Becoming a European homegrown jihadist: a multilevel analysis of involvement in the Dutch Hofstadgroup, 2002-2005

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9. Individual-level analysis II: Terrorists as psychologically distinctive

9.1 Introduction

This chapter completes the two-part examination of the individual level analysis. The explanations discussed in the following paragraphs share a focus on explaining involvement in terrorism as resulting from the distinct psychological features. The first three paragraphs in particular embody the assumption that terrorists are somehow different from 'normal' individuals. They assess mental illness, psychological trauma and personality characteristics as factors that can increase the likeliness of involvement in terrorism. The chapter's second half departs from the focus on abnormality to look at the role of emotions in bringing about involvement in terrorist groups and terrorist attacks. In particular, frustration-induced anger and fear of death are discussed as factors that can motivate such participation.

9.1.1 Are terrorists abnormal?

Two recurrent trends in research on terrorism have been the search for a distinctive terrorist personality or profile and the idea that terrorism can be explained as the result of mental illness or psychological damage incurred during childhood. The debate about the presumed link between psychopathology and involvement in terrorism in particular has received considerable criticism. Numerous authors have lamented the empirically poorly substantiated nature of such claims.[908] The difficulty of accessing terrorists for research purposes, let alone carrying out clinical studies on them, means that explanations which hold that involvement in terrorism stems from distinct psychological qualities must be treated with care.[909] Yet the ongoing popularity of many of these explanations means that they cannot simply be dismissed. On the basis of a literature review, the author identified five themes in this literature that form the main points of discussion (Table 10).

Individual level analysis II: Terrorists as psychologically distinctive
Psychopathology
Psychoanalysis, significance loss and identity-related alienation
Terrorist personality or profile
Anger and frustration
Mortality salience

Table 10

908 Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, 3; Victoroff, "The mind of the terrorist," 31; Andrew Silke, "Cheshire-cat logic: the recurring theme of terrorist abnormality in psychological research," *Psychology, Crime & Law* 4, no. 1 (1998): 52-53.

909 Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, 3-4.

9.2 Psychopathology

Perhaps because it is comforting to see terrorist violence as the work of mentally disturbed individuals, psychopathology has become a well-established explanation for this form of behavior.[910] But as a multitude of authors attest, no matter how much the psychopathology argument makes intuitive sense, it lacks sufficient empirical support.[911] Terrorists appear no more likely to suffer from major mental illness than the general population.[912] Furthermore, psychopaths would make highly unreliable and dangerous operatives, making it likely that they would be shunned by terrorist groups.[913] Neither is it convincing to argue that terrorism's severe 'occupational hazards' would only be acceptable to the mentally unstable. There is a wide range of people who hold dangerous jobs, such as police officers and soldiers, who are not considered mentally disturbed.[914] For these reasons, psychopathology ranks among the most criticized explanations for involvement in terrorism.

While few authors continue to propagate the view that terrorists are psychopathic, the link between involvement in terrorism and mental health issues more broadly remains contested. Merari and colleagues raise the important point that some personality disorders are very subtle; thorough clinical tests are needed before they can be ascertained or dismissed.[915] A study by Kleinmann claims evidence that terrorists are more likely to suffer from mental health issues such as schizophrenia than the general population.[916] Lankford addresses this topic in considerably greater detail and reports that a significant percentage of suicide attackers suffered from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and 'other mental health problems'.[917] In an explorative study based on access to police files, Weenink writes that just under fifty percent of his sample of

910 Borum, *Psychology of terrorism*, 31; Silke, "Cheshire-cat logic," 56-57.

911 Raymond R. Corrado, "A critique of the mental disorder perspective of political terrorism," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 4, no. 3-4 (1981): 295-304; Crenshaw, "The psychology of political terrorism," 385; Hudson, "The sociology and psychology of terrorism," 60; Arie W. Kruglanski and Shira Fishman, "What makes terrorism tick? Its individual, group and organizational aspects," *Revista de Psicología Social: International Journal of Social Psychology* 24, no. 2 (2009): 140-141; Clark McCauley, "Psychological issues in understanding terrorism and the response to terrorism," in *The psychology of terrorism: volume III, theoretical understandings and perspectives*, ed. Chris E. Stout (Westport / London: Praeger, 2002), 5-6; McCauley and Segal, "Social psychology of terrorist groups," 333; Merari, "Psychological aspects of suicide terrorism," 107; Charles L. Ruby, "Are terrorists mentally deranged?," *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 2, no. 1 (2002): 22; Silke, "Cheshire-cat logic," 53, 60-62; Victoroff, "The mind of the terrorist," 12-14.

912 Silke, "Cheshire-cat logic," 62; Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, 61.

913 J.T. Alderdice, "The individual, the group and the psychology of terrorism," *International Review of Psychiatry* 19, no. 3 (2007): 201; Aaron T. Beck, "Prisoners of hate," *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 40, no. 3 (2002): 210; Borum, *Psychology of terrorism*, 32; Robin M. Frost, "Terrorist psychology, motivation and strategy," *The Adelphi Papers* 45, no. 378 (2005): 42-43; Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation," 21.

914 Ruby, "Are terrorists mentally deranged?," 21.

915 Merari, "Psychological aspects of suicide terrorism," 104.

916 Kleinmann, "Radicalization of homegrown Sunni militants in the United States," 287-288.

917 Adam Lankford, "Précis of The Myth of Martyrdom: what really drives suicide bombers, rampage shooters, and other self-destructive killers," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 37, no. 4 (2014): 354-355.

Dutch jihadists displayed 'problem behavior' and that six percent had diagnosed mental health problems.[918]

While outright psychopathology has become less prevalent as an explanation for terrorism, relatively 'minor' mental health problems continue to figure prominently in the literature. Studies like Weenink's cannot be seen as (nor claim to be) clinical diagnoses, yet their use of extensive empirical data lends considerable credibility to the notion that behavioral issues and mental health problems other than psychopathology may still play a role in bringing about involvement in terrorism. However, it remains to be elucidated how exactly factors such as depression or autism spectrum disorders can contribute to this outcome. After all, many people will suffer some form of depression during their lives yet the vast majority of these individuals will not become involved in any kind of violent behavior. Given the history of poorly supported claims of terrorists' abnormality, caution is in order.

