-dehumanisation was negatively related to activism ($\beta = -.26, p = .01$) and unrelated to radicalism ($\beta = -.05, p = .61$).

In order to test the significance of the mediation, using bootstrapped confidence interval estimates of the indirect effects ($N = 1000$; Preacher & Hayes, 2008), I switched to DWLS estimator. Both indirect effects, LoS on radicalism through self-dehumanisation ($\beta = -.01, p = .73, CI [-.08, .04]$) and LoS on activism through self-dehumanisation were non-significant ($\beta = -.07, p = .17, CI [-.18, -.004]$).

Finally, aiming to isolate the mediating effect of self-dehumanisation, I fit Model 3, adding the following covariates: past radicalism and past activism, self-esteem and negative affect. All proposed paths with standardised parameter estimates are displayed in Figure 1. All fit indices showed an acceptable fit between the model and the data (CFI = .98, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .06), except SRMR, which had the value of .09. Latent variable factor loadings of Model 3 can be viewed in Appendix A.

The indirect effect of LoS on radicalism via self-dehumanisation (controlling for self-esteem, negative affect and past radicalism) was not supported by the bootstrapped confidence interval estimates ($\beta = -.04, p = .053, CI [-.09, .001]$) but the test showed a negative indirect effect through self-dehumanisation on activism ($\beta = -.12, p < .001, CI [-.19, -.08]$).

Exploratory Analyses

Additionally, to examine whether activism leads to radicalism, I used multiple linear regression to predict radicalism based on past activism while controlling for past radicalism and present activism intentions. The regression equation was significant ($F(3, 177) = 55.97, p < .001$) and explained 49% of the variance in radicalism intentions. The results indicated that past activism was not a significant predictor of current radicalism ($\beta = -.04, t(177) = -1.04, p = .30$) when holding past radicalism and present activism constant. Current

radicalism was predicted by past radicalism ($\beta = .32$, $t(177) = 7.45$, $p < .001$) and present activism ($\beta = .36$, $t(177) = 6.17$, $p < .001$) when controlling for the other two predictors in the model.

Figure 1

Indirect effect of significance loss on radicalism and activism intentions through self-dehumanisation, negative affect and self-esteem (Model 3)

Note. $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$

Study 2

In Study 2, my goal was to test the causal relationship between LoS and activism and LoS and radicalism. As the results of Study 1 did not support the role of self-dehumanisation as a mediator, I explored the effects of group vs. individual significance loss radicalism and activism intentions, instead of experimentally testing self-dehumanisation's mediating effects.

The possibility of different types of LoS leading to different political action intentions stems from research on the role of emotions in predicting normative and non-normative collective action. Shadiqi et al. (2018) found that non-normative collective action was predicted by group-based, not self-based emotions. Tausch et al. (2011) demonstrated the relationship between anger and normative collective action and contempt and non-normative collection action. Moreover, anger and contempt are found to result from different forms of

moral violations: the first from violations of autonomy, i.e., hurting individual's freedom and rights, and the latter from violations of community, such as defying the group's honour (Rozin et al., 1999). Thus, LoS concerning one's group could lead to violent radicalism (non-normative collective action) and LoS concerning the individual to peaceful activism (normative collective action).

Method

Participants

I calculated the target sample size with the same tool and values as in Study 1, except for using seven latent and 37 observed variables for this study. Minimum suggested sample size was $N = 170$. Rule of thumb for multigroup SEM is 100 observations per group (Kline, 2005), thus, 300 participants would be required. Due to financial constraints, I recruited 264 participants (147 female, 1 nonbinary, $M_{\text{age}} = 26.69$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.41$), using Prolific and compensating £0.67 each. The inclusion criteria was being a resident of the United Kingdom over the age of 18. The participants of Study 1 were not eligible to participate.

The participants were randomly assigned to three conditions for this between-subjects experimental design. One participant was rejected due to failing an attention check and not following the instructions of another question. Six participants were excluded from the sample because they were unable to recall any humiliating experiences. New places opened up until 264 complete surveys were collected. The data was collected on 22nd July 2020.

