

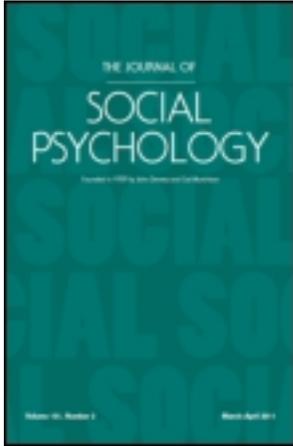
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The Distinct Roles of Subordinate and Superordinate Group Power, Conflict, and Categorization on Intergroup Prejudice in a Multiethnic Italian Territory

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ABSTRACT. A German-speaking population majority and an Italian-speaking minority have lived in Italian Tyrol, also called “South Tyrol,” an area of northern Italy, for 85 years. In contrast, Trentino, which is adjacent to South Tyrol, has always been an Italian-speaking region. For this latter population, thus, intergroup contact with the population of South Tyrol has been minimal for 85 years. Researchers have shown that intergroup contact forms a condition that can affect levels of intergroup prejudice (S. L. Gaertner et al., 2000). Accordingly, the present author predicted and found differences in prejudice between Trentini participants on the one hand and South Tyrolean participants on the other hand as an effect of the differential level of intergroup contact that these 2 populations experienced. The author also found evidence for his prediction that this effect is mediated by the differential perceptions held by these 2 populations of culturally based intergroup conflict. Further, as hypothesized, because of this latter perception, members of the Italian minority in South Tyrol also perceived the political power of the Trentino–South Tyrol higher order administrative “Region” to be stronger than did members of both the Austrian South Tyrolean and the Trentini majorities. The author discussed implications at the societal level with respect to the role of perceived intergroup conflict for improving intergroup relations.

Key words: common in-group identity, group conflict, prejudice, South Tyrol

INTERGROUP CONFLICT—in Italy, South Tyrol and Trentino have a long history of it, derived from issues of nationhood and civil rights. Thus, many people tend to view the conflict between South Tyroleans and Trentini in cultural terms. Following World War I, the southern part of the Austrian Tyrol, which is also called “South Tyrol,” became part of Italy. Since then, the Italian government joined South Tyrol and the formerly Austrian Italian territory of Trentino, forming 1 of the 21 administrative departments into which Italy is divided.

In fact, the problem is more complicated than that perception of the conflict in cultural terms indicates. It also involves political, historical, economic, social,

and psychological aspects. The conflict involves five main social and political entities: (a) Italian-speaking Trentini, who after WWI were re-included into Italy after nearly 1,000 years of forced inclusion in the Austrian empire; (b) Italian-speaking South Tyroleans, whose ancestors were transferred from the rest of Italy to South Tyrol by the Italian government after the end of WWI to culturally “italianize” this formerly Austrian territory; (c) German-speaking South Tyroleans, who have striven for reunification with Austrian Tyrol since their forced inclusion into Italy after WWI; (d) the government of Italy, as representative of the Italian-speaking community’s interests and rights; and (e) the government of Austria, as representative of the German-speaking community’s interests and rights.

Because of this complex situation, civil unrest has marked the years between WWI and the late 1960s, with ever-rising grievances and tensions between the respective residents of South Tyrol and Trentino. In 1972, the United Nations sponsored negotiations between the Austrian and Italian governments, which reached an agreement that seemed to have a realistic chance to end the conflict. The agreement provided an ad hoc law for potential development of a viable pluralistic society in the South Tyrol and Trentino territories. Since 1972, South Tyrol and Trentino have experienced significant changes in politics, social policies, and community relations. Fair employment practices were introduced, and the voting system was changed, thereby eliminating some of the political inequalities between the German-speaking and Italian-speaking populations of the two territories. Since then, the paramilitary organizations have stopped their violence, and so the political, social, and economic climate between South Tyrol and Trentino has changed extensively. People commonly believe this to have resulted from the fact that the 1972 agreement acknowledged that inhabitants of this part of the Italian state are divided by their cultural identity and traditions. However, in so doing, the agreement also affirmed the extant division of the persons of this territory into two mutually exclusive communities, by whether they are German speaking or Italian speaking.