9.2.1 Mental health issues and the Hofstadgroup

The only two participants subjected to extensive psychological and psychiatric assessments were Van Gogh's killer and the individual who videotaped threats to the Dutch public in 2005.[919] Van Gogh's assailant steadfastly refused to cooperate with specialists at the psychiatric observation clinic Pieter Baan Centre (PBC) in Utrecht. Nevertheless, in the report presented during his trial, PBC experts concluded that there was no indication that he had refused cooperation on pathological grounds and that the little data they had gathered was insufficient to warrant the view that Van Gogh's killer suffered from some kind of disorder.[920] Initially, the participant who videotaped threats also refused to cooperate.[921] But by early 2005, a psychological report was submitted to the court that concluded he too did not suffer from a personality disorder.[922]

Within the broader Hofstadgroup, reliable indications of mental illness are virtually absent. The one clear case concerns a young man on the edges of 2005's Piranha group. In October 2007, he escaped from a psychiatric hospital and stabbed two police officers, one of whom then shot the assailant dead.[923] While this individual clearly suffered from mental health problems, at present there are simply no indications that these issues contributed to his (peripheral) participation in the group. There is therefore little cause to amend the overall conclusion that mental health problems do not offer an explanation for involvement in the Hofstadgroup.

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918 Anton W. Weenink, "Behavioral problems and disorders among radicals in police files," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 2 (2015): 24-27.

919 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 3-4.

920 Amsterdam District Court, "LJN AU0025," 8-9.

921 "Psychisch onderzoek naar Samir A. levert niets op," *De Volkskrant*, 13 December 2004.

922 "Rechter wil meer getuigen, zaak Samir A. vertraagd," *NRC Handelsblad*, 25 February 2005.

923 Janny Groen, Annieke Kranenberg, and Weert Schenk, "Bilal B. was bekende van Hofstadgroep," *De Volkskrant*, 16 October 2007.

9.3 Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis was pioneered by Sigmund Freud in the late nineteenth century. In explaining human behavior, it affords a key role to the influence of repressed or unconsciously held desires.[924] The origins of these desires are attributed to various phases of childhood mental development, with particular emphasis on 'unresolved intrapsychic conflict' that occurred during this period.[925] In the second half of the twentieth-century, psychoanalytical approaches began to be used to explain involvement in terrorism. Narcissism-aggression theory, for instance, holds that ego-damage suffered during childhood or adolescence can lead individuals to terrorism as a way of projecting inner pain on external targets.[926] Another approach posits that the inability to live up to societal expectations and norms can prompt the adoption of 'negative identities', whereby the damaged individual embraces precisely those values that society abhors and becomes somebody by embodying the 'nobody'.[927]

Psychoanalytical approaches have lost ground in contemporary psychological and psychiatric research.[928] One problematic aspect of these theories is their lack of strong empirical support.[929] Another issue is their embodiment of the 'fundamental attribution error'. That is the human tendency to ascribe the behavior of others to innate qualities and to downplay the role of circumstances. Essentially, psychoanalytical approaches 'overestimate the internal causes of terrorist behavior'.[930] Finally, psychoanalytical explanations are hard to falsify; how can the assertion of an *unconsciously held* desire be refuted?[931]

While Post acknowledges the absence of 'major psychopathology', he holds to the psychoanalytical approach essentially as a way of continuing the argument that terrorists are intrinsically different.[932] Likewise, Merari and colleagues assert in one publication that the suicide terrorists they studied showed no evidence of psychopathic tendencies, but argue in another that forty percent of the same sample did display subclinical (i.e. not definitely observed) suicidal tendencies that,

924 Michael P. Arena and Bruce A. Arrigo, *The terrorist identity: explaining the terrorist threat* (New York / London: New York University Press, 2006), 3-4; Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, 57.
925 Victoroff, "The mind of the terrorist," 22.
926 Post, "Terrorist psycho-logic," 27; Ross, "A model of the psychological causes," 134; Victoroff, "The mind of the terrorist," 23-24.
927 Hudson, "The sociology and psychology of terrorism," 20; Crenshaw, "The psychology of political terrorism," 393.
928 Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, 57; Victoroff, "The mind of the terrorist," 26.
929 Arena and Arrigo, *The terrorist identity*, 24-25; Borum, *Psychology of terrorism*, 11; Corrado, "A critique of the mental disorder perspective," 298-304; Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, 57; Brooke Rogers, "The psychology of violent radicalisation," in *The psychology of counter-terrorism*, ed. Andrew Silke (London / New York: Routledge, 2011), 36; Silke, "Cheshire-cat logic," 52-67; Victoroff, "The mind of the terrorist," 22.
930 Arena and Arrigo, *The terrorist identity*, 4.
931 Victoroff, "The mind of the terrorist," 26.
932 Post, "Terrorist psycho-logic," 25-27.

moreover, the subjects themselves may have held without being aware of them.[933] As Silke and Horgan point out, psychoanalytical approaches essentially provide a way of promulgating the questionable argument that terrorism results from some form of mental illness.[934]

Given their empirical and theoretical deficiencies, 'classic' psychoanalytical approaches such as narcissism-aggression theory will not be used to study involvement in the Hofstadgroup. Instead, the discussion continues with two more recently coined explanations that depart from the psychoanalytical tradition of subconsciously held desires and psychological damage incurred during childhood and adolescence, yet also resemble it in their emphasis on (perceived) shortcomings in an individual's sense of self as motivating behavior. These lines of inquiry focus on 'significance quests' and identity-related alienation.

9.4 Significance quests and identity-related alienation

The wish to attain and maintain a sense of personal significance has been identified by psychological research as a key human need.[935] Kruglanski et al. present this 'fundamental desire to matter, to be someone, to have respect' as terrorists' overarching motivation.[936] Such a yearning may be triggered by real, perceived or potential significance loss, which itself may be brought about by, for instance, existential anxiety, social isolation, (group-based) humiliation or deprivation.[937] Significance quests are not envisioned as purely defensive reactions to (potential) significance loss, however. Involvement in terrorism may also come about as the result of an opportunity for marked 'significance gain', such as the chance to acquire social standing by committing a 'martyrdom' (suicide) attack.[938]

Research has provided empirical support for the notion that the desire to (re)gain a sense of personal significance can contribute to processes of involvement in terrorism.[939] However, it should be noted that a desire for significance is not unique to terrorists. The likeliness that such quests will increase the probability of involvement in terrorism appears dependent on contextual factors. These are the perception of *unjust* personal or group-based deprivation, the ability to point to a hostile responsible party and the availability of justifications for violence.[940]

933 Ariel Merari et al., "Personality characteristics of 'self martyrs' / 'suicide bombers' and organizers of suicide attacks," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 1 (2009): 95-96; Merari et al., "Making Palestinian 'martyrdom operations'," 118.

