

# Are There Unconscious Psychological Factors That Contribute to Political Extremism?

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the possibility of common unconscious factors that underpin an individual's identification with political extremism. The issue of common psychological tendencies that have been observed to be prevalent in political extremism will be addressed first to determine how sound this claim is as of existing theories, then I will move on to discussions surrounding introspective psychological theories that attempt to explain the occurrence of these features. This supplementary discussion will analyze the consistencies between the existing literature and the explanatory power of specific theories in relation to one another. On a general note, this paper will first give an overview of existing research on these topics and then discuss the findings of this research in its contributions as collective insight.

## Literature Review

### Determining The Main Psychological Features of Extreme Ideologies

This article by Jan-Willem van Prooijen and Andre P. M. Krouwel seeks to discuss the main psychological features of political extremism as it is determined by the authors that there are abundant similarities between extremists on both sides of the political spectrum. The base argument of this paper refers to the existing Rigidity of the right rigidity-of-the-right model (Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Danel J. Levenson and R. Nevitt Sanford 1950)<sup>1</sup> which proposes that there is a distinction in cognitive styles of the political left and right. Contrary to this, the authors refer to recent research to argue that extremism is seen as a predictor of reactions to political and social events (Jost, 2017). They propose four main psychological features that contribute to or are in accordance with extreme ideologies. This argument is sustained by the belief that, because of the rigidity and dogmatic cognitive styles of all political extremism, these psychological factors are characteristic of either side of the political spectrum.

### A Contemporary Kleinian Contribution to Understanding Racism

Melanie Klein's theories of projective identification and splitting provide explanations for the role of the self and its instabilities to understand the compensation in negative dynamics like prejudice. This article by Brian Rassmusen and Daneil Salhani provided examples of Klein's theory specifically in applications to racism, in an attempt to explore the under-recognized psychological defense mechanisms of self-esteem, developed from birth. While it should be recognized that conflating the complex phenomena of racism to the understanding of political extremism seems inappropriate, this article serves as a very in depth explanation to understanding Kleinian theory in regards to all matters of psychological defense mechanisms. As found later in the paper, supported by a great deal of the additional research, political extremism has been consistently considered to be provoked by a matter of anxious disposition and thus, is fairly generalizable to the unconscious events accompanying racist and prejudiced behaviors.

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<sup>1</sup> John T. Jost and Anna Kende, (2019), Setting the Record Straight: System Justification and Rigidity of the Right in Contemporary Hungarian Politics, *International Journal Of Psychology*, pg. 3

Overall, this article provides insight into Kleinian theory that thoroughly explains projective identification, splitting, paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, envy and reparations, all in the context of ego/self protection. Supported by the additional research in this paper, this article puts this form of behavior in the context of defense against threats to the self and more specifically to self-esteem. This insight is particularly useful in the scope of understanding prejudiced and extremist social categorization resulting from insecurity and anxious projection.

However, as the purpose of this article is specifically regarding racism and microaggressions, it is vital that further research is done to supplement this information so that it can be properly applied to political extremity in a direct sense. The most beneficial aspect of this article in the scope of this paper, comes from its explanation of the Kleinian stages of infant development and how it can give way to projection.

### Interpersonal Attachment and Patterns of Ideological Beliefs

This article provides addition supporting input for the psychanalytic theories of attachment in relation to political ideologies in general. It includes references to two key theories of socio-political ideology, Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) which stand to be principle explanations regarding individual belief systems which associate to political orientation and as explained by this article, they have emerged as “predicting a variety of intergroup phenomena (e.g., prejudice, intolerance, nationalism), as well as more overtly political variables like partisanship, policy preferences, and electoral choice (Altemeyer, 1998; Federico & Sidanius, 2002; McFarland, 2005; Peterson, Doty, & Winter, 1993; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Whitley, 1999; Whitley & Lee, 2000).”<sup>2</sup>. This paper's overall hypothesis predicts that insecure attachment is common in the development of these socio-political orientations.

