

Can friendships be bipartisan? The effects of political ideology on peer relationships

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Abstract

Although political ideology has been examined extensively as a predictor of individual differences, it has been absent in the interpersonal relationships literature. Political ideology may have strong effects on friendship patterns because of its polarizing nature. Findings among actual friendship groups (Study 1) indicated a degree of similarity in peers' political ideology alignments, but also suggested that liberals and conservatives were comfortable with some level of bipartisanship among their friends. In an experimental condition with hypothetical peers (Study 2), individuals' political ideology predicted their reported friendship potential (perceived similarity and desire for friendship) with gay-affirming and gay-disapproving peers whose ideologies were not explicitly indicated. This effect of political ideology on friendship potential was significant over and above the effect predicted by individuals' similarity or dissimilarity on sexual minority attitudes with these peers. Findings highlight the overarching relevance of political ideology as a factor that contributes to friendship patterns.

Keywords

political ideology, peer groups, intergroup relations, prejudice, liberalism, conservatism, homophobic attitudes

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"It's nice to say 'Let's be bipartisan.' But we're a partisan nation. We were raised as a partisan nation."
Colin Powell

Hewstone, & Voci, 2007). The peer relationships literature has examined friendships on account of

Peer friendships have a significant role in promoting positive intergroup relations. Cross-group friendships, when they exist, can foster empathy, lower intergroup anxiety, and improve intergroup attitudes (Barlow, Louis, & Hewstone, 2009; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Turner,

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shared social identities such as gender, race, or sexual orientation (Currarini, Jackson, & Pin, 2010; Kao & Joyner, 2004; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Ueno, 2010). Nevertheless, this research has yet to examine friendship patterns on account of political ideology, despite the expansive literature indicating that political ideology is a salient social identity for people in many countries and one that explains individual differences on numerous issues (for a review, see Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Thus, we examined political ideology and its effects on friendship patterns within actual peer groups (Study 1) and from a more experimental framework (Study 2). There are important implications for understanding the degree to which partisan or bipartisan friendships exist, and how broadly the effects of political ideology apply to and explain friendship patterns. This knowledge could inform efforts to improve relationships between liberals and conservatives, as friendships often provide ideal conditions for this process (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Contextualizing liberal and conservative social identities

Although several classification systems have been proposed to describe political ideology social identities in the U.S., most individuals readily identify with and make in-group and out-group distinctions using the liberal-conservative dichotomy (Jost, 2006). Jost et al. (2003) identified the core dimensions of liberalism and conservatism to be their positions toward social change and equality. Conservatism was characterized by resistance to social change and opposition to social equality, motivated by a desire to reduce uncertainty and perceived threat. In contrast, liberalism was characterized by support for social change and greater social equality.

Outside these core dimensions of liberalism and conservatism, many peripheral attitudes toward specific social policies are integrally associated with these identities (Jost et al., 2003). For

instance, liberals and conservatives in the U.S. differ on attitudes toward same-sex marriage and abortion (Chambers, Baron, & Inman, 2006; Haslam & Levy, 2006). Liberals also report more favorable attitudes toward sexual minorities and racial minorities than do conservatives (Cornelis & van Hiel, 2006; Haslam & Levy, 2006; Lambert & Chasteen, 1997). Consequently, the liberal-conservative dichotomy is a parsimonious way to predict many individual differences with great accuracy. However, these issues have not been examined adequately within interpersonal relationships.

Political ideology as a predictor of peer friendship patterns

Beyond individual differences on account of liberalism and conservatism, it is important to examine the role of these identities and effects of their differences at a broader interpersonal level. As stated by the basic similarity-attraction and homophily hypotheses, individuals are attracted to and initiate relationships with those who share similar social identities and attitudes (Byrne, 1971; Kandel, 1978). Individuals often choose to affiliate with similar peers, and socialization may increase similarity over time (Kandel, 1978). Social identity theory suggests that this can be motivated by in-group favoritism (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Terry & Hogg, 2001), and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) suggests a similar motivation for similarity, in that individuals seek information from others to validate their own beliefs.

Several studies have examined basic peer similarity on specific factors (e.g., race, sexual orientation, or racial and sexual minority attitudes; Currarini et al., 2010; Kao & Joyner, 2004; Poteat, 2007; Poteat & Spanierman, 2010; Ueno, 2010) and support the aforementioned theoretical perspectives. For example, peer groups often are more homogenous than diverse in their racial or ethnic composition (Currarini et al., 2010; Kao & Joyner, 2004) or sexual-orientation

composition (Ueno, 2010). Also, peers report similar sexual minority and racial-minority attitudes (Poteat & Spanierman, 2010). These results imply that individuals are attracted to and choose friends directly because of their similarity on these specific identities or attitudes (i.e., the result of a basic similarity-attraction effect; Byrne, 1971). Yet, it is possible that broader belief systems, such as political ideology, also inform these decisions.

