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**POLITICAL EXPERTISE AND
OPEN-MINDED COGNITION¹**

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Introduction

How do individuals construe the political world? How do people represent political information in memory? How do citizens use political information when deriving political beliefs, opinions, and attitudes? Political psychologists have been exploring questions of this nature for decades. A common thread running through this literature involves the claim that political experts and novices construe, represent, and process political information differently (Fiske & Kinder, 1981; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Lodge & Taber, 2013; Zaller, 1992). That is, a comprehensive approach to understanding political cognition cannot simply adopt a psychological model of political information processing that presumes “one size fits all.” On the contrary, it is important to develop and test models of political information processing that explicitly incorporate the role of individual differences in political expertise.

Political expertise potentially influences a variety of psychological processes when individuals engage in political reasoning. The present chapter focuses on how political expertise influences cognitive processing style. More specifically, this chapter examines the extent to which political expertise influences the tendency to process political information in a *directionally biased* or *unbiased* manner. That is, we examine the effect of political expertise on “closed-minded” versus “open-minded” cognition (Ottati, 2015; Ottati, Price, Wilson, & Sumaktoyo, 2015). “Open-Minded Cognition” is structured as a bipolar psychological continuum that ranges from closed-minded dogmatism to open-minded cognition (Price, Ottati, Wilson, & Kim, 2015). An open-minded cognitive style is *directionally unbiased*. It involves a willingness to openly consider multiple intellectual perspectives, attitudes, or opinions—including those that contradict the individual’s

preexisting opinions and expectations. In contrast, a closed-minded or dogmatic cognitive style is *directionally biased*. It is marked by a tendency to select, interpret, and elaborate upon information in a manner that reinforces or confirms the individual's preexisting opinions and expectations (e.g., Eagly, Chen, Chaiken, & Shaw-Barnes, 1999; Nickerson, 1998; Price et al., 2015).

In examining the effect of political expertise on open-minded cognition we consider two distinct components of this construct. The first component is emphasized in traditional conceptualizations of political expertise that focus on the role of political knowledge (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1991; McGraw, Lodge, & Stroh, 1990). From this perspective, political experts are individuals who possess a large amount of knowledge pertaining to politics whereas political novices are individuals who possess minimal amounts of political knowledge. The second component, which is the focus of our more recent research, involves *self-perceptions* of political expertise (Ottati et al., 2015). In this case, political experts are simply individuals who *believe* they possess a large amount of political knowledge whereas political novices are individuals who *believe* they possess a minimal amount of political knowledge. Importantly, this later approach emphasizes that political experts and political novices occupy distinct social roles.

Political Expertise as Political Knowledge

Previous research has employed a variety of measures when assessing individual differences in political expertise (e.g., education, political engagement, media exposure). However, the most widely accepted approach to measuring political expertise typically involves assessment of an individual's political knowledge (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1991; but see Krosnick, 1990). That is, individuals are given a political information test. Political knowledge scores are computed by simply computing the sum or proportion of correct answers (McGraw et al., 1990; McGraw, Pinney, & Neumann, 1991). These measures assess the amount of previously acquired political information that is represented in long-term memory, and that is accessible when individuals answer questions contained in a political information test.

Is political knowledge associated with an increase or decrease in open-minded cognition? Previous research provides a mixed answer to this question. On the one hand, a number of studies suggest that politically knowledgeable individuals possess a more accurate view of political reality, a view that is less likely to be biased by prior opinions or expectations. For example, some studies reveal that politically knowledgeable individuals process political information in a systematic manner (e.g., Goren, 1997; Hsu & Price, 1993; Tewksbury, 1999), whereas politically uninformed individuals rely on heuristic cues that can produce biased political judgments and decisions (Hart, Ottati, & Krumdick, 2011; Ottati & Isbell, 1996). When evaluating a political candidate, for example, politically uninformed individuals are more likely to report judgments that are biased by incidental

affective states or physical attractiveness of the political candidate (Hart, Ottati, & Krundick, 2011; Ottati & Isbell, 1996). Politically knowledgeable individuals have been observed to correct for biases of this nature (Hart, Ottati, & Krundick, 2011; Ottati & Isbell, 1996), or alternatively, to employ “appropriate” forms of heuristic processing that render “correct” political decisions (i.e., decisions equivalent to those that would emerge given systematic processing; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). These findings suggest that politically knowledgeable individuals possess the skill that is required to engage in accurate, unbiased, and open-minded forms of political reasoning.

