
Defending the Status Quo: Power and Bias in Social Conflict

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We hypothesized that partisans who represent power and the status quo would judge their opponents less accurately than would partisans seeking change, who would be stereotyped as extremists. We surveyed the attitudes and book preferences of traditionalist and revisionist English professors, who differed in their inclinations to preserve or change the literary status quo. Both groups overestimated the differences in their attitudes and book preferences, the extremity of their opponent's conviction, and the numerical balances of the two sides. Consistent with the status quo hypotheses, traditionalists were more prone to polarize the two sides' attitudes and underestimate the book preferences they shared with their opponents, and both sides attributed more extreme convictions to revisionists. Discussion focused on mechanisms related to power-related biases.

In their now classic "They Saw a Game" study, Hastorf and Cantril (1954) showed that the conflict between irate football fans from rival Ivy League schools was related to their contrasting perceptions of a controversial game and, in particular, to each side's conviction that its own team was less aggressive than its opponent. Social perception, this study showed, is intertwined with group conflict. Subsequent research has elaborated on this seminal idea, documenting the robust, reflexive, and seemingly universal tendency for opposing partisans to perceive their opposition as hostile, irrational, immoral, and ideologically extreme, and exploring how these mutual perceptions escalate social conflict (e.g., Bar-Tal & Geva, 1986; Brewer, 1979; Levine & Campbell, 1972; Plous, 1985).

The social cognitive approach to group conflict, inspired by Hastorf and Cantril's (1954) study, has generally assumed that both sides to social conflicts are equally prone to social misperception (Brewer & Kramer, 1985;

Bronfenbrenner, 1961; Worchel & Austin, 1986). Invariant cognitive processes, such as in-group favoritism, stereotyping, and dehumanization, lead opposing factions to misperceive one another, independent of both the perceiver's and target's group affiliation. Social perception thus operates independently of between-group dynamics.

Recent studies, however, have begun to reveal how characteristics of group membership influence perceptual processes that relate to social conflict. For example, a group's status as a numerical minority or majority has been linked to divergent or convergent processing of communication (Nemeth, 1986), perceptions of in-group and out-group homogeneity (Mullen & Hu, 1989), and levels of integrative complexity (Gruenfeld, 1995). The level of legitimacy attributed to a group's position and whether the group is on the offensive or defensive within a dispute have been linked to increased in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Ng & Cram, 1988). More germane to the present study's focus on power differences is the fact that winning as opposed to losing groups (Brewer, 1979) and, in certain conditions, higher status as opposed to lower status groups have been shown to demonstrate greater in-group favoritism (Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991). Social perception and bias,

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these studies show, are influenced by between-group relations.

In this study, we examined the relation between power and the tendency for opposing partisans to stereotype their opponents and be stereotyped as extremists. Based on recent research and theory linking power to social attention, we hypothesized that more powerful partisans, representing the status quo, would demonstrate greater judgmental bias and that less powerful partisans seeking change would be more likely to be stereotyped as extremists.

NAIVE REALISM AND CONFLICT POLARIZATION

In our research on social conflict, we have attempted to address a long-standing question: Do partisans perceive their opponents and conflict accurately, or do they imagine conflicts that are more extreme than is actually the case? We proposed, following the insights of Asch (1952) and Ichheiser (1970), that opposing partisans are susceptible to an inferential process known as *naive realism*, which has three tenets (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995). First, people assume that they see the world objectively, thereby underestimating the subjective forces that shape their perception and judgment (Asch, 1952). Second, people assume that others base their judgments on this same "objective reality," a tendency known as the false consensus effect (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). Third, partisans attribute the origins of judgments that deviate from their own, such as those of their opposition, to ideological bias. We hypothesized that opposing partisans to social disputes, because of their naive realism, would exaggerate their opposition's ideological bias and extremism and the magnitude of their conflict.

We tested these hypotheses in a series of studies of the attitudes of partisans to the conflicts over abortion, racial justice, and the death penalty (Keltner & Robinson, 1993, 1996; Robinson et al., 1995). Opposing partisans offered their attitudes toward various issues central to their dispute and then estimated the attitudes of typical members of the "other side" and their "own side." As expected, partisans expressed different attitudes regarding the fundamental facts, issues, and principles relevant to the disputes. Consistent with the naive realism formulation, however, opposing partisans polarized their conflicts, overestimating their opponent's extremism, their own side's extremism, and the magnitude of the differences between the two sides.

ASYMMETRIES IN CONFLICT POLARIZATION

Although the tendency for opposing partisans to polarize their differences was robust, these initial studies

yielded intriguing asymmetries in conflict polarization. Placed within a recent framework for understanding the accuracy of social stereotypes (Judd & Park, 1993), our studies documented consistent *observer* and *target* effects. In terms of observer effects, partisans associated with the status quo within a particular dispute tended to be the most biased judges. Thus, pro-choice partisans in the abortion dispute, whose attitudes represented the legal status quo, liberals in the racial dispute, whose attitudes represented the normative, consensual status quo on a liberal campus, and traditionalists in the Western canon dispute, whose attitudes represented the institutional status quo, exaggerated the magnitude of their conflict and their opponent's extremism more than did pro-lifers, conservatives, and revisionists (Robinson & Keltner, 1996; Robinson et al., 1995). There was also a consistent target effect: Partisans seeking to change the status quo within a dispute, such as pro-lifers and conservatives, were judged by both groups to be more extreme in their attitudes and convictions. It is noteworthy that across these studies, social bias was not consistently related to partisans' political ideology. In certain conflicts, conservatives were less accurate judges but were more accurately judged, whereas in other conflicts, liberals were less accurate judges but were more accurately judged.

