

**Right-Wing Extremist Radicalization Processes:****The Formers' Perspective<sup>1</sup>****Daniel Koehler<sup>2</sup>**

## Abstract

This study is based on the in-depth analysis of nine narrative interviews with seven former high ranking German right-wing extremists. Giving an intensive overview about the related academic literature on right-wing radicalization processes the findings regarding the individual motivations for entry; belonging and exit are integrated therein, albeit focusing on the first two (entry and belonging). In addition an overarching theoretical radicalization process model is proposed to highlight the findings from the interview analysis. The major finding is, that non-politicized ideals (e.g. justice, freedom) combined with a strong desire for expression are used by radical right-wing groups to attach these to a concrete political program and assignments ('political struggle') to foster a specific internalization of a political ideology and expected behaviour. This creates a closed motivational circle pushing the individuals to the maximum degree of radicalization possible in every individual case.

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<sup>1</sup> This study was originally written in German. The translation into English was mastered by Alexander Craig, Palo Alto California, a dear friend and brilliant philologist

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Diagnosis of the Problem

Studying individual and collective radicalization processes has become a major academic endeavour since 9/11 the latest. With the majority of the academic literature focusing on violent Islamic or Jihadi radicalization processes other radical milieus – such as the right-wing extremist milieu – have been highly underestimated in regard to their potential to threaten and attack societies until the cases of the Norwegian Anders Behring Breivik and the German National Socialist Underground (NSU) brought the dangers from the Far-Right to a wide international audience's attention. Partially underestimated maybe because in some countries it is much harder to differentiate between a legitimate sense of national pride, conservatism or scepticism towards the government and a violence promoting ideology build on racism, xenophobia and nationalism than compared with Jihadism. Germany has seen an almost unbroken tradition of violent right-wing (i.e. neo-Nazism) extremism since the end of the Second World War and a long history of right-wing terrorism since 1968 the latest. Although Germany can be seen as unusually repressive in its legislation (e.g. the banning of the Swastika's public display and the distribution of "Mein Kampf") compared to other Western democracies, the country nevertheless harbours one of Europe's largest, best organized and most violent right-wing extremist movements. This has however not led to a brought and well established academic field of study of right-wing extremism, not to speak of coherent theories about right-wing radicalization processes in general. In addition a major problem off all studies in the field of radicalization is the 'conspicuity-dilemma'. Usually researchers in this field start backwards: looking at individuals or groups clearly marked as 'extremists' or 'terrorists' either because they are convicted as such or are otherwise illegally active. Using the mark of illegal violence or behavior as a first line of determination, the first following questions are usually when and how individuals turn violent in an otherwise non-violent radicalization (i.e. ideologicalization)? Within the mass of people who belong to the ideological kind of terrorists but never turn violent (or not to that extend) it is highly difficult when to regard whom as a potential suspect of a dangerous radicalization process. In other words to look at

the foreground of radicalization processes that already turned violent is often times politically and legally difficult, however necessary. This study aims at explaining how and why individuals became active in the German right-wing extremist environment and how their radicalization process (here: ideologicalization process) led to a specific understanding of the strategic use of violence to foster the political cause. It is important to note that many individual factors came together in the life course of the interviewees, of which no one was born a neo-Nazi, but made to one by certain milieus and groups, as well as through their own decision. At the core of this study consequentially lies a radicalization model which does not aim to explain all occurrences of violent radicalization but to add another dimension to the political and academic debate thereof.

## 1.2 Political and Scientific Relevance

This study should serve as a contribution to the understanding of individual right-wing extremist processes of radicalization. In research on right-wing extremism, the majority of relevant studies restrict themselves to deductive or methodical procedures of action, *e.g.*, the search for certain biographical characteristics in interviews (“profiling”) according to particular theories. The criminal profiles are compared and a search is made in this way for common characteristics, which are then shown as an explanation for the “decline” into the right-wing scene (cf. *e.g.* Frindte & Neumann, 2002c; Hagan, Rippl, Boehnke, & Merken, 1998; Heitmeyer, et al., 1992; Hinrichs, 2003; Husfeldt, 2006; Willems, 1995). This is a problematic beginning which underlies the problem of determinism: from this assumption it is concluded, or at least implied, that the extracted factors lead in their combination to right-wing extremist patterns of attitude and behavior. Yet neither any variance within the factors nor any deviating behavior can be clarified. Thus this study tries to overcome some of the methodological mistakes of previous works.

A thorough understanding of the radicalization process of the individual is the prerequisite for an effective social and political response to the problem of “right-wing extremism.” Only in this way can targeted measures for prevention, containment, or exit-assistance be formulated.

### 1.3 Questions, Goals, and Research Hypotheses

The question of the present study therefore results from this methodical attempt: what similarities (motive, mechanism, *etc.*) are detected in the individual radicalization processes of different former right-wing extremists? The goal is to determine whether and in what way these possible similarities can be transferred to an abstract process-picture or model and, furthermore, to discover the individual motivation(s) of the interviewed person for their early entry into the right-wing extremist political scene. The research hypothesis of this investigation is that existing parallels on an individual level support a radicalization model that is non-ideological, or to more specific: in which ideology becomes a variable that can be analyzed as a factor in relation to other influences.

### 1.4 Procedures of the Investigation and Design

In the course of the examination an initial rough encoding of materials could be carried out with the text-analysis software MAXQDA and be refined into more parallel comparison- and categorization-steps. The resulting abstract categories were then finalized into a coherent model and compared with past research.

Disambiguation followed the introduction (which the Methodology and State of the Research sections already cover). In the center of this examination are the complexes of “right- wing extremism” and “radicalization” or “radicalization-process.” Afterwards, the evaluation of the interview formed the nucleus of the content of the study, and thereafter the results were ordered into the existing state of the research. This method is typical in “Grounded Theory,” in order to build up the independence of the analysis (Charmaz, 2006: 6; Creswell, 2009: 173ff). In this way, every effort is made to prevent certain theories or factors from being found known or unknown in the data. The overall outcome, then, is a discussion of the empirical results, theoretical knowledge, and implications for research and politics.

### 1.5 Theories and Methods

In the course of exploring the principal question, this study will primarily use “Grounded Theory” (GT) as well as qualitative interview-analysis in particular instances. GT was developed by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser in the beginning of the 1960s in Chicago. The goal of Grounded Theory was and is to develop hypotheses to explain social phenomena based on collected data. The testing of those hypotheses was not the primary focus of GT.

The central elements of GT are firstly the categorization and encoding of data-materials and secondly the system of constant comparison of data and codes still in the development phase (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Strübing, 2008). This methodology is, in other words, suitable above all for the innovative generation of theory. GT is typically applied in areas which are still not supported by theories, or at least not sufficiently so or where no a priori hypothesis is to be tested. As will become clear in the literature review in this work (Chapter 4), there is no lack of theory in the research on right-wing extremists. This study will rather emphasize the problems stemming from the multiplicity of such (*cf.* §1.6, 4.4). On account of both the background of the work (right-wing extremism as a fringe-phenomenon, pathological problem, *etc.*) and the common flaws of determinism (*e.g.*, that a collection of biographical factors leads to a right-wing extremist setting), Grounded Theory was chosen as a starting point for this study, trying to approach the research question with no specific theory or hypothesis in mind. Processes of radicalization can thereby stand in the foreground along with motives on the level of individuals, which was rarely the case in preceding theories.

The interviews were conducted by *EXIT Deutschland*<sup>3</sup>, the oldest and largest deradicalization and disengagement program in Germany and analyzed by the author. This separation of data collection and analysis serves to protect the privacy of the interviewees and support the researcher’s objectivity and minimize possible bias. The interviews were

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<sup>3</sup> [www.exit-deutschland.de](http://www.exit-deutschland.de)

semi-structured. This should have increased the likelihood that the information came from the actual experiences of the interviewed person instead of being deduced from the questions (cf. Dick, 1990). None of the conducted interviews have yet been scientifically analyzed. In these interviews, the persons consulted were supposed to develop their narrative themselves and thereby express which events, feelings, situations, *etc.*, were from their viewpoint decisive for their entry into and continued involvement in the right-wing extremist political scene. Naturally, from this method stems the question of “bias / source-of-error.” Could the persons interviewed offer distorted or false responses to their past—either knowingly or unknowingly—in order to justify their behavior to themselves or to others, to avoid consequent punishments, or simply out of shame and feelings of culpability? Or could it be that the individuals lied because they still sympathized with the ideas of right-wing extremism and simply strove for a change of surroundings for other reasons (punishments, *etc.*)? The danger of distortion in the conducted interviews can of course never be completely excluded but was regarded to be very low. In the first place, *EXIT* is a non-governmental organization, meaning that most of the distrust and tactical behavior associated with government institutions vanishes (*EXIT* for example does not protect clients from legal persecution). Second, the interviews were conducted by others who had exited from the right-wing extremist political scene. These interviewers are employed by *EXIT* or are experienced staff, which has a very profound knowledge of the scene. Furthermore, these conversations are a part of a long exit-process of reintegration into democratic society. During this process a special relationship of trust begins to form between the exiting person and *EXIT* as an organization. Fourth and finally, all exit-participants know that the information they supply is kept strictly anonymous and that it will not be used either against them or against their possible friendships in the scene. The interviews were conducted using an extensive ethical consent fully in accordance with the APA’s “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct” agreed upon by both the interviewers and interviewees. In summary, one could in other words say that any motivation for the conscious skewing of information in the interviews is highly unlikely. Nevertheless, the issue of the interviewed person’s subjective perspective still remains: that is to say, how the individual assesses

his/her own strengths and weaknesses as well as how he/she remembers, interprets, and generally interacts with the past. In this work, the subjective perspective of the individual is regarded as a very significant variable.

Other systematic sources of error in the range of interviews were minimized to the greatest extent possible. Both male and female individuals within a wide age-spectrum<sup>4</sup> were chosen. The time spent by the interviewed person in the right-wing extremist scene varied from approximately five to over fifteen years. The interviews dealt with people with very heterogeneous educational and family circumstances and those with both urban as well as rural backgrounds. Both (formerly) high-ranking members as well as “street soldiers”, who stood low in the hierarchy, were interviewed.

The four-fold set of criteria for the selection of interviews was defined as follows: first, a “complete radicalization-process” (understood here as entry, belonging, exit) culminating in a position of leadership or stable involvement in the right-wing extremist scene; second, extensive membership in the scene, *i.e.*, more than five years of *active* participation; third, topicality/coevality, *i.e.*, exit not longer than five years prior to interview; and finally, detailed depth of the narrative.

According to “Grounded Theory” (Glaser, 1978), the researcher should free himself/herself from pre-existing personal hypotheses and theories as much as possible, lest he/she either consciously or unconsciously pursue such preconceptions in the analysis of the existing data. That is naturally only feasible in a limited sense, since each person would have to completely remove himself/herself from all foreknowledge, which (being impossible) would have ultimately been detrimental to the analysis. The data was prioritized as the basis for the analysis and not the current state of the research or the literature. The interviews, consequently, served as the basis for the subsequent encoding and categorization of the contents, in order to formulate the motives of the subjects as well as any similarities or differences in theme between the interviews. The interviews and questionings were examined with text-analysis software (MAXQDA). The goal of this study is not to develop a general “catch-all theory;” for such a “bottom-up” proposal would first require that more

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<sup>4</sup> See “Interviews at-a-Glance” (§7) in the Table of Contents for more on these demographics.

explorative studies be conducted, such as the present work. For the same reason, a quantitative approach is unsuitable. The theories and variables important to a quantitative analysis certainly must first be developed, since, as will be made clear in the course of this study, the present models are inadequate. This suggests that GT would serve most effectively.

Epistemologically, this study, which follows “Grounded Theory,” stems from the approach of pragmatic interactionism (Strübing, 2008: 37ff). Reality, and therefore also the theories which describe it, should be thought of as a consequence of a permanent “power-process” between individuals and social or material objects, which makes understanding behaviors possible and which forms a dynamic pattern or process. In order to make this point clear: “Reality is surely objective, but it is not universal: consequently, there is also no reason to accept a universal criterion for truth which is independent of an agent” (Strübing, 2008: 39).<sup>5</sup>

This emphasizes the interpretive role of the researcher and the innovative power of GT.

## 1.6 Status of the Sources and Current Literature / Orientation of the Research

As with all social phenomena, right-wing extremism is a “complex phenomenon” (Minkenberg, 2000; Schubarth & Melzer, 1993) and therefore is actually a collection of different individual aspects which intersect and influence one another. Provided that these can be identified generally, the real effect or characteristic in the overall system of unknown variables remains mostly unclear. Nevertheless, we can identify three different levels (roughly speaking) of supposed factors in the literature for this influence (cf. Beelmann, Jonas, Zick, & Küpper, 2009). First is the macro-social context in the form of a social framework, as something of a scientific and social state of affairs, or a certain political climate which affects the individual in definitive ways.

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<sup>5</sup> „Realität ist zwar objektiv, aber nicht universell, es gibt mithin auch keinen Anlass, ein universelles, akteursunabhängiges Wahrheitskriterium anzunehmen.“



The second are the micro-social factors, which are by far the most common (*e.g.*, unemployment, gaps in the biography, education, *etc.*). With micro-social factors one must try to identify the particular characteristics of right-wing extremist criminals which could explain the behavior of each person respectively. Between micro- and macro-social factors there are certainly clear interplays (*e.g.* Rippl, 2003: 274), but regardless, they are rarely investigated in the research together because of difficulties in selectivity (*i.e.*, keeping the factors separated and isolated) and the inherent differences of the variables.

A third category of factors for influence could be described as “meso-social.” Among other things, this category includes special group-dynamics or subcultural attitudinal patterns (*e.g.* Beelmann, et al., 2009: 297). The central element of this investigation remains on the individual level and therefore does not, for example, relate to the explanation of right-wing extremist electoral success or popular sympathies. Accordingly, only the factors and theories which can have a known influence on individual radicalization processes appear in the literature overview following the interview analyses. A detailed interpretation and description of the literature will follow in Chapter Four, during the ordering of the results from the interview analyses. As previously mentioned, the deterministic approach in the literature on right-wing extremism exhibits certain problems of method. Deterministic approaches describe either a quantitative correlation (increases in right-wing extremist violence and, *e.g.*, economic depression) or biographical characteristics (age, education, employment, *etc.*), and this constitutes the critical failure of determinism: for the questions pertaining to the motivation of individual radicalization (entry, retention, and escalation) are not explained through abstract variables (such as age, education, *etc.*), since those questions concern two different levels of analysis. Thus, the derivation of personal motivations from quantitative variables is highly problematic.

Macro- and meso-social factors are too abstract, while micro-social variables, as they are mostly derived from interviews, cannot satisfactorily explain either the biographical variance in the right-wing extremist scene or the negative alternative (why other individuals with the same characteristics do not inevitably become right-wing extremists).

