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Transcript

Lee Jussim

It is deeply ironic that academia has become essentially a club for the left-most 10% to 20% of the country. So this rhetoric about inclusivity and diversity is a form of inclusion that excludes about 80% of the country.

Zach Rausch

That's Lee Jussim. On today's show, we continue the conversation on an academic paper that helped lead to the founding of Heterodox Academy. We hear from social psychologist and co-author of the research paper, Lee Jussim. I'm Zach Rausch. This is Heterodox Out Loud.

The full academic paper can be found here:

[Political Diversity Will Improve Social Psychological Science](#)

The summary blog post can be found on our website here:

[It's finally out-The big review paper on the lack of political diversity in social psychology](#)

Zach Rausch

Lee Jussim is Distinguished Professor at Rutgers University. He's published numerous articles and edited several books on social perception, accuracy, self-fulfilling prophecies, as well as racial and gender stereotypes. He also writes a blog for Psychology Today and was one of Heterodox Academy's earliest members. In our interview, we discussed how political diversity could improve social psychological science, as well as his more recent research on political bias in his field. Here's my interview with Lee.

Alright, we're going to start by going back to 2014, when you co-wrote a piece with few social psychologists, including Jon Haidt, called "Political Diversity Will Improve Social Psychological Science," which our listeners just got to hear excerpts from. So, before we really get started, tell us a

little bit about your academic story and how you became interested in these issues of political homogeneity.

Lee Jussim

That's probably a very long story, but probably by about 15 years ago, the mid 2000s. At that time, I was probably focused primarily on social psychology, was really hostile to findings, empirical findings, conducted using conventional or even better than conventional methods that contested sort of leftist worldviews. My earliest stuff was actually scores of studies now showing reasonable levels of accuracy among the stereotypes that have been assessed in those studies by people holding those stereotypes. And it was clear that people hated that. People in social psychology hated that stuff, and they never really refuted it. It was obvious they viscerally hated it. And so something was going on. This wasn't normal science, like normal science functions the way it's supposed to, and there's some wrong belief out there in the scientific literature, and abundant, tons of evidence are accumulated that disconfirms that scientific belief, that it might take a while, but that eventually the received wisdom, the canonized ideas in the field would eventually change. I just wasn't seeing that. And that made to me, raise the possibility that social psychologists operate just like everybody else who doesn't want to hear it when their cherished beliefs are challenged.

So that's the rule.

Zach Rausch

And so just to make sure I understand clearly, really where your story started was a personal experience with your research, that you are putting out content and people, even though you are consistently finding kind of heterodox views in your research, nobody was taking them seriously. It sounds like.

Lee Jussim

I don't want to overstate that, and I don't want to craft some weird victim narrative because that wouldn't even be true. So, neither I, nor anyone I collaborated with, ever had trouble publishing this stuff. So, it's not like there was some conspiracy of ideologues suppressing research, that just didn't happen. But what did happen is when I or other people would present this stuff, you would just get like virulent pushback that I have never gotten in any other context. That was one piece of it. But then the other piece was that the work got published but got mostly ignored. So when there are 40

or 50 studies saying there's actually a reasonable degree of accuracy and lots of sex stereotypes, lots of racial stereotypes, stereotypes about age, stereotypes about occupations, again, it's dozens of studies at this point, when there's dozens of such studies and annual review chapters and publications in American Psychologists or Psyche Review or Journal of Personality and Sociology have throw away statements about the inaccuracy of stereotypes without a single citation. What that tells you is that the stuff was simply being ignored as if it had never happened.

Zach Rausch

You've written a couple of pieces recently that part of the argument that you were making was that political bias expresses itself in many different ways, and I think this is what you're saying. It's not just direct suppression of research, that it's coming out in multiple ways. Can you talk more about that?

Lee Jussim

There are many potential and I think sometimes real known manifestations of political biases. One is to simply ignore research efforts when published that challenges some cherished view. Suppression of research is actually very hard to document, because how do you document something that didn't occur, like a conspiracy theory? All these social scientists are hiding their findings. That's very hard, but it's not impossible. Researcher LJ Zigerell discovered their tests; the Time-Sharing Experiments in the Social Sciences is an NSF program that supports embedding experiments within nationally representative surveys. And there were a slew somewhere, like 17 experiments assessing racial bias embedded in these survey studies. And even though most produced publications evidence showing essentially egalitarian responses or unbiased responses, or in a subset, what he showed was black respondents showed more in-group favoritism than did white respondents, that those findings were almost all unpublished, like 80-90% of those were unpublished. Now someone suppressed that, or someone chose not to publish it. Right? And so that people would consider not publishing something that they know is going to create problems for them is rational within the context of the individual researcher making a decision. But then it really harms and undercuts the validity of the widespread conclusions in the field, because data that contrasts with dominant narratives doesn't get published.

