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The Moral Stereotypes of Liberals and Conservatives

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Abstract

We investigated the moral stereotypes political liberals and conservatives have of themselves and each other. In reality, liberals endorse the individual-focused moral concerns of compassion and fairness more than conservatives do, and conservatives endorse the group-focused moral concerns of ingroup loyalty, respect for authorities and traditions, and physical/spiritual purity more than liberals do. 2,212 U.S. participants filled out the Moral Foundations Questionnaire with their own answers, or as a typical liberal or conservative would answer. Across the political spectrum, moral stereotypes about “typical” liberals and conservatives correctly reflected the direction of actual differences in foundation endorsement but exaggerated the magnitude of these differences. Contrary to common theories of stereotyping, the moral stereotypes were not simple underestimations of the political outgroup’s morality. Both liberals and conservatives exaggerated the ideological extremity of moral concerns for the ingroup as well as the outgroup. Liberals were least accurate about both groups.

Keywords: ideology, morality, stereotypes, liberals, conservatives

The Moral Stereotypes of Liberals and Conservatives

“The national Democratic Party is immoral to the core. Any American who would vote for Democrats is guilty of fostering the worst kind of degeneracy. The leaders of this party are severely out of touch with mainstream, traditional American values. They are crusaders for perversion, for licentiousness, for nihilism and worse.”

—Joseph Farah (2003), *World Net Daily*

“Republicans don't believe in the imagination, partly because so few of them have one, but mostly because it gets in the way of their chosen work, which is to destroy the human race and the planet. Human beings, who have imaginations, can see a recipe for disaster in the making; Republicans, whose goal in life is to profit from disaster and who don't give a hoot about human beings, either can't or won't. Which is why I personally think they should be exterminated before they cause any more harm.”

—Michael Feingold (2004), *Village Voice*

For as long as there have been political rivalries there have been stereotypes, often crude and nasty, painted by each side about the other. These stereotypes go far beyond cliché jokes about latte liberals and gun-rack conservatives; as the quotations above show, they often include the claim that the other side is immoral or downright evil.

Of course, evil is in the eye of the beholder, and liberal and conservative eyes seem to be tuned to different wavelengths of immorality. A hallmark of the ideological “culture war” in the U.S. is that opponents on either side of the political divide trade unique and distinct accusations of immorality, portraying their own side as the righteous moral center. For conservatives, liberals have an “anything goes” morality that says everything should be permitted for the sake of inclusion, diversity, and pleasure, no matter how bizarre or depraved (e.g., Leo, 2002). For liberals, conservatives lack basic moral compassion, especially for oppressed groups, and take a perverse joy in seeing the rich and powerful get richer and more powerful while innocents suffer in poverty (e.g., Krugman, 2007). These views may be caricatures or exaggerations, but it is clear that accusations of immorality differ in content depending on whether they come from the right or the left. In this paper we use Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Haidt & Graham, 2007) to investigate liberals’ and conservatives’ *moral stereotypes* of themselves and each other—that is, their expectations about the degree to which typical partisans would endorse values related to each of five intuitive moral foundations. Our study was designed to answer three questions: 1. How accurate are these moral stereotypes? 2. Are they exaggerations of real differences in moral values? 3. Where on the political spectrum do we find the greatest accuracy? Rather than examining general beliefs about the evils of the other side, we hoped to obtain finer resolution of the moral domain and then ascertain whether there were different patterns of inaccuracy for different kinds of moral concerns.

Exaggeration, Accuracy, and Partisan Stereotypes

Although the literature on stereotypes has tended to concentrate on biases and inaccuracies, several recent reviews have noted the accuracy of many social stereotypes in terms of real group differences (Judd & Park, 2005; Jussim, Harber, Crawford, Cain, & Cohen, 2005; Ryan, 2002). The notion that stereotypes could be *exaggerations* of actual group differences has been around for three quarters of a century (Katz & Braly, 1933), and was popularized by Allport's (1954) classic book *The Nature of Prejudice*: "Whether favorable or unfavorable, a stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category...A stereotype need not be altogether false" (pp. 191-192). Stereotypes have long been thought of as motivated exaggerations both in terms of stereotypical characteristics (Irish people are drunk *every day*) and in terms of overgeneralization (*Every Irish person is drunk every day*).

A review by McCauley (1995), however, found only weak support for stereotypes-as-exaggeration as a general cognitive process. McCauley did note, though, that in cases of direct intergroup hostility, exaggeration of outgroup traits or between-group differences may increase due to motivational processes. For instance, McCauley & Stitt (1978) found general accuracy with some *underestimation* of group differences when White students were asked to estimate characteristics of Black students. But in the cases of racial, gender and occupational groups McCauley (1995) reviews, there may be motives to appear *unprejudiced* against outgroups, and these motives might counteract exaggeration tendencies. In cases where one does not wish to hide signs of intergroup hostility, motivational factors may have the opposite effect, increasing exaggeration and stereotyping.

This brings us to politics, where people are quite willing to report their preferences for ingroups over outgroups (e.g., Nosek, Smyth, et al., 2007), and sometimes even relish the opportunity. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) has been applied to political partisans, positing a motivation to maximize distinctions between the political ingroup and outgroup based on identifications with one's own political party (Greene, 2004). Examining the accuracy of stereotypes about the issue positions of Democrats and Republicans, Judd and Park (1993) found more exaggeration and overgeneralization in the outgroup stereotypes of either side relative to stereotypes about the ingroup; outgroup stereotype exaggeration was strongest for those most identified with their ingroup, suggesting that partisans (on both sides) exaggerate symmetrically, and exaggerate more than moderates and centrists.

