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Gender Constructions in the Prevention of and Deradicalization from Islamism in Germany.

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Abstract
Women have always played a key role in modern extremist organizations. Ambivalent propaganda and recruitment strategies also specifically target women. In addition, research findings highlight different gender-specific reasons for radicalization. Nevertheless, radicalization has long been perceived as a male phenomenon and women have been ascribed stereotypical characteristics that portray them as appendages or supporters of men. As a result, there is a risk that a biased image of "female radicalization" will become entrenched and also influence prevention and deradicalization. Following on from this, this article deals not only with the isolated question of possible gender specifics, but also with the (re)construction of gender orders and stereotypes in the field of prevention and deradicalization in the context of Islamism. Through the documentary analysis of eleven interviews with actors involved in prevention and intervention in Germany, three types of gender constructions in the field of prevention and deradicalization from Islamism were reconstructed in which gender orders and gender-specific assumptions about radicalization processes are expressed. The first type emphasizes emotionality and influenceability as stereotypical female characteristics and understands the radicalization of women as a process of assimilation. In contrast, the second type emphasizes recognition and self-determination. Here, the radicalization of women is primarily understood as a functional strategy for liberation from the social gender order. In the third type, the interviewees focus on idealistic and ideological elements and understand radicalization as a process of developing political subjectivity.

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Introduction

Islamist radicalization has long been perceived as primarily a male phenomenon. Research findings show that of the more than 41,000 persons from 80 countries who left their country between 2013 and 2018 to join the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, around 13% were women. However, there are geographical differences here. For example, around 35% of IS

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supporters from East Asia were female, compared to 23% and 17% of people from Eastern and Western Europe and less than 1% of people from sub-Saharan Africa (Cook & Vale, 2018). Overall, women in extremist organizations are also heterogeneous in terms of their origin, motivation and role assumption. Although domestic roles, the role of housewife and mother or supporter of the husband, are still predominant in Islamist organizations (Cook & Vale, 2018; Hoyle et al., 2015) the reduction to exclusively highly restricted female roles is contradicted. On the one hand, the decisive task of conveying ideology is associated with raising children. On the other hand, it is emphasized that women are also active in recruitment, propaganda, administrative areas, education and health care and are increasingly developing active agency and participation in combat or police work (Bloom & Lokmanoglu, 2023; Gan et al., 2019). This increasing heterogeneity also corresponds to the ambivalent women-specific propaganda activities of Islamist groups as well as the diverse and also violence-oriented motivations for joining extremist actors (Peresin & Cervone, 2015; Saltman & Smith, 2015).

Due to the increasing participation of women in extremist organizations, the importance of gender dimensions is also being recognized in the context of preventing and countering Islamist radicalization. Internationally, several authors recognized the importance of the gender dimension and advocate strengthening gender and gender-related aspects in prevention and deradicalization practices (Baer, 2016; Khalid et al., 2023; Möller et al., 2023; Morgades-Bamba, 2020; White, 2023). These include, for example, the promotion of gender equality, a targeted emancipatory orientation and the consideration of gender-sensitive approaches as central premises in program development. Building on this, Wdzięczak (2022) examines the assessment of experts in P/CVE with regard to the role of gender and gender mainstreaming. The results show that many actors acknowledge the importance of gender equality in their programs, but lack clear concepts and strategies for integrating gender aspects. The respondents predominantly emphasize the advantages of integrating the gender perspective and consider this to be important in order to obtain a holistic view of radicalization. At an organizational level, gender parity has almost been achieved among professionals, but there is still a male dominance in the area of preventing and countering violent extremism. At the same time, with regard to the gender-specificity of violent

extremism, the necessity of social gender equality is emphasized in order to counter extremist propaganda. The international comparative study thus provides insights into how professionals reflect on gender-specific approaches in their practice and calls for a further strengthening of gender sensitivity. However, successful professionalization, the development and implementation of gender-sensitive approaches require an analysis of the prevalence and reproduction of gender-related assumptions, narratives, and constructions. Building on the findings, this article conducts an in-depth analysis of the professional practice in Germany. Based on the basic assumptions of praxeological professionalization research (Bohnsack, 2020), it is assumed that there is a tension, or notorious discrepancy, between reflexive-communicative and conjunctive action-oriented knowledge. It is therefore necessary to consider and compare both levels of knowledge. Thus, this article not only deals with the isolated question of gender specifics, but also with the (re)construction of gender orders and stereotypes that manifest in the field of prevention and deradicalization programs.

Gender-specific Radicalization

Islamist ideology is characterized by a rigid, biologically based, heteronormative, hierarchical, and misogynistic image of women. On the other hand, masculinity is heroized and men are portrayed as strong leaders (Kulaçatan, 2020; Roose & Cook, 2022; Schwarz, 2022). However, as women are also turning to Islamism, gender-specific aspects of radicalization and the role of gender orders are increasingly becoming a focus of research. Although the separation of typically female and typically male radicalization is viewed critically due to the reproduction of stereotypes and the associated simplification (Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017). Nevertheless, considering gender orders and examining motives and risk factors of Islamism from a gender perspective make this categorization a relevant analytical framework.