934 Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, 61; Silke, "Cheshire-cat logic," 64-67.

935 Arie W. Kruglanski and Edward Orehek, "The role of the quest for personal significance in motivating terrorism," in *The psychology of social conflict and aggression*, ed. Joseph P. Forgas, Arie W. Kruglanski, and Kipling D. Williams (New York / London: Psychology Press, 2011), 154.

936 Kruglanski et al., "The psychology of radicalization and deradicalization," 73.

937 Kruglanski and Fishman, "What makes terrorism tick?," 142-145; Kruglanski et al., "The psychology of radicalization and deradicalization," 74-76; Arie W. Kruglanski et al., "Fully committed: suicide bombers' motivation and the quest for personal significance," *Political Psychology* 30, no. 3 (2009): 331-357.

938 Kruglanski et al., "The psychology of radicalization and deradicalization," 75-76.

939 Ilardi, "Interviews with Canadian radicals," 717-718.

940 Kruglanski and Orehek, "The role of the quest," 163.

Identity-related alienation essentially holds that children of Muslim immigrants to Western countries can come to feel that they neither belong to the country and culture of their parents, nor to the country and culture of their birth. Too modern to fit into the first and too different in appearance and upbringing to fit seamlessly into the latter, these second and third generation immigrants may come to lack a clear sense of identity. Experiences with discrimination or exclusion can exacerbate this feeling of alienation and add a keen sense of frustration and anger towards their fellow citizens. In such a setting, radical and extremist interpretations of Islam can become especially attractive through their ability to offer straightforward explanations ('you didn't get the job because unbelievers hate Muslims'), provide a clear sense of identity ('you're not Dutch or Moroccan, but a Muslim') and a militant purpose ('you must defend your religion').[941]

9.4.1 Significance quests and the Hofstadgroup

The clearest and most consequential significance quest among Hofstadgroup participants was the one that Van Gogh's future murderer underwent. The killer himself made this very clear in a farewell letter he wrote to his family. 'It has not eluded you that I have changed since the death of my mother. In the wake of her death I have undertaken a search to uncover the truth. (…) I have chosen to fulfill my duty to Allah and to trade my soul for paradise'.[942] The death of his mother triggered a cognitive opening that set Van Gogh's killer on a quest for answers that led him, in rapid succession, to embrace fundamentalist, radical and extremist interpretations of Islam.[943] Ultimately, his desire to be a 'true' Muslim resulted in the belief that blasphemers should be killed and that it was his personal duty to carry out the punishment, thus restoring some of the significance lost by the Prophet Muhammad at the hands of Van Gogh and Hirsi Ali.

The partial autobiography written by the individual who tried to reach Chechnya in 2003 and who videotaped a threat to the Dutch public in 2005 also reveals his experience of a significance quest. In a revealing passage, he states: '[o]n the Internet, I went looking for answers about Islam, I looked at websites belonging to Hamas and later I discovered al-Qaeda. I no longer watched gruesome images [of Muslim suffering], I had seen enough. Now I went looking for answers; "how should a Muslim react to all this injustice?"'[944] The desire for vengeance, explain Kruglanski et al., focuses on restoring an individual or group's loss of significance.[945] The quest to restore significance to Muslims affected by armed conflict, and to attain status as a 'true' Muslim in the

941 Cottee, "Jihadism as a subcultural response," 731, 738; Dalgaard-Nielsen, "Violent radicalization in Europe," 800; Loza, "The psychology of extremism and terrorism," 150; McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*, 85-88; Sam Mullins, "Iraq versus lack of integration: understanding the motivations of contemporary Islamist terrorists in Western countries," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 4, no. 2 (2012): 119; Olivier Roy, "Euro-islam: de jihad van binnenuit?," *Justitiële Verkenningen* 31, no. 2 (2005): 28-30, 36-38.

942 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHB03/27: 4040-4041; Alberts et al., "De wereld van Mohammed B."

943 Peters, "Dutch extremist Islamism," 145-159.

944 A[.], "Deurwaarders van Allah," 11.

945 Kruglanski et al., "The psychology of radicalization and deradicalization," 73-74.

process, would play a key role in this individual's behavior throughout the 2002-2005 existence of the group.

With regard to the broader group, significance quests drew participants to the group and motivated their continued presence. Numerous individuals were searching for the 'true' or 'right' interpretation of Islam and were able to address such questions within the group.[946] Groen and Kranenberg's interviews with female Hofstadgroup participants also show that at least some of these young women were drawn to radical Islam by a search for identity and that, more generally, they were exploring what roles women were allowed or expected to fulfill in jihad.[947] Lastly, the various recent converts in the group's ranks are also considered to have undergone significance quests around the time of their involvement, as conversion to a religion suggests a search for meaning and answers to the larger questions of life and death.[948] Indeed, one convert described how the desire to become a 'perfect Muslim' brought about the adoption of jihadist beliefs, which this individual saw as representing 'true' Islam.[949]

Many Hofstadgroup participants wanted to deepen their understanding of their faith and to ascertain what it meant to be a Muslim in a time when across the globe large numbers of co-religionists were affected by armed conflict. The sense of injustice, the perception that Western state and 'apostate' Muslims were responsible for this state of affairs and the availability of ideological justifications for violence, both online and within the group, created a context in which significance quests led to an increased likeliness of involvement in extremism and even terrorism. For the group's most militant participants, the significance quest concept suggests that the (intended) use of terrorism stemmed in part from their desire to become 'true' Muslims and to restore some of the significance they perceived their co-religionists and the faith as a whole had lost at the hands of Western military interventions in Muslims countries and the actions of blasphemers like Van Gogh.

