

# Resiliences to radicalization

*four key perspectives*

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**DOI**

[10.1016/j.ijlcrj.2021.100486](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcrj.2021.100486)

**Publication date**

2021

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice

**License**

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**Citation for published version (APA):**

Stephens, W., & Sieckelinck, S. (2021). Resiliences to radicalization: four key perspectives. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 66, Article 100486. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcrj.2021.100486>

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Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

## International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/ijlcrj](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ijlcrj)

## Resiliences to radicalization: Four key perspectives

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Resilience  
 Radicalization  
 Q-methodology  
 P/CVE  
 Collaboration

## ABSTRACT

Building resilience to radicalization has become a key pillar of many policies for preventing violent extremism. However, sustained debates over the precise nature of the terms radicalisation and resilience impact the ability to implement these policies. A growing body of literature argues that the way in which key ideas are understood matters to what happens in practice. Additionally, the cross-sector collaboration called for in PVE policy can be made more challenging through divergences in understanding of central concepts. As such, the way in which resilience to radicalization is being understood by frontline workers matters. In light of this, a q-methodology study was conducted, which identified four perspectives on resilience to radicalization amongst policy-makers and practitioners in Belgium, the Netherlands, and the UK. These perspectives are examined in light of the broader debates around both resilience and radicalization, and the extent to which the divergences matter for collaboration is considered.

## 1. Introduction

Over the last two decades preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has become a major policy issue in the international arena, as well as for national and local governments. A whole architecture for prevention has emerged, particularly in the last ten years, ranging from the European Commission's Radicalization Awareness Network and international organizations (e.g., Hedayah Centre<sup>1</sup>), to local government appointed prevention officers. Yet, in the main, the work of prevention is expected to be carried out by practitioners and professionals engaged in the daily frontline work of education, youth work, social care, and health provision. The incorporation of this strand of preventive work into these existing roles has proven challenging and a body of critical scholarship has emerged, raising concerns about the intrusion of security-related tasks into the work of social and educational professionals, particularly regarding the need for these frontline practitioners to recognize and flag-up signs of extremism (e.g. Kundani, 2009; Middleton, 2016; O'Donnell, 2016; Stanley et al., 2017). Perhaps in order to move away from explicitly security-oriented approaches, there has been a growing trend in P/CVE strategies to frame the role of social and educational professionals in terms of building resilience to radicalization (Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2019a). To take an example: in the United Kingdom, schools are charged with building "pupils' resilience to radicalisation by promoting fundamental British values" (Department of Education, 2015, p. 5). This focus on resilience has in itself been the subject of critique, with concerns that "building resilience" is either too ambiguous a concept to serve as much more than a buzzword (Jore, 2020), or that it masks practices which depoliticize the issues being faced by those potentially drawn to extremism (Altermark and Nilsson, 2018).

In the last three years, increasing attention has been drawn to the role of front-line workers themselves in interpreting, resisting,

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcrj.2021.100486>

Received 16 November 2020; Received in revised form 30 April 2021; Accepted 3 June 2021

Available online 11 June 2021

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and transforming P/CVE policy prescriptions (Bevir and Brown, 2019; Busher et al., 2019; Coaffee, 2019; Jamine and Fadil, 2019; Ragazzi and de Jongh, 2019). Bevir and Brown (2019) analysis of counter-terrorism governance draws on decentred theory to foreground the importance of policy actor perspectives. Diverse practices of governance emerge, they argue, as policies are resisted and transformed by actors resisting “the intentions and policies of elites by consuming them in ways that draw on their local traditions and local reasoning” (Bevir and Brown, 2019, p. 6). Coaffee (2019) extends this beyond practitioners to examine the role of local communities in enabling and resisting counter-terror policy implementation and local governance arrangements.

Central to this view of the emergence and transformation of local governance is the notion that individual policy actors come with different “webs of belief” informed by understandings of the world and the practices into which they have been socialized, which influence how they develop and implement policy (Bevir, 2016, p. 232). The notion that policy actors’ individual beliefs and perspectives matter to the actual implementation of policy is not new – Lipsky’s (1980) notion of street level bureaucracy, in which front line workers essentially act as policy decision makers given the discretionary space which they are afforded (Lipsky, 2010; Tummers and Bekkers, 2014). In the same vein, it has been argued that the actions of front-line workers are shaped largely by norms and beliefs, and as such, understanding these beliefs is “essential to understanding the modern state” (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2000, p. 333).

Decentred theory accounts for changes in these webs of belief and the emergence of diverse governance practices, as these understandings of the world brought by different actors interact with different dilemmas in practice (Bevir, 2016). An important consequence of a decentred perspective is that we cannot predict the beliefs of individual actors based on where they are located in the apparatus of governance (Bevir and Brown, 2019). It would suggest we might not expect to find a neat division of perspectives between those working at the front-line and those further from the grassroots.

This study seeks to build on the foundations laid by Bevir and Brown (2019) and Coaffee (2019) in foregrounding the importance of policy and local actor perspectives in counter-terror policy by examining the specific case of resilience to radicalisation. Understanding policy actor perspectives on what it means to build resilience to radicalisation is particularly pertinent given both the increasing popularity of this notion, and the wide range of interpretation afforded by the ambiguity of the notion of resilience. This ambiguity can lend itself to “building resilience” serving as a receptacle for quite different standpoints and approaches. Resilience to radicalization could be taken as a call to strengthening commitment to a set of national values on the one hand, or strengthening critique and resistance to the very notion of national values on the other (Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2019a). This is illustrated in the example of one counter-extremism project, in which the very resilience aimed for by the project empowered citizens to “also resist the mechanisms of governance” (Bevir and Brown, 2019, p. 6).

These differences in understanding what it means to build resilience have important implications given that policies that call for resilience building also tend to call for collaboration across different sectors and disciplines (Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2019b; Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, 2018). Thus, we find actors drawing from a wide range of different disciplinary and professional traditions called upon to collaborate in the ambiguous work of building resilience to radicalization.

Capturing the perspectives of actors at a point in time does not do justice to the complexity of a decentred theory of governance in which webs of belief, and actions undertaken, are revised in interaction with dilemmas arising in practise. However, it can provide a foundation for examining the influence of policy actor perspectives in a rapidly developing field of policy and practice, the implementation of which has very real impacts on the lives of young people. This study, then, addresses the question: in what ways do policy actors understand what it means to be resilient to radicalisation?

