Abstract

Previous research has hypothesized that conservative ideologies are the result of a worldview within which the world is viewed as a dangerous and threatening place, and where individuals are essentially hedonistic and need extrinsic rules in order to behave morally. Research has also indicated that conservatives are generally higher in authoritarianism, intolerance for ambiguity, dogmatism, and need for closure than liberals. Based on these findings, it was hypothesized that people who hold more conservative ideologies will be less willing to introspect than those who hold more liberal ideologies. Ratings of individual’s written profiles on an Internet dating site were consistent with this research hypothesis. Implications of a relationship between ideology, worldview, and introspection are discussed.
Introduction

Ideologies, especially in the world of politics and government, often transcend theory and become integral parts of campaigns, policies, and laws. Although ideologies vary from person to person, individuals often group together based on broadly similar belief systems. The most notable political belief systems distinguish between conservatives versus liberals. Commonly, conservative ideologies tend to favor stability and traditional values (Jost, Kruglanski, Glaser, & Sulloway, 2003), while liberal ideologies tend to favor progression and idealistic values (Lakoff, 2002).

Liberals and conservatives can differ tremendously in their ideologies; yet what influences and fuels these differences? For example, how can cohorts living at the same time in the same nation be so divided on the events of the Iraq War? How could individuals who simultaneously experienced the events of September 11, 2001 form such varied attitudes on whom to hold responsible? In other words, what drives an individual’s ideology? It has been argued that an underlying system of beliefs, morals, and perceptions are continually guiding and shaping our ideologies (2002).

Belief Systems and Worldviews

It could be argued that the differences found between liberal and conservative beliefs extend beyond the voting booth and into one’s individual sense of self. That is to say, agreeing with certain policies or forms of government not only exposes where one stands on a particular issue, but also has implications regarding one’s morals, beliefs about dependence (or independence), attitude towards authority, and so on. According to Caprara, Capanna, Vecchione, and Barbaranelli (2006), this ‘personalization of politics’
is important not only for how individuals develop their political ideologies, but also plays a crucial role in determining how political candidates and political parties reach out to those individuals during elections. A ‘personalization of politics’ suggests that political beliefs are correlated with, or reflective of, one’s underlying worldviews, rather than simply one’s views on certain policies or the role of government. For instance, supporting or opposing a proposal to increase welfare benefits may indeed be a reflection of one’s partisan preferences (i.e., whether the proposal came from a Democrat or a Republican). However, it could also be argued that support for increased welfare benefits expresses a worldview consistent with the belief that members of society ought to lend assistance to those who are less fortunate. Conversely, the worldview of those who oppose this particular policy might reflect a belief that prosperity should derive from the individual and not from the aid of society.

In a broad sense, worldviews are a collection of beliefs regarding general truths about existence as well as a collection of values that characterize one’s identity (Golec & Van Bergh, 2007). As noted, individual differences in personality, as well as in political orientation, can be viewed as the result of an underlying worldview. The way in which one thinks about the role of individuals and the role of society has been at the center of countless philosophical debates. Hobbes, for example, believed man to be essentially flawed, selfish, and individualistic (Chaurasia, 2001). To Hobbes, society functions to regulate the behavior of individuals through the implementation of laws. Rousseau’s concept of the social contract, on the other hand, held that individuals should be responsible to one another, rather than adherent to laws (2001). Unlike Hobbes, Rousseau
did not view individuals as corrupt or selfish. Instead, Rousseau believed in the innate decency of individuals, which provided them with the ability to act in the interest of the common societal good.

