

Dispositions, Scripts, or Motivated Correction? Understanding Ideological Differences in Explanations for Social Problems

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Research has consistently found that liberals and conservatives generate different attributions for the causes of social problems and respond differently to people who have internal-controllable causes for needing help. Five studies using a variety of methods (the “college bowl” paradigm, the attitude-attribution paradigm, 2 surveys with nationally representative samples, and an experiment that assessed attributional judgments under varying levels of cognitive load) explored whether these differences could be explained by (a) underlying dispositional differences in the tendency to see the causes of behavior as personally or situationally located, (b) ideological scripts, or (c) differences in the motivation to correct personal attributions. Results were most consistent with the motivated correction explanation. The findings shed further light on the cognitive strategies and motivational priorities of liberals and conservatives.

Research has consistently found that liberals and conservatives prefer different attributions for the causes of various social and personal problems. For example, attitudes toward social welfare and the indigent are consistently correlated with ideologically patterned attributions about the causes of poverty (e.g., Sniderman, Hagen, Tetlock, & Brady, 1986). Conservatives blame poverty on self-indulgence and on a lack of moral standards and intelligence. Liberals see the poor as victims of unjust social practices and structures. These ideological differences in attributions for poverty predict willingness to support expansion of social programs. Liberals generally favor increased spending on social programs, whereas conservatives oppose such spending (e.g., Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Feather, 1985; Furnham, 1982; Griffin & Oheneba-Sakyi, 1993; Kluegel, 1990; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986; Williams, 1984). A similar ideology-attribution pattern emerges for explaining homelessness (Pellegrini, Queirolo, Monarrez, & Valenzuela, 1997), crime (Carroll,

Perkowitz, Lurigio, & Weaver, 1987), foreign aggression (Skitka, McMurray, & Burroughs, 1991), and even obesity (Crandall, 1994, 1995; Lantinga & Skitka, 1996). Liberals tend to focus on situational or institutional explanations for things like homelessness or why people commit crimes, whereas conservatives tend to focus on personal explanations for the same phenomena.

Other research has focused less on the attributions people make about the causes of social problems, and more on demonstrating ideological differences in willingness to assist people as a function of why they need help. When there are sufficient resources available to help all whom require it, liberals are more likely than conservatives to help targets with internal and controllable causes for needing assistance. For example, liberals are more likely than conservatives to support providing (a) an organ transplant to someone who failed to follow doctor's orders and subsequently experienced organ failure, (b) subsidized drug treatment for someone who contracted AIDS through unsafe sex practices, (c) job training assistance to people unemployed because of poor performance, and (d) federal disaster assistance to people who did not buy flood insurance (Skitka, 1999; Skitka & Tetlock, 1992, 1993a, 1993b). In sum, ideological differences in the attributions people make for the causes of social or personal problems and in people's relative willingness to help those with internal-controllable (IC) needs are both robust findings.

The five studies described in this article were designed to explore three competing accounts for these well-replicated patterns of results: (a) a dispositional hypothesis, (b) an ideological script hypothesis, and (c) a motivated correction hypothesis.

The Dispositional Hypothesis

People may vary in their baseline propensities to see the causes of others' behavior as rooted either in something about the person or something about the person's situation. People who consistently perceive the causes of behavior as residing mostly within persons may be more attracted to a conservative political identification, and conversely, those who consistently perceive the causes of behavior to be the result of situational or institutional causes may

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be more attracted to a liberal political identification. The dispositional hypothesis therefore implies that liberals and conservatives should differ not only in the attributions they make for social problems, but for other kinds of behavior as well.

The dispositional hypothesis is consistent with several major theories that predict that political orientation or related traits are the result of early childhood experiences, family dynamics, or both. For example, the Berkeley school theorized that right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) was a consequence of Freudian ego defense mechanisms in reaction to a stern and distant father (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). Others taking a less psychodynamic perspective have also found support for (a) the notion that the political right and left are connected to authoritarian-paternalistic versus egalitarian-nurturing family models (e.g., McClosky & Chong, 1985; Milburn & Conrad, 1996), and (b) the role of early social learning in developing predispositions for political ideologies (Bandura, 1973).

Tomkins' (1963) ideo-affective script theory represents a blend of these perspectives, and is the most explicit in theorizing that underlying dispositions shape people's perceptions of the world, as well as their attraction to specific political orientations. Specifically, children's responses to various parental styles and reward contingencies are theorized to lead them to develop a belief that humans are either fundamentally good (humanists) or bad (normativists). These dispositional perspectives shape how the person then perceives and reacts to his or her social world, and are posited to be an important determinant of subsequent political beliefs and affiliations. Humanists and normativists are predicted to naturally gravitate toward (respectively) more liberal and conservative political orientations. Consistent with Tomkins' thesis, humanists are in fact more likely to be liberal, and normativists are more likely to be conservative in political orientation (De St. Aubin, 1996; Stone & Schaffner, 1988, 1997; Tomkins, 1963). In sum, there are theoretical reasons to believe that underlying dispositions may lead to different ways of seeing the world, that in turn lead people to adopt different political identities.

The Ideological Script Hypothesis

Instead of differences in attributional thresholds leading people to self-identify as either liberal or conservative, the ideological script hypothesis proposes that identifying oneself as liberal or conservative leads people to adopt different explanations for social problems. Specifically, after self-identifying as either politically liberal or conservative, people may learn the corresponding attributional "party line." According to this hypothesis, attributions about the causes of social problems are post hoc explanations that justify a specific political point of view rather than a dispositionally different way of interpreting the social world. If the ideological script hypothesis is true, we should expect to see attributional differences only in contexts for which there is an easily accessible ideological script.

Consistent with the ideological script hypothesis, there is some evidence that people's opinions tend to ride the coattails of political elites. For example, Zaller (1992) found that when liberal and conservative elites both supported the Vietnam War in 1964, people who attended to politics and current events showed similar nonpartisan support for the war. By 1970, however, political elites had become much more divided about the war (liberals became

increasingly against it, but conservatives continued to support the war effort), a division that was widely disseminated in the popular press. A subsequent division emerged among politically aware liberals and conservatives in the mass public. These results are consistent with the idea that lay people may base their political positions on the prevailing "party line."

The Two Stage or Motivated Correction Hypothesis

The motivated correction hypothesis predicts that liberals and conservatives may be equally inclined to make personal attributions for why the poor are poor, why criminals engage in crime, and why obese people are obese. Where they may differ is in their motivation to correct these first-pass attributions about the causes of behavior in domains where ideological differences have been observed. According to this perspective, when attributional analysis yields a conclusion that is inconsistent with perceivers' core values or preferred conclusions, perceivers will be motivated to engage in corrective processing. This effortful processing should lead perceivers to consider the possibility of nonpersonal causes for why people might be poor, commit crimes, or are fat.

According to this hypothesis, people should be equally likely to make first-pass personal attributions about the causes of social problems—a notion consistent with Kluegel and Smith's (1986) assertion that individualism represents the dominant ideology in the United States. This hypothesis is also consistent with Gilbert and colleagues' (Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Krull, 1988; Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988) research on spontaneous trait inferences. According to Gilbert, people spontaneously infer personal causes for behavior, and only take into account situational information in a second, more effortful stage of reasoning, if they have sufficient motivation and cognitive resources to do so (cf., Petty & Wegener, 1993).

Similarly, Devine and colleagues (Devine, 1989; Devine, Monteith, Zuwerick, & Elliot, 1991) found that people automatically judge others in stereotypical terms. Low- and high-prejudiced people differ in the extent to which they are motivated to correct these initial stereotypical judgments. Low-prejudice people experience compunction because the automatically activated stereotypical judgments are inconsistent with their core values and beliefs about themselves as tolerant and egalitarian people. This compunction, in turn, motivates stereotype correction. High-prejudice people, in contrast, do not tend to adjust their initial stereotyped impression because they lack any particular motivation to do so.

Taken together, these lines of theory and research converge on the hypothesis that perceivers may be motivated to adjust their initial attributions when the logical conclusions of a personal attribution conflict with their values. Figure 1 details a model of ideological reasoning based on an integration of these perspectives (it should be noted that the attributional side of the model was influenced by the explanation process model proposed by Anderson, Krull, & Weiner, 1996).