On the other hand, an equal (if not larger) body of research suggests that political knowledge increases the likelihood that individuals will engage in directionally biased forms of political reasoning—reasoning that reinforces preexisting opinions or expectations. One reason why this might occur is that knowledgeable individuals are more likely to possess crystallized political representations (e.g., party stereotypes) that potentially bias the processing of newly acquired political information. Consistent with this assumption, research indicates that politically knowledgeable individuals are more likely to exhibit a party-congruent bias when recalling information pertaining to political candidate (Lodge & Hamill, 1986; but see Lau & Redlawsk, 2001 for a different perspective). Research also suggests that, even when processing information in a systematic manner, knowledgeable individuals may engage in directionally biased information processing. Knowledgeable individuals possess well-organized memory representations that are characterized by high levels of evaluative consistency and evaluative clustering (e.g., Fiske & Kinder, 1981; Lusk & Judd, 1988; McGraw & Pinney, 1990; but see McGraw et al., 1991). Moreover, the relation between social worldviews, ideology, and policy preferences is magnified among politically knowledgeable individuals (Federico, Hunt, & Ergun, 2009; Federico & Schneider, 2007; but see Goren, 2000). These findings suggest that political knowledge may be associated with a tendency to maintain cognitive and evaluative consistency, a tendency that might bias cognition in the direction of preexisting expectations and opinions.

More generally, directionally biased reasoning strategies are evident when individuals selectively process political information, counterargue political information, or generate inferences that reinforce preexisting political attitudes and expectations (Lavine, Borgida, & Sullivan, 2000; Ottati, Fishbein, & Middlestadt, 1988; Ottati, Wilson, & Price, 2018; Taber & Lodge, 2006; Redlawsk, 2002). Research suggests that politically knowledgeable individuals can employ these motivated reasoning strategies (Lodge & Hamill, 1986; Lodge & Taber, 2013; Lusk & Judd, 1988; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Indeed, the ability to employ these cognitive strategies may be higher among politically knowledgeable individuals (Lavine, Johnston, & Steenbergen, 2012). At least in part, this is because well-informed citizens are more likely to possess strong political attitudes that can be automatically activated when deriving political judgments and decisions (Lodge & Taber, 2013). These automatically activated attitudes can trigger

selective information-processing strategies that reinforce preexisting attitudes (Taber & Lodge, 2006), as well as cognitive elaborations that serve to denigrate opposing attitudes and opinions (Lodge & Taber, 2013). Moreover, when employing motivated reasoning strategies, politically knowledgeable individuals may be more confident that they are arriving at a valid and accurate judgmental conclusion (Lavine et al., 2012).

In sum, theory and research is equivocal regarding the relation between political knowledge and open-minded cognition. Some work suggests that political knowledge is associated with decreased reliance upon cognitive heuristics that produce directionally biased political judgments, or alternatively, an increased likelihood of correcting for biases of this nature. In contrast, other research implies that political knowledge can be associated with an increase in directionally biased forms of motivated political reasoning. Interestingly, our own research indicates that political knowledge is uncorrelated with open-minded cognition (Price et al., 2015). Perhaps this is because political knowledge triggers a variety of conflicting effects on open-minded cognition that, on balance, cancel. Additional research is needed to further investigate this possibility, and to examine factors that may moderate the influence of political knowledge on open-minded cognition.

Political Expertise as a Social Role

Although most research regarding political expertise focuses on individual differences in political knowledge, some have suggested that political expertise possesses multiple components (e.g., political knowledge, attention to political messages, political interest, depth of political information processing, complexity and organization of political thought; Krosnick, 1990; Luskin, 1990). The present chapter maintains a focus on political knowledge when conceptualizing political expertise, but importantly, makes a distinction between political knowledge stored in memory and the self-perception of political knowledge. That is, whereas previous research regarding political expertise examines the effect of actual political knowledge on political information processing, the remainder of this chapter focuses on *self-perceptions* of political expertise.