In much the same vein as Hobbes and Rousseau, Lakoff (2002) considers the worldview of most typical conservatives to reflect what he conceptualizes as the Strict Father model, whereas the worldview of most typical liberals reflects the Nurturant Parent model. According to Lakoff, the Strict Father model holds that society is a dangerous place and that the family should be in charge of teaching discipline, obedience, respect, and self-reliance (2002). In this model, the ‘strict father’ can either be represented as a real authority figure (e.g., father, mother, police officer) or personified as a larger system of authority (e.g., God, government, laws). Those individuals whose worldviews resonate with the Strict Father model stress respect for, yet independence from, authority through the practice of responsibility, self-reliance, and self-discipline. In other words, because the world is dangerous and corrupt, the Strict Father must serve to implement moral values and beliefs, with the expectation that individuals will reflect such values and exhibit respectable, upstanding conduct.

Adherents to the Strict Father model support the metaphors of Moral Authority and Moral Order within their worldview (Lakoff, 2002). In general, Moral Authority asserts that authority in itself is moral, just, and beneficial, while Moral Order asserts that there is an innate hierarchy of authority figures (e.g., God holds more power than humans, adults hold more power than children). For this reason, supporters of the Strict Father worldview might view movements such as feminism as a contradiction to Moral
Order because men are typically viewed as more powerful than women. That is, feminism, homosexuality, or atheism are threats because of the incongruity with the perceived natural order of dominance. Because obedience to authority is how individuals become self-disciplined, the use of rewards and punishments is crucial in shaping moral behavior. Furthermore, the Strict Father worldview holds a positive view of competition, maintaining that it rewards and promotes self-discipline. This worldview is consonant with conservative ideologies that support more capitalistic, free-market policies such as free trade, more so than social programs such as welfare that aim towards equality. Historical examples of individuals exhibiting the Strict Father approach is evidenced in the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, both of whom were committed to reducing taxes which might otherwise be spent on redistributive public policies and social programs (Lakoff, 2002).

While the Nurturant Parent model (2002) acknowledges that the world can be a corrupt place at times, this model maintains that the world is generally a hospitable place, and that individuals will perpetuate warmth and caring. The Nurturant Parent model and the Strict Father model both predict that the manner in which a child is reared will later have effects on how the individual perceives the world. The Nurturant Parent model believes the overall objective is to lead a happy, fulfilling life while showing nurturance, caring, and support for others, and that individuals learn nurturance, caring, and respect by being shown such qualities themselves. The Strict Father Model, alternatively, emphasizes learning respect and obedience through laws, punishments, and self-discipline. Lakoff (2002) cites examples of socially responsible, peace-seeking
individuals, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Hillary Clinton, who exemplify the Nurturant Parent approach to the world.

Although the aforementioned worldview models have been debated at length amongst philosophers of the past, a significant justification for such theories is grounded in the empirical research of modern scholars. Colloquially and empirically, conservatism has long been linked with authoritarianism. Authoritarianism was first presented within the scholarly literature when Adorno (1950) became interested in those individuals whose personalities were particularly susceptible to fascist propaganda (Adorno, 1950; Rubinstein, 1997). A few major hallmarks of the authoritarian personality are valuing convention, rigidity (Adorno, 1950), intolerance towards out-groups, and adherence to authority/laws (Rubinstein, 1997). Authoritarians typically have a disdain for weakness, a preoccupation with power, and hostility towards minorities who deviate from traditional values (Adorno, 1950). Particularly relevant to this study is Adorno’s finding concerning authoritarian anti-intraception, or disregard for the subjective, imaginative, or abstract (1950), which suggests authoritarian individuals are more preoccupied with the tangible or unambiguous. Indeed, this disinterest in subjective matters appears to be congruent with other authoritarian correlates such as valuing tradition and laws.

Some thirty years after Adorno, Altemeyer attempted to broaden the concept of authoritarianism, giving birth to the term Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA). While Adorno originally introduced the theory of authoritarianism, Altemeyer’s research has sought to understand how authoritarianism is organized, how it develops in individuals, and its role in society (Altemeyer, 1988). In a general sense, RWA is viewed as an
individual predisposition towards aggression, conventionalism, and submission to authority (Altemeyer, 1988; Crowson, Thoma, & Hestevold, 2005). Similar to the Strict Father worldview of conservatives, Altemeyer (1988) claims that right-wing authoritarians seek to control others’ behavior through punishment, laws, and authority figures. Although conservatives generally tend to score higher on the RWA scale (1988), right-wing politics and authoritarianism are two different constructs and should not be considered synonymous⁠¹.

