



2.27 The Epistemic Bases of Prejudice

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Abstract

In the current research, we investigated the role of need for closure (NFC), or the general desire for epistemic certainty, on the experience of sympathy, or the desire to protect individuals in need—the lack of which constitutes a form of affective prejudice—towards Muslim immigrants in Italy. As a disadvantaged outgroup, these immigrants are especially in need of sympathy from natives and, given the tensions of the immigration debate, are at-risk for low sympathy. Conceptually, high NFC individuals can strongly adopt traditional cultural norms as a way to acquire their desired stable knowledge; this can make sympathy towards immigrants less likely. Consistent with past research on NFC and the binding moral foundations (i.e., the preference for traditional cultural norms) on prejudice towards outgroups, we proposed that individuals with a high NFC, and who endorsed the binding moral foundations, would be particularly likely to have decreased sympathy towards Muslim immigrants in Italy. In a sample of 186 Italian university students (43.9% female), we found that high NFC individuals had decreased sympathy towards these immigrants through the binding foundations, controlling for cultural identification and individuals' proclivity to take others' perspectives.

Keywords: immigration; prejudice; need for closure; sympathy; moral foundations