

16 Searching for the root of all evil: an existential-sociological perspective on political enemyship and scapegoating

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Political enemyship is common and diverse, ranging from the scapegoating of minority parties by dominant ones to conspiracy theories about the alleged power of one individual to control wide swaths of society. Many social scientists have argued that enemy figures and out-groups play an essential role in the construction and defense of political identities. We propose that to understand why this is the case, we should first analyze the diverse psychological functions that enemies serve at the individual level.

To this end, we begin this chapter by summarizing a theory that explains how perceived relations of enmity in both personal and political arenas allow individuals to maintain a sense of having personal control and a valued identity – beliefs that ultimately serve to buffer threatening thoughts about personal mortality. We then review evidence from the social-psychological literature supporting this existential theory. In the second half of the chapter, we turn from the question of the functions that enemyship serves to the question of when (i.e., under what socio-historical circumstances) enemyship is most likely to be employed for those functions. Drawing on insights from sociology, we propose several hypotheses concerning both quantitative and qualitative variation in enemyship processes. We believe that our integrative existential-sociological framework has considerable potential to explain why political enemyship and scapegoating take place, and to predict when these phenomena can be expected with reasonable certainty.

Enemyship and politics

A number of psychologists (e.g., Allport, 1954; Cantril, 1941) have argued that clear enemy groups are necessary to solidify political group identities (for review, see Holt and Silverstein, 1989). This work is based on variations of the social identity theory (Tajfel, 2010/1978)

hypothesis that group members strive for valued group distinctiveness, and perhaps the best way to do so is by differentiating the group from devalued out-groups. Thus, defining group characteristics over and against those of an enemy group is often a crucial process in the consolidation of political beliefs and identity.

Indeed, in the most radical statement of this position, the political theorist Carl Schmitt (2007/1932) argued that the very essence of politics as a unique domain of human activity inhered in the *friend–enemy* relationship. For Schmitt, politics could only be distinguished from other important sociocultural domains – such as aesthetics and religion – by recognizing the defense of one’s position against that of an enemy as the starting point for all political thought and action. Schmitt went further to claim that politics (as grounded in the friend–enemy relationship) uniquely affords individuals the opportunity to satisfy *existential* motives. For Schmitt, existential motivation meant being willing to kill or be killed in service of an idea (see also Marcuse, 2009/1968).

We do not straightforwardly endorse Schmitt’s narrow definitions of politics or existential motivation. But conceptual issues aside, the historical record clearly supports his key notion – namely, that political friend–enemy relations have immense power to drive individuals to extreme acts, including murder and martyrdom. This reality raises the question of how exactly collective political constructions offer individuals an opportunity to satisfy their personal existential motivations. Specifically, how do political processes, largely occurring outside the purview of a given individual, give rise to such deep-seated personal convictions? Moreover, under which circumstances will individuals be most likely to satisfy their existential motives through the friend–enemy relationship?

We propose that underneath these questions lies the issue of why enemyship is so important for the construction of identity and the maintenance of belief systems. Two characteristics of enemyship in particular call out for explanation: first, it is *irrational* – marked by fervor and superstition and capable of fomenting extreme antisocial actions with little regard for sound judgment; second, it *assumes various forms* – its object, scope, and duration differing significantly between groups and sociohistorical circumstances. To be sure, a sociological perspective emphasizing historically situated struggles for resources could explain much of the second aspect of enemyship, and indeed we will adopt a largely sociological approach later in this chapter. However, we believe that a framework emphasizing existential motives to establish a valued identity in the face of mortality is better suited than other perspectives to explain the more irrational aspect of enemyship. Therefore, to understand this fundamental issue, we first need to examine the human existential situation, and the

existential functions of personal enemyship. Therein, we propose, lie the psychological roots of political enemyship.

An existential theory of (political) enemyship

An existential theory of enemyship should be rooted in that which is both the ultimate existential concern and the ultimate threat posed by an enemy: death (Hoffman, 1983; Tillich, 1952). Within social psychology, the most widely researched theory of the role of death awareness in human behavior is terror management theory (TMT) (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon, 2003). According to the theory, people's knowledge of their impending death compels the construction and defense of cultural ideologies that guarantee immortality (such as political ideologies), and striving for lasting personal value within these cultural frameworks.

