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Parasocial and Group Attitudes in a Political Context: Does a personable politician improve group acceptance?

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A Thesis in the Field of Psychology

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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Abstract

This study investigates how exposure to personal narratives of an outgroup leader may increase positive attitudes toward the leader and, by extension, also her group. To test this question, the reactions of participants to videos of an opposing party politician, either relaying personal stories or discussing public and social policies, were compared. I expected that the attitude toward a politician would become more positive in response to self-disclosures compared to political discussions. I also expected the change in attitude to the politician would extend to attitudes about members of the political party because the relatability of the politician changes the conceptual boundaries that form group identity.

Separate lines of research provide justification for these hypotheses. Research on group attitudes has generally focused on interracial topics, with one area being attitude change. Attitude in this context has been shown to become more positive when personal stories are shared in-person and extends to the represented group. Another line of research focuses on perceived and imagined relationships with public figures. Attitude change was shown to occur when messages were attributed to the individual.

In this study, 63 participants completed an online survey. At the start of the online survey, participants were assigned to groups based on political identity and randomly assigned to a politician video of either personal or political messages. Afterward, participants answered assessments on subjective qualities of liability, trustworthiness, relatability, for both the politician and her party. A one-way ANOVA

was conducted to test the relationship between video response, leader attitude, and party attitude. Results indicate that the videos were effective at changing leader attitude, but were inconclusive regarding change in party attitude due to low levels of statistical power. Refinements to the measures and their implementation and, more importantly, a larger sample, will allow for more conclusive tests of these hypotheses in the future.

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Chapter I.

Introduction

Antagonism and violence between members of opposing political parties has been publicized with increased frequency since the 2016 election cycle (Levin & Reitzel, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2016). Journalists have noted President Donald Trump's low agreeableness in contentious situations, a trait seldom seen in high-office holders, as a single aggravating factor in a more complex social phenomenon—an increased aggression between members of opposing political parties (Nai & Maier, 2018).

As the political outgroup to Donald Trump and his policies, members of the Democrat party have less common ground to form positive social interactions with Republicans, forming a basis for strained relationships. People with dissimilarities on importantly held values or beliefs tend to respond to each other with measurable increases in disliking (Schroeder & Risen, 2016) and avoidance (Pinel et al., 2006). The desire to reveal authentic personal stories—known as self-disclosures—is reduced among members of certain groups. When dissimilar groups communicate, they usually avoid sharing vulnerabilities and genuineness that are core qualities of self-disclosures (Schroeder & Risen, 2016). Without an outlet or motive for experiencing shared humanity, strained communications set in motion an exchange of negative experiences and emotions that has no self-correcting mechanism, ultimately contributing to intergroup harm (Pinel et al., 2006; Schroeder & Risen, 2016).

Research on self-disclosure in other relationship types, such as friendships and in-person interactions, suggests that self-disclosure by an individual may increase positive attitudes beyond the individual to improve relations with members of their affiliated outgroup (Berthohold et al., 2013; Schroeder & Risen, 2016; Welker et al., 2014). Reduced polarization can result when an improvement in attitude to one group member is attributed to the political outgroup, such as between aggressive neighboring nations (Schroeder & Risen, 2016). Leaders are prime examples of associative attitude changes because they are representatives of the group and targets for ideological and social disagreements (Arieli et al., 2019; Judd et al., 2005). News reporting is one media channel that can focus on the role of leaders in intergroup disagreements to the exclusion of positive personal narratives (Bail et al., 2018; Pew Research Center, 2016).

Parasocial interactions are becoming a common way for people to relate to political figures due to new trends in social media (Arieli et al., 2019). Parasocial interactions can be understood as the imagined interactions one has with a public figure through media content. These interactions may form a pretext of knowledge that is attributed to personal experiences when it is gained through one-way messaging. Content and venue are both known variables for promoting parasocial relationships (Schroeder & Risen, 2016). The setting of a self-disclosure, for instance social media blogging, has been shown to influence attitudes toward a celebrity by creating a false sense of intimacy (Kim & Song, 2016). This effect is even stronger when the celebrity is dissimilar to the observer (Lee & Jang, 2013). Political leaders of the opposite party may, therefore, be subject to the public's false sense of familiarity, a situation where self-disclosure should show significant changes in attitudes about the leader. So far, research has focused on

actual relationships and real interactions and has yet to test parasocial interactions with a political leader. To date, no studies have specifically evaluated the effect of a) a parasocial interaction with an outgroup leader, b) on attitudes toward an outgroup, c) by exposure to videos of self-disclosure. This study builds on intergroup research to better understand how political identity contributes to affinity and polarization. This area of research is particularly timely because of recent increases in political polarization and episodes of outgroup harm. Political polarization appears to be a downward spiral that isolates groups, fixates ideology, and poses obstacles to intergroup dialogue (Bail et al., 2018) and cooperation (Schroeder et al., 2015), but the field does not yet understand how media content about a socially prominent person influences general attitudes toward a related group.