POWER AND SOCIAL BIAS

Why might partisans defending the status quo be more biased observers, and why might partisans seeking change be stereotyped as extremists? One possible answer is that the power associated with defending the status quo influences social attention in ways that would produce these observer and target effects. Power is defined as the control that one individual or group exercises over the actions and resources of another individual or group, often in opposition to their interests (French & Raven, 1959; Ng & Cram, 1988). Within social conflicts, power is often linked to the status quo. Partisans with power often establish the prevailing attitudes that define the accepted position on a particular social issue. In contrast, partisans seeking to change prevailing attitudes and policies often act from a position of less power.

Recent theory postulates that power affects social attention in ways that predispose powerful individuals to be more biased judges and less powerful individuals to be less accurately judged (Chance, 1967; Fiske, 1993). As social perceivers, it is proposed, high-power individuals are less outcome dependent on others (Erber & Fiske, 1984) and, therefore, less motivated to carefully attend to the actions and attitudes of others than are less powerful individuals, who must carefully attend to others to

negotiate relations within a more precarious social environment (Chance, 1967; Fiske, 1993). As targets of social perception, high-power individuals are more likely to be the object of others' careful social attention, in order for others to negotiate successful social relations with them, whereas low-power individuals are less likely to be the objects of careful social attention (Chance, 1967).

The proposal that high-power individuals are less careful in attending to others' actions and attitudes has been borne out in different studies. Dominant nonhuman primates, for example, attend less carefully to others than do less dominant animals (Chance, 1967; for review, see Emory, 1988). High-power humans spend less time looking at low-power individuals who are speaking than low-power individuals spend looking at high-power individuals who are speaking (Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985). High-power individuals also seem more prone than low-power individuals to stereotype others (Fiske, 1993). These findings converge on the first status quo hypothesis tested in the current study: More powerful partisans will be more likely than less powerful partisans to stereotype their opponents' beliefs as extreme and to view the conflict as polarized.

The proposed perspective concerning the relations between power and social attention also leads to specific predictions regarding which partisans in conflicts will be more likely to be stereotyped as extremists. Studies of animal dominance hierarchies, human gaze patterns, and the use of stereotypes all indicate that high-power individuals are attended to more carefully than are low-power individuals, in large part because individuals benefit from accurate knowledge about the intentions and actions of more powerful individuals (Chance, 1967; Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985; Emory, 1988). Low-power individuals, in contrast, are attended to less carefully and, as a consequence, are more likely to be stereotyped (Fiske, 1993). For example, one recent study found that the emotions of high-status individuals were more accurately judged than the emotions of low-status individuals (Keltner & Ebenbach, 1996). Another, related study showed that the facial expressions of women were judged in more stereotypic fashion than were the facial expressions of men (Plant, Hyde, Keltner, & Devine, 1996). The preceding reasoning and evidence led to the second status quo hypothesis tested in the current study: Less powerful partisans seeking change will be more likely than more powerful partisans to be stereotyped as extremists.

STATUS QUO AND BIAS IN THE WESTERN CANON DISPUTE

Laboratory studies of power and bias have made certain individuals more powerful by giving them control over the resources of others (e.g., Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991). In the present study, we capitalized on the actual

power differences between two groups involved in a real-world conflict—the Western canon dispute—which divides partisans according to their beliefs about the content and philosophy of a liberal arts education (Berman, 1992; Bloom, 1987; D'Souza, 1991). Within this dispute, there is a clearly defined status quo—the historically established, widely known literary canon (e.g., the works of Sophocles, Homer, Shakespeare, Milton). One side, the *traditionalists*, intends to preserve this canon, whereas the other side, *revisionists*, intends to change it by including more works by minorities and women (Robinson & Keltner, 1996). Further, traditionalists tend to hold power in their departments. They tend to be tenured male faculty, represent the literary status quo, and exercise control over important actions (e.g., hiring and curriculum decisions) and the allocation of resources (e.g., raises, fellowships). In contrast, revisionists often hold less power in their departments, because they tend to be untenured female faculty who seek to change the literary status quo.

We surveyed partisans to the Western canon dispute, and in a first report of that study, we focused on the ideological basis of revisionists' and traditionalists' book preferences (Robinson & Keltner, 1996). In the present article, we report analyses of the other questions from that same survey, which are germane to two purposes. A first purpose was to further explore the tendency for partisans to polarize their conflict by examining new measures of conflict polarization. Following our naive realism formulation, we predicted that revisionists and traditionalists would exaggerate the differences in their attitudes, the differences in book preferences, the extremity of the other side's conviction, and the numerical balance of the two sides (cf. Judd & Johnson, 1983).

A second purpose was to test two hypotheses generated by the status quo analysis of asymmetries in bias in social conflicts. This analysis led us to predict that traditionalists would be more inclined than revisionists to exaggerate the differences in the two sides' attitudes and book preferences, to polarize the two sides' attitudes (i.e., assume they were negatively correlated), and to exaggerate their opponents' attitudinal extremism and conviction. Based on related reasoning, we also predicted that both groups would exaggerate revisionists' attitudinal extremism and conviction.

METHOD

Participants

In the spring of 1992, questionnaires were sent to the faculty members and lecturers of English departments of 8 branches of the University of California, 14 branches

of the California State University, and 5 private universities in California (University of Pacific, University of San Francisco, Santa Clara University, University of Southern California, and Stanford University).

Questionnaire

Initial phone contact was made with the department secretary in each department, who agreed to distribute the questionnaires to the mailboxes of current faculty members and lecturers. Each questionnaire was stapled to a stamped envelope that was addressed to the second author. Initial instructions described the questionnaire as a survey, distributed at the public and private universities throughout California, of English instructors' attitudes toward the Western canon debate. Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire privately and return it in the accompanying envelope. Participants could also provide their address on a separate card requesting an explanation of the study and relevant findings and publications.

