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Concomitant Attenuation and Amplification of Religious Prejudice: A Preliminary Theoretical Synthesis and Illustrations from a Muslim Society

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Abstract: *Religion is a multifaceted phenomenon whereby psychic, emotional, social, moral, and interpersonal attitudes become taken-for-granted realities. The manifold complexity of religious attitudes has produced various models that try to explain religious prejudice as an outcome variable. At the same time, youth in Muslim countries are susceptible to a dual religious prejudice anchored in religion on the one hand and sectarian doctrines on the other. Additionally, many overlapping correlates, such as discrimination, social exclusion, stereotypical behavior, and threat perception, produce additional data that need to be placed within the broader theoretical perspective. Moreover, the study of religious prejudice poses a series of the above-mentioned challenges. For instance, in Muslim societies, many social groups may display both sectarian and religious prejudice. The case of concomitant religious and sectarian prejudice treated as a compound cognitive, social, and moral behavior is sporadic in the theoretical and empirical literature. The present overview is based on a preliminary review of some of the fundamental theoretical literature in the field with the goal of informing new strands of studies on the subject aimed at collecting empirical data from traditional societies that are still very passionate about religious identities.*

Background

Sectarianism and group hostility have assumed many forms throughout the Muslim world during the past few decades. Consequently, there has been a nascent interest in the study of religious sectarianism and prejudice owing to their invasive societal character and detrimental sociopolitical outcomes (Gaiser, 2022; Wehrey, 2017). In the case of Muslim societies, it has been argued that beyond the traditional lines of religious, dogmatic, and doctrinal demarcation, sectarian identity construction heavily relies on political economy, geopolitical venues, and the influence of religious elites through ever-growing social media (Wehrey, 2017). For instance, sectarian violence in Pakistan, a Muslim-majority country, is linked to its geopolitical affiliation with Saudi Arabia on the one hand and the allegiances of a segment of its population to neighboring Iran on the other. Subsequently, the study of the systematic reproduction of sectarian identities matters because it may help understand how violence is incited through pervasive discrimination and prejudice based on these supra-national religious affiliations (Agara et al., 2022).

It is often criticized that most of the literature on inter-group relations, such as prejudice, is social psychological in nature, whereas in social psychology, the study of religious attitudes is often devoid of an in-depth understanding of religion itself. Hence, divergent perspectives with a wide range of disciplinary focuses, methods, and discourses characterize the field of religious prejudice (Augoustinos & Every, 2007). A central polemic in the contemporary study of religious prejudice as a psycho-social construct arises out of the predominantly contingent Western background in the theoretical and empirical realms of global scholarship. In fact, while much of the theorizing on prejudice has a Western face, it is the contemporary

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manifestation that occurs more readily in traditional, patriarchal, and authoritarian societies (Osborne et al., 2021). Unlike the advanced industrialized societies of Europe, traditional societies tend to display a higher level of religious prejudice and still have a passionate affiliation with their religious groups (Bourdillon, 2022).

Secondly, religious prejudice is often taken for granted as an attitude directed by the religious majority toward the religious minority. In contrast, it is also the truism of empirical research that minorities display prejudicial attitudes toward majority religions in a geographical and political sense. Hence, most of the measurement tools are directed to capture the implicit attitudes of the majority and may lag behind the requirement of measurement invariance. Additionally, interest in prejudice studies is often due to policymakers' goal of reducing prejudice, and there is a sharp contrast between the academic understanding and the pragmatic approach of policymakers. Hence, synthesizing conceptual frameworks and the nexus of causality between strictly relevant empirical constructs is also necessary (Setiawan et al., 2021). Finally, prejudice is such a traumatic symptom for society and group processes. It has been a subject of investigation in various fields of study, and the convergence of various conceptual and theoretical ideas requires a substantive synthesis of empirical and theoretical literature. In fact, integrated frameworks of prejudice can only explain the concomitant causative nexus between individual motivation, group (sect) norms, and societal contexts on the one hand and concomitant attenuating and amplifying mechanisms on the other. It is also pertinent to note that religious affiliations may work in both ways, i.e., reducing and promoting prejudice with respect to any given target group (Burch–Brown & Baker, 2016; Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005).

Aim of the Review

This review synthesis was aimed at clarifying and summarizing the theoretical literature on the interdisciplinary subject of religious otherness and group dynamics, such as social categorization and prejudice. Given the wide applicability and usefulness of these frameworks in reducing prejudice, the paper also discusses prejudice with the help of intergroup threat theory (ITT) and contact theory within a single conceptual scheme. The researchers have used review questions as guiding lenses for collecting and synthesizing theoretical literature. Theories are presented through conceptual schemes, and various assumptions are discussed with reference to a subsequent presentation of a conceptual model that can be tested with reference to the population of any Muslim society.

Objectives of the Review

The objective is to determine how prejudice is assumed in the theoretical literature as a product of the complex social identity and categorization of self and others at various levels of analysis and how religious and sectarian prejudice are to be studied within one comprehensive framework that allows us to see the attenuation and amplification of prejudice. The following questions were answered with reference to the fundamental literature in sociology and social psychology on prejudice:

Question I: Why does religion promote collective attitudes that cause prejudice toward others?

