The Significance of the Superordinate: Linking (Dis-)Embedded Identity to Non-Normative Ends and Means

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Abstract

In this article, we examine the significance of a superordinate identity of citizens in plural democratic societies with a focus on the combinations of the identification with a particular societal subgroup and the (dis-)identification with society as the superordinate group. We develop these combinations into the conceptions of embedded identity and dis-embedded identity. Embedded identity derives from the acknowledgment that one´s particular ingroup membership at a given level of ingroup-outgroup categorization is embedded in a higher-level group membership. In contrast, dis-embedded identity derives from the accentuation and prioritization of one's particular ingroup membership at the expense of one's membership in the superordinate group. Articulating Turner´s self-categorization theory with theoretical reasoning about normative frameworks, we hypothesized that embedded identity diminishes sympathy for non-normative ends and means, whereas dis-embedded identity fosters sympathy for non-normative ends and means. Two experiments, conducted with young people in Germany as research participants, supported these hypotheses: Embedded identity was unrelated or even negatively related to sympathy for non-normative ends and means, whereas dis-embedded identity was positively related to sympathy for non-normative ends and means. We highlight the contribution of our present research and that of social psychological research, more generally, to the understanding of (de)radicalization processes in plural democratic societies.

Introduction

Fundamental ideas of democratic societies are equality, freedom, and justice (Rawls, 2001). For their fulfillment, a plural democratic society is in need of a superordinate identity of its citizens despite and across subgroup divisions. This is because a superordinate identity is the

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requirement for the adoption of a superordinate normative framework defining the spectrums of normatively acceptable as well as unacceptable ends and means (Rawls, 2001; Simon, 2011; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), the rescindment of anti-outgroup attitudes, and the application of pro-ingroup attitudes to the superordinate (in)group in its entirety (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). Hence, superordinate identity holds the potential for the unification, mutual restraint, and pacification of citizens within society. In contrast, if a lack of superordinate identity is in existence, citizens are unconstrained by the superordinate normative framework, anti-outgroup and pro-ingroup attitudes are free to operate (Gaertner et al., 1993; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000), and subgroup divisions generate boundaries of equality-based respect and corresponding entitlements and obligations (Simon, 2020).

As collective identities are "connecting the individual and the social" (Simon, 2011, p. 138), they determine which ends are pursued and which means are used. By superordinate identities the spectrums of normatively acceptable as well as unacceptable ends and means within the superordinate group are defined. If present, the choice of ends and means is restricted to the realm of normatively accepted ones. If absent, the choice is not restricted, so that ends and means from the realm of normatively unaccepted ones become a potential choice (Rawls, 2001; Simon, 2011). Thus, superordinate identity needs to be taken into account in order to advance our understanding of radicalization and deradicalization.

A combination of the identification with a particular ingroup and the dis-identification with society can be a state supporting radicalization (Sageman, 2017; Simon, 2011). For example, the prioritization and accentuation of the ingroup identity (e.g., race) over and above the superordinate identity (e.g., society) is a characteristic feature of extremist (e.g., Neo-Nazi) groups (Adams & Roscigno, 2005) and citizens already dis-identified with society may be especially prone to the recruitment by extremist groups (see Koehler, 2014; Reininger, 2018). Empirical evidence indicates that a lack of perceived belongingness to a group (due to rejection or exclusion) can be associated with an increased tendency of aggression towards involved but also uninvolved others (Buckley, Winkel, & Leary, 2004; Warburton, Williams,

& Cairns, 2006; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001), intergroup hostility, and fundamentalist beliefs (Reininger, 2018; Schaafsma & Williams, 2012). In contrast, a combination of the identification with a particular ingroup and the identification with society can be a state hindering radicalization or supporting deradicalization (Sageman, 2017; Simon, 2011). Empirical evidence indicates that the identification with society is related to the rejection of violence and terrorism (Charkawi, Dunn, & Bliuc, 2020) as well as that political system support is positively related to peaceful and negatively related to violent protest orientation (Isemann, Walther, Solfrank, & Wilbertz, 2019). The assumption that identities need to be taken into account in order to advance our understanding of (de)radicalization is also in line with a newly proposed perspective on intergroup conflict (Simon, 2020). It is focused on the differentiation and interaction of Level 1 (the level of ingroup-outgroup identity) and Level 2 (the level of superordinate identity)—advocating the relevance of both levels (see Simon, 2020). Based on this perspective, the order and stability of plural democratic societies may depend on the identification of citizens with a particular ingroup (Level 1) combined with the identification with the superordinate group (Level 2).

Overview of the Present Research

Most research on (de)radicalization does solely consider single-level forms of collective identity (if any), is correlational, and is limited to a rather narrow set of specific societal subgroups. We make a complementary contribution by experimentally examining multi-level forms of collective identity of ordinary citizens and the resulting consequences bearing implications for the order and stability of plural democratic societies. The present research, with participants recruited to represent ordinary citizens not belonging to a radical subgroup of society, is intended to be a first demonstration of more general processes conducive to (de)radicalization.

Two experiments with young people in Germany were conducted. We focused on the combination of the identification with young people (Level 1) and the identification with

German society (Level 2) as well as on the combination of the identification with young people (Level 1) and the dis-identification (which rather corresponds to a de-accentuation and de-prioritization rather than an outright rejection) with German society (Level 2). Henceforth, for the sake of brevity, we will refer to the former combination as *L1+L2 identity* and to the latter combination as *L1−L2 identity*. If normative political actions and protest on behalf of the interests of young people, e.g., concerning environmental protection and climate change, financial markets, racism, and upload filters (Mass, 2019; Stegemann, 2013), are not met with positive responsiveness on the part of society, consequences may be a lack of superordinate identity and then sympathy for non-normative forms of political action and protest (Simon, 2011; Simon & Ruhs, 2008). We therefore examined the relations of L1+L2 identity and L1−L2 identity to sympathy for non-normative ends and means. We define non-normative ends and means, being mindful of our research context, in terms of the violation of the fundamental ideas of democratic societies such as equality, freedom, and justice (Rawls, 2001).

Both Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 were conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the German Psychological Society (DGPs, 2016). All participants were informed about the present research and its ethical guidelines[2] and subsequently gave their informed consent.

