

On the Automaticity of American Nationalism

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To appear in J. T. Jost, A. C. Kay, and H. Thorisdottir's (Eds.), Social and Psychological Bases of Ideology and System Justification.

Abstract

How do people typically form opinions and make choices about national matters? What factors influence how people behave in the political realm? The majority of work on these questions in psychology and political science has emphasized the role of consciously accessible influences on political behavior, such as political party affiliation and an assortment of principles and values. Although there is no doubt that people consciously consult their nationalist ideologies in order to make decisions in the political arena, we focus in the present chapter on the possibility that nationalist ideological knowledge also operates automatically to guide and influence opinions and actions. Much work in social, cognitive, and political psychology would suggest that stored representations of nationalist-relevant knowledge, attitudes, goals, and behaviors can be activated by nationalist symbols and cues outside of people's awareness and intention, and then shape and influence their behavior. We consider this possibility in detail, and also summarize recent empirical findings in support of it.

On the Automaticity of American Nationalism

In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building.

Billig, 1995, p. 8

The results of a massive Zogby poll on the views of American voters in February 2004 were summarized in a report entitled “E Pluribus Duo: Red State versus Blue State America” (Zogby, 2004). The play on the American national motto of “E Pluribus Unum” (*From Many, One*) reflects the theme evident throughout the polling results, which is that Americans showed remarkable divergence in their attitudes according to whether they identified as republican or democrat. This political divide continues today, with democrats and republicans disagreeing strongly on issues related to war, religion, the economy, and many others. For example, whereas 75% of democrats think that the March 2003 invasion into Iraq was a mistake, only 17% of republicans think so (Gallup Polling, July, 2005). Republicans are far less likely (49%) than democrats (72%) to view medical research using stem cells from human embryos as morally acceptable (Gallup Polling, May, 2005). And, while 84% of republicans agree with President Bush on the issues that matter most to them, only 5% of democrats do so (Gallup Polling, October, 2005). These polling numbers, and others like them, would seem to suggest that political expression and behavior in the United States is determined largely by party-based ideologies, an impression that is supported by decades of research on the predictive validity of party identification for voting behavior (e.g., Bartels, 2000; Bassili, 1995;

Brady & Sniderman, 1985; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Cohen, 2003; Conover & Feldman, 1984; Green, 1988; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002; Miller & Schanks, 1996; Petrocik, 1989).

If party affiliation is the ideological engine that drives much political behavior in the United States, it is notable that it is often understood as a consciously accessible and intentional influence. People can report it easily (e.g., Green et al., 2002; Miller & Shanks, 1996), and intentionally base their political decisions on it (e.g., Bassili, 1995; Cohen, 2003). At first glance, this would seem to imply that much political expression and behavior proceeds in a conscious and intentional manner. And yet, there is also a rapidly growing literature on how choice and behavior can also proceed automatically (e.g., Bargh, 2007; Dijksterhuis, 2004; Ferguson, in press; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Hassin, Uleman, & Bargh, 2005; Quattrone & Tversky, 1988; Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005; Zaller, 1992). This literature would predict that whereas people might consciously behave in line with their explicitly avowed political ideologies and values, they may also be unintentionally and nonconsciously moved by subtle political and ideological cues in their environment. This possibility would indicate that people might answer polling questions, or make voting decisions, in line with ideological cues of which they are unaware, and by which they would prefer to remain uninfluenced (Wilson & Brekke, 1994).

In the current chapter, we first consider research and theory that suggests how ideological knowledge might influence people in an automatic fashion, and then discuss how nationalist ideologies in particular might operate implicitly. We then review recent

findings concerning automatic American nationalism, and consider directions for future research.

The automaticity of ideology

The word “ideology” (idéologie) was created by the French philosopher Count Destutt de Tracy in the late 18th century to denote a “science of ideas” (de Tracy, 1817-1818), and has since been one of the most widely studied topics across the social sciences (e.g., see Augoustinos, 1999). Although its definition varies somewhat according to the specific discipline, an ideology can generally be understood as “a set of consensually shared beliefs and doctrines that provide the moral and intellectual basis for a political, economic, or social system” (Jost, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2004, p. 265). One important element of such a definition concerns the prescriptive nature of the knowledge. This definition would signify that a set of political opinions, values, principles, attitudes, and behaviors that together point toward a particular political system or perspective can be considered ideological in nature (see also Althusser, 1994; Hawkes, 2003; Minar, 1971; Mullins, 1972; Zizek, 1994).

How are people influenced by their ideologies? There is no doubt that people are sometimes knowingly and purposefully influenced by their explicitly avowed ideologies and values. When considering national policies, people often deliberately consult the platform of the political party with which they identify (e.g., see Bassili, 1995; Cohen, 2003). However, there is a long history in sociology, social theory, political science, and social psychology of the idea that people might also be influenced by ideological knowledge in a more automatic manner. In seeking to explain the influence of ideology on thought and action, sociologists, social psychologists, and political scientists alike

have converged on the metaphor that ideologies are like habits or practices that people perform spontaneously and unintentionally (e.g., Bem & Bem, 1970; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Freedman, 2000). Like all habits, ideologies effectively narrow down choices and “free the individual from the burden of ‘all those decisions’” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 53). More directly, Althusser (1994) argued that “Ideology has very little to do with ‘consciousness’ – it is profoundly unconscious” (see also Altemeyer, 1998; Bem & Bem, 1970; Brewer, 1979; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1994, p. 999; Tajfel, 1982). From this widely shared perspective, an ideology might be likened to an invisible political blueprint, which not only efficiently guides a person’s thought and behavior, but also ultimately prescribes and helps to maintain a certain economic or cultural order.