It is important to emphasize that self-perception of knowledge is distinct from an individual's actual level of knowledge within a domain. When individuals estimate their performance at a task, the correlation between perceived and actual performance is often low (Dunning, Johnson, Ehrlinger, & Kruger, 2003). One reason for this finding is that individuals generally over-estimate their knowledge, talents, and abilities. As a consequence, the average person believes he or she is above average, a result that contradicts statistical logic (Alicke & Govorun, 2005; Brown & Gallagher, 1992). Interestingly, the tendency to over-estimate self-competence primarily emerges for individuals possessing relatively low levels of skill (Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Dunning et al., 2003). This occurs because unskilled

individuals are “doubly cursed.” Their low level of skill not only produces a low level of performance, but also an inability to accurately assess performance. As a result, unskilled individuals not only perform poorly on tests, but are also unable to discern whether their answers (or anyone else’s) are right or wrong (Dunning et al., 2003). Inspired by these findings, research described in the remainder of this chapter is based upon the assumption that self-perception of political expertise is distinct from an individual’s actual level of political knowledge.

The distinction between self-perceived and actual political knowledge is also evident when considering the malleable nature of self-perceptions. Research indicates self-esteem possesses a malleable component that varies across situations (i.e., “state self-esteem,” Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). In an analogous fashion, we assume that self-perceptions of political expertise vary across situations. For example, self-perceptions of political expertise are presumed to be high when individuals are told they have performed well on a political information test, but relatively low when individuals are told they have failed a political information test (Ottati et al., 2015). Situational variation in self-perceived expertise also arises because self-perceptions of political expertise are relative. Consider, for example, a university undergraduate political science student who discusses politics with a group of high school students. In this situation, the undergraduate political science student will perceive him- or herself to be relatively high in political expertise. In contrast, assume this same political science student attends a political science conference populated by world-renowned political scholars who are highly published. In this later situation, the undergraduate political science student will perceive him- or herself to be relatively low in political expertise (Ottati et al., 2015). In sum, for a variety of reasons, self-perceptions of political expertise possess a malleable component that varies across situations. In contrast, knowledge of politics constitutes a more stable individual-difference characteristic, changing only when individuals endeavor to educate themselves regarding political issues and affairs. As such, it is important to regard self-perceptions of political expertise and political knowledge as distinct constructs.

It should be emphasized that self-perceptions of expertise are not simply self-ratings. They also function as a form of self-categorization. Namely, when an individual perceives him- or herself to be high in political expertise, it can be said that the individual has categorized him- or herself as occupying the social role of the political expert. As is the case with other social categories (e.g., race, gender), this social category is associated with a variety of traits and behaviors that are represented in memory. The prototype of a “political expert” presumably includes a variety of traits (e.g., “intelligent,” “verbally fluent,” “educated in political affairs”) and behaviors (e.g., “keeps abreast of political events,” “frequently talks about politics”) that are commonly associated with political experts in everyday life. Importantly, social roles are also associated with social norms that prescribe certain behaviors and prohibit other behaviors (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Sarbin & Allen, 1968;

Triandis, 1972, 1980; Triandis, Marin, Hui, Lisansky, & Ottati, 1984). For example, social norms permit a teacher to enthusiastically lecture about course material, and discourage a teacher from remaining completely silent during class. Students, on the other hand, are faced with a different set of normative role expectations (e.g., raise your hand to ask a question, take notes, and quietly listen).

Although role-specific normative expectations commonly prescribe specific *behavioral* responses (e.g., raise your hand), we propose that they also prescribe specific *cognitive* response patterns (e.g., carefully think about the teacher's remarks). Consider, for example, a seminar pertaining to heart disease. Some individuals attending this seminar might occupy the role of "novice" (e.g., a layperson), whereas others might occupy the role of "expert" (e.g., a cardiology professor). Novices possess limited knowledge. As such, social norms dictate that they should listen and learn in an open-minded fashion. However, the expert possesses extensive knowledge, and therefore is entitled to adopt a more forceful and dogmatic orientation (see Triandis et al., 1984 for related effects of status). Thus, whereas dogmatic statements may be tolerated when the "expert" speaks, novices are expected to adopt a more open-minded cognitive orientation (see Kruglanski & Mayseless, 1987; Leary & Hoyle, 2015 for linkages between awareness of personal limitation and open-mindedness).

