

Challenge is Not Accepted: When Belief Superiority Responds to Uncertainty and Promotes Religious Intolerance

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Abstract

The rising intolerance in Indonesia is spiking and has become more confounding due to the heated political temperature following series of government election. Religious identity is politicized in a magnitude that escalates religious fundamentalism and consequently, intolerance. Past research shown how personal uncertainty enable individuals to find closure through firm beliefs and ideologies. This article is aimed to explore how the need for closure construct belief superiority as a coping mechanism towards perceived threats of challenged worldviews, and how it potentially strengthened intolerance when supported collectively. In effort to be able to tailor an understanding, this article will review the perspectives of uncertainty-identity and the need for closure, the development of belief superiority, and how Terror Management Theory sees individuals with challenged worldview. An integrative perspective of how belief superiority manifests as a response to the need for closure inflicted by personal uncertainties is offered, and ends with a discussion on how belief superiority affecting religious intolerance as a retaliation to cope when worldview is threatened.

“But it is the same with man as with the tree. The more he seeks to rise into the height and light, the more vigorously do his roots struggle earth word, down word, into the dark, the deep - into evil.”

(Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra)

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is currently exposed to a challenging virtue of rising intolerance. Scholars and observers of Indonesian politics agree that Indonesian Islam and society is moving progressively towards conservative direction (Hamayotsu, 2013). Despite the fact that the 1998 riot and the fall of the New Order regime opened doors to democracy (McCoy, 2013), the changing political nuance accommodates social vigilantism that promotes intolerance and discriminative behaviors (Menchik, 2014). This leads the situation to a heating religious group interactions between the Muslim majority groups and the other groups which creates concerns over the threat towards liberalism and religious pluralism (McCoy, 2013). The recent democratic exercises in Indonesia, began with the 2017 Jakarta’s gubernatorial election and escalated throughout the 2019 Presidential’s election, suffers from the rising intolerance ambience. Findings from a nation-wide survey conducted by CSIS (2017) revealed alarming results on level of intolerance towards differences of ideas, values and beliefs. The result displays resistance towards leadership of different religion that the Muslim majority. Echoing to the result is the survey conducted by PPIM-UIN [2017] also reflecting on factors contributing to the rising intolerance, such as perceived threats towards the Muslim majority. The phenomenon of intolerance is also amplified by the growing spirit of religious purification movements which accommodates factors of exclusions and eschewing any forms of innovation and engagement with cultural context.

The phenomenon of intolerance in Indonesia is explained by Menchik (2014) as a result of Godly Nationalism. A term that defines an imagined community united by common, orthodox theism, and collaboratively mobilized by the state with the support of existing religious organizations. While Godly Nationalism demands citizens’ faith of God, no specific religion is enforced. Hence, Indonesia’s develop a national identity of being

exclusively religious but not particular. For this national identity to sustain, some beliefs must be privileged and any forms of deviations is not tolerated as it is perceived as threats to the preferred worldview, particularly religion.

Previous research concurred factors that lie foundations for religious intolerance. Studies conferred that personal uncertainties leads to the need for closure [Brandt & Reyna, 2010; Jost, 2006; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006]. Personal uncertainties derived from individual worldviews comprised of many things such as values, attitudes, the future, beliefs, religions, and many more. Since people usually believe that their worldviews are the superior and righteous ones [Hogg, Kruglanski & Bos, 2013; Stephan & Stephan, 1985; Stephan, Stephan, & Gudykunst, 1999], people don't respond well to being countered by others [Jacks & Cameron, 2003; Brandt, 2017; Saucier & Webster, 2010]. Hence, when the worldview is challenged, people perceive it as threats to their self and identity [Stephan & Stephan, 1985; Stephan, Stephan, & Gudykunst, 1999].