Questionnaire items were related to six domains: (a) personal information; (b) partisan self-identification; (c) strength of conviction; (d) attitudes regarding literature, a liberal arts education, and educational policy; (e) selection of a list of books for an introductory English class; and (f) proportion of partisans on each side of the Western canon debate.

Personal Information

Respondents were asked to identify their faculty status (tenured, nontenured professor, or non-tenure-track lecturer), gender, ethnicity (African American, Asian, Caucasian, Chicano/Latino/Hispanic, Native American, Other), and whether they had taught an introductory literature or composition course in the past 3 years.

Self-Identification Within the Western Canon Dispute

Respondents were next asked to label themselves as *revisionists*, *traditionalists*, or *neutral/undecided*. Revisionists were defined according to their interest in "changing the English curriculum by including more works by women and minorities." Traditionalists were defined according to their interest in "restricting the curriculum to the teaching of the more traditionally defined Western canon." Respondents selected the label that best corresponded to their own beliefs regarding the literary canon.

Levels of Conviction

Respondents rated the strength of their own convictions and the levels of conviction of average revisionists and traditionalists (1 = *very weak conviction*, 7 = *extremely intense conviction*). Average was defined numerically as the

average of all English instructors in colleges and universities participating in this study, according to the definitions of traditionalist or revisionist offered previously. This numerical sense of average was used to discourage respondents from estimating the preferences of extremists or prototypical partisans.

Attitudes Related to the Western Canon Dispute

A total of 11 attitude items, representing both revisionist and traditionalist perspectives, were presented. These items were primarily derived from a reading of relevant publications on the Western canon dispute (e.g., Berman, 1992). For each item, respondents offered their position using a 7-point scale (ranging from -3 = *strongly disagree* to 0 = *neither agree nor disagree* to 3 = *strongly agree*) and then on the same scale estimated the "average of the responses of revisionists and of traditionalists in California universities and colleges." A total of 4 items related to literature and revolved around the contentious theme of whether there are objective standards of truth in literary analysis or not: (a) "A literary text has one correct interpretation"; (b) "A literary text has several, equally correct interpretations"; (c) "Literary study can determine the quality of a literary text"; and (d) "Literature is best understood and taught when the instructor is of the same ethnicity and/or gender as the author." Another 4 items related to a liberal arts undergraduate education and revolved around the central issue of whether Western European culture or diverse cultures should be the foundation of a liberal arts education: (a) "The themes and principles of Western European culture are common to all cultures"; (b) "The themes and principles of Western European culture are unique"; (c) "The aim of a liberal arts education should be to teach students a common cultural heritage"; and (d), "The aim of a liberal arts education should be to teach students to appreciate diverse cultural heritages." Finally, 3 items concerned education policy, especially the role of minorities and women in liberal arts departments and whether the attention to diversity lowers educational standards: (a) "Expanding the curriculum to include more works by women and minorities improves the quality of a liberal arts education"; (b) "English departments should consider, and if necessary give preference to, a job candidate's race and/or gender in their faculty hiring decisions"; and (c) "Educational standards have declined in the last decade."

Choosing Books for an Introductory English Course

In the next part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to select 15 books that they and their opponents would teach in an introductory English course. Specifically, participants were first presented with a list

of 50 books. About two thirds of the books were "classics" (e.g., Plato, Dante, Dickens, Melville), and one third were more "revisionist," including books by women or minority authors (e.g., Frederick Douglass, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Gabriel Garcia Marquez) that were selected from multicultural reading lists (Berman, 1992). Respondents were asked to choose 15 books that they would teach in a hypothetical "introductory literature course required of all first-year undergraduates" and 15 books that they believed would reflect the average preferences of the "other side."

Perceptions of the Numerical Representation of Partisans to the Western Canon Dispute

Respondents estimated "the percentage of English department faculty" (tenured, nontenured, and lecturer) at "major universities in California including your own department" who would label themselves as revisionist, traditionalist, and neutral/undecided.

RESULTS

Of the 688 questionnaires actually distributed, 271 were returned, for an effective response rate of 39.4%. Of the returned questionnaires, 236 were completed and were thus usable for the current study's purposes.¹ Clearly, the response rate is critical to our analyses, in particular those that compare participants' estimates of population means to estimates of those means that are derived from sample statistics (for example, revisionists' estimates of average traditionalists' attitudes). Although 39.4% is not an ideal response rate, it still suggests that a fairly representative sample was obtained. That is, if the most deviant 39.4% of the population had responded, by virtue of a normal distribution, we still would have a reasonably representative sample. Nevertheless, given the response rate, follow-up procedures were carried out to ascertain whether nonrespondents were in any way different from respondents. In a series of telephone interviews with the secretary of each department, conducted following the receipt of the completed questionnaires, we were unable to discern any difference between the respondents and nonrespondents on any of the important demographic measures employed in this study, including gender, ethnicity, or tenure status.

Three sets of data analyses were performed. First, we examined the distributions and demographic characteristics of the revisionists and traditionalists, to determine the relative power (e.g., tenured versus nontenured, male versus female) of the two groups' members. Second, to extend previous research on naive realism and conflict polarization, we examined revisionists' and

traditionalists' actual differences in attitudes, book selections, levels of conviction, and perceptions of the proportions of partisans on each side of the dispute, and then compared those actual differences with partisans' estimates of those differences to determine whether revisionists and traditionalists polarize the Western canon debate. Finally, we tested the status quo hypotheses, which predicted that traditionalists would polarize the differences between the two sides more than revisionists and that both sides would be more likely to stereotype revisionists than traditionalists as extremists.

Who Were the Revisionists and Traditionalists?