According to the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis, a similar dynamic emerges when individuals categorize *themselves* as "political experts." That is, individuals who perceive *themselves* to be high in political expertise will adopt a cognitive style that is normatively prescribed for "political experts." Because political experts have earned the privilege of adopting forceful and dogmatic political opinions, these individuals will feel entitled to respond to political messages in a more closed-minded or dogmatic fashion. Conversely, individuals who perceive themselves to be average or low in political expertise are expected to adopt a cognitive style that is normatively prescribed for the "layperson." That is, these individuals are more likely to believe they are normatively obligated to listen to political messages in an open-minded fashion. This Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis was tested in a series of experiments that manipulated self-perceptions of expertise. Because self-perceived expertise was experimentally manipulated using random assignment, effects elicited by self-perceived expertise cannot be attributed to individual differences in political knowledge.

The Earned Dogmatism Effect

According to the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis, individuals are more likely to respond to political messages in a closed-minded manner when they perceive themselves to be "experts." Using U.S. voting age samples that varied in terms of key voter characteristics (age, gender, race, and partisanship), this hypothesis was examined in multiple experiments.²

Normative Approval of a Dogmatic Expert

According to the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis, social norms entitle political experts to respond to political messages in a more dogmatic manner than political novices. Ottati et al. (2015) tested this assumption by presenting experimental participants with a description of a target person (see Na, Choi, & Sul, 2013 for related work). In the “political expert” condition, the target person was initially described as being extremely knowledgeable with regard to political affairs, and having carefully followed politics over the course of many years. In the “political novice” condition, the target person was initially described as someone who possesses a minimal amount of political knowledge, having essentially ignored politics over the course of many years. The second portion of the description, which described the target person’s *current approach to politics*, was identical in the two experimental conditions. In both conditions, the person’s *current approach to politics* was described as closed-minded or dogmatic. Specifically, this portion of the description indicated that the target person “no longer has much patience for political opinions or arguments he disagrees with,” “tunes out messages he disagrees with,” and so on. After reading the entire description of the target person, participants rated the extent to which the target person’s *current approach to politics* is “warranted,” “justified,” and “appropriate.” A “normative approval” score was computed by simply averaging these three ratings.

As predicted, normative approval was higher in the “expert” condition than in the “novice” condition. Consistent with the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis, social norms dictated that the target person’s current dogmatic approach to politics was more warranted, justified, and appropriate when the target person was described as a political expert than when the target person was described as a political novice (Ottati et al., 2015). This indicates political expertise can be conceptualized as a social role. As with any social role (e.g., mother, teacher, lawyer), the roles of “political expert” and “political novice” contain unique and distinct sets of normative prescriptions. These normative prescriptions not only pertain to behavior, but also dictate expected and appropriate patterns of cognitive responding. In particular, the “political expert” role entitles an individual to engage in relatively closed-minded and dogmatic patterns of reasoning. In contrast, the “political novice” role dictates that an individual should feel more obligated to adopt an unbiased and open-minded style of thinking.

The Problem With Success

A second experiment was designed to test the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis by manipulating *self*-perceptions of political expertise. In this case, the manipulation was designed to elicit a “working representation” of the self that suggested the individual occupied the role of a “political novice” or “political expert” (Ottati et al., 2015). Specifically, it was assumed that successful performance on a political

test would lead individuals to construe themselves as “political experts” who were knowledgeable regarding political affairs. Conversely, it was assumed that failure on a political test would lead individuals to construe themselves as “political novices” who possessed minimal knowledge of political affairs (see Trafimow & Sniezek, 1994 for related work).

Importantly, this approach enabled us to disentangle the effect of self-perceived expertise from the effect of political knowledge. This is because individuals were *randomly assigned* to a condition that promoted either success or failure on the political information test. Thus, participants in the two experimental conditions did not differ in terms of their actual level of political knowledge. In this fashion, self-perceptions of expertise were manipulated independent of participants’ actual level of political knowledge. Effects of self-perceived expertise could not be attributed to individual differences in political knowledge.