Procedure and Measures

Participants responded to an online questionnaire, listed as a study about emotions and political behaviour. After consenting to the study, they provided demographic information and were then displayed the same introductory text about groups as in Study 1 but in this study, they were asked to write the names of three particular groups. Then the participants were randomly assigned to write about either a time when they (individual LoS condition), or one of the groups they had specified (group LoS condition) were disrespected, humiliated or laughed at by others. The control group described their morning routines. In all three conditions, the instructions asked participants to describe the experience and how it made them feel in detail. Webber et al. (2018) used a similar task to induce LoS. Then the

participants completed the rest of the questionnaires in the order specified below. Item order was randomised.

Loss of Significance. LoS was measured using items “ashamed”, “insignificant” and “humiliated”. The latter two were added to the 20-item PANAS (5-point scale; 1 = “Very slightly or not at all”; 5 = “Extremely”; Watson et al., 1988) used in Study 1 with instructions here asking participants to indicate how they feel at the moment. To allow a delay between the manipulation and the measurement of the outcome, participants then also the same self-dehumanisation questionnaire as in Study 1. This delay might be necessary when measuring distant approach-based reactions (activism and radicalism) to a discrepancy, such as the difference between the need to view oneself positively vs. the negative self-view induced by the manipulation (Jonas et al., 2014; also used by Mahfud & Adam-Troian, 2019; Webber et al., 2018).

Activism and Radicalism Intentions. Activism and radicalism intentions were measured using the same items as in Study 1. Participants in the group-based LoS condition were asked answer about the group they had written about and the individual-based LoS and control condition participants were shown the three groups they specified and asked to answer about the group that is the most important to them.

Past Activism and Radicalism. Past activism and radicalism were measured like in Study 1.

Results

Planned Analyses

All analyses were conducted in R version 3.6.3 (R Core Team, 2020). I used linear regression analysis to test if LoS manipulation influenced the reported LoS. The results indicated that the control group reported significantly lower LoS than the individual LoS experimental group ($\beta = -.42$, $p < .001$) but there was no significant difference between the experimental groups ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .77$). Thus, the writing task indeed induced significance loss. Results of a chi-square test indicated that there were no by-group differences in gender ($\chi^2(4, N = 264) = 3.87$, $p = .42$) and one-way ANOVA showed no by-group differences in age ($F(2, 261) = 1.17$, $p = .31$). Moreover, the results of linear regression analyses indicated that the association between LoS and radicalism was not influenced by age ($p = .72$) or gender ($p = .10$). Neither did age ($p = .67$) or gender ($p = .61$) influence the relationship between LoS and activism. The five most commonly identified social groups were environmentalists ($n = 77$), females/women ($n = 33$), Labour party ($n = 27$), British ($n = 25$), farmers ($n = 20$).

In order to test if LoS induces radicalism (H3) and activism (H4), I used SEM in lavaan 0.6-6 (Rosseel, 2012) with WLSM estimation because of non-normal data and 4-point ARIS measurement. I specified two paths: from LoS to activism and from LoS to radicalism. The model showed good fit (CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .05). The results indicated that LoS predicted radicalism ($\beta = .27, p = .001$) and activism intentions ($\beta = .18, p = .01$).

To test the hypotheses which proposed that the association between LoS and radicalism is stronger when LoS concerns one's group (H5) and that the association between LoS and activism is stronger when it concerns the individual (H6), I used multigroup SEM, specifying two models per hypothesis. All models had paths from LoS to radicalism and from LoS to activism. The first models from both model pairs allowed the regression parameter of the path from LoS to radicalism (activism) to differ between the two experimental groups. In the second models, this parameter was constrained to equality across groups. Chi-squares of the constrained and unconstrained model were then compared.

