

Interpersonal Foundations of Ideological Thinking

Curtis D. Hardin, Rick M. Cheung, Michael W. Magee, Steven Noel, & Kasumi
Yoshimura

Brooklyn College & Graduate Center

City University of New York

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"Our present economic, social and international arrangements are based, in large measure, upon organized lovelessness."

-Aldous Huxley, 1944, p. 93

The popular notion that social injustice is due to insufficient love among humankind would seem to be indisputable, yet contemporary research on the foundations of injustice suggests a more complicated, even ironic, story. Although the maintenance of injustice is probably at root purchased with institutionalized terror or the threat of terror (see Jackman, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), it is also true that for a variety of pragmatic reasons victims of injustice may never have to directly face the brutal bottom line. In fact, many victims of economic, social, and personal injustice live lives of quiet acquiescence. People not only manage to cope with their disadvantage, but to a remarkable degree understand, defend, rationalize and embrace the very social systems that perpetuate their disadvantage. Even among the disadvantaged, "There is a general psychological tendency to justify and rationalize the status quo, that is, a motive to see the system as good, fair, legitimate, and desirable" (Jost & Banaji, 1994). In short, people think ideologically.

Although the status quo is often advantageous for the few at the expense of the many, several ways in which ideological thinking is psychologically adaptive for the disadvantaged and advantaged alike have been empirically identified. For example, preservation of the status quo maintains order, predictability, and reduced fear of uncertainty (for reviews see Jackman, 1994; Jost, 2009; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Hence, the kinds of attitudes that explain and

justify social injustice are not only motivated by factors independent of love or lack thereof, but research also suggests that ideological thinking may be motivated in addition by something a lot like love—the human need to connect with others through feelings of mutual understanding (Cheung, Noel, & Hardin, in press; Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2008).

We argue here that ideological thinking—whether it involves attitudes that justify the status quo or attitudes that challenge the status quo—is bound up with human relationships, and in particular the motivation to establish, maintain, and regulate relationship-specific shared views of the world, along lines implied by shared reality theory (Hardin & Conley, 2001; Hardin & Higgins, 1996). To the extent that political and religious ideologies, for example, are sets of interrelated beliefs and attitudes that provide common lenses through which to view the world, they may be especially useful for building and maintaining shared reality with others. Ideologies, in other words, may function as ‘pre- packaged’ units of interpretation that help people navigate their social lives. After a brief description of our theoretical approach and initial evidence, we turn to a more detailed discussion of the role of interpersonal relationships in two important domains related to ideological thinking—intergroup prejudice and religion.

Shared Reality Theory

Shared reality theory provides a way to understand when and how ideological commitments may be used, regulated, and defended as a function of the specific

relationships in which they are shared (Hardin & Conley, 2001; Hardin & Higgins, 1996). According to shared reality theory, experiences and attitudes are cognitively reified when they are perceived to be mutually acknowledged, recognized, or otherwise intersubjectively “shared” with others. People are motivated to achieve shared reality with others to (a) establish, maintain, and regulate interpersonal relationships, thereby satisfying human needs for nurturance, affiliation, reproduction, safety and survival (e.g., Asch, 1952; Bowlby, 1969/1983; Freud, 1921/1959; Sherif, 1936), and (b) perceive themselves and their environments as orderly, predictable, and controllable, thereby satisfying human epistemic needs (e.g., Bowlby, 1969; Festinger, 1954; Mead, 1934/1967). Hence, two fundamental adaptive requirements for survival—social integration and knowledge about the world—are served and integrated by the same social-cognitive process, the regulation of relationship-specific shared realities.

The postulate that specific interpersonal relationships and cognitions about reality are mutually regulated through shared reality processes has two critical implications. First, people should ‘tune’ relationship-relevant attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward others in desired or obligatory relationships to facilitate the shared reality on which the relationships depend. Second, people should ‘anti-tune’ attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors away from undesired or incompatible others to protect relationship-relevant shared realities within existing relationships. Consistent with these implications, research shows that individuals mimic the characteristics and behaviors of salient, desirable others (e.g., Cesario, Plaks, & Higgins, 2006), shift their attitudes toward those of close relationship partners (e.g., Davis & Rusbult, 2001), and regulate their self-concepts with respect to the

perspectives of significant others and even the perspectives of strangers (Baldwin & Holmes, 1987; Hinkley & Andersen, 1996; Sinclair, Dunn, & Lowery, 2005; Sinclair, Huntsinger, Skorinko, & Hardin, 2005).

The first reason to believe that ideological thinking is influenced by the perspectives shared with others comes from large literatures in political science showing that to a large degree people take on the political attitudes and orientation of their parents (e.g., Hyman, 1959; Sapiro, 2004; Sears, 1975; Sears & Levy, 2003). Although the effect of parental attitudes on their offspring may decline somewhat as they accumulate other important relationships (Harris, 1995; Niemi & Jennings, 1991), there is a great deal of evidence suggesting that young adults and late adolescents are strongly influenced by shared political preferences and behavior with parents and friends (e.g., Kitt & Gleicher, 1950; Stillman, Guthrie, & Becher, 1960). The transmission of political partisanship from parents to children is known to be more effective when both parents belong to the same political party and when political attitudes within the family are well known (Jennings & Niemi, 1981). Both findings are consistent with a shared reality perspective—the first because it is a situation in which there are no competing shared realities within the same family, and the second because discursive salience makes specific political attitudes relationship relevant to the particular relationships upon which shared reality is established and maintained.

