Ask and You Shall Receive? Right-Wing Authoritarianism Shapes Reactions to Religious

Accommodation Requests at Work

Abstract

Religious accommodation in the workplace remains a contentious issue in the United States. We conducted an experiment to examine how individual differences in right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) shape how people react to religious accommodation requests from Muslim versus Christian employees. Results reveal that participants exhibited more bias toward employees requesting religious accommodations when compared to employees requesting secular accommodations, but RWA determined which religion was stigmatized more: raters high in RWA stigmatized Muslims more heavily for requesting religious accommodations, but raters low in RWA stigmatized Christians more heavily for the same request. These results are consistent with the ideologically objectionable premise model (IOPM) of prejudice, demonstrating that those with both high *and* low RWA can exhibit symmetrical biases toward religious practices that are not aligned with their values. We discuss the implications of these findings for future scholarship on authoritarian traits.

Keywords

Ask and You Shall Receive? Right-Wing Authoritarianism Shapes Reactions to Religious Accommodation Requests at Work

1. Introduction

As religious diversity increases in the United States, many workers have a growing desire to practice their religion in the workplace. However, workplaces in the U.S. generally maintain a secular character (Cash & Gray, 2000), which may lead to disputes between employees and employers. Consistent with this concern, the number of religious discrimination lawsuits in the U.S. is rising over time (Trottman, 2013), which points to a clear need for a better understanding of why biases toward religious practices might emerge at work.

In this study, we propose that individual differences in right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) play a critical role in understanding when and why observers exhibit biases toward colleagues who request religious accommodations. To date, most research on religious accommodation starts with the presumption that Christians (i.e., the majority religious group in the U.S.) are less likely to be stigmatized than minority religious groups, with a particularly-compelling body of research showing that Muslim Americans are especially stigmatized (e.g., King & Ahmad, 2010). We draw on the ideologically objectionable premise model (IOPM; Crawford, 2012) to demonstrate that this is not always the case. Our research shows that people both high *and* low in RWA can exhibit symmetrical biases against religious accommodation requests depending on the faith of the requester. This research consequently advances our understanding of RWA and social biases with important implications for fair treatment in the workplace.

1.1 Right-Wing Authoritarianism

RWA is a social-attitudinal variable conceptualized by Altemeyer (1981). The label "right-wing" does not indicate affiliation with a political party, but rather signifies acceptance of traditional values and obedience to powerful authority figures. People high in RWA are characteristically followers who are predisposed to obeying leaders they perceive as legitimate; they are inclined to value traditional standards and accept them with a higher degree of certainty than the general population (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2005).

RWA is an important individual difference because it provides a value structure that justifies the expression of prejudice toward groups with practices or beliefs that differ from those of the traditional majority. Divergent practices or beliefs are bothersome to people high in RWA because they challenge the certainty with which they view mainstream, traditional practices and beliefs as legitimate, enduring, and correct. Consequently, multiple studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between RWA and prejudice towards racial and ethnic minorities, women, and homosexuals (Hunsberger, Owusu, & Duck. 1999; Whitley, 1999; Duckitt & Farre, 1994). In contrast, people low in RWA, who do not conform to traditional values or offer blind obedience to authority figures, are more accepting of divergent practices and perspectives.

RWA also predicts reactions to religious practices and beliefs. In particular, the Traditionalism facet of RWA has proven important in understanding reactions to religious minorities and behaviors with religious implications; for example, only Traditionalism is positively correlated with religiosity, discrimination against gays, and opposition towards contraceptive use (Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, & Heled, 2010). Thus, this study will focus on the Traditionalism aspect of RWA in the U.S., where emergent theory suggests that people with high

versus low levels of RWA-Traditionalism should exhibit symmetrical, but opposing, types of disliking toward religious practices.

1.2 The Ideologically Objectionable Premise Model

Early research documented that people high in RWA are much more likely to commit biased double-standards than people low in RWA. For example, Altemeyer (1996) studied reactions to hypothetical vignettes describing mandatory prayer in public schools in the U.S., manipulating whether Christian or Muslim group prayer was the mandatory practice. He found that people high in RWA exhibited a double standard by favoring mandatory Christian group prayer while strongly denouncing Muslim group prayer; in contrast, people low in RWA denounced both Christian and Muslim group prayer. As Crawford (2012) summarized, these types of findings encouraged personality researchers to conclude that people high in RWA are cognitively rigid and biased, whereas people low in RWA exhibit balanced judgment.

