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The psychology of hate crime offenders who target Muslims

Who could be a hate crime offender?

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Introduction

On 23 May 2017, the day after a suicide bomber exploded a bomb at the Manchester Arena, UK, killing 22 people, mainly young girls, Donald Trump, president of the USA, described the perpetrator as ‘sad’ and a ‘loser’. In an amazing demonstration of serendipity, he identified appropriate terms to describe at least some of the people who commit hate crimes; the research evidence suggests that feelings of isolation and marginalisation are, among other factors, characteristic of hate crime offenders. However, this does not present a complete profile of hate crime offenders; there is also evidence that group membership can be a significant factor in hate crime offending and that membership of a group can valorise individuals to aggressive acts even to the point of putting their own futures at risk. In this chapter, we will consider research exploring the characteristics of hate crime offenders and discuss how this knowledge could be used to reduce the incidence of Islamophobic hate crime. The essence of hate crime is that it is enacted because of the victim’s identity as a member of a particular group rather than any individual qualities or characteristics s/he may possess. Thus, research and theoretical frameworks which encompass the influence of group membership must be of relevance. The notion of propensity to enact hate crimes as being related to personality characteristics and the possibility of links to pathological psychological states will also be discussed. We will also consider the role of personal attitudes and address the issue of discrepancies between expressed attitudes and actual behaviours as problematic in the prediction of who will commit hate offences. The difficulties of addressing and eliminating the causes of Islamophobic hate crime without risking further polarising individuals and broader groups will be considered.

Influences of salient group identity

Levin and McDevitt (1993) identified bigotry as the underpinning characteristic of all hate crime perpetrators. They also identified four sub-categories of hate offenders: thrill seekers, defensive offenders, retaliatory offenders and mission offenders. Of these the most enduring is that category they termed ‘mission offenders’. This group involves perpetrators who develop a career of bigotry with a total commitment to hate, which becomes a life focus. The aim of
this type of perpetrator is ridding the world of an evil, a generalised menace, with this menace being unconnected to any specific effect personally experienced by him. Thus the committing of hate crimes by a member of this group is not directly connected to any personal life experience; rather, it is connected to a world view drawn from a restricted exposure to information drawn from specific sources.

Explanations for this limited use of source information for building the sense of mission derives from social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979). The focus within social identity theory (SIT) is on the group membership conferring salient aspects of identity on the individual to the extent that these aspects dominate how the person sees himself/herself as being. In effect belonging to a particular group facilitates the identification of others as being non members, being the ‘other’ or the ‘out-group’; this process of what Tajfel and Turner called social categorisation is associated with the cognitive change of the way in which the out-group is valued in comparison with the group of which a person is a member – having once defined a person (or group) as not being ‘one of us’ that group can legitimately be denigrated and criticised.

Not only that, the assignation of other people into particular groups allows an individual to make broad sweeping attributions about their qualities, their worth, their abilities and personal characteristics. This is cognitively less demanding than seeing them as individuals and such stereotyping or categorisation allows a faster process of decision making in relation to them. Categories tell us how we should and should not behave; we use the norms we have developed in relation to category membership to make decisions about actions. Thus for the mission offender described above it is at this time that they can define group norms (derogatory ones for the out-group, heroic ones for the in-group).

Tajfel and Turner argue that as we identify with a particular group we assume the characteristics and qualities of that group and value these. The individual then seeks information from sources broadly supportive of that group in order to maintain self-esteem. At this point a person can enter what Tajfel and Turner call stage three of the group identity process whereby the individual engages in social comparison through which the characteristics, qualities and actions of the in-group are favourably compared with those of out-groups. This comparison includes consideration of group qualities (those positive things the group members have in common), group resources and group rewards.

This is a critical part of SIT as once groups see themselves as different, members inevitably develop out-group hostility either because there is competition for resources or as a result of competing identities. While a person may belong to many different groups these cannot be mutually conflicting. If they are conflicting, the individual experiences dissonance and moves away from one group. The process of out-group derogation legitimises the victimisation of others.