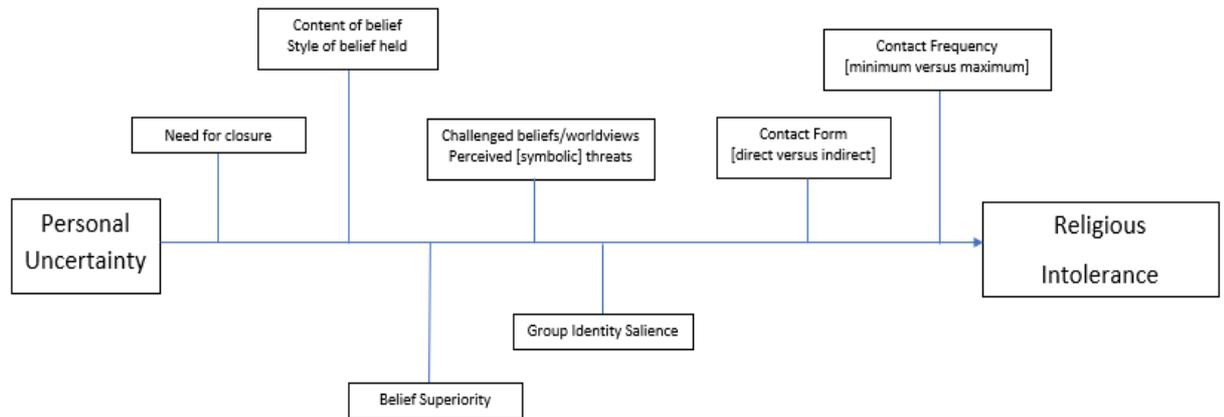
Table 1. Comparative studies on religious intolerance

Literatures on Reasons for Intolerance	Brandt & Reyna, 2010; Jost, 2006; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006	Jacks & Cameron, 2003; Brandt, 2017; Saucier & Webster, 2010	Stephan & Stephan, 1985; Stephan, Stephan, & Gudykunst, 1999	Hogg, Kruglanski & Bos, 2013; Stephan & Stephan, 1985; Stephan, Stephan, & Gudykunst, 1999	Goldman & Hogg, 2013; Hogg & Smith, 2007; Terry & Hogg, 1996; Karpov, Lisovskaya, & Barry, 2012	Walker & Pettigrew, 1984; Walker & Smith, 2002; Hogg & Adelman, 2013
Research topics	Personal uncertainty	Dislike worldviews			Believe that beliefs is better than others when	Collective identification

	and the need for closure	that are different and/or challenging	Perceived [symbolic] threats	Believe that belief is better than others	strengthen collectively, ingroup identification, group identity salience and entitativity	reduce personal uncertainty/ anxiety
Proposed Synthesis	When personal uncertainty manifests the need for closure in belief superiority, collective identity salience is needed to sustain closure and offers support to retaliate when worldview is challenged and threat is perceived.					

In effort to maintain the closure gained from their worldview, people need assurance from similar-minded people to ensure the firmness of the preferred belief and its sustainability. Collective accordance by groups with salient identity offers that assurance [Goldman & Hogg, 2016; Hogg & Smith, 2007; Terry & Hogg, 1996; Karpov, Lisovskaya, & Barry, 2012]. The collectively-shared belief then offers reduction of anxiety caused by personal uncertainty and provide closure [Walker & Pettigrew, 1984; Walker & Smith, 2002; Hogg & Adelman, 2013]. Belief superiority then become a manifestation for the need of closure. Particularly from religious point of view, the superiority develop not only from the content of the religious teachings itself, but mostly from the way belief is interpreted (Brandt & Van Tongeren, 2017). Those who interpret religious teachings literally are more prone to fundamentalism/closed-mindedness and perceived any different worldviews as threats, than those who employ symbolic approach towards the principles.

Fig. 1. Exploratory path of religious intolerance



As previous studies have mapped out factors that are contributing to traits, behaviors and predictors that explains the dynamics of religious intolerance, this paper will try to tailor an integrative, and potentially sequential dynamics, that transforms personal uncertainty to develop belief superiority and translated in religious intolerance behavior. This paper will try to walk through previous studies in relevance to intergroup relations and religious intolerance by also putting highlights on relevant constructs promoting intolerance, such as uncertainties, prejudice, perceived threats, and preconceived fundamentalism to begin exploring the details of intergroup relations and followed by how social identity being put into contexts of intergroup relations and the attitudes developed towards dissimilar others. An integrative perspective of how belief superiority manifests as a response to the need for closure inflicted by personal uncertainties is offered, and ends with a discussion on how individuals can manage uncertainties by grasping the concept of belief superiority as a way to cope when worldview is threatened.

RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Researches on intergroup contact mostly based their stemmed ideas in Allport's text of *The Nature of Prejudice*, which elaborated contact as a means of reducing prejudice. The original contact hypothesis introduced four contact conditions crucial to reduce

prejudice, such as equal status of the groups in the situation, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and authority support. As Pettigrew and Tropp [2006] concurred that a meta-analysis study indicates that the four conditions facilitate and improved outgroup attitudes, but not necessarily essential to reduce prejudice.

Recent development recognized five different facets that have characterized much of intergroup contact research over the past 20 years [Dovidio, Love, Schellhaas, & Hewstone, 2017]. Those facets are forms of contact, mediating mechanisms, moderating factors, nature and temporal stage of the intergroup exchange, and outcomes of contact. Contemporary research in forms of contact specify types of contact into direct [extended and vicarious] and indirect [imagined and virtual] contact. As stated by Pettigrew and Tropp [2006] and Brown and Hewstone [2005], intergroup contact helps increase empathy with the outgroup and reduce anxiety

According to Integrated Threat Theory [ITT] perspective, intergroup anxiety are displayed as high when people rely on their response on cognitive heuristics, namely stereotypes, and in return expressing typically negative emotions and evaluations, such as prejudice [Stephan, Stephan, & Gudykunst, 1999]. Since ITT focuses on prejudice, its ability to predict intergroup attitude is highlighting mostly on the detrimental effects of intergroup relations as induced by anxiety. As anxiety is claimed to be one of the major threats that leads to anxiety, ITT also incorporates uncertainty as a related construct that heightened prejudice.

Another perspective that is also focusing immensely on uncertainty would be coming from Uncertainty-Identity Theory [Hogg, 2007]. The key premise stated that since uncertainty creates difficulties to anticipate and plan, it empowers motives and behavior to reduce it [Hogg, 2000, 2007a, 2012]. In the light of promoting intolerance, Hogg and Adelman [2013] argued that self-uncertainty promotes individuals to incline with extreme groups. This could be the risk factors following predictions of the Uncertainty-Identity Theory that identified how people, in effort to reduce anxiety, have the tendency to be self-inclusively categorizing themselves into groups when faced with uncertainties, and would prefer groups that display clear, simple, unambiguous, consensual, and focused –

which is prototypically relevant with groups holding extreme ideologies. The logic of relationship between uncertainty and group entitativity was found across studies explaining radicalism and zealotry (Hogg, 2005, 2007; Hogg, Adelman, & Blagg, 2010; Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006).

UNCERTAINTY AND THE NEED FOR CLOSURE

Previous research connects uncertainty and defensive behavior (Niedbala & Hohman, 2018). The principle tenet of Uncertainty-Identity Theory (Hogg, 2007) claims that uncertainty creates abhorrent feelings for not being able to anticipate situations and actions. Thus, uncertainty provokes behavior that can manage anxiety and reduce uncertainty. When faced with uncertainty and in need to protect oneself, grounding one's beliefs and worldviews with like-minded people helps reduce anxiety and at the same time reinforce their worldviews collectively (Bos, Poortvliet, Maas, Miedema, & Ham, 2005). Since worldviews offer the sense of predictability, certainty, and self-worth, people will take actions to protect it from challenges and other perceived threats (Goplen & Plant, 2015).

In effort to protect and preserve their beliefs, people can also selectively avoid and isolate themselves from views that are dissent than theirs and negate strongly towards those who think differently. Uncertainty can also be managed effectively by group identification as a result of self-categorization (Hogg & Adelman, 2013). This motivation to protect and promote the ideological integrity derived from the feeling of moral superiority and in the hardships of uncertainty, people display need of closure by indicating close-mindedness and intolerance [Hogg, Kruglanski, & Bos, 2013]. Failure to accomplish the sense of being righteous and superior will result in greater anxiety due to the unfulfilled need for closure.