In addition to the construct of RWA, a sizeable amount of literature has examined social dominance orientation (SDO) as a correlate of conservative attitudes (e.g., Duckitt & Fisher, 2003; Van Hiel, Cornelis, & Roets, 2007). Individuals who hold attitudes of SDO typically favor hierarchical approaches to ideologies, policies, and intergroup relations (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). As the name implies, individuals whose attitudes reflect SDO seek to emphasize inequality in social groups by dominating and discriminating against out-groups (1994). Individuals with a social dominance orientation believe that certain people (or groups) are innately better than others. Accordingly, these individuals attempt to maintain inequality by supporting hierarchical policies, such as cultural elitism. SDO has been shown to positively correlate with measures of racism, sexism, nationalism, support for law and militarism, and interestingly, Republican-party preference (1994). In today’s political climate, one’s stance on issues such as immigration and healthcare reform might also hinge on varying

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⁠¹ Altemeyer (1988) distinguishes conservatism as a dispositional tendency towards the status quo and traditionalism, whereas RWA is fashioned from a collection of attitudes supportive of authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism.
degrees of SDO. Endorsing these issues presumably facilitates equality, whereas opposition to these issues maintains disparities among groups or individuals.

Other research on the conservative personality has linked higher levels of dogmatism and intolerance for ambiguity with politically conservative attitudes (Jost, Kruglanski, Glaser, & Sulloway, 2003) and has found that conservatives tend to be less open to new experience (Jost et al., 2003; Van Hiel et al., 2007). According to Wilson (1973), certain individuals experience anxiety and intimidation from situations of uncertainty. These individuals, therefore, adhere to conservative ideologies as an ego-defensive response (1973), which might explain attitudes of anti-intraception and intolerance for ambiguity.

Perhaps as a result of this need for certainty, conservatives value the need for structure and need for closure more than liberals (Jost et al., 2003). These needs potentially serve as defensive strategies aimed at maintaining one’s view of social order and customs (2003). Such characteristics seem to parallel key aspects of SDO, such as the preservation of social order. In addition, conservatives are generally lower than liberals on measures of cognitive complexity (2003), which could be viewed as the product of the conservative need for closure and structure. This tendency to narrow and limit certain aspects of cognition is predicted to extend to self-examination as well. One means of examining this notion is through an investigation of introspection.

Introspection

Introspection is generally understood to be the act of examining one’s own inner thoughts and emotions. This reflection is not directed towards some specific goal but
simply seeks to explore the self, disregarding any external stimuli (Van Gundy & Schieman, 2001). Introspection has been described as an awareness or an openness to one’s own affect (Frith & Lau, 2006), a meta-conscious appraisal (Schooler & Schreiber, 2004) and a “subjective consciousness” (Overgaard, 2006). Carruthers (2009), on the other hand, makes a point to differentiate introspection from metacognition. What he suggests is that metacognition is the capability to make first-person attributions, whereas introspection is the mechanism for which to arrive at those attributions (2009). In other words, metacognition is the ability to reflect on one’s beliefs, intentions, judgments, and so on (2009), whereas introspection is the process by which one reaches this conclusion.