President Trump is used here as a single example of a broader timely phenomenon in parasocial relationships. The prevalence of a 24/7 news media cycle and social networking, such as Twitter, contribute to an environment where imagined relationships flourish. The President's Twitter feed is one example where information from a limited venue is appropriated by news media, and recontextualized to support a single, often negative, interpretation. We actually know very little about public figures other than what is filtered through news media for motives unrelated to factual accuracy, such as viewership and sponsorship. Social media, in contrast, may promote parasocial relationships. Self-disclosures are less common in news media because the parasocial relationship is altered through filtering, recontextualizing, and opinion-formation. However, social media platforms may provide a raw and authentic display from which to develop a more complex assessment of the politician's character.

President Trump's Twitter feed is one example of how a political leader can influence the views of citizens not only toward himself but his political party (Jacobson, 2018). We understand from interracial (Welker et al., 2014) and international (Schroeder & Risen, 2016) studies that the attitude about a single group member can become generalized to the entire group, but this dynamic hasn't been fully explored in the context of political groups (Kim & Song, 2016; Lee & Jang, 2013; Lee & Shin, 2014). Might the attitude toward a public leader, even a contentious one, be altered in a positive direction, such as by exposure to a personal storytelling by the leader? Would the attitude toward the political group also change?

The following study is a between-subjects pre-and-post-test experiment that measures changes in the attitude of college students to a dissimilar political party after exposure to video clips of the party's leaders. The objective of this study is to evaluate if self-disclosures of an outgroup leader will predict a change in attitudes toward that outgroup. The study is designed as a web-based interactive questionnaire including audio-video displays, custom surveys, and a single standardized measure for feelings of loneliness.

First, participants answered questions about a) their attitudes toward specific political leaders, b) and political parties, c) and self-report feelings of loneliness. These responses formed the basis for grouping participants according to political leanings. Each group then watched either a video containing a self-disclosure by an opposing party's leader (outgroup leader) or the same video with the self-disclosure removed. These videos highlighted personal relationships of the leaders and served to show positive relationships and humanize them, unlike past research that fabricated self-

disclosures (Kim & Song, 2016). Participants then answered follow-up questions to determine changes to a) the attitudes toward political leaders and b) attitudes toward political party members (the outgroup). Statistical analysis compared attitudes before and after watching the video clips while controlling for feelings of loneliness among participants.

I expected that the attitude toward a politician would become more positive in response to self-disclosures because the prosocial content humanizes the politician, makes her more relatable, non-threatening, and worthy of responding prosocial behavior. I also expected the change in attitude to the politician would extend to attitudes about members of the political party because the relatability of the politician changes the conceptual boundaries that form group identity, contextualizing the groups within a broader shared humanity. If this hypothesis had been supported, the study would have shown the importance of parasocial relationships in forming attitudes among dissimilar social groups. As it were, the findings supported a relationship between personal narratives and increased positive attitude toward the individual, but effects on group attitudes were inconclusive. This relationship was known from prior studies but this study expands the relationship by showing it is active in political group interactions (Mattingly et al., 2011; Welker et al., 2014).

I also expected to see a relationship between self-reported loneliness and outgroup attitude because prior research shows that feelings of loneliness are known to alter the effect of a shared disclosures (Pinel & Long, 2012). Subjective sharing has a stronger effect on recipients' attitudes when they feel isolated or alone (Pinel & Long, 2012). Notably, this effect is not seen in disclosures of self-concept, beliefs, or ideology; it is

only seen after sharing an impactful personal experience (Pinel & Long, 2012), such as was used in the proposed study. The study controlled for loneliness to eliminate its potential role in forming attitudes about a political group.

This study contributes to the field by expanding research on group identity and intragroup behavior, particularly in the less studied area of political groups. A core premise of this research is that contemporary media and group interactions already reveal an active, although implicit or less understood, application of parasocial dynamics to influence attitudes of the masses for political gain—a type of guilt by association or mob mentality. Explaining this perceived phenomenon would draw it out of the shadows, to provide checks and balances on social manipulation and coercion. Understanding the dynamics that precondition partisan animosity and polarizing behavior may lead to new methods of intergroup dialogue. The study adds to our present understanding of parasocial interactions of citizens to their political leaders, with implications for choices of campaign media and tone.

Study Aim & Hypothesis

The research problem is the result of three research areas that have developed to a point in need of integration. The field is currently advancing knowledge on a) parasocial relationships, b) increased positive regard through sharing, and c) improved intergroup communication to reduce aggression. Each area has focused on distinct demographics, a) entertainment celebrities, b) interracial relations in the USA, and c) openly hostile nations. The time is ripe to merge these perspectives. Intergroup attitude is the crucial

shared factor among these research areas and, in synthesizing the research and applying it to a new topic, the field will benefit from theoretical generalization.

Parasocial Relationship

National leaders communicate with the public indirectly through media channels, such as news or twitter, and this type of relationship is termed parasocial interaction. Parasocial behavior includes the imagined interactions a person has with a public figure who is communicating indirectly, the implication is that people assume intimacy that does not exist (Greenwood & Long, 2011).