This article explains theories in relation to group behavior and relationship to authority for SDO and RWA. It does refer to a significant distinction that must be made between ideological values and political attitudes as separate, but often overlapping dimensions.<sup>3</sup> There are specific connections between this article and another article mentioned as a part of this paper's consolidation of relevant research (John Jost et al. Political Conservatism on Motivated Social Cognition) which provides insightful and direct links between existing attachment theories discussed in this paper in relation to the determined cognitive styles of political Conservatives. However, this reference is accompanied by a proposed limitation of this paper regarding its deficiency in exploring the conservative ideology in all relevant dimensions (the continuum in which an individual can have various levels of a characteristic). This article then goes on to explain the existing research on the dimensions of conservative political identity, specifically referring to the proposed framework by Duckitt 2001 in his dual process theory in connection to attachment styles. The paper gives a thorough explanation of attachment theory in relation to ideology. The investigation included in this article seeks to explore the hypothesis that attachment style is in direct coordination to world view, the effects of the two attachment dimensions (anxious or avoidant) should have largely indirect effects on ideological belief systems and finally the general independence of attachment style to specific world views. This paper provides discussion surrounding the order and causality of attachment styles/pathways in accordance with worldview applying these two theories to emphasize correspondence to specific thinking styles. While the contributions of this article are significant, this article acknowledges that these findings are not substantial enough to draw firm and definite conclusions and that further research is required.<sup>4</sup> That said, the associations regarded in this article are particularly useful in the scope of this overall discussion and are supported by the supplementary articles mentioned in this paper.

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<sup>2</sup> Weber, C., & Federico, C. M. (2007). Interpersonal Attachment and Patterns of Ideological Belief. *Political Psychology*, 28(4), 389–416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447056>

<sup>3</sup> Weber, C., & Federico, C. M. (2007). Interpersonal Attachment and Patterns of Ideological Belief. *Political Psychology*, 28(4), 391–416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447056>

## Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition

This paper, as mentioned in reference to the article above, is useful to explore in its alternative approach to understanding the psychological motivations and characteristics of political conservatism. As mentioned above, this paper was described as limited in its description of the dimensions of political conservatism, but for this project's purpose we can broaden its insight when used in combination with the additional informative resources. This paper applies the concepts of motivated social cognition to incorporate the individual unconscious needs and how these events regulate the cognition of the individual. As explained by this article, “Analyzing political conservatism as motivated social cognition integrates theories of personality (authoritarianism, dogmatism–intolerance of ambiguity), epistemic and existential needs (for closure, regulatory focus, terror management), and ideological rationalization (social dominance, system justification)”<sup>5</sup> While this article does explicitly state that it seeks to compare the cognitive styles of conservatives to those of the political left, which is contrary to one of the other papers mentioned in this project (Jan-Willem van Prooijen and Andre P. M. Krouwel), the information provided is still significant in its regard to the wider understanding of the relationship between the individual cognition and political ideologies. In understanding how individual differences associated with intolerance or prejudice can arise from psychological disparities; the complex understanding of political extremity in the general sense becomes more accessible to make assumptions about possible psychic roots.

The main argument of this paper in its acclaimed alternative approach to understanding conservatism is that the existing methods in this field and its approach that is majorly based in personality theory is limiting, arguing that the measure of individual differences to explain this behavior is flawed, the argument of which will be explored in the discussion of this paper. The general theoretical assumptions of this paper are still, however, centered on understanding the motivations of the self, with a mention of directional and non-directional motives in the role of belief formation.<sup>6</sup> This article illuminates the distinctions between its motivated cognition approach from other theories of conservatism before explaining the basis of those existing theories along with the defining features of conservatism itself. The consensus of this paper in its in-depth analysis and comparison of existing theories on the conservative political ideology is that there are substantial links made between individual differences of personality along with cognitive motivations and that these conclusions solidify the claim that situational factors are a strong contributor to circumstances of conservatism.

