

Overcoming Identity Based, Intergroup Conflict with the American Religious Right

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| Abstract <p>The Religious Right in the United States has become a long-standing player in the American political system. Through the course of its political involvement, this group of politically active conservative religious people has become involved in many conflicts since its origins in the late 1970s. Taking controversial stances on many social issues, this conflict has become ingrained in American politics and society. As conflicts such as this become protracted, they become less focused on tangible outcomes or the original issues, and a system develops where conflict roots itself into the identity of a group. This can lead to stalemate, hostility towards the outgroup, and other problematic systemic issues in conflict.</p> <p>The guiding research question for my thesis is how one might overcome such an identity based, intergroup conflict. To understand how group identity functions in conflict, I have used the Religious Right as a case study to which I applied social identity theory approaches to conflict.</p> <p>In my thesis, I first outline social identity theory and establish its relevance for conflict. I then, using others research, show how understanding this aspect of human cognition helps us see how social identities may play out in conflict, and what role approaches based on social identity theory may take in conflict resolution. In my next chapter, I present a brief historical sketch of movements preceding the American Religious Right and how it has developed since its origins.</p> <p>With my theoretical base and my case established, I then show how the approaches informed by social identity theory laid out in my first chapter may be applied to the Religious Right. This application of theory shows that there exist several possible approaches through which engaging people in the Religious Right may lead away from the problematic entrenched systems of conflict and towards a more productive means of engagement.</p> | | |
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1. Introduction

As with any country, the way religion intertwines with the history of the United States has shaped the landscape of everyday life. More than just a part of history, religion as it is lived and experienced in the United States shapes the public space. Notably, within the last forty years there has been a movement of many Christian groups to connect their religious beliefs with their political beliefs. Terms such as Evangelical, Fundamentalist, or Religious Right have come to characterize a certain ethos embraced by many Americans of this religious and political movement. Embracing very specific values which this group seeks to codify into law, this group has met much opposition in its desire to pass legislation with specific Christian interpretations. As such, this conflict has emerged time and again over conflicts of social, cultural, and political importance. On divisive issues such as this, clear lines have been drawn, and people have entrenched themselves in their positions on these issues. This leaves us with a conflict in stalemate, antagonistic participation, and a situation with seemingly no resolution for people so entrenched in their values.

The question this paper seeks to address is how to transform this identity based conflict between the this political-religious movement and its opposition. In order to look at possible ways forward, I will use social identity theory to understand how group identity affects conflicts such as this, and apply previous research on this topic to the Religious Right. Using social identity theory will allow me to examine the social-psychological aspects of this group and how these features affect the conflicts the Religious Right has with its opponents. Through this, I will be able to discuss possible ways forward utilizing approaches based on this theory.

First, I will present social identity theory as a way to understand group identities, and demonstrate how a social identity functions within an intergroup conflict. Second, I will give the recent history of this religious and political movement in the United States and discuss the Religious Right as a social identity. Finally, working with the theory and applying it to the group as presented in its history and its current state, I will suggest possible avenues for transforming this conflict from its current intractable state towards an avenue of productive disagreement within American society.

2. Social Identity Theory and Intergroup Conflict

In this chapter, I will set out my theoretical framework around social identity theory and intergroup conflict. First, I introduce the relevance of identity to intergroup conflict. Secondly, I introduce social identity theory as my theoretical frame. Thirdly, I will define conflict and violence, as well as delineate the goals of conflict resolution attempts. Following these definitions, I will discuss how social identity theory can give insight into both how conflicts arise and how conflicts may be eased.

2.1 The importance of Identity and Identification

At the outset, it is worth identifying the importance of identity and identification. At the risk of stating the obvious, I will begin by saying that identifying with a group is a social process. This social nature, however obvious it may be, is crucial in understanding how people come to belong to define themselves in terms of certain groups and not others, how groups understand themselves and their role in society, how individuals see themselves within a group, and many other processes foundational to the quest to understand groups in conflict. Groups, their identities, goals, and purposes are negotiated by those within the group and are affected by those outside. The nature of any group is shaped by its context and the society of which it is part. When we look at how groups form, how people come to belong to groups, and how these groups function in conflict and in peace, we are observing primarily social phenomenon rather than the behavior of individuals.

At the outset of such a project as this, it is worth bringing to the forefront why questions of identity and social identity are a productive means to understand conflict. Conflict, as it is often understood, is centered on material competition or ideological differences. The people in the midst of conflict are, in the various forms of media, typically represented as rational, self-invested actors who are acting in their own self-interest in situations of competition for scarce materials or motivated by differences of ideology. However, this is often not the case, particularly in the case of protracted conflicts which span years, and even generations. While conflicts may start out over concrete issues, Vallacher et al. point out that "over time, however, conflicts tend to center on less tangible issues involving moral superiority, values, and other aspects of human existence that are not amenable to practical solutions"¹. While many conflicts start out through clear and concrete disagreements or competition, over time, conflicts become anchored in issues not defined by the initial disagreement. Because of this, a traditional approach to motivation in intergroup conflict cannot adequately capture the driving factors in long-term conflicts.² People in these protracted conflicts often act in ways that would go against their own self-interest, and defy explanations based on the assumption of a purely rational actor acting on self-interest.³ Rather than rational self-interest, identity is one such aspect of human cognition which shapes how people act in conflict in ways that may defy logic. Groups and group identities both give shape to and are, in turn, shaped by protracted conflict. Intangible issues such as morality and values, which drive the conflict, interweave with how people and groups define themselves and function in times of conflict. Therefore, in searching for way forward out of a conflicted situation, it is insufficient to focus on

¹ Robin R. Vallacher et al. "Why Do Conflicts become Intractable? The Dynamical Perspective on Malignant Social Relations." In *The Oxford Handbook of Intergroup Conflict.*, ed Linda R. Tropp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14-15.

² Vallacher et al, 17.

³ Vallacher et al, 17-18

the presenting issues, and deeper, identity-based issues require consideration. Amid such protracted conflicts, it is necessary to look for a theory that can provide a better understanding of how to escape these protracted conflicts which are no longer about the issues over which the conflict arose. I believe social identity theory is one such theory.

2.2 Social Identity Theory

In this section, I set out to do three things. First, I present how social identity has been defined, looking at several definitions. Secondly, I will discuss why and how a social identity is formed. Finally, I will discuss how social identity is measured and how I will measure social identity for the scope of my project.

Social identity has been defined in many ways. Tajfel and Turner, when they first introduced the concept, defined social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership."⁴ This definition was later expanded by Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Blackwell to include intragroup behavior, defining social identity as "self-categorizations that 'define the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories."⁵ Ervin Staub claims that "social identity theory has focused on how people categorize themselves (and others) as members of groups, how they identify themselves with certain groups, and the tendency they have to enhance themselves by comparing their group favorably with other groups."⁶ Korostelina has defined social identity as "a feeling of belonging to a social group, as a strong connection with social category and as an important part of our mind that affects our social perceptions and behavior."⁷ While these definitions all differ in some small ways, they all paint a picture of the same phenomenon, and may all be useful for providing a basic understanding of what a social identity is.

Social identity theory answers both questions of personal and group identity. According to the theory, "people derive their self-concepts, in part, from their membership in social groups."⁸ This socialized identity as a part of a larger system becomes part of the definition of one's self. As Robert White puts it, "For those who employ the concept of social identity, the self is a product of

⁴ Lee Jussim, Richard D. Ashmore, and David Wilder, "Introduction" in *Social Identity, Intergroup conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, ed Richard D. Ashmore, Lee Jussim, and David Wilder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.

⁵ Robert W. White, "Social and Role Identities in Political Violence" in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, And and Conflict Reduction* ed. Richard Ashmore, Lee Jussim, and David Wilder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 139.

⁶ Ervin Staub. "Individual and Group Identities in Genocide and Mass Killing" in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict and Conflict Reduction*, ed Richard Ashmore, Lee Jussim, and David Wilder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 164.

⁷ Karina V. Korostelina. *Social Identity and Conflict: Structures, Dynamics, and Implications* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 15.

⁸ Rezarta Bilali and Michael A. Ross, "Remembering Intergroup Conflict" in *The Oxford Handbook of Intergroup Contact* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 127

comparison and categorization processes in which the 'perceiver appraises the self in relation to others.'"⁹

Social identity is not an intrinsic part of a person; rather, it is a social construction and influenced by the existing social structures.¹⁰ It is also not something that people can always choose. One can have a social identity placed on them on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity, or other factors through which others may categorize them. While individuals may exert some control over groups with which they identify, they do not get to define the group. Thus, while some social identities may involve a certain level of choice or ideological commitment, individuals do not create the categories with which they may align themselves.¹¹

2.3 Forming a Social Identity

Thinking about the formation of a social identity, it is first important to ask why such identities are formed before we consider how they are formed. Social identities meet several psychological needs and serve several functions. Brewer's optimal distinctiveness theory gives a great deal of insight into why these identities develop. Speaking about this theory, Korostelina tells us, "Brewer's theory of "optimal distinctiveness" suggests that people have the dual need for distinction from a group (intercategory contrast) and for inclusion in it (intracategory assimilation)."¹² Developing a social identity fulfills both of these needs. As Korostelina points out, "thus, identification fulfills two main functions; (1) realization of the individual need to belong to a group that provides protection and confidence and (2) inclusion of a person into a system of social relationships."¹³ Furthermore, identities such as this reduce uncertainty.¹⁴ For those who are highly identified, a person can find within the identity a clear understanding of how the world is, how it should be, and how one should act in the world.

As a person forms or connects with a social identity, there are two key processes. First, one cognitively associates oneself with the group. Beyond simply categorizing oneself as a part, however, "Social identification, then, entails affective and evaluative processes that are above and beyond mere cognitive classification of the self and others into a shared social category."¹⁵

Categorization and the corresponding evaluative processes are the substance of a social identity, and

⁹ White, 139.

¹⁰ Herbert C. Kelman, "The Role of National Identity in Conflict Resolution" in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, ed. Richard Ashmore, Lee Jussim, and David Wilder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 194.

¹¹ Jack Citrin, Cara Wong, and Brian Duff. "The Meaning of American National Identity" in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction* ed. Richard Ashmore, Lee Jussim, and David Wilder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 72

¹² Korostelina, 66.

¹³ Korostelina, 19.

¹⁴ Korostelina, 66.

¹⁵ Marilynn B. Brewer. "Ingroup Identification and Intergroup Conflict" in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction* ed. Richard Ashmore, Lee Jussim, and David Wilder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21.

understanding how these processes work in a person's connection with an identity is important. In this section, I will explore these two processes as they occur in the process of forming and connecting with a social identity.

In social identity theory, the concept of categorization plays an important role in understanding its formation. Indeed, as Brewer points out, "Virtually all current theories of social identity and intergroup relations recognize social categorization as the basic cognitive process underlying all intergroup phenomena."¹⁶ This kind of categorization is a basic feature of cognition, both for individuals and groups which allows people to simplify the world around them.¹⁷ As Dovidio et al put it, "Categorization enables decisions about incoming information to be made quickly, because the instant an object is categorized it is assigned the properties shared by other category members."¹⁸ As a feature of human cognition, it is not something humans can escape, but will inform how people make decisions and see all aspects of the world. Social identity, formed by such categorization, "results from the categorization of the world into ingroup and outgroup and the labeling of oneself as a member of the ingroup."¹⁹

As a result of this categorization, stereotypes form as a natural consequence.²⁰ These stereotypes do not always reflect reality, and are by this definition, simplifications which do not carry an ability to represent the complexity of the identity of the other. Indeed, as Dovidio et al tell us, "Distinctions between members of different categories become exaggerated. Thus, categorization enhances perceptions of similarities within and differences between groups."²¹ These stereotypes, regardless of how accurate they are, still inform how people understand the world to be real. As such, while they may at times be a caricature at best, they still shape the reality from which people function.

In social categorization, Korostelina tells us there are three stages. She writes, "During the first stage, individuals define themselves as members of a social group; in the second, they learn the stereotypes and norms of the group; and in the third, group categories influence the perception and understanding of all situations in a particular context."²² The cognitive processes at the level of the individual are clearly influenced by context and setting; one must learn with which groups one can possibly identify, and once that is completed, how to behave and how to think as a member of one's group.

¹⁶ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 19

¹⁷ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 20

¹⁸ John F. Dovidio et al. "Divergent Intergroup Perspectives" in *The Oxford Handbook of Intergroup Conflict* ed. Linda R. Tropp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 159.

¹⁹ Kay Deaux. "Models, Meanings, and Motivations" in *Social Identity Processes* ed Dora Capozza and Rupert Brown (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), 17.

²⁰ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 20.

²¹ Dovidio et al, 160

²² Korostelina, 25

While this categorization is the psychological foundation for social identity theory, social identity theory cannot be reduced to categorization. As noted above, the categorization allows a person to identify *as* part of a group; it is the emotional and evaluative processes which allow a person to identify *with* the group to which they belong.²³ These evaluative approaches are laden with values and morality. While generally, one views positively the group to which he or she belongs, it cannot be assumed they do so.

It is this portion of the formation of a social identity which is most variable. The strength of this emotional connection to the group and the positivity of the evaluations play a major role in how closely one identifies with a group, how much one will assume the values of the group, and how closely one's own identity is tied into this group. Through her research, Korostelina points out that these emotional evaluations are a more powerful predictor of intergroup attitudes than the cognitive.²⁴ While these emotional and evaluative processes may be harder to evaluate or less clear than the categorization which occurs, it is likely far more significant in determining behavior.

2.4 Measuring Social Identity

Given the purpose of my project, it is important to discuss how one can measure and speak about social identity. As noted above, the two key components of social identity are categorization as a member of the group and emotional attachment to the group. Any measure of social identity must examine and account for these in some way. Additionally, I need to account for the salience of the people who hold such an identity.

Salience is a key term in speaking about the levels at which one holds a social identity. Before moving forward with measurements, it is here helpful to define and understand these terms. Very simply understood, a salient identity is the most important identity for a person. Or as some would describe it, a strong social identity is a salient social identity. Salience is the level at which one identifies with a group, and ranges from low to high.²⁵ As Korostelina puts it, "One's salient identity characterizes one's core position within other identities and does not depend on the situations of intergroup relations. It influences one's thinking and behavior even in situations lacking an opposing category or identity."²⁶ Salience, therefore, is a zero-sum proposition; in order for one identity to become more salient, other identities a person or group may hold become less salient.²⁷ Salience is not a feature of the group, but of an individual's relation to the group.

²³ Citrin, Wong, and Duff, 73-74.

²⁴ Korostelina, 169.

²⁵ Korostelina, 71.

²⁶ Korostelina, 20.

²⁷ Korostelina, 71.

A highly salient identity means that intergroup boundaries are sharply drawn, whereas less salient identities are more open.²⁸ A highly salient social identity moves a person from viewing their group as equal with other groups to superior to others and becoming more ingroup-centric.²⁹ Additionally, a salient social identity means that the ingroup goals and values carry more weight than those rooted in individual identity.³⁰ As social identities become more salient, the importance of the ingroup, as well as the clarity of who is in and who is out, increases. As these boundaries become clearer, the interactions with the outgroup become more difficult and less positive.³¹

In Korostelina's work, she outlines three factors as determinants of the salience of different social identities: level of difference, prevalence of intergroup or interpersonal contact, and competition among groups.³² Greater levels of differences relates to the guiding process in social identity theory of categorization. The greater the differences, the greater the role categorization will have in the process. The prevalence of intergroup or interpersonal contact "with other people as typical members of outgroups strengthen identification with ingroup sand lead to the formation of a salient social identity."³³ And, the greater the competition between groups, the more salient the related identity becomes.³⁴

She also identifies three factors that lead to an increase in the salience of social identity: the existence of a majority or prevalence of people relating to a specific social category, threatening or negative attitudes toward the ingroup, and a change in a person's goals and values on account of situational changes. In situations described by her first factor, the existence of nationality, class, language, or other such majority groups can lead to more salient social identities. Secondly, if an ingroup comes under threat or attack – physical, verbal, or otherwise – the corresponding identity usually becomes more salient. As Korostelina writes, "those negative sentiments can promote enhanced ingroup solidarity, loyalty, and subsequent negative attitudes toward the outgroup."³⁵ Thirdly, a change in goals and values in relation to one's situation can become significant. As someone grows in his or her profession, attends a certain university, converts to a different religion, or goes through another such change, each of these changes can become significant if they attach their social identity to it.³⁶ However, overall, Korostelina tells us that. "Any change in the social situation or balance of power will lead to an increase in the salience of corresponding identity."³⁷

²⁸ Korostelina 44.