While popular in eastern philosophy, introspection in western cultures is sometimes viewed as threatening instead of enlightening. Hixon and Swann (1993) provide evidence for introspection facilitating self-insight when the introspectiveness involves questions about what. However, introspectiveness involving why questions appeared to have a negative effect on self-insight (1993). This is perhaps due to the cognitive dissonance felt by individuals when asked to explain why they feel or behave in such ways. For example, merely thinking about why one might consider engaging in socially taboo acts (e.g., lying, sexual promiscuity, racism) often contradicts one’s social or religious morals, therefore creating a state of cognitive dissonance. One might wonder, “How can I have such thoughts and still consider myself to be a good person?” In this sense, reluctance to introspect serves as either a defense mechanism in order to maintain one’s impression of certainty or as a buffer for self-esteem if one suspects his certainty is in jeopardy.
Because it is an internal cognitive state, introspection is difficult to measure. Observing oneself is often a biased venture and reporting on what one observes has the capacity to be even more biased. Several researchers (Schooler & Schreiber, 2004; Frith & Lau, 2006; Overgaard, 2006) have tried to operationally define introspection in hopes of creating an adequate measure. While there is general consensus on what introspection entails, measuring such an intangible process has proved elusive.

Reflecting on the states of mind we experience is a semantic puzzle of sorts. Trying to find the right words to describe what we have experienced is often complicated and can result in descriptions of similar cognitive states, but not quite the genuine condition. Schooler and Schreiber (2004) call this the “paradox of introspection”, where “experience is subjectively self-evident but empirically inscrutable” (pp. 18). For example, in reflecting upon a heated confrontation it should be easy to recognize that one experienced feelings of anger or distress. However, these descriptive terms do not accurately reflect the true mental state that one experienced while in the situation. Similarly, the birth of a child might be characterized as remarkable or momentous, but semantically describing that particular feeling will certainly fall short of one’s actual cognitive experience. Whether it is done presently, prospectively, or retrospectively, introspection is an ironic cognitive task, given that a certain degree of our own cognitive reflections will always remain elusive, as they become lost in the translation of experience to language.

Perhaps for these reasons, little, if any, research regarding introspection and political affiliation exists. From the introspection research that does exist, conclusions
about conservative and liberal differences must be drawn from self-report data. For instance, Berzonsky and Sullivan (1992) cite evidence that individuals higher in reported self-reflection also exhibit more openness to experience, more liberal values, and more general tolerance for exploration. As noted earlier, conservatives tend to be less open to experience, more intolerant of ambiguity, and generally more reliant on self-certainty than liberals. That, coupled with the evidence reported by Berzonsky and Sullivan, strongly suggests conservatives engage in less introspective behaviors.

The substantive interest of this study is to examine differences in introspection among individuals with a more liberal political orientation and among individuals with a more conservative political orientation. We believe that reluctance to introspect functions, in part, as a defense mechanism that serves to maintain conservative beliefs. This notion is consistent with conservative correlates such as the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis, intolerance of ambiguity, less openness to experience, need for closure, and anti-intraception. It could also be argued that given conservative correlates, such as the principles of SDO and RWA, the conservative attempt to uphold social inequalities and biases between in-groups and out-groups operates best on a cognitively shallow level, therefore requiring little need for introspective processes (Jost et al., 2003). That is, if conservative individuals place value on tradition and authority, introspecting might seem superfluous, unnecessary, or even threatening at some level. As a result, conservatives should seek to support their beliefs through reliance on religion or other types of authority (e.g., politicians, news outlets). If one has previously developed trust in such an authority (perhaps through the discovery of a similar worldview) it should be easy to
simply accept their word as truth. In this sense, intellectualizing an argument instead of introspecting upon it serves to support one’s worldview while distancing oneself from internal thoughts.

Traditional conservatives subscribing to the Strict Father model would also resonate with Hobbes famous quote that life is “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes, 1991, p.89). As a result, apprehensions founded in this dangerous worldview should attenuate conservative’s interest in introspection. If conservatives fear that the world and those individuals within it are corrupt and threatening, a critical examination of their own thoughts and feelings should be somewhat questionable. This fear, coupled with a prominent regard for self-reliance, should lead conservatives to view introspection as a threat to their moral fabric, rather than an act of insight. This prediction leads us to believe that individuals with more conservative ideologies tend to disregard deep, introspective thought because it open doors to uncertainty.

