

## Is liberalism really a mental illness?

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Conservative pundits like Michael Savage and Mark Dice like to ruffle feathers by claiming that liberalism is a mental disorder. Well...is it?

No. Of course not. It's crude and dangerous to pathologize the political beliefs of half the population — beliefs which have often changed the world for the better.

However, this pathologizing has been done to conservatives since the end of World War Two. In his theory of anti-democratic authoritarianism, Theodor Adorno identified a number of 'symptoms' of an authoritarian personality 'syndrome', including sexual inhibition, support for conventional values, and admiration of toughness and power. The political bias of the concept was sealed by psychologist Bob Altemeyer in 1981, when he coined the hugely popular concept 'right-wing authoritarianism'.

Since then, psychologists have condemned conservatism as dysfunctional. For example, Van Hiel, Mervielde and De Fruyt (2004) investigated the link between right-wing ideology and 'maladaptive personality'; right-wing beliefs are routinely linked to prejudice (e.g., Ekehammar et al., 2004); and studies have reported that conservatives have, on average, lower IQs (e.g., Onraet et al., 2015; a rare example of leftist academics admitting that IQ tests do measure intelligence and that group differences in intelligence do exist). Meanwhile, the esteemed

American Psychological Association has endorsed pseudoscientific leftist ideas like toxic masculinity and white privilege.

Psychological interventions likewise seem strangely often to tend towards left-wing goals. For example, Broockman and Kalla (2016) used ‘deep canvassing’ (encouraging empathetic perspective-taking during door knocking) to increase voter support for transgender bathrooms, without ever considering whether it was ethical to do so. More recently, psychologists have found that magnets, applied to certain areas of the brain, can ‘cure’ religiosity and in-group preference (Holbrook et al., 2016). The adoption of this tech is foreshadowed today by ‘unconscious bias training’ corporate seminars. It’s not enough to control your behaviors: progressives now want to get right inside your brain and eradicate what they don’t like there, too. If you thought censorship of conservatives on Twitter and Facebook was bad enough today, consider whether Silicon Valley would draw the line at shadow-banning your thoughts before they happen.

Outside of academia, the corporate media likewise deifies liberals and demonizes conservatives. As just one illustration, the press ridiculed ‘tradwives’ (called ‘radicalized’ by the *Times* of London, with ‘a dark heart’ by the *Guardian*), while speaking in gushing terms about Bella Thorne’s \$1 million OnlyFans payday (The *Mirror* talked about her ‘smashing records’ while the *Mail* reported on how she ‘celebrated’ her ‘success’). The media promotes a *Sex and the City* lifestyle, while ignoring the fact that the show’s writer, Candace Bushnell, said she regrets choosing a career over children and is now ‘truly alone’.

This is despite number of premarital partners longitudinally predicting substance abuse (Ramrakha et al., 2013), and some research suggesting that frequency of casual sex predicts suicidal thoughts later in life (Sandberg-Thoma and Dush, 2013).

Anyway, the narrative is clear: right-wing bad, left-wing good.

This is not to say that the aforementioned points are not valid; conservative beliefs likely are correlated with certain disorders in the population at large. Rather, the issue here is the weight of

focus on conservatism compared to liberalism — unsurprising, given that liberals outnumber conservatives in psychology academia by a ratio of 14:1 (Duarte et al., 2015). Indeed, a search on Google Scholar returns almost six times as many results for ‘right-wing violence’ as it does for ‘left-wing violence’. As radical Marxists burn, loot and murder across the US, would anyone seriously argue that leftist violence is not equally worthy of study? Of course it’s right to analyze Hitler’s pathologies — but what about those of Mao or Stalin?

Fortunately, academics have recently started to explore the psychopathologies of the left. Thirty years ago, a typical paper on the subject would be that published in *Political Psychology* under the title ‘The Myth of Left-Wing Authoritarianism’ (Stone, 1980). Yet, by 2018, the tide had started to turn: in their paper ‘Finding the Loch Ness Monster: Left-wing Authoritarianism in the United States’, Conway and colleagues (2018) found evidence that left-wing authoritarianism — as measured through items like, ‘The only way our country can get through the crisis ahead is to get rid of our “traditional” values’ — was a viable construct’. Even more recently, the ‘horseshoe hypothesis’ was supported by a study finding that authoritarianism exists on both the far-right and the far-left (Costello et al., 2020). Indeed, this year, endorsement for totalitarian COVID-19 measures (e.g., increased government powers, immunity certificates, banning the sale of firearms) has been predicted by both left- and right-wing authoritarianism (Manson, 2020). Evidence is plentiful, therefore, that pathology can exist on both sides of the political spectrum. However, there is also evidence that liberalism may be associated with its own unique disorders.