In addition to the family, ideological thinking also reflects attitudes shared within important ingroups. Several studies link social and political attitudes to social identities especially valued by the people in their lives (e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee,

1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002; Greene, 1999; Newcomb, 1943). For example, data from the American National Election Studies indicates that ideological self-placement is related to evaluations of liberals and conservatives as social groups, and that these evaluations, in turn, stem from beliefs about political issues as well as affective evaluations of ingroup social identities (Conover & Feldman, 1981). Such findings are compatible with both reference group theory (Merton, 1957) and social identity theories (e.g., Abrams, 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which imply that political opinions are influenced by the desire to align oneself with positively evaluated social groups. For example, Australian beliefs about Americans and Australians are most strongly influenced by opinions expressed by fellow Australian sources (Haslam et al., 1996). Liberal and conservative participants presented with either a generous or stringent welfare policy support the new policy when their own political party allegedly endorses it, regardless of policy content (Cohen, 2003). Furthermore, this study demonstrated that party ingroup position leads people to engage in selective and biased processing of policy information in order to arrive at agreement with fellow ingroup members as well as to selectively invoke moral consequences of the chosen policy in order to justify the ingroup position. Thus, evidence suggests that people's opinions about political parties and specific policy issues are influenced by their attachment to valued social groups.

The idea that people share ideology to maintain and regulate interpersonal relationships is also supported by experimental evidence. For example, college students exhibit stronger anti-labor attitudes after playing a computer-mediated game of catch

with high-status partners than equal-status partners (Cheung, Noel, & Hardin, in press). In another program of research, participants completed common measures of allegiance to the status quo after participating in an ostensibly unrelated study in which they had described either their mother or father—one known to be Republican and the other Democratic based on pretesting several weeks earlier (Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2008). Participants scored significantly higher on measures of system justification when they had recently thought about an interaction with their conservative parent than their liberal parent, and did so regardless of whether they had been asked to think about positive or negative interactions. Finally, in a series of experiments, participants exhibited greater endorsement of conservative values and less liking for an experimenter when he claimed to be very liberal than moderately liberal, but only to the degree that participant close others shared their conservative values (Cheung, Noel, & Hardin, 2009). Such findings suggest that parental attitudes do not merely encourage people to share the same ideological frame but also discourage people from easily dropping the shared ideological frame when they interact with others who do not share their political values (cf. Sinclair, Hardin, & Lowery, 2006).

Although research of this type strongly implicates the role of interpersonal dynamics in ideological thinking, we turn to evidence gleaned from research on two broad categories of thinking implicated in the ideological justification of the status quo: intergroup prejudice and religion. Applying the shared reality analysis to the case of ideology—whether it involves prejudice or religion—suggests that ideological thinking is regulated by shared reality with others. That is, the particular people with whom one

shares ideological commitment are, in turn, the relationships on which those ideologies are based, and threats to one's ideology, in turn, are threats to the relationships in which ideology is shared. When these relationships are vital—i.e., important, successful, imposed, difficult to escape, or otherwise stable—people are motivated to defend the ideological shared realities on which the relationships are based (e.g., Asch, 1952; Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Sherif, 1936). In sum, although contemporary research on ideology has focused most on its palliative effects on mortality, pragmatics, epistemics, ego and group maintenance, research shows that yet another reason why people engage in ideological thinking is to establish, maintain, or otherwise regulate specific interpersonal relationships—something a lot like love.

INTERPERSONAL FOUNDATIONS OF STEREOTYPING AND PREJUDICE

It has long been observed that the content of stereotypes and prejudice functions not only to explain existing social arrangements but justify their legitimacy (e.g., Allport, 1954; Jackman, 1994; Marx & Engels, 1846). For example, the common stereotype that the impoverished are lazy provides a ready-made, culturally shared explanation for economic disparity that pins the blame on the impoverished themselves. Indeed, research shows that prejudice and stereotyping commonly function for ideological ends (for reviews see Allport, 1954; Dovidio et al., 2005; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000; Jackman, 1994; Jost, Burgess, & Mosso, 2001; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). For example, broadly shared stereotypes affect self-evaluation and behavior to the degree that one endorses attitudes that justify the status quo (Cheung & Hardin, in press). In one

experiment, Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong indicate that their work merits less pay when their stigmatized ethnicity is made salient, but only to the degree that they score high in social dominance orientation (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), a well-validated measure of acceptance of extant social hierarchy. In a second experiment, women in the U.S. indicate that their work on a “logic” task (but not an identical “verbal” task) merits less pay when their gender is made salient, but only to the degree that they identify as politically conservative, an identity strongly associated with a variety of attitudes that justify the status quo (see Jost et al., 2003). Notably, this ideologically driven effect of self-stereotyping extends to task performance. Women perform worse on a “logic” task (but not an identical “verbal” task) when their gender is made salient, but only to the degree that they identify as politically conservative. In contrast, women who identify as politically liberal perform better on the logic task when their gender is made salient. In sum, this research demonstrates not only the pernicious consequences of common stereotypes but also that the system-justifying consequences of stereotypes depend on the degree to which people engage in generalized forms of ideological thinking like political conservatism and social dominance orientation.

