



Evaluations of witnesses' responses to bias: Universalism–Concern and the costs of confrontation



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ABSTRACT

The present research examined how situational and individual difference factors influence majority-group observers' evaluations of witnesses' responses to an incident of bias. In Study 1, participants learned of a situation in which a White person applying for a job he did or did not need (high vs. low cost of confrontation) heard his interviewer make a racist comment, which the White person did or did not confront. Non-confrontation was evaluated as less appropriate than confrontation when the costs of confronting were low, but not when costs were high, revealing that in a high cost situation the appropriate response to bias is more ambiguous. Study 2 focused on this high cost situation to show that evaluations of another person's responses to bias depend on individual differences in the observer's values. Observers who scored low on Universalism–Concern evaluated another person's non-confrontation as appropriate as confrontation, but participants who scored high on Universalism–Concern perceived non-confrontation as less appropriate. Considering how responses to bias are assessed helps illuminate normative processes that affect confrontations of bias against outgroups, contributing to the knowledge of the processes that may allow biases to persist.

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1. Introduction

Recent research has aimed to understand when targets of bias confront unfair negative comments and actions directed toward them or their group (see, for example, Becker, Zawadzki, & Shields, 2014). That research also considers how individual differences, such as in beliefs about the malleability of prejudice (Rattan & Dweck, 2010) or optimism (Kaiser & Miller, 2004), among targets can increase or decrease their willingness to confront bias. However, confronting bias is not solely the responsibility of members of targeted, disadvantaged groups; how members of majority groups not only perceive injustice (Drury & Kaiser, 2014; Inman & Baron, 1996) but also evaluate the responses of others to injustice can affect the persistence and impact of social bias in society. In the present research, consisting of two studies, we investigated how majority-group members evaluate other ingroup members who do or do not confront racial bias against another group. Specifically, we tested the potential moderating roles of (a) the social conditions under which the person decided whether to confront the bias (Study 1), and (b) individual differences in the values held by observers of the other person's response to bias (Study 2).

1.1. Background

Confrontations of bias address socially unfair treatment and preserve egalitarian norms and are therefore generally seen by observers as positive social behaviors (Dickter, Kittel, & Gyurovski, 2012). Non-confrontations of bias are typically perceived as less appropriate, because they allow a biased remark to remain unchallenged, and may even convey agreement with bias.

1.1.1. Costs of confrontation

Although confronting bias may generally be perceived as a socially responsible act, how people evaluate the appropriateness of confrontation and non-confrontation may be shaped by contextual influences. Previous research on prosocial behavior has highlighted that perceiving personal costs associated with performing the act affects the way people evaluate the appropriateness of both engaging in and refraining from enacting the prosocial behavior. For instance, when helping involves greater personal cost to the person who intervenes (e.g., greater personal risk), not intervening is perceived to be a more socially acceptable response (Holahan, 1977; Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Clark, 1981). Indeed, people often justify not intervening to help another person on the basis of the potential costs incurred for helping (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005).

Confrontation of bias by a witness may also be considered a form of prosocial behavior involving assessments of costs and benefits of

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various courses of action (Ashburn-Nardo, Blanchar, Petersson, Morris, & Goodwin, 2014; Penner et al., 2005). As such, when people recognize that the personal costs are high to a witness for confronting bias, they may perceive non-confrontation as excusable, and thus as relatively socially appropriate. We tested this general hypothesis in Study 1.

1.1.2. Values and appropriateness of confrontation and non-confrontation

The degree to which people evaluate the appropriateness of confrontation or non-confrontation by a witness may also be affected by relevant individual differences, particularly in situations in which the personal costs of confronting are at odds with the social costs of not confronting bias. In situations in which behavioral appropriateness is ambiguous or there are conflicting influences, individual differences among observers are particularly important guides of behavior (e.g., Eccleston & Major, 2006). As Mischel (1973) explained, "Individual differences can determine behavior most strongly when the situation is ambiguously structured ... so that subjects are uncertain about how to categorize it" (p. 276; see also Snyder & Ickes, 1985). Previous research has revealed that confrontations by individual targets of bias are shaped by personal factors, such as commitment to fight bias or optimism (Kaiser & Miller, 2004; Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Hill, 2006). However, we are not aware of research on individual differences in how people assess the appropriateness of others' confrontation or non-confrontation of bias.

Observers' values likely influence their judgments of the appropriateness of another person's action or inaction in the face of bias. Values are general beliefs that guide not only people's selection of actions but also evaluations of their own and other people's behaviors (Feather, 1995; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992, 1994; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987), particularly members of their own group's (Marques & Paez, 1994; Tyler & Blader, 2003). Values would likely be important predictors of the weight given to different costs and rewards in responses to bias, because values directly define the standards by which action (or inaction) is judged.