Firstly, the modern self-identified strain of ‘liberalism’ is explicitly correlated with mental illness. Studies of the mentally ill have found that they tend to vote less conservative and more liberal (Howard and Anthony, 1977; Kelly, 2014). One paper, for example, found that 78 percent of mental illness outpatients in Germany preferred liberal political candidates, compared to just 56 percent of the general public. More recently, Kirkegaard (2020) analyzed the General Social Survey data and found that extreme liberals had a 150 percent increase in the rate of mental illness compared to moderates. Conservatives — even extreme conservatives — were 17 percent and 24 percent less likely than moderates, respectively, to have been diagnosed with

mental illness. Meanwhile, Pew Research Center's March 2020 American Trends Panel Survey similarly showed that 38 percent of 'very liberal' whites have been told by a doctor that they have a mental health condition (compared to 20 percent of moderates and 15 percent of the 'very conservative').

More broadly, the same strain of (illiberal) 'liberalism' has been associated with destructive and unhealthy behaviors. Conservatives tend to be happier (Napier and Tost, 2008), healthier (Subramanian and Perkins, 2009), and — you guessed it — more attractive (Peterson and Palmer, 2017). Believing, as they do, that they have personal responsibility for their lives, they also tend to live longer (Kondrichin and Lester, 1998; Smith and Dorling, 1996). Studies suggest that liberals, meanwhile, are more likely to drink alcohol (Yakovlev and Guessford, 2013), take drugs (Nour, Evans and Carhart-Harris, 2017), and be promiscuous (Hatemi, Crabtree and McDermott, 2017).

These unhealthy behaviors perhaps share a common neurobiological root with liberal political beliefs.

A disorder called the behavioral variant of frontotemporal dementia (bvFTD) sheds some light. Miller and colleagues (2001) reported on a 63-year-old patient who was conservative before developing bvFTD. She then became 'politically opinionated' about her anti-conservative political beliefs, to the point of confronting strangers; she started dressing in a more casual manner; and she developed an interest in animal rights; altering her preference for collecting jewelry to collecting stuffed animals.

As if these qualities weren't suggestive enough of many antifa types, the Association for Frontotemporal Degeneration lists the following among the symptoms of the disorder: rude and offensive comments, inappropriate sexual behavior, neglect of personal hygiene, binge eating, repeating words or phrases, clapping (it remains silent on the emoji 'clap' which has become so ubiquitous), rereading the same book over and over again, questionable financial decisions (see \$150k liberal arts degrees; not to mention the left's blind addiction to government borrowing),

frequent and abrupt mood changes (see 2015-2020), and, perhaps most crucially of all, blaming others for the consequences of socially unacceptable behavior. The neurobiological root of such liberal traits is highlighted by research into bvFTD. Namely, it is associated with a reduced emotional response to negative emotional stimuli (Jacques et al., 2015), reduced attention to threat (Joshi et al., 2014), and reduced reactivity to disgusting stimuli (Eckart et al., 2012). In short, people with the disorder are less sensitive to danger. As a result, it can impair the self-protection instinct (Shinagawa, 2015).

Overall, there seem to be three main traits which define what one might call ‘pathological liberalism’, all of which may have a core of reduced threat sensitivity.

The first is an extreme openness to new things and tolerance of ambiguity. Liberalism is indeed associated with the personality trait ‘openness to experience’: that is, adventurous and tolerant of new ideas and change (e.g., Schoen and Schumann, 2007; Vecchione et al., 2011). Looking at personality more broadly, conservatism tends to be associated with preferences for stability, order and structure, while liberalism tends to be associated with curiosity, creativity, and novelty-seeking. It is also — credit where it’s due — associated with thinking deeply and rejecting simple solutions (Jost et al., 2003; Carney, Jost and Gosling, 2008; Jost, Federico and Napier, 2009; Caparos et al., 2015). Indeed, liberals tend to have more gray matter in the part of the brain that deals with processing signals for potential change (Amodio et al., 2007; Kanai et al., 2011; Schreiber et al., 2013). Liberals are more likely to prefer abstract art (Wilson, Ausman and Mathews, 1973) and have messy work spaces (Carney, Jost and Gosling, 2008).

There is a huge amount of value in being open-minded but not — as G.K. Chesterton said — so open-minded that your brain falls out. On this point, Woodley (2010) proposed the idea of ‘clever sillies’ — intelligent people who lack common sense and overanalyze things to produce sophisticated rationalizations for nonsense. In the words of George Orwell: ‘There are some ideas so absurd that only an intellectual could believe them.’

Similarly, the cultural mediation hypothesis argues that intelligent people are — rightly or wrongly — more likely to follow the crowd because they have the cognitive ability to rationalize doing so and to predict the social benefits therein (Woodley, 2011).

