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# US against THEM

## *Ethnocentric Foundations of American Opinion*

DONALD R. KINDER & CINDY D. KAM

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CHAPTER 1

# Four Theories in Search of Ethnocentrism

What is the nature of ethnocentrism? How does ethnocentrism arise? And when—under what conditions—does ethnocentrism become important to politics? An adequate theory of ethnocentrism must provide convincing answers to all three questions: nature, origins, and consequences.

With this obligation in mind, our principal business in this chapter is to work through the major theories that claim to speak directly to ethnocentrism. In the pages ahead, we examine ethnocentrism from four distinct theoretical perspectives:

- Ethnocentrism as a consequence of realistic group conflict
- Ethnocentrism as an outgrowth of the authoritarian personality
- Ethnocentrism as an expression of social identity
- Ethnocentrism as an outcome of natural selection

As we will see, no single theory supplies completely satisfying answers to all three questions. Each, however, offers valuable insights, lessons for us to carry forward. Grappling with these alternative points of view here will pave the way to a more adequate theoretical framework for ethnocentrism, which we develop in chapter 2. To arrive at this better understanding of ethnocentrism today, we turn to the past, to traditions of explanation associated with William Graham Sumner, Daniel Levinson, Henri Tajfel, and Edward O. Wilson.

## ETHNOCENTRISM DEFINED

But first a few words about ethnocentrism itself. Without a clear conception of our object of study, we could find ourselves in the unfortunate position of the Javanese folktale figure "Stupid Boy," who, as Clifford Geertz tells the tale, "having been counseled by his mother to seek a quiet wife, returned with a corpse." A corpse makes a quiet wife, all right, but surely this was not what mother had in mind.[1] Let's try to do better. When we say that

ethnocentrism plays an important role in American public opinion, just what is it that we are arguing for?

Ethnocentrism is a mental habit. It is a predisposition to divide the human world into in-groups and out-groups. It is a readiness to reduce society to us and them. Or rather, it is a readiness to reduce society to us *versus* them. This division of humankind into in-group and out-group is not innocuous. Members of in-groups (until they prove otherwise) are assumed to be virtuous: friendly, cooperative, trustworthy, safe, and more. Members of out-groups (until they prove otherwise) are assumed to be the opposite: unfriendly, uncooperative, unworthy of trust, dangerous, and more. Symbols and practices become objects of attachment and pride when they belong to the in-group and objects of condescension, disdain, and (in extreme cases) hatred when they belong to out-groups. Ethnocentrism constitutes a readiness to act in favor of in-groups and in opposition to out-groups; it charts a safe path through a social world that may seem uncomfortable, difficult, and, at times, perilous.[2]

People differ—reliably and stably—in the degree to which they see the social world this way. At least since Darwin, it has been axiomatic in the biological sciences to regard living organisms not as constant classes but as variable populations. This point applies to barnacles and to human beings alike. People vary from one another in all sorts of ways: height, color, sociability, intelligence, and more—including ethnocentrism.

People vary from one another *incrementally*. It would be a mistake to conceive of ethnocentrism as a type and to assume that people either are ethnocentric or that they are not. People are more or less ethnocentric. They vary in the degree to which they reduce the social world to in-groups and out-groups, to us and them. Ethnocentrism is a quantity, not a kind.[3]

Ethnocentrism should not be interpreted as irrational, the twisted expression of repressed hostilities and primeval fears. Ethnocentrism is not a sickness. We do not require a therapist's technique to reveal it or psychodynamic processes to explain it. Ethnocentrism is normal. It is, one might say, a "natural" way to look upon the social world.

Finally, ethnocentrism is a *general* predisposition. It is in this respect that ethnocentrism differs from prejudice. In contrast to prejudice, ethnocentrism "has to do not only with numerous groups toward which the individual has hostile opinions and attitudes but, equally important, with groups toward which he is positively disposed." Moreover, while prejudice is hostility directed at a specific group, ethnocentrism refers to a "relatively consistent frame of mind concerning 'aliens' generally." Thus when we turn from race prejudice or anti-Semitism or any other particular social animosity, on the one hand, to ethnocentrism, on the other, we come face to face with "prejudice, broadly conceived" (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 102).[4]



## ETHNOCENTRISM AS A CONSEQUENCE OF REALISTIC GROUP CONFLICT

Defined this way, how might ethnocentrism—prejudice, broadly conceived—arise? Looking for answers, let's turn first to William Graham Sumner. As we noted in the introduction, Sumner introduced the term *ethnocentrism* into the social science lexicon. But we turn to him here because he also had interesting things to say about ethnocentrism's origins.

In Sumner's view, ethnocentrism included both in-group solidarity and out-group hostility. The two were connected inextricably. Both, Sumner argued, arose out of conflict, inevitable in a Hobbesian world of scarce resources:

> The insiders in a we-group are in a relation of peace, order, law, government, and industry, to each other. Their relation to all outsiders, or others-groups, is one of war and plunder. . . . Sentiments are produced to correspond. Loyalty to the group, sacrifice for it, hatred and contempt for outsiders, brotherhood within, warlikeness without—all grow together, common products of the same situation. ([1906] 2002, pp. 12–13)

This is Sumner's principal claim—that in-group solidarity *and* out-group hostility grow out of intergroup competition—and it remains a central feature of contemporary versions of realistic group conflict theory. From this perspective, antagonism between groups is rooted in actual conflict. Groups have incompatible goals, and they compete for scarce resources. Conflict is most intense where competition is keenest, where contending groups have the most at stake. In a way that would no doubt earn Sumner's approval, contemporary realistic group conflict theory treats ethnic and racial groups as "vehicles for the pursuit of interest in modern pluralist societies . . . participants in ongoing competition for control of economic, political, and social structures" (Giles and Evans 1986, pp. 470, 471).[5]

Sumner provided abundant examples of ethnocentrism, first in *Folkways* (1906) and then later in *The Science of Society* (Sumner, Keller, and Davie 1927). Of course, establishing that ethnocentrism is commonplace (Sumner was sure that ethnocentrism was universal) is not the same thing as explaining its origins. Was Sumner right to propose that ethnocentrism arises from group conflict?

Let's start with in-group solidarity. Sumner was emphatic that in-group solidarity arises from conflict between groups over scarce resources. In one form or another, this proposition can be found in the writings of Simmel, Marx, Sorel, and Dahrendorf, among others. But is it, as Dahrendorf has written, really a "general law" (1964, p. 58)? No. In *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1956), Coser argued that conflict with outsiders often leads to

in-group solidarity, but not invariably. Conflict can also lead to demoralization, and in extreme cases, disintegration. Empirical studies suggest that Coser was correct. Conflict generates in-group solidarity only under certain conditions: when in-group solidarity is above some threshold before threat materializes, when threat is seen as a menace to the entire group, and when authoritative leadership seeks to mobilize solidarity (M. Brewer and Campbell 1976; Sherif et al. 1961; Stein 1976).

What of Sumner's second proposition, that conflict is the primary cause of out-group animosity? It turns out that there is empirical support aplenty for this. Consider, as one example, the remarkable field experiments carried out by Muzafer Sherif. In the most famous of these, Sherif recruited two dozen eleven-year-old boys for what was advertised as a summer camp experience. The boys were carefully screened and were mutually unacquainted. Prior to the experiment, they were randomly assigned to one of two groups and then transported separately to Robbers Cave, a state park in Oklahoma. There each group set about various activities designed to build solidarity. The boys went on hikes together, pitched tents, made meals, and built a rope bridge. All of this took place under the gentle direction and watchful eye of experimental assistants posing as camp counselors, who spent their off hours surreptitiously recording detailed observations of the day's proceedings. During this first stage of the experiment, which lasted one week, the two groups of boys occupied different sites within the park and were kept largely unaware of each other's presence.

During stage two, the Rattlers and the Eagles, as the groups now called themselves, were brought into a relationship of conflict through a series of staged contests. Points were awarded for victories on the athletic field, for the best skit, and for the tidiest cabins. The Rattlers and the Eagles were informed that at the end of their stay, the winning group was to be awarded a trophy and each member of the winning group given a splendid prize. The two groups were now taking their meals together, and at the entrance to the common mess hall the results of the day's competition were ostentatiously displayed and added to the ongoing total.

In short order, the Rattlers and the Eagles began to compete fiercely with one another. They exchanged insults, referring to each other as "rotten pukes" and "dirty bastards." They carried out midnight raids to tear up each other's cabins. They celebrated their victories and rationalized their defeats. They wrestled and fought each other, to the point where counselors had to step in to prevent injury. Sherif had predicted that the experimental creation of conflict would generate out-group hostility, but we suspect that he got rather more than he had bargained for.[6]

Realistic group conflict theory is also supported by the most robust empirical finding in the entire American race relations literature: that of a strong



connection between the threat that blacks seem to pose to whites, on the one hand, and the hostility of whites' response, on the other. In *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, V. O. Key showed in masterly detail that politics in the American South through the middle of the twentieth century was most reactionary in the so-called black belt: those regions of the South characterized by rich soil where the plantation economy had flourished and black people lived in concentrated numbers. It was in the black belt where, as Key put it (1949, p. 5), whites possessed "the deepest and most immediate concern with the maintenance of white supremacy." Accordingly, it was within the black belt where support for secession and war was most adamant, where the subsequent drive for black disfranchisement came with greatest force, and where defense of segregation in the 1950s and '60s was most ferocious.[7]

Acknowledging that realistic group conflict theory represents a valuable perspective on social conflict, a major obstacle stands in the way of its application here. Examined closely, realistic group conflict theory has little to say about *generalized* hostility. Why should there be ethnocentrism—prejudice, broadly conceived—in the first place? Hostility directed at a specific group, yes, but hostility in general? Virtually all the empirical support for group conflict theory comes from one group's reaction to the threat posed by one other. In the altogether typical case, realistic group conflict theory takes up pairs of opposing groups: the Rattlers and the Eagles at summer camp, whites and blacks in the American South, and so on. Insofar as ethnocentrism entails hostility directed not at a single out-group but at many out-groups, these applications of realistic group conflict theory, however successful they may be in explaining particular instances of conflict, simply do not speak to ethnocentrism as we conceive it. From the perspective of group conflict theory, generalized prejudice is possible only in the presence of multiple and simultaneous intergroup conflicts. But we are interested in ethnocentrism in precisely this sense. Ethnocentrism is generalized prejudice. If our question is why some people are ethnocentric while others are not, why some but not others are predisposed to take many kinds of difference as warrant for condescension or contempt, then group conflict theory cannot take us very far. More promising, as we are about to see, is the theory of authoritarianism.[8]

## ETHNOCENTRISM AS AN OUTGROWTH OF THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY

Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford, who together produced the monumental study of the authoritarian personality (1950), lived in a more precarious world than did William Graham Sumner. Their study was launched in the early 1940s in the United

States against a backdrop of horrific events: crushing economic depression, cataclysmic war, and the deliberate liquidation of the Jewish population of Europe. Frenkel-Brunswik, one of the principal architects of the study, fled Vienna shortly after Hitler's rise to power. She was Jewish and no doubt knew anti-Semitism well. Little wonder that Adorno and his associates initiated their investigation hoping to illuminate the nature and origins of anti-Semitism and its implications for democratic society. But what began as a study of anti-Semitism ended up as an investigation of the prejudiced personality.

Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford were psychologists by training, and they organized their project around a psychological question: why do some individuals but not others find antidemocratic ideas so appealing? Taking for granted that antidemocratic ideas would be available in any society, they defined their goal to be to identify those who were drawn to antidemocratic ideas, to identify those who were repelled by such ideas, and to explain the difference.[9]

To carry out their project, Adorno's team made use of the new techniques of attitude measurement, in-depth interviewing, and rudimentary statistical analysis—methods that were unavailable to Sumner but were coming to prominence in the social sciences of their day. For theoretical inspiration, they drew primarily on psychodynamic concepts. This meant that Adorno and his colleagues were inclined to see susceptibility to antidemocratic ideas as irrational, an expression of unconscious drives, wishes, and emotional impulses. To understand antidemocratic belief, they urged, look deep into personality; and for evidence, sift through clues offered up by "dreams, fantasies, and misinterpretations of the world" (Adorno et al. 1950, pp. 8–9).

Among various antidemocratic beliefs that they might have examined, the four researchers chose anti-Semitism for their primary exhibit. Levinson took the lead in this portion of the project, and he began by formulating a set of propositions intended to capture the core of contemporary anti-Semitism.[10] He then translated these propositions into plain speech, into statements that ordinary people would recognize and that some might agree with. In final form, the anti-Semitism scale includes such claims as these:

> There are too many Jews in the various federal agencies and bureaus in Washington, and they have too much control over our national policies.
>
> Persecution of the Jews would be largely eliminated if the Jews would make really sincere efforts to rid themselves of their harmful and offensive faults.
>
> The trouble with letting Jews into a nice neighborhood is that they gradually give it a typical Jewish atmosphere.



In composing these statements, Levinson tried to avoid extreme anti-Semitism, to soften and partially disguise animosity toward Jewish people and Jewish faith by adding qualifying phrases and an occasional gesture to democratic ideals. As Roger Brown (1965, p. 483) once put it, "Each question has a kind of fair-minded and reasonable veneer. It is sometimes rather difficult to find the sting."[11]

Levinson and his associates administered their scale of garden-variety anti-Semitism to samples of college students, nurses, psychiatric patients, Kiwanis club members, schoolteachers, veterans, union members, and prison inmates. The propositions that make up the scale raise a variety of conceivable objections to Jews, some of them mutually contradictory: for example, that Jews push their way into places they do not belong, that they (at the same time) keep too much to themselves, and that they (nevertheless) must be segregated. Levinson found that people responded to the questions with impressive consistency, as if the questions were about one thing and one thing only. Some people were consistently sympathetic, while others—the majority—were consistently hostile.[12]

Levinson and his colleagues next wondered whether anti-Semitism might be associated with other varieties of prejudice. In taking up this question, the project moved from a particular animosity—anti-Semitism—to a general predisposition—what they called *ethnocentrism.* Levinson and his colleagues, unlike Sumner, were keenly interested in the possibility that some people were more ethnocentric than others. This is our interest as well. People differ from one another in all sorts of ways: height, color, sociability, intelligence, and more—including, we say with Levinson, ethnocentrism.

To see if such a thing as ethnocentrism might exist, Levinson prepared a set of propositions pertaining to a wide array of possible targets: blacks, Japanese Americans, the mentally ill, Filipinos, criminals, European refugees, "foreign ideas," and more. As in the measurement of anti-Semitism, the propositions were written in everyday language, hostility was softened, and the various complaints were phrased in ways that seemed consistent with common sense and democratic values.[13]

Levinson found considerable consistency here as well. Those Americans who insisted that blacks be kept in their place were likely also to express contempt or condescension for criminals, Japanese Americans, conscientious objectors, immigrants, foreign ideas, and all the rest—including Jews. Responses to the anti-Semitism scale and the ethnocentrism scale, Levinson discovered, were highly correlated. He concluded that "it is the total ethnocentric ideology, rather than prejudice against any single group, which requires explanation" (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 122).[14]

If, as Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford say, it is ethnocentrism that requires explanation, how did they explain it? Their first move

was to argue that the striking consistency in belief that is the hallmark of ethnocentrism could be accounted for only by some underlying organizing psychological structure. Ethnocentrism could not reflect actual experience, for actual experience is too messy, too variegated, to produce such an integrated, cohesive ideology as ethnocentrism. Anti-Semitism, racism, opposition to immigration, and all the rest must be expressions of a unified and deep psychological force. Underneath ethnocentric ideology, Adorno and his team hoped to prove, was the authoritarian personality.

They began this part of the project by conducting intensive interviews with people who had scored either very high or very low on the ethnocentrism scale. The interviews were both designed and subsequently analyzed from the perspective of psychodynamic theory, and they seemed to reveal psychological inclinations—none of them flattering—that typified the ethnocentric: rigid adherence to traditional values, moralistic condemnation of those who violate convention, readiness to capitulate to established authorities (parents, bosses, "great leaders"), preoccupation with strength and power, disdain for imagination and generosity, cynicism toward human nature, and a conviction that wild and dangerous things go on in the world.