²⁹ Korostelina, 62.

³⁰ Korostelina, 73.

³¹ Korostelina 44.

³² Korostelina, 72-73.

³³ Korostelina, 73

³⁴ Korostelina, 73.

³⁵ Korostelina 116.

³⁶ Korostelina, 116.

³⁷ Korostelina 117.

As established, there are two key components of social identity: categorization and affective evaluations of the category. Both of these must be taken into account in order to effectively measure or speak of social identity. To measure social identity moving forward, I will focus on three things. First, to adequately speak about the social identity of the group, I will define the characteristics of the group which, for its members, are defining features. Second, but related to the first point, I will speak about the content of the social identity. This will examine the normative behavior, expectations, and values. By focusing on these two things, we can define the categorization process which takes place in social identity theory and clarify what a group identifies with and the boundaries which they draw. Thirdly, I will speak about the salience of the group, which will take into account the emotional and evaluative aspects in addition to the categories above. By looking at social identity through these three things, I will be able to identify specific characteristics of the group that may play a specific role in the ongoing conflict, and by addressing the specific nature of these three features of the social identity, make proposals for moving forward out of the conflict.

2.5 Defining Conflict, Violent Conflict, Peace

In this section, I set out to define these terms and clarify what are reasonable goals for those working in conflicted situations. While definitions of these terms may appear on the surface to be simple, the common usage betrays a complexity behind these terms. Once these terms are defined, in this section I also set out what the goals are for working in a conflicted situation such as the one the Religious Right is in, showing how resolution as commonly used is an inadequate means for

The first issue with defining conflict is our encounter with its negative connotation in our speech and usage. Conflict itself is not a bad thing; it motivates change, and can lead to better cooperation, allocation of resources, or other positive outcomes. Susan Optow suggests that constructive conflict is characterized by "cooperative processes, a focus on mutual gains, open communication, and trust."³⁸ She also states "Conflicts are important junctures for surfacing urgent concerns about fairness that can effect positive change."³⁹ While much of the conflict presented in the news media is negative, the reality is that our lives are shaped by many conflicts that are necessary for positive growth. Unfortunately, not all conflicts are carried out constructively. Optow characterizes destructive conflict as "competitive processes, antagonistic interests, impoverished communication, suspicion, and harsh tactics."⁴⁰ Conflict is an inevitability, but its destructive nature is not.

Drawing from Galtung's work *Peace by Peaceful Means*, there are three kinds of violence in conflict. While a question of violence for many of us may draw up images of war and battle, for

³⁸ Susan Optow. "The Scope of Justice, Intergroup Conflict, and Peace" in *The Oxford Handbook of Intergroup Conflict* ed. Linda R. Tropp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 82.

³⁹ Optow., 82.

⁴⁰ Optow, 82.

Galtung, no shots need to be fired for a conflict to be violent. Galtung identifies direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence as the ways in which conflicts may be violent.

Direct violence is present if there is an actor who intends immediate consequences upon a recipient.⁴¹ This is fairly straightforward, and is what most of us think of when we hear the word violence. Structural violence, which Galtung suggests is the same thing as indirect violence, exists when there is not that actor with immediate intentions on violence. "The two major forms of outer structural violence are well known from politics and economics: repression and exploitation. Both work on the body and mind, but are not necessarily intended."⁴² Cultural violence is behind all other forms of violence; "all of it symbolic, in religion and ideology, in language and art, in science and law, in media and education." Cultural violence functions to legitimize direct and structural violence.⁴³

It is worth pointing out here that conflicts can be violent without direct acts of violence. While the idea of violent conflict may bring to mind images of warfare, genocide, or tyrannical governments, in fact, violence need not be so overt. Rather, structural and cultural violence can inflict harm as well. Governments denying rights, healthcare, or necessary services – while not commonly defined as violent – can be understood to be a means of violence.

Drawing from Galtung's work, there are two definitions of peace that he offers, negative peace and positive peace. In his words, negative peace "is the absence/reduction of violence of all kinds."⁴⁴ This kind of peace is defined by the absence or negation of violence. It is called negative because its definition relies on a negation, not because it has a pessimistic outlook. Positive peace defines peace as "nonviolent and creative conflict transformation."⁴⁵ He continues later "by positive peace we mean a cooperative system beyond 'passive peaceful coexistence', one that can bring forth positively synergistic fruits of the harmony."⁴⁶ It is worth noting that these definitions are not in opposition to one another, but rather, are complementary. As such, a full definition of peace would not be one or the other, but would encompass both. Peace, therefore, is more than just the absence of violence, though the absence of violence is required. It is a system, in which people interact positively with one another and support one another. It requires action, cooperation, and the development and maintenance of a healthy system of coexistence.

Having looked at definitions, it is now important to discuss the goal or aim of people working in a conflicted situation. There is a challenge when talking about what the goal is when

⁴¹ Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means* (Oslo: International Peace Institute, 1996), 2.

⁴² Galtung, 2.

⁴³ Galtung, 2.

⁴⁴ Galtung 9, 31.

⁴⁵ Galtung 9.

⁴⁶ Galtung 61.

working in conflicted situations. Often, we hear of conflict resolution, implying that the conflict at hand is simply over resources, and once that issue finds a solution that is amenable to both parties, the conflict is thus successfully resolved. While this does work for some conflicts, it is hardly the case for all. In the case of protracted conflict, conflict is not something that can be simply resolved when conflict has moved beyond tangible issues. What is at stake in these conflicts is not the resolution of issues, but the transformation of how people approach conflict and see themselves in relation to it. Success under this approach is more than simply resolving the issues. Therefore, success is defined not based on resolution, but on moving conflict from a toxic, destructive or non-productive stalemate forward to a healthy way through which problems can find solutions. As Vellacher et al. describe it,

The central issue of conflict resolution, then, is not how to resolve the existential or tangible issues in dispute. Rather, the issue is how to transform the system from the coordinated ensemble of dynamics perpetuating the conflict to a different coherent state that allows for benign (or perhaps positive) relations between the parties.⁴⁷

Given this, conflict is therefore analyzed as a system of action rather than as a set of issues, and the success of an approach to conflicted situations is based not on its ability to resolve the presenting issues but to shape the system toward a different, more productive end.

There are many different ways to productively or unproductively exist in conflict. Vellacher et al list as characteristics of intractable conflicts as being based on existential issues, having poor ingroup and outgroup relations, and based on emotionality.⁴⁸ As described previously, Optow described destructed conflict in terms of competition, antagonism, poor communication, suspicion, and harsh tactics. Beyond these markers, violence, hostility, and aggression are obvious signifiers of toxic conflict. To move conflict in a positive direction means moving conflict away from these modes of thinking and operating.

Because of this, the rest of this paper is working on two assumptions. Firstly, for identity based conflicts such as those I will show the Religious Right to be in, resolution of presenting issues is not actually a means to overcoming conflict. Rather, the goal is moving conflict away from a toxic system towards positive relations between the two conflicted parties. Secondly, positive peace, not a negative peace, is the end goal which leads towards positive conflict transformation and reduction. Thus, peace is considered not a one-time goal, but a system which requires maintenance to continue functioning positively.

⁴⁷ Vallacher et al, 15-16

⁴⁸ Vallacher et al, 14-15

2.6 Social Identity and Intergroup Conflict

As it relates to intergroup conflict, social identity can provide a useful lens for understanding. As noted above, it is insufficient to simply look at the proximate causes of a conflict in cases of protracted conflict. Social identity, as I will show, both shapes and is shaped by intergroup conflict, and in order to address conflicts in which the social identity of a group plays a role, these identities must be accounted for. Additionally, I will show how various theories based on a social identity perspective, can use insights from the theory in order to understand social identities roles in conflict and conflict reduction. Social identity theory gives a language through which to understand certain facets of human cognition. It is not a theory about causes of conflicts, nor is it a theory about how to end conflicts. However, its insights how humans function provide a valuable means to understand how certain aspects of conflict develop. Therefore, understanding social identity theory in conflict is to understand how it can give shape to the dynamic and structure of conflicts.

2.6.1 Social identity as a contributor to conflict

There are many features of social identity that may lead to increasing hostility or negative conflict. However, it is an incorrect assumption to make that all social identities unequivocally lead to conflict. As Gibson points out, “the dominant view among social psychologists today is that the relationship between ingroup and outgroup attitudes is conditional in nature.”⁴⁹ Thus, we cannot assume that a social identity, however strong, will inevitably lead towards a violent conflict. Marilyn Brewer has identified a continuum along which “each element in the progression provides a necessary but not sufficient condition for occurrence of the subsequent elements.”⁵⁰ At each point along this continuum, conflict or hostility become more likely. She divides the continuum in to four principles that are distinguishable: the social categorization principle, the ingroup-positivity principle, the intergroup comparison principle, and the outgroup hostility principle.⁵¹ She notes that “Within this system, the first two elements are probably universal characteristics of human social groups (as Sumner postulated), but the third and fourth elements require additional social structural and motivational conditions that are not inherent in the processes of group formation itself.”⁵² Having already focused quite heavily on categorization as a feature of human cognition and social identity, I will here focus on the remaining three principles which move conflicts toward the more violent end of the spectrum.

⁴⁹ James L. Gibson, “Do Strong Group Identities Fuel Intolerance? Evidence from the South African Case.” *Political Psychology*, 27 no. 5 (2006): 670

⁵⁰ Brewer, “Ingroup Identification,” 19.

⁵¹ Brewer, “Ingroup Identification,” 19.

⁵² Brewer, “Ingroup Identification,” 19.

Brewer's ingroup positivity principle is the second point on her spectrum. The very idea of self-categorization in social identity theory implies a positive benefit and positive affective connection with a group. Here, Brewer cites her optimal distinctiveness theory, which outlines an individual's need for inclusion into collectives, yet differentiating oneself from others.⁵³ She argues that groups meet the need for inclusion, and that the boundaries of self-categorization meet the need of sufficiently differentiating oneself from other people. Optimal distinctiveness theory means that these needs of inclusion and differentiation are the driving motives for social identification. However, Brewer points out that "although the desire for self-enhancement may not be a primary cause of ingroup identification, identification may well lead to a motivation to view the ingroup in the most favorable possible terms."⁵⁴

According to Brewer, a human's ability and desire form groups comes from our evolutionary need for interdependence for survival. We need to trust others, and others need to trust us; however, it is dangerous to be too trusting as we may be taken advantage of. An ingroup to which we are loyal (and, in turn, is loyal to us) serves as an important categorical tool which protects us from sharing our resources with those who would take advantage of us. Brewer defines ingroups as "bounded communities of mutual trust and obligation that delimit mutual interdependence and cooperation."⁵⁵ From this standpoint, recognizing someone as part of our ingroup carries significant weight with how we would interact with another person or group. This recognition is not simple, however; it is a categorization which labels a person as a part of the ingroup or not. Furthermore, this kind of categorization lowers risk, as Ashmore points out: "social categorization and clear group boundaries provide one mechanism for achieving the benefits of cooperative interdependence without the risk of excessive cost."⁵⁶

Because the ingroup is based on people knowing who they can trust, this leads to positive connections with others we perceive to be as part of our ingroup and the absence of those feelings toward the outgroup. Positive feelings, which translate into positive actions for the ingroup, can begin to show some of the ways in which a salient social identity can exacerbate intergroup conflict. Prejudices are one way in which this can play out. For example, Ashmore points out that subtler forms of racism are not defined by the strength of negative feelings toward minorities, but the absence of positive sentiment towards them.⁵⁷ These positive feelings alone, and regardless of animosity for an outgroup, can lead to preferential treatment for the ingroup.

⁵³ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 22.

⁵⁴ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 22.

⁵⁵ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 29.

⁵⁶ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 28.

⁵⁷ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 23.

Those who one categorizes within one's group, according to Brewer, are afforded social benefits of belonging to the group that are not shared by the outgroup, and on an emotional level, seen as non-threatening and beneficial for their fellow members. As Brewer puts it, "Ingroup positivity implies a sort of self-absorption where group members attend to the concerns and welfare of their own group with disregard for the status or outcomes of those outside the ingroup boundary."⁵⁸ This kind of positivity, while not reliant on a negative view of other groups, still can easily result in concrete asymmetries in the treatment of groups. Through this, we can see that a lack of a negative view of others does not mean that all groups are viewed equally by those within an ingroup, and even simply treating one's group favorably can create tension based on the resulting inequalities. As Brewer writes, "If social groups differ in access to resources and power, the benefits of ingroup favoritism accrue to members of some groups more than others and contribute to substantial differences in outcomes between the groups as a whole."⁵⁹ This kind of inequality can certainly lead to conflict, or enhance existing conflict.

This brings us to the next place along Brewer's continuum, which she calls intergroup comparison. Any social identity, as stated previously, exists among a myriad of other possible identities. As such, the evaluative aspects of social identity do not happen solely with the knowledge of the ingroup, but they happen in the presence of alternate identities and outgroups. As established in the previous section, there exists a great desire to judge the ingroup positively. While this evaluation can be judged against internal standards of what is good, Brewer points out that in most cases "knowledge of the status of outgroups becomes relevant to assessing the state and welfare of the ingroup."⁶⁰ She continues, "The need for social comparison is aroused when there is uncertainty about one's standing on some dimension of self-evaluation, uncertainty that can be resolved by comparing one's own position to that of relevant others."⁶¹ Here, she stresses the importance of the relevance of the outgroup – that which is being compared to needs to be a valid measurement of status for comparison. Thus, it is not against all outgroups, or outgroups chosen at random, which ingroups choose to compare to, but it is specific groups which provide the ingroup its own measure of status.

It is worth noting that this type of comparison still does not have to be negative; one can make comparisons "for purposes of objective self-appraisal or to motivate self-correction and improvement."⁶² However, Brewer points out that when these become both relative and evaluative assessments, defining oneself positively becomes a competitive proposition, and the judgements

⁵⁸ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 23.

⁵⁹ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 23.

⁶⁰ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 24.

⁶¹ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 24.

⁶² Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 25.

move from 'we are good' to 'we are better.' As she sums it up, "Combined with motivations for self-enhancement, then, social comparison becomes social competition and the pursuit of positive self-regard can be achieved only at the expense of the other."⁶³

There are several aspects of this worth noting. Firstly, Brewer points out that "the more similar groups are in their values and aspirations, the more acute the intergroup social competition."⁶⁴ Because of this, groups which are more similar may encounter more conflict than groups which are less similar. Secondly, groups of different statuses display different bias and behavior. The positions of groups in society will shape how they act. Thirdly, where there are many dimensions of evaluation, "social competition for positive distinctiveness may be more diffused and less intense."⁶⁵ If there are more criteria for comparison rather than less, based on this research it lowers the intensity of resulting competition or negative feelings.

This brings us to the final point on this end of Brewer's continuum of outgroup hostility. Brewer establishes the distinction between comparison, as described above, and aggression. Here, aggression is defined as "the motivation to harm the other as an end in itself."⁶⁶ At this point, there is a different kind of discrimination which develops. In other stages, discrimination was based on furthering the ingroup; here, discrimination is active and intentional negative behavior against an outgroup. However, Brewer points out that when a conflict is perceived to be zero-sum, it is difficult to tell if motivations become about ingroup favoritism or outgroup hostility, since the resulting actions would likely be similar to one another.