## 2. Resilience to radicalisation

The notion of building resilience to radicalisation is commonly drawn upon in P/CVE policies (e.g., Department of Education, 2015; European Commission, 2018; UNESCO, 2017) and a number of authors have suggested that thinking in terms of resilience may be helpful in addressing radicalization (e.g., Dalggaard-Nielsen and Schack, 2016; Ellis and Abdi, 2017; Stephens et al., 2019). However, both resilience and radicalisation are concepts that carry a fair degree of ambiguity and contestation. Unsurprisingly then, what it means to build resilience to radicalisation is open to a wide degree of interpretation.

### 2.1. Radicalisation

Radicalization generally refers to a process through which individuals or groups move closer to adopting extremist views or violence. This seemingly simple assertion is made complex by the contention surrounding what it means to be radicalized, what the causes of radicalization are, and what constitutes extremism. The contentiousness around determining what constitutes extremism is well captured in the outcry surrounding the labelling of the climate change group Extinction Rebellion, as an extremist organisation (Dodd and Grierson, 2020).

A major point of divergence in determining what it means to be radicalised revolves around the issues of whether the endpoint of radicalization is cognitive or behavioural (Neumann, 2013). That is, whether being radicalised means one ascribes to an extremist ideology, or whether it requires that one is prepared to adopt violence as a tool to further ideological/political aims. This distinction is significant as it determines whether we are concerned with – and therefore seek to prevent – violent action, or whether the holding of extreme ideas in itself, regardless of action taken, is the outcome we seek to prevent.

In tackling this, two recent models of radicalisation, the Attitudes-Behaviour Corrective (ABC) model (Khalil et al., 2019) and the Two-Pyramids Model (McCaughey and Moskalenko, 2017), distinguish themselves from other models by disaggregating radicalisation of belief from radicalisation of action. However, these models diverge in their perspectives of the *causes* of radicalisation. The ABC

model rests on rational choice theory, suggesting that people become move towards extremism as the rewards – be they psychological rewards or otherwise – outweigh the costs. This basis is disputed as insufficiently attending to the dynamics of groups and social identity (McCauley, 2020). These divergences reflect the wider discourse on the causes of radicalisation. While there is a general acceptance that it is a multi-faceted process involving interacting factors and no single pathway (Dzhekova et al., 2016), divergences arise in relation to the weight and emphasis given to different factors potentially involved in radicalisation. While some approaches give primacy to extremist ideologies, others focus on grievances fuelled by a sense that the prevailing political order leaves one left behind (Doosje et al., 2016), the attraction of a group which offers a sense of belonging and shared identity (Sageman, 2004), or people searching for a sense of purpose and significance (Kruglanski et al., 2014). Again, these divergences are significant – if ideology is considered the driving factor in radicalisation this gives rise to different approaches to prevention than when, say, primary importance is given to radicalisation seen as satisfying a need for belonging and shared identity (Hardy, 2018). Differences emerge also between perspectives arising from different fields, be it psychology, education, or public health (Stephens et al., 2019).

These same divergences were traced in a recent review of policies for preventing radicalization. Hardy (2018) found that while most policies adopted a multi-faceted response, they diverged on: 1. Whether the focus is on extreme ideas in general, or violence more particularly and 2. the weight given to different causes of radicalisation. He attributes the differences found across country policies in part to the “cultural, political, and historical” contexts in which these policies arose, and the space for ambiguity afforded by the lack of scientific consensus on the causes of radicalisation (Hardy, 2018, p. 92).

On the question of radicalization then, it is conceivable that different actors’ perspectives on its causes, and therefore how it should be prevented, may arise both from different national contexts, and from association with different fields which may foreground certain causes over others.

## 2.2. Resilience

The concept of resilience equally lends itself to plausible yet competing perspectives on what it is and how it is cultivated. This in part arises from the breadth of its usage. It is drawn upon in many disciplines, including physics, ecology, psychology, and political science, and has been applied to address a multitude of social issues. Multiple definitions of resilience abound therefore, in part reflecting the fact that it has developed somewhat independently in these different disciplines (Alexander, 2013). This has led to some arguing that it is a highly ambiguous concept that often serves as little more than a buzzword (Wimelius et al., 2018). Adding somewhat to the complexity is the different levels to which resilience is applied, from the individual, to the community, to society as a whole. Individual resilience is often associated with psychological perspectives, community resilience with social psychology, and societal resilience with political science and sociological perspectives.

At the most general level, resilience refers to a system or, in the case of psychology, an individual, being able to respond to or emerge from some form of stress or adversity in a healthy or positive way (Rutter, 2012). One of the major areas of contention concerns defining what counts as positive and healthy functioning. A general shift in resilience research can be seen from a “bounce-back” view of resilience in which to be resilient means to return to pre-stress functioning, towards an expanded conception including adaption and transformation in the face of adversity (Davidson et al., 2016). From a bounce-back perspective, maintaining the status-quo can be seen as a sign of resilience, from a transformative perspective, disrupting the status-quo could be seen as a sign of resilience (Davidson et al., 2016).

### 2.2.1. Critiques of resilience in social policy

The question of what counts as healthy gives rise to one of the major critiques of resilience: that dominant norms define what counts as a healthy response (Anholt, 2017). In effect this means those defining resilience in any given situation have the power to decide on what constitutes healthy, and outcomes that depart from this may be viewed as a lack of resilience.

It has also been argued that resilience can shift responsibility from structural and political issues to lay the responsibility for change in the hands of individuals and communities (Boyden and Cooper, 2007). In effect, it is argued, by focusing on resilience, attention is turned to helping individuals and communities cope with adversity rather than addressing the structural causes of that adversity (Evans and Reid, 2013). In a similar vein, one of the distinguishing factors in ways of thinking about resilience in psychology has been whether it consists of a trait that individuals possess, or it refers to a process and response that is highly mediated by the environment (Ungar, 2011). The distinction is important, in the first we are at risk of blaming the individual for failing to be resilient, and focus our attention on trying to make the individual resilient, in the second, we place primary attention on the social environment as the locus for intervention, which allow for the possibility that an individual or community may demonstrate a resilient response in one context but not in another (Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000).

### 2.3. Resilience in the context of preventing violent extremism

As noted, resilience to radicalization is a popular concept in P/CVE. However, the academic literature addressing the question of resilience to radicalization in detail is still limited. The papers that do address resilience to radicalization explicitly fall into three main strands: papers that apply the concept of resilience to efforts to prevent radicalization (e.g. Ellis and Abdi, 2017; Grossman et al., 2020), papers that critique the use of resilience as a concept in PVE (e.g. Altermark and Nilsson, 2018; Jore, 2020), and a mapping of the discourses on resilience to radicalization in scholarly work and in policy (Christodoulou, 2020; Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2019a; Stephens et al., 2019).