Zach Rausch

When you're in a field which has really large-scale ideological imbalances, what ends up happening is you have a dominant narrative based on whatever group is most prominent in that area, and then that leads to studies that don't support the dominant narrative, don't get cited, so they end up getting ignored. Then people who want to publish something that goes against the dominant narrative are more likely to self-suppress, or maybe even those studies get suppressed in the first place. And then there are all sorts of different long-term impacts, right?

Lee Jussim

Right.

Zach Rausch

Can you talk a little bit about how we got to this place in the first place?

Lee Jussim

Somewhere between the 60s and 90s, you have this dramatic spike in the sort of the ratio of academics on the left to academics on the right. It jumps from 3/4:1 to like 8/9/10:1, when you have 80%, 90%, 95%, 99% of the people on the left, two things happen: things that people on the left believe, but which may involve assumptions or ideologically-based beliefs because everyone believes them become taken to be true. They're just facts. And anyone who thinks otherwise is either depraved or stupid. And so if you believe otherwise, you're now in an environment where many people believe you're depraved or stupid. This essentially creates a hostile work environment, not really just for Conservatives, but for anyone who is willing to challenge these sort of leftist orthodoxies and shibboleths. So a common manifestation over the last year or two are faculty are constantly getting themselves in trouble for expressing criticisms of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. Whether or not the political skew corrupts science, it is in the process of creating a hostile environment for anyone who descends from the prevailing views. Now, this started with you asking, how did this happen?

So now my answer is, for whatever reason, the skew became more heavily left starting in the 60s and 70s. It is now so left that it has created essentially a mentality of groupthink and conformity. And you are at high risk of denunciation, ostracism, and even you are at higher risk of being sanctioned in some way if you don't conform to the prevailing ideology, regardless of how that affects one's science.

Zach Rausch

Right, and that creates an incentive structure that keeps the imbalance going.

Lee Jussim

Right, absolutely. You may not have to be conservative. You can be a centrist. You can be a not-far-enough leftist now. Why would you go into academia and subject yourself to the kind of politically hostile environment that is now breaking out all over the place? Why wouldn't you find some other avenue to express those intellectual interests?

Zach Rausch

Is ideological homogeneity always a problem? Is that always going to create this kind of hostile environment, or is there some other variable that we also need to account for?

Lee Jussim

Well, nothing's always. I mean, not a few biases are always, but they can still be bad, whether they are conventional race or gender biases or political biases. You don't need it to be all. You just need it to be bad enough that it's like, "Okay, I won't deal with that." No, I mean, I think there are plenty of reasonable people on the left in academia who are not hostile to people with opposing views, who you can work with and who are not simply grinding political axes under the guise of conducting social science. I think there are a lot of people like that. Actually, that doesn't change the lay of the land, because let's say you do work that contests some leftist narrative, whether it's on stereotypes or discrimination or social justice or the characteristics of Liberals and Conservatives. And you have a good publication, you're accomplished, you develop the skills, you work hard, you get the papers published. And I've said repeatedly that I've never had trouble getting the stuff published. So this is all plausible. Okay, so you apply for a job, an academic job, there's four people on the search committee. Really, all you need is one to torpedo your job.

If one person says this is a disaster area, you're not going to be one of the people on the short list. So you don't need most people to be like this. You just need a strong enough minority to obstruct the walking back of this relentlessly and progressively more extreme leftward drift of academia.

Zach Rausch

And so for our listeners who are not in the social sciences, why should they care? Like, why does this matter, and why do you care so much about it?

Lee Jussim

There are, in my opinion, many reasons to care about it. The most important is that fields that aspire to be scientific, which certainly includes psychology, most of psychology and most of the social sciences purport to be truth-seeking enterprises. And if the claims that emerge from these fields are corrupted by the political agendas of the scientists who populate them, then the truth claims emerging from those fields will be eventually demonstrably false. Because, whether it's social programs or policies or anything else that emerges on the basis of claims that have emerged from politically corrupt social science are going to be invalid. There's lots of examples of this. But just to get concrete, the poster child for this is implicit bias trainings. The advocates of implicit bias trainings can cite lots of articles about implicit bias. But over the last five or seven years, there has been a great sort of walking back of the claims in the peer reviewed scientific literature that have been made on the basis of the first 15 years of work on implicit bias. There are peer reviewed articles in really mainstream and even kind of prestigious publications with titles like, "The Delusive Nature of the Implicit Bias Construct."