The actual experimental procedure proceeded as follows. Experimental participants initially completed a multiple choice test containing fifteen items regarding specific politicians, political procedures, and government agencies. Participants were randomly assigned to complete either an easy version (success condition) or a difficult version of this political test (failure condition). For example, one question in the easy condition asked, “Who is the current President of the United States?” An equivalent question in the difficult condition asked, “Who was Nixon’s initial vice president?” After completing the test, participants in the easy test condition were told that they had scored “better than 86% of other test takers.” In contrast, participants in the difficult condition were told that they had scored “worse than 86% of test takers.” Thus, the experimental manipulation was “double-barreled.” Namely, the “failure” condition was intended to elicit poor actual performance accompanied by social feedback that indicated the participant performed poorly on the test. Conversely, the “success” condition was intended to elicit a high level of actual performance accompanied by social feedback that indicated the participant performed well on the test.

After completing the political test and receiving performance feedback, all participants completed a previously validated measure of Political Open-Minded Cognition (Ottati et al., 2015; Price et al., 2015). This consisted of six survey items. Three items were worded in an “open-minded” direction (i.e., “When it comes to politics, I am open to considering other viewpoints”; “I try to reserve judgment until I have a chance to hear both sides of a political issue”; “When thinking about a political issue, I consider as many different opinions as possible”). The other three items were worded in a “closed-minded” direction (i.e., “I often ‘tune out’ political messages I disagree with”; “I believe it is a waste of time to pay attention to certain political ideas”; “I have no patience for political arguments I disagree with”). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with each item. After reverse scoring responses the “closed” items, responses to the six items were simply averaged to produce a summary Political Open-Minded Cognition score. Previous validation research confirms that Political

Open-Minded Cognition is a unique construct that is unrelated to individual differences in political knowledge and need for cognition; negatively associated with Dogmatism, Intolerance for Ambiguity, and American System Justification; and positively associated with a tendency to discuss politics with people who disagree with oneself (Price et al., 2015).

Before performing the main analyses, a manipulation check revealed that the experimental manipulation was only partially successful. As expected, average performance on the political test was higher among participants who completed the easy test than the difficult test. However, contrary to expectation, some of the participants in the difficult test condition answered many of the test items correctly. Not surprisingly, comments provided by a number of these participants suggested that they did not believe they scored “worse than 86% of test takers.” Thus, the experimental manipulation was ineffective for this portion of the sample. To address this problem, the data was analyzed twice. In a “reduced sample” analysis, the data was analyzed after excluding participants who performed quite well on the difficult test (answered ten or more items correctly). This “reduced sample” analysis yielded support for the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis. Political Open-Minded Cognition was lower in the success condition compared to the failure condition. The same pattern of mean differences emerged when performing the “full sample” analysis, although in this case, the difference between the success and failure condition failed to achieve significance.

In sum, the “reduced sample” analysis in Experiment 2 provided preliminary support for the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis. However, the “reduced sample” analysis also possessed a notable shortcoming. Specifically, it introduced a confound between self-perceived expertise and actual political knowledge.³ We therefore employed experimental strategies that eliminated this problem in the three experiments that follow.

Ease of Retrieving Political Information

Theory and research within social psychology documents the existence of an “ease of retrieval” effect (Schwarz, 2011; Schwarz et al., 1991). Specifically, as is the case with many feeling states (e.g., mood), individuals use the feeling of “ease of retrieval” as information when deriving social judgments. For example, individuals asked to recall twelve examples of assertive behaviors (difficult) rated themselves as less assertive than individuals asked to recall six examples of assertive behavior (easy; Schwarz et al., 1991). This effect emerges because, when individuals experience feelings of difficulty in retrieving twelve assertive behaviors, they infer that they must be relatively unassertive. In contrast, when individuals experience feelings of ease in retrieving six assertive behaviors, they infer that they must be relatively assertive. In this fashion, “ease of retrieval” influences self-perceptions.

A third experiment employed a variant of Schwarz and colleagues’ (1991) “ease of retrieval” manipulation when manipulating self-perceptions of political

expertise (Ottati et al., 2015). In the “easy” condition, participants were asked to name two policies implemented by President Obama. In the difficult condition, participants were asked to name ten policies implemented by President Obama. To create an intensified awareness of failure in the ten policy condition, participants who named less than ten policies were required to write “I don’t know” in any remaining text boxes. Due to the relative ease of retrieving two policies, it was presumed that participants in the easy condition would infer that they knew a respectable amount about politics, leading to relatively high self-perceptions of political expertise. Due to the difficulty of retrieving ten policy positions, it was assumed that participants in the difficult condition would infer that they were uninformed about politics, leading to low self-perceptions of political expertise. Importantly, participants were *randomly* assigned to the high versus low self-perception of expertise conditions. Thus, effects of the experimental manipulation cannot be attributed to individual differences in political knowledge.