Current Study

The present study investigated the relationship between introspection and ideology through an examination of narratives created on an online dating site. Examining differences in the open-ended narratives of liberals and conservatives is of value to the scholarly literature because it provides a means by which to connect one’s degree of introspection to one’s ideology. The sample we examined was limited to individuals identifying themselves as either extremely liberal or extremely conservative (excluding people who reported themselves as “somewhat” liberal or conservative) in order to most directly compare the two ideologies. When selecting profiles, we sampled
only those aged 25 or older, reasoning that younger individuals are often less cognitively invested in politics (as evidenced by the historically low percentage of young people who participate in national and local elections).

An online dating site was used to obtain data because the format of an online dating profile allows for open-ended, potentially self-reflective writing with few parameters. Online dating profiles are a good means by which to examine introspectiveness because portions of the profile provide individuals the opportunity to orient inward by discussing who they are, their likes and dislikes, their wishes and desires, and so forth. Although individual profiles on a dating website might not be an ideal unit of analysis for illustrating particular differences between liberals’ and conservatives’ ideologies, the political orientations of profile users were easily extracted based on self-identified ideological strength. We hypothesized that extremely conservative individuals would exhibit lower levels of introspective thought than would extremely liberal individuals.

Method

Introspection was measured by examining the personal descriptions from internet personal advertisements. It was reasoned that individuals who frequently introspect will be more likely to reflect this in their writing, given an appropriate venue. That is, if introspection is a stable personality trait we should expect certain types of people to exhibit this behavior more often than others in a variety of different situations, including online personal advertisements. As noted, internet personal ads are open-ended and
designed to highlight both the self and personal facets of one’s life, therefore providing individuals with an opportunity to introspect.

Participants

Data was collected from 200 Match.com (www.match.com) profiles and included fifty males listing their political affiliation as ‘Ultra Conservative’, fifty females listing their political affiliation as ‘Ultra Conservative’, fifty males listing their political affiliation as ‘Very Liberal’, and fifty females listing their political affiliation as ‘Very Liberal’. In order to obtain these 200 profiles, the entire Match.com database of profiles was filtered so as to provide only individuals meeting the criteria of the four categories listed above. More specifically, we ran four separate profile searches, first filtering only for ‘Ultra Conservative’ males, then for ‘Ultra Conservative’ females, followed by ‘Very Liberal’ males, and finally a filtered search for ‘Very Liberal’ females. All profiles sampled were also filtered to include only those individuals who described themselves as age 25 or older, residing within the United States, and searching for a heterosexual relationship. This filtering yielded several hundred profiles from which fifty profiles of each type (i.e., male/female ultra conservative and male/female very liberal) were randomly selected.

Procedure

Each profile’s ‘About me and who I’m looking for’ section was copied and pasted in its entirety into a blank word document. Random numbers were assigned to each passage and any demographic information profile users provided in the separate ‘About me’ section, which includes questions regarding hair color, education level, income, and
so forth, was kept separate from the passages. Any demographic information that individuals volunteered within the passage (e.g., I am 35 years old with two daughters) was considered to be descriptive content and were permitted in. Researchers did, however, exclude passages that stated a profile user’s political affiliation or political orientation from the 200 profile dataset, as this might bias raters’ judgment of the passages.

Three raters, including one of the authors, judged each passage on a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being least introspective and 5 being most introspective. To assess introspectiveness, raters were instructed to consider the depth of introspection in the passage as a whole, while also considering the relative number of introspective versus non-introspective thoughts expressed.

Raters were given the following definition of introspection from which to work: “Introspection is the act of attending to and reporting upon one’s own inner content (i.e., thoughts, emotions, or beliefs).” (Overgaard, 2006). In addition, extensive discussion among the raters and practice on a number of profiles not included in the sample was performed in order to ensure the raters understood how introspection was defined in the present study. Although the largest interrater reliability correlation \((r=.57)\) only accounts for 32.49% of the explained variance among the scores, the interrater reliabilities in this study were nonetheless significant at \(p<.001\) (see Table 1). While these correlations may not reach the desired interrater reliability levels standard in other studies of qualitative data (LeBreton & Senter, 2008), it is important to keep in mind that introspection in itself is a difficult construct to define and observe. In some respects, the degree of reliability
should be considered a success given the measurement error associated with an often vague and ill-defined construct such as introspection.

