Examining Structural Reasoning and Political Ideology as Predictors for Modern Racism and Sexism

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Introduction

- Inequity refers to unjust disparities across various groups including but not limited to race, gender, religion, and sexuality.
- Structural explanations of inequity take into consideration the broader context of an individual and often recognize systemic factors that may limit an individual’s success.
- Individual explanations cite personal attributes (ex. work ethic) or choices as a cause of inequity and put the onus on the individual to overcome their situation.

The key to systemic thinking is recognizing structural barriers rather than placing blame on an individual.

Research Questions

- Does expression of structural reasoning about racial or gender inequity vary based on participant political ideology?
- Does structural reasoning about racial/gender inequity relate to expressions of racism/sexism?
- Does structural reasoning about inequity relate to racism or sexism similarly or differently as a function of political ideology?

Methods

Participants (607 UMass undergraduates over the age of 18) were given a survey in which they were asked to rate their overall political views on a scale of 1-7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political ideology</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Participant distribution based on political ideology

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political ideology</th>
<th>Mean (Race Structuralism Scale)</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Intervals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>4.112903</td>
<td>0.1242443</td>
<td>(3.872452, 4.353356)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>4.837433</td>
<td>0.0739314</td>
<td>(4.692222, 4.982944)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>5.620310</td>
<td>0.0516742</td>
<td>(5.527818, 5.712803)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Examining whether political ideology predicts responses on the race structuralism scale. Relative to conservatives, both moderates and liberals are more likely to express structural reasoning on the race structuralism scale (higher score = more structural reasoning). The same was observed with the gender structuralism scale, with both moderates and liberals being more likely to express structural reasoning about gender inequity than conservatives were. Moderate: β = 0.7245, SE = 0.1430, t = 5.066, p = 0.001. Liberal: β = 1.5184, SE = 0.1329, t = 11.42, p < 0.001.

Figure 1. Model examining whether political ideology and responses on the race structuralism scale (RSS) predict responses on the modern racism (MR) scale. MR x RSS: β = -0.603007, SE = 0.083047, t = -7.265, p < 0.001

- Lower values on the race structuralism scale were associated with higher values on the modern racism scale (less structural reasoning = higher racism)
- No interaction with political ideology, and no main effects of political ideology (relatively similar slopes)

Figure 2. Model examining whether political ideology and responses on the gender structuralism scale (GSS) predict responses on the modern sexism (MS) scale. MS x GSS: β = -0.727618, SE = 0.083466, t = -8.718, p < 0.001

- Lower values on the gender structuralism scale were associated with higher values on the modern sexism scale (less structural reasoning = higher sexism)
- No interaction with political ideology, and no main effects of political ideology (relatively similar slopes)

Conclusion

- In relation to conservatives, both moderates and liberals are more likely to express structural reasoning about inequity.
- Structural reasoning about inequity is inversely related to expressions of racism/sexism (less structural reasoning = higher racism/sexism)
- Structural reasoning shows no interaction with political ideology when predicting responses on the modern racism and modern sexism scales; similar slopes indicate that expressions of structural reasoning do not vary across political ideologies.
- A participant’s tendency to engage in structural reasoning does a better job explaining their racism/sexism than their political ideology does.

Future Directions

- The finding that structural reasoning is inversely related to expression of racism/sexism highlights the importance of incorporating structural explanations into teachings about inequity.
- The sample size of this study can be expanded to include adults of more varied ages to determine how generalizable this finding is.
- An experimental study can be conducted in which structural/individual explanations are manipulated to establish a more causal relationship between structural reasoning and racism/sexism.

Acknowledgements

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References