The next step was to formulate propositions to measure each of these psychological inclinations, to capture in questionnaire form the insights of the clinical interviews. According to Levinson and colleagues, this proved simple and straightforward:

> Once a hypothesis had been formulated concerning the way in which some deep-lying trend in the personality might express itself in some opinion or attitude that was dynamically, though not logically, related to prejudice against out-groups, a preliminary sketch for an item was usually not far to seek: a phrase from the daily newspaper, an utterance by an interviewee, a fragment of ordinary conversation was usually ready at hand. (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 225)

Whether or not things went quite this smoothly, the team did succeed in assembling a reliable measure of authoritarianism—the famous F scale (*F* for fascism).[15] They then proceeded to show that authoritarians—that is, people who scored high on the F scale—were in fact very likely to be both anti-Semitic and ethnocentric. Dislike of Jews, prejudice against blacks, contempt for foreigners, and similar attitudes all seem to arise out of a particular personality type, the authoritarian.

From the perspective of psychodynamic theory, ethnocentrism serves the authoritarian well. Out-groups—Jews, criminals, Japanese Americans—become convenient and safe psychological targets. Through the psychological process of displacement, such groups absorb the hostilities originally pro-



voked by the authoritarian's parents. Through projection, out-groups take on forbidden qualities—unbridled power, liberation from the demands of work, free and easy sex—those things that the authoritarian secretly wants but cannot have. Adorno and his colleagues concluded that "the political, economic, and social convictions of an individual often form a broad and coherent pattern, as if bound together by a 'mentality' or 'spirit,'" which is itself "an expression of deep-lying trends in personality."[16]

When *The Authoritarian Personality* was published, it was greeted with widespread acclaim, and then, in the space of a few years, buried under an avalanche of criticism.[17] Two complaints did most of the damage, and both are highly relevant for what we care about here: the existence of ethnocentrism and its foundations in personality. The first objection concerns sample bias. Because of limitations of funding, Adorno and colleagues were forced to rely on volunteers for their studies, and this they accomplished by working through formal organizations. The almost inevitable result was a sample that was disproportionately middle class and socially active—and therefore, perhaps, more likely to show the coherence of ideas about social groups and politics that was the study's central finding.

A second and more lethal criticism has to do with scale construction. It begins with the seemingly innocent observation that the questions that make up the anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism, and F scales are formatted in identical fashion. In each instance, study participants were presented with a proposition—such as "Obedience and respect for authority are the most important values that children can learn"—and asked how much they agreed or disagreed with it. This is the Likert method of opinion assessment, and in principle there is little wrong with it (Likert 1932). The lethal mistake came not in the application of the Likert procedure per se but in the writing of the specific propositions. All the propositions were written to run in the same direction. In every case, agreement indicated a propensity toward anti-Semitism or ethnocentrism or authoritarianism; in every case, disagreement indicated the opposing propensity. Writing in defense of the anti-Semitism scale in particular, Levinson argued that "since the scale attempts to measure receptivity to anti-Semitic ideology, it seemed reasonable to use only anti-Semitic statements in the scale" (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 59).

Reasonable as it may have seemed at the time, this decision fatally compromises *The Authoritarian Personality*'s results. It means that the impressive figures Adorno and colleagues report on the internal consistency of their scales and, more important, the striking correlations they report on the relationship *between* the scales are inflated, perhaps egregiously so. The correlations within and between scales are partly a product of a tendency for people to agree to reasonable-sounding propositions, irrespective of their

content. This tendency, the acquiescence response set, is well documented now, as it was not at the time Levinson and company were designing their research, and its effects are surprisingly powerful.[18]

So, is there really such a thing as ethnocentrism? If there is, does it reflect antidemocratic tendencies rooted in the authoritarian personality? Though nearly a thousand pages long, strikingly ambitious in purpose and intermittently brilliant in analysis, *The Authoritarian Personality*, in the end, cannot say.

The critics of *The Authoritarian Personality* were right to point out the study's defects, and they were persuasive. But it is important to recognize that the critics thereby established that Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford failed to prove their conclusions, not that their conclusions were necessarily incorrect.[19]

According to *The Authoritarian Personality*, a primary characteristic of ethnocentrism is the generality and consistency of out-group rejection:

> It is as if the ethnocentric individual feels threatened by most of the groups to which he does not have a sense of belonging; if he cannot identify, he must oppose; if a group is not "acceptable," it is "alien."
>
> [The ethnocentric person] is prepared to reject groups with which he has never had contact; his approach to a new and strange person or culture is not one of curiosity, interest and receptivity but rather one of doubt and rejection. The feeling of difference is transformed into a sense of threat and an attitude of hostility. The new group easily becomes an out-group. (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 149)

The authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* presented these points as if they were established facts, and that they had established them. We know now that they were mistaken. But, over the last five decades, in a series of studies, with measures corrected against the contaminations of response set, and for samples taken both inside and outside the United States, the generality and consistency of out-group animosity is a common result. So, for example, Americans who regard the Japanese with condescension tend to think the same about Mexicans. Russians who blame Jews for their nation's troubles also blame capitalists, dissidents, and nonethnic Russians. And on it goes. Much as Levinson and colleagues claimed more than fifty years ago, hostility toward any one group appears to be part of a broader system of belief, "a relatively consistent frame of mind concerning 'aliens' generally" (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 102).[20]

And what of their claim that ethnocentrism is an outgrowth of authoritarianism? Perhaps they were right on this point too—though arriving at this conclusion requires a reimagining of authoritarianism itself.[21]



For this we turn to Karen Stenner's book, *The Authoritarian Dynamic* (2005). Building on her work with Stanley Feldman (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Feldman 2003), Stenner offers a new and appealing conceptualization of authoritarianism. She begins by severing the connection between authoritarianism and psychodynamic theory. Stenner invites us to think of authoritarianism as arising out of a basic human dilemma. Living alongside others is an inescapable feature of human society. This leads inevitably to tension between personal autonomy and social cohesion. The problem is how to strike a proper balance between group authority and uniformity, on the one side, and individual autonomy and diversity, on the other. Authoritarians choose the former over the latter: they are inclined to glorify, encourage, and reward uniformity, while disparaging, suppressing, and punishing difference. According to Stenner, the

> overriding objective of the authoritarian is always to enhance oneness and sameness; to minimize the diversity of people, beliefs, and behaviors with which one is confronted; and to institute and defend some collective order that makes all of this possible. (2005, p. 143)

To measure authoritarianism, Stenner relies on a disarmingly straightforward method. She simply asks people to choose values that children should be encouraged to learn at home. Those who select "good manners" and "obedience" as primary virtues for children are authoritarian; those who choose "imagination" and "independence" are not.[22]

Stenner finds that authoritarianism, measured in this way, is a consistent and sometimes powerful predictor of political intolerance. Intolerance, in her analysis, includes such things as keeping "undesirables" out of the neighborhood, prohibiting dissemination of pornography, and requiring prayer in school. Authoritarianism and intolerance are consistently connected not only in the United States, but in many other places besides: in Britain, Spain, Russia, the Czech Republic, and scores of other countries. The details differ from one place to the next—for British authoritarians it is immigrants from South Asia who must be curtailed, while Russian authoritarians worry about controlling the peoples of the Caucasus—but the general pattern is much the same. From such evidence Stenner concludes that "authoritarianism is the primary determinant of general intolerance of difference worldwide" (2005, p. 133).[23]

Ethnocentrism and intolerance are not the same, and Stenner's analysis is confined entirely to the latter. She never takes up the relationship between authoritarianism and ethnocentrism. However, she does find a consistent connection between authoritarianism and many specific instances of intolerance, involving many different groups. It seems reasonable to conclude

that authoritarianism, as Stenner defines it, and ethnocentrism, as we think of it, are related.

And so, although it has taken a good long while, it seems that Adorno and colleagues may have been right all along. They were right, first of all, to presume that people differ from one another in their general outlook toward others. People are more or less ethnocentric: predisposed to react with more or less pride to their in-group and predisposed to react with more or less suspicion, condescension, and contempt to groups not their own. They were right to draw a sharp distinction between ethnocentric ideology, on the one hand, and authoritarian personality, on the other. And with Stenner's evidence in hand, perhaps they were right as well to conclude that ethnocentrism is an outgrowth, at least in part, of the authoritarian personality. These are important lessons to carry forward. At the same time, to reduce ethnocentrism *entirely* to personality would be a mistake. The personality approach misses important parts of the story of the origins of ethnocentrism, as we will see. And a preoccupation with personality is blind to the part that elites play in the mobilization of ethnocentrism.[24]

## ETHNOCENTRISM AS AN EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

Skipping forward a generation, we come next to Henri Tajfel and social identity theory.[25] Tajfel was a leading figure in what came to be known as the European perspective on social psychology. He founded a Society, edited an influential monograph series, and was a prominent lecturer in Leiden, Paris, and Bologna. His ardent interest in social conflict was a product of his own experience. He was born European and Jewish; his family perished in the Holocaust. Throughout his professional career, Tajfel carried with him "memories of a raging storm" (1981, p. 7).

Tajfel was a sharp critic of American social psychology, which had become, in his judgment, "a social science practiced in a social vacuum" (1981, p. 1). To Tajfel the American turn to laboratory investigation of psychological micro-processes was a terrible mistake. Social psychology, Tajfel insisted, must "include in its theoretical and research preoccupations a direct concern with the relationship between human psychological functioning and the large-scale social processes and events which shape this functioning and are shaped by it" (1981, p. 18).

Given this line of criticism, it is ironic that Tajfel is remembered best for an experimental result from which all of society and culture and history had been deliberately obliterated. This was the so-called minimal group experiment, which questioned whether conflicts of interest were necessary to produce ethnocentrism, as Sherif and other realistic group conflict theorists



insisted. Tajfel was impressed with the results of Sherif's field experiments, but he wondered whether explicit and objective conflicts of interest were actually necessary conditions for the emergence of ethnocentrism. Tajfel's answer, supplied by the minimal group experiment, was a resounding no.

In the first stage of the experiment, participants are assigned to different groups on what must surely have appeared to them to be trivial grounds. For example, in the original experiment, Bristol teenage boys were shown a rapid sequence of slides and asked to estimate the number of dots displayed on each. Based on their answers, or so they were told, they were then were divided into two groups, those who consistently overestimated the number of dots and those who consistently underestimated them. Neither group was more accurate, they were informed, nor was the tendency to over- or underestimate revealing of any deeper truth. It was just a convenient way to divide them up.

This is a defining feature of the minimal group experiment: the triviality of group affiliation. In another version of the experiment, group assignments appeared to be made on the basis of whether participants, all of whom were in the dark about abstract art, preferred the paintings of Klee to those of Kandinsky. In still another, one that could be called the ultimate minimal group experiment, participants were explicitly assigned to one group or the other by a public and ostentatious toss of a coin.[26]

After assignment to one group or the other, each participant is isolated into an individual cubicle, takes part in a problem-solving activity, and then is asked to allocate rewards to other participants (never to themselves). In the original experiment, Bristol schoolboys allocated points that were redeemable for money at the end of the experiment. As part of the allocation task, participants learn that the recipients are members of their own (minimal) group or members of the other (minimal) group; they are otherwise anonymous.

These ostensibly innocuous conditions produce in-group favoritism. In Tajfel's original experiment, more than 70 percent of participants allocated rewards in way that favored their group. And in scores of variations on the basic minimal group experiment design, the results are the same. Group membership—minimal group membership—generates rewards: money, but also affection, trust, and cooperation.

*Minimal* seems a fitting term to apply to the social system created in these experiments. In-group affiliation is superficial. Group membership is anonymous. Conflict of interest between groups is removed. Self-interest is set aside since participants allocate rewards only to others. Groups are temporary fabrications, so there is no history of hostility and no shadow of the future. And yet, in this artificial social system, in the absence of conflict of interest or the perception of threat, and putting aside differences in culture, social standing, and economic or political power, in-group favoritism

always emerges. It emerges again and again, in experiments conducted among Bristol schoolboys, soldiers in the West German army, Maori children in New Zealand, trade school students in Geneva, undergraduates in New York City, and more.[27]

The ethnocentrism expressed in the minimal group experiment takes a particular and illuminating form. Participants in these experiments are allowed to allocate rewards pretty much as they wish. They can choose to reward their own group, or express generosity to the other group, or ignore the group boundary entirely. What they often do is allocate rewards so as to enhance the difference between their group and the other group. They are not fanatics in this: their choices also reflect everyday conceptions of equity and fairness. Still, the tendency to put distance between their group and the other group—between "us" and "them"—is impressive. They choose this option even when doing so diminishes the rewards enjoyed by their own group.[28]

This result is both replicable and, to us and many others, remarkable. It certainly surprised Tajfel, who created the minimal group condition under the assumption that it would serve as a neutral starting point, a baseline condition. Subsequent experiments would then systematically add in one feature at a time until in-group favoritism finally made an appearance. As things turned out, additional features were unnecessary.

To explain this remarkable and unexpected result, Tajfel and his Bristol colleagues created social identity theory. The theory begins with an assumption about human nature. Tajfel assumes that people—everywhere, regardless of circumstance—are motivated to maintain a positive identity. Social identity theory takes this point as axiomatic: individuals are always striving "to maintain or enhance their self-esteem" (Tajfel and Turner 1979, p. 40).[29]

People derive their sense of self, according to social identity theory, in large part from their membership in social groups. In this sense it could be said that not only are individuals in social groups, but also social groups are "in" individuals. Identity is largely a reflection of where and how people locate themselves in their society. In Tajfel's view, "the individual realizes himself in society—that is, he recognizes his identity in socially defined terms, and these definitions become reality as he lives in society."[30]

Identity is a psychological matter. It is determined not by objective membership but by the perception of belonging. The transformation of mere membership into a sense of identity takes place through a process of social categorization. Social categorization parses the social world into a manageable set of basic categories. Through social categorization, individuals define who they are and who others are. Such classifications are

> cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment, and thus enable the individual to undertake many forms of social action. But they do not merely systematize the social world; they also provide a system of orientation for self-reference: they create and define the individual's place in society. Social groups, understood in this sense, provide their members with an identification of themselves in social terms. (Tajfel and Turner 1979, p. 40)



One consequence of social categorization is accentuation: people accentuate similarities between themselves and their in-group, and accentuate differences between themselves and their various out-groups. Identity takes on an "us versus them" mentality. Individuals, one might say, are transformed into groups.[31]

The creation of social identity theory was motivated by the puzzle presented by the minimal group experiment result. It cannot be much of an achievement that the theory explains this one result, but it is worth recounting how the theory does so. Here is a lightly paraphrased account, from Hogg and Abrams, two of the theory's principal advocates:

> The minimal group experiments demonstrate that mere social categorization—the discontinuous classification of individuals into two distinct groups—is sufficient to generate ethnocentrism and conflict.
>
> Individuals in these studies are categorizing themselves in terms of the minimal category provided by the experiment. This process of categorization—of self and others—accentuates group differences on the only dimension readily available: the allocation of rewards. The accentuation of difference favors the ingroup because individuals are deriving their social identity in part from the category created in the experiment. The involvement of the self in the categorization process activates the need to maintain or enhance self-esteem, and this can be accomplished by favoring the ingroup—and hence the self—over the outgroup. (1988, p. 51)

In-group favoritism is a well-established result, but it is of course just a tendency, one that, as we noted earlier, is moderated by a sense of fairness. Furthermore, in studies that permit the distinction to be detected, ethnocentrism in the minimal group experiment appears to be more in-group favoritism than out-group hostility.[32] One might say that the in-group/out-group differentiation under examination in the minimal group experiments is a reflection of the merging of self and in-group, rather than the distancing of self from out-groups. This observation provides the point of departure for Marilynn Brewer's theory of social identity, the most interesting and important variation on Tajfel's original thinking.[33]

Taking a page out of Gordon Allport's classic 1954 book on prejudice, Brewer first stipulates that in-groups take psychological primacy over out-groups. Familiarity, loyalty, and preference for one's in-group all precede

awareness of and attitudes toward out-groups. In the minimal group experiment, participants readily reward in-group members, but they are reluctant to punish out-group members. In-group bias is largely due to in-group favoritism, not out-group derogation. According to Brewer, "once the self has become attached to a social group or category, positive affect and evaluations associated with the self-concept are automatically transferred to the group as a whole" (2007, p. 732).[34]

Brewer argues that in-group favoritism has its origins in evolutionary processes; that it is a reflection, in the final analysis, of "the profoundly social nature of human beings as a species" (2007, p. 730). Group living is part of our ancestral history; it is, Brewer says, "the fundamental survival strategy that characterizes the human species." Over the course of evolutionary history, we have evolved to "rely on cooperation rather than strength, and on social learning rather than instinct" (1999, p. 433). Contemporary human nature, Brewer maintains, is characterized by "obligatory interdependence."

