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May 2020
BYU Honors Program

Honors Thesis Proposal

I.   Working Title

Reciprocal Empathy: Reversing Antipathy Toward Immigrant Outgroups in Emotion and Votes

II.   Statement of Intent

The purpose of this thesis will be to answer the following questions: How can members of immigrant outgroups be effectively "humanized" by native ingroups? What are the best methods of stimulating empathy within those who hold dehumanized, racist, or highly intolerant views of immigrants? How would such a change translate into support toward pro-immigrant policies? I argue that a "reciprocal empathy approach," where the *outgroup* expresses empathy towards the *ingroup* on issues of conflict, can actually lead to the reciprocation of empathy from the native population and result in greater support for integration policies. The thesis will be based on original research collected in 2018 through a large-scale survey experiment (N= 8,172) in Great Britain with two BYU Political Science professors (Prof. Joshua Gubler and Prof. Joel Selway). I plan to use my capstone research project on reciprocal empathy resulting from this research as my thesis groundwork, while choosing to analyze different demographic indicators and immigrant policies. I plan to include a new policy analysis section focusing policies concerning the wearing of the burqa in public areas and the building of the Calais Wall along the border of France. Considering that my results from analyzing a less common policy back in 2018 were inconclusive, I hope to now find new and meaningful insights into the reciprocal empathy approach.

III.   Significance & Preliminary Research

From 2015 to 2016, Europe witnessed a great influx of migrants to its continent which introduced the challenge of integration and assimilation in the years to come. Many Europeans became aware through media coverage of unrest in the Middle East. This unrest led to a surge of refugees arriving on Mediterranean shores. 90% of those arriving on the shores of Greece were from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (Crawley 2018). Even after the flow of migrants slowed, the

daunting task remains: the successful integration of Europe's newcomers into European society without losing the authenticity of what makes Europe European. Many native Europeans fear the loss of their European identity and as a result, some choose to act with hostility and resentment towards immigrants (in many cases, specifically Muslim immigrants) and vote against pro-immigrant policies or for restrictive policies. Although most Europeans are not hostile towards immigrants themselves, there is a percentage of natives that hold an extremely degrading view of Muslim immigrants (referred to as the outgroup).

A central obstacle of integration is the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments. Many studies have sought to find the most effective methods of encouraging humanization and empathy within the general public through media or conflict resolution activities and meetings. These methods are partially effective – a group of individuals often increase not only in empathy, but also in dissonance (Glasford et al. 2008; Gubler 2013). These individuals are referred to as "hardliners" for the purpose of this research (Glasford et al. 2008; Gubler 2015). This is an important aspect of the reciprocal empathy method– I theorize that the results indicate this method as a solution for reaching hardliners. Most studies attempt to spur empathy from the native population (ingroup) by presenting the difficult situations and hardships of the outgroup. While there are an abundance of studies that have sought to promote the humanization of outgroups, few focus on the percent of the native population that experiences high dissonance as a result of empathy-seeking messages (Batson et al. 1997; Batson and Ahmad 2009; Cortes et al. 2005; Leyens et al. 2000; Vaes et al. 2003; Feldman 2015; Halpern 2004). The research for this thesis will focus on the "reciprocal empathy approach," a method used by Prof. Joshua Gubler in the paper "Humanizing the Outgroup in Contexts of Protracted Intergroup Conflict," which focuses on outgroup displays of empathy towards the ingroup on issues unrelated to the conflict between the two groups (Gubler 2015). While this theory has been tested before between groups dealing with active violent conflict between them (such as groups in the Middle East), it has never been tested at a large scale focusing on native and immigrant relationships in Europe.

My initial research on reciprocal empathy and reading on group conflict reconciliation and resolution has provided insight into the importance of understanding dehumanization and victimhood. Humanizing the outgroup is the essential first step in reconciliation between members of group conflict (Gubler et. al. 2015). When a normal group which supports humanitarian causes sees themselves as "victims" in any given situation, then their perceived

"victimhood" leads to exceptions in their humanitarian views and actions (Bar-Tal et al. 2009). In the intergroup contact theory, both group proximity and group interaction in "everyday life" is essential to how the ingroup views and treats the outgroup (Varshney 2001). Another theory suggests prolonged intergroup contact can lead to sustained intergroup interaction after an initial increase in conflict (Enos 2014). Within all of these theories, and many others I've researched (and plan to include in my literature review), the "hardliners" of the ingroup appear to be unaffected by group contact. It is suggested that positive mental- and emotional-stimuli are needed to reverse dehumanization (Gubler, 2015). The reciprocal empathy approach does not seek to generate empathy from the ingroup for outgroup suffering, but rather offers them empathy from the outgroup. This method does not pose any form of guilt or dissonance upon the ingroup, but rather allows them to witness an extension of empathy, a very humanistic trait, from the outgroup itself.