These findings complement chapter 7's conclusion that strategic and organizational rationales for the group's planned and perpetrated acts of terrorism were largely absent. The significance quest explanation suggests that these acts are better understood as distinctly personal in origin. They resembled what McCormick labels the 'expressionist' tradition of terrorism; rooted in a 19th century philosophy of revolutionary violence, it sees the use of violence as a means of *personal expression* and redemption, rather than as a means for achieving political objectives.[950] The Hofstadgroup's most militant participants were looking to restore significance lost by themselves

946 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHA04/21: 1593-1594, 1604-1605, 1612-1613; VERD: 19849, 19917-19918, 19935, 19945, 20004, 20012-20013, 20225, 20242; Vermaat, *Nederlandse jihad*, 208; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 5, "Personal interview 1," 1.

947 Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 18, 65.

948 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," GET: 4084, 4145, 4177; VERD: 20461, 20518-20519.

949 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 4, "Personal interview 1," 2.

950 McCormick, "Terrorist decision making," 477.

and their coreligionists, and in the process solidify their own sense of identity and purpose, rather than aiming to achieve strategic goals.[951]

9.4.2 Identity-related alienation and the Hofstadgroup

Several publications on the Hofstadgroup raise identity-related alienation as a possible explanation for the adoption of radical and extremist views by the group's participants.[952] It also features prominently in the autobiography of a young Dutch Muslim who was arrested on terrorism related charges in September 2004.[953] Although not part of the Hofstadgroup, his background and convictions were similar to those who were, suggesting that identity-related alienation could have played a role in the Hofstadgroup. The available empirical evidence, however, paints a different picture. It is clear that some participants strongly identified with an imagined worldwide community of believers, an association that superseded their national identities.[954] But there is simply insufficient evidence to suppose that this self-perception as a member of the global ummah stemmed from identity-related issues.

Only one explicit reference to identity-related alienation was encountered. It stems from a chat session in which one of the men who traveled to Pakistan or Afghanistan in 2003 reprimanded a chat-partner for indicating she struggled with reconciling her Moroccan heritage and her Dutch upbringing. Such problems were irrelevant, according to the traveler, as she should not see herself as Moroccan or Dutch but as Muslim.[955] While it may be argued that his reply signified his own struggles with a lack of belonging, there is no actual evidence to support this possibility. In lieu of clear evidence to the contrary, identity-related alienation does not appear to offer an explanation for involvement in the Hofstadgroup.

9.5 The terrorist personality or profile

Another line of inquiry at the individual-level of analysis questions whether there is a particular 'terrorist personality'. This immediately raises objections on a conceptual level, as 'terrorist' is not a singular or clearly defined typology. Terrorists fulfill a variety of roles, adhere to different ideological convictions and come together in numerous organizational structures, ranging from

951 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 5, "Personal interview 1," 4.
952 Buijs, Demant, and Hamdy, *Strijders van eigen bodem*, 61-62, 218-228, 247; Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam*, 121-122; Spruyt, "Liberalism and the challenge of Islam," 320-321; Transnational Terrorism Security & the Rule of Law Project, "The 'Hofstadgroep'," 12.
953 Kaddouri, *Lach met de duivel*, 24, 28, 35.
954 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/13: 99, 163; 101/117: 4128, 18410; AHA18405/18422: 12228; Van San, Sieckelinck, and De Winter, *Idealen op drift*, 46-48; Erkel, *Samir*, 48; Peters, "De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling," 4, 6, 16.
955 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHD08/37: 8519.

strict hierarchies to loosely constituted networks.[956] It is therefore likely that, as Victoroff writes, 'any effort to uncover the "terrorist mind" will more likely result in uncovering a spectrum of terrorist minds'.[957] In light of these considerations it comes as little surprise that attempts to compose a distinct terrorist personality profile have floundered.[958] Personality factors alone simply do not offer a credible explanation for why some people become involved in terrorist groups and political violence.

Neither does an examination of terrorists' backgrounds reveal a distinctive profile; socioeconomic, demographic or otherwise.[959] Writing of terrorists in the 1980s, McCauley and Segal characterized them as mostly male, mostly young, predominantly from middle-class families and usually in possession of at least some university education.[960] These characteristics are too generic to offer explanations for involvement in terrorism. Similar research on twenty-first century jihadists has likewise failed to produce a profile specific enough to have much explanatory value.[961] In his study on 336 European jihadists, Bakker concludes that 'there is no standard jihadi terrorist'.[962] The individuals in his sample were mostly single males who were not particularly young, often hailed from the lower socioeconomic strata and often had a criminal record.[963] In similar work, Sageman found that the jihadists he studied mostly led middle-class existences, a contrast with Bakker's work that adds further diversity to the profile of the 'average' jihadist.[964]

Recognizing the heterogeneity of terrorists' backgrounds, several efforts have been made to differentiate between 'typical' members of jihadist groups based on their motivations for involvement instead.[965] Nesser distinguishes between idealistic and militant 'entrepreneurs', their equally ideologically-motivated and loyal 'protégés' who occupy junior leadership positions, the 'misfits' who are motivated more by personal problems than ideological commitment, and

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956 Borum, *Psychology of terrorism*, 35-36; Horgan, "From profiles to pathways," 84, 86; Horgan, "Understanding terrorist motivation," 110; Ligon et al., "Putting the 'O' in VEOs," 110-117; Victoroff, "The mind of the terrorist," 5-7.

957 Victoroff, "The mind of the terrorist," 7.

958 Borum, *Psychology of terrorism*, 35-36; Horgan, "Understanding terrorist motivation," 110; John Horgan, *Divided we stand: the strategy and psychology of Ireland's dissident terrorists* (Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 79; Hudson, "The sociology and psychology of terrorism," 9, 60; Merari et al., "Personality characteristics," 96-97.

959 Nevertheless, the appeal of profiles is such that their use in a law enforcement setting has continued. See, for instance: Quirine Eijkman, "Has the genie been let out of the bottle? Ethnic profiling in the Netherlands," *Public Space: The Journal of Law and Social Justice* 5, no. 2 (2010): 1-21.

960 McCauley and Segal, "Social psychology of terrorist groups," 332.

961 Silber and Bhatt, "Radicalization in the West," 23, 57; Porter and Kebbell, "Radicalization in Australia: examining Australia's convicted terrorists," 226-227; Merari et al., "Personality characteristics," 90-91.

