**Behavioral and Brain Sciences**

**Duarte--Haidt: Response to commentary articles**

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**Corresponding Author:**

| Corresponding Author Secondary Information: | |
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| First Author Secondary Information: | |
| Order of Authors Secondary Information: | |
A predominance of self-identified Democrats is no evidence of a leftward bias.

Benjamin E. Hilbig
Cognitive Psychology, University of Koblenz-Landau
Mailing Address: Forststraße 7, 76829 Landau, Germany
Phone: +49 6341 2803422
Email: hilbig@uni-landau.de

Morten Moshagen
Research Methods, Institute of Psychology, University of Kassel
Mailing Address: Holländische Straße 36-38, 34127 Kassel, Germany.
Phone: +49 561 804 3592
Email: moshagen@uni-kassel.de

Abstract: The reasoning of Duarte et al. hinges on the basic premise that a positive ratio of Democrats-v.-Republicans implies a political bias. However, when placed in a global and historical context, it is evident that US-Democrats currently represent a moderate position on the political left-right-spectrum; thus, Duarte et al. provide no evidence of a leftward bias in the scientific community.

Undoubtedly, a severe asymmetry in the distribution of relevant (political) viewpoints in any scientific community could endanger objectivity and progress. Duarte et al. assert that the majority of psychologists (personality and social psychologist in particular) today self-identify as US-Democrats rather than US-Republicans and conclude that the community is therefore biased to the left. This reasoning hinges on the presumption that US-Democrats occupy the left of the political spectrum, whereas US-Republicans occupy the right, implying that a moderate – and thus arguably unbiased – position would fall in between the two, so that a politically unbiased community would be constituted of an approximately equal ratio of scientists identifying as US-Democrats and US-Republicans. However, as we demonstrate below, this reasoning is fundamentally flawed since it results from an inappropriate categorization of the continuous left-right spectrum, invalidating Duarte et al.’s most fundamental basic premise.
In what follows, we rely on a vast, longitudinal, international database of content analyses of political party manifestos: the Manifesto Project Database compiled by the Manifesto Research on Political Representation project which is one of the major data sources in comparative political science (König, Marbach, & Osnabrügge, 2013). In 2003, the project received the American Political Science Association’s (APSA) award for the best data set in comparative politics. Much more information on the project, the coding, and many references providing further details can be found at https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/. The project is based on quantitative content analyses of parties’ election programs from more than 50 countries covering all free, democratic elections since 1945. It provides an estimate of parties’ positions on a left-right scale based on coding of quasi-sentences into many different categories which capture a predefined set of political issues (Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, & Eric, 2001). We base our considerations on the recently proposed logit left-right scale (“LLR scale”; Lowe, Benoit, Mikhaylov, & Laver, 2011).

Duarte et al. identify the 1980s as the critical point tilting the field towards affiliating with the US-Democrats and thus, according to their reasoning, to the left. However, the US-party positions on the LLR scale over time (see Figure 1) clearly show that both have strongly shifted towards the right of the political spectrum since the 1980s. As a result, US-Democrats currently hold a moderate position whereas US-Republicans are positioned farther out on the right wing than they used to be. Thus, the relative increase in self-identified US-Democrats in the community can be explained through the simple notion that scientists tend to favor a moderate, balanced position. In turn, the predominance of self-identified US-Democrats cannot be taken as direct evidence in favor of a pro-left bias in the community.
Moreover, Duarte et al. treat the community as though it were comprised exclusively of scientists from the US (discussing evidence primarily referring to the latter) and refer exclusively to the political spectrum in the US. However, according to the Web of Knowledge® publication database, across psychology, about 46% of all records since 2004 are published by US-based scientists whereas another 46% are due to scientists from Great Britain, Germany, Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, France, Japan, Switzerland, Belgium, and Sweden (highly similar numbers are obtained when considering the 20 most impactful journals in psychology or the 10 most impactful journals in personality and social psychology).

It is self-evident that the political parties of these countries will not map onto the US-Democrat vs US-Republican categorization. Comparing the position of US-Democrats and US-Republicans on the LLR scale to those of the 99 political parties of said 12 countries clearly reveals that US-Democrats are best characterized as holding a moderate (rather than left) position in a global context (results are virtually identical when considering all countries available in the manifesto database). Figure 2 plots the

\[Figure 1.\] Moving average (3 periods) of US-party positions on the LLR scale over time.
proportion of actual votes parties received in the most recent national elections against their position on the LLR scale. As can be seen, the “global midpoint” (both unweighted and weighted by actual votes parties received) is close to the numerical neutral point of the left-right-spectrum. In turn, this is essentially the current position of US-Democrats. By contrast, US-Republicans score approximately one standard deviation right of this global midpoint. Thus, in comparison to the political spectrum of all parties across these countries (which contribute just as much to psychological science as the US), it is clear that the US-spectrum (Democrats vs. Republicans) can only discriminate among the right half. By implication, self-placement scales (particularly those with endpoints labeled “liberal” and “conservative”) are likely to show the same bias, as these are interpreted in reference to the national political spectrum as manifested in major political parties (Benoit & Laver, 2006). Overall, a positive ratio of self-identified Democrats-v.-Republicans cannot be taken as evidence for a leftward-bias - quite the contrary, an approximately equal ratio would be indicative of a bias to the right. If anything, the community appears to be aligned with a moderate position on the global left-right-spectrum.
Figure 2. Percentage of votes gained in most recent election conditional on party positions on the LLR scale. The black lines indicate the unweighted (dashed) and weighted (dotted; weighting party positions by the proportion of actual votes received) mean across parties (mean and median differ by less than 2% of the scale). The red and blue lines indicate the LLR position of US-Republicans and US-Democrats (latest election only), respectively.

In summary, manifesto data from comparative political science indicates that US-Democrats currently hold a moderate (rather than leftist) position whereas US-Republicans occupy the right wing of the political spectrum – more so than they used to and especially in global terms. Consequently, referring solely to the US-Democrats vs. US-Republicans dichotomy severely misrepresents the underlying political spectrum. Thus, based on the evidence they present, Duarte et al. cannot assert that the field shows a pronounced pro-left bias, thus invalidating the basic premise of their reasoning.
References


Liberal Bias and the 5-Factor Model

Evan Charney
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina
echar@duke.edu

Abstract: The authors draw attention to “the embedding of liberal values and methods” in social psychological research. They note how these biases are often invisible to the researchers themselves. The authors themselves fall prey to these “invisible biases” by utilizing the 5-factor model of personality and the trait of Openness to Experience as one possible explanation for the underrepresentation of political conservatives in social psychology. I show that the manner in which the trait of Openness to Experience is conceptualized and measured is a particularly blatant example of the very liberal bias the authors decry.

Duarte et al. (2014) are to be commended for addressing the important topic of a pervasive liberal ideological bias that potentially undermines the scientific validity of some social-psychological research. Their critique, however, does go not far enough. The bias they identify is far more pervasive than the authors realize. In fact, in the course of their own argument the authors rely upon a particularly egregious example of the very bias they critique.

In addressing the underrepresentation of conservatives in social psychology, Duarte et al. ask (5.3), “[M]ight liberals simply find a career in social psychology (or the academy more broadly) more appealing?” Their answer is as follows:

Yes, for several reasons. The Big-5 trait that correlates most strongly with political liberalism is openness to experience (r = .32 in Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloways’s 2003 meta-analysis), and people high in that trait are more likely to pursue careers that
will let them indulge their curiosity and desire to learn, such as a career in the academy (McCrae, 1996).

What they fail to realize is that the 5-factor model of personality, and in particular the trait of Openness to Experience embodies, in a rather blatant manner, liberal ideological biases.

In the revised personality index of the 5-factor model (the NEO PI-R), the trait of Openness to Experience is divided into 6 different “facets” (Costa and McCrae 1992). One of these facets (06) is termed “Values,” and is judged by eight statements. I list here only four (the numbering is mine), although all of the statements listed under Values are equally problematic. Depending upon whether one agrees or disagrees with each of these statements, her Values score, and her Openness to Experience score, goes up or down. I have indicated whether the response of “agree” for each statement causes one’s score to go up or:

1. I believe that we should look to our religious authorities for decisions on moral issues. (Agree-Down)

2. I believe that the different ideas of right and wrong that people in other societies have may be right for them. (Agree-Up)

3. I believe that laws and policies should change to reflect the needs of a changing world. (Agree-Up)

4. I believe the new morality of permissiveness is no morality at all. (Agree-Down)

Consider how, in the words of Duarte et al. (3.1), “liberal values and assumptions [are] embedded into theory and method [in this case, the theory and method of the 5-factor model].” In considering these statements, I am referring both to the statements themselves and how they affect one’s Values score.
Statement 1. reflects a liberal ideological bias against religion. Is reliance upon scientific authorities, for example, “close-minded”? Granted, the question concerns moral decisions (so let us assume that science cannot resolve questions of right and wrong). Why then, is reliance upon religious authorities as opposed, for example, to philosophical or ethical authorities, or simply, moral experts, singled out as an instance of close-mindedness? Academics often rely upon “authorities” for making decisions on moral issues (e.g., the authority of John Rawls when considering matters of distributive justice), although they would likely be uncomfortable characterizing this as reliance upon an authority (even if it is).

Statement 2. reflects a liberal ideological rejection of “moral absolutism,” which is typically associated with religion. It is also a statement open to multiple interpretations. While reflecting liberal values of toleration and multiculturalism, it could easily be read as a defense of moral relativism, a very problematic view (e.g., female genital mutilation is “right” for societies where it is widely practiced) that bears no clear relation to “open-mindedness.”

Statement 3. is in some ways a concise statement of political conservatism. Edmond Burke, often considered the father of modern political conservatism, wrote repeatedly about the need to “preserve our ancient indisputable laws and liberties, and that ancient constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty” (Burke 1881, p. 302). Consider contemporary debates over “original intent” in regard to the US Constitution. Many conservatives embrace a strict constitutional originalism based upon an adherence to the principles of the “Founding Fathers” and reject “judicial activism.” Liberals are more inclined to view the Constitution as a flexible document that should be interpreted in accord with changing circumstances.

Statement 4: The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable (Knowles 2006) defines a “permissive society” as “the form of society supposed to have prevailed in the West since the mid-1960s (associated especially with the late 1960s and early 1970s), characterized
by greater tolerance and more liberal attitudes in areas such as sexuality, abortion, drug use, and obscenity.” On one basic level, we would expect conservatives to be opposed to “more liberal attitudes” (inasmuch as they are conservatives). The differences between American liberals and (social) conservatives on issues such as abortion, drug use, and obscenity are well known.

These are just 4 out of 8 questions in one section of the revised NEO PI-R personality inventory. According to Duarte et al, one explanation for the underrepresentation of conservatives in social psychology is that conservatives are more “open to experience.” What they fail to realize is that this association is circular. It exists because liberal biases are built into the characterization and assessment of personality itself upon which the authors rely.

I suspect that the 5-factor model of personality has become something of a sacred cow in psychology. This is unfortunate. The entire inventory is full of all manner of moral and political biases (though it is beyond the scope of this Comment to make this wider case. The liberal biases in the Open to Experience dimension however, should be clear for all to see. I urge the authors, in line with their own commendable recommendations, and the entire field of psychology, to take note of the liberal ideological biases built into the most widely used measure of personality.

References


Towards a De-biased Social Psychology: The effects of ideological perspective go beyond politics.

David C. Funder
University of California, Riverside
900 University Avenue
Department of Psychology
University of California, Riverside
Riverside, California, 92521
USA

TELEPHONE: 951-827-3938
E-MAIL: funder@ucr.edu
HOME PAGE URL: rap@ucr.edu

ABSTRACT: Reasonable conservatives are in short supply and will not arrive to save social psychology any time soon. The field needs to save itself through de-biasing. The effects of a liberal world view permeate and distort discussion of many topics that are not overtly political, including behavioral genetics and evolutionary psychology, the fundamental attribution error, and the remarkably persistent consistency controversy.

"A liberal is a man too broadminded to take his own side in a quarrel." -- Robert Frost

Liberals may be too open-minded for their own (ideological) good; they keep finding fault with themselves and this article is a good example. Which is not to say it's not largely correct. Social and personality psychology obviously lacks ideological diversity, and Duarte and colleagues provide strong circumstantial evidence that the causes include hostile climate, lack of role models, and subtle and not-so-subtle discrimination of the same sort that underlies other lacks of diversity elsewhere in society.

Duarte et al. argue that our science would be better if more "conservatives" were included in the ideological mix. But the point of view that carries this label has changed greatly in recent years. Not so long ago, no conservative would dream of shutting down the government over an ideological dispute, denying the validity of settled science, or
passing laws to encourage open carry of weapons on college campuses. Conservatives were *conservative*. Such people indeed have a lot to contribute to any discussion, including scientific ones. But many modern-day "conservatives" -- especially the loudest ones -- would better be described as radical, and among their radical characteristics is a pride in anti-intellectualism and willful ignorance. In a call for more conservatives, who are we actually inviting and, I truly wonder, how many even exist? I am not optimistic about the feasibility of finding enough reasonable conservatives to join our field, even if we could overcome all of the barriers the target article so vividly describes. At best, such change is a long-term goal.

In any case, we shouldn’t wait for conservatives to arrive and save us. We need to save ourselves. The target article presents mixed messages about whether de-biasing is feasible. On the one hand, it cites evidence that de-biasing is difficult or impossible. On the other hand, the entire article is an effort at de-biasing. I choose to believe the more optimistic, implicit claim of Duarte et al., which is that we can become more intellectually honest with ourselves and thereby do better science. I find the "mirror-image" test particularly promising. For any finding, we should indeed get into the habit of asking, what if the very same evidence had led to the opposite conclusion?

Politics is the least of it. In focusing on research that seeks to describe how conservatives are cognitively flawed or emotionally inadequate, or on research that treats conservative beliefs as ipso facto irrational, Duarte et al. grasp only at the low-hanging fruit. More pernicious, I believe, are the way ideological predilections bias the conduct and evaluation of research that, on the surface, has nothing to do with politics. An awful lot of research and commentary seems to be driven by our value systems, what we wish were true. So we do studies to show that what we wish were true is true, and attack the research of others that leads to conclusions that do not fit our world view.

Examples are legion. Consider just a few:
**Personality and abilities are heritable.** This finding is at last taking hold in psychology, after a century's dominance of belief in a "blank slate." The data were just too overwhelming. But the idea that people are different at the starting line is heartbreaking to the liberal world-view and encounters resistance even now.

**Human nature is a product of evolution.** Social psychologists are the last people you would expect to deny that Darwin was right -- except when it comes to human behavior, and especially if it has anything to do with sex differences (Winegard et al., 2014). The social psychological alternative to biological evolution is not intelligent design, it's culture. And as to where culture came from, that’s a problem left for another day.

**The Fundamental Attribution Error** is, as we all know, the unfortunate human tendency to view behavior as stemming from the characteristics -- the traits and beliefs -- of the people who perform it. Really, it's the situation that matters. So, change the situation and you can change the behavior; it's as simple as that. This belief is very attractive to a liberal world-view, and one does not have to look very far to find examples of how it is used to support various liberal attitudes towards crime and punishment, economic equality, education, and so forth. But the ideological consequences of belief in the overwhelming power of the situation are not consistent. It implies that the judges at Nuremberg committed the Fundamental Attribution Error when they refused to accept the excuse of Nazi generals that they were "only following orders."

**The consistency controversy**, which bedeviled the field of personality psychology for decades and which still lingers in various forms, stems from the conviction among many social psychologists that the Fundamental Attribution Error, just mentioned, affects an entire subfield of psychology. Personality psychology, it is sometimes still said, exaggerates the importance of individual differences. But to make a very long story very short, individual differences in behavior are consistent across situations (Kenrick & Funder, 1988), and personality is stable across decades (e.g., Nave, Sherman & Funder, 2010). Many important life outcomes including occupational success, marital stability and even longevity can be predicted from personality traits as well as or better than from
any other variables (Roberts et al., 2007). And changing behavior is difficult, as any parent trying to get a child to make his bed can tell you; changing attitudes is just as hard, as anyone who has ever tried to change anyone else's mind in an argument can tell you. Indeed, does anybody ever change their mind about anything? Maybe so, but generally less than the situation would seem to demand. I expect that responses to the article by Duarte et al. will add one more demonstration of how hard it is to change ingrained beliefs.

REFERENCES

Liberals and Conservatives: Non-Convertible Currencies

Hibbing, John R.; Smith, Kevin B.; and Alford, John R.
University of Nebraska--Lincoln
jhibbing@unl.edu

Abstract: Duarte et al. are correct that the social science enterprise would improve on several fronts if the number of politically conservative researchers were to increase; however, because they misunderstand the degree to which liberals and conservatives are dispositionally different, they fail to appreciate the full range of reasons that conservatives are reluctant to enter the modern social sciences.

Duarte et al.’s target article is valuable and even necessary. We agree that increasing the number of politically conservative researchers would enhance the social scientific process and in this commentary we even mention two additional benefits that could accrue. At the same time, Duarte et al. fail to appreciate the fundamental differences between liberals and conservatives and as a result may misunderstand the potential for rectifying the current situation.

No doubt in part because social scientists are overwhelmingly liberal, conservatives are so much on the defensive that they sometimes believe they are being criticized even when they are not. A clear example is found in the target article itself where the authors accuse us of claiming that conservatives are “hyper-sensitive to negative stimuli” even though a simple word search indicates we never used any such phrase. Though our findings do show that conservatives are more sensitive than liberals to negative stimuli, this does not make them hyper-sensitive any more than it makes liberals hypo-sensitive. Indeed, in the cited works we go to great lengths to explain that neither side is deserving of a pejorative label and that it is best to stop with acknowledging that liberals and conservatives are simply different. From an evolutionary standpoint, sensitivity to negative situations is hardly a bad strategy but in the current climate if social science researchers point out any
way in which conservatives are different from liberals the immediate assumption is that the goal is to demean conservatives. Duarte et al. are correct that research needs to be written more carefully but it also needs to be read more carefully. Perhaps greater ideological balance would help on this front.

A related potential benefit of increasing the number of conservative researchers is enhanced public acceptance of the social science enterprise. We come from a discipline (political science) on the frontline of attacks from politicians. These attacks typically are led by politically conservative lawmakers and resonate most with politically conservative citizens. Would the hostility of conservatives toward political and social science research be diminished if the composition of the research community was more ideologically balanced? A shift toward balance undoubtedly would broaden acceptance of the social sciences; however, in contrast to the tone of the target article, we believe that 1.) for the most part conservatives today do not want to become social scientists and 2.) even if the number of conservative social scientists did swell, conservatives would remain deeply suspicious of social science research. Duarte et al. do not see the matter this way primarily because they fail to appreciate the fundamental differences between liberals and conservatives even though some of their own research points to foundational differences (e.g., Haidt and Graham 2007).

Duarte et al. cite recent research suggesting that liberals are as prejudiced as conservatives toward “ideological dissimilar others;” in other words, conservatives are prejudiced against stereotypically left-leaning targets (e.g., African Americans) whereas liberals are prejudiced against stereotypically right-leaning targets (e.g., religious Christians). Related research shows that liberals and conservatives are equally likely to “misremember” history and to make mathematical errors all in order to affirm their ideology (Frenda et al. 2013; Kahan et al. 2013). As a result, Duarte et al. argue that liberals and conservatives are nothing more than two sides of the same coin—with one side disliking Muslims and gun control in parallel to the other side’s dislike of Christian fundamentalists and genetically modified foods.
Conservative attitudes toward liberals and liberal concepts (and liberal attitudes toward conservatives and conservative concepts) are certainly important to study but they are not all that matters. In truth, the telling comparisons involve the contrasting responses and behaviors of liberals and conservatives when they are NOT being exposed to politically charged stimuli. For example, compared to liberals, individuals with conservative issue preferences register significantly greater physiological responses (and directed attention) to startling noises and negative imagery (Oxley et al. 2008; Dodd et al. 2012); compared to conservatives, liberals are more likely to seek out information even if it may be undesirable (Shook and Fazio 2009); and compared to conservatives, liberals consistently register lower preference for closure (Jost et al. 2003).

Liberals may dislike their political opponents just as much as conservatives do and they may be just as willing to twist reality to validate their biases but this does not alter the fact that liberals and conservatives experience and process the world in remarkably different fashions. Ironically, if Duarte et al. acknowledged this gross asymmetry, it would heighten their central message since fundamental differences make it all the more important for social scientists to be sensitive to both types.

On the other hand, the existence of these bedrock differences suggests explanations for the paucity of conservative social scientists that Duarte et al. may find disquieting. As Pinker points out (2002), compared to liberals, conservatives are more likely to believe that the human condition is flawed, easily understandable, and not readily remediable; ergo, conservatives tend to perceive social programs and social research as unnecessary and/or counterproductive. Combine these perceptions of the human condition with conservatives’ reservations about uncertain information searches (Shook and Fazio) and situations with insufficient closure (Jost et al.), both of which are hallmarks of science and especially social science, and it becomes even more apparent that conservative misgivings regarding the social sciences can be traced to the nature of the enterprise.

The prevailing liberal orthodoxy in many academic disciplines discourages conservatives from signing on and the solutions proposed in the target article may help…a little. A
larger change would require significant increases in the number of conservatives who want to spend their adult lives as social scientists and, given the topics investigated in the modern social sciences, this is unlikely even if the climate became more welcoming. Achieving greater ideological balance in the social sciences will take much more than alerting liberal academics to the existence of imbalance; it will take coming to terms with the fundamentally different (and occupationally relevant) predispositions of conservatives and liberals.

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The Psychology of Psychology: A Thought Experiment

Stephen J. Ceci and Wendy M. Williams
Cornell University
G80 MVR Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853
607 255-0828
Email: sjc9@cornell.edu; wmw5@cornell.edu
Home page URL: http://www.human.cornell.edu/bio.cfm?netid=sjc9

Abstract: The lack of political diversity has been alleged to reduce research efficacy. We pose a thought experiment that could provide an empirical test by examining whether IRB members, granting agencies, and journal reviewers filter scientific products based on political values, invoking scientific criteria (rigor, etc.) as their justification. When these same products are cast in terms highlighting opposite values, do these people shift their decisions?

Fewer than 10% of social scientists consider themselves politically conservative. Duarte et al. review evidence suggesting that diversifying political viewpoints within the academy could have salutary effects in several domains, including research. Here we address this claim.