Individuals' political ideology could predict their perceived potential for friendship with peers (e.g., perceived similarity or desire for friendship) not only in situations where they have direct knowledge of peers' political ideologies, which would itself constitute a basic similarity-attraction effect (Byrne, 1971), but also in situations where they have only more limited information. We expect that ideology will predict friendship potential in circumstances where information is introduced (e.g., specific attitudes) that individuals could tie to political ideology, thus raising its salience and likelihood to influence their decisions around friendship initiation. In these circumstances, individuals may still derive political ideology information to make inferences about peers' ideologies. This may occur because many attitudes are polarized around liberalism and conservatism (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Jost et al., 2003) and because liberals and conservatives do perceive that they hold different attitudes on various issues (Chambers et al., 2006). For example, liberals might befriend peers with affirming attitudes toward sexual minorities even when they have no explicit knowledge of their political ideology. Because of the overall importance and salience of political ideology to many individuals (Jost, 2006), it could predict friendship potential in these limited-information scenarios even when controlling for the basic similarity-attraction effect on account of the specific shared attitude (e.g., sexual minority attitudes). This would highlight the broader and overarching relevance of political ideology as a contributing factor to friendship patterns.

Are bipartisan friendships possible?

On the basis of the above theories and findings, it follows that bipartisan friendships would likely be uncommon. Moreover, because of the salience of liberal and conservative identities and because many attitudes are polarized around them (Jost et al., 2003), political ideology may have a particularly strong effect on friendship patterns. For instance, shared ideological orientations among peers may also increase the likelihood of similarity on the myriad attitudes polarized around this identity (Chambers et al., 2006; Haslam & Levy, 2006; Lambert & Chasteen, 1997). For these reasons, individuals may place an especially high value on and preference for friendships with peers who share similar ideological identities.

Other arguments suggest that bipartisan friendships are more common than presumed by the above theories. First, Jost et al. (2003) noted arguments from other scholars that individuals do not hold ideologies coherent or consistent enough to influence their behaviors. From this view, ideology should have no effect on friendship patterns because it would not represent a belief system that individuals could use to reliably determine their similarity with other peers. Second, trustworthiness, cooperation, and other prosocial behaviors are foundational for relationships (Cottrell, Neuberg, & Li, 2007; Rokeach, 1973). When present, these factors may fully diminish the divisive effects of ideological differences. Third, bipartisan friendships may be more common than expected because individuals report lower expectations for similarity with friends than romantic partners (Sprecher & Regan, 2002). Finally, peers may report less similarity on broader ideological beliefs than specific attitudes, which have been the point of focus in extant research. Peers may be receptive to some degree of socialization (e.g., on specific attitudes), but may be resistant to the more substantial socialization of their overarching liberal or conservative belief system. Also, individuals may care

less about a peer's abstract ideological identity as long as they agree on a specific concrete issue of relevance to them. Thus, although we expect to identify significant effects of political ideology in relation to friendship patterns, we also anticipate some nuance to this pattern. To address these competing arguments and for comparison purposes, we examined peer similarity on political ideology and specific attitudes.

The current investigation

In two studies, we examined several issues related to friendship patterns on account of political ideology. In Study 1, we tested the degree of peer similarity on political ideology and sexual minority attitudes within actual peer dyads and groups. We hypothesized that peers would report similar ideological orientations. Also, we hypothesized that the degree of similarity among peers would be comparable for liberal and conservative groups (i.e., we did not expect to identify greater variance in the political ideology orientations of individuals within overall more liberal peer groups than conservative peer groups). In addition, we expected to identify peer similarity on sexual minority attitudes, congruent with prior findings (Poteat & Spanierman, 2010). We expected that similarity on these specific attitudes would be greater than for political ideology because peers are likely more effective at socializing specific attitudes to produce greater peer similarity than entire belief systems. We selected sexual minority attitudes because prior studies have documented differences on these attitudes between liberals and conservatives (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Poteat & Mereish, *in press*), which was important in the context of our second study.

In Study 2, we used a two-condition experimental approach to assess the effects of political ideology on friendship potential (i.e., desire for friendship and perceived similarity) with several hypothetical peers presented in vignettes, each of whom we described with multiple prosocial characteristics. In the ideology condition, we provided participants with information only on peers' political ideologies, which we manipulated across

vignettes. For participants in the attitude condition, we provided information only on peers' specific attitudes (i.e., sexual minority attitudes). On the basis of the similarity-attraction and homophily hypotheses (Byrne, 1971; Kandel, 1978) and the salience of political ideology (Jost, 2006), we hypothesized that the association between political ideology and friendship potential with these peers would be comparable in both conditions. We expected that individuals would still derive significant political ideology information about peers on the basis of their specific sexual minority attitudes. Finally, we utilized the data from participants in the attitude condition to more rigorously test the effects of political ideology on friendship potential with gay-affirming and gay-disapproving peers over and above the basic similarity-attraction effect expected from their similar or dissimilar sexual minority attitudes with these peers. To do so, we tested a model of this process (Figure 1a). We hypothesized that political ideology would directly predict perceived friendship potential with these peers (Paths A and B) even when controlling for its effect through individuals' own sexual minority attitudes (Path C), which we also expected to predict friendship potential with both peers (Paths D and E).