Given that stereotypes and prejudice indeed function to explain and justify the status quo, we turn to evidence that their expression is bound up in the web of interpersonal relationships. In so doing, we largely ignore vast literatures dating to the beginning of the 20th century, which, we hasten to note, would yield the identical story. The reason is because discoveries of the past two decades have markedly changed the scientific understanding of the nature of prejudice. Research over the past two decades

demonstrates that the common view of prejudice and stereotyping is dangerously incomplete (see Hardin & Banaji, in press). Most importantly, we now know that the operation of prejudice and stereotyping in social judgment and behavior does not require personal animus, hostility or even conscious awareness. In fact, prejudice is often “implicit”—that is, unwitting, unintentional, and uncontrollable, even among the most well-intentioned people (for one review see Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004)—a discovery that resonates across the brain sciences with the variety, sophistication and richness of thinking that occurs outside the window of conscious deliberation (e.g., French & Cleeremans, 2002). Indeed, hundreds of studies regarding cognitive accessibility, semantic priming, evaluative priming, and other areas in social cognition provide conclusive evidence that mental processes can and do operate implicitly.

Although the discovery of implicit prejudice initially brought with it an assumption that it might be immutable and unavoidable (e.g., Bargh, 1999; Devine, 1989; Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997), recent research demonstrates instead that it can be reduced and even reversed as a function of social influence, and like other attitudes is regulated in order to manage interpersonal relationships (e.g., Lowery et al., 2001; Sinclair, Huntsinger et al., 2005; Sinclair, Lowery et al., 2005).

The Interpersonal Foundations of Prejudice

One indication of the way implicit prejudice reflects shared perceptions of social hierarchy is the fact that it reflects the character of stable social organization, including

relative group power, social status, and concomitant stereotypes. For example, although ingroup preference is a common feature of implicit prejudice (e.g., Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), at least as important are findings that ingroup preference reflects social status. Members of high-status groups in the U.S. not only exhibit more implicit ingroup favoritism than lower-status groups but do so as a function of their relative status, whether rich, white, skinny, or Christian (e.g., Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002; Rudman, Feinberg, & Fairchild, 2002). At the same time, although ingroup preference is common in both implicit and explicit prejudice, outgroup preference is hardly rare (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994) and also closely tracks relative group status. For example, implicit favoritism of dominant outgroups occurs more to the extent that the ingroup is low in status, independent of explicit ingroup favoritism (Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002; Rudman et al., 2002). A surprisingly large number of African Americans exhibit implicit preference for whites over blacks (e.g., Nosek et al., 2002), and greater implicit anti-black prejudice among African Americans predicts preferences for working with white versus black partners on intellectually demanding tasks independently of explicit attitudes (Ashburn-Nardo, Knowles, & Monteith, 2003). Moreover, implicit anti-black prejudice among the African Americans is greater to the degree that they endorse system-justifying opposition to equality (e.g., Jost & Burgess, 2000; Overbeck, Jost, Mosso, & Flizik, 2004), suggesting that the well-documented tendency to favor ingroups over outgroups may be trumped implicitly by ideological thinking (see also Rudman et al., 2002)—thinking that, as we have seen, is itself an expression of interpersonal dynamics (e.g., Cheung et al., in press; Jost et al., 2008).

Although stable social organization predicts broad stratification of implicit prejudice, research suggests that this may occur only to the degree that it involves interpersonally shared views of the world. For example, friendly intergroup contact reduces implicit prejudice and explicit prejudice alike (e.g., Gross & Hardin, 2007; Henry & Hardin, 2006; Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, 2007). Implicit prejudice towards gays and lesbians is lower among people who report high levels of long-term contact with gay and lesbian friends as well as for people who report being exposed to gay-positive media (Cheung, Fingerhut, Hardin, Johnson, Noel, & Drus, 2009; Dasgupta & Rivera, 2008). Implicit prejudice toward the elderly is lower among college students the more friendships they report having with older people (Tam, Hewstone, Harwood, Voci, & Kenworthy, 2006). Implicit prejudice is lower between British and South-Asian children in England to the extent that they report outgroup friendships, and implicit prejudice is reduced even among children who report no outgroup friendships themselves but who report having friends who do (Turner et al., 2007). Although these findings are consistent with the proposition that people low in implicit prejudice are more open to outgroup friendships, statistical analyses show that the relationship is driven more by the effect of friendship on implicit prejudice than by the effect of implicit prejudice on friendship (Tam et al., 2006; Turner et al., 2007). Indeed, experimental evidence shows that implicit prejudice among white college freshmen is reduced more over the course of their first school term if they were randomly assigned to a black roommate than a white roommate (Shook & Fazio, 2008).

