

Prejudice in the pub: How alcohol and ideology loosen the tongue

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Prejudice in the pub: How alcohol and ideology loosen the tongue

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ABSTRACT

This study ($N = 124$) tested the main and interactive effects of alcohol consumption, egalitarianism, and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) in relation to prejudice suppression in the natural environment of a British Public House (pub). Employing a quasi-experimental between-subjects design, participants who had consumed alcohol were worse at suppressing their prejudice than participants with no alcohol consumption. Further, the more participants endorsed egalitarian values, the more they were able to suppress their prejudice. This tendency was resistant to the effects of alcohol. By contrast, the stronger participants held RWA beliefs, the less they were able to suppress their prejudice. In addition, this tendency was accentuated by alcohol consumption. Results are discussed in terms of theoretical and practical implications.

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What enables individuals to suppress their prejudiced attitudes? The Justification-Suppression Model of Prejudice (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003) argues that such suppression arises from motivational and social concerns to maintain a non-prejudiced self-concept both to others and to oneself (Klonis, Plant, & Devine, 2005; Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998). The process of active suppression of one's prejudices may be indicative of an awareness that one's prejudices are inappropriate and potentially offend others. Such an awareness may hold an important key to, at least for some, experiencing a smoother and positive interaction with stigmatized groups, which subsequently can lead to more perspective-taking, gaining new knowledge about them (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Stephan & Finlay, 1999), and positive intergroup contact (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). Thus, we argue that there are merits to study prejudice suppression and to identify its physiological and social psychological predictors, both inside and outside the psychology laboratory.

The influence of alcohol consumption and ideological beliefs on prejudice suppression

Alcohol consumption

Research has demonstrated that alcohol consumption leads to prejudice expression toward racial minority groups (Loersch, Bartholow, Manning, Calanchini, & Sherman, 2015; Reeves & Nagoshi, 1993; Schofield, Unkelbach, & Denson, 2015). Indeed, it has been shown that outgroup hostility can be triggered even among sober participants through exposing them to alcohol-related cues (Greitemeyer & Nierula, 2016; Stepanova, Bartholow, Sauls, & Friedman, 2012). Researchers attribute such disinhibition effects of alcohol (and its cues) to its potential to impair our regulatory cognitive control (Bartholow, Dickter, & Sestir, 2006; Bartholow, Henry, Lust, Sauls, & Wood, 2012).

Yet, to our knowledge, no previous research has replicated the link between alcohol and prejudice outside of the psychology laboratory. Thus, in the present study, we aimed to test the alcohol

disinhibition effect in relation to prejudice suppression in a pub, where people come to socialize naturally and drink various volumes of alcohol, rather than the fixed volumes determined by experimenters inside a sterile laboratory. Specifically, we predicted a disinhibition effect of alcohol on prejudice suppression. That is, participants who had consumed alcohol (vs. no alcohol) will be less able to suppress their prejudice towards different stigmatized groups. (Hyp. 1). Testing this hypothesis in a more ecologically valid context is important because participants in past studies may have been influenced by the fact that they were tested in the artificial settings of psychology laboratories with a particular goal in mind about participating in a study testing the effects of alcohol (for a broader call to increase ecological validity in psychological research see Paluck & Green, 2009).

Egalitarianism

According to Katz and Hass (1988), egalitarianism is a value system that endorses the democratic ideals of equality, social justice, and concern for the other's well-being. Research has shown that egalitarians express less prejudice compared to non-egalitarians (e.g. Maddux, Barden, Brewer, & Petty, 2005; Plant, Devine, & Brazy, 2003). With the aim to replicate this finding in the pub, we tested the hypothesis that the more participants endorse egalitarian beliefs, the more they will suppress their prejudice (Hyp. 2). Importantly, to the best of our knowledge, no previous research has examined the potential moderating effect of alcohol consumption on the relationship between egalitarianism and prejudice suppression. Yet, it is conceivable that alcohol with its myopic effects on one's cognitive functions may weaken one's personal commitments to egalitarian values. In other words, because holding onto one's egalitarian values may require cognitive control, alcohol consumption may both disrupt control regulation and diminish one's commitments to equality for all, held during sober times (Hyp. 3a). Alternatively, because of the enduring and personal nature of beliefs, such as egalitarianism, they may be resistant to the effects of alcohol (Hyp. 3b).

Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA)

People with RWA beliefs have been shown to be rigid thinkers, opposed to uncertainty, and unwilling to embrace values different from their own (Altemeyer, 1988; Cohrs, Kämpfe-Hargrave, & Riemann, 2012). Past research has documented that RWA leads to more unfavourable evaluations of outgroups and those perceived as 'social deviants' (e.g. Esses, Haddock, & Zanna, 1993; Whitley & Lee, 2000). Considering this evidence, we predicted that individuals endorsing RWA may struggle to suppress their prejudice, perhaps even more so outside the psychology laboratory (Hyp. 4). Moreover, the potential moderating effect of alcohol on the relationship between RWA and prejudice suppression was also examined. On the one hand, it is plausible to anticipate that alcohol with its deteriorating effect on cognitive control may strengthen the positive relationship between RWA and prejudice suppression (i.e. accentuation effect). That is, the combined effects of alcohol with RWA should loosen these individuals' tongues to express their negative evaluations of stigmatized groups more freely (Hyp. 5a). Alternatively, because of the enduring and personal nature of beliefs, such as RWA, they may be immune to the effects of alcohol (Hyp. 5b).

The Public House (Pub)

The pub is a social hub central to the British culture. There were over 50,000 pubs recorded in the United Kingdom in 2015 (The Guardian, 2015). One in 5 British adults visits the pub weekly. Visitors come to get over a "bad day," to celebrate happy occasions, discuss the latest news, and air their personal and political views on social issues. We suspected that naturally in such an environment prejudice is formed, experienced, discussed, suppressed, expressed, and also challenged. All of the above is typically accompanied by alcohol consumption, though not every visitor drinks alcohol. Thus, such an environment makes for an ideal natural social laboratory to be used as a backdrop to our study.

Method

Participants

A total of 124¹ (65, females, 58 males and 1 unidentified) participants took part in the study, with an average age ($M = 33.78$ years, $SD = 14.04$). This sample size was determined based on previous literature (e.g., Bartholow et al., 2012), the use of power analysis, as well as the number of the regular costumers attending this particular pub. The pub is located about 26 miles away from the two major universities in the Southeast of England. 90

Design and procedure

A quasi-experimental between-subjects design was employed to observe the effects of alcohol consumption ($N_{alcohol} = 73$, $N_{non-alcohol} = 51$). Participants completed a questionnaire either while standing at the bar or seated at their tables. Importantly, the research assistant instructed (and also monitored) participants to complete the surveys individually without the consultation or influence of the participants' peers. 95 100

Measures

Except for the measure of alcohol consumption, all other measures were assessed using a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (entirely disagree) to 7 (entirely agree).

Alcohol consumption

Participants responded to the following question: "Have you had any alcoholic drinks today?" In order to avoid ambiguity for participants, as well as having a true control condition, participants' response choices were limited to either "yes" or "no." 105

Prejudice suppression

Six items were modelled on Crandall, Eshleman and O'Brien's (2002) scale of prejudice suppression. Participants rated their agreement with statements such as: "When I meet a person of another race or ethnicity, I try to avoid thinking about their race," and "I don't laugh at jokes that are cruel toward some groups (the elderly, the disabled, etc.) of people, even if they are funny." This scale produced a reliable alpha index ($\alpha = .79$). 110

Egalitarianism

Ten items measured Egalitarianism (Katz & Hass, 1988). A sample item was: "One should find ways to help others less fortunate than oneself" ($\alpha = .90$). 115

RWA

Seven items measured RWA (Altemeyer, 1996). A sample item was: "Homosexual long-term relationships should be treated as equivalent to marriage" (reversed). Reliability analysis indicated an improvement following the exclusion of 2 items ("What our country really needs instead of more 'civil rights' is a good stiff dose of law and order" & "Obedience and respect for authority are the most important values children should learn"). After excluding these items the reliability index improved from ($\alpha = .50$) to ($\alpha = .69$). 120

Q6

Table 1. Correlations of measured variables (N = 124).

| Scale | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-----------------------------|---|--------|--------|------------------|
| Egalitarianism | - | -.58** | .51** | -.13 |
| Right Wing Authoritarianism | | - | -.50** | .16 ^o |
| Prejudice Suppression | | | - | -.19* |
| Alcohol Consumption | | | | - |

^op = .09, *p < .05, **p = .01.

Table 2. Coefficients of regression models for prejudice suppression, including 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs) and R²change.

| | B | SE | Beta | 95% CIs | R ² change |
|--------------------------|------|-----|--------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Step 1 | -.22 | .09 | -.22* | -.39 to -.04 | 5% |
| Alcohol Consumption (AC) | | | | | |
| Step 2 | .32 | .09 | .32** | .14 to .50 | 29% |
| Egalitarianism | -.29 | .09 | -.29** | -.47 to -.10 | |
| RWA | | | | | |
| Step 3 | -.14 | .09 | -.14 | -.32 to .04 | 4% |
| AC X Egalitarianisms | -.25 | .09 | -.25** | -.43 to -.07 | |
| AC X RWA | | | | | |

*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01. (N = 124) prejudice suppression. N.B. After controlling for the effects of egalitarianism and RWA in Step 2, the effect of alcohol consumption was reduced to marginally sig. (p = .098).

