

# Destructive Ideologies

J. Christopher Cohrs, Queen's University Belfast

Intergroup Conflict: Bridging Social Psychology and Peace  
Perspectives, Amherst, MA, 18–20 June 2010

# Overview

- ▶ Definitions of ideology
- ▶ Ideology at the individual level
- ▶ Ideology at the societal level
- ▶ Ideology at the group level
- ▶ An integrative framework

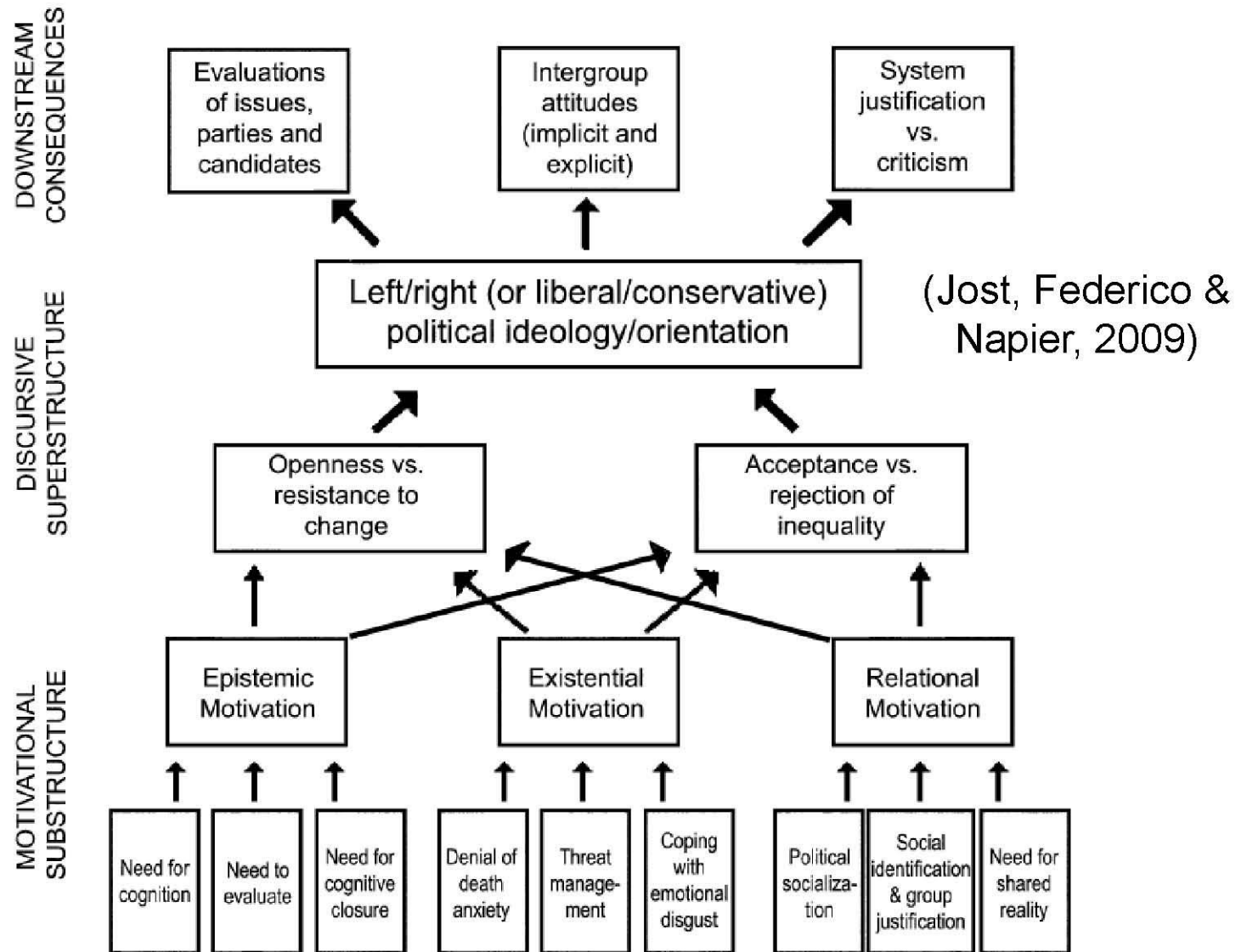
# Definitions of Ideology

- ▶ A coherent system of political cognitions, attitudes and feelings maintained by an individual
- ▶ A set of ideas that directs one's goals, expectations, and actions
- ▶ A set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved
- ▶ A vision of the ideal arrangement of society
- ▶ Evaluative; subjective; non-conscious or conscious; interconnected with values, attitudes, norms; prescriptive; abstract (Maio et al., 2003)
- ▶ Better world and nationalistic ideologies (Staub, 1999)

