

Conformity within a culture sociology essay



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Conformity within a culture can be a powerful advocate of a society's perception, especially where religion is involved. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict embeds both sides in a negative social perception of one another. Lessening the conflicting perceptions between the two groups seems as the only way for reconciliation between them. Creating a religiously motivated bias, opposing doctrines maintain and support traditional stereotypes held by each group. Although religion is the primary theme of the conflict, religion may form the foundation for bridging the differences. Building peace can promote positive interaction socially and alter perceptions when a common ground is established (Byrne, 1961).

Cultural Conformity

Shiraev and Levy (2010), suggest conformity is; " social influence in which individuals change their attitudes and/or behavior to adhere to a group or social norm" (p. 283). Human conformity as explained by social psychology is living up to expectations of others, maintaining consensus, accommodating the majority, maintaining positive relationships, and reducing negative sanctions (Shiraev & Levy, 2010). Rational actor theory describes conformity as rational choices permitting choices derived from available alternatives based on negative or positive consequences of the choice.

In regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, each respective group behaves and is represented by partisan religious doctrines. Each country views political and religious conformity as possessing serious consequences for citizens in either area (Hofman, 1977). Both the Islamic and Judaism cultures

place a high emphasis on religious consistency, attitudes toward religion are more rigorous and complex than other religions. Expectations are those of strict adherence to religious expectations, leadership, and rules within the two cultures. As a result of these strict expectations, little flexibility in beliefs and attitudes complexly woven into the cultural fabric of both cultures are tolerated. Although political and religious conflict resonates between Jewish and Muslim groups, various current issues are the result of extremist splinter groups who define their own cultural conformity and rules. Serious differences regarding religious beliefs and affiliations remain between the two groups. Although Palestinians primarily observe the Muslim religion, the majority of Israeli's are Jewish. Religion on both sides consistently has maintained a primary role in forming the lifestyle and culture of both Palestinians and Israeli's (Hofman, 1977). Religion is considered a cultural variable contributing or detracting from tolerance between nations and societies (Cohen, 1990). Intolerance from both sides perpetuated by political and religious differences prevents reconciliation as a result of mutual exclusivity.

Social Cognition and Perception

The process used by people to understand themselves and others is known as social perception. Social cognition, on the other hand, is how people remember, interpret, and use information about society and themselves. People of every culture use memory recall of experiences to make choices. Within a cultures social environment attitudes, judgments, and beliefs are formed based on social experiences. Rooted in the cultural context of a society social perception takes form. Individuals raised in like cultures tend

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to assimilated experiences between the two cultures although they have had different exposures to lifestyles and religious undertakings. Although similarities exist, the likelihood of possessing very different worldly views is very high. The simplest way to describe social perception is as a function of social cognition.

The significantly different perspectives of Israelis and Palestinians leads to conflict of beliefs and the complex worldviews held by each group contributing to their perspectives of one another. Through biased perspectives of one another and stereotypes reinforced by individual group beliefs, as a result it seems these two groups are in a perpetual war against each other. As an example many Palestinians believe Israel wants to continue controlling the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea through the use of violence. Conversely, Israelis believe Palestinians want to conquer Palestine and that they are using claims of peace as a strategy to gain control of the region. Because of the many political issues and the spectrum of interpretations and opinions, a clear perspective of what each party wants is difficult to determine.

Claiming people want consistent attitudes and beliefs, the theory presented by Heider, attitude balance must be closely considered (Spector, 2008). Heiders (1959), theory suggests people overestimate positive traits of those they like and place an emphasis on negative traits of those they dislike, underestimating positive traits. Application of heiders theory to the centuries-old conflict between Israeli-Palestinian groups demonstrates the emphasis of negative traits passing the negative emphasis from generation to generation largely based on a religious premise. In addition to both groups

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continuing these negative beliefs, both refuse to examine information to the contrary to their respective attitudes and beliefs (Krueger & DiDonato, 2008). Continued devaluation and perpetually negative attitudes toward one another has reinforced the perspectives held by each group (Krueger & DiDonato, 2008).

Require Changes of Social Perceptions

Originating with Abraham, both the Jewish and Muslim religions can be traced to common Abrahamic practices and traditions that both sides in the Islamic-Palestinian conflict refuse to consider or recognize (WGBH Educational Foundation, 2002). Along with Christianity, both religions are monotheistic and consider God as moral law and a higher power. Many of the characters within the three religions are the same. Places, history, and tales are shared by the three although shared from differing perspectives and possessing different meaning for each following (WGBH Educational Foundation, 2002). Although connected by common beliefs the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian religions are different internally determined by details of the doctrine and practice of each. These differences are stressed to a point of extreme discontentment by the warring factions.

Younger generations of Israelis and Palestinians have these perceptions passed onto them causing and ensuring future conflict (Shamir & Shikaki, 2002). Although not mature enough to determine whether they will continue the biased perception of history, as they age many will wonder about their limited choices and look to investigate the claims of both sides. Unless new perspectives are created and embraced by both factions unwarranted claims

and distorted perceptions will continue to create violence among the two groups.

Edward Tiryakian, (1997), suggests; “ international stability can be advanced by nations discovering and developing greater intercultural understanding and appreciation of each other” (p. 320). Supporting research confirms how important psychological and cultural perspectives are to religion and politics (Tiryakian, 1997). Building peace can have an effect on perception; creating common ground with another group can promote positive perceptions.

Cooperative relationships, intimate encounters, and quality social interactions emphasizing equal status contact also assist in changing opposing perspectives (Byrne, 1961). The most significant difference and most negative perception is religious beliefs, exploring new perspectives in this area undoubtedly will promote conforming social perceptions.

People are more likely to change negative attitudes they have for others or groups if they can relate to beliefs and attitudes they possess themselves (Byrne, 1969). Citing similarities in religious rituals and terminology in both Judaism, and the Muslim beliefs; both possessing Abrahamic roots, there is the potential for this to be a beginning for reconciliation. Additionally, demonstrations of similarity in both religions have been demonstrated (Mollov & Barhoum, 1998). Claims of interaction between Palestinian and Israeli students have also commenced beyond formal setting of the learning environment. Relationships have emerged and flourished during current events; constructive reactions by students during tragedy and difficult times remain in existence. Students visit one another during times of celebration

and illness. In turn this has created strong bonds for constructive and perspective changes to continue (Mollov & Barhoum, 1998).

Even the limited interactions and experiences witnessed between Palestinian and Israeli students introduces a perspective of basing inter-religious talks as a way to mediate new perspectives between these groups (Mollov & Barhoum, 1998). Communication among Palestinian and Muslim religious groups based on similar conventionalized ideas can be considered a reconciliation point based on the depth and conviction of both groups to maintain a presence in the lands they treasure because of religious heritage (Mollov & Lavie, 2001). Changing social perceptions to gain an idealistic balance of power must involve cultural and religion-based convictions to meet at a middle ground.

Conclusion

Finding a simple solution for the long term conflict between the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts may appear as simple as mediating an inter-religious dialogue. Changing social perceptions of each group however would involve a significant change social perception and a realization of the similarities between the two religions. Considering the extent of complications related to initiating such reconciliation and the complex nature of the centuries-long war, consideration of bonds and perceptual changes have begun with students on both sides should be considered. Social perception has changed, and notwithstanding the extreme challenges involved in mediating a century-long hatred, social perceptions can change by embracing and emphasizing similarities within respective religious beliefs.