A Thought Experiment

Suppose IRBs, grant funders, and journal reviewers are influenced in their judgment of research by its political orientation, not just its scientific merit (Ceci, Peters & Plotkin, 1985). Suppose individuals are asked to evaluate a project; in one version the data support a liberal agenda and in another version they support a conservative agenda—despite the methods, procedures and analyses being identical. Only the political implications of the results differ. Reviewers should not treat these studies differently if they are identical except for their political implications. If the studies have the identical design, analysis, literature framing, etc. they should be rated similarly in terms of their scientific rigor, appropriateness, and publishability.

Suppose journal reviewers are asked to review a study, a summary of which follows. After reading the full study, reviewers rate the rigor of the design, the importance/appropriateness of the question, the adequacy of the literature review/framing, and its publishability, employing the typical considerations for the journal. Here are two politically opposite versions of the same study:

VERSION A
Is the Black-White IQ Gap Partly Explained by Economic Disadvantage of Blacks?
Researchers analyzed a nationally representative data set that included IQ and a host of demographic and environmental variables. They reported that controlling for parental
educational attainment and income reduces the average Black–White group difference in IQ by roughly 90% or 13 IQ points, and given that parents’ socioeconomic status is an imperfect measure of environmental influences on intelligence, even this 13 point reduction is likely to underestimate the importance of parental social class on racial differences in intelligence. The researchers conclude:

According to cultural theories of racial and ethnic differences in intelligence, as African American families advance up the socioeconomic ladder, their children should be less exposed to environmental deficits and therefore should do better and, by extension, close the gap separating the Black mean from the White mean. In fact, this is exactly what we found: the magnitude of the mean Black–White group difference in IQ for higher SES levels, when measured in standard deviations, is far smaller.... Matching Black and White children for the geographical areas of their homes, the schools they attend, and other finer-grained socioeconomic indicators reduces the mean group IQ difference still further, eliminating IQ gaps completely. Black children from the best areas and schools (those associated with the highest mean scores) average only slightly lower than do White children with similar socioeconomic indicators. This is an anomaly for genetic theory but is easily handled by environmental theories.

1. Rate the above study on its scientific methodology. Did the researchers’ methodology allow a reasonable test of the research question? Use a 1 to 9 scale, in which 1=extremely bad, 5=neither good nor bad, and 9=extremely good.
2. Rate the question asked by these researchers regarding its appropriateness for investigators to address--is this an appropriate question for researchers to ask? Use the same 1 to 9 scale.

VERSION B
In a flipped version, different reviewers rate the same study but with the results tilted in the opposite direction:

Is the Black-White IQ Gap Partly Explained by Economic Disadvantage of Blacks?
Researchers analyzed a nationally representative data set that included IQ and a host of demographic and environmental variables. They reported that controlling for parental educational attainment and income only reduces the average Black–White group difference in IQ by 30% or roughly 5 IQ points out of the 15 point gap that separates Blacks and Whites. Moreover, given that parents’ socioeconomic status partly reflects their genetic differences in intelligence, even this 5 point reduction is likely to mask some genetic differences in parental intelligence. The researchers conclude:

According to cultural theories of racial and ethnic differences in intelligence, as self-defined Black groups advance up the socioeconomic ladder, their children should be less exposed to environmental deficits and therefore should do better and, by extension, close the gap separating the Black mean IQ from the White mean IQ. In fact, we found that the magnitude of the mean Black–White group difference in IQ for higher SES levels, when measured in standard deviations, is actually much larger than that found between lower SES groups.... Matching Black and White children for the geographical areas of their homes, the schools they attend, and other finer-grained socioeconomic
indicators again reduces the mean group IQ difference but does not eliminate it. Black children from the best areas and schools (those schools associated with the highest mean scores) still average slightly lower IQs than do White children with the lowest socioeconomic indicators. This is an anomaly for the culture-only theory but is consistent with genetic theory through regression to the mean.

Conclusion

If liberal reviewers favor version A and conservatives favor B, this is evidence that extra-scientific considerations influence reviewers’ calculus in ways that are opaque to authors and editors. Reviewers of a version incongruous with their political orientation might view the study as “not asking the right question” while their ideologically similar peers who review the opposite version might rate it as appropriate and relevant. One wonders whether a study of this type--if revealing that reviewers (including those who are regular journal reviewers and editors or grant agency panelists) were biased against ideologically-contrary interpretations--would be as readily publishable as its own counterpart arriving at the opposite conclusion.

A greater number of nonliberal scientists might help correct errors in scholarly reasoning and reframe the designs of politically-valenced investigations, or at least counterbalance them against competing designs. If a presumptively open, self-referential peer-review process is influenced by political ideology, diversifying political ideology is warranted. If reviewers assume the role of political gatekeepers to decide what is fundable or publishable, science will be the perpetual loser.

Reference

Welcoming Conservatives to the Field

Richard Nisbett
University of Michigan
nisbett@umich.edu

Abstract: More conservatives would provide advantages, and social psychologists may not be as opposed to increasing the number of conservatives as the authors think. Recruitment problems concern primarily self-selection and biases in undergraduate instruction. Social psychologists should welcome having conservatives in the field to serve as a conduit for our theories and methods to conservative intellectuals and policy makers.

I agree with Duarte et al that there is prejudice against conservatives and that there might be significant scientific and social gains from having more conservatives in the field.

The analogy to the entry of East Asians into the field is salient to me. East Asians have profoundly changed our understanding of the nature of the self and the relation of the self to larger groups including society. They have also powerfully influenced our thinking about cognition. Eastern holistic thinking is at base enormously different from logical, analytic thinking. It solves some problems that analytic thinking can’t.

Eastern views generate theories that would not likely come from a purely Western orientation. And the two traditions provide vantage points for critiquing one another’s social practices and cognitive habits.

I believe something like the same thing might be true if the social and behavioral sciences were to include larger numbers of conservatives. It would increase the range and nature of social and behavioral theories and provide valuable criticism.
As a liberal, there is another reason I want to increase the number of conservatives in the field. I want us to affect the social and political thought of conservative intellectuals and politicians. Some conservative positions are simply untenable in light of well-established social psychological theory. It’s enough to mention the fundamental attribution error. There are also opportunities for affecting social policy. A frequent conservative impulse is to reject any proposed intervention because there could be unforeseen damaging effects or “negative externalities.” Social psychologists well understand these concerns, but we also have theories that can help to avoid untoward consequences, and we have methods that can test interventions before they become adopted on a large scale.

How severe is the prejudice against conservatives? As the authors acknowledge, it’s hard to know because it’s clear that at least a part of the reason for few of them being in the field is self-selection on the basis of interests. But there is no question that conservative students might be turned off by part by professors asserting views they believe to be supported by theory and research but which in fact are merely readouts of liberal ideology. And sometimes professors express outright contempt for conservative views, which aside from being rude, lowers our credibility with sensible people of all political persuasions.

But I doubt that we are turning away many potential graduate students with a conservative bent. For the foreseeable future, self-selection based on interests, combined with distaste for the liberal ideology of the field, will result in few conservatives applying to graduate school. And a conservative eager to apply to graduate school would undoubtedly know it would be unwise to reveal conservative beliefs in an application.

How about conservative PhDs trying to join social science faculties? Would they find it difficult to get a job? I don’t doubt that a conservative political stance would be a disadvantage, but I object to the purported evidence on the point presented by Duarte et al. The Inbar and Lammers (2012) poll is flawed. The investigators asked a large number of social psychologists, “If two job candidates (with equal qualifications) were to apply for an opening in your department, and you knew that one was politically quite
conservative, do you think you would be inclined to vote for the more liberal one?” The end point on the scale was labeled “not at all.” Only by checking that endpoint could respondents show they had no prejudice against conservatives. The possibility that the respondent might be inclined to be biased in favor of the conservative candidate was not taken seriously or perhaps not even considered. Moreover, we know that scale point labels can drastically shift responses. The Inbar and Lammers scale could have the tacit implication that any reasonable social scientist could at most be neutral.

At least one of the authors of the Duarte et al paper apparently agrees with the assertion that neutrality is as far as a social psychologist would go. When I told him that I would be inclined to vote for the conservative, he seemed skeptical. I was surprised by his reaction. For all the reasons stated at the beginning of my commentary, I would welcome the intellectual opportunities and challenges owing to the presence of a conservative in my department. (Though I readily admit that the conservative’s presence might cast a pall on some water cooler conversations!)

To see whether I was alone in my preferences I polled 16 prominent social psychologists, asking them if they would welcome having more conservatives in the field, and whether, other things equal, they would vote for a conservative job candidate or a liberal candidate. (I dropped the adjective “quite” in front of conservative, since it seemed more reasonable to compare a conservative to a liberal than to compare someone who was “quite conservative” to someone who was a mere liberal.) To my knowledge, all of my respondents would describe themselves as liberal or moderate. Thirteen of the 16 stated they would welcome conservatives to the field. There is probably a NIMBY effect, however. Only seven said that they would vote for the conservative job candidate. (Seven said they would vote for the liberal, and 2 said they would have no bias either way). The existence proof here: there are prominent non-conservative social psychologists who would welcome conservatives into the field, and some of those social psychologists assert they would bend over backwards to hire a conservative into their department.
So the situation might not be as bleak as the authors assume. Their proposals for making the field more welcome to conservatives seem to me to be reasonable, possible to institute, and maybe more effective than they might assume. At the least, I think social psychologists will bear in mind the admonitions of the Duarte, et al. article when they write or lecture, and possibly even when they frame their hypotheses and design tests for them. I hope so.

References

QTIPs: Questionable Theoretical and Interpretive Practices in Social Psychology

Mark J. Brandt & Travis Proulx
Tilburg University, Department of Social Psychology, P.O. Box 90153, 5000 LE, Tilburg, Netherlands

Telephone Numbers: Brandt: +31 13 466 2154
Proulx: +31 13 466 2450

E-mail: Brandt: m.j.brandt@tilburguniversity.edu
Proulx: t.proulx@tilburguniversity.edu

Homepage: Brandt: mjbrandt.com;
Proulx: https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/webwijs/show/t.proulx.htm

Abstract: One possible consequence of ideological homogeneity is the misinterpretation of data collected with otherwise solid methods. To help identify these issues outside of politically-relevant research, we name and give broad descriptions to three questionable interpretive practices described by Duarte et al and introduce three additional questionable theoretical practices that also reduce the theoretical power and paradigmatic scope of psychology.

Questionable research practices (QRPs) in social psychology and other disciplines have been the target of efforts dedicated to improving empirical social psychology; however, a focus on improving empirical practices can be more effective by linking it with a simultaneous focus on improving theoretical and interpretive practices. While mature sciences are generally characterized by broad theoretical consensus (i.e., paradigms, Kuhn, 1962), these perspectives are often in conflict, and efforts to resolve these discrepancies foment theoretical advancement and a more precise understanding of scientific phenomena (Popper, 1959). When social psychology – or any scientific discipline – adopts a singular ideological worldview, this serves to quell sources of potentially generative conflict. It also leads to additional (and justifiable) concerns that researchers are motivated to produce and interpret findings in a manner that is consistent with a given research perspective.
Duarte and colleagues identify several instances of questionable interpretive practices (QIPs) that may have resulted from ideological homogeneity (Jussim, Crawford, Stevens, & Anglin, in press). These are instances where researchers used proper research methods for gathering data, but engaged in potentially problematic interpretations of that same data. These practices are unlikely to be unique to research areas touched by political ideology and we believe that naming them and giving them a more general description will help researchers be vigilant for these practices more broadly:

1. *Premature theoretical closure*: This is the practice whereby a finding is treated as firmly established when all of the necessary conditions for claiming the finding is supported have not yet been tested. For example, Durarte et al highlight work that suggested right-wing authoritarians are more likely to make hypocritical political judgments, when these judgments were only tested for a very limited range of issues.

2. *Imprecise naming*: There is an incentive to name constructs with as much breadth as possible so that the construct studied can be thought to extend to a wider array of situations. Duarte et al highlight research where the original authors made claims about “unethical decisions” broadly, although they primarily measured decisions contrary to liberal values.

3. *Begging the Question*: In some cases a particular research question or method is framed in such a way as the only possible result confirms the authors’ hypothesis. Duarte et al. discussed research where the original authors built their conclusion (denial of realities) into the name of their measure of environmental attitudes.

There are theoretical problems in (social) psychology that go beyond questionable interpretations of the data and include problematic theoretical practices at several stages of the theoretical process. We suggest that the QIPs identified by Durarte et al are part of a more general category of questionable theoretical and interpretive practices (QTIPs). Although there are many potential QTIPs, we think that three are worth briefly describing and adding to the list by Duarte et al and Jussim et al (in press).
4. **Deja-vu constructs**: The incentives in social psychology are to produce novel theories, leading to a proliferation of theories in our major journals. However, oftentimes new theoretical constructs are merely old constructs with new branding (Hagger, 2014). Instead of ego-depletion, for example, much of the work could fit under the much older label of mental fatigue.

5. **Homophone constructs**: Psychologists study many everyday behaviors and phenomena leading us to name our constructs with everyday words. This also leads to a situation where we give the same name to a variety of different phenomena that are not interchangeable. For example, intentions can mean many different things and only by specifying the precise type of intentions (e.g., implementation intentions, continuation intentions; see Hagger, 2014) is it possible to make precise predictions and make comparisons across studies and literatures.

6. **Naturalistic Fallacy**: Social scientists are particularly prone to providing empirical support for emerging social trends, reifying an apparently emerging status quo with data suggesting that these desired end-states are the way things naturally are. Historically, both liberally-tinged (biological origins of sexual preference) and conservatively-tinged (effects of illegal drugs) research programs have produced effects that appear motivated to justify a given social order.

QTIPs are different from QRPs. For example, Duarte and colleagues connect their contribution to discussions about QRPs in social psychology. QRPs lead to inflated Type I errors, and produce results that appear robust, but are in fact false positives. If the dearth of non-liberals in academic social psychology leads to QRPs, presumably in the favor of a liberal point-of-view, then one would predict that research agendas conducive to a liberal point-of-view (e.g., conservatives are rigid; Jost et al., 2003) would be more likely to produce false positives compared to research agendas conducive to a conservative point-of-view (e.g., the effect of grit on successes in life; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). However, it is not at all clear that more or less liberal research agendas produce different levels of false positives and, indeed, neither the conservatives-are-rigid nor the grit-leads-to-success research agendas appear to be false positives. What
is in doubt is the interpretation and scope of the reliable effects produced from various research agendas. This is not due to QRPs, but rather may be the result of QTIPs.

Rather than focusing on who is biased against whom (we know people are generally biased against those they disagree with, Brandt et al., 2014) the focus should be on how to improve social psychological theory. By naming and describing QTIPs we hope to move the discussion from who is biased to a focus on how we can improve the theoretical foundations of social psychology. Even if the analysis by Duarte et al is entirely incorrect, pushing social psychologists to think about their QTIPs in addition to the QRPs is a valuable contribution.

References


When Theory Trumps Ideology: Lessons from Evolutionary Psychology

Joshua M. Tybur and Carlos David Navarrete

1VU University
Van der Boechorststraat 1
1081 BT Amsterdam
The Netherlands
+31205983088
j.m.tybur@vu.nl
http://www.psy.vu.nl/nl/over-de-faculteit/medewerkers-alfabetisch/medewerkers-t-z/tybur-jm/

2Michigan State University
Department of Psychology
316 Physics Rd. #247
+1-517-432-8391
cdn@msu.edu
http://cdnresearch.net

Abstract: Evolutionary psychologists are personally liberal, just as social psychologists are. Yet their research has rarely been perceived as liberally biased—if anything, it has been mistaken as being motivated by conservative political agendas. Taking a closer look at evolutionary psychologists might offer the broader social psychology community guidance in neutralizing some of the biases Duarte et al. discuss.

Imagine a group of psychologists conducting research on politically charged topics such as race, sex differences, stereotyping and morality. Imagine that these psychologists generate novel hypotheses and empirical findings that had been scarcely considered by the predominantly liberal social psychology community. Imagine further that these psychologists face accusations that their research is biased by a conservative political agenda, and, as a consequence, they face some degree of stigma and exclusion from the liberal establishment within the field.
Now imagine that these psychologists, rather than being political conservatives who have been drawn into the field via high effort recruiting processes, are just as liberal as their social psychology peers.

This reality can be experienced in the flesh at the annual conference of the Human Behavior and Evolution Society, or at the annual Society for Personality and Social Psychology Evolutionary Psychology Preconference. A casual observation of the researchers who attend these and similar meetings will suggest that evolutionary psychologists are just as liberal as other psychologists (and, if anything, they’re slightly more likely to be environmentalists or vegans). Such observations would correspond with the only empirical investigation into the political attitudes of evolutionary versus non-evolutionary psychologists. In a sample of 168 Ph.D. students from six U.S. universities, Tybur et al. (2007) found that two of the 31 evolutionary psychologists (6.5%)—and 21 out of the 137 non-evolutionary psychologists (18.1%)—identified as Republican or Libertarian. When asked to place themselves on a seven point Likert scale ranging from -3 (strongly conservative) to +3 (strongly liberal), all 31 of the evolutionary psychologists in the sample categorized themselves as more liberal than the scale midpoint. These data coincide with the fact that some of the highest profile evolutionary behavioral scientists of the 20th century, including Robert Trivers (a member of the Black Panthers), John Maynard Smith (a registered member of the Communist Party of Great Britain) and E.O. Wilson (one of the world’s leading conservationists) favored (sometimes radically) liberal politics in their personal lives. The data on evolutionary psychologists’ political attitudes are also similar to those that Duarte et al. summarize in describing social psychologists writ large.

Despite being just as liberal as non-evolutionary psychologists—and, seemingly, carrying the same personal political beliefs that could bias their research—you won’t find many suggestions that evolutionary psychologists should recruit more conservatives into their ranks to strengthen their science. If anything, many liberal academics have suggested that evolutionary psychologists are conservative activists who use their research to promote a
conservative political agenda (for overviews, see Lyle and Smith, 2012; Segerstrale, 2000; Tybur et al., 2007).

So, why have evolutionary psychologists been labeled as ideologically conservative even though the data indicate that they are as liberal as non-evolutionary psychologists? Why can they, despite their liberal ideologies, conduct the type of “diverse” research on morality, prejudice, and sex differences that Duarte et al. urge social psychologists to consider? One of the benefits of an evolutionary perspective is that it is, by nature, an apolitical theoretical framework, as long as scientific readers or practitioners do not succumb to naturalistic or moralistic fallacies. When scientific practitioners and consumers are mindful to avoid leaping neither from “is” to “ought” or vice-versa, the hypotheses derived from an evolutionary perspective can differ quite strikingly from those that would be generated from a liberally biased perspective, and they do not always fit simple liberal moral intuitions. For example, consider Navarrete et al.’s (2010) proposal that aspects of race-based prejudice might be rooted in evolved psychological mechanisms designed for adaptive coping with threats posed by aggressive outgroup men. Far from conducting this research to justify prejudice against outgroup men, Navarrete (himself a left-of-center, minority male) hopes that the research would, if anything, be used to attenuate such prejudice. Or consider Thornhill and Palmer’s (2000) suggestion that sexual coercion could be better understood by considering an evolutionary perspective. Merely proposing this hypothesis was broadly interpreted across academia as “justifying” rape, and Thornhill (who himself has strong liberal values and abhors sexual coercion) received personal harassment as a result. Indeed, detractors attempted to break into his home and left death threats on his home answering machine (Thornhill, personal communication).

If evolutionary psychologists are personally liberal, how are they able to conduct research that departs so markedly from liberal intuitions? And can the answers to these questions inform solutions to social psychology’s problem with liberal bias?
We suggest that a robust, multidisciplinary theoretical framework can act as a kind of “buffer” between researchers’ personal political beliefs and their research questions. Duarte et al., while correct in pointing out social psychology’s liberal demographics, miss a critical ingredient that allows such demographics to metastasize into widespread, biased research: the lack of a coherent, overarching theoretical framework that can be used to generate testable predictions. Indeed, social psychology has frequently been criticized for lacking such a framework with integrative support from other disciplines (Kelley, 2000; Krueger & Funder, 2004; Pinker, 2011; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). With a dearth of theoretical boundaries from which to guide research questions and generate hypotheses, researchers might instead use their own political biases to guide their research, even if unwittingly.

If this line of thinking is correct, then social psychology’s problem with liberal bias is not due to its liberal demographics alone; it is due to a combination of liberal demographics and the lack of a rigorous, apolitical theoretical framework. There are two strategies that could be used to correct the field’s liberally bias research, then. The first is that outlined by Duarte et al. – to pepper the field with conservatives who can introduce their own political biases to offset those of the liberal majority. An alternative would be to commit ourselves to avoid moralistic and naturalistic fallacies and to shore up the foundations of social psychology with theories that are grounded in apolitical realms, such as evolutionary theory. We favor the latter strategy; we believe it would be easier to implement, and it would have additional benefits beyond correcting politically based biases.

References


Political orientations do not cancel out, and politics is not about truth

Hans-Rüdiger Pfister; Gisela Böhm
Leuphana University Lüneburg, Institute of Experimental Industrial Psychology, Wilschenbrucher Weg 84, 21335 Lüneburg, Germany; University of Bergen, Department of Psychosocial Science, Christiesgt. 12, 5015 Bergen, Norway.
+49-4131-677 7759
pfister@uni-lueneburg.de; gisela.boehm@psysp.uib.no
www.uib.no/personer/Gisela.Boehm#profil

Abstract: Duarte et al. propose that divergent political biases cancel each other out such that increasing political diversity will improve scientific validity. We argue that this idea is misguided. Their recommendations for improving political diversity in academia bear the danger of imposing political interests on science. Scientific scrutiny and criticism are the only viable remedies for bad science.

Duarte et al. document that the majority of psychological researchers in the US are politically liberal. They present illustrative cases where the researchers’ liberal orientations have led to biased and tendentious research. A corresponding bias could easily be found in economics or other fields where the majority of researchers are conservative (Zipp & Fenwick, 2006); whether the issue is particularly severe in social psychology is hard to tell. Bad science is ubiquitous (Goldacre, 2008). To combat bad science, it is essential to use scientific rigor to identify scientific errors, methodological flaws, and unfounded claims. We strongly support attempts to improve current reviewing procedures and scientific self-correction mechanisms.

Duarte et al., however, propose a different strategy. They argue that increasing political diversity in a research environment will improve scientific validity. Specifically, they assume that politically diverse positions “cancel each other out” and that a mix of
politically opposing positions in a research environment will generate better approximations to scientific truth. We strongly disagree with this “cancelling-out” hypothesis for several reasons.

First, we can find no empirical evidence to support this assumption in the academic domain. Even if diversity is beneficial in some domains outside of science, as the examples from organizational psychology cited by Duarte et al. suggest, it does not follow that this would be beneficial for science.