Interestingly, although numerous scholars across the social sciences have *speculated* on the automaticity of ideology, there is little empirical support for such claims. One notable exception is recent work by Jost and colleagues on system justification (e.g., Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2004; Jost & Kay, 2005; Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002; Kay & Jost, 2003; see also Devos & Banaji, 2005). These researchers have argued that people possess ideologies that (implicitly) justify the economic, cultural, and social systems of society, even at the expense of personal or group interests. Such an ideology, for example, leads to disadvantaged members of society holding the very stereotypes and beliefs about their group that would seem to perpetuate their marginality. Those classified in the lower strata of personal income may be especially likely to react to an instance of injustice (and thus, a perceived threat to the legitimacy of the system) by implicitly activating a stereotype that mollifies

or invalidates that injustice. For instance, when such people hear about the fact that 1% of people in the United States possess more than 38% of the wealth in this country (Wolff, 2000), they may implicitly generate the stereotype of “poor but happy, rich but miserable” and thereby feel less threatened by their “economically poor” but “psychologically rich” situation (see Kay & Jost, 2003). This work suggests that the perception of an injustice might automatically activate a principle or axiom that mitigates that injustice. We seek to expand on this work by investigating other kinds of implicit ideological effects, and we describe this approach below.

Ideology from a social cognitive standpoint

How might ideological knowledge exert its influence in an implicit manner? Research in social and cognitive psychology over the last two decades demonstrates that a range of information is typically associated in memory with a given stimulus, and can become activated on the mere perception of that stimulus (e.g., Bargh, 2007; Ferguson & Bargh, 2004; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Hassin et al., 2005). For instance, people possess associations in memory between group members and attitudes, stereotypes, behaviors, and goals related to that group. This body of work implies that a range of cues in our environment, such as political icons and symbols, might be associated with various types of ideological knowledge and information. These types of information would likely be diverse, and could include values, principles, exemplars, beliefs, expectations, behaviors, emotions, and motives (e.g., Carlston & Smith, 1996; Smith & Queller, 2001). Furthermore, the perception of one element of that array of knowledge should serve to activate the other elements, even without the person’s awareness or intention (e.g., Devine, 1989). This then suggests that the (conscious or nonconscious) perception of any

of the cues interconnected with such ideological information should inevitably activate that information.

What happens once such a potentially rich array of information has been unknowingly and unintentionally activated in memory? Research suggests that this activated information can then influence not only the specific stimuli to which the perceiver then attends, but also the ways in which the perceiver will interpret and react to subsequently encountered stimuli more generally (e.g., Bargh, 2007; Dijksterhuis, Aarts, & Chartrand, 2007). For example, the subliminal perception of a member of a stereotyped group can activate in memory specific trait information, which can then influence how the perceiver interprets the ambiguous behaviors of an interaction partner (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996; Higgins, 1996). In a similar way, the perception of nationalistic symbols or icons, such as the American flag, would be expected to activate associated attitudes, beliefs, goals, and behaviors, which would then have the potential to implicitly influence one's subsequent thought and behavior.

It is important to note that the kinds of information that can become associated with political icons do not necessarily have to be endorsed by the perceiver. A long history of psychological research suggests that people spontaneously, easily, and sometimes nonconsciously learn about the covariation among stimuli. For example, research on implicit learning suggests that people can encode sophisticated and complex relations among nonsense stimuli according to an artificial grammar, even while remaining consciously unaware of such learning (e.g., Anderson, 1983, 1996; Howard & Howard, 1992; Kelly, 2003; Reber, 1993; Seger, 1994). The notion of unintentional learning also manifests in social psychological work on stereotypes and prejudice.

Through a variety of channels, people unknowingly learn about various beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in relation to certain groups. And, importantly, even though people can actively disagree with such implicit associations, the associations can nevertheless influence both subtle and overt behavior toward group members (e.g., for reviews see Bargh, 2007; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Hassin et al., 2005). The fact that implicit attitudes, beliefs, goals, and behaviors can be dissociated from intentional ones more generally suggests that people may also possess implicit ideological knowledge with which they would explicitly disagree. One guiding objective of our research on this topic is to examine the existence and scope of this kind of dissociation. We now turn to more specific questions about the characterization, content, and operation of nationalist ideology.

Automatic American nationalism

Given the above consideration of how ideologies in general might operate implicitly, what are the potential characteristics of nationalistic ideologies? Although nationalism has been defined in myriad ways across disciplines and scholars (e.g. Billig, 1995; Skitka, 2005; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Gellner, 1983; Breuilly, 1992), we view a nationalistic ideology as consisting of beliefs, attitudes, goals, and behaviors that together prescribe certain economic, political, and social systems *for a particular nation*. For example, nationalistic ideology might consist of information that supports a given nation's existing or preferred form of government (e.g., democracy, dictatorship), economic system (e.g., capitalism, socialism), and various popular social programs and institutions (e.g., marriage, education, religion, family). It should be noted that we are therefore not limiting our examination of nationalism to citizens' expressed positive

attitudes toward, and commitment to, their nation, as has been the case with previous research on nationalism (e.g. Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Skitka, 2005). Instead, we consider a range of constructs that are implicitly associated with one's nation, which can include both positive attitudes toward the nation as well as the variety of constructs mentioned in the current definition.