More than 400 studies carried out in over a dozen countries have produced findings in accord with hypotheses derived from TMT (for a review, see Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt, 2008). Many of these studies test the *mortality salience* hypothesis: If cultural worldviews and self-esteem provide us with a sense of immortality, then making people's mortality salient should lead people to bolster and defend their cultural worldviews (i.e., *worldview defense*) and to strive more at tasks that provide them self-esteem. Studies show, for example, that participants who write a few sentences about their death (compared to another topic) are more favorable to people who validate their worldview (e.g., their nationality and religious beliefs) and are more disparaging of people who criticize it (Greenberg *et al.*, 2008). Importantly, however, participants in these studies are not consciously aware that thoughts of death are driving their defensive behaviors.

Accordingly, over eighty studies have also shown support for the *death thought accessibility* hypothesis – namely, that threatening the constructs people rely on for symbolic immortality will increase the extent to which cognitions about death are accessible outside immediate consciousness. In many of these studies, presenting people with information threatening aspects of their worldview or self-esteem elevates the accessibility of death-related thought, but not of other negative cognitions, suggesting that investment in these constructs serves to ameliorate concerns with mortality in particular (see Hayes, Schimel, Arndt *et al.*, 2010, for a review).

The need to deny death is thus at least partly responsible for people's pursuit and creation of symbolic meaning and self-esteem. Without the constant threat of death – the promised event forming the outer limit of our identities – humans would not be driven to construct personal and

political identities with the same fervor. Yet how do people conceptualize the threat of death in their everyday lives? Even if belief in the transcendence of a political or religious group affords people the conviction that they are persons of worth destined for immortality, they are still forced at times to contemplate death, as when they are faced by natural disasters or the loss of loved ones. TMT suggests that focused awareness of the reality that death is ultimately inevitable and could come at any moment from a variety of unpredictable environmental sources is psychologically untenable. In order to avoid preoccupation with such a disturbing conceptualization of death, people must find some other interpretation of the dangers lurking in their environment.

The existential anthropologists Ernest Becker (1969) and Mary Douglas (1966) propose that personal enemyship is one defense on which people often rely to cope with the awareness of the myriad hazards threatening them with destruction. Personal enemyship is the perception that another person or persons are using power and influence to undermine one's goals and well-being. By tracing all potential sources of threat back to a focal enemy who can be monitored, one gains a sense of control and some mastery over the problem of impending death.

Yet, as Becker (1969) argued, perceived enemies do not only augment the individual's sense of personal control in a world of random sources of potentially lethal hazard. In addition to this control-maintenance function, enemies can also be used to absolve the individual of personal guilt, an oft-cited function of the scapegoat. More generally, enemies are often used in the construction of a valued personal identity.

Anthropological evidence supports the contention that, in cultures around the globe, enemies often serve the different proximal functions identified by Becker. Douglas (1966) argues that members of diverse cultures around the world associate enemies with enigmatic forces operating outside culturally sanctioned patterns for appearance and behavior. In this way, the presence of enemies reinforces (through contrast) the individuals' sense of who they are: a valuable person with an explicit, sanctioned identity. In addition to this identity-maintenance function, belief in malevolent people and supernatural agents has been shown to help satisfy motives to bolster personal control among South Africans (e.g., Ashforth, 2001) and to reduce guilt among people living in rural areas of Ghana (Mendonsa, 1982) and Burma (Spiro, 1967).

It is important to note that although Becker asserted that enemies and scapegoats are used in multiple ways to maintain a sense of one's valued identity, he believed (as do we) that the diverse functions served by enemies ultimately fulfill the more distal goal of obtaining symbolic immortality (and thereby denying death). The implication of this analysis is that death denial is not a simple process; individuals require multiple

psychological structures – such as a valued personal identity and a sense that the world is controllable – to effectively assuage the fear of mortality. Similarly, although the different functions of enemyship may be ultimately traced back to death denial, it is useful in empirical studies to separately examine how enemyship upholds the intermediate structures sheltering the individual from this supreme terror (for a related perspective, see Sullivan, Landau, and Kay, 2012).

All the processes of interpersonal enemyship are exacerbated, through group psychological phenomena, at the political level. Like personal enemies, political enemies and scapegoats serve four existential functions for individuals and groups: direct death denial, as well as the distinct death-denying functions of identity maintenance, control maintenance, and guilt denial (Becker, 1975). In previous social-psychological studies, these four functions have been separately examined. Using our integrative existential theory, we will weave these previously separate lines of inquiry together and show how the different functions of enemyship are interrelated.