When celebrity self-disclosure statements are posted in a setting that promotes parasocial (imagined) interactions, such as Twitter, researchers have observed an increase in positive attitude toward the celebrity (Kim & Song, 2016). Venue can be manipulated by researchers to create an assumption of intimacy or actual presence that enhances the effect on positive attitude, such as with live Twitter feeds (Kim & Song, 2016). This increase in positive attitude is actually stronger when the person is dissimilar and unaffiliated to the public figure, such as an outgroup member, supportive of the hypothesis in our proposed study (Lee & Jang, 2013).

Understanding the relationship between views of an outgroup and its leaders is important because it directly relates to intergroup harm. Attitudes toward outgroup members are formed both explicitly and implicitly and seem to reinforce as a feedback loop (Turner et al., 2007). Negative attitude to the outgroup leader can subconsciously increase aggression towards the outgroup (Turner et al., 2007). The processes of attitude formation, maintenance, and alteration may involve generalizations from personal

interactions (Aron et al, 1997; Greenwood & Long, 2011; Pinel et al., 2006). Positive interactions, even the subtle influences of a personal story, might have a similar generalizable affect to the represented group (Berthold et al., 2013).

Self-Disclosure (I-Sharing)

Self-disclosure is a practical starting point for research on attitudes to outgroup leadership because research already suggests the gains in positive attitude will extend to one's relationship with the outgroup (Schroeder & Risen, 2016; Welker et al., 2014). Self-disclosure, also termed I-sharing, is a communication about how one feels about or has experienced an event or other person (Aron et al., 1997). Self-disclosure can influence attitudes toward outgroup members. Sharing with an outgroup member reduces the tendency to dehumanize that member (Pinel et al, 2017). High existential isolation moderates this effect of self-disclosure above other types of sharing, such as sharing personal values or self-concept (Pinel & Long, 2012). This increase in positivity to one member of the outgroup is predictive of positive attitudes toward the entire group (Schroeder & Risen, 2016). Leaders are the face of a group and exert broad influence; however, a leader's role in influencing outgroup attitudes has never been tested with self-disclosures.

Group Attitudes

Positive and negative attitudes, known simply as liking and disliking, are conceptualized on distinct dimensions; however, they show similar strength of effects in generalizing attitudes to the outgroup (Stark et al., 2013). Self-disclosures by members of the outgroup have been shown to improve both implicit and explicit attitudes (Turner

et al., 2007). Explicit attitudes are formed consciously and implicit attitudes are unintentionally activated by content and context, as a passive learning (Turner et al., 2007). Implicit attitudes appear to be more transferrable to the group, in part because explicit associations involve a Systems 2 analysis that discounts negative content (Ratliff & Nosek, 2011). People actively avoid negative generalizations, particularly when prejudice to the outgroup is more salient (Ratliff & Nosek, 2011). Self-disclosures are therefore a means to introduce positive content that may counteract the negativity bias seen in contemporary political groups (Turner et al., 2007).

Self-identification with a group is a matter of degree. Membership in a political party may appear binary, but people with lower identification are quick to avoid relating the group to their personal identity (Berthold et al., 2013). High identifiers, those where the group is integral to their identity, tend to reinforce group differences to maintain self-esteem, and only positively change outgroup attitudes when there is a mutually beneficial change to the ingroup (Berthold et al., 2013). A related concept to high identification is confrontational attitude. Confrontational attitude presumes a perceived advantage to the outgroup and an intent to win or gain (Puchalska-Wasyl, 2019). For this study, the test groups are measured by degree of affiliation with a political party. Self-identification is a means for grouping study participants for specific outgroup messages, but it will also be important to ensure the study population represents a range of high and low identification to maintain external validity.

New research on internal dialogue and imagined interactions is similar in concept to the proposed study. Imagined Intergroup Contact (ICC) is a method of mentally interacting with a member of the outgroup as an internal dialogue of role and perspective

reversals (Puchalska-Wasyl, 2019). The imagined dialogue is framed in a positive tone which reduces the natural propensity to overstates the ingroup advantages over the outgroup (Puchalska-Wasyl, 2019). Although the results were inconclusive, Puchalska-Wasyl (2019) noted three factors responsible for increased positive attitude: a) the simulated interaction, b) the individual's tolerance to an imagined outgroup member (perhaps as a baseline), and c) the provision of outgroup arguments (as a rationale or justification for increased social acceptance).

The study on ICC supports the proposed research design because it suggests a) the baseline tolerance to one outgroup member will correlate to the group, b) an active role is required to alter attitudes, c) and the content of the message is weighed qualitatively to form an attitude; but most importantly d) all of this can occur as an imagined relationship. The usual process of forming an attitude about an outgroup leader involves passively or subconsciously internalizing media content to form an opinion. A treatment which brings this process to critical consciousness has the potential to moderate, first, the attitude to the leader and then the attitude to the leader's group.

Research Question & Theoretical Supports

The main research question is whether self-disclosing messages by a politician can influence attitudes towards the leader and whether these attitudes generalize to the political outgroup represented by that leader, as observed in studies of interracial attitude. I hypothesized that outgroup members would respond with increase positive attitude when they actively observe self-disclosures of a politician, both to the politician and to the represented political party.

