



## Persuasive message scrutiny as a function of implicit-explicit discrepancies in racial attitudes



India R. Johnson <sup>a,\*</sup>, Richard E. Petty <sup>b</sup>, Pablo Briñol <sup>c</sup>, Ya Hui Michelle See <sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Elon University, United States*

<sup>b</sup> *The Ohio State University, United States*

<sup>c</sup> *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain*

<sup>d</sup> *National University of Singapore, Singapore*

### HIGHLIGHTS

- We test a variation of the “Watchdog Hypothesis” based on the idea of implicit ambivalence.
- Those low in explicit prejudice and high in implicit prejudice demonstrated enhanced scrutiny of race-relevant messages.
- We also test if individuals high in explicit prejudice but low in implicit prejudice will engage in more processing.
- As evaluative discrepancies increased, we found enhanced persuasive scrutiny, regardless direction of discrepancy.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 21 July 2016

Revised 14 November 2016

Accepted 16 November 2016

Available online 3 December 2016

#### Keywords:

Implicit attitudes

Explicit attitudes

Information processing

Prejudice

### ABSTRACT

Past research has shown that individuals low in prejudice think more carefully when information is from or about stigmatized individuals than non-stigmatized individuals. One explanation for this effect is that the heightened scrutiny stems from a motivation to guard against potential prejudice toward stigmatized others (i.e. “watchdog motivation”). The present research tested a variation of the watchdog hypothesis based on the idea of implicit ambivalence. Specifically, we argue that among individuals low in explicit (i.e., deliberative) prejudice, it is those who are also relatively high in implicit (i.e., automatic) prejudice who will do the most processing in prejudice relevant contexts. The implicit ambivalence framework also makes a novel prediction that individuals who are relatively high in explicit prejudice but low in implicit prejudice would also engage in enhanced information processing. As predicted, people with racial implicit-explicit attitude discrepancies, regardless of the direction of discrepancy, were found to engage in greater of scrutiny of a message about the hiring of Black faculty (study 1), a message about a Black job candidate (study 2), and even when the Black concept was merely primed subliminally prior to reading a race-irrelevant message (study 3).

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

The race of a person can influence how much scrutiny he or she receives from other people. In an initial series of studies on this topic, White and Harkins (1994) presented Caucasian participants with a persuasive message from a White or a Black source who advocated for instituting senior comprehensive exams. The message contained either strong or weak arguments. Across several replications, they consistently found that the impact of argument quality on attitudes was greater when the source was Black rather than White. Subsequent research

has shown that the enhanced scrutiny effect also applies to situations in which the target rather than the source of the message is from a stigmatized group (Fleming, Petty, & White, 2005). The present research examines whether the enhanced scrutiny of Blacks by Whites stems from a variation of the “watchdog hypothesis” that is consistent with the idea of Whites having implicit ambivalence toward Blacks (Petty, Briñol, & Johnson, 2012).

### 2. The “watchdog hypothesis” and enhanced scrutiny

In a series of studies (Fleming et al., 2005; Petty, Fleming, & White, 1999) the enhanced scrutiny of stigmatized sources and targets by Whites was attributed to a “watchdog motivation.” The main idea was that White individuals might be processing messages from or about Blacks and other stigmatized groups more than the same messages

\* Corresponding author at: Elon University, Department of Psychology, Campus Box 2337, Elon, NC 27244, United States.

E-mail addresses: [ijohnson5@elon.edu](mailto:ijohnson5@elon.edu) (I.R. Johnson), [petty.1@osu.edu](mailto:petty.1@osu.edu) (R.E. Petty), [pablo.brinnol@uam.es](mailto:pablo.brinnol@uam.es) (P. Briñol), [psysyhm@nus.edu.sg](mailto:psysyhm@nus.edu.sg) (Y.H.M. See).

from or about Whites in order to guard against some possible prejudice they might display in the situation. For example, thinking about a message about a Black individual carefully would be one way of ensuring fairness. Petty et al. (1999) reasoned that if a watchdog motivation were operating, it should primarily be Whites who were relatively low in prejudice who would show the enhanced scrutiny effect since these individuals would be most disturbed by showing prejudice.

To examine this notion, prejudice toward Blacks was assessed with explicit self-report measures (e.g., Katz & Hass, 1988), and reactions to persuasive messages from Black and White sources were evaluated. In several studies White individuals who were very low in prejudice were the ones who processed messages more for Black than White sources. This enhanced scrutiny effect by low prejudiced individuals was replicated when the message was about a Black versus a White target individual rather than from a Black versus a White source (Fleming et al., 2005).

In sum, a number of experiments have shown White individuals who are low in explicit prejudice toward Blacks tend to scrutinize a message either from a Black source or about a Black target more carefully than when the same message is from or about a White person. The current research aims to explore the watchdog motivation further by proposing that if low prejudiced individuals are motivated to engage in enhanced scrutiny of Blacks to look out for their own possible prejudice, then it should mostly be those individuals who have some reason to suspect possible prejudice on their part who would engage in this scrutiny. That is, people who do not want to be prejudiced or who see themselves as unprejudiced (low explicit prejudice) but who harbor automatic negative reactions toward Blacks (high implicit prejudice) would experience conflict and be the most vigilant in guarding against prejudice (see also, Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Monteith, 1993; Monteith & Devine 1993).