## 2. Definition and Clarification of Concepts

### 2.1. Radicalization and its Requisite Processes

The notion of radicalization goes back to the concept of “radical”-ism (Lat. *rādix* = Eng. ‘root,’ ‘cause’) and points to a comprehensive history with different political and social backgrounds. Both the early liberalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as the different political groups in the United Kingdom around the 19<sup>th</sup> century employed this concept in order to distinguish themselves from one another and from the political establishment of the time. The term “radicalization” became more or less popular since 2005 (cf. Sedgwick, 2010: 480) and has been applied in a very heterogeneous way, which is still lacking a consensus on the meaning of the term (ibid.). In one detailed investigation of the history of this term and its relation to the idea of “extremism,” Pisoiu (2011) concludes that there was a need for a self-sufficient concept of radicalism and for a different spectrum combining the political and the religious in order to constitute the fundamental meaning of the concept as presented by Pisoiu: “sweeping change” and “going to the root” (Pisoiu, 2011: 27). The concept of “radicalism” was almost completely abandoned in favor of the idea of “extremism” within the German discourse on right-wing extremism, particularly advanced by the State Office for Defense of the Constitution and Federal Constitution Court (cf. Jaschke, 2007: 16ff) arguing that “extremism” constitutes itself by illegal aggressive action against the state and society, whereby “radicalism” would fall under the legitimate realm of freedom of thought and expression. Contrary to this abandonment, Pisoiu pleads for the retention of the concept in the sense of a comprehensive category, which is no abnormal manifestation of the political system, but which rather arises in the normal political process (Pisoiu, 2011: 29). One can in other words speak of “radical” or “radicalized” individuals and groups, who with recourse to central ground principles (usually well-rooted in tradition) strive for sweeping social change. From this follows the consequence that one should speak of different types of radicalism (ibid.). Pisoiu as well as the German legal differentiation between “radicalism” and “extremism” point to another aspect that is commonly used within the international debate: the concepts of “violent” and “non-violent” radicalization

(cf. Bartlett & Miller, 2012). “Violent radicalization”, meaning the “radicalization that leads to violence” (ibid.: 2) and “non-violent radicalization”, referring “to the process by which individuals come to hold radical views in relation to the *status quo* but do not undertake, aid, or abet terrorist activity” (ibid. italics in original) is usually used to describe legitimate and illegitimate forms of radicalism and radicalization. During the course of the interview analysis another aspect of *radicalism* will be brought forward: *the degree of ideological reflection of the person’s every day life*. Indeed in accordance with the international debate (but in high contrast to the German notion and common usage of “radicalism”) a high degree of radicalization does not equal a high degree of violent behavior or outstanding brutality. What seemed to be a more important element of radicalism is to what extent every life aspect was placed rationally within a certain ideology. This may happen with varying degrees of *intellectual* reflection (e.g. quoting a fascist thinker to explain certain behavior or merely stating to do something because it seemed right). Radicalized individuals do not need to understand and know every philosophical aspect of the ideology but they do have a general sense of correct and incorrect behavior while being part of the scene and adhering to a specific ideology. Of course a radicalization in this sense is a rather normal phenomenon in society, e.g. in sports, or dietary preferences (veganism for example). The important link here is the fusion with a certain type of ideology, that is inherently aggressive and violent, e.g. right-wing extremist ideology, which will be portrayed below in depth (2.2).

The concept of process, derived from the Latin *prōcessus* (Eng. ‘progress,’ ‘a going-forward’) and deeply influenced by natural science, describes a sequence of logical steps which follow from or build upon each other and which have a form and a transformation to a goal with a clearly-definable beginning and end. It is usually subdivided into a process that is at once deterministic (the steps go together causally) and stochastic (the movement between the steps is not constrained) (cf. Ritter & Eisler, 1971). With Pisoiu (2011: 30), we can conclude that this implies strategic action on the individual level of a rational agent for a definite goal continuously towards a succession of different phases. This contradicts, however, the majority of present knowledge about individual involvement in radical groups (for a thorough discussion, see Pisoiu, 2011: 30ff). This work utilizes an idea of process from

the natural sciences starkly different from the sociological conception thereof. This is understood vaguely as a “time-dependent chain of events” (Miebach, 2008), without thereby implying the above-discussed determinism, which here is the reason for the usage of the concept of process. Categories central to a sociological understanding of “process” include time, change, recursivity, dynamism, and structure (*cf.* Miebach, 2008). This corresponds also to the central epistemological idea of “Grounded Theory:”

“...the concept of reality as a process. Reality in the past, present and future is subjected to continuous change, which likewise has its roots in the social process of the interactive construction of objects as in the physical-material dynamism of nature.” (Strübing, 2008: 39).<sup>6</sup>

In this sense a specification of the underlying process should first follow the analysis of the individual perception of each radicalization.

## 2.2. Right-Wing Extremism

The concept of right-wing extremism is highly controversial in research. In an analysis of different studies of right-wing extremism, Mudde (1996) arrived at twenty-six different ways to define the concept, which contained fifty-eight different criteria. In a similar examination of thirteen studies, Druwe (1996) found “only” thirty-seven different partially-intersecting meanings. It could therefore be claimed that the research fails to identify a singular, accepted definition of the term. The concept of extremism (Lat. *extrēmus* = Eng. ‘the most peripheral’) is a product of legal-constitutional discourse, at least in the German-speaking world. Used for the first time in the 1974 Report on the Defense of the Constitution, it was supposed to replace the concept of right-wing radicalism (as the concept of “radicalism” then existed). In this context the word “extremism” was on the one hand clearly attached to the “efforts of the right-wing hostility to the constitution”<sup>7</sup> and on the

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<sup>6</sup> „(...) die Auffassung von Realität als Prozess. Realität in Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft ist fortgesetztem Wandel unterworfen, der seine Ursachen ebenso sehr im sozialen Prozess der interaktiven Objektbildung wie in der physisch-stofflichen Dynamik der Natur hat.“

<sup>7</sup> “verfassungsfeindliche Bestrebungen von Rechts”

other hand described with the categories of nationalism and racism. The concept of radicalism was therefore again attributed to the legitimate sphere of benign democratic opinion-formulation, on the grounds that political opinion cannot be deemed “harmful” unless it terminates in “harmful” criminal actions. The meaning of the term was molded very pragmatically by the Federal Constitution Court in the substantiation of the prohibition of the “Sozialistische Reichspartei” in 1952 and German Communist Party in 1956. In the context of the concept of “defensible democracy,”<sup>8</sup> the authorities in particular applied and spread this usage of the term as implying active, hostile attempts against the constitution (*i.e.*, actions, deeds). In contrast, the scholarship is aware of the action-setting dichotomy (cf. Heitmeyer, 1987) and therefore points to a much more complex dimension of the phenomenon. The scientific discourse is broken down into three levels, or aspects, by Decker *et al.* (2010). First, the issue is often approached from a “center-edge dichotomy.” Here right-wing extremism is viewed in contrast to a “normal” democratic center (Klärner & Kohlstruck, 2006; Pfahl-Traughber, 2000). In this sense, extremism becomes a generic term for the enemies of democracy, or for those on the outermost edge of the political spectrum. This view is problematic, for it implies, on the one hand, a stylization of right-wing extremism as a fringe-phenomenon, and on the other, a clear separation between the center and the fringe, neither of which reflects reality. The second dichotomy pertains to the “right-left opposition” (Funke, 1978; Link, 1991). The extremism theory of Jesse and Backes (U. Backes, 2006; U. Backes & Jesse, 2005; Uwe Backes & Moreau, 1993; Jesse, 2009) fits into this context. This theory set down as a central criterion the ideology of hostility to the constitution, and in the process relied heavily on the definition of “defense of the constitution.” Particularly problematic in this approach is the equation of “left” and “right” as “extremes” equally hostile to the democratic center, since these are therefore interpreted as “normal,” “moderate,” “safe,” *etc.* Moreover, the differences between “left” and “right” are blurred by this method. The third and final dichotomy is that of “theory vs. praxis” (O. Decker & Brähler, 2006), which was already explained above (defense of the constitution vs. the scholarship/science).

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<sup>8</sup> „wehrhaften Demokratie“

A central point which bypasses the described controversy was already set down by Lipset (1959): the definition of right-wing extremism as the opposite of pluralism. This also found entry into the definition of right-wing radicalism by Wagner (2013), which was found by the author as highly valuable in overcoming the above mentioned dichotomies and was consequently used for this study:

“Right-Wing Radicalism is a term for a social reality referring to a family of ideologies, which create organizations, movements, mentalities, fashion, groups and scenes, united by the characteristic constraining of the individual’s freedom as ‘zoon politicon’ and of groups on the account of biological and/or ethnic-cultural reasons and criteria. In addition these elements suspend freedom and dignity, as well as personal rights, in spirit and action, and introduce non-democratic forms of government. Right-Wing Radicalism aspires to create and maintain an order establishing prerogatives for biological and cultural chosen ones thought of as an ethnos, folk or race and to develop a distinctive culture of life, which is thought to be superior and to be established accordingly through morality and legal status, as well as force, ensuring the submission to this order of every participant.” (B. Wagner, 2013a: 3).<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Analysis of the Interviews

Supporting the present work are nine interviews in total with six former members of the German right-wing extremist political scene. All semi-structured interviews were conducted by *EXIT Deutschland* to ensure the privacy of the interviewees and the researcher’s maximum degree of objectivity during coding according to Grounded Theory. The questions were concerned with (1) entry- and (2) exit-processes, as well as (3) the experiences of the subjects from their time within the scene. This rough, tripartite division is

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<sup>9</sup> „Rechtsradikalismus ist (damit definitorisch) ein Begriff für eine gesellschaftliche Realität, die sich auf eine Familie von Ideologien bezieht, die Organisationen, Bewegungen, Zeitgeister, Moden, Gruppen und Szenen hervorbringt, denen es gemeinsam ist, die Freiheit der Person als Zoon Politicon und der von Gruppen in ihrer Gleichwertigkeit aus biologischen, ethnisch-kulturellen Gründen und Kriterien in ihrer Geltung zu beschränken, dazu die Freiheit und Würde, die Persönlichkeitsrechte in Geist und Tat suspendiert und undemokratische Herrschaftsformen einsetzt. Es wird eine Ordnung angestrebt und aufrechterhalten, die Vorrechte bio-kulturell Auserwählter als Ethnie, Volk oder Rasse und die sich eine aparte Lebenskultur schafft, die als höherwertig besser zu stellen ist, mittels spezieller Sittlichkeit und Rechtsstellung sowie mit Gewalt sichert, der sich jeder Teilnehmer an dieser Ordnung zu unterwerfen hat.“

also reflected in the breakdown of the radicalization process into different phases, as follows: entry (Phase I), professionalization (Phase II), and exit (Phase III). However, no definite lines should be drawn between the phases. A precise process-model, derived from the analysis of interviews, will be proposed and explained at the end of this chapter. The analysis of interviews was also broken up into three process-phases for greater clarity, although the model arose first from the analysis of data. Thus a certain sorting of the material follows the proposed model. There would surely be still further ways to present the collected data at this point, but due to the spatial constraints surrounding this work, the sorting model appears here as abridged.

The process-model was developed in parallel to the data-analysis according to the rules of GT (see Introduction). First, several individual interviews were coded as “open,” *i.e.*, all distinctive features, motives, *etc.*, and partially some more abstract codes as well were highlighted with a strict adherence to the text (“*in vivo*”). Next followed the step of “axial coding,” *i.e.*, the identification of central codes (“head-categories”), *e.g.*, “able to speak with someone,” *etc.* The “contrast” of these codes with the later data-material was especially important for the adjustment and correction in the analysis according to GT. The third and last step, “selective coding,” brought together the head-categories and the final “core-categories” containing the highest level of abstraction for the maximum effect on the collected data. The empirical basis for the abstract model was made concrete in the alternating categorization and recirculation of the material.

### 3.1. Phase I – Entry into the Right-Wing Extremist Scene

All interviewed persons described their entry into the scene as a long-term and highly complex process spurred by a variety of motives and influences. On the one hand, often formative influences (above all, an attitudinal pattern) from family and the social environment were identified:



“In principle I believe that family naturally has a huge influence, because it educates each person and accordingly the children and young people as well head in certain directions.” (Interview 1; A: section 2).<sup>10</sup>

Thus, certain ideas (*e.g.*, “the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht*”) often prevail in parents’ homes or among grandparents. In this way there can be contact quite early in one’s life with specific patterns of attitudes pertaining to the Third Reich. Moreover, “conservative values” and to a lesser extent some clear manifestations of right-wing extremist belief (“routine racism”) were described as a type of “first contact,” communicated through parents, circles of friends, or the general social environment (such as sports clubs, *etc.*). This often led to conflicts and problems in school, which typically entailed a recursion to previously-known attitude-patterns. On the other hand, the persons interviewed usually rejected the notion that dependency on a particular path was decisive for their affinity and entry into the right-wing extremist scene, although the social environment’s influence was definitively affirmed:

“Generally speaking, I would certainly say that when I consider people in my social circle from different political inclinations, I can definitely see what family circumstances they come from and what they have now become, in what [political] direction they think, even relating to their work or school—the family definitely has something to do with that. But I don’t think you can specifically say ‘it [the political influence] came from the family-circle and therefore he became a right-wing extremist.’ I find that hard to believe.” (Interview 1; A: section 2).<sup>11</sup>

Naturally, it should not be expected that the interviewed persons would recognize such path-adherence as being noteworthy or even in this case that they would express it. This adherence plays a strong role in the transition from the first to the second phase and from thereon out. Through the movement into different groups, the support of networks and

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<sup>10</sup> „Prinzipiell denke ich, dass Familien natürlich einen großen Einfluss haben, weil sie erzieherisch auf den jeweiligen Menschen wirken und dementsprechend die Kinder und jungen Leute auch in bestimmte Richtungen lenken.“

<sup>11</sup> „Prinzipiell würde ich schon sagen, wenn ich mir Leute aus meinem Umfeld aus verschiedenen politischen Richtungen betrachte, da kann man schon gucken, aus welchen Familienverhältnissen sie kommen und was sie jetzt geworden sind, in welche Richtung sie denken, auch beruflich/schulisch, hat da die Familie sicherlich auch was damit zu tun. Aber ich denke, man kann es nicht speziell sagen, aus dem Familienkreis kam der und deshalb ist er rechtsextrem geworden. Das finde ich schwer.“



also various activities it becomes easier for individuals to take up radical ideas and to spread them forward.

