

Effect of Motivation on Racial Differences in Primary Cognitive Functions

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Abstract

In the present work, we develop the motivation to express prejudice scale and establish its convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity. Across the studies, we paid particular attention to establishing how our new measure is distinct from, and provides predictive utility beyond, both attitudes and the motivations to respond without prejudice. Although some evidence suggests that people low in IMS and high in EMS might be especially likely to be motivated to express prejudice, we contend that a motivation to express prejudice (MP) is not identical to or interchangeable with IMS, EMS, or their combination. Although it is unlikely for someone to be high in both IMS and MP, low levels of IMS do not guarantee high levels of MP because viewing prejudice as unacceptable (i.e., being low in IMS) is not the same as feeling motivated or impelled to express prejudice (i.e., being high in MP). Likewise, it is logically and psychologically possible for a person to be either high or low in EMS and to also be either high or low in the motivation to express prejudice. The motivation to express prejudice should therefore be theoretically and empirically distinct from these constructs.

Keyword: Motivation, Prejudice, Convergent, Discriminant, Combination, Guarantee & Interchangeable.

Introduction

In different times and places racial boundaries are drawn in very different ways. In the U.S. a person is considered “Black” if they have any African ancestry. This extreme form of binary racial classification reflects the so-called “one-drop rule” that became the standard system of racial classification in the U.S. after the Civil War. Imagine how different the meaning of “race” would be in the US if the one-drop rule were reversed: anyone with any European ancestry

would be classified as white. In Brazil, in contrast to the U.S., racial classifications are organized on a more continuous spectrum. In the U.S. all East Asians are considered a single racial category; in East Asia, on the other hand, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and Vietnamese are considered separate races. The United States Immigration Commission in 1911 considered people of Irish, Italian, Polish, and English descent to be distinct “races”, and the 1924 Immigration Act passed by Congress restricted immigration of what were termed “inferior races” from Southern and Eastern Europe. In Germany under the Nazis, Jews were considered a distinct race, not merely a religious group or an ethnic group. In Africa today, Tutsi and Hutu have sometimes been regarded as distinct races. Racial classifications are thus never simply given by biological descent even if they always invoke biology; they are always constructed through complex historical and cultural processes.

Racial classifications do not logically imply racial oppression (i.e. a social injustice backed by power). This is how ethnic distinctions are sometimes experienced: to be of Irish or Swedish or Italian descent in America is to share a certain cultural identity, and perhaps to participate in certain cultural practices as well, but this does not imply any forms of oppression involving these categories. Ethnic difference can be just that: differences. Racial classifications could in principle be simply a way of noting physical differences of various sorts that are linked to biological descent. However, in practice racial classifications are almost always linked to forms of unjust economic and social inequality, domination, and exclusion, as well as to belief systems that assign superior and inferior statuses and attributes according to race. Indeed, as a sociological generalization we can say that racial classifications become salient in people’s lives primarily to the extent that they are linked to forms of socioeconomic inequality and oppression. The term “racism” designates this intersection of racial classification with oppression.

Racism and The Lives of White Americans

To study race in American society, then, is to investigate the ways in which racial classifications are linked to historically variable forms of oppression. The moral core of such an analysis is understanding the ways in which racial oppression imposes harms on people in the racially

oppressed category. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to think of racism as something that only affects the lives of African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos and other racially defined “minorities”. Racism has profoundly shaped American society and politics in ways that deeply affect the lives of white Americans as well, particularly the lives of working class and poor whites, not just the lives of minorities.

- In the 1880s and 1890s a radical political movement of workers and small farmers – the Populists – emerged in the Midwest and the South. For a time, it appeared that black tenant farmers and small white farmers in the South might be able to make common cause against large landowners and Southern elites.
- Throughout the late 19th century and the first part of the twentieth century employers used racial minorities as strike breakers in industrial strikes. This significantly weakened the ability of unions to win strikes, and also contributed to deep resentments against blacks and other minorities within the white working class.
- In the late 1960s and early 1970s, in response to the civil rights movement, the Republican Party under Nixon adopted what came to be known as the “Southern Strategy” in which racial fears were deliberately used to get white working-class voters to switch political allegiance from the Democrats to the Republicans.
- Research on wage inequality has demonstrated that in those cities and regions of the United States where the black/white wage difference is the greatest it is also the case that the wages of white workers are the lowest and inequality among whites is greatest.

The Historical Trajectory of Racial Oppression

While racism may harm significant segments of the racially dominant group in American society, nevertheless racism is above all a form of domination that harms the racially oppressed groups. These harms have been a core part of American history, and not merely of distant history. It is hard to overstate this point: it is only in the most recent past that the classical liberal idea of equality before the law has been extended to include racial minorities, and even today in many critical respects such equality remains more promise than reality.