**Motivations for hate crime offending**

McDevitt, Levin and Bennett (2002) argue that perpetrators of mission hate crimes make hate a career rather than a hobby; they may operate within organised groups such as the English Defence League, Britain First, National Action or Scottish Dawn or act alone but the focus is always on the need to ‘liberate’ society from the objects of hate. The other typologies of hate crime they identified allow for a more transient disposition to offend; although all typologies are underpinned by bigotry, the period of time during which perpetrators enact their bigoted attitudes into actual offences tend to be more short-lived.

McDevitt, Levin and Bennett (2002) identified three further causes of hate crime. Thrill-seeking hate crimes (largely confined to younger males) are associated with group dynamics and
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thrill seeking, and tend almost universally to be carried out by groups or by individuals spurred on by the presence of other group members. Defensive hate crimes (committed by those who see their communities as under threat) are responses to perceived risks emanating from the victim’s group. Retaliatory hate crimes take place when people aggress against a minority group member because another minority member has offended against their group. It is important to note the notion of ‘thrill seeking’ as a category has been challenged by Chakraborti and Garland (2009), who suggest that, far from seeking thrills, the young men who commit hate crimes in groups are typically from marginalised groups who are themselves the recipients of negative attitudes and hostility form the dominant groups in society. An example of thrill-seeking offending is where a group of young men pull the headscarf from a Muslim woman or launch into a torrent of abuse suggesting a visibly Muslim individual should ‘go home’. Defensive hate crimes might take the form of direct discrimination against the target group such as refusing to allow them access to certain resources (for example, bullying minority group children by refusing to allow them access to play or sport facilities).

Hate crimes serve a dual purpose, that of causing harm to a member of a specific group but also working as a symbolic reminder to all members of that group or community that they are hated (Craig 2002). To an extent it is irrelevant whether a person fully commits as a member of that socially identifiable minority group, they still serve as visible symbols of that loathed group and of the risk in which members of that group are placed. This symbolic relationship also acts instrumentally in influencing patterns of actions of the victims group; the behaviour of group members may change in order to avoid placing themselves at risk. Members may avoid certain locations, avoid following certain dress codes or stop going out at certain times in order to avoid exposing themselves to the risk of harm. In this way hate crimes are very effective for the perpetrator in that they restrict behaviours of members of the victims group, extending far beyond the victim’s social circle. Craig (2002) also suggests that perpetrators’ friends and social groups are also affected in that they feel pressurised to behave in a hostile way when engaging with members of the victim’s social groups. In this way, further ideas about in-group and out-group appropriate behaviours are integrated into victim and aggressors’ self-schema (Weng 2004). The cycle of antagonism, hostility and hate is perpetuated. McDevitt et al. (2002) noted that a considerable proportion of hate crimes are enacted by groups rather than individuals (they argued the motives were primarily Thrill Seeking in such cases); they reported that 66% of the cases they reviewed were perpetrated by groups or by individuals who were accompanied by group members as onlookers.

De-individuation processes and hate crime

It has been argued that the polarising of behaviour in large groups or crowds is a consequence of deindividuation (Zimbardo 1970; Reicher 2001), a process whereby membership of a physically present group leads to a loss of personal accountability and concern for social evaluation. Leader, Mullen and Abrams (2007) demonstrated that the level of violence shown in a crowd will increase in tandem with the size of the crowd increasing. However, deindividuation does not address the core of McDevitt et al.’s (2002) findings, that the membership of a hate group influences individual members’ behaviours towards those who are representative of the hated group.

Deindividuation explains a greater propensity to be violent but not why the presence of others with a particular attitude should direct that violence – arguably deindividuation theories would suggest the development of a general increase in antisocial behaviour rather than a specific hate-focused behaviour should develop. Deindividuation Theory explains changes in behaviour as a consequence of the loss of a sense of identity, of self-awareness and of rational
behaviour (Klein, Spears and Reicher 2007). The integration of negative attitudes to outgroups leading to hate crimes is explained through a development within deindividuation theory: emergent norm theory (Turner and Killian 1987).

