

Ambivalent Prejudice toward Refugees: The Role of Social Contact and Ethnic Origin

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Abstract

This study used a sample survey of college students ($n = 194$) in order to test two opposing concepts, egalitarianism and the protestant work ethic (PWE), which may explain Americans' attitude toward refugees. We found that egalitarianism was associated with positive attitudes toward immigrants and PWE with negative attitudes. Further, close contact was associated with positive attitudes toward immigrants, whereas impersonal contact with negative attitudes. Implications for intercultural education are discussed.

Introduction

The history of the United States is littered with accounts of prejudice toward refugees and immigrants (Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999; Takaki, 1989). From the Irish in the 19th century, to the Japanese during the WWII, to Middle Eastern immigrants in the Post-9/11 era, attitudes toward refugee and immigrant groups have often been marked by hostility and discrimination. Yet, many Americans espouse a belief that the United States is a nation of immigrants, and that cultural diversity is one of America's foremost strengths. This sentiment is captured in Emma Lazarus' famous poem engraved at the base of the Statue of Liberty.

Give me your tired, your poor,
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore

--Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus"

The discordant nature of American values, attitudes, and behaviors toward refugees has been the subject of a substantial body of research. The literature suggests that attitudes toward racial and ethnic outgroups, including refugees, are best characterized as ambivalent; that is, they contain both positive and negative elements (Biernat, Vescio, Theno, & Crandall, 1996; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Katz & Haas, 1988; Katz, Wackenhut, & Hass, 1986; Maio, Bell, & Esses, 1996). The sympathy and antipathy that individuals express toward these groups is hypothesized to be due to two strong, but conflicting American values (Biernat, et al., 1996; Katz & Haas, 1988). While on the one hand, Americans value egalitarianism, characterized by social equality, social justice, and concern for others in need, they also value the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE), an individualistic belief in hard work, self-discipline, and individual achievement (Katz & Haas, 1988; Katz et al., 1986). Biernat and colleagues (1996) suggest that egalitarianism is negatively

associated with all forms of prejudice, whereas adherence to the PWE is positively associated with prejudice toward those outgroups viewed to violate the PWE. This finding is consonant with other research on prejudice that shows that perceived value violations by outgroups are associated with increased prejudice (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Rokeach, 1960).

Although ambivalent prejudice has most frequently been studied in the context of Whites' attitudes toward Blacks, research suggests that this model of prejudice applies to attitudes toward refugees and immigrants as well (Maio, et al., 1996; Maio, Esses, & Bell, 2000). Attitudes toward refugees are likely ambivalent in that, on the one hand, refugees are viewed as poor, more likely to be involved in crime, and as a burden on the public system, while on the other hand, they are also perceived sympathetically, as disadvantaged and deserving of social justice. Research on Americans' attitudes has consistently shown that a large percentage of Americans hold prejudiced views of refugees and immigrants (Stephan et al. 1999). Further, immigration may be viewed as both a realistic threat (i.e., as competition for resources) and a symbolic threat (i.e., threat to worldview) (Stephen et al., 1999). The present study further tested this notion by examining the relationship of egalitarianism and PWE with attitudes toward refugees of different ethnic origins. We argue that refugees provide a model system for testing the role of the PWE in that some ethnic origins are viewed stereotypically as upholding the PWE (e.g., Asian refugees), whereas other ethnic groups are viewed stereotypically as rejecting the PWE (e.g., African refugees). In this way, by examining various ethnic origins we can more closely test the nature of ambivalent prejudice with respect to the role of the PWE.

Despite the factors that result in increased prejudice, many individuals espouse positive attitudes toward refugees and form close relationships with them. One way in which individuals may come to reduce prejudice and form these relationships is through direct social contact

(Pettigrew, 1998; Wagner et al., 2006). The contact hypothesis is based on the notion that prejudice originates from unfamiliarity and separation between groups and that contact among the groups will lead to more positive intergroup attitudes (Brewer & Gaertner, 2001). Brown, Vivian, and Hewstone (1999) suggested that positive contact between groups as a means to reduce prejudice is one of the most enduring ideas in the study of intergroup relations. Beginning with the work of Allport (1954), research on the effects of social contact has examined the conditions under which social contact results in reduction of prejudice. Most modern formulations of the contact hypothesis identify four conditions under which social contact has positive effects. Specifically, intergroup contact must be socially supported, personal, cooperative, and among individuals of equal status (Allport, 1954; Brewer & Gaertner, 2001; Pettigrew, 1998; Stephan, 1987).