Contrary to this long-term process which is not always reflected in the individuals' responses—*i.e.*, the dependence on or adherence to a set path—other personal motives are decisive for the conscious and desired decision to seek out entry into known groups. Especially prominent was the search for a collective identity, united with individualization and dissociation. The youths (as they were at the time) specifically searched for a community, a sense of belonging or a replacement for their family. Simultaneously with this they wanted to satisfy their longing for a reinforcement of their own personality:

“I think the overarching concept is ‘community.’ I believe this was lacking in our daily company. Each person kind of had to look out for himself. I think that’s the biggest problem for young people. They find community and support in subcultures, but they can also receive these subcultures in extreme contexts. The right-wing scene plays with the lack of perspective of youths, with angst (and especially with angst about the future), and it plays enormously with the concept of socialism... The security of the family is lacking among young people and they strive to find their own support. The search for community is for me the main idea.” (Interview 1; A: section 37).<sup>12</sup>

Not to have to “hide oneself,” to do “something different,” adventure, rebellion or resistance, and mounting a defense against a perceived threat (not the resistance against every authority that is typical among youth) all play an important part. One wants in a group “to do one’s own thing.” From this comes naturally and early-on the impulse to visually separate oneself (style of clothing, tattoos, *etc.*), which is a particular mark of skinhead groups:

“From a gut feeling there was a natural sense of belonging together and...this construction of identity continued in the right-wing scene, and when you

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<sup>12</sup> „Ich glaube der Oberbegriff heißt "Gemeinschaft". Ich glaube in unserer heutigen Gesellschaft fehlt es daran. Jeder ist irgendwie auf sich selbst gestellt. Ich denke, das ist das größte Problem für junge Leute. Gemeinschaft und Halt finden sie in Subkulturen, das bekommen sie aber auch in extremistischen Szenen. Die rechte Szene spielt mit der Perspektivlosigkeit der Jugendlichen, mit Ängsten und Zukunftsängsten, und sie spielt enorm mit dem Sozialismusbegriff. (...) Die familiäre Geborgenheit fehlt den Jugendlichen, und die suchen sie sich Halt. Gemeinschaftssuche ist für mich der Oberbegriff.“

enter you wear the insignia and everyone can immediately see who you are...on the street. That's how it is. That was exactly the feeling." (Interview 8; F; page 3).<sup>13</sup>

This individual need is a part of the most extreme, important motivation for all those persons interviewed: the desire for expression. To express oneself, to discuss personal views, to present opinions, or furthermore to collectively "exist for a thing" was a central drive to entry into the right-wing scene:

"It was, it was from that point an interesting evening... we speak right now for now really only about the evening... it was in other words really interesting to have many people right there around me, from whom I didn't have to hide myself, from whom I didn't have to hide my opinions... Then it was also really interesting, to be able to suddenly speak with someone about my opinions. Looking back I would also definitely say that there were about four or five truly intelligent people there, with whom you could really talk about things. At the time I realized that there was one with whom I could really have a talk about my opinions, about...yes, just that kind of thing." (Interview 8; F; page 2).<sup>14</sup>

These "opinions of one's own" relate to one's pre-existing conceptions of self-worth or the point of one's life, both of which supplement the expression of the second central foundation for the motivation towards entry. Concepts such as "national pride," "family-worth," "community," "homeland," "idealism," "camaraderie," but also "justice", "freedom" or "social change" are, on the one hand, already existing, and on the other, experienced as strong pulls to the right-wing extremist scene, since right-wing extremism claims these values as its own. All persons interviewed described the "loss of value" in their society,

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<sup>13</sup> „Vom Bauchgefühl her war das natürlich ein Zusammengehörigkeitsempfinden und... dieses Identitätsbildende halt auch wieder...ne Szene in die man reinkommt und wenn man deren Insignien trägt wie jeder sofort sieht wer man ist ... auf der Straße. Ist ja so. Das war so das Bauchgefühl.“

<sup>14</sup> „Es war, es war von daher ein interessanter Abend als dass da... wir reden jetzt ja erstmal wirklich nur von dem Abend... es war also wirklich interessant auf einmal ganz viele Leute um mich rum zu haben, vor denen ich mich nicht verstecken brauchte, vor denen ich meine Ansichten nicht verstecken brauchte... Dann war's auch sehr interessant, plötzlich auch mit jemandem über meine Ansichten sprechen zu können. Also rückblickend würde ich schon sagen, dass da ungefähr vier oder fünf wirklich intelligente Leute da waren, mit denen man wirklich über Dinge reden konnte. Zu dem Zeitpunkt habe ich festgestellt, dass da einer war, mit dem ich mich wirklich unterhalten konnte, über meine Ansichten, über... ja, solche Sachen eben.“

which they sought to balance by a targeted search for value-oriented or otherwise “meaningful” surroundings:

“I think in our daily community there is generally a lack of certain social elements, which means that each person is uh, uhm, inward-minded, naturally success-oriented and since it isn’t natural for adults, I’d just say, to offer free consultation hours to other adults for problems or even any *Spielkurse\** or common *Spielrunde\** with children, for one to offer himself for something except, I would say, for kindergarten day-care, that one is there for someone, that is naturally a part of a popular, uhm, even a part of a sense of being a people.” [\* *Spielkurse* / *Spielrunde*: play-date groups, specifically where mothers socialize while the children play together] (Interview 3; A; section 16).<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, we can often see the effects of random occurrences in the entry-phase. One meets certain people at a party, encounters a conversation in a chat-room, undergoes critical experiences (e.g., physical violence from left-extremism), etc.:

“If that had at that time been Greenpeace in the chat, maybe today I would be working for Greenpeace. It wouldn’t have mattered then at all whether right, left, up, down. I wouldn’t have cared at all...” (Interview 4; B; section 166).<sup>16</sup>

These purely random contacts and experiences contribute to entry to a certain degree and they create possibilities (through contacts or formative experiences) for further involvement in or exposure to the scene. However, chance and accident should not be overvalued. Its effect was only as an accelerant and not as a fundamental facilitation to entry. All individuals made their decisions to approach and to enter into the scene consciously and with a specific goal in mind.

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<sup>15</sup> „Ich denke in unserer heutigen Gesellschaft allgemein fehlt es an bestimmten sozialen Elementen, das heißt jeder ist für sich so ein bisschen äh ähm in sich gekehrt, natürlich erfolgsorientiert und da ist es nicht selbstverständlich, dass Eltern umsonst sag ich mal Sprechstunden anderen Eltern anbieten für Probleme oder sogar irgendwelche Spielkurse oder gemeinsame Spielrunden mit den Kindern, dass man sich auch außer sag ich mal den Kindergartenzeiten auch was anbietet, dass man für einander da ist, dass ist natürlich ein Teil einer völkischen ähm auch ein Teil einer völkischen Gesinnung.“

<sup>16</sup> „Wären das damals in den Chat Greenpeace gewesen, wär ich heute wahrscheinlich bei Greenpeace. Es wäre damals fürchterlich egal gewesen, ob rechts, links, oben, unten. Das wär mir völlig wurscht gewesen...“

Additionally, the search for a feeling of group cohesion or community contributed early-on to group-dynamic processes (peer pressure, “to have to prove oneself”), which had an effect similar to that of the chance occurrence. These processes appear generally and were not determined by the search for community. Through this search the individuals were, however, more responsive to the effect of the group-dynamic process.

In this stage of radicalization, political interest or involvement is still at a very low level. At first glance, this is contradictory to the initial desire for expression of a particular conception of morals or ideals, since these also appear very political. But at this point in time, the ideals are still not unified (or at least, are only occasionally unified) into a coherent political frame (*e.g.*, a political ideology):

“At fourteen years old I established my first sense of camaraderie—or that was how I thought of it at the time. That was such an in-between time, politics didn’t interest me much in my adolescence.” (Interview 7; E; section 5).<sup>17</sup>

“Hmm. Yes. So I was eleven years old, almost, active in the right-wing extremist scene and its influence over me grew by degrees. In other words I had – first my entry followed into the Schleswig-Holstein skinhead-scene, where you still cannot speak of a political superstructure or of an ideology.” (Interview 6; D; section 2).<sup>18</sup>

In summary, one can say that expression or the desire for certain values and ideals (at first relatively apolitical) together with the drive to individualization and dissociation in the search for a (collective) identity or community form the most important complex of motivations in the entry-phase. Supported and accelerated by chance occurrences, group-processes or environmental influences (the formative family, circle of friends, *etc.*), this phase can potentially last for years.

The motive of expression should at this point be especially emphasized once more. Accompanying this motivation are a strong impulse for social change, personal influence and

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<sup>17</sup> „Mit 14 Jahren habe ich meine erste Kameradschaft – oder was ich damals dafür hielt – gegründet. Das war so ein Zwischenspiel, in der Pubertät hat mich Politik nicht sehr interessiert.“

<sup>18</sup> „Hmm. Ja. Also ich war 11 Jahre, also fast, in der Szene aktiv und das hatte sich bei mir stufenmäßig entwickelt. Also ich hatte, zunächst mein Einstieg erfolgte in die Schleswig-Holsteinische Skinheadszone, da kann man noch nicht von politischen Überbau sprechen oder von ner Ideologisierung.“

change, social participation, and the organization and idealistic realization of beliefs.<sup>19</sup> An affected youth believes that all of these, for one reason or another (*e.g.*, the feeling that one is ostracized from one's own moral ideals), can only be satisfied in the right-wing extremist political scene. No evidence can be found in the interviews for the origins of this need for expression, and whether or in what way there could be a difference between this need in youths who enter the right-wing extremist scene and those who do not.

### 3.2. Phase II –Professionalization and Associated Politicization

The second phase is marked by a strong politicization of morals or ideals, a steadily-widening spectrum of missions, an increasing cultural assimilation into the right-wing extremist scene, isolation from the outside world, and a gradual change or bolstering of motivation.

Once the individuals first “enter into the scene” (there is no precise point of entry; at some point people simply begin to identify themselves as a part of the scene), the processes of radicalization, politicization and professionalization sharply accelerate (*i.e.*, the frequency of decisive encounters, experiences, and decisions increases). Contacts and relationships made in different groups and on different occasions especially contribute to this acceleration:

“In the technical sense it was like this, and thereafter it continued without stopping, that I met more and more people, not only regional people, like very regional only from my district – that's what I meant by ‘regional’ – but I met people from further and further away. So in the technical sense it was like that.” (Interview 8; F; page 1).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> In this work, these elements form the idea of “broad political understanding!”

<sup>20</sup> „Das war so im technischen Sinne, und danach ging's dann halt los, dass ich mehr und mehr Leute kennen gelernt hab, nicht nur regionale Leute, also ganz regional nur aus meinem Stadtteil - so meinte ich das mit regional - sondern nach und nach halt auch hamburgweit Leute kennen gelernt. Das war so im technischen Sinne.“

The process depends, for one, on the tasks, operations and roles which are at this point undertaken by the people involved in the scene or which must be completed by members. It is exactly these tasks, operations and roles which by their nature demand the level of politicization (*i.e.*, involvement and a political ideology) and therefore professionalization (or radicalization) both outwardly and inwardly. The more the individuals are influenced and gain distinction in the course of such political operations, the quicker they climb up the hierarchy and achieve status, which by degrees increases their inner motivation for achieving more status:

“...But because there’s a need for community and it grows. And I saw myself then in that way also. I was like such a small puppy who itches for a leader, for camaraderie. Thus I saw myself, I observed myself, and I wanted to be something.” (Interview 5; C; section 26).<sup>21</sup>

This necessarily leads to focusing, isolation towards the outside world, and suppression of the apolitical elements in one’s life. To the extent to which individuals progress on the road to professionalization, politicization overpowers the apolitical life:

“It also requires great trust in the people to whom one turns. People come from a very fractioned scene in which they are completely swept up socially.” (Interview 2; A; section 34).<sup>22</sup>

These operations stand in a recursive relationship to new and different motives. Thus, different tasks lead to new responsibilities and also to the appropriation of new capabilities. New networks are formed and one’s own role in the group changes and develops. For the individuals involved, new possibilities for expression and self-realization present themselves. On the other hand, the divergence between old and new motives (idealism, belief, social change; see further in this chapter) leads also to a certain variety of new operations and to

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<sup>21</sup> „Sondern weil man Zugehörigkeit braucht und das wächst dann. Und ich hab mich dann auch so gesehen. Ich war dann quasi wie so’n kleiner Hundewelp, der dann beim Kameradschaftsführer kratzt. So sieh mich, nimm mich wahr und ich will was werden.“

<sup>22</sup> „Es braucht auch großes Vertrauen in die Leute, an die man sich wendet. Man kommt aus einer sehr sektoiden Szene, in der man sozial komplett vereinnahmt ist.“

the intensification of those operations. The mutually-strengthening relationship between mission and motivation proves to be a particularly strong driving factor in the radicalization process:

“It depends. First you really have to prove yourself and also get something going, you have to hold water. When that’s good, you’re accepted. But you always have to do something more. If that point arrives, that you are accepted, protected, it becomes as a part of the camaraderie, and you’re also totally exploited.” (Interview 5; C; section 14).<sup>23</sup>

“Mhm, through—there is throughout a hierarchy in the scene, which actually has different—different triggers, so you have it once if you’re there for years, if you’ve shown power, ah, I wasn’t like this: I hadn’t set down a goal for myself, that I must somehow, ah, make a name for myself, but I simply took up some assignments which I finished, I just did them and therefore it’s natural, that you have a definite, ah, that you become a key figure, a leader-figure, as one always likes to call it and he receives naturally, ah, a little bit of respect then, around the inside of the city, and eventually also further into other circles, into other federal states; ultimately contacts quickly spring up state-wide as well, which means I had a wide field, where there were connections and interfaces to the music scene, uh, also in other states, where you hold cross-regional meetings and of course participate in cross-regional demonstrations, uh, accordingly you had a position as a leader for Berlin if you’re, uh, invited and, uhm, also called up, “when does the bus get in to Berlin?” and such things. Ah I would say, this—this hierarchy or this leader, when [there are] such levels in the hierarchy, it goes actually really fast, I mean this entry and recognition, for me it went actually really fast and, uhm, through that I took up certain things.” (Interview 3; A; section 4).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> „Es kommt drauf an. Also zuerst muss man sich wirklich beweisen und man muss auch einige Dinge auf die Beine stellen die Hand und Fuß haben. Wenn das gut ist, wird man auch akzeptiert. Man muss aber immer etwas mehr machen. Wenn das dann soweit ist, dass man angenommen wird, wahrgenommen wird, wird das also zum Teil auch über die Kameradschaft, auch einfach ausgeschlachtet“.

<sup>24</sup> „Mhm, durch- es gibt durchaus ne Hierarchie innerhalb der Szene, das hat jetzt aber verschiedene verschiedene Auslöser, also das hat man einmal wenn man jahrelang dabei war, wenn man Leistung gezeigt hat, äh ich war jetzt nicht in dem, hatte jetzt nicht für mich das Ziel gesetzt ich muss irgendwo äh mir nen Namen machen, sondern ich hab einfach bestimmte Aufgaben übernommen, das einfach erledigt, ich hab sie einfach getätigt und dadurch ist natürlich, hat man ne bestimmte, äh wird man zur Schlüsselfigur, Kaderfigur, wie man’s auch immer nennen möchte und äh bekommt dann natürlich auch ein bisschen Respekt, es spricht sich rum innerhalb der Stadt, es geht dann auch weiter in andere Landkreise, in andere Bundesländer; letztendlich entstehen darin dann auch schnell Kontakte bundesweit, dass heißt ich hat ja nun auch ein breites Umfeld, da gab’s ja dann auch Berührungen und Schnittstellen zur Musikszene, äh auch in andere Städte, wo man dann halt überregionale Treffen und Teilnahme auch an überregionalen Demonstrationen natürlich, äh dementsprechend hat man dann so ne Stellung äh ja als Kaderfigur für Berlin in dem Fall, dass man dann auch

The most extreme and extensive tasks and operations are grouped under the conceptual heading of “political struggle.” The (political) events require manifold knowledge and skills. Girl-groups, protests, party celebrations, commemorative marches, round-table meetings, concerts, election campaigns, info kiosks, hall events, demonstrations, camping groups, hikes, fellowship evenings, propaganda actions, “folk-dance groups,” and many more must be organized and promoted. It requires a great deal of planning, transportation of people and materials, registrations or applications, dissemination of information, coordination, invitations to other groups, oversight and security for the event, *etc.* Related to all of this come assignments that pertain to politics in general: running youth-clubs, bars and citizen-bureaus, as well as organizing recruitment, public relations (issuing badges and placards, writing articles, planning internet projects, giving speeches and lectures, making and distributing banners/leaflets, *etc.*), and educational evenings. To carry out and take part in all of these activities, new operational models must be thought up (innovation and modernization), new members must be inducted, political opposition must be identified and slowed down, a certain image must be portrayed to the outside world, strategic and theoretical work must be done, and much more. Additionally there are extensive administrative duties and assignments (financial bookkeeping, scribal work, publications, legal questions, *etc.*) which must be attended to. With such a scale of important tasks it is not hard to imagine that many individuals in the right-wing extremist scene take up specializations, *e.g.*, in recruiting, public relations, or event management. Broad organizational skills, resistance to stress, reliability, and specific technical knowledge are particularly necessary for these specializations.

