

*Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 2002, pp. 43–52

## **Them and Us: Hidden Ideologies—Differences in Degree or Kind?**

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*This article looks at three measuring instruments—the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale, the Social Dominance Orientation Scale, and the Attitudes About Reality Scale—used to examine covert ideology and its relationship to social and political beliefs and behaviors. These scales share similar ideological components involving abdication of moral responsibility to an outside agent, belief that one's own ideology represents the only form of truth, and negative beliefs about individuals who are not members of one's own group. Evidence is provided to suggest that radical fundamentalists and some groups within U.S. society share ideological beliefs that differ in degree rather than kind. These beliefs make it easy for them to divide the world into “us” and “them” and exacerbate the present conflict.*

Ever since the terrible events of September 11, there has been much discussion in the media about how an extremist worldview can propel individuals to perform horrific acts of violence. It is important to remember, however, that radical fundamentalists are not the only group to possess a worldview. A worldview may be defined as a set of covert values and beliefs that is not often discussed with others and, indeed, is rarely examined by the individual who possesses it. Because of this lack of scrutiny, it is only recently that psychologists have begun to identify such hidden ideologies and to explore their influence on various attitudes and behaviors.

In this article I will discuss three measures of covert ideology that seem to be particularly relevant to political attitudes and beliefs about intergroup conflict. These are the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA), the Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDO), and the Attitudes About Reality Scale (AAR). Although each of these scales has a different conceptual framework, there appears to be some

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overlap among them. I shall briefly review evidence that members of particular demographic groups are likely to score similarly on the three scales, that these scales predict comparable beliefs about intergroup relationships as well as the level of hostility directed against others who are defined as *not* members of one's own group, and that they are related to attitudinal position on a variety of ongoing domestic and foreign policy issues. Next, I will review evidence that these scales are related to individual differences in personality and cognitive processing as well as markers of group identification. Finally, I will examine the implications of understanding worldviews commonly found in Western society for understanding the worldview and motivations of radical fundamentalists.

### Scale Definitions and Findings

#### *Right-Wing Authoritarianism*

The RWA is probably the instrument most frequently used by researchers to examine the relationship between covert ideology and political beliefs and attitudes. It was developed by Altemeyer (1981, 1988) to measure (1) degree of acceptance of established authority and law; (2) acceptance of law as the basis of morality; and (3) punitiveness toward "sanctioned targets" such as minority groups, social deviants, and "common criminals" (Christie, 1991).

People who have strong beliefs in religious fundamentalism are also likely to score high in right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Fulton, Gorsuch, & Maynard, 1999). This relationship has been confirmed among individuals from a number of religious backgrounds—Christian, Jewish, Moslem, and Hindu (Hunsberger, 1996). It also appears in studies of other cultures. For example, research in Ghana has found that right-wing authoritarianism and religious fundamentalism were associated in both Christian and Moslem subsamples (Hunsberger, Owusu, & Duck, 1999).

As one might expect, people who endorse politically conservative parties are also likely to score high in right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1988; McHoskey, 1996; Suedfeld, Steel, & Schmidt, 1994). This relationship between authoritarianism and right-wing party preference has been replicated internationally, in Israel (Rubinstein, 1996) and India (Ojha, 1997). The association between right-wing authoritarianism and membership in other demographic categories is less clear. Males tend to score higher on the scale than females (Altemeyer, 1988), despite the fact that women usually score higher on religiosity than men do. (Findings on ethnic, national, and cohort effects are complex and will not be discussed here.)

Right-wing authoritarianism has been found to be associated with negative attitudes toward members of outgroups. For example, researchers have consistently found a positive relationship between authoritarianism and prejudice against homosexuals (Fulton, Gorsuch, & Maynard, 1999; Hunsberger, 1996; Laythe,

Finkel, & Kirkpatrick, 2001; Whitley & Lee, 2000). However, the concept of authoritarianism is applicable to attitudes about many other important social and political issues. In one large-scale study, students scoring high in authoritarianism were also more likely to endorse harsh punitive sentiments and solutions to the problems of AIDS and drugs; express hostility toward the environmental movement rather than polluters; and hold more conservative views on abortion, child abuse, homelessness, and political changes in the Soviet Union (Peterson, Doty, & Winter, 1993). Studies in Australia found that students high in right-wing authoritarianism were more likely to rate a drug-related offense as more serious than students with low right-wing authoritarianism scores. They were less likely to make a distinction between those who intentionally smuggled drugs and those who were duped by another to do so. High authoritarians were also more positive about the imposed penalty and perceived less justification for the offense when the perpetrator was portrayed as Asian rather than Anglo-Australian (Feather & Oberdan, 2000).