Several theories describe aspects of the attitudinal relationship between outgroup and outgroup leaders, but this study is the first time they have been combined to test for generalizability to a political party. Prior studies often focused on in-person interactions of outgroup members (Mattingly et al., 2011; Schroeder & Risen, 2016; Welker et al., 2014). Imagined interactions recently became a subject of study, but has only tested attitudes toward a general or average group member, not a clearly identified public figure (Puchalska-Wasyl, 2019). Self-expansion Theory predicts increases in positive attitude and relationship maintenance, as the person builds a relationship on successive positive interactions (Mattingly et al., 2011; Schroeder & Risen, 2016; Welker et al., 2014). The cumulative effect of positive attitudes towards an outgroup requires relatability (Judd et al., 2005). Leaders communicate selectively and observers often lack a personal connection (Arieli et al., 2019). Generally, when the observer has had no personal interaction with the subject this fits the category of a parasocial relationship. Luckily, several theories of parasociality exist (Kim & Song, 2016; Lee and Shin, 2014; Puchalska-Wasyl, 2019; Welker et al., 2014). One aim of this study will be to identify which theory best explains the relationship between attitudes toward leaders and their represented groups.

Another aim of the study has been to identify trait differences that influence parasocial communication and attitude change. For example, a person who tends to be immersed in narratives and to identify with the main character often responds stronger and agrees more readily to a first-hand account rather than to the same content in writing (Lee & Shin, 2014). People do not respond the same way to in-person and media communications. Multimodal communication, such as the videos used in the study, were

expected to diminish the role of personality traits in maintaining biased attitudes. The role of existential isolation, as subjective feeling of social isolation, stands apart because it has been implicated in increased positive attitudes toward outgroup members (Pinel et al., 2006). Perceived social isolation, and the affective state it can induce, may predispose the person to seek out an imagined closeness, even toward dissimilar politicians (Pinel & Long, 2012; Pinel et al., 2006). Social isolation is associated with anxiety and a desire to belong, and both of which have been implicated in moderating positive attitude toward outgroup members when only written media is used (Greenwood & Long, 2011). I expected to see a similar effect for existential isolation in this study but it was not significant, perhaps due to the multimedia nature of the stimuli.

Significance of Study

The study attempts to address the role of parasocial relationships with political leaders in shaping attitudes towards political outgroup. I have chosen politicians as the primer for the study due to their clear visibility and the defined identity of political parties, and because of the significance of political attitudes in the real world.

To date, no research has addressed the potential of a parasocial relationship to modify attitude to the outgroup. The primary role of a leader in perceptions of a group and its intentions must be addressed to accurately describe intergroup behavior. A contemporary shift in media tone has focused on the personality of leaders to such prominence that attitudes to key figures may be exerting a disproportionate force on attitudes to the outgroup (Nai & Maier, 2018). Essentially, leaders are salient to their outgroup because of media saturation. Polarizing tone may be an accompanying factor.

Outgroup attitudes to the leader then overshadows the myriad of casual intergroup interactions, narrowing perspectives of the group to negative content and dominant figures.

People form one-sided relationships with national leaders to which they have no personal history or interaction (Greenwood & Long, 2011). Past research on personal sharing cannot be replicated in this scenario because the interaction is not a mutual, it is perceived intimacy rather than actual; but the research supports a broad changeability of attitude.

The study was designed to observe changes in attitude to outgroup leaders by presenting content that humanizes the leaders and then to observe changes in outgroup attitude. The crucial design element was the use of audio-visual content of the leaders with personal stories isolated to focus attention on a positive image. This approach was a challenge to implement, but the design is similar enough to compare to the studies that used contrived politician messages, thus broadening perspective in this line of research (Kim & Song, 2016; Lee & Jang, 2013).

Chapter II.

Method

The study was administered via Qualtrics as an online survey from August to December 2020. The survey was structured to collect explicit measures before and after exposure to audiovisual content. Participants were recruited through a university study pool that provides participation credit for psychology courses. The target sample was 500 participants, 250 participants from each party affiliation. The study is based on 68 participants, with the majority (68%) representing the Democrat party, two Republicans (3%), and the remaining 19 (29%) politically independent group as a control.

Participants

A total of 68 participants attempted the study, with 42 (62%) reporting as female and 16 (24%) male, and 10 (14%) undisclosed gender. Participants were students from a university in the northeastern United States, with 55% under the age of 24 and 76% under the age of 30. Their racial groups are represented by 18 (31%) white, 4 (7%) black, 7 (12%) Hispanic, 6 (10%) Asian, 1 (2%) multi-racial and 22 (38%) reporting as foreign born and raised. Participants received class participation credit for completion of the survey.

