Orienting vs. Multiple Perspectives: Exploring the Dynamics of Reactions to Uncertainty

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Article info

Abstract

In this article, we explore the dynamics of reactions to uncertainty through the lens of a theory of orienting vs. multiple perspectives. In offering real-life examples of situations in which people have contrasting opinions and points of view on different topics, each rooted in different psychological perspectives, we illustrate how a contrasting multiplicity of viewpoints can give rise to both socially 'disturbing' vs. 'appealing' uncertainty. We then introduce the theory, outline the mechanisms of orienting vs. multiple perspectives in reacting to socially induced uncertainty, and review some representative theory-generated research illustrations showing both the denial and the acknowledgment of multiple perspectives. Next we delve into the themes of uncertainty reduction with respect to symbolic self-completion, diffusion of gratitude, position exchange, and polycultural psychology. Finally, we explore a subset of recently observed phenomena typically ascribed to ecological threats, epistemic uncertainty, and significance loss, and interpret them through the lens of the theory. These phenomena serve as further examples of the potential effects of orienting and multiple perspectives. Finally, we draw conclusions and derive implications for researchers willing to extend and apply such integrative analysis to still different social phenomena.

Keywords: orienting, multiple perspectives, uncertainty, motivation, multiplicity in social relations

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Introduction

A diverse group of people convenes in a conference room to discuss the intricate issue of climate change. Everyone brings some beliefs, values, and perspectives to the table, resulting in a range of opinions and different interpretations of reality. One person argues that climate change is primarily caused by human activities, citing scientific studies and data showcasing the surge in greenhouse gas emissions, and emphasizes the pressing need for immediate action to mitigate its impact. Another person holds the opposing view, claiming that climate change is a natural phenomenon and not significantly influenced by human actions, and points to historical climate cycles by arguing that current changes are within the normal range of variability. A third participant adopts a more nuanced stance, recognizing the influence of human activities on climate change while also questioning the extent of their impact. As the discussion progresses, it becomes evident that these differing opinions and interpretations of reality generate some uncertainty. What will be the effects of this socially generated uncertainty? Who will embrace or reject such uncertainty? Let's consider a second example.

In a stimulating university debate club, a topic is presented for discussion: the effects of social media on society. The club members, known for their diverse backgrounds and a shared passion for intellectual exploration, enthusiastically participate in a lively debate. One member argues that social media has transformed communication, enabling individuals to connect globally and share diverse viewpoints. Emphasizing the positive aspects, they highlight increased access to information, amplification of marginalized voices, and the ability to mobilize for social causes. In contrast, another member asserts that social media has contributed to the deterioration of genuine human connection, and expresses concerns about the rise in online bullying, the spread of misinformation, and the addictive nature of social media platforms, which can lead to negative social effects. A third member adopts a still different position, recognizing both the benefits and drawbacks of social media. This person highlights the potential for online communities to foster dialogue and understanding, but also cautions against the risks of echo chambers and the manipulation of public opinion through targeted algorithms. Once more, as the debate unfolds, such heterogeneity of opinions and interpretations of reality generates uncertainty. How will people react to this uncertainty? Again, who will welcome or reject such socially generated uncertainty?

From the examples above it is evident that a collection of different perspectives and diverse 'truths,' even in stark contrast with each other, can be disturbing for some and intriguing for others. The uncertainty arising from not knowing whether social media is beneficial or harmful, for example, or from *simultaneously* believing in both these truths, is something to avoid for some individuals and stimulating for others. The latter might describe this coexistence of diverse and contrasting subjective truths not only as non-disturbing but also interesting, fascinating, or even inspiring—they will savor and *appreciate* multiplicity. In both the above illustrations, individuals present compelling arguments supporting their own viewpoints and perspectives, thus possibly rendering the group

divided and uncertain about the most 'accurate' understanding of the situation. When confronted with uncertainty with a goal-directed state of mind, it is evident that some people react by attempting to *eliminate* that uncertainty-bound, 'noxious' psychological condition. They may want to turn to clear, univocal, and sometimes drastic—but *unambiguos*—solutions (e.g., Brizi et al., 2016; Greenberg et al., 1986; Griffin et al., 1995; Kruglanski, 1989; 2004; Kruglanski et al., 2006; Levine, 1985; Mannetti et al., 2007; Orehek & Weaverling, 2017; Staw et al., 1981; Stephan et al., 2000; Wicklund, 1997a; 1998; see also Bradac, 2001, and Guerin, 2001, for a critical stance; cf. Festinger, 1954). Others, instead, remain open and welcome the multiplicity of perspectives present within the social milieu (e.g., Maddi, 1968; McAlister & Pessemier, 1982; Silvia, 2008; Szumowska & Kruglanski, 2020; see also Pantaleo, 2011a).