More respondents labeled themselves as revisionists (60.9%) than traditionalists (18.6%) or neutrals/undecided (20.5%), $\chi^2 = 75.16, p < .01$. Table 1 presents characteristics of the self-labeled revisionists, traditionalists, and neutrals.² A greater proportion of traditionalists than revisionists were tenured ($M_s = 68.2\%$ vs. 49.7%), $\chi^2 = 4.65, p < .05$, and male ($M_s = 72.7\%$ vs. 48.3%), $\chi^2 = 8.21, p < .01$, consistent with our definition of traditionalists as members, both in their department status (tenured) and in their gender (male), of the powerful status quo. The two sides did not differ in their ethnicity.

Replications and Extensions of Naive Realism and Conflict Polarization

Actual and perceived differences in attitudes. To examine partisans' actual and perceived differences across the 11 attitude items, we created composite measures of partisans' own attitudes and their estimates of the two sides' attitudes. For each of the three composite measures (own attitudes, estimates of revisionists' attitudes, estimates of traditionalists' attitudes), we coded responses so that higher scores always indicated more revisionist attitudes, and then calculated the average score across all 11 items. These three composite measures could each range from 1 (*extremely traditionalist*) to 7 (*extremely revisionist*). For the composite measures of partisans' own attitudes, estimates of revisionist attitudes, and estimates of traditionalist attitudes, the Cronbach alpha coefficients were .72, .53, and .68 respectively. Figure 1 presents the two sides' own attitudes and estimates of the average attitudes among revisionists and traditionalists. A two sample *t* test comparing the two sides' actual attitudes indicated that revisionists had more revisionist attitudes than did traditionalists ($M_s = 5.20$ vs. 3.42), $t(155) = 13.46, p < .01$. We next used one-sampled *t* tests to compare each side's estimates of the two sides' differences with the actual difference between the two sides' attitudes (1.78 on the 7-point scale). Consistent with the naive realism prediction, one-sample *t* tests indicated

TABLE 1: Demographic Characteristics of Revisionists and Traditionalists

	Revisionists (n = 141)	Traditionalists (n = 44)	Neutrals (n = 51)
Percentage female	51.7	27.3	27.5
Percentage male	48.3	72.7	72.5
Percentage tenured	49.7	68.2	45.1
Percentage nontenured	20.0	9.1	21.6
Percentage lecturer	30.3	22.7	33.3
Percentage Caucasian	85.0	88.6	80.4
Percentage non-Caucasian	15.0	11.4	19.6

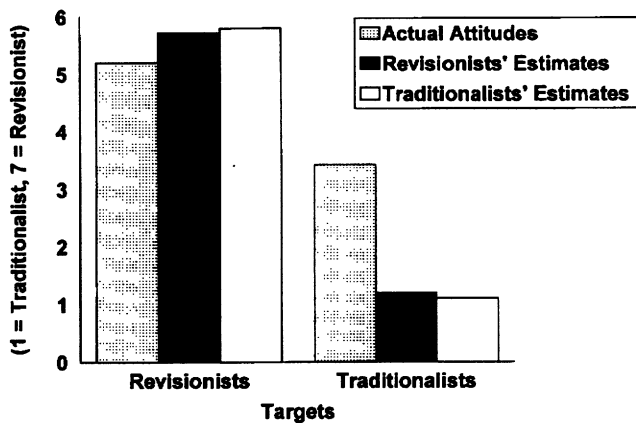


Figure 1 Actual and perceived differences in revisionists' and traditionalists' attitudes.

that both revisionists ($M_s = 2.91$ vs. 1.78), $t(125) = 26.12$, $p < .01$, and traditionalists, ($M_s = 2.90$ vs. 1.78), $t(39) = 12.46$, $p < .01$, overestimated the difference between the two sides' attitudes.

Actual and perceived differences in book preferences. In a first report of our study of the Western canon dispute, we tallied the 15 books that were most commonly chosen by revisionists and traditionalists (Robinson & Keltner, 1996). This comparison of group preferences revealed that 7 of the 15 books that the two sides most commonly chose were the same. The books that revisionists and traditionalists selected in common, in order of frequency of selection, included *Macbeth* (Shakespeare), *The Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer), *Oedipus the King* (Sophocles), *The Iliad* (Homer), *Walden* (Thoreau), *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (Joyce), and *Moby Dick* (Melville). Figure 2 compares this estimate of the actual overlap in revisionists' and traditionalists' book selections with the number of books that individual partisans selected in common for their own list and that of their opponents. Both sides were expected to underestimate the number of books that they preferred in common with their opponents. Consistent with this prediction, one-sample

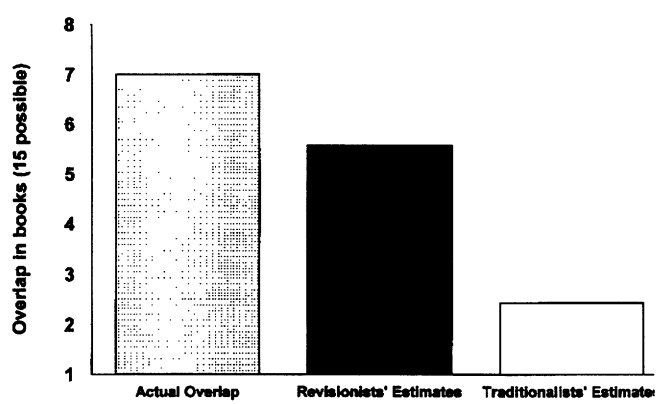


Figure 2 Actual and perceived overlap in revisionists' and traditionalists' book selections.

t tests comparing the assumed and actual overlap revealed that both revisionists ($M_s = 5.57$ vs. 7.00), $t(119) = 5.77$, $p < .01$, and traditionalists ($M_s = 2.44$ vs. 7.00), $t(38) = 10.22$, $p < .01$, underestimated the book preferences they shared with their opponents.³

