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Conclusion & Discussion

It was initially difficult to determine how we may reconcile the many ideas contained within a theoretical discussion of identity within a religious context. As we have seen throughout this book, there are conflicting views, shared histories, unique experiences and varying levels of reported religiosity. What is considered a minority group in one context may be a majority in another, and what may be Jewish to one group may not be Jewish to a different group. As this book was concerned with combining these thoughts, feelings and histories into a cohesive framework, it also set out to discuss Jewish identity and how a perceived identity may function in a majority national context.

Social identity theory was used because of its way of explaining intergroup dynamics. Optimal distinction was highlighted within this theory, as it helps to frame our argument for shifting group salience. What is hopefully evident, as this book comes to a conclusion, is that there is as much importance associated with perception regarding group membership and status as there is to actually being a member. By this I mean, one may be a member of a group that is a minority in physical size, but perception of how that group fits into its surroundings may make all the difference when it comes to actual feelings of minority status. Reimagining minority status as an optimal distinction within religious social groups could dramatically change how we view minority religious groups living in a national majority context. This could allow much clearer and productive mechanisms for mutual understanding and increased efficient integration. In more specific terms, the following section will outline and revisit what this book set out to accomplish within each chapter, and discuss how these findings contribute to the development of social identity theory and optimal distinction as appropriate frameworks for religious social groups. Finally we will examine limitations and directions for the future.

General Findings

As the running theme throughout these chapters was the consideration of religious groups as a base for a social identity, we did not set out to reinvent theory, but to assess its compatibility within such groups. Looking at general findings within each theme, it is best to examine chapters both in their own right and as their contribution to this book as a whole. The general findings will be described, chapter by chapter, as highlights of the message from within each study.

Chapter one looked specifically at social religious membership through the consideration of the different modes in which one could contemplate their membership and participation. By looking at candid responses, this chapter was able to closely consider how much of 'what it means to be Jewish' for these participants actually stemmed from active, ritual practice, and how much was a result of passive based traditions of everyday life. The general findings of this section helped with evaluating the personal perception of what it means to be Jewish – in this case, in order to relate how these actions may be

considered as passively based or actively based. What was observed was an affinity for this subject group to consider cultural (passive) happenings as central to what it means to be Jewish, and therefore set the stage for the discussion of Judaism as a social identity.

Chapter two explains how we came to discover and then describe what is referred to in this book as a 'passive' religious participation style. The scale itself saw some difficulties in its construction, but the strengths outweighed the weaknesses, as there were positive findings concerning the ability to separate participation styles. The reliability of the new scale was generally very high. The notable results of this scale were the ways in which we were able to show a relationship to self-esteem with this scale, in contrast to an active scale. One of the major presuppositions of social identity theory is that positive self-esteem should be visible as a result of group membership. Through this new scale, showing correlations with passive and not active practice for participants goes a long way in supporting the argument that religious group membership sustainability can be a function of social connections. Viewing religious membership in this way allows us to not only solidify salience of religious group membership, but also to identify what aspects of this membership are making an impact on our self-esteem. As noted in the chapter-specific discussion, there is work to be done concerning further validation of this scale, but it did show positive results in differentiating religious participation for this discussion.

Chapter three is where self-esteem as a general topic was introduced. In order to continue to use social identity theory, we must satisfy one of the major tenets of it, which is the existence of positive self-esteem through membership. This chapter set out to discover not only if there is positive self-esteem, both personally and collectively, but also where this self-esteem may originate (with respect to participation). As such, it was important for this chapter to separate self-esteem into personal and collective sections. The reason for this again speaks to the end goal of being able to discuss the origins of this self-esteem. Would we see self-esteem as a function of someone's personal or global awareness, or would we see it as a function of being a part of a group? The general findings of this chapter were describing the existence of positive self-esteem as it relates to religious group membership, and more importantly, to establish that self-esteem can be derived from passive practice. Social identity theory may now be addressed through the major requirements set out by Tajfel and Turner (1986), but we can also hope to extrapolate this theory, and in a further chapter step discuss optimal distinction.