For reasons that will be clarified in the following, individuals reacting with *openness* and *appreciation* to multiplicity might even be grateful for and actively enjoy the contrasting views entailed in a diversity of opinions and standpoints. Where does this readiness to welcome, even embrace uncertainty entailed in multiple perspectives stem from? And, more generally, how do people respond to socially generated and subjectively 'disturbing' vs. 'appealing' uncertainty—and why?

Orienting vs. Multiple Perspectives

Our answer is rooted in a theory of physical/biological orienting vs. multiple psychological perspectives (Wicklund, 1994; 1999; Pantaleo, 1997; 2000; Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011; Pantaleo & Wicklund, 2000; 2001; Wicklund & Pantaleo, 2012). The theory posits an overriding psychological dimension along which humans move as a consequence of the interplay of two *opposing forces*, or causal factors: physical/biological threats, and the internalization of multiple perspectives. On the one hand, there are physical/biological threats, including—some instances among others—those arising from strong anxiety inductions; deprivations; social, physical and biological pressures; physical/biological hazards; sudden crisis in the social and material surroundings; strong need states; strong states of commitment; impending action; overstimulation to the point of confusion; acute lapses of competence; the sudden functioning of instincts (e.g., sex, hunger); or any similar conditions with strong motivational and emotional connotations. All of these factors push individuals, groups, or broader social units toward the *orienting extreme* of the continuum. In the psychological state of orienting, a leaning towards univocal, clear-cut, and ultimately 'correct' and long-lasting physical/biological solutions will tend to dominate.

Furthermore, the theory states that people in a state of orienting tend to disregard and reject the multiple perspectives and points of view typically offered in heterogeneous social milieus, in a typically self-centered and egocentric way. Given the onset of the orienting reaction, the ability for (multiple) perspective-taking diminishes (e.g., Wicklund & Steins, 1996) because, in this psychological state, individuals focus on achieving—essentially for themselves and their group—a factual, tangible, and physically/biologically satisfying end state.

When in a state of *orienting*, a general psychological totalitarian orientation towards 'physical', 'tangible', 'unambiguous', and 'correct' physical/biological solutions comes to dominate (e.g., towards the 'right' or 'true' opinion among an array of different opinions), this producing an evident flight from ambiguity (see Levine, 1985). In such a motivated condition, of course, there is no inclination to embrace socially generated uncertainties in the form of subjectively appealing *multiple* standpoints and perspectives.

On the other hand, (a) a collection of *intense* and *varied* experiences made through unconstrained imitation of others who offer variability, active role-playing and improvisation of various positions and different social roles, accompanied by interest, curiosity, and the like (e.g. Bandura, 1977; Berlyne, 1968; Davies & Harre, 1990; deCharms, 1968; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Faison, 1977; G.H. Mead, 1934; Piaget, 1966; Silvia, 2008), in (b) *diverse* social settings (situations that offer heterogeneity of standpoints and interpretative angles), leads, in the appropriate and suitable conditions, to the *internalization*—i.e. long-term appropriation—of that multiplicity of perspectives (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gillespie & Martin, 2014; G.H. Mead, 1934; Pantaleo, 2005a; Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011; Shibutani, 1955; Vygotsky, 1978; Wicklund, 1989; 1997b; Wicklund et al., 1988). Active internalization of multiple standpoints contrasts the orienting response, pushing the person toward the *multiple perspectives extreme* of the continuum.

The fundamental point, here, is that the theory considers active, intense and varied social experience not only as a counterforce (e.g., Lewin, 1931; 1943) to the narrowing of multiplicity (i.e., as a dynamic factor contrasting the onset and intensity of orienting) but also—if strong enough—as a causal factor capable of fostering people's appreciation, even enjoyment, of a multiplicity of perspectives and individual and group standpoints. In such a situation, the uncertainty stemming from the presence of social diversity, when matched with an adequate repertoire of *internalized* multiple perspectives, is not only acknowledged and respected, but also actively embraced and further explored (Pantaleo, 2004a; 2004b; see also Pantaleo, 2005a; 2005b; 2011b; Wicklund, 2007).