Although friendly intergroup contact generally reduces intergroup prejudice, evidence suggests that interpersonal power also contributes to the regulation of prejudice. For example, in research involving blacks and whites in Chicago as well as Christians and Muslims in Lebanon, implicit intergroup prejudice is lower to the degree that participants report outgroup friendships (Henry & Hardin, 2006). However, results also indicate that implicit prejudice reduction is greater for low-status group members toward high-status group members than it is for high-status group members toward low-status group members. That is, outgroup friendships predict greater reductions in implicit outgroup prejudice for Muslims than Christians and for blacks than whites. These findings are not only congruent with the generally greater social status that Christians versus Muslims enjoy in contemporary Lebanon, and whites versus blacks enjoy in America, but also the shared reality theory implication that social tuning effects are subject to interpersonal power, whether engendered by interpersonal factors or broader socio-structural factors (e.g., Hardin & Banaji, in press; Hardin & Conley, 2001).

The relationship between prejudice and the social context does not appear in whole cloth but develops over time starting in early childhood in the context of interpersonal dynamics (e.g., Baron & Banaji, 2006; Rutland et al., 2005). For example, implicit racial prejudice among white 4th- and 5th-grade children is correlated with the explicit prejudice of their parents, but only to the extent that the children identify with their parents (Sinclair, Dunn et al., 2005). People exhibit more positive implicit attitudes toward women to the degree that they report that their fathers were uninvolved in their childhood (Rudman & Goodwin, 2004). Implicit prejudice against adolescents is greater

among fellow adolescents to the degree that they report having close friendships with adults (Gross & Hardin, 2007). And implicit intergroup prejudice between Korean and Japanese students in the U.S. is greater to the degree that participants remain connected to their ethnic heritage through language (Greenwald et al., 1998).

We believe that the reason why patterns of implicit prejudice generally track culture-wide social organization and practice is because social organizational structure largely determines who interacts with whom and the conditions in which they do so. The strongest evidence for this claim comes from research demonstrating that implicit prejudice is subject to the demands of immediate social situations and interpersonal dynamics, like human behavior more generally (e.g., Ross & Nisbett, 1991). For example, white participants exhibit lower implicit prejudice in the presence of a likeable black experimenter than a likeable white experimenter (Lowery et al., 2001; see also Richeson & Ambady, 2003). This research suggests further that interpersonal effects on implicit prejudice are due in part to the degree that people are interpersonally engaged with others presumed to hold prejudice-related values—that is, when they desire, are obligated or are otherwise motivated to establish or maintain the relationship. For example, participants exhibit less implicit racial prejudice in the presence of an experimenter wearing a t-shirt with an anti-racism message than a blank t-shirt, but only to the degree that the experimenter is likeable (Sinclair, Lowery, et al., 2005). Importantly, when the experimenter is dislikeable, implicit prejudice is actually greater in the presence of the ostensibly egalitarian experimenter.

Congruent with this analysis, diversity education with a likeable black professor reduces implicit prejudice and does so through liking for the professor and increased friendships with other African Americans (Rudman, Ashmore, & Gary, 2001), and thinking about likable gay-positive role models increases endorsement of gay-positive attitudes including legalizing civil unions for gays and lesbians (Dasgupta & Rivera, 2008). In a cautionary note, however, evidence also suggests that for groups who remain broadly stigmatized across society, a single encounter with a member of the stigmatized group can easily backfire, even if the encounter is positive. For example, college students who report having no gay friends at all exhibit greater implicit anti-gay prejudice when a male experimenter incidentally mentions his “boyfriend” than his “girlfriend,” and collegiate women who report having no lesbian friends exhibit greater implicit anti-lesbian prejudice when the experimenter is ostensibly from a gay and lesbian organization than another campus organization (Cheung, Fingerhut et al., 2009).

To this point, we have discussed evidence that shared reality regulates prejudice directed towards others, but research also shows that shared reality regulates prejudice directed towards the self. For example, Asian-American women evaluate their math ability as greater when their ethnicity is salient than when their gender is salient, but evaluate their verbal ability as greater when their gender is salient than when their ethnicity is salient (Sinclair et al., 2006). Importantly, however, this research shows that self-stereotyping is intimately bound up with what participants think close others think about them. Although Asian Americans and European Americans exhibit substantial self-stereotyping, they do so only to the extent that they believe that close others stereotype

them. On the other hand, African Americans exhibit negligible self-stereotyping of this type and do so for the very same reason—avoiding self-stereotyping to the extent that they believe close others do not stereotype them.

Finally, research on the social tuning of prejudice and stereotyping demonstrates that interpersonal dynamics regulate ideological thinking in complex ways. For example, exclusion from a cooperative game by ostensibly anti-black partners reduces implicit prejudice, but has the opposite effect among participants who share a simple idiosyncratic connection with their ostracizers (e.g., a birthday or favorite food)—an interpersonal connection apparently not easily broken (Cheung, Noel et al., in press). That is, under the circumstance of feeling uncannily connected, interpersonal exclusion by ostensibly anti-black partners actually increased implicit prejudice, perhaps in response to the threat to the connection the social exclusion posed. A second experiment demonstrated that the effect extends to ideologically consistent self-stereotyping. Exclusion from a game played with ostensibly gender-traditional men reduced implicit identification with the gender-traditional family role among women, unless they thought they shared a birthday or favorite food with their ostracizers. This simple connection caused women to exhibit greater implicit identification with the family when they were excluded than included in the game.