The model posits that when people notice an event or problem (e.g., they notice a delay in the checkout line they are in), they need to categorize or define what they have noticed (a person using food stamps). After interpreting the event, people generate an initial explanation, which we know from previous research is likely to be a trait inference or a personal attribution (Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Krull, 1988; Gilbert et al., 1988). This stage of

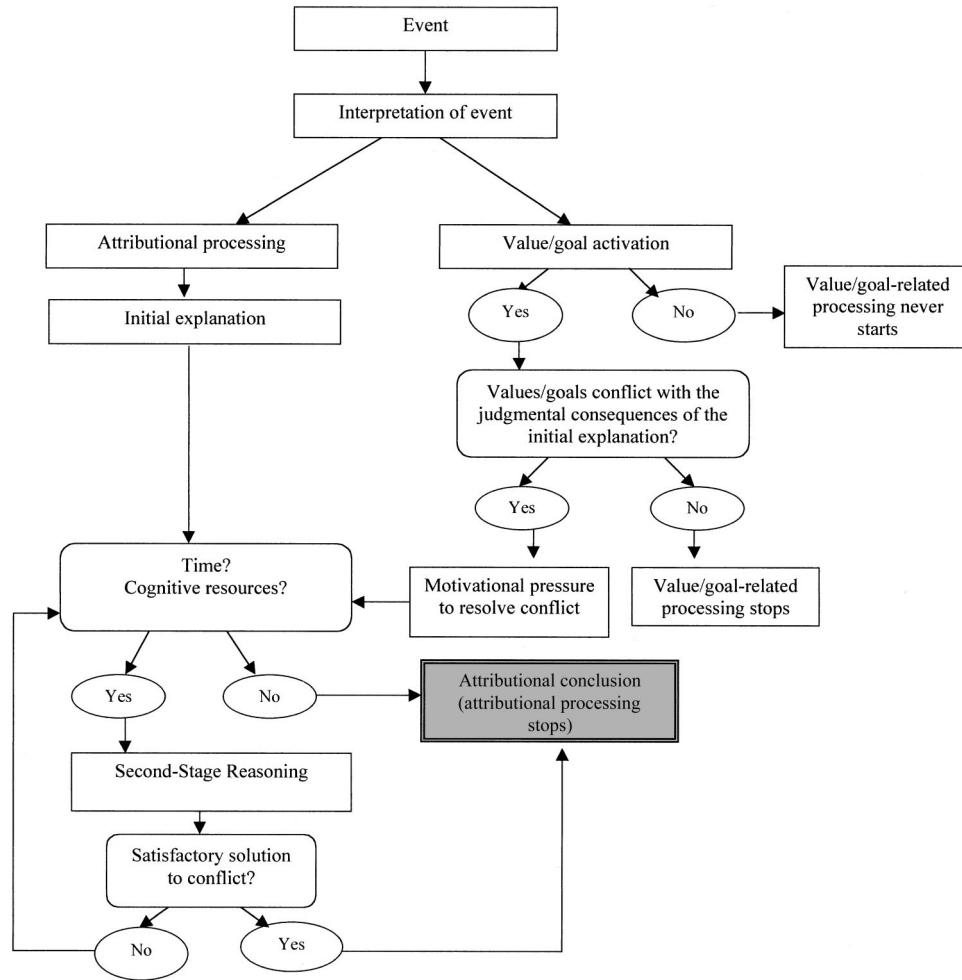


Figure 1. A motivated correction model of ideological reasoning.

reasoning is expected to happen in a very automatic way, on the basis of people's expectations, previous experience, and so forth. The interpretation of the event, however, may simultaneously initiate another cognitive process, that is, it might activate people's concerns with their core values. For example, witnessing a person using food stamps may lead to two separate thought processes: (a) an attributional chain of reasoning (why does this person need government assistance?), and (b) a chain of reasoning activated by values or goals—for example, thoughts about oppression, equal access to job opportunities, and humanitarian goals, or thoughts about values associated with self-reliance and the protestant work ethic.

If initial attributional analysis and activated values lead to consistent conclusions, processing will stop. If activated values and initial attributions lead to inconsistent logical conclusions, however, people will be motivated to continue processing, presuming they have the time and cognitive resources to do so (see Festinger, 1957, and Heider, 1958, for detailed discussions of the psychological pressure toward consistency).

In sum, the motivated correction hypothesis suggests that (a) the observed tendency for liberals to prefer situational explanations and to be more likely to help people with IC causes of need is the

result of a cognitively effortful correction process, (b) we should observe ideological differences in preferences for personal versus situational attributions only in contexts where people are motivated by value conflict or other ideologically based goals to engage in second-stage processing, and (c) liberals and conservatives are equally capable and likely to engage in second-stage processing should value conflict or other ideological goals provide the motivation to do so.

There is some preliminary evidence that supports the motivated correction hypothesis. For example, Skitka (1999) found that although liberals and conservatives were equally likely to attribute responsibility to flood victims and communities who did not take precautions against flood damage (i.e., those who did not use local tax dollars to build flood walls or levees), liberals were more willing than conservatives to support providing humanitarian aid for these victims. Of interest, this ideological difference was not mediated by the attributions people made for why flood victims needed help. Despite perceiving disaster victims who did not take precautions against flood risks as responsible for their plight, liberals nonetheless supported providing these people humanitarian assistance; conservatives did not. Political orientation had a direct, rather than attributionally mediated, effect on willingness to

provide disaster assistance, a result that is consistent with motivated correction but inconsistent with the dispositional or ideological script hypotheses. Other research in the domains of support for social welfare programs (Zucker & Weiner, 1993) and abortion (Zucker, 1999) has also reported direct effects of political orientation that are consistent with a motivated correction interpretation when testing the implications of Weiner's (1986) attribution-affect-action model. In each of these domains, liberals' commitment to specific values (e.g., egalitarian access to minimum subsistence or women's autonomy) conflicted with the typical consequences of an attribution of personal responsibility.

Although each of the examples of possible correction cited here involve conflicts between attributions and values that liberals hold especially dear, the motivated correction hypothesis would nonetheless posit that conservatives will similarly be motivated to engage in second-stage reasoning when the attribution-affect sequence leads to conclusions that are at odds with conservative values or goals. Given, however, that (a) conservative belief systems are heavily invested in the value of self-reliance and individualism, which will rarely conflict with personal attributions for social or personal problems, and (b) liberals' ideological belief systems are more likely than conservatives' to contain commitments to conflicting values (e.g., both individualism and humanitarianism; see Tetlock, Peterson, & Lerner, 1996), it may not be surprising that we have more empirical examples of correction on the part of liberals than conservatives.

Before describing the studies that tested the implications of the dispositional, ideological script, and motivated correction hypotheses, we first will more fully clarify what we mean by political orientation and ideology.

Political Ideology and Personality

Theorists have organized a variety of overlapping personality and attitudinal variables into ideological/affective/cognitive stylistic "resonances" (Alker & Poppen, 1973; Carroll et al., 1987). One resonance, cognitive conservatism, combines support for traditional power structures and opposition to egalitarianism with personality measures of dogmatism, authoritarianism, and intolerance of ambiguity (a resonance reminiscent of the classic work on authoritarianism—Adorno et al., 1950). The second resonance, liberal humanism, combines a liberal political orientation, egalitarianism, and humanism (e.g., Carroll et al., 1987; Eysenck, 1971).¹ The close conceptual and empirical links between personality and political ideology have also been noted by other researchers (e.g., Hogan & Dickstein, 1972; Tetlock, 1984). Focusing on operational definitions, one could argue on both conceptual and psychometric grounds that an item such as "Many poor people simply don't want to work hard" could just as easily be part of an ideology, attitude, or an authoritarianism scale.

Our position is that we will gain a more robust understanding of individual differences in political ideology and personality when we concentrate empirical effort on assessing well-replicated, broad-band resonances or their indicators, rather than attempting to isolate the intercorrelated components of each resonance (Skitka & Tetlock, 1993b). When possible, we used a variety of indicators to tap these resonances (e.g., Altemeyer's, 1988, RWA scale; Katz & Hass's, 1988, liberal-humanism scale; self-reported liberalism/conservatism). However, these lengthy assessment batteries were

not as amenable for either telephone or web-based surveys, where the trade off between respondent burden and response rates is a greater concern. In these cases, we used a proxy "likes and dislikes" measure of political orientation. Conover and Feldman (1981) argued that people's ideological identifications (i.e., "I am a liberal" or "I am a conservative") are derived primarily from whether they like or dislike liberals or conservatives (see also Levitin & Miller, 1979). One way to measure relative degrees of liberalism and conservatism is therefore to collect ratings of participants' like or dislike of liberals and conservatives, respectively, and to subtract one rating from the other. Nonzero difference scores reflect strength of ideological orientation (Knight, 1999). Bauman and Skitka (2001) found that the correlation between a political ideology factor score based on measures of RWA, liberal humanism, and self-reported political orientation, and a like-dislike measure, was strong ($r = .69$) and that both operationalizations of political orientation showed satisfactory discriminant validity.

For ease of presentation, we will refer to liberals and conservatives and political orientation and ideology, regardless of the method used to identify them, instead of using the more cumbersome labels of *cognitive conservatism* and *liberal humanism*.

Our goal of the five studies that will be described next was to explore which account—the dispositional, ideological script, or motivational correction—provides the best explanation for observed liberal-conservative differences in attributions and in willingness to help others as a function of these attributions.

Study 1

In Study 1, we used the classic "college bowl" game methodology developed by Ross (1977) to explore whether liberals and conservatives were differentially likely to make personal attributions in a nonpolitical context. Participants read a description of two students who were asked to participate in a quiz game. Two students were described who were randomly assigned the role of being either the quizmaster (who generated a number of questions based on his idiosyncratic knowledge to pose to the contestant) or the contestant. The story described the contestant as correctly answering only one of the five questions presented by the quizmaster. If perceivers take into account the situation—that is, that the quizmaster and contestant roles were randomly assigned—they should realize that the quizmaster would be likely to have fared just as poorly as the contestant if their roles had been reversed.

If liberals and conservatives dispositionally differ in their preferences for personal versus situational attributions, conservatives should be more likely than liberals to estimate the students' intel-

¹ This result reflects the widespread reliance on college student samples drawn from one country (the United States) and from a narrow band of time (late 20th century). Other possible resonances include libertarianism (strong needs for autonomy fused with support for "liberalism" on social issues and "conservatism" on economic issues) or coercive egalitarianism (envy and resentment of wealthy fused with support for authoritarian means of redistributing wealth). Similarly, as political orientation approaches the true extremes on either the left or the right, they begin to increasingly resemble each other in terms of cognitive rigidity (see McClosky & Chong, 1985). True left-wing authoritarians, however, are very rarely observed except in specific politically elite and European samples.

ligence on the basis of the salient personal factors and to discount available situational cues. That is, conservatives should see a greater difference between the quizmaster and contestant's intelligence than liberals. In contrast, if attributional differences for the causes of social problems are rooted more in ideological scripts than dispositional preferences for personal versus situational explanations, liberals' and conservatives' attributions about the students' relative intelligence should not be different, because there is no easily available ideological script for why people might perform well or poorly as a quiz game contestant or quizmaster.