Study 1

Method

Participants were 196 college students (77% women, 68.4% White, 95.9% heterosexual) ages 18 to 25 ($M = 20.45$, $SD = 1.13$), comprising 69 friendship dyads or groups, ranging from two to six individuals in size ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.72$). Participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology courses at a large Midwestern and a small New England university and were required to have at least one friend participate to receive research credit. All friends must have known and interacted with one another for at least two months. Participants completed the survey independently online after receiving a web link to the administration site. Psychology students entered their own names, and their friends entered their

own names and the name of the student who asked them to participate. This allowed us to identify individuals in the same friendship group or dyad and ensure that individuals were in only one group.

Measures

Political ideology We assessed political ideology with three items adapted from Liu and Latané (1998; 1 = *very liberal*, 9 = *very conservative*): “Overall, how would you describe your political ideology”; “How would you describe your views on social issues”; “How would you describe your views on economic issues?” Higher scores indicate a stronger conservative ideology and lower scores a stronger liberal ideology ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.57$). The reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .83$.

Sexual minority attitudes We assessed sexual minority attitudes using the 10-item Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale – Short Form (ATLG; Herek, 1988). Sample items include, “Female homosexuality is a sin” and “I think male homosexuals are disgusting” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 9 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate greater sexual prejudice ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.62$). One item, “State laws regulating private, consenting lesbian behavior should be loosened,” was replaced with the item, “Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions,” from the full-scale version because of court rulings on past criminalization of same-sex behavior (*Lawrence v. Texas*, 2003). The reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .90$.

Results

Prior to testing for peer similarity on political ideology and ATLG, we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test for basic individual differences on account of gender and race. We identified a significant main effect for gender, Wilks' $\Lambda = .94$, $F(2, 189) = 6.09$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. The main effect for race and the interaction between gender and race were not significant.

Follow-up univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) indicated that men reported higher ATLG than did women, $F(1, 190) = 9.03$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, but that gender differences were not significant for political ideology, $F(1, 190) = 0.18$, $p = .68$. Conservatism and ATLG were significantly associated ($r = .36$, $p < .001$).

We used SAS PROC MIXED for multilevel modeling to analyze the nested data of individuals (Level 1) within their peer group (Level 2). We computed two fully unconditional null models, one for political ideology and one for ATLG. In each model, this partitioned the total variance in scores to variance within and between peer groups. These models tested whether there were significant group differences in political ideology and sexual prejudice. The amount of variance in scores across peer groups was significant for ideology ($Z = 2.09$, $p = .01$) and ATLG ($Z = 3.74$, $p < .001$). Next, we calculated the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) from these results to determine more specifically the degree of peer similarity. Higher ICCs indicate that a greater proportion of total variance exists between groups relative to within groups, and that individuals in the same peer group share a higher level of similarity/interdependence. The ICC for ideology was .19, which indicated that 19% of the total variance in ideology scores was based on peer group membership. For ATLG, the ICC was .41, which indicated that 41% of the total variance in ATLG scores was based on peer group membership. Because there were significant individual differences on ATLG based on gender, and because groups tend to be more gender homogenous than diverse (Kandel, 1978), the size of the ICC for ATLG potentially could have been due to the gender composition of the groups. We recalculated this ICC controlling for the group gender composition and found that it was equivalent.

Finally, we calculated the amount of variance in political ideology and ATLG among group members for each peer group and tested whether these variances were significantly associated with the overall level of liberalism/conservatism of the group. As hypothesized, the associations were

not significant (ideology: $r = .18, p = .13$; ATLG: $r = .19, p = .12$), indicating that the amount of variance in liberalism/conservatism and ATLG among peers in the same group was similar within liberal and conservative peer groups.

Discussion

Findings from Study 1 provide several insights into friendship patterns related to political ideology and associated attitudes. Similar to findings for other identities and attitudes (Currarini et al., 2010; Kao & Joyner, 2004; Ueno, 2010), our findings support our foundational hypothesis that peers hold similar political ideology alignments and specific related attitudes, in this case sexual minority attitudes. Additionally, the level of peer similarity on ideology and these attitudes was comparable across liberal and conservative peer groups. The amount of variance in the ideology orientations and sexual minority attitudes of group members was not associated with the overall extent to which these groups were liberal or conservative. Our political ideology findings support the argument that individuals' ideologies are relevant and can influence their behaviors (Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2003). In this case, individuals choose friends whose ideology orientations are similar to their own, perhaps due to in-group favoritism (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Terry & Hogg, 2001) or to increase the likelihood that they will receive validation (Festinger, 1954). Our documentation of peer similarity on sexual minority attitudes is congruent with prior studies (Poteat & Spanierman, 2010), and may be explained by the same underlying motivations.