Taken together, research on the social control of implicit prejudice suggests that stereotypes and prejudice—as culturally shared ideological expressions—operate in ways

that strongly implicate the role of interpersonal regulation and motivation through shared reality processes.

INTERPERSONAL FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES

It has been noted at least since the Enlightenment that religion enables people to cope with life challenges, including but not limited to poverty, dangerous working conditions, sexual subjugation, slavery, and death. Common religious tropes present a kind of face-valid evidence that religion may operate ideologically. In the Christian canon, for example, “blessed are the meek” whose “reward is not on earth but in heaven,” which is where “the last shall be first” and “lions will lie down with sheep.” Though the metaphor for the effects of religious faith appears near fifty years earlier in Marquis de Sade’s *Juliette* (1797/1994), it is Marx (1843) who is most famous for observing that “Religion is the ... opiate of the people.” Of course, the argument that religious beliefs explain, rationalize, and otherwise comfort those oppressed by the human condition is hardly limited to the writings of Marx, including Freud, Malinowski, Nietzsche, Russell, Weber and Voltaire. William James (1902/1985) captured the ideological nature of religion with characteristic grace writing, “*Religion . . . makes easy and felicitous what in any case is necessary...*” (p. 56, emphasis in the original).

Although it is not our primary purpose here to make the case that religion functions ideologically, the fact that religion is strangely absent from contemporary social-psychological discussions of ideology makes it necessary. In fact, the ideological

functions of religion are identified in research across a variety of empirical methodologies, measurement dimensions, and populations. Moreover, like prejudice and other more commonly studied dimensions of ideology, evidence suggests that religious attitudes are animated by interpersonal dynamics along lines implied by shared reality theory.

Religion as Ideology

The claim that religion functions in part to justify the status quo may be modern, but the notion that religious faith palliates fear of death is both ancient and ubiquitous, spanning canonical writings of all the world's major religions, Greek and Roman mythology, and virtually all documented pre-industrial oral traditions (e.g., Campbell, 1949; Freud, 1921/1959; Geertz, 1973; James, 1902/1985; Levi-Strauss, 1966; Malinowski, 1948; Smith, 1998). Although the adage that “there are no atheists in foxholes” may well be debatable, it does capture the popular assumption that a primary benefit of religion is to enable people to cope with mortality—an assumption that is strongly supported empirically. Religiosity assuages fear of death, and does so as the prospect of death increases (for a review see Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985). Moreover, a recent but growing literature demonstrates the relationship is causal (for a review see Greenberg, Landau, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, in press; cf. Burling, 1993). In one experiment, for example, exposure to images of corpses and descriptions about death from disease and accidents reduces fear of death and increase belief in an afterlife among religious believers but not among nonbelievers (Osarchuk & Tate, 1973). In another

experiment, defensive responses to an experimental manipulation of thoughts of personal mortality are greater among people low in religious fundamentalism than people high in religious fundamentalism (Friedman & Rholes, 2008).

Religion not only provides solace for death but satisfaction in life, which is no trivial matter given that most people in the world face moderate to severe social and economic challenges. Religiosity predicts greater happiness, life satisfaction, sense of purpose, and mental health (for reviews see Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Hardy, 1979). Moreover, the palliative effect of religious beliefs are stronger to the degree that life circumstances are likely to be difficult, that is, when the salve that religious beliefs may offer may be especially useful. For example, religious belief in an afterlife more strongly predicts happiness in the elderly than the young (e.g., Steinitz, 1980), and the benefits of church attendance on life satisfaction are greater to the degree that people are elderly, in poor health, and socially isolated (e.g., Moberg & Taves, 1965). Religion is used to cope with stress more among those likely to have difficult lives, including women more than men, old more than young, blacks more than whites, widowed more than married, uneducated more than educated, and poor more than rich (for a review see Pargament, 1997). In what may be the ultimate criterion of life satisfaction, religiosity is implicated in reduced suicide rates (cf. Durkheim, 1897). Suicide rates are lower among those who attend church regularly than those who do not (e.g., Bainbridge, 1997; Comstock & Partridge, 1972), and lower among members of churches promoting social networking programs than members of churches that do not (Stack & Wasserman, 1992).

Evidence that religion may assuage existential anxiety and enhance life satisfaction certainly reflects ideological thinking, but contemporary research on ideology has focused most on acquiescence to existing social and economic injustice (for reviews see Jost, in press; Jost & Major, 2001; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). By this criterion, the mark of ideology is the degree to which it facilitates endorsement of attitudes that indicate acceptance of the status quo, including racial and gender hierarchies as well as other dimensions of allegiance to the status quo like political conservatism. Although most of this evidence is correlational, is it broadly consistent with the claim that religion promotes attitudes that reflect, perpetuate, and justify the status quo. For example, religiosity is associated with political conservatism, authoritarianism, Protestant work ethic, social dominance orientation, and system justification (e.g., Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Furnham, 1990; for a review see Jost et al., 2003).

