



“Putting myself in their shoes”: Ethnic perspective taking explains liberal–conservative differences in prejudice and stereotyping

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 14 December 2015

Received in revised form 15 March 2016

Accepted 28 March 2016

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Political ideology

Ethnic perspective taking

Prejudice

Stereotyping

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the role of ethnic perspective taking in explaining ideological differences in the expression of prejudice and endorsement of stereotypes. Two hundred sixty-four participants completed measures of political ideology, ethnic perspective taking, ethnic prejudice, and stereotype endorsement. As hypothesized, liberals were less likely than conservatives to express prejudice and endorse stereotypes, and they were more likely than conservatives to report taking the perspective of racial/ethnic outgroups. Structural equation modeling and mediation analyses suggest that ethnic perspective taking partially mediated the relationship between political ideology and prejudice and stereotyping. Additional findings and implications for the ideological boundaries of perspective taking are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Nearly all major theoretical approaches to political ideology have addressed its impact on prejudice and stereotyping, from Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, and Sanford (1950) to Rokeach (1960), Altemeyer (1998), and beyond (Duckitt, 2001; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The consensus among these researchers is that there are differences between liberals' and conservatives' expression of prejudice and endorsement of stereotypes. Some have further argued that differences in cognitive tendencies between liberals and conservatives might explain the link between ideology and prejudice and stereotyping (e.g., Hodson & Busseri, 2012). For instance, researchers have identified ideological differences in cognitive styles (e.g., Jost et al., 2003; Rokeach, 1960; Tetlock, 1983, 1984) and cognitive abilities (Hodson & Busseri, 2012). The primary aim of the present work is to examine a novel, cognitive explanation for ideological differences in prejudice and stereotyping. Because of its positive effects within intergroup contexts (Todd & Galinsky, 2014), we investigated the tendency to take the perspective of racial/ethnic outgroups as a potential mediator of the relationship between political ideology and prejudice and stereotyping. Past research has called for a sharper distinction between investigations of cognitive perspective taking and its more affective counterpart (i.e., empathy, Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), making the present investigation of ethnic perspective taking a timely addition to the often intersecting literatures of political ideology and prejudice and stereotyping.

1.1. Ideological differences in prejudice and stereotyping

Liberals and conservatives seem to differ in their expression of prejudice. Compared to liberals, conservatives tend to report more prejudice toward racial minorities, gays and lesbians, and the overweight (Crandall, 1994; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Lambert & Chasteen, 1997; Sears & Henry, 2003; Terriizzi, Shook, & Ventis, 2010). Liberals, who value social tolerance to a greater extent than conservatives (Kerlinger, 1984; Stone, 1980; cf. Chambers, Schlenker, & Collisson, 2013), tend to have more positive attitudes toward disadvantaged groups. When comparing attitudes toward high-status groups to low-status (or disadvantaged) groups, conservatives consistently show greater favoritism toward the former. For instance, conservatives are more likely to favor Whites over African Americans, heterosexuals over gays and lesbians, and thin people over the overweight. Among liberals this bias is weaker (Nosek, Banaji, & Jost, 2009; Nosek et al., 2007). The conservative tendency to favor high-status groups over low-status ones is argued to be a system-justifying attitude because high-status group favoritism perpetuates hierarchical societies. Conversely, liberals' lack of high-status group favoritism reflects their motivation to decrease inequality among disadvantaged groups and establish more egalitarian societies (Bobbio, 1996; Jost et al., 2003; Kerlinger, 1984; Nosek et al., 2009; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Liberals and conservatives also differ in the extent to which they endorse group stereotypes. Conservatism has been found to be associated with endorsing stereotypes of gays and lesbians (Heaven & Oxman, 1999) and Blacks (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1992). In one study, conservatives' negative attitudes toward Black affirmative action policies were mediated by endorsement of racial stereotypes (Reyna, Henry, Korfmaier, & Tucker, 2006). In a sample of 2.5 million respondents from Project

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Implicit, conservatives reliably showed greater endorsement of group stereotypes than liberals (Nosek et al., 2007).

1.2. Political ideology and ethnic perspective taking

Indirect evidence suggests a link between political ideology and the tendency to take the perspective of racial/ethnic outgroups. Perspective taking is the process of imagining the world from the vantage point of another person and actively considering their thoughts and/or feelings (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005). In intergroup contexts, perspective taking involves considering an outgroup member's thoughts, feelings, and/or experiences (Todd & Galinsky, 2014). One area of research pointing to ideological differences in ethnic perspective taking is open- and closed-mindedness. To the extent that liberals are relatively more open-minded than conservatives (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; Jost et al., 2003) and expose themselves to a more diverse range of cultural information (Xu, Mar, & Peterson, 2013), they should be more willing to consider the perspective of racial/ethnic groups. Indeed, research shows liberals think about race/ethnicity more frequently and in more complex ways than conservatives (e.g., Reid & Foels, 2010). Another area of research linking political ideology and perspective taking more generally is integrative complexity, a form of cognitive complexity that measures the extent to which one considers multiple perspectives in social judgments. Liberals have been shown to be higher than conservatives in this style of cognitive complexity (Jost et al., 2003; Tetlock, 1983). These ideological differences in personality and cognitive styles (e.g., open-mindedness, cognitive complexity) suggest liberals may be more likely than conservatives to consider the perspective of racial/ethnic outgroups.