The diversity of roles inside the scene lends itself to considerable tension, since the pressure in all functions is generally described as strong. Aside from being a “political soldier,” this also means for one to be like a “national mother,” leader/manager, family of

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ähm eingeladen wird und dann auch ähm ja angerufen, wann kommt in Berlin der Bus etc. solche Dinge. Äh ich würd sagen, diese diese Hierarchie oder diese Leiter, wenn man so diese Stufen in der Hierarchie, das geht eigentlich recht schnell, also dieser Einstieg und Anerkennung, das ging bei mir eigentlich recht fix und ähm dadurch das ich bestimmte Dinge übernommen habe.“



the people, relationship-partner, *etc.*, and each person has strict and inflexible role-expectations to fill, such as manliness, strength, and for women, submission. In particular, mothers among the interviewed persons described the pressure to be a “perfect German mother” and to lead a model family as enormous and nearly incompatible with the time and strains which the above-described political duties and assignments demand:

“And what I see, in other words there are such people who naturally would like the domestic wife at home. They by no means think independently and so the trend goes that way, I would have gladly had a woman who was educated, who goes to work, who had children, who does the housework, who supports me and then even in addition continues the political struggle... reality is something very different. Because as said it can also not conform to the overall assignment that one has, one should work, one should carry on the political fight, one should care for the housework. So if one has a family, it’s not really possible.” (Interview 5; C; section 42).<sup>25</sup>

Recursive to these assignments and activities comes also a shifting of motivations. Increasing assimilation through politicization and specialization also entails a higher position in the hierarchy and a greater level of acceptance, power, responsibility, affirmation, and trust. But these moments in no way comprise the only incentives to enter into the scene, though they do have a compelling and confirming effect. The preceding hunger for morals or idealism transforms at this point into a proper “belief” in one’s own deeds, such that one sees oneself as a “bearer of truth” and works with increasing engagement to strive for social change:

“No, on the contrary. I compare it with a cult, an illusion, a cult. You’re in there, you get comfort, a slap on the back, and you go further and further in. Because you always want more, you always want to go higher, you always want to be more, you always want more recognition.” (Interview 5; C; section 24).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> „Und was ich sehe, also es gibt so einige die möchten natürlich das Heimchen am Herd. Die ja net unbedingt selbstständig denken und so, der Trend geht aber dahin, ich hätte gern ne Frau die gebildet ist, die arbeiten geht, die Kinder bekommt, die den Haushalt macht, die mich unterstützt und dann eben noch den politischen Kampf führt. (...) Was gelebt wird ist was ganz anderes. Weil wie gesagt es kann ja auch net konform gehen mit den ganzen Aufgaben die man hat, man soll arbeiten, man soll politischen Kampf führen, man soll sich um den Haushalt kümmern. Ja wo bleibt denn da die Familie, kann gar nicht.“

<sup>26</sup> „Ne, im Gegenteil. Also ich vergleiche das mit, mit ner Sekte, mit Wahn, ner Sekte. Man is da dann drinnen, man bekommt Zuspruch, man wird, es gibt Schulterklopfen, man steigert sich da immer mehr rein. Weil man ja

“For me right-wing extremism is the great superstition of the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. That is like an exit from a psychological sect.” (Interview 7; E; section 17).<sup>27</sup>

A classical political activism (tied up with a political ideology) develops, which through intense pressure inspires members to change something and to accomplish something, with the result that the individual approaches the corresponding assignments ever more strongly. Naturally, these “activists” become more and more professional and adroit in their specialized areas as well, which further deepens their feeling of being able to accomplish something. This is also expressed in the actions which occupied a place of high importance for the interviewed persons and which were again and again referred to as charitable (political). Collecting garbage (“environmental protection is homeland protection”), assistance for other mothers, consultation hours with the elderly, community game hours, care for prisoners, *etc.*, not only have a strong effect on recruitment, but they are also seriously intended and above all very meaningful with respect to the previously-discussed questions of moral idealism.

Aside from the so-called political services, there is also another series of different complexes; not the least of which includes violence, crime (violence against women, pressure towards prostitution, felonies of the worst kind, political and apolitical), trials, and imprisonment. Yet it is astonishing that affinity for violence generally appears to decrease along with decreasing political activism. That is to say, the apolitical and violent groups and persons (*e.g.*, skinhead groups) are consistently located far at the bottom of the hierarchy. In the course of one’s own political radicalization, one begins to realize that violence and crime can be counterproductive or harmful to one’s own cause. This does not whatsoever mean that crime and violence are kept entirely out of the picture; violence is absolutely called upon, tolerated, instrumentalized, and employed in covert settings. But in the course of the process of professionalization, committing violence and crimes which are not detrimental

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immer mehr möchte, man möchte immer weiter hoch, man möchte immer mehr bewegen, man möchte immer mehr Anerkennung.“

<sup>27</sup> „Für mich ist der Rechtsextremismus der große Aberglaube des 20. oder 21. Jahrhunderts. Das ist wie der Ausstieg aus einer Psychosekte.“

“to the cause” becomes increasingly valued, *i.e.*, a strategic method develops that places in the foreground the group- or ideological-goals.

Apolitical recreation (parties, concerts, *etc.*) and friendships (in addition to relationships) also play a role, although they become secondary over time:

“Adults must realize that the ideology in the scene has priority over social bonds.” (Interview 1; A; section 24).<sup>28</sup>

In addition, livelihood must be secured in different ways. The fear of losing one’s job and of the normal workload in non-political professions of different sorts in addition to the everyday stress of earning a living is regularly voiced. Moreover, fear of political repression, criminal prosecution, and other risks of physical violence from the state (police, Office for the Defense of the Constitution, employer, *etc.*) and from political opponents also surfaces. One is accordingly occupied for the majority of one’s time with distancing oneself from stereotypes, to maintain the *status quo* inside and outside the political scene, to steer clear of relationship and alcohol-related problems (usually outside the scene), to lead one’s own family, and at the same time to continue the political struggle. Moreover, one is not supposed to lose sight of professionalization: knowledge, skills, and experience must be aggregated, tested, and built up, in order to fulfill the conditions of the role and one’s own personal motives.

It could be said that the process of professionalization or radicalization in the right-wing extremist scene was described as an extreme and highly costly lifestyle (perhaps better: life task). A tight network of political and apolitical assignments, roles, motives, and goals gave the interviewed persons the drive to lead a “political struggle” for years that entailed the full submission of all other areas of their lives. Take note that the present work according to its nature is about people who led a “complete” (*i.e.*, maximally extended) radicalization process until their exit. Naturally, they could have let their rise or involvement in the scene stagnate at any time and at any level, but then, according to the definition, they would not be or would only conditionally be described as “radical.”

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<sup>28</sup> „Die Eltern müssen wissen, dass die Ideologie in der Szene den Vorrang vor den sozialen Bindungen hat.“

At the conclusion of this phase there arises a very interesting mechanism of action. The steady professionalization and specialization leads importantly to an increase in duties, self-knowledge, and experience. Apparently these particularly active individuals approach a “professional high-point” beyond which they surpass the professionalism of the scene. This means that one apprehends the limits of one’s achievements, and by that point knows, for example, how demonstrations are organized, how talented youth are recruited, how public-relations work is conducted, or how an organizational platform can be generated. In short: one is experienced in “political struggle,” but then fails in the infighting or double moral standard of the scene. This often-subconscious knowledge is based on the original moral motivation. One puts enormous amounts of time and energy into a cause, into an ideology, into certain values and ideals, perfects the methods of their dissemination, and in the end encounters the not-particularly-ideological motives of power, greed, enrichment, *etc.*, that dominate the managerial levels of many groups. The people begin to see, step-by-step, a “theory-praxis discrepancy,” but only because they had garnered experience and professionalized themselves enough to be able to evaluate this:

“So to make a long story short, I noticed more and more that the beliefs I held were not at all shared in the scene, so very, very little at first but more and more I noticed that what I actually wanted and what I actually would have liked to have had for change in the society of the world didn’t concur with what the right-wing scene wanted to have for social change.” (Interview 8; F; page 9).<sup>29</sup>

“Yes, well yes and no, it’s like this, there we would have been again at the so-called double moral standard. If it is then important for the political struggle and if it, I mean I see it one way, but many others see it a different way, that then contacts are made in right-wing rock-concerts and so on and so forth. I don’t see it as political struggle so much as private pleasure. There the kids were—they were just suddenly pushed off. Yes, so there we would have been at the double moral standard, the family should of course be strong and fortified and so on and so forth, the wife should be at home, but if it’s useful then we push the child either to the neighbors or

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<sup>29</sup> „Also um’s kurz zu sagen, ich hab nach und nach immer mehr gemerkt, dass die Positionen die ich vertrete null in der Szene vertreten sind, also sehr, sehr wenig anfangs und nach und nach hab ich gemerkt, dass das was ich tatsächlich möchte und das was ich tatsächlich an Veränderung in Gesellschaft in der Welt haben möchte, dass das nicht mit dem übereinstimmt was die rechte Szene für Veränderungen der Gesellschaft haben möchte. Das das einfach überhaupt nicht miteinander übereinstimmt.“

to the mother-in-law or our own mothers, or wherever.” (Interview 5; C; section 48).<sup>30</sup>

Contradictions in the ideology were at this point in time mostly still not strongly observed. The frustration through the “theory-praxis” discrepancy (what the ideology “prescribes” and what is eventually implemented) leads to a construction of a mental distancing, which erodes belief in the ideology step-by-step. Usually this is established first in the course of the exit-process:

“I was dissatisfied with my surroundings. It was too pleasure-oriented for me, too little ideological. The lifestyle didn’t correspond with the theory. I left the JN,\* but not at first with the intention to separate myself from the life-philosophy. But at some point I came to the conclusion that I knew there were contradictions. Partially the ideological fragments came from my childhood, it’s hard to free myself from them. When the underlying beliefs were no longer there, everything from the weeks collapsed inwards.” [\* JN: Junge Nationaldemokraten, “young national-democrats,” the youth corps of the German minority-party NPD.] (Interview 7; E; section 17).<sup>31</sup>

In summary, the second phase is marked by a complex, mutually-strengthening network of a great many political and apolitical assignments, tasks, roles, and new motives. In this phase the individuals specialize and professionalize, and this attends the progressive radicalization and rise in the hierarchy. This phase, depending on how far it proceeds, involves a mental collapse “for the cause” and carries in a certain way the germ of the exit in itself.

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<sup>30</sup> „Ja, jein also eh das ist das, da wären wir wieder bei der so genannten Doppelmoral. Wenn’s dann für den politischen Kampf wichtig ist und wenn’s, also ich seh dat nicht so, aber viele sehen das so, dass dann Kontakte geknüpft werden auf Rechtsrockkonzerten und so weiter und sofort. Seh ich nicht als politischen Kampf, sondern als privates Vergnügen. Da werden die Kinder, die werden halt einfach abgeschoben. Ja, also da wären wir wieder bei der Doppelmoral, die Familie soll doch gestärkt und aufgebaut und so weiter und sofort, die Frau soll Zuhause sein, aber wenn es denn förderlich ist dann schieben wir das Kind entweder zu Nachbarn oder zu Schwiegermutter oder eigene Mutter, oder wie auch immer.“

<sup>31</sup> „Ich war unzufrieden mit dem Umfeld. Das war mir zu spaßorientiert, zu wenig ideologisch. Der Lebenswandel stimmte nicht mit der Theorie überein. Ich bin aus der JN ausgetreten, aber zunächst nicht mit dem Vorsatz, mich von der Weltanschauung zu lösen. Doch irgendwann kam ich ins Grübeln, mir wurden Widersprüche bewusst. Teilweise kamen die ideologischen Fragmente ja aus meiner Kindheit, es ist schwer sich davon zu befreien. Als der grundlegende Glaube nicht mehr da war, fiel alles innerhalb von Wochen zusammen.“

### 3.3. Phase III –Exit

As already discussed above, the radicalization process involves an enormous time- and energy-expenditure that contains enough (to a certain point) intrinsic value, *i.e.*, one's own process-motivation, to justify the high price. One certainly receives not only rewards for one's work (status, recognition, trust, authority, visibility, respect, success, *etc.*), but also sees certain roots and motives satisfied for a time. The feeling to move something forward, to work for change, to make a difference, to be a part of a revolution, *etc.*, pushes many people along in the radicalization process. The "professionalization high-point" was mentioned above as well. An initiate at a certain point has collected sufficient experience and sizable enough knowledge that he/she realizes to what extent the scene is itself capable of implementing or ready and willing to implement his/her own propagandized morals and ideals. Frustration arises, not only because of the quite far-spread inability of other people and managers in the scene, but also and above all because of a central and essential disappointment of hopes and expectations. All interviewees describe a "double moral standard," *i.e.*, the difference between "propagated ideals" in the theory and the praxis with which one lives:

"As said: that business with my child was the dot on the *i*, because, when you pass through the entire structure and actually observe the ideal that you have in mind and that is communicated to the outside through comradeship, it isn't there. It simply isn't there." (Interview 4; B; section 150).<sup>32</sup>

"Yes! For me it was simply that in the moment what was in my head, what I wanted to make into reality, didn't work. It just didn't work. If you then think about such a comradeship and look at it, and look at the people, there's nothing. Somehow no one has...no one has his life under control, no one has a goal in any way or something else but they tell you then how it should work. But you can think and look at them and you think, 'Boah Alki [German slang for alcoholic], unemployed, who wears women's

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<sup>32</sup> „Wie gesagt: Das mit meinem Kind war das Tüpfelchen auf dem *i*, weil, wenn man die ganze Struktur da durchläuft und merkt eigentlich das Ideal, was man im Kopf hat und nach außen propagiert wird von den Kameradschaften, das gibt es nicht. Das gibt es einfach nicht.“

clothes and hits his children.’ Then you think to yourself, ‘What should I do here, then.’ It doesn’t work.” (Interview 4; B; section 110).<sup>33</sup>

Such examples describe that which was in all cases the ultimate cause for the frustration, which then led over a longer period of time and more phases to their exit.

