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## Conservative Mind: A Focus on Introspection and Worldview

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THE CONSERVATIVE MIND: A FOCUS ON INTROSPECTION AND  
WORLDVIEW

by

APRIL A. STRICKLAND

(Under the Direction of William D. McIntosh)

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine conservative attitudes as a function of introspection. Previous literature has hypothesized that conservative ideologies are the result of a dangerous and authoritarian worldview, where individuals are essentially hedonistic and need rules and regulations in order to behave morally. Empirical research has also indicated that conservatives are generally higher in authoritarianism, intolerance for ambiguity, dogmatism, and need for closure than liberals. Based on these conservative correlates, it was hypothesized within this study that less introspective thought would be shown by those individuals who hold more conservative ideologies, as opposed to those individuals that hold more liberal ideologies. Implications from this study give support to the interconnection between introspectiveness, worldview, and conservative beliefs.

INDEX WORDS: Conservative, Liberal, Introspection, Worldview

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## DEDICATION

To my parents, whose love, support, encouragement, and money have allowed me this accomplishment. To my best friend, Grant, who is forever a part of this work and forever a part of me.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Beliefs, norms, and even reality are all relative to the individual. Making sense of the world and understanding the ebb and flow of society requires that perceptions, inferences, and assumptions are made. We as humans are autonomous in our existence; each of us experiences the world in different ways. Individual perceptions involve both a sensory element which can be observed or felt, and a cognitive element which can be interpreted in the mind. No two individuals experience the world in the same way, though there is a great deal of overlap in our experiences.

We, as individuals, create our own understanding of the world that is consistent with what we personally have experienced and perceived to be true. This knowledge leads to broad generalizations, or judgments, about the way in which the world operates. Once attitudes have been formed and solidified, some individuals will reflect on these perceptions of reality, or ‘what is’, and compare them with ‘what should be’. This individual belief of ‘what should be’ is better termed an ideology.

Ideologies are doctrines, bodies of ideas (Webster’s New World Dictionary, 1970), or guiding principles that can reflect one’s individual morals, convictions, experiences, and/or perceptions. Ideologies are different than attitudes in that ideologies are theoretical and abstract in nature. Yet ideologies, especially in the world of politics and government, often transcend theory and become implemented in campaigns, policies, and laws. Although ideologies vary from person to person, individuals often group together based on broadly similar belief systems.

The grouping of ideologically similar individuals can easily be observed in today's world of politics. In the United States, individuals are most commonly categorized as either liberal or conservative. As previously mentioned, no two experiences or perceptions are the same; therefore, no two ideologies will be exact replicas. In this respect, it is important to note the beliefs that individuals *do* share, beliefs which seem to unite their varying personal ideologies.

### *Liberal and Conservative Ideologies*

In general, conservative ideologies tend to favor keeping things the same whereas liberal ideologies tend to favor change. Conservatives tend to be more laissez-faire in their approach to economic issues. The conservative approach maintains that our country is the Land of Opportunity, where everyone is innately capable of the same success (Lakoff, 2002). As a result, conservatives typically support less government interference with business practices, less taxation/ spending on social programs, less environmental regulations, and more free trade measures (Dean, 2006; Colmes, 2003; Lakoff, 2002).

In contrast, the term 'liberal' is frequently used interchangeably with the term 'progressive' because liberals tend to favor reform and do not feel limited by tradition (Colmes, 2003). Liberals tend to support more mediating government policies when it comes to economic issues. They tend to encourage taxation, such as increased spending on public housing (Dean, 2006), and regulations as a means to create equality and to invest in the community (Lakoff, 2002). To illustrate, liberal ideologies might see the need to enforce regulatory policies, such as affirmative action, in order to create equality whereas conservative ideologies might view it as an interference with the opportunities available in the capitalist system.

When considering social issues, the divide between liberal and conservative ideologies seems to grow even wider. Here the tables tend to turn, with liberals typically supporting less government intervention and conservatives typically favoring more. The conservative ideology generally opposes issues such as abortion and gay marriage (Lakoff, 2002), maintaining it is the government's job to place restrictions on such practices. Because conservatives believe one's success should be a reflection of one's efforts, failures and mistakes should also be attributed to the individual. For example, conservatives tend to support the penal system and its laws (e.g., the death penalty, illegal immigration) because it holds individuals responsible for their actions.

In contrast, liberals believe the government should not restrict such individual liberties (Dean, 2006). The liberal ideology tends to hold that the government should function as an egalitarian protector, with issues such as abortion and gay marriage being reflections of individual rights. Liberals do, however, tend to favor gun control laws and regulations on the death penalty because as a protector of individual rights, the government should not support forms of violence or aggression between individuals (Lakoff, 2002).

### *Creating and Maintaining Divides*

Indeed, certain issues seem to highlight the considerable differences between liberal and conservative ideologies. In particular, threatening situations often cause attitudes to polarize towards an individual's prior political dispositions, potentially leading to an even larger divide among parties (Lavine, Lodge, & Freitas, 2005). For instance, a central component of the terror management theory states that when one's values are challenged, self-esteem serves as an anxiety buffer (Greenberg, Solomon, &

Pyszczynski, 1997). As it relates to political ideology, a threat to one's values might initially cause anxiety. However, self-esteem boosters, such as social support networks, function to reduce one's apprehensions (1997).