Based upon ingroup positivity, aggression and inflicting harm of an outgroup is not sanctioned in the absence of direct motivation. However, "these are the constraints that are lifted when outgroups are viewed with hatred or contempt—emotions that justify outgroup harm above and beyond ingroup benefit."⁶⁷ From a social identity perspective,

To justify aggression against outgroups in the interest of the ingroup, the very existence of the outgroup, or its goals and values, must be seen as a threat to the maintenance of the ingroup and to one's own social identity. Thus, understanding the relationship between ingroup identification and outgroup hostility requires understanding how the interests of the ingroup and those of the outgroup come to be perceived in conflict.⁶⁸

That the outgroup is a competitor, different, morally inferior, or any other stereotype, does not lead to aggression unless it becomes seen as a threat. This shows an important link between perceived

⁶³ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 25.

⁶⁴ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 25.

⁶⁵ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 25.

⁶⁶ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 26.

⁶⁷ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 27.

⁶⁸ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 27.

threats to the ingroup and hostility toward the outgroup, particularly in the presence of these conditions.

This process of becoming a threat is important. From the perspective of optimal distinctiveness theory, there are two possible threats: marginalization from the ingroup and the loss of distinctiveness.⁶⁹ One possible reaction to align oneself with the ingroup in the face of losing one's acceptance is hypervaluation of the group and derogation of outgroups. As Brewer puts it, "Threats to inclusion are predicted to heighten feelings of moral superiority, intolerance of difference, and concomitant emotions of contempt and disgust toward relevant outgroups."⁷⁰ To the second threat, Brewer argues that "The social changes that give rise to the prospect of close contact, integration, or influence from the outgroup engage the second form of threat to social identity – the threat of loss of distinctiveness, accompanied by feelings of invasion."⁷¹ While these two reactions to these threats are not inevitable, they are often the case. As Brewer sums up, "This analysis suggests that the combined emotions of contempt (engendered by moral superiority in the service of insecure identity) and anger (engendered by fear of invasion and loss of distinctiveness) provide the potent ingredients that are sufficient to kindle hatred, expulsion, and even ethnic cleansing."⁷²

Brewer's theory acknowledges that there are moderating conditions that help move groups along the spectrum previously outlined. The moderating conditions she identifies are common goals, power politics, culture, and social structural complexity.⁷³ Common goals can help or harm. The ingroup trust that makes common ingroup goals unifying is absent in the intergroup setting, and can make this lack of trust more obvious when groups have to work together. Loss of differentiation is also a potential threat, as are any pre-existing dynamics of the intergroup interaction.

Power politics is the next mediating condition which Brewer mentions. Brewer writes that typical conflict processes as outlined above "may be exacerbated through deliberate manipulation by group leaders in the interests of mobilizing collective action to secure or maintain political power."⁷⁴ Under situations of mistrust, people may fear being under control of those in the outgroup, and under such threat, may cling more tightly to the ingroup.

Variations among different cultures is another moderating condition. Cultures function differently from one another, and any theory which would not take into account the contextual nature of any conflict would be inadequate. The distinction Brewer makes is between collectivist

⁶⁹ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 32-33.

⁷⁰ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 32.

⁷¹ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 33.

⁷² Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 33.

⁷³ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 33-35

⁷⁴ Brewer, "Ingroup Identification," 34.

and individualist cultures. She suggests that collectivist societies draw sharper lines between groups and that there is less trust toward outgroups.⁷⁵

Brewer also lists social structural complexity as an important factor. In highly segmented societies, Brewer notes a strong link between intense ingroup favoritism and outgroup antagonism, writing that “Such segmentation promotes social comparison and perceptions of conflict of interest that give rise to negative attitudes toward outgroups and high potential for conflict.”⁷⁶ Conversely, in societies where social structures are more complex and people are differentiated along many lines, people do not categorize as strongly. Brewer writes that “Such cross-cutting ingroup-outgroup distinctions reduce the intensity of the individual’s need for inclusion, thereby reducing the potential for polarizing loyalties along any single cleavage or group distinction and perhaps increasing tolerance for outgroups in general.”⁷⁷ From this, we see the importance of complex identity structures as a mediating factor.

While Brewer’s theory is certainly helpful, before I move forward it is worth highlighting the effects of salience on intergroup relations and intergroup conflict. Several authors point out that a highly salient identity carries with it consequences for how people interact with outgroups and shapes how the ingroup/outgroup dynamic is seen.

In a highly salient social identity, often people subordinate their identity to that of a group, a process known as depersonalization. As Kuppens et al put it, “When social identity is salient, people undergo a process of depersonalization and see themselves as interchangeable group members. If one’s social identity is salient, this would imply that group concerns are also salient, giving rise to group-based appraisals and emotions.”⁷⁸ As a result of this depersonalization, the sense of self is closely tied to the ingroup. Depersonalization also applies to the outgroup. Often, the outgroup is homogenized and essentialized, and seen as one entity rather than as individuals. Thus, if the outgroup is a threat, that the outgroup consists of diverse individuals with varying opinions is lost, and all pose a threat.

People with more salient identities have a higher chance of perceiving negative intentions of other groups and seeking out action in retribution for those actions. As Brewer puts it, “Compared to ingroupers, outgroupers are less likely to be helped in ambiguous circumstances, more likely to be seen as provoking aggression, less likely to receive the benefit of the doubt in attributions for negative behaviors, and likely to be seen as less deserving of public welfare.”⁷⁹ These effects are

⁷⁵ Brewer, “Ingroup Identification,” 34.

⁷⁶ Brewer, “Ingroup Identification,” 34.

⁷⁷ Brewer, “Ingroup Identification,” 35.

⁷⁸ Kuppens et al. “Social Identity Salience Shapes Group-Based Emotions Through Group-Based Appraisals.” *Cognition and Emotion* 27 no 8 (December 2013): 1360.

⁷⁹ Brewer, “Ingroup Identification,” 23.

higher in people with more salient identities. Roccas and Elster tell us that "People who strongly identify with their group tend to endorse more strongly aggressive policies, are less critical of the ingroup's wrongdoings, and are less responsive to interventions designed to reduce conflict."⁸⁰ Additionally, they point out that "instead of maintaining a detached attitude that would enable them to contain the conflict and seek resolution, highly identified group members are more likely to wish for retribution and revenge."⁸¹ Through these insights it becomes clear that highly salient identities are related to aggressive behavior toward the outgroup.

Salience is also affected by stressors around people. As people encounter crisis situations, the work of Ervin Staub shows that people often turn towards groups in order to fulfill needs that a crisis has disrupted. As he puts it, "it is the frustration of basic needs by instigating conditions that leads group members, whose individual identity is shaken, to turn to the group for identity, to focus more on their social identity, or to 'give themselves over' to an identity group."⁸² Thus, once in crisis, people often latch on to a social identity in a stronger way than they otherwise would. Keeping this in mind, it is worth paying attention to any contextual conditions frustrating the basic needs of people which are met by connecting with a social identity.

2.6.2 Social Identity and Conflict Resolution

It is worth mentioning at this point that any of those possible negative outcomes are possibilities, not inevitabilities. Just as the processes that lead to a social identity can lead towards greater conflict, they can also be used towards more positive conflict outcomes. To look at how insights from social identity theory can be used towards more productive conflict, first, I will say more about how a social identity can meet needs positively and not just contribute to conflict. Following that, I look at various strategies based on social identity theory that a person might use in order to shape systems of conflict towards a more positive and productive conflict.

The first way I want to point out that a social identity can contribute to a positive outcome is through meeting psychological needs positively. As stated above, one of the cognitive functions of social identity is meeting needs, and it can do so in a number of ways. As Staub points out, "A good social identity – an identity based in a group that is seen in a positive light, for example, as effective and powerful – can also be a good source of security, feelings of effectiveness and control, and connection."⁸³ These feelings themselves are not negative, nor do they mean negative involvement in conflict. Rather, needs can be met positively, and when these needs are met, there is no upsetting life changing conditions which push people towards totalizing ideologies. Therefore, as needs are met positively, many of the negative possibilities outlined above become less likely.

⁸⁰ Roccas and Elster, 106.

⁸¹ Roccas and Elster 107.

⁸² Staub, 162.

⁸³ Staub, 164.

The common ingroup identity model is one social identity based approach through which conflicts may be productively addressed. In this approach, establishing a superordinate identity is one proposed way in which social identities can bring different groups under one commonly shared ingroup. From this process, theorists argue that if a superordinate group can be established, the positive feelings which are normally associated with the ingroup grow to include a previous outgroup under this new identity. This theory has been backed up by a great deal of research. As Dovidio et al point out,

There is considerable evidence, for both laboratory and naturalistic groups, interventions that establish a common identity or reinforce an existing shared identity (e.g., national or university identity) reduce intergroup threat, increase willingness to exchange information, and enhance attentiveness to the needs and perspective of members of another group, now included within a superordinate identity.⁸⁴

Despite this data that is in support of this theory, there are certain limitations which must be kept in mind if this approach is to be utilized in a specific context. Brewer points out that “Shared superordinate identity must precede or arise concomitant with superordinate goals before positive interdependence can be realized.”⁸⁵ The groups must have a reason to work together in order to view each other as non-threatening, similar, and to be willing to give up their respective previously held identities.

Additionally, the attempt to create a superordinate identity may threaten the need for differentiation. Once again looking at Brewer’s optimal distinctiveness theory, there exists a need within groups and individuals for a differentiated identity, and when this is threatened people cling to it more tightly rather than giving it up for a superordinate identity. Instead of having the desired result, a failed attempt at establishing a superordinate identity can increase intergroup bias and tension.⁸⁶

The context of the conflict is also important. As Roccas and Elster point out, “When the conflict is violent, protracted, and revolving around sacred symbols, people are likely to reject strongly a superordinate identity that includes the enemy outgroup.”⁸⁷ Knowledge of these contextual factors can help to indicate whether or not this approach is likely to succeed, or whether or not there is an increased likelihood that this will only exacerbate the conflict.

None of these possible negative outcomes mean that this is always a useless strategy. However, it goes to show that this, like any other strategy to alleviate conflict, should be used as contextually appropriate, and with a plan rather than just expecting intergroup contact to be a

⁸⁴ Dovidio et al, 170.

⁸⁵ Marilyn Brewer. “Superordinate Goals Versus Superordinate Identity as bases of Intergroup Cooperation.” In *Social Identity Processes* (London: SAGE publications, 2000), 122.

⁸⁶ Roccas and Elster, 110.

⁸⁷ Roccas and Elster, 110.

panacea. It is not enough to appeal to a broader identity and ask people who have been in a conflict to suddenly get along. There needs to remain a possibility of differentiation, as well as a means to positively see the new group. Roccas and Elster write, “To minimize such negative reactions, the effective implementation of a common superordinate identity requires simultaneous maintenance of the sense of distinctiveness for the ingroup along with the creation of a positive attachment to the superordinate identity.”⁸⁸ However, “When this form of recategorization is successful, ingroup loyalties and concern for collective welfare are transferred from the original subgroups to the new social category as a whole.”⁸⁹ Thus, this approach requires careful thought and the right context for it to be an effective means of transforming conflict.

The next social identity based model to consider is the crossed categorization model. It is a fact of human cognition that each person carries many different categories with which we identify, and this is no different for people who have developed a salient identity. The difference for people who have developed a highly salient identity is that one identity has become the defining identity, and thus affects all the others. To counter this, the crossed categorization model suggests drawing upon the multiple other categories to which a person belongs. As Roccas and Elster put it, “Whereas the common ingroup identity model is based on identities linked to embedded categories, the crossed categorization model focuses on identities that cut across categories. Thus, multiple dimensions of categorization can be accessible and important at the same time.”⁹⁰ The approach in crossed categorization, therefore, is to build affinity for those in an outgroup by finding a group of mutual belonging. Rather than creating a new superordinate identity, this is based on categories which already exist.

This approach is backed up by research. A 2001 study, for example, showed that even thinking about multiple categories which one might share with the outgroup would lead to higher evaluation of the outgroup.⁹¹ However, this approach may work best when the categories are not closely related to the identity related to conflict. A crossed categorization approach can reduce bias better when the alternate identity is not related to the conflict.⁹² Additionally, Roccas and Elster tell us that

“Furthermore, similar to the findings from research on the common ingroup identity model, identification with one’s initial ingroup inhibits the positive influence of awareness of multiple identities on conflict reduction, and making multiple identities salient reduced ingroup favoritism for less identified but not for highly identified group members.”⁹³

⁸⁸ Roccas and Elster, 110.

⁸⁹ Marilyn Brewer, “The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations: Can Research Inform Practice?” *Journal of Social Issues* 53(1) (1997): 201.

⁹⁰ Roccas and Elster, 110.

⁹¹ Roccas and Elster, 110.

⁹² Roccas and Elster, 110-111.

⁹³ Roccas and Elster, 111.

Thus, this perspective is not without flaws, working better for less identified members of a group.

Social identity complexity is another social identity approach which can affect conflict in a positive way. As defined by Verkuyten and Marinovic, “The concept of social identity complexity refers to individual differences in the way in which different group memberships are subjectively combined.”⁹⁴ The more complex the identity structure, the more distinct are the groups to which a person belongs; the lower the complexity, the more people assume overlap between multiple identities. As Prati et al write, “Studies have shown that those with highly complex identity structure give lower importance to conservatism and power values, have higher tolerance for diversity, and have low explicit and implicit racial attitudes above and beyond any effects of ideology and cognitive style.”⁹⁵ Verkuyten and Marinovic also write that “low social identity complexity means that multiple identities are embedded in a single in-group representation making an individual who is an out-group member on one dimension also an out-group member on another dimension.”⁹⁶ They continue,

Low social identity complexity means that multiple identities are embedded in a single in-group representation making an individual who is an out-group member on one dimension an out-group member on another dimension. This lack of cross-cutting identities increases the in-group vs. out-group distinctions and thereby strengthens the distancing from the out-group members and increases the cognitive bias of in-group bias.⁹⁷

Through this, we see the positive outcomes of a highly complex identity, as well as the consequences of a low social identity complexity.

This approach to understanding social identity in conflict is related to the crossed categorization model. Maykel Verkuyten and Borja Martinovic explain the difference as “While the common ingroup identity model and the crossed categorization model focus on patterns of objective overlap between multiple identities, the social identity complexity model focuses on the *subjective* representation of the interrelations between multiple identities.”⁹⁸

Another approach to conflict based on social identity theory is increasing social identity complexity. As Roccas and Elster tell us, “Greater complexity in representations of social identities correlated positively with tolerance toward a variety of outgroups.”⁹⁹ As such, if an identity is

⁹⁴ Maykel Verkuyten and Borja Martinovic, “Minority Identity and Host National Identification Among Immigrants” in *Social Conflict Within and Between Groups* ed Carsten K.W. DeDreu (New York: Psychology Press, 2014), 66.

⁹⁵ Prati et al. “Encouraging Majority Support for Immigrant Access to Health Services: Multiple Categorization and Social Identity Complexity as Antecedents of Health Equality.” *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*. 19(4) (2016), 429.

⁹⁶ Verkuyten and Martinovic, 67.

⁹⁷ Verkuyten and Martinovic, 67.

⁹⁸ Roccas and Elster, 112 .

⁹⁹ Roccas and Elster, 111

affected by social identities, actions which lead towards a more complex social identity structure can lead to a reduction in toxic conflict.