### *Social Dominance Orientation*

The SDO is a newer instrument developed to examine the underlying dynamic of many social and political attitudes (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). It is conceptualized as measuring

the value that people place upon non-egalitarian and hierarchically structured relationships among social groups. It expresses general support for the domination of certain socially constructed groups over other socially constructed groups, regardless of the manner in which these groups are defined. These groups may be defined on the basis of "race," sex, nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, region, skin color, clan, caste, lineage, tribe, minimal groups or any other group distinction which the human mind is capable of constructing. (J. Sidanius, personal communication, October 6, 2001)

People who are high in social dominance orientation tend to endorse policies that give advantages to members of their own group in preference to members of groups other than their own. These individuals have been found to favor ideologies that maintain their group's hegemony (for example, racism and belief in meritocracy) and to support policies with negative implications for members of groups with lower status than their own; (for example, negative attitudes about civil rights and social programs; Pratto et al., 1994). Political conservatism, belief in racial superiority, support for the Gulf War, and approval of police behavior in the beating of Rodney King were all significantly and positively related to the level of social dominance orientation in a sample of adults in Los Angeles (Sidanius & Liu, 1992). A later study found that people high in social dominance orientation are more likely to support military programs in general as well as to support specific military actions such as the Gulf War (Pratto, Stallworth, & Conway-Lanz, 1998).

Social dominance orientation has been found to predict inegalitarian beliefs cross-culturally. For example, a study done in Canada, Taiwan, Israel, and China found that social dominance orientation scores correlated with sexism (measured in culturally appropriate ways) in each country and with ethnic prejudice and with other attitudes affirming local hegemony in every country except China (Pratto et al., 2000). Belief in social dominance appears to be associated with a higher position of an individual's group within the local status hierarchy. For example, researchers have found that in both the United States and Israel, social dominance orientation is positively associated with ingroup identification for all high-status groups and negatively associated with ingroup identification for almost all low-status groups (Levin & Sidanius, 1999). For nearly all groups, higher social dominance orientation was associated with more negative affect toward the lower status group.

High scores in social dominance orientation are also associated with patriotism and a conservative political stance for members of dominant groups, but this relationship is not always found among members of groups that are disadvantaged within a society (Levin, Sidanius, Rabinowitz, & Federico, 1998). Recent studies suggest that the attitudes of ethnic-minority individuals high in social dominance orientation about patriotism and conservative policies are influenced by the level of injustice they perceive within society (Rabinowitz, 1999).

It should not be surprising that a number of studies report that men, in general, score higher in social dominance orientation than women do (Pratto et al., 2000). This difference persists across ethnic, class, age, and religious groupings in the United States (Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1994; Sidanius, Pratto, & Rabinowitz, 1994) and across national samples in Europe (Sidanius, Pratto, & Brief, 1995) and the Middle East and China (Sidanius, Levin, Liu, & Pratto, 2000). Findings about greater male support of conservative ideology, military programs, and punitive policies and greater female support of social programs and equal rights appear to be accounted for by the gender difference in social dominance orientation (Pratto, Stallworth, & Sidanius, 1997).

Although the SDO shares some variance with the RWA (Altemeyer, 1998), it predicts quite different relationships in terms of group identification. Thus, in contrast to studies using the RWA, social dominance orientation is not highly correlated with religiosity in either the United States or Israel (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). In these societies neither religion nor religiosity appear to be highly related to relative status. On the other hand, both instruments find higher scores in males than in females.

#### *Attitudes About Reality*

The AAR is a more general measuring instrument than the RWA or SDO. This scale was designed to examine views about the relationship between subjective and

external reality in a variety of conceptual domains (Unger, Draper, & Pendergrass, 1986). People who score high on this scale appear to have a positivist view of reality. They believe in the validity of external reality and the legitimacy of some form of authority external to themselves. They tend to believe that their own values and those of their source of authority are universally true, to favor the socio-political status quo within their own society, and to prefer deterministic rather than relativistic explanations of various social issues. In contrast, those who score low on this scale (constructionists) tend to see external reality as historically and situationally determined, to accept as legitimate individual and group efforts to change the status quo, and to prefer social solutions for many social ills rather than solutions based on physical science.

Positivist scores on the AAR have been found to be associated with commitment to more conservative or right-wing political parties. Positivism has also been found to be associated with religiosity in Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish students in the United States (Jackson & Jeffers, 1989; Unger et al., 1986) and in Jewish, Christian, and Moslem students in Israel (Unger & Safir, 1994). Like the SDO, the AAR has been found to share a modest amount of variance with the RWA (Evans, 2000). Positivists share with high authoritarians a negative view of homosexuals (Gaydos, 2000) and people with AIDS (Ariely-Kagan, 1991). They have repeatedly been shown to have more sexist attitudes about the roles of women and men in society (Draper, 1990; Ricketts, 1992; Unger, 1984–1985). Unlike the RWA and the SDO, however, no strong or consistent gender differences have been found in scores on the AAR.

Attitudes about reality in general are related to attitudes about particular social and political issues. For example, positivists are more likely than constructionists to believe that nuclear weapons can effectively deter war, that space weapons can defend against a nuclear attack, and that governmental policies would ensure survival in the event of a nuclear attack (Columbus, 1993). Positivists were also more likely to support the Gulf War and to allocate more blame to Saddam Hussein for starting it (Unger & Lemay, 1991).