Seeking to maintain one's ideological beliefs makes sense on a cognitive level. The human mind seeks to categorize objects and events in order to streamline details and to reduce any inconsistencies (i.e., cognitive dissonance). Often, reducing cognitive dissonance requires a reliance on cognitive shortcuts or more simplistic cognitive processes, such as attitude polarization. For instance, Suedfeld and Tetlock (1977) found that when countries were at war, their leaders' degree of complex thinking dropped significantly (as cited in Smith & Mackie, 2000). Specifically, during times of East-West turmoil (e.g., the Korean War, Berlin blockade) political speeches from both sides indicated simplistic and stereotypical thinking about the opposition (2000). Simply put, attitude polarization reduces vast, diverse notions down to a more cognitively manageable size.

Within the realm of politics, the cause for such one-dimensional modes of thought is that attitude polarization makes salient the fact that there are some individuals who resonate with one's beliefs and some individuals who do not. In other words, the awareness of one's own group membership creates in-group and out-group biases. The creation of an 'us versus them' mentality allows individuals to neatly categorize all members of the out-group as homogenous conformers while viewing members of the in-group as individualistic, impartial, and morally superior (Smith & Mackie, 2000). As a result, it is easy to understand how rivalries between conservatives and liberals can become so heated. Issues such as opposing the death penalty or supporting free enterprise

not only challenge an individual's ideology but also pose a threat to the individual's identification as a particular group member.

By now it should be clear that liberals and conservatives can differ tremendously in their ideologies; yet what influences and fuels these great debates? Most individuals throughout history have encountered the same types of events and have come away with different perspectives. How could the same cohort of individuals be so divided on the events of Vietnam? How could those individuals experiencing the events of September 11, 2001 together form such divisive attitudes on who is to blame? In other words, what drives individual discretion? It may be that an underlying system of beliefs, perceptions, and truths are continually guiding and shaping our ideologies.

#### *Discriminating Between Worldviews*

The way we view the world has a pronounced effect on our cognitive processes, attitudes, and our behavior. Behavioral outcomes, such as voting for a particular candidate are, by and large, reflections of our own individual attitudes. Such differences in outlooks can result in differing opinions on politics, religion, family, and society as a whole. It is well documented that conservatives and liberals have differing views regarding many social matters, economic policies, environmental issues and so forth. But why do these differences exist in the first place? How is it that a substantial number of individuals can agree with one another on a variety of topics and yet clash with an equally large group of individuals on almost every one of those same issues? The answer, it seems, transcends the actual issues at hand and instead comes from a more deeply rooted driving force. That is, differences found between liberals and conservatives extend farther than the voting booth and into one's individual sense of self.

Political affiliation is not merely a set of attitudes on certain issues, but instead involves a deeper sense of identity. To identify oneself as a particular political affiliate often implies much more than the issue at hand. Agreeing with certain policies or forms of government not only shows where one stands on a particular issue, but also has implications regarding one's own morals, beliefs about dependence (or independence), attitude towards authority, and so on. According to Caprara et al. (2006), this "personalization of politics" is important not only for how individuals create their own political ideologies, but also plays a crucial role in determining how political candidates and political parties reach out to those individuals during elections. Because the way in which we view the world is a deeply rooted driving force of behavior, one of the easiest ways to reach out to an individual is to identify oneself as having a similar worldview.

Therefore, identification of oneself as a conservative or a liberal is essentially dependent upon one's individual worldview. In a broad sense, worldviews are a collection of beliefs regarding both general truths about existence as well as a collection of values that characterize one's identity (Golec & Van Bergh, 2007). According to Golec and Van Bergh (2007), worldviews consist of "concepts, explanative categories, and values through which individuals perceive reality, define life experiences, and construct identities." (pp. 589-590). As a result, individual differences in personality, as well as in political choice, can be viewed as resulting from underlying worldviews.

So what exactly characterizes conservative and liberal worldviews? Lakoff (2002) explains such differing outlooks as the resulting influence of both morality and of the family. According to Lakoff, most typical conservatives follow what he calls the Strict Father model, whereas most typical liberals follow the Nurturant Parent model.

The Strict Father model holds the view that society is a dangerous place and that the family should be in charge of teaching discipline, obedience, respect, and self-reliance. In this model, the 'strict father' can either be represented as a real authority figure (e.g., father, mother, police officer) or can be personified as a larger system of authority (e.g., government, laws). Those individuals whose worldviews resonate with the Strict Father model stress respect for, yet independence from, authority through the practice of responsibility, self-reliance, and self-discipline. In other words, because the world is dangerous and corrupt, the Strict Father must serve to implement moral values and beliefs, with the expectation of individuals reflecting such values and exhibiting respectable, upstanding conduct.