The decategorization model is a means of deconstructing the category of the other by increased contact with the other, and is another social identity based approach towards more productive conflict. This specifically seeks, through personal relationships with people in the outgroups, to demystify the other and break down stereotypes of the outgroup and decrease social identity salience. As Hewstone and Greenland summarized it, “The goal then is more interpersonally oriented and non-category-based form of responding that allows members ‘to attend to information that replaces category identity as the most useful basis for classifying each other.’”¹⁰⁰ By taking this approach, the goal is to give back a complex understanding of the other as an individual and make the category a less meaningful way of representing an outgroup.¹⁰¹ If categorization has a homogenizing effect on the outgroup, this approach seeks to diversify the outgroup and through that diversity break down stereotypes. As a result, this weakens the strength of negative stereotypes and breaks down harsh boundaries by members developing an interpersonal rather than intergroup focus.¹⁰²

This is a distinct approach from the intergroup contact theory, and sets its own unique goals. As Brewer puts it, “This perspective on the contact situation suggests that intergroup interactions should be structured so as to reduce the salience of category distinctions and to promote opportunities to get to know outgroup members as individuals.”¹⁰³ This approach, as with the others, is not without its limits. Once again, issues about differentiation and individuation arise. Reducing salience of an identity can be seen as a threat to either of those aspects of human psychology. Carried out improperly or in a way that differentiation or individuation are seen as threatened, decategorization would be counter-productive and would risk worsening the conflict.

The final model I am using through which social identity theory based approaches may be applied is intergroup contact theory. Allport’s intergroup contact theory was originally proposed in 1954, and there has been a great deal of research on it since. The original formulation in 1954 delineated four features in order for intergroup contact to be successful. Allport required “(1) equal status within the contact situation; (2) intergroup cooperation; (3) common goals, and (4) support of authorities, law, or custom.”¹⁰⁴ Since this original proposal, others have added based on their research “opportunities for personal acquaintance between the members” and “intergroup

¹⁰⁰ Miles Hewstone and Katy Greenland. “Intergroup Conflict.” *International Journal of Psychology*, 35(2) (2000): 140.

¹⁰¹ Brewer, *Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 201.

¹⁰² Esra Cuhadar and Bruce Dayton. “The Social Psychology of Identity and Inter-group Conflict: From Theory to Practice.” *International Studies Perspectives* 12(2001): 278.

¹⁰³ Brewer, *Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 201

¹⁰⁴ Dovidio et al., 170

friendships” as important. Research conducted through the years has supported Allport’s formulation. Direct contact has been found to improve outgroup attitudes “by reducing anxiety, threat, and negative intergroup emotions and by promoting positive emotions, empathy, perspective-taking, and self-disclosure.”¹⁰⁵ Additionally, it has been found that “Contact reduces prejudice, as well as negative emotions associated with the outgroup, and intergroup threat.”¹⁰⁶

However, intergroup contact theory is not without its weaknesses. Firstly, most of the research conducted on this theory has focused on the timeperiods either before or after violent conflict, with little being done on the time period during. In fact, Wagner and Hewstone point out that “If there is already violence between groups, intergroup proximity and contact can contribute to its growth, simply because proximity offers increased opportunities to engage in violence against, and even kill, members of the outgroup.”¹⁰⁷ Additionally, Wagner and Hewstone point out that the theory does not fully take into account the way in which minority and majority groups take away different things from intergroup contact and have different needs.¹⁰⁸ For a full understanding, the power dynamics would need to be taken into account.

Despite these weaknesses, intergroup contact theory still holds a great deal of value. As Wagner and Hewstone put it, “Nevertheless, a meta-analytic review of this literature supports the conclusion that programs based on the contact hypothesis are effective in reducing prejudice and improving intergroup relations even after periods of protracted and severe intergroup violence.”¹⁰⁹ Despite its limitations, it is clear that intergroup contact which meets Allport’s prerequisites can be a positive force for alleviating conflict between groups in the right circumstances.

At this point, I have made the case that a social identity can either contribute to conflicts or contribute to a positive peace. Through identifying mediating factors, and possible ways in which social identities can contribute towards conflict or peace, I believe I have made it clear that the psychological factors that lead to social identity formation are a neutral facet of human cognition. Therefore, it is impossible to argue whether they are good or bad, or whether or not social identity itself causes conflicts. As Korostelina puts it, “Social identity is neither the cause nor the product of conflict. Rather, it should be understood "as a form of consciousness that entirely changes the dynamic and structure of conflict"¹¹⁰ There is no doubt that a social identity can shape a conflict, in the same way that a conflict can shape a social identity. Rather than demonstrate cause, I have shown how these mutually informative events can affect each other.

¹⁰⁵ Ulrich Wagner and Miles Hewstone, “Intergroup Contact” in *The Oxford Handbook of Intergroup Conflict* ed. Linda R. Tropp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 198.

¹⁰⁶ Wagner and Hewstone, 199.

¹⁰⁷ Wagner and Hewstone, 200.

¹⁰⁸ Wagner and Hewstone, 205.

¹⁰⁹ Wagner and Hewstone, 203

¹¹⁰ Korostelina, 147

3. The Religious Right in the United States

Having explored social identity theory and established my theoretical framework, I am turning now to the Religious Right in the United States. In looking at the Religious Right, I here set out to do several things. First, I will define key terms before moving forward. Secondly, I will give a brief history of the connections between conservative religious ideologies and various political movements in the United States in the twentieth century. From there, describe the Religious Right in terms of social identity theory. After that, I will define the conflict of the Religious Right, and then define how the Religious Right functions in this conflict.

3.1 Definitions

Before exploring the history, it is helpful to first clarify much of the terminology surrounding the different movements and groups. Due to the lack of clarity in popular usage, when speaking about various religious groups in the United States, there are several terms that are necessary to define. In this section, I set out to define what I mean by Evangelical, Fundamentalist, and the Religious Right.

Defining Evangelical is a difficult task and largely depends on context. Roger Olson identifies six different meanings of Evangelical, ranging from the preferred way of European Lutheran Churches to refer to themselves, to the American-centric journalistic shorthand for religious fanatic.¹¹¹ That so many different uses can be found of the word shows the importance of context and clarity. To define Evangelical as it relates to this context, I am drawing from David Bebbington's four characteristics which he uses to define Evangelical. These characteristics consist of biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism, and evangelism.¹¹² Biblicism refers to a high view of the authority of the Bible, which can include but is not limited to an inerrant view of the Bible. Conversionism refers often to a conversion experience, and speaks to the need for repentance. Crucicentrism refers to the cross, and the central power of Jesus on the cross for salvation. Evangelism speaks to a strong need to preach the gospel to others. While these four categories are broad, together, they are a popular way for scholars to speak about Evangelicals in a clear way. Moving forward, I intend to use Evangelical specifically to describe religious people or groups which display these characteristics.

It is important to note that Evangelical is often used as a synonym for the Religious Right. Many, in fact, may identify themselves as an Evangelical over and above a member of the Religious Right. I have, however, chosen to use the term Religious Right because it serves to define more clearly the means, motives, and identity of the group, and makes clear that one can be an Evangelical without necessarily being a part of the Religious Right. So, while some would identify

¹¹¹ Roger Olson. "Tensions in Evangelical Theology." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*. 42 no. 1 (2003), 77.

¹¹² Olson, 79

as an Evangelical, some would identify as a Fundamentalist, and some may prefer a denominational identification, I believe the history below will show a clear unification around a certain set of theological, political, and ideological goals with which people strongly identify. It is that set of unifying beliefs, which in common use goes by many names, which mobilize the group I refer to as the Religious Right.

The term Fundamentalist suffers from a similar lack of clarity in popular usage as Evangelical. As will be expanded upon in the history, I use Fundamentalist to refer to movements directly related to the publication of *The Fundamentals*. While this, in many cases, may overlap with Evangelical, it is somewhat distinct and can refer to a variety of things which may not be defining for Evangelical circles. For example, *The Fundamentals* were, among other things, very hostile to the Roman Catholic Church – a characteristic which is not shared uniformly within present-day Evangelical churches. However, tracing roots to this key work in the early twentieth century, anti-Catholic thought may be rightly called Fundamentalist. As such, when I say Fundamentalist I am making a connection with a distinct movement of the early 20th century rather than using the term generally to refer to conservative religious belief.

While I will explore later in greater detail how the Religious Right fits within the framework of social identity theory and what defines the group boundaries, I here want to establish a working definition moving forward. At the risk of stating the obvious, there are two components which need to be defined: the religious component, and the political right component.

The religious portion of the Religious Right is difficult to pin down. The history below will show that the Religious Right is informed by theological movements across many denominations and with varying theological influences; yet out of these varied influences, there is a unifying set of issues. There are strong Evangelical and Fundamentalist influences in the Religious Right, though the Religious Right is not limited to these groups. As the history below will show, what unifies the religious people of the Religious Right is a common set of issues rather than a wholly consistent theological agreement.

While we might think of the political right portion of the Religious Right as easy to define given America's two party system, it is not so simple. It would be a mistake to equate the Religious Right with the Republican Party. From the history presented below, it will be clear that the Religious Right is in part a construction of the Republican Party to gain support from what President Jimmy Carter showed to be an influential voting bloc. Despite this connection, the Religious Right may represent one faction in a It was a movement that “attempts to mobilize

Evangelical protestants and other orthodox Christians into conservative political action.”¹¹³ In an effort to gain support from the conservative religious groups, many within the Republican Party took on positions which were against abortion and other social issues in order to mobilize this Evangelical voting bloc so political conservatives could carry out the rest of their agenda. Politically, this group focuses on social issues, though for many these social or religious issues have become connected to economic or other policies.

This brings me to my definition of the Religious Right. Historically, it is easy to see that the Religious Right is a political development between 1976 and 1980, and is its own unique brand of Republican Party politics. Therefore, while I believe it is necessary to acknowledge the movements of the twentieth century that have undoubtedly influenced the Religious Right, I want to be clear that I am not equating the Religious Right with the movements that predate it, nor am I suggesting that it is a direct line from the theological and political movements to the present-day Religious Right. As I use the term, the Religious Right refers to a post-Carter alliance between conservative Christianity and the Republican Party.

3.2 A History of Precursors to and Development of the Religious Right

Given the scope of my project, a full history of religious and social movements in the United States is neither possible to give nor necessary to understand the current state of right-leaning religious groups in the United States. However, in order to be able to understand the movement, it is necessary to examine key movements that have informed the present state of the Religious Right. In order to understand the theological influences, I begin with the Fundamentalist and Evangelical movements in the early twentieth century. From there, I will look at post-war political and religious developments related to the Religious Right. Following that, I will focus on the 1970’s through the decade’s religious issues and the election of Evangelical Jimmy Carter as President of the United States. Understanding election years to bring out the clearest political shifts, statements, and rhetoric, starting with 1976 and Jimmy Carter’s presidency I will use presidential election years as a means of delineating shifts in thought. From there, I focus on the developments of the Religious Right movement since its originating in the 1980s. I close with a snapshot of the where the Religious Right is as of 2015, and offer some thoughts about the potential consequences of the 2016 election on the movement and its place in American society.

Given this approach, there remains much I have left out, and as such, I feel the need to briefly acknowledge some limitations of my history as presented and justify my choices. What I am presenting is largely been a history of white, protestant Christianity. Furthermore, I have intended to focus on what I believe to be the most influential movements which most closely relate to the

¹¹³ Clyde Wilcox and Carin Robinson, *Onward Christian Soldiers?: The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 8.

formation and development of the Religious Right. This eliminates a large number of events, voices, and demographics from the story of religious and political movements in twentieth century America. I, for example, will not spend much time on the Civil Rights movement, except to point out how conservative voices reacted against it. I also do not say much about the Vietnam War, the feminist movement, or other key social developments due to my focus on the Religious Right. While the Religious Right certainly did not develop in a vacuum where other events and issues were not happening, I my history is intended to only highlight the movements in the United States which are most important in understanding the Religious Right.

Additionally, this history should not be read as if it is a direct line from the Fundamentalists to the Religious Right of today; in fact, I would hope the history I have presented would challenge such an understanding. While, for example, many are willing to associate the Social Gospel with religious liberalism and Fundamentalism with the Christian Right, actors such as William Jennings Bryan (discussed below in regards to the Scopes trial) show that the divide between the two is not so clear, and the path forward from either of those movements is not destined for only one outcome.

Because the paths of these historical movements are not linear as some would suggest, I believe this history leads to the conclusion that the Religious Right is something that was constructed with some level of intent, rather than the only logical outcome of people's religious beliefs. Additionally, this history shows that the connection of these religious groups with the Republican Party was not the only possible outcome. Therefore, rather than seeing the Religious Right as the only possible outcome of these conditions, it is important to see that this alliance between religious and political conservatives is more a construction than it is a naturally occurring alliance.

I intend to give a history of a collection of movements, and not just one. However, these diverse movements have become intentionally unified by Republican politicians and conservative religious leaders into one relatively cohesive movement. Because of this, I think there is a tension in what I am trying to do. On the one hand, I want to recognize the diversity of the groups that have coalesced into this Religious Right identity, yet by speaking to the diversity, there is a risk of losing the sense of cohesiveness of the group that has formed. On the other hand, I do want to recognize that this is a cohesive political and religious group; however, I do not want to homogenize these diverse groups and oversimplify the those who would identify as part of this group. Therefore, it is important to strike a middle ground that simultaneously recognizes the complexity and diversity of the Religious Right while at the same time recognizes the unifying themes and issues that both politically and religiously unite people into one group which can be spoken of cohesively.

3.2.1 *The Fundamentals* and Christian Fundamentalism

While the formation of the Fundamentalist movement may be somewhat distant from us today, theological and political aspects apparent in this group are clearly influential to the Religious Right today. As Wilcox tells us, “Early in the twentieth century two religious movements – fundamentalism and Pentecostalism – emerged that would later provide the major constituencies for the Christian Right.”¹¹⁴ In 1910, *The Fundamentals* was published, which solidified the thoughts of several movements into one volume. It was published by “a loose coalition of pietistic revivalist, conservative Calvinists, and other evangelicals.”¹¹⁵ Theologically, the work was built on three ideas.¹¹⁶ First, the document relies on a premillennialist understanding of the return of Christ. This means that *The Fundamentals* took this specific eschatological understanding of the second coming of Jesus, believing that Jesus would come and issue a thousand year reign on earth. Second, *The Fundamentals* takes a dispensationalist approach to scripture. This view of scripture understands that there are seven eras of dispensation in which God revealed his rule in scripture.. Third, *The Fundamentals* took a strongly inerrant approach to scripture, understanding the Bible to be without flaw or error.

In addition to these theological characteristics, Fundamentalists and their leaders were not likely to engage in politics. As Marsden writes, “Although a variety of traditions was represented, most of the movement’s leaders in fact expressed relatively little interest in political or social issues.”¹¹⁷ Generally speaking, Fundamentalists were often separationists.¹¹⁸ Rather than a strong engagement with politics, the primary emphasis was on evangelizing.

The Scopes trial was one of the major events, and likely the most important, in which this Fundamentalist group gained national visibility. The defendant, John T. Scopes, was a science teacher in a Tennessee school, who violated Tennessee state law and taught evolution in his classroom. With legal support from the American Civil Liberties Union, Scope’s defense was not contesting whether or not he had violated Tennessee state law, but challenged the constitutionality of that law. With famed Social Gospel activist and former presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan (who would die within a week of the conclusion of the trial) serving as the prosecution, the trial became “a public carnival and media circus,” garnering significant national and international attention.¹¹⁹ The trial, due to the incredible amount of publicity and media debate, brought the issue

¹¹⁴ Wilcox and Robinson, 31.

¹¹⁵ Wilcox and Robinson, 32.

¹¹⁶ Wilcox and Robinson 32.

¹¹⁷ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 141.