Experiment 1

In the first experiment, we experimentally varied the salience of different forms of collective identity. In the experimental condition, the superordinate identity was made salient. In four control conditions, the ingroup identity (alone, in congruence with the superordinate identity, or in contradistinction to the superordinate identity), or the identity as an individual were

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[2]This included, among other things, information about the subject area of the present research, the procedure and duration of participation, the compensation for participation, the right to withdraw one´s participation, the applicable data protection regulations, and the affiliation and full contact details of the first author. No deception was involved in Experiment 1 or Experiment 2.

made salient. We intended to increase L1+L2 identification and to decrease L1−L2 identification in the superordinate identity condition relative to the control conditions. We hypothesized that L1+L2 identification would then have negative effects and L1−L2 identification would have positive effects on sympathy for non-normative ends and means. Taken together, the experimentally induced salience of superordinate identity should diminish sympathy for non-normative ends and means via measured L1+L2 identification and L1−L2 identification.

Method

Participants. The present research was introduced to (potential) participants as an investigation of "group memberships and patterns of opinions." Participants were recruited on the campus of a German university in February 2020. Each participant received €5 or, in the case of psychology students, course credit for participating. Data were collected in standardized laboratory cubicles using online questionnaires. Only individuals who had German citizenship, were permanent residents of Germany, and were born after 1989 were included in the final sample for statistical analyses. In line with an a priori power analysis using *G*Power* (statistical test = ANOVA, f = .25, $α$ = .05, power = .80, groups = 5; Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009), which advised a total sample size of 200, our final sample comprised 212 participants. Central demographic characteristics of this sample are gender (62.26% female, 37.26% male, 0.47% other), age (M = 22.54, SD = 2.71, min = 18, max = 30), education (restricted or unrestricted university entry qualification: 85.85%, bachelor or master degree: 11.79%, other or missing: 2.36%), and political orientation (M = −1.45, SD = 1.18, ranging from −3 *liberal* to +3 *conservative*).

Manipulation. To manipulate the salience of the different forms of collective identity, we adapted an approach first described by Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, and Turner in 1999 (see also Ho & Yeung, 2019). Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions. A variety of control conditions was used to ensure that the observed effects were specifically due to the manipulation of superordinate identity as stated in our hypotheses. Depending on the

condition [superordinate identity / ingroup identity / ingroup identity in congruence / ingroup identity in contradistinction / individual identity], participants were shown the general instruction "Please fill out the following table as [a part of German society / a young person / a young person and a part of German society / a young person but not a part of German society / an individual person]." This instruction was accompanied by a graphical representation of a circle labeled "I" and its relationship to a circle labeled according to the respective reference group(s), e.g., "I" as a part of "young people." Below—the main manipulation—a table headed "Things that are fairly important to [us as German society / us young people / us young people and German society / us young people but not German society / me personally]" followed by five rows to enter five things which fulfill this criterion was shown. After the manipulation check, the general instruction "Please answer the following questions as [a part of German society / a young person / a young person and a part of German society / a young person but not a part of German society / an individual person]" was repeated accompanied by the respective graphical representation.

Measures. The measures of L1+L2 identification, of L1−L2 identification, and of sympathy for non-normative means were adapted from previous investigations within the same field of research (see Simon, Reichert, & Grabow, 2013; Simon & Ruhs, 2008). The measure of sympathy for non-normative ends was self-designed. An index was computed for each construct by averaging responses over the respective items. Each item (except sociodemographic characteristics required for the selection of participants) could be skipped by participants selecting the option "I cannot or do not want to answer." Below, each measure is described in detail.[3]

Identification. We used one item each to measure L1+L2 identification ("I feel I belong to the group of young people as well as to German society") and L1−L2 identification ("I feel I belong more to the group of young people than to German society"). Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*totally*).

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[3]The questionnaire contained additional measures not relevant to the present research.

Sympathy for non-normative ends. To measure sympathy for non-normative ends, six items were used (α = .66). Participants indicated to what extent they "have sympathy for the pursuit of the following ends—if it benefits young people in Germany:" "reform of the right to vote (e.g., revocation of voting rights for old people)," "introduction of a veto right (e.g., of young people) against democratic decisions," "establishment of a ranking of societal groups (e.g., declaration of young people as the principal group in German society)," "repeal of guidelines (e.g., of 'respect for the elderly')," "obligation to adopt certain values (e.g., the values of young people) for all subgroups of society," and "introduction of penalties for the dissemination of certain (e.g., outdated) opinions." Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*no understanding at all*) to 4 (*total understanding*).

Sympathy for non-normative means. To measure sympathy for non-normative means, six items were used (α = .81). Participants indicated to what extent they "have sympathy for the use of the following means—if it benefits young people in Germany:" "writing political messages or graffiti on walls," "participating in unauthorized demonstrations," "blocking roads or stopping public transport," "occupying houses, factories, offices or other buildings," "participating in demonstrations—even if violence is to be expected," and "damaging third-party property out of protest." Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*no understanding at all*) to 4 (*total understanding*).

Results

All analyses reported in this article were carried out using the statistical software *IBM SPSS Statistics 25* (IBM Corporation, 2017) and, in the case of path analyses, *Mplus 8* (Muthén & Muthén, 2017a). Hypotheses were tested by adequately robust parametric test procedures (Bortz & Schuster, 2010; Muthén & Muthén, 2017a). For all statistical tests, α was set to the 5%-level (two-tailed), but for tests of a priori and clearly directional hypotheses, we considered a two-tailed *p*-value equal to or smaller than .10 to indicate significance.

Preliminary Analyses. We computed a principal component analysis with varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization with the items of sympathy for non-normative ends and

means. A two-factor solution was found (explained variance = 47.04%) resembling these scales (within-loadings ≥ |.54|, cross-loadings ≤ |.20|), except for one item ("repeal of guidelines [e.g., of 'respect for the elderly']") of sympathy for non-normative ends with ambiguous factor loadings (within-loading = .32, cross-loading = .40). Additionally, one item ("damaging third-party property out of protest") of sympathy for non-normative means showed a mean ($M = .21$, $SD = .58$) significantly lower than a third of the mean for the scale ($M = 1.28$, $SD = .85$). Thus, these two items were removed so that the measures of sympathy for non-normative ends (still $\alpha = .66$) and sympathy for non-normative means (still $\alpha = .81$) comprised five items each in the following analyses.