Enemyship in service of death denial

Becker posited that enemyship buffers people from thoughts of death that – because they are repressed – are not typically available to introspective awareness. How, then, can we empirically test this analysis? TMT addresses this question with a dual-process model of defense against the awareness of mortality. When people are consciously aware of their mortality, they typically respond with so-called *proximal* defenses: They deny their vulnerability to death in an immediate and literal way. However, when death-related cognitions are resonating at the fringes of consciousness, people respond with *distal* defense: They cling to symbolic constructs that have nothing literally to do with physical death but rather function to uphold a basis for symbolic immortality (see Greenberg, Landau, and Arndt, 2013). In this way, people rely on symbolically mediated processes – like enemyship – to deny death indirectly, without conscious awareness that their defense functions as a form of denial.

In line with this model, numerous studies have shown that when thoughts of mortality are accessible but outside current focal attention, people are more likely to engage in political enemyship as a distal defense against death. For example, some of the earliest studies demonstrating terror-management processes (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon *et al.*, 1990) did so by showing that reminders of death (relative to reminders of other topics) increased US participants' subsequent tendency to engage in worldview defense, which was measured in the form of both

participants' liking for a person who praised the USA and their dislike for someone who attacked US values. It is important to recognize that in these studies, revulsion against a hated out-group member was just as important a response to nonconscious death concerns as attraction towards a person who affirmed one's political values. More dramatic evidence comes from studies (McGregor, Lieberman, Greenberg *et al.*, 1998) showing that death thoughts (compared to a control condition) actually increased participants' physical aggression against a person who belonged to an opposing political party.

Additional research on political worldview defense induced by mortality salience has explicated many of the details of this process. For example, Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino *et al.* (2002) found that mortality reminders increased bias for one's national in-group relative to another nation, and that this effect occurred through a corresponding increase in the perceived entitativity, or cohesiveness, of one's in-group, as well as increased identification with the group. In other words, reminders of one's personal mortality induce attempts to identify with a group (political or otherwise) seen as transcending the self and being in some sense an immortal, lasting entity. This bid for immortality through political identification comes with a price, however – an immediate heightened revulsion towards political enemies and other groups.

Political enemyship elicited by death-related anxiety can have some surprisingly counterintuitive and insidious effects. In one study (Hayes, Schimel, and Williams, 2008), Christian participants who read an article threatening their religious worldview showed an increase in the accessibility of death-related thoughts. This follows from the TMT perspective that our cultural worldviews provide us with an anxiety buffer protecting against the awareness of death: When our protective cultural beliefs are attacked, death anxiety creeps back into conscious awareness. Most interestingly, however, if worldview-threatened participants read an article about several Muslims dying in a plane crash – in other words, if members of what could be perceived as an enemy group perished – they did *not* show an increase in death-related thoughts. In other words, learning of the death of one's enemy alleviates a heightened concern with one's own death that is otherwise present under threat. Death denial (perhaps ironically) motivates individuals not only to seek out enemies but also to be invested in their destruction.

Enemyship in service of identity maintenance

Our brief review of the role of death concerns in fueling intergroup enemyship points to a key assumption of the social scientific investigation

of political enemyship: enemies reinforce (political) identities. As discussed, focused mortality salience seems to elevate enemyship via an increased sense of in-group identification (Castano *et al.*, 2002). Other work in social psychology has focused more exclusively on the connection between enemyship and the construction and maintenance of social identities (of course, for Becker, the goal of identity maintenance ultimately served the purpose of death denial).

Research in the social identity theory tradition suggests that mere comparisons between one's in-group and an out-group will automatically orient the individual towards enemyship-related cognitions, particularly to the extent that the individual is invested in the in-group as a positive source of identity. For example, when people are asked to think about their (national) in-group relative to various out-groups, positive correlations emerge between one's sense of pride in and identification with the in-group, on the one hand, and derogation of out-groups on the other hand (Mummendey, Klink, and Brown, 2001). However, these correlations are weaker if one has not been explicitly primed to engage in intergroup comparison.

