

Support for Privilege Based on Nationality in Switched-At-Birth Scenario

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Abstract : Many of life's privileges (and burdens) are thrust on us at birth. Someone born white or male in the United States is also born with a set of advantages over someone born non-white or female. One aspect of privileges conferred by birth is that they are so entrenched in social institutions and social norms that until they are robustly challenged, they can be seen as a moral good. While American society increasingly confronts privileges based on gender and race, other types of privileges, like one's nationality, see less attention. The nationality one is born into can have enormous effects on one's personal life, work opportunities, and health outcomes. Yet, we predicted that although most Americans would regard it as absurd to think that white people have a right to protect their privileges and 'way of life', they would regard it as obvious that Americans have a right to protect the American way of life and associated privileges. In a preregistered study we presented 300 Americans randomly with one out of three 'privilege scales' in order to assess their agreement with certain statements. The domains for the privilege scales were nationality, race, and gender. Next, all participants completed the switched-at-birth task assessing one's tendency to essentialize nationality. We found that Americans are more approving of privilege based on nationality than of privilege based on gender and race. In addition, we found an interaction of condition with ideology, showing that conservatives are in general more approving of the privilege of any kind than liberals are, and they especially approve of privilege based on nationality. For the switched-at-birth task, we found that both, liberals as well as conservatives are equally willing to grant the child 100% American nationality. Whether or not one chose 100% is unrelated to the expressed approval of privilege based on nationality. One might hesitate to fully grant the child 100% American nationality in the task, yet disapprove of privilege based on nationality. This shows that as much as we see beholders of privilege being oblivious to their statuses within other social categories, like gender or race, we seem to detect the same blindness for the privilege based on nationality. Liberals showing relatively fewer support for privilege based on nationality compared to conservatives still refused to acknowledge the child as having become 100% American and thereby denying the privileges it potentially bestows upon them.

Keywords : thought experiment, anti-immigrant attitudes, privilege of nationality, immigration, moral circles, psychology

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