In contrast, the IOPM suggests that this pattern of asymmetrical biases emerges because RWA research typically focuses on scenarios or premises that are *ideologically objectionable* to those with less-traditional, low-RWA viewpoints. For example, people low in RWA are likely to reject the premise of mandatory school prayer wholesale, and consequently they lack the opportunity to exhibit a double-standard in favor of one faith like those high in RWA, who find the premise of mandatory school prayer permissible. In contrast, newer research that examines situations that are ideologically permissible to those high *and* low in RWA documents symmetrical biases. For example, Crawford (2012) examined reactions to setting aside space in schools for voluntary prayer, which is ideologically permissible to people both high and low in RWA. He found that Christian participants low in RWA favored Muslim over Christian prayer space, whereas Christians high in RWA favored Christian over Muslim space. Thus, low RWA

led to a bias in favor of the minority religious practice and against the traditional, majority religious practice, whereas high RWA generated a symmetrical, opposing bias. Scholarship on the IOPM is part of a broader trend in social psychology that documents that both liberals and conservatives can exhibit biases toward groups that are ideologically opposed to them (e.g., Crawford & Pilanksi, 2014; Brandt et al., 2014).

1.3 The Present Study

The present study extends research on the IOPM to examine reactions toward religious accommodation requests at work. Because religious accommodation in the U.S. falls within the scope of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it should be an ideologically permissible concept to people both high and low in RWA. However, consistent with Crawford (2012), we expect to find a symmetrical bias: people low in RWA with more liberal viewpoints should react more negatively to religious accommodation requests from Christians, whereas people high in RWA with more conservative viewpoints should react more negatively to accommodation requests from Muslims. We expect people low in RWA to express bias because the majority of Christians in America do not request formal prayer breaks at work, and Christians desiring to enact this practice may be perceived to be fundamentalists. Fundamentalism clashes with the liberal values of people with low RWA, rendering fundamentalist Christians an out-group and possible target of prejudice (Chambers et al., 2013). Thus, low RWA can readily promote prejudice towards fundamentalist, Christian employees who request unusual religious accommodations.

To test this expectation, we used a vignette design in which employed participants were presented with fictional scenarios describing a request for either a religious accommodation or a secular accommodation. In the religious accommodation condition, the employee requested information about prayer breaks at work. In the secular accommodation condition, the employee

requested information about special medical benefits. The fictional employees were male managers of either the Christian or Muslim faith making requests to their Human Resources department. Therefore, the study employed a 2 (Faith: Christian vs. Muslim) x 2 (Accommodation: Secular vs. Religious) between-subjects design; we expect this interaction to be further qualified by RWA-Traditionalism to yield a symmetrical bias. Our dependent variable was interpersonal liking of the employee in the vignette, which we selected as an indicator of social bias.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). All 120 participants were employed full-time within an organization and residents of the U.S. Participation was limited to Christians or individuals without religious affiliations; no members of religious minority groups in the U.S. were eligible. The sample was 70% male and 82.5% Caucasian, and participants reported a mean age of 34.66 years old (*SD*=10.28).

2.2 Procedure

After receiving informed consent, participants completed measures of demographic variables and RWA-Traditionalism. Then, participants were randomly assigned to read one of the four vignettes. After answering manipulation check variables, participants completed a measure of interpersonal liking of the employee in the vignette.

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 RWA-Traditionalism. We used the revised RWA-Traditionalism scale developed by Duckitt et al. (2010). This subscale consists of 12 items utilizing a 9-point Likert-type scale

(1= Very Strongly Disagree, 9=Very Strongly Agree). An example item is "The 'old-fashioned ways' and 'old-fashioned values' still show the best way to live". In this study, α = .86.

2.3.2 Interpersonal liking. We modified a measure by Montoya and Horton (2004) to measure bias in the form of interpersonal liking. This scale consists of 9 items utilizing a 9-point Likert-type scale (1 = Very Strongly Disagree, 9 = Very Strongly Agree). A sample item is, "I think I would enjoy this manager's company." In this study, α = .95.

3. Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables of the study are presented in Table 1. The hypothesis predicted a three-way interaction such that participants high in RWA-Traditionalism would report the lowest liking in the Muslim religious accommodation condition, and participants low in RWA-Traditionalism would report the lowest liking in the Christian religious accommodation condition. To test this hypothesis, we used the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013). The results of this analysis are shown in Table 2. Results indicate that participants rated employees seeking religious accommodation as significantly less likable. The two-way interaction between faith and accommodation was not significant, but the three-way interaction between faith, accommodation, and RWA-Traditionalism was significant ($\Delta R^2 = .03$), in support of the hypothesis. The form of the interaction is shown in Figure 1.

The top panel of Figure 1 shows the interaction of the faith and accommodation manipulations for participants high in RWA-Traditionalism, whereas the bottom panel shows the same interaction for participants low in RWA-Traditionalism. For high RWA-Traditionalism, the religious accommodation request yielded significantly lower liking ratings than the secular accommodation request when the employee was Muslim ($t = -3.92, p < .001$). However, liking ratings did not differ between the secular and religious accommodation conditions if the

employee was Christian (t = -1.43, *ns*). A symmetrical pattern emerged in the bottom panel of Figure 1 for people low in RWA-Traditionalism. Here, the religious accommodation request yielded significantly lower liking ratings than the secular accommodation request when the employee was Christian (t = -2.74, p < .01). However, liking ratings did not differ between the secular and religious accommodation conditions if the employee was Muslim (t = -0.69, *ns*). Thus, the form of the three-way interaction supports our hypothesis and the IOPM.

4. Discussion

Multiple studies and recent court cases illustrate instances of prejudice towards Muslims in the workplace, particularly those who desire to practice their religion (Ghumman et al., 2013; King & Ahmad, 2010). This study manipulated employee religion and accommodation type separately to examine the effects of religious affiliation and religious practice of employees independently and in combination. Results show that participants responded negatively to religious accommodation requests regardless of the faith of the requester. Faith, however, mattered when RWA-Traditionalism was considered; results showed that people high in RWA-Traditionalism were most prejudiced towards the Muslim employee requesting religious accommodation request, and that people low in RWA-Traditionalism were most prejudiced towards the Christian employee requesting religious accommodation. These findings support and extend the IOPM (Crawford, 2012) and highlight the complex relationship between RWA and prejudice.

Our findings are important for personality researchers because they highlight how people with low-authoritarian traits may exhibit their own forms of biased judgments, which is a critically-understudied issue (Brandt et al., 2014). Although the biases of people with high-authoritarian traits are well documented (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996), people with low

authoritarianism may exhibit equally hostile reactions toward traditional, conservative, or mainstream targets. Aside from religious groups, such targets could include military organizations and political groups (Brandt et al., 2014), or businesses that espouse traditional social values (Dahling, Wiley, Fishman, & Loihle, 2016).

Our study has several limitations worth noting. First, our experimental design may lack external validity, and replication with surveys or field research is necessary. Second, our sample was not representative of the general U.S. population with respect to religiosity. In particular, the percentage of non-affiliated participants in the sample is especially high when compared to demographics of the general population, although even non-affiliated adults in the U.S. are typically socialized and familiar with Christian religious practices (Pew Forum on Religion & Spiritual Life, 2007). Despite these limitations, our study offers a valuable addition to the literature on RWA; we offer one of the few empirical tests of the IOPM, and we shed light on when minority (Muslim) *and* majority (Christian) employees may face stigma by requesting a religious accommodation at work.

5. References

Altemeyer, B. (1981). *Right-wing authoritarianism.* Winnipeg, Canada: University of Manitoba

Press.

Altemeyer, B. (1996). *The authoritarian specter.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Altemeyer, B., & Hunsberger, B. (2005). Fundamentalism and authoritarianism. In R. F.

Paloutzian, C. L. Park, R. F. Paloutzian, C. L. Park (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of*

religion and spirituality (pp. 378-393). New York, NY, US: Guilford Press.