962 Bakker, "Characteristics of jihadi terrorists," 143.

963 Ibid., 140-142.

964 Sageman, *Understanding terror networks*, 73-74.

965 Petter Nesser, "Joining jihadi terrorist cells in Europe: exploring motivational aspects of recruitment and radicalization," in *Understanding violent radicalisation: terrorist and jihadist movements in Europe*, ed. Magnus Ranstorp (London / New York: Routledge, 2010), 87-114; John M. Venhaus, "Why youth join al-Qaeda," in *Special Report 236* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2010), 8-11.

'drifters' who become involved more or less through chance.[966] More recent empirical work on the Provisional IRA has disaggregated data on terrorists' backgrounds based on the roles or functions they performed within that organization.[967] One such study found that younger members were more likely to be involved in violent front-line activities.[968] While these important efforts draw attention to the various roles that exist within terrorist organizations, they are not specific enough to provide an explanation for involvement based on particular personality characteristics.

Some researchers have looked at personality characteristics as predisposing risk factors for involvement in terrorism.[969] Aggressiveness, for instance, has been linked to an increased likelihood of involvement in criminal violence.[970] Della Porta found prior experience with using violence for political means to be one of the most important factors in the backgrounds of Italian terrorists of the 1970s and 1980s.[971] Several authors argue that terrorism might be especially attractive to highly authoritarian individuals.[972] People for whom honor is an important value are more likely to favor an aggressive response to perceived external threats.[973] Alternatively, individuals with a higher preference for social inequality (social dominance orientation) and hierarchical social relations are more likely to hold negative attitudes towards out-groups which, in turn, might signify a lower threshold to using violence or seeing its use of legitimate.[974]

Other characteristics that could potentially heighten the likeliness of involvement in terrorism are prejudice,[975] youth and immaturity,[976] a desire for action, glory, adventure or the thrill of war

966 Nesser, "Joining jihadi terrorist cells in Europe," 92-94.

967 Mia Bloom, Paul Gill, and John Horgan, "Tiocfaid ár Mná: women in the Provisional Irish Republican Army," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 4, no. 1 (2012): 67-70; Paul Gill and John Horgan, "Who were the Volunteers? The shifting sociological and operational profile of 1240 Provisional Irish Republican Army Members," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 25, no. 3 (2013): 451-453.

968 Gill and Horgan, "Who were the volunteers?," 451-452.

969 Borum, *Psychology of terrorism*, 15-16, 36; Crenshaw, *Explaining terrorism*, 100; Horgan, "From profiles to pathways," 84-85; Hudson, "The sociology and psychology of terrorism," 60; Post, "Terrorist psycho-logic," 27.

970 Silke, *Terrorism*, 67-68; Taylor, "Is terrorism a group phenomenon?," 125.

971 Della Porta, "Recruitment processes," 313.

972 Taylor, *The fanatics*, 70-71; Schwartz, Dunkel, and Waterman, "Terrorism," 544; McCauley and Segal, "Social psychology of terrorist groups," 333.

973 Collin D. Barnes et al., "My country, my self: honor, identity, and defensive responses to national threats," *Self and Identity* 13, no. 6 (2014): 2-4, 19.

974 Shana Levin et al., "Social dominance and social identity in Lebanon: implications for support of violence agains the West," in *Psychology of terrorism: classic and contemporary insights*, ed. Jeff Victoroff and Arie W. Kruglanski (New York / Hove: Psychology Press, 2009), 253-255; Felicia Pratto et al., "Social Dominance Orientation: a personality variable predicting social and political attitudes," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 67, no. 4 (1994): 741-758.

975 Taylor, *The fanatics*, 68-69.

976 Crenshaw, *Explaining terrorism*, 100-101; Alice Locicero and Samuel J. Sinclair, "Terrorism and terrorist leaders: insights from developmental and ecological psychology," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 3 (2008): 236, 242.

and violence,[977] the lack of a clear sense of purpose,[978] impatience with words or a dissatisfaction with the efficacy of political activities,[979] and a desire for status.[980] Horgan also notes anger or alienation, identification with victims of injustice and the belief that violence is not inherently immoral.[981] Doosje et al. add that personal uncertainty with regard to self and world views and perceived intergroup threat can contribute to support for a radical belief system.[982] Some scholars argue that altruism should also be counted among these characteristics, as terrorists are liable to view their own actions as the selfless promotion of a common good.[983] Finally, Pedahzur et al. find that suicide terrorism is partly motivated by fatalism.[984]

The literature indicates that there is no such thing as a terrorist personality or profile. These findings once again underline the fallacy of seeing terrorists as people who are somehow distinct in terms of psychology, mental illness or character. However, the potential relevance of personality characteristics for understanding involvement in terrorism should not be ruled out altogether. There may be predisposing risk factors that increase the likeliness, however slightly, of certain individuals becoming involved in terrorism.

9.5.1 Personality characteristics and the Hofstadgroup

Several findings stand out which suggest that personality characteristics had a role to play in influencing the behavior of several leading Hofstadgroup participants. The clearest and most important of these is Van Gogh's murderer's history of violent behavior. In June 2000, this individual was detained after having been involved in a bar fight. A year later, he displayed threatening behavior to officers who visited his parental home on a matter related to his sister. In July 2001, he stabbed a policeman in an Amsterdam park and then threw the knife at another officer. These offenses resulted in a sentence of 12 weeks' imprisonment. In May 2004, another incident involving Van Gogh's future assailant was registered; this time he had threatened to kill a social services employee. Finally, on the 24th of September of the same year, he was arrested

977 Bartlett and Miller, "The edge of violence," 14-15; Simon Cottee and Keith Hayward, "Terrorist (e)motives: the existential attractions of terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 12 (2011): 966-969; Crenshaw, "The psychology of political terrorism," 385-388; Ilardi, "Interviews with Canadian radicals," 719-720; Post, "Terrorist psycho-logic," 27.

978 Schwartz, Dunkel, and Waterman, "Terrorism," 544-545.

979 Horgan, "From profiles to pathways," 85; McCauley and Segal, "Social psychology of terrorist groups," 333.

980 Bartlett and Miller, "The edge of violence," 15; McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*, 62-64.

981 Horgan, "From profiles to pathways," 84-85.

982 Bertjan Doosje, Annemarie Loseman, and Kees Van den Bos, "Determinants of radicalization of Islamic youth in the Netherlands: personal uncertainty, perceived injustice, and perceived group threat," *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 3 (2013): 587, 589-591.