### 3.4. The Three-Phase Model – Summarization of the Results

At this point the findings from the analysis of interviews should be transferred to a chart, which by way of overview clarifies the transition between the phases as well as the different motives and activities. This process-model does not claim to universally explain the course of all individual radicalizations, since the fundamental nature of the research is qualitative. Furthermore, a previously-discussed particularity of this model is the focus on the activities inside the scene and the activities of the radicalization-process. Therefore, the character derived from the interviews should be compared with its backgrounds and functionalities. It turns out that the designated super-categories for all interviewed people in the whole process can be named “doing politics.” Accordingly, at the beginning no politics in the sense of a party-program or a differentiated ideology is meant (“narrow political understanding”), but rather the desire for moral agency, social change, organization (in the sense of “getting something going”), community participation, and change (“wide or broad political understanding”). These needs are ideologized and politicized (in a narrow sense) in the course of the radicalization process. The consequence of this approach is a fundamentally different image of the actual working-mechanics in the radicalization process from that which is generally believed in the right-wing extremism research and among the public at large. In this study, the goal-oriented motivations of individuals are more important, individuals who better explain their involvement in right-wing extremist groups

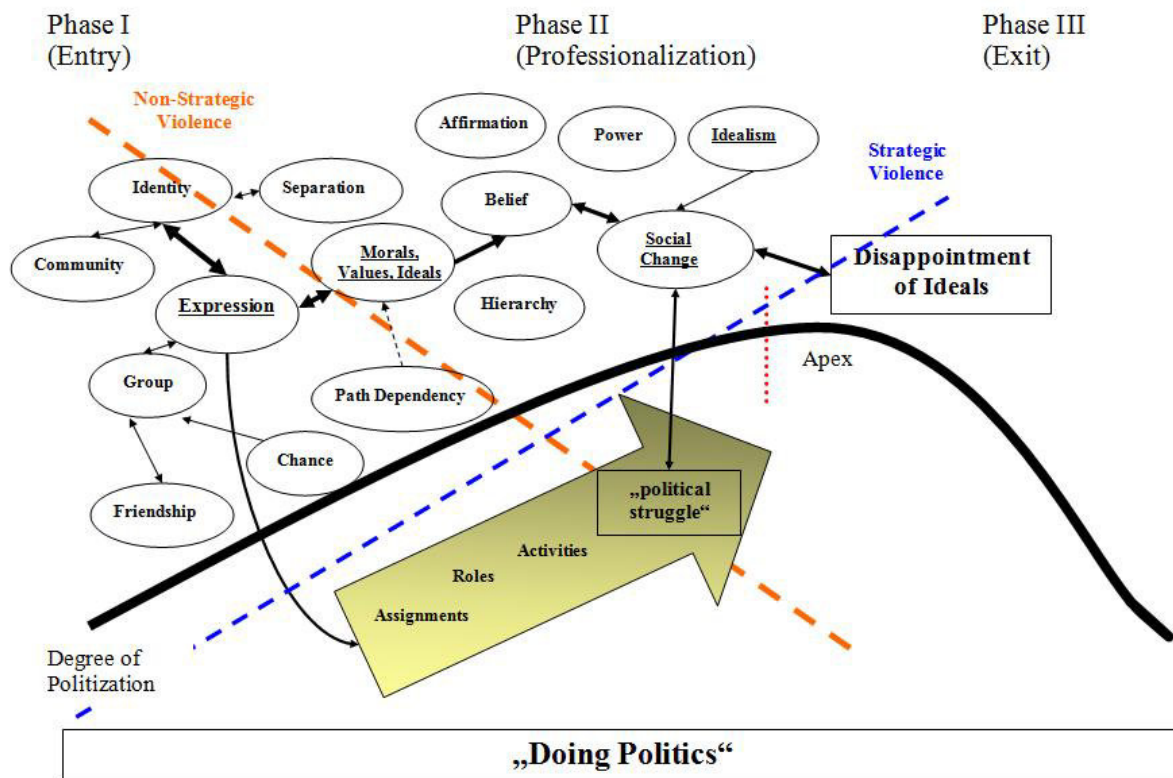
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<sup>33</sup> „Ja! Es war für mich in dem Moment einfach so, dass was bei mir im Kopf war, was ich verwirklichen wollte, ging nicht. Es ging einfach nicht. Wenn man dann denkt in so einer Kameradschaft und sich das anguckt, und sich die Leute anguckt und es kommt nichts. Keiner hat irgendwie .... Keiner hat sein Leben unter Kontrolle, keiner hat irgendwie ein Ziel oder sonst was und die sagen dir dann aber, wie es funktionieren soll. Du kannst aber denken und guckst dir die an und denkst ‘Boah Alki, arbeitslos, der eine trägt Frauenkleider, der andere schlägt seine Kinder.’ Da denkst du dir ‚Was soll ich denn hier noch machen.’ Geht nicht.“



as due to “causal” factors (unemployment, family background, *etc.*). These allow the individuals in theory merely reactive leeway. So individual decisions are styled as or marginalized to mere consequences or factors and are thereby pre-determinable (again, constituting a crucial oversight of determinism). In practice the biographical characteristics in the analysis played a very subordinate role both at entry and in the continuation within the scene, *i.e.*, they were not helpful in understanding the involvement of the individual.

The entire process can be graphically represented as follows:



Principally it should be noted that there is no clear separation between the individual phases. Likewise, the phases are not differentiable over time. The transition is fluid and the order of motive should also not imply a temporal or hierarchical sequence. The nucleus of the model is the “degree of politicization” in connection with the super-category “doing politics.” As already made clear, this means an understanding of politics in a narrower sense at first which widens over time. In the entry-phase, the wish for expression of certain values, ideas, and ideals plays a role above all. This drive is closely bound up with a search for



(collective) identity, individualization, and dissociation. A conflict between the wish for a strong community and a pronounced individual structure (which implies a self-demarkation also with respect to the group through distinction, *etc.*) appears not to exist. A slight influence through the social environment (family, circle of friends, sport clubs, *etc.*) on the values and ideals which one seeks or would like to adopt can possibly be found, but it would only be a very limited influence. Oftentimes chance plays a significant role in the question when one meets some groups or persons, whether through random meetings or events. That then leads forward to new friendships and further contacts, which are partially also random (one is invited to a party by contact A and there meets contact B, *etc.*) and which become extended somewhat consciously. The described need for expression of morals or ideals leads to performance of duty, roles, and assignments with ever-increasing frequency, which can be summarized with the phrase “political struggle.” This concept also includes a political element, since the assignments are the actual reason for the continuing politicization (or professionalization, radicalization). In this fluid transition to the second phase the motives shift more and more to an idealistic political essence, which contains as a complementary factor alongside social change and belief in the cause also the entry into the hierarchy, status-gain (affirmation), and increased power (more responsibility, functions, *etc.*). These motives stand in a mutually-strengthening and mutually-intersecting relationship with the assignments, roles, and duties allotted to the individual. In the course of both phases the attitude towards violence also changes. “Affinity for violence” and “aversion to violence” mean that one is decreasingly or increasingly (respectively) appreciative of the harmful effects of *uncontrolled or non-strategic violence*. No overarching rejection of violence is meant, only to the extent that it is detrimental to the political cause. Political success (*e.g.*, electoral results, success in recruitment and in public relations, positive media presence, establishment of new structures) becomes more important than the “struggle against the political enemy.” It is a direct effect of professionalization, which is also expressed, that groups and persons who use uncontrolled violence are seen as very low in the hierarchy or even as not belonging to the scene at all:

“So when I now imagine, so let’s take a typical east skinhead, who lives on the outskirts of Berlin somewhere, who never even heard the name Jürgen Rieger, or an equivalent member of the opposition, nor any of his statements, but he based his whole world view on the statements of Landser and Stahlgewitter, there were such people, if such a one now drives to Berlin and for the first time in his life sees a dark-skinned man and then immediately beats him up, that is to be sure a crime with right-wing extreme background, no question, but at the same time it is no crime committed by the scene.” (Interview 8; F; page 25).<sup>34</sup>

Other types of misdemeanors and crimes, however, have a normal character and are therefore helpful to the initial acceptance, so long as these are not harmful to the political cause. In parallel of course the notion of the strategic use of violence (embedded in a political strategy) rises with the professionalization.

This described professionalization leads from a certain point to a frustration, namely, if one’s own skills and knowledge surpass those of the environment in such a way that one is in the position to realize to what extent the propagandized ideology corresponds to the scene’s preparedness to action and pragmatic capability. In this regard, it is interesting that such a frustration can appear still earlier but then is often followed by a transition inside the scene to a more professional group or to an additional takeover of further duties. The eventual crucial disappointment of ideals and values, which one partially also sought out in Phase I, leads then to exit and completes the process of radicalization.

#### 4. Orientation of the Results in the Literature

Contemporary research into right-wing extremism in Germany for the most part pursues a completely different approach than the one adopted in this study. Indeed, many theories have been developed for the explanation of right-wing extremist radicalization,

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<sup>34</sup> „Also, wenn ich mir jetzt vorstelle, also nehmen wir die typische Ostglatze, die irgendwo im Berliner Randgebiet wohnt, den Namen Jürgen Rieger, oder ein entsprechendes Pendant in der Gegend, noch nicht mal gehört hat, von dem keine Aussagen gehört hat, sondern sich sein gesamtes Weltbild auf die Aussagen von Landser und Stahlgewitter gründet, solche Leute gibt es ja, wenn so einer jetzt nach Berlin fährt und das erste Mal in seinem Leben einen dunkelhäutigen Menschen sieht und den sofort zusammenschlägt, dann ist das zwar eine Straftat mit rechtsradikalem Hintergrund, gar keine Frage, gleichzeitig ist es aber keine Straftat aus der Szene“.

theories which are not by any means incongruous with this present work. However, these theories are so different in approach, methodology, focus, and implications that at this point an overview of the most current theories in the field is warranted. In addition to each theory (or theory-complex) a position should be named with the results of the interview analysis. The question is whether by this analysis of interviews evidence or points can be found that explicitly contradict one theory or support another. Due to the diversity of scientific theories and methodologies, this approach should make useful the screened material, in accordance with “Grounded Theory,” for the review or verification of current theories as well. The division of theories was already briefly explained in the introduction. To this it must be added, however, that the individuals were of course not questioned according to the separate theories. This is merely a comparison of their own representations of the radicalization processes with the existing theories; *i.e.*, to what extent the indicated factors appear in the interviewees’ accounts, and if to any extent they do, with what level of significance. In addition the findings of this study, *i.e.* the radicalization process above, will be situated within international radicalization research very briefly. As this study is concerned with radicalization processes, the abundant data on the interviewee’s deradicalization process will be discussed separately.

#### 4.1 Macro-Social Context-Factors

##### 4.1.1. *The Contact-Hypothesis*

One socio-psychological attempt at explanation is the contact-hypothesis from the area of prejudice-research. One of its founders, the American psychologist Gordon Allport (1897-1967), proposes in his 1958 book *The Nature of Prejudice* the theory that prejudice (and including therein racism, xenophobia, *etc.*) is born from a lack of contact with the victimized group. This would generate distorted opinions about the members of the other group, which is in turn prone to stereotypes, political discourse, or pathological mechanisms (projection of fear, *etc.*) (Allport, 1958). Empirically, however, the theory obtains mixed results. For example, Marek Fuchs (2003) found no significant influence of the contact-

hypothesis in an analytic study of the interviews of approximately 4,300 adolescents. Yet Vera Husfeldt (2006) in her analysis of the CIVIC Education Study conducted by the *International Evaluation Association* from 1999-2000 (undertaken in 24 countries on political education in fourteen- to nineteen-year-olds) highlighted the lack of contact with immigrants as influential among other factors (*e.g.*, low trust in institutions, positive attitude to one's nation, deficient school environment). Likewise, Winkler (2003) found in his examination of the first euro-barometer in 1997 (carried out in fifteen countries) a significant positive influence of contact with immigrants on the opinions on immigration; Dollase (2001) also found the theory authentic. The strongest criticism of Allport was his omission of different egotistical motives (*e.g.*, preservation of status) for the members of right-wing extremist groups. In the case of right-wing extremists, the stereotypes corrected through increased contact to opposites would be undesirable (cf. also Bonilla-Silva, 2001; M. R. Jackman, 1994), as such correction would call into question some of the right-wing extremists' deepest beliefs.

Despite the sharply divided responses to the contact-hypothesis, a modified version of Allport's theory can be established. Jonas (1998) pointed out the meaning of actually experiencing contact with immigrants of different social status compared to one another. Furthermore, it is important to recognize the idea of enemy-construction or the characterization of "the foreign" (cf. Borstel & Wagner, 2006). Right-wing extremism subsists on a particular way of picturing the enemy, a picture which it transfers to immigrants, other ethnicities or "races," or religions. This enemy-picture is central to the understanding of right-wing extremist radicalization (*ibid.*). Particularly in the area of violent militancy, the construction of the enemy-picture creates the background for decision-making and the conditions for the intertwining of other radicalization factors (Hennig, 1983). A further differentiation comes from McVeigh, Myers and Sikkink (2004). They sought to show that neither the absence of contact nor (intensive) contact with immigrants or other ethnicities is of significance, first in the case of the Ku Klux Klan in the US state of Indiana in the 1920s and later in a national study of the presence of racist groups. The right level of a particular presence of minority groups geographically close to majority groups, which permits a

distanced contact, is according to them absolutely critical to constructing stereotypes that on the one hand plausibly have effects and on the other are verifiable only with great difficulty (through their relative distance). Along these same lines: “Without such distance, the inaccuracies of these claims would be obvious to their targeted audience” (ibid.: 500). Thus also Fuchs (2003: 666) in his study sees as important the influence of low levels of contact with foreigners on the right-wing extremist conditions. In the interviews, only very rarely was “contact” with immigrants mentioned. In most cases it was about passive working-mechanisms, as for example the sense that foreigners would receive better social benefits. No interview contained any mention of direct contact with immigrants, which could have affected prejudices either positively or negatively. Although ultimately the “objective” or “victim” of the ideology, the contact with opposition (foreigners, homosexuals, anti-fascists, etc.) or the lack thereof does not appear to be closely bound-up in the radicalization process. The level of radicalization and politicization to a much greater degree defines the extent to which contact (also understood as attack) is sought out and the stereotypes are represented, and not the other way around.