Perceived levels of conviction. We expected both sides to exaggerate their opponent's levels of conviction, consistent with the tendency for partisans to attribute ideological extremism to their opponents. Figure 3 presents partisans' self-rated conviction and the two sides' estimates of average levels of conviction among revisionists and traditionalists. Two-sample t tests revealed that revisionists and traditionalists did not differ in their self-rated convictions ($M_s = 5.48$ vs. 5.21), $p > .10$. One-sample t tests revealed, as predicted by the naive realism formulation, that both sides overestimated the extremity of their opponents' conviction. Revisionists overestimated the extremity of conviction among traditionalists ($M_s = 5.50$ vs. 5.21), $t(132) = 2.36$, $p < .05$, and traditionalists overestimated the extremity of conviction among revisionists ($M_s = 5.88$ vs. 5.48), $t(42) = 2.84$, $p < .01$. Paired-subjects t tests found that traditionalists perceived their opponents' conviction ($M = 5.88$) to be greater than their own ($M = 5.21$), $t(42) = -2.97$, $p < .01$, whereas revisionists did not estimate traditionalists' conviction to be greater than their own ($M_s = 5.50$ vs. 5.48), $p > .10$.

Estimates of the proportions of the two groups on each side of the dispute. The final hypothesis derived from the naive realism formulation was that opposing partisans, consistent with their tendency to polarize the differences between the two sides, would estimate the proportions of partisans on each side of the dispute to be polarized, or equal in number. Figure 4 presents partisans' estimates of the distribution of partisans across the three groups. Whereas revisionists outnumbered traditionalists in our sample (60.9% vs. 18.6%), both sides assumed that the

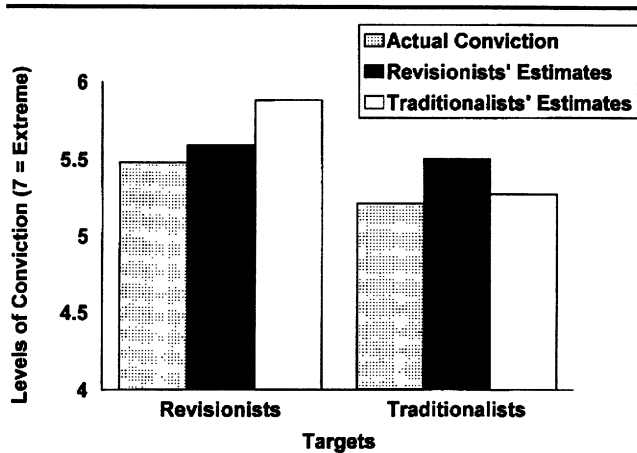


Figure 3 Actual and perceived differences in revisionists' and traditionalists' levels of conviction.

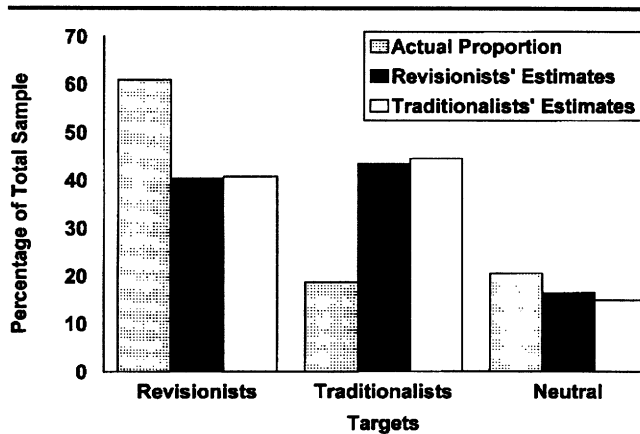


Figure 4 Actual and perceived distributions of partisans on each side of dispute.

two factions were about equally numerous, as predicted. As a consequence, one-sample t tests showed that revisionists underestimated the prevalence of revisionists (40.3% vs. 60.9%), $t(136) = -14.55$, $p < .01$, as did traditionalists (40.7% vs. 60.9%), $t(42) = -7.41$, $p < .01$. Similarly, one-sample t tests showed that revisionists overestimated the prevalence of traditionalists (43.3% vs. 18.6%), $t(136) = 16.17$, $p < .01$, as did traditionalists (44.4% vs. 18.6%), $t(42) = 10.36$, $p < .01$.

Tests of the Status Quo Hypotheses

We now turn to the tests of the status quo hypotheses. In terms of observer effects, we predicted that traditionalists would be more prone than revisionists to polarize the differences in the two sides' attitudes and book preferences and exaggerate their opponents' attitudinal extremity and conviction. In terms of target effects, we

predicted that both sides would judge the attitudes and convictions of revisionists to be more extreme.

Observer and target effects in partisans' estimates of attitudes. To examine the accuracy of revisionists and traditionalists at judging the two sides' attitudes (see Figure 1), a two-way ANOVA with position of observer (revisionist vs. traditionalist) as a between-subjects factor and position of target (revisionist vs. traditionalist) as a within-subjects factors was conducted on partisans' accuracy scores. As in previous research (e.g., Robinson et al., 1995), accuracy scores were computed by subtracting the mean of each side's actual attitudes from partisans' estimates of each side's attitudes. Traditionalists were expected to be more biased observers than revisionists, and revisionists were expected to be judged less accurately by both sides. Neither of these main effects proved to be significant. The two-way ANOVA did yield a significant interaction, however, which indicated that both sides judged their own side's attitudes more accurately (mean discrepancy = 0.58 on a 7-point scale) than those of their opposition (mean discrepancy = 0.71 on a 7-point scale), $F(1, 160) = 7.06$, $p < .01$.