Political studies of partisan stereotypes have tended to concentrate on voter impressions of political candidates. Feldman and Conover (1983) found that political party and ideological (liberal-conservative) cues were influential in voters' inferences about candidate issue positions and general perceptions of the candidate. Partisan stereotypes based on political party or ideological information play a powerful and enduring role in political decision-making, from evaluation of political candidates (Rahn, 1993; Rahn & Cramer, 1996) to predicting and recalling

candidates' positions on issues (Hamill, Lodge & Blake, 1985; Lodge & Hamill, 1986). Despite this research, empirical evidence on how partisan stereotypes influence attributions of traits, beliefs or attitudes is surprisingly scarce (McGraw, 2003). And although work on the stereotypes of ideologically-opposed groups makes use of moral issues (e.g., Judd & Park, 1993), we have found no studies looking specifically at the content of *moral* stereotypes, or at how such stereotypes might be driven by processes beyond simple outgroup derogation along partisan lines.

Moral stereotyping along five foundations

Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Haidt & Graham, 2007) was created to identify the moral content areas most widely discussed in the anthropological and evolutionary literatures. The theory posits that there are five best candidates for being the psychological “foundations” upon which moral systems and institutions can be socially constructed. Cultures (including political cultures) build networks of virtues, vices, meanings, and narratives that look and feel right to people to the extent that they are well-grounded on one or more of the foundations (see Shweder, Much, Mahapatra & Park, 1997, which inspired Moral Foundations Theory). The first two foundations are Harm/care (involving intuitions of sympathy, compassion, and nurturance) and Fairness/reciprocity (including notions of rights, justice, and what people owe to each other). These two foundations are generally concerned with the protection and fair treatment of individuals; they are therefore called the two “individualizing” foundations. The other three foundations, in contrast, are called the “binding” foundations because they generally support moral systems in which people are bound into larger groups and institutions. These foundations are Ingroup/loyalty (supporting moral obligations of patriotism and “us vs. them” thinking); Authority/respect (including concerns about social order and the importance of traditions and role-based duties in maintaining order) and Purity/sanctity (including concerns about treating the body as a temple and living in a higher, more “divine” way, versus a lower, baser, more carnal way).

Moral Foundations Theory helps to characterize the political culture war in the United States. Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) found that liberals endorsed the individualizing foundations (Harm and Fairness) more than conservatives did, whereas conservatives endorsed the binding foundations (Ingroup, Authority, and Purity) more than liberals did; liberals showed much stronger endorsement of individualizing foundations than binding foundations, while conservatives endorsed all five foundations relatively equally. This pattern was observed across a variety of methods including self-report measures of (un)willingness to violate the foundations for money, text analyses of sermons in liberal and conservative churches (Graham, et al., 2009), and content coding of the life narratives of liberals and conservatives (McAdams, Albaugh, Farber, Daniels, Logan, & Olson, 2008). The same pattern has been observed across a variety of

large national and international samples, including a nationally-representative sample of the U.S. (Smith & Vaisey, 2009).

If this pattern is found so consistently across methods and samples, are people aware of these differences? Do conservatives understand that liberals are particularly passionate about moral issues related to harm and fairness? Do liberals understand that conservatives care about harm and fairness, but also have moral concerns about group loyalty, authority, and purity? Research on partisan stereotypes (Judd & Park, 1993), as well as research on naïve realism and the culture war (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995), suggests that the two sides will overestimate their differences on specific issues and policies. Might they likewise exaggerate differences in fundamental moral concerns, perhaps contributing to the intractability of the culture war by stereotyping their opponents as monsters who fail to value what's truly moral? Would these moral stereotypes be characterized by symmetrical outgroup derogation (partisans painting the other side as immoral in general), or would there be more complexity or asymmetry to the stereotypes and even own-group stereotyping?

To examine the moral stereotypes that liberals and conservatives hold about each other, we took advantage of a method introduced by Dawes, Singer, and Lemons (1972) of having partisans indicate the attitudes or values of "typical" partisan group members, allowing comparison of these projections with the partisans' actual answers. Participants completed multiple versions of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ; Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Iyer, Koleva, & Ditto, 2009). One version asked participants for their own responses; we refer to these as the "actual" scores. The other two versions asked participants to complete the MFQ as a "typical liberal" would, or as a "typical conservative" would; we refer to these as the "moral stereotype" scores. These versions allow us to assess moral stereotypes about liberals and conservatives, and to quantify the exaggeration and accuracy of these stereotypes by comparing them to the responses people gave for themselves, and to the responses given by a nationally representative sample.

Regarding our first research question (Are moral stereotypes accurate?), because of the pervasiveness of the actual liberal-conservative differences, we predicted that participants would, on average, correctly guess that liberals value the individualizing foundations more than conservatives do, and that conservatives value the binding foundations more than liberals do. Regarding our second question (Are these stereotypes exaggerations of real group differences?), although McCauley (1995) found only weak evidence for a general cognitive process of stereotypes-as-exaggeration, we expected that the hostility between liberals and conservatives could create motivations to distort and exaggerate the existing group differences. As such, we predicted that participants overall would exaggerate the political differences, relative to the actual scores in this sample and from a nationally-representative sample. It is even possible that liberals and conservatives would exaggerate the moral concerns of their own group, not just the outgroup, perhaps as motivation to further distinguish their group from the other (Greene, 2004).

Regarding our third question (Who is most accurate?) we find reasons in the literature to generate three hypotheses, among which we hoped to adjudicate.