Adherents to the Strict Father model support the metaphors of Moral Authority and Moral Order within their worldview (Lakoff, 2002). In general, Moral Authority asserts that authority in itself is moral, just, and beneficial, while Moral Order asserts that there is an innate hierarchy of authority figures (e.g., God holds more power than humans, adults hold more power than children). For this reason, supporters of the Strict Father worldview might view movements like feminism to contradict Moral Order because men are typically more powerful than women. Thus a person who holds such a worldview might view feminism, homosexuality, or atheism as a threat because it goes against the natural order of dominance. Because obedience to authority is how individuals become self-disciplined, the use of rewards and punishments is crucial in shaping moral behavior. Furthermore, the Strict Father worldview holds a positive view of competition, maintaining that it provides rewards for self-discipline. This worldview can be evidenced within conservative ideologies that support more capitalistic modes of

thought like free trade, rather than supporting social programs like welfare that aim towards equality.

In contrast, the Nurturant Parent model (Lakoff, 2002) does not hold such a dangerous worldview, though it does acknowledge that the world can be a corrupt place at times. To the follower of the Nurturant Parent model, the world is a generally hospitable place, with the expectation that individuals themselves will perpetuate such warmth and caring. In this respect, the Nurturant Parent model and the Strict Father model are similar in that they both believe the manner in which a child is reared will have later affects on how the individual perceives the world. The Nurturant Parent model believes the overall objective is to lead a happy, fulfilling life while showing nurturance, caring, and support for others. Rather than learning respect and obedience through laws, punishments, and the self-discipline seen in the Strict Father model, the Nurturant Parent model maintains that individuals learn nurturance, caring, and respect by being shown such qualities themselves.

Instead of a hierarchical approach to authority as in the Strict Father worldview, the Nurturant Parent worldview holds that authority should come from nurturance and wisdom, rather than dominance. Cooperation is viewed more positively than competition because it promotes equality, interdependence, and reliance on others. Instead of relying on Moral Authority and Moral Order, those who resonate with the Nurturant Parent worldview tend to view morality as a function of fairness, happiness, and self-nurturance. In this sense it is easy to see how liberal ideologies can reflect the Nurturant Parent worldview. For example, in the Nurturant Parent model violence is seen as creating more violence whereas nurturance is seen as creating more nurturance (2002). In this respect,



liberals feel justified in their beliefs when opposing issues like the death penalty or supporting taxation for social programs.

Duckitt and Fisher (2003) also identify a set of worldviews categorized as either 'tough-minded' or 'tender-minded'. Those who resonate with the 'tough-minded' worldview tend to view society as brutally competitive, where individuals are continually trying to assert their own dominance over one another (2003). On the other hand, those who resonate with the 'tender-minded' worldview tend to view society as altruistic, where individuals are cooperative and caring towards one another (2003). More importantly, Duckitt and Fisher (2003) claim that worldviews can be seen as the result of individual differences in personality. Therefore, worldviews, like personality characteristics, remain stable over time.

Golec and Van Bergh (2007) suggest that worldviews fall into one of three categories: traditional, modern, and postmodern. Traditionalists believe there is one right way of doing things and therefore reject those who deviate from the norm. As a result, the traditional worldview values the past, customs, religion, control (by authorities), and social hierarchies. This traditional worldview is consistent with those who are politically conservative. Alternatively, the modern worldview values science and rational thought. Those who adhere to this worldview understand experiences through cause and effect relationships. On the other hand, the postmodern worldview goes beyond rationality and envisions the world as more relativistic. The postmodern worldview values freedom of thought and the ability to question one's own existence. Both the modern and postmodern worldviews stress tolerance, autonomy, and equality and are consistent with those who are politically liberal.

*The Conservative Worldview: Then and Now*

However, the conservative approach to politics today is a faint reflection of the traditional conservative approach of the 1950s and 60s. Barry Goldwater's 1960 classic *The Conscience of Conservatism* laid the foundation for what traditional conservatism of the time should be. In it, Goldwater asserts that conservatives understand the nature of man as both an economic and spiritual creature (1960). Therefore the ideology behind conservative politics should seek to enhance man's spiritual nature by preserving and maximizing freedom (1960). Goldwater believes liberal ideologies that emphasize materialistic, economic wants (e.g., welfare, social security, etc.) interfere with and fight against nature (1960). As an institution dedicated to maximizing individual liberties, the government should maintain its necessary and legitimate duties to the people, yet it should not seek to restrict the lives of men by putting power in the hands of few (1960).

During the Reagan administration, a new wave of conservative thought emerged called neoconservatism (Dean, 2006). Neoconservatives essentially hold the traditional conservative understanding of the nature of humanity; however, their governmental policies are more aggressive and involved in the lives of individuals. A distinguishing characteristic of neoconservative ideologies is the desire for nation building and the promotion of values, which is often imposed militarily. For example, neoconservatives within the United States feel it is the duty of our country to promote peace, free trade, and democracy within the world, even if it means engaging in war to eventually attain those goals.

The conservative approach to today's government has changed since the times of traditional, Goldwater conservatism, yet the worldview guided by both classic

conservatives and neoconservatives remains that which reflects Lakoff's Strict Father model of a system of adherence to authority, self-discipline, and rewards and punishments. Worldview is important to note because it emphasizes the similarities between different types of conservatives. These types include: theoconservatives (who favor theocratic forms of government), paleoconservatives (who favor a libertarian approach to free trade), and socioconservatives (whose values mimic that of the religious right; Dean, 2006). Despite the various ways of classifying one's political partialities, an underlying way of viewing at the world appears to be what truly defines both conservatives and liberal ideologies.

