Ingroup Bias in the Application of Historical Information to Blame Judgments
Tajae Reese & Nick D. Ungson | Albright College

Background

Research Question
Do people exhibit racial bias when applying historical information to blame decisions of transgressors?

Blame
• ...to hold responsible; to find fault with
• Associated with spiteful punishment (Gill & Cerce, 2017; Gill & Ungson, 2018)

Historicist narratives (Gill & Cerce, 2017)
• A storied account of how a moral transgressor “became that way”
• Narratives reduced blame, but not perceived intentionality
• Evidence that White participants do not reduce blame for Black transgressors, even when historicist narrative is present (Gill & Pizzuto, under review)
• The current study attempts to replicate these findings – and examine potential biases among Black participants
  • Will Black participants also ignore history information for Black transgressors?
  • OR will Black participants ignore history information for White transgressors?

Method

Participants were asked to read vignettes describing an intentional moral transgression (physical assault) committed by either a Black [or White] man named Tyrone [Brad] Winters

Independent Variables:
• Participant Race: Black vs. White
• Transgressor Race: Black vs. White (between-subjects)
• Societal -Level Historicism
  • 6-item scale measuring extent to which American racial inequality is due to past history of segregation, injustice
  • (Included as moderator – no significant effects)
• History Condition (between-subjects)
  1. Just Act: transgression only
  2. History: transgression + historicist narrative
     “his father started to physically abuse him... Winters learned that violence was a way to keep somebody in line.”

Dependent Variable: Blame
(1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)
1. I blame Winters for his criminal behavior.
2. I feel moral anger or disapproval toward Winters.
3. I have strong feelings of dislike for Winters.

Results

Analysis: Three-Way ANOVA
Participant Race * Transgressor Race * History Condition
Results: Significant three-way interaction
F(1, 78) = 4.76, p = .03

Main Findings
• White P’s blamed Black transgressors LESS when exposed to historicist narratives (p = .07), but were unaffected by history when blaming White transgressors, suggesting outgroup favoritism among White P’s when narratives are present
• White P’s were more blaming than Black P’s when judging a Black transgressor without history information (p = .07) – in the absence of historicist narratives, White P’s seemed to exhibit outgroup derogation.

Conclusions & Future Directions

• White P’s were more forgiving of Black (but not White) transgressors when history was present
• However, White P’s were more blaming of Black (but not White) transgressors when no history was present

Future Directions
• Appears as if Black P’s become more blaming of Black transgressors when history was present?
• How would gender of transgressor affect blame and application of history information?
• Future analyses will further examine the role of Societal-Level Historicism on blame, as well as outcomes of compassion, free will, punishment, etc.
• Future studies should attempt to recruit a larger sample size