Second, the call for greater diversity is commonly motivated by a desire to increase social justice and equity rather than to search for scientific truth. Facilitating the access of, say, women to academia is a political issue; nobody should be discriminated against, for example by being excluded from an academic position on the basis of features such as sex or ethnicity. The question of whether the gender composition of a research environment has an effect on scientific quality is not part of the discrimination argument. In fact, discrimination based on sex or ethnicity is considered unfair precisely because it is generally assumed that sex or ethnicity have no bearing on academic achievement.

Third, several bizarre conclusions follow from the cancelling-out hypothesis. For example, will collaboration between evolutionary theorists and Intelligent-Design advocates cancel out their respective biases and generate a more truthful theory somewhere in the middle? Scientific truth is not a matter of political diversity and compromises unless one assumes a radical constructivist position (Lennon, 1997). And why limit diversity to political diversity? Why not increase religious diversity and add a religious fundamentalist to a psychology department dominated by atheists, hoping that their orientations will cancel out? We cannot see how this combination would improve scientific outcomes. The history of science rather demonstrates that religious or political diversity is a hindrance to scientific progress; the role of the church in the great scientific revolutions from Galileo to Darwin may serve as a case in point. Instead of cancelling each other out, those with opposing political viewpoints will likely denigrate each other, and their particular biases will be stretched to greater extremes. It seems that Duarte et al.
are neglecting a crucial distinction: Political diversity is a manifestation of conflicts of interest, not of biased knowledge, and a compromise of interests does not imply a convergence on truth.

Fourth, the cancelling-out hypothesis suggests that all political orientations are comparable and on par with each other, in particular with respect to their stance on the scientific method and their ability and willingness to contribute to scientific research. However, some political orientations, most notably those that are closely associated with religious beliefs, are in effect opposed to the scientific method as a privileged route to knowledge (Gauchat, 2008). Of course, there has always been academic debate about what constitutes a legitimate scientific method. But although science is in a continuous state of flux, there is an accepted core of legitimate methodology; the case of Intelligent Design is a good example of an attempt to gain trustworthiness and political influence by declaring oneself to be genuinely “scientific.” If we wanted to increase political diversity in our institutions, who would decide which parties to admit to the diversity mix and which to exclude? What are the criteria for determining whether a political orientation will contribute to the cancelling-out mechanism?

There is a more fundamental argument for why we see the call for political diversity in science as misguided and ultimately as politically dangerous. Simply speaking, one cannot choose one’s sex, skin color, or ethnicity. Which party to vote for in an election, by contrast, is a matter of choice. The idea that people can freely change their vote as personal preferences or political circumstances change is a pillar of democratic societies. We are not born with our political partisanship, albeit some findings suggest a – weak and mediated – genetic influence on political orientations (Oskarsson et al., 2014). Treating political categories such as liberal or conservative as if they were categories like sex and ethnicity, that is, genetically determined and immutable, is committing a kind of naturalistic fallacy. Recommending, as Duarte et al. do, that the political composition of academic teams be actively regulated is to falsely take political orientations as “given” – as facts of nature. What if researchers change their political orientation over time, and what about the possibility that this change may occur as a result of their scientific pursuit
itself? We think that any attempt to externally control the degree of political diversity in a group of thinking and developing individuals is doomed to fail.

Why is it politically dangerous to try to actively increase political diversity? Selecting candidates according to political orientation, be it for an academic or any other type of position, has rightly been viewed as a distinguishing hallmark of totalitarian regimes. We do not insinuate any such intentions to Duarte et al.; however, selecting for political diversity necessarily implies assessing individuals’ political orientations. And who assesses the assessor? The very idea of political selection bears the seed of political control, of abuse, and of fabricating academic careers that are uncorrelated with scientific achievement.

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Political diversity versus stimuli diversity: Alternative ways to improve Social Psychological Science

Thomas Kessler, Jutta Proch, Stefanie Hechler, & Larissa Näägler

Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena, Germany
Tel.: +49 3641 945250
thomas.kessler@uni-jena.de
jutta.proch@uni-jena.de
stefanie.hechler@uni-jena.de
larissa-abigail.naegler@uni-jena.de
http://www.sozialpsychologie.uni-jena.de

Abstract: Instead of enhancing diversity in research groups, we suggest that in order to reduce biases in social psychological research a more basic formulation and systematic testing of theories is required. Following the important but often neglected ecological research approach would lead to systematic variation of stimuli and sometimes representative sampling of stimuli for specific environments.

While we agree with the diagnosis of Duarte and colleagues that political and social psychological research is sometimes biased. However, we disagree with their proposed cure. According to Duarte and colleagues such biases in research can be traced back to insufficient diversity in ideas, perspectives, and research agendas. To enhance this diversity, and thereby reduce biases, the authors propose to enhance the political diversity of research groups. We are skeptical about this recommendation for several reasons: First, we do not know how much diversity would be necessary to reduce these biases. Would it be enough to include liberals and conservatives? Or should communists, fascists, or even terrorists also be included? Second, which type of diversity would be most important for reducing biases in research? Alternatively to political diversity, one may think of ethnic, cultural, religious, or disciplinary diversity. Third, we doubt that diversity within research groups necessarily reduces biases. Diversity in research groups may foster influences of hidden profile (Lu, Yuan & McLeod, 2012), where the focus on common information produces minimal consensus, which creates limited and biased research. Diversity in research groups may even lead to protracted conflicts and biased
research, for example, the endless debates about qualitative or quantitative research or pro- or anti-Israel attitudes. Such examples show that not all diverse research groups are productive.

In order to develop alternatives to improve social psychological science, we suggest a more systematic analysis of the underlying processes that lead to biased research would be necessary. In addition to biases produced by methodological weaknesses (Cumming, 2013; Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011), we think biases in research mainly emerge because of the following reasons: Researchers often focus only on certain stimuli-examples but not systematically on the whole or, at least, a broad range of stimuli (e.g., triggering events for disgust; Proch & Kessler, 2014). They actively disbelieve what they consider as morally wrong (e.g., positive effects of authoritarianism; Kessler & Cohrs, 2008). In addition, they perceive some issues as “social problems” whereas similar others disappear (e.g., targets of prejudice; Kessler & Mummendey, 2001). Finally, they take for granted what others also state to be true, which prevents them from actually testing their truth.

Based on these considerations, we like to focus on one simple but often neglected way to handle the problem of biased research. Instead of producing studies with “interesting” effects, theories and concepts should be tested more systematically. We feel that “interesting” effects are more likely to be published than systematic tests of theories. This is not necessarily a political phenomenon, but may lead to biased research in all social psychological fields. Systematic testing of theories requires a thorough formulation of theories and concepts. Observations and phenomena should, therefore, be analyzed in psychological terms, which are then traced back to general social psychological processes. For instance, most intergroup research has demonstrated that members of all groups (even the most arbitrary) show some biases (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy & Flament, 1971). Taking into account such basic social psychological research would make obvious that conservatives as well as liberals would be biased, albeit they may exhibit their biases on their group-specific topics. Moreover, thorough testing of theories should include more systematic observations (see Rozin, 2001). In addition to the orthogonal
experimental design, this would include systematic variation of stimuli and an ecological representative design. We therefore suggest to take an ecological perspective according to Brunswick (1955; Dhami, Hertwig, & Hoffrage, 2004) more seriously. Such an approach would lead to a greater variation of (amongst others) triggering events, group identities, targets of deviance and prejudice that are studied. For instance, to test the hypothesis that conservatives are more disgust sensitive than liberals, it is necessary to vary the disgust eliciting events systematically. Thus, research should not only focus on elicitors that trigger disgust in conservatives, such as homosexuality, but also on elicitors that may trigger disgust in liberals such as environmental pollution or animal husbandry. In fact, our own recent studies show that either conservatives or liberals can be more disgust sensitive depending on the set of triggering events (Proch & Kessler, 2014). With such results, representative sampling becomes an important tool for further research. With representative sampling, it becomes possible to examine the domination of certain stimuli in a particular environment, which could make either conservatives or liberals more disgust sensitive. Thus, generalizations beyond a particular environment may be invalid. We should follow Brunswick’s ideas of varying the environmental stimuli in order to disentangle psychological processes from content. This would be possible only by varying the content of stimuli either systematically or according to the typical distribution in a certain environment. Only then could one generalize psychological tendencies (e.g., higher disgust sensitivity) towards a particular environment.

In addition to the self-conscious inclusion of an ecological perspective in testing and sampling, we would like to add that the scope of theory building and knowledge gathering should also be broadened. Fundamental phenomena should connect diverse fields within social psychology and psychology in general. Instead of working in isolated spheres and keeping citation circles, work groups should link more closely and challenge each other in constructive ways. Interestingly, the present article seems to focus mainly on “American” social psychology and does not refer to a “European” tradition (or diverse others) such as basic intergroup research (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Furthermore, excellent research may also broaden its scope of literature to the history of psychology, to other social sciences (e.g., anthropology, philosophy) and to all relevant written and oral
sources, which would include novels and simply talking to people with various perspectives. Finally, we may also learn to take questions, concerns, and critique of young students and researchers more seriously as they do not think along habitual lines as more experienced researchers (Luchins, 1951). Perceived from this angle, we recommend not to worry about the composition of work groups, but rather to worry about the scope and breadth of the research focus and evidence.

**References**


“Wait – you’re a conservative?” Political Diversity and the Dilemma of Disclosure

Jim A.C. Everett

Department of Experimental Psychology
University of Oxford
South Parks Road, Oxford
OX1 3UD, United Kingdom

+44 (0) 1865 271444
jim.everett@psy.ox.ac.uk
www.jimaceverett.com

Abstract: Many of the proposed recommendations for remediying the harmful effects of political homogeneity for psychology depend upon conservatives disclosing their political identity. Yet how likely is this, when disclosure is so harmful to the individual? Considering this issue as a social dilemma clarifies the pernicious nature of the problem, as well as suggesting how the dilemma can be resolved.

As Duarte and colleagues note in their thought-provoking and insightful article, there is a stunning lack of political diversity in social psychology. Ironically for a field in which one of the biggest topics of study is prejudice, the academy is both subtly and overtly hostile to conservatives (Inbar & Lammers, 2012; Jussim, 2012). Duarte et al.’s article was of particular interest to me, in part because I was one of the just 2% of graduate students who self-identified as conservative in Inbar and Lammers’ survey. I agree with the authors on almost all of their points in the target article, but also suggest that the authors fail to discuss an issue central to ameliorating the lack of diversity in the field: actually having people disclose their non-liberal political identities. Many of the proposed recommendations for improving the state of the field are predicated on having conservatives disclose their political identity. But how likely is this?

As I began my graduate studies in psychology, I faced an important choice: should I attempt to hide my own conservative political beliefs? Indeed, I was specifically advised
by more than one social psychology professor to not disclose my own right-of-center politics if I wish to be successful in my career in social psychology. Here, I argue that disclosing one’s political identity in the present climate should be seen as a social dilemma. Considering this state of affairs as a social dilemma – situations in which collective interests are at odds with private interests – helps to clarify the pernicious nature of the problem, as well as suggesting how the problem can be ameliorated.

Social dilemmas have two fundamental characteristics:

1. Each individual receives a higher payoff for defecting from what is in the collective interest (e.g., using all the available resources for your own advantage) than for cooperating, regardless what other individuals do.
2. All individuals are better off if they all cooperate than if they all defect (Dawes, 1980; Hardin, 1968).

How does the issue of disclosing one’s non-liberal identity constitute a social dilemma? In short, the individual non-liberal researcher is better off by not disclosing, but the collective is better off by there being such disclosure.

The first prong of a social dilemma is that the individual researcher receives a higher payoff from defecting from what is in the common interest. Given the hostility in the field, political conservatives are individually better off by not disclosing their political views. A researcher who hopes to win grants, publish papers in top-tier journals, and gain tenure would be individually better off by attempting to ‘pass’ as liberal. Yet should conservative psychologists – and particularly graduate students – simply try and hide their political beliefs? I suggest not.

The second prong of a social dilemma is that the collective is better off if everyone cooperates. If people do not disclose their non-liberal political identity and conservative social psychologists withdraw from this hostile environment, the field is much worse off – affecting liberals, conservatives, and all those in between. How so? As discussed at length in the target article, lack of diversity is harmful to the field for a number of
reasons, including: liberal values and assumptions can become embedded into theories and methods; researchers may concentrate on topics that validate the liberal progression narrative and avoid topics that contest that narrative; and negative attitudes regarding conservatives can produce a science that mischaracterizes their traits and attributes.

Why is disclosure necessary to avoid this collective tragedy? Put simply, having openly conservative psychologists is a prerequisite for some of the most important solutions proposed by Duarte et al. Unless there are openly conservative psychologists, it will be impossible to engage in cross-political collaborations and have a base of non-liberal psychologists to act as reviewers. More broadly, the benefits of intergroup contact are well documented for reducing prejudice and encouraging cooperation (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Fundamentally, however, this depends on group members being identified as such – which is impossible if people hide their beliefs. Further, it is important for group memberships to be salient in intergroup encounters for the positive effects to generalize to other individuals and contexts (Hewstone & Brown, 1986). Unless individuals disclose their non-liberal political beliefs, a hostile climate will remain where prospective students are put off by the perceived lack of diversity. Having openly conservative psychologists is therefore essential to reducing hostility in the field.

What, therefore, is one to do? In their landmark paper, Messick and Brewer (1983) identify two types of solutions to social dilemmas: structural solutions and motivational solutions. Structural solutions are those that come about through organised group action, and often involve regulation or social coercion to constrain individual motivation in the collective interest. In contrast, individual motivational solutions rely on the individual preferences of the actors involved, seeking to maximize those factors that influence individuals to act for the collective good. To help resolve this dilemma, both structural and motivational solutions can be employed. However, it is too much here to expect that conservatives should simply disclose their identities and face the resulting problems. Motivational solutions aimed at conservatives, therefore, are likely to have limited effectiveness. Rather, the structural features of our system must change to provide additional support and benefits to conservatives and reduce the costs of disclosure. It is
liberals that are privileged in social psychology, and therefore liberals that must take the lead in breaking this down.

Perhaps the most important thing liberal psychologists can do is to actively be aware of their advantaged position in the field simply by virtue of their political beliefs, and challenge this wherever possible. It is liberals – not conservatives – that have both the greatest responsibility and the greatest power to create a climate in which open disclosure and acceptance of diversity is celebrated. Only then can we avoid the disastrous effects that political homogeneity will have on our discipline.

References


Too paranoid to see progress: Social psychology is probably liberal, but it doesn’t believe in progress.

* Bo Winegard – Florida State University, Department of Psychology
1107 West Call St., Tallahassee, Fl. 32304

Email: Winegard@psy.fsu.edu

http://psy.fsu.edu/~baumeisterticelab/winegard.html

Benjamin Winegard – University of Missouri, Department of Psychological Sciences
210 McAlester Hall, Columbia, MO 65211
(573) 882-6860

Email: bmw8vb@mail.missouri.edu

David C. Geary - University of Missouri, Department of Psychological Sciences
210 McAlester Hall, Columbia, MO 65211
(573) 882-6860

Email: GearyD@Missouri.edu

*First and corresponding author

Abstract: We agree with Duarte et al. that bias in social psychology is a serious problem that researchers should confront. However, we are skeptical that most social psychologists adhere to a liberal progress narrative. We suggest, instead, that most social psychologists are paranoid egalitarian meliorists (PEM). We explain the term and suggest possible remedies to bias in social psychology.

Duarte et al. contend that the field of social psychology has become increasingly populated by politically liberal researchers. In fact, although social psychology was once more diverse, it has, according to Duarte et al. (supported by evidence from Inbar & Lammers, 2012) become almost unproductively monolithic. This paucity of political diversity creates three chief problems: (1) liberal values may become enmeshed in theory and method; (2) researchers may focus on topics that support the liberal progress narrative and avoid topics that potentially contradict it; and (3) hostile attitudes about
conservatives may create a field that misrepresents the psychology of conservatism. Of course, any explicit or implicit discrimination against conservatives (or any other group of people) not based on scientific criteria should be eliminated from social psychology. To this end, Duarte et al.’s review provides a welcomed and useful evaluation of the current state of the field. We have some concerns, however, with Duarte et al.’s promotion of Smith’s “liberal progress narrative.” We believe that the term paranoid egalitarian meliorism (PEM) more accurately characterizes the attitude of many social psychologists. We suggest that PEM may lead to many of the symptoms that Duarte et al. accurately diagnose.

Duarte et al. propose that many social psychologists adhere to what Smith (2003) called the “liberal progress narrative” (LPN). This narrative may bias the field because it may insidiously motivate researchers to pursue inquiries consistent with this belief system while ignoring other, potentially contradictory investigations. The LPN views history as a battle against unjust and oppressive institutions and regimes. Gradually, according to the LPN, freedom has flowered and the righteous forces of democracy and equality have triumphed over the darkness of concentrated social and economic power.

Although there is some truth to Duarte et al.’s argument regarding the LPN, we believe that it mischaracterizes the political narrative/attitude that most social psychologists hold. In fact, informal evidence suggests that many social psychologists are hostile to whiggish notions of “progress” and consider it indecent to trumpet cultural successes while ignoring the many real or perceived injustices that free markets and technology have birthed. For example, although this is anecdotal and requires further substantiation, our experience suggests that many social psychologists were either indifferent or actively hostile to Steven Pinker’s extremely whiggish (essentially a LPN manifesto) The Better Angels of our Nature (2011), which documents the incredible secular decline in human violence. Furthermore, at least a few prominent social psychologists have written books lamenting the growing threat of violent media, the rising trend of narcissism and the increasing misery of today’s youth—all narratives that contradict the basic tenets of progress.
We suggest, instead, that many social psychologists adhere to a brand of liberalism that is strongly colored by the attitude of paranoid egalitarian meliorism (PEM). We do not mean paranoid pejoratively; rather we mean it as a form of error-management (Haselton & Nettle, 2006). In this view, paranoid refers to a heightened sensitivity to perceive injustices and/or threats to equality. Because of this, many social psychologists: (1) study topics that are related to perceived injustices (stereotyping, prejudice, hierarchies, immorality of the wealthy, obedience); (2) ignore topics that are perceived to threaten egalitarianism (heritability, stereotype accuracy, possible benefits of conformity/hierarchy); and (3) become hostile/biased against research suggesting that some outcome differences among individuals and/or groups are at least partially caused by differences in personal traits rather than by discrimination or social oppression (e.g., that sex differences in STEM field representation are partially caused by cognitive differences and the different occupational preferences of men and women).

At its most extreme, PEM can lead to the creation of “victim groups” who become quarantined from objective scientific analysis. Protection of such perceived victim groups becomes a sacred value (Tetlock, 2003), and those who are perceived as violating this sacred value are assailed. Biased reviews, funding, and hiring decisions are justified because they are means to protecting a sacred cause. Consider the example of STEM-field representation from above. Because women are a perceived victim group, the dispassionate and disinterested study of STEM-field representation is almost impossible in social psychology. Those who suggest that the disparate representation is caused at least partially by personal traits are often attacked, denied access to top-tier journals, and forced to adhere to scientific standards much more rigorous than those who argue that the disparate representation is entirely socially caused. In general, PEM disdains scientific analyses that posit personal variables may explain some variation in outcomes because such analyses are seen as “blaming the victims.” Although this is, as we noted, an extreme outcome of PEM, it only requires a small percentage of passionate advocates to potentially distort the review, hiring, and tenure processes.
We, of course, are dedicated to tolerance, diversity, and equality of treatment. Furthermore, we believe that social science can and should be used to help us better understand society so that we can improve the life of all humans, especially those who are particularly vulnerable. However, this should be achieved by pursuing the truth regardless of however temporarily unpleasant it may be to some people. Perhaps social psychologists should attempt to mimic medical researchers. Many medical researchers are passionately committed to the cause of improving peoples’ wellbeing. However, that passionate commitment does not interfere with objective analyses of susceptibility rates. One may think it unjust that some groups (e.g., men or women) are at greater risk for certain maladies, but that doesn’t prevent researchers (and the CDC) from noting the heightened risk and advocating potential preemptive action (e.g., advocating that sexually active women get HPV vaccinations). It may offend some peoples’ moral sensibility that some groups are more vulnerable to certain diseases than others, but it is just a fact that we have to live with.

If increasing the number of conservatives in psychology will help to this end, then we endorse Duarte et al.’s recommendations. The important thing is getting the science right.

References


Method and matter in the social sciences: Umbilically tied to the Enlightenment

Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi
University of Haifa, Israel
benny@psy.haifa.ac.il

Abstract: This commentary deals with the nonconformity of academics and the ethos of social science. Academics in all fields deviate from majority norms in politics and religion, and this deviance may be essential to the academic mind and to academic norms. The Enlightenment legacy inspires both methods and subject matter in academic work, and severing ties with it may be impossible.

Given the indisputable fact that social psychology has been dominated by liberal ideals, Duarte et al. suggest that the field would be better off if practitioners were a more representative sample of the population in terms of politics. A broader historical and psychological context is needed to evaluate this suggestion. The political agenda of social psychology has been shaped by historical events. Cartwright wrote: "If I were required to name the one person who has had the greatest impact upon the field, it would have to be Adolf Hitler" (Cartwright, 1979, p. 84). In addition to Nazism in Europe, the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War had a formative effect. The Kitty Genovese murder in 1964 led (rightly or wrongly) to bystander effect research. None of these seems as subversive as work on the Just World illusion (Lerner, 1980). Would a conservative-majority social psychology have produced another body of research? Naturally.

The analysis needs to start with the fact that all academics, not just psychologists, diverge significantly from the general population in terms of beliefs and ideals, and this may be linked to their career commitments. This is a statistical generalization, allowing for concrete exceptions, but still a strong one. A liberal majority dominates most disciplines, including economics, physics, biology, engineering, business, and law (Cardiff & Klein, 2005; Klein, & Stern, 2009; Klein & Western, 2005). The association between academic aspirations and politics was evident in a 2004 survey of 15,569 undergraduates. Before starting college, 19% of liberal undergraduates were interested in getting a Ph.D., and under 10% of conservatives. While in college, 33% of conservatives chose professional fields, and only 18% of liberals (Woessner & Kelly–Woessner, 2009).