#### 4.1.2. “Ethnic Competition Theory”

“Ethnic Competition Theory” is synonymous with the contact-hypothesis, but it came out of a negative effect of the contact between different ethnic or national groups. This effect is primarily expressed in a relationship of competition over scarce goods and resources (Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2005; Campbell, 1965; Lubbers & Scheepers, 2000, 2001; Sherif, 1966; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Dating from Blalock and Campbell (Blalock, 1967; Campbell, 1965), this means that the probability of conflict between groups increases with diminishing distance separating them. Additionally, the economic competence and position of the minority group plays a decisive role. Thus, the ability to acquire and hold a certain portion in economic life will affect the risk of conflict (Blalock, 1967). The theory was statistically investigated especially in the context of ethnically-motivated riots in the US (Olzak, 1989, 1992; Olzak & Nagel, 1986; Olzak, Shanahan, & McEneaney, 1996) and enjoyed

wide acceptance in the literature with the combination of economic competition and inter-group processes based on mistrust and egotism (E. M. Beck, 2000; Esser, 1996a, 1996b; Heitmeyer, Dollase, & Vossen, 1996; Myers, 1997; Olzak, 2006; Olzak, et al., 1996; Quillian, 1995; Sarah Anne Soule, 1992; Sarah A. Soule & Van Dyke, 1999; Tolnay & Beck, 1995; Van Dyke, Soule, & Widom, 2001). This effect is intensified further through strong nationalism, either among the relevant groups or in a wider social context (Mummendey & Simon, 1997). A further complementary factor could be the level of immigration (Gamper & Willems, 2006). But in a study of racially-motivated crime in New York, this connection could not be shown (*ibid.*). On the other hand, the strengthening effect of immigration appears regularly in European studies (Gamper & Willems, 2006; Knigge, 1998; McLaren, 1999; Steininger & Rotte, 2009).

The socio-economic status of each group, which appears to be threatened by the presence of another group, is also discussed in the approach of “collective deprivation.” Here, however, the economic threat or devaluation is not only based in groups but also in the entire society (recession). Theoretically this threat or competition could have a legitimizing effect on right-wing extremist crimes. However, the concept in this form is controversial. Indeed, sometimes the effects could be demonstrated (T. F. Pettigrew, 2002; Rippl & Baier, 2005) or eliminated (Rippl, 2003; Terwey, 2000). The quantitative framework is the decision maker: the larger the deprived group, the lower the effect on xenophobia and on right-wing extremist violence appears to be. Statistically, this statement can be broadly supported: almost no connection was found between deprivation relating to society as a whole and xenophobic or nativist crimes (cf. the comprehensive overview of Green, 1998; Green, Strolovitch, & Wong, 1998; Jefferson & Pryor, 1999; Kitschelt & McGann, 1996; McLaren, 1999; Myers, 1997; Winkler, 2003). Therefore, it seems that the xenophobia-mechanism begins to engage with increasing regionalization of deprivation (Steininger & Rotte, 2009); or in other words, the correlation between deprivation and xenophobia is more significant on smaller scales, such as in a certain city or individual region. Most of these studies relate to the area of the European Union and therefore it must be considered whether the economic and political integration of the European states cancels out this

effect. Accordingly, it could be said that the “recession – right-wing extremism” connection ought to be approached with the utmost caution. Interestingly enough, in the conducted interviews no potentially-expected threat-scenarios were brought up (e.g.: “foreigners take away our work”). No “competition situation” over scarce resources with certain target groups (immigrants, etc.) appeared to be recognized or of significance to the interviewed persons. Similar to the contact-hypothesis, the entry- and exit-motives and working-mechanism were not reactionary (e.g. “because of frustration over foreigners who are taking away my work, I am going to join a right-wing extremist group”), but proactive and formerly self-oriented (i.e., the drive for expression, group-togetherness, the search for morals, etc.).

#### 4.1.3. Socio-Economic Change

An equally complementary part of the previous propositions is the theory of negative effect on the attitude towards immigrants through socio-economic change or rather “modernization,” “globalization,” or the fear of losing traditions and therefore the accompanying insecurity, loss of identity, or anxiety with regard to status. Klönne (1989) formulated his theory in 1989 that the success of right-wing extremist groups is an expression of social protest by the so-called “modernization losers,” in other words, by the stratum of the population that gets the short end of the stick in socio-economic change. This idea was already expressed in a slightly modified form in 1967 (Scheuch & Klingermann, 1967) and also in 1952 (Bendix, 1952): in all modern industrial societies, there is to be found the “normal pathological” process of refusing to adapt and shutting oneself off from arising social, cultural, and economic changes. The fear of losing status plays a decisive role (Mayer & Perrineau, 1996). Only in the context of the socio-cultural change of modernization do old problem-areas like immigration or abortion contain new powers of mobilization and legitimization. Minkenberg (2000) terms the affected persons “welfare chauvinists” (ibid.: 183). Authoritarianism and ethno-centrism appear to be a central psychological defense-mechanism of this group (ibid.: 185).



Socio-economic change as a wide concept and its influence on right-wing extremist violence and attitudes were researched in the European Union in the time period 2001-2004 with an international comparative study in eight European states through the analysis of over 300 qualitative interviews. The goal was to review the effect of fifteen outline plans of the European Union for the betterment of socio-economic conditions (Commission, 2004). The report sees as valid the connection between the strengthening of right-wing extremism and socio-economic change (ibid.: 1). The extended evaluation of the study in the social sciences appears to support these results so far (e.g. Hentges, 2003; Tóth & Grajczjár, 2007). It is not new, however, that socio-economic change and the accompanying mechanisms of insecurity and disintegration have a strong effect on right-wing extremist attitudes and radicalization processes (fear of loss and threats). Moreover, it is not new that those affected by a “fallback to archaic personal- and social-forms react, and that this reaction is reflected in an over-improvement of each person and in an accompanying devaluation of the other” (Fuchs, 2003: 654)<sup>35</sup>; this appears in quite a few case-studies and interviews with solid reliability (cf. e.g. Beermann, et al., 2009; Fetzer, 2000; Heitmeyer, 1994, 2010; Ignazi, 1992; Klein-Allermann, Kracke, Noack, & Hofer, 1995; Kleinert & De Rijke, 2001; Kracke, Oepke, Wild, & Noack, 1998; Lipset & Raab, 1978; Loch & Heitmeyer, 2001; Mayer & Perrineau, 1996; McVeigh, et al., 2004; McVeigh & Sikkink, 2005; Oepke, 2005; T. F. M. Pettigrew, R.W., 1995). The fear of losing one’s job was consistently described by the interviewed persons as a daily worry, but as a part of the “normal” daily worries in the course of one’s life-security (also that which involves the financing of political activities, such as concert-visits, etc.). Unemployment is classified theoretically as macro-social (collective deprivation) or micro-social (individual/relative deprivation). In this theory only the macro-social effects of unemployment on right-wing extremism are meant. Falk and Zweimüller (2005) found a strong connection between unemployment/joblessness and the frequency of xenophobic crimes, primarily comparing East and West Germany. Additionally, Jackman, Volpert (1996) and Beyme (1988) validated this connection.

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<sup>35</sup> „...Rückgriff auf archaische Persönlichkeits- und Sozialformen reagieren, was in einer Übersteigerung der eigenen Person und einer damit einhergehenden Abwertung Anderer zum Ausdruck kommt.“



The loss of identity or values, which is often described in connection with modernization and social change, appears to be of greater significance. Only rarely was this connection directly named (*cf.* the extracts from pages fourteen through sixteen), but one could interpret the search for group-togetherness, morals, and validation as a consequence of “general social decay.”

#### 4.1.4. Right-Wing Extremist Attitudes or Favorable Conditions in the Population

As the research group (Reinares & al., 2008) charged by the European Commission with the research of radicalization processes already suggested, right-wing extremist violence and radicalization always arises in a complex field of personal motives and a promoting, favorable, or legitimizing environment. The positive effect—*i.e.*, intensifying or reinforcing—of negative social attitudes on the radicalization processes of right-wing extremists is self-evident. So a deeply-rooted nationalism or patriotism can definitely function as a catalyzer or reinforcement through a perceived legitimization (of actions, of ideology, *etc.*) (*cf.* Asbrock, Wagner, & Christ, 2006; Gamper & Willems, 2006). Nationalism is here significant (1) as an auxiliary entry-motivation for a possible radicalization (Ignazi, 1992) and (2) as the foundation for a moral-ideological superiority complex which is tied up with one’s own nation, race, ethnicity, or religion and which is central to the functionality of the right-wing extremist philosophy (*cf.* J. B. Billiet & De Witte, 1995; J. B. Billiet, Eisinga, & Scheepers, 1996; J. B. e. a. Billiet, 2001). In the area of violent radicalization the function of example is also clear. As it was observed that “everyone just talks, but no one does anything,” right-wing extremist violent criminals find themselves called to radical behaviors (Krafeld, 2001; Melzer, 1992; Möller, 2000, 2006). At a regional or urban level, right-wing extreme “every-day cultures” can develop (Reif-Spirek, 2000) which tolerate or even motivate propaganda (decals, posters, swastikas, *etc.*) and attacks. “Every-day racism” or “conservative values” in the social environment of the people interviewed for this study were by all means important:

“So it is here sort of all entrenched and I think that it also is very hard to get it out. Just this every-day racism, you negro, you Jew, these cursewords from the youth, that is super extreme here. One can also really demonstrate that in other areas, or also with other youths, who for example have some other school’s education, it’s definitely not this way. So I mean, it is already extremely entrenched.” (Interview 3; A; section 12).<sup>36</sup>

As already explained above, such explanatory models of the social environment (school, sport clubs, *etc.*), an environment familiar or otherwise, oversimplify the approach and entry into the right-wing extremist scene. These factors certainly did not have a decisive influence on any of the persons interviewed.

Therefore, the climate of opinion can have a direct influence on right-wing extremist radicalizations and states of being prone to violence (cf. Wolf, Stellmacher, Wagner, & Christ, 2003). In addition to attitudes about immigration, violence, one’s own nation, *etc.*, other cultural-specific moments also function to support that which concerns the radicalization of right-wing extremists. These could be, among other things, a pronounced culture of achievement (Baier, 2005) or honor (Möller, 2006). Also in the macro-social context stands the classic scapegoat theory (cf. Berkowitz, 1993) or ‘black sheep effect’ (cf. Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988), which can be central for the legitimization of right-wing extremist violence. Following these theories is the effect of certain xenophobic discourse in the media. Since some demographic or immigrant groups are commonly counted as lazy, criminal, untrustworthy, dirty, *etc.*, and since this picture is fostered by popular culture and popular media, there is naturally a strengthening or legitimizing force applied to individuals with right-wing extremist sympathies (Dudek & Jaschke, 1981, 1982, 1984; Ohlemacher, 1998; Stöss, 2007).

A further argument connected with the climate of opinions and dominant state- and social-philosophy is linked to Capitalism or Neoliberalism (cf. Wilken, Thole, & Butterwegge, 2010). Here it is assumed that neoliberalism as a social ideology contains within itself

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<sup>36</sup> „Also das ist hier irgendwie alles verankert und ich glaube, dass es auch ganz schwer ist raus zu bekommen. Also, grade dieser Alltagsrassismus, du Neger, du Jude, diese Schimpfwörter von Jugendlichen, das ist hier super extrem. Also da kann man auch wirklich festmachen, dass es in anderen Bereichen, oder auch mit anderen Jugendlichen, die zum Beispiel auch eine andere schulische Ausbildung haben, definitiv nicht so ist. Also, das ist schon krass verankert.“

central elements which are responsible for the outbreak of right-wing extremist violence. Some examples are an exaggerated sense of power (and therefore the division into useful and useless), social Darwinism, and “location-nationalism.” Although one can surely speak of a limited philosophical relationship due to some similar ideological points, it would on the other hand be an exaggeration to see the roots of right-wing extremism in Capitalism. Here it must be emphasized that the language is not of potential economic consequences (cf. on this point King, 1987), but rather of the human- and social-picture intertwined with Capitalism. Thus, non-capitalist societies in which right-wing extremist violent crimes could be observed are easily found.<sup>37</sup>

Political ideologies are a further aspect of social attitudes and their influence on individuals. They provide central interpretive patterns and legitimization for certain forms of action and behavior. In the beginning of radicalization they help the individual find himself/herself in the new sense-system and provide possible motivations, driving forces, behavioral direction, enemy-pictures, and methods of problem-resolution (Borstel & Wagner, 2006; Hennig, 1983; Mudde, 2000; Wahl, 2003; Watts, 1996; Winkler, 2003). Furthermore, they build the nucleus of social movement, which assumes a perceived threat and/or increased immigration. The perceived threat relates particularly to the feared loss of status or the restriction in a possible status enhancement (cf. also Jonas, 1998; Stöss, 2007). Furthermore, ideology appears to be a central component in a kind of “chain-reaction,” composed, according to Watts (1996), of biases and discrimination potential (as a precondition), as well as a two-fold identification of the enemy (ideology + threat/competition).

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<sup>37</sup> So, for example, in the GDR (B. Wagner, 2013b).

#### 4.2. Meso-Social Factors

“The meso-social context [contains] causes which follow from the relationships with and between groups” (Beelmann, *et al.*, 2009: 297).<sup>38</sup> Because of the dynamic nature and narrow possibility of delineation of these factors in the grey area between micro- and macro-social influences and causes for right-wing extremist radicalization, these elements are particularly difficult to grasp and conceptualize. They are on the one hand supported by a larger or smaller group and are sometimes merely macro-social factors on a smaller scale. At the same time dynamic interplay is of central meaning to the individual. Contrary to the macro-social factors, which as a general rule are virtually invulnerable to influence by an individual person, meso-social elements appear as perfectly malleable. A change from the individual to the communal level and back is in this case the rule.

One of these influences unquestionably significant is the group dynamic. As Beelman (2009: 297) already expressed, right-wing extremism is a “group phenomenon.” The importance of the group and the group’s own dynamics in relation to the radicalization of individual group members is clear. Aggression as a learned behavior is primarily structured and focused either in the family or the “peer-group” (Hodges, Card, & Isaacs, 2002). Cliques thereby develop independent group identities and behavioral constraints, which in the changing relationship to individual members of the group in different ways can pave the way to the readiness to use force (cf. Fuchs, Lamnek, & Wiederer, 2003; Gamper & Willems, 2006; Hafeneger & Becker, 2007; Hafeneger & Jansen, 2001; Möller, 2005a; Mummendey & Simon, 1997; Tajfel, 1981; Wahl, 2003). Sometimes discourse within groups can bring forth a real “aesthetic of violence” (Jaschke, 2007; Ueltzhöffer, 1993). Part of the group culture can as well be a prominent “hyper-masculinity,” which, with a chauvinistic picture of society, archaic action patterns, and simplified black-white logic, uses violence as a legitimate method for the achievement of their own or their group’s goals. This process is described and analyzed ubiquitously in case-studies of different right-wing extremist mini-groups or subcultures (Beelmann, *et al.*, 2009; Clarke, 1976; Hinrichs, 2003; Kohlstruck & Münch, 2006;

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<sup>38</sup> „Der meso-soziale Kontext [umfasst] Ursachen, die sich aus den Beziehungen zu und zwischen Gruppen ergeben.“

Möller, 2004, 2006; Neumann & Frindte, 2002; Rippl & Boehnke, 1998; Wetzels & Brettfeld, 2003).

Group-dynamic processes therefore play a role in the radicalization of the persons interviewed for these studies. In this regard, it is sometimes about group-pressure, also to a certain extent about the friendships made in the group, but above all about making more contacts. Additionally the search for a collective identity, community, and togetherness was an important motive for the initial approach to the scene. It could therefore be said that in the sense of meso-social theories the group dynamic is crucial for radicalization, yet this was emphatically not the case in the interviews here described. For the most part, the process ran itself out consciously and in a self-directed fashion.