Genocide and geographical displacement

When European settlers came to North America, they encountered an indigenous population that had effective control over the most important economic resource of the time: land. From very early on, displacement and genocide were the central ways of dealing with the inevitable conflicts over this resource, first by the British colonies and later by the U.S. Government. The 19th century folk saying “the only good Indian is a dead Indian” reflects the moral monstrosity of this stance. Most often the land was simply confiscated by force and the indigenous inhabitants driven off or killed. Occasionally land was formally ceded by Native American tribes through treaties in the aftermath of military defeat. When treaties occurred, they guaranteed the native people making the treaty certain rights in exchange for the agreement. Often these rights were subsequently ignored.

Slavery

Everyone knows that most people with African ancestors living in the United States today are the descendants of people who were the property of white Americans. Everyone knows this, but it is easy to lose site of what this really means. Human beings were property: they were owned in the same sense as a horse can be owned. They could be whipped and branded and in other ways physically harmed with virtually no legal restrictions. The killing of a slave by a slave master was almost never punished. The rape of slaves was a common practice. Slave owners were free to split up families and to sell the children of slaves.

Some scholars have argued on the basis of these facts about improving standards of living of slaves in the 19th century that slavery was not as oppressive as often thought.⁴ This claim minimizes the impact on the lives of slaves of the condition of such radical and complete unfreedom and the deep symbolic degradation that slaves experienced. The nature of the social structure of slavery meant that significant physical brutality was ubiquitous in spite of the modestly improving standard of living of slaves and the ideology of paternalism. Because

slavery was a lifetime condition, slaves had very little positive incentive to work hard. Since the prosperity of slave owners depended on the effort of their slaves, this meant that slave owners had to rely very heavily on negative incentives – force and the threat of force – to extract such effort.

Second-Class Citizenship

Slavery was abolished after the Civil War, but this did not mean a complete dismantling of legally-enforced racial oppression. On paper, the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1868, guaranteed equal protection of the law and full rights to all citizens, and the 15th amendment passed two years later explicitly specified these rights applied to all people regardless of race or color. If these Amendments had been taken seriously and rigorously enforced, then racial oppression could not have taken the form of second-class citizenship.

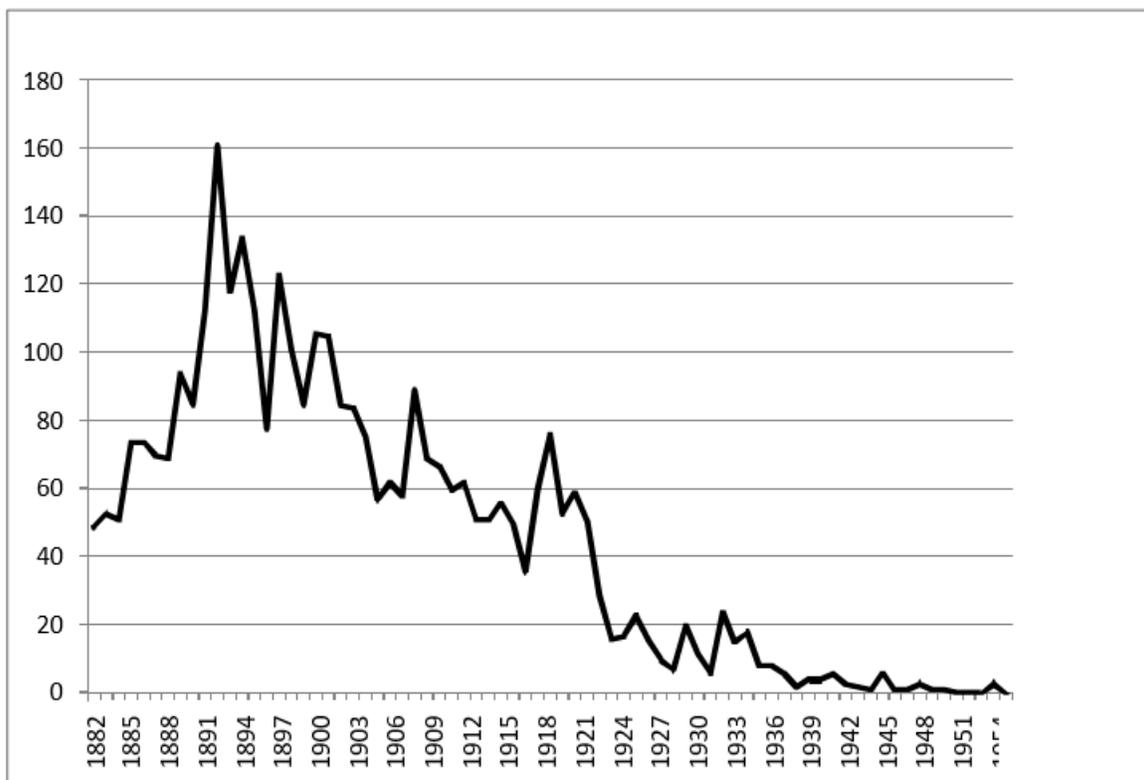


Figure 1: Lynchings of Blacks per year, 1882-1964.