## Attachment Security Compassion and Altruism

This article can be an incredibly useful recourse to strengthen some of the key concepts proposed by the aforementioned article on Interpersonal Attachments and Ideological beliefs (Weber, C., Ferdico C.) as many of the discussion points are comparatively concordant with the argument of that article. However, this article expands further on political extremity, exploring equally the left side of the political spectrum and the right. Similarly to the previous article on attachment theory, this article centers its argument that the attachment style of an individual can be used to predict later social perceptions. “The operation of this system is affected by an individual's social experiences, especially with early caregivers, resulting in measurable individual differences in attachment security”<sup>7</sup> This article also proposes two strategies within the attachment system that help to predict later cognitive styles. This paper incorporates the link between the caregiving system and the attachment system before giving an overview of existing literature on attachment security.

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<sup>4</sup> Weber, C., & Federico, C. M. (2007). Interpersonal Attachment and Patterns of Ideological Belief. *Political*

*Psychology*, 28(4), 407–416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447056>

<sup>5</sup> Jost, T., et al. “Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition.” *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 129, no. 3, 2003, pp. 1–375, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.3.339>.

<sup>6</sup> Jost, T., et al. “Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition.” *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 129, no. 3, 2003, pp. 2–375, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.3.339>.

Considering the research mentioned, this article provides detail on their own investigation regarding the effects of attachment security on compassion felt towards a distressed individual.

These findings and discussions support the consensus of the ideas presented in the paper concerning ideologies and attachments, strengthening the possibility of the relationship between attachment and social perspectives.

## Discussion

For the purpose of this paper, starting with a direct and clear set of observations from the article entitled: Determining the main psychological features of extreme ideologies, will help to illustrate a representation of the general commonalities that seem to be concordant among the majority of the recourses used in this project. From a general overview of this first recourse, we can proceed to dissect each argument in terms of its validity from agreement in other pieces of relevant literature.

### Generalized Psychological Commonalities and Consistency in Existing Literature

This first article (Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel) takes somewhat of an opposing stance to what is proposed by the rigidity-of-the-right model (Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Danel J. Levenson and R. Nevitt Sanford 1950). This model centers on the idea that the psychological attributes of the extreme right which allow for nationalistic and conservative attitudes are majorly characterized by “higher levels of fear and cognitive and perceptual rigidity, dogmatism, intolerance of ambiguity, epistemic needs for order, simplicity, structure and closure”.<sup>8</sup> This article however argues that the very nature of political extremism, not the ideology itself, is a predictor of individual reactions to social and political events and therefore there are cognitive disparities existing on both extreme ends of the political spectrum. The general argument of this paper proposes that both left-wing and right-wing political extremists share cognitive styles concordant with: Psychological distress, Cognitive simplicity, Intolerance and Overconfidence.<sup>9</sup>

The proposal of psychological distress as described in this paper, “defined as a sense of meaninglessness that stems from anxious uncertainty—stimulates adherence to extreme ideologies.”<sup>10</sup> They also detail that this is provoked by anxiety inducing social events or perceptions that stimulate people to regain a sense of purpose through rigid ideologies. (with reference to the Significant quest theory, Kruglanski et al., 2014). They also specify that this factor promotes behavior to compensate for feelings of uncertainty and loss of significance. Crucially, this article

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<sup>7</sup> Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2005). Attachment Security, Compassion, and Altruism. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14(1), 35–38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20182981>

<sup>8</sup> Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel, A. P. M. (2019). Psychological features of extreme political ideologies. *Association for Psychological Science*, 28(2), 1–5.

<sup>9</sup> Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel, A. P. M. (2019). Psychological features of extreme political ideologies. *Association for Psychological Science*, 28(2), 2–5.