Several authors (Akkuş et al., 2020; Kulaçatan, 2020; Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017; Salah, 2019) have identified gender-specific aspects that render Islamist ideologies and groups appealing. For example, Islamist actors propagate clear gender roles, overemphasizing stereotypical expectations, which may provide girls and women with a clear orientation and

unambiguous task assignments. Following the ideological elements, Islamist actors also rely on gendered constructions in propaganda and recruitment. These include promises of marriage with Islamist fighters, recognition of family responsibilities, archaic masculinity or ingroup-strengthening constructions such as a strong and solidary sisterhood or brotherhood, and the promise of a good life in the caliphate (Herschinger, 2022; Musial, 2016).

A demographic analysis of men and women involved in terrorist activities reveals that women also represent a heterogeneous group. They are more often associated with terrorist organizations compared to men but less frequently involved in attacks (Brugh et al., 2019). In a study of French female students, Morgades-Bamda et al. (2020) came to the conclusion that personality traits such as Machiavellianism, narcissism, sadism and psychopathy promote both cognitive and behavioral radicalization in the women studied. Psychopathological characteristics, on the other hand, play no significant role in the radicalization process. In addition, it was shown that perceived cultural discrimination and religious commitment increase dogmatism and thus potentially increase radicalization. However, the authors did not carry out a comparison with male students, so it is unclear whether these are gender-specific or generalist radicalization factors. In a case study of Indonesian female IS supporters, Nuraniyah (2018) shows that they develop their own agency to benefit from extremist groups by increasing their submissiveness or by resisting traditional female roles. Möller et al. (2023) identify the insufficient satisfaction of control and integration needs as factors in radicalization. These needs are addressed differently depending on gender. The authors point to connections with growing up in patriarchal family structures, according to which stereotypes such as male hegemony and female subordination are potentially (re-)produced. Overall, the question of whether and to what extent radicalization actually differs according to gender, or which gender-specific factors, (social) gender orders, and gender constructions are relevant, has not yet been clarified.

Deradicalization

A number of terms have been used to refer to deradicalization from Islamism, each emphasizing different aspects. While disengagement primarily refers to a change in

(extremist) behavior (Horgan, 2008), deradicalization is usually understood as a holistic cognitive transformation through which radical ideology and involvement in extremist groups are abandoned (Rabasa et al., 2010). In addition, secondary and tertiary prevention include approaches aimed at preventing radicalization from becoming strengthened or reversing manifest radicalization (Ceylan & Kiefer, 2018; Kart et al., 2023). The factors that initiate and/or accompany deradicalization or disengagement are often categorized as push and pull factors. External pull factors include, for example, improved educational opportunities or positive experiences outside of extremist groups (Disley et al., 2011; Schmid, 2013). In some cases, an important role is attributed to the social environment and social actors (Bösing et al., 2023a, 2023b; LaFree & Miller, 2008; Logvinov, 2021). Push factors, on the other hand, are internal aspects such as negative experiences within the extremist groups or failure to achieve desired goals (Horgan, 2008; Altier et al., 2017; Emser et al., 2022). In a systematic review (Morrison et al., 2021; Silke et al., 2021), the authors found that disillusionment and the ability of individuals to return to a secure social life are particularly crucial for successful deradicalization (see also Barelle, 2015).

Deradicalization programs are carried out by state and non-state actors in different forms. For example, while programs in Pakistan focus on conveying a new understanding of religion (Kurtenbach et al., 2021; Azam & Fatima, 2017), soft approaches are implemented in Indonesia, for example in prisons and with the involvement of former extremists (Aslam et al, 2016; Sumpter, 2017). Kenya focuses on prevention with young people due to the growing strength of the Islamist militia Al Shabaab (Badurdeen & Goldsmith, 2018; Sahgal & Kimaiyo, 2020). A comparison with other Western European countries shows that in Germany, a high proportion of actors from the non-governmental, civil society sector implement prevention and deradicalization programs. Here, as well as in state and/or security authority contexts, a wide range of approaches are used, which can primarily be located in the field of social work (von Lautz et al., 2023). The field has seen growth in recent years; in 2021, there was a recorded increase of around a third in prevention and intervention programs across all phenomena in Germany compared to 2018 (Michalis & Kemmesies, 2021).

Theoretical framework

The article deals with the attribution and reproduction of socially, discursively and institutionally prevalent gender roles and orders. The social constructivist perspective understands gender in its construction through interaction in social situations (Gildemeister, 2019; West & Zimmermann, 1987). Gender relations become particularly clear by contrasting the constructions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. The analysis is, therefore, not only concerned with the isolated representation of images of women but also with contrasting assumptions about men and women, as well as about female and male radicalization, revealing underlying gender constructions. The focus is particularly on gender orders that are hierarchical to one another. We adopt an intersectional perspective of analysis, according to which other social categories and orders of inequality are also considered in their overlaps and interrelationships (Crenshaw, 1989; Marten & Walgenbach, 2017).

Radicalization can also be viewed from a social constructivist and interactional perspective in terms of Doing Social Problems. Groenemeyer (2010, 2012) explains social problems and their problematization as dependent on political and social discourses. In these discourses, a wide variety of actors and interest groups with structurally different power, hegemony and resources negotiate the construction of problems. The actors involved in dealing with the problem – such as professionals und institutions in radicalization prevention and intervention – play a special role here. On the one hand, they draw on the definitions of the problem, and on the other hand, they constantly reconstruct them through their casework and institutional practice. This is an interactive process between organizations, professionals and clients, in which the abstract nature of the problem is made explicit. Since the prevailing narratives in prevention practice about the radicalization processes and related gender constructions have the potential to massively influence the perception of the problem and possible strategies for dealing with it, comprehensive analyses of the practice of action are also required from a problem-sociological perspective.