Question II: Which are the social psychological frameworks instrumental to the amplification and attenuation of prejudice at the group level?

Question III: How to explain the compound effect of amplification and attenuation of prejudice

Question IV: How can we illustrate these concepts from the viewpoint of Muslim societies known for sectarian and religious tensions?

Religion, collective consciousness, and prejudice

While addressing the question of collective attitudes promoted by religion, classical sociologists are extremely relevant. The very beginning of the classical sociological analysis of society was characterized by an emphatic display of interest by the founding fathers of sociology in the manner and consequences of religion as a structuring force. Somehow, at the beginning of Durkheim's work, religion was acknowledged as a force that has the potential to impose a structure on the actions and symbolic capabilities of people, e.g., Totem. It is very clear for the sake of classical sociological theorizing that

religion constitutes a fundamental subject of functionalist thinking in the work of Emile Durkheim. For instance, in his Le Suicide (1897), he argues for the potential of religion to superimpose itself on the very existence of individuals. Forces of social integration are essentially conceived as forces of religion in his work. Therefore, his definition of religion almost excludes any reference to the consciousness of the individual; rather, it presents religion as "a system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself and about collective existence" (Durkheim, 1951).

The religious feeling in Durkheim is a project of collective consciousness rather than individual attitudes. Hence, religious sentiment is seen as an institutional rather than individual factor of social life (Pickering & Durkheim, 2011). The potential of religion to transcend individuals in a symbolic relationship and institutional and cultural processes ends up limiting selfish and egoistic tendencies. That is why it was empirically verified that, for the sake of LeSuicide, egoistic suicide was disproportionally higher among socially and religiously isolated individuals. Hence, religion is conceived as an institutional force that acts for the benefit of both individuals and society, as well as a great phenomenon of social integration (Durkheim, 2011).

Similarly, as explained by Durkheim himself, his emphasis on religion as a coercive set of ideas is not to be confused with a revival of historical materialism. Therefore, his connotation of religion as a social force is neither material nor spiritual; rather, it has a moral and social connotation. Hence, Durkheim interpreted various forms of religious objects and symbolic elements as arising out of social and cultural life. Within the context of widespread liberal humanism, Durkheim's assertion of religious phenomena met with harsh criticism from some circles of sociology (Pickering, 2010). However, it is also true that he believed in individual morality and the accumulative effect of individuals in the development of religious and moral consciousness. The Weberian description of religion in broader historical and Kantian terms as ideological determinism is a powerful alternative to both Durkheim and the subsequent rational choice thinking on religion (Case et al., 1989).

From the above discussion, we may conclude that for classical functionalist theorists such as Durkheim, religion is not a system of ideas dependent on individuals; rather, it is a system of forces (Wach, 2019). Nonetheless, it is also justified to say that in the work of Durkheim, at least in a figurative sense, religious forces can be equated with the coercive structure of religion, whereby religious individuals become the subject of scientific investigation under a series of assumptions. The following are a few of these assumptions:

1. The fundamental concept of distinction between sacred and profane imposes a group belief on individuals that makes them behave in a collective, consensual, as well as ritualistic way, causing self-negation, self-sacrifice, chastity, financial sacrifices, acceptance of misfortune, courage to face adverse life circumstances, and fulfillment of duties beyond personal capabilities.
2. Participation in religious actions and rituals, including sacrificial rites, raises the individual above himself, hence conferring upon him a kind of reanimation and hope.
3. The final assumption about the effect of religion on an external social fact confers a kind of social solidarity within the communal group that shares a particular system of beliefs and rituals that are social rather than individual (Pickering, 2002). These features of Durkheim's sociology of religion are presented in a conceptual scheme below.

Chart 1

Religion as the collective conscience
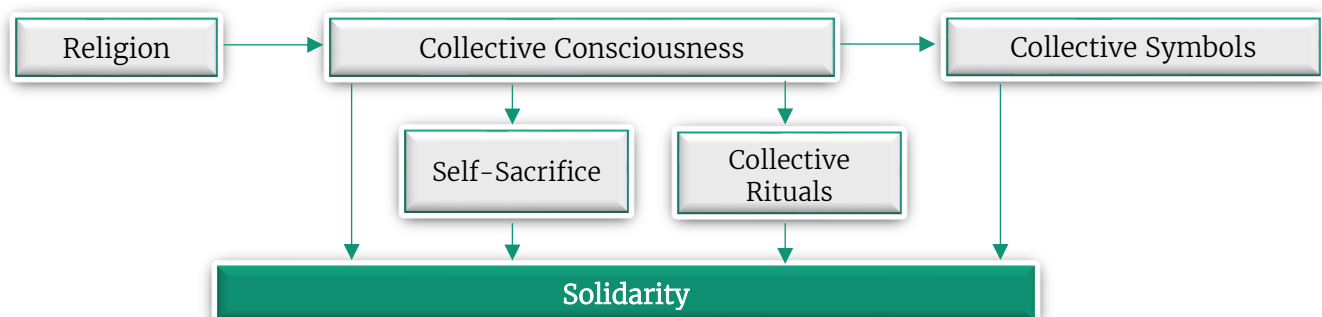
The chart (on the previous page) presents various assumptions of Durkheim's theory in a preliminary discourse on religion and group identity. It is stated in this regard that religion accords a level of solidarity and collective consciousness that helps the individual transcend his individuality and resultantly establishes his social identity. People regard themselves not as individuals but as members of their unique religious community and behave according to these memberships. Further segments in this framework will relate the concept of religiosity with social categorization and social identity theory, thereby presenting religion as a group-level phenomenon while bringing the individual back in.