Of course, it is possible to characterize as implicit nationalism anything that is implicitly associated in memory with the nation. Instead, in line with the classic literature on both ideology and nationalism, as described earlier, we focus in on the potentially prescriptive nature of the knowledge and information that are implicitly associated with the nation. That is, we consider the extent to which nationalistic knowledge is ultimately geared toward endorsing and preserving the institutions, programs, policies, and perspectives of the respective nation. This would suggest that beyond a mere association between the United States and capitalism (and capitalism-related principles, values, and behaviors), implicit American nationalism should also consist of positive implicit attitudes toward capitalism and its related components. For example, we discuss in the section on empirical work the prediction that the perception of United States cues implicitly evokes greater positive regard and endorsement for the materialistic values and behaviors theorized to be an inherent component of capitalistic/market-based systems (e.g., see Kasser, Ryan, Couchman & Sheldon, 2003).

We should also note that while there presumably is a great deal of unanimity across citizens (at least within stable nation-states) with regard to their attitudes toward broad governmental and economic systems (e.g., capitalism, materialism), people might nevertheless vary systematically in the degree of their implicit support for more specific

political stances, positions, and current events. What would predict or explain such differences in implicit nationalistic ideological knowledge of citizens of the United States?

Although we have tested for multiple moderators, as we discuss throughout the empirical section below, the moderator that has so far proven important in explaining the variance in the results is the participants' reported exposure to American political news. Why would news exposure matter? We argue that the primary source of information about the nation (in the case of the United States) is the national news media. People acquire information about the country through news programs on television, magazines, radio programs, and the internet. Whereas some people follow political news about the nation closely, such as news concerning the war in Iraq and the war on terror, for example, others are less politically engaged and watch the news only rarely, if at all. In this way, the information that becomes associated with the United States, and in turn with national cues, should be affected to some extent by whether people pay attention to current events and national politics. We discuss this moderator in more detail in the empirical section below, as well as in the discussion section.

Empirical evidence for implicit American nationalism

How do nationalistic ideologies become activated? Ideological knowledge concerning one's nation is typically explicitly measured. For example, researchers might ask respondents to indicate their support of various government or economic systems, or the degree to which they value the nation, on Likert-type scales (e.g. Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Instead of asking people to knowingly and intentionally provide their opinions and attitudes concerning the nation, however, we are interested in the types of

knowledge and information that are associated with the nation in memory, and can become implicitly activated in memory on the perception of nationalistic stimuli. Thus, we use symbols of the nation (e.g., the national flag) as primes, and then test the types of knowledge and information that become activated and influential on subsequent attitudes, beliefs, and behavior.

In most of the research reported below we used one of the most ubiquitous national cues in the United States – the national flag. Although the flag has been a highly visible national symbol since the founding of the country, its presence has greatly increased since the terrorist attacks on the United States in September of 2001 (Gerstenfeld, 2002; Kellner, 2003). The pervasive presence of the flag in the lives of Americans enhances the ecological validity of any findings that emerge. In the research we summarize below we examined three constructs – power, materialism, and aggression. In each section we review our predictions and then the findings. First however, we briefly discuss political news exposure as a moderator.

News exposure

Does reported exposure to the news actually predict knowledge about current events? To the extent that people report following U.S. political news, we expected them to possess more knowledge about current political events, as well as political knowledge in general, compared with those who say that they rarely follow the news. In one study that took place in July of 2005 (Ferguson & Hassin, 2006-a), participants were first asked to report the extent to which they followed U.S. political news on average according to a 10-point scale. To validate this item, we also asked them to provide details about their weekly intake of news from a range of sources including television news programs (e.g.,

CNN, the Daily Show, network news programs), newspapers (e.g., The New York Times), and news websites. They were also asked a number of other questions such as their GPA and political affiliation.

Participants then were asked to indicate their knowledge of current events and political facts. For example, they were asked to answer questions about a variety of current events such as the announcement of the retirement of Justice Sandra Day O’Conner, a recent insurgency attack in Iraq, and the coverage surrounding the leak concerning CIA operative Valerie Plame. Participants were also asked to answer questions that assessed their knowledge of people in key political positions. For example, participants were asked to identify the governor of their home state, the Secretary of State, and the people commonly referred to by the press as “Neo-Cons”.

What news exposure is not. We assessed whether reported news exposure, according to the one item, correlated with potentially confounding variables. News exposure was not correlated with political affiliation or party, GPA, gender, non-news TV watching, or type of news source (conservative versus liberal). We have replicated the lack of relationship between news exposure and these and other constructs (e.g., math SAT, religiosity, verbal SAT) across multiple studies (Carter & Ferguson, 2007-a; Carter & Ferguson, 2006-b; Ferguson & Hassin, 2006-b).