#### 4.3. Micro-Social Factors

##### 4.3.1. *Authoritarian Personality*

This especially popular form of explanation of right-wing extremist radicalization goes back to Theodor Adorno, who together with psychologists Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson and Nevitt Sanford wanted to propose a comprehensive personality theory for the explanation of National Socialism and its wide acceptance by the German population. The personality functions in this approach as the result of different “psychodynamic” childhood experiences: Conventionalism, authoritarian subjection, authoritarian aggression, anti-intracception, superstition and stereotypes, power and inurement, destructivity and cynicism, projection and sexuality. As a result, Adorno believed that the authoritarian personality was highly disposed to prominent hierarchies, traditional and conservative values, and especially to the acceptance of a chief leader (Adorno, 1950). In this case the liability to right-wing extremist violent acts was also traced back to the subject’s personal disposition or character, which was certainly strong through upbringing and childhood life experiences. This theory was much-discussed and, as earlier with macro-social factors, the results are controversial. Many scientists see in interviews and case-studies the theory of personality disposition (*i.e.*, affinity for violence, hierarchy, and authoritarianism from upbringing) validated (e.g.

Beelmann, et al., 2009; J. B. Billiet, et al., 1996; Fuchs, 2003; Gamper & Willems, 2006; Hafeneger, 1994; Hafeneger & Jansen, 2001; Kleinert & De Rijke, 2001; König, 1998a; Noack, 2001; Oepke, 2008; Oesterreich, 1993, 1996, 2000; Rippl, 2003; Rippl, Kindervater, & Seipel, 2000; Terwey, 2000; Wahl, 2003; Winkler, 2003). Especially in the area of right-wing extremist violence among youth, the authoritarian personality was more commonly suggested as an explanation (Lederer, 1983; Lederer & Schmidt, 1995; Oesterreich, 1993). In clinical studies some forensic medical experts identified different personality traits as significant, such as low tolerance for insecurity or a need for hierarchy (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003a, 2003b). Furthermore, a very stable relationship was found between an authoritarian personality and ethnic prejudices (Lederer, 1983). But there are also opposing opinions. Altemeyer (1988), for example, found in his interviews no evidence for a significant impact of education in the area of right-wing extremist radicalization. Especially strongly criticized was the exit-hypothesis according to the approach of Adorno, which stated that the political, social and economic attitude patterns of an individual indicate a self-contained worldview of hidden personal patterns (Bacher, 2001; Walkenhorst, 2001). To the extent that childhood socialization and education causes the oft-described “I-pains” and a disposition to covert or overt aggression, aggression which can easily be invoked through right-wing extremist ideologies and groups (cf. König, 1998b), the hypothesis was supported by most empirical studies but could not be shown to be universally sound. On the one hand there is hardly a causality to demonstrate; on the other hand, it is not difficult to find individuals in right-wing extremist circumstances who do not exhibit a classic “authoritarian personality” or a predisposition influenced by an authoritarian education. So this theory even in the interviews of this work plays no special role. Little evidence for a personality disposition and only very little evidence for the formative influence of an authoritarian education was found. Merely one person described the influence of the education from their grandparents (according to the model of the Third Reich) on him and his mother, which had “paved the way.” To this point it must be added that in this case as well no special “authoritarian” education had stuck out: “That’s not true. I

experienced love, from my grandparents, even from my mother” (Interview 1; A; section 47).<sup>39</sup>

#### 4.3.2. *Deprivation Theory (Relative Deprivation)*

Going back to Lipset and Hofstadter (Hofstadter, 1964; Lipset, 1959; Lipset & Raab, 1978) is the developed hypothesis that individuals who see their economic status threatened tend to be more likely to support right-wing extremist parties and to perpetuate right-wing extremist attitudinal patterns, which on the other hand is the precondition and basis for a right-wing extremist radicalization of themselves or of other persons. Lipset thus coined the concept of right-wing extremism “from the middle,” since it appears that especially the middle (of society) is affected by the fear of loss, which is able to lead to ethnocentric or nationalistic attitudes. In contrast to the above-mentioned Collective Deprivation, Relative or Individual Deprivation appears to have a strong meaning in the area of right-wing extremist radicalization. The effect on youth criminals seems particularly clear. In the interviews, juvenile offenders portrayed their actual socio-economic position, the position of their family, and their subjectively-observed situation in comparison to ethnic minorities as determining factors for their readiness to use violence (Runciman, 1966; Silbereisen & Walper, 1987; Würtz, 2000). In these interviews an appropriate example was named:

“The politics of integration was also a theme for me. Because I even...so there were already classifications and uhm...yes...what is clear and what one sees...just stokes the hatred against foreigners, if you aren’t already concerned with that. Then you are concerned with that...one sees “AHA” who are helped, who get support, why not me!? ... Right! So I realized the one thing: as I was pregnant, I was at the public health department to apply for reimbursement of baby’s first clothes...there was a posting: ‘Foreigners 2700 D-Marks, Germans 1600 D-Marks.’ There you have to ask yourself: ‘Why?’ So...for me that was just the entry.” (Interview 4; B; section 28).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> „Das stimmt nicht. Ich habe Liebe erfahren, von meinen Großeltern, selbst von meiner Mutter.“

<sup>40</sup> „Auch die Integrationspolitik war für mich ein Thema. Weil ich eben ..., also es gibt schon Klassifizierungen und ehmm... ja ... was halt klar ist und was man sieht... schürt halt den Hass gegen Ausländer, wenn man sich nicht damit beschäftigt. Man beschäftigt sich dann mit ... man sieht „AHA“ den wird geholfen, der kriegt Unterstützung, warum ich nicht!?! (...) Richtig! Also einfallen tut mir das eine: als ich schwanger war mit dem



Social inequality and a corresponding sense of injustice function generally as strong factors motivating violent crimes (Albrecht, 2001) and are exploited with especial effectiveness by right-wing extremist groups by means of various psychological mechanisms (scapegoats, defense of homeland and people vs. exploitation, etc.). Accordingly, Relative Deprivation functions as one of the most commonly posited and referenced explanatory factors for right-wing extremist attitudes and violence.<sup>41</sup>

Yet despite the extensive positive literature for the validation of Relative Deprivation as a cause of right-wing extremism, it is worth mentioning here various differences and critical positions. For one, the concept was in this way put in perspective: that a direct competitive situation or essentially contact with a better-positioned minority group functions as a condition for the negative effective of one's own deprivation (Rippl & Baier, 2005; Terwey, 2000; Winkler, 2003). Another supplement to Deprivation Theory is based on a difference in values or tension on the individual level. Values imparted by our society as well as life-goals perceived as worthwhile or desirable become frustrations for people (especially youths) with lacking social-capital (education, family background, etc.) and with the accompanying reduced chances to achieve these goals. This can result in discharge of right-wing extremist aggression (Butterwegge, Lösch, & Ptak, 2008; Hagan, et al., 1998). In this sense Deprivation would not *per se* be the deciding factor, but rather the difference between expectations and that which is possible.

Other studies could find no influence whatsoever of Relative Deprivation on right-wing extremist radicalization and motivations to violence (Bacher, 2001). Just so, in the analysis of the General Population Survey of the Social Sciences (ALLBUS) by the Leibniz Institute for Social Sciences (ALLBUS, 1996) and the Nürnberger Vocational-School Internal

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Großen, war ich auf dem Gesundheitsamt um Erstlingsausstattung zu beantragen... da war ein Aushang: Ausländer 2700 D-Mark, Deutsche 1600 D-Mark. Da fragt man sich dann: „Warum?“ so.... das war für mich dann halt so der Einstieg.“

<sup>41</sup> (cf. Beelmann, et al., 2009; Bjørgo, 2011; Bjørgo & Carlsson, 2005; Ezekiel, 2002; Frindte, 1995; Frindte & Neumann, 2002b; Gamper & Willems, 2006; Heitmeyer, 1992; Christel Hopf, 2000; W. Hopf, 1994; Medoff, 1999; Melzer, 1992; Möller, 2006; Noack, 2001; T. F. Pettigrew, 2002; T. F. M. Pettigrew, R.W., 1995; Rippl, 2003; Stöss, 2007; U. Wagner & Zick, 1995; Willems, 1993, 1994, 1995; Willems & Hill, 1993; Willems, Würtz, & Eckert, 1994).

Survey (Bacher, 1999), no influence of the individual socio-economic status of juveniles could be found on their attitudes to immigrants, foreigners, or right-wing extremism (ibid.). Still other studies could not make a connection in different surveys and interviews (Fuchs, 2003; W. Hopf, 1994; Schmidt, Maes, & Gollwitzer, 2003; Sears & Funk, 1991). With the exception of the above examples, no further mechanism of action appeared in the interviews for this study which could be traced to Relative Deprivation.

#### 4.3.3. *Disintegration Theory*

The explanatory model for right-wing extremism which is best known in the German-speaking world and which is most widely propounded was largely developed by the Bielefeld Professor of Education Wilhelm Heitmeyer. The so-called Disintegration-Insecurity Theorem builds the foundation for the approach of “group-based enmity” developed by Heitmeyer *et al.*, which seeks, similar to the approach of “hate crimes” in the Anglo-American sphere, to integrate the elements of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia, abasement of the handicapped and homeless, Islamophobia, and sexism into a new extensive research concept. The foundation for Heitmeyer’s Disintegration Theory is above all with reference to Beck (1986), the establishment of individualization in other areas of life, *i.e.*, the qualitative downgrading of the conventional or heretofore familiar milieu and framework of tradition (family, clubs, *etc.*). For individuals this means a release from certain compulsions that were bound up with the old framework of tradition, and therefore the increase of their own potential for action. According to Heitmeyer, however, this potential can be fully achieved only through identity-related mechanisms for action. Thus, threatened youths are for different reasons (flawed socialization, lacking human capital, ignorance about perspectives or possibilities) incapable themselves of drawing upon their own potential. This excessive strain can ultimately lead to disorientation, insecurity, and a lacking sense of self-worth. Right-wing extremism appears to these youths, then, as a welcome and clear power of interpretation, which offers strong frameworks and ready structures of meaning, while imparting identity (Anhut & Heitmeyer, 2000; Heitmeyer, 1987, 1994, 2002; Heitmeyer &

Imbusch, 2005; Heitmeyer & Jacobi, 1991; Heitmeyer, et al., 1992; Möller, Heitmeyer, & Sünker, 1989).

This approach is sometimes referred to following Durkheim and Parson's Anomie Theory. Both scientists assumed the construction of social norms and orders brought about by uprooting and fast social change in order to explain the social decay of modern society which they observed (Durkheim, 1973; Parsons, 1942). In this respect Parson's work is particularly interesting, as he first related right-wing extremism (or in his time, national-socialism) with insecurity and disappointed individual hopes through the separation of the society. That processes of individualization can lead to insecurity or the already-named "authoritarian reaction" belongs in the same way to a theorem of right-wing extremism research supported mostly by interviews (e.g. U. Beck, 1986; Commission, 2004; Hagan, Rippl, Boehnke, & Hefler, 1999; Hagan, et al., 1998; Heitmeyer & Jacobi, 1991; Ignazi, 1995). Another heretofore only inadequately examined aspect of individualization is an inflated sense of self-awareness, which is expressed in self-aggrandizement and consequently in the devaluation of other people (Fuchs, 2003).

Disintegration or Anomie Theory has found strong support in the social sciences and was received very positively. The great majority of studies (interviews, surveys, individual case-studies) see the theory as valid in most cases at the very least (e.g. Baacke & Heitmeyer, 1985; Babka von Gostomski, 2003; Beelmann, et al., 2009; Blazak, 2001; Frindte, 1995; Frindte & Neumann, 2002a; Fuchs, 2003; Gamper & Willems, 2006; Hafeneger, 1993, 1994; Hafeneger & Becker, 2007; Hafeneger & Jansen, 2001; Kassis, 2005; Möller, 2005b, 2006; Noack, 2001; Rippl & Seipel, 2002; Winkler, 1996). Closely related to Anomie or Disintegration Theory is the effect of fractures in the family biography (separation of parents, abuse, etc.) or faulty or failed early-childhood socialization. These effects are often described in connection with the disintegration arising from them and belong to the most-frequently appearing features of biographical analyses of right-wing extremist offenders (e.g. Fuchs, 2003; Fuchs, et al., 2003; Christel Hopf, 2000; C. Hopf, Rieker, Sanden-Marcus, & Schmidt, 1995; C. Hopf & Schmidt, 1993; Ihle, Esser, & Schmidt, 2003; Ittel, Stecher,

Merkens, Zinnecker, & Oepke, 2008; Ittel, Stecher, Merkens, Zinnecker, & Schmid, 2008; Kassis, 2005; Köttig, 2004; Krall, 2007; Oepke, 2005; Oevermann, 1998).

Critics of Disintegration Theory are very seldom found. However, Minkenberg shows in his approach to modernization theory that in no way do only “disintegrated” people tend toward right-wing extremism (Minkenberg, 1990, 1998, 2000, 2006; Minkenberg, Sucker, & Wenninger, 2006):

“(…) it [Disintegration Theory] overlooks the possibility, indeed the fact, that right-wing radical views and behaviour can also be developed and passed on in intact milieus.” (Minkenberg, 2000: 173)

Additionally, Fuchs finds only a restricted explanatory value (the theory appears partly to explain individual cases, and partly not) of Disintegration Theory (Fuchs, 2003: 668). Wendt *et al.* (Wendt, Lau, & Kröber, 2002) found in their comparison of right-wing extremists and apolitical violent criminals that right-wing extremist offenders were to a lesser degree affected by biographical ties and their own experiences of violence (not only in the family; cf. Adamek & Lewis, 1975, for social controlling power), more often grew up in complete families, and more often found in employment up to the time of the crime than apolitical comparison-groups. In an examination of other sentences for arson attacks with right-wing extremist motives between 1995 and 1998, Neubacher too found no evidence for a social Disintegration (Neubacher, 1998); additionally, Kreuzer (2001) highlighted the “normality” of the right-wing extremist offenders which he investigated.

Since the focus of the Disintegration approach is limited to the German-speaking world and also to juveniles, one excludes from the outside a wide mass of right-wing extremist radicalized supports of different groups worldwide. In particular, the often-stated assessment of right-wing extremism as a phenomenon of the middle (cf. O. Decker & Brähler, 2006; Klärner, 2008; Kraske & Werner, 2007) shows that the approach of Heitmeyer appears to represent an important part of the explanation of one part of the problem, but can obviously only be seen as a supplement to the area of right-wing extremist radicalization as a whole.