The motivated correction hypothesis can also provide an account for why we might expect to see ideological differences in the college bowl context. The participants' task in this experiment is to estimate the quizmaster's and contestant's intelligence. Academic debates about the malleability of intelligence have raged for years, and the arguments on the side of both nature and nurture have taken on a distinct ideological flavor. For example, Herrnstein and Murray (1996) argued in their controversial book *The Bell Curve* that inherited intelligence, not environment, is the primary determinant of a variety of social behaviors, including class, socioeconomic level, crime, educational achievement, welfare, and even parental styles. Critics suggest that *The Bell Curve* represents a conservative political agenda masquerading as research (e.g., Gould, 1996; Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Gresson, 1997), with one critic going so far as to claim that it "lays the political, ideological, economic, and paramilitary groundwork for fascism" (Rosenthal, 1995, p. 44), and for others to warn that a focus on supposed differences in intellectual ability leads to inequality, social injustice, racism, and sexism (e.g., Fischer et al., 1996; Robitaille & Robeck, 1995). Simply quantifying intelligence has been argued (by liberals) to be an ideologically conservative effort to place individuals into "awkward, arbitrary categories" (Hitchens, 1994), and that assessments of human intelligence contradict the formal American commitment to equality (Hayman, 1998). Defenders of *The Bell Curve* argue that attacks on *The Bell Curve* are based on empirically groundless commitments to egalitarian values that blind liberal scholars to real individual differences (e.g., Weyher, 1998).

In sum, even though one could make an argument for either a liberal or a conservative political agenda on the basis of the data presented in *The Bell Curve* (see Gottfredson, 1997, for detail), these academic debates nonetheless point to the apparent tension between liberals' commitment to egalitarianism and making personal attributions for intelligence. No such clear value conflict exists for conservatives. Therefore the motivated correction hypothesis predicts an interaction: Conservatives should see the quizmaster as more intelligent than the contestant, but value conflict should motivate liberals to see the targets as equal, and above the midpoint (because it is a presumed positive liberal bias), in intelligence.

Method

Participants

Seventy-eight undergraduates completed questionnaires in partial fulfillment of class requirements for an introductory psychology class.

Design

This study was based on a 2 (political orientation: liberal, conservative) \times 2 (target: quizmaster, contestant) mixed-factor experimental design.

Procedure

Participants were told that their task was to read a brief story, and then to make a number of ratings about their impressions of the characters. The story described how a professor selected two student volunteers to come up in front of a class to participate in a trivia game. The students were described as being randomly assigned into the role of a quizmaster or contestant by drawing straws. The quizmaster was asked to generate five questions from his idiosyncratic knowledge, with the stipulation that he knew the correct answer to all five questions. Joe (the quizmaster) subsequently posed his questions to the other student (Stan, the contestant). For example, Joe asked, "What cowboy movie actor's sidekick is Smiley Burnette?," to which Stan looked puzzled, and finally replied, "I really don't know. The only movie cowboy that pops to mind for me is John Wayne." Joe asked four additional questions (selected at random from the game *Trivial Pursuit*). Stan was described as answering only one of the five questions correctly.

After reading the story, participants were asked a number of questions, including their impressions of both Stan's and Joe's intelligence on a -4 (*very unintelligent*) to 4 (*very intelligent*) scale.

Measures

In addition to making attributions about the intelligence of the quizmaster and contestant described in the story, participants also completed Altemeyer's (1988) RWA scale and two self-report, single-item measures of political orientation ("How liberal or conservative do you tend to be when it comes to social policy?," and "How liberal or conservative do you tend to be when it comes to economic policy?") each using 7-point scales that ranged from *very liberal* to *very conservative*. A principal-components analysis of these three measures yielded a single-component solution. z scores on the three scales were therefore created (to make units of measurement equivalent), and averaged to yield an index of political orientation. The middle 10% of the scores were dropped to avoid classification errors, leaving 33 conservatives and 34 liberals in the sample.

Results

Results of a target (quizmaster, contestant) and political orientation of the perceiver (liberal or conservative) mixed-design analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that our results replicated previous correspondence bias research (Ross, 1977). Specifically, participants perceived the quizmaster to be more intelligent ($M = 1.51$) than the contestant ($M = 0.89$), $F(1, 65) = 7.70$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .10$.

However, the political orientation of the perceiver qualified this result, $F(1, 65) = 5.05$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$. As can be seen in Figure 2, liberals perceived the quizmaster and contestant to be equal in intelligence, $F(1, 65) < 1$, but conservatives rated the contestant to be lower in intelligence ($M = 0.39$) than the quizmaster ($M = 1.38$), $F(1, 65) = 12.42$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .29$.

Discussion

The observation of ideological differences in this experimental context was consistent with the predictions of both the dispositional and motivated correction hypotheses, but inconsistent with

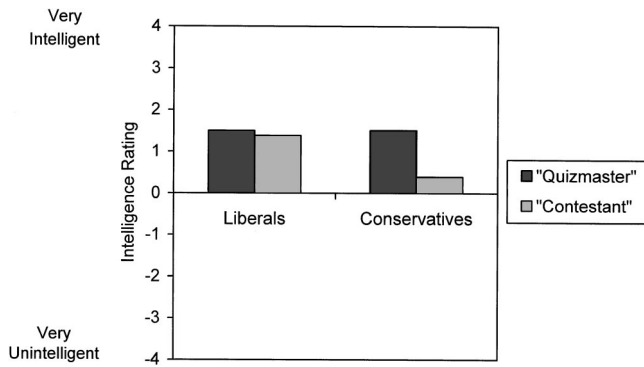


Figure 2. Mean intelligence ratings of the quizmaster and contestant as a function of political orientation in Study 1.

the predictions of the ideological script hypothesis. Although these results cannot conclusively differentiate between the dispositional and motivated correction hypotheses, the fact that liberals rated both the quizmaster and the contestant well above the midpoint in intelligence is consistent with an apparent liberal bias, that is, everyone can be equal and high in intelligence. These results, however, are preliminary at best. Very little research has explored whether there are ideological differences in attributions people make in nonpolitical contexts, so replication is especially important. Study 2 was therefore designed to conceptually replicate the findings of Study 1 by adopting another classic research paradigm designed to test people's baseline propensity to take into account personal versus situational information.

Study 2

We modeled Study 2 after Jones and Harris's (1967) attitude-attribution paradigm. Jones and Harris had research participants guess the true opinion of another student on the basis of reading an essay the student presumably had written. In one condition of the study, participants were told that the author of the essay had freely chosen their essay position (either pro- or anti-Castro), thereby making it easy to guess the essayist's opinion. In the other condition, participants believed that the author had no choice about the position to take in their essay because they had been assigned their position as a participant in a debate. Although research participants perceived a smaller difference in opinion between the pro- and anti-Castro essayists in the no-choice as compared with the choice condition, on the whole, participants still assumed that the content of the essay reflected the author's true feelings even in the no-choice condition.

If the dispositional hypothesis is correct, political orientation should moderate participants' tendency to see a difference between the pro- and anti-essayists' opinions. Specifically, liberals should report a smaller difference than conservatives between their guesses of the true attitudes of essayists who are randomly assigned to their positions (pro or con) on some issue, especially when situational cues are made salient and available. In contrast, the ideological script hypothesis predicts that the political orientation of the perceiver should have no impact on perceivers' attitude attributions, because there is no available ideological script to suggest what the authors' true attitudes should be. The moti-

vated correction hypothesis also predicts an absence of ideological differences in attributed attitudes. Although liberal values might motivate corrected intelligence assessments (in a context like Study 1), neither liberal nor conservative values or goals are implicated in attributing someone's true attitude on the basis of an essay written under no-choice conditions.

Method

Participants

Three hundred ninety-nine undergraduates participated in the study in partial fulfillment of requirements for an introductory psychology course. None of the participants in this study participated in Study 1.

Design

This experiment was based on a 2 (author's assigned position: pro, anti) \times 2 (salience of situational constraints: low, high) \times 2 (essay topic: welfare reform, tuition increase) experimental design with political orientation as a covariate.

Procedure

On arrival at the laboratory, half of the participants were asked to write an essay on a specific issue and were given no choice on their essay position (the high-situational-salience condition). The other participants were not asked to write an essay (the low-situational-salience condition).

Participants were then handed a photocopied, hand-written essay on the topic of either tuition increases at the university or welfare reform. Half of the participants received a pro-version of the essay; the other half received an anti-version of the essay (it should be noted that all essays were pretested to ensure that they were of equal quality and were based on a compilation of actual student arguments on these issues). All participants were told that the essayists had been randomly assigned what position to write about in their essay. After reading the essay, participants were asked to guess the essayists' true opinion on the issue on a 9-point scale rated from -4 (*strongly against a tuition increase or welfare reform*) to 4 (*strongly in favor of a tuition increase or welfare reform*).

Measures

The same measures of political orientation used in Study 1 were used in Study 2, but the continuous version of the political orientation measure was retained.

Results

Unlike Study 1, the results of Study 2 found no support for the hypothesis that political orientation moderated whether people considered situational information when guessing an essayist's true opinion. There was no relationship between political orientation and the tendency to guess that essayists' attitudes were the same as the position they took on their essay, $r = .01$, ns .

Analysis of the 2 (author's assigned position: pro, anti) \times 2 (salience of situational constraints: low, high) \times 2 (essay topic: welfare reform, tuition increase) between-subjects ANOVA revealed three significant effects on attributed opinion: a topic main effect, $F(1, 395) = 18.15$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .04$; a position main effect, $F(1, 395) = 139.09$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .26$; and a Topic \times Position interaction, $F(1, 395) = 35.50$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$.