Of course, political leaders have long recognized the power of orienting their followers towards comparisons with enemy out-groups to escalate in-group identification and foster political zeal. The tactic of rallying individuals to support the in-group more fervently by pointing to the presence of a scapegoat or enemy group has historically been most successful in situations of widespread social uncertainty (a point to which we will return in a later section of this chapter). Accordingly, research shows that the likelihood that people's strivings for group-based identity will prompt them to derogate enemies is increased in uncertain circumstances (e.g., Hogg, 2012). When individuals are feeling uncertain about their future (and particularly their economic future) they have a greater preference for membership in radical or authoritarian groups with rigid identities (Hogg, Meehan, and Farquharson, 2010; Sales, 1972). Clear political identities can resolve feelings of uncertainty, while often reinforcing (and being reinforced by) processes of political enemyship and polarization. For example, when US Democrats and Republicans were induced to feel uncertain about key aspects of their lives, they evinced a positive correlation between perceptions that their political party is an entitative group and of the relative polarization of their party's attitudes on important issues compared to the other group (Sherman, Hogg, and Maitner, 2009). In short, uncertainty about one's identity prompts construal of one's political group as having a clear identity to the extent that it is contrasted with that of an enemy out-group.

Enemyship in service of control maintenance

Becker (1969, 1975) proposed that because people recognize that the environments through which they move are filled with random sources of hazard, they are motivated to see themselves as having powerful enemies to whom all potential danger may be traced. Relatively speaking, human enemies are easy to predict, avoid, and even defeat. This analysis suggests an interesting hypothesis – namely, that it is exactly when people feel like their sense of personal control is under threat that they should be most desirous of having powerful enemies.

We (Sullivan, Landau, and Rothschild, 2010) tested this hypothesis in the political arena just prior to the 2008 US presidential election. We primed half of our participants with a reminder that they have little control over multiple sources of hazard, ranging from communicable diseases to accidents during travel. The other participants were not reminded of such hazards. We then asked participants the extent to which they endorsed different conspiracy theories claiming that the candidate opposed to their preferred candidate was orchestrating attempts to steal the election. In confirmation of our hypothesis, those participants whose sense of control had been threatened were more likely to believe that their political enemy (in this case, either President Barack Obama or Senator John McCain) had enough power and malicious intent to rig the election.

Becker's analysis suggests that this effect occurred because people rely on identifiable enemies to maintain control in a chaotic world. If this is indeed the case, then we would expect that having a clear enemy would actually *increase* people's sense of control under threatening circumstances. To test this, we (Rothschild, Landau, Sullivan *et al.*, 2012) drew on the observation that enemies can be used as scapegoats to explain particular cases of hazard. Complex and long-term threats like global climate change that are difficult to comprehend can be perceived as uncontrollable. However, if such a threat can be blamed on a particular scapegoat group, this might increase people's conviction that they understand the cause of the threat and that it therefore is not beyond their personal control.

Accordingly, we (Rothschild *et al.*, 2012) exposed some participants to a portrayal of global climate change as a poorly understood threat, and others to information suggesting that the causes of this catastrophe are well understood. Participants were then presented with information either about a group that could serve as a viable scapegoat for explaining climate change (oil companies), or about a group that could not reasonably explain this threat (the Amish). Among those participants who thought about climate change as an unexplained threat, personal control

was increased if they were given oil companies as a scapegoat to explain the phenomenon. Thus, evidence shows not only that people will artificially imbue enemies and scapegoats with power in order to bolster their sense of control, but also that exposure to these targets does in fact serve this function.

Enemyship in service of guilt denial

Political enemies do not only help individuals maintain valued identities by providing them with a sense of personal control. Enemies can also be used as scapegoats in the more traditional sense of the term, meaning people can transfer blame for negative events from themselves to their enemies, absolving themselves of guilt. This tactic is used frequently by political pundits and party leaders, as when Democrats attempt to portray Republicans as responsible for the current problems in the US economy, and vice versa.