In a mapping of the academic literature, different conceptions of what is required to build resilience were identified (Stephens et al.,

2019). Conceptions at an individual level involved developing cognitive skills such as critical thinking, fostering certain character traits such as empathy, and promoting values such as tolerance. Another conception of resilience building focused on creating space and opportunity to engage in dialogue, to discuss controversial issues and to take action such as engaging in legal forms of protest. A final conception of resilience was that of community resilience developed through promoting connections within communities (social-bonding), between communities (social-bridging), and between communities and institutions (social-linking).

Within PVE policy two major metaphors of resilience were identified (Stephens and Sieckelinc, 2019a), the first being “resilience as a shield” in which building resilience was conceived of in terms of building some sort of protection between individuals/communities and extremism. For example, developing critical skills so that individuals resist extremist ideas, or promoting values of openness and tolerance in order to resist efforts to dehumanize others. The second metaphor identified was that of resilience through connection – conceiving of resilience as arising from strengthening social connections that can withstand divisive forces.

Critiques of resilience in P/CVE mirror many of those of resilience generally. For example, Altermark and Nilsson (2018, p. 63) critique a popular resilience building PVE program in Europe arguing that it is deeply depoliticizing. They suggest that this program focuses on young people having “the proper positive attitudes” and in so doing, places the onus on a change in attitude rather than looking at the need to address issues of discrimination, poverty and segregation. In a similar vein Christodoulou (2020) highlights the prevalence of a discourse of resilience in the work of the European Radicalization Awareness Network. She argues that a simplistic notion of resilience is adopted, which frames young people as vulnerable requiring inoculation against extremism through skills and values, which can then frame dissent as a lack of resilience. Further, she argues that the individual focus of resilience diverts attention from the structural changes required.

Given the ambiguity associated with the notion of resilience to radicalization it is possible for different actors to hold conflicting, yet plausible, ways of interpreting and enacting resilience building efforts. These different ways of understanding this notion may not only make collaboration more challenging, but as these critiques point to, certain ways of approaching resilience to radicalization may be more problematic than others. The web of beliefs which shape actors’ perceptions of what it means to be resilient to radicalisation are likely to include differences both in understanding the causes and endpoint of radicalisation, and in perspectives on what constitutes resilience.

In order to address the question of this study and understand what different perspectives on resilience can currently be found amongst policy actors, a q methodology study was conducted. Q-methodology, a method designed for the systematic study of subjectivity (Brown, 1980), is particularly well suited to this task. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods it uncovers the ways in which people conceive of or understand a topic. It enables us to build a picture of the *types* of viewpoint that exist on a topic (Watts and Stenner, 2012). Rather than starting with predefined perspectives on which an individual can be judged to be more or less representative, q-enables us to describe the ways people are actually thinking about an issue, regardless of whether or not it is a logically or theoretically consistent perspective. This open starting point allows an exploration of the views of policy actors without initially presuming what these perspectives might look like.

### 3. Research methodology

#### 3.1. Q-methodology

In a Q-study, participants are presented with a set of statements on a topic and are asked to sort them on a subjective basis, for example those they most agree with to those they most disagree with. The statements are prepared by the researcher, aiming to be broadly representative of the range of possible opinions and perspectives. In this rank ordering of statements, participants have to consider not only the extent to which they agree or disagree with a statement, but also how they do so in relation to the other statements under consideration (Brown, 1980). The individual sorts are then correlated, and similarities and patterns are identified through factor analysis, allowing the identification of shared perspectives evident in a similar ranking of statements. This enables the extraction from all the varied perspectives a smaller number of *types* of perspective on an issue.

**Table 1**  
Thematic breakdown of statements.

What a resilient response looks like	
Maintain status quo	4 statements
Challenge status quo	4 statements
Inner Strength	3 statements
Flexibility	3 statements
How resilience is built	
Developing cognitive skills	3 statements
Learning about Diversity	4 statements
Developing values	4 statements
Opportunities to exercise agency	3 statements
Access to stability/opportunity	4 statements
Connected and strong community/network	4 statements
Opportunities to engage in discussion	3 statements
Internal Characteristics	4 statements
Being shielded	3 statements

### 3.1.1. The statements

The set of statements presented to participants for sorting are referred to as the *q-set*. An initial collection of statements relating to resilience to radicalization was made drawing on a range of different sources: academic articles, newspaper articles, professional publications, and interviews with seven individuals working with issues of radicalization in an urban neighbourhood in the Netherlands. This led to an initial set of ninety-five statements. After eliminating statements that were almost identical, seventy-four statements were found from which the final *q-set* was selected.

Two different kinds of statements concerning resilience to radicalisation were found: ones that described what a resilient response looks like, and those that described how resilience can be built. In order to ensure a broadly representative spread of statements, the statements were sorted according to a theoretical breakdown of ways of thinking about resilience that emerged from a review of the literature (Stephens et al., 2019). As some of the categories contain greater nuances that were important to capture, the categories did not receive precisely the same number of statements (see Table 1). However, care was taken to ensure a spread across the different theoretically derived perspectives. This led to 47 statements (see appendix) being selected to make up the *q-set*.

### 3.1.2. Participants

In order to capture the diversity of viewpoints held, Q-methodology doesn't rely on random sampling, but rather the purposive selection of a number of respondents likely to hold differing views and perspectives (van Exel and de Graaf, 2005). Forty participants (18F, 22M) were selected, representing a range of policy makers and practitioners from Belgium, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. These countries are being followed as part of the larger research project in which this current study is embedded.<sup>2</sup> These three settings share certain similarities having all experienced terror attacks in the last decade as well as having had their own citizens travel to other countries as foreign fighters. Yet they have each approached prevention somewhat differently. The UK has the long-standing but problematic Prevent strategy which includes a statutory requirement for practitioners to report and respond to signs of potential extremism, whereas the Netherlands has seen a diversity of approaches arising from different municipal strategies, with a focus on integration (Hardy, 2018). Belgium has taken a combination of restrictive measures alongside efforts to counter social polarisation. As such the participants are faced with similar challenges related to extremism, but are embedded in different policy contexts. It should be noted at the outset that the majority of the participants come from the Netherlands, meaning the possibility of generalisation of results across all three countries is limited.

The practitioners were drawn from the practices being followed in the larger project, and policy-makers were selected by identifying those who were involved in P/CVE policy making at national and local levels, additional policy makers beyond those originally identified were included based on snowball sampling. Eighteen of the participants were female and twenty-two male. The breakdown of participants is provided in Table 2.