From this perspective, in-groups become a site for altruism. Within the group, norms facilitate reciprocal exchange. Expectations of cooperation and security promote mutual trust. Reciprocal attraction motivates compliance. Symbols and rituals emerge that differentiate the in-group from local out-groups, which reduce the risk that in-group benefits will be inadvertently extended to out-group members, and assure that in-group members will recognize their own entitlement to group benefits (M. Brewer 1999, pp. 433–34). In short, in-groups become "bounded communities of mutual cooperation and trust" (2007, p. 732). Brewer concludes that in-group favoritism arises not, as Tajfel would have it, out of a universal striving for self-esteem, but rather out of the fundamental human need for security.[35]

Finally, and this time drawing a distinction with Sumner, Brewer argues that there is no theoretical basis for expecting a close connection between in-group loyalty and out-group hostility. In-group loyalty may be a necessary condition for out-group hostility, but it is not sufficient. Put another way, strong attachment to the in-group is compatible with a wide range of sentiments toward out-groups: admiration, sympathy, indifference, as well as disdain and hatred. This seems to be so. Sometimes strong in-group loyalty is accompanied by strong out-group animosity (Gibson and Gouws 2000; Perreault and Bourhis 1999); sometimes not (M. Brewer and Campbell 1976; De Figueiredo and Elkins 2003; Feshbach 1994). In-group solidarity and out-group hostility appear to be bundled together less tightly than Sumner originally believed.[36]

The basic finding of in-group favoritism has stood up well to replications and challenges, and it remains provocative today. Like Solomon Asch's (1951) famous experiments on conformity or Stanley Milgram's (1974) unsettling studies on obedience to authority, Tajfel's minimal group experiment teaches us something about social life that we did not know before. In particular, the minimal group experiment suggests how ready we are to impose social categories and how far-reaching the consequences may be. It implies, contrary to realistic group conflict theory, that ethnocentrism does not require conflict of interest.[37] It also suggests, contrary to Levinson and *The Authoritarian Personality*, that ethnocentrism need not be interpreted as a dark and irrational expression of repressed hostilities and primeval fears. Ethnocentrism is a commonplace consequence of the human striving for self-regard and personal security.



Against these valuable contributions is the standard worry about generalizing from experimental results. What can in-group favoritism created in the laboratory tell us about ethnocentrism in the world?

Quite a lot, according to Donald Horowitz. In his excellent review and analysis of ethnic group conflict, Horowitz (1985) readily acknowledges that the minimal group experimental setup faced by Bristol schoolboys is quite different from the deadly serious and ongoing circumstance confronting rival ethnic groups. Nevertheless, Horowitz commends the minimal-group experiment for isolating several vital features of actual group conflict: the "powerful pull of group loyalty, the quest for relative in-group advantage, and the willingness to incur costs to maximize intergroup differentials" (Horowitz 1985, p. 146). He then proceeds to take Tajfel's result as casting doubt on theories of ethnic conflict that assign primacy to competition over material interests.

Maybe so. Tajfel was himself quite modest on this point. His intention was not to deny objective conflicts of interest their place in an explanation of intergroup conflict. As he put it, social identity theory "cannot replace the economic and social analysis, but must be used to supplement it" (Tajfel 1981, p. 223). "It would be no less than ridiculous," Tajfel wrote, "to assert that objective rewards (in terms of money, standards of living, consumption of goods and services, etc.) are not the most important determinants" of contemporary group conflict.

Social identity theory attempts to identify the environmental conditions that give rise to ethnocentrism (or more precisely, to in-group favoritism). In this enterprise, Tajfel, Brewer, and others in this theoretical tradition display little interest in differences among individuals. All of us strive for self-esteem or for security. Placed in the right conditions, all of us are likely to express in-group favoritism.

This is a valuable perspective to bring to ethnocentrism—but it is not ours. Like Daniel Levinson and his colleagues, we are interested first and foremost in differences among individuals. We treat ethnocentrism as a predisposition, a form of individual readiness that guides perception, thought, and action. We argue that people differ from one another—reliably and

durably—in degree of ethnocentrism: that some people are very ethnocentric; many are mildly ethnocentric; and a few are not ethnocentric at all. And we claim (and plan to convincingly show) that such differences in ethnocentrism can take us some distance in explaining the opinions Americans take on pressing issues of contemporary politics.

## ETHNOCENTRISM AS AN OUTCOME OF NATURAL SELECTION

A century and a half after Charles Darwin completed *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, the evidence for evolution through natural selection is overwhelming. It is less a theory than a fact, as Ernst Mayr has put it (2001). Biologists have observed evolution in natural populations of plants and animals, and have reproduced evolution experimentally, in the laboratory and in the field. Intricate adaptations of organisms to their environment have been massively documented. The fossil record, while incomplete, follows predicted chronologies exactly. The scope of empirical confirmation is stunning: on the one hand, the generation and inheritance of genetic variation is understood down to the molecular level, and on the other, the geographic distribution of whole species—"biogeography"—is accounted for as well. Evolution through natural selection is the unifying theory of biology. "Nothing in biology makes sense, except in the light of evolution."[38]

This is an inspiring story of scientific achievement—but what does it have to do with our project? Quite a bit, according to the Harvard entomologist Edward O. Wilson. Surveying biological science from Darwin to the present day, Wilson singles out natural selection as "the essential first hypothesis for any serious consideration of the human condition" (1978, pp. 1–2). Until political science, psychology, economics, and the other social sciences absorb the lessons of evolution and natural selection, they will remain, according to Wilson, theoretically incapacitated, limited to mere description of the surface regularity of human behavior.[39]

Taking his own advice seriously, Wilson has made it his project to build a bridge from natural selection to human society. In *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975), Wilson summarized vast amounts of research on vertebrate social behavior. Drawing on ethology, ecology, and genetics, Wilson attempted to formulate general principles concerning the biological properties of whole societies, including, in the book's final and controversial chapter, human society. His subsequent writing—especially *On Human Nature* (1978), *Genes, Mind, and Culture* (with Charles Lumsden, 1981), and *Consilience* (1998)—has continued this work.[40]



According to Wilson, certain human social traits—for example, bodily adornment or funeral rites—are unique to the human species, occur in all cultures, and are as true to the human type as "wing tessellation is to a fritillary butterfly or a complicated spring melody to a wood thrush" (1978, p. 21). Wilson concludes that the accumulated evidence for a "large hereditary component" to human social behavior is "decisive" (1978, p. 19).

The key question for us is whether Wilson's conclusion holds in the particular case of ethnocentrism. Is ethnocentrism part of "human nature"?[41]

Perhaps it is. Social life surely enjoys huge comparative advantages over solitary life: in the sharing of knowledge, the division of labor, and the economies of mutual defense. This implies that evolutionary pressures would have favored motivational dispositions furthering group life. As a consequence, over the long haul, mutations furthering the capacity for in-group loyalty and out-group hostility might have spread through the population (e.g., D. Campbell 1965, 1975).[42]

However, if ethnocentrism entails both hostility to out-groups and attachment to in-groups, and if the latter rises to the level of altruistic sacrifice, then how could such a disposition evolve? This is the "central theoretical problem of sociobiology" (E. O. Wilson 1975, p. 3). Fallen heroes leave behind no offspring. If self-sacrifice results in fewer descendents, the genes that encourage heroic altruism can be expected to gradually disappear. Yet at the same time, there appear to be indisputable instances of altruism in the world, where one person increases the fitness of another at the expense of her own—as in surrendering needed food or shelter, or deferring in the choice of a mate, or placing one's self in between danger and another. How can these two points be reconciled?

Darwin suggested that altruism might be explained by natural selection acting on *groups*, as it does on individuals. In a famous passage from *The Descent of Man*, published some twenty years after *Origin of Species*, Darwin wrote:

> It must not be forgotten that although a high standard of morality gives but a slight or no advantage to each individual man and his children over other men of the same tribe, yet that an increase in the number of well-endowed men and advancement in the standard of morality will certainly give an immense advantage to one tribe over another. There can be no doubt that a tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to aid one another, and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; *and this would be natural selection.* At all times throughout the world tribes have

> supplanted other tribes; and as morality is one important element in their success, the standard of morality and the number of well-endowed men will thus everywhere tend to rise and increase. (Darwin 1871, pp. 159–60, italics added)

Darwin did not develop this idea, however, and for the better part of one hundred years, group selection played virtually no role in the standard theory of evolution.[43]

But in recent years, a modern theory of group selection has arisen. Under this account, altruism can evolve when there exists a multiplicity of groups, which vary in the proportion of altruistic types. Groups with more altruists must be more fit—they must produce more offspring. And the differential fitness of groups (favoring altruists) must be strong enough to counter the differential fitness of individuals within groups (favoring the selfish). Because altruism is maladaptive with respect to individual selection but adaptive with respect to group selection, it can evolve only if the process of group selection is sufficiently strong. According to Sober and Wilson (1998), evidence in support of group selection is now overwhelming.[44]

Suppose we accept the proposition that natural selection operates on groups as well as individuals, and that this is especially true for humans. Does this mean that a new and rosy picture of human benevolence has been thereby established, that a romantic vision of universal generosity fulfilled? No. In the first place, group selection theory does not abandon the idea of competition that forms the core of the theory of natural selection; rather, it provides an additional setting in which competition can occur. Second of all, group selection does not replace individual selection, it supplements it. Group selection leaves ample room for individuals to seek personal advantage. Altruistic motives are mixed with the purely selfish. Ambivalence is the human condition, and ambivalence is more likely to be resolved with opportunistic selfishness than sacrificial altruism (D. Campbell 1975; E. O. Wilson 1975). Third and most important for our purposes, altruism rooted in natural selection is not universal altruism. It is altruism for the benefit of the in-group *and* to the detriment of the out-group. If group selection provides the mechanism by which helping behavior directed at members of one's own group can evolve, "it equally provides a context in which hurting individuals in other groups can be selectively advantageous. Group selection favors within-group niceness *and* between-group nastiness" (Sober and Wilson 1998, p. 9). And within-group niceness and between-group nastiness is, of course, just a colloquial way to say "ethnocentrism."

Group selection suggests that ethnocentrism can be conceived of as an adaptation, a part of "human nature." It rides on the general point that key features of human behavior evolved by natural selection and are today con-



strained throughout the entire species by particular sets of genes. It makes a case for ethnocentrism as a general predisposition.[45]

This is an important conclusion, but it leaves open whether *individual differences* in ethnocentrism have a genetic source. We take for granted—and will shortly show—that contemporary Americans differ from one another in the degree to which they display ethnocentrism. Is it reasonable to suppose that such differences can be traced, at least in part, to underlying differences in "genetic blueprints"?

We think the answer is yes, and we think so primarily because of the empirical results from the new interdisciplinary field of human behavioral genetics—the intersection of genetics and the behavioral sciences.[46] Wilson drew on the early returns from this literature to bolster his case about the inheritability of human behavior. The examples available to Wilson at the time were certainly powerful—research linking genetic mutations to a wide array of neurological disorders, impairments of intelligence, and disease—but they left unclear whether genetic variation might also play a role in social behavior in the normal range. As we will see in a moment, research over the last decade or so makes this case powerfully.

The primary goal of quantitative behavioral genetics is to partition the observed variation in human traits into genetic and environmental sources. Of course, in one respect the genotype and the environment are equally important, in that each is indispensable to human development. Any observed behavior—any phenotype—is the result of a continuous interaction between genes and environment. Still, a deep and important question remains: to what extent do the differences observed among people reflect differences in their genotypes and to what extent do they reflect differences in their environments?[47]

Mathematically, this question can be written:

$$V^P = V^G + V^{CE} + V^{UE} + \varepsilon,$$

where $V^P$ is the variance of the phenotype, $V^G$ is the variance of the genotype, $V^{CE}$ is variance of the common (or shared) environment, $V^{UE}$ is the variance of the unique environment, and $\varepsilon$ is error. $V^G/V^P$ is the trait's heritability, the fraction of the observed variance in a certain trait that is caused by differences in heredity (Lush 1940, 1949). Estimates of heritability provide the "backbone" of human behavioral genetics (E. O. Wilson 1998).

The theoretical foundation for behavioral genetics was laid down by the rediscovery of Mendel's laws of single-gene inheritance in the early part of the twentieth century and the extension of these laws to complex factorial traits by Fisher (1918), Haldane (1932), and S. Wright (1921). This trio of brilliant statisticians generalized Mendel's experimental findings to quantitative differences, to differences of degree rather than kind. Inheritance of

traits that form a continuously graded series from one extreme to the other without falling into kinds or types—traits like skin color or height or, as we would say, ethnocentrism—is complicated. It is complicated in the first instance because whatever genetic influence might be operating is almost certainly polygenic: that is, traits are influenced by large ensembles of genes, distributed across different chromosomal sites, each with modest effect, acting together, sometimes in complex ways. It turns out, nevertheless, that the principles of genetic transmission that Mendel discovered—segregation and independent assortment—apply to these more complicated cases.

The most direct and straightforward empirical method for partitioning phenotypic variation into genetic and environmental sources is the experiment. Experimentation is widely used in studies of plant and animal breeding but is obviously out of bounds for human populations. Next best is the statistical analysis of "natural experiments." The classic natural experiment in human behavioral genetics capitalizes on the difference between monozygotic (MZ), or identical, twins (who share an identical genetic inheritance, genetic relatedness of approximately 1.0) and dizygotic (DZ), or fraternal, twins (who develop from two separate eggs, fertilized by two separate sperm, genetic relatedness of approximately 0.5). Insofar as identical twins are more similar than fraternal twins on a particular trait, to that degree the trait can be said to be due to genetic differences. Other designs bring in additional family relationships: for example, parents and biological offspring, parents and adopted offspring, children of one identical twin pair and the children of the other, and so forth. Because genetic resemblance among different kinds of biological relatives is understood and can be expressed in precise numerical terms (Falconer 1961), all these designs offer the opportunity of estimating, under more or less reasonable assumptions, the heritability of virtually any (measurable) human trait.

Research in human behavioral genetics began with a focus on illness and achieved notable successes. In a relatively brief period, scores of debilitating diseases such as cystic fibrosis, hemophilia, color blindness, and schizophrenia were traced, in part, to genetic sources. More recently, research in the field has expanded its focus, taking up the heritability of various personality traits and social attitudes. The best of this work is characterized by meticulous attention to measurement, sophisticated statistical analysis, and data provided by carefully maintained archives.[48]

Consider the evidence on the heritability of social attitudes. The subject itself may seem ridiculous. Attitudes are *learned.* Everybody says so (almost everybody). In his influential essay, Gordon Allport (1935) offered three conjectures about the origins of attitudes. First of all, attitudes might be built up through the gradual accretion of experience; second, they might reflect a single dramatic emotional experience, or trauma; and third, they



might be adopted ready-made from parents, teachers, and friends. That's it: nothing here about inheritance or biology or genetics. Allport took for granted that attitudes are learned, and so, in overwhelming numbers, have those who have written about attitudes since. So widespread is this assumption that the early behavior genetic studies of personality would sometimes include measures of social attitudes as a kind of control, on the (mistaken) idea that attitudes would provide a heritability baseline of zero.[49]

The seminal paper in this line of research was published in 1986 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.*[50] N. G. Martin and his colleagues compared a large Australian sample of MZ and DZ twins on a measure of general conservatism. Their analysis suggested not just a genetic component to conservatism, but a *large* genetic component to conservatism. Under their statistical model, more than half of the observed variation in conservatism is attributed to genetic difference.[51]

This result may seem surprising, but it is no fluke. Other studies, employing different designs, different samples, and somewhat different statistical techniques, arrive at essentially the same conclusion (e.g., Alford, Funk, and Hibbing 2005; Bouchard et al. 1990; Eaves and Eysenck 1974; Eaves et al. 1999; Olson, Vernon, and Jang 2001). Conservatism, it would seem, arises in an important way from genetic endowments.[52]

E. O. Wilson calls heritability estimates of the sort we are discussing here—heritabilities of about 0.5—"midrange" effects. We suppose that heritabilities of about 0.5 are midrange when compared against the near perfect genetic effect for finger length (Lynch and Walsh 1998). But to social scientists working at the individual level, midrange effects look pretty big. They *are* big: the findings suggest that roughly half of the variation we observe in ethnocentrism may be due to variation in the underlying genetic program.