The straightforward implication, as spelled out by the theory, is that cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral orienting vs. multiple perspectives outcomes will depend directly on the *relative strength of the two opposing forces*. As long as the multiple-perspective force prevails, people (or groups) who have come to dwell in multiple perspectives on the basis of *active* internalization of multiplicity, will be able to admit and even welcome social heterogeneity and socially diverse opinions and repertoires. They will feel attracted to others who offer variability and somewhat divergent, even contrasting perspectives and points of view. By contrast, strong physical biological threats should reduce, instead, the breath of socially allowed perspectives and points of view, and transform social life accordingly, in an *orienting* enterprise.

At this point, we should highlight another important aspect—that, according to the theory of orienting vs. multiple perspectives, humans may also *move* along the continuum. The two forms of social interaction depicted above, in fact, represent the extremities of a psychological continuum of orienting vs. multiple perspectives. The theory explicitly avoids positing two fixed and separate categories of individuals, or people, or groups and broader social units, each interacting according to a single, characteristic modality (orienting vs. multiple perspectives). Rather, individuals (and broader social units) may shift their perception of the social landscape, and subsequently move either more toward the orienting end of the continuum or toward the multiple-perspectives end. Their actions and responses will then depend on the relative (contemporary and accumulated) strength—i.e., the *resultant*—of the two mutually opposing forces, or vectors (Lewin, 1931; 1943).

From this theoretical angle, reactions to uncertainty will ultimately be contingent on the relative position that an individual or broader social unit occupies along the *continuum* of orienting vs. multiple perspectives. This position, in turn, results from the interplay of two opposing forces, one pushing towards the orienting extreme as a function of *physical/biological threats*, which orient the person towards corresponding physical/biological solutions, the other towards the multiple perspectives extreme, as a function of the active *internalization* of multiple social standpoints and perspectives in appropriate internalization conditions (e.g., Pantaleo, 2005a; Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011). The relative position of the individual along the continuum, thus, indicates the *psychological state* with which the person is expected to *react to uncertainty* given a certain constellation of forces pushing either towards the 'orienting' or the 'multiple perspectives' extremes of the continuum (Wicklund, 1994; 1999; Pantaleo, 1997; 2000; Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011; Pantaleo & Wicklund, 2000; 2001; Wicklund & Pantaleo, 2012; cf. Wicklund, 1990).

Note, however, that reactions to uncertainty are not solely determined by situational factors. Through the opposite workings of the process depicted above (two opposing forces), specific reactions in terms of 'orienting' vs. 'multiple perspectives' may well *crystallize* and be passed through generations of individuals and broader social units, thus resulting in relatively long-lasting inclinations, proclivities, and clusters of seemingly stable orienting vs. multiple perspectives 'personalities'. Furthermore, they can also take the form of analogous and corresponding *developmental,* and even *cross-cultural* differences (Pantaleo, 1997; 2000; Pantaleo & Wicklund, 2001, pp. 17-22). In other words, in this article, we will be necessarily dealing—from a theoretical point of view—with psychological outcomes that extend *beyond* purely situationally-determined reactions to uncertainty. While we do not posit the existence of any a-priori 'personality' of orienting vs. multiple perspectives, we see the possibility for such an inclination (leaning, tendency, orientation—thus 'personality') to develop and crystallize in the unbalanced (and prolonged) interplay of the two opposing forces (Lewin, 1931; see Pantaleo, 1997; 2000; Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011; Pantaleo & Wicklund, 2000; 2001; Wicklund, 1994; 1999).

Some Paradigmatic Illustration from Research

In the following we will briefly focus on some paradigmatic illustrations of the workings of orienting vs. multiple perspectives.