We next tested the hypotheses that traditionalists would be more prone to exaggerate the attitudinal extremism of each side and that both sides would most exaggerate revisionists' extremism. To test these hypotheses, we first calculated each side's attitudinal extremism by finding the mean of the absolute values of participants' responses to the 11 items. The absolute values were used because they reflect the extremity with which partisans endorsed each item. On this measure of overall attitudinal extremity, a two-sample t test yielded a trend indicating that revisionists on average had more extreme attitudes ($M = 2.13$ out of a possible score of 3) than did traditionalists ($M = 1.99$), $t(168) = 1.80$, $p < .10$. We then subtracted each side's actual attitudinal extremity score from revisionists' and traditionalists' estimates of the two sides' attitudinal extremity, which were again equal to the means of the relevant absolute values of the 11 items. A two-way ANOVA of these estimates was then conducted, with position of observer (revisionist vs. traditionalist) as a between-subjects factor and position of target (revisionist vs. traditionalist) as a within-subjects factors. Traditionalists overestimated the extremism of the two sides more than did revisionists ($M_s = .14$ vs. $.02$), $F(1, 163) = 4.13$, $p < .05$, and both sides overestimated the extremism of revisionists more than that of traditionalists ($M_s = .13$ vs. $-.02$), $F(1, 163) = 20.24$, $p < .001$. These two main effects were qualified by a significant interaction, $F(1, 163) = 4.85$, $p < .05$, however. As seen in Figure 5, the clearest evidence of biased estimation of attitudes was seen in traditionalists' estimates of revisionist attitudes.

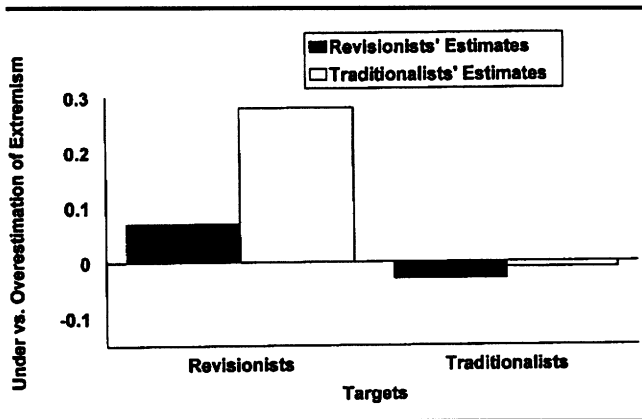


Figure 5 Attributions of attitudinal extremism.

Correlations between own and estimated attitudes. As another means of assessing the extent to which partisans perceived themselves and their own group as different from their opponents, we examined the correlations between the measures of partisans' own attitudes and their estimates of the two sides' attitudes. Traditionalists' estimates of their opponents' attitudes were expected to be negatively correlated with their own attitudes and their estimates of traditionalist attitudes, whereas revisionists were not expected to demonstrate such attitude polarization. The correlations relevant to this prediction are presented in Figure 6. The correlations between partisans' own attitudes and the attitudes they attributed to their own side were significant for revisionists ($r = .48$, $p < .01$) and traditionalists ($r = .44$, $p < .05$). But consistent with the status quo hypothesis, traditionalists' estimates of their opponents' attitudes were negatively correlated with their own attitudes ($r = -.31$, $p < .05$), whereas revisionists' estimates of their opponents' attitudes were not significantly correlated with their own attitudes ($r = .05$, ns). The difference between these two correlations was significant, $z = 2.09$, $p < .05$. Similarly, traditionalists' estimates of their own side's attitudes were negatively correlated with their estimates of their opposition's attitudes ($r = -.48$, $p < .01$), whereas these estimates were not significantly correlated for revisionists ($r = -.07$, ns). Again, the difference between these two correlations was significant, $z = 2.53$, $p < .01$.

Observer effects in estimates of the opposition's book preferences. We next examined whether traditionalists were more prone than revisionists to underestimate the number of books they preferred in common with their opponents (see Figure 2). A two-sample t test comparing the two sides' average estimates of the overlap in book preferences with their opposition indicated that traditionalists underestimated the book preferences they shared with their opponents to a greater extent than did revisionists

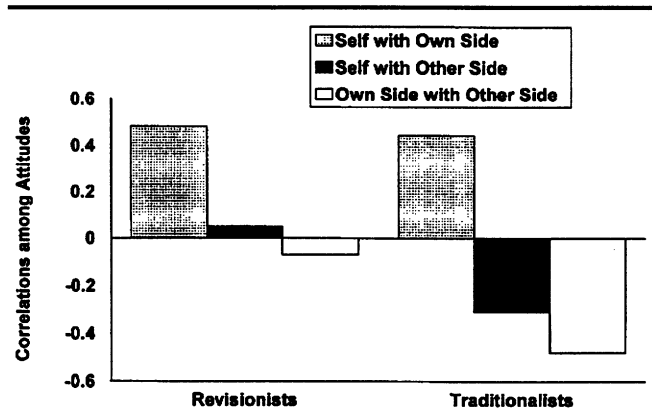


Figure 6 Correlations between partisans' attitudes and estimates of the two sides' attitudes.

revisionists ($M_s = 2.44$ and 5.57 , respectively), $t(155) = 6.20$, $p < .01$.

Target effects in estimates of conviction. Finally, to test the hypothesis that both sides would attribute more extreme convictions to revisionists, a two-way ANOVA, with position of observer (revisionist or traditionalist) as a between-subjects factor and position of target (revisionist or traditionalist) as a within-subjects factor, was conducted on partisans' estimates of each side's level of conviction. This analysis yielded the expected significant main effect for target, $F(1, 171) = 4.31$, $p < .05$. As seen in Figure 3, both revisionists and traditionalists believed that revisionists had stronger convictions on the average ($M = 5.67$) than did traditionalists ($M = 5.44$). The effect of observer and the interaction between observer and target were not significant.

