



## A mediational analysis of the role of right-wing authoritarianism and religious fundamentalism in the religiosity–prejudice link

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### ABSTRACT

Most religions teach tolerance; however, dimensions of religiousness and prejudice are often positively related. This study examined whether rigid ideological beliefs associated with religion, such as right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and religious fundamentalism (RF), mediate relationships between general religiosity and certain prejudices. Participants completed self-report measures of RWA, RF, homosexual prejudice, and racial prejudice. State-of-the-art mediation path analysis and structural equation modeling were used to test the mediational effects of RWA and RF on the religiosity–prejudice relationship. Components of RWA and RF fully mediated the relationship between religiosity and prejudice. RF was the strongest mediator of value-violating prejudice, and RWA aggression solely mediated the relationship between religiosity and subtle racism. Cognitively rigid ideologies may be responsible for the appearance of a religiosity–prejudice relationship.

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The relationship between religiosity and prejudice is complex and somewhat paradoxical. Despite most religions teaching tolerance, many dimensions of religiosity and prejudice have been positively associated (Hall, Matz, & Wood, 2010; Whitley, 2009). For instance, general religiousness has been linked with racial and homosexual prejudices in a representative sample of Americans (Rowatt, LaBouff, Johnson, Froese, & Tsang, 2009). Moreover, meta-analyses have indicated positive relationships between religiosity and racial prejudice (Hall, Matz, & Wood, 2010) and homosexual prejudice (Whitley, 2009). Part of this paradox could be attributable to third variables. Rigid ideological beliefs often associated with religiosity, such as right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer, 1981, 1988, 1996) and religious fundamentalism (RF; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992), could be mediating the relationship between religiosity and prejudice. The primary purpose of this study was to use state-of-the-art mediation path analyses (MacKinnon, 2008; MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004) to examine whether components of RWA or RF mediate relationships between general religiosity and racial and homosexual prejudices.

RF is a closed-minded set of beliefs contingent upon one fundamental, inerrant set of teachings about humanity and the deity (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). Religious fundamentalists think less complexly about a variety of issues, including issues regarding prejudice such as holding stereotypes (Pancer, Jackson,

Hunsberger, Pratt, & Lea, 1995). RWA represents a more general conceptualization of moral values as well as the degree to which these values must be upheld and defended. As indicated by exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (see Mavor, Louis, & Sibley, 2010), RWA is a rigid set of beliefs comprised of three subcomponents: (1) authoritarian aggression – promoting punitive behaviors toward evildoers, (2) authoritarian submission – belief that all legitimate authorities should be obeyed, and (3) conventionalism – a belief there is a certain, inerrant set of values and morals society must uphold (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Mavor et al., 2010; Mavor, Macleod, Boal, & Louis, 2009). Right-wing authoritarians have a tendency to act religiously, including attending church, praying, and reading scripture often (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992).

Both RF and RWA have been associated with rigid or inflexible cognition. RF has been associated with reduced cognitive complexity (Pancer et al., 1995), and measures of cognitive rigidity (e.g., need for cognition, preference for consistency) have been shown to partially mediate the relationship between RF and a variety of prejudices (Hill, Terrell, Cohen, & Nagoshi, 2010). RWA has been associated with resistance to change (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003) as well as need for structure and a greater reliance on heuristic processing (Kimmelmeier, 2010). Individuals high in RWA have tended to submit to authorities, punish evildoers, and enforce strict rules about moral or proper behavior (Altemeyer, 1988). As such, individuals high in RWA have been shown to be highly punitive toward value-violating others such as gay men (Altemeyer, 1988).

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Because not all religious individuals think less complexly, individuals' general religiosity may not be what accounts for prejudiced attitudes among religious individuals. Rather, rigid ideologies often associated with religiosity and responsible for how some religious individuals practice their faith in a closed-minded manner may account for prejudiced attitudes. Additionally, RF and RWA may play different roles in which forms of prejudice they influence or mediate.

We are not the first to implicate RWA or RF as possible mediators of the religiosity–prejudice relationship. Laythe, Finkel, Bringle, and Kirkpatrick (2002) found when RWA was statistically controlled, RF was negatively correlated with racial prejudice and positively correlated with homosexual prejudice. Additionally, Rowatt and Franklin (2004) found when both RWA and RF were statistically controlled, Christian Orthodoxy was negatively correlated with implicit racial prejudice. Perhaps most surprisingly, Fulton, Gorsuch, and Maynard (1999) demonstrated when RF was statistically controlled, intrinsic religiosity was a predictor of tolerance or acceptance toward homosexuals. Although these previous studies are important, Mavor et al. (2009) pointed out RWA and RF scales both contain items with overlapping constructs of conventionalism regarding religious and sexual practices. When the conventionalism confound was removed from RWA, RF correlated positively with both racial and homosexual prejudice even after RWA aggression was statistically controlled (Mavor et al., 2009).