By examining peer similarity on political ideology and sexual minority attitudes, we were able to compare the sizes of these patterns. As hypothesized, peers reported significant, but not overwhelming, similarity on their level of liberalism/conservatism. This warrants some qualification to the notion that political ideology differences are highly divisive and that bipartisan friendships are rare. In actuality, individuals appear comfortable with some level of bipartisanship among their friends. Further, this level of peer

dissimilarity (i.e., bipartisanship) was larger than for their specific sexual minority attitudes. Differential socialization processes may partially explain these distinct patterns (Kandel, 1978). Peers may be more effective at socializing specific and concrete attitudes, whereas broader and more abstract ideological belief systems may be more resistant to socialization. In sum, it is likely easier for peers to socialize and influence individuals' specific attitudes than their entire belief systems. This may explain why peers ultimately report higher levels of similarity on specific attitudes than ideologies.

Study 2

In Study 2, we tested a condition in which political ideology predicted friendship potential with peers whose sexual minority attitudes, but not political ideology, were known. We compared these effects to those in a second condition in which peers' political ideologies were indicated. Also, in the first condition we tested if the direct effects of political ideology remained significant even when controlling for the effects of individuals' own sexual minority attitudes as part of a basic similarity-attraction effect with the gay-affirming and gay-disapproving peers.

Method

Participants and procedures Participants were 596 adults (76.2% women, 64.6% White, 91.4% heterosexual) ages 17 to 67 ($M = 24.29$, $SD = 9.27$) recruited through undergraduate courses at a New England university ($n = 324$) and online community forums ($n = 272$). We made efforts to recruit participants evenly through general and politically related discussion and advertising forums in large and small communities across the U.S. Online participant recruitment and survey completion are increasingly common and successful ways to attain more diverse samples than typically represented by undergraduate psychology students (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). Results vary little from those in laboratory settings (Gosling, Vazire,

Srivastava, & John, 2004). Most participants (74.8%) were currently students. Of the participants, 211 read peer descriptions that included only information on peers' attitudes toward sexual minorities (attitude condition), and 385 read peer descriptions that included only information on peers' political ideology (ideology condition). All other information about each peer was held constant across conditions. Participants completed the survey online after receiving a web link to the administration site and were invited to enter into a raffle for several prizes for their participation.

Measures

All participants completed the political ideology items described in Study 1 ($\alpha = .88$; 1 = *very liberal*, 7 = *very conservative*), and participants in the attitude condition also completed the ATLG scale described in Study 1 ($\alpha = .89$). Participants in both conditions completed several other measures prior to reading the peer vignettes described below (e.g., on personality, cognition, other beliefs). However, these data were not part of the current study.

Peer vignettes Participants read three brief vignettes, each describing a different peer (Appendix A). In all vignettes, the peer was described with prosocial characteristics and as open to making new friends. In the attitude condition, we included information on sexual minority attitudes, manipulated across vignettes, to indicate that the peer was gay-affirming, gay-disapproving, or a filler peer for which we provided no attitude information. In the ideology condition, we included information on political ideology, manipulated across vignettes, to indicate that the peer identified as liberal, conservative, or a filler peer for which we provided no ideology information. Peers in both conditions were programmed to appear as the same gender as the participant. The order of the affirming and disapproving peer (attitude condition) or liberal and conservative peer (ideology condition)

was counterbalanced to appear either first or third, and the filler peer always appeared second. Participants were not told how many peers they would rate and the study was only described broadly as one on interpersonal relationships. We documented no order effects in either condition.

Friendship potential We measured friendship potential using items that assessed perceived similarity (5 items; e.g., "[Peer name] is someone I could relate with," and "[Peer name] is similar to me"; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 9 = *strongly agree*) and desire for friendship (8 items; e.g., "I would like to get to know [peer name]," and "[peer name] is someone I would like as a friend"; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 9 = *strongly agree*) with each peer. An exploratory factor analysis for each vignette indicated that these items loaded as expected on two distinct factors. The first factor (desire for friendship) accounted for 56–63% of the variance and the second factor (perceived similarity) accounted for 7–11% of the variance across the six total vignettes. Higher scores indicate greater perceived similarity and desire for friendship. The reliability coefficients for perceived similarity were $\alpha = .89, .84$, and $.89$ for the disapproving, filler, and affirming peer, and $\alpha = .91, .86$, and $.92$ for the conservative, filler, and liberal peer. The reliability coefficients for desire for friendship were $\alpha = .94, .94$, and $.95$ for the disapproving, filler, and affirming peer, respectively, and $\alpha = .94, .93$, and $.94$ for the conservative, filler, and liberal peers, respectively. We treated the combined factors as an index of perceived friendship potential, as they were largely correlated in each of the vignettes ($r_s = .65-.68, p < .001$).

Results

We conducted two MANOVAs, one for the attitude and one for the ideology condition, to test for differences between participants from the university and community forums. There were some differences in the attitude, Wilks's $\Lambda = .91$, $F(5, 200) = 3.84, p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, and ideology

condition, Wilks's $\Lambda = .95$, $F(4, 375) = 4.55$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. In the attitude condition, with small effect sizes, community participants reported higher scores than university participants on friendship potential with the filler peer, $F(1, 204) = 15.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. In the ideology condition, with small effect sizes, university participants reported higher scores than community participants on conservatism, $F(1, 378) = 5.60$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, friendship potential with the conservative peer, $F(1, 378) = 5.86$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, and friendship potential with the filler peer, $F(1, 378) = 10.73$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Although these mean levels differed, effect sizes were small and the patterns of associations among the factors were comparable. Thus, we combined the university and community forum samples for our subsequent analyses.