What news exposure is. As expected, reported news exposure according to the one item was correlated with watching a variety of news programs (FOX, CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, *The Daily Show*) and a national newspaper (*The New York Times*). Also, importantly, it significantly predicted participants’ knowledge of current events and also political facts. In fact, those high in news exposure (according to a median split)

correctly answered more than double the number of questions about current events compared with those low in news exposure, as one would expect.

These results indicate that reported news exposure, according to the single item described earlier, reflects the degree to which participants know about current events and political figures. The results also suggest that those with high media exposure may be exposed to information about national topics mainly through TV news, but also to some extent through newspaper and website reading. We now turn to research examining the construct of power in implicit American nationalism.

Power

America is regarded as the closest thing to a superpower remaining in the new multipolar world (e.g., see Von Drehle, 2006). Its military might and global economic force are respected and feared the world over (e.g., see Young, 2000; BBC News, 2006). One of the most familiar symbols of this power is the American flag, which is firmly affixed to every military aircraft and tank, and flies high over the offices of America's most powerful corporations. The most powerful men and women in America are its politicians, who are most commonly seen by the general public behind podiums draped in the stars and stripes, wearing flag lapel pins and brilliant red or blue ties on crisp white shirts. All of these images collude to associate America (and, by extension, the American flag) with the concepts of power and ambition. We thus predicted that the perception of concept of American cues would lead to an increased desire for power.

The first study was designed to examine the impact of the presence of the American flag on the accessibility of the concept of power (Carter & Ferguson, 2006-a). Based on the idea that people associate the American flag with powerful positions and

politicians, we predicted that when primed with the flag participants would show an increased accessibility of the concept of power. For the dependent measure of accessibility of power, we used a word-fragment task, in which participants filled in the missing letters to a number of word fragments that could be completed with either a power-related or -unrelated word. We also expected that this effect might be moderated by individuals' political news exposure. After all, a major source of information about the military, economic, and cultural power of America over other countries is the news. Thus, we predicted that the association would be strongest in those individuals who reported high exposure to political news, while those individuals low in news exposure would show a weaker association.

For this first study, we brought participants into the laboratory, ostensibly to perform an experiment on the relationship between visual acuity and individual differences in abstract thinking. Upon arriving in the laboratory, participants first completed a questionnaire on their political ideology and news following habits. Next, participants performed a computer-based priming measure, which they were told was the "visual acuity task." It actually contained subliminal flashes of either the American flag or a control figure immediately before the target stimuli to which participants were responding. The target stimuli were images containing either curved or straight lines, and participants were asked to determine, as quickly as possible, whether the lines were curved or straight. The subliminal exposure to the American flag ensures that any effects of the American flag remain implicit. Participants then completed the word fragment task. The measure consisted of 12 words with some letters missing, and participants were told to fill in the missing letters to form complete words. Six of these word fragments

could either be filled in to form a word related to power (e.g. power, leader, boss) or a word unrelated to power. The other six words were filler words.

We found that participants who had been subliminally primed with the American flag filled in significantly more of the word fragments with words related to power - but only if they followed U.S. political news. Participants who reported low news exposure were equally likely to fill in power and non-power words. Thus, as predicted, even the subliminal perception of the American flag activates the concept of power, and this activation is moderated by news exposure (Carter & Ferguson, 2006-a).

But does this accessibility of power also entail a greater desire for power? To examine this possibility, a second study was designed to examine the impact of the presence of the American flag on the desire for powerful roles. We predicted that when primed with the flag, participants would show an increased desire for power. For the dependent measure of a desire for power, we used a questionnaire developed by Smith and Trope (2006) in which participants express a preference for more or less powerful roles in a series of vignettes. Similar to the previous experiment, we believe this effect may be moderated by the extent to which individuals expose themselves to political news.

Participants were approached on campus to complete a packet of ostensibly unrelated surveys in exchange for a candy bar. The survey packet contained the political ideology and news following habits questionnaire, a priming measure, and a measure of desire for power and a suspicion probe. The priming measure was a "Visual Geography Quiz" which asked participants to identify four pictured locations, and indicate their confidence in that identification. Two of the pictures included an image of the American

flag, though for half of the participants, those same pictures had the flags digitally removed. The measure of desire for power describes three scenarios, each with two different roles (see Smith & Trope, 2006). One role in each scenario had relatively high power, and one had relatively low power. For example, one scenario described two roles in a construction company. Employees (the low power role) would be responsible for construction/architecture tasks, and interior design tasks. Supervisors (the high power role) would be responsible for selecting employees and assigning them tasks, and evaluating their performance. Participants were asked to rate each role for its desirability, and then choose which role they would prefer in that scenario, on a five-point scale.

Finally, participants responded to a suspicion probe, which asked them about the strategies they had used during the visual geography quiz, and whether or not they had noticed anything odd about the surveys. No participant mentioned anything about the presence of the American flag in any of their responses. Thus, we can presume that any influence the flag may have had on participants was unnoticed and unintended, and therefore implicit.