**Emergent norms and social representations**

Emergent norm theory (Turner and Killian 1987) proposes that as social behaviour is driven by norms it is the development of new norms in groups of people which should be explored in order to explain violent group behaviours. Specifically, Turner and Killian (1987) argued that in large groups individual norms are discarded and new norms emerge reflecting the predispositions of large parts of a crowd. In a music festival such as Latitude or Glastonbury, where norms of friendship and sharing are emphasised, random acts of aggression will be stopped immediately; in a different kind of crowd, acts of aggression can take on a unifying function. Suggestions for action will be normalised if they converge with the predispositions of the crowd. If many people in the crowd are angry or looking for excitement the individuals who show aggression are more likely to impact on the behaviour of others and the crowd develops consensus as to what is acceptable and what is wrong. So, group members start to feel pressure to conform to an implicit norm, the process of conforming taking place either through action or through approval signalling. Not all people will take action, some will be curious spectators and others may be concerned about events although not sure what to do to express those concerns (McDevitt et al. 2002). Nonetheless the lack of any challenge reinforces the view of the group that the aggressive behaviours are acceptable and approved.

The focus on actions does not mean that attitudes and social representations are unimportant in influencing hate-based offending. The process of interacting with others leads to the development of societally shared beliefs and attitudes, called social representations (Moscovici 1988); inevitably different representations of the same object may be held by different sections of society or even by the same individual at different moments in time. The social representation includes not only the orientation of an attitude (for example, positive or negative) but also the reason for holding the attitude. For example, Rafiq, Jobanuptra and Muncer (2006) researched attitudes of British students to the Iraq war; while both Muslim and Christian students held negative attitudes to the war and to the reasons for its initiation, they had differing overall representations of the war with Christian students far likely to have a broad ‘war on terror’ orientation within their social representation of the war than did the Muslim students.

Another example is attitudes to the wearing of the religious symbols in contemporary France; this is banned in public places because laïcité is a central part of the French constitution. This is historically a consequence of the French revolution and the removal from the Church of the great powers and controls, which it had enjoyed prior to the revolution. Arguably this is now of less importance and the symbolic power of the ban is to identify to citizens the power of the State over minority religions; while it is true that the wearing of the cross by a Christian teacher is banned just as firmly as the covering of hair by a Muslim teacher, the social representation of the ban is that it is perceived by Muslims as being directly discriminating against them, given that covering the head is part of the requirements of Islam while the wearing of a cross is not essential to Christian practice. Social representation theory (SRT) is important in our understanding of behaviour because it explains the way in which our attitudes and consequent behaviours are informed by social practices such as discussions, media representations and cultural representations. It also helps explain the ways in which people form attitudes to people and objects which are outside their own direct experiences. So, it may be that people hold negative
views of cultural and ethnic minorities, such as refugees or Muslims with whom they have had no personal contact; SRT explains this through the drawing on group cultural representations to inform attitudes and beliefs.

Craig (2002) suggests that the diffusion of social responsibility and insensitivity to any restraints is characteristic of hate crime offenders, particularly those acting in groups or in the presence of group members. As group size increases, the perpetrator feels less responsibility on a personal level for the outcome of his actions, while the presence of others gives support and affirmation to the person’s hatred for the victim’s group. This can lead to an increase in the individual’s group-orientation in tandem with a perception that the perpetrator’s in-group is in some manner being victimised by society, particularly when broader societal attitudes and/or legislation stigmatise hate offenders (Brown 1997). The effect is exaggerated when groups, which have historically been advantaged relative to minority groups are required by legislation to relinquish that advantage – while most people pay lip service to equality in the abstract, its implementation is resisted by some.