¹¹⁸ Wilcox and Robinson, 34

¹¹⁹ William Martin. *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*.(New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 15.

of evolution, and more broadly, Fundamentalism, to the forefront. As Marsden puts it, “It would be difficult to overestimate the impact of ‘the Monkey Trial’ at Dayton, Tennessee.”¹²⁰ While the prosecution won the immediate case, it was a small victory in a much larger defeat. Within a few years, nationwide, all legislation preventing the teaching of evolution in public schools was repealed.¹²¹

As a result of the widely publicized trial, many outside Fundamentalist circles came to view the Fundamentalist negatively. According to Marsden “in the trial by public opinion and the press, it was clear that the twentieth century, the cities, and the universities had won a resounding victory, and that the country, the South, and the Fundamentalists were guilty as charged.”¹²² Additionally, Brown writes of this time period that “Conservative evangelicals were increasingly perceived as lacking in ‘tolerance, compromise, and other democratic values,’ a view that was only further underscored by the 1925 Scopes trial.”¹²³ As a result, “in the aftermath of the Scopes trial and the failure of prohibition, Fundamentalists and other Evangelicals retreated from politics in what has been called the ‘great reversal.’”¹²⁴ The damage to the Fundamentalists’ reputation as movement caused several changes. Fundamentalism became associated with small-town Protestantism rather than a specific religious movement as it was when it originated. Additionally, the Fundamentalist movement was increasingly seen as obscurantist, and would not be able to shake that label.¹²⁵ While Fundamentalism in the early twenties was a nationally influential movement, after the Scopes trial it consisted of ‘less flexible and more isolated minorities often retreating into isolationism.’¹²⁶

Reacting to this and other losses of control of not just public but seminary education, the Evangelicals spent the 1930s establishing Bible colleges to educate a new generation of Fundamentalists. Additionally, they formed numerous radio programs and print publications to spread their message.¹²⁷ Evangelicals withdrew from politics and took to the airwaves, focusing on establishing preaching programs on radio across the United States.¹²⁸ While perhaps in the public eye it was thought that Fundamentalism was dead, it was indeed far from it. Though the movement itself had changed in the twenty years following the publication of the Fundamentals, the network of radio and print was established for the next generation of Christian leaders to build from, and there still remained a significant population of people sympathetic to the Fundamentalist vision.

¹²⁰ Marsden, 184

¹²¹ Martin, 15

¹²² Marsden, 186

¹²³ Brown, 19

¹²⁴ Wilcox and Robinson, 40

¹²⁵ Marsden, 188

¹²⁶ Marsden 164

¹²⁷ Martin, 18.

¹²⁸ Steven Preston Brown. *Trumping Religion: The New Christian Right, the Free Speech Clause, and the Courts* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 20.

3.2.2 Post War Religious Movements of the 1950s and 60s

In this period, conservative Protestants distanced themselves from some aspects of the prewar Fundamentalism. In this time, they “combined an emphasis on Augustinian orthodoxy with a positive social program and the desire for renewed cultural and political involvement.”¹²⁹ Rather than the isolationist approach of the Fundamentalists, this aspect of Christian conservatism drove those affected by the movement outward into society around them. This movement, while mostly theological, was not apolitical, and the theological agenda and political agenda quickly merged. As Axel Schafer puts it, “by merging their attack on theological liberalism with the denunciation of political liberalism, Evangelical thinkers asserted their claim to political relevance in the wider Cold War order.”¹³⁰

A related movement of note within conservative Christian circles was the anti-communist movement. While these Christians were understandably anti-communist, given how the communists opposed religion, this anti-communism spilled over into many political positions, opposing Medicare and sex education.¹³¹ While, generally speaking, the Christian anti-communist movement was not necessarily widely popular, the anti-communist position garnered a deal of sympathy and would later bleed over into other issues. For many, this issue connected faith with political action. As Martin points out, “Fundamentalist entrepreneurs formed a set of new political organizations to take part in the anti-communist movement.”¹³² This anti-communist platform and how it carried into the political realm would inform the political involvement of other groups that would come later.

White Protestantism was in a strong position at the end of the 1950s. As Schafer puts it, “By the late 1950’s, white Evangelical Protestants had attained a measure of socio-cultural legitimacy, theological authority, internal unity, and political influence that they had not experienced since the nineteenth century.”¹³³ One cannot speak of this era without mentioning Billy Graham. Billy Graham is a good reflection of this time period within Evangelical Christianity. Graham was perhaps the first evangelical superstar, holding many popular gatherings throughout the country. Billy Graham’s involvement in politics became influential, and his political involvement is significant for what would come later. Graham, because of his influence with so many Americans, was given a great deal of access to many political leaders, and was a close acquaintance of Richard Nixon.¹³⁴ Among Graham’s strong stances were the anti-communist stance, which was

¹²⁹ Axel R. Schafer, *Countercultural Conservatives*. (Madison, WI: University Of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 45.

¹³⁰ Schafer, 46.

¹³¹ Wilcox, and Robinson 41.

¹³² Wilcox and Robinson, 41.

¹³³ Schafer, 63.

¹³⁴ Martin, 95.

accompanied closely by a pro-capitalist ideology.¹³⁵ While Billy Graham was not the only conservative leader, he was visibly involved in political debate and trying to connect politicians to Christian voters.

The 1960s brought a significant shift in American culture, and the conservative religious groups were affected just as much by this decade of upheaval within American society. While those within the movement might suggest that their beliefs were in opposition to the values of the cultural upheaval, Schafer argues the success of conservative religious organizations was built on how well it meshed with the culture of the time rather than its opposition to it. Shaffer points out that “the counterculture and evangelicalism thus resembled each other in their rhetorical styles, organizational patterns, and expressive modes.”¹³⁶ Additionally, he points out that Evangelicals “denounced the secularity and moral relativism, yet thrived upon the appropriation of its organizational techniques, expressive modes, and anti-establishment language.” He concludes that “Evangelical and fundamentalist churches, rather than being swept away by the waves of antitraditionalism and iconoclasm in the sixties, emerged victorious from the upheaval.”¹³⁷

This period also saw a shift in the way in which people related to their denominations. While previously they had been distinct, this period saw the growth of ecumenical organizations, particularly among religious conservatives. As Schafer writes

Crucially, this merger of ecumenism and orthodoxy, and the ability to combine a traditional message with a modern image, formed the backdrop for Evangelicalism’s success in the context of the large-scale socio-economic and demographic changes during and after the Second World War.¹³⁸

Being able to mix a traditional message across denominational lines strengthened many non-denominational movements and brought many different voices together in a way that had previously not occurred.

3.2.3 The 1970s, Jimmy Carter, and the Beginning of the Religious Right

Several events happened in the 1970s that were crucial to forming what we now understand to be the Religious Right. Entering the decade, there was no concept of a unified religious voting bloc, yet by the end of the decade, religious conservatives would overwhelmingly unite as an influential voting demographic. While I have previously highlighted conservative actors within the various movements, it is incorrect to assume that these various religious movements are monolithic in their political or theological belief and practices. Although there were elements of conservative Christian voters, they were not unified into one party’s system in the way we conceive of it today.

¹³⁵ Martin, 30.

¹³⁶ Schafer, 93-94.

¹³⁷ Schafer, 70.

¹³⁸ Schafer, 51.

Within this decade, long-term debates within many Christian groups and organizations came to a head. Long established Evangelical organizations had, until this point, functioned with a great deal of diversity of belief, and there were both liberal and conservative voices within organizations. However, in the 1970s, we see the way in which the left failed to organize as a bloc within the Evangelical organizations and, as such, lost a voice amidst conservative unity. Schafer writes that ““With the failure of the evangelical Left to provide a unifying vision, this combination of single-issue orientation with broad ecumenical engagement, theological orthodoxy, and conservative politics came to characterize the approach and appeal of the New Christian Right.”¹³⁹ Leaders in the conservative factions of the party managed to organize, establish themselves in positions of leadership, and as such, drive the direction of such organizations. These kinds of internal divides show that “In extended battles over issues such as social action, biblical inerrancy, and the virtues of capitalism, conservatives managed to marginalize liberal and leftwing impulses.”¹⁴⁰ These examples are important because it is necessary to point out that quite often these religious communities which are now synonymous with conservatism (be it theological or political) quite often became so not as a natural result of some inherent connection between religion and right-wing politics. Rather, as Schafer tells us, “the Right became dominant on the basis of internal movement struggles, rather than simply on the basis of the natural proclivity of evangelicals for rightwing politics.”¹⁴¹

The election of Jimmy Carter in 1976 is a significant turning point in the history of religious involvement in politics. Jimmy Carter was a self-proclaimed born-again Christian and a member of a Southern Baptist church. In his election, by connecting with evangelicals through his faith and shared vocabulary, he managed to take typically Republican areas and turned many votes in his favor though he was a Democratic candidate. It was, as Martin points out, among “conservative Christians who were inclined either to vote Republican or to stand clear of the political process entirely – on whom Carter’s public acknowledgment of his faith had perhaps the greatest impact.”¹⁴² Carter, through the use of religious language, was able to capture the votes of and mobilize voters who shared his faith. However, just as Carter united this bloc of voters, it very quickly turned against him.

Several issues arose during the 1970s and shaped Carter’s presidency that are important moving forward to understanding the modern Religious Right. Among these issues were private schools, abortion, the equal rights amendment, and the family. The issue of religious schools and education is often overlooked in its importance in uniting a movement. After the 1955 *Brown v.*

¹³⁹ Schafer, 93.

¹⁴⁰ Schaefer, 145.

¹⁴¹ Schafer, 71.

¹⁴² Martin 152.

Board Supreme Court decision which desegregated American schools, many communities founded supposedly religious schools with the intention of establishing functionally segregated schools. The Lynchburg Christian Academy, founded by Jerry Falwell, is an example of such an institution.¹⁴³ As this kind of segregated education continued to be a problem, the Internal Revenue Service threatened to take away the tax-exempt status of these religious schools which continued discriminatory practices. This aroused the ire of many conservative leaders who saw this as a threat to religious liberty or an attack against churches, and mobilized conservative leaders and their congregants. The backlash was so severe that the IRS eventually backed down from its threats. While many people focus on abortion as a uniting issue, it is worth noting that “Several key figures on the Religious Right credit the 1978 IRS/Christian School battle with playing a pivotal role in bringing together conservative Christians and creating a genuine politically effective movement.”¹⁴⁴ While this may not be on the minds of Americans today, it is certainly a key historical point within the movement, if not the solidifying issue around with fractured religious groups found not only unity, but an alliance with the Republican Party.

Abortion was another significant issue which became codified in this time period. What is interesting was that backlash against this decision was originally primarily Catholic, while Evangelicals remained divided on the issue. Martin points out that

Catholics played the major role in generating the anti-abortion movement spawned by the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. By contrast, conservative Protestants seemed hardly to recognize it as a major issue. In 1971, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) had voted almost unanimously in support of a resolution affirming a woman’s right to have an abortion if giving birth would pose physical or emotional danger.¹⁴⁵

Despite this initial inaction among Evangelical circles, the initiatives of several key leaders such as gave the issue a voice, and in a short time, the Evangelical community was unified against abortion.¹⁴⁶

The Equal Rights Amendment was another unifying issue around with conservative protestants came together in opposition. This amendment to the US constitution, which guaranteed equality on the basis of sex, passed through both houses of Congress and was sent to the state legislatures for ratification (as is the process outlined in the constitution). It is worth pointing out that, at this point, there was opposition to the amendment from both parties, yet neither party, in principal, could be considered against women’s rights.¹⁴⁷ However, a religious and conservative

¹⁴³ Martin, 71.

¹⁴⁴ Martin, 173.

¹⁴⁵ Martin, 156

¹⁴⁶ Martin, 193.

¹⁴⁷ J. Brooks Flippen. *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 68.

lack of support was tied in with several other issues, few of which had to do with the actual text of the amendment. For example, the ERA was by some in conservative groups negatively tied to a radical lesbian agenda.¹⁴⁸ For others, it was connected with challenging the traditional role of women in the family as the homemaker.¹⁴⁹ Through this, it appears that opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment was part of a larger struggle over a certain understanding of the role of women and definitions of family.

This brings us to the issue of the family as coded language. While family was a focus of Carter's 1976 campaign, it became something that was used against him later on. Issues mentioned previously, such as homosexuality, abortion, women's rights, and education all became summed up under "family values."¹⁵⁰ This shorthand connected a variety of issues which coalesced around one understanding of what is family, how to be family, and proper way to raise and care for children.

Jimmy Carter's mobilization of Evangelical protestants made it clear that this group of voters was significant, and as these above issues and others grew during his presidency, these newly engaged conservative voters began to organize and mobilize around these issues. As Brooks puts it, "Few spoke of a 'Religious Right' by the end of 1978, but in retrospect, the battles over the previous twenty-four months – the frustrations born of abortion, homosexuality, feminism, and the ERA, education and secular humanism, and as always, foreign policy – had laid a strong foundation for the movement."¹⁵¹ Thus we can see in this time period that a combination of internal struggles within religious groups in which conservative voices dominated, the collection of these issues, and the changing trends of the era all coalesced to lay the ground for a unified movement.

3.2.4 The 1980s, Ronald Reagan, and the Moral Majority

While the 1976 election showed that Evangelical Christian voters could be an influential voting bloc, the 1980 election solidified their place in the Republican Party. The 1980 election brought together movements outlined in the previous section in which theologically conservative groups in large numbers mobilized, organized, and became connected to the platform of the Republican Party through the presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan.

Ronald Reagan was not what the religious community may have expected to be its political champion. He was a divorced Hollywood actor, yet Ronald Reagan aggressively courted the religious vote. Using key issues such as abortion, education, and other such 'family values,' Reagan played to those in Evangelical Christian circles. Describing a key speech during 1980 election season, Flippin writes that "Reagan had said everything the assembled conservatives wanted to hear,

¹⁴⁸ Flippin, 150

¹⁴⁹ Flippin, 150

¹⁵⁰ Flippin, 235

¹⁵¹ Flippin, 189

from denouncing abortion and communism to stressing the role of the American family.”¹⁵² Through such advocacy, Reagan earned the support of leaders in circles in the Christian Right, becoming “unofficially close.”¹⁵³ Despite his divorce and other aspects about Reagan’s past that would have typically made him unlikeable to born-again Christians, it was clear that “In the end, all factors considered, many in the Religious Right were now willing to tolerate personal imperfections if the candidate advanced their cause.”¹⁵⁴

There were several influential religious leaders in this decade which helped to solidify the place of the Evangelical voters within the Republican Party. A discussion of this development in American history is not complete without looking at Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority. As Falwell defined it, the Moral Majority was “pro-life, pro-family, pro-moral, and pro-American.”¹⁵⁵ While these issues may stem from Christianity, the positions that Falwell and others involved were not limited to theological concerns. As Martin puts it, “Jerry Falwell and his cobelligerents may have been drawn into politics by issues clearly related to ‘family values’ but they quickly fleshed out their platforms to include positions not ordinarily dealt with in Sunday School.”¹⁵⁶ This Religious Right was influenced by both religious concerns and political concerns, and the line between the two was often intentionally blurred. With this new marriage of the political and the theological, the Moral Majority opened chapters in 47 states, and through these chapters conducted voter registration drives and educational seminars in which the Republican candidates were uplifted.¹⁵⁷ As one of the originators of the Moral Majority put it, “The key to any kind of political impact is to get these people united in some way, so they can see that they are battling the same thing and need to be unified.”¹⁵⁸ While the unification was a major event in the early 1980s, by the end of the decade the Moral Majority was in decline, and folded in 1986. As Martin puts it, “Public opinion polls repeatedly indicated that a substantial majority of the population held negative views of Falwell and his organization, no doubt partly because they had been subjected to such an intense barrage of scrutiny and criticism.”¹⁵⁹

The marriage between the Republican Party and the Evangelical Christian movement was a political move made by the Republican Party, which in turn leaders in religious communities embraced as a means to advance their theological agenda. For the Republicans, this strategy helped

¹⁵² Flippen, 286.

¹⁵³ Flippen 265.

¹⁵⁴ Flippen 276.

¹⁵⁵ Martin, 201.

¹⁵⁶ Martin, 210.

¹⁵⁷ Flippen, 293.

¹⁵⁸ Martin, 200.