The final sample included in this study consisted of 63 participants. The average age of participants was 19.22 years (SD = 3.45). Political outlook is represented by: 9 (14%) very liberal, 26 (42%) liberal, 9 (14%) slightly liberal, and 19 (30%) reporting as

moderate outlook. Political party is represented by: 18 (27%) strong Democrat, 8 (12%) weak Democrat, 19 (30%), and 18 (28%) Independent/leaning Democrat. The following data includes the 58 participants that viewed Nikki Haley videos. All participants, including those who did not answer or responded "I do not know" when asked to identify Haley by name, are included in the analysis due to the small sample size

Eligibility

To be eligible, students were at least 18 years of age and consented to take a 60-minute online survey over a laptop or desktop computer. All participants who completed at least some of the measures were included in the study.

Procedures

Data was collected through the research study pool of a university in the northeastern United States. Psychology students at the undergraduate and graduate levels comprise the population sample offered by this venue, a population of 1,200. Students selected the survey, based on personal interest, from a list of topic summaries and were referred via a hyperlink.

Qualtrics was the webhost and data collection point for the study. Qualtrics is a low-cost platform providing a high level of participant anonymity. The platform also included a feature to readily integrate the video content into the survey design. Survey completion was unsupervised. Private remote access combined with anonymity ensured that participants were not pressured to conform their views to social expectations. Participants were encouraged to use laptop or desktop computers for best viewing of video content.

A single politician was selected to represent each political party. The main criterion was parity in gender, age, and presentation—Senator Tulsi Gabbard, as representative of the Democratic Party leadership, and former Secretary Nikki Haley, for the Republican Party leadership.

Video clips were selected based on quality criteria of the leader's self-disclosure story, with secondary attention to practical time limitations (12 minutes combined viewing time). The self-disclosure statements conform to a minimum standard: a) a personal happening, b) involving an emotional or prosocial values topic (e.g. hard work, empathy, determination, self-sacrifice), c) and reference to a personal relationship and its effects or impact. Two video clips of each politician were chosen to control for content exposure. All videos were edited to isolate for a) impersonal policy and social discussion, as the control variable, and b) self-disclosure stories, as the experimental variable. The result was a collection four spliced montages for each politician, two representing policy and social content, as controls, and two representing self-disclosure stories, as experimental stimuli. The experimental and control videos depict the leader of the opposite political party. In this way, all Republican participants will assess the same complete set of Democrat leader videos and, likewise, all Democrat participants will assess the complete set of Republican leader videos. A complete list of video clips for each political party is provided in Appendix 2. These videos will be displayed during testing as the only primer used in the study.

Nikki Haley is a Republican politician with media presence during her tenure as governor of South Carolina, from 2011 to 2017, and as United States ambassador to the United Nations, from 2017 to 2018. Control and experimental groups viewed content

from two videos edited only by cut and splice to isolate stimuli. A book tour event in 2019 in which Haley discusses political and social topics as well as her family and life trauma. An interviewer from the Reagan Foundation is present and can be heard asking questions, off camera. The edited videos eliminate his presence as a potential influence. In the second video, Haley gave a speech at the Hudson Institute in 2020 regarding the merits of conservative ideology. Following the opening comments, she relays a story of growing up as a working member of a family business. Her personal story was isolated to represent the experimental stimuli from this speech and removed from the control video. Video lengths were held constant to both groups.

Interested students were provide the online link to the survey through the university study pool. Participants first gave consent through the online consent form. A general description was provided for the tasks presented in the study, including the importance of recognizing the leaders and of actively observing videos of their stories. The consent form stated a survey completion time of 40-minutes.

The first section of the survey comprised two questions in which participants self-reported their political outlook and affiliation. These questions functioned as an automated screener so that participants would receive videos and survey content on the opposite political party. Participants that answered as Independent were randomly assigned political party content. These two groups, Republican and Democrat survey takers, were randomly assigned to either the control or experimental subgroups. The control and experimental groups received the same questions for the duration of the study, with exception to random order, name of politician, and political party.

A prompt announced when videos would play next and prepared participants for follow-up questions thereafter. When participants selected to move forward to the video display, they watched the randomly assigned videos, either a control set on policy and social discourse, or experimental videos, containing self-disclosure stories.

Participants were free to pause or replay the videos via an imbedded YouTube format. After viewing the videos, all participants answered the identical set of questions regarding their responses to video content and how the politician presented herself. Participants were then shown a photograph of the politician and were asked to enter her name in a text field. They completed the set of questions regarding attitudes toward this politician. Participants then answered the set of questions related to party attitudes. The questions were identical and randomized for all groups, with the exception of the party name.

Finally, participants were presented 3 sets of questions in random order: a) the EIS scale, b) political knowledge, and c) demographic questions. They answered a single question to control for phone use, with the expectation that video viewing would be compromised on smartphones. Participants were then debriefed on the general purpose of the study, the methods used, the award of credit for participation, and a request to keep the purpose of the experiment in confidence.

Measures

The study included Likert-style measures that captured a) group affiliation, b) attitudes, to test the hypothesis, and d) political knowledge, e) existential isolation, f) age, race, and gender, to control for influences on attitude. The online survey [Appendix 1]

includes a complete list of individual measures. Table 1 reports means (d), alphas, and intercorrelations of all measures included in this analysis

Group Affiliation

Political outlook was measured on two dimensions: ideological outlook and political party preference. Ideological outlook was presented as, "How would you describe your political outlook?," with the options being Very Liberal, Liberal, Slightly Liberal, Moderate, Slightly Conservative, Conservative, Very Conservative.
Political party mirrored the same self-reporting style, "How would you describe your political party preference (choose one)?," with options for Strong Democrat, Weak Democrat, Independent/Lean Democrat, Independent, Independent/Lean Republican, Weak Republican, Strong Republican. Moderate and Independent were provided as neutral value choices.