Methods

This article is based on an interview study conducted as part of the 'Distanz'[2] research project, in which 26 experts in German radicalization prevention and intervention with a focus on Islamism were interviewed in 25 interviews. The research project was approved by the ethics committee of the University of Vechta. All participants were informed in advance with a written information sheet about the research project, data protection as well as the content and processing of the interviews and gave their consent before the interview. They were also informed that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw their consent to participate at any time without giving reasons and without any penalty. The interviews were transcribed and anonymized, and the audio files were subsequently deleted.

The sampling procedure was based on the theoretical sampling originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and followed the principle of minimizing and maximizing differences in relation to the research interest (Döring & Bortz, 2016). In particular, the institutional affiliation, activity and intervention level of the interviewees were contrasted. As a recruitment strategy, the relevant prevention and intervention projects were listed and contacted by email based on the MAPEX platform (Mapex, n.d.) and a Database for prevention of Islamism and counseling (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, n.d.). The majority of the interviewees (n=16) worked in civil society organizations. The other interviewees worked in governmental and/or security agency contexts, with three of the interviewees being involved entirely or predominantly in coordination activities. The professional backgrounds of the participants are predominantly in the fields of social work, education, religious studies, Islamic studies and Islamic theology. The interview guidelines comprise three thematic blocks: (1) structural framework conditions of the work, (2) processes of turning to Islamism, (3) the operations of deradicalization and disengagement. The guidelines were reviewed in a workshop with practitioners and by the research project's expert advisory board.

The documentary method (Bohnsack, 2010, 2021) serves as the analytical procedure. In this methodology, a distinction is made between reflexively accessible, communicatively

[2] www.forschungsverbund-deradikalisierung.de

generalizable knowledge, and conjunctive, action-guiding knowledge. The research interest relates beyond the immanent meaning of the statements to the documentary meaning that structures the experiences described. It is, therefore, a question of the orientation frame within which the topics are addressed and a shift in the analytical perspective from asking *what* to asking *how*. The analysis thus reconstructs the structure of action, the *modus operandi* of action practice (Bohnsack, 2010).

For the interpretation process (Graphic 1), we first selected all segments of the interviews in which gender-related topics were addressed. Then, as suggested by Nohl (2010) for the documentary analysis of interviews, a text type analysis was carried out first. This procedure follows on from Schütze's (1983) narrative structure analysis and serves to identify the text forms of *narrative*, *description*, *argumentation* and *evaluation*. The narrative is particularly close to the narrator's experiences due to its inherent dynamics. In descriptions, but especially in argumentations and evaluations, on the other hand, the interviewee theorizes and switches to a reflexive level of communication. Due to the structures of the guided interviews, an analysis of the speaker interactions was also conducted. This method originates from conversation analysis and serves to check the extent to which the interviewers have a suggestive effect on the answers (Kleemann et al., 2013). After the formal linguistic analysis of the sequences, a *formulating interpretation* (Bohnsack, 2010) was carried out. The formulating analyses involves identifying super- and sub-themes in the sequences and producing thematic summaries. This analysis step draws on the central distinction in praxeological sociology of knowledge between immanent and documentary meaning. After the formulating interpretation, eleven interviews were selected for further detailed reconstructive analysis. The following *reflective interpretation* serves to reconstruct the documentary meaning and to identify the modus operandi of the action practice. In the interpretation of interviews, this is achieved by searching for implicit regularity within a case and by distinguishing it from cases that deal with the same problem or the same topic in a different way (Nohl, 2010). The comparative comparisons between functionally equivalent homologous and heterologous utterances are thus at the center of this analysis step. As the interviews contain a high proportion of argumentation in addition to the narrative text form, the reflecting interpretation was supplemented by objective hermeneutic techniques. These

include sequential extensive fine analysis as well as wording and context variations. (Kleemann et al., 2013; Wernet, 2009). In the interview interpretation, the orientation frames are reconstructed through the search for implicit regularity of narratives within a case as well as through the permanent comparative analysis with other cases. In addition, the interpreters overcome their own situatedness through the empirical comparison. This does not suspend their own prior knowledge, but rather contextualizes it methodically and makes the analysis intersubjectively comprehensible (Nohl, 2010, 2013). In order to structure the comparison, it is necessary to identify the *tertium comparationis*. In the present analysis, the tertium comparationis is how the interviewees address gender-specific differences in the processes (de)radicalization.

Graphic 1: Interpretation process

Results: Gender constructions and narratives

The interviewed professionals often comment on gender-specific factors that are considered relevant in radicalization, deradicalization and prevention. As the interviews predominantly contrast women-specific factors with the previous narratives, the analysis and presentation of results also follows this logic. Therefore, there is a focus on constructions of ‘female radicalization’ in contrast to ‘male radicalization’. Central topics are romantic relationships, or the search for a partnership, ambivalent forms of emancipation through radicalization and gender-specific propaganda from Islamist scenes. With regard to the radicalization of men, on the other hand, the search for adventure or an affinity for violence are common as assumed radicalization factors. In addition, the interviews allow us to reconstruct three contrasting types of gender constructions (Tab. 1), which were abstracted through permanent comparative analyses.