### 3.1.3. Procedure

The Q-Sorts were conducted in either 1-1 sessions, or in small groups of colleagues, in the workplaces of the participants. Participants were told that this would capture their individual perspectives and that they would have a chance to explain their sorting choices during an interview after the sorting process. They were instructed to take as long as they and to sort according to their personal perspective rather than what they thought would be the official perspective of their organisation.

Participants were asked to read through the 47 statements and make an initial sorting into three piles 'agree', 'disagree', and 'unsure'. They then worked systematically through these piles, placing them on the sorting grid in order to sort from those they agreed with most on the left-hand side to those they agreed with least on the right. As is common in Q-studies, the sorting grid forced sorting into a quasi-normal distribution, with fewer items at the extreme ends (most agree and most disagree) and more items in the centre, as illustrated in Fig. 1. This resulted in a single, holistic, arrangement of statements for each participant – their *q-sort*.

The sorting process was followed by a semi-structured interview. All participants were asked to explain the statements they agreed with most, and those they agreed with least, as well as any ideas they felt were missing from the statements. Participants were then asked to share their thoughts openly on any of the other statements and their placement. These interviews were conducted in the main language of the participants – either Dutch or English. During analysis a translated version of the Dutch interviews was used alongside the original Dutch transcript in order to identify nuances in response.

## 3.2. Analysis and interpretation

The process of analysis is two-fold: factor analysis and interpretation. First, statistically identifying similar *q-sorts* and aggregating these. Then drawing on this statistical data and the interview data to construct descriptions of different perspectives.

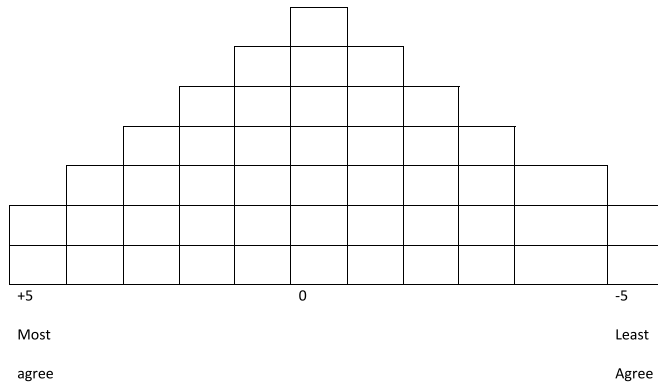
### 3.2.1. Factor analysis

A total of 40 *q-sorts* were intercorrelated and factor-analysed using a dedicated online program (Banasick, 2019). Four factors were extracted and rotated using varimax rotation. Together these factors accounted for 45% of the study variance. Twenty-seven of the forty *q-sorts* loaded significantly exclusively on one of these four factors with significance at  $p < 0.01$  (see Appendix – Table A2). The

<sup>2</sup> This study is part of a larger research project funded by REDACTED. The project REDACTED is investigating grassroots practices to preventing violent extremism that adopt social and educative rather than security-based approaches. As well as following the practices in the field, the policy context in which these practices are embedded are being analysed.

**Table 2**  
Participants by country.

	Netherlands	UK	Belgium
Practitioner	11	7	4
Policy-maker	12	3	3



**Fig. 1.** - Fixed distribution of the Q-Set.

significant loading of q-sorts on a factor indicates that they sorted the statements in a similar way, and thus we assume that they share a distinct perspective on resilience to radicalization.

The q-sorts from those participants loading significantly on a factor are merged to form an ‘ideal’ q-sort for each factor – this ideal sort is referred to as the factor array. The sorts are merged using weighted averaging, meaning that those sorts that load highest on a factor are given the highest weighting in the averaging process.

**3.2.2. Interpretation**

Factor interpretation, the final stage of analysis, involves a careful and detailed inspection of the full factor array, examining not only the ranking of individual statements, but also how they are ranked relative to other statements. After initial observations were made about the arrangement of statements in a factor array, the interview transcripts for those participants loading significantly on that factor were closely read. These interview transcripts were used to refine and embellish the initial observations of the factor arrays by drawing on the participants’ own explanations for why they ranked statements in a given way. The drafted interpretations were then examined and discussed by two other researchers familiar with the study data, and a policy-maker with a strong familiarity with the field of P/CVE. The results of this discussion were then drawn on to finalize the factor descriptions presented below.

**4. Results**

The descriptions of the four perspectives are built from the rank ordering of statements and the comments of participants who share this perspective. In the descriptions reference is made to specific statements in the form “Sx” with x representing the number of the statement. The full list of statements can be found in the appendix.

**4.1. Areas of consensus**

Before examining the different perspectives that emerged from the factor analysis, it is worth noting those areas of consensus across the perspectives. Table 3 lists the statements on which there is little variance in ranking between the perspectives – that is statements that do not statistically distinguish between any pair of factors (non-significant at  $p > 0.01$ ).

There are some clear areas of agreement across different perspectives. Statements 44, 13, 19 and 26 revolve around the notion of being aware of and tolerant of different views and ideas. Notably, these three converging statements centre on things that can be taught or fostered rather than inherent traits of individuals. These are positively regarded across the board as contributing to resilience to radicalization. There is also a consensus across the board that shielding people from extreme ideas does not contribute to making them more resilient. The distinctions between the four perspectives can be viewed against this backdrop of consensus.

**4.2. Four perspectives**

The four factors extracted from the factor analysis are presented below as four perspectives on resilience to radicalization drawing on the composite q-sort and interview data of those associated with each factor. Each factor description includes references to statements, Table A1 (see appendix) indicates the ranking of each statement for all four perspectives. Each description ends with basic

**Table 3**  
Idealized scores of the perspectives for consensus statements.

	Perspective 1	Perspective 2	Perspective 3	Perspective 4
S20 Someone who is resilient doesn't take extremist messages seriously	-1	-1	-1	-1
S44 Teaching empathy will make people more resilient	+3	+3	+3	+3
S13 Being taught that different views and opinions exist in the world makes someone more resilient	+3	+4	+4	+3
S19 Being able to talk to others about their thoughts and ideas makes people more resilient	+3	+4	+3	+4
S26 Being taught to be tolerant of difference will make someone more resilient	+4	+3	+3	+2
S21 Being shielded from extreme ideas makes someone more resilient	-5	-4	-4	-5

demographic data about the participants loading significantly on that factor. Comments made by participants are displayed in italics.