In our studies on scapegoating in response to the threat of climate change (Rothschild *et al.*, 2012), we examined the possibility that this process can facilitate guilt denial in addition to control maintenance. In one study, college students were presented with descriptions of climate change as either a poorly understood, uncontrollable threat, or as the direct fault of the participants' group (i.e., young Americans). The latter framing posed a threat to the moral value of that group's identity, and thereby to the self. Relative to a neutral control condition, participants were more likely to scapegoat oil companies for climate change in either threat condition; but whereas the effect of a control threat on scapegoating was mediated by perceived personal control, the effect of a moral value threat occurred through guilt feelings. Furthermore, mirroring the results described in the previous section, participants who were blamed for climate change but then presented with a viable scapegoat group showed reduced feelings of personal guilt compared to blamed participants presented with a nonviable target. In addition, exposure to a scapegoat reduced participants' willingness to take personal action to stop climate change after being blamed for this catastrophe.

In sum, empirical studies have shown that political enemyship and scapegoating processes facilitate death and guilt denial as well as identity and control maintenance, at both personal and group levels. However, social psychologists have not paid a great deal of attention to the broader social and cultural factors that might encourage individuals to rely specifically on enemyship processes as a means of satisfying these existential motives. Obviously, people can deny death, establish clear identities, maintain a sense of personal control, and unburden themselves of guilt

through a variety of outlets and mechanisms (despite the fact that, as many of the cited theorists have argued, enemyship seems to be a prominent means of fulfilling these functions across different cultural and historical settings). Why is it that, today especially, political enemyship, conspiracy theories, and related phenomena seem to be on the rise (as many of the chapters in this volume attest to)? To answer this question, we will supplement the existential theory of enemyship with a sociological perspective.

A sociological perspective on political enemyship

The sociological literature on enemyship and scapegoating has yielded at least three major insights. These insights help us understand: (1) how the process of socially constructing political enemies tends to imbue them with certain characteristics; (2) the social circumstances under which enemyship processes are most likely to occur in general (a factor we refer to as “quantitative variation in enemyship”); and (3) the social circumstances under which certain kinds of enemyship or scapegoating processes are more likely to occur than others (what we refer to as “qualitative variation in enemyship”). We discuss each of these insights in turn. Some of our research has provided initial support for the first two points; however, the model of qualitative variation in enemyship remains largely untested, and therefore stands out as a potential starting point for future interdisciplinary research.

The social construction of ambiguously powerful enemies

Political enemies are social constructions or collective representations (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Smith, 1996). As Sartre (1948) argued, enemy groups are often imbued with such fantastic qualities that their representation ceases to have any real connection to their actual behavior, as in the case of the view of Jewish people as world-dominating conspirators held by many anti-Semites. Drawing on these ideas, Smith (1996) argued that certain forms of enemyship adopt the status of *chimeria*: socially constructed visions of a political figure or group that ascribe them fantastic powers beyond their actual reach.

Douglas (1966) described this quality of *chimeria* possessed by enemies in terms of the process of attributing *ambiguous power* to the enemy. In other words, people see their enemies as capable of perpetrating a wide range of misdeeds, and as operating outside the boundaries of condoned or conventionally understood power. If we draw on our existential

theory of political enemyship, it is easy to understand why enemies would be socially constructed as ambiguously powerful. Such representations readily allow people to use enemies as scapegoats to satisfy control maintenance and guilt-denial functions, because they are believed capable of carrying out a variety of misdeeds. In contrast, explicit representations of an enemy's capabilities and shortcomings limit the range of hazards and negative outcomes that can be attributed to them. In addition, as mentioned earlier, this process facilitates identity maintenance: In a conception of the world as a struggle between Good and Evil, an ambiguously powerful enemy serves as a point of contrast to define more explicitly the in-group's power as benevolent, morally sanctioned, honorable, and trustworthy.

In one of our studies (Sullivan *et al.*, 2010), we tested the sociological hypothesis that enemies perceived as ambiguously powerful would be most effective at performing a control-maintenance function. Participants whose sense of control was threatened and who were then exposed to a portrayal of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda as ambiguously powerful (e.g., enigmatic and poorly understood) actually showed higher perceptions of personal control than participants exposed to a portrayal of Al-Qaeda as weak or as having well-understood powers. This finding provides critical support for the idea that we construct ambiguous enemies to satisfy existential motives for control, because it is rather counterintuitive. Superficially, one would assume that exposure to a weak enemy would be more likely to boost control than exposure to a powerful one. However, ambiguous enemies serve as focal objects to which diverse sources of risk can be attributed. Accordingly, we found that the increase in perceived personal control occurred through a reduction in the perception of randomly distributed future risk among those participants who thought about Al-Qaeda as an ambiguously powerful enemy.