We found that participants who were primed with the American flag rated the more powerful roles as significantly more desirable than the less powerful roles, and also tended to choose the more powerful roles than participants in the control condition, though again, only for those who followed U.S. political news. Participants low in news following showed no difference in their desire for a more or less powerful role between the flag and control conditions. Thus, a subtle exposure to the American flag implicitly increases the desire for powerful positions, and this was again moderated by news

exposure. We should add that participants' explicitly expressed political ideology and party affiliation did not have any moderating effect in either of the two experiments, and that the moderating role of news exposure holds even when controlling for political ideology.

What are the implications of an association between America and the construct of power? It could imply that people might attempt to assert their power or authority in a nationalistic context, escalating a delicate situation. Would a politician in the presence of the American flag be less likely to reach an important compromise if her concessions threatened her authority? Would a voter choose a candidate based on the candidate's explicit expressions of power, rather than on his explicit expressions of policy? Although the current studies examined the accessibility of, and desire for, power, in future research we will examine whether the perception to American cues leads to behavioral effects in line with desire for power.

We will also examine the potential boundaries of this association between the nation and power. For example, would news-watching participants primed with American cues show negative or socially undesirable expressions of power, such as making a weaker individual suffer? The high and low power roles in the study described above were all in relatively benign contexts and so raises the question of whether the effect would extend to more important or less socially acceptable contexts. Moreover, we also will examine whether the implicit association demonstrated above represents a uniquely implicit association, or whether people maintain similar explicit associations. That is, whether a dissociation between implicit and explicit associations of America and the concept of power exists.

Another question for future research concerns the moderating effect of news exposure on the association between America and power. Namely, is the effect due to self-selection or learning? To be sure, individuals high in news exposure selected themselves into that group. However, while the decision to follow the news was their own, the content of that news, which displays expressions and people of power in dutifully American contexts, was beyond their control. As such, it could be the case that participants high in news exposure choose to follow the news because they are particularly concerned about powerful Americans, which would indicate that the moderating role of news exposure works through self-selection. It could also be that people learn the association through repeated pairings of power in American contexts in the media, which would indicate that the moderating role of news exposure is a function of associative learning. It could also be a combination of the two, such that the content of the news has a unique effect on those who are perhaps particularly susceptible to learning such associations. Future research employing a direct manipulation of news exposure will be one way to distinguish these possibilities. We now move on to findings concerning implicit effects of American symbols on materialism.

Materialism

One way in which America exerts its power is through its vast economic might. As the world's wealthiest country, with the largest share of the wealthiest 10% of citizens (Davies, Sandstrom, Shorrocks, & Wolff, 2006), the buying power of Americans is at an all time high. Furthermore, behavior and values related to the consumption of goods remain an integral part of American culture. For example, in recent research (Kasser & Sheldon, 2000), participants under mortality salience found money and material goods

more attractive, and also acted more greedily in a shared resource game than control subjects. In a review of related research, Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon (2004) concluded that this is in part because participants under mortality salience cling to their worldview to escape thoughts of death, and materialism is part of the dominant cultural worldview.

The predominant role of materialism in American culture is also sometimes made explicit by national leaders. For instance, President Bush said the following at a press conference, shortly after the tragedy on September 11th, 2001:

“We cannot let the terrorists achieve the objective of frightening our nation to the point where we don’t conduct business, where people don’t shop... Mrs. Bush and I want to encourage Americans to go out shopping.”

Given this kind of explicit link between the nation, patriotism, and shopping, it may be that such values and behaviors become activated implicitly on the mere perception of American cues. It should also be the case that news exposure moderates the association between the nation and materialism. Those who closely follow the news may be the most likely to have internalized the connection President Bush made explicit in the speech cited above, and thus directly associate participating in the economy as an act of nationalism. Moreover, one of the major sources of information about America’s wealth and concerns with money is the national news. Thus, we predicted that desire for wealth and spending would become associated with America more closely for those who are high in news exposure, while those low in news exposure would be less likely to have this association.

Based on the idea that people associate America with wealth and consumerism, we predicted that participants covertly primed with the American flag would place a

higher importance on material values. For the dependent measure of materialism, we asked participants to rate the importance of various factors they might consider when looking for a new job. This allows participants to place more or less importance on money and status without violating social desirability norms.

Participants were approached on campus to complete several unrelated surveys in exchange for a candy bar. The packet contained a questionnaire on news following and political ideology, the Flag priming task (the "Visual Geography Quiz" described earlier), the materialism measure, some filler questionnaires unrelated to the present prediction, and finally, a suspicion probe. For the dependent measure of materialism, we asked participants to imagine they were looking for a new job, and to rate 8 different job attributes for how important each would be for their decision. Four of the 8 job attributes were pretested to be associated with materialism (salary, possibilities for a raise in salary, prestige of job title, having subordinates to supervise). The other four attributes were pretested to be unrelated to materialism, and served as control items (intellectually stimulating, flexible hours, friendly atmosphere/co-workers, opportunity to work with people). A composite rating of the materialistic attributes was created, as well as a difference score subtracting the non-materialistic attributes from the materialistic attributes, which served as a measure of the comparative importance of the materialistic attributes.