From my past research, the theoretical power of reciprocal empathy becomes clear. Tested in the Middle East and in London, the results indicate that there is a significant effect on participants when the method is used. In this thesis, I plan to analyze the demographic differences among gender and different generations. Many studies have indicated that gender and age play an important role in immigration policy views (Luedtke 2005, Fetzer 2000). Men often feel more threatened by the predominantly male incoming migrant labor and younger generations that have gone through modern schooling recognize more liberal and pro-outgroup views (Fetzer 2000, Coninck et al. 2019, Freeman 2012). Based on these reasons and more, I will review demographics for both gender and age and analyze their effect on both the empathy treatment and policy measurement. If there are significant results, this will further indicate if one demographic group or another are affected more by the reciprocal empathy treatment.

Based on the research and analysis conducted in 2018, our team concluded that in comparison with all other methods used, the reciprocal empathy treatment resulted in the highest predicted empathy within the ingroup. I will build upon these findings and provide an analysis on two main policies: the prohibition of burqas in public areas of the U.K. and support for building the Calais Wall (along the border of France, which would prevent future illegal immigration). In contrast to my capstone work, where my analysis for the support of a five-tier visa system showed too small of a measure to be considered, I theorize that an analysis of burqa and Calais policies will be stronger indicators of policy support because of the relative greater public

understanding on these issues. I also hypothesize that my analysis of these policies will be more reflective of which treatment individuals receive and that those receiving the reciprocal empathy treatment will show less support for these restrictive policies. If this is the case, then reciprocal empathy can be considered a strong method of reversing animosity toward immigrant groups by demonstrating a change in policy support.

IV. Project Overview

Methodology and Procedures

This thesis is based on a randomized sample of 8,172 native British participants within Great Britain who answered a survey spanning topics surrounding the idea of identity. Several of these sections and questions focused on immigration. These sections were designed by me, the team of students, and Prof. Gubler in London to measure the level of empathy British ingroup members feel towards outgroup Muslim immigrants. The focus on Muslim immigrants is reflective of the migration patterns experienced in Europe since 2015 and for this reason appears to be the most controversial immigrant group in society and policy.

To determine how each British participant viewed Muslim immigrants, a pre-treatment humanization measure and antipathy index were used for dependent variable measurements of empathy and dissonance. Since the focus of the experiment attempts to target the small percentage of hardliners of the participants, the pre-treatment was designed to measure the level of empathy felt by respondents and filtered individuals who responded with low levels of humanization (which would be labeled as "hardliners"). Within the treatments there was a control group and four other treatment groups of approximately 1550 participants each. The treatments consisted of a short empathetic narrative of either a Muslim immigrant or Briton native to either the opposite identity group or their own group. The reciprocal empathy treatment is the narrative from a Muslim immigrant to a British native. The sentiments expressed in all these narratives stemmed from the Grenfell Tower fire incident in London and a fictitious narrative of the death of a close friend to cancer. The Grenfell Tower fire occurred in 2017 and resulted in 72 deaths and was a tragedy nationwide across the United Kingdom. The reason for choosing this event was that it was a tragedy neutral and separate from immigration politics, and was a national shock mourned by all throughout regions of the United Kingdom. Both native Britons and Muslims were lost in this fire. Death due to illness was also chosen for its neutrality

and personal relatability for either group. Each treatment would be compared to see which evoked the most empathy, dissonance, and change in policy views in the questions posed after the narratives.

Following the treatment, the participants answered a number of questions asking to rank the extent to which they felt both positive and negative emotions. This served as both the empathy and dissonance measurement for attitudes toward Muslim immigrants. Participants then also answered questions on five different policies relating to Muslim immigrants ranking their degree of support for each policy. The five policies included the following: (1) support for a five-tier visa immigration system, (2) support for vulnerable persons resettlement scheme, (3) support for building the Calais Wall, (4) prohibition of burqas in all public areas of the U.K., and (5) prohibition of all girls in primary schools under eight wearing the hijab.