Neither do the authors mention that the findings about the politics of academics rather unsurprisingly run parallel to findings about their religiosity, which show a similar degree of nonconformity. These are highly relevant because religiosity correlates so clearly with politics. Surveys of religiosity among academics in the United States,
starting in 1914, have consistently shown a huge gap separating them from the general population (Ament, 1927; Ecklund & Park, 2009; Ecklund & Scheitle, 2007; Gross & Simmons, 2009; Lehman & Witty, 1931; Leuba, 1916). Recent surveys of elite faculty found 63.7% non-believers, compared to under 5% in the general population. Fourteen percent of the population were “evangelical”/“fundamentalist,” and under 2% of academics (Ecklund & Scheitle, 2007; Gross & Simmons, 2009). Findings from outside the United States have been similar (Beit-Hallahmi, 2014).

Gross and Fosse (2012) argued that the liberalism of academics is causally tied to an overrepresentation of Jewish (i.e. secular), non-religious, or liberal Protestant individuals among them. Gross and Simmons (2006) found that conservative politics, Republican Party affiliation, and evangelical identity were tied to lower confidence in higher education and holding professors in lower esteem. Granger and Price (2007) found that fundamentalist beliefs reduced the likelihood of pursuing science training, and Sherkat (2011) reported that Catholics and conservative Protestants had low levels of science literacy.

Research on eminent scientists in both the natural and the social sciences has shown that they had been recognized early on as unusually gifted, anti-authoritarian, and contemptuous of convention and tradition (Eiduson, 1962; Eiduson & Beckman, 1973; Feist, 2006; Roe, 1952). Political views, career interests, and religious identities stabilize in late adolescence, when religious and political non-conformists, marked by intellectualism (a high level of analytical, non-intuitive thinking), start moving towards academic careers (Ecklund, 2010; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2009; Hardy, 1974; Highton, 2009; Hoge & Keeter, 1976).

Quite early on, an “Eminence effect” was noted, with more eminent scientists in all fields being irreligious. “I do not see any way to avoid the conclusion that disbelief in a personal God and in personal immortality is directly proportional to abilities making for success in the sciences in question” (Leuba, 1916, p. 279). Among members of the United States National Academy of Sciences in biological and physical sciences, many of them Nobel Laureates, only 7 percent believed in a personal God, while in the general population the corresponding figure hovers around 95% (Larson & Witham, 1998). Data on Nobel Laureates in all fields, including Peace and Literature, show similar trends (Beit-Hallahmi, 2014). An international intellectual (secular) elite was a reality before 1900, as demonstrated by data on early Nobelists (Beit-Hallahmi, 2014). Most winners before 1920 had been born before 1850, and were no more religious than laureates 100 years later.

Lipset (1982) argued that academic excellence was tied to nonconformity in both religion and politics, and that the most eminent were in the radical left corner. Bello (1954) interviewed 87 promising research scientists under age forty. The majority were irreligious and almost no one voted for Eisenhower in 1952. More recently, the correlation between eminence and politics was demonstrated by data on the Democrat/Republican ratio at California universities. At UC Berkeley it was 8.7, at UCLA 7.2, at Stanford 6.7, UCSD 6.6, and at even at Caltech (supposedly dominated by
conservative, but brilliant, engineers). 4.2. Less prestigious California institutions had more Republicans (Cardiff & Klein, 2005).

Could the ethnic/religious/political composition of the social psychology tribe (or the nuclear physics tribe) change significantly in the foreseeable future? Research on Catholic underrepresentation in academia offers relevant data. Greeley (1963, 1973, 1977, 1990) challenged received wisdom and presented data showing that since the 1960s Catholics had the same rates of graduate degrees as others, and were just as likely to enter the academic world. Fifty years later, Catholics, who make up more than 25% of the population, are indeed well-represented among holders of advanced degrees (27.9%), but significantly underrepresented among elite faculty (9.0%) (Ecklund & Park, 2009). Internationally, data on Nobel Laureates show a severe under-representation of Catholics in all fields except Literature (Beit-Hallahmi, 2014). This case shows that cultural change is slow and unpredictable, and in the foreseeable future we will meet the usual suspects in both physics and social science.

Duarte et al. cite approvingly Merton’s "ideal-type model of a self-correcting epistemic community" (p. 37), but fail to notice that choosing it is a political act. Merton (1942/1973) advocated an anti-authoritarian weltanschauung, derived from Enlightenment ideals (or even an Enlightenment political program). Hollinger (1996) showed that Merton’s portrayal of the academic ethos was developed in the context of the fight for democracy in the 1930s and 1940s. In social science, an ethos based on universalism and skepticism cannot be easily insulated from substantive questions. Wishing to find a new inspiration, Duarte et al. find themselves back where social science started, at the Enlightenment.

References


Lack of Political Diversity and the Framing of Findings in Personality and Clinical Psychology: Commentary on Duarte et al. (in press)

Scott O. Lilienfeld, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
Emory University

Contact Information: Scott O. Lilienfeld, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Room 473, Emory University, 36 Eagle Row, Atlanta, Georgia 30322; Phone Number: 404-727-1125; Electronic Mail: silien@emory.edu

Abstract: I extend the arguments of Duarte, Crawford, Stern, Haidt, Jussim, and Tetlock (in press) by examining the implications of political uniformity for the framing of findings in personality and clinical psychology. I argue that the one-sided framing of psychological research on political ideology has limited our understanding of the personality correlates of liberalism and conservatism.

Consider the following passage:

“…structural MRI data demonstrated that conservatives have an increased gray matter volume of the right amygdala, a brain structure involved in the processing of threatening information. This suggests that individuals embracing conservative political views might be more sensitive to signals of threat, and display avoidance regulatory strategies …” (Carraro, Castelli, & Macchiella, 2011, p. 1).

At first blush, this summary of the literature seems couched in scientifically impartial language. Yet a moment’s reflection reveals that this passage could just as readily been worded as follows:

“…structural MRI data demonstrated that liberals have a decreased gray matter volume of the right amygdala, a brain structure involved in the processing of
threatening information. This suggests that individuals embracing liberal political views might be less sensitive to signals of threat, and be less likely to display avoidance regulatory strategies…”

The authors’ choice of conservatives’ rather than liberals’ personality as the explanandum may appear inconsequential. Nevertheless, the question of how to conceptualize differences in political ideology may hold largely unappreciated implications for the conduct and interpretation of research in personality and clinical psychology.

In their incisive article, Duarte, Crawford, Stern, Haidt, Jussim, and Tetlock (in press) lay bare the troubling scientific ramifications of political uniformity for social psychology. I extend Duarte et al.’s important arguments by examining the implications of this lack of political diversity for a problem they did not explicitly address, namely, the framing of findings in two fields allied with social psychology: personality and clinical psychology (see also Groeger, 2011).

Over the past several decades, researchers have demonstrated that conservatives and liberals differ in sensitivity to threat (Hibbing, Smith, & Alford, 2014; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003) and openness to experience (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008), with conservatives being higher in the former and lower in the latter. The assertions of some writers to the contrary (Ferguson, 2012), these differences are robust, replicable, and generalizable across diverse samples (Hibbing et al., 2014).

Although these differences are value-free, they have commonly been framed by researchers as reflecting poorly on conservatives. For example, conservatives’ higher sensitivity to threat relative to liberals’ has frequently been portrayed as reflecting “negativity bias” (Hibbing et al., 2014) or “motivated close-mindedness” (Thorisdóttir & Jost, 2011), and conservatives’ lower levels of openness to experience relative to liberals has been portrayed as reflecting a reliance on “system-justifying ideologies” (Jost & Hunyady, 2005).

Furthermore, many authors who have examined the personality correlates of political ideology have framed them in terms of explaining the sources of conservatives’, rather than liberals’, political ideology, thereby implying inadvertently that only the former necessitates explanation. As exemplified by such book titles as The Republican
Brain (Mooney, 2012), these writers have often treated conservatives as the reference class and liberals as the comparison class. For example, although Jost et al. (2003) maintained that political conservatism is rooted partly in a desire to satisfy certain “psychological motivational needs” (p. 340), they did not address the possibility that political liberalism stems from different emotional needs. Similarly, the “negativity bias” of conservatives, which appears to reflect their heightened threat sensitivity (Lilienfeld & Latzman, 2014), can just as validly be conceptualized as a “bias away from threat” on the part of liberals.

The one-sided framing of liberal-conservative differences neglects research suggesting that high and low levels of most, if not all, personality traits are neither inherently maladaptive nor adaptive. Instead, extremes on both poles of these traits probably entail differing trade-offs (Nettle, 2006). For example, although high levels of threat sensitivity are tied to risk for certain anxiety disorders and other internalizing disorders (Nelson et al., 2013), these trait levels may be adaptive in circumstances of high objective danger, such as the gathering storm clouds of war. Conversely, although low levels of threat sensitivity are tied to risk for psychopathic personality and other externalizing conditions, such as conduct disorder (Patrick, Fowles, & Krueger, 2009), these trait levels may predispose to adaptive risk-taking and perhaps prosocial altruism (Smith, Lilienfeld, Coffey, & Dabbs, 2013). Trade-offs may also be evident for extremes on the dimension of openness to experience. Although high openness to experience is associated with heightened creativity and artistic accomplishment (Li et al., 2014), it is also associated with elevated levels of schizotypy and paranormal beliefs (Kwapil, Barrantes-Vidal, & Silvia, 2008). On the flip side of the coin, low openness to experience is linked to high levels of rigidity, authoritarianism, and perhaps prejudice (Cullen, Wright, & Alessandri, 2002), but it may also be linked to better reality contact and a relative immunity to psychotic ideation.

Moreover, many individuals on both poles of personality dimensions may seek out and occupy certain “ecological niches” (Hutchinson, 1978) in which their dispositions facilitate adaptation. For example, individuals with low openness to experience may thrive in occupations marked by a high need for structure, such as tax law, whereas
individuals with high openness to experience may thrive in largely unstructured occupations, such as literature.

A nuanced and comprehensive understanding of personality requires researchers to appreciate that individual differences are rarely adaptive or maladaptive per se, but are associated with both advantages and disadvantages as a function of still poorly understood moderating variables, including other personality variables and situational factors. The lack of political diversity in psychology may contribute to a one-sided perspective that implicitly regards extremes in certain individual differences as inherently maladaptive. As a consequence, psychologists have accorded insufficient attention to (a) personality dispositions associated with liberalism and (b) the potential advantages of high threat sensitivity and low openness to experience, thereby impeding our understanding of the relations between personality and ideology on both ends of the political spectrum.

As Duarte et al. (in press) observe, most psychologists appear to be politically liberal. Because most of us are blind to the existence of our psychological blind spots (Pronin, Lee, & 2002), many psychologists may be largely oblivious of the extent to which their political biases subtly shape their framing of research on political ideology.

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Should Social Psychologists Create a Disciplinary Affirmative Action Program for Political Conservatives?

Richard A. Shweder
University of Chicago
Department of Comparative Human Development, 5730 S. Woodlawn Ave, Chicago, Illinois 60637
773 702 1524
rshd@uchicago.edu
https://humdev.uchicago.edu/directory/richard-shweder

Abstract: Freely staying on the move between alternative points of view is the best antidote to dogmatism. Robert Merton’s ideals for an epistemic community are sufficient to correct pseudo-empirical studies aimed at confirming propositions that liberals (or conservatives) think deserve to be true. Institutionalizing the self-proclaimed political identities of social psychology students and faculty may make things worse.

Robert Merton’s norms for a self-correcting epistemic community are referenced in Duarte et al. These include the ideals of disinterestedness and organized skepticism. Notably, Merton makes no mention of balance in the political beliefs of its disputatious members. Merton prized the intellectual virtues we associate with a Thucydides (disciplined impartiality) or a Socrates (a principled commitment to explore the other side). He was well aware of the intellectual hazards attendant on the triumph of ideology over critical reason; which is perhaps one reason he proposed that the members of an ideal epistemic community must be disputatious; and should do so by applying quality control standards for reasoning, research design and the interpretation of evidence. It seems to me the ideals of Merton’s epistemic community are sufficient to critique and correct pseudo-empirical studies aimed at confirming propositions that liberals (or conservatives) think deserve to be true.

Merton wrote during an era when an institution of higher learning (my own) could proudly declare in its official 1972 Report on Faculty Appointments that the primary aim of a great University is “improving the stock of ordered knowledge and rational judgment;” and that in the furtherance of that goal “there must be no consideration of sex,
Duarte et al want to overturn that prohibition on the political and ideological screening of scholars. I doubt that step will be effective. I do not think it is wise.

Throughout the essay there are nods, hedges, shows of solidarity and words of praise for social psychology, although the dominant tone is one of epistemic crisis. The authors propose that politically liberal research institutions should become proactive in welcoming political conservatives to campus, selectively setting them loose in the halls of the academy to define and engage the subject matter of social psychology. Social psychologists are called upon to create a disciplinary affirmative action program for political conservatives. This recruitment of scholars on the basis of political beliefs is justified by an appeal to the epistemic well-being of the discipline, to improve the stock of ordered knowledge in what Duarte et al judge to be the relatively undisciplined and insufficiently disputatious contemporary social psychology community.

Narrowly stated, there is lots of “advocacy research” out there, both inside and outside the academic social science disciplines. “How do you feel about the murder of innocent life?” “How do you feel about female genital mutilation?” Those are not impartial interview probes concerning the voluntary termination of a pregnancy or surgical modifications of the human body; and precisely because they are leading, conclusion-tending questions formulated in such a way as to block alternative interpretations that have no place in “scientific” inquiry (Shweder 2004, 2013). Duarte et al are very effective at exposing this type of bias in the construction of interview probes.

Broadly stated, the authors point to the ideological homogeneity of social psychology, the loss of a Socratic assumption questioning tradition, and the promotion of liberal egalitarian moral agendas and legends of Enlightenment progressivism (religion should and will go away and be replaced by science, groups should and will go away and be replaced by individuals; stereotyping individual on the basis of group characteristics is
vicious, heteronomy should and will go away and be replaced by autonomy; all dressed up in the appearance of empirical demonstration studies. The famous Milgram experiments come to mind. Most interpretations involve some form of disparagement of both hierarchy and in-group/out-group formations. Rarely considered is the adaptive function and reasonableness of the decision-making heuristic: respect superior orders from high status and trusted in-group members. Here one may well be faced with an experimental selection bias, in which a setting is contrived to produce a dramatic but atypically maladaptive result, like watching some species of birds sitting on a basketball rather than on their own eggs because of their reliance on circularity cues, which generally serve them well in their normal unconstrained reproductive environments where they do not typically find a very round basketball situated next to their imperfectly circular eggs.

These are real problems for those of us who value Socratic communities. Nevertheless, the recommendation section of the essay, while seeking greater voice for underrepresented ideological perspectives in social psychology, embraces the very problem it diagnoses by embracing a liberal affirmative action approach, by institutionalizing the self-proclaimed political and moral identities of social psychology students and faculty, and by making political attitude census categories legitimate criteria for the admission of students, the granting of fellowships and the promotion of faculty. This type of bureaucratic formalization of political and moral identities, even in the intended service of a social justice quest for “viewpoint diversity” in the academy, is not likely to produce convergence in the search for truth or greater respect for the ways of critical reason. It might make things worse. I doubt the proposal will contribute to the process of imaginative hypothesis generation or the willingness to engage in skeptical reasoning. One fascinating feature of the Duarte et al proposal is the absence of any anticipated dissent. Early on one author is described as “a neo-positivist contrarian who favors a don’t-ask-don’t- tell policy in which scholarship should be judged on its merit.” I found myself wondering: Does he or she really support the recommendation? I would have welcomed that contrarian voice. Such a policy stance may seem old-fashioned, quaint or utopian. Nevertheless, whether one is a positivist or not, that stance seems wise to me:
be disputatious; judge what is said (rather than the political beliefs of the person who said it); do so on its epistemic merits; prize Merton’s ideals. The knowable world is incomplete if seen from any one point of view, incoherent if seen from all points of view at once and empty if seen from no perspective at all. Freely staying on the move between alternative points of view is the best antidote to dogmatism.

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Is liberal bias universal? An international perspective on social psychologists.

Michal Bilewicz
Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw, Stawki 5/7, 00-183 Warsaw, Poland
Tel. +48 22 5549842
Email: bilewicz@psych.uw.edu.pl, Website: http://cbu.psychologia.pl/

Aleksandra Cichocka
School of Psychology, Keynes College, University of Kent
Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NP, United Kingdom
Tel: +44 12 27827878
Email: a.k.cichocka@kent.ac.uk

Paulina Górska
Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw, Stawki 5/7, 00-183 Warsaw, Poland
Tel. +48 22 5549842
Email: paulina.gorska@psych.uw.edu.pl

Zsolt Péter Szabó
University of Pécs, Ifjúság ú. 6, 7624 Pécs, Hungary
Tel. +36 72 503600 /24597
Email: szabo.zsolt.peter@pte.hu

Abstract: Based on our comparison of political orientation and research interests of social psychologists in capitalist Western countries vs. post-Communist Eastern-European countries we suggest that Duarte and colleagues’ claim of liberal bias in the field seems Americanocentric. We propose an alternative account of psychologists’ political skew–based on their opposition to the attitudes prevalent in their societies, particularly among low-status groups.

“The field is shifting leftward” claim Duarte and colleagues. Their analysis suggests that the social psychological research is conducted by politically homogeneous environment that includes mainly political liberals and lacks a conservative voice. In this commentary we would like highlight some limitations of an Americanocentric view on social psychology and present an alternative explanation of psychologists’ political skew–based on their opposition to the attitudes prevalent in their societies, particularly among the low-status groups.
Duarte and colleagues’ analysis relies mainly on unidimensional understanding of political ideology, in which political orientation in terms of economic issues is highly correlated with political orientation in terms of social issues (see Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). This overlap of economic and political liberalism seems more prevalent in the Western capitalist countries, particularly in the US. In other parts of the world, such as the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, free market economic worldviews are often linked to social liberalism (Golec, 2001; Kossowska & van Hiel, 2003). By ignoring the differences between economic and social attitudes, Duarte and colleagues inaccurately generalize the political leanings of American social psychologists to the rest of the world (see Henrich et al., 2010).

The claim about psychological field “shifting leftward” comes from Haidt’s observation during the 2011 SPSP annual meeting, as well as Inbar and Lammers’ (2012) analysis of SPSP members’ political attitudes. SPSP is an American non-profit institution, holding its meetings in US, with 72.5% of members being American. Indeed, more than 80% of psychologists participating in both studies by Inbar & Lammers (2012) were American. Duarte and colleagues’ observation about psychologists’ liberalism might then be a local American specificity rather than a universal phenomenon. We decided to examine this phenomenon with a more internationally diverse sample.

For international comparison we selected two Western traditionally capitalist countries (UK and US) and two East-European post-communist countries (Hungary and Poland). We focused on comparing these countries due to their diverse political-economic history, as well as differences in support for state interventionism in economy. Indeed, support for state interventions tends to be higher in Hungary and Poland than in UK and US, and this difference is particularly strong among people of lower socio-economic status (World Value Survey Association, 2014).

In a recent online study of 132 social psychologists from the UK, US, Hungary and Poland, we asked participants to indicate their political views with respect to social issues (e.g. religion or gender roles) and economic issues (e.g. taxes or welfare state) (Figure 1).
Social psychologists working in the post-communist East-European countries expressed rather right-wing political orientation in with respect to economic issues and left-wing political orientation with respect to social issues, whereas Western social psychologists expressed left-wing orientation on both dimensions. Although East-European social psychologists were overall more right-wing than Western social psychologists, this difference was more pronounced for economic than for social issues. Despite a relatively small sample size, this study serves as a preliminary illustration of the differences between Western and Eastern social psychology.

It then seems that Duarte and colleagues’ conclusions of about “the field” might be limited to Western countries with long tradition of free-market economy and liberal
democracy. Moreover, by overseeing the situational context of political opinions and focusing on self-selection and hostile climate as main reasons of liberal bias, they essentialize psychologists’ political opinions. We propose an alternative explanation of dominant political leanings in psychology.

American and British social psychologists function in societies in which support for state interventions in economy is relatively low, even among low status groups. In Hungary and Poland, however, low status groups support economic interventions (WVSA, 2014). We suggest that psychologists – usually forming part of the middle-class – tend to accentuate their political attitudes in opposition to attitudes prevalent among low-status groups in their societies. Such accentuation is a typical distinction strategy of middle-class, allowing for reproduction of cultural and social capital in opposition to working-class rather than in opposition to higher classes (Bourdieu, 1984). This opposition seems to be reflected in the research interests of social psychologists.

In case of Western social psychology some of the commonly studied topics are: ethnic prejudice, climate change denial or system justification (Duarte et al., this issue). All of them can be attributed to the political right rather than left. However, in the case of East-European social psychology, most commonly studied topics include: complaining, belief in an unjust world, entitlement attitudes, conspiracy theories, nationalism, or uncompetitiveness (Bilewicz & Olechowski, 2014). These issues combine anti-capitalism and social conservatism—a mix common among the low-status groups in post-communist countries. East-European social psychologists tend to perceive these topics in terms of pathologies. This stigmatizes negative evaluations of current economic and political order, and delegitimizes collective action.

Another good illustration of regional differences in research topics is the use of implicit association test, a measure of unconscious attitudes (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998). This method, originally developed in the USA to explain stereotyping, discrimination and racial biases (see Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; McConnell, & Leibold, 2001), has been used by Polish social psychologists as a tool for measuring consumer
attitudes toward corporate brands (e.g. Maison, Greenwald, Bruin, 2001; 2004). The same technique can then be used in the interest of discriminated groups (in the West) or in the interest of the market and power-holders (in Eastern Europe). This example seems to further illustrate differences in economic worldviews of social psychologists.

Social identities of social psychologists are construed in opposition to the ‘participants’ – the low-status out-group members worth studying (Hegarty & Bruckmüller, 2013). Thus, social psychological research might not be biased because of liberal political inclinations but rather by the opposition between researchers and the values of the low status groups in their societies.

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Abstract: Political homogeneity within a scientific field nurtures threats to the validity of many research conclusions by allowing ideologically compatible values to influence interpretations, by minimizing skepticism, and by creating premature consensus. Although validity threats can crop in any research, the usual corrective activities in science are more likely to be minimized and delayed.

Duarte and colleagues (this issue) document the types of distortions that can creep into a scientific field when a particular political ideology takes hold and alternative viewpoints are largely absent. We agree with their analysis and offer additional support for a key theme: Ideological homogeneity can nurture threats to the validity of research conclusions and can be especially damaging to external and construct validity.