Stereotypical role expectations: 'female radicalization' as assimilation Interview_2_m, Interview_15_m, Interview_17_m, Interview_24_m	Stereotyping • Men as leaders • Emotionality and influenceability as stereotyped female characteristics Distinct understanding of assimilation • Women radicalize through assimilation
Recognition and self-determination: 'female radicalization' as a functional strategy Interview_5_m, Interview_11_f, Interview_16_f, Interview_22_f, Interview_23_m	Criticism of social gender orders • Accentuation of women's self-determination • Criticism of external expectations or restrictions Functional radicalization • Radicalization as a functional strategy for escaping oppressive conditions
Ideologization and agency: 'female radicalization' as empowerment Interview_8_f, Interview_20_f	Women as capable and political subjects • Focus on autonomy and self-determination • Accentuation of agency Radicalization as empowerment • Radicalization as the development of political subjectivity

Table 1: Types of orientation frames regarding gender constructions

Stereotypical role expectations: 'female radicalization' as assimilation

In the first type, the gender constructions are characterized by stereotypical role expectations. In particular, there is a distinct understanding of assimilation, according to which women turn to Islamism almost exclusively by adapting to a man, without taking their own political or ideological components into account. In various interviews, romantic

relationships and the search for partnership are highlighted as decisive factors for the radicalization of women. In some cases, these aspects are even seen as primary influencing factors. Those who assimilate tend to give up their own identity, practices or views in favor of the norms they have been taught, or at least adapt them strongly. Assimilation can happen both consciously and unconsciously and can lead to different outcomes. While men appear as leaders, emotionality and influenceability are attributed to women as stereotypical female characteristics. This shows a clear depoliticization of 'female radicalization' compared to men.

In an interview with a professional, the interviewee elaborates on the differences between various groups in their Islamist radicalization.

> *"There is little radicalization among women, we have no female clients at all, only male clients. As far as I know, at many counseling centers, most of them are male, you could say. The radicalization, the people who go in radical directions, are mostly men, even the people who have left the country, 80 percent are men. For women there are different things. For example, they find someone, love plays an important role or family problems also play an important role. But the relationship in particular, if they later meet and love someone, a man, then they have Salafist views because of the man."* (Interview_2_m)

After the interviewee initially addresses differences in the radicalization processes, the sequence shows, that this is less about differences in radicalization and more about a fundamental assumption of a low prevalence of radicalization among women. This is exemplified by the statement that it is predominantly men who have left Germany to join the so-called IS and that both their own and other advice centers usually only have male clients. The reference to 'different things', which is contrasted with radicalization, is particularly striking for the underlying orientation. Stereotyped conflicts and behaviours are attributed to women in the form of emotional challenges. They are interpreted as the counterpart to 'male radicalization'. Any autonomous political subjectivity is negated in favor of assimilation to a man or ideologization by a man. This reduction refers to stereotyped social expectations, which are expressed in particular in the assumption that women are largely susceptible to

influence and naive. The interviewee's elaboration, in which he himself refers to his limited experience in counseling women, points to existing rigid structures with regard to normative gender assumptions – as is also evident in other sequences of the interview.

> *"If someone is 60 or 70 and has done jihad in Afghanistan, then they say, yes, I did it this way and that way, maybe recommend to other people that they do jihad, that it's a good thing. Sometimes it's difficult to influence these people. Most of the time, with young people it's easier. I think it's easier with women. The women become very/ yes, you can help the women faster or influence them, influence them positively."* (Interview_2_m)

In the sequence, the interviewee presents different levels of comparison with regard to the assumed successes in deradicalization processes. The dimension of jihad experience, country-specific differences, missionary and recruitment experiences are contrasted with age- and gender-specific assumptions. In addition to mentioning the influenceability of young people without corresponding biographies and ideological foundations, the counseling of women is also presented as more straightforward. The idea that women are not trapped in strong ideological structures is reinforced and positive influence is seen as easier. The dual structure of counseling, which is presented here as (fast) help on the one hand and (positive) influence on the other, again documents a focus on the emotional burdens identified at the forefront as well as an assumed low ideological commitment and easy influenceability. Thus, the sequence homologous to the above underlines the gender-specific stereotyped attribution as well as an assimilation narrative, which postulates that women largely orient themselves towards (their) men.

Other interviewees also assume a low level of ideological commitment in favor of an assimilationist understanding among girls and women. According to them, the reason for a (temporary) turn to radical groups or ideologies is in particular family conflicts, which are dealt with differently depending on gender.