<sup>10</sup> Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel, A. P. M. (2019). Psychological features of extreme political ideologies. *Association for Psychological Science*, 28(2), 2–5.

highlight that although dominant theories emphasize this factor of psychological distress to be a motivator of conservative ideologies, the feelings of distress push individuals to feel more secure in their political positions when in relation to leaders who are not only radical but also group-oriented; they therefore argue that this can promote extremism on both ends of the spectrum as they probe, "Would distress exert similar effects in countries where the political currents that combine radicalism with nationalism are mostly located on the left, such as Venezuela (i.e., Hugo Chavez and Nicolás Maduro), Ecuador (i.e., Evo Morales), or Nicaragua (i.e., Daniel Ortega; e.g., Müller, 2016)?" "Evidence indeed suggests that the link between distress and conservatism is much less straightforward than often assumed (Malka, Lelkes, & Holzer, 2017)." <sup>11</sup> . Nonetheless, this article concludes that because of the typical feelings of uncertainty that are promoted by feelings of psychological distress, it also helps to promote support for extremist beliefs and radical movements.

When looking at support for these claims, we can draw our attention to the article regarding Kleinian theory and Racism. The evidence presented in this article aligning the unconscious impulses that are fueled by anxious dispositions (attributes of the paranoid-schizoid positions) and the concept of projective identification, some of the evidence for this in individuals who engage in racist behaviors and alienation of those perceived as *other* seem to have similar cognitive styles to the psychological distress mentioned in the first article. Those who, "psychologically compensate for feelings of uncertainty and fear through strong ideological convictions" <sup>12</sup> seem to bear similarities to those who "routinely use projection as a psychological defense to manage anxiety and maintain self-esteem" <sup>13</sup>

To better understand the significance of Kleinian theory when applying it to the unconscious psychological events of the individual, this specific article goes into detail regarding the different positions the infant progresses through when formulating its worldview. There is listed the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. To better illuminate what is meant by *positions*, the article states "Fonagy and Target (2003, 119) explain: "The term 'position' is appropriate as it implies a particular constellation of object relationships, external and internal, phantasies, anxieties and defenses to which the individual is likely to return throughout life." Although the depressive position follows developmentally from the paranoid-schizoid position, Klein and her followers emphatically believe that fluctuation between the stages never ends." <sup>14</sup> . From the understanding of the paranoid-schizoid position as the infants preliminary reaction to the world around them, and the consequent distress, we can understand the following depressive position as a means of integrating the reality of perceived threat from its origin, "In the depressive position, the infant begins to perceive the mother as a whole object; that is, the person (the good mother) who gratifies one moment is recognized as the same person (the bad mother) who frustrates in another." <sup>15</sup> . With this understanding of the Kleinian positions, later in this paper, we can discuss how the persistence of cognitive biases that are seen in similarity with the paranoid-schizoid positions of this infant, effects the normal oscillation between that position and the depressive state, where the individual is supposedly coming to terms with the reality of their cognitive biases.

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<sup>11</sup> Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel, A. P. M. (2019). Psychological features of extreme political ideologies. *Association for Psychological Science*, 28(2), 2–5.

<sup>12</sup> Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel, A. P. M. (2019). Psychological features of extreme political ideologies. *Association for Psychological Science*, 28(2), 2–5.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Rasmussen, Daniel Salhani (2010), A Contemporary Kleinian Contribution to Understanding Racism, *Chicago Journals Website*, Vol 84(3), pg.8

<sup>14</sup> Brian Rasmussen, Daniel Salhani (2010), A Contemporary Kleinian Contribution to Understanding Racism,

*Chicago Journals Website, Vol 84(3), pg.10*

<sup>15</sup> Brian Rasmussen, Daniel Salhani (2010), A Contemporary Kleinian Contribution to Understanding Racism, *Chicago Journals Website, Vol 84(3), pg.11*

To find additional similarities, the second commonality in the cognition of political extremists mentioned by the authors of the first article (Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel) propose cognitive simplicity. This is proposed as another way for individuals who are experiencing psychological distress to feel secure in their belief systems, “Feelings of distress prompt a desire for clarity, and extremist belief systems provide meaning to a complex social environment through a set of straightforward assumptions that make the world more comprehensible (Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006).”<sup>16</sup> From this we can identify a clear and direct link between this form of simplification and the splitting<sup>17</sup>, described as “a defense to keep good and bad experiences separate, is the mechanism that dominates this early period. [paranoid-schizoid]”<sup>18</sup> to make this similarity even more direct, it is also explained that this mechanism is used by the infant in its earliest stages to create order out of chaos, ordering the world into binomial categories.<sup>19</sup> From these two insights, these ridged mindsets are illustrated clearly as defense mechanisms against negative feelings of psychological distress, as mentioned earlier, and a sense of vulnerability.