1) *Moderates most accurate.* Studies on ideological polarization (e.g., Chambers et al., 2006; Cohen, 2003), the ideological extremity hypothesis (e.g., Rokeach, 1956; Tetlock, 1984; Greenberg & Jonas, 2003), and naïve realism (Robinson, Ward, Keltner, & Ross, 1995) suggest a *symmetrical* exaggeration of differences when liberals and conservatives try to look at the world through the eyes of the other. Supporting this view, Skitka and Bauman (2008) found that the political left and right are equally likely to combine morality and politics, and that moral conviction is a motivator of political action for both liberals and conservatives. Partisans should distort equally (presumably by underestimating their opponents' moral concerns) because both sides think the other side does not truly care about morality. On this view, political moderates should be the most accurate, morally stereotyping liberals and conservatives the least.

2) *Liberals most accurate.* Social psychological work on conservatism (see Jost et al., 2003, and Sibley & Duckitt, 2008, for meta-analytic reviews) shows relations between conservatism or authoritarianism and mental rigidity, intolerance, and close-mindedness. These findings suggest that conservatives might be less able to see the world from an alternate moral standpoint (and be more threatened by such alternatives) and therefore could be more motivated to stereotype liberals than vice-versa. Tetlock (2000) found that conservative business managers were more likely than their liberal counterparts to defend heuristic-driven errors such as overattribution and overconfidence when effective for goal achievement, suggesting a similar acceptance of stereotyping when it suits ideological motivations. Similarly, Carter, et al. (2006) found that acceptance of social stereotyping was highest in individuals with more conservative gender-role values, preference for hierarchies, higher social-dominance orientation, and less universal outlooks – all traits associated with political conservatism.

3) *Conservatives most accurate.* Moral Foundations Theory suggests that liberals may have a harder time understanding conservatives than vice-versa. It may be easier to imagine a change in worldview that removes three familiar foundations (for conservatives answering as a typical liberal) than a change that adds three unfamiliar foundations (for liberals answering as a typical conservative). If liberals can't intuitively grasp what could be considered moral about ingroup (racism?), authority (hierarchy and oppression?), and purity (sexual Puritanism?), then they may be forced to conclude that, as our opening quotation suggests, conservatives simply do not care about morality. Or, more specifically, they'd be forced to conclude that conservatives do not care about harm and fairness, because conservatives support policies that seem to hurt and cheat people for no good (moral) reason.

Following the existing stereotype literature, we consider the first hypothesis (that moderates will be the most accurate) to be the default prediction: if the results only show outgroup derogations by partisans about each other, then moral stereotypes are no different than other forms of stereotyping. However, if the results show asymmetrical inaccuracies (hypotheses 2 and 3), inaccuracies about the ingroup as well as the outgroup, or overestimations as well as

underestimations of moral values, then this would suggest that moral stereotypes involve psychological processes in addition to those normally discussed in research on stereotyping and intergroup relations.

Method

Participants. Project Implicit (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/>) maintains a web-based volunteer participant pool that is open to the general public. With regular media coverage, Project Implicit enjoys a healthy traffic flow (>20,000 study sessions completed per week) from a heterogeneous sample of the general public. Even so, the sample is not representative of a definable population (Nosek, Smyth, et al., 2007). Volunteers for the participant pool must pre-register and are randomly assigned to a study from a pool of dozens of studies each time they visit the website. Once participants were randomly assigned to this study, they were never again assigned to it on subsequent visits. As such, participants did not self-select to be in this study, but they did self-select to visit the website and participate in research.

The participants were 2,212 volunteers (62% female; median age 32; only U.S. residents or citizens). All participants in the research pool had previously filled out demographic information, including sex, age, and political identity (7-point scale, strongly liberal to strongly conservative). 1,174 participants self-identified using one of the three points on the liberal side of the scale, 538 chose the “moderate” midpoint, and 500 chose one of the three conservative points on the scale. Data from 77 participants were excluded because of high ratings on the catch item of the MFQ.¹

Materials. Materials consisted of multiple versions of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ). The MFQ consists of two parts, moral relevance and moral judgments. In the relevance part, participants indicate the moral relevance of 23 foundation-related concerns (four each for Harm and Fairness, five each for the other three foundations), such as “Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty” (for Ingroup). Relevance was indicated on a 6-point scale, from never relevant to always relevant. In the judgments section, participants rated their agreement (6-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree) with 20 foundation-related statements, such as “If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer’s orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty” (for Authority). All items appear in the appendix (see Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Iyer, Koleva, & Ditto, 2009, for more information about the MFQ).

Procedure. To keep the study session brief and repetitiveness to a minimum, we capitalized on the power of a large sample with a planned missingness design. Participants were randomly assigned to complete four of six possible questionnaires: 2 (moral relevance or moral judgments), by 3 (answered as oneself, as a “typical liberal”, or as a “typical conservative”).²

¹ The catch item asked about the moral relevance of “whether or not someone believed in astrology.” Removal of these participants did not significantly alter any of the results.

² Results for questionnaires answered as oneself are reported in Graham, et al. (2009), Study 2. Participants also completed an Implicit Association Test that is not relevant for this report.

Because participants completed four out of the six possible measures, all of our 2,212 participants completed two to four measures as they thought a typical political partisan would complete them. About one sixth of all participants completed all four partisan measures (relevance and judgments sections as both typical liberal and typical conservative).

The instructions at the top of the liberal [and conservative] versions of the moral relevance measures read as follows:

When A TYPICAL LIBERAL [CONSERVATIVE] decides whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to the liberal's [conservative's] thinking? Remember, instead of selecting your own answers, answer all questions as a typical liberal [conservative].