Religiosity predicts prejudice against stigmatized groups, including findings that increasing church attendance predicts greater racism and anti-Semitism (reviewed in Batson et al., 1993; see also Adorno et al., 1950), although some evidence indicates that those who are extremely religious exhibit the relatively lower levels of prejudice characteristic of the nonreligious (e.g., Perkins, 1985; Struening, 1963). Congruent with our argument that ideological thinking serves interpersonal concerns, evidence suggests that the relationship between religiosity and prejudice is bound up with specific attitudes shared within particular religious communities, which can and do vary a great deal. For example, anti-Semitism is greater among members of religious groups that expressly teach Jewish culpability for Jesus' crucifixion (e.g., Glock & Spark, 1965). Although

research suggests that intrinsic religiosity does not predict prejudice against groups deemed by religious ingroups as socially acceptable today (e.g., Jews, blacks), it nonetheless does predict more prejudice against groups that continue to be deemed by many religious ingroups as unacceptable (e.g., homosexuals, communists) (e.g., Batson et al., 1993; Haidt & Hersh, 2001.)

Interpersonal foundations of religious experience

Religion may well be the strongest and most ubiquitous element of social identity (e.g., Christiano, Swatos, & Kivisto, 2002). Compared to other social groupings religious communities are especially cohesive. For example, most important close relationships come from within the religious community (e.g., Kaldor, Bellamy, Powell, Correy, & Castle, 1994), and a wide variety of community-specific religious experiences, from visceral transcendence to ecstatic “speaking in tongues,” occur more to the degree that they are perceived as desirable and expected within the religious ingroup (Spilka et al., 1996). We argue that religion resonates not just because of group membership per se (e.g., Turner, 1991), but to the extent that group identities and other experiences are interpersonally shared within particular relationships. As James (1897/1979) wrote, “Our faith is faith in some one else’s faith...” (p. 9).

The psychodynamic tradition famously located individual religious identity within the very first interpersonal relationships one has. From this perspective, religious beliefs are internalized through intense identification with one’s parents, and the most primitive

function of these and other self-identifications is to provide a psychological means to cope with anxiety about parental disapproval and separation (Freud, 1921/1959, 1927/1975, 1933/1990; McDargh, 1983; Meissner, 1984; Sullivan, 1953). Indeed, research shows that by far the largest predictor of religious identity is the religious identity of one's parents (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977; Cavalli-Sforza, Feldman, Chen, & Dornbusch, 1982), evidence especially persuasive in countries like the U.S. in which hundreds of specific thriving religious traditions afford easily accessible alternatives to the family religion. Freud argued further that shared group identities inhibit ingroup conflict and justify intergroup conflict to the degree that members of the group perceive themselves as having mutually shared identifications with father-like group leaders, authorities, and guiding ideals—an argument based in no small part on his analysis of religious experience (Freud, 1913/1950, 1921/1959). Indeed, contemporary research shows that religiosity strongly predicts adherence to the duties, obligations, morals, values and beliefs perceived to be shared within the family and society (e.g., Rasmussen & Charman, 1995; see also Higgins, 1989).

Shared reality theory implies that religious identity is not simply passed down from parent to child but that it is perpetually regulated by family dynamics over time in the context of other interpersonal relationships. Life in multicultural societies is commonly punctuated with encounters with others who hold different beliefs as well as those with worldviews that may challenge assumptions established and cultivated within the family. To the extent that inevitable challenges to religious beliefs also challenge the relationships in which religion is shared, as shared reality theory implies, religious beliefs

should be psychologically vital to the extent that parental relationships are stable. By the same token, religious beliefs should be vulnerable to the extent that parental relationships are unstable (Magee & Hardin, in press). Hence, indicators of the quality of the parental relationships should predict the type and stability of the religious beliefs shared within the relationship—a hypothesis supported from the “cradle to the grave.”

Not only is religiosity established within the family soon after infancy, but religiosity increases in intensity over the early teenage years among children in highly religious homes and decreases in intensity among children in less religious homes (Ozarak, 1989). Religiosity among adolescents is predicted especially strongly by religious activities shared with parents, including prayer and Bible study within the home as well as outside the home in shared church attendance (e.g., Erickson, 1992). Religious conversation away from the family religion occurs most often in adolescence (e.g., Johnson, 1959; Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996), a period characterized by increasingly alienation from parents and increasingly intense relationships with peers who often have different religious beliefs (e.g., Harris, 1995; Salzman, 1953). For example, adolescent converts are especially likely to report family problems and poor relationships with their parents (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). In a study that followed some fifteen hundred high-school seniors for up to sixteen years, children were less likely to leave the family religion to the degree that they remained strongly connected to the family (Wilson & Sherkat, 1994). Notably, however, people who do convert away from the family religion in their youth commonly return to it when they marry and have children of their own (e.g., Roof, 1993), which is when their life circumstance newly

affords avenues of shared reality with their parents—among others things, shared experiences as parents. Finally, given evidence that specific shared practices and identification with parents is a strong predictor of religiosity, it is no surprise that personality traits associated with social alienation also predict religious conversion, including stormy adolescence (Ullman, 1982) and low self-esteem (Hallahmi & Nevo, 1987; Pratt, 1924).