Manipulation Check. We computed planned contrasts to check the effectiveness of the experimental variation (see Figure 1). As predicted, L1+L2 identification in the superordinate identity condition ($M = 3.20$, $SD = .95$) was significantly higher compared to the aggregated control conditions ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .98$; $T = 1.74$, $df = 206$, $p = .083$), whereas L1−L2 identification in the superordinate identity condition ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 1.11$) was significantly lower compared to the aggregated control conditions ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.20$; $T = 3.12$, $df = 206$, $p = .002$). We also noticed that L1+L2 identification was unexpectedly high in the ingroup in contradistinction condition. Nevertheless, we proceeded with our hypothesis test based on the observation that L1+L2 identification was successfully increased and L1−L2 identification successfully decreased in the experimental condition.

Main Analysis. First, we checked for mean differences in sympathy for non-normative ends and means between the conditions. No mean differences were found in univariate analyses of variance in sympathy for non-normative ends, $F(4,207) = .68$, $p = .607$, or means, $F(4,207) = 1.00$, $p = .410$. Second, we conducted a path analysis to test our specific mediation hypotheses. The specified model is presented in Figure 2. As a saturated manifest model, it yielded a perfect fit (Brown, 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999): $\chi^2 = 0$, $df = 0$, $p < .001$; *comparative-fit index* (*CFI*) = 1; *Tucker-Lewis index* (*TLI*) = 1; *root mean square error of approximation* (*RMSEA*) = 0; *standardized root mean square residual* (*SRMR*) = 0; estimator = *maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors* (*MLR*).
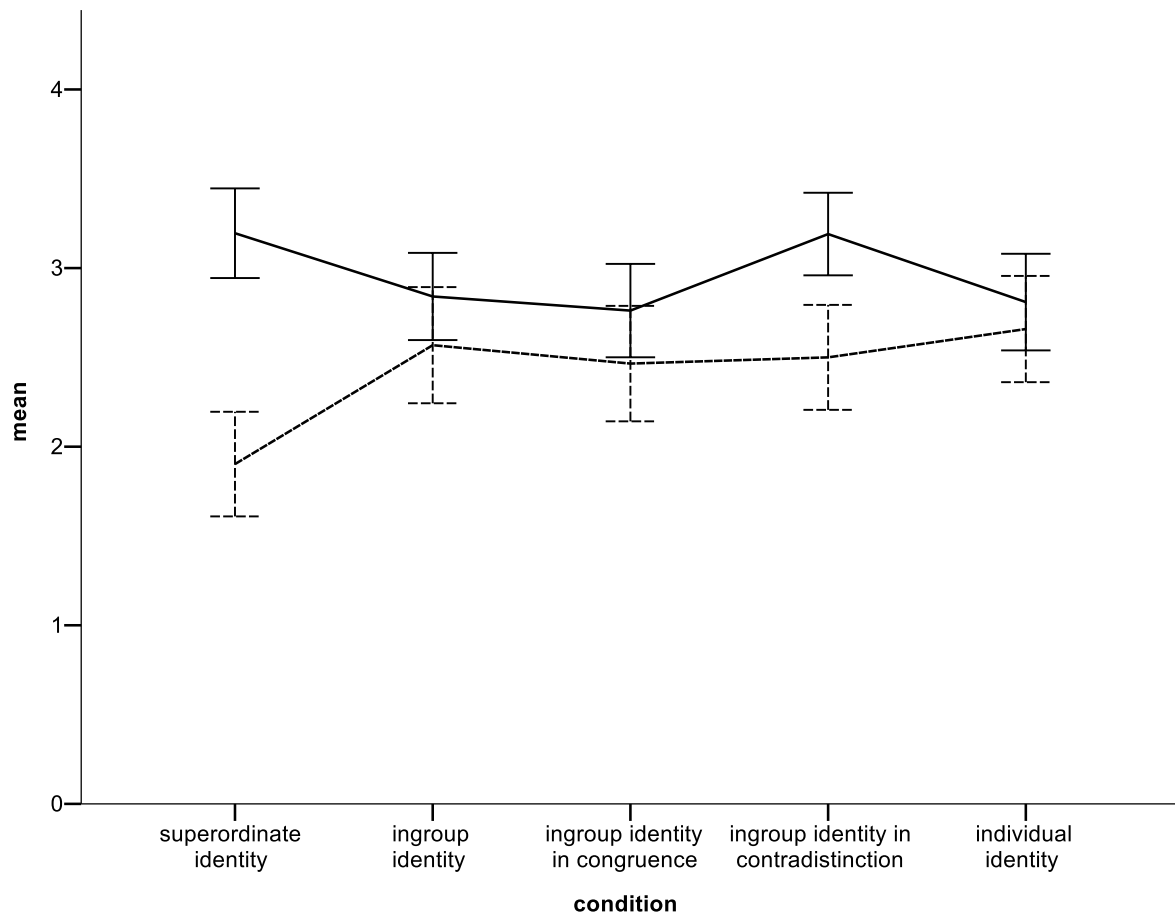
Figure 1. Experiment 1: Means of L1+L2 identification and L1−L2 identification in each condition. L1+L2 identification is presented by the solid line, L1−L2 identification is presented by the dotted line. 90%-confidence intervals are shown.

The analysis provided partial support for our hypotheses (see also Table 1). First, as already confirmed by the manipulation check, the experimental variation (more precisely, the dummy-coded contrast between the superordinate identity condition [=1] and the control conditions [= 0]) positively predicted L1+L2 identification ($b = .293$, $SE = .165$; $\beta = .118$, $p = .078$) and negatively predicted L1−L2 identification ($b = −.642$, $SE = .195$; $\beta = −.211$, $p = .001$). L1+L2 identification did not have significant effects on sympathy for non-normative ends ($b = −.074$, $SE = .049$; $\beta = −.116$, $p = .120$) or means ($b = −.023$, $SE = .077$; $\beta = −.023$,