An example is the construct of meritocracy, a measure used by Napier and Jost (2008) to test the conclusion that conservatives are better at “rationalizing inequality – for example, by seeing it as emerging from a fair, legitimate, and meritocratic system” (pp. 568-569).
However, their single-item measure of meritocracy is comparable to items in personal efficacy scales (asking if success in life is due to luck or hard work). Other research shows that this item is significantly related to personal agency but not to system justification (Schlenker, Chambers, & Le, 2012). “Meritocracy” is compatible with the liberal view that conservatives rationalize injustice whereas “personal agency,” a label better supported by data, is inconsistent with a darker portrayal of conservatives. This example illustrates how the labeling of constructs guides interpretations.

Researchers should be skeptical when interpreting scale results: look carefully at the items themselves, make their own judgments about relevant concepts, and rely on empirical justification for conclusions. Ultimately, construct validity is determined by examining a measure’s place in the nomological net of similar and dissimilar constructs. Political homogeneity can distort this process by allowing ideologically compatible values to: influence interpretations (e.g., using a biased, limited selection of other constructs for assessing convergent and discriminant validity), minimize skepticism, and create premature consensus.

Another example is the system justification (SJ) scale, which was designed to measure “the rationalization of the status quo” to avoid acknowledging the injustice of the system (Kay & Jost, 2003, p. 825). Conservatives score higher on SJ than liberals, seemingly supporting the interpretation that the former are more defensive, fearful, and motivated to distort reality. However, SJ is positively related to personal control, optimism, self-esteem, agreeableness, moral commitment, and work ethic, and negatively related to depression, neuroticism, and cynicism (Schlenker et al., 2012). The nomological net into which this measure fits would usually be regarded as indicating positive adjustment and mental health and seems inconsistent with a darker view of conservatives. As with meritocracy, using a wider range of measures for the net, ones having positive as well as negative connotations, yields a better appreciation of what might actually be measured and why a different set of conclusions might be appropriate.
Embedding liberal values within theory and method is especially evident in the extensive literature linking political views with personality and prejudice. A major confound has plagued this research: Studies focused on attitudes toward minority, primarily left-leaning social groups (e.g., atheists, homosexuals, Blacks) and failed to include social groups across the entire ideological spectrum (Chambers, Schlenker, & Collisson, 2013). When right-leaning social groups (e.g., Christians, business people, military personnel) were included, liberals expressed as much prejudice toward those groups as conservatives expressed toward the left-leaning ones. In other words, both conservatives and liberals express prejudice toward groups whose values and goals conflict with their own. The restricted range of prior targets permitted misleading generalizations that have questionable external validity.

Another construct validity problem applies to measures that are widely assumed to be antecedents of prejudice and markers of intolerance and bigotry: right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), modern and symbolic racism (MR/SR), and social dominance orientation (SDO). Each scale contains items that comprise important value components of political ideologies. For example, the RWA scale includes items that reference religion and traditional values, which are embraced by conservatives more than liberals, and the SDO scale includes items that assess preferences for equality (receiving equal outcomes regardless of inputs) rather than equity (receiving outcomes commensurate with one’s inputs), which are favored by liberals more than conservatives (Schlenker et al., 2012). Similar concerns about measures of prejudice have been raised by others (e.g., MR/SR, Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986; Zuriff, 2002), but these critiques have largely been ignored and these measures continue to be widely utilized.

To illustrate the problem, we found that scores on these measures (e.g., RWA, SR, SDO) were negatively related to evaluations of left-leaning groups but positively related to evaluations of right-leaning groups. In other words, these relationships again show prejudice on both sides, with conservatives (high scorers) and liberals (low scorers) each favoring groups who shared compatible values (Chambers et al., 2013).
In two other studies, we manipulated both the race (black or white) and ideological position (conservative or liberal) of the target and assessed participants’ scores on MR and anti-black racism (Chambers et al., 2013). If these measures assessed racial bigotry—as they are purported to do—they should predict negative attitudes towards Black targets and positive attitudes towards White targets, regardless of the target’s ideological position. However, we found that they predicted attitudes based on the target’s ideological position and not its race. Higher modern racism scores, for example, predicted negative attitudes (i.e., greater prejudice) toward both Black and White liberal targets, and positive attitudes (i.e., lower prejudice) toward both White and Black conservative targets. In other words, these measures seem to be tapping differences in core ideological beliefs and values. Ironically, they failed to predict the very thing they are supposed to predict—racial prejudice.

Although we focused on construct and external validity, internal and statistical conclusion validity can also be compromised. An example is the relationship between a measure of social inequality (Gini index) and happiness, which was used by Napier and Jost (2008) to conclude that unlike conservatives, liberals “lack ideological rationalizations that would help them frame inequality in a positive … light” (p. 571). However, data reanalyses showed a major confound (between Gini index and time) and a failure to control for variables that were included in their other work (church attendance). When these were taken into account, the social inequality effect disappeared (Schlenker et al., 2012).

Keep in mind that threats to validity can creep into any research but whenever a particular ideological position dominates, corrective activities are more likely to be suppressed. The beauty of science is that corrective activities usually occur; the question is how long it may take.

References


Meta-Ethical Pluralism: A Cautionary Tale about Cohesive Moral Communities

Jennifer Cole Wright
Associate Professor, Department of Psychology
Affiliate Member, Department of Philosophy
College of Charleston
57 Coming Street, Charleston, SC 29412
843-953-8196
wrightjj1@cofc.edu
http://wrightjj1.people.cofc.edu

Abstract: Meta-ethical pluralism gives us additional insight into how moral communities become cohesive and why this can be problematic (even dangerous) – and in this way provides support for the worries raised by the target article. At the same time, it offers several reasons to be concerned about the proposed initiative, the most important of which is that it could seriously backfire.

For decades, meta-ethicalists (see citations for list) have debated that status of people’s ordinary moral discourse. When someone states “Racial discrimination is unacceptable!” is she expressing negative feelings and/or other “con” attitudes towards discrimination, or an affective affiliation with community norms? Or is she conveying beliefs about objectively-determined (i.e., non-relative and/or mind-independent) matters of moral fact?

Most involved in the debate (though not all – see Gill, 2009; Loeb, 2008) assume the answer to be one or the other. But our research suggests that it is both. On some occasions, for some issues, people take an objectivist stance, believing non-relative/mind-independent facts to underpin their moral beliefs/judgments/values/practices (hereafter “beliefs”). Other times, for other issues, the same people take a non-objectivist stance, treating their moral beliefs as reflections of a personal moral code and/or the social community to which they

Under the former circumstances, people express strong certainty about their beliefs and intolerance for divergent beliefs. They show little interest in interacting with/helping those who hold them and find social censorship/punishment acceptable. Under the latter circumstances, people express lower certainty and less intolerance for divergence. They show a greater interest in interacting with/helping those who hold them and are uncomfortable with social censorship/punishment, believing that people should make their own choices and that open dialogue/debate is important (see above; also Wright, 2012; Wright, Cullum, & Schwab, 2008). A paradigmatic example of this was provided by Jonathan Safran Foer, author of *Eating Animals* (2010), during a lecture delivered in 2012 when he stated – industrialized animal agriculture is the most serious moral crisis of our time and yet each person must decide for him/herself how to respond.

A strong predictor of people’s meta-ethical stance on an issue is the degree of consensus expected from their relevant community. Where stronger consensus is expected, greater objectivity – and intolerance for divergent beliefs – is found (Goodwin & Darley, 2010, 2012; Wright, et al., 2014). This relationship appears complex and bi-directional: while we’ve found perceived consensus to fully mediate the relationship between meta-ethical stance and attitudes/behaviors towards divergence (Wright, et al., 2014), manipulations of perceived consensus have also resulted in shifts in meta-ethical stance (Goodwin & Darley, 2012). Regardless, the point is that people who belong to cohesive communities (i.e., those with strongly shared moral beliefs) are more likely to view those beliefs as objectively grounded and less likely to tolerate divergence. What in less cohesive communities may be viewed as reasonable (even celebrated) moral diversity becomes deviance to be censured/prohibited – even punished.
The relevance of this to the topic at hand should be (hopefully) clear. The more unified/cohesive a community we perceive ourselves to be, the more likely we are to feel suspicious of and inclined to reject divergence – especially when it is of moral significance, as are many of the issues discussed in the target article. This suggests that creating a less cohesive community – one that openly acknowledges a wider range of beliefs/judgments/values/practices – could shift meta-ethical stances and reduce expectations of consensus, increasing tolerance for disagreement and appreciation for respectful dialogue/debate. And an initiative that advocates for a stronger conservative voice in social psychology (and academia more generally) may indeed be a legitimate way to decrease the cohesiveness that the authors worry is undermining our scholarly activities.

That said, let me express three concerns that might warrant further consideration before investing serious time/money into this initiative:

First, the divide between liberals and conservatives nation-wide (if not globally) has become increasingly large and incendiary. According to a recent Pew report, there is greater ideological disagreement between, and uniformity within, liberal and conservative groups today than at any point in the previous two decades – generating stronger, more harmful, animosity (Pew, 2014). They have become separate, and increasingly cohesive, communities. It is therefore unlikely that bringing conservatives and liberals together under the same academic umbrella will turn them into a “community” (cohesive or otherwise). Yet this is critical, because while perceived disagreement within communities can have the positive effects mentioned above (and found by others – e.g., Crano, 2012), disagreement between cohesive communities often has the opposite effect (examples of which are given in the article). People disapprove – often strongly – of divergence in other communities (Wright, 2012; Wright, et al., 2008, but see Sarkissian, et al., 2011), which can create a polarized “us against them” situation. And if we aren’t careful, this initiative could have a similar effect, resulting in the stagnation, bickering, and outright conflict often present when disagreeing cohesive communities come
together to “work it out”. In other words – many of the problems identified in the target article could get worse, not better.

Second, this isn’t our first encounter with the distorting influence if bias – indeed, many important mechanisms/strategies have been developed to help protect against it. If we’ve become lazy in their application, this should be fixed. But, I’m not convinced that an initiative directed at one particular source of bias is warranted. And, if our objective is to be as “value-neutral” as possible, I’m not sure how bringing together such strongly divided groups accomplishes this – it’s not as if, contrary to what the authors seem to think, liberal and conservative beliefs, if placed in close enough proximity to one another, will somehow cancel (or balance) each other out!

Third, cautionary tale aside, community cohesiveness is not always a bad thing – it provides a solid foundation for both continuity/tradition and social change. Plus, I think we can generally agree that certain moral issues are (or should be) “closed” to dialogue/debate. I’m not saying that liberals have everything right – or that they should discount, ignore, and/or shut down all conservative viewpoints. But we need to get clear on where the mandate for increased diversity begins and ends. Which divergent beliefs count as legitimate counterpoints? Whose divergent voices should be included? Unless we’re simply seeking diversity for diversity’s sake (which I hope we’re not), these questions require serious thought.

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* list of meta-ethicists
A “cohesive moral community” is already patrolling behavioral science*

George Ainslie
School of Economics, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7710, South Africa
Department of Veterans Affairs, Coatesville, PA 19320
1 610 246-5364
George.Ainslie@va.gov
www.picoeconomics.org

Abstract: Authors of non-liberal proposals experience more collegial objections than others do. These are often couched as criticism of determinism, reductionism, or methodological individualism, but from a scientific viewpoint such criticism could be easily answered. Underneath it is a wish to harness scientific belief in service of positive social values, at the cost of reducing objectivity.

Scientists are subject to the same distorting influences as everyone else. These include not only prejudice, ideology, and confirmation bias (Section 4.1 & passim.); we are also subject to the social pressures generated when people harness belief as a self-control device. For instance, people have been shown to form exaggerated beliefs about the addictive effects of a single drug use, arguably to keep themselves from trying it (Hammersley & Reid 2002; Heyman, 2009, pp. 27-38). This kind of effort readily becomes communal, and brings social pressure to bear on scientific inquiry. For instance, there was outrage in the recovering alcoholic community at the Rand report that 15% of alcoholics could successfully return to controlled drinking (Roizen, 1987). Many beliefs about psychological issues can be interpreted as advancing or hindering communal efforts at impulse control. Diversity of opinion interferes with any resulting “cohesive moral community” (Section 3), which encourages the consensus of all right-thinking people. Going by the findings of one of the co-authors (Haidt, 2012), liberals are most apt to see immorality in callousness toward or belittling of disadvantaged people, while conservatives are more apt to see immorality in threats to social bonds, particularly as maintained by received wisdom.
A liberal moral community is already apparent within behavioral science. Among target articles in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* are many topics that one side or the other could see as exciting people’s lower impulses. Comparing just those articles on which I happen to have written commentaries, the greater risks taken in making non-liberal arguments are evident. (I know nothing of the authors’ personal politics.)

- Liberal: Atran and Norenzayan argued that religious belief has been shaped by its adaptive functions (2004), thus arguably replacing its sacredness with utility.
- Non-liberal: Nell argued that cruelty serves an adaptive function, both for “perpetrators and spectators” (2006), thus potentially making it seem more normal.
- Liberal: Müller and Schumann discussed potential instrumental uses of recreational drugs (2011). Most of these are currently illegal, and the movements to at least reduce restrictions on them are favored by liberals (although also by libertarians).
- Non-liberal by implication: Van de Vliert presented a statistical analysis suggesting that countries’ cultural strengths are a function of climate and wealth (2013). Since wealth is not a truly independent variable, this thesis would seem to support climatic determinism, which has been anathematized by liberals.

The psychological origin of religion is largely taken for granted among scientists, and only one of 25 commentators (Glassman) complained that Atran and Norenzayan belittled theology. With Müller and Schumann, only one of 19 commentators (Wu) seemed critical of a political implication (“[M&S] propose a staged drug policy that matches well the neoliberal governance scheme”). On the other hand, several commentators blamed Nell for failing to uphold an environmental-pathology view of cruelty, leading him to comment,

> There is a need for a ‘negative psychology’ as a balance to the mandatory optimism of current Western (and especially American) psychology that holds to Enlightenment notions of an inexorable march to perfection, and blocks serious empirical research on, yes, evil… (p. 249).
Van de Vliert did not incur liberal criticism, but his complex model suggests wariness of political push-back (see my commentary, 2013). He was at pains to distance his proposal from climatic determinism, noting that it was “a sensitive subject” (p. 478). His own proposal was that both cold and hot climates impose stress, which interacts with a society’s wealth to affect culture—in effect, stress that does not overwhelm you makes you stronger. However, cold stress had much greater effects than heat stress, and he did not analyze, or even mention, the dual role of wealth as both cause and effect. Even more remarkably, when a commentator pointed out the relevance of IQ as a factor (Allik & Realo, 2013), the author acknowledged that “heat demands, cold demands, monetary resources, and their four interactions accounted for 62% of the variation in IQ across 106 countries” (p. 514); but he said that this was a negative finding, since “none of the four interaction effects reached significance.” Van de Vliert appears to have found evidence that the absence of cold demands is associated with both lower IQ and less cultural advance—much as in climatic determinism— but this simple conclusion is obscured within a more complex one that does not offend liberal opinion.

The issue of determinism has been especially polarizing since E. O. Wilson’s *Sociobiology* appeared (1975). Wilson’s argument that many human character traits have a genetic basis led to charges that “biological determinism” was an apology for a racist status quo (reviewed in Segerstrole, 2000). The controversy endures (Laland & Brown, 2011), and with it the suggestion that the genetics of some behavioral traits should not be studied to begin with (Hayden, 2013). We might think that the critics mean climatic or biological fatalism, that is, sole determinism. However, there are some for whom determinism itself, which used to be accepted as a fundamental tenet of science, lays too heavy a hand on human choice— at least in the form of its implication, reductionism (the assumption that behavioral traits have a mechanistic basis):

Reductionism is a plague that grows proportionally as our society gets more sophisticated at controlling human behavior. We come to experience and conceptualize ourselves as powerless victims of mechanism, and thereby enter into a self-fulfilling prophecy. (Miller 2003)
Also in question is the assumption that a group’s choices must be made entirely within the brains of the individual members—often criticized as “methodological individualism” (Udehn, 2001).

Critics of determinist/reductionist/individualist approaches often fault them for precluding social influence. In doing so they avoid recognizing three conciliatory possibilities:

- that an inborn or environmentally imposed predisposition is not complete “determination,” but is just prepared or prewired, a groove in the Lockean blank slate from which the chalk of behavior can deviate given adequate motivation;
- that individuals may derive reward from vicarious experience, so individual interests need not be selfish. (Indeed they are sometimes overwhelmingly altruistic-- Marsh et.al., 2014);
- that seeing the individual as the sole seat of motivation is compatible with studying the emergent properties of groups in their own right (Ross, pp. 254-312)—“ontological individualism” as a component of “emergentism” (Sawyer, 2002).

Thus from a scientific point of view socially oriented critics could easily find compatibility with more mechanistic approaches. But logical solutions notwithstanding, liberal criticism seems to be inspired by a wish for behavioral science to advance our humanistic values and forestall our invidious impulses.

This wish is the real root of the moral community that non-liberal dissent threatens to make less cohesive. My reaction is that censoring science to serve social policy has dire implications-- This was, after all, what Pope Urban VIII was trying to do with Galileo. In any case, society needs to decide whether keeping non-liberals out of social science departments (Section 2) will actually serve the goal of controlling base social impulses, and even if so, whether this goal is worth the divorce of belief from the best available research findings as judged in wide-ranging debate.

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Political Bias is Tenacious

Peter H. Ditto, Sean P. Wojcik, Eric Evan Chen, Rebecca H. Grady, Megan Ringel

University of California, Irvine

MAILING ADDRESS:
Psychology and Social Behavior
4201 Social & Behavioral Sciences Gateway
University of California
Irvine, CA 92697-7085

INSTITUTIONAL TELEPHONE NUMBER: 949-824-1844

EMAILS:
phditto@uci.edu
swojcik@uci.edu
chene5@uci.edu
grady.becky@gmail.com
mringel@uci.edu

HOME PAGE URL: http://socialecology.uci.edu/faculty/phditto

Abstract: Duarte et al. are right to worry about political bias in social psychology but underestimate the ease of correcting it. Both liberals and conservatives show partisan bias that often worsens with cognitive sophistication. More non-liberals in social psychology is unlikely to speed our convergence upon the truth, although it may broaden the questions we ask and the data we collect.

Most people, but especially political liberals, view diversity of almost any kind as an intrinsic good. But Duarte et al. recognize that greater diversity of political views in social psychology should not be seen as an end in itself. In no way diminishing contemptible cases of politically conservative students made to feel unwelcome in our field, the preeminent value of diversity in this case is its potential to produce better science. Duarte et al.’s core argument is that a more politically diverse social psychology will serve as an antidote to liberal bias and help the field more quickly and efficiently “converge upon the truth” (p. 5).
Their argument rests on two key assumptions. The first is that social psychological research is widely vulnerable to political bias. While only a small percentage of social psychological research has an explicitly political focus, it is important to remember that only a few decades ago climate science would have seemed irrelevant to partisan politics. As partisan hostility increasingly insinuates itself into everyday American life (Iyengar & Westwood, 2014), its potential to ensnare previously apolitical scientific questions in the web of the ongoing culture war will grow as well. Moreover, social psychological research is uniquely susceptible to political bias because its fundamental motivating assumption--that human behavior and outcomes are largely determined by social forces--lies precisely on the intellectual fault line of left-right ideological conflict. Any research that bears on the role of individual versus situational determinants of human outcomes is vulnerable. It is hard to dispute, for example, that liberal sympathies in social psychology contributed to the field’s initial reluctance to accept research demonstrating substantial genetic contributions to intelligence and personality (e.g., Kamin, 1974).

More formally, the persistent intuition that political ideology biases the interpretation of scientific data has now been confirmed by dozens of experiments over the past five decades (Lord & Taylor, 2009; MacCoun, 1998), and there is little reason to believe that social psychological researchers are immune to these effects. While some evidence suggests that liberals are dispositionally less prone than conservatives to motivated reasoning (e.g., Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), a recent meta-analysis by our research group examining more than 30 studies of politically-biased evidence evaluation found clear evidence of partisan bias in both liberals and conservatives, and at virtually identical levels (Liu et al., 2014). Moreover, recent studies provide intriguing evidence that partisan bias becomes more pronounced with greater topical knowledge and cognitive sophistication (e.g., Kahan, Peters, Dawson, & Slovic, 2013; Taber & Lodge, 2006), as does a general insensitivity to one’s own biases (West, Meserve, & Stanovich, 2012). Early studies documenting biased evidence evaluation used psychology researchers as participants (e.g., Abramowitz, Gomes, & Abramowitz, 1975; Mahoney, 1977), and this recent research further confirms that high levels of knowledge, intelligence and perceived objectivity do not necessarily provide protection from bias, as
most people likely assume. Instead, they may simply allow scientists with strong ideological commitments to unknowingly deploy their considerable cognitive skills in biased fashion to become particularly resistant to attacks on those commitments.

Thus, we agree with Duarte et al. regarding the potential for political bias to impede the progress of scientific discovery in social psychology. We have considerably less confidence, however, in their subsequent assumption that increasing the representation of non-liberals in the field will effectively address the problem.

There is certainly wisdom in Duarte et al.’s assertion that more conservative social psychologists would increase the likelihood of identifying flaws in research with embedded liberal biases. The anecdotal examples of liberal bias they cite are consistent with research on motivated skepticism (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Ditto, Scepansky, Munro, Apanovitch, & Lockhart, 1998) showing that a primary source of biased judgment is our tendency to uncritically evaluate information that confirms our prior beliefs and preferences.

But political bias is both implicit and tenacious, and there is little reason to believe that either liberal social psychological researchers, or any newly minted conservative ones, will be easily disabused of the tendency to expect and prefer empirical results that confirm their political views, and find flaws in results that do not. Social psychology has seen many theoretical controversies and data have resolved few of them (Greenwald, 2012). Increasing the minority influence of conservatives in the field may lead to more diverse viewpoints being represented in the literature and a more challenging peer-review process, but rather than leading the field to converge on some universally accepted “truth,” it seems more likely to engender theoretical conflict and a divided literature, with each side defending their operationalizations, methods and data while disparaging those of the other side. Calls for greater civility and scientific humility are valuable, but another fear is that a prevailing liberal bias will be replaced by an “equivalency bias,” favoring the view that liberals and conservatives are equally bestowed with psychological strengths and weaknesses. This may ultimately prove to be the case, but it may not, and
defaulting to such an equivalency bias in place of a liberal one will leave our science no better off.

In the mid-1900’s, psychologists were optimistic that integration by itself would improve interracial relations, until research and real world experience revealed that contact produces beneficial results only under specified conditions (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003). Analogously, additional efforts will be required to approximate a social psychology free of political bias, and there may be important convergence here with recent efforts to acknowledge and combat researcher bias more generally (Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011).