UNCERTAINTY AND RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

Looking into how the development takes place, the rise of fundamentalism was a response to uncertainties presented by globalization and modernization, followed by changes and some contexts of economic, social, and political stability. Religious

fundamentalism, in particular, surged as more dogmatic and intolerant towards inconsistency and ambiguity in response to their increased need for closure (Brandt & Reyna, 2010). When the need for closure is high in the presence of uncertainty, extreme groups and ideologies might offer the means of reducing anxiety. Extreme groups and ideologies, typically reflected in religious and political fundamentalism, displays intolerance in forms of a rejection of scientific advancement (Scheufele, Corley, Shih, Dalrymple, & Ho, 2009), prejudice toward a variety of outgroups (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005), and violence [Ginges, Hansen, & Norenzayan, 2009]. As further elaborated by Brandt and Reyna [2010], fundamentalism offers closure as it protects people from dissent values, provide orders and predictability.

This is echoed by other studies summaries that stated how fundamentalism works as an adaptive process to offer coherency, sense of control, and the reduction of ambiguity (Brandt & Reyna, 2010). Other studies emphasized that in effort to obtain firm knowledge, fundamentalists look for an epistemic authority or leaders figure with expertise and credentials to provide unfalsifiable truth (Kruglanski et al., 2005). The need for this firm knowledge derive from the needs to manage uncertainty due to the nature of ideologies that promote stability and conservatism (Jost, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Jost Napier, Thorisdottir, Gosling, Palfai, & Ostafin, 2007; Jost, Kruglanski, & Simon, 1999).

Rejecting those perceived upholding different values from theirs helps fundamentalists to avoid attacks and challenges on their beliefs and worldviews (e.g., Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Jackson & Esses, 1997; Mavor & Gallois, 2008), and at the same time, invalidate opposing beliefs and worldviews. The prejudice and discrimination aimed at outgroup members are considered as efforts to bolster one's cultural worldview (Das, Bushman, Bezemer, Kerkhof, & Vermeulen, 2009; Greenberg et al., 1990; Kruglanski & Webster, 1991; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2000) and also to reserve cognitive closure (Kruglanski & Webster, 1991).

TERROR MANAGEMENT THEORY

As stated by Terror Management Theory (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991; Greenberg, Koole, & Pyszczynski, 2004), individual's existential and personal significance is ultimately threatened by mortality salience. This awareness of mortality creates anxiety (Maxfield, John, & Pyszczynski, 2014) that motivates significance restoration. Reminded to personal mortality salience potentially strengthen the favored belief systems (Bassett, Van Tongeren, Green, Sonntag, & Kilpatrick, 2015). However, a study conducted by Van den Bos, Poortvliet, Maas, Miedema, and Van den Ham (2005) claimed that personal uncertainty played a greater role to moderate defense reactions of the challenged worldview, than mortality salience (Van den Bos, van Ameijde, and Van Gorp, 2006).

In order to manage the threat of personal insignificance, individuals seek attachment to social groups to be able to share their own worldview and render service to the group in effort to restore their self-esteem. As individual seeks to manage the anxiety of insignificance and uncertainties, unfalsifiable confirmation in the context of ideologies become a rewarding result for the existential quest (Friesen, Campbell & Kay, 2015) and creates susceptibility toward extreme ideas and groups (Hogg, Meehan, & Farquharson, 2010; Hogg, Sherman, Dierselhuis, Maitner, & Moffitt, 2007). Susceptibility to extreme ideas and groups open passages for religious zeal to develop. Because zeal is powerful, it continuously engages commitment to idealistic extremes that are interpreted as the morally superior by the believers and as antisocial by others. Religious zeal is strengthened by ideas of conviction for one's belief superiority and derogation of others (McGregor, Haji, Nash, & Teper, 2008). As conclude by McGregor, Haji, and Kang (2008), people search for unfalsifiable notions (such as religions) because having clarity about positive self-worth and being part of a group, offers a sense of belief accuracy and gives answer to the existential questions that is constantly challenged by mortality salience.