Physical/Biological Threats and the Denial of Multiple Perspectives

In a seminal study by Pantaleo (Pantaleo, 1997; 2002, Study 1) physical/biological threat was manipulated to produce intolerance of opinions allegedly expressed by different people. In this paradigmatic experiment, participants were initially asked to read a variety of contrasting opinions on the theme 'lying' (e.g., 'One cannot avoid lying if one wants to succeed' – Gerd F., retailer; 'Lying is immoral' – Christian B., nurse; 'A person who lies has no phantasy' – Helga B., Manager; and the like). Subsequently, they were instructed to delete all opinions they could 'absolutely not allow to exist.' Half of them were then requested to describe a close-up of a woman expressing a neutral mood (control condition); the other half a close-up of the same person, this time retouched so as to show a contagious skin disease and a grimace of pain. Participants in this condition were also asked to elaborate on what would have happened in their lives if they had discovered they contracted the infectious disease themselves (threat condition). Participants from both conditions were then asked to read a new set of contrasting opinions on a different theme (in that specific instance, about the pros and cons of watching television) and, again, to delete all opinions they could 'absolutely not allow to exist.' The two themes ('lying' and 'watching television') were balanced across conditions. As predicted, participants in the control condition deleted (i.e., denied) roughly the same proportion of opinions both prior and after exposure to the neutral picture, whereas participants in the experimental condition, after exposure to physical/biological threat, deleted a significantly higher proportion of opinions, on *both* sides of the issue.

A second experiment (Pantaleo, 1997; 2002, Study 2) employed a similar research design and replicated the results of the first study. Moreover, this second study estimated also participants' background of multiple perspectives in terms of the amount of intense and differentiated social contact people reported at the outset of the experiment. Results crucially revealed that people who rejected others' opinions and points of view were also those with a comparatively more limited experience of multiple perspectives. Turning around the issue, this pattern of results also suggested that people with a substantial background of multiple contacts and internalized perspectives were better able, by contrast, to *resist* physical/biological threat, if compared with people with less varied social experience (i.e., the ones who denied multiple perspectives to exist; see also Pantaleo, 2001a; Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011).

Forced Compliance and the Opening to Multiple Perspectives

According to the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1956; Brehm, 2007; Brehm & Cohen, 1962; see also Harmon-Jones, 2019), the paradigm of forced compliance can be used to prompt attitude change in favor of an advocated counter-attitudinal position (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). For instance, if a person against smoking is induced to argue in favor of smoking, such counter-attitudinal advocacy should produce dissonance accompanied by psychological discomfort, an aversive tension state that can be reduced by changing attitude in favor of smoking (i.e., the counter-attitudinal position).

The paradigm of forced compliance, on the other hand, can also be interpreted as a procedure that typically prompts the *internalization of a new perspective*, that is the psychological assimilation of the advocated new viewpoint (e.g., through active role-playing of the novel attitudinal position). According to the theory of multiple perspectives (Pantaleo, 1997; Wicklund, 1999; Pantaleo & Wicklund, 2000; 2001; Wicklund & Pantaleo, 2012), to the extent that the new (counter-attitudinal) perspective is appropriated, this perspective will come to coexist—as any other internalized standpoint—with the initial attitudinal stance, this furthering the psychological condition of multiple perspectives (Wicklund & Brehm, 2001; 2004).

In a seminal study on a reinterpretation of forced compliance, Pantaleo (1999) run an experiment with a sample of non-smokers. Participants assigned to the experimental group wrote counter-attitudinal statements emphasizing the positive aspects of smoking. By contrast, in the control group (yoked design), each participant red the arguments written by his or her matched respondent. All participants then listened to a tape-recorded discussion between a person endorsing the participant's original standpoint and another person arguing for the *opposite* view, and expressed their opinions about the controversial discussion. Opinions were provided on three separate dependent measures by evaluating (a) the new, counter-attitudinal position; (b) the old, own initial position, and (c) *both* standpoints simultaneously. The findings showed that people in the experimental group (forced compliance) tended to agree with both positions simultaneously, more than the passive controls, who actually rejected this possibility. Importantly, people assigned to the experimental (forced compliance) group continued to agree, simultaneously, with their old, initial position—this instantiating the coexistence of *both* attitudinal standpoints and, thereby, people's opening to multiple perspectives (see also Brehm, 2004, p. 253; Pantaleo, 2006; Pantaleo & Wollschläger, 2001).

A parallel illustration can be found in a study by Pantaleo (2001, pp. 173-181) ran, on purpose, in an explicit *intergroup* setting to extend the theoretical breath of orienting vs. multiple perspectives. Participants (non-smokers) were randomly assigned either to (a) a forced compliance counter-attitudinal condition (arguing in favor of smoking), (b) a passive exposure to the same information condition, or (c) a control condition (arguing for an irrelevant theme). All participants red a discussion between two people, one expressing arguments against smoking (an *ingroup* member), the other in favor of smoking (an *outgroup* member). Participants then expressed their agreement with each of three dependent measures, in terms of how much they favored (a) the opinion of the ingroup member (i.e., their own initial opinion); (b) the opinion of the outgroup member; and (c) *both* the opinions simultaneously. Whereas people (i.e., non-smokers who had never smoked in their lives) in either the control group or the passive exposure condition did not substantially change their views, participants in the forced compliance condition endorsed, once more, *both* positions simultaneously while continuing to endorse, separately, also their initial (ingroup) opinion *and* the counter-