Participants rated essayists as less likely to agree with a tuition increase ($M = -0.97$) than welfare reform ($M = 0.22$). When

averaging across essay topic, results also replicated Jones and Harris's (1967) finding that research participants discounted the fact that the authors' position on the essay was assigned, not chosen. That is, participants reported that the pro-issue essayists' attitude was more pro-issue ($M = 1.27$) than the anti-issue essayists' attitude, which was perceived to be more anti-issue ($M = -2.02$).

These results, however, varied as a function of essay topic. Analysis of simple effects indicated that results only strongly replicated Jones and Harris's (1967) original findings in the welfare-reform context. Although participants perceived the authors of pro- and anti-issue essays to be different in their true attitudes in both the welfare reform, $F(1, 395) = 161.84, p < .01, \eta^2 = .54$, and tuition-increase contexts, $F(1, 395) = 18.69, p < .01, \eta^2 = .06$, the effect was clearly much stronger in the welfare reform than the tuition-increase condition. Moreover, participants were less likely to infer essay-attitude correspondence when they were asked to guess the true attitude of the author of a pro-tuition-increase essay (see Figure 3 for more detail). Our college student sample was clearly not prepared to believe that the pro-tuition-increase essay reflected its author's true attitude.

Political orientation of the perceiver (as a covariate in an analysis of covariance [ANCOVA]) did not qualify these results, $F < 1$. Liberals and conservatives were both equally likely to presume that the essayists' attitude was consistent with their essay content, unless the essayist had taken a pro-tuition-hike position.

Discussion

Political orientation of the perceiver did not moderate people's tendency to discount situational cues that should lead people to be skeptical that essayists' true attitudes were consistent with their no-choice position on an essay. Although it requires accepting the null hypothesis, the results of Study 2 were therefore more consistent with either an ideological script or motivated correction than a dispositional explanation for why we consistently observe ideological differences in attributions for social problems and in willingness to help people as a function of why they need assistance. The evidence against the dispositional hypothesis is bolstered by several observations: (a) the study replicated the basic findings of Jones and Harris (1967), which indicates that the study

design had sufficient statistical sensitivity to detect established effects; (b) the conclusion against ideological differences replicated across two topical domains (tuition increases and welfare reform); and (c) the conclusion against ideological differences emerged even when situational constraints were made especially salient by having participants first write a counterattitudinal essay (Gilbert & Jones, 1986). Although the dispositional hypothesis cannot be completely ruled out, the results of Study 2 therefore shift the burden of proof to those who characterize ideologically patterned attributions as rooted in underlying stable dispositional differences between liberals and conservatives (see Greenwald, 1975, on the power of null hypothesis results to shift burdens of proof).

That said, the attitude-attribution paradigm is not without its limitations. Several scholars have argued that there are strong pressures operating on research participants in the attitude-attribution paradigm to use available information to guess the essayists' true attitude (e.g., Funder, 1987; Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; A. G. Miller, Schmidt, Meyer, & Colella, 1984; Wright & Wells, 1988). A. G. Miller, Ashton, and Mishal (1990), for example, suggested that participants assume "that the experimenter would not provide an essay written under constraint unless it was relevant for the required attributional judgment" (p. 647). The lack of observed ideological differences in this context, then, might be due to demand characteristics that lead participants to use the essays as diagnostic information. The fact that participants did not demonstrate evidence of correspondence bias in the pro-tuition-hike context is consistent with the notion that people will use whatever information they have available in an attempt to guess essayists' true attitudes in this context. When participants had additional information (i.e., an awareness of the likely base rate of college students who have pro-tuition-hike beliefs), they did not rely only on the essay content to guess essayists' true attitudes (see also Hicks, 1985, for similar results).

Another possible limitation of Study 2 (and Study 1) is the use of college student samples. An exclusive reliance on college student samples is generally problematic, and especially so when testing hypotheses about political ideology. College students' political beliefs are not typically fully crystallized (Sears, 1986). Until people work, pay taxes, and participate as more fully enfranchised citizens, they may have little investment in developing a coherent or stable political ideology.

To address these possible limitations, in Study 3 we used a national representative sample and a task that corrected for the possibility that the results observed in the attitude-attribution study were the result of demand characteristics.

Study 3

Participants in Study 3 were asked to make binary judgments about the most likely explanation for a given event. For example, participants were given the following description: "The doctor laughed long and hard at the joke," and they were asked to indicate which of two explanations (one personal, one situational) for the event seemed to be the most likely—for example, "It was a funny joke" or "The doctor has a good sense of humor." Pilot testing indicated that two of the five events used were perceived to be more politicized, or open to politicized interpretation: "The man lost his job" and "The prisoner was paroled." The other three

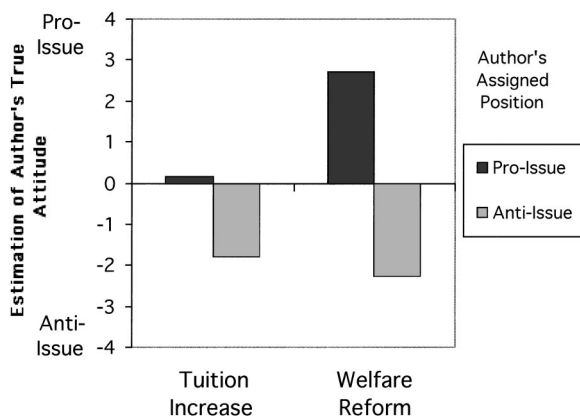


Figure 3. Guess of an essay writer's true attitude on social welfare or a tuition increase in Study 2.

events were judged to be unlikely to yield a party-line response: "The woman gave \$200 to her favorite charity," "The lawyer tripped over his girlfriend's feet while learning the new dance step," and "The doctor laughed long and hard at the joke."

Results would be consistent with the dispositional hypothesis if liberals consistently preferred situational to personal explanations, and conservatives consistently preferred personal to situational explanations for each of the events. The script hypothesis predicts that ideological differences in preferences for personal versus situational explanations will emerge only for events that have a political script. Results would be consistent with the ideological script hypothesis if ideological differences emerged in response to the parole and job-loss events, but not in response to the laughing hard, tripping, or charitable events.

Of particular interest, however, were participants' reactions to "The prisoner was paroled." Participants' explanation choices were "He turned over a new leaf" and "The prison was overcrowded." Given that conservatives tend to believe that the cause of crime is dispositional (a stable personal attribution, i.e., "criminals are bad people, and bad people rarely change"), they should be more likely to reject the notion that a prisoner was paroled because he or she "turned over a new leaf." In contrast, liberals tend to believe that people commit crimes because of either institutional barriers or failures (a situational attribution), and are more likely to believe that criminals can reform, and therefore should be more inclined to believe the prisoner could change.

Shifting the attributional problem away from why people commit crimes to why they might be paroled provides one interesting comparison of the predictions of the dispositional versus the ideological script and motivated correction hypotheses. The dispositional hypothesis prediction is that conservatives will choose the personal attribution, because they chronically see the world in terms of personal rather than situational causal factors. However, making a personal attribution in this case would require conservatives to endorse the notion that a prisoner can reform—something that is in explicit contrast to a conservative script for criminal behavior. Both the ideological script and the motivated correction hypothesis predict that conservatives should be more likely to endorse the situational explanation in this context: It is more consistent with their ideological script about crime, and it is more consistent with their ideological values (i.e., to be tough on crime).

Method

Participants

The study sample ($N = 1,639$, a 55% within-panel response rate) was drawn from a national panel of respondents maintained by Knowledge Networks (Menlo Park, CA). Knowledge Networks recruits panel participants using random-digit-dialing telephone selection methods. Once a panel member agrees to participate, they are given a free interactive device to access the World Wide Web (e.g., a WebTV). Panel members agree to participate in approximately one survey a week in exchange for the free Internet device and monthly Internet service. Characteristics of the panel closely match those of the U.S. Census (for more detail, see <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp>). Panel members receive an e-mail to alert them when they have a survey to complete, with a "clickable" start button to initiate the survey. Participants can access each survey only once, and the survey is protected from nonpanel member access.

Procedure

Participants received an e-mail alerting them to the survey, and they were asked to try to complete the survey within the next week. When participants clicked start, they were instructed that they were going to be presented with brief behavioral descriptions and that their task was to indicate which explanation for the person's behavior seemed to be the most likely. They were also told that there were no right or wrong answers, and that the researchers were simply interested in people's gut reactions about which explanation seemed to them to be the most likely in each case. Single-sentence behavioral descriptions were presented one per screen. For example, a participant would read the sentence "The doctor laughed long and hard at the joke. Why?" on the screen, with the prompt "Please indicate which of these two explanations for the behavior seem to be most likely: 'He has a good sense of humor' or 'It was a funny joke.'" Participants' task was to mouse click on the button next to the explanation they preferred. Participants then clicked on a button to advance to the next screen. Personal and situational explanations were presented in random order across participants within each behavioral description (see Table 1 for more detail on the items and the options).

Political Orientation

Participants were asked four questions to tap their relative dislike of political conservatives, political liberals, republicans, and democrats (e.g., "How much do you tend to dislike _____"), with 5-point response scales that were anchored with *not at all*, *slightly*, *moderately*, *much*, and *very much*. Political orientation was subsequently operationalized as the average difference between participants' dislike of political liberals and conservatives and their dislike of democrats and republicans. This strategy yielded 905 participants who had nonzero difference scores on the relative dislike measure. Participants whose relative dislike of conservatives/republicans exceeded their dislike of liberals/democrats were called "liberals" ($n = 386$) and participants whose relative dislike of liberals/democrats exceeded their dislike of conservatives/republicans were called "conservatives" ($n = 519$).