#### 4.2.1. Perspective 1: being free to express and explore diverse ideas and values

This perspective locates resilience in an environment which provides stability and exposure to diversity, and in which the individual has the freedom to hold and explore diverse values and ideas.

In this perspective, the environment plays a central role in resilience to radicalization. Resilience relies on an environment that provides both stability (S27, S9, S3) and access to diversity (S17, S10, S14). Crucially, it is an environment in which there is freedom to express and explore ideas (S32, S14). Notably, while the notion that being able to share extreme thoughts openly makes people resilient (S41) is not highly rated in this perspective, it is more highly rated than in any other. The statement "having someone in the community the can trust and confide in" (S42) captures the core of this perspective: a safe environment in which things can be spoken about. As one participant with this perspective explained: "because he was being told he couldn't express his views, they were being suppressed, he felt the need to express them even more but then ended up joining the likes of Tommy Robinson."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in this perspective resilience requires that individuals are taught to be empathetic and tolerant (S44, S26), but also that they have the freedom to hold their own values (S6, S15) and that they indeed may well be offended by satire (S34). While it is not that resilience means an individual will just "shrug off prejudice" (S12), it is also not expected that they express the level of criticality (S33) or activism (S1) that we see in perspective two.

This perspective is significantly associated with seven participants from the study. They are a combination of policy-makers and practitioners from the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK. They primarily work directly in the field of PVE (rather than participants whose work touches on PVE).

#### 4.2.2. Perspective 2: being critical and acting against injustice

In this perspective the resilient individual is one who is able to stand-up and take action about things that are important to them, they are embedded in a social environment in which they can actively question what is around them.

Similar to perspective one, this perspective sees a stable and loving environment in which individuals can debate controversial issues as central to resilience (S27, S32). Yet this perspective departs from perspective one in the importance it places on the individual being a critical and active protagonist. This perspective highly rates opportunities to participate in decision making as a source of resilience (S35), and sees the resilient individual as one who is able to stand up against prejudice (S31) and protest about things they feel passionately about (S4).

Criticality is seen as central to resilience. Assimilating or adapting to national values is not a sign of resilience (S6), notably this perspective does not reject the notion that a resilient individual may break a law that they believe to be unjust (S46), and it emphatically rejects the notion that abiding by the law of the land is a sign of resilience (S2). In the words of a participant with this perspective: "I think that someone who is very rebellious at school can still be very resilient ... Because it requires courage to stand up to something which is authority and which, uh, everyone thinks is the norm, so to pull you out of the mainstream."

This criticality extends to all facets of life, including religion, to be resilient it is important to be able to be critical of sacred texts (S33), and a strong religious faith is not a source of resilience, indeed it may be a barrier to resilience (S25). While a stable community is important, resilience is dependent upon being part of an *open* community, indeed, being part of an inward-looking community is seen as harmful to resilience. This is evident in ambivalence towards the statement "Having close connections between people in a community makes people more resilient" (S18), and is captured in the comments of participants: "... you can be religious but it's also important to make jokes about it and don't make it tough .... but also know there are other people who think in other ways."

While critical skills are viewed as central to resilience, resilience itself is not seen as dependent upon a strong IQ or achieving a high-level of academic education (S8, S24). From this perspective, it is very possible to be highly intelligent and do well in school, whilst not being resilient to radicalization.

This perspective is significantly associated with nine participants from the study. They are a combination of policy-makers and practitioners, all from the Netherlands. They primarily have work that addresses PVE, without this being their main portfolio.

<sup>3</sup> Tommy Robinson is a well-known figure of the far-right in the United Kingdom.



#### 4.2.3. Perspective 3: being flexible and adapting to social norms

Flexibility is central to this perspective on resilience. While it is not expected that people love or fully accept all the norms and values around them, the resilient individual seeks to understand and adapt to these norms and differences around them.

In this perspective, being flexible and adaptable is central to what it means to be resilient to radicalization. The notion that a resilient person can adapt to different cultures is highly rated (S47), as is the idea that a resilient person is able to change their values to match the values of the country they live in (S6), this is particularly notable given how low this is rated by other perspectives. Indeed, it is notable that while the first two perspectives strongly reject the notion that being committed to the values of the country that they live in is a sign of resilience, this perspective does not (S15).

This ability to be flexible and to adapt takes precedence over environmental factors. While all other perspectives positively regard having a diverse friendship group (S17), a stable and loving network (S27), and a strong self-esteem (S37), this perspective does not attach importance these issues, neither positively or negatively rating them. Further, while all other perspectives regard having access to a good job as a potential source of resilience, this is rejected in this perspective (S3).

While flexibility is central, it does not imply that the individual is compliant or uncritical, indeed, this perspective highly rates learning to question information as source of resilience (S22) and strongly rejects the notion that being well behaved at school is a sign of resilience (S39). Nor is it expected that the resilient individual would not be offended by humour or satire (S34), and indeed, the notion that resilience means someone would stand up against prejudice regardless of personal consequences is not rejected (S31).

The heart of this perspective is captured in the comments of one of the participants: "Well, someone who is resilient can adapt their values to the values of the country in which they live. Yes, if you are resilient you can do that, it doesn't have to mean you agree."

This perspective is significantly associated with five participants from the study. They are a combination of policy-makers and practitioners, from the UK, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

#### 4.2.4. Perspective 4: being robust and closely connected to others

This perspective locates resilience to radicalization in an individual with a certain robustness, who is embedded in a well-connected social environment, and who generally abides by the norms and values around them.

The resilient individual in this perspective has a strong self-esteem (S37) and is able to stand up for their values (S1). Yet this does not extend to the kinds of criticality and activism in perspective two, rather, in this perspective being resilient means one is able to shrug-off prejudice (S12), and while all other perspectives reject the notion that being easy going makes somebody more resilient, in this perspective it is positively rated (S29). As one participant put it "If people have prejudice of him it doesn't come in, he notices, but it doesn't come in and it doesn't destabilize his personality or his actions". While all other perspective positively rank being taught to question information (S22) and having the chance to participate in decision making (S35) as sources of resilience, this does not regard them as important to resilience to radicalization.

Another distinguishing feature of this perspective of resilience is the role of norms and values. This perspective emphatically rejects the idea that someone who is resilient might break a law they believe to be unjust (S46), and while all other perspectives reject the notion that to be resilient means to be well behaved at school (S39) and to obey the laws of the land (S2), this perspective does not.

In this perspective, the social environment which promotes resilience is one of connection and close community (S27, S7, S38), indeed this is the only perspective that positively rates a strong friendship group as a source of resilience (S16).