Group-Level Frameworks for Prejudice: Their Amplification and Attenuation

In the section below on social categorization, complex identity, contact theory, and threat theory are reviewed as explanatory frameworks for the concept of prejudice at the group level.

II (a): Social Identity Theory, Multiple Self-Categorization, and Attenuation of Prejudice

Some strands of literature have debated the non-embedded characteristics of social life in the present context. The background to the very vast social psychological literature is that the decline of social identity is a fixed concept. In fact, it is stated that individuals adhere to multiple identities and multiple in-group situations, which makes it very difficult to elicit the single-out response of one identity and a single categorization of the self in the out-group relationship (Hogg, 2016). Social identity complexity is, hence, a complex concept that has been measured empirically in the field of social psychology with some success. Conceptually, identity complexity arises from overlapping identities and overlapping replicating role performance within multiple in-groups. Previous research demonstrates that this kind of complexity of identity has a series of positive outcomes for intergroup relations (Abrams, 2015).

This is particularly true of Muslim societies such as Pakistan, where the social identity has assumed various forms of complexity of self-categorization within various spheres of group life while at the same time maintaining very strong demarcations between religious and sectarian entities. A paucity of literature has synthesized religious affiliation and other types of social categorizations. Present socialization through group life is a complex phenomenon if we take the example of youth in Muslim society. For clarity, let's take the example of a set of group identities that Muslim youth have to adhere to during the phase of their socialization in the university structure. The structure in itself has multiple identity categorizations, such as membership in sports clubs, gyms, reading circles, peer groups, music clans, subject specialization, and hostel inmates versus day scholars. Beyond these structures of categorization, even social media and society, in their political and economic façades, have much to offer in terms of the complexity of the identity of a student (Cadinu et al., 2013; Cedeño, 2020).

The literature also highlights the importance of prerequisites for multiple identity complexity. The first one is that one has to be aware of the complexity of multiple categorizations. This awareness is likely to be a salient feature of youth, as they have to place themselves in various role performances on an everyday basis. Multiple category dimensions can, however, converge and hence form yet other homogenized in-group identities. For instance, being a hostel inmate, a student of sociology, a female, or a member of a blood donation society on campus overlaps with group categorizations. The question is how this overlap may affect the overall complexity of social identity. Does the overlapping create a convergent large in-group, and what are the consequences of awareness of this complexity of social identity for out-group relations? Fortunately, the previous literature has offered some insight.

### Social Identity Complexity and Attenuation of Prejudice

According to one of the studies conducted precisely on the overlapping complexity of social identity on the attitude toward the outgroups in America, it was found that the perception of complexity and overlapping of social categorization is positively associated with the favorable evaluation of outgroups and support for diversity and multiculturalism (Miller et al., 2009). It is pertinent to mention that the perception of diversity in the in-group is related to the favorable evaluation of out-groups, including religious identity-driven groups such as sects and other religions. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that it is not simply the number of groups that matters; rather, it is the awareness of the overlapping and cross-cutting of

identity and its subjective perception that makes the self prone to favorable out-group attitudes. In short, it is assumed that individuals who are aware of the complexity of in-groups are in a better position to realize that others, even religious otherness, may vary or coexist on some dimensions of their overlapping identity (Shih et., 2009). A bold example is that players of national teams are easily accorded the right to marry citizens of other nations and religions. Hence, a famous Pakistani cricketer married an Indian tennis star without any discontent from the citizens of two otherwise rival nations. This display of affection between two individuals actually reflects the assumption that, in the face of multiple interlinked elements of social identity, a positive status (nation hero) may supersede or eliminate the element of out-group negativity, such as nationality or even religion.

Chart 2

Social identity complexity
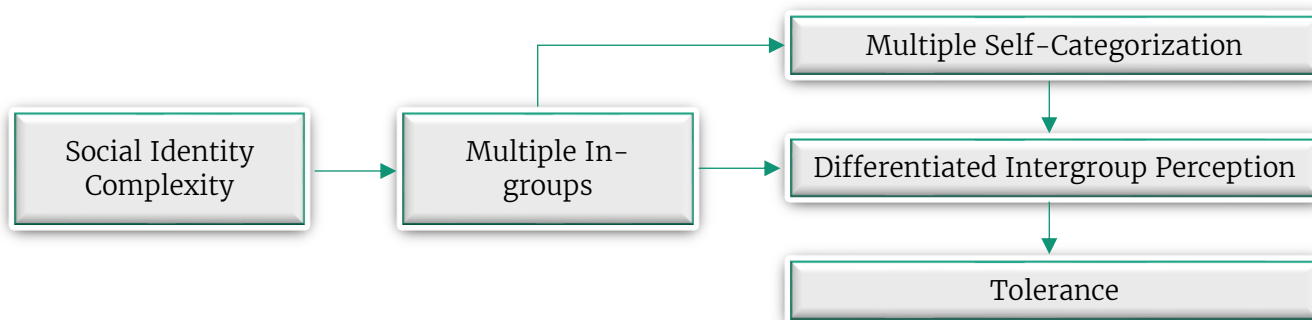
The chart shows how the complexity of social identity produces acceptance and tolerance of others as a positive outcome of multiple self-categorizations and multiple in-group feelings. This hypothesis seems to be quite true, given the fact that contact quality and quantity may raise awareness about the multiplicity of in-group bounds. This theme will be further linked with contact theory in a subsequent section of this chapter.