In the suspicion probe, no participant mentioned anything about the presence of the American flag in any of their responses. Thus, we can presume that any influence the flag had on participants was unintentional. We found that compared with participants in the control condition, participants who were primed with the American flag rated the

materialistic attributes significantly higher, but only if they reported high news exposure. Similarly, participants primed with the American flag had a significantly higher difference score (indicating a greater relative weighting of the materialistic over the non-materialistic attributes) than participants in the control condition, but again, only if they were high in news following. Participants low in news following showed no difference on these two measures. Thus, as predicted, the subtle and covert exposure to the American flag implicitly led participants to express more materialistic values, and this effect was moderated by news exposure (Carter & Ferguson, 2006-b). Also, as found in the power studies, participants' explicitly expressed political ideology did not moderate the effect, and controlling for it statistically did not alter the moderating role of news exposure.

What do these results imply? Firstly, they suggest that expressions of value can be influenced by the covert perception of nationalistic cues. This could influence various types of decisions, and particularly those that concern money. For example, a person making a purchase decision might be persuaded to choose the more luxurious option if its packaging contains a subtle reminder of America, even when the person does not have the money to do so. It may also be the case that people who are making decisions about national policies and programs consider the financial burden more so when in a nationalistic context, versus not. For example, is the prospect of higher taxes and social program spending more objectionable when presented in a nationalistic context? And, beyond attitudes and values, are there implicit effects of American cues on actual purchasing or voting behavior?

Another issue is the potential distinction between acquiring money and spending it. That is, do such nationalistic cues lead participants to place a greater value on money, leading to a hoarding instinct, or does the acquisition of money merely represent the ability to spend it conspicuously? Does it lead to a greater value of money only because it means the ability to spend it immediately? If the association is indeed about spending money, is it about spending more generally, or is it limited to more conspicuous expressions of wealth? We are investigating all of these possibilities currently. Furthermore, we are also investigating whether the moderating role of news exposure is due to self-selection factors or learning, as discussed in the previous section on power. We now turn to the last group of empirical findings concerning the implicit effects of American cues on aggression.

Aggression

Beyond the notions of power and materialism being implicitly associated with America, we have also tested for the possibility that the construct of aggression is linked with the nation in memory and is able to become activated on the perception of subtle nationalistic cues (Ferguson & Hassin, 2006-b). The theme of aggression is prevalent within public discourse on American current events (e.g., Von Zielbauer & Marshall, 2006; El-Naggar, 2006; Kocieniewski, Dewan, Hamill & Gately, 2006), in terms of America aggressing on others (e.g., in Iraq, Afghanistan), other groups or entities aggressing on America (e.g., terrorists), and Americans showing aggression toward each other (e.g., school shootings). The association between American cues and war might be particularly strong currently, given the ongoing war between the United States (and other

countries) and Iraq, as well as the well-publicized “war on terror” initiated by the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September, 2001 (e.g., see Bush, 2006).

Furthermore, America has a reputation as a violent society. The violent homicide rate in America dwarfs that of other industrialized nations (e.g., United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2002), and we are still plagued by school shootings and other violent crime. This violence seems to be part of American culture. For example, violence in America (and especially the prevalence of guns in America) is one of the central themes of Michael Moore's 2003 Oscar winning film "Bowling for Columbine." Also, interestingly, immediately before major and minor sporting events, many of them violent and aggressive in nature, Americans stand and salute the flag while singing the national anthem in a striking display of national unity. Together, these examples suggest that simply perceiving a symbol of the nation may be sufficient to activate aggression-related knowledge in memory, with potential downstream effects on behavior.

Should such an association emerge for everyone? Just as the variable of news exposure moderates the implicit effects of national symbols on power and materialism, we also expected that it would do the same for aggression. As before, the main argument here is that the news provides a constant stream of details about America and aggression across a variety of domains and events (for reviews see Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Bushman & Cantor, 2003). This should mean that those who report high news exposure should possess stronger links between the nation and aggression compared with those who report little or no news exposure.

In the first of three experiments (Ferguson & Hassin, 2006-b), participants were covertly primed with the American flag as they walked into the lab room. Specifically,

they signed in to a “participant log” sheet, and a nearby text was either face-up, showing a color image of the American flag, or was face-down, with no flag or American images visible. Thus, the image of the American flag was present in the room in a highly naturalistic manner, in a way that likely mimics everyday exposure to nationalistic images in the real world. After signing in, participants then sat at nearby desks and completed a series of word-fragments, as well as other filler questionnaires. Among the word-fragments were ones that measured aggression (“hi_” and ‘gu_”) and war (“wa_”). Participants then eventually reported their news exposure among other demographic information.

None of the participants reported noticing anything about the flag, even when told that a political cue had been placed in the room. The results showed that for those who reported high news exposure, those primed with the flag were significantly more likely to complete the word-fragments with the aggression and war words, compared with those not primed with the flag. This effect was absent for those low in news exposure. This first experiment demonstrated that for those who follow the news, the covert perception of a nationalistic cue made aggression and war more accessible in memory than for those not exposed to such a cue. We should also note that the interaction between news exposure and priming condition was not moderated by party affiliation, suggesting that this effect emerged for democrats and republicans alike, as long as they watched the news.

What might be the downstream affects of such accessibility? We tested this in the next two experiments. In the first, participants completed a scrambled sentence task (e.g., Srull & Wyer, 1979) in which American cues were placed (e.g., *America, nation, flag*)

alongside many nationalist-unrelated words. After completing this task, they were then asked to read a vignette about a target who was ambiguously aggressive (Srull & Wyer, 1979), and asked to rate the target on a series of personality traits that were either directly or evaluatively consistent with the construct of aggression. After this task and some filler questionnaires they then reported their news exposure habits as well as other demographic information.