### *Conservative Correlates*

Although the aforementioned worldview models are merely theoretical constructs, the justification for such theories is grounded in empirical research. As discussed, there are a host of studies that provide evidence for cognitive, behavioral, and affective differences between liberals and conservatives. Presumably, these individual differences are the result of a variety of underlying ways of thinking (i.e., worldviews).

Colloquially and empirically, conservatism has long been thought of as synonymous with authoritarianism. Authoritarianism was first identified when Adorno (1950) became interested in those individuals whose personalities were particularly susceptible to fascist propaganda (Adorno, 1950; Rubinstein, 1997). A few major hallmarks of the authoritarian personality are valuing convention, rigidity (Adorno, 1950), intolerance towards out-groups, and adherence to authority/laws (Rubinstein, 1997). Authoritarians typically have a disdain for weakness, a preoccupation with power, and hostility towards minorities who deviate from traditional values (Adorno, 1950).

Particularly relevant to this study is Adorno's finding concerning authoritarian anti-intraception, or disregard for the subjective, imaginative, or abstract (1950), which suggests authoritarian individuals are more concerned with the tangible or unambiguous. Indeed, this disinterest in subjective matters appears to support other authoritative correlates such as valuing tradition and laws.

Some thirty years later, Altemeyer's attempt to broaden the concept of authoritarianism gave birth to the term Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA). While Adorno originally introduced the theory of authoritarianism, Altemeyer's research since then has sought to understand how authoritarianism is organized, how it develops in individuals, and its role in a democratic society (Altemeyer, 1988). In a general sense, RWA is viewed as an individual predisposition towards aggression, conventionalism, and submission to authority (or authoritarianism) (Altemeyer, 1988; Crowson, Thoma, & Hestevold, 2005). Similar to the Strict Father worldview of conservatives, Altemeyer (1988) claims that right-wing authoritarians seek to control other's behavior through the use of punishment, laws, and authority figures.

Despite what the name suggests, Altemeyer is quick to note that right-wing politics and authoritarianism should not be considered synonymous with one another. Although conservatives generally tend to score higher on the RWA scale (1988), there are important distinctions that can be drawn between the two constructs. True conservative ideology does place emphasis on preserving tradition; however, it advocates such preservation through free speech, equal opportunity, and tolerance (1988). In contrast, true authoritarian ideology emphasizes obedience to authority, intolerance towards minorities, and a fixation with power (Adorno, 1950). It is imperative to note

that what it means to be a conservative has changed significantly over the past century. In our society today, it appears the lines between conservative ideology and RWA constructs are becoming finer, thus resulting in the perception that they are one in the same. By definition these constructs are not identical, yet empirically they have consistently been shown to be mediators for one another when taking into account other correlating variables (Crowson, Thoma, & Hestevold, 2005).

For instance, a good deal of literature has examined at social dominance orientation (SDO) as a correlate of conservative attitudes (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003; Van Hiel, Cornelis, & Roets, 2007). SDO was first introduced by Pratto et al. (1994) as a way of examining the biases between in-groups and out-groups. Those individuals who hold attitudes of SDO typically favor hierarchical approaches to ideologies, policies, and intergroup relations (Pratto, et al., 1994). As the name implies, those individuals whose attitudes reflect SDO seek to highlight inequality in social groups by dominating and discriminating against out-groups (1994). These individuals believe that certain people (or groups) are innately better than others. Accordingly, individuals higher on SDO attempt to maintain inequality by supporting hierarchical policies, such as cultural elitism. Not surprisingly, SDO has been shown to positively correlate with measures of racism, sexism, nationalism, support for law and militarism, and interestingly, Republican party preference (1994).

Other research on the conservative personality has consistently linked higher levels of dogmatism and intolerance for ambiguity with politically conservative attitudes (Jost, Kruglanski, Glaser, & Sulloway, 2003). Conservatives tend to be less encouraging of uncertainty and less open to experience (Jost, Kruglanski, Glaser, & Sulloway, 2003;

Van Hiel, Cornelis, & Roets, 2007). According to Wilson (1973), certain individuals experience anxiety and intimidation from situations of uncertainty. These individuals, therefore, adhere to conservative ideologies as an ego-defensive response (1973), which might explain attitudes of anti-intracception and intolerance for ambiguity.

Perhaps as a result of this need for certainty, conservatives value the need for structure and need for closure more than liberals (Jost, Kruglanski, Glaser, & Sulloway, 2003). These needs may serve as defensive strategies aimed at maintaining one's view of social order and customs (2003). Such characteristics seem to parallel key aspects of social dominance orientation, like the preservation of social order. In addition, conservatives are generally lower than liberals on measures of cognitive complexity (2003). This finding could be seen as the outcome of the conservative need for closure and structure. For example, when faced with cognitive dissonance, conservatives might seek resolutions based on convention or prior stereotypes, instead of engaging in deep, contemplative thought. As a side note, it is possible that one's level of cognitive complexity could be moderated by general interest in politics, with extremists on both the right and left wing scoring higher in cognitive complexity and more moderate individuals scoring lower in cognitive complexity (2003).