Effects of political ideology on friendship potential across conditions In the attitude condition, political ideology and ATLG were

both associated with friendship potential with the gay-affirming and gay-disapproving peer in the expected directions, and neither was associated with friendship potential with the filler peer (Table 1a). In the ideology condition, political ideology was associated with friendship potential with the liberal and conservative peer in the expected directions, and not with the filler peer (Table 1b).

We conducted two hierarchal regression analyses to test the moderating effect of condition type (i.e., attitude vs. ideology condition) on the association between political ideology and friendship potential with the respective peers (conservative vs. gay-disapproving peer, liberal vs. gay-affirming peer). We centered our variables to reduce the effects of multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). In the first model, we entered the main effects of political ideology and condition type on Step 1 and their interaction on Step 2 to predict friendship potential with the conservative or gay-disapproving peer. We followed these

Table 1a. Correlations and descriptive statistics for Study 2: Attitude condition

Measures	Conservatism	ATLG	FP-Disapproving	FP-Filler	FP-Affirming
Conservatism	—				
ATLG	.48**	—			
FP-Disapproving	.52**	.58**	—		
FP-Filler	.05	.04	.25**	—	
FP-Affirming	-.44**	-.58**	-.48**	.09	—
<i>M</i>	3.07	2.50	4.00	5.92	6.66
<i>SD</i>	1.30	1.45	1.51	1.17	1.32

Note. ATLG = attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (higher scores = greater sexual prejudice); FP-Disapproving = friendship potential with gay-disapproving peer; FP-Filler = friendship potential with filler peer; FP-Affirming = friendship potential with gay-affirming peer. ** $p < .01$.

Table 1b. Correlations and descriptive statistics for Study 2: Ideology condition

Measures	Conservatism	FP-Conservative	FP-Filler	FP-Liberal
Conservatism	—			
FP-Conservative	.57**	—		
FP-Filler	-.02	.24**	—	
FP-Liberal	-.57**	-.42**	.26**	—
<i>M</i>	3.26	4.92	6.10	6.30
<i>SD</i>	1.43	1.58	1.12	1.34

Note. FP-Conservative = friendship potential with conservative peer; FP-Filler = friendship potential with filler peer; FP-Liberal = friendship potential with liberal peer. ** $p < .01$

Table 2. Moderating effects of condition for Study 2

Independent variables	B	β	R^2
Model 1: Friendship potential with conservative/disapproving peer			
Step 1: Political ideology	0.59***	.53***	.46***
Condition (attitude vs. ideology)	1.24***	.38***	
Step 2: Political ideology	0.61***	.55***	$\Delta R^2 = .00$
Condition (attitude vs. ideology)	1.24***	.37***	
Political ideology \times condition	-0.01	-.02	
Model 2: Friendship potential with liberal/affirming peer			
Step 1: Political ideology	-0.52***	-.55***	.34***
Condition (attitude vs. ideology)	-0.41***	-.15***	
Step 2: Political ideology	-0.34**	-.36**	$\Delta R^2 = .00$
Condition (attitude vs. ideology)	-0.42***	-.15***	
Political ideology \times condition	-0.10	-.20	

Note: $N = 587$. ΔR^2 = change in percent variance accounted for between Steps 1 and 2.
** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

same steps to predict friendship potential with the liberal or gay-affirming peer in the second model. The moderating effect of condition was not significant in either model ($\beta = -0.02, p = .89$ and $\beta = -.20, p = .14$, respectively; Table 2). Thus, political ideology was as strongly associated with friendship potential when only peers' specific attitudes were known as it was when peers' political ideologies were explicitly known.

Testing the continued direct effect of political ideology on friendship patterns Using LISREL 8.8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006), we tested models of political ideology effects on friendship potential with gay-affirming and gay-disapproving peers (Figures 1a–c). We used several indices to

assess if each model was a good fit to the data: chi-square/ df ratio, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), incremental fit (IFI), comparative fit (CFI), and non-normed fit (NNFI). IFI, CFI, and NNFI values of at least .90 indicate the model to be a good fit to the data (Kline, 1998), RMSEA values of .08 or below are recommended (Hu & Bentler, 1999), and values of the chi-square/ df ratio of less than 3 indicate an adequate fit (Kline, 1998).

We tested the measurement model, followed by the two latent models. We created three-item parcels as indicators of sexual minority attitudes. Parcels can improve reliability and minimize potential violations of assumptions of multivariate normality (Coffman & MacCallum, 2005). We

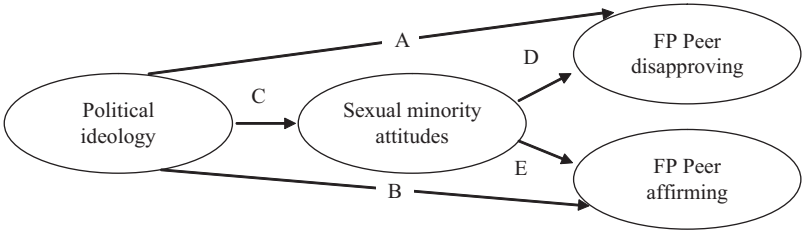


Figure 1a. Hypothesized model in which the effects of political ideology (indicated by level of conservatism) on friendship potential with gay-affirming and gay-disapproving peers are direct and partially indirect, mediated by sexual minority attitudes.