## CONCLUSIONS

We began our review of the principal theories of ethnocentrism with the hope of finding good answers to three basic questions: What is the nature of ethnocentrism? How does ethnocentrism arise? When does ethnocentrism become important to politics? If now we have come to the end of the review without altogether complete and convincing answers, we have certainly learned a lot that is valuable. We are indebted to Sumner for noticing ethnocentrism in the first place, for naming it felicitously, for defining it sensibly, and for insisting that the study of ethnocentrism must take into account economic, social, and political conditions. We are indebted to Daniel Levinson and his colleagues for imagining that people in modern democratic societies will vary in how fully they subscribe to ethnocentrism, and to their persistent successors who eventually established that ethnocentrism

defined this way does indeed exist. We are indebted to Henri Tajfel for his remarkable experiments showing how readily we indulge in partitioning the social world into in-groups and out-groups. And we are indebted to E. O. Wilson and scores of scientists working at the intersection of the biological and behavioral sciences for two revelatory ideas: that ethnocentrism is part of human nature and that humans are more or less ethnocentric due to genetic inheritance.

If these pieces are partial, they are important, and we will try in the next chapter to put them together in a theoretically satisfying way. But one piece so far is missing altogether. Not one of the four theories we have examined here speaks to this question: when does ethnocentrism take on political significance? An adequate theory of ethnocentrism must define its nature, account for its origins, *and* specify the conditions under which it is more and less consequential. This is the business of chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

# Ethnocentrism Reconceived

Having completed our review of the leading theories of ethnocentrism in the last chapter, we turn now to the task of developing a more comprehensive and satisfactory framework of our own. In part this is a matter of identifying what is most useful in the work of our predecessors; in part it is a matter of bringing lines of theoretical analysis to bear on the problem of ethnocentrism in new ways; and in largest part it is a matter of developing an argument that specifies when ethnocentrism takes on, and fails to take on, political significance. Our aim is to construct a theoretical framework that is at once abstract enough to provide understanding that reaches beyond mere summary of empirical regularities and precise enough to instruct analysis of particular cases that are shortly to come.

Our framework is presented in three connected parts, each corresponding to one of the three questions that a theory of ethnocentrism must address. First, what is the nature of ethnocentrism? Second, how does ethnocentrism arise? And third, the question of consequences: when does ethnocentrism become important to public opinion?

## THE NATURE OF ETHNOCENTRISM

Our view, set out in the last chapter, is that ethnocentrism is a predisposition to divide human society into in-groups and out-groups. People vary from one another in their readiness to look upon the social world in this way: that is, they are more or less ethnocentric. To those given to ethnocentrism, in-groups are communities of virtue, trust, and cooperation, safe and superior havens. Out-groups, on the other hand, are not. To the ethnocentric, out-group members and their customs seem strange, discomforting, perhaps even dangerous.

If ethnocentrism is a readiness to divide the world into in-groups and out-groups, then the nature of ethnocentrism is revealed in part by what we take the nature of a group to be. In our analysis, a group does not require

institutional sponsors or formal membership or face-to-face interaction—though it might have all three. The defining point, rather, is psychological. Any aggregation of individuals can be a group if the aggregation is seen and experienced in that way. Criminals, Arabs, college professors: all "are groups in so far as they are social categories or regions in an individual's social outlook—objects of opinions, attitudes, affect, and striving" (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 146).

This means that membership is not sufficient to establish an in-group, just as the absence of membership is not sufficient to establish an out-group. What is required is psychological striving: attraction and identification in the case of in-groups; condescension and opposition in the case of out-groups. In Sherif's field experiments, young boys fought each other so fiercely because competition transformed mere membership into something psychologically consequential. Under Sherif's effective direction, the Rattlers and the Eagles became tribes, sources of personal identity and strong emotion.[1]

If a group is "any set of people who constitute a psychological entity for any individual" (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 146), then groups have extraordinary range. Catholics are a group, but so is the neighborhood bridge club. True enough, but because of our interest in national politics, we are drawn much more to the former than to the latter. Politics on a national scale is organized in these terms. When control over the national government becomes the prize of politics, group attachments and oppositions based in particularistic features like kin or local community are subordinated to attachments rooted in broader categories such as class and ethnicity (Posner 2004). A consideration of broad social groups of this kind is perhaps especially relevant for an analysis of politics in the United States, a nation of continental size and extraordinary heterogeneity. According to Walter Dean Burnham (1974), the most persistent and intractable of American political conflicts derive from "ethnocultural antagonisms": oppositions rooted in race, ethnicity, class, religion, and region.[2]

## THE ORIGINS OF ETHNOCENTRISM

Most of the empirical work that follows concentrates on the consequences of ethnocentrism. Our primary object is to show that attempts to explain and predict public opinion must take ethnocentrism into account. This will keep us thoroughly occupied, but our focus on the effects of ethnocentrism does not relieve us of the obligation to supply at least a rudimentary account of the origins of ethnocentrism. We spell out that account here and test it, insofar as we can, in the following chapter.



### *Early Readiness*

Early on, children display an inclination to parse the social world into "natural kinds." They believe that race and sex and ethnicity belong to the living world, and that differences between races or sexes or ethnicities are rooted in biology, or blood, or some such underlying essence. Such differences encompass inner qualities—temperament, intellect, character—as well as outward, physical ones. Children come to these beliefs on their own. They do not need to be taught that race and sex and ethnicity are natural kinds; they know these things themselves. Children are ready, one might say, for ethnocentrism.[3]

If all children are ready for ethnocentrism, why do some end up more ethnocentric than others? We claim that people vary in the degree to which their beliefs and feelings about social life can be described as ethnocentric. If they do not vary, then our attempt to understand differences in the American public's views on such things as homeland security and welfare reform by invoking ethnocentrism is doomed from the outset. There *are* reliable and consequential differences in ethnocentrism, we will shortly show. The question, then, is this: how do such differences arise?

### *Genetic Transmission and Social Learning*

In the last chapter we learned that political predispositions bearing a resemblance to ethnocentrism have a sizable genetic component. Roughly one-half of the variation we observe in important social attitudes appears to be due to variation in genotypes. Accordingly, we propose that parents influence their biological offspring's ethnocentric predisposition through the genetic blueprint they provide at conception. Part of the mystery of individual differences in ethnocentrism, we say, lies in our genes.[4]

Part, but not all. Social learning theory proceeds from the premise that "the complex repertoires of behavior displayed by members of society are to a large extent acquired with little or no direct tuition through observation of response patterns exemplified by various socialization agents" (Bandura 1969, p. 213). Children do not rely exclusively on parents as socialization agents, but they rely on parents more than on any other single source. A significant part of social learning takes place through children imitating, internalizing, and reproducing what their parents say and do. This implies that the correspondence we expect to find between the ethnocentrism of parents and the ethnocentrism of children is due not only to genetic transmission but to social learning. And from the point of view of social learning theory, the magnitude of correspondence should depend on

conditions that facilitate the learning process: such things as the clarity and consistency of cues given by parents, the prominence of politics in family discussions, and the attachment felt by offspring for their parents.[5]

### *Personality*

One aspect of personality, authoritarianism, emerges from a basic and recurrent human dilemma (Feldman 2003; Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005). Living alongside others is an inescapable feature of human society, and it leads inevitably to tension between personal autonomy and social cohesion. Authoritarians habitually choose the latter over the former: they are inclined to glorify, encourage, and reward uniformity, while disparaging, suppressing, and punishing difference.[6] By valuing uniformity and authority over autonomy and diversity, authoritarians, we propose, should be drawn "naturally" to an ethnocentric point of view. Ethnocentrism has its origins, in part, in authoritarianism.

### *Education*

Education is widely thought to bestow the values and resources that encourage a "sober second thought," providing individuals with the capacity to override prejudice. This argument is made perhaps most forcefully in the literature on political tolerance, where democratic regimes are said to be tested by their willingness to tolerate a full and frank exchange of views. Political tolerance is a difficult test; it "implies a willingness to 'put up with' those things that one rejects. Politically, it implies a willingness to permit the expression of those ideas or interests that one opposes." Tolerance cuts against the human grain, since people "distrust what they do not understand and cannot control" and need to "feel safe against the terrors of the unknown" (Marcus et al. 1995, p. 28; McClosky and Brill 1983, pp. 13–14).

If political tolerance is very much an acquired taste, then the evidence is overwhelming that many Americans fail to acquire it. For example, in Samuel Stouffer's famous study carried out in the 1950s as the McCarthy hearings were underway, relatively few Americans were prepared to grant constitutional rights of speech and assembly to communists. Stouffer's results shattered the assumption that Americans would apply democratic procedures and rights to all, and subsequent research has massively reinforced the point.[7]

Of course, some Americans *are* prepared to defend ideas and activities they find distasteful. Such people, it turns out, come very disproportionately from the ranks of the well educated. Beginning with Stouffer's results on communists on up to contemporary disputes over gay rights and racist



speech, more education is always associated with more tolerance.[8] Evidently education imparts knowledge, values, and experiences that together act as a counterweight to the "natural" inclination toward intolerance. Americans are more or less ethnocentric, we suggest, because of differences in education.

### *Consolidation and Stability in Adulthood*

We know that broad personality traits—like introversion-extraversion or general temperament—show substantial and increasing stability over the life span, reaching a high plateau by middle age.[9] Political predispositions show the same pattern: by the midthirties, consolidation and consistency begin to replace the "attitudinal fragmentation and disorder" of the young adult years.[10] We expect ethnocentrism to follow a similar path. By middle age, if not before, ethnocentrism should be fully formed, a stable and general predisposition ready to guide perception, thought, and action.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF ETHNOCENTRISM

The principal purpose of our project is to establish that ethnocentrism plays an important part in matters of political consequence; more specifically, that ethnocentrism is a significant force shaping public opinion. By public opinion we mean, following V. O. Key, "those opinions held by private citizens which governments find it prudent to heed" (1961, p. 14). Such opinions, according to John Zaller, arise out of "a marriage of information and predisposition: information to form a mental picture of the given issue, and predisposition to motivate some conclusion about it" (1992, p. 6). Zaller's pithy formulation is appealing because it focuses attention on the primary empirical task we face here: namely, to determine the strength of the connection between ethnocentrism, considered as a predisposition, on the one hand, and the public's opinion on matters of public policy, on the other.

Ethnocentrism is a deep habit and a stable predisposition, but its importance to public opinion on government policy, we argue, is variable. As we will see, in some cases, at some points in time, ethnocentrism is important; in other cases, in other points in time, much less so. In *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences,* Jon Elster (1989) argues that social scientists have been quite successful in developing and testing explanations, but much less successful in specifying the conditions under which those explanations apply. They "can isolate tendencies, propensities, and mechanisms and show that they have implications for behavior that are often surprising and counterintuitive. What they are more rarely able to do is to state necessary and

sufficient conditions under which the various mechanisms are switched on" (1989, p. 9). Mindful of Elster's complaint, our aim here is to suggest the conditions under which ethnocentrism is "switched on" in political judgment—or in language we prefer, the conditions under which ethnocentrism is *activated*.[11]

On the subject of activation, our principal predecessors offer surprisingly little guidance. William Graham Sumner regarded ethnocentrism as a universal predisposition, and by this he seemed to mean both that ethnocentrism is present in all societies and that ethnocentrism is *always* in play. No help there.

Nor do Daniel Levinson and his colleagues have much to say on the subject of activation. Their purpose in *The Authoritarian Personality* was to offer an understanding of why people are more or less susceptible to antidemocratic appeals. Ethnocentrism (like authoritarianism) is a predisposition, a readiness to act, but it is not action itself. To understand action, to understand the expression of ethnocentrism in judgment or behavior, would require, Levinson and friends write in a discouraging and most unhelpful passage, "an understanding of the total organization of society" (1950, p. 7).

The tradition of research inaugurated by Henri Tajfel does little better. Tajfel's major contribution to ethnocentrism, we argue in chapter 1, was to demonstrate that ethnocentrism can arise out of a minimal group experience. In a series of remarkable studies, Tajfel showed that the mere categorization of individuals into one grouping or another is sufficient to generate in-group favoritism. The many replications that followed fortify the original result but provide little help in specifying the conditions that govern when in-group favoritism enters into politics.

Fourth and finally, E. O. Wilson has a thing or two to say about activation, but at a level of abstraction too high to be of much use here. Wilson's approach to activation, from the perspective of evolutionary biology, is to specify the causal mechanisms of human development that connect the genome to behavior. We have not yet arrived at good answers yet, though there is broad agreement on a first principle: namely, human behavior reflects an interaction between genes and culture (Boyd and Richerson 1985, 2005; D. Campbell 1965, 1975; Lumsden and Wilson 1981; Richerson and Boyd 2005; E. Wilson 1975, 1998). Genes and culture are "inseverably linked" (Lumsden and E. O. Wilson, 1983, p. 117). This seems true, as far as it goes, but, for our immediate needs, it does not go very far.

We are, in short, more or less on our own.

One increasingly popular option for those attempting to provide a scientific account of politics these days is the theory of rational choice. In *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), to take an altogether splendid example, Anthony Downs imagined that parties and citizens follow the dictates of rationality, approaching "every situation with one eye on the gains to be had, the other eye on costs, a delicate ability to balance them, and a strong desire to follow wherever rationality leads" (pp. 7–8). Rational choice theory is "one of the most impressive intellectual achievements of the first half of the twentieth century" and "an elegant machine for applying reason to problems of choice" (H. Simon 1983, p. 12).



Acknowledging this point, we turn for help in another direction, to psychology. Psychologists have generally greeted the assumptions of rational choice theory with skepticism, finding rationality both unrealistic and preemptive, a distraction from discovering what is really going on (e.g., Abelson 1976, 1995; Kahneman 2003a; Kahneman and Tversky 1979; H. Simon 1955). Our account of activation is informed by a general theory of human judgment, the cumulative and considerable achievement of the last half century of cognitive science, a development led most notably by Herbert Simon, Daniel Kahneman, and Amos Tversky.

When set against the model of rational choice that has reigned supreme over economics, the general model of reasoning offered up by psychology is, admittedly, something of a mess. But as Kinder and Weiss wrote some thirty years ago, just as the first waves of the new research on cognition were rolling in, "elegance ain't everything" (1978, p. 732). Putting the point rather more professionally, Daniel Kahneman began his Nobel Lecture by describing the contrast between economic and psychological approaches this way:

> Economists often criticize psychological research for its propensity to generate lists of errors and biases, and for its failure to offer a coherent alternative to the rational-agent model. This complaint is only partly justified: psychological theories of intuitive thinking cannot match the elegance and precision of formal normative models of belief and choice, but this is just another way of saying that rational models are psychologically unrealistic. Furthermore, the alternative to simple and precise models is not chaos. Psychology offers integrative concepts and mid-level generalizations which gain credibility from their ability to explain ostensibly different phenomena in diverse domains. (2003a, p. 1449)

The general theory we draw on here begins with the notion of bounded rationality, the assertion that "human thinking powers are very modest when compared with the complexities of the environments in which human beings live. Faced with complexity and uncertainty, lacking the wits to optimize, they must be content to suffice—to find 'good enough' solutions to their problems and 'good enough' courses of action" (H. Simon 1979, p. 3). Under bounded rationality, the human decision maker is represented as a person

> who is limited in computational capacity, and who searches very selectively through large realms of possibilities in order to discover what alternatives of action are available, and what the consequences of each of these alternatives are. The search is incomplete, often inadequate, based on uncertain information and partial ignorance, and usually terminated with the discovery of satisfactory, not optimal, courses of action. (H. Simon 1985, p. 295)

We argue that opinions on politics, like the decisions and judgments made in other domains of life, are governed by bounded rationality (Kahneman 2003a; Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Kahneman 1974, 1981).[12] Two aspects of bounded rationality are especially relevant to the activation of ethnocentrism: sharp limitations of human attention and inevitable framing effects in human judgment. Ethnocentrism will be more or less important to public opinion on an issue depending on the ability of the issue to command the public's limited and fickle attention and on how the particular issue is framed.