DISCUSSION

Since Hastorf and Cantril's (1954) "They Saw a Game" study, investigators have examined how opposing partisans' perceptions of one another contribute to the origin, escalation, and resolution of social conflict (e.g., Brewer, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1961). The current study addressed two aims that continue within this tradition. First, we extended our findings on naive realism and social misperception to new measures of conflict polarization. Second, we tested the hypotheses that partisans with power (traditionalists) would judge their conflict less accurately and that less powerful partisans seeking change (revisionists) would be stereotyped as extremists.

Conflict Polarization: A Judgmental Heuristic in Social Conflict

The findings relevant to partisans' attitudes, book preferences, levels of conviction, and perceptions of the proportions of partisans on each side of the dispute replicated and extended previous research on naive

realism (Robinson et al., 1995). Revisionists and traditionalists clearly differed in their attitudes toward literature, a liberal arts education, and educational policy. Revisionists endorsed the principles of relativism in literary scholarship, cultural diversity, and multicultural education. Traditionalists more strongly endorsed the notions that there are standards in literary analysis, that there are benefits to teaching a common, Western European cultural heritage, and that there has been a recent decline in educational standards. Both revisionists and traditionalists, however, exaggerated the differences between the two sides, much as partisans have done in our studies of other social conflicts (Robinson et al., 1995).

The present study reveals two new facets to the polarization of differences by partisans. First, partisans exaggerated the differences in their concrete book preferences. On the average, revisionists and traditionalists agreed on seven books that they would teach in a hypothetical introductory English course (Robinson & Keltner, 1996). Both sides, however, underestimated this intellectual and pedagogical common ground. This finding is consistent with the tendency for negotiators and policy makers to underestimate their common ground and, therefore, fail to reach satisfying agreements and solutions that their actual preferences might allow (Plous, 1985; Thompson & Hrebec, in press).

Second, partisans also polarized the proportions of partisans on each side of the dispute. Whereas people tend to believe that others share their beliefs (Ross, et al., 1977), committed partisans assume that the attitudes of both sides to social conflicts, and not just their own, are common (Judd & Johnson, 1983). Our findings further indicate that partisans assume the two sides to a conflict are roughly equal in number—that is, they polarize the number of partisans on opposing sides to social disputes. Taken together, the findings from the current study and previous studies indicate that partisans rely on a polarization heuristic when judging their conflicts, accentuating the differences between the two sides' attitudes, preferences, political agendas, moral principles, and conventions, and misperceiving numerical representation (Brewer, 1979; Plous, 1985; Robinson et al., 1995).

Defending the Status Quo and Social Misperception

Recent studies suggest that group-related motivation may predispose individuals in certain groups to be more biased than members of other groups. For example, individuals associated with smaller as opposed to larger factions demonstrated greater motivation in preparing for discussions (Levine & Russo, in press) and were also found to think in less biased fashion about their position (Zdaniuk & Levine, 1996), in part because of the threat posed by belonging to a small faction. Based on similar

arguments linking group-based motivation to social judgment, it has been proposed that more powerful individuals are more likely to stereotype others, and, therefore, are more biased social judges, but are more likely to be more accurately judged themselves (Fiske, 1993). Based on these theoretical considerations and suggestive empirical evidence (Keltner & Robinson, 1996), we tested hypotheses concerning the relation between group-based power and social bias within the Western canon dispute. We predicted that traditionalists, who have more power and represent the academic status quo, would be more biased judges and that revisionists, who have less power and seek change, would be stereotyped as extremists.

These two hypotheses received modest support. In terms of the predicted observer effects, traditionalists perceived the two sides' attitudes to be polarized (negatively correlated), they significantly underestimated the overlap in book selections between the two sides, and they overestimated the extremity of revisionists' attitudes. In each of these analyses, revisionists were less likely than traditionalists to polarize the differences between the two sides and exaggerate their opponents' extremism. These observer effects, it is important to note, were relatively small compared with the tendency for both revisionists and traditionalists to exaggerate the magnitude of their conflict. In terms of the predicted target effects, both sides stereotyped the convictions and attitudes of revisionists as more extreme, consistent with studies showing that low-power persons are often stereotyped (Fiske, 1993) and that agents of ideological change are judged as extremists.

There are alternative accounts of the observer and target findings observed in the present study, some of which are addressed by other analyses and some of which await further exploration. One might argue that the traditionalists we surveyed, who were fewer in number than revisionists, were simply more extremist or impassioned partisans and thus were more prone to bias than the more numerous, and perhaps more moderate, revisionists. The self-rated levels of conviction among revisionists and traditionalists, however, did not differ. Additionally, across revisionists and traditionalists, self-rated conviction did not correlate with measures of perceptual bias, including perceptions of the magnitude of the two sides' attitudinal differences ($r = .05$, *ns*), the overlap in book preferences with their opponents ($r = -.07$, *ns*), or the perception that the two sides were equal in number ($r = -.03$, *ns*). Thus, social bias did not simply reflect the extremity of personal conviction.

Additionally, one might speculate that the documented observer effects were due to partisans' sex rather than their association with power and the status quo position. Women comprised a higher proportion of the

revisionist sample, and in many social judgment tasks, women are slightly more accurate judges than men (e.g., Hall, 1984). Analyses of sex differences in accuracy in this study, however, revealed that women were in fact not more accurate judges of partisans' attitudes, convictions, or book preferences. It is also interesting to note that partisans' accuracy was not related to their tenure status, which one might have predicted from the power-based analysis that motivated the current study. These findings suggest that in the Western canon dispute, it was partisanship and position on the issue, and not gender or tenure status, that related to social bias.