¹⁵⁹ Martin 270-271.

separate Christians in the South from their historic support of the Democratic Party.¹⁶⁰ In this moment, there were two groups who were seeking to use each other to advance their goals. The Republican Party wanted to separate the southern Evangelicals from their historically Democratic leanings and to expand its base. The leaders in what was becoming the Religious right were looking for people in the government to make the changes which they desired – namely those surrounding ‘family values.’ However, it is clear that this was not and has not been an equal relationship – while the Republican Party was successful in using this group to achieve what it wanted from the relationship, those in the Religious Right, by and large, have not seen their goals realized though their allegiance to the Republican Party remains strong.

Ronald Reagan, despite his campaign promises, was not the friend that those in conservative religious communities expected him to be. After his election, Reagan quickly tabled his social agenda and did not achieve much of what those in the Evangelical community elected him to do, disappointing many. As Flippin puts it, “Having arrived in its political Canaan, the Religious Right found no paradise but a struggle that in many ways demonstrated the movement’s own limits.”¹⁶¹ By the 1984 election, those in the new Religious Right who were once proud of their role in electing President Reagan were now disappointed in Reagan and his government.¹⁶²

After the goals of the Religious Right found little success under Ronald Regan, Pat Robertson decided to run for the presidency in the Republican Primary elections in 1988. Robertson was well known in Evangelical circles, and a major part of the Religious Right. Robertson was a pioneer of Christian broadcasting, owned a Christian cable network, and hosted an hour-long television show.¹⁶³ Robertson’s charismatic theology distanced him from Falwell’s Moral Majority, though his television network’s inclination for conservatism and his vision of Christian Political involvement was similar.¹⁶⁴ Robertson focused early efforts in his campaign in Michigan, and through some questionable tactics, stacked various positions throughout the state in his favor.¹⁶⁵ However, many did not know him, and the majority of Americans had negative opinions of television based evangelists such as Robertson.¹⁶⁶

Pat Robertson’s campaign in the primary elections of 1988 was simultaneously an indication of the limitations of the Religious Right as well as the sources of their power. His lack of success showed that the Religious Right, on its own, had little chance to win this kind of election. However, Robertson used his connections from previous voter education efforts to garner a support in a

¹⁶⁰ Martin, 234.

¹⁶¹ Flippin, 321.

¹⁶² Martin, 235.

¹⁶³ Martin, 259.

¹⁶⁴ Martin, 261.

¹⁶⁵ Martin, 272.

¹⁶⁶ Martin, 276.

grassroots manner, showing the power of conservative religious networking. Robertson ultimately failed to win a state in the primary, though his presence in the election was significant. What he did show was the power of the Religious Right in grassroots organizing.¹⁶⁷ Additionally, he began the trend in which higher percentages of voters in subsequent elections identifying themselves as evangelicals.¹⁶⁸ For the Republican Party, this was both a success and a failure. On the one hand, the Republican Party continued the trend of mobilizing many religious people who previously didn't participate in politics to now vote in their favor. On the other hand, "Pat Robertson's 1988 presidential bid not only divided Republicans, it 'also revealed fissures within the Religious Right itself."¹⁶⁹ This reflected a divide in the Republican Party as these new voters joined its ranks.

3.2.5 1990's and the Christian Coalition

Though the Moral Majority was losing influence at the end of the 1980s, the newly formed bloc of religious voters was still a target to mobilize by the Republican Party. If the end of the 1980's reflected a conservative turn for the movement, the 1990's may be thought of as a swing back to a more moderate direction. Leading the charge of the next wave was Ralph Reed, who led the Christian Coalition. Reed was a veteran of religious conservative groups and was a skilled organizer. Started in 1989, the organization quickly grew to being financially secure with 82,000 members by the fall of 1991.¹⁷⁰ Given the failure of Pat Robertson in the 1988 election, and subsequently the victory of Bill Clinton over George H.W. Bush, many wondered whether the Religious Right had a future.

Reed used the dependable tactics that the Religious Right had to this point relied on. As Martin describes it, "To generate a response, Reed relied on one of the Christian Right's most dependable ploys: outraging its constituency with sensational accounts of offenses against religion and morality committed by homosexuals, liberals, or the government."¹⁷¹ Through this, the Christian Coalition grew with both finances and influence, once again stirring up its base and engaging them for political action.

Despite these tactics, Ralph Reed set out to more broadly include the Religious Right in the American political mainstream. As Hart writes, "Reed hoped to portray 'religious conservatives' as he called them, as moderate, unobjectionable, and completely within the mainstream of American politics."¹⁷² Rather than placing the group outside of or morally superior to American politics, Reed thought of Christians as rightly occupying space within the American political system. The political

¹⁶⁷ Martin, 296.

¹⁶⁸ Martin, 297.

¹⁶⁹ Dodds, 287.

¹⁷⁰ Martin, 317.

¹⁷¹ Martin, 303.

¹⁷² Hart, D.G. *From Billy Graham to Sarah Palin: Evangelicals and the Betrayal of American Conservatism*. Grand Rapids, (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 132.

stances outlined by Reed and the Christian Coalition were an “effort to repackage the Christian Coalition as a moderate voting bloc that would sit squarely within the political mainstream (and, coincidentally, make the author a kingmaker.)”¹⁷³ Theologically, Reed made the case for Christian involvement in the American political system as allies of the Republican Party.¹⁷⁴ Through this, we can see that Reed represents a significant shift, both theologically and politically. Politically, Reed continued to work from within the Republican Party; however, Reed wanted to move the conservative religious voice from a position on the periphery toward a central location in the life of the Republican Party. As Hart puts it, “If Evangelicals were to be taken seriously, they needed to ‘do more than rock the obad and panic the establishment.’”¹⁷⁵ Theologically, the shift continued from isolationism to active involvement in American political life. As such, Reed’s leadership in the Christian Coalition represent the changes which took place in the Religious Right in this decade.

Throughout the nineties, the issues largely remained the same, with some differences. The Conservative Coalition, continuing the anti-abortion stance of the 1980s, also hammered out positions which in which the Religious Right began to see itself as a mainstream part of American political life and the Republican Party. As Hart describes it, “Reed considered himself and the Christian Coalition to be conservative. For him this meant less government, lower taxes, ‘tougher laws against crime and drugs, and policies to strengthen the family.’”¹⁷⁶ Now, the Religious Right as represented by Ralph Reed envisioned itself as a mainstream force in American politics that sought to include more voices within the movement. As Dodds points out, “One indication of the Religious Right’s greater inclusivity and diversity in the 1990s concerns conservative Catholics, a group that had long been a Potential ally of the Religious Right but that had never really been brought into the fold.”¹⁷⁷ Through greater denominational diversity, a softer stance on some issues that made the Religious Right more appealing for moderates, and leadership which was advocating for a voice in the mainstream, in this decade the significant shift in the movement was about the place of the movement in relation to society.

3.2.6 George W Bush, Barack Obama, and The Tea Party

The 2000 election put an Evangelical back in the White House with the victory of George W. Bush as president. For many, “At the beginning of the new millennium the Religious Right appeared to be a permanent feature of American electoral politics.”¹⁷⁸ During the 2000 election, George W. Bush, as could be expected, received a great deal of support from the Religious Right

¹⁷³ Hart, 137.

¹⁷⁴ Hart 137.

¹⁷⁵ Hart, 137

¹⁷⁶ Hart, 132.

¹⁷⁷ Dodds, 287-88.

¹⁷⁸ Hart, 151.

and was the first Evangelical to occupy the White House since Jimmy Carter. As Dodds puts it, “After Bush was elected, the Religious Right basked in his overtly religious rhetoric and gloried in his appointment of the conservative evangelical, Senator John Ashcroft, as Attorney General.”¹⁷⁹ This feeling of success among the Religious Right continued under Bush through the 2004 election, though this may be misleading. While some joked after the 2004 election that GOP (an acronym for “Grand Old Party” and nickname of the Republican Party) now stood for “God’s Own Party,” as Dodds tells us, “While the standard account portrays the Religious Right as being very powerful in 2004, it may have hit the high-water mark of political power shortly thereafter and then soon declined.”¹⁸⁰

While previously the Religious Right existed as a cohesive bloc because Christian conservatives united over pressing issues, the 2008 primary cycle showed the divides in the movement, and perhaps displayed that the multiple factions of the group which were previously unified were now once again divided, and no one candidate emerged as the unifying choice of the Religious Right.¹⁸¹ Additionally, another shift occurred in 2008. As Hart writes,

Rank-and-file evangelicals did vote overwhelmingly for Republicans in 2008, and the attraction of ‘tea-party’ candidates for born-again voters in the 2010 midterm contests is another apparent indication of an affinity between conservatism and evangelicalism. But even while many ordinary evangelicals continue to balk at the Democratic Party and its candidates, the evangelical intelligentsia is tracking toward the political Left and away from conservative politics and the Republican Party.¹⁸²

This may be the beginning of a significant shift for the Religious Right, particularly if the leadership is changing political directions even if the base is not.

The 2008 election saw the election of the first Black President of the United States with the Election of Barak Obama. And, with a Democrat as president, and Republicans not in control of Congress, the Religious Right was once again out of power. For many this was a sign of the shrinking power of the Religious Right in American Politics. Though a Christian, Barack Obama’s roots in the black church mean his religious background is far from that of the Religious Right.

The 2010 midterms raise an interesting question about the place of the Religious Right within the Republican Party, namely, its relationship with the Tea Party. During this 2010 off-year election cycle, the Tea Party emerged as a new political faction of the Republican Party, winning several seats in Congress. While some draw a clear distinction between the two, others see the overlap between the Tea Party faction of the Republican Party and the Religious Right. On the one

¹⁷⁹ Dodds, Graham G. “Crusade or Charade? The Religious Right and the Culture Wars.” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 42 no. 3 (2012): 279.

¹⁸⁰ Dodds, 280, 284.

¹⁸¹ Dodds, 289-290.

¹⁸² Hart, 16

hand, the Tea Party is largely libertarian and focused on economic rather than social issues.¹⁸³ On the other, many are willing to see overlap, and as Dodds puts it, “Insofar as the two groups are, indeed, similar, the Religious Right may now enjoy many of the benefits of political power while largely avoiding the media spotlight.”¹⁸⁴ Regardless of the connection between the Tea Party and the Religious Right, it appeared as of 2010 that the Religious Right was shrinking. Wilcox and Robinson point out that “Most Christian Right organizations are weaker in 2010 than they were in 2000, with fewer members, state chapters, and activists.”¹⁸⁵ While conservative organizations, such as the Moral Majority, had come and gone, that membership was down across all organizations was a sign for many that this group was running out of people and influence.

3.2.7 The Religious Right as of 2015

As pointed out previously, the key issues of the Religious Right have remained relatively unchanged since the movement first coalesced in the 1970s. Abortion, gay marriage, school choice, and other issues all still motivate and encourage religious conservatives to turn out and vote for the Republican Party. While the relative strength of this religious movement has ebbed and flowed, it has remained a constant voice within American politics since 1980. As of 2015, the Religious Right is still unified around the issues which arose during the Carter administration.¹⁸⁶ It has maintained its strategy of influencing through working within the Republican Party rather than trying to influence both parties.¹⁸⁷ In addition to keeping its policy and approach the same since the 1980 election, its target audience has remained the same. As Wilcox and Robinson point out, “Most analysts agree that the principle target audience of the Christian Right remains the white evangelical community, especially the Fundamentalist and Pentecostal wings. But the contemporary Christian Right is also targeting conservative Catholics, mainline protestants, and African Americans.”¹⁸⁸ While the movement has attempted to appeal to more ream may have spread a bit, the primary target audience has remained the same.

Though these issues and approaches have remained the same, because of the shift of the 1990s, the Religious Right envisions itself in the mainstream rather than on the fringe. And, as Dodds theorizes, one possible reason the movement may appear to be shrinking is due to the fact that much of its functions have been taken over by the Republican Party itself. He suggests that the Religious Right may be less visible because many of its actions and functions have now been taken over by the Republican Party itself.¹⁸⁹ Over the years, the Religious Right has certainly shifted the

¹⁸³ Dodds 284.

¹⁸⁴ Dodds, 284-285.

¹⁸⁵ Wilcox and Robinson, 180.

¹⁸⁶ Flippen, 343.

¹⁸⁷ Wilcox and Robinson, 100.

¹⁸⁸ Wilcox and Robinson, 56.

¹⁸⁹ Dodds, 285.

platform of the Republican Party and changed the way Republican candidates talk about the issues important to the Religious Right.

Despite overarching consistency in its aims over several decades, the Religious Right has not brought much change at the policy level. Dodds tells us that “The view that the Religious Right’s efforts to change policy have met with failure is widely shared by academics and members of the Religious Right itself, if not also by the general public.”¹⁹⁰ If anything, the Religious Right has watched policy move in the opposite of its desired directions. However, the goals of the Religious Right are still very political and seek to reverse the advances made in, for example, areas of women’s health and LGBT rights. As Martin points out, “Like all other major political movements, the Religious Right seeks to control, or at least to exert strong influence over the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the United States government.”¹⁹¹ While the theological influences serve to highlight certain issues, it is worth noting the inherently political goals of the movement, despite its lack of success.

It is also worth pointing out throughout this history is much of what unifies the Religious Right is its desire to fight certain issues. Whether this was the original unification around the IRS challenge to Christian segregation academies, or the fight in the courts against marriage rights for LGBT people, this history thematically reveals the unification through opposition. At times, as capitalized on by Ralph Reed, this has been an intentional strategy of the Religious Right.

As of this writing, Donald Trump is the recently inaugurated president of the United States. His divisive campaign was a clear deviation from the mainstream Republican Party as it has existed since George W. Bush. However, results show that he clearly had significant support among Evangelical Christians. The initial weeks of the Trump presidency have been chaotic, divisive, and seem to indicate that the United States are headed into a way of doing politics that is unfamiliar. It is quite possible that his presidency will lead to a shift in how the Religious Right is empowered or acts within the American Political system. While I will not speak to the ways in which I think this will change the movement, particularly since such speculation has through this election proven to be inaccurate, it is necessary to mention that what this thesis may reveal about the Religious Right may very well be at a moment of transition and my conclusions may require further adjustment in the situations that emerge as a result of the Trump presidency.

3.3 The Religious Right as a Social Identity

Having established a history of the Religious Right and clarifying my vocabulary, it is now possible to explore the Religious Right under social identity theory. As I believe my history has shown, the Religious Right is best understood as an umbrella term for a myriad of subgroups.

¹⁹⁰ Dodds, 294.

¹⁹¹ Martin 371.

However, because there is a common identity formed under this umbrella term, it is possible to speak of unity within these groups. While one of the difficulties I discussed above is the contested use of language around terms such as Evangelical, Fundamentalist, Religious Right, and other such language, I hope to be clear in my own language in order to describe what is going on. As previously stated, I am measuring social identity through three factors. First, I will identify the characteristics of those within the group. Secondly, I will focus on the content of the social identity, understood to be the normative behavior, expectations, and values. Lastly, I will focus on the salience.

The characteristics of a social identity, as previously stated, are the defining features of a group. As this relates to the Religious Right, there are several implicit defining features which make one part of the group. First, there is a religious component, often with Evangelical or Fundamentalist influences. Usually, this is a Christian belief of some kind. Secondly, these religious beliefs are manifested around the specific list of issues which the Religious Right has unified around as being important. These issues center around family values, and include key issues such as abortion and LGBT rights. Politically, being aligned with the Republican Party is another marker. This moves beyond theological issues, and brings up issues such as personal responsibility and individualism. As the history presented above shows, these are the defining characteristics of the Religious Right.

Considering the Religious Right as a social identity, it is also important to look at the content of the identity. As I defined it previously, the content of a social identity consists of normative behavior, beliefs, and values. While these three things may overlap in some ways, I think it is helpful to keep these categories distinct for the purposes of outlining the content of this social identity.