Chapter four took the idea of active and passive participation and placed it within the context of an intrinsic/extrinsic religious orientation. The purpose of this was to see if these ideas were paired or comparable in any way, and to see if a social religious membership or a passive based participation style was associated with either of these classic religious orientations. The goal of this chapter was to examine religious orientation styles insofar as hoping to address feelings that social membership may be strictly an extrinsically oriented orientation. The notable results from this study were not as starkly conclusive as

conventional wisdom might suggest. We see that religious orientation for members with an inclination for passive participation may very well be intrinsic and/extrinsic, but it does not need to be strictly one or the other. In this case we can see a Jewish identity, or more specifically a Jewish social identity as something more than a 'means to an end', but one that can resemble an intrinsic orientation as well. General findings provide an argument for 'Jewish' being an optimal distinction, as this social identity is found to be discussed as intrinsic. For this reason, it would be more closely in line with the basic tenets of optimal distinction mentioned in the beginning of this book. The general findings of this chapter further discuss passive participation and it being considered in some cases both as intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientations.

Chapter five, presented a framework wherein subjects could relate how much they do or do not feel a part of a cultural or religious majority. The importance of this question for subjects was to see to what extent 'culture' may refer to Canadian culture or Jewish culture. Would these be seen as mutually exclusive or as existing within one another? The general findings of this chapter were that not only is there a feeling of being a member of both a national and religious cultural majority for the most part, but there is also an indication of close proximity living. Close proximity living refers to data that acknowledge participants' tendencies to live within the same neighborhoods. This may account for why we see higher scores concerning feelings of majority membership on a neighborhood level. This can also imply that regardless of actual participation, group members are inclined to live within reach of each other. An important observation is in Canadian identity perception, which is also strong, and we do not see a distinct indication of feeling 'left out' from this group regarding whatever is perceived as being a Canadian.

Chapter six attempts to go beyond social identity theory and assess to what extent we may be seeing Jewish identity as an optimal distinction. In order to assess this, the chapter looks at comparisons between subjects living in both a majority (Israel) and minority (Canada) Jewish context. The general findings of this chapter show a decrease of the mention of a Jewish identity marker for those individuals that had made Aliyah, a permanent move to Israel. This is important because if 'Jewish' may be functioning as an optimal distinction then this is what we would expect to see. A decrease in both active and passive practice, as a result of being a part of cultural majority where these same markers were more salient than as a minority, allows further acceptance of this idea. The comparison of identity markers through interviews of both Jewish Canadians in Canada and Jewish Canadians who have moved to Israel provides arguments for the presence of this theoretical idea at work. In this context, we can see evidence for the optimal distinction as we saw a constant salient Jewish identity for Jewish Canadians who stayed in Canada versus the described decline for those who made the move to Israel. We were able also to observe other salient identity markers present in those who had moved to Israel and are in majority Jewish settings that we did not see described in the minority Canadian Jewish setting.

Religion as a social identity

Considering the results and discussions that came from within these chapters, what can be said for religious groups and social identity? While each chapter has a conclusion of its own, an overall summation points to the idea that in the right circumstances, we can see religious group membership as a social identity. This book was also able to produce general findings in the direction of satisfying all basic guidelines of social identity theory as outlined by Tajfel and Turner (1986).

Religion can be a difficult term to work with and can be a perplexing idea to study quantitatively. This is due partly to the fact that personal religious worships and adherence can vary from person to person. In considering religion as a social identity, we can remove the uncertainties situated in definitional arguments surrounding belief based elements and allow religious group membership to be decided by one person in one personal circumstance. Each member can choose to what degree this salient identity might fit under a group's umbrella, for example, every way that one can be considered being Jewish. It is not for me to say that one is 'more' or 'less' Jewish than another, but what we can say is that one who considers him or herself Jewish on his or her own terms in a given social situation will meet the requirements for a discussion within a social identity framework. More specifically, being a member of the Jewish community of Amsterdam may mean something different from being a member of the Jewish community of Vancouver, Paris, or Buenos Aires. However, in each specific context, being a social member comes with the ability to not only belong, but also to derive positive self-esteem through belonging. It is because of this idea that we can say religious group membership can be a social identity, not only through active practice but through passive participation.