attitudinal (outgroup) argument. These results amount, again, to an *opening* to multiple perspectives (vs. rejecting the uncertainty-generating multiplicity of contrasting views) stimulated by the forced compliance paradigm (see also Pantaleo, 2001b). Notably, separate measurements of participants degree of *social identification* with non-smokers (i.e., the *ingroup* of people endorsing opinions against smoking) vs. smokers in general (i.e., the outgroup of people endorsing opinions in favor of smoking), introduced as a further dependent variable, clearly indicated that in the forced compliance condition people took a substantial neutral stance. This reflects, again, the acknowledgment of *both*—thus multiple—standpoints (see Brehm, 2004, pp. 253). Further, social identification with non-smokers (the ingroup) was still clearly psychologically present to participants in the forced compliance condition—but comparatively more pronounced, of course, in the other conditions (control, and passive exposure).

The reader will recognize that forced compliance is *not* the only or ideal means to produce the internalization of multiple perspectives. This paradigm can only approximate the psychological appropriation of a new set of values and perspectives (Wicklund & Brehm, 2004). For internalization to stay strong in one's behavioral repertoire, we need *active* imitation, repeated role-playing, improvisation, and the like, on a vast and *differentiated* (thus *multiple*) array of social values and attitudinal standings. In other words, to produce a profound internalization of multiple perspectives, we need *intense*, *varied* and suitable (e.g. Pantaleo, 2005a; Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011) social experiences—an outright *social immersion*—in new and diverse social settings (Pantaleo, 1997; Pantaleo & Wicklund, 2001; Wicklund, 1999; Wicklund & Brehm, 2004).

Broadening the Domain of Application

Recent empirical findings from various research areas in psychology can also be explored through the lens of the theory of orienting vs. multiple perspectives. In the paragraphs that follow, we offer a concise and necessarily selective overview of how the concepts of orienting versus multiple perspectives could be used to look at seemingly distant yet interconnected research domains. Our intention is to encourage the integration of psychological insights and empirical research under a few overarching theoretical principles. Readers with expertise in the field can enhance this willingly and necessarily limited set of illustrative examples by referring to additional empirical data, or exploring even different investigations that, in their judgment, meet the essential criteria for conducting an analysis in terms of 'orienting' versus 'multiple perspectives' in the broader psychological arenas, in their areas of interest.

Uncertainty Reduction Through Symbolic Self-Completion

A first instance comes from studies on striving for definite identity goals through self-symbolizing on social media (Sciara et al., 2023). In these studies, people feeling a sense of incompleteness in their academic path try to convey to others a consistent, symbolic, and *univocal* image of themselves to others, thereby suppressing the multiplicity of perspectives they would normally express when referring to themselves. Further studies, however, clarify that as soon as such incomplete people are given the possibility to resolve their incompleteness via online self-symbolizing, the *orienting* effects of incomplete identity goals (e.g., impulsiveness in online posting, uninterest in others' posted content, feelings of irritation, and narrowing of attention) are significantly reduced (Sciara et al., 2022).

Gratitude on Social Media and Opening to Others

A recent study by Sciara et al. (2021) points to another theoretically-relevant phenomenon that takes the form of a preliminary *opening to multiple perspectives* in certain social settings initially characterized by computer-mediated communication, then by real life face-to-face interactions and social exchange. In summarizing their findings, the authors comment that "… observing others' exchange of grateful posts/comments on Facebook appeared to enhance participants' in-person expression of gratitude (i.e., self-reported gratitude expression within face-to-face interactions) […]" (Sciara et al., 2021, p. 1). In other words, observing someone acting gratefully towards another person would appear first to prompt imitation (Bandura, 1977) of the other, then to contribute to diffusion of societal positive behaviors and attitudes possibly grounded in grateful interactions.

Such face-to-face diffusion of gratitude, spreading from computer-mediated environments to a multitude of offline in-person exchanges, nicely instantiates what Pantaleo and Wicklund (2012) termed 'social performance' (or, 'performance for [or, to the benefit of] the other')—this amounting to the (grateful) acknowledgment of others' deed, ideas, and points of view in furthering social functioning. From our theoretical perspective, this mutually-acknowledged multiplicity of opinions and points of view, exchanged and appropriated in grateful social interactions, should work against several forms of undesirable—and noxious—socially-generated uncertainty.