The instructions at the top of the moral judgments measure read as follows:

Please read the following statements and indicate the extent to which A TYPICAL LIBERAL [CONSERVATIVE] would agree or disagree. Remember, instead of selecting your own answers, answer all questions as a typical liberal [conservative].

Comparison datasets. To gauge the accuracy of participants' predictions of "typical" liberal and conservative responses, we needed a standard of comparison. The most obvious comparisons were the *actual* ratings provided by the liberals and conservatives in our sample, when they were asked to answer as themselves. This was indeed our first comparison. However, it is not ideal because our sample is not representative of the national population. For instance, our sample of conservatives contains a higher proportion of self-described slight conservatives than a representative population would. We therefore created a second comparison dataset by selecting the actual responses of self-reported extreme liberals and conservatives (the two endpoints of our 7-point politics measure). If the moral stereotypes are equivalent or stronger than these extremes, then they are likely to be exaggerations compared to the average liberal or conservative in the general population.

To further increase confidence in our exaggeration interpretations, we also obtained scores for a short form of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire collected from a nationally-representative sample (Smith & Vaisey, 2009). This dataset is the result of a random-digit-dialing survey given to 1,001 individuals by Knowledge Networks. The two samples had four items in common for every foundation except Ingroup, which had one item in common. Comparisons between the moral stereotypes and this nationally-representative dataset include only the items common to both datasets (see Appendix).

Results

We measured and analyzed accuracy at the level of moral foundations subscores, which were aggregates of 4 or 5 items each; this allowed us to capture accuracy in terms of mean foundational concerns, as well as relative rankings of the five foundations. For the ten Moral

Foundations Questionnaire subscores (five foundations measured by relevance and judgments subscales) we compared predicted (moral stereotype) scores answered as a typical liberal or typical conservative to four criteria: (a) the actual liberal and conservative means in the current sample, (b) the actual means for extreme liberals and conservatives in the current sample, (c) the actual liberal and conservative means in the representative sample, and (d) the actual means for extreme liberals and conservatives in the representative sample.

As an example, the mean Harm-relevance score for all participants answering as a typical conservative was 2.46, with a standard deviation of 1.11. The actual mean of conservatives in the sample was 3.43 (SD .95), meaning that people on average underestimated how morally relevant conservatives would find Harm concerns, $t(477.53) = -13.52, p < .001, d = 1.24$. We compared such overall moral stereotype scores (using the entire sample) as well as the moral stereotypes held by liberals, moderates, and conservatives separately. Means and statistics for all comparisons (ten foundation subscores answered as a typical liberal and typical conservative, compared to the four comparison criteria) are available in a supplemental spreadsheet at www.moralfoundations.org; the spreadsheet calculates t , df , and d for each comparison (see example above) using formulas that do not assume equal variances or Ns. Below we present meta-analytic summaries of these comparisons. We organize the results around answers to our three central questions.

1. Are the moral stereotypes accurate with regard to the direction of liberal-conservative differences in the foundations? Yes. For both relevance and judgment items, answers as a typical liberal yielded higher scores on Harm and Fairness than answers as a typical conservative ($ts > 23.83, ps < .001, ds > 1.00$), and lower scores on Ingroup, Authority, and Purity ($ts < -15.76, ps < .001, ds > 0.65$). These showed directional accuracy compared to the real group differences found both in this study (see below) and in previous research (Graham et al., 2009; McAdams, et al., 2008; van Leeuwen & Park, 2009): liberals endorse individual-focused moral concerns more than conservatives do, and conservatives endorse group-focused moral concerns more than liberals do.

2. Are these stereotypes exaggerations of the real group differences? Yes. Figure 1 shows the average conservative-liberal differences for each foundation, comparing the moral stereotypes (answered as typical partisans) to the actual differences found in our four comparison criteria (current sample means, current sample extremes, representative sample means, representative sample extremes). Differences were calculated as follows: the overall moral foundation means for answered-as-liberal versions were subtracted from the overall means for the same scores answered as a typical conservative. For example, the average score for Harm relevance answered as a typical liberal (3.77) was subtracted from the average score for Harm relevance answered as a typical conservative (2.46) for a difference of -1.31, and a standard error of this difference in means (.042) was calculated based on the pooled standard deviations and Ns of the two group means. Differences between the actual means of liberals and conservatives, and

between the actual means of extreme liberals and extreme conservatives, were calculated the same way.³

For all of the measures, foundation differences were similar across formats (relevance and judgments), and so for clarity of presentation the two MFQ subscales are combined in Figure 1. As both the top panel (comparisons to current sample) and bottom panel (comparisons to representative sample) show, moral stereotypes exaggerated the liberal-conservative differences in line with Moral Foundations Theory. Not only were the moral stereotypes about typical partisans more different from each other (average absolute difference 1.41, range 0.58 to 2.12) than the actual MFQ scores of liberals and conservatives (average absolute difference = 0.57, range 0.12 to 1.41), they were as different or even more so than the actual scores of extreme partisans (average absolute difference = 0.98, range 0.06 to 1.91). That is, participants' beliefs about the "typical" liberal and conservative were even more polarized than the actual polarization between *extreme* liberals and conservatives.