### *Commanding Attention*

The architecture of the human information processing system can be thought of as comprised of independent memories: a vast, virtually permanent memory store (long-term memory) and a small, temporary memory store, where information is consciously attended to and actively processed (working memory). Working memory has limited capacity, processes information serially, and encodes new information so that it can be "written" into long-term memory slowly. Attention is a scarce resource, and the command of attention is therefore crucial for "setting the agenda for human problem solving" (H. Simon 1983, p. 30).[13]

The capacity of politics to command attention should not be taken for granted. In a series of powerful essays written in the aftermath of World War I, Walter Lippmann argued that the trials and tribulations of daily life were compelling in a way that politics could rarely be. To expect ordinary people to become absorbed in the affairs of state would be to demand of them an appetite for political knowledge quite peculiar, if not actually pathological. We may be "concerned in public affairs," Lippmann wrote, but we are "immersed in our private ones" ([1922] 1997, p. 36).

Lippmann presented his argument without benefit of the kinds of systematic evidence we now require, but he was an unusually perceptive analyst, and on this point in particular he was surely right. Much as Lippmann suspected, Americans are "much more concerned with the business of buying and selling, earning and disposing of things, than they are with the 'idle' talk of politics" (Lane 1962, p. 25). While the vicissitudes of family, work, and health are central preoccupations, the events of political life remain, for the most part, peripheral curiosities. "Politics," as Robert Dahl once put it, "is a sideshow in the great circus of life" (1961, p. 305).[14]

A first precondition for the activation of ethnocentrism in the process of political judgment is that the issue in question command sufficient public attention. When for a significant fraction of the American public an issue becomes psychologically meaningful, then ethnocentrism may—*may*—come into play. Under these circumstances, when new information challenges a person's predisposition, an entire repertoire of defensive mental mechanisms swings into action. The person may engage in denial, bolstering, rationalization, differentiation, and more—all in the service of protecting and preserving the original predisposition. In this account, motivated reasoning, reasoning guided by predisposition, is impressively versatile—even if, as Abelson and Rosenberg once wrote, it would "mortify a logician" (1958, p. 5).[15]

But how do we fulfill that condition in politics? How do citizens "decide" to pay attention to one thing as against another? The simple answer is that this deciding is done, for the most part, for them. What the American public takes to be important in politics is a direct and immediate reflection of what the news media decide is important. How preoccupied Americans are with a problem depends in the first instance on the prominence of the problem in the news. Rising prices, unemployment, energy shortages, national defense: all these become high priority issues for the public after they first become high priority for newspapers and networks. News media are instruments of "agenda setting."[16]

Issues and problems come and go, and they typically come and go *rapidly* (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Jones 1994).[17] Because some problems lend themselves to we-they thinking more than others do (see below), the importance of ethnocentrism as a predisposition guiding political judgment depends in part on the dynamics of agenda setting, the movement of problems onto and off of the national stage.

### *Framing the Issue*

With the events of September 11, 2001, the war on terrorism moved dramatically onto the national stage. The attacks on New York and Washington commanded the American public's attention. The cluster of policies associated with terrorism thereby became eligible subjects for ethnocentric thinking. But the command of attention is a necessary condition, not a sufficient one. The activation of ethnocentrism requires something in addition: that the public understand the issue in a particular way—in a way that encourages them to see the issue in ethnocentric terms.

In a series of brilliant experiments, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky showed that the judgments people reach and the decisions they make are subject to pervasive framing effects (Tversky and Kahneman 1981). Consider real patients confronting a choice between surgery and radiation. For one group of patients, the surgery option was described as associated with a 90 percent survival rate; for another group of patients, the same procedure was described as associated with a 10 percent mortality rate. The two descriptions—or frames—are formally identical. They differ only by what seems a superficial detail of presentation. It would be frivolous, from standard rational choice theory, for such a detail to matter. But in fact, patients presented with the survival frame were much more likely to choose surgery (McNeil et al. 1982). This result, and many more like it, leads to the conclusion that "framing effects are not a laboratory curiosity, but a ubiquitous reality" (Kahneman 2003a, p. 1459).[18]

Frames operate by altering the relative salience of different aspects of the problem. Different—but logically equivalent—frames highlight some features of the situation and mask others. Accessible features influence decisions; features of low accessibility are largely ignored. Framing is powerful because people generally passively accept the frame they are given.[19]

As Kahneman and Tversky discovered in decision making, so it should be in the judgments people form on matters of public policy. Perhaps even more so. For politics is "altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance" (Lippmann [1922] 1997, p. 11). And so the public comes to depend on others for news about national and world affairs. Such affairs are inevitably complex, always subject to alternative interpretation. This gives elites the opportunity to impose their own particular interpretation of what is happening. Presidents, members of Congress, activists, policy analysts, candidates and officials, reporters, and editors are all engaged in a more or less continuous conversation over the meaning of current events. This conversation is formulated at least in part with the public in mind, and it becomes available to ordinary citizens in a multitude of ways: television news programs, newspaper editorials and syndicated columns, talk radio, blogs, direct mail, and Internet news services, among others. Through all these channels, citizens are bombarded with suggestions about how events should be understood—bombarded, we would say, with frames.

Elites spend as much time and money as they do crafting and disseminating frames because frames make a difference—good frames can command the attention of citizens and affect how they think.[20] This is relevant here because the activation of ethnocentrism is more likely insofar as there is resonance—"close correspondence" or "good fit"—between ethnocentrism, on the one hand, and what is taking place in politics that commands attention, on the other. Fit improves, and activation is more likely, when politics is



portrayed as conflict among groups. All the better, from this perspective, if the conflict is framed as a struggle between just *two* groups—between, say, Palestinians and Israelis, or Sunni and Shia, or civilized nations and terrorist barbarians. Better still if such conflict can be framed in moral terms, as a struggle between good and evil. Conflict framed as a struggle between two groups—one side, malicious and brutal, bent on stealing or ruining; the other side, nobly determined to protect what is rightfully theirs—is just the sort of thing to set ethnocentrism to work.

## ONWARD

Soon enough we will be swimming in details about American public opinion on particular topics: terrorism, foreign aid, immigration, gay marriage, welfare reform, affirmative action, and more. The details are important—they are indispensable if we are to create sensible models of public opinion from one topic to the next and therefore generate credible evidence that ethnocentrism actually adds to what we already know. At the same time, we run the risk of becoming captivated by detail, and distracted away from our main goal, which is to establish the importance of ethnocentrism in general, across many dissimilar issues. That is the main work of the framework spelled out in this chapter: to help us move back and forth between ethnocentrism as a general predisposition, on the one hand, and particular claims about concrete policy disputes, on the other.

We start in on the details in the next chapter. There we introduce and defend a particular way of measuring ethnocentrism (*two* ways, actually), describe the general shape of ethnocentrism in American society today, demonstrate that ethnocentrism is distinct from predispositions that are fixtures in standard accounts of public opinion, and show why some Americans are more ethnocentric than others.

CHAPTER 3

# American Ethnocentrism Today

We have argued that ethnocentrism is an attitude that divides the world into two opposing camps. From an ethnocentric point of view, groups are either "friend" or they are "foe." Ethnocentrism is a general outlook on social difference; it is prejudice, broadly conceived.

Having developed this conception of ethnocentrism in the preceding chapters, here we introduce and explore measures of ethnocentrism set in the contemporary American scene. Our immediate purpose is to establish that our measures are worth taking seriously—and therefore so too are the tests of ethnocentrism's political significance that we present in the chapters to come.

We begin with a brief discussion of the surveys that supply the empirical testing ground for our project. Then we introduce and defend our measures of ethnocentrism: a primary measure based on stereotyping and a secondary measure based on sentiment. Next, in the core of the chapter, we employ these measures in order to test three basic claims about ethnocentrism in the contemporary United States. First, is in-group favoritism ubiquitous? Second, is animosity toward out-groups generalized? And third, are in-group favoritism and out-group animosity tightly bound to one another? Informed by these tests, we then create measures of ethnocentrism, examine their properties, and use them to investigate the relationship between ethnocentrism, on the one hand, and standard political predispositions, on the other. In the final section of the chapter, we take up the puzzle of individual differences in ethnocentrism. Why are some Americans more ethnocentric than others?

## SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

Our test of the importance of ethnocentrism comes down to ascertaining ethnocentrism's impact on public opinion. To what degree, if at all, are Americans' views on the war on terrorism or affirmative action in college



admissions a consequence of ethnocentrism? To answer such questions, we rely principally on recent sample surveys from two excellent sources: the General Social Surveys (GSS) carried out by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago; and the National Election Studies (NES) undertaken by the Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, located at the University of Michigan.[1]

We focus on these studies in the first instance because they carry the measures of group stereotypes that we believe should be the centerpiece of the empirical analysis of ethnocentrism. The stereotype measures were developed at the National Opinion Research Center and were included for the first time in the 1990 GSS. In slightly variant form, they were included on more recent editions of both the GSS and NES. The stereotype measures suit our purposes well: the battery of questions asks about the qualities of in-groups and out-groups (a necessary feature of ethnocentrism), about a multiplicity of qualities (multiple indicators are very valuable for measurement and analysis purposes), and about multiple out-groups (necessary as well since ethnocentrism entails generalized hostility). In short, GSS and NES supply just what we need. We will say more about the measures in the next section.

Moreover, both GSS and NES go to considerable—and expensive—lengths to attain representative samples. In each case, respondents are selected through a multistage area probability design. This ensures that every household in the continental United States has an equal probability of falling into the sample.

Of course, not all those designated by the sampling design are actually interviewed. Some cannot be located; some are never at home; and some, despite repeated urging, simply refuse. Still, more than seven in ten are successfully interviewed. The combination of probability sampling and high response rates implies that Americans interviewed by GSS and by NES should constitute a faithful sample of the nation as a whole—and for the most part, they do. On measures of income, education, marital status, and similar demographics, the samples we analyze resemble the national population quite closely.[2]

Another advantage is size. For example, in the fall of 1992, the NES carried out personal interviews with a sample of nearly 2500 Americans of voting age. Large samples are highly desirable for the kinds of analysis we undertake since, for some purposes, we need to partition the national population into subgroupings—defined by race or national heritage or gender or some other characteristic.

The surveys we analyze are large in another sense as well. They go on for quite a long while—in the view of some respondents, no doubt a *very* long while. The interviews are not brief snatches of conversation; they are

lengthy discussions. For example, the average conversation between interviewer and respondent in the 1992 NES lasted for more than two and one-half hours (160 minutes, to be precise), divided roughly evenly into two separate conversations, one before the election and one right after. From our perspective, this is time well spent. The interviews cover a wide territory: in the domain of public policy, they range all the way from affirmative action and welfare reform to military aggression and foreign aid. Such diversity of cases is just what we need to test the claim of ethnocentrism. Moreover, the interviews devote considerable space to standard political predispositions as well as important aspects of social background: partisan identification, education, religion, and much more. Such assessments are vital to our project, for they allow us to estimate the impact of ethnocentrism on policy opinion while controlling for alternative explanations.

One final advantage of our reliance on GSS and NES is worth noting. Both GSS and NES are ongoing and long-running. GSS was launched in 1973; the first NES was carried out in 1948. Both are dedicated to ensuring comparability of analysis across time. Individual studies, of course, take place in different settings: before and after wars, in good times and bad, under Democratic and Republican administrations, in the midst of campaigns or in the quiet moments in between. The combination of comparable designs and measures in study after study, on the one hand, and dramatic variation in the political environment, on the other, enables us to treat such variation as "natural experiments." And as we will see, this gives us leverage over the question of the conditions under which ethnocentrism is activated.

## MEASURING ETHNOCENTRISM

Ethnocentrism is commonly expressed through *stereotypes*. Stereotypes refer to the beliefs we possess about social groups—what we know or what we think we know about "poets, professors, professional wrestlers, and film stars" (Brown 1965, p. 188), among others.[3] Stereotypes capture the characteristics that define a social group, that set it apart from others. Most often, such characteristics have to do with underlying dispositions—temperament, intelligence, trustworthiness—the deep core of human nature. When we say that "Jews are pushy" or that "blacks are lazy," we are trafficking in stereotypes.[4]

Stereotyping is often held up for reprimand, but it is an inevitable aspect of human cognition. To negotiate and make sense of the world, we need stereotypes. "Life is so short," as Gordon Allport once put it, "and the demands upon us for practical adjustments so great, that we cannot let our ignorance detain us in our daily transactions. We have to decide whether objects are good or bad by classes. We cannot weigh each object in the world by itself. Rough and ready rubrics, however coarse and broad, have to suffice" (1954, p. 9).



If stereotypes are grounded in ordinary cognitive processes and if they reduce the social world to manageable size, they are, of course, very much a mixed blessing. For one thing, stereotypes exaggerate differences and sharpen boundaries: in-groups and out-groups appear more different from each other than they actually are (e.g., D. Campbell 1967; Taylor et al. 1978; Krueger, Rothbart, and Sriram 1989). For another, stereotypes tend to portray members of out-groups as though they were all the same: individual variation is flattened, anomalous cases are set aside (e.g., Kunda and Oleson 1995, 1997; Kinder and McConnaughy 2006; Park and Rothbart 1982). Third, stereotypes are permeated by affect. To say that "Jews are pushy" or that "blacks are lazy" is not only to make a judgment but also to express an emotion. And fourth, stereotypes are easily activated and, once activated, influence judgment and behavior in a variety of ways.[5]

To measure ethnocentrism expressed in terms of stereotypes, we draw on a battery of questions developed by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago and used for the first time in the 1990 installment of the GSS.[6] In these questions, survey respondents were presented with a series of paired antonyms—*hardworking* versus *lazy*, say—and asked to judge whether members of some designated group—whites, for example—are mostly hardworking, mostly lazy, or somewhere in between. Here is the question exactly as it appeared in the 2000 NES:

> Now I have some questions about different groups in our society. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the characteristics of people in a group can be rated. In the first statement a score of 1 means that you think almost all of the people in that group are "hard-working." A score of 7 means that you think almost all of the people in the group are "lazy." A score of 4 means that you think the group is not towards one end or the other, and of course you may choose any number in between that comes closest to where you think people in the group stand.
>
> Where would you rate whites in general on this scale?

After being asked to judge whites on this score, respondents were asked to make the same judgment, this time about blacks, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans, in turn. The procedure was then repeated for two additional dimensions: "intelligent versus unintelligent" and "trustworthy versus untrustworthy."[7]

These questions suit our purposes well. Moral character and intellectual capacity are central features of stereotypes in general (e.g., Stangor and Lange 1994; Fiske 1998). Moreover, claims of in-group superiority are

commonly expressed precisely in these terms: that in-groups are generally more trustworthy, more industrious, and so on than are out-groups (M. Brewer and Campbell 1976).[8] And on a more technical note, assessments of in-groups and out-groups along multiple dimensions—intelligence, trustworthiness, hard-working, and so on—mean that we can submit our overall measure of ethnocentrism to stringent empirical tests (as we will shortly see).

In the GSS and NES questions, social groups are defined by race: white, black, Asian American, and Hispanic American. This, of course, is not the only way to partition the social world, and so not the only way to define ethnocentrism. All societies are divided, and they are divided in a multitude of ways. Dispatch competent ethnographers to any country in the world, Daniel Posner suggests, and they will return with accounts of dozens of differences among the population they were sent to study: "the color of their skin, the religions they practice, the dialects they speak, the places from which they migrated, the foods they eat, and the marriage rituals they practice" (2005, p. 529). Acknowledging that human society can be partitioned in limitless variety, group boundaries specified by race in particular should serve us well in our effort to demonstrate the political significance of ethnocentrism.

We say this partly for historical reasons. From the very outset, American politics and society have been organized in important ways by conflict over race. Constitutional arguments over the meaning of citizenship; the debate over slavery and secession; the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Redemption; the rising of the civil rights movement; on up through contemporary arguments over affirmative action and fair representation: race has been and remains today a central theme of American political life (e.g., Burnham 1974; Myrdal 1944; Klinkner and Smith 1999).