Brandt, M.J., Reyna, C., Chambers, J.R., Crawford, J.T., & Wetherell, G. (2014). The

ideological-conflict hypothesis: Intolerance among both liberals and conservatives.

Current Directions in Psychological Science, 23, 27-34. doi:10.1177/0963721413510932

Buhrmester, M., Kwang, T., & Gosling, S. D. (2011). Amazon's Mechanical Turk: A new source

of inexpensive, yet high-quality, data? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *6*, 3-5.

doi:10.1177/1745691610393980

Cash, K. C., & Gray, G. R. (2000). A framework for accommodating religion and spirituality in

the workplace. *Academy of Management Executive*, *14*, 124-133.

doi:10.5465/AME.2000.4468072

Chambers, J.R., Schlenker, B.R., & Collisson, B. (2013). Ideology and prejudice: The role of

value conflicts. *Psychological Science, 24,* 140-149. doi:10.1177/0956797612447820

Crawford, J.T. (2012). The ideologically objectionable premise model: Predicting biased

political judgments on the left and right. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 48,*

138-151. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2011.10.004

Crawford, J.T., & Pilanski, J.M. (2014). Political intolerance, right and left. *Political*

Psychology, 35, 841-851. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2012.00926.x

Dahling, J.J., Wiley, S., Fishman, Z.A., & Loihle, A. (2016). A stake in the fight: When do heterosexual employees resist organizational policies that deny LGB equality? *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 132*, 1-15. doi:10.1016/j.obhdp.2015.11.003

Duckitt, J., & Farre, B. (1994). Right-wing authoritarianism and political intolerance among Whites in the future majority-rule South Africa. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, *134*, 735-741. doi:10.1080/00224545.1994.9923008

Duckitt, J., Bizumic, B., Krauss, S. W., & Heled, E. (2010). A tripartite approach to Right-Wing Authoritarianism: The Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism model. *Political Psychology*, *31*, 685-715. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2010.00781.x

Hayes, A.F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press

Hunsberger, B., Owusu, V., & Duck, R. (1999). Religion and prejudice in Ghana and Canada: Religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism and attitudes toward homosexuals and women. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *9*, 181-194. doi:10.1207/s15327582ijpr0903_2

King, E. B., & Ahmad, A. S. (2010). An experimental field study of interpersonal discrimination toward Muslim job applicants. *Personnel Psychology*, *63*, 881–906. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6570.2010.01199.x

Montoya, R. M., & Horton, R. S. (2004). On the importance of cognitive evaluation as a determinant of interpersonal attraction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *86*, 696-712. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.86.5.696

Paolacci, G., & Chandler, J. (2014). Inside the Turk: Understanding Mechanical Turk as a

participant pool. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 23*, 184-188.

doi:10.1177/0963721414531598

Pew Forum on Religion & Spiritual Life (2007). *Summary of Key Findings - Statistics on

Religion in America Report*. Retrieved April 15, 2015, from

http://religions.pewforum.org/reports

Trottman, M. (2013, October 27). Religious-discrimination claims on the rise. *Wall Street

Journal*, B1, B4.

Whitley, B. J. (1999). Right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and prejudice.

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *77*, 126-134. doi:10.1037/0022-

3514.77.1.126

Table 1

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Faith manipulation	--	--	--					
2. Accommodation manipulation	--	--	--	--				
3. Gender	--	--	-.26**	-.17	--			
4. Age	34.66	10.28	-.16	-.23*	.05	--		
5. Right-wing authoritarianism	3.79	1.77	-.08	-.01	.02	.18	--	
6. Interpersonal liking	5.16	1.82	.04	-.27**	.04	.13	.03	--

Note: Faith manipulation is coded 0 = Christian, 1 = Muslim. Accommodation manipulation is

coded 0 = Secular, 1 = Religious. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Regression of Interpersonal Liking on Manipulations and Right-Wing Authoritarianism

Predictor	b	SE	t
Faith manipulation	0.19	.39	.48
Accommodation manipulation	-1.17	.39	-2.99**
RWA-Traditionalism	0.43	.17	2.59*
Faith x Accommodation interaction	-.15	.55	-.27
Faith x RWA-Traditionalism interaction	-.68	.22	-3.08**
Accommodation x RWA-Traditionalism interaction	.22	.22	1.00
Faith x Accommodation x RWA-Traditionalism interaction	-.76	.31	-2.42*