3. *Who is most accurate? It depends on the type of morality.* As described above, comparisons to actual group means were made not just for the moral stereotypes held by the sample as a whole, but also separately for the moral stereotypes held by liberals, moderates, and conservatives. This allows us to address our third research question about who is most accurate when answering as a typical liberal or typical conservative. Statistics and effect sizes for each of these comparisons (the three groups' moral stereotypes about typical liberals and conservatives compared to the four actual group criteria, for five foundations, gauged by relevance and judgments measures) were calculated.³ Here we meta-analytically summarize the comparisons using ranges and averages of effect sizes, gauging accuracy in terms of differences from the current sample means and (using only items common to both datasets) the representative sample means.

3a. *Conservatives were most accurate about the individual-focused moral concerns of either side, and liberals were least accurate.* Compared to actual group means of either data set, moral stereotypes about the typical conservative showed substantial underestimation of conservatives' Harm and Fairness concerns. Liberals tended to underestimate the most (average $d = -.98$, $-1.50 \leq ds \leq -.41$), followed by moderates (average $d = -.48$, $-.79 \leq ds \leq -.08$); conservatives underestimated the individualizing concerns of the typical conservative the least (average $d = -.34$, $-.55 \leq ds \leq -.11$), but they too underestimated their own group's Harm and Fairness concerns in every comparison with actual conservative individualizing foundation scores.

Stereotypes about the Harm and Fairness concerns of the typical liberal tended to be more accurate as compared to actual liberal scores in the two datasets. Here again conservatives were the most accurate, only slightly underestimating liberal individualizing concerns (average $d = -$

³ All of the separate liberal-conservative differences and standard errors of the differences can be found in the supplement.

³ All of the individual comparisons can be found in the supplement.

.08, $-.66 \leq ds \leq .26$), followed by moderates, who underestimated slightly more (average $d = -.12$, $-.61 \leq ds \leq .30$). Liberals were the least accurate about their own group's individualizing concerns, *overestimating* them on average (average $d = .40$, $-.11 \leq ds \leq .80$).

3b. Moderates are most accurate about the group-focused moral concerns of either side, and liberals are least accurate. Stereotypes about the Ingroup, Authority, and Purity concerns of the typical conservative tended to be overestimations compared to the actual group means in both datasets. Here again liberals were the least accurate, overestimating conservative binding concerns the most (average $d = .55$, $.03 \leq ds \leq 1.01$), followed by conservatives, who also overestimated their own group's binding concerns (average $d = .34$, $-.22 \leq ds \leq .70$); moderates were the most accurate (average $d = .28$, $-.14 \leq ds \leq .66$), but they too overestimated the binding concerns when answering as a typical conservative.

Stereotypes about the typical liberal, on the other hand, tended to underestimate the binding moral concerns actual liberals reported. Here again liberals were the least accurate, underestimating their own binding concerns the most (average $d = -.62$, $-1.19 \leq ds \leq -.11$), followed by conservatives (average $d = -.46$, $-.90 \leq ds \leq .18$). Moderates were the most accurate (average $d = -.17$, $-.63 \leq ds \leq .43$), but also underestimated the binding concerns when answering as a typical liberal.

3c. Liberals exaggerate moral differences the most. Means for the three groups' moral stereotypes about the typical liberal and typical conservative are shown compared to the real group means (solid black lines) in Figure 2. As both of the top panels (current sample comparison) and both of the bottom panels (representative sample comparison) show, participants across the political spectrum tended to exaggerate the liberal-conservative differences, as evidenced by the steeper slopes of the prediction lines as compared to the actual lines. This exaggeration of differences is an effect of overestimating liberals' individualizing concerns and underestimating their binding concerns, and overestimating conservatives' binding concerns and underestimating their individualizing concerns. All four panels of Figure 2 show that liberals exaggerate differences the most (lines representing moral stereotypes held by liberals have the steepest slopes); the figure also shows that the largest inaccuracies were liberal underestimations of the individualizing concerns of the typical conservative.⁴

Discussion

Results indicate that people at all points on the political spectrum are at least intuitively aware of the actual differences in moral concerns between liberals and conservatives: they correctly predicted that liberals would care more than conservatives about the two

⁴ Patterns of exaggeration were also examined across all seven points of the political identity item. In line with the group analyses above, exaggeration of the individualizing foundations was highest for extreme liberals and lowest for extreme conservatives, and exaggeration of binding foundations was highest for extreme partisans and lowest for those in the middle of the scale. Graphs of exaggeration across politics for all measures and aggregations can be found at www.moralfoundations.org.

individualizing foundations and that conservatives would care more than liberals about the three binding foundations. The results also confirm previous studies of partisan misperception (e.g., Chambers, Baron, & Inman, 2006) by showing that, in general, people overestimate the degree to which liberals and conservatives differ. People even morally stereotype their own ingroup, with liberals overestimating liberals' strong individualizing concerns and underestimating liberals' weak binding concerns, and conservatives exaggerating conservatives' moral concerns in the opposite directions. Our results also go beyond previous studies in finding and explaining an otherwise puzzling result: liberals were the least accurate.

We presented three possible hypotheses about accuracy: 1) We found no support for the hypothesis that liberals would be most accurate; liberals were the least accurate about conservatives *and* about liberals. The largest inaccuracies were in liberals' underestimations of conservatives' Harm and Fairness concerns, and liberals further exaggerated the political differences by overestimating their own such concerns. 2) We found some support for the hypothesis that moderates would be most accurate, which they were in the case of the binding foundations. However, and most crucially, partisan inaccuracies were not mirror images of each other. On the contrary, liberals and conservatives both tended to exaggerate their binding foundation differences by underestimating the typical liberal and overestimating the typical conservative. 3) Finally, we found some support for the hypothesis that conservatives would be the most accurate, which they were in the case of the individualizing foundations. In line with Moral Foundations Theory, liberals dramatically underestimated the Harm and Fairness concerns of conservatives.