> *"Incidentally, this is the case with girls who don't receive any affection or appreciation from their fathers. They go and look for this appreciation and affection elsewhere. They then say: 'Well, my dad/ or the boy here, who is an active, radicalized*

> *preacher, sometimes also a fighter in IS, he made me feel like a woman. He treated me like a woman, he treated me like a human being. [...] And he is the first one who gave me this love.' So here too, I wouldn't say 100 percent radical, no, but this person was simply concerned with appreciation and love and affection."* (Interview_17_m)

The interviewee emphasizes that there is a noticeable lack of affection and appreciation from their fathers among the girls at the program. To compensate, they tend to seek this lack of affection elsewhere, often from male role models or partners from radicalized environments. This approach is not a consequence of an ideological radicalization, but a compensatory strategy to experience love and appreciation from a man. The comparative analysis within the interview and case comparison shows that no interpretations of empowerment or processes of demarcation are assumed here. Radicalization is not seen as an independent process, but rather as a consequence of the search for a partner, which ultimately leads to the radical milieu. This is linked to the assumption that esteem becomes particularly important if the partner represents a leading personality – a fighter or preacher – who makes the decision for the woman to compensate for the lack of a father figure. Here, too, the statement indicates that a heteronormative perspective and stereotyped role attributions are assumed in the love relationship and partnership. The emphasis on the need for a male caregiver ultimately implies a heteronormative view of gender, according to which girls need one in order to develop. The assumed lack of 'male affection' as the primary cause of radicalization shows that an adaptation process is also assumed. As a contrast to the radicalization of girls, the interviewee refers to radicalization factors relating boys, also in the context of a lack of affection from their parents. They react *"out of anger, out of frustration, sometimes also out of hatred, simply as anti-dad or anti-mom [...]. And if mom, for example, is not particularly interested in religion, which is usually the case, many of them come from secular families, then the son tends to be particularly religious"* (Interview_17_m). In contrast to the girls, it is not assumed that the boys are compensated and oriented by new caregivers, but rather an exaggerated religiosity or the development of their own political subjectivity is emphasized.

Interviewee 24 also describes strong emotionality and love stories as opposed to supposedly rational decisions by men.

> *"I think with women this whole radicalization process is much more connected to emotions than with young men. [...] In my experience, because I've worked a lot with girls, women are much more emotional about the whole thing and sometimes this radicalization has developed simply through a love story. In other words, they got to know each other in the scene and they fell in love, and then this radicalization process happened, co-radicalizing."* (Interview_24_m)

The radicalization of women is discussed in comparison to young men. In addition to the gender-specific consideration, an age classification is initially implied, which is then revised by referring to girls. It is stressed that for women this process is accompanied by a stronger focus on emotional aspects and that they approach the topic in a more emotional context than men. This argument is substantiated in the context of romantic relationships, which are seen as a triggering factor for the radicalization of women. The professional points out that the people involved met and fell in love within the radicalized scene, which further intensified the radicalization process in the form of co-radicalization. It should be emphasized, however, that despite the outline of structurally similar experiences, radicalization solely through a love story is identified exclusively among women. It is striking that radicalization is constructed as a phenomenon with a male imprint in this depiction, while at the same time emotionality is demarcated as a female attribute compared to supposedly more rational motivators for radicalization. This remains homologous in the further course of the interview, for example in stories about deradicalization support.

Recognition and self-determination: 'female radicalization' as a functional strategy

Contrary to assimilation narratives and stereotypical role expectations, the interviewees in this type emphasize women's self-determination. This refers to autonomy and recognition and the right and ability of women to make their own decisions. Autonomy and control over one's own life are highlighted and external expectations or constraints are

criticized. Radicalization is seen as a functional coping strategy that is particularly concerned with escaping oppressive conditions.

Interviewee 11 elaborates on gender-specific factors in radicalization processes. These are discussed in particular in the context of social conditions and demands and contrasted with a lack of recognition in mainstream society.

> *"Today, if you say I'm just satisfied with being a housewife and mother, you're immediately/ it's almost like a cancel culture, you're immediately labeled, you're immediately told you have nothing, you can't do anything. It's such a precarious, such a marginalized culture all of a sudden."* (Interview_11_f)

The interviewee articulates the ambivalence of today's modern demands and expectations towards women. This ambivalence is viewed against the background of the emancipatory progress of the women's movement, which overcame traditional roles. The interviewee identifies an active degradation of the women, who are marginalized by the rejection of the new role expectations. Therefore, these devaluations not only take place on an individual level, but are also conditioned by social structures. The professional observes an overreaction that not only overcomes old role expectations, but also constructs new expectations to which women must conform – which have a similarly restrictive and patronizing effect. Under these circumstances, Islamist radicalization is interpreted as a functional ideology that represents an opportunity for the realization and recognition of traditional lifestyles. The recognition of pluralistic lifestyles and the emphasis on women's self-determination and autonomy are particularly evident in the intensified argumentation expressed through the political slogan 'cancel culture,' the implicit reference to censorship, and the assumption of labeling as central premises. This perspective remains homologous in the rest of the interview when patronizing practices in deradicalization programs are criticized and the preservation of freedom of choice is demanded.

> *"Well, it's also very diverse. Then we have some who continue to wear headscarves, we have one who totally wanted to go on the slopes. Who totally partied first, who also engaged in very sexual behavior, where we say that's what she probably needs. [...] Something like that, that a woman doesn't have to constantly prove that she's a good*

mother. That you don't always have this mistrust, oh she's raising her children to be Salafists or whatever." (Interview_11_f)

In the passage on working with returnees from Syria, reference is made to the diversity of women and their individual needs and life plans. While some wanted a secluded life or to continue practicing their religion, others consciously sought a hedonistic life. Both are classified as expressions of needs. It is stressed that the work with these women should not be seen as a holistic test, but rather that autonomy and freedom of choice should be respected. The interviewee criticizes that the women are often met with mistrust, which can disrupt successful deradicalization processes. The comparison of the hedonistic lifestyle as a contrast to motherhood on the one hand and possible Salafist parenting styles on the other documents a pronounced criticism of disempowering practices, while at the same time emphasizing the right to self-determination over one's own lifestyle.

