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Self-concept clarity buffers the impact of societal threat to safety on right-wing authoritarianism

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5 Abstract

6 In an Italian community sample ($N = 86$, men = 31.4%, mean age = 38.30, $SD = 14.27$), we
7 performed a quasi-experimental vignette study on the link between societal threat to safety and
8 right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), focused on the moderating role of self-concept clarity (SCC).
9 A moderated regression showed that manipulated societal threat to safety fostered RWA only
10 among low SCC scorers.

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16 Key words: Self-concept clarity, Right-wing authoritarianism, Societal threat to safety,
17 Moderation, DPTE

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1 and measures; more methodological details (included the scenarios used as experimental
2 manipulation) are available in Mirisola et al. (2014).¹

3 In the pre-experimental questionnaire we assessed pre-experimental RWA using Roccato
4 and Russo's (2015) Italian short RWA scale, form A (10 items, four categories), $\alpha = .88$ and SCC
5 with the Italian version of Campbell and colleagues' (1996) SCC Scale (12 items, five categories),
6 validated by Manzi, Parise, Iafate, Sedikides, and Vignoles (2015), $\alpha = .89$.

7 Participants were then asked to imagine themselves in the situation of coming back to Italy
8 in 2025 after some years spent abroad. After being told that the Election Day was approaching, they
9 experienced a mock political campaign during which information about the candidates (four
10 candidates running for the role of Prime Minister) and generic non-political information was
11 available. During the campaign, the titles of the information scrolled down on the computer screen
12 and participants could access the information they were interested in by clicking on the title. In the
13 middle of the campaign we introduced the experimental manipulation. Based on Mirisola et al.
14 (2014), a randomly allocated group of participants ($n = 48$) read a secure scenario depicting Italy as
15 one of the most secure nations in the world and the Italians as believing to live in one of the best
16 periods of the human history. The remaining participants ($n = 38$) read an insecure scenario
17 presenting Italy as a very dangerous place, with widespread criminality and armed squads
18 controlling many city districts. After the exposure to the scenarios, the electoral campaign
19 continued and, at the end of it, participants completed the Italian short RWA scale, form B (10
20 items, four categories, cf. Roccato & Russo, 2015), $\alpha = .90$, and Mirisola, Di Stefano, and Falgares'
21 (2007) Italian version of Altemeyer's (1988) dangerous world beliefs (DWB) scale, $\alpha = .95$. We
22 computed all the scales' scores by averaging their items.

23 Results

24 Preliminary analyses showed that our manipulation was effective: The participants exposed to
25 the threatening scenario, $M = 2.98$, $SD = .68$, showed higher DWB scores than those exposed to the

¹ The results reported here are from a sample independent from Mirisola et al.'s (2014).

1 secure scenario, $M = 2.11$, $SD = .67$, $t(84) = -5.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .30$. Moreover, the secure and the
 2 insecure group showed the same RWA, $t(84) = 1.17$, $p = .24$, and SCC scores, $t(84) = .39$, $p = .70$.
 3 A moderated regression, in which—using pre-experimental RWA as covariate—we entered the
 4 experimental manipulation, participants' SCC and their interaction, showed that post-experimental
 5 RWA ($Adj. R^2 = .74$), controlling for pre-experimental RWA, $B = .96$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$, was
 6 fostered by exposure to the threatening scenario, $B = .10$, $SE = .04$, $p = .01$, while was not
 7 associated with SCC, $B = .04$, $SE = .05$, $p = .42$. Most interestingly, the interaction between
 8 exposure to the threatening scenario (coded as -1 for low threat and 1 for high threat) and SCC
 9 (mean-centered) showed a significant association with post-experimental RWA, $B = -.10$, $SE = .05$,
 10 $p = .04$: The societal threat to safety-RWA link was significant among participants with low (-1 SD)
 11 SCC scores, $simple\ slope = .17$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$, but not among those with high (+ 1 SD) SCC
 12 scores, $simple\ slope = .02$, $SE = .05$, $p = .70$ (see Figure 1).