The ideological "culture war" in the U.S. is, in part, an honest disagreement about ends (moral values that each side wants to advance), as well as an honest disagreement about means (laws and policies) to advance those ends. But our findings suggest that there is an additional process at work: partisans on each side exaggerate the degree to which the other side pursues moral ends that are different from their own. Much of this exaggeration comes from each side underestimating the degree to which the other side shares its own values. But some of it comes, unexpectedly, from overestimating the degree to which "typical" members of one's own side endorse its values. Studies of ingroup stereotypes tend to show that they are more accurate and less exaggerated than stereotypes about an outgroup (Linville, Fischer, & Salovey, 1989), especially for higher-status groups like Whites (Ryan, 1996). However, the current study found that moral stereotypes about an ideological group (e.g., liberals) can be just as exaggerated when held by ingroup members as by outgroup members, and sometimes even more so. We suspect that this is partially due to the continuous nature of political identification, in that one can imagine members of one's own group more extreme than oneself (and even believe that "typical" ingroup members are more extreme than oneself). But this may also be a unique feature of moral stereotypes, in that one can exaggerate the moral values of one's own group in ways that are in line with those same values.

The asymmetrical pattern found in moral stereotypes about the individualizing foundations fits remarkably well with recent work on ideological opponent and own-group misperceptions. Examining co-perceptions of conflicting groups such as pro-life/pro-choice and hawks/doves, Chambers and Melnyk (2006) found that partisans saw their adversaries as motivated by an opposition to their own core values, rather than being motivated by promotion of the adversaries' values. This is consistent with the moral stereotypes that liberals appear to have of conservatives: liberals see conservatives as being motivated by an opposition to liberals' core values of compassion and fairness, as well as being motivated by their own (non-moral) values of ingroup loyalty, respect for authorities and traditions, and spiritual purity. For instance, when conservatives express binding-foundation moral concerns about gay marriage—e.g., that it subverts traditional gender roles and family structures—liberals may have difficulty perceiving any moral value in such traditional arrangements and therefore conclude that conservatives are motivated by simple homophobia, untempered by concerns about fairness, equality, and rights. This misperception is asymmetrical: conservatives did underestimate liberal moral concerns with the binding foundations, but they were no more likely to underestimate than liberals themselves.

It is striking that instead of basic partisan outgroup derogation, in which both sides predict that the other is less moral (or more evil) in general, we found foundation-specific moral stereotypes about liberals and conservatives – and these moral stereotypes were largely shared by all. Participants across the political spectrum exaggerated liberal moral disregard for Ingroup, Authority and Purity, as well as conservative disregard for Harm and Fairness. Although these specific moral stereotypes were not completely symmetrical – liberals showed a particular exaggeration of the individualizing differences – this study does suggest that everyone (liberals, moderates, conservatives) holds the same specific moral stereotypes about liberals and conservatives, and these stereotypes are basically exaggerations of the patterns predicted by Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Graham, 2007). This suggests that moral stereotypes might be unique in that they are motivated (partisans want to cast the other side as immoral) and yet partisans share the same moral stereotypes about liberals and conservatives. Even more surprising, they share both of these moral stereotypes with moderates, who are presumably not as motivated to stereotype either side. More research is needed to further delineate the moral stereotypes of political partisans, for instance to see if moral stereotypes about members of political parties mirror those about ideological groups, both in two-party political systems like the U.S. and in multiparty systems like Italy. We also hope that future studies can use Moral Foundations Theory's finer resolution of the moral domain to investigate specific moral stereotypes along other social groupings, such as race, gender, social class, age, or weight.

Chambers and Melnyk (2006) conclude: "Partisan group members suffer the misapprehension that their adversaries work to actively and willfully oppose their own sides' interests rather than promoting the values that are central to their adversaries' doctrine...it is this perception that may spawn the feelings of distrust and animosity that partisans feel toward their rivals and may ultimately fuel conflict between partisan groups" (p. 1309). In this study, we