And if the work really has been wildly oversold, is not anywhere near what it's cracked up to be, which I think is true, then what you would find is that when people institute these trainings in the real world, they will accomplish almost nothing, and they might even be counterproductive.

Zach Rausch

So it's been ten years, maybe even eight, now that when you wrote this piece, "Political Diversity Will Improve Social Psychological Science." In this span of eight years, have things gotten better, in your view, gotten worse? The same? Where do you stand on this?

Lee Jussim

When we wrote the piece, when we wrote the 2014/15 piece, we were writing like 2013/14 published in 2015, I think we were really optimistic. We thought academia might have there was a chance it genuinely believed its rhetoric about the benefits of diversity because there's like, soaring rhetoric about the benefits of diversity. "Everyone should be included. We have so many pressing problems.

We need everybody involved. Discrimination is bad. It's a personal injustice, and people bring different perspectives and standpoints. And it's all important to understanding all these pressing problems." Like that's the rhetoric, right? In that context, it is deeply ironic that academia has become essentially a club for the left-most 10% to 20% of the country. So this rhetoric about inclusivity and diversity, it's a form of inclusion that excludes about 80% of the country. I don't see it reversing anytime soon. It was like 20 years or so, the Supreme Court ruled that universities can actually use diversity as one of their, not the only thing for admissions, but it certainly can be one of the criteria they use for admissions. That having a healthy, vibrant academic environment, diversity has some value.

This is a quote from this 2003 decision from the Supreme Court: "There are many possible bases for diversity admissions. People who have lived or traveled widely abroad, are fluent in several languages, have overcome personal adversity and family hardship, have exceptional records of extensive community service, and have had successful careers in other fields. All applicants have the opportunity to highlight their own potential diversity contributions." Okay, so why did I just quote that? Because that has nothing, that is entirely disconnected from the manner in which universities are instituting diversity, equity, and inclusion. That is, you will have no added value by virtue of having lived abroad or overcoming personal adversity. That is given literally no weight.

Zach Rausch

Do you see some value, though, in the current DEI trainings that do exist, or do you think we need to completely change the way that we're talking about this?

Lee Jussim

I am torn because that there are proactive steps that universities take, proactive steps to increase their openness and receptivity and support for students who can't keep up with the euphemism treadmill. So, ten years ago it would have been marginalized groups or minority groups. Now, like, what is it like minoritized groups, whatever that term is that refers your term of choice to refer to people who have come from difficult backgrounds, who belong to demographic groups that have suffered long histories of oppression, ostracism, and stigma, that the universities take proactive steps to be more inviting places to those sorts of people. That is a good thing. That it's being frequently instituted in such a manner that also functions to exclude, create a hostile environment for, and generally dismiss somewhere around 70% or 80% of the rest of the population, I think is a

betrayal of those diversity and inclusion principles that universities claim to be advancing while they provide these programs targeting specific groups.

Zach Rausch

We're coming to the end of the interview, so I want to end with maybe some hopeful note of what can be done, maybe your hope for the future and what you'd like to leave our listeners with.

Lee Jussim

I would say the most hopeful route is to abandon all hope. I see no reason to believe that the trajectory of academia anyway is going to change anytime soon. And once you abandon all hope, someone like me, I'm tenured full professor. I can now mostly throw caution to the wind. And so, what we have done is form a new academic professional organization. So Heterodox Academy has been great. It has provided a forum for advocating for and advancing political diversity and other forms of intellectual diversity. It provides a forum for all sorts of discussions and ideas. But our group, which is the Society for Open Inquiry in Behavioral Sciences, is a conventional professional academic organization. That is, we have a Journal. I am actually the editor of the Journal, and we will be having a conference over the summer. And the idea is to provide a forum for ideas and research that reflects the value of open inquiry, is that if the work is based on comparably rigorous standards as most of what's out there, then it deserves the same forum, the same play, the same exposure to not just academia, but to the public as other work.

Zach Rausch

Fascinating discussion and really appreciate having you on, Lee.

Lee Jussim

It's been fun. Thank you.

Zach Rausch

Lee Jussim on Heterodox out Loud. If you enjoyed this episode, subscribe and listen to more thought-provoking takes from our blog authors. To learn more about the current state of free inquiry and ideological diversity on campus, join us at the 2022 Heterodox Academy conference in Denver this June. You can watch some outstanding speakers, including Jonathan Haidt, Batya Ungar-

Sargon, Matt Yglesias, Glenn Loury, John McWhorter, and many more. Get details at HeterodoxAcademy.org. Thanks to Davies content for producing this podcast and to Kara Boyer on our communications team. I'm Zach Rausch. Until next time.