Other alternative explanations of the current study's findings linking power to social bias deserve further exploration. First, one might contend that traditionalists were more biased judges, not because of their relative power, but because they perceive the Western canon dispute in terms of what they will lose (e.g., what books they will no longer teach, faculty positions that will be filled by people with whom they differ in philosophical orientation), whereas revisionists perceive the conflict in terms of potential gains (e.g., exciting additions to the curriculum, new faculty members they might help hire). Extrapolating from prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984), traditionalists should thus perceive the conflict as more costly, the demands and positions of their opposition more antithetical to their own, and the conflict as more extreme. We hasten to add, however, that loss aversion is likely to be a potent factor in the perceptions of people in power, who often perceive change in terms of loss.

Second, other factors than the inclination to stereotype less powerful individuals may have accounted for the tendency for partisans to attribute more extreme convictions to revisionists than traditionalists. For example, highly visible revisionists, originally the ideological minority in the Western canon dispute, may have advocated their position in a consistent, coherent, and simpler fashion to gain credibility (Nemeth, 1986; Tetlock, 1981), which would lead partisans on both sides to perceive revisionists as the more extreme group. Or revisionists may have been the more salient members of English departments, because of their novel ideological position and ethnicity and gender, which again would lead partisans to make more extreme attributions about the convictions of revisionists (Taylor & Fiske, 1978).

Limitations and Future Directions

Our focus on the Western canon debate raises the question of whether power will produce increased bias in other settings. Fortunately, the tendency for traditionalists to demonstrate greater judgmental bias dovetails with findings from recent laboratory research (e.g., Fiske, 1993). Relevant laboratory research in which

power was experimentally manipulated have found that members of more powerful groups discriminate in favor of the in-group and against the out-group in the allocation of resources (Sachdev & Bourhis, 1985, 1987, 1991). This finding is consistent, we would argue, with the more general tendency for powerful individuals to display increased social bias. In addition to these studies, we believe research on power and social bias needs to proceed in at least three directions.

First, it is important to study the sources of perceived power, as well as the different aspects of power that produce social bias. Perceived power may be associated with affiliation with the dominant political party, legal support, consensual support (i.e., being in the well-recognized numerical majority), and even authoritative support, as when individuals assume their position derives from absolute divine or theoretical authority (e.g., Hunter, 1991). Members of groups in power, we would predict, would be more biased judges of conflicts, and members of groups seeking change would be perceived in more stereotypical terms.

Second, it is important to establish the boundary conditions in which power fails to increase social bias, or actually reduces social bias. We have argued that power reduces the motivation to carefully attend to others, in part because individuals with power are less outcome dependent on others (Erber & Fiske, 1984). This analysis raises the question of what conditions will increase the motivation of powerful individuals to carefully attend to others. One such condition, recent research indicates, is the accountability that powerful individuals feel. For example, Supreme Court justices in the ideological majority, who presumably exercise more power in determining judicial decisions, tended to write more integratively complex opinions than did justices in the numerical minority (Gruenfeld, 1995). Powerful individuals whose actions have clear consequences and are subject to public evaluation may be more careful in the information they gather and judgments that they make than powerful individuals whose actions are less consequential and public.

A second limitation of the present study is that it does not address how power and the defense of the status quo lead partisans to be more biased observers and how the process of seeking change leads partisans to be stereotyped as extremist (see Keltner & Robinson, 1996, for discussion). One likely mechanism associated with increased observer bias is the carefulness of social attention (Fiske, 1993). Relevant research on stereotypes (Fiske, 1993) and nonverbal behavior (Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985) shows that low-power individuals are more motivated, careful judges of social behavior, particularly the behavior of high-power individuals. This suggests that powerful individuals, who are vigilant in

their social attention and judgment, will demonstrate less bias. Consistent with this approach, we have recently found that powerful individuals who felt only moderate emotion vis-à-vis a conflict were biased in their judgments of their opposition and conflict, whereas highly emotional partisans were quite accurate in their judgments (Ebenbach & Keltner, 1996), consistent with accounts linking emotion to motivated judgment (Schwarz, 1990). The next step is to link these power-related attentional processes to observer and target effects within the actual interactions, negotiations, and confrontations that define social conflicts.

Specific within-group dynamics related to power may also be involved in producing asymmetries in social bias. For example, groups representing the status quo may be more prone to collective beliefs, such as the illusion of invulnerability and unanimity, that lead to less systematic social information processing (Janis, 1972). Groups seeking change, in contrast, may collectively experience distress and suspicion associated with not having power. This might motivate more careful, vigilant social information processing that is associated with increased accuracy (e.g., Ebenbach & Keltner, 1996; Schwarz, 1990).

Finally, it is important to explore other biases related to power and their effects on different kinds of relations. For example, we have found that individuals of higher status are less accurate judges than low-status members of their group members' personalities and emotional experience (Keltner & Ebenbach, 1996). From intimate relations to confrontations between groups, power organizes social relations and appears to be related to the tendency to misperceive and be misperceived. This study and others like it will illuminate the nature, mechanisms, and consequences of social biases that accompany power.

NOTES

1. The maximum number of participants for each data analysis varied slightly because certain participants did not respond to all the questionnaire items. As a consequence, the degrees of freedom for comparable analyses will vary slightly.

2. The results regarding neutrals are available from the authors. Neutral participants' own attitudes tended to fall, as one would expect, between those of revisionists and traditionalists, and are uninteresting for the purposes of the present analysis. As in previous studies (Robinson et al., 1995), neutrals were prone to exaggerate the differences between the two sides.

3. Whereas in the present study we examined the preferences and estimates of individual partisans, in the first report of our study of the Western canon dispute (Robinson & Keltner, 1996), we compared the preferences and estimates of partisans' groups. Specifically, in that first study, we compared the 15 books the two sides chose most frequently for their own list with the 15 books the two sides most frequently chose for their opponents' list. Consistent with the present study's finding that revisionist partisans perceived greater overlap with their opponents than traditionalist partisans, revisionists as a group chose 6 of the same books for their list and for their opponent's list, whereas tradi-

tionists as a group chose no books that were common to their list and their opponent's list.

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