Table 3. Goodness of fit for Study 2 mediation models

Model	Fit indices						
	χ^2	<i>df</i>	χ^2/df	IFI	CFI	NNFI	RMSEA (90% CI)
Measurement model	78.36	29	2.70	.98	.98	.96	0.091(.067, 0.12)
Full mediation (Figure 1b)	94.54	33	2.86	.97	.97	.96	0.095(.073, 0.12)
Partial mediation (Figure 1c)	79.37	31	2.56	.98	.98	.97	0.087(.064, 0.11)

Note. IFI = incremental fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; NNFI = non-normed fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; 90% CI = confidence interval. Parentheses indicate upper and lower bounds of the 90% CI.

formed parcels based on the factor loadings of each item so that they were evenly distributed across the parcels. We used the three items of political ideology as indicators of this latent factor, with higher scores indicating greater conservatism. Finally, we used the subscales of perceived similarity and desire for friendship as indicators of friendship potential for the gay-affirming and gay-disapproving peers. We included friendship potential with both peers in the same model because we used a within-group design and wanted to account for the association between the ratings of these two peers. All indicators were constrained to load only on their respective latent factor. Correlations among the latent factors were free to be estimated, but the measurement errors were not allowed to correlate. The measurement model was an adequate fit (Table 3).

Finally, we tested and compared the latent models (Figure 1b and 1c) in which the effects of political ideology were either partially or fully mediated by sexual minority attitudes. Both models were a good fit to the data (Table 3). In the partial-mediation model, the direct effects of political ideology on friendship potential

remained significant ($\beta = .20$ and $-.23$, $p < .01$, for the gay-disapproving and gay-approving peer) even when controlling for the strong similarity-attraction effect on account of individuals' own sexual minority attitudes. Also, the indirect effects of political ideology on friendship potential with the gay-affirming and gay-disapproving peer through sexual minority attitudes were significant in the partial meditation model ($\beta = 0.33$, and $-.30$, $p < .01$, for the gay-disapproving and gay-approving peer), and full meditation model ($\beta = .42$ and $-.42$, $p < .01$, for the disapproving and approving peer).

Because the full-mediation model (i.e., with no direct effects of political ideology) was a nested model of the partial-mediation model (i.e., with direct effects of political ideology), we tested if the exclusion of the political ideology direct effects led to a significantly poorer fit of the model to the data. To do so, we tested the significance of the change in chi-square between the two models. The test was significant, $\Delta\chi^2 = 15.17$ ($df = 2$, $p < .001$), indicating that including the direct effects of political ideology yielded a better fit of the model to the data.

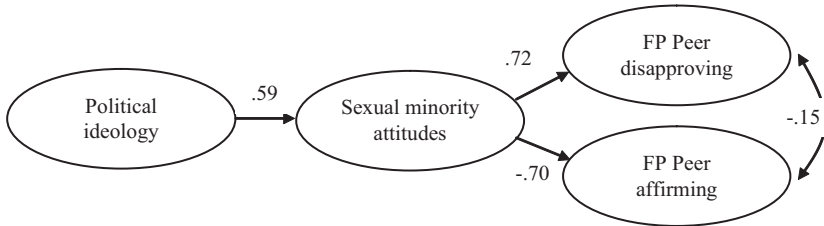


Figure 1b. Model in which the effects of political ideology (indicated by level of conservatism) on friendship potential with gay-affirming and gay-disapproving peers are fully indirect, mediated by sexual minority attitudes. *Note.* All path coefficients are standardized and significant at $p < .01$. FP Peer = Friendship potential with the respective peer.

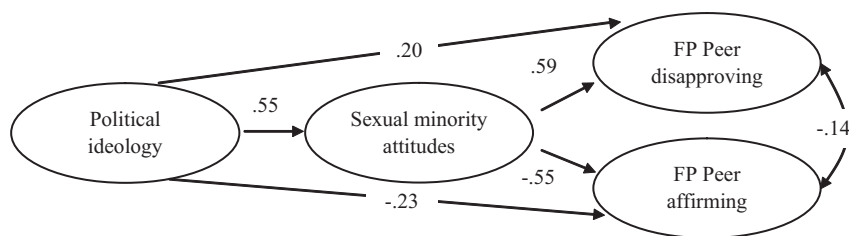


Figure 1c. Model in which the effects of political ideology (indicated by level of conservatism) on friendship potential with gay-affirming and gay-disapproving peers are direct and partially indirect, mediated by sexual minority attitudes.

Note. All path coefficients are standardized and significant at $p < .01$. FP Peer = Friendship potential with the respective peer.