The results showed that the association between LoS and radicalism was significant and stronger in the group-based LoS condition ($\beta = .38, p = .01$), whereas the path was nonsignificant in the individual-based LoS condition ($\beta = .17, p = .24$). Yet, the results of the chi-square difference test indicated no significant difference between the strength of the association between the two experimental conditions ($\chi^2(1, N = 264) = .77, p = .38$). The path from LoS to activism too was stronger and significant in case of LoS concerning one's group ($\beta = .26, p = .02$), compared to individual-based LoS condition where it was nonsignificant ($\beta = .07, p = .54$). A chi-square difference test did not indicate a by-group difference in the association between LoS and activism ($\chi^2(1, N = 264) = .77, p = .38$).

Exploratory Analyses

Like in Study 1, I explored if past activism predicts current radicalism when controlling for past radicalism and present activism. The multiple regression equation was significant ($F(3, 260) = 67.51, p < .001$) and explained 44% of the variance in radicalism intentions. The results showed that past activism does not predict current radicalism ($\beta = -.04, t(260) = -1.18, p = .24$) when holding past radicalism and present activism constant. However, current radicalism was predicted by past radicalism ($\beta = .31, t(260) = 8.03, p < .001$) and present activism ($\beta = .45, t(260) = 8.09, p < .001$) when controlling for the other two predictors in the model.

Discussion

This dissertation aimed to explain why some people adopt violent and others peaceful means to restore significance and meaning in life. Evidence from the present studies supported the positive association between significance loss and increased political action intentions. In line with H2, which suggested a positive relationship between significance loss and peaceful activism intentions, the results of Study 1 demonstrated that significance loss was positively related to both activism and radicalism intentions. Study 1 also found that significance loss is linked to self-dehumanisation and that self-dehumanisation is negatively related to activism but not radicalism intentions. Thus, the results did not support self-dehumanisation's proposed mediating role on the relationship between significance loss and violent radicalism intentions (H1). Findings from an experimental Study 2 showed a causal effect of significance loss on activism (H4) and violent radicalism (H3) intentions, supporting the respective hypotheses. However, the results indicated that the type of significance loss (group vs. individual) does not influence the strength of the associations between significance loss and peaceful or violent activism intentions, failing to support H5 and H6.

Significance Loss Motivates Both Violent and Peaceful Activism

Lacking significance in life enhances political violence intentions. A moderate positive association between loss of significance and radicalism intentions in Study 1 provided initial evidence for this idea and the results from an experimental second study demonstrated causality of the effect: The humiliation manipulation caused higher levels of reported significance loss which predicted violent radicalism intentions. These findings are in line with the Significance Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al. 2014), according to which radicalisation is induced by a loss of significance which activates the significance quest, motivating people to join radical groups and adopt radical ideologies which provide significance and meaning. While there is an abundance of empirical support for SQT from research with actual extremists (e.g., Jasko et al., 2020, 2016; Kruglanski et al., 2019), in a recent review, Gøtzsche-Astrup (2018) emphasised the need for more causal designs.

The present study addressed this and the results fit findings from other recent experimental studies testing the causal role of significance loss in violent radicalism (e.g., Mahfud & Adam-Troian, 2019; Schumpe et al., 2018; Webber et al., 2018). The moderate size of the present effect matches with effect sizes demonstrated by Mahfud and Adam-Troian (2019) and some contexts examined by Jasko et al. (2020). Taken together, my

findings with other recent experimental evidence cannot fully explain the complex process of radicalisation as it entails other factors on multiple levels, like social networks (Jasko et al., 2016) or context (Jasko et al., 2020). Nevertheless, significance loss causing violent radicalism intentions explains the individual motivational force which plays a role in the initial shift towards violent radicalisation. This could inform interventions in psychology and social work.

The present research also provided causal evidence in support of significance loss enhancing peaceful activism intentions. With an equivalent effect size, Study 1 replicated the association between significance loss and activism also shown in some studies by Jasko et al. (2019). Study 2 demonstrated a smaller effect size but it was considerably larger than found by Mahfud and Adam-Troian (2019) in a study examining the mediating role of anomia in the association between significance loss and political activism. This effect size variation might be explained by differences in procedures: in my studies, the participants could freely choose a group and then indicate willingness to participate in collective action in support of it but in Mahfud and Adam-Troian's (2019) studies, everyone answered about the Yellow Vests movement.