Note: RWA = right-wing authoritarianism. Faith manipulation is coded 0 = Christian, 1 =

Muslim. Accommodation manipulation is coded 0 = Secular, 1 = Religious. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$
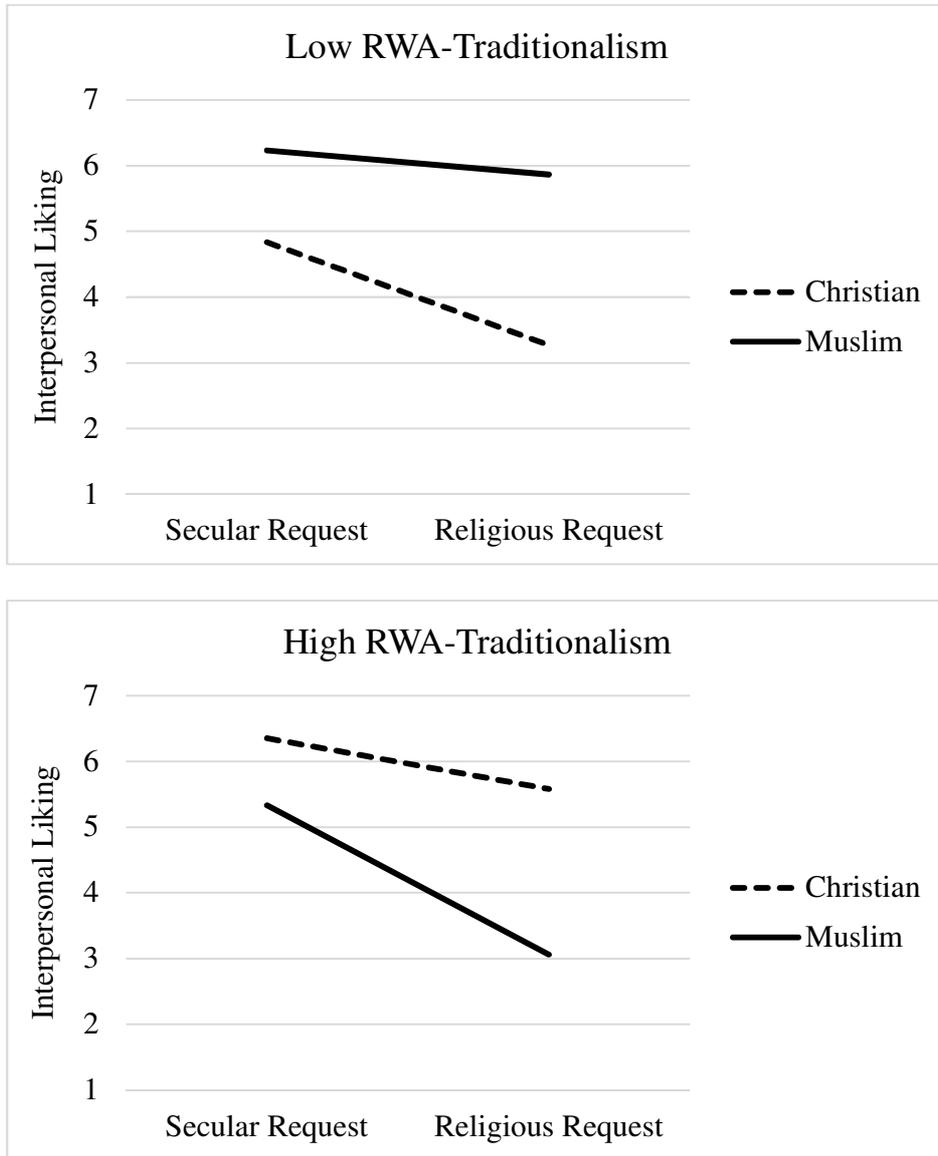
Figure 1. Interaction of accommodation request manipulation and faith manipulation on interpersonal liking for people with high RWA-Traditionalism (top panel) and low RWA-Traditionalism (bottom panel). *Note*: RWA = right-wing authoritarianism.