In interview 5, gender specifics are also negotiated in particular under the impression of repressive social conditions and gender orders. The interviewee describes the social demands placed on women, which they try to evade by turning to conservative or even radical positions and practices. Radicalization is primarily driven by supposed functionality.

"But young women, I was able to accompany it in one case, who also used the veil as a kind of self-protection and somehow/ [...] young women sometimes find emancipation in ultra-conservative, radical or extremist positions, because they can detach themselves through marriage, whatever, or what they fantasize about, marriage, a little from that/ (..) and that's super, super difficult to put it like that, I don't have a clean formulation for it, to be able to detach yourself a bit from the pressure, that you as an emancipated young woman now also have to train, study, work." (Interview_5_m)

Against the background of the abstraction of one case, the ambivalent form of emancipation is discussed. Accordingly, on the one hand, the practice of veiling acts as a protective mechanism. On the other hand, conservative to radical Islamist positions have a pull effect for young women by opening up the possibility of realizing a traditional way of life

as a housewife and mother, contrary to the demands in the context of the pluralization of lifestyles. Despite the previous reference to radical or extremist positions, these no longer play a role in the following argumentation; ideological elements are not cited. Instead, marriage and the subsequent conventional family structure with a traditional distribution of roles are emphasized. According to this, the mere prospect of a future marriage to a man who himself holds corresponding positions and the associated relief is seen as attractive to young women. The "ultra-conservative" positions and their manifestation in the form of veiling and marriage are less characterized by ideological intentions, but are rather presented as a strong narrative, an undeniable basis for legitimizing individual life decisions. The comparative analysis with other interviews shows that despite the assumption of functionality and coping, ideological commitment also plays a minor role here.

At the same time, this passage makes it clear that the interviewee is ambivalent about the emancipation narrative itself, as it is presented in this context in contrast to emancipation movements. The ambivalence is evident not only in verbalized insecurity but also in the juxtaposition of emancipation through self-positioning and the pressure to which an emancipated woman is subjected. This leads to pressure to participate; wherein modern gender roles are imposed on women. The functionality of radicalization is also emphasized in other places, for example when there is *"no need to combine children and career or to meet expectations outside the home"* (Interview_23_m).

Ideologization and agency: 'female radicalization' as empowerment

Similar to the previous type, the interviewees focus on the agency and autonomy of women, who are seen as active actors. Accordingly, emancipation narratives are also cited in the sequences analyzed. However, the comparative analysis shows that the orientations differ in detail and that other focal points or gender-specific attributions are accentuated. In this context, agency refers to the ability and freedom to act independently, pursue goals, and exert influence. Beyond this, however, it is not just about criticizing sexist social conditions and radicalization as a way of escaping them. Rather, it is constructed as an active form of empowerment with clear idealistic and ideological components.

> *"We have some women who have sought out partners in Syria from Germany, for example, who didn't necessarily have anything to do with the issue beforehand. As I said, in my experience, women were very aggressive and brash and quickly became radicalized and acted on it."* (Interview_8_f)

In this sequence the radicalization of women is also discussed in the context of a relationship and the search for a partner. According to this, women who previously had no concrete contact with Islamism and radicalization specifically sought partners in Syria. In contrast to men, they radicalize very aggressively. On an immanent level, initially similar to the assimilation narrative, radicalization is also constructed through adaptation to a man. Nevertheless, the interview documents a different orientation in which women are ascribed a clear active role. Ideologization is accentuated and radicalization is seen as an independent process. Instead of a passive orientation towards men, the interviewee stresses the autonomous ability to act, which consequently leads to radicalization becoming even more pronounced compared to men. Any oppressive social or family circumstances are not attributed any greater relevance here either. They turn to radicalization for political or ideological motives, as well as within the context of radical networks. The agency is emphasized and the radicalization is interpreted as empowerment.

> *"So, I think that when it comes to joining a fighter in Syria, for example, it's simply this from little to: 'I'm the wife of a fighter.' People just want to do it right and a thousand percent, because they believe that the demands of the scene are so high. They just want to do it right. And because for many women, it's also about capturing the supposed hearts of these fighters or exiles and they become very self-sacrificing and selflessly involved in radicalization, so to speak."* (Interview_8_f)

The interviewee argues that the aggressive radicalization can be linked to the high demands of the scene and represents a counterpart to the male fighter. This is a consideration of gender-specific pull factors that make turning to the groups attractive. Furthermore, it is highlighted that this is also related to the conquest of a man. The radicalization of women is thus related to men, but not dependent on them. A selfless sacrifice is described, which is

accompanied by a strong ideologization and is also related to individual demands. The capturing of the fighters' hearts is seen as an active and ideological claim that leads to a strengthening of self-determination, an increase in significance and a consolidation of identity, rather than silent assimilation and submission. However, the interviewee also points out that this is seen as self-damaging if the women become too involved in radicalization. She emphasizes the strong degree of devotion and sacrifice, as well as a pronounced ideological commitment on the part of the women. This devotion then leads to ideologization and ultimately submission to the patriarchal structures of Islamism, which, however, represents an ambivalent form of empowerment. Consequently, the women will not be seen exclusively as victims, but are characterized precisely by their devotion, self-efficacy and participation in the ideology and scene.