Schwartz's (1992) original theory of basic human values attempted to capture a comprehensive and cross-culturally valid set of values and to describe the relations among those values. Schwartz identified 10 basic human values (Self-direction, Stimulation, Hedonism, Achievement, Power, Security, Conformity, Tradition, Benevolence and Universalism) that can be organized into a circular continuum, according to compatibilities and conflicts among them. Cross-cultural research in more than 80 countries and with diverse samples supported the comprehensiveness of this set of values, their relationships, and their broad applicability (see Schwartz, 1992, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2001). The theory of basic human values has been used in research on diverse topics, such as political behavior (Schwartz, Caprara, & Vecchione, 2010), self-affirmation (Burson, Crocker, & Mischkowski, 2012), and altruism (Lönnqvist, Leikas, Paunonen, Nissinen, & Verkasalo, 2006).

Universalism, the value of primary interest in Study 2, represents a motivation to understand, appreciate, tolerate, and protect all people and nature. Universalism is closely (and positively) related to Benevolence. However, Benevolence is defined as a motivation to care for the welfare of people with whom one is close and therefore has a relatively narrow focus of application. By contrast, Universalism is related to concerns about the welfare of others more generally. Both Universalism and Benevolence are in conflict with Power (a motivation to attain social status and prestige, and control or dominance over people and resources) and Achievement (a motivation to be personally successful according to social standards) (Schwartz, 1992).

While Universalism, Benevolence, Achievement, and Power are all related to traditional measures of social bias, Universalism is the value most strongly related to measures of prejudice and social dominance (Cohrs, Moschner, Maes, & Kielmann, 2005; Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002; Feather & McKee, 2008) – individuals who more strongly endorse the value of Universalism score lower on these measures. In addition, although Benevolence and Universalism (but not other values in the

model) are important predictors of prosocial behaviors (Caprara, Alessandri, & Eisenberg, 2012; Caprara & Steca, 2007), Universalism is more closely related conceptually to prosocial actions toward other people in general, not just toward others with whom one is close (Schwartz, 2010). Because values affect behavior mainly when they are activated by a specific situation (Verplanken & Holland, 2002) and the value of Universalism captures whether equality is held as a central standard of behavior, we hypothesized that Universalism would be the primary value in guiding evaluations of confrontations (and non-confrontations) of bias.

In addition, Schwartz et al. (2012) recently refined the theory of basic human values and identified three subtypes of Universalism: Universalism–Nature, a motivation to preserve the natural environment; Universalism–Tolerance, a motivation to accept and understand people who are different from oneself; and Universalism–Concern a "commitment to equality, justice and protection for all people" (Schwartz et al., 2012, p. 669).

To the extent that Universalism–Concern specifically reflects a motivation to strive for social justice and equality, even at personal expense, when appraising the appropriateness of different responses to bias, people relatively high on this value would likely give more weight to the social cost of not confronting, even when there are potentially mitigating personal costs associated with confronting. In Study 2, we apply the situation identified in Study 1, where the personal costs of confronting are at odds with the social costs of not confronting, to test the unique effects of Universalism–Concern over and above other basic values in Schwartz et al.'s (2012) refined theory on observers' assessments of the appropriateness of non-confrontation versus confrontation of bias.

1.2. Purpose

The purpose of the present research was to examine how situational factors (Study 1) and individual differences in values (Study 2) influence majority-group observers' evaluations of witnesses' responses to an incident of bias. The aim of Study 1 was to understand how observers assess the appropriateness of not confronting (vs. confronting) as a function of situational factors affecting personal costs for intervention. The goal of Study 2 was to illuminate how individual differences in endorsement of a value related to the degree to which equality is held as a central standard of behavior (i.e., Universalism–Concern) influence observers' evaluations of different responses to bias in situations in which the cost to a witness for confronting bias is high.

Theoretically, expanding the study of confrontation to how others evaluate those who do or do not confront bias can broaden the perspective on the general social forces that can either ameliorate or maintain social bias. Practically, understanding the influences on non-targets who witness bias can have important social consequences, as non-targets who confront are taken more seriously and are seen as more persuasive than confronters who are the target of bias (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Gulker, Mark, & Monteith, 2013; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010). Investigating how observers evaluate witnesses' decision to confront bias or not and the conditions that may shape that assessment can provide insight into the process that socially inhibit unfair bias (Blanz, Mummendey, & Otten, 1997).

2. Study 1

2.1. Overview

In Study 1, participants (all from a majority group) learned of a situation in which a White applicant heard his interviewer make a biased comment about Black applicants and then did or did not confront the interviewer about that comment. We also varied the social circumstances of the applicant by indicating that he had a high versus low need for the position for which he was interviewing. The dependent measure

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