The current study focuses on the effects of personal (vs. impersonal) contact on perceptions of refugees. Personal contact, here, refers to contact among group members characterized by frequent, sustained contact, marked by intergroup friendship (Pettigrew, 1998). In his review of the literature on social contact, Pettigrew (1998) suggests that cross-group friendship potentially addresses all four conditions of the contact hypothesis, and thereby represents the optimal situation for prejudice reduction. Further, personal contact with individual outgroup members may generalize, thereby making attitudes toward the outgroup more positive (Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Pettigrew, 1997). Conversely, impersonal contact refers to passive and superficial contact with outgroup members. Such experiences may actually lead to more negative attitudes toward the outgroup in that these interactions may be difficult, such as when individuals speak different languages (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Hewstone & Brown, 1986). Research by Stangor, Jonas, Stroebe, and Hewstone (1996) demonstrated that exchange students

who experienced only impersonal intergroup contact reported more prejudicial attitudes than those who also experienced close, personal contact. Research by Henderson-King and Nisbett (1996) additionally showed that negative impersonal contact with a single outgroup member could lead to increased prejudice toward the outgroup as a whole.

Refugees in St. Louis, Missouri

The setting for our study of ambivalence and social contact on prejudice toward refugees was St. Louis, Missouri. The number of refugees living in St. Louis has spiked in the last decade after St. Louis was designated a preferred community for refugees of the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition, refugees from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa have continued to migrate to St. Louis in large numbers (International Institute of St. Louis, 2005). Census data indicates that the number of refugees settling in St. Louis rose by 65% from 1990 to 2000 (Mitchell, 2003). Although our interest is people's general attitude toward immigrants, we focused only on refugees in the current study because of a large number of refugees migrating to the St. Louis area from other cities in the US. Refugees seem to be attracted to St. Louis because of its relatively low competition for low wage jobs and its lower cost of housing compared to other large cities (International Institute of St. Louis, 2005). It is estimated that the number of refugees living in the city of St. Louis, including people from Eastern Europe, Middle East, Asia, Africa, and their American-born children is close to 100,000, about one-third of the population of the city, making the area one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the Midwest.

Method

Participants

Participants were 194 (70 male and 124 female) undergraduate students at a Catholic University in St. Louis. The sample comprised of 165 Whites, 10 Blacks, 8 Asians, 7 Latinos, and 3 classifying themselves as “other.” The mean age of the sample was 20.83 ($SD = 3.96$), and 180 of the participants were born in the United States, whereas 14 were foreign born.

Procedure

Participants were sampled from three introductory-level statistics courses, two advanced-level psychology courses, one foreign language class (Italian), and one physics course. A variety of courses were selected so as to increase the representativeness of the sample. At the end of each respective class, the second author distributed the survey questionnaires and provided brief instructions to the participants.

Measures

Social Contact. Participants completed an 11-item social contact scale based on a revision of a previous scale devised by the first author (Matsuo, 1992). This scale was intended to measure personal (e.g., “How many of your close friends are immigrants?”) and impersonal contact (e.g., “How many immigrants do you encounter at work or school?”).

Attitudes toward Specific Ethnic Groups. Participants reported their attitudes toward Asian, African, Middle Eastern, Bosnian, and European refugees by completing semantic differential items (See Appendix). Central and Latin American refugees were not included in this scale because having Latin American groups on the survey might have prompted participants to imagine undocumented immigrants, which would have skewed the data. Participants were asked to make five bipolar ratings for each ethnic group on 7-point scales for the following

dimensions: *cold-warm, negative-positive, unfriendly-friendly, disrespectful-respectful, uncomfortable-comfortable, unwelcoming-welcoming* (modified from Voci & Hewstone, 2003).