A corresponding orientation frame is also evident in interview 20, in which the interviewee discusses gender-specific motivators for radicalization processes.

> *"For girls who now come from very patriarchal, traditional, in quotation marks, Muslim families, this is an opportunity to emancipate themselves. [...] She can write history, she also has something to say and she can take part in the propaganda."* (Interview_20_f)

It is explained that radicalization among girls represents an opportunity for self-realization over and above other factors. This is made explicit by referring to traditional Muslim families, which have a patriarchal structure. Thus, it is linked to a cultural dimension, which is implicitly contrasted with the mainstream society. Ideological radicalization encompasses the purpose of self-realization and empowerment and is not seen solely as a coping mechanism. Beyond the deficit perspective and liberation from oppressive conditions, the orientation places emphasis on politicization and views radicalization an opportunity to develop political subjectivity for women.

Discussion

The analysis of gender-related narratives shows a heterogeneous picture of different ideas about gender orders and gender-typical radicalization processes. However, it also shows that socially widespread gender constructions and orders also prevail and are reproduced in the field of prevention and deradicalization. It is noticeable that only male interviewees are assigned to the first type of gender constructions, while only female interviewees are assigned to the third type. According to the representative Leipzig Authoritarianism Study, 25% of respondents in 2022 have a closed anti-feminist and 27% a closed sexist world view. Although men exhibit this to a particularly high degree (33% / 32%), this also applies to around one in five women (19% / 22%) (Kalkstein et al. 2022). Building on this, it is hardly surprising that sexist and stereotypical gender perceptions can also be identified in this study. This is particularly clear in the case of stereotyping and in the contrasts between supposedly masculine and feminine characteristics or radicalization conditions. In the first type presented, role expectations and the accentuation of emotionality and influenceability are emphasized as stereotyped female characteristics. The radicalization is understood as an assimilation process in which women adapt to norms set by men. Potential contextual conditions, group-specific or political elements are excluded. In contrast to this, the second type emphasizes recognition and self-determination, and women's radicalization is primarily understood as a functional strategy for liberation from patriarchal gender orders. In the third case, the interviewees focus on ideological and idealistic elements and interpret radicalization as empowerment. Here, agency and political subjectivity are emphasized. This can be linked to Kruglanski et al. (2019), who highlight the desire for personal meaning as a central factor in radicalization.

The overview of the roles of women within extremist groups outlined above not only provides insights into their significance for the organizations, but also reveals the diversity of their motivations. The research results show that women should not be viewed exclusively as passive followers or supporters. Rather, there is a heterogeneity in their activities, whereby they sometimes actively participate in and maintain structures, particularly in areas of the Islamic State, and an orientation towards violence is also recognizable (Hoyle et al., 2015). The reconstructed types each accentuate different elements that follow on from the role

(expectations). Above all, a reduction to passivity and followership as role expectations contradicts these research findings. At the same time, an overemphasis on functionality is problematic in that it risks neglecting other aspects of the ideology and does not resolve the ambivalence between liberation from oppressive conditions and subjugation to patriarchal structures. A study in the UK by Schmidt (2022) identifies three predominant types of gender stereotypes. *The (Stupid) Victim* focuses on victim narratives according to which women are particularly manipulable and are influenced by others. *The "Good Mother"*, on the other hand, refers to the ascribed family roles of women. *The Monster* ultimately portrays women as more violent than men in terrorist radicalization. Here and in the present study, an essentialization of gender-specific attributions can be seen in a connectable way. In addition, both studies show that women in (de)radicalization are often viewed in relation to third parties. This is the case, for example, in their emancipation from patriarchal fathers, in their assimilation to their men, in their role as mothers or in their orientation towards preachers. In comparison to 'male radicalization', less attention is paid to the individuality and political subjectivity of women. As illustrated, the analysis of gender orders focuses in particular on the consideration of social structures and immanent orders of inequality of social categories as well as the relations within these. Accordingly, the explicit consideration of the (de)radicalization processes of women in their ascribed roles and in interaction with other (male) reference persons is also a very important analytical perspective. Nevertheless, it is clear that this view of interactions and gender orders is only taken in the narratives of 'female radicalization', while 'male radicalization' – apart from the recruitment practices of Islamist actors – is predominantly considered without the significance of (female) reference persons. This imbalance points to a blind spot in research and prevention practice.

The gender-specific essentializations of assumptions about radicalization have the potential to reproduce social gender orders. Also, the analysis suggests that the corresponding assumptions may determine the practice. In their entanglement of assumptions about radicalization, power relations and social inequalities, these circumstances have the potential to shape the problem constructions. In the routine (institutional) work, a prevailing problem construction is used and (re-)constructed (Groenemeyer, 2010, 2012; Leimbach & Juckschat, 2023). Following on from the present analysis, this applies in particular to the accentuation of

stereotyped characteristics, the attribution of low competence and responsibility for action, as well as an increasing depoliticization and relativization of radicalization (Figlestahler & Schau, 2019), which is particularly pronounced in relation to women. Contrary to this, accentuations of political subjectivity can also be identified among some respondents. Herrschinger (2020) also shows that the radicalization of women can represent a politicization. As previously excluded actors, they experience influence and inclusion through radicalization. This politicization is described as the "subjectification of women as actors of terror, as they also find and assert their place in the radicalized discourse." (Herrschinger, 2022, pp. 121-122, translation E.B.). Women must therefore also be understood as part of the movements. It must be acknowledged that it is not exclusively traditional lifestyles, but rather the interplay of and with politicization and subjectification that makes radicalization attractive to women.