Religion as optimal distinction

Revisiting Brewer's (1991) article outlining optimal distinction, the implications are considerable. Should a group be functioning socially (in this case, social religious group membership), and there are no immediate threats to its existence, optimal distinction could be the vehicle by which integration of these groups can naturally occur. More specifically, as an optimal distinction, the feelings of being part of a minority religious group may fade into the background of being accepted as part of a national majority. If we accept that through the arguments and results of the studies discussed above we can consider religious group membership a social identity, then it can be possible to infer that this social identity derived from passive religious participation can also be a driving force in what makes a person feel unique. This uniqueness then could be inferred as an optimal distinction on one who may, for example, see him or herself as Canadian. What unique sort of Canadian? In this case, a Jewish Canadian. Evidence of this phenomenon can be seen through the changing identity

salience of Canadians who have made Aliyah, as well as indicated feelings of majority membership in the self-report survey studies. The idea of "Jewish" as an optimal distinction could very well hold an answer to how these thriving secular communities continue to be productive and positive members of everyday Canadian city life.

Limitations

The overall series of studies have several design characteristics which limit the ability to infer the results to the general population. While this section does not wish to minimize any positive findings or contributions, transparency and other technical considerations must be mentioned as academic integrity is paramount. As such, it should be noted that each chapter is not without its limitations.

The first limitations to mention are possible threats to external validity, more specifically the generalizability of the findings. While it is desirable to generalize these findings as widely as possible, there are some issues presented below that will only allow these studies to be generalized to a certain degree (for example, in chapters one through five, data is collected only from Jews living in Vancouver, thus results may not be generalizable to all Jews in Canada). In some cases, there are trends that will be interesting for further review and research and, in others, some more concrete empirical data.

Concerning sample size, there are a few concerns that should be mentioned. The sample itself consisted of several hundred Jewish individuals out of several thousand in the actual community of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada. That being said, it was never the intention of this book to generalize findings to all of Canada or world Jewry, but it is very likely that something can be said about the Lower Mainland (Vancouver, Richmond, etc.) or a similar community in size and age. Generally, one would strive to have a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error when conducting a study to be generalized to a certain population. In the case of this study, there are approximately 200 respondents per survey round, and the margin of error was 6.89% with a 95% confidence interval. This allows a clear discussion of results and trends, however, any arguments could certainly be made stronger with more participants. There is a large representation from the 18-25 year old category and from female respondents. According to a report from the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver (JFGV) (2013), there are approximately 2000 Jews in the Vancouver area who are in the 13-22 age range and, therefore, this current sample should be sufficient to say something, especially regarding this age group. JFGV used a similar sample of 185 participants for the 2013 study and for a 2009 report (JFGV, 2009) they sent 200 surveys and analyzed the 116 that were returned out of 1100 potential respondents aged 19-29 (56% were listed as students). Concerning any effects from the possible overrepresentation of female participants, consulting results of the JFGV reports we see from 2009 that 64% of their responses came from female participants while 36% came from male participants;

they further remark that in a 2001 census of Jewish Vancouver 51% were male and 49% were female. We can therefore be confident that the findings of this book follow the same patterns of responses from the JFGV and that they are applicable in that same area of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada. There was no control specifically for female participants and the fact that more participants were female seems to be a running occurrence within these studies. Regarding survey sample data in the previous JFGV studies this is also mentioned, but the data is still deemed fit for analysis and, for this reason, the same was done for the sample within this book. Looking to Chapter 2 (p. 67, Figure 2), there is a visual model of the correlations found between each variable. It can be seen that gender (37.9 % male responses, 62.1% female responses) had a weak, but significant correlation only with the new scale, as did age (49.8% in the 18-25 range). Accordingly, it is not believed that either of these variables had a particularly large effect on the overall results. Concerning experience and interview based chapters, it is unknown if this had any effect on the data, but it is explicitly indicated how many participants were of each gender. In general, sample size could have had an effect in chapters 2, 3, 4 & 5 as these chapters relied heavily on reaching the population for correlational or scale based data. It is unlikely that these results can be inferred onto all religious minority groups. It should also be noted that this research was conducted within Vancouver, a liberal and open city, and within Canada, a generally multicultural country, and it could be expected that the same study, if conducted within a more closed society or country that is not as experienced with minorities or other cultures, that we would not see the same results. However, in such a multicultural setting, it would be reasonable to suggest comparable results from Jewish populations in other similar cities in Canada.