From this perspective the response of the individual to cling to extremist beliefs allows them to perpetuate and strengthen this dichotomous and overly simplistic thinking.

To expand on this further, the first article adds that to maintain these perceptions, a sense of overconfidence in judgement and intolerance is necessary to promote a sense of self-enhancement (a view supported by attachment research as being a motivator for political ideology) or as described in the paper, this overconfidence enhances “beliefs that one accurately understands reality”<sup>20</sup>. The final factor mentioned in this paper that contributes to the general understanding of the maintenance of these beliefs is a sense of intolerance, as described, “Through the combined processes of cognitive simplicity and overconfidence, extremists may experience their moral judgments as moral absolutes that reflect a simple and universal truth. Such moral superiority implies that different values and beliefs—and the groups of people who endorse them—are considered morally inferior.”<sup>21</sup>, to compare this input with the previously discussed concept of projective identification, this intolerance that promotes feelings of superiority can similarly be seen as a defense mechanism to protect the self. This idea can be expanded on by referring to the explanation of projective identification in the article regarding Kleinian theory. “Projective identification involves splitting the ego and disposing of unwanted parts of the self by projecting them onto a person who is identified as the other and then fantasizing about controlling those parts in the other person”, “In this instance, the concept shows the way in which the recipient is made to feel a certain way, for instance, to feel inferior.”<sup>22</sup>. From these comparisons, we can find initial similarities between the descriptions of the paranoid-schizoid position and its relevance to the general cognitive styles of political extremists.

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<sup>16</sup> Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel, A. P. M. (2019). Psychological features of extreme political ideologies. *Association for Psychological Science*, 28(2), 3–5.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Rasmussen, Daniel Salhani (2010), A Contemporary Kleinian Contribution to Understanding Racism, *Chicago Journals Website, Vol 84(3), pg.10*

<sup>18</sup> Brian Rasmussen, Daniel Salhani (2010), A Contemporary Kleinian Contribution to Understanding Racism, *Chicago Journals Website, Vol 84(3), pg.8*

<sup>19</sup> Brian Rasmussen, Daniel Salhani (2010), A Contemporary Kleinian Contribution to Understanding Racism, *Chicago Journals Website, Vol 84(3), pg.10*



<sup>20</sup> Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel, A. P. M. (2019). Psychological features of extreme political ideologies. *Association for Psychological Science*, 28(2), 3–5.

<sup>21</sup> Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel, A. P. M. (2019). Psychological features of extreme political ideologies. *Association for Psychological Science*, 28(2), 3–5.

<sup>22</sup> Brian Rasmussen, Daniel Salhani (2010), A Contemporary Kleinian Contribution to Understanding Racism, *Chicago Journals Website*, Vol 84(3), pg.8

## Links Between Attachment Style and Political Extremism

We can use this collective insight to better understand the contribution of self-enhancing behavior to the use of political ideology as a means of defense against psychological distress. For this discussion, we can move to the paper on Interpersonal Attachment and Ideology (Weber, C., & Federico, C. M.), in which they seek to use some aspects of motivated social cognition to better understand all dimensions of conservatism, including self-enhancement and self-transcendence.<sup>23</sup> For this they refer to Duckitt et al 2002 and his dual process theory, which explores "the origins of both dimensions, in which ideological beliefs are rooted in motivational goals that are made cognitively accessible through socialization practices"<sup>24</sup> this explanation, while so far in accordance with the general idea of intolerance presented ((Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel), the difference being that the first article claims that these motivational goals are found in individuals identifying with both extremes, not simply right wing ideologies of conservatives.