### *The Risk of Introspection*

Based on prior research, understanding of the conservative psychology gives support to the rigidity-of-the-Right hypothesis, which states that conservatives are more authoritarian and unyielding on issues than are liberals (Dillion, 1993). Indeed, this hypothesis falls neatly into place when considering the correlations between conservatism, dogmatism, intolerance of ambiguity, and need for closure. The message

from many of these empirical studies indicates that conservatives value confidence, certainty, and sureness in their own beliefs. It is feasible that engaging in less cognitively risky acts serves to facilitate many, if not all, of the aforementioned constructs.

Research contrasting liberal and conservative individuals has mainly focused on cognitive complexity (i.e., the ability to take on multiple perspectives); (Jost, Kruglanski, Glaser, & Sulloway, 2003) or cognitive capacities (i.e., the range of psychological dimensions); (Wilson, 1973). In this study, we are not interested in multiple dimensions or perspectives, but rather the extent to which one attempts to understand oneself and one's place in the world. This understanding or insight into the individual self can be achieved through the process of deep contemplation, or introspection.

The word 'introspection' comes from the Latin words 'spicere', meaning 'to look', and 'intra', meaning 'within' (Kind, 2006). Introspection is generally understood to be the act of examining one's own inner thoughts and emotions. This reflection is not directed towards some specific goal but simply seeks to explore the self, disregarding any external stimuli (Van Gundy & Schieman, 2001). Introspection has been described as an awareness or an openness to one's own affect (Frith & Lau, 2006), a meta-conscious appraisal (Schooler & Schreiber, 2004) and a "subjective consciousness" (Overgaard, 2006).

While popular in eastern philosophy, introspection in western cultures can be viewed as threatening instead of enlightening. Hixon and Swann (1993) provide evidence for introspection facilitating self-insight when the introspectiveness involves questions about *what*. However, introspectiveness involving *why* questions appeared to have a negative effect on self-insight (1993). This is perhaps due to the cognitive dissonance felt

by individuals when asked to explain why they feel or behave in such ways. For example, thinking about *why* you might engage in or even consider engaging in socially taboo acts (e.g., lying, sexual promiscuity, racism, etc.) often contradicts one's social or religious morals therefore creating a state of cognitive dissonance. One might wonder, "How can I have such thoughts and still consider myself to be a good person?" In that sense, reluctance to introspect can serve as a defense mechanism or as a buffer for self-esteem.

Because it is an internal cognitive state, introspection is difficult to measure. Observing oneself is often a biased venture and reporting on what one observes has the capacity to be even more biased. Several researchers (Schooler & Schreiber, 2004; Frith & Lau, 2006; Overgaard, 2006) have tried to operationally define introspection in hopes of creating an adequate measure. While there is a general consensus on what introspection entails, measuring such a process has continuously proved troubling. To capture such an internal state requires the ability to accurately and honestly reflect on oneself. This task becomes even more difficult when one considers that we, as individuals, can sometimes be completely blind to cognitive factors that might be influencing our thoughts and actions. Furthermore, reflecting on the states of mind we do experience requires a semantic puzzle of sorts. Trying to find the right words to match what we have experienced is often complicated and can result in similar descriptions of cognitive states, but not quite the genuine condition. Schooler and Schreiber (2004) call this the "paradox of introspection", where "experience is subjectively self-evident but empirically inscrutable" (pp. 18).

Perhaps for these reasons, little, if any, research regarding introspection and political affiliation exists. From the introspection research that does exist, conclusions



about conservative and liberal differences must be drawn from self-report. For instance, Berzonsky and Sullivan (1992) cite evidence that individuals higher in reported self-reflection also exhibit more openness to experience, more liberal values, and more general tolerance for exploration. As noted earlier, conservatives tend to be less open to experience and more intolerant of ambiguity. That coupled with the evidence reported by Berzonsky and Sullivan suggests conservatives engage in less introspective behaviors.

As the name suggests, conservatives seek to preserve the status quo by adhering to an ideology that is orientated towards the past (Golec & Van Bergh, 2007) and places value on prudence (Dean, 2006) and self-reliance (Lakoff, 2002). Introspection, therefore, can be seen as a risky cognitive behavior because it threatens individual certainty and self-reliance. Reluctance to introspect may function as a defensive mechanism which serves to maintain conservative beliefs. This notion is consistent with conservative correlates such as the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis, intolerance of ambiguity, less openness to experience, need for closure, and anti-introception. According to other conservative correlates, such as the principles of SDO and RWA, the conservative attempt to uphold social inequalities and biases between in-groups and out-groups may operate best on a cognitively shallow level, therefore requiring little need for introspective processes.

As mentioned earlier, worldview moderates what individuals value and hold true. If conservative individuals place value on tradition and authority, introspecting might seem superfluous and unnecessary. As a result, conservatives may seek to backup their beliefs through reliance on religion or other types of authority (certain politicians, news outlets, etc.). If one has previously created trust in such an authority figure (perhaps

through the discovery of a similar worldview) it may be easy to simply accept their word as truth. In this sense, intellectualizing an argument instead of introspecting upon it serves to support one's worldview while distancing oneself from their internal thoughts.

Indeed, this theory would support Lakoff's (2002) Strict Father model of the conservative worldview. Seeking guidance through authority and laws might explain why conservatives tend to support less environmental regulations and tighter restrictions on gay marriage and abortion. Adherence to authority is a central component of the conservative ideology. Therefore, when confronted with potentially introspective questions such as "What would I do if my teenage daughter got pregnant?" the answer becomes obvious. By favoring a government ban on abortion, the introspective process has been made obsolete and there remains no gray area in which to make decisions.