And although race may be a specious concept—largely without support in modern biology—it remains a powerful idea in everyday life. Here we refer to the folk theory of race, race as popularly understood (Hirschfeld 1996). The folk theory of race begins with the axiom that human populations can be partitioned into distinct types or kinds on the basis of their concrete, physical differences. Race is transmitted and fixed at birth; it is inherited and immutable. Differences among races are natural: they derive from some underlying essence. And finally, this essence finds expression not only in physical appearance but in qualities of temperament, intellect, and character as well. Defined this way, the folk theory of race is widespread and deeply entrenched (e.g., Bargh 1999; Devine 1989; Hirschfeld 1996).[9]

Finally, notice that the stereotype questions are formatted so that people can express favoritism for their own group without flagrantly violating norms of fairness. Thus, for example, white Americans who believe that



blacks are less intelligent than whites can say so indirectly, in a sequence of separated judgments, without ever having to subscribe explicitly to the invidious comparison. In addition to this practical advantage, measuring ethnocentrism through social comparison is also appropriate on theoretical grounds. Ethnocentrism entails assessments of in-groups and of out-groups, and this is just what the stereotype battery requires.[10]

The stereotype battery fits our conception of ethnocentrism well, but we should not make the mistake of thinking that the correspondence is perfect. Nor should we imagine that we have come across an immaculate measure of stereotyping: measurement is inevitably imperfect. For these reasons, it is always prudent to have a backup, if only to check on the robustness of results. Our second-best measure of ethnocentrism draws on the NES 0–100 point "feeling thermometer" scale. Designed to serve as a general-purpose measure of political evaluation, the thermometer scale was introduced into the NES series in 1964. It is presented to survey respondents this way:

> I'd like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. I will use something we call the feeling thermometer and here is how it works:
>
> I'll read the name of a person and I'd like you to rate that person using the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person and that you don't care too much for that person. You would rate the person at the 50-degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person.

After evaluating a series of prominent political leaders, respondents are asked to apply the same thermometer scale to a succession of political and social groups. Counted among these groups are (almost always) whites, blacks, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans.

The thermometer scale offers a more direct look into the emotional aspect of ethnocentrism than does the stereotype battery, but the parallel in measurement between the two is otherwise close. As with the stereotype battery, when presented with the thermometer scale, people are asked to evaluate in-groups and out-groups in separate assessments, and they can express favoritism for their own group without conspicuously violating norms of fairness.

In a short while we will document that the two measures are correlated—as they should be since we think of them as alternative measures of the same underlying construct. We will also show that the two measures are distinct—a reflection at least in part of the difference between cognitive and

affective systems.[11] This means that in the chapters ahead, we can use the one measure to check on the other. And it also means that we can take our investigation of ethnocentrism further back into the past than we otherwise could: while the stereotype battery is a relatively recent addition to the GSS and the NES, the thermometer scale has been appearing in national surveys for much longer.[12]

## IN-GROUP FAVORITISM?

Sumner was convinced that ethnocentrism was a universal condition. First in *Folkways* and then more systematically in *The Science of Society*, he reviewed the anthropological evidence, concluding that around the world, ethnocentrism prevails.

Since Sumner's time, the single best test of the claim of ethnocentrism's universality comes from a most remarkable—and mostly overlooked—study organized by Robert LeVine and Donald Campbell in the early 1960s. LeVine and Campbell set out to test the universality of ethnocentrism by examining group perceptions and assessments in multiple cultural settings. Toward that end, they arranged for standardized interviews to be carried out in 1965 with 1,500 respondents distributed evenly across each of 30 ethnic groups scattered across Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. The groups selected constituted the "major peoples with compact territorial identity" in the region and represented a wide range of economic, linguistic, and cultural traditions. Those interviewed were asked (in the local language) about their own group as well as each of 9 out-groups in their own country. They were questioned about many things: their familiarity and contact with other groups, their willingness to take part in various social activities with members of other groups, and much more. But the primary business was to ask about stereotypes—both stereotypes that people applied to their own group and those they applied to others. That is, LeVine and Campbell decided that stereotyping was the place to look for evidence of ethnocentrism. We think they were wise to do so.

The results of this fascinating study, reported by Marilynn Brewer and Donald Campbell in 1976 in *Ethnocentrism and Intergroup Attitudes*, reveal pervasive in-group favoritism. All 30 groups rated their own group more favorably than they did the average out-group. On such central traits as honesty, friendliness, peacefulness, and generosity, in-groups regarded themselves as superior, on average, to out-groups. A more stringent test of in-group favoritism would consider not just the average out-group, but each out-group taken up individually. Did all groups rate their own group more favorably than they did *all* out-groups? Almost: 27 of 30 groups did so.[13]



TABLE 3.1. In-group favoritism expressed through stereotypes (lazy versus hard-working)

| | Assessments of: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assessments by: | Whites | Blacks | Hispanics | Asians |
| Whites | 0.32 | −0.06 | 0.02 | 0.29 |
| | (1627) | (1609) | (1538) | (1511) |
| Blacks | 0.20 | 0.24 | 0.16 | 0.25 |
| | (264) | (268) | (249) | (239) |
| Hispanics | 0.33 | −0.01 | 0.28 | 0.30 |
| | (168) | (168) | (167) | (157) |
| Asians | 0.38 | −0.18 | 0.02 | 0.63 |
| | (28) | (27) | (27) | (28) |

*Source:* 1992 NES.

*Note:* Table entry is the average assessment of each group, among respondents in each racial/ethnic group, on the lazy versus hard-working trait question. The trait assessments are coded from −1 (Nearly all are lazy) to +1 (Nearly all are hard-working). Number of observations appears in parentheses.

Some traits show more evidence of ethnocentrism than others. In-group favoritism was most pronounced on characteristics that make for comfortable and smooth interpersonal relations. *We* are trustworthy, cooperative, peaceful, and honest; *those people over there* are untrustworthy, competitive, quarrelsome, and dishonest. Brewer and Campbell concluded that the fundamental distinction between in-group and out-group is captured by "feelings of trust, familiarity, and personal security." Following Enloe (1972), they suggest that the basic function of group life is to inform an individual "where he belongs and whom he can trust."[14]

Brewer and Campbell are convincing, but their evidence has nothing to say about ethnocentrism among groups in advanced industrial societies like the United States. How common is in-group favoritism in a fully modern setting? Do Americans attribute favorable characteristics more to their own group than they do to out-groups? Or, put the other way around, do they attribute undesirable characteristics less to their own group than they do to out-groups?

To answer these questions, consider table 3.1. There we have summarized results for a single characteristic (lazy versus hard-working) taken from a single survey (the 1992 NES). The columns of the table are defined by the group that is being rated. In the 1992 NES, the columns refer to ratings of whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. The rows of the table are defined by the group that is providing the rating: ratings by whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. The main elements of the table are mean scores on the trait, coded from −1 (almost all are lazy) to +1 (almost all are hard-working), with 0 representing the midpoint. A positive score indicates a favorable

judgment, just as a negative score indicates an unfavorable judgment. The table also provides the number of cases (in parentheses) for each calculation. In some instances, this number is small (for Asian Americans, the number is perilously small).

Do whites, as predicted, attribute the characteristic of hard-working more to their own group than they do to blacks, Hispanics, and Asians? The first row of table 3.1 shows that they do. Asian Americans display in-group favoritism too, and even more conspicuously (fourth row of table 3.1). The results for blacks and Hispanics are different, however. Both blacks and Hispanics see their own group as generally hard-working—but they generally see other groups as hard-working too. As a result, in-group favoritism among black and Hispanic Americans is partial or limited. It shows up in just one respect. Black Americans believe blacks to be more hard-working than Hispanics, and Hispanics, returning the favor, believe that Hispanics are more hard-working than blacks.

The pattern of results shown in table 3.1 is entirely general. It is just what we see elsewhere, in other NES and GSS surveys, and on other characteristics: intelligence, patriotism, self-reliance, trustworthiness, propensity for violence, and more. Everywhere we look, we find general in-group favoritism among white and Asian Americans, and partial in-group favoritism among black and Hispanic Americans.[15]

Replication is reassuring, but the samples for Asian Americans in GSS and NES are so undersized that we cannot be sure that in-group favoritism really applies to them. To find a sizable and high-quality sample of Asian Americans, we turned to the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (MCSUI). Supported by the Russell Sage Foundation, MCSUI was carried out between 1992 and 1994 in four American cities: Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles. In Los Angeles alone, where our analysis concentrates, more than 4000 adults were interviewed, divided more or less evenly among whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians (the last three groups were deliberately oversampled). Conveniently for our purposes, MCSUI included a stereotype measure. Each Los Angeles respondent was asked to offer judgments about the character of four racial groups—whites, blacks, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans—with respect to each of five characteristics: intelligence, friendliness, fairness, law-abiding, and self-supporting.[16]

It turns out that Asians living in Los Angeles regarded their group to be superior, on average, to *all* other groups on *every* characteristic. Asians are smarter, friendlier, fairer, more law-abiding, and more self-supporting than are whites, blacks, and Hispanics—all this according to Asians themselves. It would appear that the pattern we detected in GSS and NES surveys with small samples holds generally.[17]



Elsewhere in the Los Angeles study, we find what we found before. Whites display in-group favoritism generally. Blacks and Hispanics show in-group favoritism partially: they display in-group favoritism compared to each other, but not toward more advantaged groups. There is one interesting wrinkle here. Neither the GSS nor the NES form of the stereotype battery asks about friendliness. The Los Angeles study did. And when it comes to friendliness, the expected ethnocentric pattern shows up for *all* groups. Blacks and Hispanics, like whites and Asians, believe their group is easier to get along with than other groups are. This result is interesting in light of Brewer and Campbell's claim, based on surveys in East Africa, that in-groups constitute communities of trust and comfort.[18]

Sumner treated ethnocentrism as a universal condition, an inescapable consequence of inevitable conflict between rival groups. Our first round of results suggests that Sumner was wrong. In-group favoritism is common, but not universal. For African Americans and Hispanic Americans, ethnocentrism is partial—it shows up vis-à-vis some out-groups but not for others, and for some characteristics but not for all. Put another way, in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century, blacks and Hispanics have a comparatively difficult time asserting their own group's superiority. Ethnocentrism would seem to be, as Tajfel once put it, something of "a one-way street," appearing with consistency only in the views of dominant groups.[19]

An inkling of this was turned up by Brewer and Campbell in their results from East Africa. They found that traits having to do with achievement and status were less apt to show evidence of in-group favoritism. Judgments about a group's intelligence or wealth seemed to be conditioned on actual levels of resources and power. Group members might prefer to see themselves as capable and successful, but such judgments are constrained by real conditions. Likewise, in modern complex societies, low-status group members may evaluate high-status groups more positively on aspects tied directly to status differences. In effect, as Marilynn Brewer says, "they are simply acknowledging objective differences in status, power, or wealth and resources" (2007, p. 733).[20]

That is what we find for ethnocentrism expressed in terms of group stereotypes. What happens when we test for in-group favoritism making use of the thermometer scale?

Table 3.2 presents a representative sample of results, drawing again from the 1992 NES. The table is set up in just the same way as its predecessor, with the columns of the table defined by the group that is being evaluated and the rows of the table defined by the group that is providing the evaluation. This time the elements of the table are mean scores on the thermometer rating scale, ranging in principle from 0 (very cold) to 100 (very warm).

TABLE 3.2. In-group favoritism expressed through sentiment

| Ratings by: | Ratings of: Whites | Blacks | Hispanics | Asians |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Whites | 71.3 | 61.2 | 58.2 | 58.4 |
| | (1645) | (1638) | (1592) | (1609) |
| Blacks | 71.5 | 88.0 | 67.2 | 61.9 |
| | (272) | (276) | (256) | (253) |
| Hispanics | 71.7 | 69.4 | 79.4 | 62.9 |
| | (170) | (170) | (174) | (165) |
| Asians | 65.2 | 59.6 | 56.0 | 72.8 |
| | (27) | (26) | (26) | (27) |

*Source:* 1992 NES.

*Note:* Table entry is the average rating of each group, among respondents in each racial/ethnic group, using the feeling thermometer. Number of observations appears in parentheses. The ratings are coded from 0 (Coldest) to 100 (Warmest).

Table 3.2 reveals general support for in-group favoritism—*very general support.* Whites and Asians feel more warmly toward their own group than they do toward others. But so too do blacks and Hispanics. Moreover, this pattern of general in-group favoritism emerges in other surveys we have analyzed, again for all groups, and at least as strongly. Expressed in terms of sentiment, in-group favoritism is thriving.[21]

Taken all around, then, we find consistent—if not quite universal—support for in-group favoritism. And we find in-group favoritism not among artificial experimental groups or among ethnic groups of East Africa. Rather, we find it among whites and blacks and Hispanics and Asians in the world's oldest and richest democratic republic.

## PREJUDICE, BROADLY CONCEIVED?

If ethnocentrism is really "prejudice, broadly conceived," then we should find two kinds of consistency in the beliefs and attitudes that Americans hold toward social groups. First of all is consistency among various beliefs about a particular group. Whites who regard blacks as lazy should also think of them as unintelligent and untrustworthy. It was consistency of this kind that Levinson and his colleagues (Adorno et al. 1950) took as evidence for anti-Semitism. Second, we also look for consistency among beliefs *across* groups. What is the relationship between, say, black Americans' view of Hispanics' intelligence and their assessment of the trustworthiness of Asian Americans? There is no logical connection between the two. But according to ethnocentrism, black Americans who are unimpressed with the intelligence of Hispanic Americans should also find Asian Americans untrustworthy.



A seemingly straightforward index of consistency is provided by the correlation coefficient. It is a simple matter to calculate the relevant coefficients, and when we do, we discover plenty of consistency of both kinds. Whites who regard blacks as lazy also think of them as unintelligent and untrustworthy, just as black Americans who appear unimpressed with the intelligence of Hispanic Americans also find Asian Americans untrustworthy. And on it goes.

These results are certainly compatible with the claim of prejudice broadly conceived, but for technical reasons, it is hard to know exactly what to make of them. On the one hand, the observed correlations are no doubt attenuated because of unreliability in the measures: the response categories are coarse, respondents misspeak, interviewers make mistakes, and so on. This means that the evidence for ethnocentrism might well be stronger than the raw correlations suggest. On the other hand, the correlations may be artificially enhanced due to systematic response error. The stereotype questions are designed to measure just one thing—beliefs about the characteristic attributes of groups—but because of their unusual format, they may also inadvertently measure something else as well: namely, the systematic way respondents make their way through the question series. Faced with the stereotype battery, respondents may proceed by relying on a judgment heuristic that Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman call "anchoring and adjustment" (Tversky and Kahneman 1974). The implication here is that the real evidence for ethnocentrism might be weaker than the raw correlations suggest.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is the proper remedy for problems of this sort. Using CFA, we can test the claim of generalized prejudice, while correcting for both kinds of error (Jöreskog 1969; Bollen 1989). A typical set of CFA results appears in table 3.3. This analysis is based on the responses of white Americans to the stereotype battery present in the 1992 NES. To test the claim of generalized prejudice, we factor analyzed the empirical structure of twelve indicators: four groups—blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and whites—rated on three attributes—intelligent, hard-working, and violent. (We included stereotypes about whites, the in-group, as well as stereotypes about the three out-groups, so we could test whether in-group solidarity and out-group prejudice are connected. We will get to those results shortly.) As we have noted, ethnocentrism requires consistency at two levels: both within group and across group. In the factor analysis model, group-specific factors cause assessments of particular attributes: that is, the latent variable "attitude toward Hispanics" causes judgments about intelligence among Hispanics, laziness among

TABLE 3.3. Prejudice broadly conceived? Maximum likelihood factor analysis of group stereotypes held by whites (estimates based on variance-covariance matrix)

| | Factor loadings | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Whites | Asians | Hispanics | Blacks | Reliability |
| Whites—lazy | 0.64 | | | | 0.31 |
| Whites—smart | −0.68 | | | | 0.32 |
| Whites—peaceful | −0.78 | | | | 0.45 |
| Asians—lazy | | 0.70 | | | 0.26 |
| Asians—smart | | −0.81 | | | 0.41 |
| Asians—peaceful | | −0.78 | | | 0.45 |
| Hispanics—lazy | | | 0.61 | | 0.26 |
| Hispanics—smart | | | −0.70 | | 0.45 |
| Hispanics—peaceful | | | −0.63 | | 0.33 |
| Blacks—lazy | | | | 0.76 | 0.44 |
| Blacks—smart | | | | −0.70 | 0.42 |
| Blacks—peaceful | | | | −0.72 | 0.37 |

Chi-square with 30 degrees of freedom = 133.90 ($p < 0.01$).