The second determinant of pathological liberalism is extreme emotionality and empathy. Liberals tend to be more empathetic (Hirsh et al., 2010), and more agreeable in general (Schoen and Schumann, 2007; Vecchione et al., 2011); they are also more likely to reject group loyalty (see Haidt, 2012) and, as discussed, are less prejudiced towards ‘out-groups’. From a neurobiological perspective, political liberalism has been linked to activity in the part of the brain that deals with interpersonal trust (Belfi, Koscik and Tranel, 2015). Bringing this all together, a study of Twitter users found that those following Republicans used more words emphasizing group membership (such as in-group identity, national identity, and religion), while those following Democrats used more emotional language (e.g., feelings, anxiety, positive emotions and expletives; Sylwester and Purver, 2015).

Again, there are many benefits to such altruism — up to a point. Many researchers have also explored the concept of pathological altruism (Oakley et al., 2011), in which charitable giving actually does more harm than good (by, for example, fostering dependence and undermining organic economic development. One illustration comes from the donation of second-hand clothing to countries like Kenya, which has all but killed the once-thriving garment industry there.

But when liberal altruism becomes pathological, it can also be at the subject’s own expense. For example, a survey by the American National Election Studies in 2018 asked respondents to rate how warm they felt towards their own race compared to others. All groups were biased in favor of their own except for one: white liberals, who feel warmer to others than to their own people. In other words, in contrast to all other groups, white liberals put others above themselves.

This prostration before other groups introduces the third trait that defines pathological liberalism: low self-esteem. Die-hard liberals seem to live in a world of self-loathing: they believe they are

born dirty thanks to new varieties of ‘original sin’; and they never recognize the good things their history has contributed, instead campaigning to actively ‘dismantle’ their own culture. Their protests are invariably forms of self-abuse or self-abasement, like lying in front of traffic or getting on their knees. A function of low self-esteem is also believing that one has little control over one’s life. Research has indicated that having an external ‘locus of control’ (i.e., believing that your fate is determined by powerful people and forces) is typically linked to a leftist ideology (e.g., Levenson and Miller, 1976). In surely one of the great reversals of history, a 2019 Cato Institute survey found that just 33 percent of people identifying as ‘very liberal’ agreed that ‘[their] life is determined by [their] own actions’, compared to 52 percent of those who are very conservative. It in turn makes sense that those who feel less in control of their own destiny would support ‘free’ healthcare, ‘free’ education, more welfare, and more regulation. As Edmund Burke said, ‘Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without.’

This external locus of control has recently manifested itself in victimhood culture — the Marxist belief that one is a perpetual victim of omnipotent but invisible power structures, from which only the same Marxist authorities can rescue such victim groups. What is less well known is a recent paper which found that those who exhibit these ‘virtuous victimhood’ behaviors were more likely to have ‘dark’ personality traits, including narcissism (Ok et al., 2020). Twenge, Zhang and Im (2004) explain the contradiction between low self-esteem and narcissism in terms of locus of control; the pathological liberal likely believes that, when something good happens in their life, it was their achievement; when something bad happens, they are the victim of oppression.

Pride is the vice with the strongest correlation with narcissism (Veselka, Giammarco and Vernon, 2014). This narcissistic culture of pride is another defining trait of pathological liberalism — even manifesting in parades to celebrate pride. A ‘born this way’ mindset which embraces unhealthy lifestyle groups like the obese can only lead to disaster. As Thomas Aquinas

said, pride is the worst vice and the source of all other vices. Without looking up towards the heavens, why would we ever seek to improve?

Ultimately, those suffering from pathological liberalism may have too much regard for others and too little self-respect; they may be too tolerant of uncertainty and novelty; and they may be too insensitive to potential danger. A few manifestations of this might include the mayor of Florence starting a ‘Hug a Chinese’ campaign to fight racism at the start of COVID-19; a pop-up restaurant in Toronto where all the chefs have Aids; and Drag Queen Storytime, where toddlers are read to in public libraries by crossdressing fetishists.

That’s not to say the aforementioned traits are inherently bad. Such liberalism has produced some societal benefits that we all enjoy, of course. The opposing argument could be — and frequently is — made about conservatives being too closed-minded and intolerant. These two forces act on one another in a sort-of Hegelian dialectic, like yin and yang, with the resulting tension keeping society in motion. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1903) noted that ‘the two parties which divide the state, the party of conservatism and that of innovation, are very old, and have disputed the possession of the world ever since it was made.’

Rather, the issue is when the pendulum swings too far in one direction: ‘All things in moderation, including moderation,’ as Oscar Wilde said. Liberals control academia, the press, and Hollywood and are tightening their stranglehold on the internet day by day. In light of pathological liberalism, can we be sure these institutions are safe in only their hands?