Furthermore, apprehensions founded in a dangerous worldview may also moderate conservative's interest in introspection. Along with the world being a dangerous and threatening place, conservatives may also believe themselves to be capable of committing offensive actions or thoughts. This fear, coupled with a high regard for self-reliance, may cause conservatives to view introspection a threat to their moral fabric, rather than an act of insight.

Because there is virtually no literature on introspection and political affiliation, we must make assumptions indirectly using previous research. It is hypothesized that conservatives will display less introspective thought than liberals. As mentioned earlier, conservatives have shown lower degrees of cognitive complexity and more need for certainty. Cognitive complexity and introspection both involve in-depth thought processes but still remain two different concepts. The main difference between the two is

that introspection centers on the ability to reflect into and about oneself, while cognitive complexity centers on the ability to differentiate between multiple perspectives (Jost, Kruglanski, Glaser, & Sulloway, 2003).

In this study we will examine the narratives of profiles created on an online dating site. The data from this study were collected from an online dating site because the format of an online dating profile allows for open-ended writing with few parameters. Online dating profiles are a good opportunity to examine introspectiveness because portions of the profile give individuals the chance to orient themselves inward by discussing who they are, their likes and dislikes, their wishes and desires, etc. Data was limited to those individuals claiming either extremely liberal or extremely conservative political ideologies in order to illustrate more clearly the differences between the two. When selecting profiles, we chose an age cutoff of 25 or older because we hypothesize that younger individuals have the tendency to be less cognitively invested in politics and/or their political attitudes may be driven more by the beliefs of friends and family than their own conscious reflections. From the data we collect, we expect extremely conservative individuals to exhibit lower levels of introspection than extremely liberal individuals. In particular, it was predicted that conservative individuals would articulate a higher number of external statements and a lower number of introspective statements than liberal individuals.

## Chapter 2

### METHOD

Introspection is the act of examining one's inner thoughts and emotions. In this study, it was measured by examining the number and quality of introspective statements that an individual reports. Presumably, those individuals who engage in introspection frequently will be more likely to discuss such cognitive events, given an appropriate venue, as well as, discuss them in a sincere and thoughtful manner. The forum that is the source of data for this study is open-ended and designed to highlight (i.e., make salient) both the self and certain facets of one's life. As a result, those individuals who regularly engage in introspection should have the appropriate opportunity to convey introspective information about themselves.

#### *Participants*

Data was collected from 200 Match.com profiles: Fifty profiles of males listing their political affiliation as 'Ultra Conservative', fifty profiles of females listing their political affiliation as 'Ultra Conservative', fifty profiles of males listing their political affiliation as 'Very Liberal', and fifty profiles of females listing their political affiliation as 'Very Liberal'. All profiles sampled were of individuals who described themselves as age 25 or older, reside within the United States, and are searching for a heterosexual relationship.

#### *Procedure*

A total of four searches were conducted based on the parameters described above. Search results were sorted alphabetically by username. Fifty total profiles were sampled by selecting every fifth profile after randomly selecting a starting point from 1 to 9. Each

selected profile's 'About me and who I'm looking for' section was then copied and pasted in its entirety into a blank word document. Random numbers were assigned to each passage and any identifying information (e.g., political affiliation, religious affiliation, hobbies, etc.) were kept separate from the passages themselves. Every statement from each passage was labeled as either an introspective or external statement by three independent raters. The ratio of introspective to external statements was then recorded, offsetting any individual differences in passage length.

The 'About me and who I'm looking for' section is designed to guide individuals to introspect by specifically asking them to think about themselves. Therefore it was expected that the majority of statements from each passage would be introspective. However, the open-ended format does allow for individuals to avoid introspection and provide more descriptive accounts of themselves. Because most of the statements were expected to be introspective, raters examined each passage in search of statements that stand out (i.e., external statements). If individuals are truly avoiding the introspective process, their personal accounts should reflect this and their passages should reflect more external statements (as opposed to introspective statements). External statements were categorized as those which are merely explanatory and descriptive (e.g., "I have brown hair", "People say I'm hilarious"). External statements can also reflect ability and activities such as "I am attractive" and "I like to go to the movies". These statements should reflect insights that could be easily observed by others and do not necessarily require access to a person's inner thoughts.

Introspective statements, on the other hand, include those statements addressing individual beliefs, internal thoughts, emotions, and desires. An example of an

introspective statement would be “I’m looking for a leader” or “I love a sense of humor”. Unlike external statements, these statements require access to a person’s inner thoughts and/or beliefs. As previously mentioned, passages from the ‘About me and who I’m looking for’ section are expected to reflect mostly introspective statements. Because raters were specifically seeking out external statements, introspective statements served as the default for all other statements. In other words, unless a statement was clearly external (i.e., descriptive and explanatory), it was considered an introspective statement. Statements that appeared to be more commentative in nature (e.g., “Well, what can I say?” or “The essay of all essays”) were considered introspective because they reflect inner thought. Statements that were clearly incomplete or appear irrelevant (e.g., “Bummer”, “Duh”) were disregarded.