Discussion

The results of Study 2 provide additional support for the overarching relevance and significance of political ideology in the prediction of peer friendship patterns. Political ideology predicted friendship potential not only with other liberal and conservative peers, as expected, but also with gay-affirming and gay-disapproving peers whose ideologies were not indicated. The comparable associations between political ideology and friendship potential in the ideology condition (i.e., in which ideologies were indicated) and attitude condition (i.e., in which only sexual minority attitudes were indicated) suggest that individuals still derive substantial information from peers' political ideologies even when this information is not explicitly known. Because political ideology is a central belief system around which many specific attitudes are polarized (Chambers et al., 2006; Haslam & Levy, 2006; Jost et al., 2003), individuals may automatically infer peers' political ideology even with only limited knowledge about other characteristics or attitudes of these peers. This may raise the salience of their own ideological identity, which may then contribute to and inform their decision to initiate a friendship.

The role of ideology as a predictor of friendship patterns Political ideology had direct and indirect effects on friendship potential with gay-affirming and gay-disapproving peers. Its effects were partially mediated through individuals' own sexual minority attitudes, which builds

on findings that liberals and conservatives differ on these attitudes (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Poteat & Mereish, in press). Our findings extend this to the interpersonal level to indicate that liberals and conservatives are attracted to different peers as friends partially because they hold these significantly different specific attitudes. This supports the similarity-attraction and homophily hypotheses in that liberals and conservatives select and initiate friendships with those who share similar social identities and attitudes (Byrne, 1971; Kandel, 1978). Additionally, this process might be motivated by liberals' and conservatives' in-group favoritism (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Terry & Hogg, 2001).

Of even greater interest, the direct effects of political ideology on friendship potential with these peers remained significant, over and above the strong basic similarity-attraction effects of individuals' own specific shared sexual minority attitudes. Further, the model was a significantly poorer fit when we excluded these direct effects. These findings especially highlight the important role of political ideology as a predictor of friendship patterns. Peers may not disclose their political ideology explicitly during initial interactions; however, they may express their views on some of the myriad other issues that are polarized around political ideology. In this case, individuals' political ideology may become salient and significantly influence their motivation to initiate a friendship, over and above the influence of sharing or not sharing the same view on the specific issue under discussion. Congruent with social

comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), individuals might be interested in befriending peers who share attitudes aligned with their political ideology in order to validate their own political beliefs.

As studies continue to document peer similarity on a range of specific factors (Currarini et al., 2010; Kao & Joyner, 2004; Poteat & Spanierman, 2010; Ueno, 2010), it is important to explain why certain broader patterns of similarities exist among peers. From our findings, the liberal-conservative classification system offers a parsimonious framework to explain peer similarity on a broad range of specific attitudes. Thus, greater attention to political ideology and its influence on peer friendship patterns is warranted.

General discussion

Although political ideology has been examined extensively as a predictor of individual differences, it has been absent in the literature on interpersonal relationships. Yet, as a salient belief system to many individuals and one around which many attitudes are polarized, it also has clear effects on friendship patterns, as documented in our studies. Our findings among actual peers (Study 1) and for hypothetical peers (Study 2) confirm that individuals generally prefer friendships with peers of the same political ideology. Further, political ideology explains why individuals choose friends on account of other more specific attitudes, which we demonstrated through the case of sexual minority attitudes in Study 2.

Attention to bipartisan friendships: Recognizing dissimilarity among peers

The predominant focus in the peer relationships literature has been on the documentation and explanation of similarity among peers (Byrne, 1971; Kandel, 1978; Kao & Joyner, 2004; McPherson et al., 2001; Poteat & Spanierman, 2010; Ueno, 2010), without adequate attention to peer dissimilarity. Although our findings contribute to this focus in some ways, those of Study 1 also highlight the existence of variability among group members in their ideological orientations,

signifying a level of bipartisanship. The findings of Study 1 suggest that ideological dissimilarity does not automatically deter friendships from being formed. Consequently, the peer friendship context could serve as an effective avenue to improve relations among liberals and conservatives and to facilitate constructive dialogue on the many issues connected to these social identities. Foundational relationship factors such as trustworthiness, cooperation, and other prosocial behaviors (Cottrell et al., 2007; Rokeach, 1973), should be considered in promoting these bipartisan relationships. Studies should continue to identify factors that foster the development of these relationships and that predict which individuals are more open to bipartisan relationships than others. Ultimately, this could offer a greater understanding of conditions that promote positive intergroup relations among liberals and conservatives. Promoting intergroup relations between liberals and conservatives through their friendships could be especially beneficial, as friendships often provide optimal conditions for intergroup interactions (Barlow et al., 2009; Molina & Wittig, 2006; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Strengths, limitations, and future research

The current studies extend the literature on political ideology and peer relationships in several ways. Our results indicate the degree to which peers are similar in their ideological orientation, and in doing so offer a balanced perspective to contradictory arguments around the role and level of influence of ideology in people's lives. They indicate that political ideology predicts the peers individuals may befriend and on what other attitudes they may be similar (e.g., sexual minority attitudes). Our experimental approach in Study 2 enabled us to focus specifically on the initial selection process and to control for ongoing socialization (Kandel, 1978), which we could not do in Study 1. Also, our use of vignettes allowed us to guard against confounding effects of other variables such as subjective physical attractiveness. They also allowed us to conduct a more

rigorous test of the overriding effect of political ideology by providing prosocial descriptions of each peer (e.g., trustworthy, dependable, caring, easygoing, open to new friends), which could have minimized the effects of ideology due to their foundational role in friendship formation (Cottrell et al., 2007). At the same time, our attention to actual peer groups and dyads in Study 1 provided evidence that these findings generalize to actual friendships and addressed concerns related to the validity of experimental approaches to study this phenomenon. However, future research might include a mixture of these approaches, perhaps by examining the relationship dynamics of liberal and conservative friends within an experimental setting.