Resilience depends more on inner strength and strong and stable environment than it does on exposure to ideas and debate. As one participant put it: "I am convinced that the environment where people are growing up can make them resilient ... that's why I put all the things here about group cohesion, participation, friendships ...". While access to balanced information and the ability to debate controversial issues are not rejected, it is notable that while these are highly rated in other perspectives, they are seen as neutral factors from this perspective (S14, S32).

This perspective is significantly associated with six participants from the study. They are all practitioners, from Belgium and the Netherlands.

### 4.3. Consensus and divergence between perspectives

#### 4.3.1. Consensus

While there are clear distinctions between the perspectives, it is instructive to consider the backdrop of consensus between perspectives. This is particularly interesting in the context of the expectation of collaboration between different actors in efforts to build resilience.

First, all perspectives reject the notion that shielding young people from extreme messages will contribute to resilience to radicalization. In many ways this is unsurprising given the focus on resilience rather than protection. Yet, it would seem to point to a common underlying belief that young people are capable of recognizing and rejecting extremist ideas if other conditions are in place. This suggests a valuable common point of departure – it is not exposure to extreme ideas in itself that is at issue, but rather the extent to which people are equipped to deal with them, whether this is due to having developed certain capabilities, or because of the social environment in which they are embedded. Of course, this does not mean that the importance of measures to restrict the spread of extremist ideas is necessarily rejected, but rather suggests a rejection of the idea that young people are *inherently* vulnerable to extremist ideologies.

Second, there is a shared positive regard for a cluster of statements concerned with understanding and tolerating a diversity of views and perspectives. On the face of it this may appear trivial – it is a set of low-stake issues that are perhaps hard to disagree with: developing empathy and tolerance and having the space to discuss thoughts and ideas. Yet, this consensus, particularly around the

positive role of empathy, would indicate a shared view that resilience cannot be reduced to either a set of skills or environmental factors, but that it also involves an affective and relational element. Further, these statements revolve around things that can be taught, there is a suggestion of a relationship between education and resilience, that it is something that can be fostered by the environment.

4.3.2. Divergence

While there is a background of consensus, there are also divergences between these perspectives, some of which appear to be in some tension. Examining these divergences through the framework of the wider discourse on resilience can be instructive. As described, when thinking about resilience in social policy two key issues emerge repeatedly: first, the extent to which resilience is conceived of in terms of individuals possessing certain traits vs. the extent to which it is conceived of as arising from a social environment; second, the extent to which resilience is understood in terms of “bouncing back” to the status quo vs. the extent to which resilience is understood to involve transformation. The differences between these standpoints are discussed widely in the literature as they lead to different conclusions about what it means to build resilience.

Plotting the four perspectives in conceptual space along these axes throws some light on how they fit within the broader discussion on resilience (Fig. 2). The exact positioning of these statements is a matter of relative distance between perspectives on these axes rather than an absolute measure of the extent to which they reflect one or other position. Their positioning is a matter of judgement based on two key components: one, how highly statements relating to one of these positions were rated; two, how participants associated with these perspectives described resilience to radicalisation. To take an example, P2 positively associate resilience with being able to protest about issues (S4), whereas this is negatively rated by the other perspectives, similarly P1 and P2 negatively rate S15 – being committed to national values – while P3 and P4 positively rate these. Taken together with the comments and rating of other statements which are captured in the descriptions of each perspective, P1 and P2 are located somewhat higher on the “critique and transform” axis relative to P3 and P4. Each of the perspectives is nuanced and none fall directly into one extreme or the other, but locating them relative to one another in this conceptual space can assist in drawing out areas of divergence and tension.

Across the first axis we can distinguish between perspective one (P1) on the one hand, which places an emphasis on being embedded in a stable yet diverse environment, and P3 on the other which places flexibility at the heart of resilience. While P2 and P3 tend to give greater weight – although not exclusively to individual traits, the nature of these traits is quite distinct, reflecting divergences across the second axis. The flexibility to adapt to prevailing norms associated with P3 contrasts with the critical activism of P2. P4 looks to both a robust individual with a strong self-esteem and to a closely connected social environment. Its focus on stability stands in stark contrast with the debate and activism of P2.

5. Discussion

As was expected, diverse views on what is meant by resilience to radicalisation can be systematically traced in this group of policy actors. Drawing on de-centred theory we suggested that policy actors will come to notion of resilience to radicalisation with webs of belief, part of which include different yet plausible views on the endpoint and causes of radicalisation, as well as on what constitutes resilience.

From one angle we can examine these perspectives in light of different ways of thinking about radicalisation. As discussed, the academic discourse on radicalisation tends towards viewing it as a multi-faceted issue, with the differences between models and theories lying in the relative emphasis they place on different factors (Hardy, 2018). Similarly, each of these perspectives are nuanced and would seem to suggest that addressing radicalisation involves addressing multiple issues, with more emphasis given to certain factors than others. For example, P2 and P3 would seem to place particular significance on how people interact with ideas – with P2 calling for the development of critical skills to see through them, and P3 focussing on the ability to adapt to prevailing norms, even if one does not fully agree with them. While different in suggested response, they suggest a common concern for the influence of ideology, giving this aspect relative importance. In contrast, P4 places a much heavier emphasis on access to a strong environment and attaches little importance to exploring and debating different ideas and views. Much more attention seems to be placed on social dynamics rather than the engagement with ideas.

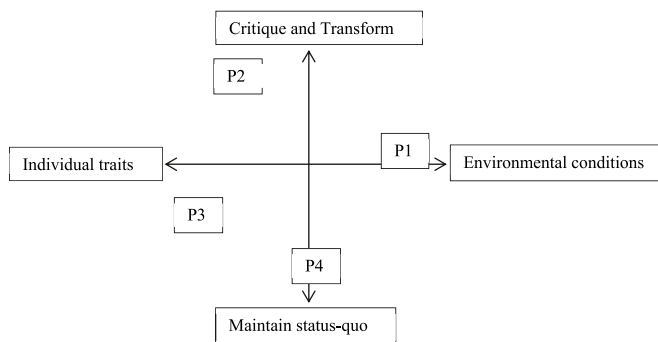


Fig. 2. Mapping of perspectives.