Adjusted goodness of fit = 0.961.

Root mean square residual = 0.051.

Correlations between the latent factors

| | Whites | Asians | Hispanics | Blacks |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Whites | 1.00 | | | |
| Asians | 0.13 | 1.00 | | |
| Hispanics | 0.03 | 0.56 | 1.00 | |
| Blacks | −0.05 | 0.39 | 0.71 | 1.00 |

*Source:* 1992 NES.

Hispanics, and so forth. The model allows for these group-specific factors to be correlated: that is, the latent variable "attitude toward Hispanics" is correlated with the latent variable "attitude toward Asian Americans," and so on.[22]

The results appear in table 3.3. Notice first of all that the model fits the observed relationships quite well.[23] Second, particular stereotyped beliefs load sizably and quite uniformly on each of the four group factors. Thus, the requirement of consistency within group holds.[24] And third, the relationships between attitudes toward out-groups are also significant and substantial. They range from 0.39 (the correlation between attitude toward Asian Americans and attitude toward black Americans) to 0.71 (the correlation between attitude toward Hispanic Americans and attitude toward black Americans). That is, what whites think about one out-group is quite consistent with what they think about another, just as ethnocentrism requires.



The results presented in table 3.3 closely resemble what we turn up when we estimate comparable models in other surveys, for whites and for other racial groups as well. By these various tests, ethnocentrism does indeed seem to be prejudice, broadly conceived.[25]

## IN-GROUP SOLIDARITY AND OUT-GROUP PREJUDICE?

As we learned in chapter 1, William Graham Sumner thought that in-group solidarity and out-group prejudice would always be found together: "Loyalty to the group, sacrifice for it, hatred and contempt for outsiders, brotherhood within, warlikeness without—all grow together, common products of the same situation" ([1906] 2002, p. 13).

This is not what we find. Table 3.3 contains the relevant results, and as shown there, the evidence runs against Sumner's expectation. The correlations between attitude toward the in-group (whites) and attitude toward various out-groups are miniscule: 0.13, 0.03, and −0.05. The latter two are essentially zero—neither differs from zero by standard statistical tests. And the former, though barely statistically significant, is trivial substantively and runs in a direction opposite to that predicted.

Nor do we turn up more favorable evidence elsewhere: in the 1990 GSS, or in the 1996 NES, or in the 2000 GSS. Alternative measures and specifications produce the same result. Contrary to the proposition that the more in-group favoritism, the more out-group animosity, the two seem quite unconnected.[26] This finding supports Marilynn Brewer's (2007) conclusion, based primarily on her review of experimental results. Strong attachment to the in-group appears to be compatible with a wide range of sentiments toward out-groups. In-group solidarity and out-group hostility are bundled together less tightly than Sumner originally believed.[27]

## MEASURES OF ETHNOCENTRISM

For all the analysis that is to come, we need to build a general measure of ethnocentrism; two measures, really: a primary measure based on stereotypes; and a secondary measure, based on sentiment. The two scales are put together in parallel ways. Both hinge on comparison, on preferring in-groups to out-groups.

Here is the formula for building the primary measure of ethnocentrism (E):

$$E = \{(\text{Trait}_1 \text{ in-group score} - \text{Trait}_1 \text{ average out-group score}) + (\text{Trait}_2 \text{ in-group score} - \text{Trait}_2 \text{ average out-group score}) + (\text{Trait}_3 \text{ in-group score} - \text{Trait}_3 \text{ average out-group score})\}/3$$

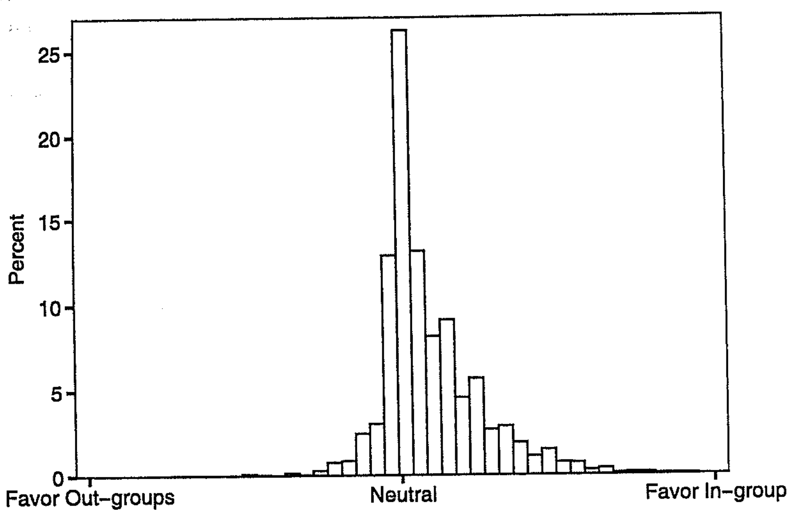


FIGURE 3.1. Distribution of ethnocentrism based on social stereotypes. Source: 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 NES.

Notice that by this formula each trait—hard-working or intelligent or trustworthy—carries equal weight. More complicated schemes are possible, of course, but the factor analysis results imply something very close to equal weighing. Our experience with more complicated weighting schemes is that they produce overall scores that are difficult to distinguish from that generated by equal weighting. And in any case, weighting traits equally generates a reliable overall scale (Cronbach's coefficient *alpha* for E = 0.77).[28]

E is scored to range from –1 to +1. A "perfect" score of +1 means that on each and every trait, "nearly all" members of the in-group are believed to be virtuous and "nearly all" members of all out-groups are believed to be virtue-less. A score of +1 is perfect in the sense that it represents an extreme form of ethnocentrism. A score of –1 is equally perfect, but in the opposite direction: –1 represents a topsy-turvy world in which out-groups are seen as virtuous and in-groups as utterly without virtue. An overall score of 0, finally, indicates an absence of ethnocentrism, that on average, in-group and out-groups are indistinguishable.

Figure 3.1 presents the distribution of scores on E. (The figure is based on pooling respondents from the 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 NES.) That the American public is ethnocentric on balance is revealed in figure 3.1 in two ways: first, the curve is displaced modestly away from the neutral point to the right, in the ethnocentric direction; and second, the curve is modestly asymmetric, sloping downward less precipitously to the right, toward the ethnocentric point of view.



Figure 3.1 reveals what might be called mild ethnocentrism. On the one hand, in-group favoritism is common. A clear majority of the American public—58.9 percent to be exact—scored above the neutral point (0), where in-groups and out-groups are thought to be equal.[29] On the other hand, in-group favoritism is restrained. No one claims categorical superiority: that members of one's own group are uniformly intelligent, hard-working, and trustworthy while members of all other groups are uniformly stupid, lazy, and unreliable. What we have here is a sense of perceptible but subtle superiority, widely shared.

To Levinson and his colleagues, ethnocentrism was something dark and dangerous. In their account, the "ethnocentric individual feels threatened by most of the groups to which he does not have a sense of belonging; if he cannot identify, he must oppose; if a group is not 'acceptable,' it is alien" (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 147). Likewise for Sumner: in his analysis, the typical manifestations of ethnocentrism included contempt, abomination, plunder, and war (Sumner [1906] 2002, pp. 12–13). No doubt ethnocentrism can take extreme form, but we do not insist on it; and in any case, it is not what we generally find.

Our second and secondary measure of ethnocentrism (call it E*) is based on thermometer score ratings and is assembled by the same logic:

E* = {feeling thermometer rating for in-group –
average feeling thermometer rating for out-groups}

Like E, E* is scored to range from –1 to +1. Here a "perfect" score of +1 means that the in-group is rated very warmly (100 degrees) and all out-groups are rated very coldly (0 degrees). As before, a score of –1 is equally perfect in the opposite direction. An overall score of 0, finally, indicates an absence of ethnocentrism, that on average, in-group and out-groups elicit indistinguishable feelings. This formula generates a very reliable overall scale (Cronbach's coefficient *alpha* for E* = 0.88).[30]

Figure 3.2 presents the distribution of scores on E*. (As before, we pool respondents from the 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 NES.) In a society free of ethnocentrism, E* scores should be distributed in a symmetric and narrow band around the neutral point, indicating that Americans feel no more warmly (or coolly) toward their own group than they do toward out-groups. In practice, as figure 3.2 shows, this is not what we find. The distribution of the ethnocentrism scale is not centered at neutrality. Instead, like scores on E but more decisively, scores on E* are displaced to the right, in the ethnocentric direction. Nor is the distribution symmetric; rather, respondents thin out much more rapidly to the left of neutrality than they do to the right, in the region of ethnocentrism. As before, extreme ethnocentrism is rare, but in mild form, it is pervasive.[31]

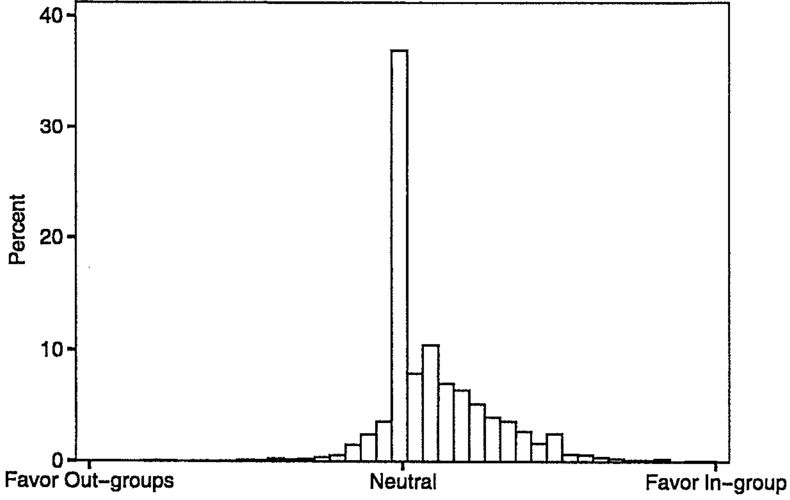


FIGURE 3.2. Distribution of ethnocentrism based on group sentiment. Source: 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 NES.

We have been proceeding under the assumption that that the two measures of ethnocentrism—E and E*—reflect the same underlying construct. That they are distributed in roughly equivalent ways is encouraging on this point, of course. But if they really are alternative (if inevitably imperfect) measures of ethnocentrism, they must be correlated with one another. And so they are: pooling respondents from the 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 NES, the Pearson correlation ($r$) is 0.42.

## CORRELATES OF ETHNOCENTRISM

Next we examine ethnocentrism's place among a standard set of social and political predispositions. We have argued that ethnocentrism represents a distinctive way of looking at the world. From an ethnocentric point of view, groups are either "friend" or "foe." As such, ethnocentrism might be correlated with other political predispositions—with certain varieties of conservatism, say—but it cannot be interchangeable with them. If that turned out to be true, then we would have no reason to proceed, no warrant for arguing that the understanding of public opinion has been diminished by the failure, up until now, to take ethnocentrism seriously. To see how closely ethnocentrism is associated with standard political predispositions, we rely on our primary measure of ethnocentrism, the one based on stereotypes (E), though the results would be no different were we to use the alternative measure based on group sentiment (E*).



We start with partisanship, first among equals when it comes to political predispositions. Most Americans think of themselves as Democrats or as Republicans. Party identification is a standing decision, a "durable attachment, not readily disturbed by passing events and personalities" (Campbell et al. [1960] 1980, p. 151). And it is consequential: "To the average person, the affairs of government are remote and complex, and yet the average citizen is asked periodically to formulate opinions about these affairs. . . . In this dilemma, having the party symbol stamped on certain candidates, certain issue positions, certain interpretations of reality is of great psychological convenience" (Stokes 1966, pp. 126–27; also see Bartels 2000; Converse 1966; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). To the extent that the issues we take up in the chapters ahead—from the war on terrorism to affirmative action in college admissions—generate strong and durable disagreements between Democratic and Republican elites, we would expect Democrats and Republicans in the general public to disagree as well. Put differently, partisanship is likely to play an important part in our analysis of public opinion. True enough, but whatever part partisanship plays in opinion must be independent of the part ethnocentrism plays. As table 3.4 reveals, partisanship and ethnocentrism are virtually uncorrelated.[32]

What about the relationship between ethnocentrism and views on the size and scope of government authority? Compared to citizens of other developed democracies, Americans are, on average, "suspicious of government, skeptical about the benefits of government authority, and impressed with the virtue of limiting government" (Kingdon 1999, p. 29). Moreover, differences among Americans on broad questions of governmental authority

TABLE 3.4. The relationship between ethnocentrism and social and political predispositions

| | Full sample | Whites | Blacks | Hispanics |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Partisanship | –0.06 | –0.00 | 0.02 | 0.03 |
| | (4923) | (3931) | (598) | (394) |
| Limited government | –0.03 | –0.09 | –0.05 | –0.02 |
| | (4947) | (3951) | (604) | (392) |
| Egalitarianism | –0.19 | –0.18 | 0.07 | –0.02 |
| | (4974) | (3964) | (609) | (401) |
| Ideological identification | –0.07 | –0.07 | 0.02 | 0.03 |
| | (4945) | (3951) | (599) | (395) |
| Social trust | –0.08 | –0.17 | –0.02 | –0.07 |
| | (4898) | (3901) | (602) | (395) |

*Source:* 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 NES.

*Note:* Table entry is the Pearson correlation coefficient. Number of observations appears in parentheses.

generate corresponding differences on a wide range of specific policy questions. Limited government is an important idea—but as table 3.4 shows, it has no association with ethnocentrism.[33]

Alongside the American taste for limited government, and to some degree in opposition to it, is a preference for egalitarianism—what Tocqueville called the American "passion" for equality. Americans seem to take egalitarian beliefs—that everyone is fundamentally the same under the skin, that everyone deserves the same chance in life—seriously, and such general beliefs appear to influence what they think government should do (if anything) about poverty, health care, discrimination, and more. As might be expected, and as table 3.4 shows, egalitarianism and ethnocentrism are negatively correlated. Ethnocentric Americans are inclined, slightly but consistently, to reject egalitarian principles.[34]

Next we consider ideological identification. It turns out that when asked directly, many American are willing to describe themselves in ideological terms—as liberals or (more often) as conservatives—and these descriptions appear to be, if not sophisticated or philosophical, politically meaningful. Self-identified liberals tend to favor redistributive policies and social change; self-identified conservatives tend to celebrate the market and express misgivings about racial integration (Conover and Feldman 1981; Levitin and Miller 1979). Liberals and conservatives also differ when it comes to ethnocentrism—Americans who think of themselves as conservative are a bit more ethnocentric, on average, than are those who think of themselves as liberal—though the difference is tiny, as shown in table 3.4.[35]

This brings us to social trust. Renewing a claim first made by Alexis de Tocqueville, Robert Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000) has argued that social trust is essential to democratic society. Without trust, community withers and cooperative projects unravel. The prospects for democracy in a society in which people "do not get along well with one another, do not trust one another, and do not associate with one another" would seem, as Robert Lane once put it, "unpromising"; life in such a place would be "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" (1959, p. 163, citing Hobbes's *Leviathan*).

Survey questions intended to measure social trust have been included in recent National Election Studies. By design, these questions are utterly general. They do not refer to any particular people (neighbors, coworkers, strangers on the street). Nor do they do specify what it is that is to be entrusted (secrets, material possessions, one's own physical safety). As Almond and Verba put it, the standard questions would seem to require "sweeping judgments of human nature" (1963, p. 267). As such, we would expect to find a negative relationship between ethnocentrism and social trust. And, as shown in table 3.4, we do.[36]



The relationship between ethnocentrism and social trust is surprisingly weak, however. We expected to see a stronger relationship because of the emphasis placed on trust in defining in-group relations. In-groups, as Marilynn Brewer argues, are "bounded communities of mutual cooperation and trust" (2007, p. 732). In Brewer's analysis of ethnocentrism, nothing distinguishes social relations carried on within the group with those carried on across group boundaries more than trust.[37]

In sum, partisanship, limited government, equality, ideological identification, and social trust are often treated as important ingredients in American public opinion. Our analysis of opinion will certainly take them into account. But the findings presented in table 3.4 make clear that we can put away the worry that ethnocentrism brings nothing new to political analysis—that ethnocentrism is just another word for conservatism or anti-egalitarianism or the like. Ethnocentrism represents a distinctive outlook on social life, one that, as we will shortly show, has a distinctive and independent impact on public opinion.