983 Silke, *Terrorism*, 68-70; Ami Pedahzur, Arie Perliger, and Leonard Weinberg, "Altruism and fatalism: the characteristics of Palestinian suicide terrorists," *Deviant Behavior* 24, no. 4 (2003): 408-409.

984 Pedahzur, Perliger, and Weinberg, "Altruism and fatalism," 409.

for aggressive behavior towards police officers after having been caught using public transport without a valid ticket.[985]

None of these observations form a clinical diagnosis of an aggressive predisposition. Yet it is striking that this person is the only Hofstadgroup participant who had such an extensive history of violent behavior and the only one to have committed an act of premeditated aggression.[986] Although it is hard to evaluate their accuracy, there are also several descriptions of Van Gogh's murderer by former colleagues, friends and other group participants that paint him as someone who could be short-tempered and who was prone to (verbally) aggressive outbursts.[987] Furthermore, the professionals who sought to examine him at the PBC *speculated* that he may have suffered from an aggression disorder.[988] At the very least, his history of violent behavior showed him to be an individual who could match the intention to use violence with a proven capability to do so. It is likely that this disposition contributed to his ability to commit murder.

One of the men who traveled to Pakistan or Afghanistan was clearly influenced by a longing for adventure, excitement and a boyish fascination with weapons. The descriptions of his experiences that he gave to others frequently revolved around his self-described expertise with various weapons, the interesting people he met and the hardships he had to endure; from vigorous physical training to diets that allegedly included eating tree bark.[989] Based on the degree of self-aggrandizement in his chat conversations with others, it also seems clear that this person sought and enjoyed the status of being (seen as) a warrior for his faith.[990] Likewise, an interviewee described a longing for adventure and romantic notions of what it meant to participate in jihad as partly motivating his attraction Salafi-Jihadism and his involvement in the group. He also reflected that he had been driven by 'youthful naiveté'.[991]

While not so much a personality characteristic as an element of someone's personal background, data suggests that being a recent convert made at least some participants more susceptible to adopting extremist views. As newcomers to Islam, converts' lack of knowledge about their religion appears to have made them more likely to see the group's 'born Muslims' as sources of religious authority, especially when they had (some) command of Arabic.[992] Two final 'predisposing risk

985 Commissie van Toezicht betreffende de Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdiensten, "Toezichtsrapport met betrekking tot Mohammed B.," 12-14; Alberts et al., "De wereld van Mohammed B."

986 Although he was not the *only* participant to have previously engaged in violent behavior: Vermaat, *Nederlandse jihad*, 109.

987 Alberts et al., "De wereld van Mohammed B."; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," GET: 18415-18416; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 2, "Personal interview 1," 2; Chorus and Olgun, *Broeders*, 19-20; Vermaat, *Nederlandse jihad*, 141; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 5, "Personal interview 1," 5.

988 "Mohammed bleef gesloten boek in observatiekliniek," *De Volkskrant*, 11 July 2005.

989 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHA05/22: 2166, 2175-2176; AHD2108/2137: 8595-8597, 8618-8619, 8635-8636, 8768-8769, 8774-8775, 8880, 8919, 8929-8931; AHD2109/2138: 9056.

990 Ibid., AHA05/22: 2166; AHD2108/2137: 8571, 8593-8595, 8635, 8716, 8767-8768, 8773, 8880, 8919, 8928; AHD2109/2138: 9048-9049, 9054-9056.

991 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, "Personal interview 1," 9-10.

992 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 5, "Personal interview 1," 2-3.

factors' found among a larger number of Hofstadgroup participants, were identification with the victims of perceived injustice, and the belief that violence is not inherently immoral.[993]

None of the personality characteristics described in the previous paragraphs preordained these individuals' future participation in the Hofstadgroup. Still, personality characteristics appear to have played a secondary, supportive role in bringing about involvement. That contribution was to make those who had these characteristics more likely to become interested in radical or extremist interpretations of Islam, the company of like-minded individuals and, in some cases, involvement in violent behavior.

9.6 The role of emotions

Emotions, in particular anger, have played a background role in many of the explanations discussed over the past several chapters. This final section delves deeper into how they can influence involvement in terrorism. It does so by highlighting two emotional states that the literature earmarks as being especially relevant; frustration-induced anger and fear of death.

9.6.1 Anger and frustration

Aggressive behavior can be instrumental or emotional. In the first case, aggression is consciously chosen as the means to achieve certain aims; in the latter, aggression is brought on by anger which in turn is a response to insult, physical pain or frustration.[994] Anger is frequently encountered as a (contributing) factor in explanations for involvement in terrorism, particularly in the shape of a personal grievance and a desire for revenge.[995] Of the triggers of anger, it is the link between frustration and aggression in particular that has become a frequently encountered explanation for terrorism and political violence. In its original incarnation, frustration-aggression theory held that frustration occurs when an individual's expectancy of reward is thwarted, prompting aggression towards the source of that thwarting. However, if, for instance, fear of punishment makes such a course of action ill-advised, the intended aggression may also be displaced onto substitutes.[996]

Frustration-aggression theory has found its way into numerous explanations for political violence, such as Gurr's thesis that deprivation can lead to rebellion through the activation of

993 A[.], "Deurwaarders," 3, 5-8; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 1," 6; De Graaf, *Gevaarlijke vrouwen*, 258; Dienst Nationale Recherche, „RL8026," 01/01: 131; AHA104/121: 1666; 1601/1613: 1163; AHB1601/1625: 3166-3168; GET: 4128, 18116; De Koning, „Changing worldviews and friendship," 385; Erkel, *Samir*, 65-67; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 18-21, 68-70, 169-170; Peters, „De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling," appendix: Overzicht teksten geschreven of vertaald door Mohammed B., 33; Vermaat, *Nederlandse jihad*, 216, 227.

994 McCauley, "Psychological issues in understanding terrorism," 7-8, 16; Taylor, *The fanatics*, 4-6.

995 McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction*, 13-18; Merari, "Psychological aspects of suicide terrorism," 107.