$p = .767$) despite trends in the expected direction. As predicted, however, L1−L2 identification had significant positive effects on sympathy for non-normative ends ($b = .116$, $SE = .033$; $\beta = .223$, $p = .001$) and means ($b = .149$, $SE = .056$; $\beta = .188$, $p = .008$). The experimental variation had no significant direct effect on sympathy for non-normative ends ($b = .233$, $SE = .124$; $\beta = .147$, $p = .056$)[4] or means ($b = .165$, $SE = .149$; $\beta = .068$, $p = .265$). But we observed significant indirect effects of the experimental variation via L1−L2 identification both on sympathy for non-normative ends ($b = −.075$, $SE = .032$; $\beta = −.047$, $p = .020$) and means ($b = −.096$, $SE = .045$; $\beta = −.040$, $p = .031$).[5]
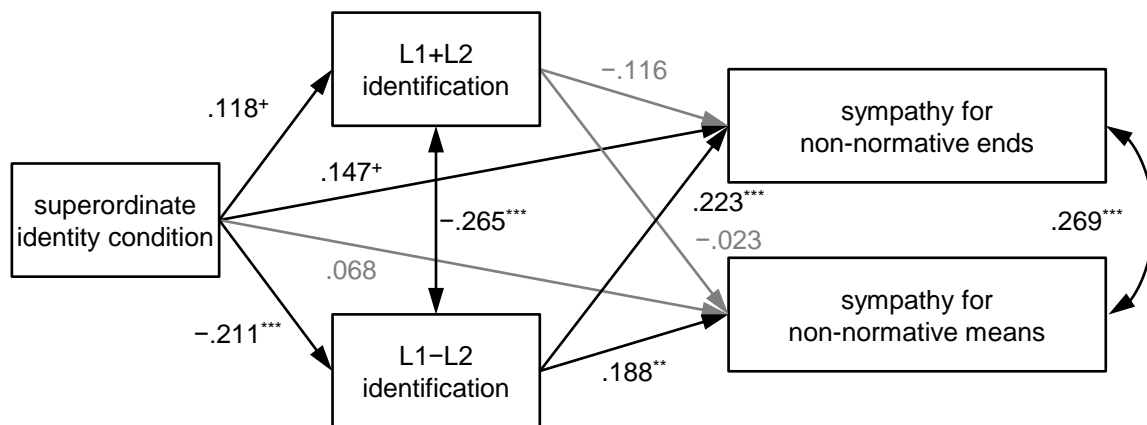

Figure 2. Experiment 1: Model of the main analysis. Significant paths (at a two-tailed α-level of 10%) are presented by a black line, non-significant paths are presented by a grey line. The experimental variation is dummy coded as *superordinate identity condition* [= 1, control conditions = 0]. This model, as a saturated manifest model, yields a perfect fit: $\chi^2 = 0$, $df = 0$, $p < .001$; *CFI* = 1; *TLI* = 1; *RMSEA* = 0; *SRMR* = 0; estimator = *MLR*. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; MLR = maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors. $^+p \leq .10$, $^*p \leq .05$, $^{**}p \leq .01$, $^{***}p \leq .001$ (two-tailed).

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[4]This positive direct effect of the experimental variation on sympathy for non-normative ends just failed to reach significance. At first sight, this observation may be surprising. But considering that L1+L2 identification and L1−L2 identification—being the active ingredients—are controlled for, this weak residue effect may be negligible.

[5]Additionally, we conducted this path analysis with sympathy for non-normative ends and sympathy for non-normative means being measured by all six original items. The results remained virtually unchanged. All paths pointed in the same direction as before and the significant paths remained significant. The only difference was that the negative path from L1+L2 identification to sympathy for non-normative ends also reached significance ($b = −.093$, $SE = .048$; $\beta = −.149$, $p = .043$).

Table 1

Experiment 1: Results of the main analysis

	LBCI	β	UBCI	*SE*	*p*
L1+L2 identification ON					
Superordinate identity condition	.008	.118	.228	.067	.078
L1−L2 identification ON					
Superordinate identity condition	−.315	−.211	−.106	.063	.001
Sympathy for non-normative ends ON					
L1+L2 identification	−.239	−.116	.007	.075	.120
L1−L2 identification	.116	.223	.330	.065	.001
Superordinate identity condition	.021	.147	.273	.077	.056
Sympathy for non-normative ends IND					
SIC via L1+L2 identification	−.032	−.014	.005	.011	.223
SIC via L1−L2 identification	−.080	−.047	−.014	.020	.020
Sympathy for non-normative means ON					
L1+L2 identification	−.154	−.023	.107	.079	.767
L1−L2 identification	.071	.188	.304	.071	.008
Superordinate identity condition	−.032	.068	.169	.061	.265
Sympathy for non-normative means IND					
SIC via L1+L2 identification	−.019	−.003	.013	.010	.773
SIC via L1−L2 identification	−.070	−.040	−.009	.018	.031

Notes. LBCI = lower bound of 90% confidence interval; UBCI = upper bound of 90% confidence interval; SIC = superordinate identity condition; ON = direct effects; IND = indirect effects. The experimental variation is dummy coded as *superordinate identity condition* (*SIC*) [= 1, control conditions = 0]. Standardized results are reported.

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Discussion

In Experiment 1 it was demonstrated that, as intended, L1+L2 identification was increased and L1−L2 identification was decreased by the salience of the superordinate identity as these forms of identity were successfully manipulated. We also observed an unexpectedly high L1+L2 identification in the ingroup identity in contradistinction condition, which points to participants´ reactance to the prescribed contrast between the ingroup and the superordinate group and thus a strengthened claim to belong to both groups. As predicted, L1−L2 identification was positively related to both sympathy for non-normative ends and means, but L1+L2 identification was unrelated to such sympathy. Finally, the significant indirect effects of the experimental variation via L1−L2 identification on sympathy for non-normative ends and means are some indication that identification plays a causal role in radicalization (see Hayes, 2018).

The insights provided by the first experiment suggest a further refinement of the conceptions of L1+L2 identity and L1−L2 identity. We propose that the identification with a particular ingroup in combination with the (dis-)identification with the superordinate group is best described in terms of (dis-)embeddedness. *Embedded identity*, formerly L1+L2 identity, can then be conceptualized as the acknowledgment that one´s particular ingroup membership at a given level of ingroup-outgroup categorization is embedded in a higher level, i.e., superordinate and more inclusive, group membership (Simon, 2020; Turner et al., 1987). *Dis-embedded identity*, formerly L1−L2 identity, can then be conceptualized as the accentuation and prioritization of one's particular ingroup membership at the expense of one's membership in the superordinate group, thus dis-embedding the ingroup from the superordinate group (Hutnik, 1986; Reininger, 2018; Sammut, 2011; Schaefer & Simon, 2017; Simon, 2020; Simon & Ruhs, 2008). This conception is also in line with past theoretical reasoning that people holding an embedded or dis-embedded identity are accordingly embedded in or dis-embedded from the superordinate normative framework (Simon, 2011; Simon & Ruhs, 2008).