Disintegration Theory played no role in the interviews for this study. On the contrary, all individuals were relatively well-integrated before their entry. Also, with respect to their later environment in the scene, no especially conspicuous pattern of disintegration was detected:

“...many who study, they study in the social field, psychology or teaching or whatever.” (Interview 5; C; Section 62)<sup>42</sup>

“From my experience I can say that it was really mixed in my circle of friends from that time. There were not only people who came from low social circumstances or educationally disadvantaged parents, but also people whose parents came from high educational circles.” (Interview 1; A; Section 4)<sup>43</sup>

“The young people there were really very different, they came from all educational strata.” (Interview 1; A; Section 14)<sup>44</sup>

“There were some who only grew up with one biological parent, there were children of divorced parents. Most striking for me was that there were at least in my area many kids and youths whose parents, mostly also the mothers, had big problems that their children had drifted off into the right-wing political scene, and also resisted it. Partly it seemed that they picked up their kids from a bar, cut off Thor Steinar-symbols from their clothes, and threw out their music. In these cases we told the youths that an intact home with the parents was important. Especially at the age where you begin an apprenticeship or study. You need this peace there, in other words just let it be with the music or the gear. You must keep the family peace, and just the same goes for relationships. We always said that a relationship is important, even if the partner perhaps doesn't come from the right-wing scene. If everything in the inner private life is in order, the public work also functions.” (Interview 1; A; Section 17)<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> „(...) viele die studieren, die studieren im sozialen Bereich Psychologie oder Lehramt oder was auch immer.“

<sup>43</sup> „Ich kann aus meiner Erfahrung sagen, dass es in meinem damaligen Kameradenumfeld recht gemischt war. Es waren jetzt nicht nur Leute, die aus sozial schwachen oder bildungsfernen Elternhäusern stammten, sondern auch welche dabei, deren Eltern aus höheren Bildungskreisen stammten.“

<sup>44</sup> „Dabei waren die jungen Leute recht unterschiedlich, sie kamen aus allen Bildungsschichten.“

<sup>45</sup> „Es gab einige, die nur mit einem leiblichen Elternteil aufgewachsen sind, es gab Scheidungskinder. Auffällig für mich war, dass zumindest in meinem Bereich viele Kinder und Jugendliche waren, deren Eltern, meistens auch die Mütter, große Probleme damit hatten, dass ihr Kind in die rechte Szene abdriftet, und sich auch dagegen gewehrt haben. Teilweise sah das so aus, dass sie ihre Kinder aus einer Bar herausgeholt haben, Thor Steinar-Symbole aus der Kleidung geschnitten und Musik weggeworfen haben. In diesen Fällen haben wir den Jugendlichen gesagt, dass ein intaktes Elternhaus wichtig ist. Gerade in dem Alter, in dem man eine Lehre anfängt oder studiert. Da braucht man diese Ruhe, also lass es doch sein mit der Musik oder den Klamotten.“

#### 4.3.4. Education

A further character trait extracted from interviews, individual case-studies and biographical analysis of right-wing extremist violent offenders is an educational level that is below average (O. B. Decker, Elmar, 2005; Frindte, 1995; Frindte & Neumann, 2002c; Gamper & Willems, 2006; Hinrichs, 2003; Hodges, et al., 2002; Husfeldt, 2006; Ittel, Stecher, Merkens, Zinnecker, & Oepke, 2008; Ittel, Stecher, Merkens, Zinnecker, & Schmid, 2008; Kassis, 2005; Klein-Allermann, et al., 1995; Melzer & Rostampour, 2002; Oepke, 2005; Wahl, Ottinger-Gaßebner, Kleinert, & Renninger, 2005). An inadequate education together with relative deprivation and disintegration quickly achieves the status of a standard right-wing extremist profile. It can from this be shown that right-wing extremist attitudes decrease with increasing levels of education (W. Hopf, 1999). Although it is true that individuals with high educational degrees are seldom to be found in the area of (militant) right-wing extremism, it is not simple to show a correlation. For one, the quality of the school appears to play a role (Husfeldt, 2006; Melzer & Rostampour, 2002). This pertains above all to the failure of teaching central social skills, which was found to be an extremely common factor in the profile analyses of right-wing extremists (W. Hopf, 1991, 1999; Mansel, 2000; Marneros, 2002, 2005; Möller, 2000, 2006; Wahl, et al., 2005; Wiezorek, 2006). This lacking social competence is expressed in the radicalization process through the inability to cope with one's own problems, fears, or stress-situations without violence, or to access one's full potential (*cf.* Disintegration) with success. The frustration resulting therefrom in connection with the perceived limited choice of potential behavior- or reaction-schemata can then, according to many researchers, push the individual increasingly along the path to violent right-wing extremism. Furthermore, however, the level of education appears not to have sufficient explanatory power on its own. Only in connection with other psychological elements (relative group deprivation, contact with other ethnic groups, political

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Man muss den Familienfrieden halten, und genauso in Beziehungen. Wir haben immer gesagt, dass eine Beziehung wichtig ist, auch wenn die betreffende vielleicht nicht aus der Szene kommt. Wenn privat alles in Ordnung ist, funktioniert auch die Arbeit nach außen.“

conservatism, *etc.*) can a negative effect be noted in the sense of the development of right-wing extremist attitudes and patterns of behavior (U. Wagner & Zick, 1995). In the above citations for Disintegration Theory it is especially clear that in the present interviews there was no striking pattern of the influence of education. Entirely to the contrary, both the interviewed persons and their environments in the scene were strongly mixed with regards to their educational backgrounds.

Even in comparison with apolitical violent offenders, no particular position of right-wing extremism appears which nullifies the explanatory power for right-wing extremism (Wendt, et al., 2002). It follows that one can without problems highlight individuals with a high level of education and material success (*e.g.*, William Pierce 1933-2002, founder and leader of the National Alliance, Ph.D. in Physics and temporary professor at Oregon State University; Jürgen Rieger 1946-2009, lawyer). Instead, there appears to be a connection between the level of education and the individual position in the hierarchy.

#### 4.3.5. Social Necessities

Biographical analyses facilitated the development of the theory that many members of right-wing extremist groups joined the movement because of particular social necessities (Beelmann, et al., 2009; Bjørgo, 2011; Bjørgo & Carlsson, 2005; Blee, 2002; Commission, 2004; Ezekiel, 2002; Frindte, 1995; Frindte & Neumann, 2002c; Moore, 1991; Mummendey & Simon, 1997; Reinares & al., 2008; Stöss, 2007; Wippermann, Zarcos-Lamolda, & Krafeld, 2002). These needs could include anything from absent feelings of self-worth about the search for identity to the pressure for group-togetherness (on group-togetherness cf. Bjørgo, 2011; Bjørgo & Carlsson, 2005; Borstel & Wagner, 2006; Gamper & Willems, 2006). Additionally, striving for power and recognition plays a particular role in the motivation to join a right-wing extremist group and to radicalize oneself further, step-by-step, or to become radicalized (Ezekiel, 2002; Stöss, 2007; Wahl, 2003). The contacts to “peer-groups” bound-up in the school environment or potential violent experiences are also of significance in this case (Hinrichs, 2003; Hodges, *et al.*, 2002; Kassis, 2005), insofar as they can lead to



encouragement to radicalization, either negatively (*e.g.*, bullying from other students leads to the search for protection from other groups) or positively (*e.g.*, group-togetherness).

The pursuit of cohesion, togetherness, friendship, and community plays a clear role in the present interviews for the subjects' entries into the right-wing extremist scene. More important for their radicalization, however, was the initial need for the expression of different morals and ideals, which proceed to develop in the scene to idealism and a belief in the cause.

#### 4.4. Result of the Categorization in the Present Literature

Not all of the suggested factors and theories were visible in this investigation. This is especially astonishing in the case of the non-macro-social theories, since the focus in this work is indeed on the individual level. As described in the introduction, even meso- and macro-social factors have a meaningful influence on the radicalization process of the individual:

“Radicalisation is a context-bound phenomenon par excellence. Global, sociological and political drivers matter as much as ideological and psychological ones. (...) A second common characteristic of all forms of radicalisation leading towards violence is that it always takes place at the intersection of an enabling environment and a personal trajectory. Not all individuals who share the same sense of injustice or are living in the same polarised environment turn to radicalism and even less so to violence or terrorism. Concrete personal experiences, kinship and friendship, group dynamics and socialisation into the use of violence are needed to trigger the actual process.” (Reinares & al., 2008: 9)

But macro-social factors thereby prove too abstract to be verifiable via the methods of interview-analysis employed here. The studies from this area, discussed above, use quantitative statistical methods. That applies to a certain extent even to meso-social factors. Group-dynamic processes are certainly of great importance, but with the methods used here only from the perspective of the individuals. In order to be able to investigate these processes and their effects in their original contexts, another approach must be selected.

None of the persons interviewed for this work named a macro-social influence. Yet this could theoretically be explained even by ignorance of such a macro-social force's consequences for the persons themselves. Nevertheless, considering the material presented here, one can strongly put into perspective the meaning of macro-social factors for individual radicalization.

To some degree, a low effect of micro-social variables on the persons investigated for this study must be conceded. Their explanatory worth is nevertheless limited. On the one hand, these factors force a unification of diverse individual backgrounds:

“Individuals involved in terrorism often come from a diversity of social backgrounds and have undergone rather different processes of violent radicalisation. Profiles of terrorists do not work as a tool to identify actual or potential terrorists because such profiles fail to capture the diversity and how people change when they become involved in militant extremism.” (Bjørgero, 2011: 9)

For this reason, differentiated micro-social approaches can also constitute different types of the members of a right-wing extremist group: Willems and Hill (1993) distinguish between activists, ethno-centrists, criminals, and mere participants. Bjørgero (2011; 2005) refines the typology through four dimensions of radicalization: ideological vs. non-ideological; leader vs. mere participant; high social status vs. marginalized; and the search for adventure.

On the other hand, “the right-wing extremist” is generally typified in certain set ways. But in this respect it cannot be explained why he or she became such: not every person with breaks in their own family biography or with special social needs, for instance, turns to right-wing extremism. This approach suffers from the methodical weakness of determinism. For what does it reveal if an overwhelming majority of right-wing extremist violent offenders are characterized as, to give an example, jobless, male, and with a low level of education? Moreover, it is doubtful whether the heretofore widely-accepted approach of considering factors or groups of factors as relatively isolated is a promising one. Membership and participation in right-wing extremist groups is no *ad hoc* arrangement, but rather the result of a long development:

“It can therefore be concluded that right-wing extremist orientations often lie at the very end of a long-term process. With respect to the research into aggression and violence, right-wing extremist attitudes develop from the interplay between individual, inter-group and social factors.” (Beelmann, *et al.*, 2009: 298-299)<sup>46</sup>

In conclusion, it must be said that through the critically-recognized “German bias,” the research on the radicalization of right-wing extremists is fundamentally afflicted with a strong cultural prejudice. This seriously degrades the explanatory value of the described theories and factors regarding present national or cultural influences in Germany.

## 5. Conclusion: Implications for Research and Politics

In this study, a methodical approach to process-analysis (Grounded Theory) in the area of the radicalization of individuals was proposed and applied which is relatively rare in the field of right-wing extremism research in Germany. Throughout this approach the focus remained particularly on the question of activities and the motives bound up therewith, as well as how and in what ways the individuals perceived these as personally meaningful. Difficulties in the methodology were already made clear in the introduction. The claim was not to develop a universal theory but rather to abstract a general process out of the provided data, if such a process exists at all. This was found to be the case and now, consequently, a retroactive investigation must verify the model of this study in further studies of interviews. Nevertheless, it was possible with Grounded Theory to find a new and innovative approach towards explaining individual radicalization, and the strength of the approach itself is clear. The central findings are summarized as follows:

- Right-wing extremist radicalization is not a pathological process which supposes abnormality, perversion, or similar.

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<sup>46</sup> „Dabei ist davon auszugehen, dass rechtsextreme Orientierungen oft erst am Ende eines langfristigen Prozesses stehen. Mit Blick auf die Aggressions- und Gewaltforschung entwickeln sich rechtsextreme Einstellungen aus der Wechselwirkung individueller, intergruppalen und gesellschaftlicher Faktoren.“

- Biographical features played almost no role with the interviewed persons in the context of their decisions to join the right-wing extremist scene and to further develop themselves within it.
- The character of the described radicalization is that of a process of self-realization, as it also occurs in every other respect in our society outside of right-wing extremism.
- Driven by the strong desire for expression, morals, ideals, collective identity, and simultaneous individualization, the persons questioned saw in right-wing extremist environments the possibility for self-expression and to both share and discuss their opinions.
- The urge for social change and political organization is another strong driving factor.
- The categories underlying the overall process can be termed “doing politics,” whereby a wide political understanding (abstract social change, organization, *etc.*) is intended.

The most important scientific implication is simply the further discovery of the bearing capacity and causal mechanisms of the model proposed here.

The political implications are, however, far more extensive and of greater scope. One must understand that right-wing extremists, or at least those radicalized among them, are neither failed human beings nor physically sick. Just as mistaken is the view that right-wing extremism is a fringe-phenomenon. People from all levels of education and with varying vocational and family-related backgrounds can follow the path to radicalization and act accordingly as well when necessary, as this study has shown. Repression, ignorance of the problem, or reference to processes of disintegration, *etc.*, betray a fundamental misunderstanding of the real motives and ultimate reasons which are responsible for each individual’s career in the right-wing extremist scene. With this view it is impossible to construct an efficient and effective program or measures towards prevention, containment, and diminution of the problem. So long as politics and society view right-wing extremists as alcoholic failures or pathological criminals who combine a propensity to violence with a political ideology and who are inclined to live on their impulses, the sundry federal

programs, state exit-assistance, country- and citizen-initiatives will all graze only a small part of the phenomenon. The radical nucleus to which the results of this study point is of an entirely different nature. Evidently it is composed of individuals who view their wish for social change and expression as no longer achievable within the confines of the democratic system. The strong drive for changes in social participation, self-responsible or autonomous organization, and collective identity exhibits solid political potential in a wide sense. The fact that democratic society, with its own accompanying morals and ideals, is not in a position to fill this void and to thereby create a free space which is currently occupied by right-wing extremist ideologies and organizations implies a rift between social institutions and youths or young-adults. Evidently, great distrust or disappointment with the established political system prevails before individuals decide to make their way into the right-wing extremist scene. Along with this, one of the deepest concerns of people in this study is the balanced discussion and expression of different morals and ideals, as well as the desire to be able to utilize one's own creative potential. At the same time a lack of collective identity appears to be a clear problem. In a democratic system, it should be possible to successfully address all of these points without the need to fall back on a right-wing extremist ideology. The proposed process of radicalization even implies a certain political and social failure. Should the model presented here be sound in the long-term, it would be clear that youths in particular have a strong wish for active participation both in their communities and in their own lives and that the established political system has lost touch as well as credibility. The solution to this problem would require an active and integrating political system which minimizes the distance between young people and politics, affords them the possibility of self-expression, and, above all, opens up sensible avenues for participation through which their own potentials can be utilized.

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## 7. Interviews at-a-Glance

As the interviews are the property of *EXIT Deutschland* and contain partially personal and otherwise sensitive data, the full text cannot be included in this work. Access to the interviews can be granted at the request of the author or of *EXIT Deutschland*.

Interview #.	With Person	Gender	Age at Time of Interview
1	A	Male	25-35
2	A		
3	A		
4	B	Female	25-35
5	C	Female	20-30
6	D	Male	25-35
7	E	Male	20-30
8	F	Male	20-30
9	G	Male	20-30