None of the participants reported noticing any connection between the scrambled sentence task and the vignette task. There was only the expected interaction between news exposure and priming condition, which was not moderated by participants' political party affiliation. The results showed that for those who reported high news exposure, those primed with the flag rated the target as significantly more aggressive than those not primed, on both the aggressive-related traits and the traits evaluatively consistent with aggression. This effect was absent for those low in news exposure.

In the next experiment, we sought to test for potential behavioral effects. Participants first began a computer task in which they had to decide whether an array of dots was odd or even (Bargh et al., 1996). In between the displays of the dots, an American flag or a control image was subliminally presented. After about 80 trials, an error message appeared on the screen, and the experimenter then informed the participant that the computer had not saved the data and that the participant would need to do the dot task a second time. This mild provocation has been used in previous research by Bargh and colleagues (Bargh et al., 1996). A hidden video camera recorded each participant's reactions to the news, and then two independent judges coded each participant for the extent to which she or he responded with aggressiveness. Participants also completed a

mood measure, and then filled out a number of questionnaires, including one about their news exposure habits. They then were told that they would not have to do the task a second time, and were thanked and dismissed.

As expected, the results showed an interaction between priming and news exposure. (There was no effect of party affiliation on the results.) For those high in news exposure, those primed with the flag were rated as relatively more hostile than those not primed. And, this effect was not evident for those low in news exposure. Thus, this pattern of data suggests that the perception of American cues automatically increases one's tendency to respond to a mild provocation with relatively more aggression, as long as one is high in news exposure. Moreover, there were no effects on participants' mood, suggesting that even though they were acting in a relatively more aggressive fashion, they remained consciously unaware of it. Together, these three experiments on the implicit link between America and aggression showed effects on construct accessibility, judgment, and behavior (Ferguson & Hassin, 2006-b).

These findings suggest that the covert perception of American cues might be able to influence how (news-watching) Americans disambiguate their world. A phrase or statement or action that might otherwise seem neutral might be interpreted as more aggressive if it is perceived within a subtle nationalistic context. But, importantly, is the nation linked with aggression generally? Or is it the case that news-watchers who encounter nationalistic cues are more likely to see aggression in potential threats to the nation, or enemies, or foreigners in particular? Such an effect would show the selectivity of the kinds of knowledge implicitly linked with America. In current research we are examining whether this is the case. Moreover, we are also exploring the extent to which

people are aware of this kind of effect, and whether they would knowingly act in such a way.

Finally, it should be noted, as was the case with power and materialism, that people with high news exposure may have stronger associations between aggression and America for a couple reasons. Firstly, it may be the case that those who follow American news learn these kinds of associations, and in this way the news can be thought of as a source for this aspect of implicit American nationalism. However, it is also possible that those who are particularly concerned with the role of America in aggressive pursuits might be particularly interested in watching the news, and in this way the moderating role of news exposure would be due to self-selection factors. And, of course, these two explanations are not mutually exclusive.

Conclusions

In this chapter we considered a social cognitive approach to implicit ideology. Based on theory and research in social cognition showing how thought and behavior can occur nonconsciously and unintentionally (Bargh, 2007; Bargh & Ferguson, 2000; Greenwald & Banaji, 2005; Hassin et al., 2005; Wilson & Brekke, 1994), and theory across the social sciences concerning the possibility that ideological knowledge operates “below the radar” (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; Althusser, 1994; Bem & Bem, 1970; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Brewer, 1979; Freedman, 2000; Jost, Pelham & Carvallo, 2002; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1994, p. 999), we described some ways in which ideological knowledge might be able to become activated in memory implicitly, and then influence the person’s attitudes, judgment, and behavior without his or her knowledge, intention, or awareness.

Against this general background of how ideologies might operate implicitly overall, we considered nationalistic ideologies in particular. We proposed a definition of implicit nationalism, and discussed recent findings on implicit American nationalism.

Specifically, we summarized recent findings showing that the types of nationalistic knowledge that become activated on perception of American cues depends on the person's level of political news exposure. For news-watchers, the perception of such cues leads to more support for power (Carter & Ferguson, 2006-a) and materialism (Carter & Ferguson, 2006-b), and more evidence of aggressive judgment and behavior (Ferguson & Hassin, 2006-b). Below we discuss some implications of these findings.

Relation to other research on implicit ideology

Whereas the present findings speak to the potentially implicit effects of ideological symbols in general, they focus on the effects of American cues specifically. In this way, the results expand on the work by Devos and Banaji (2005) showing the implicit association between the American identity and white ethnicity. These researchers found an interesting dissociation between the extent to which participants consciously rated groups and ethnicities as "American" and whether they actually possessed implicit associations between national symbols and those same groups. Even though participants occasionally reported that non-white ethnic minorities were more American than whites, their implicit associations showed the reverse pattern. Such a dissociation has meaningful implications for behavior as implicit associations are likely to guide interpretations, attitudes, and behavior in spontaneous, or cognitively-busy, situations (e.g., see Fazio & Olson, 2003).