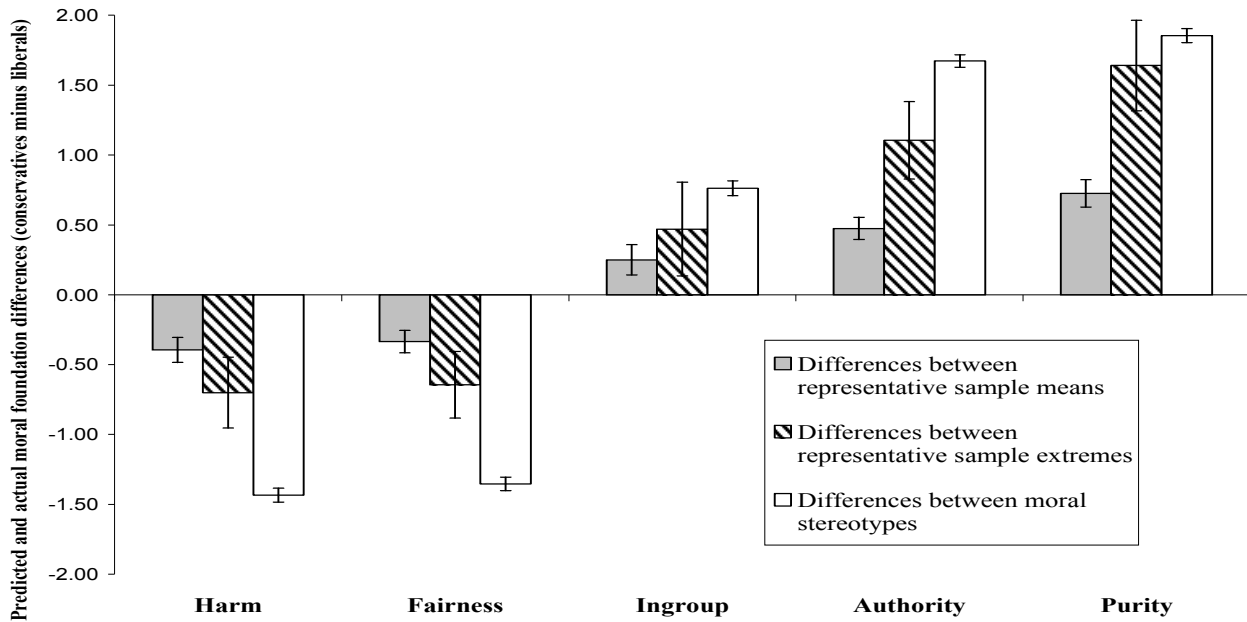
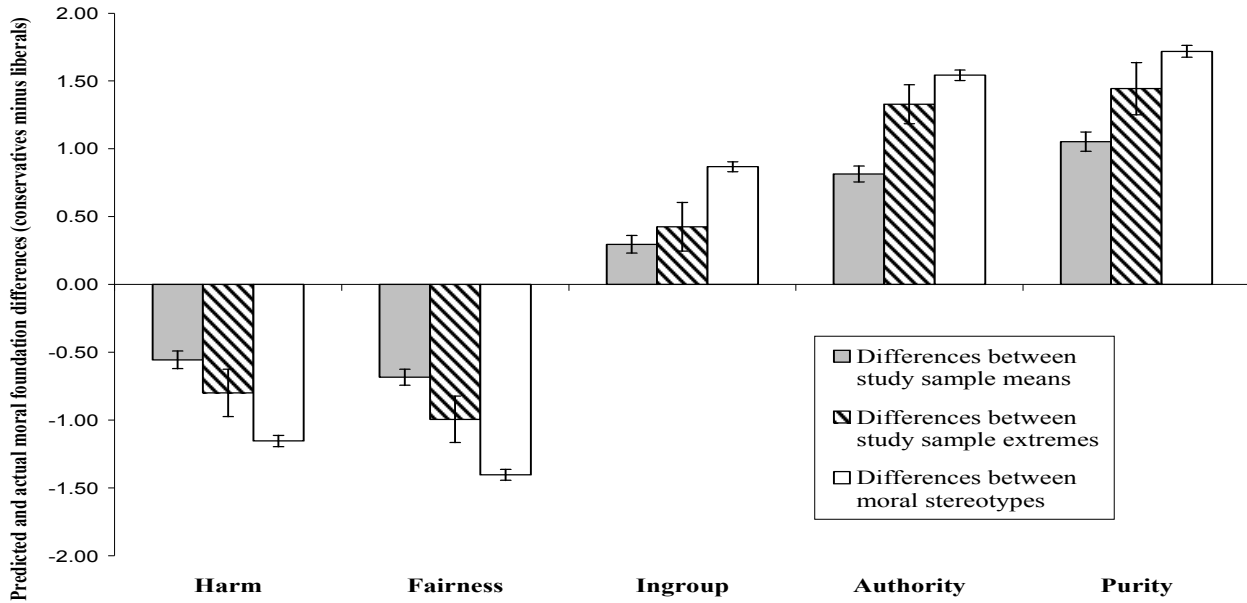
focused on the moral values of ideological opponents, and their perceptions of the moral values of their own as well as the other side, in order to understand the moral “distrust and animosity” endemic to the liberal-conservative culture war. We found that there are real moral differences between liberals and conservatives, but people across the political spectrum exaggerate the magnitude of these differences and in so doing create opposing moral stereotypes about both sides. Calling attention to this unique form of stereotyping, and to the fact that liberal and conservative moral values are less polarized than most people think, could be effective ways of reducing the distrust and animosity of current ideological divisions.

