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Short Communication

Social dominance orientation connects prejudicial human–human and human–animal relations



Kristof Dhont^{a,*}, Gordon Hodson^{b,2}, Kimberly Costello^c, Cara C. MacInnis^{b,3}

^a Department of Developmental, Personality and Social Psychology, Ghent University, Belgium

^b Department of Psychology, Brock University, Canada

^c School of English and Liberal Studies, Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology, Canada

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ABSTRACT

Recent theorizing suggests that biases toward human outgroups may be related to biases toward (non-human) animals, and that individual differences in desire for group dominance and inequality may underlie associations between these biases. The present investigation directly tests these assumptions. As expected, the results of the current study ($N = 191$) demonstrate that endorsing speciesist attitudes is significantly and positively associated with negative attitudes toward ethnic outgroups. Importantly, individual differences in social dominance orientation accounted for the association between speciesist and ethnic outgroup attitudes; that is, these variables are associated due to their common association with social dominance orientation that underpins these biases. We conclude that social dominance orientation represents a critical individual difference variable underlying ideological belief systems and attitudes pertaining to both human–human intergroup and human–animal relations.

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1. Introduction

Lay people generally believe that human–human intergroup biases, such as prejudice against immigrants, are largely *unrelated* to human–animal relations, such as exploiting animals for our own purposes (Costello & Hodson, *in press a*). Yet recent research supporting an Interspecies Model of Prejudice (Costello & Hodson, *in press b*; Hodson & Costello, 2012; Hodson, MacInnis, & Costello, 2013) demonstrates that seeing humans as different from and superior to animals plays a key role in animalistically dehumanizing human outgroups (e.g., immigrants; Blacks) and negatively evaluating those outgroups. Indeed, “the very act of treating [outgroups] like animals would lose its meaning if animals were treated well”. (Plous, 2003, p. 510). In fact, “elevating” animals to the status of humans by emphasizing their similarity to humans significantly improves attitudes and moral inclusiveness toward human outgroups (Bastian, Costello, Loughnan, & Hodson, 2012;

Costello & Hodson, 2010). Thus biases toward human outgroups appear related to biases toward non-human animals, and individual differences in desire for group dominance may underlie any associations between these biases. The present investigation directly tests these previously untested assumptions.

1.1. The group dominance perspective

Social dominance theory (SDT) is a conceptual framework explaining group-based hierarchy and oppression in society (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Central to SDT is the proposition that people vary in their levels of social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto et al., 1994), the fundamental desire to achieve and maintain group-based dominance and inequality among social groups. SDO is a reliable predictor of a wide range of intergroup attitudes across different contexts and domains, including racial and ethnic prejudice and sexism (e.g., Hodson & Esses, 2005; Kteily, Ho, & Sidanius, 2012; Pratto et al., 1994; Roets, Van Hiel, & Dhont, 2012; Sibley & Duckitt, 2010). Furthermore, research has shown that distinct ideological belief systems, such as political conservatism and racism, are correlated with one another *due to* a general desire for group-based dominance (Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996). That is, individual differences in SDO underlie the linkages between these beliefs. As such, SDO accounts for the significant association between different ideological belief systems within the domain of human–human intergroup relations.

* Corresponding author. Address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent, Belgium. Tel.: +32 92646424.

E-mail addresses: Kristof.Dhont@UGent.be (K. Dhont), ghodson@brocku.ca (G. Hodson), Kimberly.Costello@senecacollege.ca (K. Costello), cara.macinnis@utoronto.ca (C.C. MacInnis).

¹ Kristof Dhont is a post-doctoral researcher supported by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO, Belgium).

² Address: 500 Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, Ontario L2S 3A1, Canada.

³ Present address: Department of Psychology, University of Toronto Scarborough, 1245 Military Trail, Toronto, Ontario M1C 1A4 Canada.

Although this social dominance perspective was conceived to explain group-based hierarchy among human groups, this framework can be broadened to explain individual differences in dominance strivings of humans over animals (Costello & Hodson, 2010, in press b; Hyers, 2006) and over the natural environment (Milfont, Richter, Sibley, Wilson, & Fischer, 2013). As with racial and ethnic prejudice, speciesism is an expression of underlying competitive-power motives of social dominance and support for hierarchy and inequality between groups, here between humans and animals (Allen, Wilson, Ng, & Dunne, 2000; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Supporting this view, SDO predicts greater beliefs that humans are distinct from and superior to animals (Costello & Hodson, 2010), and predicts greater acceptance of animal exploitation and more meat consumption (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Hyers, 2006). Furthermore, children of high-SDO parents also hold greater human supremacy beliefs over animals (Costello & Hodson, in press b).

