



Searching for certainty: Religious beliefs and intolerance toward value-violating groups



Małgorzata Kossowska*, Maciej Sekerdej

Jagiellonian University, Poland

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 January 2015

Received in revised form 23 March 2015

Accepted 28 March 2015

Available online 9 April 2015

Keywords:

Uncertainty avoidance

Religiosity

Prejudice toward value-violating groups

ABSTRACT

Religiosity has been consistently linked to prejudice toward a variety of outgroups. This article proposes that this is the case only when religiosity reflects a specific aspect of seeking guidance and security in daily practices and complex sociocultural norms. Outgroups that challenge the epistemic certainty that belief in God provides are rejected in an effort to protect this certainty. The results from two studies found that uncertainty avoidance was related to belief in God and this belief mediated the relationship between uncertainty avoidance and intolerance within the context of general human rights (Study 1), and the derogation of value-violating groups (e.g., homosexuals or followers of other religions) but not of groups that pose no threat to religious values (old or poor people) (Study 2). The interpretative dimension of religiosity (i.e., the way in which people process religious content) is not connected to security seeking, as reflected in the lack of a correlation with uncertainty avoidance and with different prejudice measures. The results are discussed in relation to past research on religiosity and prejudice, and suggest that for people who avoid uncertainty, only those types of religious beliefs that provide a sense of certainty are linked with intolerance toward value-violating groups.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Uncertainty is an uncomfortable and aversive state, and experiencing it can thus constitute a threat (Hogg, 2007; Kruglanski, 1989; Van den Bos, 2009). Therefore, people generally feel a need to either eliminate uncertainty or find a way to make it tolerable and cognitively manageable. They do this in a variety of ways, most notably by adhering to personal goals, values or cultural worldviews (for overview: Jonas et al., 2014). Thus, our attempts to reduce uncertainty constitute a self-regulatory process through which people assign value to their daily practices and sociocultural norms. It may be expected that religious beliefs also buffer against and provide relief from the experience of uncertainty by offering simple maps of meaning and by providing guidance with respect to general perspectives on life (Brandt & Reyna, 2010; Hommel & Colzato, 2010). To maintain the stability and certainty that some types of religious beliefs provide, people who threaten a particular belief are often rejected and even treated with hostility (e.g., Brandt & Reyna, 2010; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). One strategy that people use to protect the certainty that religious beliefs provide is through intolerance toward

value-violating groups (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2005; Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005). In this paper, we aimed to demonstrate that uncertainty avoidance is related to not all religious beliefs, but only to those that provide a sense of certainty, and that these particular beliefs are protected from threats to this certainty by intolerance toward value-violating groups. In that way, our study contributes to the existing literature on the relationship between religiosity and feelings of uncertainty. This study also helps to shed light on how certain types of religiosity can interact with uncertainty avoidance, thereby leading to intergroup prejudice.

1.1. Religious beliefs as a cognitive response to uncertainty

Managing uncertainty includes various proximal defenses (e.g., the avoidance of potentially threatening stimuli, objects and situations; see: Corr, 2011) and distal defenses (e.g., eager and unequivocal engagement with an incentive or commitment; see: Harmon-Jones, Amodio, & Harmon-Jones, 2010). Using distal responses, people can activate palliative-approach-motivated states by pursuing concrete incentives (e.g., chocolate, gambling for money) or abstract incentives such as ideals, ideologies, and religious beliefs. Researchers believe that these abstract incentives may be more reliable because they can be effortlessly evoked in the

* Corresponding author at: Institute of Psychology, ul. Ingardena 6, 30-056 Kraków, Poland. Tel.: +48 12 663 24 17.

E-mail address: malgorzata.kossowska@uj.edu.pl (M. Kossowska).

privacy of one's own mind, free from exertion, conflict, the risk of failure, or aversive consequences (for review: I. McGregor, Nash, & Prentice, 2010).

Many studies suggest that religious beliefs as distal reactions may be particularly effective in relieving anxiety (e.g., I. McGregor, Haji, Nash, & Teper, 2008; I. McGregor et al., 2010; Vail et al., 2010; for review: Jonas et al., 2014). Why might religious beliefs act in this way? They represent adherence to a set of religious teachings that are believed to contain the inerrant truth about both existential and ethereal existence (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). Such beliefs are firm, stable, and certain knowledge structures that provide a sense of meaning, coherence, and control while reducing ambiguity (e.g., Hood, Hill, & Williamson, 2005; McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). They also allow people to understand their experiences and to act with purpose in their environments.