Six items were summed to form an Attitudes to Specific Ethnic Groups scale.

General Attitudes Toward Refugees. Participants were asked to report their attitudes toward refugees and immigrants in general by completing a modified version of the 10-item scale used by Starr and Roberts (1982). The original scale was modified to measure attitudes toward immigrants living in St. Louis. Examples of items include “St. Louis has too many immigrants” and “It would be better if immigrants settle in another city or country.” Responses to each item were made on a 5-point scale with endpoints ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Items were summed to form a General Attitudes toward Immigrants scale.

Humanitarianism / Protestant Work Ethic Scale. This 21-item scale was developed by Katz & Haas (1988) and was designed to measure Humanitarian/Egalitarian beliefs and beliefs that correspond to the Protestant Work Ethic. Responses to each item are made on a 6-point scale, ranging from -3 (*Strongly Disagree*) to +3 (*Strongly Agree*). Items were then summed to form an Egalitarian Scale and a Protestant work ethic scale (see Katz & Haas, 1988).

Results

We first tested the assumption that perceptions toward refugees varied by ethnic origin. Repeated measures ANOVAs were used to compare the ethnic groups on each of the bipolar dimensions. Mean ratings with associated standard deviations are reported in Table 1. For the cold-warm dimension, results indicated a significant effect of ethnic origin, $F(1, 171) = 15.595, p < .001$ with European refugees perceived most positively and Middle Eastern refugees least positively. The results were similar for the negative-positive dimension ($p < .001$), unfriendly-

friendly ($p < .001$), uncomfortable-comfortable ($p < .001$), and unwelcoming-welcoming ($p < .05$). No differences were found for the disrespectful-respectful dimension.

We next conducted a series of regression analyses to test the effects of several demographic variables, American values (Egalitarianism vs. PWE), and social contact on attitudes toward refugees. We tested these variables first on general attitudes toward refugees, and then separately on each different ethnic group. The results are shown in Table 2.

Demographic variables did not significantly affect either the General Attitudes nor on Specific Ethnic Groups scales. As hypothesized, Egalitarianism significantly and positively affected scores on both the General Attitudes ($B = 0.429, p < 0.001$) and on attitudes toward each ethnic group ($B = 0.279, p < 0.001$ for Asians, $B = 0.312, p < 0.001$ for Africans, $B = 0.242, p < 0.05$ for Bosnians, $B = 0.320, p < 0.05$ for Middle Easterners, and $B = 0.151, p < 0.05$ for European refugees). In other words, greater endorsement of Egalitarianism was associated with more positive attitudes toward refugees. Further, PWE had a significant negative impact on General Attitudes ($B = -0.124, p < 0.05$), such that greater adherence to the PWE was associated with more negative attitudes. Finally, whereas Personal Contact had a significant positive impact on General Attitudes ($B = 0.501, p < 0.001$), Impersonal Contact had a significant negative impact on General Attitude ($B = -0.326, p < 0.05$), such that more impersonal contact with refugees was associated with more negative attitudes.

The results indicated that general attitudes toward refugees are, as hypothesized, dependent upon Egalitarian beliefs ($p < .001$), such that increases in egalitarianism are associated with more positive attitudes, greater adherence to the PWE is associated with more negative attitudes ($p < .05$), personal contact is associated with more positive attitudes ($p < .001$), and impersonal contact ($p < 0.05$) is associated with more negative attitudes toward refugees.

Although most of these variables were not significant in individual models of ethnic origin, Egalitarian beliefs is a single statistically significant predictor of people's attitude toward refugees in general, as well as in each individual ethnic category.

Discussion

This study provides initial evidence that American college students hold ambivalent attitudes toward refugees and that these attitudes are based upon the maintenance of dual American values. While on the one hand individuals in this study believed that everyone should be given an equal opportunity to prosper, they also believed that prosperity results from hard work and individual achievement. The present study also shows that contact with outgroup members plays an important role in determining positive attitudes toward the outgroup, but only when that contact is personal. Secondary forms of contact seem to have an adverse effect on individuals' attitudes toward refugees.