This causal link between significance loss and activism fits past research which has found that peaceful collective action can provide a sense of belonging (Bäck et al., 2015) and feeling good about oneself (Becker et al., 2011). Being the first to integrate SQT with research on pro-environmental behaviours, Molinario et al. (2019) showed that significance quest motivates only difficult environmental behaviours like activism but not everyday actions like recycling. The current experimental study adds to this qualitative and correlational evidence, clarifying the causal direction. In addition to political violence, even peaceful political activism can be triggered by adverse social experiences. This notion is an important theoretical extension of the SQT which originally focused on political violence.

Self-dehumanisation's Role in Violent Radicalisation Remains Unclear

Aiming to explain the causal pathways leading to peaceful and violent activism, self-dehumanisation was proposed as a mediator between significance loss and violent radicalism. However, in light of the current results, there is little support for the hypothesised mediating effect. In both studies, self-dehumanisation was negatively related to peaceful activism intentions but unrelated to violent radicalism intentions and the hypothesised indirect effect on violent radicalism via self-dehumanisation was nonsignificant. These results might be explained by the association between the experience of being dehumanised

and cognitive deconstructive states (Bastian & Haslam, 2011) which are characterised by numbness and lethargy (Twenge et al., 2003). Self-dehumanisation's demobilising effects might counteract the activism-inducing influence of the significance quest. Even if self-dehumanisation has some role in warranting violence because the perception of oneself as lacking humanness (e.g., reduced interpersonal warmth, self-restraint or moral reasoning) might make hurting others seem more permissible (Bastian et al., 2013, 2012), the apathy associated with self-dehumanisation might counteract these effects in case of political activism.

Self-dehumanisation's demobilising effect might have been especially pronounced in the present studies because in model specifications, I eventually used only the Human Nature (HN) dimension of self-dehumanisation measurement. In light of Bastian and Haslam's (2010) findings about the HN dimension of self-dehumanisation being more sensitive to social ostracism, one's reduced perception of specifically HN as a response to significance loss seems reasonable. Yet, self-dehumanisation's hypothesised violence-warranting role might be more connected to the Human Uniqueness (UH) dimension which consists of elements like moral sensibility and self-control (Haslam, 2006). Therefore, the failure to provide support for the proposed indirect effect of significance loss on violent radicalism via self-dehumanisation might also stem from the current measurement issues.

Nevertheless, this dissertation extends knowledge on self-dehumanisation's antecedents and outcomes in the context of collective political action. The results showed that self-dehumanisation is related to reduced activism intentions, even when controlling for the effects of negative affect and self-esteem. This indicates that perceiving oneself as less than human has effects distinguishable from general negative feelings. Moreover, associations between significance loss, self-dehumanisation and reduced activism resonate with the argumentation by Bastian et al. (2014) about domestic violence victims experiencing self-dehumanisation which might make them perceive the maltreatment as deserved. Bastian (2019) argued that this can result in reduced motivation to fight back or leave, upholding many abusive relationships.

While the present findings are in line with theorising on abuse victims' self-dehumanisation and studies showing that powerlessness (Yang et al., 2016) and being ostracised (Bastian & Haslam, 2010) cause self-dehumanisation, they are inconsistent with an experimental study which found that self-dehumanisation leads to prosocial behaviour (Bastian et al., 2013). Importantly, prosocial behaviour in that study was operationalised through agreeing to participate in another study which undoubtedly requires less

commitment and energy than political activism. Taken together, our findings converge with relevant past research and support the idea that dehumanising oneself might be induced by adverse social experiences, consequently decreasing motivation to fight injustice. This insight adds to a growing body of knowledge on self-dehumanisation.