II (b): Social Contact Theory and the Attenuation of Prejudice

Among the various antecedents or predisposing factors behind intergroup threat perception is previous exposure to religious others. One of the ways we are readily exposed to religious others is perhaps through our contacts with those communities or groups. The explanatory path through which social contact may attenuate or amplify the symbolic and realistic threats perceived by the members of a particular social group is 'gap-filling' knowledge that can reduce the unreasonable number of irrational fears of out-group members work on the construct of contact can be traced back to the time of (Tannenbaum & Allport, 1956) in his famous work on the contact hypothesis. Allport believed that conditions such as intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by authorities, as well as equal status, are the factors that can potentially help lower the level of prejudice. The contact hypothesis defined in this line of reasoning is essentially different, as contact seems to be the negative correlate of prejudice and social exclusion. Social contact is, therefore, important in reducing prejudice. It is also found in the subsequent models of reasoning with prejudice that contact, even if it is unplanned and unstructured, may reduce the levels of prejudice. Literature also shows that it is not necessary to have optimal contact situations for the sake of having a significant reduction in prejudice (Batson & Stocks, 2005; Wojcieszak & Warner, 2020). It is pertinent to note that Allport's conception has a tautological fallacy at its core intuitive content within the construct of contact. It is the contact that provides equal status.

The way intergroup threat theory predicts negative attitudes about outgroups and intergroup contact, as explained by (Pettigrew, 1998), elucidates various mechanisms through which prejudice can be reduced. The first mechanism is learning about the outgroup. Lack of knowledge in intergroup situations is almost equal to fear of the unknown. In fact, prior contact provides knowledge that can challenge our assumptions about differences and expectations of indecency from outgroup members. These lessons directly contradict our stereotypes. This leads to a positive attitude because contact may expose information that is inconsistent with previously held stereotypes and intergroup attitudes.

Another mechanism through which intergroup contact may reduce prejudice is through changing behavior. Our attitudes are a result of our ever-changing behaviors, which might be a result of changes in situations and expectations. Exposure to new information through contact may require acceptance by the outgroup, which has the potential to revise our attitude toward them. The short repetition of contact exposes us to a kind of dissonance about our old beliefs and new situations (Burch-Brown & Baker, 2016). This may result in our changing behaviors. The third mechanism by which optimal contact reduces intergroup prejudice is through a reduction in anxiety, which in itself causes negative encounters. Reduced anxiety can generate positive emotions such as empathy, friendships, and intimacy (Servidio, 2020). This generation of effective ties can mediate prejudice. With the rise of urbanization, migration, and bulk higher education, we expect that there will be more contacts, interactions, and friendships. All these kinds of intergroup contact will reduce prejudice in its cognitive and effective forms. The fourth and final mechanism is that of in-group reappraisal.

While social contact reshapes our conservatism about out-groups, it also affects in-group dynamics. Social contact in intergroup situations is similar to a double-edged sword. The more contact and exposure we have with the out-group, the more we are effectively and cognitively distant from the norms of our in-group. More contact with the out-group implies less contact with the ingroup and less expression of prejudice. The above-mentioned mechanisms of urbanization and immigration indirectly imply a switch from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity in Durkheim's terms (Durkheim, 1960). Again, social contact theory must be reevaluated against the backdrop of the macro-structural perspective. The societal and institutional dynamics involved in intergroup strife and contact need to be brought into perspective. Many negative attitudes toward outgroups might simply reflect societal norms such as discrimination rather than individual psychological processes. These norms are above the psychological dynamics involved in intergroup relations. In summary, Allport's contact hypothesis offers a prescriptive and normative account of contact rather than a natural and sui generis construct that can be measured independently of the tautological fallacy.

Chart 3

Intergroup contact and attenuation of negative out-group attitudes

The Process of Amplification of Prejudice

II (c): Social Categorization Theory, Proto typicality and Amplification of Prejudice

Social categorization is just a natural capability of human beings. They have to assess and evaluate the complex sensory reality into simple categories of thought. This attitude helps us create a viable approach to quick and easy decision-making. When we categorize an object of thought, we tend to attribute the properties of the group to the individuals in the process of categorization, which is possibly the point where prejudice, stereotyping, and social identity converge in a somewhat consistent pattern of evaluation of others, including religious others (Szekeres et al., 2022; Turner, 2010). Hence, social categorization seems to be a natural cognitive response to visual clues about others. When we perceive someone to be of a certain age group, we tend to categorize that person not only through the general physical and mental capabilities of the age group but also with a set of age-specific normative and behavioral attitudes on the basis of group belonging.