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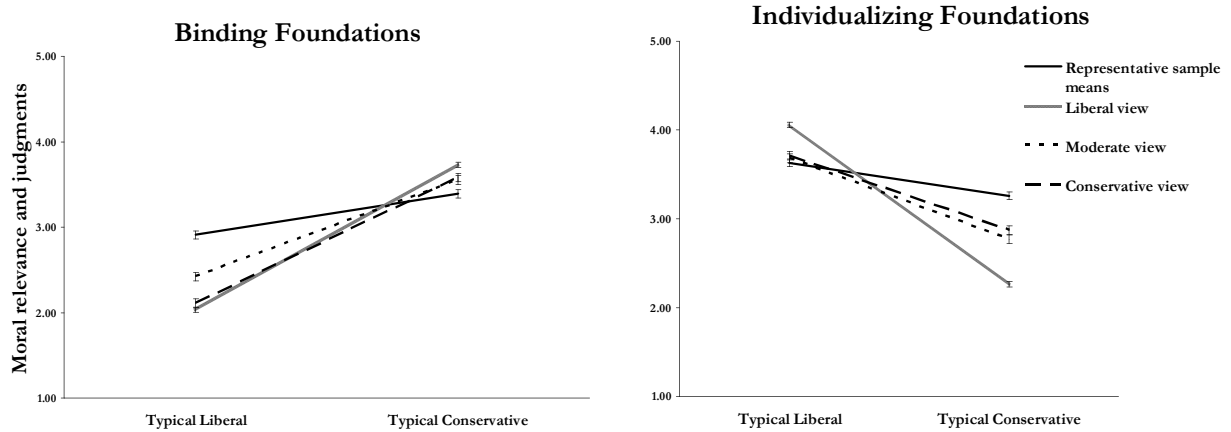
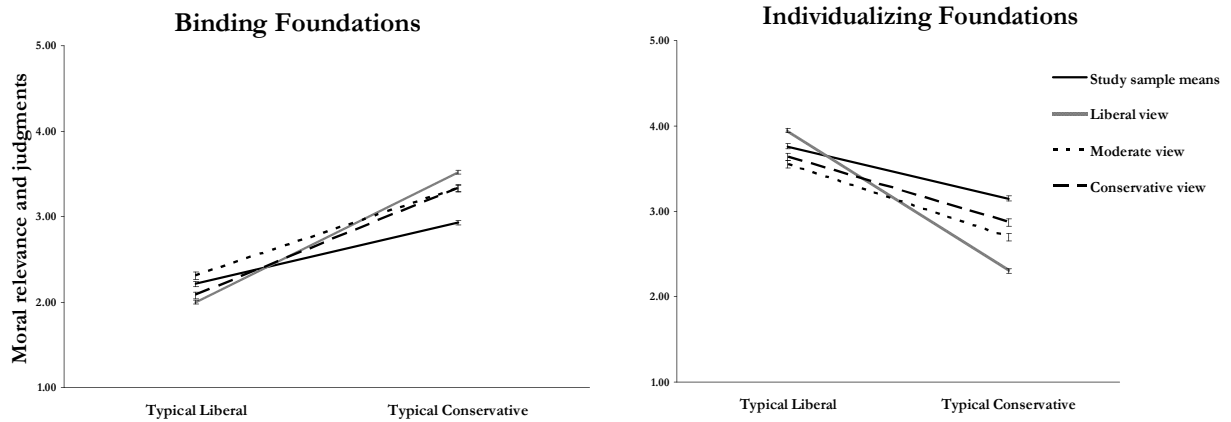
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Figure 1. Comparisons of moral stereotypes to actual conservative-liberal differences in moral foundation endorsement



Note. Gray bars represent the difference between the actual Moral Foundations Questionnaire means for liberals and conservatives, striped bars represent differences between extreme conservatives and extreme liberals, and white bars represent differences between answers as a typical conservative and as a typical liberal. Error bars represent standard error of the difference between the means, based on pooled standard deviation and not assuming equal sizes or variances in the two groups. Negative values indicate higher for liberals, positive values indicate higher for conservatives. Top panel compares moral stereotypes (answered as typical partisans) to self-reported scores in the same sample; bottom panel compares moral stereotypes to actual scores in a nationally-representative sample.

Figure 2. Moral stereotypes about the typical liberal's and typical conservative's endorsement of the binding foundations (Ingroup, Authority, Purity), and individualizing foundations (Harm, Fairness)



Note. Solid black lines represent actual group means for liberals and conservatives, and all other lines represent the moral stereotypes indicated when liberals, moderates, and conservatives answered as a “typical” liberal or conservative. Top panels compare scores to the means in the current study sample; bottom panels compare scores (overlapping items only) to liberal and conservative means in a nationally-representative dataset. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Appendix. Moral Foundations Questionnaire

Section I. Moral Relevance

Harm:

- Whether or not someone was harmed*
- Whether or not someone suffered emotionally*
- Whether or not someone used violence
- Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable

Fairness:

- Whether or not some people were treated differently than others*
- Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights
- Whether or not someone acted unfairly*
- Whether or not someone ended up profiting more than others

Ingroup:

- Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group*
- Whether or not the action was done by a friend or relative of yours
- Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty
- Whether or not the action affected your group
- Whether or not someone put the interests of the group above his/her own

Authority:

- Whether or not the people involved were of the same rank or status
- Whether or not someone failed to fulfill the duties of his or her role*
- Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority*
- Whether or not an authority failed to protect his/her subordinates
- Whether or not someone respected the traditions of society

Purity:

- Whether or not someone did something disgusting*
- Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency*
- Whether or not someone did something unnatural or degrading
- Whether or not someone acted in a virtuous or uplifting way
- Whether or not someone was able to control his or her desires

Section II. Moral Judgment

Harm:

If I saw a mother slapping her child, I would be outraged.

It can never be right to kill a human being.*

Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.*

The government must first and foremost protect all people from harm.

Fairness:

If a friend wanted to cut in with me on a long line, I would feel uncomfortable because it wouldn't be fair to those behind me.

In the fight against terrorism, some people's rights will have to be violated. [Reverse scored]
Justice, fairness and equality are the most important requirements for a society.*

When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.*

Ingroup:

If I knew that my brother had committed a murder, and the police were looking for him, I would turn him in. [Reverse scored]

When it comes to close friendships and romantic relationships, it is okay for people to seek out only members of their own ethnic or religious group.

Loyalty to one's group is more important than one's individual concerns.

The government should strive to improve the well being of people in our nation, even if it sometimes happens at the expense of people in other nations.

Authority:

Men and women each have different roles to play in society.

If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty.*

Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.*

When the government makes laws, those laws should always respect the traditions and heritage of the country.

Purity:

People should not do things that are revolting to others, even if no one is harmed.*

I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural or disgusting.*

Chastity is still an important virtue for teenagers today, even if many don't think it is.

The government should try to help people live virtuously and avoid sin.

*Item also included in Smith & Vaisey's (2009) Knowledge Networks data collection with a nationally-representative sample.