Most contemporary research on the familial foundations of religious experience has emerged from the attachment literature, which postulates that cognitive expectancies involving trust and predictability are learned and established within the family, eliciting relationship expectancies that may vary from secure parental attachment to variations of insecure parental attachment (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). To the extent that parental attachment reflects the quality and vitality of relationships with parents, shared reality theory implies that attachment security should predict the stability of experiences and beliefs shared with parents, including religiosity. Conversely, if religious ideas are not tethered to stable, vital relationships then they may be more vulnerable to competing social influences. Consistent with this prediction, research shows that adult religiosity is more strongly related to the religiosity of their parents among those who are securely attached to their parents than those who are insecurely attached (Granqvist, 1998, 2002; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990).

Given that religious conversion has been identified as a particularly acute form of rebellion against parents (Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977), conversion out of the family religion should be associated with insecure parental attachment. Indeed, evidence suggests that suggests that people insecurely attached to their parents are more likely to experience major religious change or religious conversion than people securely attached to their parents (Granqvist, 1998; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; Granqvist, Ivarson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 1997, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). For example, religious conversion data from 11 independent studies involving nearly fifteen-hundred participants indicate that those with insecure parental attachment are more likely to have experienced a sudden religious conversion than participants with secure attachments (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004). Few conversion studies record specific details surrounding the life experiences related to the religious conversions, but those that do suggest that religious conversions are related to relationship problems (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Indeed, the most common theme predicting religious conversation is relationship problems, including the death of a significant other (Granqvist, 1998).

The role of the family in religiosity is not limited to the Judeo-Christian tradition in which conceptions of God are nearly always paternal. Evidence suggests that the vast majority of members of groups outside this tradition arrive from the Judeo-Christian traditions (e.g., Ullman, 1982). And given that new-age adherents, for example, almost always migrate from traditionally religious families, it is telling that familial attachment predicts conversion to new-age beliefs. New-age beliefs are positively related to insecure

parental attachment but negatively related to secure parental attachment (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001; see also Granqvist et al., 2007). Moreover, participants who perceive their parents to be insensitive are more likely to report sudden religious changes and endorse new-age beliefs (Granqvist, et al., 2007).

Although the research we have reviewed to this point strongly implicates the role of interpersonal relationships in the regulation of religious beliefs, it almost exclusively involves non-experimental, correlational designs, leaving open the possibility that it is not relationship dynamics that regulate religious dynamics but rather that religious dynamics regulate relationship dynamics. According to shared reality theory, the causal influence should flow in both directions. Not only do living relationships engender relationship-relevant shared realities, but relationships are established and maintained to the degree that relationship partners share reality. Hence, religious shared reality should also be implicated in the trajectory of relationships. That is, people should feel closer, more connected to, and identified with those with whom they share religious experience. Although the research on religion relevant to this claim is largely limited to studies of marriage, the findings corroborate the hypothesis. Marital happiness is greater in religious couples than non-religious couples or mixed-religion couples (for a meta-analysis see Witter et al., 1985). Compared to nonreligious couples, religious couples report greater marital commitment, less extra-marital sex, and less disagreement about beliefs and values (e.g., Hood et al., 1996). Shared religion is also implicated in marital stability. Divorce rates are much lower among couples who share religious beliefs than among those who do not (e.g., Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993). Moreover, a longitudinal study

indicates that the strongest predictor of marital stability is regular, joint church attendance (Heaton & Call, 1997). Finally, in investigations across a variety of religious faiths and several independent studies, divorce rates are much lower among religious couples whose church attendance is high than low (reviewed in Heaton & Goodman, 1985). Although such findings are likely determined by a variety of factors, they are broadly consistent with the claim that religious shared reality elicits relationship stability.

Although hardly conclusive, the correlational and longitudinal evidence we have identified to this point is consistent with the two key implications of shared reality theory, namely that (a) shared religiosity within specific interpersonal relationships enhances the stability of those relationships, and (b) the quality of specific interpersonal relationships induces religious shared reality. However, the strongest support for these hypotheses necessitates research in which the causal relationships can be experimentally captured. Unfortunately, very little experimental research on the topic has been done. Yet the experiments on the topic that do exist corroborate these hypotheses. For example, Christian and Jewish participants express greater inter-religious prejudice after thinking about an ingroup religious icon (e.g., Christ, Abraham) than an entertainment icon (e.g., Madonna, Elvis), and do so to the degree that they perceive themselves as devout, integrated members of their religious community (Felix & Hardin, 2009).

Experiments show that threats to religious belief are handled differently as a function of parental relationship dynamics. To the extent that threats to religious belief also threaten the relationships within which the beliefs are shared, shared reality theory

implies that psychological responses to the threats will be different for those who perceive their religious experience to be shared in secure versus insecure parental relationships. Religious experience shared in secure parental relationships should be defended, but religious experience shared in insecure parental relationships should be malleable. In one ingenious experiment, for example, the threat to religious shared reality was manipulated by subliminal exposure to either the phrase “God has forsaken me” or a control phrase unrelated to religion (Birgegard & Granqvist, 2004). Exposure to the threatening phrase increased religiosity among participants securely attached to their parents but decreased religiosity among participants insecurely attached to their parents. A second experiment provided complementary evidence of interpersonal concerns in the maintenance of religious beliefs by examining the consequences of threats to a specific parental relationship. Subliminal exposure to the phrase “Mother is gone” increased religiosity among securely attached participants but decreased religiosity among insecurely attached participants—an effect that resonates with the finding that even threats to seemingly trivial connections in new relationships are met with a bolstering of relationship-relevant implicit stereotyping and prejudice (Cheung, Fingerhut et al., in press).