This difference aside, the general aim of the paper is concordant with the belief that ideology is reflective of exposure to environmental threats and furthermore, reflective of the individual's attachment style.<sup>25</sup>

To reiterate, the link between attachment style and the defense response of political extremism can be seen clearly as both are in association with feelings of threat, as described in the article about attachment, "The primary goal of attachment behavior is the alleviation of anxiety and an enduring sense of security"<sup>26</sup>, without even referring to the paper's later explanation of evidence that supports the relationship between attachment style, ideology and the mediation of worldview, we can see very strong, if not direct links between the motivators of attachment behavior and the motivators of political extremity in response to perceived threat from what we know already.

However, to support this further, we can look to this paper's discussion to determine the exact predictors of specific political ideologies. In relation to the speculation of attachment theory, the dependent success of early attachment will give way to either a stable attachment style, "marked by either security, trust and warmth" or "by one of two compensatory traits: anxiety or avoidance"<sup>27</sup>, earlier in the paper, the secure form of attachment is additionally commented to be characterized by the belief that "the world is a safe harmonious place populated by people of good will"<sup>28</sup> while insecure attachment, which occurs when the proximity-seeking attempts are not met by emotionally available attachment figures, means the ultimate failure of the attachment behavior and the resultant behavior is, "According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2003), under these circumstances, 'The distress originally elicited by the encounter with threats is now accompanied by serious doubts that safety can be attained, that the world

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<sup>23</sup> Weber, C., & Federico, C. M. (2007). Interpersonal Attachment and Patterns of Ideological Belief. *Political Psychology*, 28(4), 392–416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447056>

<sup>24</sup> Weber, C., & Federico, C. M. (2007). Interpersonal Attachment and Patterns of Ideological Belief. *Political Psychology*, 28(4), 389–416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447056>

<sup>25</sup> Weber, C., & Federico, C. M. (2007). Interpersonal Attachment and Patterns of Ideological Belief. *Political Psychology*, 28(4), 393–416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447056>

<sup>26</sup> Weber, C., & Federico, C. M. (2007). Interpersonal Attachment and Patterns of Ideological Belief. *Political Psychology*, 28(4), 389–416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447056>

<sup>27</sup> Weber, C., & Federico, C. M. (2007). Interpersonal Attachment and Patterns of Ideological Belief. *Political Psychology*, 28(4), 405–416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447056>

<sup>28</sup> Weber, C., & Federico, C. M. (2007). Interpersonal Attachment and Patterns of Ideological Belief. *Political Psychology*, 28(4), 393–416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447056>

is a safe place, that others can be trusted and that the self has the resources necessary to manage stress”<sup>29</sup> To explain the significance of this difference, we can identify similarities in the article focusing on explaining conservative ideology on motivated social cognition. This article also refers to the importance of childhood emotional experiences to the determinacy of political ideology, “For example, childhood experiences arising from a parental focus on the child and his or her inner self are expected to reinforce feelings of excitement, joy, surprise, distress, and shame, in turn leading the child to gravitate toward the humanistic orientation, or left-wing perspective. In contrast, more structured, punitive parenting engenders emotions such as anger and contempt, which reflect the normative orientation, or right-wing perspective (Loye, 1977; W. F. Stone, 1986; Tomkins, 1963, 1965).”<sup>30</sup> In other words, both interlinking articles stress the importance of adolescent experience in shaping the individual's social perspective later in life.

### Attachment Styles as Predictive of Political Worldviews

As mentioned by the article on attachment style and ideology, the Duckitt 2002 dual process theory which is central to the overall argument explores “the origins of both dimensions, in which ideological beliefs are rooted in motivational goals that are made cognitively accessible through socialization practices”<sup>31</sup> and thus the effect of early attachment on social behavior is emphasized by not only the article on attachment and ideology (Weber, C., & Federico, C. M.) but also by the article entitled Attachment security, compassion and Altruism (Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R.).