1.2. Present research

Integrating recent findings about the psychological underpinnings of human–animal relations with the traditional focus of SDT on human outgroup prejudice, SDO conceptually represents the key individual difference variable underlying ideological belief systems and attitudes pertaining to both human–human intergroup and human–animal relations. Consequentially, we expected that speciesist attitudes are positively correlated with human outgroup attitudes because both belief systems are underpinned by a general desire for group-based dominance and inequality. This conceptual argument has been raised previously (Costello & Hodson, in press a,b; Hodson & Costello, 2012; Hodson et al., 2013), but no empirical evidence has tested this theoretical presumption. In the same manner that SDO represents an “underlying psychological motive” (Sidanius et al., 1996, p. 484) connecting conservatism and racism, SDO presumably links generalized prejudices toward human ethnic outgroups and speciesist attitudes toward non-human animals. Specifically, we predicted that: (a) speciesist and ethnic prejudice are positively correlated (Hypothesis 1); and (b) individual differences in SDO account for this association (Hypothesis 2), with speciesist and ethnic outgroup prejudice only correlated due to their common association with SDO.

2. Method

Undergraduate psychology students ($N = 209$) at a Canadian university completed relevant measures during a course seminar. Eighteen self-identifying members of two or more target outgroups were excluded from analyses, leaving 191 participants (78.5% females; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.47$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 3.73$).

Respondents completed a shortened 6-item SDO scale ($\alpha = .82$; $M = 2.11$; $SD = 1.02$) on 7-point scales (1, *strongly disagree*; 7, *strongly agree*; Pratto et al., 1994; see Appendix A). To measure ethnic prejudice, respondents indicated attitudes toward immigrants, Black people, ethnic minorities, Native/Aboriginal people, and Muslims, on attitude thermometers ranging from 0–10° (extremely unfavorable) to 91–100° (extremely favorable); items were recoded so that higher scores indicate greater ethnic prejudice ($\alpha = .93$; $M = 3.11$; $SD = 1.75$). Eight items (based on Herzog, Betchard, & Pittman, 1991; Wuensch, Jenkins, & Poteat, 2002; see Appendix A) measured speciesist attitudes ($\alpha = .80$; $M = 3.19$; $SD = 1.13$). Items were completed on 7-point scales (1, *strongly disagree*; 7, *strongly agree*), with higher scores reflecting greater speciesism.

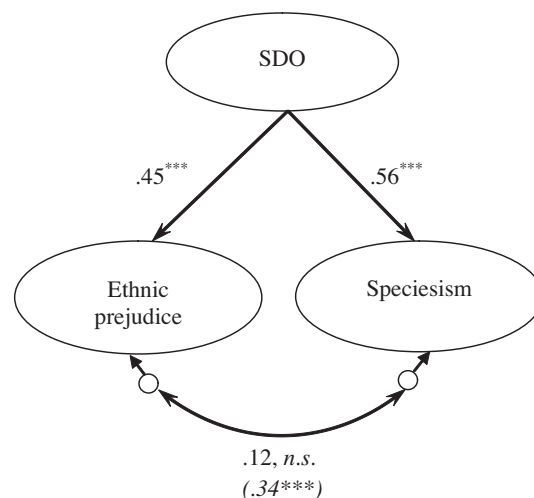


Fig. 1. Latent factor model revealing a non-significant residual correlation between ethnic outgroup prejudice and speciesism when SDO is partialled out. Parenthetical value reflects the significant zero-order correlation. *** $p < .001$.

3. Results

We analyzed the relationships among speciesism, ethnic prejudice, and SDO with latent variables analyses in Mplus (version 6.1, Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2011), using a robust maximum likelihood estimation. The original items indicated the latent factors. The proportion of missing values was negligible and never exceeded 1%; full information maximum likelihood method dealt with the missing data (Schafer & Graham, 2002). The correlational (measurement) model showed good model fit, $\chi^2(149) = 220.36$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .050; SRMR = .055; CFI = .94, suggesting factor validity and construct independence of the latent constructs.⁴

As expected, correlations between the latent constructs were positive and significant. Confirming Hypothesis 1, speciesism was significantly related to ethnic prejudice, $r = .34$, $p < .001$; higher scores on speciesism were thus associated with more ethnic prejudice. Furthermore, both speciesism and ethnic prejudice were significantly related to SDO, $r = .56$, $p < .001$ and $r = .45$, $p < .001$, respectively.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that SDO largely accounts for the association between speciesism and ethnic prejudice (see Sidanius et al., 1996, for a conceptually related statistical approach). Supporting this hypothesis, after partialing out SDO (see Fig. 1, presenting standardized estimates), the residual correlation between speciesism and ethnic prejudice was no longer statistically significant, $r = .12$, $p = .17$. Thus, speciesism and ethnic prejudice are significantly interrelated *because*, as statistically demonstrated, attitudes toward both human and non-human animal outgroups are grounded in a generalized desire for group inequality and hierarchically structured group relations.⁵

In testing whether SDO empirically links conservatism and racism, Sidanius and colleagues (1996) also ruled out alternative models, such as whether conservatism explains SDO–racism associations, or racism explains SDO–conservatism relations. We similarly tested alternative models. Importantly, ethnic prejudice did not explain the association between SDO and speciesism; the residual correlation between SDO and speciesism remained

⁴ Satisfactory fit is indicated by a χ^2/df ratio < 2 , RMSEA $\leq .06$, SRMR $\leq .08$, CFI $\geq .95$ (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

⁵ Tests including target outgroup members ($N = 209$) revealed similar results: speciesism and ethnic prejudice were correlated, $r = .28$, $p < .001$, but not after partialing out SDO, $r = .11$, $p = .24$.

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