1.3. Perspective taking, prejudice, and stereotyping

Perspective taking has been identified as an effective strategy for improving intergroup relations because of its ability to reduce prejudice and stereotyping (for a review, see Todd & Galinsky, 2014). Taking the perspective of a Black target experiencing race-related difficulties or discrimination increased positive racial attitudes – not only toward the target but Blacks more generally (Dovidio et al., 2004; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). Perspective taking also improves attitudes toward other stigmatized groups, such as the homeless and those with AIDS (Batson et al., 1997). These changes are not confined to reducing explicit prejudice; implicit prejudice toward outgroups is reduced as well (Todd & Burgmer, 2013). Perspective taking has also been shown to reduce both implicit and explicit stereotype endorsement due to its ability to reduce the accessibility and maintenance of stereotypical information (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Todd, Galinsky, & Bodenhausen, 2012).

If liberals are more likely than conservatives to take the perspective of racial/ethnic outgroups, and perspective taking in intergroup contexts has been shown to reduce prejudice and stereotyping, then it reasons that ideological differences in prejudice and stereotyping may be explained in part by variability in ethnic perspective taking. In other words, ideological differences in the expression of prejudice and endorsement of stereotypes should be mediated by the tendency to imagine the world from the point of view of racial/ethnic outgroups.

1.4. The current research

To date, no published research has investigated ethnic perspective taking as an explanation for long-studied ideological differences in prejudice and stereotyping. In the present research, we investigate these ideas using structural equation modeling by measuring individual differences in political ideology, ethnic perspective taking, ethnic prejudice, and stereotype endorsement, and examine if the link between political ideology and prejudice and stereotyping is mediated by ethnic perspective taking. We operationalize political ideology in two ways, left–right political self-identification and endorsement of liberal and

conservative attitudes. Not all who self-identify as liberal or conservative consistently endorse liberal and conservative attitudes (Feldman & Johnston, 2014). Measuring endorsement of liberal and conservative attitudes may capture the complexity of political ideology better than a single, unidimensional measure. Importantly, we operationalize ethnic perspective taking as a cognitive tendency because our measure focuses on the propensity to take the psychological point of view of other races/ethnicities. We also operationalize prejudice and stereotyping as two distinct but related forms of intergroup bias¹, and we assess these constructs explicitly (see Hewstone et al., 2002).

2. Method

Two hundred ninety-six undergraduates at the University of Arkansas completed an online study about public opinion and social perception in exchange for partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Twenty-seven participants were excluded for failing at least one of two attention check items (“This is an attention check item. Please select ‘3’ for this answer.”), as well as five participants for giving a response three standard deviations from the mean on either the measure of conservatism or ethnic perspective taking. This left a final sample of 264 participants for analyses (84% White, 69% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 19.91$, $SD = 3.87$). After providing informed consent, participants completed measures of political ideology, ethnic perspective taking, ethnic prejudice, stereotype endorsement, and several other variables unrelated to the current study. All measures were presented in random order.

2.1. Measures

2.1.1. Political ideology

We measured political ideology using political self-identification and endorsement of liberal and conservative attitudes. Political self-identification was measured using a left–right, single-item self-identification scale (1 = very liberal, 7 = very conservative), a common method to assess political ideology (Jost, 2006). We assessed endorsement of liberal and conservative attitudes using a modified version of Kerlinger's (1984) Social Attitudes Statements Scale (SASS; see Supplementary data). The SASS includes a 13-item liberalism subscale (e.g., “Large fortunes should be taxed fairly heavily over and above income taxes” and “Making sure all human beings have equal rights is important for society to work”) and conservatism subscale (e.g., “Encouraging competition allows for the best businesses and individuals to ‘rise to the top’” and “If civilization is to survive, there must be a turning back to religion”) each answered on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale. Liberalism ($\alpha = .76$) and conservatism ($\alpha = .68$) were negatively correlated, $r = -.57$, $p < .001$.

2.1.2. Ethnic perspective taking

Davis' (1983) seven-item perspective-taking subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index captures a more cognitive form of perspective taking by assessing “the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others” (p. 113). We modified Davis' items to reflect the cognitive tendency to take the perspective of other races/ethnicities (e.g., “I try to understand different races/ethnicities better by imagining how things look from their perspective”, “I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the perspective of people from other racial/ethnic backgrounds” [reverse-scored], and “When someone of another race/ethnicity is upset, I usually try to ‘put myself in their shoes’ for a while”). Each item was answered on a 1 (not at all like

¹ We acknowledge that the term bias typically refers to the discrepancy in favoritism expressed toward one's ingroup relative to other outgroups (e.g., Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). Here, we indicate that the term bias will refer to negative attitudes toward ethnic outgroups (prejudice) and endorsement of ethnic group traits (stereotyping).

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