In their investigation of the contribution of attachment behavior in predicting levels of compassion and altruism would help to expand on what is meant exactly by the “socialization practices” referred to in the explanation of Duckitt’s theory. This would help to answer questions regarding attachment style’s direct contribution to specific motivational goals that underlie these socialization practices. Significantly, this article goes into detail about the alternative ways to obtain security when secure attachment is not successful for the individual. “These secondary strategies are of two major kinds: hyper activation and deactivation of the attachment system. (We reviewed evidence for these strategies in Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003.)”<sup>32</sup>. They describe that hyperactivation (can be seen in association with anxious attachment) results in extensive efforts to obtain proximity to attachment figures while deactivation (association with avoidant attachment) result in inhibitions of proximity seeking inclinations. They hypothesize that individuals with both types of insecure attachment are less prone to act compassionately, empathetically and altruistically than securely attached individuals.<sup>33</sup> Further in the paper, their collective research supports the idea that secure attachment is a foundational factor in promoting compassionate behaviors later in life, even adding that secure attachment can decrease aggressive behavior to individuals of a perceivably threatening outgroup<sup>34</sup>, but what does this mean in association with political ideology? The article on understanding conservative ideology on motivated social-cognition analyses the Right-wing-authoritarianism theory and its explanations on the effect of parenting styles.

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<sup>29</sup> Weber, C., & Federico, C. M. (2007). Interpersonal Attachment and Patterns of Ideological Belief. *Political Psychology*, 28(4), 393–416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447056>



<sup>30</sup> Jost, T., et al. "Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition." *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 129, no. 3, 2003, pp. 1–375. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.3.339>.

<sup>31</sup> Weber, C., & Federico, C. M. (2007). Interpersonal Attachment and Patterns of Ideological Belief. *Political Psychology*, 28(4), 389–416. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447056>

<sup>32</sup> Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2005). Attachment Security, Compassion, and Altruism. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14(1), 35–38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20182981>

<sup>33</sup> Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2005). Attachment Security, Compassion, and Altruism. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14(1), 36–38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20182981>

<sup>34</sup> Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2005). Attachment Security, Compassion, and Altruism. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14(1), 37–38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20182981>

In relation to the development of personality, this theory holds that, "harsh parenting styles brought on by economic hardship led entire generations to repress hostility toward authority figures and to replace it with an exaggerated deference and idealization of authority and tendencies to blame societal scapegoats and punish deviants", "*The theory of authoritarianism holds that fear and aggressiveness resulting from parental punitiveness motivate individuals to seek predictability and control in their environments.*"<sup>35</sup> This explanation in relation to compassion and its association with secure attachment may offer an explanation of the tendency for more aggressive and less behaviorally compassionate attitudes towards those perceived as the *other* or the outgroup along with the tendency to promote dichotomous and simplistic worldviews. Both behaviors can therefore be considered to have connections with insecure attachments.

## The Depressive State and Cognitive Biases

This then prompts the question of additional similarities between the early adolescent experiences and the cognitive biases that are seen to be prevalent in the cognitive styles of political extremists. We have already determined that there are explicit similarities between the paranoid-schizoid behavior of the infant and the splitting of the world into dichotomies to promote feelings of security, but what about the other stages of infant development mentioned by the article on Kleinian theory and Racism. To open this discussion, we should look to the Kleinian concept of the depressive position (Rasmussen, Salhani). This position as described by the article, takes place after the splitting behavior occurs within the paranoid schizoid position, "In the depressive position, the infant begins to perceive the mother as a whole object; that is, the person (the good mother) who gratifies one moment is recognized as the same person (the bad mother) who frustrates in another. This recognition that the good and the bad objects are really one and the same is the core of the depressive position."<sup>36</sup> This recognition and shift away from the rigid dichotomies that were presented in the description of the paranoid-schizoid position is crucial to understanding the maturation of the infant's worldview, to put this in the scope of understanding political ideologies, we can make comparisons with a statement from the article on understanding conservatism on motivated social cognition. In the discussion on the theory of Intolerance of Ambiguity which is research done on the general personality variables that coordinated positively to prejudice, the author refers to the review by Furnham and Ribchester (1995) "In a review of research on ambiguity intolerance, Furnham and Ribchester (1995) provided the following list of consequences of this tendency: *Resistance to reversal of apparent fluctuating stimuli, the early selection and maintenance of one solution in a perceptually ambiguous situation, inability to allow for the possibility of good and bad traits in the same person, acceptance of attitude statements representing a rigid, black-white view of life, seeking for certainty, a rigid dichotomizing into fixed*