Other studies (Wdzięczak, 2022; Baron et al., 2023) with professionals from such P/CVE programs show that the counselors consider the inclusion of gender aspects to be helpful for their work. In some cases, this is also reflected decidedly in connection with social conditions and structures of inequality. Gender sensitivity is often located at the action level, for example when it comes to the gender-specific selection of professionals. In addition, there is a hope to counter Islamist-based, essentialist, and biologistic gender assumptions with a social constructivist perspective and thereby resist extremist propaganda. Nevertheless, it appears that gender-sensitive approaches are integrated into the work intuitively rather than purposefully. A closer examination of the practical aspects of professionals reveals that, alongside normative and scientific knowledge, the personal identity of practitioners and their implicit experiential knowledge also play a decisive role. From a praxeological-sociological perspective, scientific knowledge is considered an integral part of communicatively accessible knowledge. Conversely, experiential knowledge is gaining increasing importance in professional research, emerging within the context of practical activities and interactions with clients (Bohnsack, 2017, 2021; Kubisch, 2023; Kubisch & Franz, 2022). Various forms of knowledge are applied and implemented in practice, shaping case work through ongoing interactions with clients. Consequently, professional practice is subject to specific logics and structural conditions, evident in the tension between theoretical knowledge and complex

problem situations, as well as asymmetrical working relationships (Oevermann, 2009; Pfadenhauer & Sander, 2010; Schmidt, 2008; Schützeichel, 2020). Gender-related assumptions thus amalgamate socialized knowledge, scientific findings, and practical experience. While the other studies cited illustrate that gender dimensions are ascribed particular relevance by professionals on a reflexive level, the present analysis shows diverse gender constructions, partly with the reproduction of stereotyped and sexist orientations, partly with a strong focus on the development of political subjectivity. Thus, a tension between the norm and habitus can indeed be assumed here insofar as the transformation of knowledge into practice is not always successful. It should be noted that the habitualized gender-specific expectations play an ambivalent role in counseling practice: they assist in navigating new situations in demanding professional environments but can also limit the perspective on practical action, hindering the appropriate handling of problems. Kubisch (2023) clarifies that, due to the inertia of habitual changes, consolidated implicit knowledge may impede the adequate adaptation of action practices. Building on this, gender dimensions are a crucial analytical perspective, especially when it comes to pointing out the risks associated with stereotyping, assumptions and, in particular, the essentialization of supposed characteristics. Emphasizing these aspects can lead to unequal treatment based on gender and disrupt individually adapted case management (Davis, 2020).

It is noticeable that many narratives refer to supposedly Islam-specific gender orders. This is expressed in an ambivalent way both in the liberation from patriarchal family relationships and in the accentuation of the pull effect of the recognition of traditional lifestyles. However, looking at these results from an intersectional perspective reveals a blending of supposedly cultural and gender-related aspects, which is evident in the exclusive localization of sexist and anti-feminist attitudes as well as the recognition of traditional gender roles in the “Islamic world”. Traditional religiosity and religious fundamentalism do indeed favor sexist and antifeminist attitudes and are thus also associated with the demand for traditional roles (Höcker et al. 2020; Kalkstein et al. 2022). However, sexism and anti-feminism are by no means a genuinely religious or Muslim phenomenon. Data from the Shell Youth Study shows that a traditional distribution of roles is generally relatively popular among young people in Germany (Wolfert & Quenzel, 2019). In addition, the traditional

distribution of roles also corresponds to the social norm (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022). A reduction of the explanatory approaches and attractiveness factors of radicalization to traditional Islamic role models is therefore not sufficient as an explanation. Rather, this runs the risk of ultimately contributing to othering by contrasting a German ‘us’ and an Islamic ‘them’.

Conclusion

Building on problem sociology and professional-theoretical analysis, the reflection on the gender dimension is indispensable for conducting adequate case work and counteracting biased problem construction. This underscores the need in radicalization research for critical reflection on gender orders and dynamics. Such research should not only analyze ‘female radicalization’ but also delve into specific 'male radicalization' and, in particular, the significance of gender orders and structural conditions. Based on this and further analyses, gender-oriented approaches can be developed and implemented in prevention and deradicalization.

Limitations

Although many prevention and deradicalization programs were reached in this study, the reconstruction was ultimately carried out on a relatively small sample. Accordingly, there is no claim to statistical representativeness. Further research, for example via group discussions and increased international comparisons or quantitative research approaches, could offer a more comprehensive understanding and validation on a larger scale.

In order to make a contribution to the international field of research, the German-language interview sequences had to be translated, which posed a particular challenge for the presentation and comprehensibility of reconstructive research results. It was decided to carry out the translation after the analysis in order to be able to take appropriate account of language-specific features and contextualize them accordingly. Possible further distortions

were counteracted by experienced interviewers and interpreters, the use of interview guidelines and a methodologically sound analysis method.

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