A consequence of the impact of emerging group norms is that people in different demographic groups will perceive hate crimes differently dependent on the demographic characteristics of both victims and offenders (Craig and Waldo 1996). They found that while there was consensus between different demographic groups as to what constituted a hate crime, participants who were from ethnic minorities were twice as likely as were Caucasian participants to state explicitly that hate crime motivations included that the victim was a minority group member and this group was also more likely to mention the race and gender of the perpetrator as being salient (ibid.). They also found that the evaluation of the severity of a hate crime was dependent on demographic characteristics of victim and perpetrator (ibid.). They presented participants with scenarios in which motivations for the assault were varied (by motivation based on race, religion, sexual orientation or unclear) and where the gender of the victim was varied (ibid.). They found that these factors influenced assessment of the seriousness of the crime and that the gender and racial characteristics of the offender also influenced their perceptions of the offence (ibid.).

In another study Craig (1999) showed participants from Caucasian and from African-American backgrounds videotaped assaults. The assaults showed same-race or different-race attacks. Overall, participants found both types of assault unpleasant to view but African-American participants viewed different-race assaults as being more frequent and more typical than did Caucasian students. They also noted that they would expect victims to return to the scene with friends at a later time to seek revenge. This could be linked to their being more likely to have experienced direct or vicarious experience of being victims of hate-assault. They might also be aware of the contemporary bias in the conviction rates and sentences for hate crimes; DeSantis and Kayson (1997) found in mock trials that African-American defendants were more likely to be convicted than were Caucasian defendants in identical cases across the full range of offending, from relatively minor crimes such as theft to more serious offending such as assault, drug dealing etc. and that they were given heavier sentences. The implications for understanding responses to religious-based hate crimes and their victims were that perceptions of culpability of minorities and majorities are skewed to the advantage of majority groups. However, Marcus-Newhall, Blake and Baumann (2002) found that the perpetrator was more likely to be seen as guilty of a hate crime when he was Caucasian and the victim was African-American, regardless of the ethnicity of the rater, suggesting that in-group favouritism was not always in operation. The authors suggest that it may be that as a majority-perpetrator on minority-victim crime was consonant with societal experience and hence the dominant social-representation may have been a factor in the findings.
Mechanisms and processes of group identification

Although it is known that experience of group-based hostility can increase minority group identification, little work has been conducted exploring the mechanisms through which such discrimination influences identification and intergroup attitudes. Hutchison, Lubna, Goncalves-Portelinha, Kamali and Khan (2015) conducted an elegantly designed study exploring compatibility between identities (British and Muslim), group-based discrimination and identification and attitudes in British Muslims. The paradigms used allowed the direct examination of the link between discrimination and attitudes to the dominant (British) identity. They noted that while some perceived their religious and national identities as being complementary (Hopkins 2011) for others the minority identity was most salient, with feelings that their minority identity and its associated norms and expectations risked being threatened within the dominant group.

Hutchison et al. (2015) investigated the extent to which group-based discrimination could predict the responses of minorities in terms of their attitudes to the dominant culture and identification. The implications for understanding both the dynamics and consequences of hate crime are clear; if experience of hate and discrimination short of physical assault cause a hostility to the dominant culture then this has consequences for multi-religious and multi-cultural communities’ harmony. When participants in the study (British Muslim students at a British university) were given a highly anti-Muslim newspaper article to read, and then told that the ideas expressed had either little support or much support from the general public, the level of perceived support had a powerful effect on their affiliation to their religious identity. The impact of the information that the hostile newspaper article had ‘much support’ from the majority group was to lead the participants to believe that there was an incompatibility between being British and being Muslim, and, in turn, this impacted on the extent to which they identified as being Muslim (rather than having a dual compatible identity as British and Muslim) and on their attitudes to British non-Muslims. Thus, inter-group conflict and mistrust can be generated by non-physical expressions of hate (the actual article used had been referred for prosecution for incitement to racial hatred though in the end no prosecution took place), and this conflict can provide the platform for further inter-group conflict and hostility. The researchers did note that while the effect they found was powerful, the mean identity-incompatibility scores for the sample were low, indicating that the British Muslims in their sample did not view being Muslim and being British as mutually exclusive.