There are several behaviors which make up the normative behavior of the Religious Right. Political engagement is a part of the normative behavior of the Religious Right. As has been a major purpose since its creation, the Religious Right served to mobilize people in favor of Republican candidates who carry out the . While not everyone in the Religious Right will become part of an organization like the Moral Majority, Christian Coalition, or another similar group, the normative behavior, in large part, is supporting and voting for candidates who support key issues. Related to this unification around key issues, it appears that principled opposition of some kind is another normative behavior of the Religious Right. While there are many ways this manifests, it appears that some action steps taken, either towards protecting what is valuable or dismantling what is evil, are another kind of normative behavior. Often, this may simply take the form of speaking against

something or voting. Regardless, this notion of a principled stand seems to be thematic in the Religious Right's opposition to certain issues.

Because of the religious beliefs, there is a normative moral code closely related to the ethical code of White Christian Protestantism. While many politicians have eschewed this kind of behavior, there appear to be a certain moral code around the defining values which, together, outline the normative behavior of the Religious Right. Certain actions, such as divorce, are merely frowned upon. Other actions, such as homosexual behavior or abortion, are strictly taboo. While it is perhaps beyond the scope of this project to fully deconstruct the moral code through which the Religious Right acts, it is worth noting that there does indeed exist a moral code based on conservative Christian belief and practice, mostly centered around the coded language family values.

The next two aspects of content of the Religious Right I am looking at are beliefs and values, and it is necessary to distinguish the two. Simply put, beliefs, as I am here using the term, are understandings of how the world does or should work. Values, on the other hand, provide statements of worth, and define what is most important. While perhaps this is most obvious, one of the unifying beliefs of the Religious Right is a belief in a certain form of Christianity. Usually, though not exclusively, this has been built on a conservative kind of Protestantism, which as shown, has been influenced by Fundamentalism and/or Evangelicalism. Though there are certainly Catholics, mainline-protestants, and even some non-Christians who would fall within this group, they themselves often display traits of being influenced by these 20th century Christian movements.

One of the clearest beliefs of the Religious Right is encapsulated in its umbrella term of family values. This is coded language not simply for being pro-family, but contains a certain view of what a family should be, how family members should act, and who is allowed and not allowed to be defined as a family. This language relates to issues of pre-marital sex and sex education in public schools, homosexuality and same-sex marriage, pro-life policies, single-parent households, and more. This broad-based belief which covers a variety of issues is a way in which those in the Religious Right is not simply for families, but is for a certain kind of family.

Turning to the values, in addition to the definition presented above, I understand values to be things which a person or group sees positively; thus, while negative emotions may arise out of how these values are expressed, I understand these values to be understood positively by those who hold them. Though perhaps obvious, it is worth pointing out that the Religious Right values its religious beliefs and ability to practice its religion as it wishes. The Evangelical and Fundamentalist influences which carry into political opinions are important for this group to be able to express. Issues of expressions of faith – such as prayer or religious teachings in schools – prove time and again to hold great worth for the Religious Right.

Family is another key value of those in the Religious Right. As pointed out above, there are specific normative beliefs of what a family is and consists of. This specific understanding of family, however, proves time and again to be something the Religious Right values highly. The political battle over definitions of marriage, for example, show how ideas of family that are not within the bounds of their normative beliefs are to be publicly challenged.

The Religious Right also values individual responsibility. This is both a theological and a political concern. As pointed out in the history of the group, it is clear the politics and theology have merged on this issue. As Schafer puts it,

By elevating choice, individual sovereignty, and free enterprise, evangelicalism provided spiritual sanctioning for business success and translated it into a religious drama in which the awakening constituted a relegitimization of the core myths of the American way of life.¹⁹²

Combining the theological import of individual choice and action with the economic and political structures of the United States, as such, has led individual responsibility to become a normative value of the Religious Right. Expressed through a wide variety of positions, this value gives shape to religious and political life of those in the Religious Right.

The third facet of measuring a social identity is salience. Salience has a significant impact on the effects of one's social identity, and is an important feature to take into consideration. As previously defined, a salient identity is the most important identity for a person. Measured from low salience to high salience, it can be understood as the level at which one identifies with a social identity.

As it relates to social identity theory, I have so far shown that there exists a category with which people identify that I call the Religious Right. While salience is an individual measure and cannot be applied to a group outright, these factors which increase salience are important to remember in both assessing the state of conflict between the Religious Right and other groups. Particularly for individuals and groups for whom salience appears high, these determinants of salience are necessary to take into account in order to productively move conflict in a productive direction.

Before looking at the salience of the identity within the Religious Right, I want to highlight once again some key consequences of a salient identity. A highly salient social identity means boundaries are drawn more sharply, leads a person to value their ingroup as superior, and leads to ingroup goals carrying more weight than individual identity. Drawing once again from Korostelina's work, there are three determinants of salience: level of difference, prevalence of

¹⁹² Schafer, 29.

intergroup contact, and competition between groups, each of which carries an impact on the salience of a social identity.

Levels of difference between groups are one determinant of salience. As pointed out previously, Korostelina tells us that higher levels of difference lead to a more salient identity. Between the Religious Right and those who it sees as the outsiders, there can be a significant level of difference between those within the Religious Right and those not considered to be a part of the ingroup. While it is important to point out that the level to which people within the Religious Right will understand themselves to be different may vary, in the way the dialogue is presented from the leadership of the movement, it is clear that leaders such as Jerry Falwell and Ralph Reed envision a large difference between the Religious Right and those who it opposes.

The prevalence of intergroup contact is another determinant of salience. As cited previously, the more people interact with others as typical outgroup members, the more salient an identity will become. As pointed out in the characteristics of the Religious Right, it does not have the same external markers that a social identity based on race, ethnicity, or language might. As such, intergroup contact is not always directly visible unless disagreements over the identifying beliefs come up. However, it may be worth considering what role the media may play in presenting the other as the prototype. If contact in person is limited or not visible, portrayals through the media become increasingly important as those interactions define what is typical.

Competition between groups is another determinant of salience. Korostolina, as cited previously, tells us that the more competition between groups, the more salient identities will become. Given the competitive nature of the political goals of the Religious Right, it is clear that there are high levels of competition. In order for 'family values' to be recognized in the way that the Religious Right wants, others have to lose out on their goals. If marriage has the legal definition that the Religious Right wants it to have, then gay and lesbian couples cannot have their relationships recognized by the government. The goals of the Religious Right are not simply to govern their own behavior, but at times to influence the behavior of others through legislation. Thus, this competitive nature of the Religious Right's positions may very well serve to raise the salience of social identity in those who embrace the Religious Right as a part of their identity.

While salience can vary from person to person, it is worth understanding how these determinants of salience may increase the salience of those identifying with the Religious Right. Each of these factors is clearly at work within the Religious Right. While it is impossible to understand how each of these determinants play out in every individual case, if someone wishes to work with those in the Religious Right, it is beneficial to understand how these factors shape the social identity and may enhance features of it. To recognize that difference, stereotype based

intergroup contact, and competition increase the salience of the identity is to understand how these may negatively affect conflicts of which the Religious Right is a part.

3.4 Defining the Conflict

Having established a closer look at the Religious Right as a social identity, it is necessary to define the conflict which I argue the Religious Right is involved in and identify the characteristics of said conflict. Here, I set out to define what kind of conflict I believe this is. Next, I point out underlying issues of systemic violence within the conflict, and briefly summarize the opponent in the Religious Right's understanding. I then, building from Marilynn Brewer's continuum, show how the Religious Right may present in the midst of conflict along this spectrum.

I argue that this is a protracted, identity-based conflict. As pointed out previously, the longer conflicts go on, the more conflicts become centered on more abstract concepts such as moral superiority or values. Because the Religious Right has now for forty years been an organized group that has seen itself in conflict with others, this insight is important. Rather than mere political disagreements, because the conflict has lasted for such a long time, moral superiority and contrasting values have taken precedence over the presenting issues. While the original issues have not entirely changed – for example, family values language is still used – the entrenched nature of these issues has become significant.

While as the history presented shows there were clear dividing issues of policy, this conflict has now turned into a conflict heavily influenced by identities. To understand oneself as part of the Religious Right means to understand oneself as involved in the struggles of the group. These struggles to reach religiously motivated political ends have lasted for decades, and people in young adulthood have grown up understanding the conflict between the Religious Right and its political opponents to be a part of their life-long reality. As such, this protracted conflict is a part of identity, and carries on not just because of the original dividing issues.

3.4.1 Issues of Violence in the conflict with the Religious Right

I also argue that there are issues of violence at play in the conflicts of which the Religious Right is a part. Johan Galtung points out that there are multiple ways in which a conflict may turn violent, in that there are different kinds of violence. Except for extremely rare isolated incidents, this conflict is not characterized by issues of direct violence. However, as defined previously, there are issues of structural and cultural violence at play. An important distinction needs to be made. Those in the Religious Right understand their political positions to be based on improving the situation for themselves and those around them. Apart from extreme outliers, its motives are to make the world better as the Religious Right understands it, rather than making those around them worse - though the outcome may be different than this intent. Though there have been incredibly

rare instances of violence (such as religiously motivated attacks on abortion clinics), it is improper to let the extreme define the norm.

While the Religious Right often sees itself as the victim, in many instances it makes more sense to see it as the aggressor in structural conflict. Because of its position in the Republican Party, it carries with it some cultural power as well as political power insofar as the Religious Right is able to shape the platform of the Republican Party and influence its policy. Though the Religious Right has often been hampered in its abilities to carry out policies, the positions it takes, in totality, often contribute to systemic conflicts larger than the Religious Right. As pointed out, many of its policies reflect its history of racism, sexism, and homophobia. For example, Schafer writes that

The conservative attack on the welfare state for allegedly generating dependency and encouraging moral iniquity exemplified this strategy. Since the claim that a lack of economic independence translates into the absence of moral self-control had traditionally been used to denigrate blacks and females, conservatives reasserted established race and gender stereotypes via an attack on the beneficiaries of supposedly overgenerous public assistance – namely African Americans and women... This can be interpreted as a coded reassertion of race and gender divisions.¹⁹³

As such these kinds of language and policies, regardless of intent, can contribute to such racist or sexist structural inequalities.

While the movement may envision itself embattled over the soul of America, the life or death consequences of its policies and actions cannot be overlooked. While this conflict may be glossed over as political disagreements, I would argue that the significant and negative impact the identity-based positions of the Religious Right warrant understanding these disagreements as an active conflict between the Religious Right and those it opposes. For example, as outlined above, the harsh anti-abortion policies the Religious Right would wish to impart would have significant health impacts for many women across the United States. Or, the anti-welfare approach (as held by people like Ralph Reed) come with significant negative outcomes for people who need such programs. While it appears that many hold such political positions with integrity, it would be irresponsible to ignore the real and severe consequences if such policies were to go into place.

To this point, I have solely focused on the Religious Right and its perspective, without identifying who it is in conflict with. This has been intentional; the construction of the other is more a creation of ingroup thinking than it is based in an unbiased understanding of the world. As such, I am focusing on how the Religious Right understands its opponent(s) rather than an objective analysis of who the ‘other’ is within this conflict.

There is not just one group the Religious Right understands itself to be in conflict with, nor are there simply few issues. However, under the umbrella term of family values, the Religious Right

¹⁹³ Schafer, 124.

is able to stake its position in opposition to homosexuals, feminists, pro-choice groups, and more. The conflict in this case is understood to be against those who are threatening the American family structure as the Religious Right sees it. As such, it appears one of the significant ways that the other is defined is through this threat to family values.

Perhaps obvious from the political nature of the Religious Right, the political left is a clear other in the language of the Religious Right. Insofar as the left is working to counter the goals of the Religious Right, they exist in direct political opposition. The left is what stands between the Religious Right and realizing their goals politically. Additionally, often the left is portrayed as against the religious goals of the Religious Right as well, insofar as they are separate from the political goals.

3.4.2 Spectrum of the Religious Right Social Identity in Conflict

As pointed out previously, the level at which people identify with the Religious Right will vary. In addition to those variances in level of identification, people in this conflict will present at different places on Brewer's spectrum within the conflict. To move forward towards a healthier way to engage conflict, it is helpful, if not necessary, to identify how people may fall along this continuum in order to productively engage and work with people. As such, I hope to in brief demonstrate how this intergroup conflict may present among the various positions of Brewer's continuum.

Positivity for the ingroup is near the low side of Brewer's spectrum. As previously stated in earlier sections of this work, positivity for the ingroup, while not inherently concerned with negative feelings towards the outgroup, can result in asymmetrical treatment based on ingroup or outgroup classification. Particularly if one group has more access to power or resources, asymmetrical benefits will occur if distribution is affected by favoritism towards one group. Regardless of the consequences, this point on the continuum is defined simply by positive feelings toward the ingroup. Looking at the history of the Religious Right, there are certainly instances where we can see this favorable treatment at work. Politicians such as Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump have been given a pass on personal moral failures because they have aligned themselves with the Religious Right. By voting for others who espouse the beliefs of the Religious Right, by favoring Religious Right beliefs through policies, and through other actions, at this stage it is easy to see how those in the Religious Right would live out positivity for the ingroup.

Ingroup comparison is the next position in Brewer's spectrum. Similar to ingroup positivity, intergroup comparison is not necessarily a negative or conflict-enhancing proposition. However, as pointed out previously, often this kind of comparison can turn into a competitive proposition with the evaluative shift from "we are good" to "we are better." Framed in this way, comparing one's

group with another becomes a competition in which a positive view of the ingroup only comes at the expense of the outgroup.

With the Religious Right, it seems clear that much of its thought have drifted into win-lose propositions in which for the Religious Right to feel successful, its opponents must be doing poorly. In the key issues of the Religious Right, the positions as described in the history above are clearly a zero-sum proposition. The way in which the Religious Right views homosexuality and same-sex marriage is a great example of how this kind of comparison takes place. It is apparent that marriages between people of the same sex are viewed as less legitimate than those of heterosexual couples. While this kind of comparison may be benign, it is apparent through the history of legal, moral, and social challenges the Religious Right clearly views itself as better. If a person or group of the Religious Right is at this point on the continuum, it may be the case that a positive view of oneself may only come at the expense of the outgroup – whether that be on the issue of homosexuality or another issue.

Outgroup hostility is the final point on Brewer's spectrum. It is at this point in the spectrum which competition turns into aggression and hurting the outgroup becomes an end unto itself. At this point, discrimination is now intentional and not a byproduct of ingroup favoritism. Additionally, such aggression typically comes from an understanding that the ingroup and its goals and values are under an existential threat. Therefore, to act aggressively against an outgroup may come from a desire to protect the ingroup. As previously highlighted from Brewer's research, contempt from a position of moral superiority and anger based on fear are the driving forces "that are sufficient to kindle hatred, expulsion, and even ethnic cleansing."¹⁹⁴

While I do not want to suggest that outgroup hostility is necessarily normative within the Religious Right, it is certainly present among some who identify with the group. Aware of how the nature of protracted conflicts moves people toward this kind of behavior, it makes sense to see this kind of position coming from some in the Religious Right. Also, as pointed out previously, when conflict is perceived to be zero-sum (as it may be in the intergroup comparison stage) it is difficult to tell whether the motive is to help the ingroup or harm the outgroup. Paying attention to Brewer's two key emotions - contempt based on moral superiority and a fear-driven anger - the rhetoric of the Religious Right has, since its inception, played to these in order to stir up its base and inspire people towards action.

An example of how such outgroup hostility plays out in the current positions of the Religious Right is the current ongoing debate on immigration from Muslim based countries. As of this writing, there is currently an extended battle over issuing travel visas to people from six

¹⁹⁴ Brewer, Ingroup Identification, 33.