Results

As can be seen in Table 1, political orientation was not associated with preferred explanations for the politically neutral behaviors. Participants overall were somewhat more likely to believe that the doctor laughed at the joke because it was funny than because he had an especially good sense of humor, and were more equally divided about whether the lawyer tripped because he was clumsy or because he was learning a challenging dance step. Giving \$200 to charity was overwhelmingly attributed to personal generosity rather than a desire for an income-tax deduction.

Liberals and conservatives did diverge, however, in their preferred explanations for the more politically loaded behaviors. Although liberals and conservatives were both more likely to believe that the prisoner was paroled because the prison was overcrowded than because he turned over a new leaf, conservatives were more likely to endorse the situational explanation for the prisoner's parole, $\chi^2(1, N = 1,639) = 12.02, p < .01$.

Other results indicated that liberals were equally likely to believe that the man lost his job because of poor performance (50%) or because the company had financial problems (50%), but conservatives were more likely to believe that the man lost his job because he was a poor performer (58%) than because the company had financial problems (42%), $\chi^2(1, N = 1,639) = 6.03, p < .01$.

Table 1
Percentage of Liberals and Conservatives Who Chose Personal Versus Situational Explanations for Different Behaviors in Study 3

Item	Explanation	Liberals (%)	Conservatives (%)	$\chi^2(1, N = 905)$
The prisoner was paroled.	He turned over a new leaf.	39	28	12.02*
	The prison was overcrowded.	61	72	
The doctor laughed long and hard at the joke.	He has a good sense of humor.	45	44	0.03
	It was a funny joke.	55	56	
The lawyer tripped over his girlfriend's feet while learning the new dance step.	The lawyer is clumsy.	45	49	1.47
	It was a challenging dance step.	55	51	
The man lost his job.	He was a poor performer.	50	58	6.03*
	The company had financial problems.	50	42	
The woman gave \$200 to her favorite charity.	She is a generous person.	82	84	0.87
	She needed an income tax deduction.	18	16	

* $p < .05$.

Discussion

The results of Study 3 were conclusive in one major respect: The dispositional hypothesis—that is, the notion that liberals and conservatives tend to see the world through very different attributionally colored glasses—was clearly not supported. No differences in attributional preferences as a function of political orientation emerged when participants were asked to make an attribution for behaviors that were politically neutral (e.g., laughing at a joke, tripping, or giving to charity). Attributions for more politicized behaviors did, however, vary as a function of the perceivers' political orientation. Conservatives were more likely to endorse a personal than a situational explanation for why someone lost their job, whereas liberals were equally likely to endorse either option. A more atypical pattern emerged in attributions for why the prisoner was paroled. Liberals and conservatives both preferred a situational to a personal explanation for why the prisoner was paroled, with conservatives showing an even greater preference for the situational explanation than that observed with their liberal counterparts.

The parole findings seem to tilt the evidence more toward supporting a motivated correction than an ideological script interpretation. Support for the motivated correction rather than an ideological script interpretation of these results is bolstered by the following observations: (a) conservatives demonstrate very stable preferences for personal attributions in most, if not all, other politicized contexts observed to date, so observing a situational preference in this context seems at odds with the notion that these responses are heavily scripted in politicized settings, and (b) juggling a script about the causes of crime and adjusting it to fit understanding why someone was paroled must be a cognitively effortful process, even if one's beliefs about the causes of crime are heavily scripted. These results therefore suggest that people do not mindlessly plug in ideological scripts when making an attribution about behaviors in politicized contexts. Rather, it appears that liberals and conservatives are simply sometimes more motivated to take situational information into account than others. That

said, we clearly need stronger tests of the competing predictions of the script and correction hypothesis. Therefore, the focus of attention in Studies 4 and 5 shifted to investigating whether a scripted or a correction explanation provides a better account for observed differences in the tendency of liberals and conservatives to prefer personal versus situational explanations in more politicized contexts.

Study 4

In Study 4, we examined open-ended reactions to a question about whether the government should provide a minimum level of subsistence or let people get ahead on their own in a secondary analysis of the 1987 National Election Studies (NES) pilot study data (W. E. Miller & NES/Center for Political Studies, 1999). Participants were interviewed using multiple probes (e.g., "Is there anything else you would like to add?") that allowed for the possibility of top-of-the-head responses followed by either elaboration or correction. According to the ideological script hypothesis, we would expect that conservatives' first and subsequent mentions would emphasize personal factors (e.g., laziness, the need to work hard) and that liberals' first and subsequent mentions would include more references to situational or institutional barriers to getting ahead.

In contrast, the motivated correction hypothesis predicts that liberals and conservatives would not differ in their first responses to this question. Liberals and conservatives alike should be equally likely to consistently mention personal attributions in their first response. Conservatives' commitment to individualism and self-reliance should provide little motivation to think about situational impediments to getting ahead, and they should therefore maintain a mostly consistent pattern of personal attributions across responses. However, because liberals' commitment to egalitarian access to humanitarian assistance is in conflict with notions like "people should get ahead on their own," liberals should be more likely than conservatives to subsequently correct their initial statements by making references to situational and institutional barriers

that prevent some people from being able to get ahead on their own.

Method

Participants

A random sample of 457 respondents to the 1986 NES were reinterviewed between May 5 and May 30, 1987, for the 1987 NES pilot study (W. E. Miller & The NES/Center for Political Studies, 1999). Interviews were conducted using computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) by staff at the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at the University of Michigan.

Political Orientation

The NES data set included a measure of relative like and dislike of conservatives, liberals, republicans, and democrats on 100-point feeling thermometers (see Knight, 1999). Scores above 50 indicated warmth or liking and scores below 50 indicated coolness or dislike for the target group. On the basis of the rationale developed for our measure of political orientation in Study 3, participants' average rating of liberals and democrats were subtracted from their average rating of conservatives and republicans. Respondents who had an average difference score greater than 5 (where difference scores could range from 0 to 99) were classified as political conservatives ($n = 165$). Respondents who had an average difference score less than -5 were classified as political liberals ($n = 115$). This procedure excluded 215 participants who liked or disliked the political left and right nearly equally.

Procedure

Participants responded to the following open-ended question:

Some people feel the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on their own. Which is closer to the way you feel or haven't you thought much about it?²

Respondents' first, second, third, and fourth comments were recorded by trained interviewers, and later content coded by experienced coders at the ISR.³ For our purposes, two independent coders classified the ISR coding categories as references to persons (e.g., people are lazy, or people need to work hard), situations (e.g., the state of the economy), a person-situation blend (e.g., people should work harder, but it is difficult to find work), or some other type of comment (e.g., attitudes toward government, redistribution of wealth, racial or ethnic references, the need to spend money on defense). Inter-coder agreement was 90%. A third coder resolved the discrepancies.

To test the hypothesis that liberals would be more likely than conservatives to correct an initial personal attribution, we compared participants' first and second mentions.⁴ Participants who consistently mentioned only personal or situational attributions were coded as having a personal or situational-attributional pattern, respectively. Participants who (a) shifted from a personal to a situational explanation across comments, (b) shifted from a personal to a blended explanation across comments, or (c) initially offered a person-situation blend, were coded as having a "corrected" pattern of response. Finally, participants who shifted from a situational to a personal explanation were coded as having a "reverse corrected" pattern of response.

Results

Overall, 56.5% of liberals' and 70% of conservatives' comments were attributions about the causes of people's need for

government assistance. Analysis indicated that respondents' patterns of response were significantly associated with their political orientation, $\chi^2(4, N = 242) = 15.98, p < .01$.

As can be seen in Figure 4, conservatives were more likely than liberals to respond to this open-ended question and subsequent probe with personal attributions for why people do or do not need help (e.g., laziness, the need to work hard). Liberals, in contrast, were more likely than conservatives to either show a corrected response pattern (e.g., to first mention personal attributions, and elaborate with mentions of situational factors), or to respond with nonattributional comments (e.g., wealth needs to be redistributed). There were no differences in liberals' and conservatives' tendency to respond with either a consistent situational-attributional pattern, or a reverse-correction pattern (to first respond with situational attributions, and elaborate with personal attributions). The latter pattern was the least common.

Discussion

Although closed-ended surveys have found that liberals tend to prefer situational explanations for social problems, the results of this more open-ended investigation indicated that liberals were (a) less likely than conservatives to mention personal attributions, (b) more than twice as likely (19%) as conservatives (8%) to demonstrate a corrected pattern of response, and (c) more likely than conservatives to spontaneously mention nonattributions when asked about social-spending programs. Consistent with the findings of more closed-ended investigations, conservatives were most likely to make references to personal attributions than to other categories of responses in this context.

The results of Study 4 therefore were more consistent with the motivated correction than the ideological script hypothesis. Al-

² The pilot study had two versions (Form A, Form B). Form A respondents (retrospective probe) answered the closed-ended version of this question first. The closed-ended options were (a) government efforts, (b) get ahead alone, (c) haven't thought much about it, or (d) (if volunteered) it depends. Participants then responded to the following probe: "Still thinking about the question you just answered, I'd like you to tell me what ideas came to mind as you were answering that question. Exactly what things went through your mind?" In contrast, Form B participants ("stop and think" probe) shared their open-ended responses prior to answering the closed-ended version of the question. Specifically, before participants could share their closed-ended response, they were asked, "Before telling me how you feel about this, could you tell me what kinds of things come to mind when you think about the government making sure that every person has a good standard of living? Now what comes to mind when you think about letting each person get ahead on their own?" The substance of respondents' open-ended comments was not affected by whether they were made before or after responding to the closed-ended probe (see Feldman & Zaller, 1992, Table A.1), therefore our analysis treated all open-ended responses as equivalent.