One way to identify individuals who have some prejudice about which they could be concerned is to use a measure of automatic bias. Over the past decade, several techniques for assessing automatic prejudice have been developed (e.g., Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). The goal of each is to assess an evaluation that automatically comes to mind when an attitude object is encountered. If watchdog motivation stems from a desire to watch out for one's own possible prejudice and we are able to assess both deliberative (explicit) and automatic (implicit) prejudice, then it should be the case that among those who are relatively low in their explicit prejudice, it is individuals who are also relatively high in their implicit prejudice who are the most likely to show enhanced scrutiny of stigmatized others. Individuals who are low in explicit prejudice and also low in implicit prejudice should have nothing to fear with respect to their own prejudice (i.e., have nothing to watch out for), and thus should be less likely to engage in enhanced scrutiny. We test this implication of the watchdog hypothesis for scrutiny of messages from or about Blacks by White individuals across three studies.

### 3. Implicit ambivalence and information processing

In addition to examining a unique implication of the watchdog hypothesis, the current research also examines the implications of recent work on *implicit ambivalence* (Petty, Tormala, Briñol, & Jarvis, 2006), for the enhanced scrutiny effect (Petty & Briñol, 2009; Petty et al., 2012; Shoda, McConnell, & Rydell, 2014). Implicit ambivalence refers to a situation in which an endorsed reaction is contrary to an unendorsed or rejected automatic reaction that is linked to an attitude object (Petty & Briñol, 2006). Implicit ambivalence differs from explicit ambivalence which refers to conflict stemming from endorsed positivity and negativity (Kaplan, 1972; see van Harreveld, Nohlen, & Schneider, 2015). Put simply, if a person explicitly endorses both positive and negative evaluations of Blacks, that person is explicitly ambivalent and as in other cases of explicit ambivalence would report feeling mixed about the attitude object (Priester & Petty, 1996). However, if a person

endorses largely positive reactions to Blacks (low explicit prejudice) but has negative reactions automatically spring to mind whenever the minority group is mentioned (high implicit prejudice) the person does not report feeling mixed about the attitude object. In this sense, the ambivalence is implicit rather than explicit because the person does not report being ambivalent toward the attitude object (see Petty et al., 2006) even though some discomfort is associated with that object (e.g., Rydell, McConnell, & Mackie, 2008; see Petty et al., 2012, for further discussion).<sup>1</sup> Critically, the implicit ambivalence framework stipulates that implicit ambivalence can be assessed by a discrepancy in the valence of an attitude uncovered by an implicit versus explicit attitude measure (see Briñol, Petty, & Wheeler, 2006). Thus, people who are relatively low in explicit prejudice toward Blacks on a self-report measure but relatively high in implicit prejudice as measured by an assessment of automatic attitudes, would have racial implicit ambivalence.

Prior research in non-racial domains has shown that people who have relatively large discrepancies between their implicit and explicit evaluations of a variety of objects express more discomfort about the attitude object (e.g., Rydell et al., 2008) and are more likely to process information relevant to those objects than are people for whom implicit and explicit evaluations are relatively low in discrepancy. In one study (Briñol et al., 2006), for example, as implicit-explicit discrepancies in self-esteem increased, so too did processing of a message relevant to the self as indexed by a greater difference in responses to arguments that varied in their quality. The discomfort from this discrepancy is presumed to motivate the processing of information whenever the discrepancy is activated such as when confronted by information relevant to the discrepancy (Briñol et al., 2006; Johnson & McDonough-Caplan, 2016; Petty et al., 2006; Rydell et al., 2008). Thus, implicit ambivalence has a similar impact on information processing as does explicit ambivalence (e.g., Maio, Bell, & Esses, 1996). Interestingly, the implicit ambivalence hypothesis predicts the same information processing outcome as the watchdog hypothesis. In fact, the watchdog hypothesis can be viewed as a particular instantiation of the more general implicit ambivalence hypothesis. That is, the watchdog hypothesis focuses on a particular discrepancy between having relatively low explicit racial prejudice but relatively high automatic prejudice.

Importantly, in the present studies we also test a novel hypothesis from the implicit ambivalence perspective not anticipated or examined in prior research on racial prejudice. That is, not only should people who are relatively lower in their explicit prejudice than they are in their implicit prejudice engage in enhanced scrutiny of information from or about Blacks, but so too should individuals who are relatively higher in their explicit prejudice than they are in their implicit prejudice.<sup>2</sup> This idea follows directly from the implicit ambivalence notion because any discrepancy between automatic and deliberative evaluations should produce implicit ambivalence regardless of the direction of the discrepancy. In watchdog terminology, just as individuals who are favorable toward Blacks on deliberative measures may want to be sure that they are not unduly unfavorable in their reactions (and thus watch out for any automatic or gut negative reactions), so too might individuals who are high in explicit prejudice want to be sure that they are not unduly positive (and thus watch out for any automatic or gut positive reactions they might have). Put simply, the implicit ambivalence

<sup>1</sup> People might reject an automatic evaluative association for a number of reasons. They might realize that it stems from the culture (e.g., media exposure) and not from personal beliefs (e.g., Devine, 1989). Or, the association can represent the opinions of others that have been encoded (e.g., Han, Olson, & Fazio, 2006; Priester & Petty, 2001). In addition, the association can represent a previously accepted personal view that has more recently been discredited (e.g., Gregg, Seibt, & Banaji, 2006; Petty et al., 2006; for a review, see Petty & Briñol, 2009). In all of these cases, unendorsed automatic negativity can conflict with endorsed positivity.

<sup>2</sup> The original watchdog hypothesis (Petty et al., 1999) only anticipated the possibility that people low in their explicit prejudice might watch out for their implicit prejudice, and subsequent research on racial prejudice only examined one direction of discrepancy – the extent to which implicit prejudice exceeded explicit prejudice (e.g., Penner et al., 2010; Shoda et al., 2014), not the reverse direction of discrepancy.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5045645>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5045645>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)