The results also suggest that the interplay between egalitarianism and PWE is dependent on the ethnicity of the outgroup. These results provide a preliminary explanation for why prejudice toward some ethnic groups has diminished substantially over the last fifty years, while prejudice towards other groups remains unchanged. For example, although attitudes toward Asian and European immigrants have become more positive over time, attitudes toward other ethnic groups have remained the same (e.g., African immigrants), or have become more negative (e.g., Middle Eastern immigrants). Further research is needed to test this assertion more explicitly.

A major limitation of this study is that the study was conducted at a Catholic university and the results from this study might not be generalizable to other institutions and population

groups. Further, the participants were asked to report their perceptions toward refugees who tend to receive more sympathetic attitudes in comparison with immigrants because refugees were persecuted in their home countries and are here because of forced and not voluntary migration. The results, however, have very important implications for college educators who are in charge of diversity initiatives.

There are two practical implications of the present findings. First, in order to reduce prejudice, it may be necessary to promote not only egalitarian beliefs, but also to reduce adherence to the PWE, such as individualistic attitudes. Attitudes toward refugees, as was shown in this study, are ambivalent, and therefore addressing only one aspect of the ambivalence may not be sufficient to promote prejudice reduction. This suggests that programs designed to reduce prejudice (diversity programs at higher educations, for example) need to take a dual focus. Second, social contact alone may not be enough to decrease prejudice. Only when that contact is personal and cooperative does prejudice reduction occur. Thus, integration of various ethnicities may not serve to reduce prejudice without additional work to ensure that personal and close contact occurs. Aronson's Jigsaw Classroom (see or Desforges et al. (1991)'s Structured Cooperative Contact may be the more appropriate methods to reduce intergroup anxiety and increase positive interactions among group members than simple contact.

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Table 1. Perceptions of refugees by ethnic origin: results from repeated measures ANOVA

	Asian Refugees	African Refugees	Bosnian Refugees	European Refugees	Middle Eastern Refugees	(F-statistics)
Cold-Warm						
M	4.76	4.94	4.51	5.16	4.37	(15.595)***
SD	1.38	1.47	1.38	1.26	1.45	
Negative-Positive						
M	4.84	4.89	4.50	5.12	4.40	(10.630)***
SD	1.34	1.46	1.37	1.26	1.45	
Unfriendly-Friendly						
M	4.80	4.98	4.52	5.17	4.40	(11.074)***
SD	1.41	1.46	1.41	1.28	1.48	
Disrespectful-Respectful						
M	5.23	4.78	4.56	5.15	4.60	(1.128)
SD	1.41	1.46	1.44	1.28	1.43	
Uncomfortable-Comfortable						
M	4.70	4.78	4.46	5.17	4.25	(20.823)***
SD	1.37	1.43	1.33	1.31	1.48	
Unwelcome-Welcome						
M	4.81	4.86	4.50	5.11	4.37	(6.518)*
SD	1.46	1.44	1.42	1.33	1.47	

Note: Larger values indicate perceptions that are more positive

* $p < .05$

*** $p < .001$

Table 2. OLS Regression Analysis of Attitudes Toward Refugees by Race, Age, Gender, American Values and Social Contact