Experiment 2

In the second experiment, embedded identity and dis-embedded identity were the direct targets of our experimental manipulations considering the salience of both Level 1 and Level 2 group memberships. In three control conditions, to ensure that the observed effects were specifically due to the manipulations of embedded and dis-embedded identity, ingroup identity, superordinate identity, or identity as an individual were made salient. We intended to increase embedded identification in the embedded identity condition and to increase dis-embedded identification in the dis-embedded identity condition relative to the respective other conditions. We again hypothesized that embedded identification would then have negative effects and dis-embedded identification would have positive effects on sympathy for non-normative ends and means. Taken together, the experimentally induced salience of embedded identity should diminish sympathy for non-normative ends and means via measured embedded identification while the experimentally induced salience of dis-embedded identity should foster sympathy for non-normative ends and means via measured dis-embedded identification.

Method

Participants. The present research was introduced to (potential) participants as an investigation of "group memberships and patterns of opinions." Participants were recruited online in March 2020 via the contractor *Prolific* (www.prolific.co). Data were collected using online questionnaires. Each participant received £1.25 for participating. Only individuals who had German citizenship, were permanent residents of Germany, spoke German as a native language, and were born after 1992 were included in the final sample for statistical analyses. Additionally, participants had to pass two simple attention checks. The final sample comprised 210 participants, in line with an a priori power analysis using G*Power (statistical test = ANOVA, $f = .25$, $\alpha = .05$, power = .80, groups = 5; Faul et al., 2009), which advised a total sample size of 200. Central demographic characteristics of this sample are gender

(38.57% female, 60.95% male, 0.48% diverse), age (M = 23.52, SD = 2.25, min = 18, max = 27), education (compulsory basic secondary education: 1.43%, secondary education: 9.52%, restricted or unrestricted university entry qualification: 52.38%, bachelor or master degree: 35.71%, other: 0.95%), and political orientation (M = −1.47, SD = 1.19, ranging from −3 *liberal* to +3 *conservative*).

Manipulation. To manipulate the salience of the specific forms of identity, we adapted the same approach as in the first experiment (Haslam et al., 1999; Ho & Yeung, 2019). Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions. For the embedded identity condition and dis-embedded identity condition, we especially built on the manipulations of the first experiment in the ingroup identity in congruence condition and ingroup identity in contradistinction condition. In both the embedded identity condition and dis-embedded identity condition, participants were first shown the general instruction "Please fill out the following table" accompanied by a graphical representation of a circle labeled "I" as a part of a circle labeled "young people." Below, a table headed "Things that are fairly important to us young people" followed by five rows to enter five things which fulfill this criterion was shown. In the embedded identity condition, participants were then shown the same general instruction, the corresponding graphical representation (a circle labeled "I" as a part of a circle labeled "German society"), and table ("Things that are fairly important to us as German society") with German society as the reference group. In the dis-embedded identity condition, participants were instead shown the general instruction, a graphical representation (a circle labeled "German society" but without a circle labeled "I") and a table headed "Things that are fairly unimportant to German society." Thus, in this condition, we did not include the participants in German society and switched from important things to unimportant things to increase the perceived non-membership in this group compared with the group of young people. In this way, the embedded and dis-embedded identity conditions comprised the manipulation of both Level 1 and Level 2—differing in the perceived membership respectively non-membership in the superordinate group. This more subtle approach should reduce the likelihood of reactance on the part of our research participants.

In the control conditions [ingroup identity / superordinate identity / individual identity], participants were also shown the general instruction "Please fill out the following table" accompanied by a graphical representation of a circle labeled "I" as a part of a circle labeled according to the respective reference group. Below, a table headed "Things that are fairly important to [us young people / us as German society / me personally]" followed by five rows to enter five things which fulfill this criterion was shown.

Before the manipulation check, the general instruction "Please answer the following questions" was repeated accompanied by (the combination of) the respective graphical representation. The graphical representations used in the embedded and dis-embedded identity conditions are presented in Figure 3.
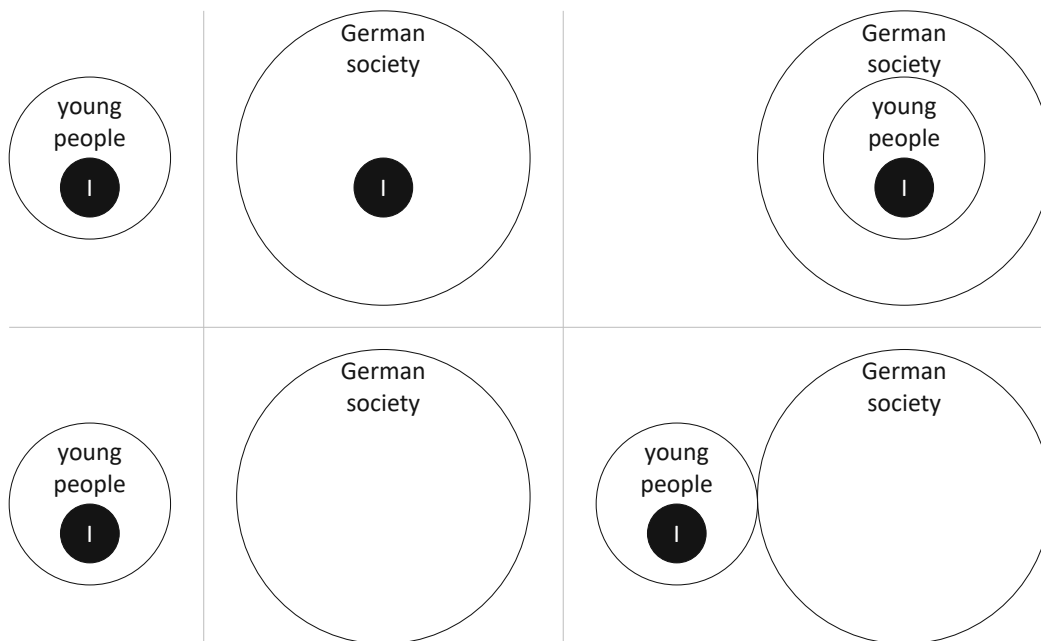

Figure 3. Experiment 2: Graphical representations used in the embedded identity condition and dis-embedded identity condition. Those in the upper row were used in the embedded identity condition, those in the lower row were used in the dis-embedded identity condition. Those in the left column were shown in connection to the manipulation of Level 1, those in the middle column were shown in connection to the manipulation of Level 2, and those in the right column were shown before the manipulation check. The presented English terms translate into the original German terms as follows: I = ich; young people = junge Menschen; German society = deutsche Gesellschaft.