Duarte et al. offer an important critique and some initial plans of attack, but the challenge remains to develop strategies that allow the signal of data to rise above the noise of ideological conflict. Making our field more welcoming to scholars of all political persuasions is intrinsically right, and it will surely lead to new questions and novel data. But in times so partisan, and for a field as entangled in ideology as social psychology, convergence upon the truth is likely more than even liberals can expect from diversity.

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Increasing ideological tolerance in social psychology

Yoel Inbar
University of Toronto

Joris Lammers
University of Cologne

Mailing address:
Department of Psychology
University of Toronto
1265 Military Trail
Toronto, Ontario M1C 1A4, Canada

Phone: 1-416-208-2795

yoel.inbar@utoronto.ca
http://yoelinbar.net

joris.lammers@uni-koeln.de
http://soccco.uni-koeln.de/joris-lammers.html

Abstract: We argue that recognizing current ideological diversity in social psychology and promoting tolerance of minority views is just as important as increasing the number of non-liberal researchers. Increasing tolerance will allow individuals in the minority to express dissenting views, which will improve psychological science by reducing bias. We present four recommendations for increasing tolerance.

Increasing ideological diversity in social psychology is crucial. However, we believe that recognizing the ideological diversity that currently exists in the field is just as important. In our surveys of the politics of social-personality psychologists, we found considerably more political diversity than we had expected—at least on economic and foreign policy (Inbar & Lammers, 2012). In our first survey of 508 individuals, 18.9% described themselves as moderate and 17.9% as conservative on economic issues. Likewise, on foreign policy 21.1% described themselves as moderate and 10.3% as conservative.
These data should not be taken to indicate that social psychology does not have an ideological diversity problem—over 90% of respondents described themselves as liberal on social issues, and in a second survey 85% described themselves as liberal overall. However, we believe that they do suggest that there is a substantial amount of diversity in some areas, and that fostering tolerance of existing political differences may improve the quality of social psychological science just as much as recruiting more non-liberal researchers. These goals are not mutually exclusive—in fact, increased tolerance of existing differences also makes the field more welcoming to non-liberal newcomers.

Here, we present four specific recommendations:

**Avoid signaling that non-liberals are not welcome in social psychology.** In papers, presentations, and casual conversations, many social psychologists assume that their audience consists entirely of political liberals. Professional talks contain jokes at the expense of Republican politicians (and Republicans only), and speakers sometimes openly disparage conservative beliefs. If the audience is entirely liberal, this is harmless (if somewhat unprofessional) comic relief. But the audience is not entirely liberal. Casually disparaging conservatives in a professional setting alienates colleagues who don’t share the majority’s political beliefs, and it sends a message to students and junior researchers that there is only one acceptable political ideology in the field. This will likely encourage those who do not share the majority ideology to choose a different line of work. As Bloom (2011) observed, “Nobody wants to be part of a community where their identity is the target of ridicule and malice.” When giving a talk, writing a paper, or even just chatting with colleagues, we recommend keeping in mind that the audience might be more politically diverse than expected. Avoid sending signals that only one political point of view is correct or acceptable. Does this mean censoring one’s beliefs? Of course not—but it does mean treating others’ beliefs with respect, not derision.

**Be especially careful around students.** There is an obvious power imbalance between students and faculty, and faculty can wittingly or unwittingly take advantage of this imbalance to pressure students to adopt the “correct” political beliefs. In our surveys, multiple students and post-docs indicated that they felt pressured or intimidated by senior
colleagues. For example, one post-doc described being insulted publicly by a senior colleague for having voted Republican. Duarte (2014) described being pressed by a faculty member to “clarify” his views on Jimmy Carter during a graduate school admissions interview (the admissions committee had discovered a blog post of Duarte’s where he criticized Carter’s views on the Middle East). Most social psychologists realize that this sort of blatant intimidation is unacceptable. However, they may be less aware of the more subtle ways in which they are communicating what the “correct” political beliefs are. We therefore propose that our first recommendation is particularly important in faculty members’ interactions with students, and that faculty need to be especially mindful of how they talk about politics around them.

**Take conservative beliefs seriously.** Simply dismissing conservative beliefs as the product of ignorance, religious fanaticism, or stupidity is itself lazy and ignorant. Of course, liberal social psychologists need not be less critical of political ideas they disagree with, but it is always wise to remain open to the possibility that one is wrong—or at least to the possibility that there is value in opposing opinions. This can also have personal benefits. When people are largely surrounded by the like-minded, their views become more extreme (Lamm & Myers, 1978). Although extremists tend to think that they are more right than their opponents (Toner, Leary, Asher, & Jongman-Sereno, 2013), their beliefs are less based on their understanding of the facts than they think (Fernbach, Rogers, Fox, & Sloman, 2013). Seriously engaging with opposing views is one way to combat this.

**Practice tolerance.** This may seem easier said than done. But we often need to interact with people with whom we disagree politically. Generally, we manage to do this: If we disagree, we can disagree respectfully; if we find we are unable to disagree respectfully, we can avoid certain hot-button topics. Most working people manage to do this in their professional lives, as most professions are nowhere near as ideologically homogenous as psychology is. If so many people manage to tolerate those who disagree with them—if we ourselves are able to do so in many areas of life—it should not be too much to ask that social psychologists do it as well.
**Conclusion.** Recruiting more non-liberal psychological scientists is a worthy goal, but it will take time—and, moreover, we see no reason that we should ever expect social psychology to perfectly mirror the demographics of the general population. People will choose to do what interests them, and some of these preferences may be correlated with demographic differences. Ideological imbalance is most problematic when the minority is silent because they fear personal or professional retribution if they express their views. Individual scientists will be biased by their values, but this bias is mitigated as long as there is a diverse scientific community that critically examines their conclusions (Nagel, 1961). But when some views are systematically excluded, a scientific field is likely to pursue biased research questions and produce biased conclusions. We strongly believe that establishing a more ideologically tolerant climate is the easiest and quickest way to combat this pernicious tendency.

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On the History of Political Diversity in Social Psychology

Kevin R. Binning, Department of Psychology, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260 (412-624-4574), krbinning@gmail.com

David O. Sears, Psychology Department, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095 (310-825-7973), sears@psych.ucla.edu

Abstract: We argue that the history of political diversity in social psychology may be better characterized by stability than a large shift. Their baseline described academic psychology as a whole than social psychology in particular, and confuses ideology with party identification. Second, we suggest that the need for political diversity is more apparent when focused on problems dealt with on an intra-disciplinary basis than when on an inter-disciplinary basis.

In the target article, Duarte and colleagues argue that social psychology has become more politically lopsided over the years, with liberals and liberalism all but dominating a field that was once much more politically diverse. They go on to suggest a number of ways that the science of social psychology would benefit from increased representation of conservatives and conservative ideology in our departments, leading journals, and academic discourse. Our goals in this brief commentary are two-fold.

We question the authors’ conclusions about increasing liberal homogeneity in social psychology, and we come to virtually the opposite conclusion from our own historical analysis of the field: social psychology has been (and continues to be) a liberal social scientific discipline since at least the 1930s. This is particularly true of research areas that have focused on political issues. Researchers who organized the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPPSI) in the 1930’s, for example, were focused on liberal concerns such as racial prejudice, class conflict, and war. Prominent psychologists in this camp included Klineberg, Allport, Krech, White, Katz, Sanford, Levinson, Frenkel-Brunswik, Newcomb, Smith, and, later, Pettigrew, Kelman, Janis, and Abelson. Most contemporary researchers studying stereotypes, prejudice, and intergroup
relations more broadly and, increasingly, environmental and health psychologists, are the intellectual heirs of the SPSSI researchers from the 1930-1960’s eras.

However, it may be a mistake to equate this social-justice tradition with the field of social psychology as a whole in that era. A second tradition developed in the 1950’s, centered more on rigorous scientific experimentation, often distancing itself somewhat from the “softer” side of social psychology that focused on social issues (e.g., Festinger, Hovland, Kelley, Campbell, Schachter, or Thibaut). No doubt most of these researchers were also at least nominally politically liberal, even though their research was not as clearly connected to politics. Duarte and colleagues seem less concerned about liberalism in these apolitical branches of social psychology.

Perhaps more important, they use the survey by McClintock and colleagues (1965) to suggest that psychology was more politically heterogeneous a half century ago than it is today. However, it is difficult to make inferences about the politics of social psychologists from these data. This is because 1) the survey lumped the small field of social psychology in with the larger other specialties in academic psychology, such as learning, sensation and perception, and physiological psychology, whose subject matters were far from social issues, and 2) as Duarte et al. note, party identification was not as highly correlated with political ideology in the American public then as now: $r = .00$ in 1956; $r = .62$ in 2004 (Lewis-Beck et al., 2008). The “sorting” of political parties into distinct ideological camps is a well-documented but fairly recent phenomenon (Levendusky, 2010), and there is no reason to think that academic psychologists were immune to such broader societal trends. As such, no doubt numerous psychologists who identified as Republicans in the McClintock survey were liberal and some who identified as Democrats were conservative, which is unlikely today. Indeed it’s a good bet that most social psychologists in those days were politically liberal regardless of their party identification.

Scientists have two competing models available to them in presenting their findings to an audience: the adversarial model and the inquisitorial model (Sears, 1994). For the present
purposes, the adversarial approach might pit the findings of liberal and conservative researchers studying a common question against one another. Each side would argue its position to the best of their ability, marshalling evidence in support of their position and disputing the conclusions of their scholarly adversaries. In the legal world, this is the same model practiced by the American justice system (i.e., with a prosecution and a defense) and follows the outline of a political debate. In the inquisitorial model, by contrast, ostensibly neutral researchers attempt to gather and present evidence fairly from both sides of an issue. It also has a long legal tradition and is widely practiced in court systems around the world (e.g., China, Russia, Germany, and Scotland).

When viewed through an inter-disciplinary lens, social psychology has many potential adversaries in more conservative disciplines such as economics and political science. Social psychologists can pit, say, a theory of symbolic politics against theories of self-interest or prospect theory against a rational-actor model of economics. In these cases, social psychology can take up the adversarial model, as each side presents the best cases they can and those with other philosophies, ideologies, and viewpoints do the same. What typically emerges is a richer, more nuanced picture of the phenomenon under study. Boundary conditions and limitations of each approach can be identified and potentially reconciled.

By contrast, when viewing the internal dynamics of the field, we have little doubt that many of the recommendations of Duarte et al. are good ones. For example, with respect to the SPSSI tradition, Duarte and colleagues’ point about a hostile climate toward conservatives is no doubt well taken (p. 30), as are the problems of embedded bias into theory and methods (p. 9), choice of topics (p. 14), and mischaracterization of conservatives (p. 17). The dangers of insular group-think and ideological homogeneity are well-documented. When a field develops a political consensus with no one to argue for other views, an adversarial model is no longer possible. That has many obvious costs to intellectual richness and creativity.
In closing, while we do believe that a diversity of political viewpoints would benefit social psychological science, we also believe that political diversity is not necessarily the most important or pressing type of diversity for the field as a whole to pursue. Particular areas within social psychology would undoubtedly benefit from exposure to politically diverse viewpoints, but this exposure has always been present when we look outside the field. For example, social psychology was once heavily male-dominated. However women have made significant inroads and are now well-represented among the leaders of the field. However, diversity in ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation is still sorely lacking. Given the historical substantive foci of the field within the social sciences, we are not sure that political diversity should be the leading priority.

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Conservatism is not the missing viewpoint for true diversity

FULL NAMES:
Beate Seibt
Sven Waldzus
Thomas W. Schubert
Rodrigo Brito

INSTITUTION:
Seibt: University of Oslo, Norway
Waldzus: Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), CIS-IUL, Lisboa, Portugal
Schubert: University of Oslo, Norway
Brito: COPELABS, Universidade Lusófona, Lisboa, Portugal

FULL INSTITUTIONAL MAILING ADDRESS(ES):
Seibt:
Beate Seibt
Psykologisk institutt
P.O box 1094
0317 Blindern, Oslo
Norway

Waldzus:
Sven Waldzus
ISCTE-IUL
Departamento de Psicologia Social e das Organizações
Av. Forças Armadas
1649-026 LISBOA, PORTUGAL

Schubert:
Thomas Schubert
Psykologisk institutt
P.O box 1094
0317 Blindern, Oslo
Norway

Brito:
Rodrigo Brito
Copelabs
Edifício U, Piso 1
Universidade Lusófona
Campo Grande 376, 1749-024 Lisboa
Portugal
INSTITUTIONAL TELEPHONE NUMBER(S) (for correspondence)
Seibt: +47-22845147
Waldzus: +351 210 464 017
Schubert: +47-46299581
Brito: +351 21 7505020

EMAIL ADDRESSES:
Seibt: beateseibt@gmail.com
Waldzus: sven.waldzus@iscte.pt
Schubert: schubert@igroup.org
Brito: rodrigoreisbrito@gmail.com

HOME PAGES:
Seibt: http://www.igroup.org/seibt/
Schubert: http://www.igroup.org/schubert/
Brito:

Abstract: The target paper diagnoses a dominance of liberal viewpoints with little evidence, promotes a conservative viewpoint without defining it, and wrongly projects the US liberal-conservative spectrum to the whole field. Instead, we propose to anticipate and reduce mixing of theorizing and ideology by using definitions that acknowledge perspective divergence, promote representative sampling and observation of the field, and dialogical publication.

We agree with Duarte and colleagues in two regards: Yes, there are problems with underrepresentation of some viewpoints among academics in social psychology, and yes, theory and ideology are occasionally mixed in theory building and testing. However, we do not think their examples of underrepresentation and ideology-driven social psychological research are typical of the field. We also believe their proposals are neither necessary nor sufficient.

We question three basic assumptions of the target article: Are “liberal” ideologies biasing social psychological theorizing more than other, more “conservative” ideologies? Is there solid evidence for underrepresentation of liberals? Would conservative viewpoints render social psychology more representative in any meaningful way?
Social psychologists often hold an individualist conceptualization of human nature, and neglect relational and collective self-aspects. This fits the conservative viewpoint better than more liberal or left worldviews. The same is true for the neglect of culture’s role in human evolution, leading to questionable biologistic hypotheses in evolutionary psychology. Together, these have probably done more harm to psychological theorizing than the prominence of some liberal ideology in some specific social psychological theories that are rightly pointed out by the target article.

The evidence for the claims of underrepresentation is rather weak. One of the data points is a show of hands at the 2011 Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) meeting. One of us was present at this occasion, but could not raise a hand because the used categorization did not fit the political orientation of this researcher. Better investigations of researchers’ standing on various issues would be needed before such claims of homogeneity could be made.

The target article’s stated goal is to promote non-liberal worldviews in general, but in practice it relies solely on contrasting liberals and conservatives in the US political spectrum. It is troubling that the conservative viewpoint, in contrast to the liberal narrative, is never properly characterized or defined. Historic changes in the US conservative ideology since the 1980ies or today’s fissures in the conservative political movement of the US are completely ignored. It is also surprising that US political worldviews are generalized pars pro toto to the whole field of social psychology. Contrasting liberalism and conservatism is misleading in at least three ways:

1. Even from a US perspective, conservatism may not be the most important missing viewpoint or group – there are also non-voters, various immigrant groups whose ideology fits neither conservatism nor liberalism, and people who do not categorize themselves as either conservatives or liberals, including some of the authors of the target article themselves.

2. From a European perspective, the differences between US conservatives and US liberals often seem marginal, and often both seem to the right of the political spectrum. For
instance, many representatives of US-liberals and conservatives alike are much more sceptical towards the idea of a welfare state than the majority of Europeans.

3. From a global perspective, using political orientation as a criterion would in fact require the recruitment of far more diverse viewpoints, such as environmentalists, pacifists, communists, fascists, separatists, djihadists, etc. People from North America and Western Europe are in many respects very exceptional and not representative for the majority of cultures (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010).

4. Political orientation is only one of a number of dimensions on which to categorize people, including academics. This is briefly acknowledged in the target article, but other dimensions such as ethnicity, race, and gender are reduced to demographic diversity and dismissed as adding nothing beyond the conservative-liberal dimension. This is clearly too narrow. Cultural psychology has accumulated ample evidence for the diverse psychologies shaped by socialization.

In sum, the heterogeneity of today’s societies in the US, the West, and globally undermines the basic assumption that especially conservative viewpoints are needed for a more representative social psychology.

Political diversity as such does not prevent the mixing of ideology with theory. Nothing is to be gained from counterbalancing well-established but allegedly liberally biased theories with conservatively biased theories. Instead, social psychologists need to distinguish between their roles as researchers and political citizens (Waldzus, Schubert, & Paladino, 2012). Perspective dependency is unavoidable and has therefore to be accounted for in the theoretical and empirical process. The following measures can help achieve this.

Define psychological constructs such that they incorporate diverging perspectives where appropriate. For example, Mummendey and Wenzel (1999) define discrimination as “…an ingroup's subjectively justified unequal, usually disadvantageous, evaluation or
treatment of an outgroup, that the latter (or an outside observer) would deem unjustified” (p. 159).

Define the target population, also with the help of sociological and anthropological literature, and seek to understand them before testing hypotheses. The goal is to adapt manipulations, hypotheses and measures to divergent perspectives. Useful methods include observation, interviews, and surveys with open questions. Anticipate misunderstandings between subcultures (Rozin, 2001). This requires changes in the publication and reviewing culture to value and publish descriptive data that cannot (yet) be theoretically explained or predicted.

Establish and promote publication formats that reinforce or even require debate (such as the dialogical publication scheme used by *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*), also across disciplinary boundaries. The goal is to help discover blind-spots and mistakes caused by a too narrow perspective.

The target paper could have provided a great service to the field if it had characterized the pitfalls of the liberal viewpoint properly and promoted diversity beyond it in general. However, by promoting an undefined conservative viewpoint as the main missing perspective, we are afraid that the target article does more harm than good: It proposes a pseudo-solution that could create an illusion of objectivity through “diversity” while preventing the field from taking effective necessary steps to overcome its actual ideological biases.

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Diverse crowds using diverse methods improves the scientific dialectic

Matt Motyl; Ravi Iyer

University of Illinois, Chicago; Civil Politics
Address: Department of Psychology (m/c 285), University of Illinois at Chicago, 1007 W. Harrison St., Chicago, IL 60607
Phone: 904-814-3665
Email: motyl@uic.edu; ravi@civilpolitics.org
URL: http://motyl.people.uic.edu/; www.polipsych.com

Abstract: In science, diversity is vital to the development of new knowledge. We agree with Duarte et al. that we need more political diversity in social psychology, but contend that we need more religious diversity and methodological diversity as well. If some diversity is good, more is better (especially in science).

Scientists move ever-closer to finding a solution to a given problem via a three-step program where a theory is proposed, challenged, and refined in accordance with accumulated evidence (Mueller, 1958). This dialectical method requires diverse theories be tested and, ideally, the most supported theories emerge from an accurate interpretation of objective data. Yet, scientists are human beings with brains that predispose us toward interpreting evidence in ways that confirming our pre-existing biases (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987). Some scholars suggest there is wisdom in crowds, and crowds may be immune to cognitive biases in the evaluation of evidence (Galton, 1907). Groups, however, are not immune to this cognitive bias; rather, they can be more biased in the conclusion they reach (Lorenz, Rauhut, Schweitzer, & Helbing, 2011; Iyer & Graham, 2013). The critical ingredient that can make some groups less biased than individuals is viewpoint diversity (Larick et. al, 2011). In general, this corroborates the target article’s argument. The target article, however, is too limited in its definition of diversity.

Social psychologists tend to emphasize the importance of diversity of familial background, gender, race, and sexual orientation (SPSP Diversity Statement, 2014),
which likely leads to more diverse viewpoints that affect the theories that our field generates. Duarte et al. advocate striving to diversify political viewpoints, which would further diversify the field’s theories. But, why stop there? For example, non-religious people are vastly overrepresented in social psychology, too. Much like the research attacking conservatives’ cognitive ability, social psychological research also attacks religious people’s cognitive ability. For example, Kanazawa (2010) published a paper which argues that intelligence leads people to be more liberal and less religious (and, more opposed to consensual nonmonogamy, which is another stigmatized identity underrepresented in social psychology; see Conley et al., 2012). Similarly, Zuckerman, Silberman, and Hall (2013) reported that religious people are less intelligent because they are more prone to conforming and less analytic in their cognitive styles. This minority-disparaging research suggests a hostile climate for religious people in social psychology, which would steer them toward more congenial careers (much like how the perceived hostile climate for conservatives may steer them away from liberal communities and liberal fields; Inbar & Lammers, 2012; Motyl, 2014; Motyl et al., 2014). To this end, social psychologists should work to include religious people to further increase viewpoint diversity and as a result, improve the scientific dialectic.

Increasing diversity need not be limited to the attributes of people either. Greater methodological and process diversity is also necessary to move nearer to scientific truths. Maslow (1966) stated, “It is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail” (p. 15). Research methods and statistical techniques have varied in their usage over time, but seem to do so in predictable manners, with trends occurring much as in fashion or art. As punch-card systems overtook statistical analyses by hand (or abacus), social psychologists designed methods that required more complicated computations. Today, we are moving into an era of “Big Data”, where studies may have millions of data points for millions of participants and require computing power that was until recently unimaginable (Rudder, 2014). It is impossible to forecast what social psychologists will learn from this next revolution in research design and data analytics, but it will likely continue moving social psychologists ever closer to scientific truth. This trend toward the latest new thing inevitably leads psychologists to predictably value complexity for complexity’s sake, even as computer scientists are
increasingly finding that simple methods performed on well-conceptualized variables outperform complex methods on noisy variables (Domingos, 2012).

The broader point is that the review process in science is fraught with disagreement; yet there is a latent variable - the quality of a given paper - that is extractable from that disagreement, if diversity is present. It is this same statistical technique, where random error is distinguished from signal, which underlies psychometrics, meta-analysis, and more broadly, the wisdom of crowds. These techniques assume there is no systematic error in the process; however, if all measurements are biased in the same direction, then averaging across these measurements will fail to produce a wise aggregated result. This is the exact point of the target article, in that systematic bias in a liberal direction will lead to worse measurement of the latent variable representing the true quality of research. Yet, in many ways, the choice of political diversity is arbitrary, as any lack of diversity can result in systematic error. We all accept that age, gender, and racial diversity will reduce systematic error as well. Collective norms that assume some methods are superior to others also introduce systematic error, and so increasing the representation of reviewers from outside a discipline can also reduce systematic error in the review process (Rozin, 2001). One could argue the academic perspective itself leads to a particular bias and that increasing the contributions of citizen scientists can improve the overall diversity of the perspectives included in the review process.