³ The original coding scheme consisted of more than 140 codes that reflected the content and frame of reference of the responses. For a full description of the original coding scheme, see Feldman and Zaller (1992); also a complete description of the content codes is available in the NES codebook (W. E. Miller & The NES/Center for Political Studies, 1999).

⁴ We limited our analysis to respondents' first and second mentions because of the fact that only 22 respondents had a third mention, and only 8 people had a fourth mention in response to the open-ended probe.

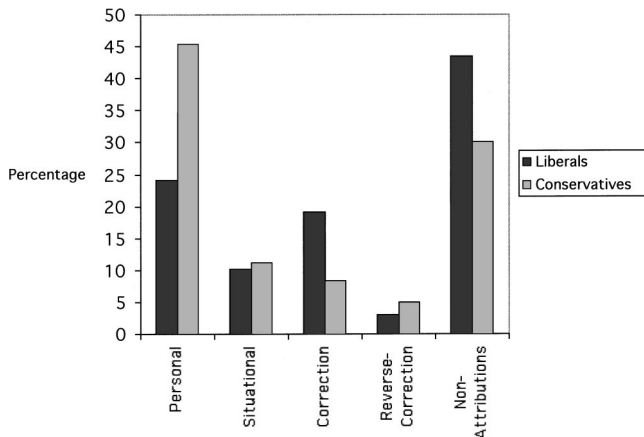


Figure 4. Attributional patterns of liberals and conservatives in Study 4, $\chi^2(4, N = 240) = 15.98, p < .01$.

though conservatives' reactions could be accounted for by a scripted or dispositional explanation, it is difficult to account for liberals' reactions using either of these frameworks. When liberals made attributional comments, they were more likely to be personal or corrected than situational.

Although the pattern of results observed in Study 4 is consistent with the motivated correction hypothesis, there is no evidence that this attributional pattern was cognitively effortful. To provide a stronger test of the motivated correction hypothesis, Study 5 explored whether previously observed ideological differences in willingness to help people with IC causes of need would disappear when perceivers were asked to make helping decisions under conditions of high cognitive load.

Given that people tend to rely more on stereotypes and cognitive shortcuts when making judgments while cognitively busy, the script hypothesis would predict either no effect of cognitive load, or perhaps even more exaggerated differences as a function of political orientation. In contrast, the motivated correction hypothesis predicts that the findings of previous research would be replicated when perceivers are not under load (i.e., liberals should be more willing than conservatives to provide assistance to personally responsible claimants), but that these differences would disappear when perceivers made decisions under high cognitive load. A distraction task, according to this hypothesis, will tax liberals' ability to correct their first pass attributions of personal responsibility in an effort to respond more consistently with their core values. Therefore, the motivated correction hypothesis predicts that liberals, like conservatives, should choose not to help claimants who have IC causes of need when they make their judgments under cognitive load.

Study 5

In Study 5, we adopted a judgment and decision-making task used in prior research to explore ideological differences in willingness to provide public assistance (see Skitka & Tetlock, 1992, 1993a, 1993b). Specifically, research participants were asked to consider a number of claimants who varied in how they contracted

AIDS and in their sexual orientation. After making a number of ratings to tap participants' reactions to the claimants, the participants' task was to decide which claimants should be given subsidized access to drug treatment. Previous research has found consistent evidence of ideological differences in willingness to help people with personal responsibility for their plight. Liberals tend to be more likely than conservatives to help claimants with IC reasons for needing help; however, liberals and conservatives tend to be equally likely to help claimants with other causes of need (i.e., those with internal-uncontrollable [IU], external-controllable [EC], or external-uncontrollable [EU] reasons for needing help) so long as resources are abundant. Half of the participants in this study made their judgments and allocation decisions while also engaged in a tone-tracking task (the high-cognitive-load condition), and half made their judgments and allocation decisions without the distraction of the tone-tracking task (the low-cognitive-load condition).

Method

Participants

Two hundred ninety-three students participated in this study in partial fulfillment of course requirements.

Stimulus Materials

Claimants. Participants were presented with profiles of people suffering from AIDS who varied on two dimensions: sexual preference (heterosexual or homosexual) and locus of responsibility for the disease. Sexual orientation was manipulated to control for the possibility that participants might be more likely to infer a target's sexual orientation in some responsibility conditions than others, if it were not explicitly controlled. Because previous research has found that effects of sexual orientation are eliminated when locus-of-responsibility information is available (e.g., Kite, Whitley, Michael, & Simon, 1991; Levin & Chapman, 1990), we did not expect to find major effects for this variable.

Borrowing from other research (e.g., Skitka & Tetlock, 1992), locus of control of the disease was described in the following ways: IC: this person contracted AIDS by engaging in high-risk sexual behavior despite knowing how AIDS is transmitted and the risk associated with these behaviors; IU: this person practiced safe sex after learning how the AIDS virus is transmitted, but was exposed to the AIDS virus before it was widely known that AIDS was a sexually transmitted disease; EC: this person contracted AIDS from a long-term but unfaithful partner; and EU: this person contracted AIDS from a blood transfusion before the AIDS antibody test was developed to screen blood. Therefore, participants were presented with a set of eight claimants who required treatment for their disease who varied as a function of a 2 (sexual orientation) \times 4 (locus of control) within-subjects design.

Cognitive load. We created a 60-min tape of synthesized flute tones at varying pitches. Each pitch was assigned a random number of repetitions from two to eight, and order of pitches was similarly randomly determined using a random number generator. A tone sounded on the tape every 5 s. Cognitive load was manipulated by having participants track the number of tones that sounded before a pitch change (the high-cognitive-load condition) versus not doing the tracking task (the low-cognitive-load condition).

Procedure

Participants were informed that their task would be to decide which of several people who needed medical treatment should receive it. It was explained that although there are many new treatments available to treat the

AIDS virus, as yet there is no cure, and the available treatment options are very expensive. Not everyone who requires treatment has medical insurance or can afford the cost of these new treatments. Participants were then told that we were interested in exploring how people think access to subsidized treatment should be allocated. Their task was to consider 8 different people who were requesting subsidized care. Participants were asked to complete a number of ratings in response to each claimant, and then to choose as many or few of the claimants as they wished to receive available drug subsidies.

The participants in the high-cognitive-load condition were given the following additional instructions before beginning the allocation task: "Because people are often busy doing other things when making judgments of others in the real world, we are going to ask you to perform a listening task while you are forming impressions and making decisions about the people who need treatment." Participants were then told that they would be required to listen to a tape playing sequences of tones. They were told that each new tone might be the same or a different pitch (that is, higher or lower) than the tone that preceded it. Participants were asked to keep track of the number of times each tone either moved to a higher or lower pitch while considering each claimant, and that they were to write down the number of times the tone sounded before changing on the bottom of each page of their questionnaire (claimants were presented one per page). Participants started tracking tone changes afresh for each new claimant. Participants in the low-cognitive-load condition did not hear tones and were told nothing about tracking tone changes.

Once participants read and evaluated all the claimants, they decided which claimants should receive subsidized drug treatment. After completing their allocation decisions, the tone task was stopped and participants were asked to complete a number of questionnaires that included manipulation checks and political-orientation measures. On completion of these measures, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Measures

Responsibility and blame. Participants were asked to make several judgments about each claimant, including the extent to which they were to blame for contracting the AIDS virus, as well as how personally responsible they were for contracting the disease on scales rated from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*). Blame and personal responsibility judgments correlated at $r = .89$. These items were therefore averaged to form a perceived responsibility scale.

Affect. Participants also rated their affective reactions to each claimant, that is, the extent to which they felt disgust, pity, compassion, distaste, sympathy, moral outrage, generosity, and punitiveness toward them on scales rated from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*). A principal-components analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on these items, which revealed the same two-component solution representing positive and negative affect that has been seen in previous research. Specifically, distaste, disgust, moral outrage, and punitiveness all loaded on the first component with loadings ranging from .70 to .93. The second component clearly tapped into positive affective reactions to the target, and consisted of sympathy, generosity, and pity, with loadings that ranged from .81 to .92. Only the compassion variable did not load clearly on a component, so this variable was not used. Scales of negative and positive affect yielded Cronbach's alphas of .88 and .83, respectively.

Political orientation. Participants completed a number of measures tapping attitudes and personality constructs related to political ideology, including Altemeyer's (1996) RWA scale, Katz and Hass's (1988) humanitarian and protestant work-ethic scales, and a five-item scale often used in representative surveys to tap ideological beliefs: how important participants believed it was to strengthen law and order, to preserve respect for authority, to maintain respect for the United States as a world power, to improve politeness in daily behavior, and to follow God's will (see Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986).

A principal-components analysis of scale scores on each of these measures yielded a single-component solution with an eigenvalue of 1.56, with all scales loading relatively evenly. Scale scores were therefore converted to z scores and averaged to create a single measure of political orientation. Participants who scored below the 45th and above the 55th percentile on this measure were classified respectively as liberals ($n = 133$) and conservatives ($n = 132$).