# Ideology at the Individual Level: The One-Dimensional View

- ▶ Liberalism–conservatism (left–right)
  1. Advocating versus resisting social change (as opposed to tradition, stability, status quo)
  2. Rejecting versus accepting inequality
- ▶ Correlated for historical reasons
- ▶ Easy and frequent use in political discourse
- ▶ Rooted in interrelated psychological motives (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski & Sulloway, 2003)





**Figure 1**

The motivational substructure, discursive superstructure, and downstream consequences of political ideology.

# Limitations

- ▶ Based mostly on data from Western countries
- ▶ Rationale for one-dimensional model context-bound: correlation for historical reasons
- ▶ “It is at least conceivable that the two core aspects of left-right ideology are decoupled or even negatively correlated in socialist or communist regimes...” (Jost et al., 2009, p. 329)

# Ideology at the Individual Level: The Two-Dimensional View

- ▶ Social/cultural and economic conservatism (e.g., Middendorp, 1991)
- ▶ Moral regulation–individual freedom and compassion–competition (Ashton et al., 2003)
- ▶ Right–wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation (e.g., Duckitt, 2001)
- ▶ Empirically not fully uncorrelated; but differential correlations and interrelation moderated

# Implications for Intergroup Conflict

- ▶ Correlations of ideology with
  - Prejudice (e.g. Altemeyer, 1998)
  - Attitudes to human rights (e.g. Cohrs et al., 2005a)
  - Militaristic attitudes (e.g. Cohrs et al., 2005b)
  - Political behaviour (e.g. Van Hiel et al., 2007)
- ▶ Decontextualized ... but some studies examined correlates in conflict contexts
- ▶ Unclear how *individual* ideology affects *intergroup* and *societal* violence



# Ideology at the Societal Level

- ▶ Three fundamental questions all societies face (Douglas, 1966; Schwartz, 2006):
  1. What is the appropriate relationship between the individual and society?
    - individual autonomy vs. social embeddedness/control
  2. What is the appropriate way of guaranteeing that necessary tasks are done?
    - hierarchies/fixed roles vs. egalitarianism/altruism
  3. What is the appropriate relationship of society to its natural and social environment?
    - mastery/exploitation vs. harmony/adaptation
- ▶ Ideologies then refer to different societal preferences in response to these questions.

# Ideology at the Societal Level

- ▶ Cultural preconditions of destructive ideologies (Staub, 1999)
  - Strong respect for authority
  - Monolithic/hierarchical vs. pluralistic society
- ▶ Schwartz's (2006) theory of cultural values
- ▶ Basabe & Valencia (2007): Culture of peace
- ▶ Fischer & Hanke (2009): Global peace index

# Ideology at the Group Level

- ▶ Ideologies shared within groups (van Dijk, 1998)
  - For values: race, ethnicity, gender, social class, immigrant status, religion (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004)
- ▶ Propagated by group leaders (Staub, 1999)
- ▶ Legitimizing myths created by dominant groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999)
- ▶ *Destructive* ideologies identify enemies that hinder the fulfilment of the vision (Staub, 1999)
  - Ideologies of antagonism
  - Problem/solution structure (van Dijk, 1998)

# An Attempt of Integration

- ▶ Multiple levels of analysis: societal – group – individual
- ▶ Hierarchical structure of ideology: general dimensions – specific belief systems