Muslim-majority countries, citing security concerns. While not overt, I believe that this comes from an implicit devaluation of Muslims as morally inferior and associating Islam with terrorism. Thus, in one such position, it is clear that we see both building blocks of moral superiority leading to contempt and anger engendered by fear. While I do not want to directly equate the politics of Donald Trump and the positions of the Religious Right, insofar as Donald Trump has the support of White Evangelicals on this issue, these positions may reflect a way in which hostility has become an end unto itself for some within the Religious Right.¹⁹⁵

It would be incorrect and irresponsible for me to characterize all within the Religious Right as motivated by aggression towards the outgroup. However, given the examples and the history of the movement, it is clear the building blocks of such aggression are present within the group, and given the competitive nature of the group's positions, it is often a blurry line as to whether the motivations are based on intergroup comparison or outgroup hostility. I also want to point out that, disregarding the most extreme outliers, while those within the Religious Right may exhibit these traits, there is little open hostility or direct violence. Therefore, it is more accurate to speak of hostility in terms of systemic or cultural issues than it is to speak of direct violence.

The Religious Right does not exist in a vacuum, and the presence of some moderating conditions mentioned previously play a role in how the Religious Right functions in conflict. The history above shows the most important mediating mentioned previously to be the presence of power politics in the US system. This affects how the Religious Right perceives itself – either as being in power or being out of power. Because it is useful, I will quote Brewer again. She writes, “When trust is ingroup-based, it is easy to fear control by outsiders; perceived common threat from outgroups increases ingroup cohesion and loyalty; appeals to ingroup interests have greater legitimacy than appeals to personal self-interest.”¹⁹⁶ For the situation of the Religious Right in the United States, it is quite possible that control by others may be threatening, particularly if the conflict is perceived in a zero-sum nature and control by others represents the frustration of one's own values.

4. Possible Ways Toward More Productive Conflict

As stated previously, I believe a focus on resolution as it relates to conflict gives a misleading image of what is possible. The goal of working in conflict, as I outlined previously, is changing the system in which negative or toxic conflict occurs into one in which more positive conflict outcomes can occur. In this chapter, based on the previously presented approaches based on

¹⁹⁵ Smith, Gregory. “Most White Evangelicals Approve of Trump Travel Prohibition and Express Concerns About Extremism.” Pew Research Center, February 27, 2017. Accessed on March 23, 2017. Available from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/27/most-white-evangelicals-approve-of-trump-travel-prohibition-and-express-concerns-about-extremism/>

¹⁹⁶ Brewer, Ingroup Identification, 34.

social identity theory, I go through the various approaches through which social identity theory can contribute to positive conflict outcomes and apply the theory to the religious right. Next, I add to these findings by addressing the approaches in totality, and draw from the overall themes to reach more recommendations for working with the Religious Right.

There are several models through which social identity theory can be applied and potentially help groups move past difficult conflicts. The common ingroup identity model, recategorization, the crossed categorization model, social identity complexity, decategorization, and intergroup contact are the theoretical approaches based on social identity theory I previously highlighted. Now, with an understanding of the social identity of the Religious Right, its history, and the factors which influence its present conflict(s), we are now able to explore the usefulness of these theories in providing a way forward towards productive conflict. Understanding that no one theory can provide a universal or perfect solution, I will apply each theory to the conflicts of the Religious Right. To do so, I will go through the various models by first briefly summarizing the approach each model takes, then providing one possible way in which each theory might be applied to the Religious Right. My applications are not intended to be thorough or complete; rather, they serve as one possible way which they may be applied to the conflicts of the Religious Right and as a demonstration of how each model may be valuable to overcoming such conflicts. I end my examination of each model with a suggestion of which point on Brewer's continuum each approach may be most effective.

The common ingroup identity model involves establishing a superordinate identity and working toward superordinate goals. This kind of approach has been shown to reduce the sense of threat from other identities and increase the willingness of both sides to work together. One concern that this approach brings is that it may threaten the need for differentiation, and in doing so, may increase intergroup bias and tension.

As this relates to the Religious Right and its conflicts, possible ways forward building on this approach would involve bringing about an identity which can include both the Religious Right and those it sees as its opponents in conflict. Additionally, it should include the ability to work towards superordinate goals. However, given that the Religious Right has been something with which people identify for almost forty years, care should be taken to ensure that the new common ingroup identity does not threaten the identity of the Religious Right or contribute to a sense of loss of differentiation.

A possibility may exist here in developing a superordinate identity around "family values." While some in the Religious Right have suggested otherwise, there are likely few people in the United States who are against families. What the Religious Right has done is to take this value of the family and taken a very narrow definition of family values and the proper actions to be

supportive of them. While it would be unreasonable for everyone to agree on an approach, there are quite possibly ways in which, by focusing on the values, the Religious Right may find common ground with those with whom it is in conflict. Through this shared superordinate identity, it could be possible to find shared goals to work towards.

Looking at the different points on Brewer's continuum, it appears likely that this approach would be most effective in the stages of positivity for the ingroup and intergroup comparison. Particularly in the positivity for the ingroup stage, it would be easier to expand the outgroup. In intergroup comparison, this approach may be more challenging, particularly if the outgroup is one of the groups against which success is measured. While the need may still exist to define one's self and ingroup as better than the outgroup, a superordinate identity which creates a common ingroup may serve to include those who were previously marginalized.

The crossed categorization model focuses on identities which cut across many categories. Rather than focusing on a creating a new superordinate identity, this model draws on pre-existing identities and encourages people to identify and build on identity categories which they share. One possible limitation of this is appealing to identity categories which are closely related to the identity in conflict. If the common identities to which one is appealing are closely related to the conflict, it is less likely that this approach will be successful. Additionally, previously cited research has found that this approach is less effective for those who are highly identified with the initial group.

As this approach relates to those in the Religious Right, there are many possible inroads through which people might find a common shared identity with those in the Religious Right. Shared identities around national origin, common religion, or common interests all may be shared with those within the movement. While the Religious Right, in many cases, uses these same categories to exclude, by identifying common shared identity through these categories there exists a possibility of utilizing crossed categorization.

One caution with the Religious Right is that common identities around religion may not be the most effective considering the closeness of religious identity to the issues in conflict with the Religious Right. As presented earlier, appealing to identities which are closer to the identity in conflict are more likely to backfire. The closer an identity is to the identity in conflict, the more likely it is to be understood as a threat or in competition. Therefore, with those who are highly identified with the Religious Right, such an approach may backfire if the crossed-categorization attempt is based on an identity that is closely related to the core values of the Religious Right. As with the common ingroup identity model, this approach is likely best on the ends of the continuum away from hostility. If hostility towards the outgroup is already a means to the end, this approach seems more likely to backfire given the highly identified nature of those in the conflict.

The social identity complexity model is built on increasing the complexity of understanding around large groups of people. A higher social identity complexity is correlated with higher levels of tolerance towards out groups. Those with lower social identity complexity tend to homogenize outgroups, see less distinction, and display lower levels of tolerance. For those with low social identity complexity, if a person is in the outgroup in one aspect of the social identity, they are understood to be entirely in the outgroup. As pointed out previously, this approach deals with the subjective evaluation of outgroups rather than objective understandings of content or conflict with the outgroup.

When put in conversation with what we know about the Religious Right and social identity, this offers a less clear path forward. While insights about social identity complexity point out that individuals holding a more complex identity structure are more tolerant of diversity and are less likely to homogenize large groups of people, the way to achieve a more complex identity is perhaps less clear, particularly in conflict. As cited previously, conflict tends to lower social identity complexity. While a more complex understanding of outside identities is linked to lowering conflict, it appears that this may be more successful as a preventative measure rather than in the midst of conflict.

As stated previously, decategorization is a means of deconstructing the category of the other through increased contact and developing meaningful personal relationships with those in the outgroup. Through this, there is a decrease in the salience of social identity. This approach lowers the category-based understanding of the outgroup and establishes interpersonal definitions of the outgroup. As with other approaches, problems may arise using this approach if a person's need for differentiation is threatened, or if intergroup contact is not positive.

As this relates to the Religious Right, I think there are many opportunities in which this kind of approach may be successful. This approach offers a great benefit in that it can offer a meaningful, positive, and personal experience with a member of the outgroup. A real world example of this might be a recent news story which highlighted how residents of a small town which voted largely for Donald Trump was now angered over the threatened deportation of a local community leader.¹⁹⁷ Because of the personal connections with this person at an individual level, many people were able to see the individual beyond the label immigrant. In addition to that, given that whether or not one is a part of the Religious Right is externally apparent, it is not always clear when a person is speaking to someone who is not in the ingroup, and it may not be known how much contact someone has with those outside their group.

¹⁹⁷ Davey, Monica. "He's a Local Pillar in a Trump Town. Now He Could Be Deported." *New York Times*, February 27, 2017. Accessed March 23, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/27/us/immigration-trump-illinois-juan-pacheco.html>

As originally postulated by Allport, this approach to intergroup contact required four features: equal status within the contact situation, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support of authorities. Through research previously cited, this kind of direct contact has been shown to reduce feelings of anxiety, threat, and negative outgroup evaluations. As with any approach, this has limitations for alleviating intergroup contact and situations where such contact may be detrimental. As cited previously, if the conflict is already violent, increased contact may simply provide more avenues for violence. Because this model requires four aspects for intergroup contact to be successful, this perspective can give people direct advice on how to set up intergroup encounters with the Religious Right in a way that is likely to end as a positive encounter.

This kind approach offers a lot when put in conversation with the Religious Right. In contact under Allport's ideal conditions, there are several things which arise. Firstly, it has already been pointed out in other approaches the value of sharing common goals. Secondly, I have also previously pointed out the research which points to the success of this kind of contact in alleviating intergroup conflict. In the same way as the decategorization model, this approach may be particularly useful by building more complex understandings of people in the outgroup through positive interpersonal contact.

As with the other approaches, Allport's Intergroup Contact model is not without its limitations. In regards to the Religious Right, it is necessary to point out some warnings for situations in which this may not be the best way forward. As with the other approaches, such contact may not always be helpful if such contact is perceived as a threat. Additionally, this approach in its original formulation requires four things to be effective; if one of the prerequisites is missing, this approach may prove to be either less effective or ineffective altogether.

4.1 What these approaches may tell us about a way forward.

Individually, I hope I have suggested what strengths and weaknesses these groups may have for people to move conflict in a less toxic direction with the Religious Right. When taken all together, I believe there remain several things which these approaches may tell us about overcoming the identity-based, intergroup conflict with the Religious Right. Rather than simply identify one theoretical approach or offer up only one of these approaches as a means of alleviating conflict, I understand these approaches to be complementary. As presented, there exists research supporting each of the listed approaches to alleviate this kind of identity based intergroup conflict. Thus, what we learn from these approaches are multiple possible paths forward and I believe each approach can be a useful tool in the toolbox for approaching this conflict. Looking at these broader learnings, I next list what may be more implicit information derived from the information presented above.

While this has not been explicitly stated, I believe each of these approaches requires listening to understand the person or group in the Religious Right for several reasons. In order to understand how a person self-categorizes, how they emotionally connect with their group, how salient their identity may be, what stage they may be at in Brewer's spectrum, or any other important information required to understand a person or group's social identity requires listening to understand. Unless a person can listen before he or she speaks, it will be impossible to adequately understand where a person or group is at. Furthermore, given what I have presented about social identities, this kind of listening is important in order for the person speaking with a member or group of people from the Religious Right to allow the person or group with whom they speak to be individuals rather than homogenized through categorization. While social identities are shared identity and operate under a shared definition, the way or reasons people categorize themselves within a set social identity can and will vary. Therefore, to understand the Religious Right and people who identify with it requires listening to the individual rather than falling back to categorizations of the group.

As a tool for understanding, Brewer's spectrum is particularly helpful for identifying where the person or people who are a part of the Religious Right may be coming from and how open or closed to discussion they are. Understanding the different points of the spectrum may shape which approach is determined to be most appropriate to take to move forward in conflict. Additionally, to recognize the goals of the person or people to whom one is speaking is valuable – if the person belongs to a group which they simply understand positively, that is very different from a person who belongs to a group and is actively hostile to those outside of the group.

In each approach listed above, a potential for any method to backfire comes from a sense of increased threat to that group's identity based on optimal distinctiveness theory. As such, it is important to disagree in such a way that it does not threaten the identity of a group one is in disagreement with. In regards to the Religious Right, there are several ways in which this must be accounted for. Firstly, it goes without saying that each person or group is different, and what may threaten one will not threaten another – once again, highlighting the importance of understanding the people one is interacting with. Secondly, there should be an awareness of the histories which go into the identity of the Religious Right. For example, as pointed out above, it has been a favored tactic of the Religious Right at times to play up the ways in which it is under some level of threat from outsiders. Because of this history, anyone approaching the Religious Right during a conflict should be aware of how their criticisms of or language about beliefs, values, or actions may fit into a preexisting narrative as described by the Religious Right.

The importance of positive interpersonal contact should not be overlooked. Regardless of the approach, it appears that this kind of positive contact can be helpful for personalizing the outsider and helping conflict become more productive. As pointed out early in the paper, if contact with the outgroup only occurs with others seen as typical outgroup members, this can have a negative, rather than a positive, effect. Particularly for the conflict the Religious Right understands itself to be in, where they are in an increasingly threatening world, for there to exist positive contact which humanizes those whom the Religious Right would see as its enemy seems important, if not necessary, for the conflict to move forward.

Because I understand each of these approaches to present different strengths and different possible weaknesses, this suggests the approaches are appropriate in different situations. As such, flexibility and the ability to apply different theories as they are appropriate is a valuable trait to have moving forward.

Additionally, it has been my goal to respect the Religious Right as a group of people who are shaped by identities like any other group. While I have not been uncritical, it has not been my purpose to make statements about whether the group is right or wrong, or make value statements about their beliefs; rather, I am trying to identify the motivations and desires of the group. In order for conflict to be productive, I believe this kind of respect puts us closer to productive conflict outcomes. Given the increasingly hostile ways of speaking – from those within the Religious Right and those critical of it – the solution is more respectful dialogue, not a dialogue that is dismissive of a group of people. Based on the research and the various models used above, it appears necessary for those who hope to change the system of conflict with the Religious Right to maintain this kind of respect in their work. Given that social identities are a normal and often healthy reality of the human condition it is important to recognize that people in the Religious Right, by identifying with the group that they do, are not displaying defective behaviors or acting in a way that is not typical of all humanity. Each social identity is different and will deal with different issues. It is important to recognize that these actions are fundamentally human, and not those of fundamentalists.

Conclusion

The Religious Right seems as if it is a force in American politics that will continue to linger as a presence within the Republican Party. Because of the Religious Right's position in society, both socially and politically, working with people who would claim this identity does not appear to be optional. This leaves, very simply put, two paths which to take, whether one identifies with the Religious Right or not: one continues towards a possibly toxic conflict, and the other path leads towards a more positive system of coexistence. I have demonstrated both the possibility and benefits of the latter.

Using social identity theory as my theoretical base, I set out to explore the Religious Right, its conflicts, and how social identity theory may help us see ways forward to more productive and less entrenched conflict. I have shown that the conflicts in which the Religious Right is involved are identity based, and furthermore, shown the value of social identity theory in addressing such an identity based conflict. Through my application of several approaches to conflict based on a social identity theory, I have not only shown the value of social identity theory in providing conflict alleviating approaches, but shown how these approaches may indeed provide possible ways forward in the case of the Religious Right in the United States. While there are certainly limitations to what I have shown, I believe I have established a clear theoretical base for further research applying these social identity based approaches to the conflicts of which the Religious Right is a part as a meaningful way out of toxic conflict and towards a positive peace.

Though I fully acknowledge the limits of what I have done, I believe there is a significance to what this research may mean. Because of the systemic violence linked to these conflicts as previously established, I believe the importance of recognizing these ways forward could be significant insofar as they may alleviate the conflict and reduce the systems of violence at work in the conflicts I have examined. With the chaos of the early weeks of the Trump presidency indicating a new divisive way of politics, as well as the way in which Trump has garnered support from the Religious Right, I believe these social identity approaches could prove particularly useful in the coming years, and that these social identity based approaches to conflict can trump this identity based conflict.

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