Here, it is worth mentioning that the sociological concept of social category and group is fundamentally different from the psychological concept. Categorization as a cognitive concept takes place as a form of simplification. In sociology, a group seems to be a normative structure that imposes its social inertia on its members. Contrarily, social categorization seems to be an impulsive set of shortcuts to make quick decisions. This process may lead to classical heuristic biases in making judgments about others, including religious ones. The section that follows explains the process of social categorization and utilization of social information for the sake of quick decision-making. Social categorization as a process starts with a simplification of the social environment by placing people into categories (e.g., social group, sect, race, etc.). To predict the behavior of our groups, individuals may use categories and categorizations that do not reflect the world itself. This is essentially the foundation of stereotyping and prejudice in a society (Stark, 1984). We tend to associate certain stereotypical information with groups when we make particular decisions. Individuals might be labeled as hardworking, obedient, and intolerant on the basis of their belonging to groups that are considered radically different from our own. Some of the basic social categories include a person's gender, age, ethnic group, religion, and sect. When we know about the basic social categories of a person, we use this information to draw conclusions beyond their social roles and personality traits (Cadinu et al., 2013).

For instance, it is very hard for Pakistani people to conceive that transgender people will be able to marry; however, this judgment is based on perceived biological traits, while marriage and cohabitation are not prima facie functions of physical and biological competence. Similarly, some normative and moral connotations attached to transgender individuals make it very difficult to conceive that they will have a good display of public morality or that they could prove themselves as good public office-bearers. All of these cognitive biases are based on established biological categorizations of transgender individuals. It is very interesting to note that in Pakistani society, one may doubt whether a funeral prayer for a transgender person is religiously appropriate or not. Unless it is compelling, a layperson would hardly make a distinction between a person's basic social categories and the stereotypical attributions thereby attached. It is important to acknowledge, as explained in the previous section that social categorization might have to do with the complexities and intersectionality of multilayered in-group memberships.

The case of religious others is particularly relevant to the detrimental outcomes of basic social category perception. Knowing that a person belongs to a caste such as Jatti in Pakistan is not a social categorization that might compel us to perceive a Jatt through the exclusive lens of his primary social categorization. In contrast, the notion of being from a religious group might require a kind of judgment prototypically that is linked to the concept of hell-heaven-bound risk perception. The prototypical categorization makes us believe that a typical member of a religious group might behave in a certain way that is risky for the cultural, normative, and symbolic resources of our own group. This assumption is further clarified in the discussion on intergroup threat theory (Bodenhausen et al., 2012; Morrison & Ybarra, 2009).

Social categorization, in the sense of prototypical, is linked with the person's stereotyping and prejudice against others. A person with sectarian and religious prejudice will be extremely sensitive to the basic religious identity of his or her object of thought. Similarly, racially prejudiced subjects accentuate the racial identity of others. This kind of attitude gives rise to in-group and out-group feelings (Liberman et al., 2017). Therefore, in a prejudiced categorization of others, a perceiver may underestimate some elements of identity while overestimating certain others. This leads to prejudice and discrimination. In-group and out-group categorization might itself be prejudiced by our "in-group over exclusion and ethnocentric tendencies ."One classical study proved the point of over-exclusion by way of a natural experiment whereby the participant had to classify people in a picture as Jews. In fact, it was seen that those who had racial and religious prejudice tended to overestimate the number of Jews in a given picture. This concept of overestimation of outgroup membership reminds us of the logical connection between prejudice and amplified concern about material and symbolic threats from religious others (Tajfel, 1978).

A similar group process that might facilitate our understanding of the homogenized perception of the outgroup is the fact that we tend to polarize religious others through our cognitive biases. Previous literature has enumerated a series of reasons for polarization and homogeneity effects against particular outgroups. The following are a few assumptions about the homogenized perception of others:

1) Members of the in-group, supposed Sunni Muslims, tend to interact with each other more frequently than they do with Muslims from other sects or other religions. This is why Sunni Muslims will possess more direct information about the unique capabilities of Sunni Muslims. This is again a tipping point between social categorization, prejudice, and social contact.

2) Interaction with in-group members provides us with an opportunity to understand multiple roles and statuses that confer a unique identity to the individual members of the in-group. The students belonging to our outgroup might only tangentially interact with us in a formal setting; hence, our preconceived traits of that group are likely to survive in our generalized stereotypical perception of religious others.

3) While outgroup comparisons are collectively made in groups, many people are looking for a unique identity that distinguishes them from their group.