# Hierarchical Structure of Ideology

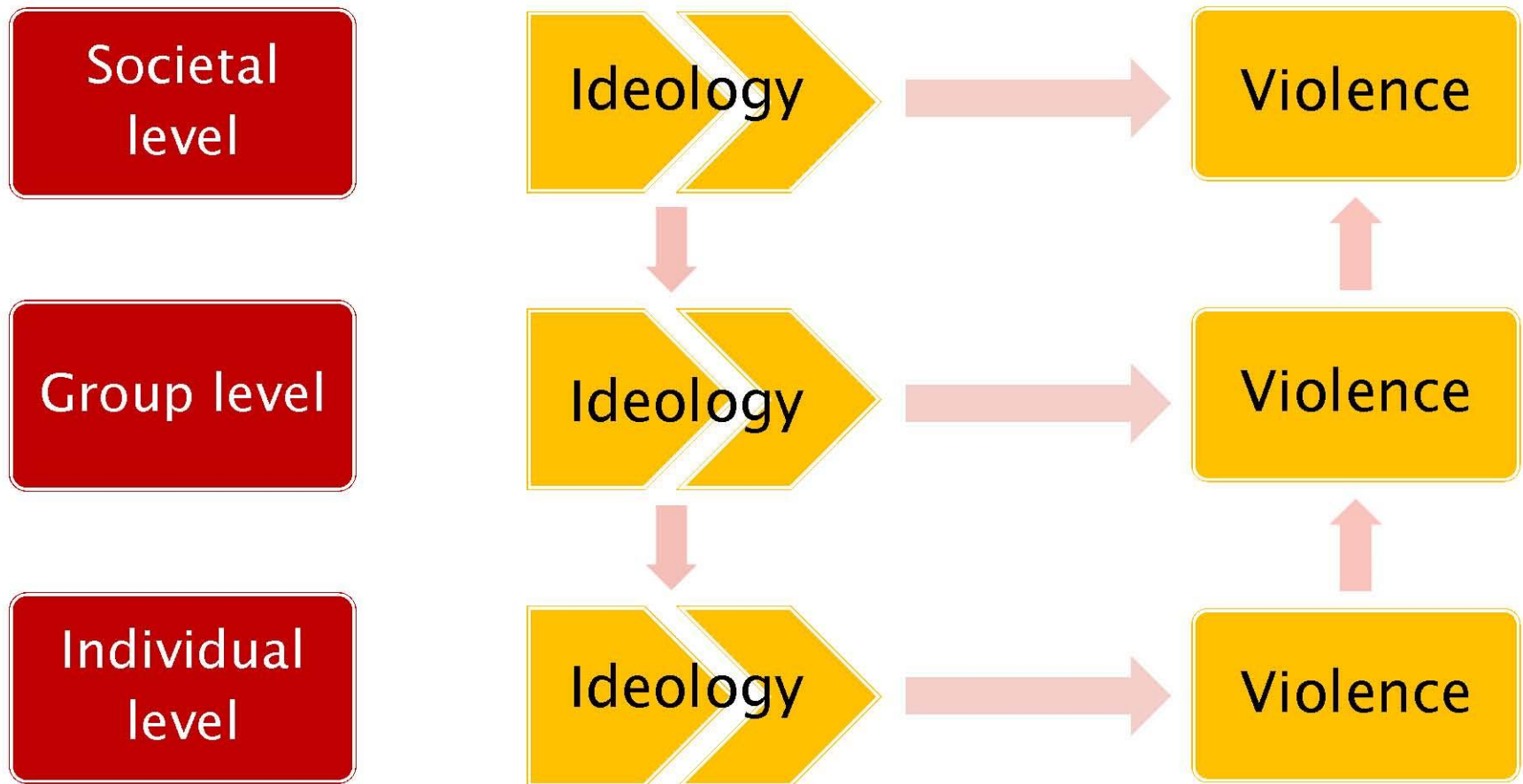
## General dimensions

1. Autonomy-embeddedness
2. Hierarchy-egalitarianism
3. Harmony-mastery

## Specific belief systems

- ▶ Societal beliefs; ideology of antagonism; legitimizing myths
- ▶ Nazi ideology: Führerprinzip, Aryan superiority, Lebensraum