Results

Manipulation Checks

Cognitive load. Cognitive load was successfully manipulated. Participants in the high-cognitive-load condition reported that it was more difficult ($M = 4.36$) than those in the low-cognitive-load condition ($M = 3.60$) to concentrate while forming impressions of claimants, $F(1, 290) = 16.70, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$, as well as more difficult to concentrate when deciding whom to assist in the high- ($M = 4.46$) as compared with the low- ($M = 3.90$) cognitive-load condition, $F(1, 290) = 6.68, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$. The overall level of distraction while doing the allocation task was also reported as being significantly higher for high- ($M = 5.13$) than the low- ($M = 3.77$) cognitive-load participants, $F(1, 290) = 60.05, p < .05, \eta^2 = .17$. Of interest, although load manipulations affected participants' perceived distractibility and ability to concentrate, participants nonetheless did not subjectively believe that forming impressions of the claimants was any more difficult in high than low-cognitive-load condition, $F(1, 291) = 1.36, ns, \eta^2 < .01$, nor did participants vary in their perception of the difficulty of making the allocation decision as a function of cognitive load, $F(1, 291) < 1, \eta^2 < .01$. In sum, the load manipulation affected participants' perceived level of distraction, but did not interfere with their subjective assessment of how difficult it was to form impressions of the claimants or to make allocation decisions.

Locus of responsibility. Manipulation checks also verified that participants varied in the extent to which they attributed personal responsibility to claimants as a function of how they contracted the disease, $F(3, 867) = 710.22, \eta^2 = .71$. Tukey pairwise comparisons indicated that the claimant with the IC of need was seen as the most responsible for his plight ($M = 7.69$). The IU and EC claimants were seen as significantly less, and equally low in responsibility, $M = 4.55$ and $M = 4.06$, respectively. The EU claimant was seen as the least responsible for his plight, $M = 1.53$. Although there were perceived differences between the IU, EC, and EU claimants on this manipulation check (the EC claimant was seen as significantly less personally responsible than the IU or EC claimants), there were no differences in reaction to IU, EC, and EU claimants on any dependent variables of interest. Therefore, for ease of presentation, we collapsed across these groups for the analyses reported in the remainder of the *Results* section.

Is Willingness to Help the Personally Responsible a Scripted or Effortfully Corrected Process?

To explore whether liberals' willingness to help personally responsible claimants requires cognitive effort and justification, a 2 (political orientation: liberal, conservative) \times 2 (cognitive load: load, no load) \times 2 (locus of control: IC, other causes) \times 2 (sexual orientation: homosexual, heterosexual) mixed-design ANOVA was conducted. Claimant sexual orientation did not have

any significant effects on who was chosen to receive drug treatment, but several other significant effects emerged from this analysis.

Consistent with the results of previous research, people helped claimants who were not responsible for their predicament ($M = 1.85$, with a range of 0 to 2) more than claimants who were personally responsible for their plight ($M = 1.05$), $F(1, 261) = 216.48$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .45$. Participants also helped fewer claimants overall when making their decisions under high ($M = 6.25$ out of 8 total) relative to low cognitive load ($M = 6.94$), $F(1, 261) = 14.28$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .05$. These main effects were qualified by a Load \times Locus of Control \times Political Orientation interaction, $F(1, 261) = 4.46$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$.

Consistent with the results of prior research, the partial interaction of political orientation and locus of responsibility was significant in the low-cognitive-load condition, $F(1, 261) = 5.84$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Liberals and conservatives were equally likely to help nonresponsible claimants when making decisions without cognitive interference, $F(1, 261) < 1$, but liberals were more likely than conservatives to provide treatment to personally responsible AIDS patients in the same condition, $F(1, 261) = 5.60$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$ (see Table 2 for more detail).

Helping decisions did not vary as a function of political orientation, however, when participants made their decisions under high cognitive load. The partial interaction of political orientation and locus of responsibility was not significant in the high-cognitive-load condition, $F(1, 261) = 1.56$, ns , $\eta^2 < .01$. Both liberals and conservatives were less likely to help personally responsible than nonresponsible claimants when making choices in this condition.

Taken together, results therefore supported the motivated correction hypothesis. Differences in liberals' and conservatives' willingness to help personally responsible claimants observed in the low-cognitive-load condition were nonexistent in the high-cognitive-load condition.

What Happens Under Load?

To more deeply explore the effects of cognitive load, we tested various possible mediators of the interactive effect of political orientation, personal responsibility, and load on helping. Baron and Kenny (1986) argued that a variable is a mediator when (a)

variation in an independent variable accounts for significant variance in the dependent variable, (b) variation in an independent variable accounts for significant variance in the proposed mediator, (c) variation in the proposed mediator accounts for significant variation in the dependent measure, and (d) when controlling for the proposed mediator, the effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable are reduced to nonsignificance. The analysis reported above indicated that the three-way interaction of cognitive load, political orientation, and personal responsibility accounted for significant variance in people's willingness to help. In short, this interaction had a significant influence on the dependent variable, satisfying Baron and Kenny's first requirement. The same interaction also significantly affected positive affective reactions to the targets, $F(3, 247) = 3.58$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .04$, negative affective reactions to the targets, $F(3, 247) = 2.78$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$, and had a marginally significant effect on the perceived responsibility of claimants, $F(3, 258) = 2.59$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$, satisfying the second criteria for establishing that these variables might mediate the interactive effect of cognitive load, political orientation, and personal responsibility on helping behavior.

The third requirement for establishing that a variable mediates a given effect is that the proposed mediator must also be significantly associated with the dependent variable. Consistent with this requirement, personal responsibility judgments, and positive and negative affect toward targets were each significantly correlated with the total number of claimants helped, $r = -.26$, $.37$, and $-.30$, respectively (all $ps < .01$; it should be noted that affective reactions broken down by claimant responsibility similarly yielded significant correlations with number of claimants helped). As perceptions of personal responsibility and negative affect increased, total number of claimants helped decreased. Stronger positive affect was associated with helping more claimants.

Finally, each prospective mediator (personal responsibility, and positive and negative affect judgments associated with personally responsible and nonpersonally responsible claimants) was entered as a covariate in separate ANCOVAs to examine if controlling for each would reduce the effect of the Locus of Control \times Political Orientation \times Cognitive Load interaction on helping. Positive affective reactions toward IC claimants emerged as the only significant covariate of people's decisions to help, $F(1, 245) = 56.93$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .19$. Controlling for variance in positive affective reactions toward IC claimants reduced the previously observed Political Orientation \times Locus of Responsibility \times Cognitive Load interaction to nonsignificance, $F(1, 245) < 1$, $\eta^2 < .001$; controlling for other reactions did not. In short, controlling for positive affect toward personally responsible claimants significantly reduced (in fact eliminated) the Political Orientation \times Locus of Responsibility \times Cognitive Load interaction, a change from a large effect ($\eta^2 = .19$) to a nonexistent effect ($\eta^2 < .001$).

Discussion

The results of Study 5 supported the motivated correction hypothesis. Liberals demonstrated greater willingness than conservatives to help claimants who were personally responsible for their plight only when they had the cognitive resources available to short-circuit the logical consequences of the attribution-affect sequence. Cognitive load did not affect liberals' attributions or their

Table 2
Means (and Standard Deviations) Associated With the Number of Claimants Chosen to Receive Drug Treatment as a Function of Political Orientation of the Perceiver, Locus of Responsibility of the Claimant, and Cognitive-Load Condition in Study 5

Target	Liberals	Conservatives
High load condition		
Internal-controllable	0.77 _a (0.97)	0.87 _a (0.98)
Other	1.53 _b (0.40)	1.44 _b (0.51)
Low load condition		
Internal-controllable	1.39 _a (0.91)	1.13 _b (0.97)
Other	1.75 _c (0.40)	1.64 _c (0.43)

Note. Means with different subscripts within each load condition (going both across and down) are significantly different.

anger or distaste toward claimants, but instead had its effect on liberals' ability to generate sympathy toward those with a high degree of personal responsibility for needing assistance. Although higher degrees of liberalism were positively associated with sympathetic reactions toward personally responsible claimants under low cognitive load, this correlation was significantly reduced when judgments were made under high cognitive load. Conservatives, in contrast, did not respond differently to claimants as a function of load condition. Conservatives were equally likely to deny assistance to personally responsible claimants under conditions of both low and high cognitive load. Because conservative values were not placed into conflict in this context, there was no motivation for conservatives to override the logical consequences of the attribution-affect-action sequence.

General Discussion

In this article, we have explored competing cognitive and motivational explanations for liberal and conservative approaches to understanding and reacting to social and personal behavior. Taken together, the results begin to paint a relatively coherent picture of how liberals and conservatives arrive at different explanations for phenomena like crime, poverty, or obesity. Liberals and conservatives appear to see the world in relatively similar ways, and seem to be equally likely to make first pass personal attributions for the causes of others' actions or problems. However, liberals and conservatives diverge in their reactions when these first pass judgments conflict with their ideological values or goals. In short, the results are more consistent with a motivated correction model of ideological reasoning than either a dispositional or ideological script hypothesis.

Although the results of all five studies were consistent with the motivated correction hypothesis (see the summary presented in Table 3), Studies 1, 2, and 3 primarily ruled out the possibility that ideological differences in attributional proclivities are based either on stable underlying dispositional differences or the enactment of well-rehearsed ideological scripts. Although the results of Studies 1–3 (especially as a set) could be explained in terms of motivated correction, the full implications of the motivated correction hypothesis were not really tested. For example, future research should examine what happens when people are required to form their impressions of college bowl participants under conditions of high cognitive load. Will liberals still report no differences in the levels of intelligence attributed to the quizmaster and contestant, or will they rate the contestant lower in intelligence than the quizmaster? According to the motivated correction hypothesis, cogni-

tive load should interfere with liberals' ability to realign and adjust their initial impressions of the college bowl participants' intelligence, to make them more consistent with their egalitarian values.