Psychological implications of being a victim of hate crime

There has been little research on the psychological implications of hate crime for recipients of hate attacks, verbal and physical, which are focused on Muslims, compared to the amount of research into those implications for minorities from other groups who have experienced hate-based transgressions. Nadal, Griffin, Hamit, Leon, Tobio and Rivera (2012) studied the experience of microaggressions towards Muslim Americans on their psychological well-being. The interest in microaggressions (not always intended) has developed in tandem with an interest in implicit attitudes (Greenwald and Banaji 1995) and hate crimes. Implicit attitudes are attitudes which may occur without conscious awareness and develop from various influences in the individual’s social, emotional and material world. Microaggressions send negative and denigrating messages to people who belong to minority and marginalised groups; they may be unintended but still have a powerful effect. Recipients may be confused, wondering if the slur was intentional or if they have been oversensitive; being on the receiving end of microaggressions can be psychologically and cognitively draining (Nadal 2008). Nadal et al. (2012) noted
that Muslims in the USA typically occupy several demographic positions; they might also be ethnic minorities, immigrants (nearly 70% of Muslims in the USA are immigrants from over 80 different countries), younger and more educated than the general American population. Thus, it can be hard, firstly to identify microaggressions as such and secondly to identify the basis for the particular aggression experienced (racial, socio-economic, religious, linguistic). Nadal et al. (2010) developed a categorisation system for the variants of Islamophobic micro-aggressions experienced by Muslims and which are independent of race, ethnicity or other demographic factors. These include:

- The emphasising of religious stereotypes such as that Muslims are terrorists – so, statements or actions that indicate false descriptions of particular religious groups.
- Exoticisation whereby the foreignness or exotic nature of some aspect of the religion is appropriated by the dominant group.
- Pathologising specific religious groups by equating their traditional practices with sin, deviance or stupidity.
- Assumption that the speaker’s religious identity is the norm, for example assuming that everyone goes to Confession.
- Assumption of religious homogeneity in which the assumption is made that all believers in a particular religion share identical practices, such as that all Muslim women will always wear head coverings.
- Denial of religious prejudice in which a person denies that a comment or action is indicative of religious bias and seeks instead to blame the recipient of the comment for being overly sensitive.

Nadal et al. (2012) used a qualitative analysis of focus group interview data to explore the pervasiveness of Islamophobic microaggressions. They ran two focus groups, each containing five adult Muslim participants of diverse ethnic origins. As well as recording the focus groups, observers made a note of the clothing worn (three of the seven female participants wore the hijab) and self-reports of ethnic background and race. The interview transcripts were analysed using a directed content analysis, focusing on the six categories outlined above. The researchers found six themes emerging from their analysis:

- endorsing stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists;
- Muslim religion as pathology;
- the assumption of religious homogeneity;
- exoticisation;
- Islamophobic language use; and
- alien in own land.

Four of the themes identified mirrored those of Nadal et al. (2010); the last two themes were new. On examining the transcripts and quotes taken from the transcripts, it was apparent that many of the comments and experiences used to derive the themes were quite subtle; the participants felt the incident was aggressive and hateful but believed they could not prove that Islamophobia was involved or necessarily intended, such as a woman describing an incident where an airport security guard at Schiphol Airport (away from the security and passport check area) asked to see her passport, then requested her to accompany him, telling her that the picture in her passport did not resemble her. While he did not mention her religion, she believed she had been stopped because she wore a hijab. Another woman, a white Muslim convert, reported
that at dinner one night her brother had asked if, when she went to mosque, she heard when the next bombing would be; she felt he had not understood that this was offensive, but assumed that all Muslims were terrorists and that the mosque was a place where terrorism would be planned.