A basic tenet of the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM; Gaertner et al., 2000) is relevant here. In CIIM, Gaertner et al. proposed that people can perceive other individuals as either sharing a common in-group identity or having a different group identity. More important for the scope of the present study is the model’s prediction that between-group prejudice and discrimination are increased by a separate group identity and decreased by a common in-group identity.

Accordingly, in the present study, I argued that in the portion of the Italian territory including South Tyrol and Trentino, the set of both political similarities in political status of the South Tyrol and Trentino populations and cultural diver-

Dr. Alessandra Festi, City Museum, Rovereto, TN, deserves heartfelt thanks for providing insights on the symbolic value of the Trentino–South Tyrol region to the Italian South Tyroleans.

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sities within the South Tyrol community should have led these populations to differentially acknowledge the existence of a more inclusive political entity: the Trentino-South Tyrol Region. In turn, this acknowledgment should have resulted in the circumstance that, consistent with the predictions of the CIIM, the level of prejudice was differentially affected as an outcome of the prolonged intergroup contact in each of the aforementioned subpopulations of the region. That is, I expected to observe differences in prejudice levels in participants belonging to one of these subpopulations—the Trentini—compared with the other two subpopulations—the German-speaking South Tyroleans and the Italian-speaking South Tyroleans.

I designed the present study to explore the overlooked role of perceptions of intergroup similarity and diversity in shaping relations between the members of the “subordinate” South Tyrol and Trentino groups and within the “superordinate” Trentino-South Tyrol Region’s common group. Further, past researchers have focused on the relations between the two numerically most considerable groups within just one of the two provinces of this territory (i.e., South Tyrol; e.g., Capozza & Manganelli Rattazzi, 1999; Costarelli & Colloca, 2004; Kirchler & Zani, 1989). By contrast, in the present study I considered relations among all of the three population groups who were living in this entire territory in a single research design. In addition to being potentially useful for better understanding of the psychological dynamics in this specific intergroup context, the present study has a theoretical aim. Prior researchers have shown the CIIM to be a useful conceptual tool in studying relations between artificially created groups. Thus, a further aim of the present study was to test whether the predictions of the CIIM apply to a real intergroup context.

My predictions were based primarily on the findings of the research on the positive effects exerted by intergroup contact on perception of prejudice (cf. Allport, 1954; for a review, see Gaertner et al., 2000). On the one hand, in the South Tyrol province, a German-speaking population majority and an Italian-speaking minority have lived together for almost one century. On the basis of that empirical work (Allport; Gaertner et al.), because both the Italian- and German-speaking inhabitants of South Tyrol have experienced reciprocal intergroup contact, I formed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The degree of prejudice held by the members of these two subpopulations of South Tyrol against a relevant out-group, namely, the population of Trentino, would not be different.

In contrast to the aforementioned culturally diverse population of South Tyrol, the population of the neighboring Trentino province has always been of solely Italian culture and language. Conceivably, for this latter population, this uniformity has minimized their chances to experience intergroup contact, a condition that has been found to be capable of decreasing the individual’s general inclination toward out-group prejudice (cf. Gaertner et al., 2000). On the basis of

the aforementioned empirical work (Allport, 1954; Gaertner et al.), I also formed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The level of prejudice against the population of South Tyrol held by the population of Trentino should be higher than the level of prejudice against the population of Trentino held by the population of South Tyrol.

Further, I hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 3: This effect (see Hypothesis 2) would be mediated by the perception of the existence of a culturally based conflict between the population of the two provinces.

I based Hypothesis 3 on the argument that Trentini's minimal intergroup contact both (a) should not have decreased their inclination to feel out-group prejudice and (b) should have increased their motivation to perceive a conflict between the culturally Italian population minority of Trentino and the culturally Austrian population majority of South Tyrol.