The results of Studies 4 and 5 were the most direct tests of the motivated correction hypothesis. When asked to think about whether the government should guarantee minimum subsistence, conservatives' initial and subsequent comments were most likely to be personal attributions; conservatives were also more likely than liberals to make attributions. Liberals were more likely than conservatives to demonstrate a corrected attributional pattern of response (i.e., to make an initial personal attribution, followed by a situational attribution), or not to make attributional comments at all (e.g., to refer to egalitarian values or program details instead). The results of Study 4 therefore supported the notion that people sometimes adjust their reactions to policy issues over time (e.g., across first and second mentions), and do so in the theoretically predicted pattern.

Study 5 yielded the most persuasive evidence that a motivated correction model of ideological reasoning can explain ideological differences in response to personal or social problems. Like previous research, we found that under normal levels of cognitive load, liberals were more willing than conservatives to help people personally responsible for their plight. However, liberals' willingness to help people high in personal responsibility dropped to typical conservative levels when they made their allocation decisions under conditions of high cognitive load. Of interest, results indicated that load interfered most with liberals' positive affective reactions to claimants who were personally responsible for their predicament. Liberals clearly had to *work* at generating a positive response toward those who brought ill fortune upon themselves, something they did not have the cognitive resources to do when making judgments under load. Results of Study 5 indicated that when people are motivated to correct the logical consequences of attributional analysis, it tends to happen at the affective stage, rather than at the attributional stage, of reasoning—a result that is consistent with the idea that the initial attributional phase happens automatically rather than at a controlled stage of reasoning. Although the notion that people would need to adjust their affective reactions before helping people high in personal responsibility for needing assistance is consistent with the important mediating role of affect in Weiner's (1986, 1995) attribution-affect-action model, future theorizing and research needs to more fully explore how attributions, affect, and motivated reasoning interrelate.

In addition, even though we observed some preliminary evidence that conservatives might engage in corrective processing (e.g., by inferring a situational cause for why a prisoner was paroled in Study 3), future research should be designed to explicitly put conservative values or goals in conflict with their initial attributions to allow a fuller test of the model presented in Figure 1. It is especially important to emphasize that even though the studies presented here found more evidence of motivated correction on the part of liberals than conservatives, there is no theoretical reason to believe that liberals "own" second-stage reasoning. According to the motivated correction model of ideological reasoning, when conservative values provide the motivational impetus to correct initial attributions, conservatives will be just as likely to engage in second-stage reasoning as liberals are when liberal values and goals provide the impetus. Although it may be difficult to devise stimulus materials or contexts that place conservative

Table 3
Study Results That Were Consistent with a Dispositional, Ideological Script, or Motivated Correction Interpretation

Study	Dispositional	Ideological script	Motivated correction
Study 1: college bowl	X		X
Study 2: attitude-attribution		X	X
Study 3: preferred explanations		X	X
Study 4: national election study			X
Study 5: aid allocation			X

values in conflict with initial attributions in domains like social welfare or crime, the parole example provides some hints for how it might be accomplished.

Other possibilities might be to extend analysis to other political concerns besides social policy. For example, one could reasonably guess that conservatives would be more motivated than liberals to take into account situational causes for why Senator Bob Dole lost the 1996 presidential election, President Nixon's behavior in the Watergate scandal, or President George W. Bush's occasional linguistic stumbles. Conversely, liberals should be more motivated than conservatives to invoke situational explanations for why President Carter did not get a second term, some of President Clinton's last-minute pardons, or even his behavior with Monica Lewinsky. Just as people may be motivated to attribute the political misfortunes of their preferred candidates to situational causes, they should also be motivated to make personal attributions for their preferred candidates' successes.

And even if we get some motivated correction in these contexts, an important additional question for future research is investigation of whether value conflict may be motivationally special. Specifically, motivated correction may be more likely when attributions conflict with values than when attributions conflict with preferences. Because values are "oughts" and "shoulds" that are more closely tied to people's self-concepts than their preferences, attributional conclusions that conflict with values may well provide a greater motivational impetus for second-stage reasoning than attributional conclusions that conflict with preferences.

One also might think that getting conservatives to give more thought to why people need help or to related judgmental tasks might lead them to engage in second-stage reasoning. Because limiting cognitive capacity makes liberals more likely to act like conservatives, perhaps increasing the degree of thought people give to an allocation task like the one used in Study 5 might make conservatives behave more like liberals. Supporting the notion that it is not just cognitive capacity or thought that is required to get people to engage in second-stage reasoning, Skitka and Tetlock (1993b, Study 2) found that conservatives withheld help from personally responsible claimants even under conditions that required them to give a great deal of detailed thought to each claimant (i.e., to make detailed individual ratings for each one). Whether participants were required to give a great deal or little thought to claimants did not affect liberals' and conservatives' allocation behavior, despite clear evidence that people made more mindful responses in the thought than the no-thought condition.⁵ These results, taken together with the results of the work presented in this article, suggest that because conservatives had no motivation to engage in second-stage reasoning in this context, devoting more cognitive resources to thinking about claimants did not lead them to correct their initial reactions toward those personally responsible for their plight. In short, devoting greater degrees of cognitive resources to a decision-making task does not appear to be sufficient to lead to greater levels of motivated correction. People must also be motivated to consider alternative explanations for a given problem or behavior.

There are some interesting implications associated with the direction the evidence presented here is pointing. The motivated correction model of ideological reasoning implies that the default attributional position is a conservative response. When people are busy, tired, or under time constraints, this model predicts that they

will respond on the basis of their initial inferences, which tend to be personal attributions (Gilbert, 1998). Other experimental work supports this implication of the model: It is much easier to get a liberal to behave like a conservative than it is to get a conservative to behave like a liberal. Liberals act like conservatives when resources are scarce, cognitive load is high, and aid serves secondary rather than primary needs (Skitka, 1999; Skitka & Tetlock, 1992, 1993b). Conservatives only act like liberals when they are asked to consider helping a person with IC causes of need who has convincingly reformed (convincing people that the personally responsible have reformed is not an easy feat, see Schwarzer & Weiner, 1991; Skitka & Tetlock, 1993b, Study 3).

Just as the defaults in stereotyping tend to be conservative and status quo maintaining (see Pratto, 1999), so too are the apparent defaults in political reasoning. This might be one of the reasons why conservatives tend to accuse liberals of being "wishy-washy." When liberals are tired or distracted, they may be more likely than conservatives to appear to (or in fact) capitulate simply because they do not have the cognitive resources to continue to engage in correction. Moreover, some research (e.g., Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1998) indicates that actively trying to suppress thinking about automatically activated concepts (e.g., stereotypes) leads to rebound effects. Once people stop suppressing the category (either because they are distracted, or the experimenter has released them from suppression instructions), their subsequent judgments have higher levels of stereotypical content than those who never tried to suppress thoughts about the category. If motivated correction involves active suppression of ideologically inconsistent conclusions, liberals may actually express even more extreme conservative reactions than their conservative peers when under load. However, if liberals' reactions are rooted more in an empathic response than active attempts to suppress negative attributions, rebound effects are less likely to occur (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). Future research will need to delve more deeply into which mechanism—suppression or empathy—seems to be driving liberals' corrective processing.

In addition to having important implications for political reasoning, these results also have important implications for attribution theory more generally. For example, even though we know that people tend to make self-serving attributions—that is, to internalize responsibility for their successes and to externalize responsibility for their failures (Jones & Nisbett, 1972)—it may be the case that generating situational explanations for failure is consistently more effortful than generating personal causes for success. Exploring whether personal attributions are more automatic and whether situational attributions are more effortful in more general ways than what were explored here may yield important new insights into basic processes that shape social inference.

Finally, it is important to note that the three hypotheses tested here are not the only ones that could be generated to explain why liberals and conservatives differ in their attributions for social

⁵ An "extra" claimant, Person Q, was included on participants' allocation worksheet. However, no Person Q was included in the pool of possible recipients. More people selected Person Q to receive help in the no-thought than the thought condition. Liberals and conservatives, however, were equally likely to demonstrate "mindless" helping of Person Q.

problems or in their willingness to help those who are personally responsible for their plight. For example, one might argue that these differences are the result of different tolerances for Type I versus Type II errors. Liberals might believe that failing to correctly attribute the cause of someone's need, and subsequently neglecting to help someone who was in fact deserving, would be a more heinous error than would helping the undeserving. Conservatives, however, might have a lower tolerance for making the reverse error in judgment (ever helping the undeserving). Liberals' and conservatives' differential tendencies to attribute the causes of need to situational or personal causes may therefore be based on differences in the perceived costs of "false positives" or "false negatives" when making helping decisions (cf., Tetlock, 2000).

Moreover, even if personal attributions are the default or automatic inference people make for the causes of others' behavior, and these inferences are only corrected when people have sufficient cognitive resources and motivation to do so, these findings may well be culturally specific. People easily absorb the major elements of political and social culture through processes of socialization and continual reinforcement for upholding norms in any given sociopolitical context (Feldman, 1988). Children in western societies are rewarded for developing more individualistic value orientations, whereas children in many eastern cultures are more likely to be rewarded for developing egalitarian and collectivistic value orientations (Triandis, 1995). Therefore, even though personal causes may be the default attributional conclusion in an American or western political context, the default setting in more collectivistic cultures may be more focused on situational or contextual causes of personal or social problems. The press toward personal attributions in fact appears to be weaker in more collectivistic societies (e.g., Lee, Hallahan, & Herzog, 1996; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Morris & Peng, 1994).

In closing, the results of the studies presented here provide considerable new insight into the cognitive and motivational underpinnings of ideological reasoning. Further integration of predictions from theories of motivated reasoning and attributional processing has the potential to lead to a number of new directions for research and theorizing in political psychology. In a similar vein, results of studies like these can also inform and extend current theories of attribution and motivated reasoning.

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