Research in our laboratory has identified the specific role of religious shared reality in response to threats to religious faith and in addition implicated religious shared reality in the regulation of interpersonal relationships outside the family (Magee & Hardin, in press). In an experiment designed to test the role of interpersonal relationship quality in the stability of religious beliefs, subliminal exposure to words associated with

evolution (e.g., Darwin, mutation, adaptation) decreased religiosity among participants insecurely attached to their parents but increased religiosity among participants securely attached to their parents. In a parallel experiment designed to test the specific role of religious shared reality in the stability of religious beliefs, subliminal exposure to evolution words decreased religiosity among participants who perceived their religious experience to be unshared with their fathers but increased religiosity among participants who perceived their religious experience to be shared with their fathers. In addition, findings in both experiments suggest that the dynamics of religious experience are expressed in a web of interpersonal relationships not limited to the family. The religious threat manipulation also affected attitudes toward atheists, a group with beliefs that are famously incompatible with religion. Although subliminal exposure to evolution words increased prejudice against atheists among participants securely attached to their parents or who perceived religious shared reality with their fathers, thoughts of evolution decreased prejudice against atheists among participants insecurely attached to their parents or who perceived a lack of religious shared reality with their fathers.

Results from both experimental programs of research demonstrate the inextricable role of interpersonal relationship regulation in the dynamics of religious faith in complementary ways. Congruent with implications of shared reality theory, both demonstrate that religious faith can be shaken if the relationships in which religion is shared are unstable as well as that threats to religious faith result in the bolstering of religion when the relationships in which religion is shared are stable. Findings also demonstrate that religious beliefs are used to regulate threats to relationships in which

religion is shared. Although a direct threat to a specific interpersonal relationship (i.e., mother is gone) may shake the religious shared reality if that relationship is insecure, the threat is met with a bolstering of religious shared reality if the relationship is secure (Birgegard & Granqvist, 2004). Results from our laboratory demonstrate that the specific perception of religious shared reality moderates the stability of religious faith. Religious faith perceived to be unshared is easily shaken but religious faith perceived to be shared is instead bolstered in response to the threat posed by unconscious thoughts of evolution (Magee & Hardin, in press). Finally, our research suggests that religious experience is not only tied to relationships in which it is shared, but also to relationships in which religious experience is almost certain to be unshared, namely, relationships with atheists.

In sum, research suggests that religion not only functions ideologically, but that religious expression is bound up with interpersonal dynamics along lines implied by shared reality theory. Durkheim (1912) observed that shared religious beliefs are critical determinants of social solidarity because they bring people together in “common cause.” The common cause we emphasize here is the regulation of mutually shared religious experience.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In contrast to the view of ideologies as belief structures that are stable, consistent, logically (as opposed to psychologically) coherent, and predicated on individualized perceptions of the world, ideologies may change considerably in response to the demands

of both ongoing and temporary social relationships (see also Glassman & Karno, 2007; Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2008). Ideological values and opinions, including those bound up with religious experience and intergroup prejudice, are influenced by the individuals and groups that surround us, and influenced in ways that suggest that a critical motivation for endorsing the ideologies we do is to maintain relationships with others.

From the perspective of shared reality theory, encountering worldviews at odds with those we share in vital relationships is threatening because it calls into question the shared, meaningful set of assumptions upon which a whole web of interpersonal relationships depend. Hence, people may be defensive about their ideological positions not so much to protect their personal beliefs but rather to protect beliefs that are shared with others in necessary or otherwise valued relationships. In other words, people engage in ideological thinking in order to protect relationships with others. This fact may help to explain the fierceness with which individuals and groups strive to avoid, repel, and even eradicate those who endorse competing ideological convictions (e.g., Bar-Tal, 1998; Green, Abelson, & Garnett, 1999; Tindale, Munier, Wasserman, & Smith, 2002). Contemporary crises, including the current Israeli–Palestinian conflict and conflict between the USA and much of the Muslim world, may arise in part because of the threat that is inherent in the existence of competing worldviews and the motivation to defend and protect existing social networks, relationships, and the ideologies on which those relationships are predicated. That is, the mere existence of an alternative worldview may challenge the shared set of beliefs that constitute the very foundation of people’s connections to their family, friends, and social groups.

Importantly, however, shared reality theory implies when and how people may be able to challenge the status quo (cf. Martorana, Galinsky, & Rao, 2005). Although the conditions that produce social change are complex, this perspective suggests that challenging broadly shared conceptions of the status quo requires at minimum shared definitions of reality with important others as fundamentally unjust and oppressive (see Asch, 1952; MacKinnon, 1989). In short, an appreciation of the role of interpersonal dynamics in the vicissitudes of ideology not only explains its stubborn persistence but also implies a course for change.

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