Since the Austrian South Tyroleans and the Italian Trentini form the numerical majority groups in the two respective provinces of residence, they are in the position to be able to politically rule their separate provinces to their own advantages. In contrast, I reasoned that the higher order administrative entity Trentino-South Tyrol Region should psychologically represent the Italian state by protecting the political rights of the Italian South Tyroleans as an Italian minority in a province where the political power is held by a population majority group having non-Italian language and culture. For this reason, I made the following prediction:

Hypothesis 4: The Italian South Tyrolean participants would perceive the *political power*, defined as the control of others' outcomes (Fiske, 1993), held by the Trentino-South Tyrol Region as greater than either the political power of the Austrian South Tyrolean province or that of the Trentini province.

Further, the Italian South Tyroleans, compared to the Austrian South Tyroleans and Trentini, should be motivated to perceive a higher degree of political conflict between their own province of residence (South Tyrol), ruled by a non-Italian political majority, and the Trentino-South Tyrol Region (cf. Ng, 1980). Indeed, with reference to South Tyrol, a deep fracture that is centered on cultural background influences the social, political, and even national identity of its German- and Italian-speaking inhabitants (Capozza & Manganeli Rattazzi, 1999; Kirchler & Zani, 1989). Accordingly, we expected the following:

Hypothesis 5: The cultural conflict perceived by the Italian South Tyrolean participants between the "subordinate" in-group (i.e., the South Tyrol Province) and the "superordinate" in-group (i.e., the Trentino-South Tyrol Region) would mediate the differences between the Italian South Tyrolean participants and both the German

South Tyrolean participants and the Trentini participants in their perceptions of the superordinate in-group as politically powerful.

Method

Participants

Participants were 80 students from the University of Trento, 80 German-speaking students from the University of Bolzano, South Tyrol, and 80 Italian-speaking students from that university.

Procedure

I conducted the present study in 2003. In the university library, a confederate introduced herself to each participant as a student from the same university. Then, she handed out a questionnaire. Through the introduction to the questionnaire, I stated that data would be used for a master's thesis about attitudes of young people in the Trentino-South Tyrol Region. Afterwards, participants were asked to indicate their gender and if both parents were born in the region.

Through the questionnaire, I then asked participants to indicate, on six 7-point Likert-type randomly ordered unipolar scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*), the extent to which they experienced six psychological states—three of positive valence (*admiration, trust, sympathy*) and three of negative valence (*anger, diffidence, contempt*)—toward the inhabitants of their respective provinces of residence (i.e., the in-group) and the inhabitants of the other province of residence (i.e., the out-group). Further, I asked participants to indicate, on a 7-point unipolar Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*), the extent to which they perceived the existence of a cultural conflict between in-group members and out-group members. Participants were then asked to indicate, along a 7-point unipolar Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*), the extent to which they perceived the existence of a cultural conflict between the subordinate in-group (i.e., the province) and the superordinate in-group (i.e., the Region). I counterbalanced the order in which the two groups were rated in the last two items. Finally, through the questionnaire, I asked participants about the extent to which they perceived the superordinate in-group as politically powerful. When all participants had completed the questionnaire, they were debriefed and thanked.

Design

The design was a 3 (group of belonging: Trentini vs. Italian South Tyroleans vs. Austrian South Tyroleans) \times 2 (gender: male vs. female) \times 2 (rating order of the target group: in-group first vs. out-group first) between-participants factorial design.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

I constructed a composite index of participants' prejudice by subtracting the out-group positive evaluation index and reverse-scored negative evaluation index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$) from the in-group ones ($\alpha = .73$). Preliminary analyses yielded no statistically significant main effects, or interactions, with the variables of interest both for respondents' gender and for group rating order. Data were therefore collapsed across these variables in all of the following analyses.