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Measures. The measures relevant to the present research were slightly modified compared with the first experiment.[6] The measures of embedded and dis-embedded identification were extended by one item each. Embedded identification was measured by the items "I feel I belong to the group of young people as well as to German society" and "I am glad to be both a young person and a part of German society" (ρ = .82). Dis-embedded identification was measured by the items "I feel I belong more to the group of young people than to German society" and "All in all, I feel more like a young person than a part of German society" (ρ = .81). In hindsight and due to an oversight, the second item of embedded identification captured the affective instead of the cognitive component of identification. Since our conceptualization of (dis-)embedded identification is focused on the cognitive component, as was our manipulation, this item was not included in the scale. Sympathy for non-normative ends (α = .75) and sympathy for non-normative means (α = .85) were measured by the same five items that were used in the first experiment.

Results

Preliminary Analyses. A principal component analysis with varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization of the items of sympathy for non-normative ends and sympathy for non-normative means was computed. Again, a two-factor solution was found (explained variance = 57.49%) resembling these scales (within-loadings ≥ |.65|, cross-loadings ≤ |.27|).

Manipulation Check. We computed planned contrasts to check the effectiveness of the experimental variations (see Figure 4). Indeed, embedded identification in the embedded identity condition (M = 2.83, SD = .82) was significantly higher compared with the aggregated other conditions (M = 2.51, SD = 1.10; T = 2.09, df = 81.63, p = .040)[7], whereas dis-embedded identification in the dis-embedded identity condition (M = 2.85, SD = 1.00) was not significantly higher compared with the aggregated other conditions (M = 2.70, SD = 1.01; T = .87, df = 203, p = .387). The overall pattern of effects of the experimental variations was

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[6]The questionnaire contained additional measures not relevant to the present research.
[7]Additionally, we conducted this analysis with embedded identification being measured with the two original items. The planned contrast just failed to reach significance (T = 1.63, df = 81.64, p = .108).

admittedly rather complex. Still, the observations that embedded identification was successfully increased in the embedded identity condition and that dis-embedded identification in the dis-embedded identity condition showed a non-significant trend in the expected direction encouraged us to proceed with the hypothesis test.
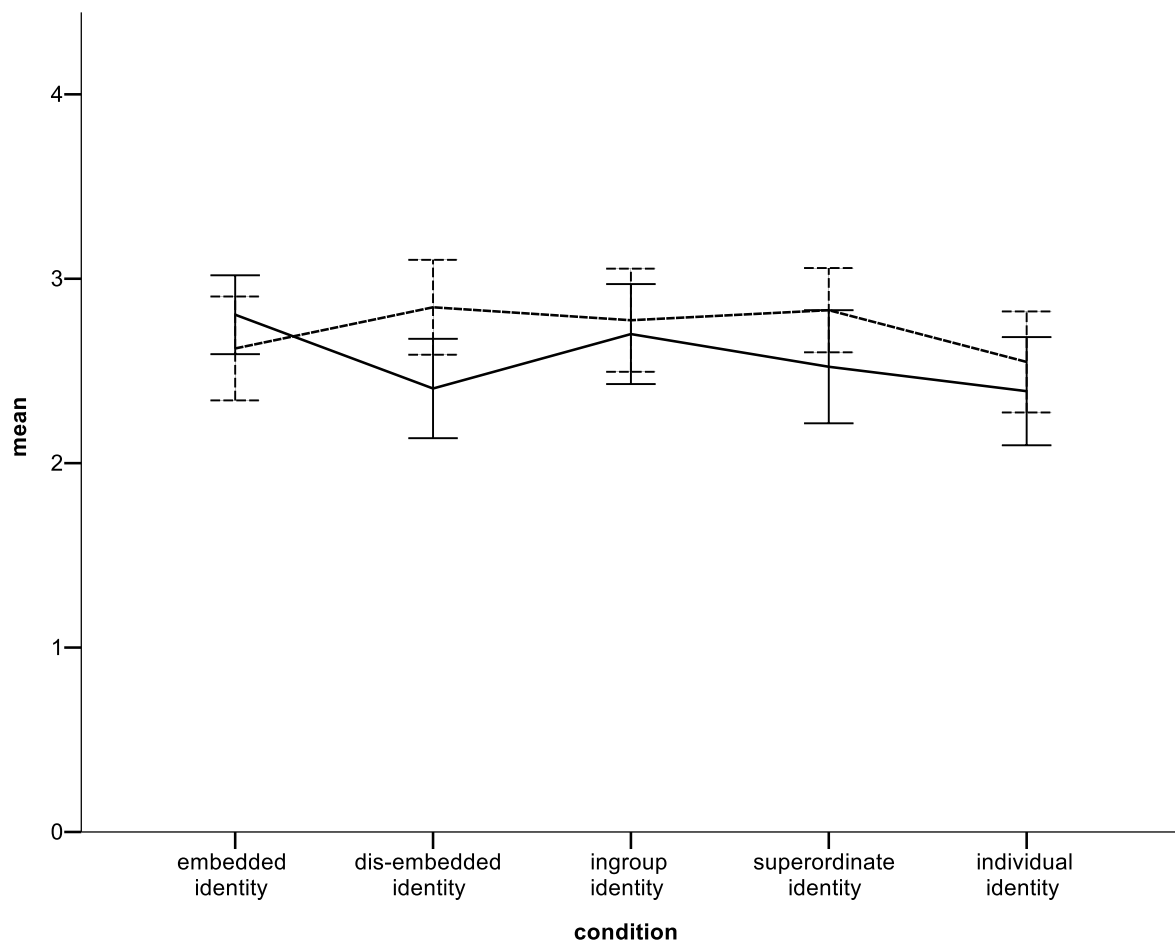

Figure 4. Experiment 2: Means of embedded identification and dis-embedded identification in each condition. Embedded identification is presented by the solid line, dis-embedded identification is presented by the dotted line. 90%-confidence intervals are shown.