Religious microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional; however, participants in this study reported instances of discrimination which were effectively verbal assaults. In addition, the researchers identified ‘passers’ (Hirschman 1970) – that is individuals who can pass for non-Muslim, possibly on the basis of dress, everyday practices and behaviours or possibly because of physical appearance. When an individual passes as a member of the dominant group, he may be allowed privileges not accessible to those who cannot pass and may not be exposed to the same level of microaggression. However, it may also be the case that a ‘passing’ Muslim may be exposed to a higher level of microaggressions as speakers assume he/she is ‘one of them’ and hence not feel the need to be restrained in their comments. In terms of the lived experience of individuals exposed to microaggressions it is important that organisations are aware of the potential for aggression and discrimination and actively engage in countering it.

**Psychological factors in predisposition to commit hate crime**

Research into the psychological factors predisposing an individual to enact hate crimes have followed one of two major pathways; they have focused on the broad socio-cultural-economic factors which might lead to an increase in hate crime or they have (in a very few cases) looked at psychological and personality factors internal to the individual. The work of McDevitt et al. (2002) cited above encompasses both approaches although the majority of hate crime is attributed, within their model to cultural factors such as group-based motivators, rather than on internal predispositions. Further arguments seeking to explain hate crime as being located primarily in socio-economic factors emanate from the aggression-frustration hypothesis first proposed by Hovland and Sears (1940) in which it was stated that the frustration associated with periods of economic decline, or in geographical locations of economic decline, would produce aggressive impulses which would be directed at minorities or any vulnerable group, regardless of whether that group could be seen as responsible for the economic decline. Effectively, hostility is directed not towards a broad or abstract concept such as ‘economic change’ but to individuals who, while totally unconnected causally to these economic changes, can be identified as members of minority out-groups and hostility to them is justified simply on the basis that they are not ‘one of us’. Incidentally this is an explanation which has been offered in the popular press to explain the election of Donald Trump as president of the USA in 2016.

Green, Glaser and Rich (1998) investigated the validity of using this model to explain hate crime. They collected data on hate crime in a metropolitan region (New York City) on a monthly over a period of nine years and modelled the change in incidents of hate crime associating the figures with the monthly unemployment data from that area. This was the best indicator of economic status available. The dependent variable of Hate Crime was defined as acts of vandalism, violence, harassment or intimidation directed against a person because of their religion, ethnicity, race or sexuality. Green et al did not partition out data for each of these four different groups. Although the logic of frustration-aggression would suggest that hate crimes against minorities would become more numerous during periods of economic downturn as people vented their frustration on an available scapegoat, Green, Glaser and Rich (1998) found no such robust and consistent relationship between economic conditions and the incidence of hate crime, suggesting that this was not a good predictor for (or explanation of) hate offending.

Although socio-economic status of a group is not in itself a predictor of hate offending there are indications that being a member of a group perceived in some way as being in need of
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defending has the potential to valorise individual group members to engage in aggressive behaviour even if this might place their own lives at risk. Swann et al. (2014) explored the processes which led to individuals who felt a very strong affiliation to a group, akin to the powerful emotional ties one would feel for family and loved ones, to make exceptional and extreme sacrifices for that groups, to the point of being prepared to die for that group. In a series of studies which encompassed participants in six continents, participants were asked to rate their agreement on a series of scales such as ‘I would fight someone physically threatening another person from my country’, ‘If someone in my country is hurt or in danger, it is like a family member is hurt or in danger’ or ‘I would sacrifice my life if it saved another country member’s life’.