## ORIGINS OF ETHNOCENTRISM

In chapter 2 we argue that children are ready for ethnocentrism, that they come equipped with a predisposition to partition the world into social groups, treated as natural kinds, and that they express rudimentary forms of ethnocentrism: strong attachment to national symbols; ardent belief that their country and customs are best; stereotyped understandings of race, class, and gender. In time, some become less ethnocentric than others, and it is variation in ethnocentrism that is our immediate subject here. Such variation arises, we suggest, from three principal sources: from instruction and genetic endowment provided by parents, from the emergence of personality, and from values and skills imparted by higher education.

### *Parents*

We expect to find a correspondence between the ethnocentrism of parents and the ethnocentrism of children on two grounds. First is learning. According to social learning theory, "the complex repertoires of behavior displayed by members of society are to a large extent acquired with little or no direct tuition through observation of response patterns exemplified by various socialization agents" (Bandura 1969, p. 213). Children do not rely exclusively on parents as socialization agents, but they rely on parents more than on any other single source. A significant part of social learning takes place through children imitating, internalizing, and reproducing what their parents say and do.

A second mechanism implicating parents is genetic transmission. As E. O. Wilson (1978) and others claim, a sizable fraction of human behavioral variation is plausibly attributed to genetic differences. Recent findings suggest that political predispositions bearing a strong resemblance to ethnocentrism have a significant and sizable genetic component. Thus parents may influence their biological offspring as much through the "genetic blueprint" they provide at conception as through the modeling and instruction they supply later on.[38]

In short, either for reasons of social learning or for reasons of genetic inheritance, or both, we should find evidence of correspondence in ethnocentrism of parents and their offspring.

The best place to look to see if this is so is the extraordinary study of political socialization created by M. Kent Jennings. In the spring of 1965, under Jennings's direction, a national sample of high school seniors was interviewed on a wide range of political subjects. Simultaneously and independently, parents of the students were questioned as well, on many of the same subjects.[39] Fortunately for our purposes, the standard thermometer score battery appeared in both sets of interviews. Parents and offspring alike were asked to report their feelings toward a series of social groups—including groups defined by race. Not so fortunately, racial groups in 1965 meant white or black. Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans were not on the list, and in 1965, it probably would have seemed strange to the majority of the respondents to have included these two groups. In order to build a measure of ethnocentrism, however, we needed more than just ratings of blacks and whites. And so we supplemented racial evaluations with religious ones. In 1965, parents and offspring were asked to evaluate Catholics, Jews, and Protestants as well as blacks and whites. And from other questions included in the interview, we were able to ascertain the race and religious affiliation of both parents and offspring. Using information about race and religion, we then could place parents and offspring into one of three classes. If they displayed in-group favoritism on race and religion, they received a score of 1.0. If they displayed in-group favoritism neither on race nor on religion, they received a score of 0.0. And if they displayed in-group favoritism on one form of classification but not on the other, they received a score of 0.5.[40]

Is this measure good enough? One encouraging sign is that it suggests, as do our other measures, that the American public is inclined toward ethnocentrism: 48.0 percent of the offspring sample and 50.6 percent of the parents show in-group favoritism on both racial and religious grounds.[41] Another and perhaps more instructive test is to see if the abbreviated measure we have concocted out of the Jennings study correlates with the measures of ethnocentrism we prefer. To carry out this test, we returned to the 2000 NES and created a measure following the identical protocol to the one governing scale construction in the 1965 socialization study (that is, a measure of in-group favoritism based on race—black, white—and religion—Catholic, Jewish, Protestant). Happily for our purposes, this measure turns out to be positively and substantially correlated with E*: Pearson $r =$ 0.55. It seems that the abbreviated measure is good enough and that we can proceed (cautiously) to analyze the origins of ethnocentrism measured in this way.[42]



Due either to social learning or to genetic inheritance, we expect to find correspondence between parent and offspring ethnocentrism. And we do find it. Parental ethnocentrism and offspring ethnocentrism are related. The relationship is significant and strong.[43] Converting the parameter estimates into predicted values, a "completely ethnocentric" parent (score of 1.0) would be expected to have an ethnocentric offspring with probability 0.54; the probability falls to 0.45 for a parent who is partially ethnocentric; it falls again to 0.37 for a parent who gives no sign of ethnocentrism.[44]

To what degree does this correspondence arise from social learning as against genetic inheritance? Under social learning theory, the magnitude of correspondence between parents and children should depend on conditions that facilitate the learning process.[45] Correspondence should increase under two conditions: when politics is prominent in family life (when parental instruction is more readily available) and when parents and children are close (when offspring will be more prepared to accept what their parents say and do). Is this so?

In a word, no. Parental influence does *not* increase when parents are politically active (the relationship goes in the opposite direction, though not significantly); parental influence does *not* increase when the family discusses politics; parental influence does *not* increase among offspring who are engaged in political life; parental influence does *not* increase among offspring who know a lot about politics; finally, parental influence does *not* increase when parents and their children are close (as claimed by the children). All this evidence runs against a social learning account of parental influence.[46]

Assume, instead, that the considerable correspondence we see between parents and their offspring is due to genetic transmission.[47] Under genetic transmission, mothers and fathers should have independent and equal effects on their offspring. We can test this by taking advantage of a special feature of the Jennings socialization study design. Interviews were carried out with the fathers of one-third of the seniors, the mothers of one-third, and *both* parents of the remaining third.[48] Among this last group, when we

predict offspring's ethnocentrism from father's ethnocentrism and mother's ethnocentrism, we find each parent contributes independently and equally.[49]

In short, parents do seem to be protagonists in the story of ethnocentrism's origins. Children grow up and enter the world of politics more or less ethnocentric, and this is a reflection, in an important way, of the ethnocentrism of their parents. Although the evidence we have presented here is far from decisive, the transmission of ethnocentrism from one generation to the next would seem to have more to do with genetic inheritance than with social learning.

### *Personality*

Daniel Levinson and his colleagues concluded that the origins of ethnocentrism are to be found in the authoritarian personality. Under intense scrutiny, the empirical case supporting their conclusion collapsed—but perhaps they were right nevertheless. According to Karen Stenner, in the United States and around the world, political, racial, and moral intolerance are "driven by the same engine, fueled by the same impulses" (2005, p. 269). The engine Stenner had in mind was, of course, authoritarianism, and this time around, the evidence is convincing (Feldman 2003; Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005). And so, perhaps ethnocentrism arises, in part, from authoritarianism, a general and deep-seated characterological predisposition to choose conformity over autonomy.

Are authoritarianism and ethnocentrism related? We can see if this is so because recent installments of the NES have included four standard questions widely used (by Stenner and others) to provide a reliable measure of authoritarianism. The questions ask about the values most important for parents to emphasize in the raising of their children, with each posing a choice between the authority of parents and the autonomy of children.[50] Measured in this fashion, authoritarianism *is* related to ethnocentrism. Pooling recent NES surveys, the Pearson *r* between authoritarianism and ethnocentrism is 0.20.[51]

A more demanding test of the claim that ethnocentrism has its origins in authoritarianism can be carried out using the 1992–1996 NES Panel. Here the test is to predict ethnocentrism expressed in 1996 from authoritarianism measured in 1992, while controlling on the effects due to other plausible factors: education, race, gender, social isolation, and more.[52] Under these conditions, we find a statistically significant though modest effect of authoritarianism. This result is consistent with the claim that ethnocentrism arises in part—in rather small part—from authoritarianism.[53]



TABLE 3.5. Ethnocentrism and education

| | [1] | [2] | [3] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Years of schooling | −0.20*** | −0.15*** | −0.05 |
| | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.03 |
| Any college | | −0.02*** | 0.14*** |
| | | 0.01 | 0.04 |
| Any college* Years of schooling | | | −0.21*** |
| | | | 0.05 |
| *N* | 4767 | 4767 | 4767 |

*Source:* 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 NES.

*Note:* Table entry is the ordinary least-squares coefficient with standard error below. Years of schooling range from 0 (zero years) to 1 (17 years). Any college is a dummy for any postsecondary educational experiences. All models include year intercepts and measures of occupation, income, homeownership, age, sex, race, and ethnicity. Full results appear in the Web appendix.

$^{***}p < 0.01$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.10$, two-tailed.

### *Education*

Education, so the standard argument goes, provides values and skills that enable individuals to overcome prejudice. From Stouffer's (1955) results on communist subversion in the 1950s to contemporary disputes over gay rights and racist speech, education is almost always associated with greater tolerance. In the conventional view, education confers knowledge, principles, and experiences that together act as a counterweight to the "natural" inclination toward prejudice. Based on this literature, we expect that individual differences in ethnocentrism can be explained, in part, by differences in education.

Education does indeed predict ethnocentrism: as years of education increase, ethnocentrism declines. Education, of course, is correlated with other aspects of social background—occupation, income, age, and so on—that may themselves predict ethnocentrism. When we include a comprehensive set of such background measures in a regression model, the effect of education on ethnocentrism remains significant and sizable. This result appears in column 1 of table 3.5.

Further analysis suggests that the college experience in particular has a special role to play in ethnocentrism's decline. First of all, attending college has an effect on ethnocentrism over and above the effect due to years of education (column 2 of table 3.5). And second, each year of education spent in college has a greater effect on ethnocentrism than does each year of education spent outside of college (column 3).[54]

Based on these results, it would seem that education, and especially the experiences associated with higher education, build tolerance and erode ethnocentrism.[55]

## ETHNOCENTRISM A STABLE PREDISPOSITION?

We expect that, like other core aspects of personality and political identity, ethnocentrism will display substantial and increasing stability in adulthood. Ascertaining whether this is so requires panel data—repeated observations of the same individuals over time. The best evidence comes once again from the Jennings socialization study. High school seniors were first interviewed in the spring of 1965, as graduation approached. The same group was questioned again in 1973, once more in 1982, and on one final occasion in 1997. As noted earlier, we are able to fashion a serviceable measure of ethnocentrism out of the 1965 survey materials, one based on race and on religion. The identical measure was available in 1973 and in 1997 as well (though, alas, not in 1982).

One simple way to gauge over-time continuity is provided by the Pearson correlation coefficient. The Pearson correlation represents the extent to which the relative ordering of individuals—in this case, from not at all ethnocentric to extremely ethnocentric—is the same on one occasion as it is on another. A score of 1.0 means that the relative ordering is identical on the two occasions; a score of –1.0 represent a complete reversal of the relative orderings; and a score of 0.0 means that there is no relationship at all between the two orderings. Regarding ethnocentrism, we find substantial but far from perfect continuity in the Jennings study materials: between 1965 and 1973, the Pearson $r = 0.25$; between 1973 and 1997, $r_r = 0.30$.

We can go a layer deeper into this question through a more refined processing of the raw correlation coefficients. "More refined" means partitioning the observed Pearson correlations into two components: a reliability component, reflecting the degree to which the measures are contaminated by error; and a stability component—"true stability"—reflecting the degree to which the two measures would be correlated if not for the attenuating presence of error. Remember that we are relying on an abridged measure of ethnocentrism in this analysis, so we can be sure that there is imprecision aplenty. To correct for error of this kind, we rely on the model developed by D. Wiley and J. Wiley (1970).[56]

The magnitude of stability coefficients is tied to the length of interval between observations. Under usual circumstances (in the absence of cyclical change), the coefficients will decline as the interval increases. With this contingency in mind, the coefficients estimated from the socialization study—based in the first instance on an interval of 8 years and in the sec-



TABLE 3.6. Stability of ethnocentrism

| Period | Stability |
|---|---|
| 1965–73 | 0.73 |
| 1973–97 | 0.80 |
| 1992–94 | 0.89 |
| 1994–96 | 0.99 |
| 2000–02 | 0.68 |
| 2002–04 | 0.72 |

*Source:* 1965–1997 Political Socialization Study Panel; 1992–1996 NES Panel; 2000–2004 NES Panel.

*Note:* Table entry is the Wiley-Wiley stability coefficient.

ond on an interval of 24 years—indicate very impressive stability (see table 3.6). The coefficients suggest, moreover, that ethnocentrism becomes increasingly stable in middle age, consistent with the evidence on personality consolidation over the life span.

As a check on these results, we carried out parallel analysis on two short-term panel studies: the 1992–1994–1996 NES and the 2000–2002–2004 NES Panels. Because the Wiley-Wiley model requires observations at three points in time, we are restricted to estimating the stability of ethnocentrism as measured by thermometer score ratings, since the thermometer score but not the stereotype battery was included in all three waves of these two NES Panel studies. These results are also presented in table 3.6. They show that once the unreliability of measurement is taken into account, ethnocentrism is very stable in the short-run in the early 1990s, but markedly less so in the first years of the twenty-first century.[57]

Ethnocentrism conforms less completely to the protocol of a stable predisposition between 2000 and 2004. Why? It is as if something intruded forcefully on American life, upsetting the normal order. The obvious candidate here, it seems to us, is the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, and the urgent shift in policy and national purpose that immediately followed. We cannot be certain about this, but several pieces of evidence point in this direction.

For one thing, according to our standard measure, between 2000 and 2002 Americans became visibly *less* ethnocentric. That is, they were less likely to claim that their variety of American (white, black, whatever) was superior to other varieties of Americans. This is consistent with the idea that on September 11, it was the nation that was attacked; in the aftermath

of September 11, Americans came together, united against a common external enemy.

Second, if the events of September 11 were in fact disconcerting for ethnocentrism, leading to the relative instability we see in table 3.6, they should have been especially disconcerting for young Americans, relatively new to politics, whose ethnocentric inclinations were not yet settled. This turns out to be true. When we reestimated the Wiley-Wiley model separately within three age groupings, we found that September 11 was especially discombobulating among the young. For the younger generation, the attacks on New York and Washington and the war on terrorism the attacks provoked seemed to force a rethinking of in-groups and out-groups, of who is with us and who is against us.[58]

## CONCLUSIONS

We have offered this chapter as a gateway linking our theory of ethnocentrism, on the one side, with empirical applications of the theory to a diverse series of policy domains shortly to commence, on the other. We introduced and defended two independent but complementary measures of ethnocentrism: a primary one based on group stereotypes, and a secondary one based on group sentiments. Both presume the primacy of racial classifications in the distinction between in-group and out-group. The two measures of ethnocentrism are correlated, and both suggest that in the richest and oldest liberal democracy in the world, ethnocentrism is pervasive.

The evidence for in-group favoritism is stronger for sentiment than it is for stereotype. The stereotype measure turns up pervasive evidence of in-group favoritism only among whites and Asian Americans. Less advantaged groups—in the present case, blacks and Hispanic Americans—have a more difficult time asserting their own group's superiority. But the measure of ethnocentrism based on sentiment reveals universal in-group favoritism, much as Sumner would have expected. Perhaps stereotypes, in contrast to feelings, are encumbered by the weight of objective conditions and by the social construction of difference. Feelings are something else again—something more elemental—and they give direct expression to the elemental predisposition of ethnocentrism.

Next we show that our measures of ethnocentrism are for the most part unrelated to social and political predispositions that are standard fixtures in the analysis and understanding of American public opinion. Ethnocentrism is not remotely the same thing as partisanship, or limited government, or egalitarianism, or ideological identification, or social distrust. This disposes of the worry that ethnocentrism merely duplicates predispositions already used in political analysis.



Toward the end of the chapter, we turned our attention to the origins of ethnocentrism. We argued that people vary in the degree to which their beliefs and feelings about social life are governed by ethnocentrism, and we suggested that such variation arises primarily from biological diversity transmitted through genetic inheritance, from the emergence of authoritarian personality, and from experiences supplied by education. Ethnocentrism is generally stable in adulthood, increasingly so across the life span. Only a national catastrophe appears strong enough to alter ethnocentrism, and even then, principally among the young.

With these important points established, it is time to move on to our real business: to ascertain the role of ethnocentrism in contemporary public opinion. Should the United States supply economic assistance to countries struggling to establish democratic forms of government? Should the flow of people from Latin America and Asia to U.S. shores be turned back? Should the welfare system be reformed, the scope and range of benefits curtailed? On these and other topics, we will assess the claim of ethnocentrism: that political opinions derive in an important way from a general outlook that partitions the world into us against them.