BELIEF SUPERIORITY

When an unfalsifiable ideology is overly self-evaluated and perceived as positive, individuals and groups begin to develop belief superiority (Tappin & McKay, 2016), which refers to a conviction that one's own or group's beliefs or attitudes are better or more

righteous than others' (Toner, Leary, Asher & Jongman-Sereno, 2013; Brandt, Evans, & Crawford, 2015; Hall & Raimi, 2018) and they are more likely to be moral compared to others (Klein & Epley, 2017). An assumption of religious superiority occurs when groups exclusivity involves beliefs that they are spiritually, religiously, and morally distinguish compared to others (Karpov, Lisovskaya & Barry, 2012), and eventually, displaying intolerance towards different ideas, values and groups.

Belief superiority was initially introduced by Saucier and Webster (2010) as part of the explanation on social vigilantism. According to Saucier and Webster [2010], belief superiority is a form of social vigilantism where individual feels the tendency to assert their 'superior' beliefs to correct others, for the 'greater good', whose opinion is considered as more ignorant. However, O'Dea, Bueno, and Saucier, (2018) later argued that social vigilantism also displays respect for others who stand by strongly to their favored beliefs. In the development, belief superiority established notions that shares similarity to several other related constructs such as moral superiority, self-righteousness, religious zeal, and ingroup glorification.

The comparative constructs was presented to give an idea of how the other related constructs shared similar characteristics with belief superiority. Self-righteousness serves the definition of one's conviction that the cherished beliefs and action are correct compared to the alternatives possessed by others (Falbo & Shepperd, 1986). The concept of moral superiority (Tappin & McKay, 2016) was defined as a perceived collective identity that is based on illusion-like, overly-positive self-evaluation and not open to critiques. Ingroup glorification sets a similar tone on how superiority is evaluated collectively by group members (Leidner, Castano, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010), where superiority beliefs and ingroup impeccability tolerates ingroup wrong doings, such as oppression and/or forms of violence. The term zeal, was elaborated by McGregor, Galliot, Vasquez, and Nash (2007) as a conviction and determination of idealism that demands consensus and leave no rooms for dissents.

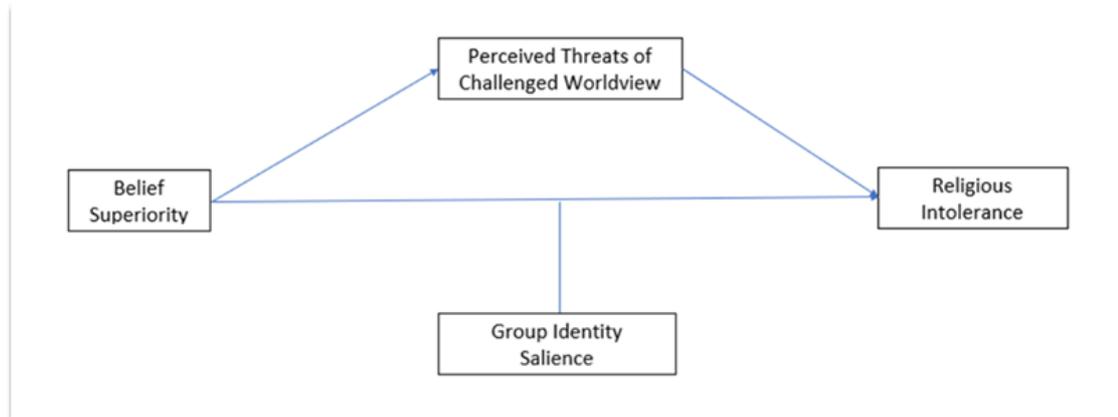
SYNTHESIS

Throughout the past two decades, more studies and theories of tolerance is still in need to be largely developed [Simon, Eschert, Schaefer, Reininger, Zitzmann, & Smith, 2018]. Societal uncertainties also remains an issue that has continuously fortified extremes movements [Fiske, 2013] and social justice seems to offer restrain to uncertainties and extremism as it tries to accommodate equality, respect and ability to voice out. Violations to social justice combined with perceived threats to groups will lead to uncertainties and resulting in negative set of beliefs towards the outgroups [Doosje, Loseman, & van den Bos, 2013]. Leaning towards extremes is rewarding because extreme groups provide clarity of structure, identities, and well-planned action that helps reduce uncertainties [Fiske, 2013].