The present pattern of results is also consistent with recent work on how system-justifying ideologies exert their influence implicitly (e.g., Jost et al., 2004; Kay & Jost, 2003). Jost and colleagues have argued that people possess ideologies that serve to strengthen the legitimacy of cultural, social, and economic systems. When people encounter an instance of injustice that might threaten the stability of the system, they spontaneously generate stereotypes and beliefs that mollify that injustice and restore legitimacy to the system(s). People are unlikely to be aware that their interpretation and reaction to an injustice is guided by a collection of such stereotypes and beliefs, and this implies that ideological knowledge can operate without awareness or intention. In a similar way, the current work demonstrates that political expression and behavior can be unknowingly guided by an ideology that is temporarily activated by a mere situational cue.

Jost and colleagues have argued that certain ideologies ultimately increase support for the status quo (e.g., Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2004; Kay & Jost, 2003), and the present findings can be tentatively interpreted from this perspective. This research demonstrates how everyday, subtle reminders of America can activate knowledge and information that would seem consistent with current and predominant American policies (aggression, power), and economic systems (materialism). One critical question that remains, however, is whether these effects are due to the present government and administration, or are more chronic, and perhaps orthogonal to the temporary political constituency of the government. Moreover, the effects of American cues on power, materialism, and aggression emerged most strongly for news watchers. One possible interpretation of the effect of this moderator is that the (mainstream) media ultimately propagate support for

some of the policies of the status quo (e.g., Alterman, 2003; Bagdikian, 2004; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; cf. Kuypers, 2002; McGowan, 2002), a conclusion that is speculative and warrants further research.

Another interesting question for work in this area is how different ideologies might develop (see Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Some ideologies may be actively and intentionally learned initially, and then eventually operate efficiently in the background, providing a nonconscious context for more deliberate and conscious thinking, in much the same way as a skill becomes automatized (e.g., Smith & Lerner, 1986). For example, someone who begins to identify with the democratic party may initially think through the positions and stances quite carefully, and then eventually those positions and principles may automatically influence that person's interpretation of subsequent, even ambiguous, political events and statements (Cohen, 2003). Other ideologies, on the other hand, may develop in a more passive manner. For instance, one possibility in the current research is that people who follow the news unknowingly absorb associations between the nation (and national symbols) and various values and principles. People may be unaware that such ideological knowledge becomes attached to the flag, or any political cue, and thus may not feel the need to monitor the influence of that cue during political expression and behavior. This suggests that the nature of the development of ideological knowledge might influence the ease with which one might become aware of, and thus potentially control, the influence of that knowledge on thought and behavior (see also Wilson & Brekke, 1994).

Political party affiliation and implicit nationalism

These findings together suggest that although decades of research show that party affiliation guides much political behavior (e.g., Bartels, 2000; Bassili, 1995; Brady & Sniderman, 1985; Campbell et al., 1960; Cohen, 2003; Conover & Feldman, 1984; Green, 1988; Green et al., 2002; Miller & Schanks, 1996), it apparently does not determine whether power, materialism, and aggression become automatically activated on the perception of the American flag, at least according to these initial studies. This suggests a potential disconnect between people's explicit thoughts, feelings, and behaviors concerning national matters, and their implicit responses. Whereas people's political party affiliation strongly predicts many aspects of their explicit nationalism, as described at the outset of the chapter, it does not seem to predict at least some elements of implicit nationalism. Future research can further explore the scope and extent of this kind of dissociation.

It is important to note that these results clearly represent only the initial examination of implicit American nationalism and it may be the case that party affiliation does matter for particular attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. For instance, whereas it may not moderate the link between the nation and power, materialism, and aggression, it may moderate the association between the nation and the support for some policies and principles. The influence of party affiliation might also be diminished within politically homogenous samples. Namely, it may be the case that party affiliation would moderate some of the effects if we tested them with a more politically diverse sample. Given that college students in the United States often affiliate more strongly with the democratic than republican party (and this was true in each of our experiments described earlier), it is

necessary to examine more conservative-leaning samples in order to explore more fully the influence of party affiliation.

News exposure and implicit American nationalism

In addition to investigating whether news watchers develop their unique set of associations with the nation as a function of watching the news (versus due to other individual differences), it also seems critical to examine the specific types of news that people follow. One noteworthy aspect of the current research is that there were few people who closely watched clearly conservative news sources, such as FOX news. (The vast majority of participants reporting watching CNN and the major network news programs.) It would therefore be informative to sample participants who vary more widely on party affiliation as well as the types of news they follow. One pertinent question would be whether the current effects are pronounced for those who watch conservative news sources, and whether the effects are mitigated for those who watch exclusively progressive news sources (e.g., National Public Radio).

Conclusion

In his work on banal nationalism, Billig (1995) suggests that mere environmental stimuli – such as a national flag – activate and maintain the ideology of nationalism. Billig not only accepts the idea that ideologies work like habits, but explicitly states that (a) they may operate non-consciously and (b) that many “innocuous” stimuli such as a flag on a public library are crucial for the maintenance and pursuit of a national ideology. The current research is an attempt to begin empirically testing these propositions, and the findings thus far suggest that ideological knowledge can be activated quite subtly, and serve as an invisible lens through which the person views and interacts with the world.

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