To date, investigators have examined religiosity–prejudice relationships while statistically controlling for RWA and RF using multiple regression analyses (Laythe, Finkel, & Kirkpatrick, 2001; Rowatt & Franklin, 2004). Unlike multiple regressions, structural equation modeling (SEM) allows for simultaneous investigation of multiple mediators of the religiosity–prejudice relationship. Toward this end, the present study tested the hypothesis that RF and the two components of RWA that do not overlap with RF (RWA aggression and submission) would mediate the relationship between religiosity and homosexual and racial prejudice within a SEM framework.

Because both RF and RWA have shown relatively similar associations with prejudice toward homosexuals (Laythe et al., 2001, 2002; Mavor et al., 2009), it was hypothesized in the present study that RWA aggression, RWA submission, and RF would fully mediate the relationship between general religiosity and homosexual prejudice (Hypothesis 1). RWA and its components have been shown to have a stronger association with racial prejudice than RF (Mavor et al., 2009; Laythe et al., 2002). Therefore, it was hypothesized that RWA aggression and RWA submission may fully mediate the relationship between religiosity and racial prejudice (Hypothesis 2).

## 1. Method

### 1.1. Participants

Two hundred eighty-nine undergraduate psychology students (71 males, 216 females; 2 unspecified gender; mean age = 19.94yrs.,  $SD = 3.37$ ) participated in this study for course credit. Our sample consisted of: 61% White, 13% Hispanic, 12% African American, 11% Asian, and approximately 3% "other". Participants were less diverse regarding religious affiliation: 47.1% Protestant, 23.5% "other" religion, 18.7% Catholic, 7.3% "no religion," 1% Hindu, 1% Buddhist, .3% Jewish, .3% Muslim, and .8% did not specify a religious affiliation.

### 1.2. Procedure and measures

An online survey was administered to participants that included measures of religiosity, personality traits, and prejudice. Individuals were given course credit in exchange for participation.

#### 1.2.1. Religiosity

Religiosity was measured as a latent variable with three indicators: intrinsic religiosity, religious behaviors, and general religiosity (see Fig. 1). Intrinsic religious orientation was measured by the *Religious Orientation Scale* (Allport & Ross, 1967), a scale designed to measure "ends" religion or religion inherently important to individuals (e.g., "My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life"; 1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree).

Religious behaviors were measured by standardizing, aggregating, and averaging responses to questions about three indicators of religious behaviors: (1) religious service attendance, (2) reading of sacred texts, and (3) prayer/meditation (cf. Rowatt et al., 2009).

Finally, a single-item measure was used to assess general religiosity (i.e., "To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person"? 1 = not at all, 7 = very much). The loadings for all three indicators of religiosity can be found in Fig. 1.

#### 1.2.2. Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA)

Subscales utilized in this study were part of a larger 10-item scale measuring RWA (Mavor et al., 2009; Smith & Winter, 2002). Mavor et al. (2009) have demonstrated the construct of RWA conventionalism is redundant in this context. After correcting for attenuation due to reliability, conventionalism correlated .99 with fundamentalism and 1.0 with homosexual prejudice. This was largely due to the fact that the construct of conventionalism included both fundamentalism and homosexual prejudice in its definition and measurement. Thus, conventionalism is both conceptually and statistically redundant with these two measures and was therefore not included in the analysis. For completeness the correlations are included in Table 1.

Three items measured RWA aggression (e.g., "What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our true path"), and three items measured RWA submission (e.g., "What our country needs most is discipline, with everyone following our leader in unity"; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

#### 1.2.3. Religious fundamentalism

The 12-item Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004) was used to assess RF (e.g., "God has given humanity a complete, unfailing guide to happiness and salvation, which must be totally followed"; 1 = very strongly disagree, 9 = very strongly agree).<sup>1</sup>

#### 1.2.4. Attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (ATLG)

Prejudice toward gay men/lesbian women was measured using a 10-item short form of the Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (e.g., "Male homosexuality is a perversion"; 1 = very strongly disagree, 7 = very strongly agree; Herek, 1988, 1994).

#### 1.2.5. Subtle racism and tolerance toward African Americans (RAS)

Participants completed a subtle measure of racism, the Racial Argument Scale (RAS; Saucier & Miller, 2003). On the RAS, participants read 13 brief paragraphs, each followed by a conclusion that was either positive or negative toward African-Americans. Participants rated how well the conclusion supported the argument (1 = not at all, 9 = very much). Because this scale was shown to have two separate factors and subscales (positive and negative; see Saucier & Miller, 2003, Study 1), each subscale was examined separately. This allowed us to examine which components of

<sup>1</sup> Religious fundamentalism was used to assess religious conventionalism instead of the RWA conventionalism subscale because the RWA conventionalism subscale: (1) has two items directly related to attitudes toward gay men/lesbians and (2) is the most contentious subscale (Mavor et al., 2009)

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