#### *Personality and Cognitive Variables Associated With These Scales*

People who score high in right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, or positivist attitudes about reality seem to share a similar pattern of undesirable personality traits. For example, those who score high on the RWA have been found to score higher in dogmatism (Altemeyer, 1988), to have less tolerance for ambiguity (W. J. Evans, 2000), and to show less self-awareness (Altemeyer, 1999) than people who score lower on this scale. Positivist individuals have also been found to be higher in dogmatism and the belief in a just world (Draper, 1990). And an inverse relationship between positivism and the use of principled moral reasoning has been found, but only in males (Walker, Rowland, &

Boyes, 1991). There are fewer studies of the connection between social dominance orientation and personality variables, although social dominance orientation has been found to be negatively correlated with empathy, tolerance, communalism, and altruism (Pratto et al., 1994). An early study by one of the researchers who developed the SDO also reported that the greater an individual's racism, the lower the level of his or her cognitive and political sophistication (Sidanius & Lau, 1989). Positivist scores on the AAR are also negatively correlated with grade point average and level of university education (Unger, 1996).

There have, of course, been a number of studies of religious fundamentalism and political conservatism that have not made use of measures of covert ideology. These studies also indicate that conservative religious and political beliefs are associated with a lack of openness to experience (Streyffeler & McNally, 1998) and that the need for closure increases the more right-wing is the orientation of the political party an individual endorses (Kemmelmeier, 1997).

### The Implications of Covert Ideology for Understanding Terrorism

It is difficult to disentangle the pernicious worldviews uncovered by the measuring instruments discussed above. One can only extrapolate that radical fundamentalists would probably score high on all three measures. However, the studies discussed above suggest that covert worldviews exist within Western society that differ in degree rather than kind from the worldview of the radical fundamentalists who bombed the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon. These worldviews share certain features, including abdication of moral responsibility to a source outside oneself, maintenance of attitudes and behaviors that value one's own group at the expense of other "deviant" groups, and closing oneself off from experiences and viewpoints that might influence the worldview one possesses. These ideology-maintaining mechanisms make it easy for people to believe that there is no true worldview other than their own and to demonize others who do not recognize this "truth."

Belief in their God-given authority has allowed the Taliban to imprison women and girls in their homes and force them into invisibility when they leave them. However, other fundamentalist forms of religion also attempt to control the bodies, behavior, and attire of women in the name of modesty. Two of the most prominent members of the religious right in the United States, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, blamed their own outgroups for the terrorist bombings a few days after they occurred: "Civil liberties groups, feminists, homosexuals and abortion rights supporters bear partial responsibility for Tuesday's terrorist attacks because their actions have turned God's anger against America" (Harris, 2001, p. C03). Although they later apologized for their remarks, a few weeks later another conservative minister called on public agencies to deny giving assistance to surviving same-sex partners of victims of the September 11 attacks (Musbach, 2001).

Women appear to be less likely to score high in right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation than are men. We should not believe, however, that being female protects one from these ways of looking at the world. It is likely that other sources of group identity interact with gender. For example, although I have found no important sex differences in attitudes about reality in the United States, gender and religiosity interacted in Israel. Indeed, religious women tended to be more positivist than religious men, although this difference was not significant. Religious and secular men had similar scores, and the only group that was significantly less positivist than the others was secular women (Unger, 1992). It is important to recognize that there is a diversity of ways in which people can look at and explain reality. It is also important to recognize that there is no necessary relationship between membership in a particular racial or ethnic group and a particular way of looking at the world.

What can we do about worldviews that are harmful to others? As usual, it is easier to state the problem than to find the solutions. One solution is to maintain and increase educational experiences with others unlike oneself. We must continue to talk to each other across political and religious lines. One study has found, for example, that men who went to an elite single-sex private school scored as more positivist in later years than men who had gone to a similarly elite but coeducational school (Addleston, 1995). Within-group education appears to reinforce beliefs about their own hegemony in individuals from dominant groups within society. Exposure to intellectual diversity may also be important. Thus, one study in Israel found that right-wing authoritarianism was lower among humanities majors than among students majoring in other disciplines within the same university (Rubinstein, 1997).

It is also important to recognize that situational factors are just as important as intrapsychic factors in altering sociopolitical views. For example, societal threat activates authoritarian predispositions (Feldman & Stenner, 1997). And powerlessness is associated with authoritarian beliefs (G. Evans, 1993). But authoritarianism can also increase nationalistic bias (Altemeyer & Kamenshikov, 1991). The recent increase in nationalism in the United States has been accompanied by an increase in hate crimes.

We do not know the direction of causality between worldviews and our beliefs about specific social issues and political events. Patriotism and nationalism are double-edged swords. At the same time as they unite us in a common purpose, they make it easy to see others as the enemy—as unlike ourselves. It is possible that the “war against terrorism” will increase “normative” levels of authoritarianism, social dominance, and positivist ideation. It might “just” make people who think in these ways more influential than they have been in recent years. Or, it may give such individuals “permission” to act against those they perceive as different from themselves. None of these are positive developments. It would indeed be a victory for the enemy if they can turn us into people who think more like themselves.

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