The explanation proposed for such responses is outlined in identity fusion theory (Swann, Jetten, Gomez, Whitehouse and Bastian 2012); identity fusion exists where a person feels such a powerful, almost visceral sense of oneness with a group that it is akin to feelings for his family. Hence, the outcome of the fusion process is a person who believes that his actions in the interests of the group are not for unknown strangers but for ‘family’. The fusion involves a union of personal identity and social identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979) with both identities retaining equal meaningfulness and providing the basis for action. It can be seen as a form of group identification (Postmes, Haslam and Jans 2013). Within fusion theory individuals may form exceptionally strong bonds with other group members; in addition, the ties that group members may form with other group members, either in person or via written or electronic communication, serve to cement the fusion with the group. Effectively once fusion is achieved the ties with the group become stronger and more psychologically difficult to sever. This combination of emotional and relational ties predisposes individuals to be prepared to undertake action in the group’s interest even where that action may risk the individual’s health, freedom or even life itself. The large groups to which a person belongs can include countries, political parties, religious groups and gangs. Priming a person with information enabling him to perceive the group as sharing core characteristics with that person will encourage the person to believe that the group is significant in defining who he is. Exposure to a shared characteristic will prime the individual to not only fuse with the group but to understand the group members as having a common element or essence, which distinguishes them form non-group members and which forms the core of that individual.

The aim of Swann et al.’s (2012) series of studies was to explore the processes of fusion and the extent to which priming the core characteristics of groups in individuals would promote the perception of family-type relationships and validate self-sacrifice. Their methodology encompassed surveys, experiments and mediated analysis. They found that while in all eleven countries studied (Australia, Chile, China, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, India, Poland, South Africa, Spain and the USA) participants could be primed to develop a fused identity with their country and were prepared to risk death for their country, this preparedness was not as strong as the preparedness to risk harm or death for their family group and there were moderator variables which influenced the extent of the sacrifice participants were prepared to make for their country. Where group members were primed with information about genetic similarity between group members, this influenced their willingness to take chances for their group. Participants were allocated to two conditions; in condition one the members were told that members of racial groups had high levels of genetic similarity, in condition two the participants were primed with information that members of racial groups did not share common genes. Regression analysis of the data generated indicated a significant finding that priming shared biological characteristics strengthens the relationship between fusion and endorsement of extreme behaviour. These findings indicate that where group members are indoctrinated into beliefs whereby the biological basis for difference between groups is the main focus of attention (such as in Nazi Germany
in the 1930s in their persecution of Jews and Roma, or in Islamophobic hate groups such as the Front Nationale in contemporary France) then holding fused group membership will predispose the individual to aggressive and risky behaviour towards out-group members. That said, in many countries shared genes are not a common source of a sense of communality; in these countries, it is the shared values which are incorporated into the fused identity and valorise individuals to engage in acts which endorse the in-group. Replication of the priming studies using shared core values rather than genetic similarity as the priming variable produced data which, when analysed through regression analysis, indicated that the relationship between fusion and endorsement of self-sacrifice was higher in the shared core value priming group. Overall it was found that there was a significant gender difference effect; males were more inclined to endorse extreme behaviour than were females.

Swann et al. (2012) note the identification of fused individuals with other group members on a familial level, and suggest that this could explain their willingness to risk their own futures in acting in the group interest; they believed that such individuals believe they will ‘live on’ through their group. This ‘living on’ should not, as Swann et al. (2012) emphasise, be seen as a kind of continuance through word of mouth or having a place in the group’s history and collective memory; rather it is seen by participants as a form of continuance over future generations which is consistent with the evolutionary psychology perspective on self-sacrifice. Evolutionary psychology proposes that there is an evolved kin-detection system in humans (as in other species), which regulates the decision to take a risk for the benefit of the biological family.

Swann et al. (2012) propose that their findings of the importance of collective relationships and allegiances, further reaching than those postulated in SIT have implications for our understanding of inter-group dynamics. The research also has implications for our ability to predict who might engage in aggressive acts against other group, that is, who might engage in hate crime. Arguably it also offers the framework for considering interventions which might take place with individuals who are at risk of engaging in aggressive behaviour against out-groups as a consequence of their perceptions of the needs of their fused racial, national or religious group.