996 Leonard Berkowitz, "Frustration-aggression hypothesis: examination and reformulation," *Psychological Bulletin* 106, no. 1 (1989): 60-61.

the frustration-aggression mechanism.[997] Despite its popularity, the theory has also attracted considerable criticism, most notably based on the straightforward observation that virtually everyone experience frustrations but only very few people engage in violence because of it.[998] This has led Berkowitz to propose a modification of the original theory which stresses the importance of situational and personal factors in bringing about an actual aggressive response to frustration, notably the degree to which the frustrating event is perceived as unpleasant, deliberate and personal.[999] As it is largely *subjective* whether frustration leads to aggression, the presence of relative deprivation as an explanatory variable can be difficult to ascertain objectively.

9.6.1.1 Anger, frustration and the Hofstadgroup

Anger forms a key explanatory variable when accounting for the behavior of the group's most militant participants. Consider the vicariously experienced insult and pain in one future participant's reaction to what he saw as the injustices being perpetrated against Muslims in places like Chechnya and Palestine. '[W]hy is a Muslim casualty worth less than a non-Muslim casualty? (…) Why do [the U.S. and Europe] only attack the Muslim world? (…) [E]ach time on television when they called the perpetrators of the attacks of eleven September terrorists, I always shouted at the television: "You are the terrorists!" (…) [T]he oppression, that gripped me, many videos were available, from babies with a hole of 10 cm in their stomach because a bullet came out there, to children who were taken from under the rubble, horrible things that were done with women, it was never warriors that I saw, the innocent were the target, they were hit'.[1000]

The desire to address these injustices by meting out vengeance to those he held responsible remained this person's predominant motivation throughout his involvement with the Hofstadgroup.[1001] But his aggression was also fed by what appears to have been a personal vendetta against the state institutions that had monitored, arrested and imprisoned him, frequently in what he experienced as a hard-handed and humiliating fashion.[1002] This may explain why this individual appeared to be conducting reconnaissance of the AIVD headquarters in 2004 and why he appeared interested in planning attacks against the same organization in 2005.[1003] It also fits with a police intelligence report earmarked as 'reliable' which indicated that upon his release in early 2005 this participant was driven to rectify the '1-0' in the unbelievers favor.[1004] Essentially, his aggression appears to have been motivated by a desire to avenge both the injustices suffered by Muslims worldwide and the affronts he had suffered personally.

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997 Gurr, *Why men rebel*, 9.
998 Victoroff, "The mind of the terrorist," 19; Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, 54-56.
999 Berkowitz, "Frustration-aggression hypothesis," 60, 62, 71.
1000 A[.], "Deurwaarders," 4, 8-10.
1001 Ibid., 11-12; Erkel, *Samir*, 227; NOVA, "Videotestament Samir A. - vertaling NOVA".
1002 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "PIRANHA," REL00: 29; NOVA, "Informatie AIVD en politie uit strafdossier"; Erkel, *Samir*, 199-200, 206-208, 218-219, 227-228, 240-241.
1003 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/01: 43-45; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "PIRANHA," REL00: 46-56; NOVA, "Informatie AIVD en politie uit strafdossier".
1004 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "PIRANHA," REL00: 29.

Aggression brought on by insult-induced anger appears the most likely explanation for what triggered the murder of Van Gogh. The assailant's discovery of religious injunctions that mandated him to kill blasphemers occurred in the summer of 2004.[1005] The Van Gogh production of Hirsi Ali's movie *Submission, part 1* aired on August 29th and was met with revulsion and anger by people in and around the Hofstadgroup, precisely because it was considered blasphemous.[1006] As one participant reflected on the murder during questioning; 'I think that (…) Van Gogh apparently hurt [the killer] so much that this happened. This speaks of revenge.'[1007] It seems likely that Van Gogh was killed not just because he had violated the murderer's religious beliefs, but deeply insulted him in the process.

Within the broader Hofstadgroup there were a number of people for who anger factored into bringing about their initial involvement. For some, this anger was a response the perceived persecution of Muslims similar to the example given above, triggering a search for answers which ultimately led to the adoption of extremist ideas and the acquaintance of like-minded individuals.[1008] Others were angered by Dutch mosques and imams' unwillingness to address questions related to the legitimacy of violent jihad or to discuss the wars taking place in Muslim countries. Frustrated by what they saw as cowardice, these individuals looked for alternative sources of religious authority, finding it online and within the Hofstadgroup.[1009] Anger also contributed to sharper in-group/out-group distinctions; the aforementioned individuals came to feel a strong disdain for 'mainstream' Salafism and several individuals came to hate the Dutch authorities after being arrested and imprisoned.[1010]

Anger played an important role both in bringing about involvement in the Hofstadgroup and contributed to (planned) acts of terrorism. As an explanatory factor, anger also underlines the need qualify the role that beliefs play in these processes. The individual who wanted to go to Chechnya was guided by a sense of idealism; a desire to help what he saw as the victims of oppression. Although his adoption of Salafi-Jihadist beliefs gave him a religious vocabulary in which to express and justify that desire, it was his anger at perceived mistreatment that initially sparked his interest in militancy and it remained a factor of influence throughout his involvement in the group. While data pertaining to the role of anger is limited to a relatively small number of participants, its influence among those individuals was considerable.

1005 Peters, "Dutch extremist Islamism," 155-156.

1006 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 23-24; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/13: 74, 161; AHA104/121: 1324-1330; Erkel, *Samir*, 223.

1007 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," VERD: 20231.

1008 Vermaat, *Nederlandse jihad*, 163.

1009 De Koning, "Changing worldviews and friendship," 385, 387; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, "Personal interview 1," 7-9; A[.], "Deurwaarders," 4-6; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 11-12; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," GET: 4018.

1010 Vermaat, *Nederlandse jihad*, 215; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 147, 183; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 1," 4.