Quantitative variation in enemyship and scapegoating processes

The thrust of our hypothesis regarding quantitative variation in enemyship lies in a sociological formula provided by Douglas (1966). In *ordered systems* – social environments where norms for behavior are clear, individuals have a basic sense of existential security, and institutions are stable and trusted – people tend to respond to threats to their basic motives by bolstering the perceived power of benevolent sources of authority, such as the government or a supreme deity. Within such ordered systems, religious beliefs, a sense of civic responsibility, or feelings of patriotism often serve to meet the various existential needs that, as Becker argued,

enemies can also fulfill. In *disordered systems* – environments where norms are unclear, people feel existentially insecure, and institutions are unstable and distrusted – people tend to respond to threats to their motives through enemyship processes. In other words, when people cannot turn to broader social institutions (such as religion or a sense of nationalism) to obtain existential equanimity, they will be more likely to rely on enemies to meet this need.

This analysis has been supported in different historical and sociological analyses. For example, Staub (1989) examined cases of genocide – such as the Nazi Holocaust and the Turkish genocide of Armenians – and found that they all occurred under what he referred to as *difficult life conditions*, meaning the widespread presence of economic problems and violence in a society, rapid industrialization and technological advance in a society, or both. Staub (1989) proposes that difficult life conditions threaten people's basic sense of positive identity and perceived control, and that people often respond to this system disorder through scapegoating. In related analyses, sociologists have argued that conditions of social fragmentation (stemming from globalization processes and financial crises) have contributed substantially to the recent rise of radical, right-wing populist movements in Western Europe and the USA (Antonio, 2000; Betz, 1994; Smith, 1996). These movements often include as a primary ideological component the vilification of immigrant out-groups and other political enemies.

Building on this context-specific sociological research, we (Sullivan *et al.*, 2010) experimentally tested the notion that people would be more likely to rely on enemyship for control maintenance under general conditions of system disorder. Specifically, we manipulated whether American participants saw the USA as an ordered system in which economic and law enforcement institutions are reliable, or as a disordered system with a fragile economy and unstable government. Participants primed with system order and a threat to personal control ascribed more compensatory power to the US government, but those primed with system disorder instead responded to a control threat with elevated perceptions of the power of their personal enemies.

Qualitative variation in enemyship and scapegoating processes

As has been clear throughout this chapter, enemyship and scapegoating are not uniform phenomena: they can arise as a primary function of different motives, and in a variety of nuanced ways. Furthermore, these processes can be examined at multiple levels. For example, we can

distinguish between the antagonistic relationship of two enemy individuals and the political enmity of two opposing parties. We have argued that enemyship of all kinds is more likely to occur in disordered systems. But we believe it is also possible to predict, as a function of certain social conditions that might coincide with general system disorder, the forms of enemyship that will be most afforded under particular sociohistorical circumstances.

At least the sketch of such a model of qualitative variation in enemyship is provided by Douglas (1994). She identifies three general patterns that foster differing forms of enemyship. By distinguishing between these patterns, we acknowledge that a disordered social system can be manifested in various ways. The first pattern could be described as *system disorder under general conditions of existential insecurity*. Here we use the term “existential insecurity” in a sociological sense (Norris and Inglehart, 2004) to indicate societies where the majority of individuals do not feel that they are adequately protected against prominent dangers (e.g., disease or death through warfare). We refer to the second pattern as *system disorder under totalitarianism*. The final pattern distinguished by Douglas is best described as *system disorder with resource inequality*. We will briefly describe how system disorder manifests differently in each of these potential sociohistorical patterns, and present hypotheses about the type and function of political enemyship that will likely occur under each.

System disorder under general conditions of existential insecurity

This pattern might be considered the “rawest” form of system disorder. When most individuals in a society feel that their lives are under daily threat, from either violence or unfavorable environmental circumstances, there are few countervailing social structures to alleviate a sense of widespread system disorder. This pattern might describe the life conditions of many early human groups in the environment of evolutionary adaptedness, but it persists today in regions characterized by civil war or a history of devastating economic exploitation by colonial powers. According to Douglas (1994), in such circumstances individuals often dedicate their allegiance to small groups which provide a minimal amount of existential security. This analysis is partly supported by research (Gelfand, Raver, Nishii *et al.*, 2011) showing that nations characterized by existential insecurity tend to have “tight” cultures, wherein individuals sacrifice individual interests to the benefit of the group. For example, Pakistan is a country that in its recent history has struggled with population density, political instability, terrorism, and major damage from natural disasters

(such as flooding and earthquakes). It also scores very high on measures of cultural tightness, such as the perception that strong norms for behavior in particular situations are shared by all group members (Gelfand *et al.*, 2011).