While the target paper is compelling in terms of how increased political diversity would benefit social psychology, we feel a broader view of diversity may be even more beneficial. In particular, the target article focuses on political diversity; we believe that social psychology lacks diversity in a number of other important domains (e.g., religion, methodology) and this lack of diversity in these other domains has similarly negative effects on the quality of social psychological research. Moreover, we believe that increasing methodological and process diversity moves science ever closer to truth by removing erroneous noise associated with particular methods and publishing processes. Additionally, the homogeneity of social psychological science creates an environment where there is much agreement on a given thesis, but limited opportunities for an antithesis to gain traction, and even fewer opportunities for genuine synthesis to occur.
The danger is that our homogeneous field using homogeneous methods will face exceptional difficulty in moving closer to discovering truth.

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Diversity of Depoliticization?

Author: Bas van der Vossen

Institution: UNC Greensboro, Department of Philosophy

Mailing address: Department of Philosophy
UNC Greensboro
239 Curry Building
Greensboro, NC 27402-6170
336.334-5059

Email: b_vande2@uncg.edu

Homepage: www.basvandervossen.com

Abstract: An ideologically homogeneous discipline of political psychology is a serious problem. But undoing the field's homogeneity may not suffice to address this problem. Instead, we should consider undoing the politicization.

Political psychologists, indeed academics in general, ought to seek the truth about their subject matter. The lead article demonstrates that an ideologically homogeneous field of political psychology is predictably bad at undertaking this task. This is a very serious problem. And I agree that it ought to be addressed. But while diversifying political psychology (and related fields) promises to be an improvement over the current state of affairs, I wonder whether this solution goes far enough. Perhaps instead of undoing the profession’s homogeneity, we should strive to undo its politicization.

Heterogeneity can help reduce the problems identified as a way of fighting one kind of bias with another kind. Conservatives can help call out the liberals’ mistakes, point out their blind spots, correct their skewed operationalizations, and so on. Perhaps this will suffice to counter the harmful effects of political biases at the level of the profession as a whole. But it cannot suffice at level of the individual researcher. After all, even when our personal mistakes are countered by others, we are still making mistakes. And it seems obvious that we should avoid making mistakes, at least if we can do so at reasonable cost.
The mistakes in question are the result of biases from which we suffer in light of partisan attitudes. But it is by no means a given that we have such partisan attitudes. So why not say that taking seriously our task to seek the truth about political psychology requires that we avoid those attitudes? Instead of fighting the symptoms, why not get rid of the disease?

The basic thought here can be summarized as follows. (Van der Vossen) Being politically biased will predictably interfere with our ability to correctly undertake the task of political psychology. But we should avoid things that make us bad at undertaking our professional tasks. Doing so is, I think, a straightforwardly moral imperative. As a result, we should avoid being politically biased. This means depoliticizing political psychology. Or, more accurately, it means depoliticizing political psychologists (as well as others like them).

I do not deny, of course, what the lead article is careful to point out: ideological people do not necessarily produce faulty research. But focusing solely on this is also to miss part of the point. What matters is not just whether pieces of research are faulty. It also matters whether researchers are approaching their tasks in a morally and professionally acceptable manner. And when political psychologists (and those who research political questions in general) are partisan or ideological, the answer is no. This is precisely why a field can go astray.

The moral ideal, then, is that those academics that study political questions remain as a-political as can be reasonably expected. And the moral ideal of the field of political psychology should be one that asks its members to remain out of politics. Such an ideal is not unusual. As a general matter, it is plausible that researchers should not have a personal stake in the outcome of their research. We want scientific investigations to be impartial, guided by the facts, and not by personal preferences, motivations, and so on. Compare, for example, the demand that medical researchers should not be on the payroll of pharmaceutical companies. The reason here is the same as with partisan political psychologists: it threatens the impartiality of their research. (Angell)

The real solution to the problems identified, then, is not just to undo homogeneity. It is to undo politicization. Academic fields that focus on political issues should adopt something like a conflict of interests-guideline that prohibits or at least strongly
discourages political activism by its members. Political psychologists (as well as philosophers, sociologists, and other related academics) should be discouraged to be active in political parties, make campaign donations, advocate for political goals, and so on.

In the long run, a depoliticized field will be better for everyone involved. It will be better for the ideological minority (whose views, careers, arguments, and work do not receive the attention and appreciation that they objectively merit). But it will also be better for the majority. In an ideological and homogeneous field, the dominant view will receive less scrutiny, and therefore likely be developed less carefully, as its challengers. As a result, the truth (whatever it is) will likely end up being misrepresented, undersold, or skewed. And that harms our ability to achieve important social improvements.

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A Checklist to Facilitate Objective Hypothesis Testing

Anthony N. Washburn, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL 60607, awashbu1@uic.edu, http://anwashburn.wordpress.com; G. Scott Morgan, Psychology Department, Drew University, Madison, NJ 07940, smorgan@drew.edu, https://sites.google.com/site/gscottmorgan3;

Linda J. Skitka, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL 60607, lsKITKA@UIC.EDU, http://Tigger.UIC.EDU/~lSKITKA.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Anthony N. Washburn, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL 60607. E-mail: awashbu1@uic.edu

Abstract: Social psychology is not a very politically diverse area of inquiry, something that could negatively affect the objectivity of social psychological theory and research (Duarte et al., 2014). This commentary offers a number of checks to help researchers uncover possible biases and identify when they are engaging in hypothesis confirmation and advocacy instead of hypothesis testing.

Duarte et al. (2014) contend that a lack of political diversity within social psychology may lead to biased research practices and conclusions, and that increasing political diversity within the discipline would improve psychological science. Increasing the number of non-liberal social psychologists is, however, a process that will likely take considerable time, if it is achieved at all. There is therefore a need for tangible guidelines and more immediate steps that researchers can take to combat bias. Given that a liberal-(or conservative-) leaning field is at risk for confirmation bias (Hardin & Higgins, 1996), a number of “checks” are recommended that researchers can immediately incorporate into their practices to ensure a focus on hypothesis testing rather than hypothesis advocacy and confirmation.

Because people have “bias blind spots” and cannot accurately diagnose the influence of their own biases (ideological or otherwise; Pronin & Kugler, 2007), a hypothesis-testing checklist has the potential to help researchers correct for biases in whatever form they exist (e.g., political, religious, racial, and cultural biases on one hand,
or theoretical and professional loyalties and biases on the other). We offer four strategies researchers might consider using to protect against bias.

Check #1: Begin by asking, “What do I want to be true and why?” Ideally, the scientific method is characterized by objectivity. Realistically, however, social psychological science is conducted by people who share many of the same biases as those they study (e.g., confirmation biases). It may therefore be useful for researchers to strive to account for whatever biases they can before going into the laboratory or the field by asking themselves, “What do I want to be true and why?” Although personal desires or preferences should have little sway in the scientific process, an early accounting of one’s own explicit biases allows one to add design elements to ensure that all theoretically grounded hypotheses (not only those that are most palatable) are meaningfully considered and tested.

Check #2: Explicitly state the theoretical rationale for your hypothesis in the form of an if-then statement. Starting with a theoretical rationale for one’s hypothesis is not only “good science,” but is also a crucial part of avoiding bias. Theoretical foundations give a clear understanding of why one expects one’s hypotheses to be true (Sutton & Staw, 1995). One way to confirm that hypotheses are grounded in a theoretical rationale rather than ideological bias is to generate an if-then statement: If a given theoretical proposition is true, then the following effect should be observed. Generating an if-then statement requires researchers to zero-in on the theoretical premise that grounds their prediction. Focusing on and explicitly stating the theoretical premise behind one’s predictions helps ensure that hypotheses are not driven by preferences for what researchers want to find but are firmly grounded in theory.

Check #3: Generate theoretical arguments for competing hypotheses and design studies accordingly. McGuire’s (2004) perspectivist approach to research and knowledge acquisition argues that all possible hypotheses are true —one just needs to think through the moderators and conditions when one hypothesis is more likely to be true than another. For this reason, researchers should challenge themselves to generate theoretical rationales not only for their preferred hypothesis but also alternative hypotheses. Generating a strong theoretical explanation for different, if not opposite, patterns of results than those
that are preferred or expected can attenuate tendencies toward hypothesis confirmation and advocacy, instead of hypothesis testing.

McGuire (2004), for example, models the perspectivist approach by hypothesizing that viewing violence on television could lead to more aggressive behavior because exposure legitimizes violence as acceptable and therefore increases desires to behave aggressively (Berkowitz, Corwin, & Heironimus, 1963). Alternatively, viewing violence on television could also lead to a reduction in aggressive behavior because exposure to violence provides a catharsis of hostile feelings and therefore reduces desires to behave aggressively (Feshbach & Singer, 1971).

Once researchers generate a theoretical rationale for competing hypotheses, they can adopt an appropriate empirical strategy. Testing competing hypotheses in one design allows the data to speak for themselves: Which account is most consistent with the data? Designing strong tests of alternative hypotheses, however, requires that each hypothesis have an equal opportunity to be supported. Sometimes this goal is best accomplished by designing multiple studies: One or more studies that provide a strong test of Hypothesis A, and one or more that provide equally strong tests of Hypothesis B or C (see Skitka, Mullen, Griffin, Hutchinson, & Chamberlin, 2002 and Skitka & Tetlock, 1993 for examples). Thresholds for what counts as support for each hypothesis should be decided *a priori*, and could be pre-registered to avoid moving the goalposts, or engaging in questionable research practices to favor one hypothesis over another (e.g., Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011).

Check #4: Be open to adversarial collaborations. In a sense, this checklist provides steps for researchers to fight against their own biases and to thus be their own intellectual adversaries. Nonetheless, psychology has documented the power of motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990); it is possible that some biases will still slip through the cracks. Researchers should be open to pursuing adversarial collaborations as a fail-safe (see the Appendix in Mellers, Hertwig, & Kahneman, 2001 for a detailed example). One may ask a colleague who has different theoretical or partisan loyalties to review one’s work, or ideally, invite collaboration in each step of the research process. Being open to invitations from others’ for adversarial collaboration would also be desirable.
The current checklist gives researchers tools to be more objective and skeptical architects of their own research. In the true spirit of scientific inquiry, social psychologists should aspire to put theories and hypotheses to the strictest of tests. Adhering to the above guidelines may facilitate objectively motivated hypothesis testing rather than subjectively laden hypothesis advocacy or confirmation. Moreover, these suggestions represent more immediate solutions to the problem of ideological bias that do not require researchers to wait for a day when the field is marked by greater ideological diversity.

References


Recognizing and Coping with Our Own Prejudices: Fighting Liberal Bias without Conservative Input

Roy F. Baumeister
Florida State University & King Abdulaziz University
baumeister@psy.fsu.edu

Abstract: This comment summarizes my struggle to overcome liberal bias without conservative argument for the opposite view. Trying to dispense with one's liberal values can help, if one is willing. Frequent self-tests help. Liberal biases include race, gender, and poverty, but also dislike of business corporations and even Western civilization. Feminism is the single strongest and most powerful bias.

Despite some quibbles over details, Duarte et al. (this issue) are absolutely right that social psychology is beset by liberal bias. Their hope that this might be corrected by recruiting more conservatively minded social psychologists into the field is commendable but I do not anticipate this happening any time soon. Hence if social psychologists want to do an optimal job of discovering scientific truths, we shall have to overcome our liberal biases.

To be sure, many social scientists see their life’s work as based on their (liberal) values, and so promoting the liberal political agenda is their main purpose rather than a handicap. This comment is addressed only to those social scientists who put finding the truth as their top value.

Which type are you? Suppose you conducted an excellent study on a topic close to your heart and the results came out starkly contrary to your political values. Would you push ahead to get those published? Suppose you found, for example, that your favorite minority or victim group really did chronically perform at a poor level and were significantly responsible for their own low status in society: Would you want the world to know (and with your name attached)?

Suppressing politically incorrect research findings (as authors or reviewers) is only part of the problem. Liberal bias prevents people from talking or even thinking about some issues. The episode of Lawrence Summers, the Harvard president who was
vilified for suggesting as a hypothesis that the lack of female Harvard physics professors could be due to a shortage of women with the requisite intellectual gifts, should be a source of shame to scientists. The debate was not about scientific data and methodology. Rather, he was thinking thoughts that are not allowed by liberal bias to be thought. Scientific inquiry is hampered by prohibitions on free thought and free speech. Summers’s case is reminiscent of Immanuel Kant, the brilliant philosopher who had to stop publishing because the authorities deemed his works to be insufficiently Christian.

Some decades ago I decided to abandon trying to support a particular viewpoint. I would strive instead to end up knowing the truth, even if it is disagreeable. Toward that end I have struggled ever since to overcome my (mostly liberal) biases.

It is important to remember that you can never tell whether you are biased, at least certainly not by conscious introspection. It is necessary instead to assume that you are usually biased.

In my case, I took the extreme approach of trying not to care. I stopped voting, because voting requires taking sides. I want to be able to see each issue from both sides and to follow the data without favoritism or preference. This has created some difficulties for me, as I am now out of step with most peers (and relatives), who have strong political views. Espousing political values merely slows me down in my quest to end up knowing the truth, because they make me cling to favored views. One common form that bias takes is setting higher criteria for accepting unpalatable than for politically agreeable conclusions.

Admittedly I find I cannot really stop caring about everything. Still, trying not to care is a useful general attitude, and I suspect (though I have no way of proving) that trying not to care helps diminish bias. And as scientists we can at least learn to be embarrassed or even ashamed about our liberal biases, rather than proud of them.

One of the hardest things about overcoming bias is that one has to recognize one’s values and preferences — and then constantly try to build the opposite case. If you wish there are no innate racial or gender differences, for example, then to guard against liberal bias you must constantly try to make the best case that there are such differences. It is essential to push oneself to develop the argument one dislikes, and not just to spell out a
I devise tests for my liberal bias. For example, do I object to racial profiling (police selectively suspecting African-Americans) while failing to protest gender profiling (police selectively suspecting males)? Have I considered the possibility that women earn less than men because they do not work as hard and are less ambitious? More broadly, do I follow the standard liberal line of blaming women’s problems and deficiencies on men? Do I readily see the evil things done by corporate America but fail to appreciate the (probably far greater) immense positive effects they have had?

In my own experience, feminism has been by far the most difficult aspect of liberal bias to overcome. Deeply ingrained habits of liberal feminist thought are augmented by widespread intimidation and enforcement, as accusations of sexism are considered sufficient to condemn both an idea and anyone who even suggests it. This is especially difficult because the feminist bias masquerades as opposing bias.

Liberal bias gives me a quasi-phobic tendency to avoid thinking certain thoughts because someone might find them offensive. To counter this, I ask myself exactly why some idea would be offensive. (Surprisingly often, I find liberals will quickly label something as offensive but cannot articulate what makes it so.) One finds oneself afraid of being accused of blaming the victim, for example — but that is not a scientific argument. Sometimes victims do deserve some blame.

Blind spots for liberals include not only issues of race, poverty, and gender but also a knee-jerk hostility toward large corporations and profits, a lack of understanding of economics, and in many cases a negative attitude toward Western civilization.

It has helped me to assume that many of my preconceived ideas are wrong and so I should be eager to change those. Catching my mistakes will hasten me along the long road toward the truth.
Mischaracterizing Social Psychology to Support the Laudable Goal of Increasing Its Political Diversity

Alice H. Eagly
Northwestern University
Department of Psychology, 2029 Sheridan Road, Evanston IL 60208
847-467-5026
eagly@northwestern.edu
http://www.psychology.northwestern.edu/people/faculty/core/profiles/alice-eagly.html

Abstract: Duarte et al.’s arguments for increasing political diversity in social psychology are based on mischaracterizations of social psychology as fundamentally flawed in understanding stereotype accuracy and the effects of attitudes on information processing. I correct their misunderstandings while agreeing with their view that political diversity, along with other forms of diversity, stands to benefit social psychology.

I agree that increased political diversity in social psychology, like many other forms of diversity, would be a plus because it would foster diversity of thought on social issues. However, Duarte et al. have put forward this enlightened idea in an accusatory manner that mischaracterizes research and theory in the field.

To reveal the target article’s biased perspective, I note the authors’ analysis of the presumed undermining of social psychology by its political liberalism. Their first example is their claim that social psychologists are in denial about stereotype accuracy. Not so. Allport (1954/1979, p. 190), a founder of research on stereotyping, argued for stereotypes’ “kernel of truth,” and his nuanced theorizing discouraged the notion that stereotypes are mere fictions. Consistent with Allport, understanding of accuracy requires differentiating between accuracy at the group and the individual levels (e.g., Ryan 2003). Sheer logic dictates that group stereotypes, as mental averages of group members, wrongly describe atypical individuals even while they may convey considerable accuracy at the group level. For example, in arguing that that gender stereotypes are “data-driven representations of social reality,” Wood and Eagly (2012, p. 91) reviewed numerous studies showing that beliefs about sex differences and similarities are moderately to
highly correlated with empirical data on the personality traits, abilities, social behaviors, and occupational distributions of women and men (e.g., Hall & Carter, 1999). These same authors also reviewed research spelling out the considerable potential of group stereotypes to mischaracterize individual group members.

Concerning a wide range of other stereotypes, Koenig and Eagly (2014) provided strong evidence of their grounding in observations of group members’ behaviors. Their studies tested the proposition that stereotypes of group members derive from people’s observations of their behaviors in the social roles in which group members are overrepresented relative to their numbers in the population. Yet, neither Koenig and Eagly nor the advocates of gender stereotype accuracy appear to have raised the ire of their social psychological colleagues.

Despite many social psychologists’ considerable open-mindedness concerning group-level stereotype accuracy, most stereotype research addresses, not accuracy, but the negative consequences of stereotypes for individuals. One theme is that stereotypes disadvantage strivers from lower-status groups who attempt to take on new roles. It is stereotypes’ descriptive accuracy that lends them the power to suppress the aspirations of those individuals who strive to break the strictures of stereotypes. Such individuals can face backlash (Rudman et al. 2012) and depressed performance of stereotype-relevant tasks (Steele & Aronson 1995). Other research emphasizes the many ways that stereotypes legitimize the societal status quo (e.g., Cuddy et al. 2008). Yet, stereotypes’ group-level accuracy and their support of the societal status quo are two sides of the same coin.

Another example that Duarte et al. offer of the presumed undermining of social psychology is their claim that social psychology is dominated by the view that prejudice and intolerance are limited to the political right. To support this claim, they feature a small number of studies that yielded one-sided characterizations of conservatives but soon faced contrary evidence produced by other researchers. On this point, Duarte and colleagues appear to be unfamiliar with the massive amount of research in social psychology on the effects of attitudes and ideology on information-processing (see Eagly
A fundamental proposition of attitude theory is that attitudes exert selective effects at all stages of information processing. Hundreds of studies have tested the proposition that people’s attitudes bias information processing in favor of material that is congruent with their attitudes. Such _congeniality effects_ are common in research on exposure and attention to attitude-relevant information and the perception, judgment, and evaluation of such information. Despite complexities arising from competition between pressures toward congeniality and pressures toward accuracy (e.g., Hart et al. 2009), neither attitude theory nor its typical findings yield support for the idea that congeniality biases are limited to or stronger among persons on political right.

Duarte et al. correctly describe social psychology as populated mainly by political liberals. The phenomenon stems from liberals’ attraction to a field that they believe produces knowledge that can facilitate social change. Following from the social movements of the last 50 years, adherents of increasing equality on the basis of gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation have flocked to social psychology. However, their preferences for progressive social change do not invariably produce biased science given that liberal, like conservative, psychological scientists are constrained by the shared rules of postpositivist science. When bias is present, it tends to be corrected over time, as illustrated by the aftermath of Jost et al.’s (2003) article.

Duarte et al. have stigmatized the entire field of social psychology based in large part on their exaggeration of social psychologists’ hostility to group-level stereotype accuracy and their overemphasis on a few studies that negatively characterized conservatives. Their article thus displays their lack of broad knowledge of theory and research in this discipline. Also, they have unwittingly illustrated one of social psychology’s oldest principle—that attitudes bias information processing, in this case by fostering their highly selective and one-sided characterization of social psychology. Luckily, they have published in a journal that allows others to immediately correct their misjudgments.

**References**


A Conservative’s Social Psychology

Clark McCauley
Department of Psychology
Bryn Mawr College
cmccaule@brynmawr.edu

Abstract: I suggest that social psychologists should stick to studying positive and negative attitudes and give up stigmatizing some attitudes as ‘prejudice.’ I recommend that we avoid assuming that race and ethnicity have no biological foundations, to avoid a collision course with modern biology. And I wonder how much difference the target article recommendations can make in the context of hiring a social psychologist for an academic position.

“Conservative” means different things to different people. In my case it means a conservative Catholic, fearful of big government, big business, and the decline of individual liberties that accompanies and outlasts every war the U.S. engages.
I point out two issues in social psychology that call for conservative attention, then reflect briefly on recommendations for increasing political pluralism in social psychology.

Social psychology without prejudice

Duarte et al summarize studies showing that liberals can be prejudiced against conservatives just as conservatives can be prejudiced against liberals. But I want to take this issue a step further to problematize—as postmodern liberals like to say—the very concept of prejudice.

The empirical warrant for the concept of prejudice is that some attitudes, both negative and positive, cannot be understood with social psychology’s everyday armamentarium of attitude theory and research. This logic led to research on the authoritarian personality and other efforts to show that there is something special and defective about the kind of people who have conservative prejudices. But if now we begin to see that self-serving bias is part of the human condition, perhaps we can do without the concept of prejudice.
Suppose I sit farther away from someone I know to be a smoker, I’m less friendly in conversation with smokers than with non-smokers, and I associate positive words faster with non-smokers and negative words faster with smokers. I might argue that I do not have a prejudice against smokers, rather I have a negative attitude toward smokers because they threaten me in various ways: smoking is disgusting, smokers smell bad, smokers lack self-control, smokers are an expensive drag on our health care system.

And so might conservatives find reasons for seeing liberals and their policies as threatening in various ways, just as liberals find reasons for seeing conservatives and their policies as threatening. It might help the much-mourned political dialog between liberals and conservatives if we could do without stigmatizing “their” views as “prejudice.” Let’s go back to studying attitudes and erase “prejudice” from our textbooks and journals.

**Constructions of race and ethnicity**

Race and ethnicity are social constructions; we are not born with access to these categories, we must learn them. But are they only social constructions? Do race and ethnicity exist only in our minds or do these categories have some objective foundation? Here I want to raise the possibility that there are biological differences between groups socially recognized as racial and ethnic groups.