Main Analysis. First, we checked for mean differences in sympathy for non-normative ends and means between the conditions. No mean differences were found in

univariate analyses of variance in sympathy for non-normative ends, $F(4,205) = .76$, $p = .549$, or means, $F(4,204) = .94$, $p = .439$. Second, we conducted a path analysis to test our specific mediation hypotheses. The specified model is presented in Figure 5. It yielded an excellent fit: $\chi^2 = .499$, $df = 2$, $p = .779$; CFI $= 1.000$; TLI $= 1.172$; RMSEA $< .001$; SRMR $= .012$; estimator = MLR (Brown, 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Muthén & Muthén, 2017b).
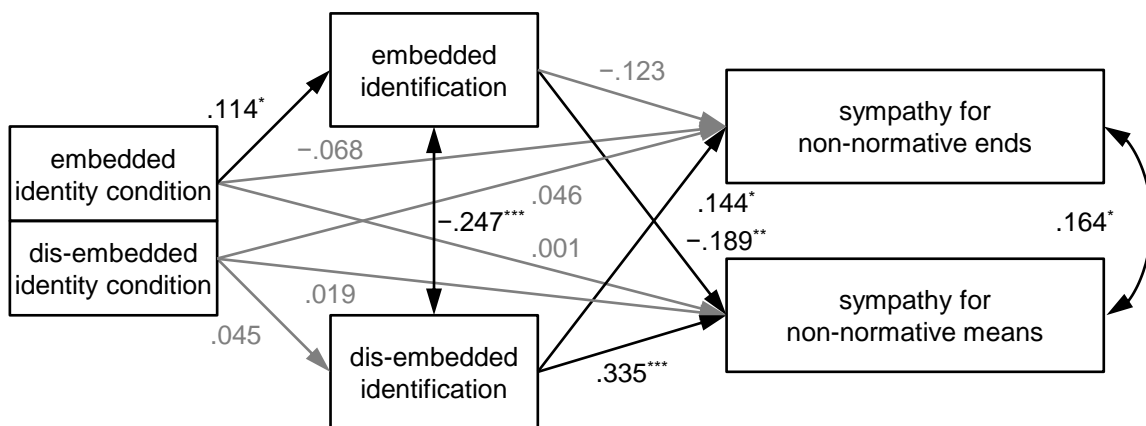

Figure 5. Experiment 2: Model of the main analysis. Significant paths (at a two-tailed α-level of 10%) are presented by a black line, non-significant paths are presented by a grey line. The experimental variations are coded as the two dummy variables *embedded identity condition* [= 1, all other conditions = 0] and *dis-embedded identity condition* [= 1, all other conditions = 0]. The model yields an excellent fit: $\chi^2 = .499$, $df = 2$, $p = .779$; *CFI* $= 1.000$; *TLI* $= 1.172$; *RMSEA* $< .001$; *SRMR* $= .012$; estimator = *MLR*. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; MLR = maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors. $^{+}p \leq .10$, $^{*}p \leq .05$, $^{**}p \leq .01$, $^{***}p \leq .001$ (two-tailed).

The results provided partial support for our hypotheses (see also Table 2). First, as already confirmed by the manipulation check, the embedded identity condition (more precisely, the dummy-coded contrast between the embedded identity condition [=1] and the aggregated other conditions [=0]) positively predicted embedded identification ($b = .299$, *SE* $= .145$; $\beta = .114$, $p = .037$), while the dis-embedded identity condition (more precisely, the dummy-coded contrast between the dis-embedded identity condition [=1] and the aggregated other conditions [=0]) did not significantly predict dis-embedded identification ($b = .112$,

$SE = .168$; $\beta = .045$, $p = .505$). Embedded identification had a significant negative effect on sympathy for non-normative means ($b = -.192$, $SE = .069$; $\beta = -.189$, $p = .005$), while the negative effect on sympathy for non-normative ends just failed to reach significance ($b = -.097$, $SE = .062$; $\beta = -.123$, $p = .115$). Dis-embedded identification had significant positive effects on sympathy for non-normative ends ($b = .119$, $SE = .058$; $\beta = .144$, $p = .041$) and means ($b = .357$, $SE = .073$; $\beta = .335$, $p < .001$). The experimental variations had no significant direct effects on sympathy for non-normative ends (bs $\le |.142|$, SEs $\ge .133$; βs $\le |.068|$, ps $\ge .283$) or means (bs $\le |.050|$, SEs $\ge .170$; βs $\le |.019|$, ps $\ge .770$). Finally, we observed a significant negative indirect effect of the experimental variation via embedded identification on sympathy for non-normative means ($b = -.058$, $SE = .034$; $\beta = -.021$, $p = .084$).

Discussion

In Experiment 2 we demonstrated that embedded identification can successfully be manipulated (as possibly could dis-embedded identification). The observation that the effects of the experimental variations seem rather complex and not very strong, also compared with the first experiment, may be due to the general disadvantages of an online experiment compared to a laboratory experiment. These include, most importantly, a lack of control over the experimental environment (Finley & Penningroth, 2015). Nevertheless, it was demonstrated that embedded identification was unrelated to sympathy for non-normative ends but negatively related to sympathy for non-normative means. Dis-embedded identification was positively related to sympathy for non-normative ends and means. Finally, the significant indirect effect of the experimental variation via embedded identification on sympathy for non-normative means is some indication that identification plays a causal role in radicalization (see Hayes, 2018). The non-significant indirect effects via dis-embedded identification should be attributed to the non-significant effect of the experimental variation on dis-embedded identification. Thus, the missing indirect effects do not necessarily indicate the general absence of this relation.

Table 2

Experiment 2: Results of the main analysis

	LBCI	β	UBCI	*SE*	*p*
Embedded identification ON					
Embedded identity condition	.024	.114	.203	.054	.037
Dis-embedded identification ON					
Dis-embedded identity condition	−.066	.045	.156	.067	.505
Sympathy for non-normative ends ON					
Embedded identification	−.251	−.123	.006	.078	.115
Dis-embedded identification	.028	.144	.260	.070	.041
Embedded identity condition	−.173	−.068	.036	.064	.283
Dis-embedded identity condition	−.068	.046	.160	.069	.511
Sympathy for non-normative ends IND					
EIC via embedded identification	−.033	−.014	.005	.011	.216
DIC via dis-embedded identification	−.011	.006	.024	.010	.537
Sympathy for non-normative means ON					
Embedded identification	−.299	−.189	−.079	.067	.005
Dis-embedded identification	.227	.335	.443	.065	< .001
Embedded identity condition	−.111	.001	.112	.068	.993
Dis-embedded identity condition	−.086	.019	.124	.064	.770
Sympathy for non-normative means IND					
EIC via embedded identification	−.042	−.021	−.001	.012	.084
DIC via dis-embedded identification	−.023	.015	.053	.023	.515

Notes. LBCI = lower bound of 90% confidence interval; UBCI = upper bound of 90% confidence interval; EIC = embedded identity condition; DIC = dis-embedded identity condition; ON = direct effects; IND = indirect effect. The experimental variations are coded as the two dummy variables *embedded identity condition* (*EIC*) [= 1, all other conditions = 0] and *dis-embedded identity condition* (*DIC*) [= 1, all other conditions = 0]. Standardized results are reported.