The results of this experiment supported the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis. Namely, as predicted, participants in the difficult condition (low self-perception of political expertise) reported greater Political Open-Minded Cognition than participants in the easy condition (high self-perception of political expertise).

The Relative Nature of the Expert Role

An individual (e.g., law school student) can occupy a “high-expertise” role in some situations (e.g., providing legal advice to a psychology student) and a “low-expertise” role in other situations (e.g., obtaining legal advice from a law professor). Thus, according to role theory, perceptions of expertise are relative and can vary within the individual across situations. A fourth experiment employed an experimental manipulation that focused on the *relative* nature of political expertise. This was accomplished by varying the protagonist’s relative level of political expertise within the context of three situational scenarios (Ottati et al., 2015).

In one situational scenario, the protagonist occupied a “low-expertise” role when discussing politics with a group of people who knew a lot *more* about politics than the protagonist. In a second situational scenario, the protagonist occupied a “high-expertise” role when discussing politics with a group of people who knew a lot *less* about politics than the protagonist did. Finally, in the “control scenario,” the protagonist encountered a group of people who were simply described as “typical” in terms of political knowledge. Participants read each of these scenarios twice, first imagining that “John” was the protagonist and then imagining that they themselves (“you”) were the protagonist. After reading each scenario, participants indicated whether the situation involved people who “know a great deal about politics,” “know very little about politics,” or “are pretty typical in terms of their knowledge of politics.” This served both as a manipulation check and as a procedure designed to strengthen the relative expertise manipulation.

Participants provided normative entitlement ratings in each of the three social role conditions. That is, participants rated the extent to which “John” (protagonist) *should* feel entitled to respond in a closed-minded fashion in each of the three social role conditions (e.g., “In this situation John should feel entitled to reject certain ideas without seriously considering them”; “In this situation, John should feel obligated to seriously consider viewpoints he disagrees with”; reverse coded: 0 = “disagree” to 10 = “agree”). In this experiment, participants did *not* respond to the “you” scenarios, which asked them to imagine that they personally occupied the role of the protagonist. These “you” scenarios were rated in a fifth experiment that follows.

The experimental procedure employed in these last two experiments possesses many advantages. First, it provides a manipulation check to ensure the experimental manipulation effectively manipulates the individual’s relative level of expertise. Second, in accordance with role theory, it enables one to document that social norms regarding open-mindedness differ *within* the individual when the individual’s (relative) social role varies across situations. Third, this experiment employs a within-subject design that completely controls for the effect of individual-difference variables, including individual differences in previously acquired political knowledge. Fourth, because the experimental manipulation does not elicit feelings of success or failure, it is less likely to influence the individual’s emotional state—thereby ruling out alternative interpretations that involve emotion (e.g., feelings of security, anger, sadness).⁴

Perhaps most importantly, unlike the previous experiments, these experiments included a control condition. In this condition, the participant did not occupy the role of expert or novice. This enabled us to distinguish the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis from the Obligated Novice Hypothesis. The Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis predicts that, relative to the control condition, the “high-expertise” condition will increase normative entitlement to respond in a closed-minded manner and decrease open-minded cognition. The Obligated Novice Hypothesis predicts that, relative to the control condition, the “low-expertise” role will decrease normative entitlement to respond in a closed-minded manner and increase open-minded cognition. The results obtained in the previous experiments can be interpreted as supporting either (or both) of these hypotheses.

In the fourth experiment, analysis of the manipulation check data confirmed that the experimental manipulation was extremely effective. Indeed, nearly 100% of the participants correctly identified whether each situational scenario involved people who “know a great deal about politics,” “know very little about politics,” or “are pretty typical in terms of their knowledge of politics.” The most interesting effects were those that emerged when predicting the normative entitlement ratings. Importantly, the Obligated Novice Hypothesis was not supported. That is, average normative entitlement ratings did *not* differ when comparing the “low-expertise” condition to the “control” condition. In contrast, the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis was strongly supported. In comparison to the control condition,

the high-expertise condition significantly increased ratings of normative entitlement (Ottati et al., 2015). Consequently, we performed a fifth experiment that exclusively focused on the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis (i.e., the low-expertise role condition was dropped).