However, it would seem that factors beyond beliefs about the nature of radicalisation are important. If we consider again the distinction between P2 and P3, while both seem concerned with ideas, they would seem to point to very different beliefs on other issues, such as the ideal citizen and the relationship between citizens and social institutions. This brings us to the notion previously highlighted, that perspectives on what it means to be resilient are linked to worldviews which shape what is considered a good or positive outcome (Ungar, 2011). Thus, while P2 and P3 are both concerned with ideology, and both accept that people may be dissatisfied with the current social order and norms, they suggest very different responses. P2 traces the vision of a politically active citizen who is unafraid to critique social norms, whereas P3 places flexibility as a central attribute of the citizen, able to adapt to the prevailing context. It must be noted that P3 does not suggest an acquiescence to injustice, but it is a very different conception of the relationship between the citizen and institutions than can be detected in P2.

If we continue this line of thinking and examine the perspectives in light of the discussion on resilience, if we consider the transform – status-quo axis (Fig. 2) P2 seems to conceptualise resilience more in an active power to affect change, whereas P4 towards the status-quo end of the axis, seems to regard resilience more in terms of the ability to resist outside influences that seek to affect change. P4 then seems more akin to the notion of resilience as a shield to protect from external forces (Stephens and Sieckelink, 2019a). Interestingly, in Dutch two words translate to resilience – *weerbaarheid* and *veerkracht*. *Weerbaarheid* can also be translated as resistance – the ability to resist negative influences, whereas *veerkracht* would seem more akin to the notion of an active, transformative notion of resilience.

It could be considered then that P2 with its orientation towards politically active citizenship belies the argument that thinking in terms of resilience is depoliticising. Yet, it becomes more complex. While P2 resists a discourse of compliant citizenship, it carries another set of normative assumptions that renders liberal-secularism desirable and religious conviction as a potential sign of a lack of resilience. This can be contrasted with P1 which values the ability to be critical, and suggests that it is possible to be sufficiently critical while hold religious convictions.

The purpose of examining the perspectives in this light is not to argue for the correctness of one or another, but rather to point to the complex factors that seem to shape these different perspectives. In doing so, a final point of importance is raised – how significant are the distinctions between these perspectives in reality?

We have argued that it is important to understand the perspectives of policy actors because there is an expectation of collaboration between various actors to build resilience. This study of course is unable to get at what actually happens in practice, however, there is good reason to believe that the subjective perspectives of policy actors do matter (Bevir and Brown, 2019).

As just outlined, the perspectives would seem to arise from different beliefs both about the most important causes of radicalisation and ideas about citizenship and society. At the very least it is clear that collaborative efforts to build resilience will be challenging if there is the assumption that all these actors mean roughly the same thing when they are talking about building resilience. Focussing on building criticality towards the existing social order would lead to different interventions and measures than focussing on developing the capacity to adapt to prevailing norms.

On one reading then, the assumptions of the emancipatory pedagogue with the traditions and background of that field may lead them to focusing on developing critical activism in the name of building resilience to radicalization at the same time as the police officer promotes commitment to national values with the same goal in mind. However, the web of beliefs shaping perspectives extends beyond the job or professional tradition. In part, as we have seen these perspectives may be shaped by how people understand the causes of radicalisation – which could conceivably be linked to national context and trainings received on radicalisation, but they also seem to be shaped by a deeper set of beliefs. The emancipatory pedagogue who rejects secularism, the police officer who values democratic questioning above obedience, the policy-maker committed to activism over assimilation, all deny any simple association of groups with perspectives.

This would suggest that the work of collaboration across disciplines and sectors is not reducible to overcoming tensions in perspective between police officers and the youth workers. Indeed, a youth worker and police officer could very well find greater consensus together than they do with their colleagues and the emancipatory pedagogue may be surprised to discover their views are in more affinity with a national policy-maker than a social worker in the same neighbourhood.

Further, this suggests that shaping how actors view and act upon the notion of resilience to radicalisation is not achievable through the prescription of a definition or approach. Nor through condemning the perspectives of one or another party. Particularly if the complex web of beliefs and ideas held by different policy actors is not taken into account. Rather, space to reflect on and explore these diverse perspectives and their associated ideas may be more what is at hand. Indeed, it was noteworthy from this study is the frequency with which participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on their own subjective positions. A number of participants asked if their colleagues could also complete the q-sort as it would provide them with a basis for a shared reflection and conversation on what they are trying to achieve.

This suggests that there is a need and desire amongst diverse policy actors to be able to step back and reflect on their work in relation to resilience building. It also raises the question as to how to do justice to the different perspectives held when diverse actors are called to collaborate – what role could exploring these different perspectives collectively play in overcoming unarticulated frustrations and tensions between partners? Does making perspectives explicit offer the possibility of more careful and critical analysis by partners on the work they are undertaking? These questions matter because they concern perspectives on what constitutes a desirable outcome of practices that have a direct influence on the lives of many young people. While there may be few simple answers to the issues at hand – for example, the extent to which being offended by humour or satire is considered a sign of a lack of resilience on the one hand or a legitimate commitment to sacred values on the other – these are issues that require discussion and reflection. Perhaps if these issues cannot be carefully and openly discussed and explored between policy actors, we cannot expect the same of the young subjects of these practices.

## 6. Future directions

The nature and scope of this study, with a small number of participants, does not allow for the unpacking of the various situational factors that give shape to the various perspectives. A survey study of the prevalence of these perspectives with a larger pool of participants would enable an examination of the role of demographic factors such as age, gender, experience, national context, on the shaping of perspectives. A comparative study, replicating the q-study but with a differentiated focus could also throw light on additional situational factors. How do perspectives on resilience to radicalization change when participants are thinking about a particular gender as the subject of resilience building efforts, or of specific forms of extremism such as religious or far-right? Making these implicit ideas explicit may enable a more open and accessible discussion amongst policy actors on what they are really talking about when it comes to building resilience to radicalization.

## Funding sources

This work was supported by the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport [Grant number: 326434].

## Declaration of competing interest

None.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to sincerely thank Professor Hans Boutellier for his comments and guidance throughout the study and the writing of this paper. In addition we would like to thank Professor Gjalt de Graaf for his guidance in the use of Q-Methodology.