The same three raters also recorded an overall introspection score for each passage based on a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being least introspective and 5 being most introspective. In order to assess overall introspectiveness, raters took into account the passage as a whole, the number of introspective statements, and the quality of those statements. Quality statements should reflect involvement, concern, and sincerity in conveying information about oneself. Both the ratio score and the overall introspectiveness score were then examined independently as well as in comparison to one another.

In the analysis, external statements, introspective statements, and overall introspectiveness scores from all three raters were averaged. Interrater reliability between the three raters was established prior to the averaging of scores. Within the three raters, a Cronbach’s alpha for external statements (0.85), introspective statements (0.90), and

overall introspectiveness scores (0.70) was found. Additionally, the means of the external and introspective statements were used to create a new variable that reflected the proportion of introspective statements to external statements. In addition to political affiliation, gender was included as a factor in the analysis. Although there were no a priori predictions concerning gender, this variable was included to explore any gender differences.

## Chapter 3

### RESULTS

On a scale of one to five, the mean introspectiveness score for conservatives ( $n = 100$ ) was 2.89 with a standard deviation of 0.97. The mean overall introspectiveness score for liberals ( $n = 100$ ) was 3.22 with a standard deviation of 0.86. Conservatives averaged 3.93 external statements and 3.82 introspective statements per narrative. Liberals averaged 6.03 external statements and 6.47 introspective statements per narrative. The mean proportion of introspective statements (vs. external statements) for conservatives ( $n = 100$ ) was 0.48 with a standard deviation of 0.21. The mean proportion of introspective statements for liberals ( $n = 100$ ) was 0.51 with a standard deviation of 0.16.

A 2 (Political affiliation: conservative vs. liberal)  $\times$  2 (Gender: male vs. female) between groups MANOVA was used to examine differences in conservative and liberal introspective thought as measured by the number of introspective statements within profile narratives. The results revealed an overall effect of Political affiliation, Wilk's  $\Delta = .954$ ,  $F(2, 195) = 4.65$ ,  $p < .05$ . There was no effect of Gender, Wilk's  $\Delta = .996$ ,  $F(2, 195) = .366$ ,  $p > .05$  and no interaction between Political affiliation and Gender, Wilk's  $\Delta = .996$ ,  $F(2, 195) = .366$ ,  $p > .05$ .

Post hoc univariate tests revealed a relationship between political affiliation and overall introspectiveness scores  $F(1, 196) = 6.237$ ,  $p < .05$ . The overall introspectiveness score was lower for individuals who identified themselves as politically conservative ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SE = .09$ ) than those individuals who identified themselves as politically liberal ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SE = .092$ ). There was no effect of gender on overall



introspectiveness scores  $F < 1$ . There was no relationship between political affiliation and the proportion of introspective to external statements. There was no significant difference in the proportion of introspective statements between conservatives ( $M = .48$ ,  $SE = .02$ ) and liberals ( $M = .51$ ,  $SE = .02$ ).

## Chapter 4

### DISCUSSION

The results generally support the hypothesis that politically conservative individuals show less introspective thought than politically liberal individuals. The overall introspectiveness score of conservatives was significantly lower than the overall introspectiveness score of liberals. Interrater reliability analyses confirmed a good degree of agreement between raters, supporting the hypothesis that introspectiveness is measuring an objectively recognizable construct. In other words, all three raters were independently able to observe the lack of introspectiveness within conservative profile narratives, while observing a greater amount of introspectiveness within liberal profile narratives. The average proportion of introspective vs. external statements did not prove statistically significant, although means are trending in the predicated direction (i.e., conservatives exhibit fewer introspective statements than liberals).

With regard to the number of introspective vs. external statements, while liberals did indeed exhibit a greater number of introspective statements, they also exhibited a greater number of external statements. The data from this study indicate that, on average, liberals wrote more than conservatives. This finding could prove significant in itself. The profile narrative is open-ended in format and encourages individuals to open up and share characteristics about themselves. As such, it could be speculated that some of the conservative correlates previously mentioned could be the basis for this finding. Writing an open-ended narrative that is by its nature personal and potentially introspective might be threatening or anxiety provoking for an individual who is averse to introspection and is intolerant of ambiguity and/or high in the need for structure.

The findings of this study are unique and novel to this body of research because they highlight differences in the way people construct and process information. Prior studies examining psychological differences between liberals and conservatives have mainly focused on personality characteristics (i.e., authoritarianism, intolerance of ambiguity, need for closure, etc.). Introspection, on the other hand, is not so much a characteristic as it is a way of thinking about and processing concepts. Instead of looking at the amount of a certain variable an individual possesses, introspection looks at both the frequency of introspective thought and the quality or depth of that thought. In this sense, introspection is not a personality trait, but rather a potential explanation for why certain characteristics exist within individuals.