Q11

Results

Descriptive statistics

The means and standard deviations of the key variables were: prejudice suppression (M = 4.90, SD = 1.23), egalitarianism (M = 5.32, SD = .99), and RWA (M = 3.18, SD = 1.05).

Predicting prejudice suppression

Stepwise hierarchical regression analyses (see Table 2) found:

As expected (hyp. 1), participants with alcohol consumption (M = 4.69, SD = 1.31) reported less prejudice suppression tendency than participants with no alcohol consumption (M = 5.20, SD = 1.06), $F_{\text{change}}(1, 120) = 6.00, p = .016$.

As predicted (hyp. 2 & 4), it was found that the more participants endorsed egalitarianism the more they suppressed their prejudice, whereas the more they endorsed RWA the less they suppressed their prejudice, $F_{\text{change}}(2, 118) = 25.22, p = .001$.

The step including the interaction terms between alcohol consumption and each of the above two predictors was significant, $F_{\text{change}}(2, 116) = 3.62, p = .030$. Alcohol consumption did not moderate the relationship between egalitarianism and prejudice suppression (p = .121), supporting hypothesis 3b (but not 3a). However, alcohol consumption moderated the relationship between RWA and prejudices suppression, p = .008 (see Table 2). Supporting hypothesis 5b (but not 5a), simple slope analyses showed that the negative relationship between RWA and prejudice suppression was more accentuated for the participants who had consumed alcohol (B = -.54, t = -5.37, p = .001) than for the sober participants (B = -.38, t = -2.90, p = .006).²

Discussion

The present study asked the question of what enables people to suppress their prejudices. In the current study we sought to answer this question in the natural environment of a pub. In addition to replicating the previously established link between alcohol consumption and decreased prejudice suppression (Bartholow et al., 2006, 2012; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Greitemeyer & Nierula, 2015), the current findings expand past research. Specifically, our work highlights that

the complex interrelationship between alcohol and ideological beliefs. While alcohol does not appear to moderate the relationship between egalitarianism and prejudice suppression, it seems to moderate the relationship between RWA and prejudice suppression such that an accentuation effect was observed.

We acknowledge that suppression of thought has been associated with the “re-bounce effect,” which refers to the paradoxical increased availability of a thought that has been previously suppressed (e.g. Logel, Iserman, Davies, Quinn, & Spencer, 2009; Wegner, 1994). We do not take issue with the above established research. However, we are reminded of the possibility that the process of active suppression may indicate that the suppressor might be aware of the inappropriateness of her/his prejudice and its potential to offend others. Such an awareness may hold the potential, at least for some, to experience a smoother and more positive interaction with stigmatized groups (Brown & Hewstone, 2005), which in turn may invalidate the initial prejudice.

Limitations

This research is limited because it relied on participants’ self-report on whether they had consumed alcohol prior to participating in the study. Future research could address these limitations by using a breathalyzer to ensure the exact quantity of alcohol in participants’ blood. Naturally, given the quasi-experimental design of the current study, causal relationships between the key variables cannot be inferred. That is, while alcohol consumption may lead to decreased prejudice suppression, it is also conceivable that individuals who are less willing to suppress their prejudice are more inclined to drink alcohol. Future research using longitudinal designs will help shed further light on this issue.

Conclusion

Given the pervasive nature of prejudice and the hurt its expression can cause to its targets, identifying factors that enable people to suppress their prejudice is worthy of scientific investigation. Our research is a first step toward disentangling the complex interrelationships between alcohol and ideological beliefs and their combined impact on prejudice suppression outside the psychology laboratory.

Notes

1. Due to missing data across different variables, the number of reported *N* inevitably varies across different analyses.
2. We also tested a hierarchical regression model which included gender and age as potential predictors. Neither was a potent predictor (p -values $\geq .114$). Moreover, because there is some past research that has observed an interactive effect between RWA and egalitarianism factors (Oyamot, Borgida, & Fisher, 2006), we also tested this 2-way interaction as well as the 3-way interaction between these two factors and alcohol consumption. No such effects were observed in the present sample (p -values $\geq .52$). Finally, because it can be argued that the more enduring individual differences predictors ought to be entered into the regression model prior to alcohol consumption, we re-run the analysis with the reversed order of predictors. However, the results were identical to those reported above.

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