The notion is echoed by Van den Bos, Poortvliet, Maas, Miedema, and Van den Ham (2005) stated that in effort to protect beliefs and worldviews from perceived threats, people need to come into exposure to consenting people repeatedly in order to reduce uncertainty. Selective exposure is another path that can be taken to deflect form different worldviews. Upon encounter or challenged, derogating other's preferred beliefs and worldviews emerges as a common probable response. People need to feel that their favored views are more correct and superior than others, and sharing the views collectively protects and encourages the belief's superiority.

Referring to the exploratory path displayed in Figure 1, it is worth looking into the integrative explanation from the uncertainty and need for closure perspective, how belief superiority when strengthen with group identity salience, despite the type and frequency of contact, could manifests in religious intolerance.

Fig. 2. Hypothetical model on religious intolerance



The great majority of intergroup contact studies have focused on the effects upon the majority or more powerful, non-stigmatized group in the interaction. A series of intriguing contact studies pointed out the importance of including subjective factors of both minority and majority group members in the interaction as an imperative perspective to intergroup contact theory (Shelton & Richeson, 2006; Shelton, Richeson, & Salvatore, 2005; Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005). Existing previous studies seem to leave room for exploration as highlighted by Pettigrew [2008]. Some findings interestingly contradict previous knowledge of how intergroup contact reduce prejudice by saying that contact that offers knowledge about the outgroup may be of minor importance in contrast to empathy and perspective taking. This affective mediators might need further attention to be explored along with other potential mediators, such as threat, with balanced focused on both majority and minority groups. This stance is emphasized by Pettigrew and Tropp [2011] stated that not all intergroup contact reduces prejudice. Negative contacts, when occur, will instill perceived threats and might resulted in either withdrawal from contact or enhance prejudice.

The question then lies on why contact has been prominently glorified when contact itself has the potential of negative exposure? In relevance to that, more focused studies on intergroup contact that enhances negative emotions deserve explorations in efforts of

understanding factors that promote and reduce positive effects of contact [Pettigrew, 2008]. In addition to that, some areas also deserve more emphasize of more focused investigation such as potential factors that can help moderate intolerance. It is also worth exploring whether developing complex social identity and exposure to diverse beliefs can contribute to moderate intolerance, by considering the double-edged of impact on either produce positive contact and develop empathy or promote negative contact and intensifies uncertainties.

From the Terror Management Theory perspectives, studies reviewed mortality salience in several areas, such as the correlation of on mortality salience and self-uncertainty (Hohman & Hogg, 2015), religiosity and hostility (Zavala, Cichocka, Orehek & Abdollahi, 2012), and also on political orientation and moral judgments (Bassett, Van Tongeren, Green, Sonntag, & Kilpatrick, 2015). Studies focused in exploring belief superiority also highlighted how belief superiority correlates with political issues (Toner, Leary, Asher & Jongman-Sereno, 2017) and religious solidarity (Polat, 2018), as an ubiquity that is also manifested as moral superiority (Tappin & McKay, 2016) claimed through admission of remorse (Forchtner, 2014). Some other studies also emphasized the unfalsifiability notion (Friesen, Campbell & Kay, 2016) when strengthened by collective identity (Karpov, Lisovskaya & Barry, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Why people display intolerance is a question that scientists have struggled to answers. This article hypothesized that to be able to understand the manifestation of religious intolerance in both individual and group level, it is essential to root back to the fundamental underlying factors such as personal uncertainty. When uncertainty needs closure, people explore firmness and authority that could offer order and predictability, which usually provided by extreme ideologies, beliefs or religions. At this point, existing studies develop assumption of how these choices of ideologies and religions transform and develop into belief superiority.

Further research can benefit from investigating how belief superiority is developed through the lenses of how belief is perceived and understood. A longitudinal study would suffice to be employed in effort to gain thorough understanding on the formative stages of belief superiority development. As Indonesia is currently going through rising intolerance, studies that focused on how diverse beliefs and exposure to different groups helps with the development of complex social identity that might contribute to openness, reduce prejudice and intolerance. Policies on education and peacebuilding effort can be drawn from studies conducted to understand how individuals learn adopt tolerance when exposed to dissimilar others.

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