Attitudes

Attitudes were collected on three subjects: a) the politician who appeared in videos, b) the political party of the politician, and c) the videos presented.

Participants were asked to "please indicate how you feel about each statement": 1.) How familiar are you with this politician? 2.) I trust this leader to make decisions of basic national interests., 3.) I feel like I know this politician personally., 4.) If given the opportunity, I would like to get to know her better in person., 5.) I perceive this person as: competent, empathetic, logical, sincere. The response scale was Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree,

Strongly Agree, and was computed with values 1 to 7. Higher values on the composite score correspond to higher positive attitude.

Political party attitudes are measured with 9 randomized questions provided to all participants. Responses were recorded to each item on sliding scale ranging from the global feeling of cool to warm, with values of 1 to 7. The remaining questions ask to "please rate your feelings about members of the Party": 1.) Most of the social interactions I have had with party members has been positive., 2.) I would feel comfortable interacting with a party member., 3.) I would feel confident discussing topics with a party member I did not know., 4.) Interacting with a party member would be awkward., 5.) To interact with a party member would involve uncertainty., 6.) I would be at ease interacting with a party member., 7.) I would feel comfortable interacting with a party member., 8.) I would feel confident discussing topics with a party member did not know. The response scale was Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree. Higher values on the composite score correspond to higher positive attitude.

All participants receive the same set of five questions in response to the videos, irrespective of political party or group assignment, asking to "Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: 1.) The person seems genuine in retelling the story., 2.) I can relate to the person's story., 3.) The story is relevant to forming an impression of the storyteller., 4.) The storyteller has presented a positive image of the party and its members by sharing the story., 5.) The story is believable. The response scale was Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree,

Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree. Higher values on the composite score correspond to higher positive attitude.

Covariates

Political knowledge was measured by eight multiple choice questions that identify a) duties of specific political offices and b) current officeholders. The questions were, 1.) What job or political office does Boris Johnson currently hold?, 2.) What job or political office does John Roberts currently hold?, 3.) What job or political office does Mike Pence currently hold?, 4.) What job or political office does Nancy Pelosi currently hold?, 5.) Which political party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington?, 6.) Which political party currently has the most members in the Senate in Washington?, 7.) How long is the term of office for a U.S. senator?, 8.) Whose responsibility is it to nominate judges to the Federal Courts?, 9.) Choices were offered as the correct answer along with 2 to 4 incorrect answers and were scored as 0 for incorrect selections and 1 for correct selections. The highest possible composite score was 9. bLow scores in political knowledge indicates a lower interest or general familiarity in politics that might skew study results if not isolated.

A second control variable, existential isolation is a known influence of group attitudes (Pinel & Long, 2012; Pinel et al., 2006; Greenwood & Long, 2011). The Existential Isolation Scale (EIS) is the standard 6-question measure of beliefs and moods indicative of loneliness, 1.) I usually feel like people share my outlook on life., 2.) I often have the same reaction to things that other people around me do., 3.) People around me tend to react to things in our environment the same way I do., 4.) People do not often share my perspective., 5.) Other people usually do not understand my experiences., 6.)

People often have the same “take” or perspective on things that I do. The response scale was Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree, scored from 1 to 7. Questions 1, 2, 3 and 6 were reverse coded. In this way, higher values correspond to greater feelings of loneliness.

Age, race, and gender were also collected to exclude as potential factors in the study results.

Data Analysis

Low participant turnout resulted in overrepresented Democrat/Liberal categories. As a result, this analysis will only include respondents that reported as at least leaning to Democrat or Liberal. Data analysis was conducted for two aims. In order to investigate the relationship between changes in attitude toward a politician and toward her political party, difference in these variables were evaluated by comparing leader attitude to party attitude. Data analysis was also conducted to examine the potential influences of the control variables, loneliness and political knowledge.

The one-way ANOVA analysis included the between-subjects factor, the presence or absence of a personal story in the politician video, and the dependent variables, 1) leader attitude and 2) party attitude. Covariates included: 1.) political outlook, 2.) political party, 3.) political knowledge, and 4.) loneliness [Table 1 & Appendix 1].

Chapter III.

Results

Data was collected on 68 participants; however, only ten people viewed Tulsi Gabbard videos. Due to randomization, the majority of participants viewing these videos were political moderates. Republicans were underrepresented in the sample. For these reasons, I will be focusing on participants assigned to videos of Nikki Haley. G*Power was used to estimate our statistical power to detect mean level differences between the experimental and control group. With the current sample size (n =68), I estimated that I had 13% power to detect a Cohen's d of 0.2 and 53% power to detect a Cohen's d of 0.5 and above. Thus, we lack adequate statistical power to reliably observe small to medium sized effects.