The Role of Significance Loss Type in Radicalisation

Contrary to my hypothesis about the moderating effect of significance loss type (group vs. individual), the results showed that the strength with which significance loss increases political action intentions does not depend on whether the humiliating experience is targeted at one personally or at a group important to them. It is important to note that both individual and group LoS manipulations were successful in inducing significance loss: there were no significant differences in reported LoS levels between the experimental groups but the control group did report significantly lower levels. Nevertheless, in the individual LoS group, reported LoS was not a significant predictor of neither radicalism nor activism. Converging with these results, a recent study indicated that individual significance loss was a weaker predictor of violent extremism than collective significance loss (Jasko et al., 2020).

Whereas there is also evidence supporting the positive effect of individual significance loss on violent action (Jasko et al., 2016; Webber et al., 2018), perhaps the present study failed to demonstrate it because of the instructions of the activism-radicalism intentions measure. The instructions in the individual LoS condition - namely, reminding participants of the three groups they specified - might have induced harmonious passion (the goal being well-integrated with other goals and aspects of life; Vallerand et al., 2003) independently of the levels of reported significance loss. Even though the manipulation successfully induced significance loss in both experimental conditions, harmonious (vs. obsessive) passion has been shown to induce peaceful activism (Belanger & Schumpe et al., 2019) and positive emotions (Mageau & Vallerand, 2007). This might have confounded the effects of the significance loss, rendering its links with both radicalism and activism nonsignificant in the individual LoS condition. Thus, the evidence for the effects of significance loss type (group vs. individual) is inconclusive and requires further examination.

Conveyor Belt to Violent Radicalisation?

What do the current results suggest about the concept of radicalisation as a path from significance loss to political violence? Evidence for the roles of self-dehumanisation and type of significance loss in differentiating the pathways to radicalism and activism was

inconclusive. However, the political action measurement model with separate activism and radicalism dimensions showed adequate fit and additional analysis on the predictors of radicalism indicated that past participation in peaceful activism does not predict current political violence intentions over and above past participation in political violence and current activism intentions. This evidence comes from exploratory analyses but it suggests that peaceful protesting might not lead to violent radicalism. Extending Moskalenko & McCauley's (2009) research which found a positive correlation between past activism and current radicalism intentions, the current findings show that there are other variables which might be driving this association. Even though significance loss facilitates both violent and peaceful activism intentions, there is evidence that peaceful activism does not necessarily lead to political violence. Considering the current radicalisation discourse where critical but peaceful movements are targeted in the name of counter-terrorism (Abbas, 2018), this idea is worth echoing in order to improve interventions and avoid stigmatising already disadvantaged groups.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the present findings strengthen existing theories and show associations which had not been tested until now, it is important to acknowledge a few limitations. The combination of current events and the nature of the present sample might limit the generalisability of our findings to other contexts. During the data collection in June and July 2020, there were widespread protests throughout the United States to draw attention to systemic racism and police brutality. Large protests organised by the Black Lives Matter movement were also held across the United Kingdom. As a great deal of the participants identified with social justice issues, like the interests of women, sexual, racial and ethnic minorities, the current events might have influenced what people considered as an appropriate response to significance loss. The present context in which (violent) demonstrations might be more normalised than usual might have pronounced the participants' political action intentions in response to significance loss. Previous studies have shown that radical social contexts support the relationship between significance loss and political violence (Jasko et al., 2020) and that endorsement of protest violence is increased by perceived unjust treatment from the police (Maguire et al., 2018) which is the focus of the current Black Lives Matter protests.

Also importantly, in the first study, there were participants who failed to provide the name of a group important to them or quit the survey after this question. Some also commented that they were reluctant to provide it because they value multiple different groups. This indicates that final the sample might be biased, consisting of people who were comfortable enough to identify a single group which might indicate having a strong identification with the group. Hogg and Adelman (2013) argue that having multiple distinct group memberships can make people resilient to extremism because a complex social identity prevents them from clinging to one group when they are impacted by uncertainty. Thus, there are multiple reasons to view the links between significance loss and political activism intentions cautiously because it might have been amplified due to our participants' stronger identification with a single group than in the general population and because of the current demonstrations. To overcome these limitations, it would be beneficial to examine the same mechanisms in a different context: at a time when protest violence and racialised police brutality are less in focus or with an ideologically different sample.