categories, premature closure, and remaining closed to familiar characteristics of stimuli. (p. 180) ”<sup>37</sup> The analysis of this theory in particular similarly supports the argument of confinement to cognitive biases based on the inability to be open to ambiguity, therefore this connection to Kleinian theory allows for the assumption that a common unconscious factor underling rigid or extreme political ideologies is an inability to enter the maturation that the depressive state provides. With that in mind, the mention of Reparations later on in the paper, described as being an occurrence that can only take place when the infant is in the depressive position, "Segal (1974, 92) describes reparation in the following way: "When the infant enters the depressive position and he is faced with the feeling that he has omnipotently destroyed his mother, his guilt and despair at having lost her awaken in him the wish to restore and recreate her in order to regain her externally and internally."

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<sup>35</sup> Jost, T., et al. "Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition." *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 129, no. 3, 2003, pp. 7–375, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.3.339>.

<sup>36</sup> Brian Rasmussen, Daniel Salhani (2010), A Contemporary Kleinian Contribution to Understanding Racism, *Chicago Journals Website*, Vol 84(3), pg.11

<sup>37</sup> Jost, T., et al. "Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition." *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 129, no. 3, 2003, pp. 8–375, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.3.339>.

<sup>38</sup> Brian Rasmussen, Daniel Salhani (2010), A Contemporary Kleinian Contribution to Understanding Racism, *Chicago Journals Website*, Vol 84(3), pg.16

Thus, reparation integrates love, hate, and the realization of the wholeness of the other."<sup>38</sup>. Therefore, it is presumed that if the depressive state is prevented by the individual assuming both overconfidence and intolerance in accepting views that oppose existing cognitive biases, the individual will have unconscious cognitive roadblocks to fully overcoming the splitting that the paranoid-schizoid position imposes. Understanding these mechanisms within Kleinian theory in application to the theory of Intolerance of Ambiguity, there is clear support for the feelings of psychological distress that promote cognitive biases/extremist views and the observable behavior of said extremist in their inability to debunk those very prejudices, because of their consistent feelings of vulnerability.

## Conclusions

This article has sought to explore the consistencies within existing research regarding the possibility of psychological commonalities for politically extreme ideologies. The collective body of research that has been overviewed in this paper has been brought together to clarify what claims are generally agreed upon. There has been a consensus of at least some form of psychological distress that prompts extremist political beliefs to be latched onto, explaining why it is a usual occurrence for such political identities and beliefs to become dogmatic, undisputable truths for many individuals. It is also agreed that most of this aggressive resistance stems from a feeling of vulnerability and attempts to safeguard the self from perceived threats. The articles that explain the significance of attachment style in this respect, both emphasize the role of insecure attachment that can contribute to a lack of empathy or provoke denigrating behavior towards an outgroup member. The role of insecure attachment can be subsumed into the effects of certain authoritarian parenting styles, a conclusion that is concordant with the long-standing Right-wing-authoritarian theory, that certain punitive styles of parenting can direct a child's perception of the world around them, shaping their anxious impulses and defensive behaviors. Therefore, as attachment style and parenting can predict the direction of a child's defensiveness and exaggerate feelings of vulnerability, many of the mentioned recourses concur those feelings of vulnerability and anxieties about society, promote rigid cognitive biases and extremist viewpoints. In relation to Kleinian theory, there can be seen a notable difference between the way most individuals oscillate between paranoid-

schizoid positions and depressive positions and the ways in which the cognitive profile of most political extremists prevents the acceptance of a natural depressive realization, thus preventing required realizations for making reparations.

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