13 Discussion

14 Threat fosters RWA (Duckitt, 2001). We tried to help understand the processes lying under
 15 this link, focusing on the role played by identity; in particular, we predicted that high levels of SCC
 16 could buffer the rise of RWA under threatening situations. As hypothesized: Threat increased
 17 individual levels of RWA only for participants low in SCC.

18 Our results are important because they underline how the focus on self-concept is important
 19 for advancing the understanding of individual responses to threat. SCC, promoting effective self-
 20 regulation and increasing perceived control, is an important resource for individuals facing threat
 21 conditions. Further research could better clarify how this buffering effect works under specific
 22 environmental conditions. In particular, SCC has been conceptualized both as a trait and a state
 23 (Campbell et al., 1996). Indeed, even though SCC evidences remarkable temporal stability, it also
 24 fluctuates with environmental influences. In future research participants' state SCC may be
 25 manipulated together with societal treat to safety, in a 2X2 experimental design. Moreover SCC is a
 26 characteristic of people's beliefs about themselves (i.e., their self-concepts). It is mute with respect

1 to the accuracy of those beliefs or the complexity of the self-concept structure. Future studies
2 should investigate the positive effects of SCC also in relation to these and other identity
3 dimensions.

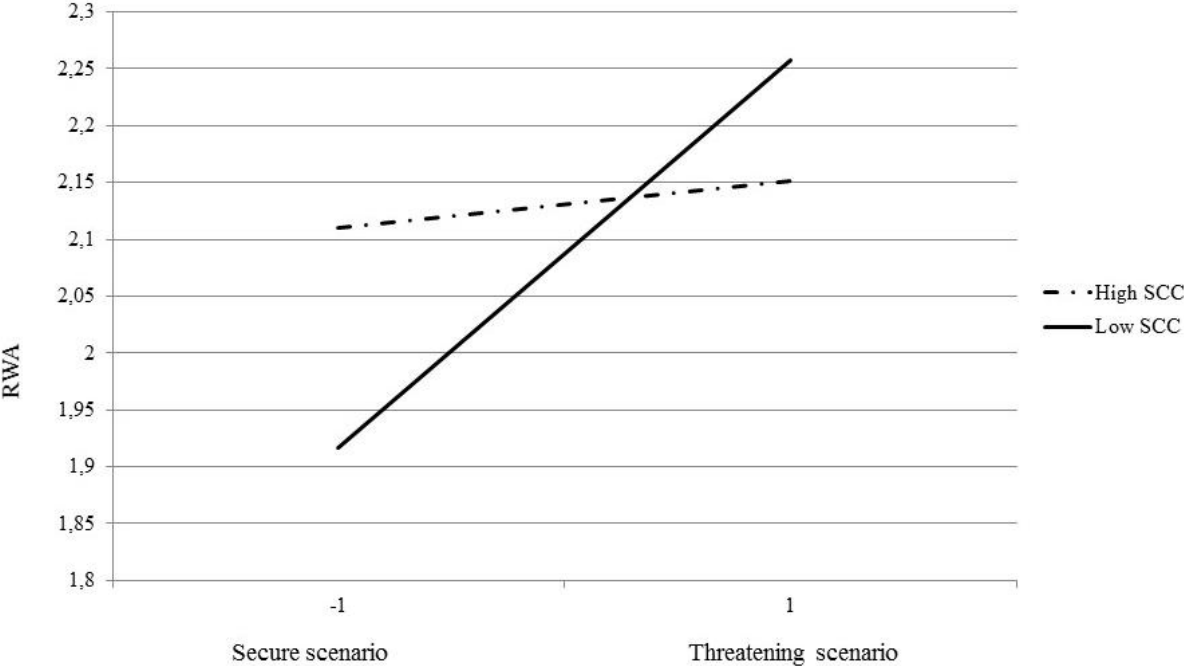
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1 Figure 1. Conditional impact of societal threat to safety on RWA



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