General Discussion

The research reported in this article focused on the significance of a superordinate identity of citizens in plural democratic societies. We introduced and examined embedded identity and dis-embedded identity. Embedded identity was conceptualized as the acknowledgment that one´s particular ingroup membership at a given level of ingroup-outgroup categorization (Level 1) is embedded in a higher-level, i.e., superordinate and more inclusive, group membership (Level 2; Simon, 2020; Turner et al., 1987). Dis-embedded identity was conceptualized as the accentuation and prioritization of one's particular ingroup membership (Level 1) at the expense of one's membership in the superordinate group (Level 2), thus dis-embedding the ingroup from the superordinate group (Hutnik, 1986; Reininger, 2018; Sammut, 2011; Schaefer & Simon, 2017; Simon, 2020; Simon & Ruhs, 2008). The introduction of those novel conceptions enabled us to report novel findings in line with a newly proposed perspective on intergroup conflict (Simon, 2020). On that account, our manipulations and measures of embedded and dis-embedded identity are still in need of further development allowing for more nuanced analyses. Future research should generate more precise and robust manipulations and refine our measures of embedded and dis-embedded identity, which only comprised one item (or two items). The existing knowledge on the relation of identification and radicalization was extended and specified by the present research. Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 demonstrated that embedded and dis-embedded identity are determined by the salience of superordinate identity and suggest that both can be experimentally varied. Embedded identity is unrelated or even negatively related to sympathy for non-normative ends and means, whereas dis-embedded identity is positively related to sympathy for non-normative ends and means. Finally, our observation of indirect effects of our experimental variations via embedded and dis-embedded identity points to a causal role of identification in (de)radicalization. Nevertheless, further and more extensive experimental research is required for a final claim of causality.

The findings of the present research mesh well with prior theorizing and empirical research. For example, while both embedded and dis-embedded identity can conduce normative politicization, dis-embedded identity seems particularly conducive to non-normative radicalization (Simon, 2011; Simon & Ruhs, 2008). A lack of perceived belongingness is positively related to an increased tendency of aggression and intergroup hostility (e.g., Buckley et al., 2004; Warburton et al., 2006; Twenge et al., 2001; Schaafsma & Williams, 2012) and a lack of superordinate identity is positively related to acceptance of violence and terrorism (Charkawi et al., 2020). The pursuit of hegemony over other societal subgroups is also more likely linked to dis-embedded than to embedded identity (Paffrath & Simon, 2020). Political system support, however, is positively related to peaceful protest orientation and negatively related to violent protest orientation (Isemann et al., 2019). Taken together, embedded identity "ensures that the superordinate entity with its political game, rules, and players is acknowledged as one's own" (Simon, 2011, p. 148)—while this is not the case for dis-embedded identity.

Implications and Conclusion

An embedded or dis-embedded identity of citizens holds direct implications for the order and stability of plural democratic societies. Citizens holding a dis-embedded identity are unconstrained by the superordinate normative framework (Rawls, 2001; Simon, 2011) and anti-outgroup attitudes and pro-ingroup attitudes are free to operate (Gaertner et al., 1993; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). Subgroup divisions then easily translate into boundaries for equality-based respect and the recognition of corresponding entitlements and obligations (Simon, 2020). Fundamental ideas of democratic societies, like equality, freedom, and justice (Rawls, 2001), are undermined by dis-embedded identity—but secured by embedded identity. Embedded identity therefore seems particularly important in the case of groups harboring rather extreme ingroup norms or pronounced intergroup hostility (see Berger, 2018; Koehler, 2015; Sageman, 2017). Nevertheless, even ordinary citizens in ordered and stable societies, like young people in Germany, may develop a dis-embedded identity and then sympathy for

non-normative ends and means due to a sense of frustration or betrayal (Simon & Oakes, 2006; Simon & Ruhs, 2008). Thus, when evaluating the potential of radicalization, the identity of citizens should not be assumed to be invariant nor should any societal subgroup be excluded prematurely.

It has been suggested that dis-embedded identity and thus radicalization can be prevented or dissolved by (equality-based) respect granted to the particular subgroup by the superordinate group, i.e., society (Paffrath & Simon, 2020). This does not imply that an extremist attitude or a radical action, which violates the imperative of respect for others, should not be reasonably and rightfully rejected—and even be curbed. It is crucial, however, to distinguish between someone's attitudes and actions, which may be rejected for the right reasons, and the person him- or herself, who deserves respect in any case. If this is taken into consideration, the accusation of being dis-respectful oneself (based on a reasonable and rightful rejection of attitudes or actions) is unjustified (Simon, 2017, 2020). On the part of society, perspective taking may additionally contribute to forgiveness for radical subgroup members (Noor & Halabi, 2018). The experience of respect from society and its representatives, entailing an unbiased, trustworthy, and dignified treatment (Simon & Stürmer, 2003), may in fact be necessary for people to (re-)identify with society and (re-) adopt its normative framework and, eventually, develop an embedded identity (Simon, 2011; Simon, Mommert, & Renger, 2015). The experience of respect may then set in motion a positive dynamic of reciprocity. Once (re-)identification with society and a (re-)adoption of its normative framework have occurred, people are likely to (again) follow the imperative of respect for others (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Rawls, 2001; Simon, 2011; Turner et al., 1987). This indirect reciprocity via superordinate identity (and embedded identity for that matter) is supported by a direct reciprocity of receiving respect from an outgroup and granting respect to the same outgroup (Reininger, Schaefer, Zitzmann, & Simon, 2020). In sum, receiving respect fosters granting respect despite and across subgroup divisions and thus hinders escalation and radicalization, but instead facilitates pacification, deradicalization, and possibly even positive intergroup relations.

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