Position Exchange and Polycultural Psychology

Still a different line of thought is anchored in the 'discursive production of selves' (Davies & Harre, 1990). From such theoretical angle, rooted in symbolic interactionism (e.g., G.H. Mead, 1934; Shibutani, 1955), in the course of their lives people try out a multiplicity of roles, and come to embody a multiplicity of distinct positions. Depending on the situation, then, they draw on that multiplicity of perspectives and select *the most appropriate* role for interacting suitably with other people in different contexts and situations (Gillespie & Martin, 2014). Is it a case of orienting or multiple perspectives? Given the explicit, exclusionary *action orientation* entailed in the above theoretical accounts (i.e., the surfacing of one self-aspect or role at a given time, to at least the momentary exclusion of the other), we would propend for the first answer—despite the *potential* given by the presence of an ostensible plurality of selves, or roles, encountered, enacted, and actively internalized in the social arena.

Parallel ideas can be found also in some relatively recent orientations of cultural psychology, for instance in the subfield of polycultural psychology (e.g., Morris et al., 2015). The basic idea is that people from different cultural milieus typically encounter and come to represent a multiplicity of cultural perspectives (see also Pantaleo, 1997; 2000; Pantaleo & Wicklund, 2001). In so doing, they show that almost everyone is potentially able to 'switch' back and forth between different identities and different cultural ways of being and acting in the world (e.g., Chinese identity, American identity; Doucerain et al., 2023). Again, in both position exchange theory and polycultural psychology, differing roles and cultural identities, though potentially psychologically present to the person, are *instrumentally* brought to life only when necessary, and in specific contexts, this instantiating an *orienting* response. The adoption of a cultural identity appropriate to a given context—and thus to a single, exclusionary perspective—is indeed functional to deal with *that* specific situation, and helps individuals to *orient* their psychological states towards characteristic aspects of contingent goals, rather than to open to, and actively enjoy, multiple psychological perspectives (Pantaleo, 1997; 2005a; 2011a; Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011; Pantaleo & Wicklund, 2001; Wicklund, 1999; Wicklund & Pantaleo, 2012).

Ecological Threats, Epistemic Uncertainty, Significance Loss

In a recent study by Contu et al. (2023a), we see how ecological threats, as instantiated by the COVID-19 pandemics and the war in Ukraine, can activate people's need for cognitive closure (Kruglanski, 1989; 2004) and, thereby, *orient*—in our language—and intensify people's desire for stringent norms (i.e., 'cultural tightness' in the language of Gelfand et al., 2011) and strong leadership in political affairs. Parallel results stem from a motivation to *avoid uncertainty,* which is shown to activate, again, people's need for closure and results, again, in increased prejudice towards 'women as leaders' (vs. 'as followers') as seen in the attribution of unchanging and stable (i.e., rigid) characteristics to the target group (Contu et al., 2024a). This reported *rigidity* in the ascription of an unwavering, permanent essence to women in this research, and the consequent intensification of a prejudicial stance towards that target group stemming from a strong motivation to avoid uncertainty, nicely instantiates, once again, the workings of *orienting* (vs. multiple perspectives).

In a similar vein, Albarello et al. (2023) recently showed that a heightened need for closure (Kruglanski, 1989; 2004) can also enhance people's general orientation towards authority, loyalty to the ingroup, and purity (i.e., the so-called 'binding moral foundations', Graham et al., 2011), and, thereby, increase the strength of prejudice towards different target groups. Again, from our theoretical angle, this would amount to people's closing down to a multiplicity of different perspectives and points of view otherwise present in the social arena. A further theoretical and empirical elaboration on the theme of prejudice (Contu et al., 2024b), adds to the above results, by showing that a strong need for closure is also able to intensify, again, prejudice towards women in leadership roles, this time intensifying an orientation towards social dominance (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), considered as a mediating variable

between need for closure, on the one hand, and prejudice, on the other. In these examples, both the intensification of social dominance and prejudice towards women, as instigated by the need for cognitive closure seems to fit, once again, with our argument on the causal factors that trigger and intensify the *orienting* response (as opposed to the psychological stance characterized by the coexistence of multiple perspectives).