Another limitation is related to the measurement and effects of self-dehumanisation. The initial two-dimensional measurement model showed poor fit but continuing with a single-dimensional measurement might have failed to fully capture the construct of self-dehumanisation and its proposed effects. Moreover, self-dehumanisation was not experimentally manipulated so it is unclear if it is causally related to the decrease in activism intentions. The present findings could be extended by examining why self-dehumanisation is associated with decreased activism. Considering that recent research has demonstrated the mediating role of moral disengagement in the association between significance loss and political violence (Belanger & Schumpe et al., 2019; Webber et al., 2018), it would also be important to manipulate self-dehumanisation experimentally, controlling for other related variables. Moreover, future studies could take a step back and explore self-dehumanisation's factor structure and its replicability in different samples.

Conclusion

Radicalisation to political violence continues being a threat to public safety in societies worldwide. In order to better prevent political violence and avoid counterproductive interventions, it is important to understand the mechanisms of radicalisation. Recognising this and the importance of the distinction between violent and peaceful activism, this dissertation aimed to answer why people turn to political violence instead of peaceful

activism by examining self-dehumanisation's role in radicalisation. The results of two online studies with British participants showed that the loss of significance predicts both peaceful and violent activism intentions and self-dehumanisation. Even though the findings did not support self-dehumanisation's mediating effect on the link between significance loss and increased violent radicalism intentions, I found that the role of self-dehumanisation in the pathway from significance loss to radicalisation might be suppressing peaceful activism. Being the first to bridge the concepts of self-dehumanisation and radicalisation, this dissertation furthers knowledge on the possible causes and effects of perceiving oneself as less than human. The present studies also contribute to the pool of experimental research which extends the generalisability of the significance quest theory (Kruglanski et al., 2014) from already radicalised extremists to the general population and from violent Islamism to other causes and groups.

Open Practices

Both studies were preregistered. The preregistration, materials, anonymised data and Transparent Changes reports for Study 1 can be accessed at osf.io/5hw8u and for Study 2 at osf.io/jvzmn.

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Appendix A

Standardised Parameter Estimates of SEM for the Indirect Effect of Self-Dehumanisation on the Relationship Between Significance Loss and Radicalism/Activism

Parameter		Estimate	SE	z	p	95% CI	
						Lower	Upper
Loadings							
LoS							
	ashamed	0.81	-	-	-	-	-
	humiliated	0.73	0.10	8.31	0.00	0.64	1.03
	ppl_laughing	0.61	0.12	6.26	0.00	0.51	0.98
Radicalism							
	aris_5	0.77	-	-	-	-	-
	aris_6	0.79	0.09	11.85	0.00	0.86	1.20
	aris_7	0.89	0.09	13.23	0.00	0.99	1.34
	aris_8	0.54	0.10	6.73	0.00	0.50	0.91
Activism							
	aris_1	0.83	-	-	-	-	-
	aris_2	0.82	0.05	18.30	0.00	0.88	1.10
	aris_3	0.88	0.05	22.13	0.00	0.97	1.16
	aris_4	0.91	0.05	23.72	0.00	1.02	1.20
Self-dehum							
	self.d_1	0.54	-	-	-	-	-
	self.d_2	0.58	0.36	4.09	0.00	0.77	2.18
	self.d_3	0.57	0.45	3.39	0.00	0.64	2.40
	self.d_4	0.57	0.41	3.66	0.00	0.71	2.33
Self-esteem							
	self.es_1	0.83	-	-	-	-	-
	self.es_2	0.79	0.05	18.66	0.00	0.86	1.06
	self.es_3	0.71	0.05	16.89	0.00	0.76	0.95
	self.es_4	0.66	0.05	14.59	0.00	0.69	0.90
	self.es_5	0.84	0.04	26.97	0.00	0.94	1.08
	self.es_6	0.80	0.05	19.90	0.00	0.87	1.06
	self.es_7	0.79	0.05	20.80	0.00	0.86	1.04
	self.es_8	0.67	0.05	15.44	0.00	0.71	0.91
	self.es_9	0.88	0.05	23.28	0.00	0.97	1.14
	self.es_10	0.81	0.05	19.54	0.00	0.88	1.08
Neg affect							
	panas_2	0.80	-	-	-	-	-
	panas_4	0.80	0.17	6.19	0.00	0.70	1.36