	General Attitudes	Asian Refugees	African Refugees	Bosnian Refugees	Middle Eastern Refugees	European Refugees
Race (1 = White, 0 = Non-White)	-2.103 (-.109)	-.311 (-.015)	1.209 (.052)	-1.010 (-.045)	-.766 (-.033)	-1.975 (-.098)
Age	.154 (.088)	-.009 (-.005)	.070 (.033)	.188 (.093)	.158 (.076)	-.126 (-.069)
Gender (1 = Male, 0= Female)	-.689 (-.048)	-.411 (-.026)	2.188 (.127)	-1.556 (-.093)	-.139 (-.008)	-.296 (-.020)
Religion (1=non-Christian, 0=Christian)	-1.476 (-.082)	.337 (.017)	-.030 (-.001)	.562 (.027)	-.513 (-.024)	.764 (.041)
Egalitarianism	.429*** (.498)	.279*** (.296)	.312*** (.304)	.242* (.242)	.320*** (.312)	.151* (.168)
Protestant Work Ethic	-.124* (-.150)	-.045 (-.050)	-.120 (-.121)	-.058 (-.060)	-.087 (-.089)	-.009 (-.010)
Personal Contact	.501*** (.355)	-.225 (-.146)	-.043 (-.026)	.236 (.144)	.016 (.009)	.083 (.057)
Impersonal Contact	-.326* (-.160)	-.013 (-.006)	-.456 (-.187)	-.446 (-.188)	-.185 (-.076)	-.097 (-.045)
Constant	31.911***	27.308***	29.739***	20.018***	20.970***	32.609***
R²	.399	.098	.141	.122	.117	.046
F Statistic	8.969***	1.459	2.211*	1.835	1.783	.651

Note: Standardized Beta coefficients are reported in parentheses. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed)

d.	RESPECT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	DISRESPECT									
e.	COMFORTABLE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	UNCOMFORTABLE									
f.	WELCOMING	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	UNWELCOMING									
Middle Eastern Immigrants										
a.	WARM	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	COLD
b.	POSITIVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	NEGATIVE									
c.	FRIENDLY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	UNFRIENDLY									
d.	RESPECT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	DISRESPECT									
e.	COMFORTABLE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	UNCOMFORTABLE									
f.	WELCOMING	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	UNWELCOMING									
African/Caribbean Immigrants										
a.	WARM	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	COLD
b.	POSITIVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	NEGATIVE									
c.	FRIENDLY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	UNFRIENDLY									
d.	RESPECT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	DISRESPECT									
e.	COMFORTABLE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	UNCOMFORTABLE									
f.	WELCOMING	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	DK	
	UNWELCOMING									

Please respond to the following statements by indicating how much you agree with each statement using the following scale (circle the number that best matches your opinion):

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

							SD	D	N
	A	SA							
1.	People from foreign countries should						1	2	3
	4	5							
	be encouraged to come to live in St. Louis								

- | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|
| 2. | The US government should provide money
4 5
to aid immigrants and refugees in America | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. | Most immigrants and refugees that come to
4 5
America are the undesirables | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. | It will be years before immigrants
4 5
will be able to stand on their feet economically | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. | As a people, Americans should feel
4 5
obligated to help immigrants | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 6. | St. Louis has too many immigrants
4 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 7. | It's a good thing to have people from
4 5
different countries living in St. Louis | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8. | It would be better if immigrants
4 5
settle in another city or country | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9. | There is adequate housing in St. Louis so that
4 5
immigrants do not displace anyone | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 10. | Immigrants take jobs away from
4 5
others who deserve them more | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11. | Immigrants are a burden on the
4 5
St. Louis public system | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Please read each statement and decide the extent to which you agree or disagree with it. Indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting one of the numbers along the scale -3 (Disagree) and 3 (Agree).

1. Prosperous nations have a moral obligation to share some of their wealth with poor nations.

Disagree -3 -2 -1 1 2 3 Agree

2. Most people who don't succeed in life are just plain lazy.

Disagree	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Agree
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3. One should find ways to help others less fortunate than oneself.

Disagree	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Agree
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4. Money acquired easily is usually spent unwisely.

Disagree	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Agree
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5. Life would have very little meaning if we never had to suffer.

Disagree	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Agree
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6. People who fail at a job have usually not tried hard enough.

Disagree	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Agree
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7. If people work hard enough they are likely to make a good life for themselves.

Disagree	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Agree
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8. A good society is one in which people should feel responsible for one another.

Disagree	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Agree
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9. Acting to protect the rights and interests of other members of the community is a major obligation for all persons.

Disagree	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Agree
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10. A distaste for hard work usually reflects a weakness of character.

Disagree	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Agree
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11. Anyone who is willing and able to work hard has a good chance of succeeding.

Disagree	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Agree
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12. A person should be concerned about the well-being of others.

Disagree	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3	Agree
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