Table 1

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* p < .001

The ‘About me and who I’m looking for’ section is designed to guide individuals to introspect by specifically asking them to think about themselves. Therefore it was expected by the researchers of this study that the passages would tend to reflect a good deal of introspection, and that a majority of the statements from each passage would be introspective. As such, during the training and practice profiles raters found it helpful to be mindful of comments that stood out as clearly not introspective. If individuals are avoiding introspection, their personal accounts were expected to be filled with non-introspective content, such as that which is merely explanatory and descriptive (e.g., “I have brown hair”, “People say I’m hilarious”), or reflect ability and activities (e.g., “I am attractive”, “I like to go to the movies”). Non-introspective content was defined as involving insights that could be easily observed by others and/or do not require access to a person’s inner thoughts, or content that was merely irrelevant commentary (e.g., “bummer”, “dude”).

While the researchers expect the open-ended format of the ‘About me and who I’m looking for’ section will encourage introspective narratives among profile users, we also expect that all users will provide some degree of purely descriptive or explanatory information. The degree to which liberals and conservatives deviate from providing introspective vs. descriptive accounts is the main focus of this study.
Introspection, on the other hand, addressed individual beliefs, internal thoughts, emotions, and desires. An example of an introspective statement would be “I’m looking for a leader” or “I love a sense of humor”. Differences in ratings among individuals identifying themselves as liberal versus conservative were examined. Potential interactions with gender were also examined.

Results

For each profile the mean of the three rater’s scores was computed and submitted to a 2x2 (political orientation x gender) Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The results revealed a main effect of political orientation $F(1, 196) = 6.24, MSE = .84, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .031$. Introspection scores were lower on average for individuals who identified themselves as ‘Ultra Conservative’ ($M = 2.89, SEM = .10$) than those individuals who identified themselves as ‘Very Liberal’ ($M = 3.22, SEM = .09$). That is to say, individuals who identified themselves as liberal tended to include more introspective statements into their Match.com narratives, whereas individuals who identified themselves as conservative tended to list more descriptive personal statements.

For example, one narrative from a conservatively oriented individual read: “I love travel and sightseeing, watching and collecting DVDs. My favorite colour is black”. Another narrative from a conservatively oriented individual contained statements such as “From Florida moved to Philadelphia for 5 years” and “My favorite day is actually Sunday because I am a huge NFL fan”. These statements are more explanatory in nature, rather than reflective of deep, introspective thought. On the other hand, an example statement from a liberally oriented individual read: “I have learned that no one was put
on this earth to live up to my expectations”. Another narrative stated: “Life is an amazing adventure and it has abundant opportunities for those that simply have the will to try”. These statements reflect a certain degree of thoughtfulness about one’s outlook on life, as opposed to mere descriptives or preferences of one’s self. Although there was a significant main effect for political orientation, results from our data showed no effect of gender and no interaction between gender and political orientation (Both Fs < 1).

Discussion

Results from our data support the hypothesis that individuals identifying themselves as ‘Ultra Conservative’ exhibit less introspection in a written passage with personal content than individuals identifying themselves as ‘Very Liberal’. Individuals who reported a conservative political orientation often provided more descriptive and explanatory statements in their profile’s ‘About me and who I’m looking for’ section (e.g., “I am 62 years old and live part time in Montana” and “I enjoy hiking, fine restaurants”). In contrast, individuals who reported a liberal political orientation often provided more insightful and introspective statements in their narratives (e.g., “No regrets, that’s what I believe in” and “My philosophy in life is to make complicated things simple”).