Parameter		Estimate	SE	z	p	95% CI	
						Lower	Upper
	panas_6	0.63	0.13	5.50	0.00	0.47	0.99
	panas_7	0.70	0.16	5.46	0.00	0.55	1.17
	panas_8	0.56	0.10	5.43	0.00	0.35	0.75
	panas_11	0.47	0.12	4.56	0.00	0.32	0.80
	panas_13	0.73	0.16	5.10	0.00	0.50	1.12
	panas_15	0.77	0.16	5.86	0.00	0.63	1.26
	panas_18	0.64	0.12	6.19	0.00	0.51	0.99
	panas_20	0.68	0.14	5.53	0.00	0.51	1.07
Past radicalism							
	past_aris_5	0.95	-	-	-	-	-
	past_aris_6	0.90	0.06	16.54	0.00	0.83	1.05
	past_aris_7	0.54	0.15	3.87	0.00	0.28	0.86
	past_aris_8	0.86	0.08	11.06	0.00	0.74	1.06
Past activism							
	past_aris_1	0.91	-	-	-	-	-
	past_aris_2	0.74	0.09	8.69	0.00	0.63	1.00
	past_aris_3	0.86	0.08	12.52	0.00	0.80	1.09
	past_aris_4	0.70	0.09	8.25	0.00	0.59	0.95
Regressions							
	radic~ LoS	0.11	0.20	0.58	0.56	-0.28	0.51
	radic~ selfd	-0.12	0.17	-1.05	0.29	-0.50	0.15
	radic~ selfes	0.12	0.12	0.95	0.34	-0.12	0.35
	radic~ negaf	0.19	0.08	1.75	0.08	-0.02	0.31
	radic~ p_radic	0.80	0.08	7.95	0.00	0.49	0.80
	activ~ LoS	0.32	0.24	1.49	0.14	-0.11	0.82
	activ~ selfd	-0.31	0.20	-2.51	0.01	-0.91	-0.11
	activ~ selfes	0.19	0.14	1.37	0.17	-0.08	0.46
	activ~ negaf	0.27	0.09	2.38	0.02	0.04	0.41
	activ~ p_activ	0.72	0.07	9.11	0.00	0.52	0.80
	selfd~ LoS	0.38	0.08	3.39	0.00	0.11	0.40
	selfes~ LoS	-0.74	0.11	-7.85	0.00	-1.04	-0.62
	negaf~ LoS	0.60	0.17	4.82	0.00	0.47	1.12
Covariances							
	radic~~ activ	0.48	0.05	1.63	0.10	-0.02	0.19
	self.es_2~~ self.es_6	0.33	0.04	2.88	0.00	0.04	0.21
	Panas_7~~ panas_20	0.50	0.08	6.68	0.00	0.35	0.65
	Panas_6~~ panas_13	0.12	0.06	2.03	0.04	0.00	0.25

Parameter	Estimate	SE	z	p	95% CI	
					Lower	Upper
p_radic ~~p_activ	0.74	0.07	8.71	0.00	0.50	0.79
past_aris_5~~ past_aris_6	0.27	0.09	0.40	0.69	-0.14	0.21
Indirect effects						
LoS on radicalism via self-d	-0.04	0.02	-1.94	0.05	-0.09	0.00
LoS on activism via self-d	-0.12	0.03	-4.58	0.00	-0.08	-0.12