Out-Group Prejudice

I performed a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), with participants' cultural group of belonging (Trentini vs. Italian South Tyroleans vs. Austrian South Tyroleans) as an independent variable and prejudice as a dependent variable.

Inspection of the relevant a priori contrast comparisons performed with Bonferroni's correction (cf. Judd, McClelland, & Culhane, 1995) revealed that, in line with Hypothesis 1, the degrees of prejudice held by the Italian-speaking participants from South Tyrol and the German-speaking participants from South Tyrol were not different, $t(159) = 1.21, p = .12$. Further, as predicted in Hypothesis 2, the Trentini participants expressed higher prejudice than did either the Austrian South Tyrolean participants, $t(159) = 3.23, p < .048, d = .64$, or the Italian South Tyrolean participants, $t(159) = 2.15, p = .001, d = .91$ ($M_s = 3.34, 2.27$, and 1.73 ; $SD_s = 1.68, 1.68$, and 1.89 , respectively).

Preliminary analyses indicated that the level of perceived culturally based conflict between the in-group and the out-group expressed by the Trentini participants ($M = 5.69, SD = 0.61$) was higher than that of either the Italian South Tyroleans or the Austrian South Tyrolean participants ($M_s = 2.70$ and $3.09, SD_s = 0.74$ and 0.58), $F_s = 8.43$ and $7.96, d_s = 4.43$ and $4.41, p_s = .03$ and $.04$, respectively. Thus, it seems likely that the Trentini participants perceived the existence of a stronger culturally based conflict between the in-group and the out-group, which in turn would make their attitude toward the out-group more prejudicial than the attitudes of the Italian South Tyrolean participants and the Austrian South Tyrolean participants. I performed an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to test this mediation prediction. To this end, in a second one-way ANOVA model with cultural group of belonging as an independent variable and prejudice as a dependent variable, perceived culturally based intergroup conflict was included as a covariate.

Consistent with Hypothesis 3, this analysis revealed that the more the Trentini participants perceived a culturally based conflict between the in-group and the out-group, the stronger their prejudice toward the out-group was, $r = .31, p = .041$. Most important, the significant effect of cultural group on out-group prejudice (as indicated by the original ANOVA contrast comparisons) was reduced

to less than significance, $t_s = 1.64$ and 1.81 , $p_s = .08$ and $.9$, respectively ($M_s = 3.21, 2.74$, and 2.93 , and $SD_s = 1.68, 1.89$, and 1.68 , respectively).

Perceived Political Power of the Superordinate In-Group

First, I performed a one-way ANOVA with participants' cultural group (Trentini vs. Italian South Tyroleans vs. Austrian South Tyroleans) as an independent variable and perceived political power of the superordinate in-group as a dependent variable.

Inspection of relevant a priori contrast comparisons performed with Bonferroni's correction (cf. Judd et al., 1995) revealed that, as predicted in Hypothesis 4, the Italian South Tyrolean participants ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.33$) perceived the superordinate in-group as having greater political power than either the Trentini participants ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.44$), $t(159) = 2.06$, $p = .041$, $d = .77$, or the Austrian South Tyrolean participants ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.35$), $t(159) = 2.38$, $p = .018$, $d = .39$.

Preliminary analyses indicated that the level of perception of the culturally based conflict between the subordinate in-group and the superordinate in-group expressed by the Italian South Tyrolean participants ($M = 6.12$, $SD = 0.87$) was higher than either that perception expressed by the Trentini participants or that perception expressed by the Austrian South Tyrolean participants, $F_s = 6.65$ and 6.81 , $p_s = .03$ and $.04$, respectively ($M_s = 3.22$ and 3.43 , $SD_s = 0.90$ and 0.79 , $d_s = 3.28$ and 3.24 , respectively). Thus, it seems likely that the Italian South Tyrolean participants perceived a stronger culturally based conflict between the subordinate in-group and the superordinate in-group than did the other participants, which in turn would make the Italian South Tyrolean participants perceive the superordinate in-group as more politically powerful than the Trentini participants and the Austrian South Tyrolean participants. I performed an ANCOVA to test this mediation prediction. To this end, in a second one-way ANOVA model with cultural group as an independent variable and perceived political power of the superordinate in-group as a dependent variable, I included perceived culturally based conflict between the subordinate in-group and the superordinate in-group as a covariate.