Thesis Structure

The thesis will be composed of two main sections. The first will be based mainly on conveying the results acquired from 2018 research and the conclusions of my capstone research paper regarding the results of the reciprocal empathy approach. It will cover the first two hypotheses of my capstone paper:

H1 *The reciprocal empathy approach to humanize outgroups will be the approach resulting in the greatest increase of empathy of the ingroup*
H2 *The reciprocal empathy treatment will create less dissonance for hardliners than any of the other treatments in this study.*

Adding on to my findings on both empathy and dissonance, I will provide an additional analysis of gender and age and review any trends for reciprocal empathy specifically. There has been extensive research performed that indicate women and younger generations as popular demographic groups with greater compassion toward immigrants and refugees in Europe. I hypothesize that women and younger generations will show a larger indication of being influenced by the reciprocal empathy treatment than men and older generations. I plan to further define these groups given the nature of analysis and further research on gender and generation divides on topics of immigration. If this is the case, the reciprocal empathy approach in this data

set can be considered a case study in public opinion divides towards immigrant groups, potentially adding more insight into the success (or lack thereof) of reaching certain demographic groups.

The second section will then take a different approach to the third hypothesis of my capstone regarding support toward immigrant policies. In my original analysis, I decided to focus solely on policy support for a five-tier visa immigration system in Europe. It was the only policy analysis out of the five different polices included in the survey that was analyzed due to time restraints. It was originally chosen for its perceived general take on immigration policy. The results of the five treatment groups for this policy, however, was too small to have any significance. It was concluded that the treatments had little impact, if any, on the views of participants for this policy. Post-analysis, it also became clearer that the five-tier visa issue was perhaps not as well-known as some of the other policies listed in the survey. Therefore, for my thesis, I have decided to investigate two more prominent and specific policies: (3) support for building the Calais Wall and (4) prohibition of burqas in all public areas of the U.K. These two policies will be analyzed separately based on regression results for variation in policy support among the five treatment groups. I hypothesize that the reciprocal empathy treatment will significantly decrease support for both the Calais Wall and burqa ban policies. If this be the case, it would indicate the connection of my theorized causal story:

Reciprocal Empathy Treatment → higher rates of empathy → higher rates of policy change

V. Qualifications of Thesis Committee

As the investigator, I am qualified to pursue research on this subject because it crosses topics and disciplines within my double major of International Relations and German Studies. During my time in the United Kingdom on the mentored research program run by Prof. Gubler and Selway, I was mentored directly by Prof. Gubler to perform analysis using R statistics software. On the program, I also collaborated with a team of thirteen talented students who already had experience with data analytics. After my time in London, I completed the rigorous POLI 328 course which equipped me with additional skills in data analysis and interpretation using the program Stata. I have also taken courses covering British politics and history (led by Prof. Joel Selway),

Comparative European politics (taught by Prof. Wade Jacoby), and issues of migration and integration (included in various courses).

Department Honors Coordinator for International Relations: Prof. Ray Christensen

I have worked closely with Prof. Christensen during my time as a student in his POLI 200 class where I learned the theory and techniques of research design, accurate citation, and professional writing. He has a strong background in international relations and comparative politics.

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Joshua Gubler

Prof. Gubler is the most qualified faculty to act as my thesis mentor as he directly supervised my team during our research in summer of 2018 focusing on the role of empathy in the humanization of outgroups. He conducts research exploring prejudice reduction and the role of emotion in motivating change (including other research on fostering empathy toward Latino immigrants domestically). I also worked closely Prof. Joshua Gubler, Prof. Chris Karpowitz, and a team of fiver other students to co-author a current project titled "Mixed Affective States and the Fundamental Challenge of Persuasion" which highlights the contradictory emotions incited by attempts to persuade individuals towards new political attitudes.

Faculty Reader: Prof. Joel Selway

Prof. Selway led coursework during my time in London and used the same original research survey and data to work with another team focusing on regional identity in the U.K. His research focuses on the design of democratic political institutions for ethnically-divided societies. He taught me mostly everything I know about British politics, culture, and history while studying abroad in London. We worked simultaneously on separate research projects using the same data from the same survey.

VI.   Timeline

June 1st 2020: Thesis proposal submitted (granted extension)
June-July 2020: Altering research analysis of policies and re-writing based on any new findings from Summer 2018
August 1st 2020: Completion of 1st Draft
August-October 2020: Revisions and edits

November 1st 2020: Thesis defense information form

December 1st 2020: Thesis defense completed & thesis submission form

December 10th 2020: Final thesis PDF & Thesis poster

December 17th 2020: Graduation

VII. Funding

I will not require any foreseeable funding for this project.

VIII. Culminating Experience

I presented my capstone research at the Midwest Political Science Association conference in Chicago last year. Seeing that I've already had this experience and that my graduation is this December, being able to defend my thesis and have my work on display in the Honors College post-graduation is already very meaningful to me.

IX. References

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