Differences in the open-ended narratives that were examined in this study could be indicative of a more fundamental difference between liberal and conservative ideologies. More precisely, writing an open-ended narrative that is by its nature personal and potentially introspective should be threatening or anxiety-provoking for an individual who is generally averse to introspection (e.g., one who is intolerant of ambiguity and/or
high in the need for structure). As such, we propose that a number of conservative correlates, such as Altemeyer’s notion of RWA, the concept of SDO, and Lakoff’s distinction between Strict Father and Nurturant Parent Models are relevant to the current finding. That is, the results of this study might be interpreted in terms of differences in conservative and liberal worldviews and how these worldviews serve to influence one’s interpretation of, not only the outside world, but also of themselves.

The Strict Father model states that the conservative worldview regards the world as a place in which individuals need rules and authority in order to learn morality. In this model, introspection is incompatible with the conservative worldview because it places great focus on self-insight, which could potentially conflict with such moral authority. To the conservative mind, adherence to authority serves as a means to reduce cognitive dissonance or easily process certain aspects of information. For example, placing official bans on such practices as abortion and stem cell research thus eliminates the need for one to introspect about what they themselves might do if placed in the same situation. For some individuals, it seems, introspection may appear as a gateway to accessing uncomfortable aspects of their inner thoughts rather than an enlightening reflection on the self. The findings of this study are also relevant to this body of research because they illustrate differences in the way individuals construct and process information. Prior studies examining the psychological nuances between traditional liberals and traditional conservatives (i.e., those on the far ends of the ideological spectrum) have mainly focused on behavioral differences which are suggestive of certain personality characteristics (e.g., submission to authority as an indicator of authoritarianism).
Examining individual differences in introspection, on the other hand, departs from the current literature because introspection is not as easily observable as say, behaviors reflective of dogmatism or intolerance for ambiguity.

In this study we have considered introspection to be an enduring personality trait, in that we believe individuals to possess various degrees of it and we believe it to be stable across situational contexts. If introspection is indeed a stable, cognitive trait we might expect it to play a mediating role in some of the aforementioned nuances between traditional liberals and traditional conservatives. More specifically, introspection could be an important component in terms of understanding individual differences among conservatives and liberals regarding traits such as RWA, need for cognition, openness to experience, and tolerance of ambiguity. The work of Adorno et al., Altemeyer, and Pratto et al. (just to name a few) recognized and explored the role that individual personality factors have on political orientation and how these personality traits may be responsible for motivating political and social attitudes. The results of this study, namely the greater willingness of liberals to create statements reflective of thoughtful insight into themselves and their worldviews, reinforce the significant relationship between personality and political orientation.

There is, of course, a limitation to this study with regard to the construct of introspection. Within the scholarly literature, introspection has been operationally defined in a variety of ways. In the current study, raters provided their subjective assessment of the extent to which they perceived profile passages to be ‘internally’ centered. Although there may be other means by which to operationally define introspection, rater’s
judgments in this study were sufficiently sensitive such that the measure was viable in terms of capturing differences amongst groups of conservative vs. liberal individuals. Additionally, although the results of this study provide support for a link between introspection and political orientation, an interpretation of the direction between these two variables (e.g., assumptions concerning the extent to which political orientation is a function of introspectiveness) should be treated with caution.

Finally, it should be noted that political orientation, whether conservative, liberal, independent, or otherwise, reflects a continuum. While two individuals both might label themselves as belonging to a particular party, their opposition or support for individual issues most likely differs. The profile narratives used in this study were collected from a sample of individuals who labeled themselves as being at the extreme ends of the political spectrum and consequently the current findings do not necessarily generalize to all individuals of a given political persuasion (e.g., moderately liberal or conservative).

Although the construct of introspection has been somewhat neglected in recent psychological literature, results from this study indicate that it might be a worthy addition to the tools available for the empirical study of political orientation, worldview, and cognition. An improved understanding of the mental processes underlying political orientation may ultimately lead, not only towards broad insight into the nature of political ideologies themselves, but may also provide a better understanding of individual behavior within the political process.
References


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