## Appendix

**Table A1**  
Idealized Scores of the Perspectives of the 47 Statements

	Perspective 1	Perspective 2	Perspective 3	Perspective 4
S1 Someone who is resilient will stick up for their values regardless of what others around them believe	-3	+1	0	+2
S2 A resilient person is someone who abides by the law of the land they live in	-3	-5	-1	0
S3 Someone will be more resilient if they have access to a good job	+1	+1	-4	+1
S4 Someone who is resilient is able to protest about things they feel passionately about	-2	+1	-3	-2
S5 Voting in elections will make someone more resilient	-1	-3	-3	-4
S6 Someone who is resilient is able to change their values to match the values of the country they live in	-4	-3	+3	0
S7 Being actively involved in bringing people together in a community will make someone more resilient	+1	0	0	+3
S8 Being encouraged and supported to get a high level of education will make someone more resilient	0	-4	-1	1
S9 Being financially stable will make someone more resilient	+1	0	-2	-2
S10 Being educated about different ethnic groups, cultures, and religions will make someone more resilient	+2	+1	+2	+1
S11 Resilience is different for every person	-1	0	+5	+5
S12 Someone who is resilient is able to shrug off prejudice and not let it bother them	-1	2	1	4
S13 Being taught that different views and opinions exist in the world makes someone more resilient	+3	+4	+4	+3
S14 Ensuring people have access to a balanced range of information will make someone more resilient	+4	+1	+2	0
S15 Being committed to the values of the country they live in is a sign of resilience	-4	-3	0	0
S16 Having a strong friendship group will make someone more resilient	0	-1	-2	+2
S17 Having a diverse friendship group will make someone more resilient	+3	+3	0	+2
S18 Having close connections between people in a community makes people more resilient	+1	0	+1	+2
S19 Being able to talk to others about their thoughts and ideas makes people more resilient	+3	+4	+3	+4
S20 Someone who is resilient doesn't take extremist messages seriously	-1	-1	-1	-1
S21 Being shielded from extreme ideas makes someone more resilient	-5	-4	-4	-5
S22 Being taught to question the information they receive makes someone more resilient	+2	+3	+4	-1
S23 Being committed to human rights will make someone more resilient	0	0	0	-1
S24 Being encouraged to strive for high academic achievement will make someone more resilient	0	-5	-4	-3
S25 Having a strong religious faith will make someone more resilient	0	-2	-1	0

(continued on next page)

Table A1 (continued)

	Perspective 1	Perspective 2	Perspective 3	Perspective 4
S26 Being taught to be tolerant of difference will make someone more resilient	+4	+3	+3	+2
S27 Having a stable and loving network around them will make someone more resilient	+5	+5	0	+4
S28 Being intelligent will make someone more resilient	-3	-2	-5	-1
S29 Being easy-going makes someone more resilient	-4	-3	-3	+1
S30 Being sceptical makes someone more resilient	-1	-2	-1	-4
S31 Someone who is resilient is able to stand up against prejudice, regardless of personal consequences	-1	+2	+1	-2
S32 Having the chance to debate controversial issues makes someone more resilient	+5	+5	+4	0
S33 Someone who is resilient is able to be critical about sacred texts	-2	+2	+1	-1
S34 Someone who is resilient is not offended by humour or satire	-5	+2	-1	-2
S35 Having the chance to participate in decision making will make someone more resilient	+2	+4	+2	-3
S36 Being committed to liberal ideas is a sign of resilience	-2	-2	-2	-4
S37 Having a strong self-esteem will make someone more resilient	+4	+2	0	+5
S38 Living in a community that comes together to ensure all its members are taken care of makes someone more resilient	+1	+1	+2	+3
S39 Someone who is resilient is well-behaved at school	-2	-4	-5	0
S40 Being taught the values of the country they live in makes people more resilient	0	-1	-1	+1
S41 Being able to share extreme thoughts openly	0	-1	-2	-3
S42 Having someone in the community they can trust and confide in makes someone more resilient	+2	-2	+1	-1
S43 Providing alternative narratives to extremist ideas will make people more resilient	+2	0	+2	-3
S44 Teaching empathy will make people more resilient	+3	+3	+3	+3
S45 We shouldn't protect young people from offence, only from extremism	-3	-1	-2	-3
S46 Someone who is resilient might break a law they believe to be unjust	-2	0	-2	-5
S47 Someone who is resilient can adapt to different cultures	-1	0	+5	+1

Table A2

Weighting of the 40 Q-Sorts on the four factors

Q -Sort	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
1	0.1554	0.4509	<b>0.6241*</b>	0.3053
2	0.5513	0.3882	0.3938	0.2313
3	<b>0.7055*</b>	0.2548	0.1279	0.1159
4	0.2273	0.0008	0.3479	0.1218
5	0.0875	0.3109	0.075	-0.0456
6	0.5007	0.2897	0.1977	0.5488
7	0.4197	<b>0.593*</b>	0.3037	0.2322
8	<b>0.4526*</b>	0.2214	0.2806	0.2123
9	0.1685	<b>0.4272*</b>	-0.2871	0.0637
10	0.3581	0.144	0.3976	0.4399
11	0.2387	<b>0.5889*</b>	0.0129	0.1674
12	<b>0.577*</b>	0.4297	0.1576	0.1242
13	0.0223	<b>0.4281*</b>	0.341	-0.0623
14	0.5475	0.2924	0.049	0.5167
15	0.1218	<b>0.5178*</b>	0.3595	0.2028
16	0.4125	<b>0.5324*</b>	0.0212	0.0918
17	<b>0.4946*</b>	0.0987	0.0277	0.3211
18	0.3374	<b>0.4428*</b>	0.1006	0.2268
19	<b>0.545*</b>	0.1845	0.412	0.0871
20	0.3806	0.0569	0.5628	0.4793
21	0.208	0.1617	<b>0.6644*</b>	0.1313
22	0.171	0.1719	<b>0.5804*</b>	0.1331
23	0.4765	0.4024	0.3986	-0.0845
24	0.6048	0.3119	0.3949	0.0314
25	0.4573	0.1587	0.4139	0.1812
26	0.3024	0.2895	0.188	0.367
27	-0.0532	0.4079	<b>0.5172*</b>	0.0968
28	0.1036	-0.1171	-0.0673	<b>0.4019*</b>
29	0.6517	0.2256	0.004	0.2542
30	0.3347	0.0518	0.1976	<b>0.5876*</b>
31	-0.1309	0.0509	0.0998	<b>0.6211*</b>
32	0.0541	0.0828	0.3518	<b>0.4761*</b>
33	0.3384	0.1825	0.1595	<b>0.6236*</b>
34	0.1342	<b>0.4566*</b>	0.2803	0.0506
35	0.3047	0.1355	0.2556	0.2166
36	0.0856	<b>0.4183*</b>	0.1176	-0.0142
37	0.3079	0.2184	<b>0.6069*</b>	0.1727
38	0.2915	0.417	0.3716	0.4687

(continued on next page)

Table A2 (continued)

Q -Sort	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
39	0.3997	-0.0177	0.1085	0.4582*
40	0.0054	0.0124	0.3526	0.0101
%Explained Variance	14	10	11	10

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