The second limitations to mention are possible threats to internal validity. This addresses the extent to which this book can infer causation and make certain conclusions based on the data. As mentioned above, the sample contained a high number of females and a high number of respondents in the 18-25 years old category (also pointing to a possibility of an overrepresentation of students, but not all indicated an occupation). Through looking to correlations there was only a weak connection with age and gender and only to one scale and none of the other variables. In general, throughout this study, there was no control specifically for one gender or one age group; it would certainly be interesting for future research to do so. For reference, in Worthington et al. (2003), they conduct research using the RCI-10 over six different studies and four out of six studies had a similar mean age as the sample in this book. In the Worthington et al. studies, the mean age for study 1 was 19.1 years; the mean age for study 2 was 19.4; the mean age for study 3 was 22.0; and the mean age for study 5 was 20.2 (p. 86). As the most visible category in this book is generally 18-25 years old, these studies hope to be able to assume a comparable range of responses concerning age and results. Furthermore, in the Worthington et al. (2003) paper, there is an overrepresentation of female participants across all studies with an even larger gap than

the studies presented here (ratio of females to males, f:m, study 1: 75.9:24.1; f:m, study 2: 70.5:29.5; f:m, study 3: 63.9:36.1; f:m, study 4: 58.0:42.0; f:m, study 5: 67.0:33.0, etc.). The authors also do not cite any issues regarding this and only mention no main effect being found for gender (p. 89).

Beyond any influences regarding demographics, it should be noted that there are certain causal inferences that are made concerning what sort of effect different religious participation styles have on self-esteem or life satisfaction. As some of these results were not due to experimental study there is always the chance that what may be apparent as religious participation causing high self-esteem could be high self-esteem causing religious participation. Further analysis of this from a more in-depth empirical angle may allow for stronger causal inferences regarding the order of the relationship. While causal order would be a definite recommendation for future studies, attention should also be brought to the possible influence of the researcher's background on participants' responses (in chapters 1 and 6 more explicitly than others, as those relied on interview and not scale data). It is possible that Jewish participants may have felt social desirability effects of responding to a Jewish researcher. According to Presser and Stinson (1998), desirability effects can be enhanced during interviews and a self-administered survey can help with this problem. Within all chapters, interviews and surveys are self-administered and there were no real time interviews. There was no direct literature on Jewish researchers surveying Jewish participants that could be found to address these concerns and perhaps this would be a promising avenue of research for the future. It is believed that any social desirability effects are minimal, considering that, as previously stated, there was no face-to-face questioning.

Other, broader limitations include chapter specific issues such as retrospective memory on the part of certain participants within chapter 6, as well as general collection and distribution challenges. Revisiting retrospective memory, it is important to note that for half of the participants there is a description of how things 'were' in Canada and for the other half of the participants there is a description of how things 'are'. Those who are in the 'were' category have the task of remembering their entire surroundings while the others have only to comment on their current situation. It is not known how each individual's state of mind may have affected the overall study but it should certainly be noted that elements of nostalgia, fondness for home or any number of factors could possibly lead to retrospective accounts being less accurate. For this reason, as was suggested in the chapter and reiterated here, it would be beneficial in future studies of similar scenarios to have a more longitudinal design where there is no retrospective element and, therefore, a more accurate picture of a given participant's circumstances can be formed.