Chart 4

Social categorization and amplification of prejudice
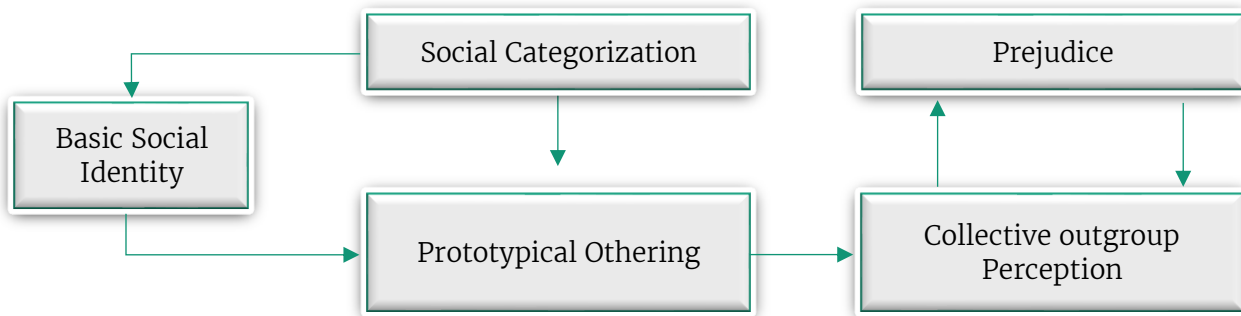
The figure above shows the conceptual connection between social categorization and prejudice. It is assumed in the elaboration that the case of religious others is very special, whereby we tend to use their basic sectarian and religious identity as a prima facie tool of othering or prototypical othering, and we use the preconceived group traits in our everyday sociability with the individuals.

II (d): Intergroup Threat Theory and Amplification of Prejudice

Our group membership has very strong implications for our identity and sociability. Groups provide support, affection, material comfort, religious affiliation, memberships, and boundaries (Rowatt & Al-Kire, 2021). As has been previously said, social identity implies categorization and antagonism. As complete social structures, groups also enforce and impose their normative structure and sanctions upon their members. They include values, beliefs, and norms on the one hand and benefits, appreciation, social approval, and acclaim on the other. The process allows us to form a distinct kind of identity that is different from other members of our group yet contrasting with the others from the outgroup. The functions of group life include self-esteem, distinctiveness, social identity formation, and consolidation. It is the truism of the research on group life that we tend to favor our own group over others, and we feel various threats to our group belonging owing to the natural rivalry with the outgroup over the scarce resources that are considered essential for group success (Postmes et al., 2005).

One distinct way to explain the group membership of human beings is through the concept of inherent tribalism. A few researchers have advocated that human beings are tribal in nature. Tribes, among other things, provide access to religion, religious and political authority, and leadership, as well as plenty of collective norms, rituals, rites, and symbolic systems such as dancing and language that facilitate our social existence (Knauft et al., 1991). One way humans display their belongingness to groups is through their mechanism of placing others as either in-group or out-group members. Furthermore, the reference literature cited in this section elaborates that we have a natural tendency to feel threatened by threats that may not actually be there. Our perception of the outgroups is often characterized by meaningless risk and threat perception, called "shooter bias" in the literature. In fact, if we were to attribute socially undesirable acts to a group, it would be an outgroup rather than an ingroup. Intergroup threat theory (ITT) describes various facets of threats in detail.

Symbolic Threats

The perception of threats is a rather natural feature of any social group that may characterize any in-group and out-group relationship. Every group or tribe, therefore, has a very refined system of symbols and meaning creation. In the Pakistani context, concepts such as Jihad (holy war), Imamat (divine leadership), Khatm-e-Nabuwat (finality of prophethood), Masoomiat (innocence), Khilafat (vicegerent), and Namoos (esteem) are religiously very important, and they help various religious and doctrinal systems create their unique identity construction and consolidation (Rafiq, 2014). Various rival groups fight over these symbols, and they preach hate speech owing to the perceived violation of these concepts. Out-groups are retained as threatening because they have the capability of challenging the meaning of the boundary and the doctrinal essence of these constructs. It is worth mentioning that these constructs may be antagonistic in their relationship with religious others. They have the capability to generate debate and allow various sectarian groups to further consolidate the symbolic meaning and hermeneutical stance on the meaning owing to the debates. This situation, coupled with the mass-mediated reality and risk perception by various sects and subsects of a religious society, is very likely to increase the odds of threat perception when it is not there (Niaz & Adnan, 2020).

Apart from these religious connotations, there are plenty of societal norms that require a kind of group protection. These include the symbolic world of ideas to which the group has to adhere, including norms, values, and beliefs (Stephan et al., 2015). present a series of words that depict the differences in the symbolic and meaning-related dimensions of thought (e.g., evil, unethical, obscene, objectionable, etc.). The prime debate is whether the symbolic threats subsist on the basis of any actual reality-based calculation and experience or if they simply are manifestations of 'group think.'

Realistic Threats

The way a group feels that its system of meaning, signs, and symbols may be threatened; similarly, actual power and resources in more materialistic and tangible ways may also be at stake owing to the presence and malice intentions of others. Types of threats may include discrimination, harassment, a lack of job opportunities, and stress owing to outgroup competition. It may include the destruction of property and the loss of territory and valued assets. Theorists have explained that these tendencies are largely negative because symbolic and realistic threats have the potential to cause negative emotions and cognitive states that ultimately trigger behavioral responses such as conflict, competition, retaliation, and confrontation.