**Role of psychological disorders**

There have been limited attempts to understand hate and hate crime as having origins in psychological disorders other than viewing the underpinning attitudes as erroneous or a consequence of cognitive distortion. Dunbar (1997) challenged this absence noting that a person who had negative views of a particular out-group would be likely to experience psychological ill-health symptoms as a reaction to attempts to maintain such a problematic view of the world. He argued the focus of cross-cultural psychology and those doing research into prejudice against specific groups had failed to consider the potential role of clinical psychology in assessing and responding to clients who demonstrated prejudiced beliefs and behaviours. After Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson and Sanford published their work on the authoritarian personality and consequent maladaptive and hostile behaviours in 1950, there has been little attempt to assess prejudiced attitudes and intervene from a clinical perspective. Gough (1951) developed the Prejudice Scale, using items taken from the MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory), a scale widely used by psychiatrists and clinical psychologists assessing serious psychological disorders. His research identified the characteristics of those scoring high on the prejudice scale as being tormented, resentful, peevish and confused. His scale correlated significantly with the Sanford Anti-Semitism scale and with some of the MMPI subscales including dysphoria, mania and schizophrenia. Gough (1951) argued that the sores on his scale showed a direct connection between the presence of an out-group bias and psychopathology. Heim (1992)
noted that, in clinical terms, prejudice was associated with the client manifesting behaviours associated with problems of empathic failure, impulsivity and a hypersensitivity towards out-group members. Gough’s (1951) study encompassed an evaluation of the relationship between diagnosis and the broader clinical assessment, which revealed the extent to which symptoms were present. Specifically, Gough (1951) focused on the Axis II disorders on DSM IV, in both the Cluster A (odd and eccentric personality disturbance) and Cluster B (impulsive and dramatic personality disturbance). He drew on a large sample of adult clients at a psychotherapy clinic drawn from a mixed socio-economic demographic and a range of racial backgrounds. He found a consistent relationship between out-group bias and an impulsive, emotionally estranged style of interpersonal communication. Patients with conduct disorder problems typically have impulse management issues; it appears from Gough’s (1951) research that this may be causally related to prejudiced attitudes, aggression and hostility to out-groups rather than merely coexisting with such aggression. His findings suggested that through clinical diagnosis procedures, clients could be identified as clinically prejudiced and that, in terms of symptoms, this prejudice was associated with patterns of disturbed social relationships, suspicion and a lack of engagement with reality. This is not to say that all people exhibiting out-group hostility and aggression can be viewed as having a mental health problem but it offers an insight into possible pathways into aggression towards an out-group for some individuals.

Conclusion

It seems to be an obvious truth to state, as do Levin and McDevitt (1993), that the main characteristic of hate crime offenders is bigotry. However, the research findings and theoretical material discussed above suggest that understanding the psychology of hate crime offending involves more than categorising perpetrators in this simple way; the complex relationships between group identification, the need for group identity and to occupy a role within the group, an individual’s life experiences and the impact of these on perceptions of others, and personality characteristics intrinsic to the individual, demonstrate that it is not easy to predict who will and who will not become a hate crime offender. It seems desirable to be able to identify some powerful predictive instrument which we could apply to individuals at risk of such offending; having identified the individuals we could then consider ways of neutralising that risk (of course, that presupposes the existence of a strategy which would be effective rather than counterproductive). What kind of instrument would be appropriate? Personality measures would not encompass the whole story while a focus on the demographic group which might be intuitively have the kind of group experiences of perceived exclusion and impotence risks further stigmatising individuals and forcing them into a position where they are more, rather than less, likely to take aggressive action. The work of Swann et al. (2012) into the willingness of individuals with fused group identities to risk harm to themselves or even death in the interests of their own group and the beliefs in ‘living on’ which accompany this willingness is an indicator of the risk that forcing potential perpetrators into a polarised position might increase rather than eliminate the possibility of hate crime offending. However, it is not tenable to accept that hate crime happens and there is little one can do to stop them; understanding the psychology of hate crime offending should be a precursor to action to prevent it. As the research of Hutchison et al. (2015) and that of Nadal et al. (2012) indicate, the consequence of failure to address the issue of aggressions – whether major attacks or microaggressions – is a further polarisation of views within both offender groups and victim groups, with a focus on a future for these populations which involves at best separation and at worst hostility, violence and murder.
References