In all of the studies cited above, uncertainty was experimentally induced via a number of methods, such as increasing mortality salience, personal uncertainty, or a lack of personal control, or via expectancy violations. We focused, however, on the need for cognitive closure (Kruglanski, 1989) as it constitutes a fundamental epistemic motive underlying how people approach and process social information. Cognitive closure is defined as an individual's desire for clear and certain explanations, over and above their willingness to accept uncertainty and ambiguity (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Thus, uncertainty avoidance is a core definitional element of cognitive closure. Recently, this claim was supported by neuropsychological analysis (Kossowska, Czarnek, Wronka, Wyczesany, & Bukowski, 2014). Individual differences related to the need for closure reflect dispositional variability in the preference for order, predictability, tolerance of ambiguity, and closed-mindedness. The motivational tendencies to avoid or attain closure affect the ways in which people interpret and respond to information in their social environments and can even influence their tendencies to either support and perpetuate the status quo (i.e., cognitive conservatism), or to question and criticize it. Some studies have indeed revealed that the need for closure is positively related to religiosity (Duriez, 2003; Saroglou, 2002) or religious fundamentalism (Brandt & Reyna, 2010).

We suggest however that not all types of religious beliefs, but particularly the orientation toward and the development of a personal relationship with God, may be seen as fulfilling the human need for certainty. These types of beliefs imply acceptance of, and submission to, a divine authority, and thus provide meaning and a clear moral program. For this reason they attract people who prefer structure and certainty in the face of life's complexity and uncertainty. We propose that other types of religious beliefs, i.e., symbolic religious beliefs (Wulff, 1991), quest religious orientation (Batson & Johnson, 1976) or the affirmation of the religious realm (Allport & Ross, 1967), may have a different function that does not regulate uncertainty.

1.2. Uncertainty, religious beliefs and intolerance toward value-violating groups

Nearly every religion preaches tolerance and love for others, including value-violating outgroups. However, for decades, studies have shown links between religion and ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, social distance, and different types of prejudice, particularly racially tainted bias (Batson & Burris, 1994; Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Hall, Matz, & Wood, 2010; Hunsberger, 1995; Whitley, 2009). Some studies show also that the link between religiosity and various forms of prejudice may be mediated by cognitively rigid ideologies (e.g., Johnson et al., 2011; Shen, Haggard, Strassburger, & Rowatt, 2013). In the present research, we aim to provide new insight into this relationship. Namely, we propose

that religiosity, especially understood as the development of a personal relationship with God, reflect a specific aspect of seeking guidance and security in daily practices and complex sociocultural norms. Consequently, as a reaction to uncertainty, religious beliefs lead to prejudicial attitudes, especially against those who are the most threatening to religious worldviews. These groups particularly comprise those who violate moral taboos (e.g., homosexuals) or specific religious doctrines (e.g., followers of other religions). We therefore hypothesized that the belief in God would mediate the relationship between uncertainty avoidance and prejudice. We do not expect these relations referring to this the interpretative dimension of religiosity.

2. Study 1

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants

The participants were 225 Polish citizens (121 were female; 1 respondent did not reveal his/her gender; mean age = 43.8, SD = 12.11, range: 20–84 years) who were recruited via community advertisements. Participants were predominantly Roman Catholic (Roman Catholics 96.4%; Protestants 1.3%, no religion 2.3%). Of these participants, 32.8% had completed higher education, 47.4% had completed secondary school, and 19.9% had completed primary education; 15.5% participants indicated that they had a lower than average income, whereas 6.1% reported a higher income. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

2.1.2. Materials and procedure

To assess individual differences in uncertainty avoidance, we used the Need for Closure scale (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). The items were rated on a six-point scale (from 1 = *completely disagree* to 6 = *completely agree*) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$, $M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.56$). A higher mean score indicated a higher individual need for closure and thus a greater tendency to avoid uncertainty.

As a measure of religiosity, participants completed the Post-Critical Belief Scale (Duriez, Fontaine, & Hutsebaut, 2000; 33 items), rooted in the two dimensions of religion posited by Wulff (1991): (1) inclusion versus exclusion of transcendence, representing the belief in God component of religion (2) literal versus symbolic, representing the interpretative component of religion. We expected that only the first dimension would be related to uncertainty avoidance and thus lead to prejudice toward value-violating groups. Ratings were obtained on a 7-point scale, from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). Higher values on the inclusion vs. exclusion dimension indicate higher levels of the inclusion of transcendence and the belief in God (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$, $M = 4.74$; $SD = 1.34$). Higher values on the literal vs. symbolic dimension indicate higher levels of a literal interpretation of religion (Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$, $M = 3.79$; $SD = 1.00$).

To measure intolerance toward value-violating groups, we asked participants to complete an 18-item scale adapted from the Humans Right Questionnaire (Diaz-Veizades, Widaman, Little, & Gibbs, 1995). Participants assessed the extent to which they would deny the civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights of groups who violate social order and security (1 = not at all, 7 = fully, Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$, $M = 2.81$; $SD = 1.12$). Items used to assess support for civil and political rights referred to the protection of personal liberty, security, and spiritual integrity. Those items that assessed support for social, cultural and economic rights made reference to rights protecting individual employment, social and economic progress, and those that assure an adequate standard of living.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/890135>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/890135>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)