The tightly organized groups that fight for survival under these conditions often view most out-groups as enemies. Of course, under general conditions of existential insecurity, resources are typically scarce, and groups are often actively involved in real conflicts over basic means of survival. Enemyship in these circumstances is most likely to be manifested as intergroup hostility. In addition to the potential for winning better access to limited resources, this intergroup enemyship also serves important symbolic functions. Enemyship in these circumstances primarily facilitates death denial and identity maintenance. By identifying a hated out-group as the source of all evil, groups can gain a sense of symbolic immortality even under material conditions of existential insecurity. And in a disordered system where group boundaries are often in a potential state of flux (e.g., an infrastructure is lacking for the assignment of formal citizenship), the construction of an enemy out-group helps solidify in-group identity and membership.

System disorder under totalitarian conditions

In many historical situations, conditions of economic and political disorder have set the stage for the temporary rise of a totalitarian regime. Here we use the term “totalitarianism” to refer to the (sometimes forced, sometimes willing) submission of people’s individual liberties to an autocratic leader with a heroic vision of the in-group’s identity (Fromm, 1941; Marcuse, 2009/1968). The widespread uncertainty about the future and personal value that characterizes system disorder often increases the willingness of individuals to support a tyrannical but forceful leader and regime that at least offer some certain vision of what the future will hold and of who is valuable in society.

In some instances, totalitarianism can rise due to the exclusive use of brute military force; however, in most instances, certain groups of people within the social system willingly allow the totalitarian government to come to power. This usually occurs (at least in part) because the totalitarian leader(s) identifies a scapegoat on which in-group members can blame the current circumstances of system disorder (Douglas, 1994). The regime promises to expunge the scapegoat group, or at least remove them from power, and through this process to restore order, symbolic value, and prosperity to the in-group. As individuals generally seek scapegoats when their feelings of personal control and moral worthiness

are under threat, system disorder increases the likelihood that they will sacrifice liberties in exchange for a scapegoat ideology and the promise of renewed order.

Thus, in these circumstances, enemyship typically takes the form of the persecution of a minority scapegoat group. In addition to aiding the totalitarian regime's rise to power, this form of enemyship primarily serves symbolic functions of death and guilt denial. The compelling leader constructs a simplistic dualist ideology of perpetual warfare between the good in-group and the evil scapegoat group, which promises in-group members a revolutionary sense of immortality, galvanizing their self-sacrificial potentialities (Lifton, 1968; Schori, Klar, and Roccas, 2009). At the same time, blaming system disorder on the scapegoat group absolves in-group members of the potential self-blame and worthlessness they might otherwise experience in undesirable economic circumstances. This guilt-denial function is bound up with the fact that, under totalitarian conditions, scapegoating is often of an intragroup nature: A minority subculture that was once part of the in-group is now reconstructed as aligned with malevolent forces that must be weeded out to preserve the "true" in-group's purity (Adorno, 2000/1975). And once the totalitarian government begins to commit symbolic and physical violence against scapegoated individuals, further vilification – perhaps to the point of genocide – of the scapegoat group is necessary to deny a mounting sense of potential guilt (Becker, 1975).

System disorder with resource inequality

A final sociohistorical manifestation of system disorder is one that is increasingly common in the modern world – namely, system disorder with sustained income inequality. This form of system disorder is distinguishable from that of a totalitarian regime because it can emerge within a politically democratic society. In the modern variants of this form, unregulated capitalist economic organization allows a radically uneven distribution of material and authoritative (e.g., educational, informational) resources to take place, resulting in large disparities between a small number of individuals of high socioeconomic status and a majority of lower-status persons (e.g., Giddens, 1983).