The original conceptualization of threat theory considered negative stereotyping and intergroup anxiety as two separate types of threats. However, the subsequent revision of the same theory allowed the researchers to merge these two types of threats within the two basic threat models. Negative stereotyping could be considered a manifestation of either symbolic or realistic threats in various situations. For instance, if the negative stereotyping posed any threats to the symbolic reality, it would be called symbolic threats, and if it had the potential to cause harm to the physical welfare or the material reality of the group, it would be placed under realistic threats (Stephan et al., 2015).

Personal and Group Level Threats

Another way to classify these threats is through the distinction between personal threats and those to the group identity at large. These could arise out of either the symbolic or material threats faced by the members of a group, such as a sect in the case of religious affiliation (Rios et al., 2018) stated that personal threats include both realistic and symbolic personal threats. If a member of a sectarian group feels threatened that he might be deprived of his property or face any economic loss or physical harm owing to his sectarian identity, this might lead him or her to face a realistic personal threat. Similarly, if a person's self-esteem and religious pride or faith are threatened, this might be categorized as a kind of symbolic personal threat. (SPT). Other basic categories of this system entail problems with the resources of a group. In the recent past, the popular political party of Pakistan was not allowed to schedule its large gathering in the industrial area of Sialkot, as the venue belonged to the Christian minority, and they had a preemptive court order to safeguard their property. This kind of threat is conceptualized as a realistic group threat but at the group level. Similarly, symbolic group threats include the extent to which the system of meaning,

ideology, or norms that are important to the survival of groups might be feared by the in-group as a threatened entity.

Key Assumptions of Intergroup Threat Theory

Intergroup threat theory is realistic in the sense that threats are real in their consequences. The four categories of threats may or may not be real, but they have real consequences in terms of negative outgroup relations. Intergroup threat theory has a meso- and micro-level explanation; however, we need to link the framework with more structurally driven variables such as cultural value orientation. As such, there exists cumulative evidence about the validity of constructs of symbolic and realistic threats in predicting negative output (Setiawan et al., 2021).

Chart 5

Typology of intergroup threats and prejudice
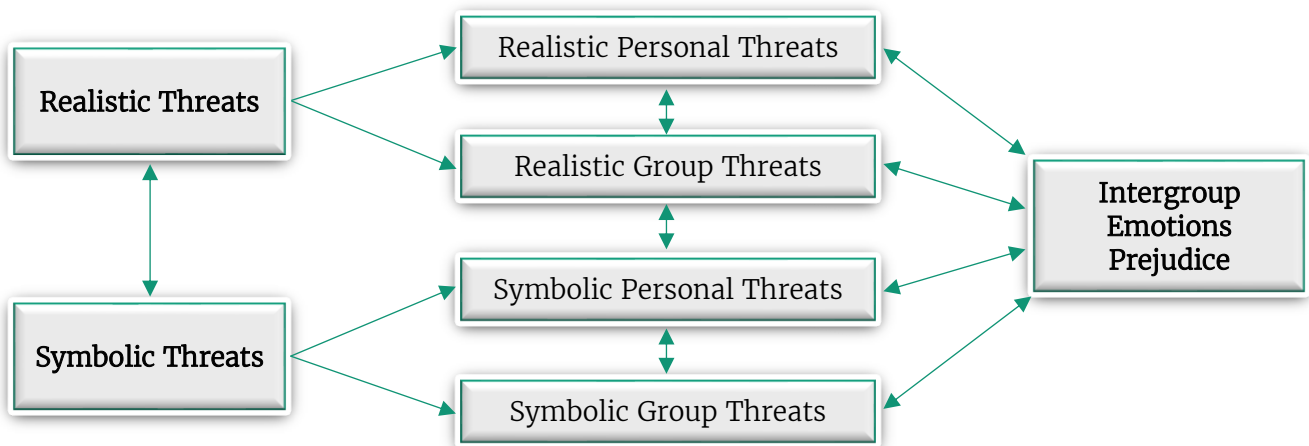
The above chart shows the four categories of threats that can be conceived from intergroup threat theory at large. The key assumption of this theory is that the perception of these threats is subjective, but it is nonetheless capable of creating various kinds of negative outcomes for out-groups, including prejudice (Stephan & Stephan, 2016). It is also worth remembering that in-group mates are conscious of threat perception, which can cause negative consequences in terms of the emotions of others. The antecedents and consequences of intergroup threats can be mediators of threats in their own right. Subsequently, the proponent of the theory implied a circular causality between threats and their antecedents and consequences. The most significant of these are the historical and social contact between various groups or religious communities.

Toward a Synthesis of Theoretical Models

This section is aimed at synthesizing various paradigms and models that can help the researcher generate various testable hypotheses in the first place, with theoretical synthesis as a subordinate goal. First, the researchers presented collective consciousness as a central epistemic enterprise in the work of Emile Durkheim. In fact, it is through the concept of collective consciousness that religion connects individuals in a collective and morally binding structure that requires them to abide by the symbolic essence of religiosity through collective rituals and self-sacrificing images of the self and society.