Concerning collection and distribution challenges, reaching participants was also a limitation, as it was difficult to contact as many people as possible due to restrictions put in place to reduce priming. This was apparent in chapters 1 and 6 more than the others, but generally could be said for all sections, and included, for example, not distributing the survey

data during an active synagogue service or religious event that may influence responses. Due to these collection challenges, there was a lower return rate than was expected. There was also an issue with distance and contacting subjects (Leiden is a considerable journey from Vancouver and a 9 hour time difference), but this effect is estimated as minimal, if at all influential, as far as results are concerned.

The measures used to conduct the research, while showing high reliability scores, could themselves be considered limitations. Personal self-esteem, as assessed through the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (1989), could have potentially shown other results had we used an alternative scale assessing a different form of personal self-esteem. The scale that was created for this study was new, and while interesting, perhaps another more widely used scale would have made results more comparable to other research. It is the opinion of the researcher that using this scale provided new information that would be otherwise unobtainable in the same form. However, with any new scale, results are not as strong as with a peer reviewed or published scale.

All of this being considered, general findings show promise in the continuation of this research and the application of social identity theory and optimal distinction within other religious based contexts.

Future Research & Implications for the future

Upon reviewing the conclusions and recommendations in the individual chapters, some final suggestions for future directions may help to take the individual studies within this piece and analyze their effects in greater depth. Generally, as indicated in the limitations section, a larger and/or broader sample may help to solidify the statements made within these chapters and replication in other provinces, states and countries may do well to test these theories further. More specifically, future recommendations are as follows:

Sections dealing with majority and minority membership could be expanded in the future with a much more detailed questionnaire about daily life, allowing the respondents to indicate not only geographically how they feel they fit in to society, but also how they may fit into different social circumstance as a majority or minority. This in-depth look at more specific daily feelings may paint a clearer picture of how each respondent is functioning on interpersonal levels with non-Jews, for example, or how they may feel their passive tendencies influence a variety of social interactions. This same idea can be helpful for future research regarding Aliyah and practice. Within subsequent studies in this same area, it could be helpful that all participants interviewed come from one specific area of the same city for closer comparison. It would also be interesting to compare results along a spectrum of active religious participation to see if we notice the same effects among more devout orthodox Jews, for example. This would allow us to say with further certainty that as a social phenomenon, 'Jewish' can be an optimal distinction.

An added bonus would be to look at other minority religious groups in and out of a majority situation (Muslims moving to an Islamic country, etc.) to see if this idea can be cross cultural or Jewish specific. When considering the chapter that explores self-esteem, it would be highly recommended to compare results with a study assessing different forms of personal versus group self-esteem. For this project, one type of personal self-esteem, global, was chosen, as past literature indicated it would be useful for comparison. Perhaps there are ways to further delve into this area by partitioning different sorts of self-esteem as it may relate to life events, successes and a person's past. This section tended to look at life satisfaction as an end result. This is not a problem for the purposes of a comparable variable as a summation of all that is being tested (in this case religious participation and self-esteem as they may or may not lead to increased life satisfaction), however, in the future, it may be interesting to look at other measures of self-esteem or self-worth as they relate to cultural identity and membership.

Creating a scale for this study was both beneficial and difficult at the same time. It would be suggested that should this scale be revisited, as recommended within the chapter itself, a shortened version be drafted to have it more precisely relate to more widely known active scales. Concerning generalizations across different religions, the scale itself was constructed to be non-religious-specific; however, there may be merit in religious-specific versions, for example, asking about Shabbat practice for Jewish participants or daily prayers for Muslim participants.

Overall implications of this research for the future are that hopefully we can begin to look at religious minority membership as a more dynamic concept, rather than simply a series of transplanted customs fighting for survival within an overwhelming majority. If we know how one views Judaism in their daily lives and to what degree this Jewish identity functions along-side or separately from another majority identity concept, we may be able to more accurately understand how these groups not only view themselves, but want to be viewed by others. It is one thing to acknowledge the cultural heritage of other community members, but if we understand these cultural differences as uniqueness within the context of a greater whole, we can extend our vision of community beyond smaller group distinctions. This could certainly facilitate close-knit functioning communities that are not separated by other cultures, but are brought together through appreciation for what they can add to a vibrant national majority.