Second class citizenship refers to a situation in which some categories of citizens have fewer rights than others. This can either take the form of an official, legally defined denial of some rights, or a less formal practical denial of rights. Laws which prohibit people who have been convicted of felonies from voting, for example, are an example of legally-defined second-class citizenship that is still common in the United States today. Police practices which target certain groups of people for stricter law enforcement or judicial practices which systematically impose stiffer sentences on particular categories of people would be examples of unofficial second-class citizenship. Public policies which treat some categories of citizens as more worthy of respect than others can also be seen as creating a kind of second class citizenship. Margaret Somers has argued that the public disrespect of poor African-Americans reflected in the abandonment of the people left behind in New Orleans during the Hurricane Katrina disaster in 2005 is a striking example of their denial of full recognition as equal citizens.

Non-Citizen Labor

The fourth form of racial oppression in American history revolves around the linkage between race and legal citizenship status. As everyone knows, the United States is a country of immigrants. Aside from Native Americans, everyone who lives in the United States is descended from people who came to North America from other continents sometime in the last few centuries. From the middle of the 19th century, some categories of these immigrants were denied legal access to citizenship status. The first instance of this was the importation of Chinese “coolie” labor on the railroads. Large numbers of poor Chinese were brought to the United States by labor recruiters as a source of cheap labor to work on building the railroads in the West and other large-scale infrastructure projects. Anti-Chinese feelings were generated by the repeated use of Chinese labor as a way of cutting wages of native-born white workers and breaking strikes. Eventually political mobilization against Chinese immigrants lead to the Chinese Exclusion Act which blocked the further immigration of nearly all Chinese and made those Chinese already in the United States permanent aliens, prohibited from obtaining U.S. Citizenship. In 1924 other severe restrictions on immigration were enacted, especially focused on prohibiting legal immigration from Asia, Africa and Latin America. For a 40 year period, until immigration reform in the 1965, legal immigration to the United States was almost entirely white.

Diffuse discrimination

There is a sense in which all forms of racism involve “racial discrimination” – i.e. treating people differently by virtue of their race. Here we use the term more narrowly to refer to situations in which such discriminatory action is not directly backed by the legal powers of the state. This includes a wide range of specific practices: employers not hiring or promoting someone on the basis of race; landlords only renting to people from certain racial groups; banks making it more difficult for racial minorities to get loans; salespeople in a store treating African-American customers differently from white customers; and so on. Often this kind of private discrimination is very difficult to detect because it occurs informally, behind the scene in the inter-personal encounters and decisions made in everyday life. In contemporary American society many such behaviors are in fact illegal, but since they are very hard to detect, laws against private discrimination are usually very difficult to enforce. Nearly half a century after the passage of civil rights legislation abolishing segregation and guaranteeing voting rights for African Americans, racial discrimination is still a reality in the United States.

Conclusion

The motivation to express prejudice is unrelated to general tendencies to respond in socially desirable ways, is moderately related to general tendencies to respond to all groups in negative ways, and is moderately related to specific intergroup attitudes. Finally, the MP scale predicted consequential outcomes across two vastly different experimental paradigms, even when controlling for attitudes and the motivations to respond without prejudice. Overall, our results suggest that the motivation to express prejudice is a real, distinct motivational construct that can be measured in a psychometrically valid way.

For the two primary target groups in the present work, Black people and gay men, the internal and external motivations to express prejudice were highly correlated. Our confirmatory factor analyses revealed, however, that IMP and EMP measure distinguishable latent factors, and Study

7's findings suggested their relationship is related to the local normative climate. In climates that prohibit prejudice, IMP and EMP are functionally non-independent, perhaps suggesting that normative climates that oppose one's values force people to more tightly link the personal and social aspects of their identities (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). IMS and EMS may thus become similarly linked in normative climates that strongly expect and encourage expressions of prejudice (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003).

Future Research

Although many studies have previously examined the effects of racial-ethnic identity and academic achievement or motivation, more information is needed to address the achievement gap between African Americans and European Americans. Additional studies are needed to examine African American racial-ethnic identity, and specifically how it contributes to academic achievement and motivation. Further studies are also needed to explore the opposing view that African American culture negatively impacts academic achievement and adversely affect African American student motivation.

This study also used a correlational analysis, which examines relationships among variables. Future research should examine the cause and effect interactions between racial ethnic identity and academic motivation in conjunction with predictive relationships. Such future research would help to determine why African American students are not as academically successful as European American students in the traditional school setting. This sample was also limited to high school students in one area of the country. Future research should be regionally diverse and focus on different age ranges in order to explore how racial-ethnic identity impacts different age groups.

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