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Liberal Bias in Social Psychology: Personal Experience

Liberal bias in grant funding

Post published by [Lee Jussim Ph.D.](#) on Sep 13, 2013 in [Rabble Rouser](#)

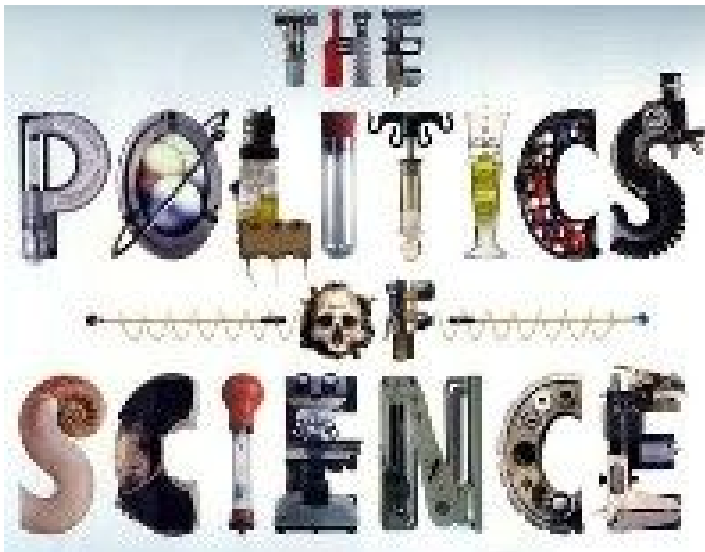
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I began to suspect that my colleagues' politics (/basics/politics) distorted their science long ago. Not always, but sometimes. A few years ago, I began new work trying to develop a questionnaire to assess people's explicit willingness to sacrifice science to advance political goals (/basics/motivation). In doing that research, we sought funding from an internal Rutgers source, a great program that provides funding for undergraduate research projects. So, Urvashi, an undergraduate in my lab, proposed a questionnaire to assess how willing

people were to sacrifice science to advance their politics.

Urvashi's funding proposal led off with the following paragraph:

The field of psychology is dominated by liberals (Redding, 2001), and this political homogeneity can be problematic . . . In fact, content analysis of all the articles published in American Psychologist during the 1990s revealed that 97% had liberal themes (Redding, 2001). Furthermore, recent research suggests many social psychologists would blatantly discriminate based on politics. About 37% admitted that, given equally qualified conservative and liberal job applicants, the liberal candidate should be hired

over the conservative candidate (Inbar & Lammers, 2012).

Although it was an excellent review of the most recent literature on the topic of political bias in science, this framing was most unfortunate. Why?

1. Because most faculty in the social sciences and humanities are liberals
2. The proposal would be reviewed by faculty in the social sciences or humanities

and

3. Telling them that "the research shows you are biased (/basics/bias) by your own politics" risked evoking hostility.



I have advised over 20 of these in the last few years and nearly all have been funded. But this proposal was not funded.

What did the reviewers complain about? Here is the feedback Urvashi received with the rejection:

"I encourage the student researcher to dedicate more effort to explaining why this research question is meaningful to the field and how it fits into the broader body of knowledge. Meaningful research must emanate from previous work and in some way address a gap in the literature or offer a new perspective on understanding (/basics/empathy) a problem. Moreover, I encourage the researcher to pay close attention to clearly defining the behavior (dependent variable) the research seeks to explain. It was

unclear whether the research question dealt with the effect of ideology on psychologists' research methods or on their professionalism in dealing with colleagues."

I protested the review to the director of the program who did not even bother to respond to the first few

emails I sent, and, when he did, basically blew me off.

So we decided to try an "anecdotal experiment" -- i.e., to change one and only one thing about the proposal, resubmit it to the same program, and see what happened. What did we change? That one, "offending" introductory paragraph. We deleted it altogether, and replaced it with this:

Conservatives are often more skeptical of scientific research than are liberals, and they are often more willing to sacrifice science to achieve political goals (Anglin & Jussim, in preparation). Furthermore, science has a long and checkered history of periodically being used and exploited as a tool to advance nefarious rightwing political agendas (e.g., social Darwinism; Nazi eliminationist practices; Herrnstein &

_____ ty) differences in _____

We bagged a slew of liberal bugaboos in one short paragraph, none of which were relevant to the topic. We saw "_____ ing fo _____ ra" - _____ ing _____ ansparently manipulative, _____ ial, t _____ ld be _____ and _____ ld be rejected again.

WRONG. The proposal was funded.

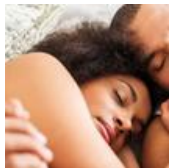
Apparently, condemning Nazis, social Darwininsts, and Herrnstein and Murray was all it took. All those reasons the first proposal was supposedly "unclear," "failed to offer some new understanding" and failed to "fit into the broader field" (see the rejecting reviewer's comments) suddenly evaporated, and why the resubmitted proposal was interesting and important became obvious.

DISCLAIMER:

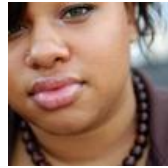
Please see my first entry in this series for a slew of qualifications about what one can and cannot make of this type of personal experience (and please do not complain about this without first reading those qualifications):

[Exposing Liberal Bias in Social Psychology \(http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/rabble-rouser/201309/exposing-liberal-bias-in-social-psychology\)](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/rabble-rouser/201309/exposing-liberal-bias-in-social-psychology)

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[\(/blog/rabble-rouser/201503/sexism-bias-disadvantage-science-and-integrity\)](#)

Simine's & Lee's excellent (I hope) discussion of biases in Psychology and STEM

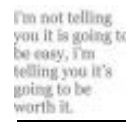
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[Sexism and Other Biases in Social Psychology](#) [\(/blog/rabble-rouser/201503/sexism-and-other-biases-in-social-psychology\)](#)

An email conversation with Simine Vazire on biases in the field

[\(/blog/rabble-rouser/201503/sexism-and-other-biases-in-social-psychology\)](#)



[How to Encourage Non-Liberal Students in Psychology](#)

[\(/blog/rabble-rouser/201502/how-encourage-non-liberal-students-in-psychology\)](#)

The real reasons why there are so few conservatives in psychology

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Psychology's liberal monoculture is scientifically dysfunctional



Contempt for Conservatism, Religion, and History (</blog/rabble-rouser/201411/contempt-conservatism-religion-and-history>)

</blog/rabble-rouser/201411/contempt-conservatism-religion-and-history>

Social scientists' contempt for conservatism, religion and history

Advertisement for Harry's razors. It features three razors with different handle colors: blue, yellow, and red. Below each razor is a label: 'HANDSOMER' for the blue one, 'SHARPER' for the yellow one, and 'LESS EXPENSIVER' for the red one. To the right of the razors is the 'HARRY'S' logo and a dark blue button with the text 'TRY HARRY'S'.