Not least, new results based on significance-quest theory (Kruglanski et al., 2022) complement the above picture. In a study by Contu et al. (2023b), a threatening loss of significance—presumably affecting people's self-esteem—is shown to bring about obsessive (i.e., exclusionary) passion towards one's romantic partner and further extreme reactions towards the partner. In our view, this represents a novel, interesting finding conceptually reproduced also by Contu et al. (2023c). In these two instances, again, we see how the instigation of quite extreme *orienting* responses due to the experience of a substantial loss of personal significance and meaning (cf. Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011, p. 232) works against the acknowledgment of others' multiple perspectives and points of view, which would instead amount to *more-than-one* fixed, objectified, and stereotypical essence ('women as followers').

Convergence and Departure of Theoretical Predictions

The condition of 'orienting' shares a common focus with several converging theoretical ideas positing strong needs for 'closure' (e.g., Kruglanski, 1989; 2004), 'cognition' (originally, Cohen et al., 1955; then, Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; see Wicklund, 1990, p. 28), or 'structure' (e.g., Bar-Tal et al., 1999) as their starting point, and also with a variety of 'threat-rigidity' (e.g., Griffin et al., 1995; Staw et al., 1981) and 'threat-univocal meaning' (e.g., Hoffmann, 1997) reactions to uncertainty. This means that, given some basic threatening/alarming conditions, mostly coupled with correspondingly heightened (personality-bound or situationally induced) needs for 'closure', definite 'structure', or coherent 'cognitions', people will characteristically tend to *orient* themselves towards clear-cut, univocal, stable, and unambiguous solutions (Pantaleo, 2002, pp. 515-516; Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011, p. 232). In such instances, all theoretical predictions stemming from the above theories and models will tend to converge, whatever the explanatory processes are (e.g., 'costs and benefits' of attaining vs. avoiding/differing closure; the workings of more basic processes of tension-reduction, or the presence of strong drive states followed by the enactment of specific habits and rituals oriented at reducing uncertainty, etc.).

The situation is less clear, however, if we consider the opposite theoretical end of 'closure'—or, what happens in a state characterized by the *absence* of the above instigators and need states. What will it happen when, for instance, we obtain a score close to 'zero' in a typical need for 'closure', 'structure', or 'cognition' scale—that is, when a certain need for closure, structure, or cognition is either not 'naturally' present (e.g., as an individual difference variable), or has not been instigated? In our view, the opposite of a psychological state determined,

for example, by a strong need for closure (also pointed to, in the scientific literature, as a strong 'need to *avoid* closure', e.g. Webster & Kruglanski, 1994; see also Kruglanski, 1989; 2004; cf. Kosic et al., 2004, p. 798) will hardly amount, automatically, to the active search, even enjoyment, of multiple (and perhaps even logically inconsistent and conflicting) opinions and points of view. *Non-closure* or attempts to postpone or *avoid closure* do not equal openness in the sense of multiple perspectives.

It is at this junction that the theory of orienting vs. multiple perspectives sharply departs from all of the above theories and models and, by positing the active *internalization* of multiple opinions and points of views—as spelled out throughout this article—, also predicts the opening to and even the active, cherishing appreciation of multiple psychological perspectives and realities (e.g., Pantaleo, 1997; 2005a; 2005b; Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011; Pantaleo & Wicklund, 2000; 2001; Wicklund, 1994; 1999; Wicklund & Pantaleo, 2012) when reacting to uncertainty.

Let's consider a further conclusive instance based on the 'costs and benefits' of attaining vs. avoiding closure (Kruglanski, 1989; 2004; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994; see also Kosic et al., 2004, p. 798) in reacting to a multiplicity of divergent opinions. Take, for instance, the case of a person who is strongly inclined to *reject* others' different and unwelcome opinions on a certain issue (e.g., methods for educating young generations) but, at the same time, even more strongly fears social disapproval if overtly rejecting those opinions, i.e. if publicly leaving a most wished-for stance of *'political correctness.'* In such a situation, in the eyes of our social actor, the *costs* of closure (e.g., social ostracism) would most probably outweigh the expected *benefits* (e.g., squelching socially induced ambiguity). That person should consequently sense a strong need to *avoid* closure—and should think and act accordingly. In other words, from this theoretical angle, we would (paradoxically) expect that person to remain *'open'* (i.e., actually not closed, or trying to avoid closure) to such a multiplicity of unwelcome perspectives. But would this 'openness' really stand for (*privately*) appreciating those (*privately rejected*) opinions and perspectives? We doubt that that would be the case.