In medicine, ethnic profiling has emerged in several domains (Burchard, 2003). There are ethnic group differences in diseases, such as Tay-Sachs and sickle-cell anemia. There are ethnic differences in response to drugs, such as weaker response to beta-blockers for African-Americans and greater sensitivity to opioids for Chinese. Ethnic profiling in medicine can be controversial (Wade, 2003) but sometimes discrimination is in the patient’s interest.
It is in genetics that the most controversial results have emerged. Rosenberg et al (2003) studied 4682 alleles from 377 markers in 1056 individuals from 52 tribal and national groups across 5 continents. Results showed 94% of genetic variation was within group, 2% between groups of the same region, and 4% between regions. Clustering by similarity produced seven regions: Africa, Europe, Middle East, Central/South Asia, East Asia, Melanesia, America.

These clusters are uncomfortably close to the old-fashioned ‘races of man’ and the work has led to extended arguments about the clustering techniques used and the fuzzy boundaries between clusters (Lewontin, 2006). Will biology find genetic correlates of ethnicity and race? It may be dangerous to bet against a modern biology that can already test DNA to predict eye color coupled to hair color (Walsh et al, 2013). Can genetic differences contribute to cultural differences? There is broad genetic variation in every sizeable human group, but it is possible that small statistical differences at a few loci may push groups in different cultural directions.

Taken together, developments in medicine and genetics suggest that social psychologists should avoid assumptions that might put us on a collision course with modern biology. Human groups can be socially constructed without denying the possibility of biological group differences, just as breeds of dogs can be socially constructed without denying the biological substrate that breeders work with.

**Will the recommendations make a difference?**

In the concluding paragraph of the target article, Duarte et al recognize that bias against conservatives is a problem, not just for social-personality psychology, but for most of psychology and indeed most of social science. This is a key observation because it points to the vulnerability of conservatives applying for an academic position.

In the current job market, where hundreds of applications are submitted for each job opening, the first winnowing of applications almost begs the selection committee to
exercise their values in fast and furious reactions to the pile of applications. The selection committee for a social psychology position usually includes department members who are not social psychologists, but this is no help when psychologists in general run 10:1 liberal vs. conservative.

Worse yet, psychology department selection committees in recent years are likely to include non-psychologists who are selected for liberal values. Pressures to hire more minority faculty will often bring a Provost’s representative onto the committee to make sure that at least one finalist is a minority candidate. The same pressures will usually ensure that a minority student is a member of the committee.

Imagine the reactions of these professional liberals to a job candidate whose research suggests that stereotypes are not all wrong, or that liberals are prejudiced against conservatives, or that race and ethnicity are more than arbitrary constructions. Now imagine that the social psychologist on the committee wades through these liberal reactions to suggest that social psychological science might be improved by giving more attention to this candidate…

The target article is a heartening start, but so long as psychology, the social sciences, and academic institutions are all dominated by liberal values, I fear that the recommendations suggested by Duarte et al can do little to raise political diversity in social psychology.

References

Sociopolitical Insularity is Psychology’s Achilles Heel

Richard E. Redding
Chapman University
Fowler School of Law and
Crean College of Health and Behavioral Sciences
Office of the Chancellor
Chapman University
One University Drive
Orange, CA  92866
redding@chapman.edu
714-628-2688
http://www.chapman.edu/our-faculty/richard-redding

Abstract: Academic psychology has become increasingly non-diverse politically, which skews and impedes social psychological science (Duarte, 2015 et al., this issue). We should embrace viewpoint diversity, especially since the arguments favoring sociopolitical diversity are identical to those for demographic and cultural diversity. Doing so will produce a more robust, open, and creative psychological science that is informed and tested by a multiplicity of sociopolitical paradigms.

No American institution has embraced cultural and demographic diversity more than the academy, and nowhere with greater enthusiasm than in the social sciences. Universities differ in many ways, as do their psychology departments, but all celebrate diversity. Substantial efforts are devoted to attract demographically diverse faculty and students, integrate culturally diverse content throughout the curriculum, provide diversity-related programming, and encourage researchers to be culturally competent.

Yet, we do not take the same steps to diversify the faculty politically or ensure that diverse sociopolitical viewpoints are represented in the curriculum and research. Up to 33% of academic psychologists freely admit to discriminatory practices against those with whom they differ politically (Inbar & Lammers, 2012), and studies reveal substantial bias against politically conservative students, professors, and policy perspectives. Conservative students and faculty (what few there are) perceive the academy as “appropriate for and welcoming of people with broadly liberal political sensibilities and as inappropriate for conservatives” (Gross & Fosse, 2012, p. 155). If
this climate existed with respect to people of color, it would give rise to a successful class action suit for racial discrimination (Tetlock, 2012).

Unfortunately, sociopolitical bias remains one of the last acceptable forms of prejudice in the academy (and beyond) (see Jussim, 2012). In describing how academic psychology has become increasingly non-diverse politically, and the many ways in which this skews and impedes policy-relevant psychological science, Duarte et al. (2015, this issue) have diagnosed the discipline’s Achilles heel. *Ideas* are what universities and academic psychology are all about. Why have we not embraced intellectual diversity on social and political issues?

The arguments favoring sociopolitical diversity, each of which is supported by a compelling body of research findings, are *identical* to those for demographic/cultural diversity: (1) when a diversity of viewpoints and life experiences are represented among the faculty and student body, it benefits teaching, learning and research (indeed, demographic diversity is seen as instrumental in achieving the educational benefits that flow from cultural and viewpoint diversity, see Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003), (2) the sociopolitical values and demographic/cultural backgrounds of faculty and students are often central to their personal identity, and (3) discrimination in hiring and professional relationships due to differences in sociopolitical values is as insidious today as is discrimination on the basis of demographic differences (Redding, 2012).

We ought, therefore, to value and promote sociopolitical diversity with the same vigor as we do demographic/cultural diversity. We should give voice to those sociopolitical identities outside the mainstream of academic life and research paradigms, remedy discrimination against those having such identities and their feeling of isolation in the academy (which makes them reluctant to manifest their sociopolitical identity in academic life and professional activities), and engage a range of sociopolitical ideas in our scholarly perspectives and teaching.

There is, of course, a fourth argument - the need for social justice - undergirding demographic diversity that is thought inapplicable to sociopolitical diversity, since political conservatives have not been a disadvantaged group in society. Yet, conservatives are marginalized and vastly underrepresented within psychological science. Perhaps, then, we should strive for fairer treatment and greater representation of
conservatives so that they are not implicitly or explicitly discriminated against in
graduate admissions, hiring and promotion, the peer-review process, and departmental
and university life generally (see Inbar & Lammers, 2012; Redding, 2012). Duarte et al.
(2015) explain how doing so will benefit the profession and society by producing a more
robust, open, and creative psychological science that is informed and tested through a
multiplicity of sociopolitical paradigms. Not only do political minorities bring diverse
perspectives, but their presence has a de-biasing and net-widening effect on the rest of the
scientific community (see Page, 2009).

As for the claim that the academy’s research perspectives and findings are liberal
because liberal ideas are necessarily the correct ones, the available empirical evidence
refutes the notion that there are differences between liberals and conservatives in
intelligence (Duarte et al., 2015), academic ability (see Redding, 2012), or in the quality
of their information processing or degree of cognitive bias when they evaluate research
findings and policy questions (Kahan, 2013). Conservatives tend to be somewhat less
open to experience (see Duarte et al., 2015) than liberals, but this does not mean that their
policy preferences are inferior. More to the point, consider the strong empirical evidence
that ideological biases unavoidably influence research agendas, paradigms and methods,
as well as the interpretation of findings and how they are used or not used to support
policy preferences; consider also how psychological science has been shaped (see Duarte
et al., 2015; Kahan, 2013; MacCoun, 1998; Tetlock, 2012; Redding, 2001; 2012) by,
among other things, “the embedding of liberal values into research questions and
methods” (Duarte et al., 2015, this issue, p. ___).

It is inescapable human nature to approach value-laden issues, whether in
research, teaching or professional practice from the perspective of one’s own
sociopolitical lens. (If most psychologists were conservative, the profession surely would
be captured by conservative ideas and sensibilities.) Since psychology faculties are not
socio-politically diverse, it comes as no surprise that their research on policy-relevant
topics also lacks diversity. Researchers are human beings (!) who cannot help but be
influenced by the views they hold on the topics they investigate. This is why the de-
biasing efforts that Duarte et al. (2015) suggest, while very useful, alone will not solve
the problem.
Fundamentally, the only way to achieve sociopolitical diversity in research and teaching is to diversify who is on the faculty, by fostering a climate that is welcoming of multiple sociopolitical voices and thereby encourages non-liberal individuals to pursue careers in academic psychology, and through outreach efforts to hire them onto our faculties (see Duarte et al., 2105; Redding, 2012). We should not want sociopolitical uniformity on social science faculties, especially since sociopolitical perspectives are an important component of culture and, therefore, of cultural diversity. If we want our universities and psychology department to be places that respect and truly engage diverse ideas, rather than doing so almost exclusively from one political vantage point, diversifying the faculty ideologically is the only way to achieve sociopolitical inclusiveness and heal psychology’s Achilles heel.

References


Political Attitudes in Social Environments

Authors: Neil Gross and Andrew Gelman
Institution: Columbia University and University of British Columbia
Mailing address: Department of Statistics, Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027
Telephone number: 212-851-2142
Email: neilgross@mac.com, gelman@stat.columbia.edu
Url: http://www.stat.columbia.edu/~gelman

Abstract: We agree with the authors that it is worthwhile to study professions’ political alignments. But we have seen no evidence to support the idea that social science fields with more politically diverse workforces generally produce better research. We also think that when considering ideological balance, it is useful to place social psychology within a larger context of the prevailing ideologies of other influential groups within society, such as military officers, journalists, and business executives.

Although we appreciate several things about the Duarte et al. essay, “Political Diversity Will Improve Social Psychological Science,” including its insistence that social scientists should work to minimize the impact of their political views on their research and its sensitivity to political threats to social science funding, we find their central argument unpersuasive. Contrary to the assertion of the authors, we have seen no evidence that social science fields with more politically diverse workforces have higher evidentiary standards, are better able to avoid replication failures, or generally produce better research. As there are no standardized ways to measure these outcomes at the disciplinary or subdisciplinary level, and as reliable data on researcher politics at the disciplinary and subdisciplinary level are scarce, there have never been—to our knowledge—any systematic attempts to examine the relationship between epistemic quality and variation in the political composition of the social-scientific community. The authors are thus calling for major changes in policy and practice based on sheer speculation. The authors cite some evidence of the benefits of “viewpoint diversity” in collaboration, but there is a scale mismatch between these studies (of small groups) and the field-level generalizations the authors make. In point of fact, research on the history
and sociology of social science suggests that scientific/intellectual movements that bundle together political commitments and programs for research—movements of the sort the authors believe to have weakened social and personality psychology—have arisen under a wide range of political conditions, as have countermovements calling for greater objectivity. Until we know more about these and related dynamics, it would be premature to tinker with organizational machineries for knowledge production in the social sciences, however much one may worry, alongside the authors, about certain current trends.

In addition we think it is helpful to consider the Duarte et al. argument in a broader context by considering other fields that lean strongly to the left or to the right. The cleanest analogy, perhaps, is between college professors (who are disproportionately liberal Democrats) and military officers (mostly conservative Republicans; see the research of political scientist Jason Dempsey, 2009). In both cases there seems to be a strong connection between the environment and the ideology. Universities have (with some notable exceptions) been centers of political radicalism for centuries, just as the military has long been a conservative institution in most places (again, with some exceptions). And this is true even though many university professors are well-paid, live well, and send their children to private schools, and even though the U.S. military has been described as the one of the few remaining bastions of socialism remaining in the 21st century. Another example of a liberal-leaning profession is journalism (with its frequently-cited dictum to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable,” and again the relative liberalism of that profession has been confirmed by polls of journalists, for example Weaver et al., 2003), while business executives represent an important, and influential, conservative group in American society. There has been some movement to balance out the liberal bias of journalism in the United States, but it is not clear what would be done to balance political representation among military officers or corporate executives.

In short, we applaud the work of Duarte et al. in exploring the statistics and implications of political attitudes among social researchers. The psychology profession is, like the
military, an all-volunteer force, and it is not clear to us that the purported benefits of righting the ideological balance among social psychologists (or among military officers, or corporate executives) are worth the efforts that would involved in such endeavors. But these sorts of ideological what-ifs make interesting thought experiments.

References


Political Bias, Explanatory Depth, and Narratives of Progress

Steven Pinker
Harvard University
pinker@wjh.harvard.edu

Abstract: Political bias has indeed been a distorter of psychology, not just in particular research areas but in an aversion to the explanatory depth available from politically fraught fields like evolution. I add two friendly amendments to the target article: the leftist moral narrative may be based on zero-sum competition among identity groups rather than continuous progress, and ideological bias should be dealt with not just via diversity of ideological factions but by minimizing the influence of ideology altogether.

This article may be among the most important papers on the practice of psychology in the recent history of the field. Left-wing bias has indeed been a substantial distorter of large swaths of research and theory. How could it not be, given everything we (as psychologists, of all people!) know about the intellectually corrupting effects of ideology, in-group consensus, and the demonizing of dissenters? Duarte et al. brilliantly document and diagnose the problem, though their survey of the damage is only partial. In addition to the topics they call out, I would add the study of sex differences, violence, genetic contributors to economic inequality, cultural contributors to economic inequality, and the shaping of personality and intelligence (see Pinker, 2002, 2011; Pinker, 2008).

The problem extends beyond particular research areas. I suspect that a left-liberal bias also explains the paucity of deep explanations in psychology—the fact that our “theories” often consist of an ever-lengthening list of biases, fallacies, illusions, neglects, blindesses, and fundamental errors, each of which pretty much restates the finding that human beings are bad at something. To explain why humans are bad at what they are bad at, and good at what they are good at, psychology needs to invoke deeper principles from disciplines that are more foundational than psychology itself, including economics, genetics, and evolutionary biology. But these sources of explanatory depth are often
excluded from psychologists’ consciousness because of their perceived political baggage (Pinker, 2002).

In addition to compromising scientific psychology, the political bias identified by the authors has corroded trust in science as a whole. To take a baleful example, skeptics of anthropogenic climate change commonly write off the scientific consensus by claiming that the left-wing bias of academic researchers is so pervasive and unacknowledged that nothing coming out of the academy can be taken at face value. They are surely wrong about climate science, but our field has given them ample evidence that such a bias exists. As salient example is the conspicuous outrage and lack of balanced debate after Lawrence Summers’ 2005 remarks on the interpretation of evidence regarding gender discrimination in academia (Pinker, 2005).

The social sciences must return to politically disinterested inquiry, and this paper is a welcome call to action. I will add two friendly amendments.

First, I’m not sure that Christian Smith’s liberal progress narrative is an entirely accurate summary of the political orientation of social scientists. As someone who has documented that there is a good deal of empirical truth to the narrative (Pinker, 2011), I can vouch that contemporary left-liberals adamantly do not believe that we have made any progress since the Enlightenment (though they do believe the struggle for such progress is worth prosecuting). Abolition of slavery? There are more slaves today, I am frequently informed, than at any time in history. The end of racial segregation? American prisons are the new Jim Crow. A decline in racism? It’s just gone underground in the form of implicit biases. The rights and safety of women? The barriers have just become better hidden, while women are in more danger than ever, especially the one in four college women who have been raped. The end of barbaric corporal punishment? We now have a panopticon-watched carceral society whose subtle forms of surveillance and conformity make burning at the stake no longer necessary.
These days it’s the libertarians, not the left-liberals, who tend to believe in progress (e.g., Ridley, 2011). Rather than liberal progress, the narrative of many left-leaning academics is that society consists of a zero-sum competition among classes, genders, and races, and the mission worth dedicating one’s life to achieving is ensuring that the currently disadvantaged groups get their fair share of the power and resources. For these reasons, the authors’ repeated reference to the “liberal progress narrative” seems to miss the mark. None of the examples of political bias that they call out requires a conviction that our society has made progress.

A second observation: The authors had a stroke of rhetorical genius in using the left-liberal shibboleth of “diversity” against them. And they make an interesting case that some kind of affirmative action for conservatives and libertarians might help neutralize the bias. But the analogy between race and gender, on the one hand, and political ideology, on the other, is partial at best. Gilbert and Sullivan notwithstanding, one is not born a liberal or a conservative in the same way one is born a male or a female, a European or an Asian or an African. Political ideologies are not arbitrary markers but have intellectual content which can be exposed, debated, and, when appropriate, discounted. All scientists should do this, including liberals and leftists; we shouldn’t assume that leftists are hardwired to bias their science in a leftward direction, requiring a faction of right-wingers to cancel them out with an opposing bias. It would be a shame if this tactical suggestion of the authors’ sparked a diversionary debate over the merits of quotas and reverse discrimination and overshadowed their larger point that the conduct of good science requires that we all do everything possible to identify and minimize the distortions of parochial ideologies.

References


What kinds of conservatives does social psychology lack, and why? Comments on Duarte et al.

Lee Ross  
Stanford University  
lross@stanford.edu

Abstract: Although Duarte et al’s claims about the potential benefits of greater political diversity in the ranks of social psychology are apt, their discussion of the decline in such diversity, the role played by self-selection, and the specific domains they cite in discussing an anti-conservative bias raise issues that merit closer examination. The claim that sound research and analysis challenging liberal orthodoxies fails to receive a fair hearing in our journals and professional discourse is also disputed.

People of all political hues are bound to view evidence and arguments through the prism of their understandings and values, and to create pressures to uniformity. One thus cannot disagree that greater political diversity in our field (and other kinds of diversity as well) would benefit us. That conceded, let me comment on three issue raised in this article that I think worth further critical consideration.

The loss of political psycho-diversity. The terms liberal and conservative in the present US political climate have a different meaning than they did when the field included more self-described conservatives, and more (moderate) Republicans. Beliefs that characterized Eisenhower and Nixon supporters—that is, fiscal conservatism and advocacy of gradual rather than radical social change (to say nothing of acceptance of a highly progressive tax structure) are not conservatives of the sort Duarte et al. have in mind when they speak of under-representation. Social scientists who hold such traditional GOP views, but nevertheless believe that government should play an active role in addressing social ills and are comfortable with extension of gay rights, and the freedom of women to seek abortions, are unlikely to label themselves as “conservatives” lest they be tarred with the same brush as the those who reject such views. The authors present no evidence, empirical or even anecdotal, of hostility to more traditional types of conservatism (such as that endorsed by the Conservative parties in the UK or Canada). In
short, what is largely absent, and rejected in social psychology (and in our elite Universities), is a particular strain of conservatism-- one heavily influenced by evangelical Christianity and/or by resentment of and resistance to changes in America’s demography and social attitudes.

Interestingly, Duarte et al seem unconcerned about the virtual disappearance from our ranks of academicians with perspectives far to the left of the typical liberal Democrat.-- that is , individuals who do not accept the view that a combination of capitalism (even with more constraints) and democracy is the only imaginable road to a good society.

**Self-selection and the politics of social psychology:** Duarte et al are correct in pointing to self-selection as a source of liberal over-presentation. Some of the central tenets of social psychology clearly have more appeal for students who want to explore sources of social ills and potential remedies than those who wish to preserve the status quo. Liberal professors no doubt tend to choose examples, both in the classroom teaching and their research in which it is conservative rather than liberal foibles that are offered as cases in point. But Duarte et al cite little if any evidence that research reports focusing on liberal susceptibility to particular biases, or reports documenting mutual susceptibility, are in fact subject to less critical scrutiny by journal reviewers and editors (as opposed to survey respondents or research participants) than reports of conservative susceptibility.

Duarte et al fail to mention that some of the most heavily lauded applied work in our field—notably, in education— features findings highly consistent with such traditional conservative values as persistence in the face of adversity, and a sense of personal responsibility and self-efficacy. Most applied work in social psychology is in fact not so much liberal in spirit as reformist. Demonstrations that modest interventions can bear fruit (), challenges both leftist claims that disadvantage cannot be overcome without structural changes in society and rightist claims that those who are faring badly are doing so primarily because of deficits in motivation, ability, or character.
Ill-chosen exemplars of liberal bias: The link between conservative ideology and resistance to evidence of climate change and its anthropogenic origins and rejection of calls for action is by no means an obvious one (and is largely restricted to the US). Stewardship of the earth, maintaining the biological status quo, and conservation of resources are obligations one might expect conservatives to take more seriously than liberals. How and why climate change denial has become such a hallmark for so many conservative Republicans is an interesting and timely challenge for social scientists to address. (I would suggest “follow the money”). But given where the weight of evidence lies, a lack of evenhandedness in treating the input of two sides in this debate is not compelling evidence of an anti-conservative bias. Other domains (education, policing, welfare economics, etc.) would surely provide more fertile ground in the search for evidence that journal editors and granting agencies are unwilling to support work that challenges liberal orthodoxies with good empirical evidence.

With respect to stereotype accuracy, the discussion offered by Duarte et al. lacks historical perspective. The original concept of a stereotype was more than the assumption of some statistical relationship between group membership and some negative (or positive) characteristic. Rather, it referred to the oversimplified belief that that all or virtually all members of a particular group share some characteristic, as an essential quality (Lippman, 1922). Whether the types of base-rates Duarte et al cite are given more weight or less weight than they merit on Bayesian grounds—and by whom—is an empirical question perhaps worth investigation (although the answer surely depends on the stipulated group and characteristic). But that question was not what motivated researchers within the social sciences to address the phenomenon of stereotyping. Their concern was the consequences of stereotypes for those subject to them, and for those holding them. References to “inaccurate” stereotypes do oversimplify the issue, but so do claims that particular stereotypes are “accurate”—especially in the absence of discussion of the factors that produce and sustain the relevant differences in actions and outcomes.

Conclusions. It would be good for the field of social psychology if thoughtful conservatives (and other thoughtful questioners of orthodoxy) were contributing more to
our journals, and if “political correctness” of a sort that can limit inquiry and stifle classroom discussion were less in evidence. It may well be that slipshod work and arguments that gives comfort to liberal orthodoxies is subjected to less critical scrutiny than those that supports conservative beliefs. Of greater concern would be evidence (which I did not find in Duarte et al) that well-done work that supports conservatives orthodoxies or challenges liberal ones fails to get a fair hearing or merited support within our discipline. Indeed the seriousness with which social psychologists have taken the issues raised by the authors of this paper and the other papers that they cite, shows that dissenting voices are both being aired and prompting vigorous discussion.

References