There is, of course, a limitation to this study with regard to the construct of introspection. Introspection has been described as an exploration of the self (Van Gundy & Schieman, 2001), an awareness of one's own affect (Frith & Lau, 2006), and a "subjective consciousness" (Overgaard, 2006). Introspection is difficult to measure because it is an act that occurs in the mind and must be reflected on through self-report. Consequently measures of introspective thought must be indirect and implicit. The method used to investigate introspection in this study examined writing and not thought. This is potentially limiting because some introspective thought could have been disregarded in the translation of thought to words. Introspective thought in this study was operationally defined as those statements that address individual beliefs, internal thoughts, emotions, and desires. In contrast to external statements which are merely descriptive, introspective statements were defined as those that require access to one's inner thoughts, and subsequently reflect insights about oneself. Although the measure of

introspection in this study exhibited good interrater reliability, the field of introspective research as a whole remains restricted by inaccessibility of direct measurement.

It should also be noted that political affiliation, whether conservative, liberal, independent, etc., reflects a continuum. While two individuals both might label themselves as belonging to a particular party, their opposition or support to certain issues may differ greatly. In other words, political affiliation is not a static personality characteristic. One's degree of liberalism or conservatism may be dependent upon the issue at hand or may depend on one's personal experience regarding a matter (e.g., abortion, welfare, etc.). The profile narratives used in this study were collected from a sample of individuals who labeled themselves as being at extreme ends of the political spectrum in order to emphasize differences between the two. Furthermore, the significance of politics within one's life is entirely dependent upon the individual. Politically moderate individuals have long been viewed as the 'mushy middle', as individuals who held no real passionate views towards either the left or the right. True, to some people politics may not be a matter of importance, however, there should be a distinction made between political fervor and one's place on the political spectrum.

The results of this study provided support for a link between introspection and political affiliation; however, the direction between these two variables is still in need of clarification. Is introspection simply a facet of conservatism or are the two variables separate personality characteristics altogether? Does a conservative worldview lead to less introspection or do those who introspect less become conservative in their ideologies? Further empirical research should focus on whether there is a causal link between these two variables.

Prior research has established that individuals scoring higher on the Dangerous World scale also score higher on measures of Right Wing Authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1988), a consistent conservative correlate. Based on this and Lakoff's Strict Father model (2002), it might be extrapolated that the conservative worldview plays some part in introspection. The results of this study suggest that both the conservative and liberal worldview influence one's approach to the outside world. Reluctance to introspect may be a reflection of the dangerous worldview conservatives tend to possess. In addition to the outside world being a dangerous place, conservatives might perceive that what is within themselves is dangerous as well, perhaps due to conflicts between their thoughts and their personal morals or religious beliefs. Conservatives might engage in less introspection in an attempt to cordon off their inner self from either risky ideas coming in or harmful thoughts going out. In this sense, threats to the self can take the form of external events or internal thoughts.

The Strict Father model also states that the conservative worldview sees the world as a place in which individuals need rules and authority in order to learn morality. In this model, introspection may be incompatible with the conservative worldview because it requires a reliance on self-insight instead of moral authority. To the conservative mind, adherence to authority may serve as a means to reduce cognitive dissonance. For example, placing bans on such practices as abortion and stem cell research eliminates the need to introspect about what one might do if placed in that situation. More empirical research is needed regarding how worldview, introspection, and political affiliation relate to one another in order to lead to a greater understanding of the foundation of conservative beliefs.

Reluctance to introspect may be viewed as a defense mechanism which allows conservatives to disregard any fears, anxieties, or personal weaknesses. Strong links between lower levels of introspectiveness and conservative beliefs give support to the idea that reluctance to introspect serves as a defense mechanism and/or a means for reducing cognitive dissonance. Indeed, Berzonsky and Sullivan's (1992) research on self-reflection indicates that such "defensive maneuvering" techniques go beyond reducing dissonance and instead serve to reduce the threat posed to one's individual identity.

Perhaps the most challenging direction for future research is understanding why such differing worldviews come to be in the first place. There are plenty of examples of siblings raised within the same household who grow up to develop dramatically different worldviews. Is it possible that individuals have a biological predisposition towards a particular worldview or do life experiences guide our direction? In the United States it seems that there are two main, distinct worldviews, but can that be said of other countries? Worldviews certainly differ from country to country but within different countries themselves, are the divides between worldviews so pronounced?

While many questions still remain about political ideologies and worldview, the differences in introspectiveness found within this study carry practical implications. The most obvious application would be to modify advertising, marketing, and campaigning strategies based on the targeted audience. For instance, if conservatives generally seek to avoid introspective thought should corporations and politicians appeal to them differently than liberals? Introspection should also be taken into consideration with regard to personal relationships. Communicating with different individuals, perhaps as a school teacher, a supervisor, or a therapist, requires the ability to work with diverse populations.

Differences in the depth, frequency, and quality of inner thought could potentially have effects on the day to day interaction between individuals and how they come to understand one another.

Acknowledging the demons and temptations within oneself is a difficult process for most individuals. We as individuals have the power to grant ourselves access to the thoughts within our own minds. True introspection should be a process of discovering what, how, and why one feels the way they do. For some individuals, however, introspection may seem a gateway to unleashing the darker side of their inner thoughts instead of an enlightening reflection on the self. The fact that individuals have a choice in recognizing their inner thoughts speaks volumes about the perception of reality. Time after time it seems to hold true that people create their own realities, seeing only what they wish to see. Worldviews, ideologies, and experiences are all mechanisms that provide groups and/or societies with feelings of cohesion and connectedness. Ultimately, however, we as individuals live alone in our worlds, alone in our unique perceptions.

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