Nonetheless, one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted to compare the effect of video stimuli on leader attitudes and party attitudes. As expected, the video stimuli were effective at altering leader attitude, $F(3, 56) = 3.401$, $p = .024$. This provides support for one of the main hypotheses. The covariates of loneliness and political knowledge were controlled to eliminate as potential influences on attitude. The sample reported average scores on these covariates but did not show an interactive effect with the dependent variable, positive attitude.

The hypothesis that a change in leader attitude would affect party attitude was non-significant $F(1, 56) = 2.510$, $p = .119$. Table 1 reports intercorrelations of all measures included in this analysis. Political outlook shows a positive correlation to

political party, as related constructs, and to leader attitude. Leader attitude is positively correlated to video responsiveness and negatively correlated to political knowledge. Loneliness shows no correlation to the other variables.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, alpha-levels, and Pearson correlation of all measures, weighted by survey weights.

Variables	M	SD	α	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Political Outlook	.663	.186	.791	1						
2. Political Party	.663	.186	.791	.705**	1					
3. Political Knowledge	.702	.190	.798	-.092	-.118	1				
4. Loneliness	.675	.206	.809	.100	-.016	-.045	1			
5. Video Response	.698	.207	.827	.149	.133	-.156	-.258	1		
6. Leader Attitude	.465	.266	.901	.361**	.170	-.355**	.080	.443**	1	
7. Party Attitude	.453	.253	.903	.221	.055	-.168	.029	.069	.367**	1

Note. $^{+}p < .1$; $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$

Chapter IV.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of self-disclosure of political leaders on attitudes towards that leader and the groups they represent. Results indicate that self-disclosure (vs. no self-disclosure) among political leaders causes more positive attitudes towards the political leader among members of the political outgroup. Personal narratives contribute to a parasocial relationship with the political leader. However, the effect of self-disclosure did not generalize to attitudes towards the entire political group.

This study applied findings in intergroup research to political contexts in novels ways. For example, features of stories have been manipulated to increase positive attitude towards a politician (Kim & Song, 2016) and this positive attitude has been show to generalize to a political outgroup (Schroeder & Risen, 2016). However, these aims have never been combined in a single study. The use of actual multimedia content supports external validity and facilitates replication. Parasocial relationship is a new area of study with several theoretical frameworks in development (Arieli et al., 2019; Judd et al., 2005). Application of parasocial relationship in the context of outgroup leadership helps to place these factors in context to the better-known variables used in interracial studies. The results suggest personal disclosures by politicians may promote more attitudes towards them from political outgroups, but may not generalize to improve attitudes towards the group.

Understanding the role of parasocial relationships in forming attitudes about leaders and their groups may be crucial to intergroup tolerance. Recent evidence

indicates increased violence and animosity among political groups (Levin & Reitzel, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2016).

Limitations & Future Directions

Self-selection bias (psychology students with interest in politics), demographic limitations (few republicans, many foreign born), small sample size, low recognition of the politicians, no control of experimental environment, and the timeliness of a potentially influential contested presidential election are all factors that limit generalization of the study findings.

Future research would benefit from addressing these limitations to improve our understanding of this phenomena. For example, the sample should be recruited from a broader pool or more representative population. Videos have a relative ease of operation and the study showed potential at only twelve minutes total viewing time. Longer duration of stimuli or a time series with repeated measures could be beneficial in determining the strength and permanence of effect.

The nonsignificant effect of experimental condition on attitudes towards political outgroups may be due to the low levels of statistical power for our analysis. Any future study would require a minimum of n=1251 to detect a Cohen's d of 0.2 and n=230 to detect a Cohen's d of 0.5. Current research design, as a survey with time-controlled videos, is feasible to apply to an expanded sample size. Future research should see to recruit a larger and more representative sample.

Participants were more likely to identify the party the politician represents than to identify her name. Future research could control for recognition, or casual exposure due to media saturation, by labeling actors with the opposite political party. Internal validity

would also strengthen because the similarity of videos, in context and content, could be manipulated to a greater precision than media-sourced videos.

The study may benefit by replacing loneliness with a new control variable. Loneliness did not correlate with any variable in the study. Positive attitude (Greenwood & Long, 2011), agreeableness, (Pinel et al., 2006), and narrative transportability (Lee & Shin, 2014) have been referenced in prior studies as moderators of outgroup attitude. Agreeableness, as a stable personality trait, is measured with a self-report similar in length to the EIS used in this study. Agreeableness as a general influencer of attitude would fit within the present understanding of the model because politician recognizability does not appear to be a factor and, if influential, only the lack of political knowledge corresponds to change in attitude. One explanation is that a non-political characteristic, such as agreeableness, is exerting a greater effect on attitude.

Finally, the measures for leader and party attitudes were custom constructed for this study. I drew heavily from prior studies on interracial attitudes; however, the set of questions for each construct may be insufficient or incomplete. A review of those prior measures and their conceptual framework would help eliminate over- or under-inclusive survey design as an influence on data.

Appendix 1.