Somehow, at the group level of analysis, there are theories of social identity that have taken many shapes and have been able to generate many hypotheses. One of the most interesting features of social identity theory is the emerging concern with multiple and overlapping identities and role performance in a differential manner. A person's adherence to multiple social categorizations allows them to avoid being heuristically biased about others, and they are hence less prejudiced about religious others. What brings us a step closer to the threat hypothesis are the assumptions of social categorization theory. In fact, social categorization theory assumes that out-group interaction is only formal and tangential and that in-group

members have a tendency to perceive social and religious others through the basic elements of identity categorization, such as race, religion, and sect. This leads to a kind of amplification of presumed prototypical othering. The net sequel of this group-based biased perception is an amplification of negative attitudes and feelings about religious otherness. One additional path through which the othering assumes a negative connotation is through the perception of risk, fear, and threat that out-groups are religious or others of the kind pose for the in-group.

The perception of threat at the personal or group level can have symbolic anchoring if the value system, ideology, and normative structure of the in-groups are threatened; similarly, it may also have a real threat component that includes tangible resources of the group or individual, including their own safety. This perception of threat leads to negative outcomes.

Chart 6

A possible research framework using constructs from the various frameworks
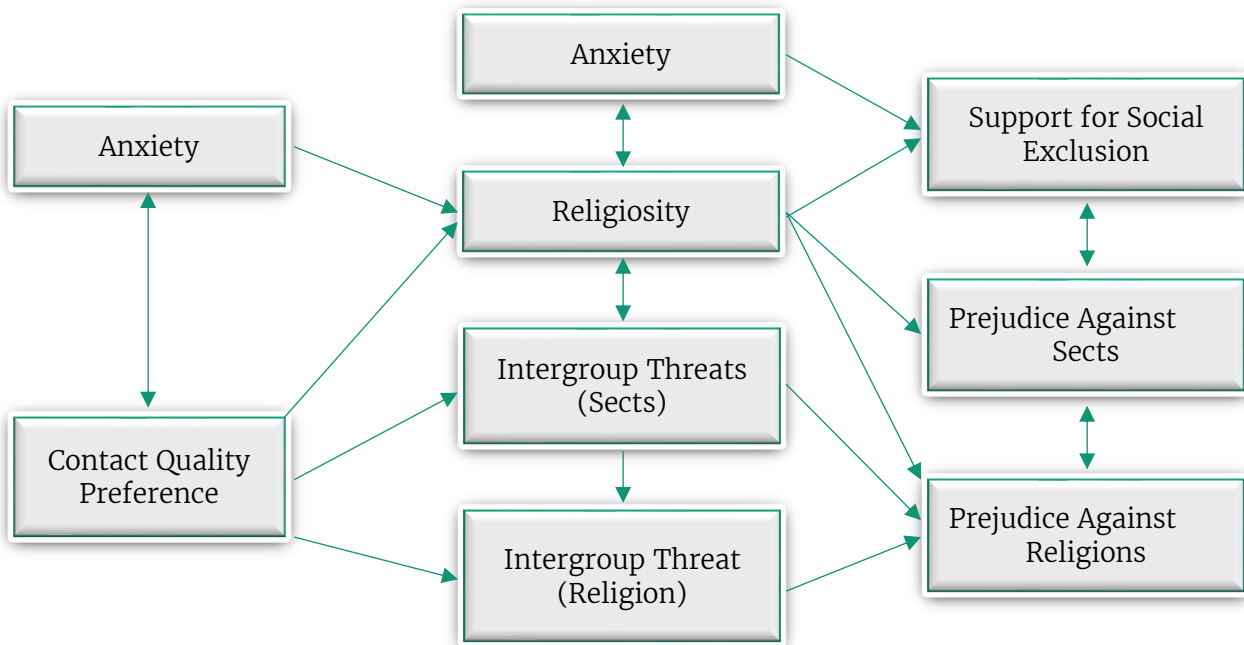
Using the above theoretical synthesis, we can generate a viable model of religious prejudice and its attenuating as well as aggravating factors. Strands of literature in the sociological tradition declare religious attitudes to be an outcome of societal structuring, and prejudice is anchored in social life. This assumption is, however, too generic and nomothetic in nature; hence, social identity theory and its more contemporary manifestation of identity complexity have the advantage of offering a middle-range explanation in a social psychological context. In short, a concomitant framework based on theories helps understand why, in the case of some Muslim societies such as Pakistan, concomitant phenomena of attenuation and amplification might manifest. Additionally, in the case of pure empirical research, the use of assumptions and syllogisms in these theoretical paradigms allows for the generation of testable hypotheses about the causal nexus and correlational association between various theoretical constructs, such as in the model above.

It is illustrated that present-day identity complexity gives way to the multiplicity of in-group identities that impinge upon contact quality and quantity; subsequently, contact may attenuate prejudice on the one hand and augment the symbolic and materialistic threats on the other, which give way to the amplification of prejudice and similar negative outcomes. I further recommended using this model to generate a testable hypothesis to accumulate evidence on the robustness of social categorization and identity complexity theory through constructs such as multiple identity adherence, identity complexity, composite threats, and productive contact. Religiosity and intergroup anxiety are logically important in a framework of study that has religious attitudes as its aim.

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