Switching Social Roles

Although individuals may exhibit a chronic tendency to be open- or closed-minded with regard to political affairs, they will also exhibit systematic fluctuations in open-mindedness that are associated with the different social roles they occupy in various social situations. An interesting feature of the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis is that it accommodates variation in open-mindedness that arises when an individual occupies the role of “political expert” in one situation, but occupies a less elevated political role in another situation. Role fluctuations are prevalent in everyday life. Indeed, during the course of a single day, individuals frequently move from one social role (e.g., mother at home) to another (e.g., lawyer at work).

In examining situational fluctuations in open-mindedness, we performed a fifth experiment that focuses on predictions generated by the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis. Because the Obligated Novice Hypothesis was not supported in the fourth experiment, the fifth experiment eliminated the “low-expertise” condition. That is, each participant was simply exposed to the “high-expertise” and “control” condition scenarios. Participants read each of these scenarios twice, first imagining that “John” was the protagonist and then imagining that they themselves (“You”) were the protagonist in the scenario. After reading the “John” version, participants provided normative entitlement ratings. After reading the “You” version, participants reported their *personal* level of open-mindedness by completing the Situation-Specific Open-Minded Cognition scale. This six-item scale is virtually identical to the Political Open-Minded Cognition scale, except that the political domain phrasing is replaced with situation-specific phrasing. For example, the item “I often tune out political messages I disagree with” was changed to “In this situation, I would tune out messages I disagree with.” Research confirms that Situation-Specific Open-Minded Cognition systematically varies across situations. For example, Situation-Specific Open-Minded Cognition is low when individuals encounter political viewpoints that blatantly contradict mainstream opinion, and high when individuals encounter viewpoints that fall within an acceptable range of public opinion (Ottati et al., 2018). Moreover, Situation-Specific Open-Minded Cognition is positively associated with a core manifestation of open-mindedness, a tendency to selectively attend to political information that contradicts one’s preexisting political predispositions (Ottati et al., 2018).

The Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis was supported once again in Experiment 5. Normative entitlement ratings were higher in the “high-expertise” condition than control condition. Situation-Specific Open-Minded Cognition was lower

in the “high-expertise” condition than control condition. Moreover, supplementary analyses confirmed that the effect of self-perceived political expertise (expert versus control) on Situation-Specific Open-Minded Cognition was partially mediated by normative entitlement. Specifically, normative entitlement was negatively associated with Situation-Specific Open-Minded Cognition. In addition, examination of the adjusted cell means revealed that the magnitude of the Self-Perceived Expertise effect on Situation-Specific Open-Minded Cognition was reduced when controlling for normative entitlement. Last, a Sobel’s test confirmed that normative entitlement did indeed mediate the effect of self-perceived political expertise on Situation-Specific Open-Minded Cognition.

Earned Dogmatism: Summing Up the Empirical Evidence

Recent research regarding the determinants of Open-Minded Cognition emphasizes that open-mindedness is malleable and influenced by a variety of situational cues. According to the Situational Merit Standard Hypothesis, different situations activate different normative standards which, in turn, elicit different levels of open-mindedness (Ottati et al., 2018). The Situational Merit Standard Hypothesis has been supported in multiple studies that manipulate a variety of situational cues. Thus, for example, situations that promote morally objectionable viewpoints (e.g., ethnic cleansing) elicit lower levels of open-mindedness than situations that promote viewpoints that are compatible with mainstream values. Preliminary work also suggests individuals are more likely to listen in an open-minded manner when conversing with an open-minded conversation partner than when conversing with a dogmatic conversation partner.

The Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis can be viewed as both an instantiation and extension of the Situational Merit Standard Hypothesis. The Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis *instantiates* the Situational Merit Standard Hypothesis because it presumes that an individual can occupy a specific role in one situation but a completely different social role in another situation (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Triandis, 1972; Triandis et al., 1984). Thus, for example, a college student majoring in political science might occupy the role of “political expert” when speaking with a group of high school students, but occupy the role of “political novice” when speaking with a group of political science professors. In this fashion, these two situations activate distinct social roles associated with distinct sets of normative entitlements and obligations. Consequently, these two situations elicit different levels of open-mindedness in the political science student. Experiments 4 and 5 provide strong evidence that effects of this nature are indeed real (Ottati et al., 2015).

The Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis *extends* the Situational Merit Standard Hypothesis because it implies two individuals can occupy distinct social roles in the same situation (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Triandis, 1972; Triandis et al., 1984). Consider, for example, a political discussion that focuses on foreign policy in the Middle East. In this particular situation, a Middle East scholar occupies the role

of “expert,” whereas a social worker occupies the role of “novice.” Consequently, in this situation, the set of normative entitlements and obligations differs for these two individuals. In particular, dogmatism is viewed as more warranted, justifiable, or appropriate when exhibited by the Middle East expert than when exhibited by the social worker.

In sum, social norms entitle experts to be more dogmatic. Consequently, conditions that promote self-perceptions of high expertise increase dogmatic processing. This Earned Dogmatism Effect was obtained in multiple experiments (Ottati et al., 2015). Specifically, it emerged when using a success (high expertise) versus failure (low expertise) manipulation of test performance to influence self-perceptions of political expertise (Experiments 2 and 3). It also emerged when examining how a participant responds to two different situations, a situation in which the participant occupies the role of “political expert” versus a situation in which the participant does not occupy an elevated social position. Importantly, these effects emerged under conditions that rule out alternative interpretations involving actual political knowledge. Thus, the current findings provide compelling evidence that supports the Earned Dogmatism Hypothesis. Self-perceptions of expertise increase normative entitlement to be closed-minded, which in turn, decrease open-minded cognition.

Conclusion

A comprehensive understanding of the relation between political expertise and open-minded cognition requires that political psychologists make a distinction between individual differences in political knowledge and self-perceptions of political expertise. There are four reasons why this is the case. First, research confirms that self-perceptions of performance often fail to strongly correlate with objective measures of performance and expertise. Second, individual differences in political knowledge are relatively stable, changing only incrementally as individuals gradually progress in their “political education.” In contrast, self-perceptions of political expertise are quite malleable, varying across situations that people encounter in their everyday life. Third, self-perceptions of political expertise influence open-mindedness in the political domain even when controlling for individual differences in political knowledge. Fourth, a comparison of effects elicited by self-perceived expertise and effects elicited by actual political knowledge reveals that these two components of expertise can produce distinct and sometimes opposite effects on political open-mindedness.

Notes

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2. All of the Earned Dogmatism experiments were run on MTurk. Four of the experiments employed a simple design involving a single, dichotomous independent variable. One experiment employed a design involving a single, trichotomous independent variable. Sample characteristics were similar in all five experiments. Across all five experiments; the average cell size was 20, average age was 34, average percent of females was 50%, average percent of non-whites was 21%, average percent Democrats was 56%, and the average percent Republicans was 27%. This does not constitute a formal, representative sample of the U.S. voting age public (e.g., the sample is more Democratic than the U.S. voting population). However, this sample does possess considerable variation in terms of key voter characteristics (age, gender, race, and partisanship).
3. Although the exclusion procedure eliminates participants who did not believe the false feedback, it produces another problem. By excluding participants who score high in the difficult (but not easy) condition, this procedure creates a confound between actual political knowledge and self-perceptions of expertise. Namely, the average level of political knowledge is lower in the low self-perceived expertise condition (failure) than in the high self-perceived expertise condition (success). Experiments 3–5 employ designs that completely eliminate this problem.
4. Although space constraints preclude a more detailed description of Experiments 4 and 5 here, it is important to note that explicit steps were taken to eliminate alternative interpretations in terms of other variables (i.e., state self-esteem, feelings of power, euphoria, insecurity, anger, irritability, sadness, anxiety, attitude certainty, and attitude extremity). Specifically, analysis of supplementary data revealed that most of these variables failed to differ when comparing the high-expertise condition to the control condition. Borderline differences emerged when comparing feelings of irritability, sadness, and power in these two conditions. Thus, when comparing the high-expertise condition to the control condition in Experiment 5, these variables were included as control variables (see Ottati, Price, Wilson, & Sumaktoyo, 2015 for a more detailed description).

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