Consistent with Hypothesis 5, this analysis revealed that the greater the Trentini participants perceived the culturally based conflict between the subordinate in-group and the superordinate in-group to be, the greater they perceived the political power of the superordinate in-group to be, $r = .47$, $p = .02$. Most important, the significant effect of cultural group on perceived political power of the superordinate in-group (as found in the original ANOVA contrast comparisons) was reduced to nonsignificance, $t_s = 1.28$ and 1.26 , $p_s = .12$ and $.10$, respectively ($M_s = 5.68, 5.14$, and 5.14 , and $SD_s = 1.33, 1.44$, and 1.35 , respectively).

Discussion

The results of the present study with real groups are consistent with those recently found by Gaertner and colleagues (2000) with artificial groups. The pres-

ent findings indicate the possibility that, in an existing intergroup context, in-group-out-group contact that does not involve regular intergroup cooperation is capable of affecting intergroup prejudice. Specifically, the differences in prejudice level in the present study indicate the possibility of reduced prejudice in members of one cultural group but not in the other one as an outcome of the prolonged intergroup contact experienced by the Austrian South Tyroleans and by the Italian South Tyroleans, but not by the Trentini. Institutional promotion of the development of a sense of identification with the superordinate group, the people of the Trentino-South Tyrol Region, may therefore help reduce the reciprocal prejudicial attitudes held at present by Trentini against the German-speaking South Tyroleans.

The results of the present study also provide novel insights into the symbolic value for the Italian South Tyroleans of the Trentino-South Tyrol Region as a representative of the Italian state protecting their political rights as an Italian minority in a province where the political majority is held by a group with non-Italian culture. For example, for members of groups, perceptions of intergroup conflict are influenced not only by perceived similarities between the in-group and the out-group but also by those dynamics of political power that Allport (1954) identified as forming one of the key factors that may moderate the positive effects of intergroup contact in reducing intergroup prejudice.

The focus of the present study was on processes related to culture-based group membership. That focus limited the generalizability of the present results. However, other researchers have found consistent effects between cultural group member samples and samples where a different type of group membership was relevant (see Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999, for a review). Future researchers should therefore ascertain the empirical tenability of the present results with samples whose group identity is based on characteristics other than culture and should start to test whether manipulated salience of superordinate versus subgroup membership moderates the implications of the present findings.

The findings of the present study also offer researchers some practical implications at the societal level. Specifically, they indicate that to understand intergroup relations within a given community and to predict their evolution, researchers must take into account the extant degree of intergroup conflict. Having a highly salient content, social categories serve as social metanorms (cf. McGarty, 1999; also see Costarelli & Palmonari, 2003): They provide group members with the cognitive criteria to evaluate the presence or absence of in-group membership in strangers. Hence, social categories normatively prescribe how strangers are to be evaluated and treated. Consistently, the history of intergroup relations affects any superordinate group membership that for political reasons is imposed on a given intergroup context. The findings of the present study are relevant to the intergroup context that has developed from formerly Austrian South Tyrol after World War I. However, the present findings can be generalized to other contexts such as that involving Palestinians in northern Israel.

With respect to the context analyzed in the present study, one can expect that social change will be slow. Most likely, the attitudes held by the members of the Italian-speaking group toward the members of the German-speaking one will become less prejudicial. However, one can anticipate that this will happen only to the extent that, over time, the heavy historical load of the past conflictual relations between the two groups becomes less salient (cf. Costarelli, 2005). To this end, relevant superordinate group memberships such as that of being “European” might speed up this process.

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