We also note several limitations. Our studies focused on the liberal-conservative dichotomy, yet other political classification systems and identities exist. Friendship patterns and the strength of the effect of ideology may differ in contexts where there are more than two dominant ideologies. Whereas many prior studies have relied on a single-item assessment of liberalism-conservatism, and although we extended this to three items, future research should still consider using more comprehensive assessments of ideology as a way to capture greater nuance (e.g., to consider other identities such as libertarian). Also, our attention to liberalism and conservatism is framed within the U.S. political context. Future research should test if these patterns generalize to friendships in countries where ideology identities can be described using similar dichotomous classification systems. In addition, we focused on friendship potential in Study 2 to examine the role of ideology in friendship formation. However, future research should examine long-term socialization processes and the extent to which political ideologies are socialized among peers relative to other more specific attitudes or behaviors. Finally, although we recruited many nonstudent participants to extend beyond the typical college student population, we note that they were not a nationally representative sample.

Overall, our findings indicate the value of examining political ideology from a broader

interpersonal framework as a way to extend beyond the identification of basic individual differences on account of this identity. There is a clear value to examining the nuanced ways in which political ideology influences friendship patterns. As positions on social issues become increasingly polarized along liberal and conservative ideological lines in the U.S. (Jost, 2006), the implications of this for interpersonal relationships, and also how interpersonal relationships could alleviate this growing polarization, warrant greater attention. For example, it would be of interest to examine how these friendship dynamics are impacted by changes in the broader social context (e.g., by the current salience of an issue in the media or during election cycles). Moreover, although studies have focused predominantly on the significant divide between liberals and conservatives, there is a need to balance this with attention to factors and processes, such as friendship interactions, that promote positive intergroup relations between members of these groups, and factors that characterize those who develop bipartisan friendships.

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Appendix

Below are sample peer vignettes read by participants. Sample vignettes for participants recruited from the university are provided for the ideology condition. Participants outside the university read comparable vignettes without the focus on the university context. We provide sample vignettes as phrased for this sample in the attitude condition vignettes.

Conservative peer (male version, university-based example)

"Aaron is a student at [institution] currently narrowing down his choices for a major that will fit his career interests. His friends and girlfriend describe him as a trustworthy, well-rounded person who does well in his classes and makes time to relax. Aaron completed a survey like the one you just completed. Based on his responses, Aaron describes himself as having a clearly conservative ideology, he holds conservative views on social and economic policies, and he votes in favor for conservative politicians and laws. During his time here, Aaron has made some friends through student groups on campus and from his previous dorm. He is open to making new friends as well."

Filler peer (male version, university-based example)

"Colin is a student at [institution]. His friends and girlfriend describe him as trustworthy, someone you can depend on and who cares for others, and who is happy and generally satisfied with his life. He is relatively easygoing, while also having some things he is particularly passionate about. He enjoys conversation, although he would not say he was extremely extraverted. Colin has made friends through his classes and through student groups on campus, and is open to making new friends."

Liberal peer (male version, university-based example)

“Chris, a student at [institution], has not yet decided on a major but has several in mind. His friends and girlfriend describe him as easygoing, trustworthy, committed to school, and having a well-balanced schedule that allows some time for fun. Chris completed a survey like the one you just completed. Based on his responses, Chris describes himself as having a clearly liberal ideology, he holds liberal views on social and economic policies, and he votes in favor for liberal politicians and laws. Chris has made some friends through student organizations and his classes. He is also open to making new friends.”

Gay-disapproving peer (female version, community-based example)

“Erin describes herself as a typical person, and reports being involved in her work and having fun spending time with friends and family. Her friends and boyfriend describe her as trustworthy, someone you can depend on, and who is generally

satisfied with her life. Erin completed a survey like the one you just completed. Based on her responses, Erin is someone who believes that homosexual behavior is wrong, homosexuality negatively impacts society, and same-sex couples should not be allowed to adopt children. She also reports being open to making new friends, whether through work or other outlets.”

Gay-approving peer (female version, community-based example)

“Christine is someone whose friends and boyfriend describe as a committed person to both work and other people in her life. Christine tries to keep a well-balanced schedule that will allow her to work hard and also have time for fun. Christine completed a survey like the one you just completed. Based on her responses, Christine is someone who believes that homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality, the gay and lesbian community has a positive impact on society, and same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt children. She also reports being open to making new friends in and outside of work.”