Conclusions and Implications

Given the above considerations, we may now briefly return to the theme of socially generated 'disturbing' vs. 'appealing' uncertainty introduced at the outset of this article and consider one further example of contrasting views on both sides of an issue. Imagine two people discussing the effects of violent video games on aggression, whereby one person argues that exposure to violent video games increases aggressive behavior, citing studies that show a link between the two. This perspective implies that stricter regulations on video game content would be necessary to protect society from potential harm. On the other hand, the other person asserts that, unfortunately, there is no conclusive evidence demonstrating a direct causal link between violent video games and real-world aggression and emphasizes that

individual factors such as education and mental health typically play a more significant role in determining aggressive behavior.

It is evident, from this example, that the contrasting views on the topic of violent videogames may generate *'disturbing' uncertainty* for some individuals. They may feel unsettled by the conflicting arguments, and unsure about the truth or the potential effects of video games. From our theoretical angle, such uncertainty may stem from a desire for a clear and definite answer, that aligns with preconceived notions, and fears, about the potential consequences of wrong judgments. This would be typical of a psychological state of *orienting*, ultimately rooted in physical/biological threats (Wicklund, 1994; 1999; Pantaleo 1997; 2000; Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011; Pantaleo & Wicklund, 2000; 2001; Wicklund & Pantaleo, 2012).

All the social scientist has to do, in this and analogous cases, is to look carefully at signs and indicators of the relative prevalence of physical/biological threats over the contrasting social (counter-) forces rooted in the active internalization of multiple perspectives (of course, the intensity of both the orienting vs. multiple perspectives forces can also be experimentally manipulated). If physical/biological threats prevail, they would push people towards the *orienting* extreme of the continuum and, characterize, thereby, their reaction to uncertainty as 'disturbing'.

On the other hand, the same contrasting views may also generate *'appealing'* uncertainty for other people, or even the same persons, provided that they are, in that very moment, *not* in orienting and also have actively internalized a repertoire of multiple perspectives. These people may want to explore the arguments from both sides of the issue, for instance by considering the potential influence of violent video games on aggression while also acknowledging the several aspects and subjective standpoints involved. These individuals may find enjoyment in the uncertainty generated by the contrasting views, may appreciate the opportunity to engage in a thought-provoking discussion, challenging their own beliefs, and exploring the nuances of the topic without feeling the need to take a clear, definite, and conclusive stance on the issue. More than that, they recognize that the truth may lie somewhere in between the extreme viewpoints, or even that each opinion has its own psychological legitimacy and, as such, they are both 'valid'.

Again, from our theoretical angle, such 'appealing' uncertainty may stem from a readiness to entertain multiple opinions, morals, values, and points of view. This time, this would be typical of a psychological state of multiple perspectives, a state rooted in the active internalization of at least two divergent perspectives, thus *multiple* psychological realities (Wicklund, 1994; 1999; Pantaleo, 1997; 2000; Pantaleo & Canessa, 2011; Pantaleo & Wicklund, 2000; 2001; Wicklund & Pantaleo, 2012).

In this case too, all the social scientist has to do, is to look—again—at signs and indicators of the relative prevalence of the social forces (i.e., the forces rooted in the active internalization of multiple perspectives) over physical/biological threats (whereby the intensity of both the orienting vs. multiple perspectives forces could also be manipulated). If those (internalized and environmental) social forces towards multiplicity prevail, they would this time push people towards the multiple perspectives extreme of the continuum and

characterize their reactions to uncertainty as 'appealing' (rather than 'disturbing').

In this latter instance, we referred on purpose to people who relish the intellectual challenge of examining different and diverse viewpoints, exploring new ideas, refining their own arguments *per se* (i.e., without any need to reduce uncertainty). These are ready to recognize that complex issues like climate change, or the effects of social media on society, or of violent videogames on aggression, cannot be reduced to a single, unitary viewpoint or a simple 'correct' solution. People accustomed to, and familiar with a multiplicity of different viewpoints and perspectives, appropriated through intense *social immersion* in those different perspectives (*multiple internalization*), will also be willing to engage with different and new standpoints, constantly challenge their own assumptions, broaden their personal/societal horizons, and highlight the importance of open dialogue and critical thinking in stimulating personal and social debate, exchange, and creativity. And in so doing, they will be the ones to be really driven by a genuine readiness to cherish the allure of multiple perspectives in addressing, with respect, controversial issues.

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