Online Survey

1. Political Outlook: How would you describe your political outlook? Very Liberal, Liberal, Slightly Liberal, Moderate, Slightly Conservative, Conservative, Very Conservative

2. Political Party: How would you describe your political party preference (choose one)? Strong Democrat, Weak Democrat, Independent/Lean Democrat, Independent, Independent/Lean Republican, Weak Republican, Strong Republican

Introduction of Stimuli: [Videos randomly assigned to opposite party affiliation]

3. Video Response:

a.) Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements [Disagree = 1; Agree = 7]:

The person seems genuine in retelling the story.

I can relate to the person's story.

The story is relevant to forming an impression of the storyteller.

The storyteller has presented a positive image of the party and its members by sharing the story.

The story is believable.

b.) Do you think the stories included deception? Very Probable, Somewhat Probable, Somewhat Improbable, Very Improbable

c.) Measures of recognition for use in descriptive analysis: 1.) Please identify the politician by name. 2.) Which party is this politician affiliated?

4. Leader Attitude:

a.) Below are a number of statements regarding attitudes to political leaders. Please indicate how you feel about each statement [Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree]:

How familiar are you with this politician?

I trust this leader to make decisions of basic national interests.

I feel like I know this politician personally.

If given the opportunity, I would like to get to know her better in person:

I perceive this person as: competent, empathetic, logical, sincere.

5. Party Attitude:

a.) Overall, with blue as cooler and red as warmer, Please rate your feelings about members of the party [Cool = 1; Warm = 7]

b.) Please rate your feelings about members of the Party [Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree]:

Most of the social interactions I have had with party members has been positive.

I would feel comfortable interacting with a party member.

I would feel confident discussing topics with a party member I did not know.

Interacting with a party member would be awkward.

To interact with a party member would involve uncertainty.

I would be at ease interacting with a party member.

I would feel comfortable interacting with a party member.

I would feel confident discussing topics with a party member did not know.

6. Loneliness:

a.) I usually feel like people share my outlook on life. [Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree]

b.) I often have the same reaction to things that other people around me do. [Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree]

c.) People around me tend to react to things in our environment the same way I do. [Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree]

d.) People do not often share my perspective. [Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree]

e.) Other people usually do not understand my experiences. [Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree]

f.) People often have the same "take" or perspective on things that I do. [Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree]

7. Political Knowledge:

a.) What job or political office does Boris Johnson currently hold? [Speaker of the United Nations' General Assembly, Prime Minister of the Untied Kingdom, Prime Minister of Australia, U.S. envoy to the United Nations, Head of the European Commission]

b.) What job or political office does John Roberts currently hold? [Secretary of Defense, Attorney General, Senate Majority Leader, Secretary of the Interior, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court]

c.) What job or political office does Mike Pence currently hold? [Attorney General, Vice President, Secretary of State, Speaker of the House, Governor of New Hampshire]

d.) What job or political office does Nancy Pelosi currently hold? [Speaker of the House, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of Homeland Security, White House Chief of Staff, Attorney General]

e.) Which political party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington? [Democrats, Republicans, Both parties have the same number of members]

f.) Which political party currently has the most members in the Senate in Washington? [Democrats, Republicans, Both parties have the same number of members]

g.) How long is the term of office for a U.S. senator? [2, 4, 5, 6, 8 years]

h.) Whose responsibility is it to nominate judges to the Federal Courts – the President, the

i.) Congress or the Supreme Court? [The President, Congress, Supreme Court]

j.) Demographic measures for use in descriptive analysis: 1.) Your Gender: [Male, Female, Other, Prefer not to say], 2.) Your Age: [18-24, 25-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, 51 or older], 3.) Your Race/Ethnicity: [White American, Black American, Hispanic American, Asian American, Native American, Multi-racial, Foreign born and raised]

Appendix 2.

Videos: Sources and Edited Versions

Republican Leader, UN Ambassador Nikki Haley (shown to Democrats):

Source: Hudson Institute. (2020, Feb 26). *A Conversation with Ambassador Nikki R. Haley* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqCky1YWknU

Control: https://youtu.be/XcCnPc1_Mjw

Experimental: https://youtu.be/Z4afcmCWPcY

Source: Reagan Foundation. (2019, Dec 11). *Conversation and Book Event with Ambassador Nikki Haley* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQzHMe489SM

Control: https://youtu.be/H8oDF3JZs8k

Experimental: https://youtu.be/Ph5ZDJezIBw

Democrat Leader, Senator Tulsi Gabbard (shown to Republicans):

Source: Gabbard, Tulsi. (2012, Apr 7). *A Window into Tulsi Gabbard's Heart: Coming Home, Understanding War's Toll on Family* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtXaqQKoflM

Control: https://youtu.be/_JaNo4nKkFg

Experimental: https://youtu.be/n7YubfdOe2c

Source: Rubin Museum. (2018, Nov 30). Tulsi Gabbard and Chandrika Tandon: Women in Leadership on Creating Change [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ddcGo8LgPU

Control: https://youtu.be/_08TQ2yMKJw

Experimental: https://youtu.be/JkLkFrK4Elo

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