9.6.2 Mortality salience

Terror Management Theory holds that thinking about the finality of life ('mortality salience') can give rise to considerable existential anxiety ('terror'), and motivate people to look for ways of relieving these fears by imbuing their existence with meaning.[1011] Religion and its promise of life-after-death is one way in which people can alleviate such stress. But worldly ideologies or straightforward membership of a group can also fulfill this function by making individuals part of something larger than themselves or by providing them with an opportunity to obtain a degree of immortality by contributing to something that will outlast their death. Terrorist groups' trumpeting of clear ideological goals and a righteous cause, as well as their ability to offer members a chance to live on in communal memory as martyrs and the promise of a place in heaven, can make them powerful beacons to those looking for existential meaning.[1012]

Mortality salience has been shown to lead to heightened esteem for an individual's own group, culture and ideology.[1013] This is directly related to such groups' ability to lower the fear of death by providing their members with meaning and significance. Conversely, mortality salience can lead to heightened hostility towards out-groups and alternative ideologies, as their existence undermines the ability to the in-group or a particular ideology to alleviate the fear of death.[1014] Mortality salience may increase support for violent measures against out-groups perceived to be threatening.[1015] An interesting aspect of mortality salience in the context of involvement in terrorism is that it can establish a feedback loop that traps members in loyalty to both the cause and the group. As participation in acts of terrorism increases the chance of death, existential anxiety is renewed, leading to a stronger focusing on the group and its ideology to alleviate this stress, thereby prolonging involvement in terrorism and prompting the next round of existential anxiety.[1016]

9.6.2.1 Mortality salience and the Hofstadgroup

Several participants feared punishments in an afterlife.[1017] Those who experienced such anxieties appear to have become more closely tied to the beliefs they thought would save them from the tortures of hell. In a telling example, one female participant told police officers that during

1011 Mark Dechesne et al., "Literal and symbolic immortality: the effect of evidence of literal immortality on self-esteem striving in response to mortality salience," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 4 (2003): 722-734; Pyszczynski, Motyl, and Abdollahi, "Righteous violence," 14.

1012 Megan K. McBride, "The logic of terrorism: existential anxiety, the search for meaning, and terrorist ideologies," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 4 (2011): 561-565; Cottee and Hayward, "Terrorist (e)motives," 965-966, 973-974; Kruglanski and Fishman, "What makes terrorism tick?," 143-144.

1013 Kruglanski and Fishman, "Psychological factors," 11.

1014 Pyszczynski, Motyl, and Abdollahi, "Righteous violence," 14-15.

1015 Mandel, "The role of instigators," 6; Silke, *Terrorism*, 71-72.

1016 McBride, "The logic of terrorism," 567-568.

1017 A[.], "Deurwaarders van Allah," 7; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHB03/27: 4041; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 39-40; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 4, "Personal interview 2," 2; NOVA, "Videotestament Samir A. - vertaling NOVA".

her involvement in the group she experienced a period of great anxiety concerning the right interpretation of Islam. She was shocked by the extremist interpretation promulgated within the group, especially as it meant denouncing her own family as apostates. At the same time, she worried that it might actually represent 'true' Islam and that her failure to uphold such views would lead to terrible punishments in the afterlife.[1018] Although she eventually disengaged from the group, these existential fears initially tied her more closely to the group and its extremist views.[1019]

It was not simply a fear of what an afterlife might hold that influenced the behavior of some Hofstadgroup participants. The obverse also applied. In at least one case, a participant was motivated to become what he saw as a 'true' Muslim not just to avoid eternal punishment, but to garner eternal reward. In addition to fear of hell there was the desire to gain a place in paradise.[1020] This desire for personal salvation was also a factor in the acts of terrorism planned and perpetrated by the group's militant inner circle. Van Gogh's assailant and the individual who record a threatening video message 2005 both stated that their actions were driven by the desire to avoid god's displeasure and to attain a place in paradise.[1021] Fear of death and a longing for paradise were powerful and distinctly personal existential motives underlying several participants' involvement process and, in some cases, the planning or perpetration of acts of terrorism.

9.7 Conclusion

A first clear conclusion to emerge from this chapter is that there is no current empirical basis to assume that major psychopathology or mental health issues more generally offer a viable explanation for Hofstadgroup participants' behavior. Presently, the Hofstadgroup case presents another argument against the idea that terrorists are somehow intrinsically different from 'normal' human beings. Neither was there data to suggest that identity-related alienation formed an explanation for involvement. Quests to gain or restore both personal and communal significance, on the other hand, appear to have been a crucial element driving participation at the individual level of analysis. They led to political and religious awakenings, the desire to become a 'true' Muslim and, in some cases, the wish to avenge personal or communally experience 'significance loss' through violence. This concept suggests that the group's planned and perpetrated acts of terrorism were a form of personal expression rather than a course of action deployed for strategic or organizational rationales.

The discussion then turned to the role of personality characteristics. It is dubious whether there is such a thing as a 'terrorist profile'. However, research indicates that certain predisposing risk

1018 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," GET: 4020, 4028, 4030, 4050-4051.
1019 Ibid., 4028-4032, 4051.
1020 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 4, "Personal interview 2," 2.
1021 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHB03/27: 4041; NOVA, "Videotestament Samir A. - vertaling NOVA"; Alberts and Derix, "Mohammed B. schreef."

factors may increase the likeliness of involvement in terrorism. Applied to the Hofstadgroup, this analytical perspective highlighted a keenness for adventure, identification with victims of perceived injustice and, in the case of Van Gogh's future assailant, a history of violent behavior. Predisposing risk factors that played a supportive role in explaining what made at least some of the Hofstadgroup's participants more susceptible to adopt extremist views and to plan or perpetrate acts of terrorism.

For some participants, frustration-induced anger influenced their initial involvement process. Unable to get satisfactory answers to their questions about jihad-related topics at their mosques, some of these young men and women became dissatisfied with 'mainstream' Islam and drawn towards venues where they *could* discuss the themes they were interested in, such as Hofstadgroup gatherings. Anger also features prominently in the acts of violence that were planned and perpetrated by the group's most extremist participants. The individual who tried to reach Chechnya in 2003 was angered by the perceived injustices suffered by his co-religionists around the world, as well as his increasingly antagonistic relationship with the Dutch authorities. Likewise, it appears that the immediate trigger for the attack on Van Gogh was the anger and hurt that *Submission*'s release provoked in the filmmaker's assailant.

One final factor that appears to have influenced at least several Hofstadgroup participants was a fear of death and of ending up in hell in particular. This formed a powerful existential motive that kept at least several participants closely wedded to their extremist beliefs, albeit in at least one case for only a brief period of time, as these beliefs were thought to offer the best way of avoiding punishments in the afterlife. Fear of displeasing their god and, conversely, a desire to attain paradise was also a factor in the planned and perpetrated acts of terrorism committed by the group's militant inner-circle. This factor once again underlined the distinctly personal, as opposed to strategic or organizational, rationales for the use of terrorism found among the Hofstadgroup's participants.