Massive levels of income inequality can generate social-psychological conditions of *anomie* (normlessness) and mistrust between individuals (Oishi, Kesebir, and Diener, 2011). With little regulation on the distribution of and processes for acquiring resources, individuals at the lower end of the economic continuum feel dissatisfied and helpless, while those at the higher end often become preoccupied with a "dizzying

quest” for obtaining a seemingly infinite (but potentially volatile) store of wealth (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Duménil and Lévy, 2011). Furthermore, the deregulated capitalist mode of socioeconomic organization that often generates income inequality simultaneously fosters a consumerist psychology and a plurality of values which leave the individual uncertain about the proper routes to achieving a valued identity (Simmel, 1978/1900). Under these circumstances, general feelings of uncertainty and looming control threat combine with high levels of mistrust to elevate reliance on political enemyship and conspiracy theories for psychological equanimity (Douglas, 1994). In short, individuals use enemies primarily to maintain a sense of personal control, tracing their economic misfortunes (or potential misfortunes) back to the alleged machinations of politicians and others whom they see as possessing more power and resources than they. At the same time, those who have higher socioeconomic status under conditions of mass income inequality often scapegoat the working class, attempting to project any guilt they might feel for their superior fortune by seeing those worse off than them as responsible for their fate.

To summarize, we predict that when system disorder takes the form of general existential insecurity, enemyship will be manifested as intergroup hostility, facilitating death denial and identity maintenance; when it takes the form of totalitarianism, enemyship will be manifested as the scapegoating of a minority group, facilitating death and guilt denial; and when it takes the form of resource inequality, enemyship will be manifested in conspiracy theories and other forms of political enemyship, facilitating control maintenance and guilt denial. Although some historical and sociological data support these hypotheses concerning qualitative variation in enemyship, the model remains at this point mostly speculative. However, for scholars interested in making predictions about the types of enemyship and scapegoating processes that are likely to emerge in future social, economic, and political circumstances, these hypotheses offer fertile ground for empirical research.

Conclusion

We believe that the existential-sociological framework outlined in this chapter offers a powerful explanation of enemyship processes. At the beginning of this chapter, we proposed that a valid account of enemyship should explain both its basic irrationality and its multiplicity of form and function. Building on classic and contemporary perspectives in existential psychology, our framework explains enemyship’s irrationality as stemming from an urgent need to allay the anxiety inherent in our

existential situation – where every part of us desires to live, yet we know that that desire will inevitably be thwarted. Hence, we desperately strive to transcend mortality by constructing a valued identity and defending that fragile symbolic construction against anything that threatens to invalidate it. Drawing on sociological analyses of the factors behind differences in political ideology and overarching worldview, our framework explains multiformity in enemyship as a function of social structural elements that shape collective beliefs about how much order exists in the social system, where that order originates, and the availability of opportunities to establish a valued identity.

Throughout this chapter we have seen how this framework can be used to integrate theories and laboratory evidence across a range of disciplines and research programs, as well as to generate novel, testable hypotheses that warrant further study. Our existential-sociological perspective does not fully replace realistic conflict theories and other accounts that might explain enemyship in terms of practical struggles between political groups. However, it goes further than such perspectives to explain some rather counterintuitive findings, such as the fact that people will actually feel a heightened sense of personal control when they contemplate a powerful enemy. As a final demonstration of the usefulness of our model, we will conclude by highlighting a few suggestions it offers for interventions that might reduce the prevalence of enemyship over the long term.

One possibility – against the arguments of theorists like Schmitt who insist on the necessity of intergroup conflict – is to redirect enemyship processes such that people focus their malice on common enemies, like world hunger and disease. But another broad possibility is to promote societal conditions of anxiety-buffering order – or at least the perception of order – by investing faith in benevolent leaders and institutions. Different ways to achieve this goal are suggested by our model of qualitative variation in enemyship. Simply helping people meet their basic demands for survival, and thereby increasing their felt existential security, should reduce enemyship. At a more symbolic level, in disordered circumstances where the rise of totalitarianism seems like a possibility, people should be offered a positive vision of their group as having a valued – and humanitarian – identity, to counteract the appeal of a revolutionary fascist vision rooted in enemyship. Finally, in postindustrial conditions of widespread income inequality, measures should be taken to restore to individuals a sense of personal control and agency in their life circumstances, so that the need for enemyship and conspiratorial ideologies is reduced. Naturally, working to reduce income inequality itself is the most straightforward means of accomplishing this aim.

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