# Multilevel Model of Destructive Ideologies

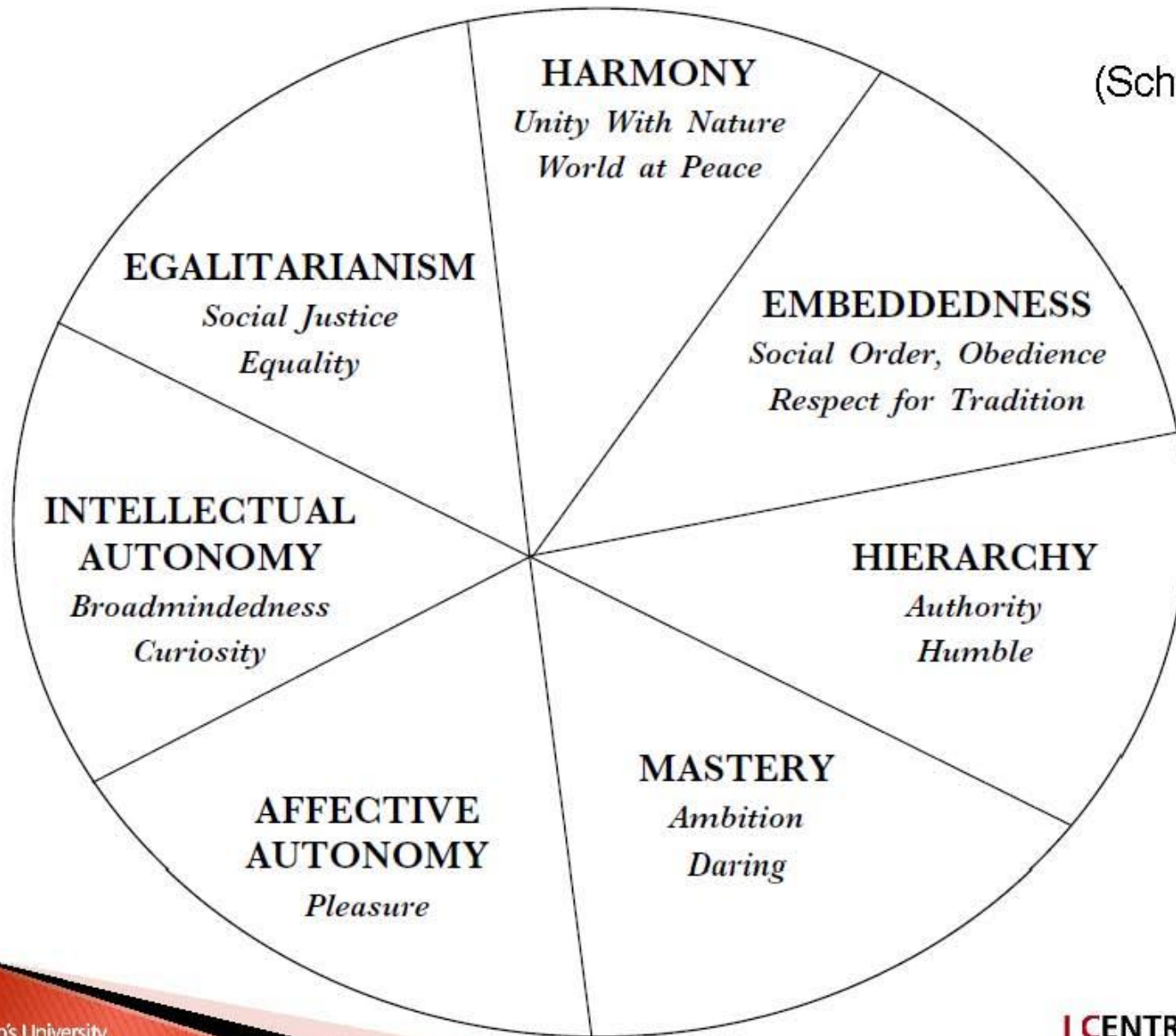


# Directions for Research

- ▶ Examine top-down effects and moderators of potency of ideology (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999)
  - Embeddedness, certainty, consensuality (hegemony), mediational strength
- ▶ Examine how ideologies become influential in predicting violence
- ▶ Examine reciprocal and bottom-up effects

**Figure 1**  
Cultural Dimensions: Prototypical Structure

(Schwartz, 2006)





# Discussion Time

*Thank You Very Much  
for Your Attention!*