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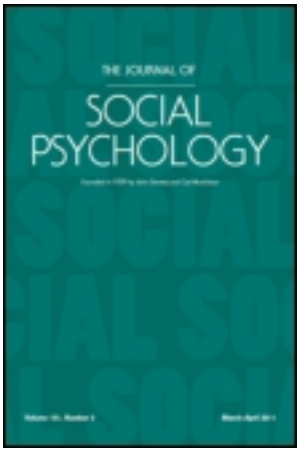

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Intergroup Conflict, Out-Group Derogation, and Self-Directed Negative Affect Among Italian South Tyroleans

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ABSTRACT. In South Tyrol, a multiethnic Italian province, the authors examined the self-directed negative affect that members of an Italian group experienced after they evaluated members of the German and Albanian groups. The authors examined the affect as a function of out-group derogation. The authors argued that to the extent that out-group derogation may run counter to norms toward intergroup fairness, such normative nonconformity will elicit negative affect directed at the self as a function of perceived intergroup conflict. The findings support the authors' line of reasoning: among Italian South Tyroleans, those who expressed greater out-group derogation were led to experience stronger negative self-directed affect when they rated a low-conflict out-group, but not when they rated a high-conflict out-group, compared to participants whose out-group derogation was less.

Key words: fairness, group conflict, out-group derogation, self-directed negative affect

SOUTH TYROL IS A TERRITORY IN NORTHERN ITALY where the former Fascist Italian dictatorship discriminated against the German-speaking population with respect to access to jobs in the public administration. Since then, by law such jobs have been allocated equally to members of the German- and Italian-speaking populations. Over time, however, this zero-sum resource allocation has created highly conflictual relations among the members of these two groups (see Capozza & Manganelli Rattazzi, 1999). So, the present authors examined some previously unexplored psychological dynamics, by focusing on the South Tyrol territory.

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To this end, on the one hand, we built on previous work that highlighted the current societal importance of the principle that prescribes that one should be fair in one's own evaluation and treatment of individuals who do not belong to one's own group, namely, the *norm of intergroup fairness* (FN; Branthwaite & Jones, 1975). On the other hand, prior researchers have shown that one's FN violation is capable of leading one to experience negative affect directed at one's self as a consequence of a peculiar type of perception, that is, psychological *discrepancy* (Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Devine & Zuwerink, 1994; Monteith, 1993; Monteith, Devine, & Zuwerink, 1993). Specifically, such a perception arises when one is aware that a gap exists between how one thinks one should have thought or behaved and how one actually thought or behaved, with respect to the norm of intergroup fairness (cf. Higgins, 1987).

The Present Study

Building on this theoretical and empirical basis, the present authors aimed to contribute to the highlighting of boundary conditions of the affective effects that perceived discrepancy exerts. Previously, no researchers had investigated whether such affective consequences depend on the level of intergroup conflict that the person perceives as characterizing the social context where the intergroup unfairness occurs. To fill in this gap in the empirical literature, in the present study we explicitly focused on an important element of intergroup relations: the perceptions of intergroup conflict.[1]

Specifically, we formulated our predictions by building on evidence that Jetten, Spears, and Manstead (1996) recently provided. In their research, they demonstrated that one's natural tendency toward pro-in-group-biased evaluation and behavior is constrained when one perceives the out-group members themselves as evaluating or treating the original person's in-group members in accordance with the norm of intergroup fairness. Also related to this issue is Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, and Sherif's (1961) seminal work that demonstrated that the extent to which intergroup relations are perceived as conflictual is a function of group members' zero-sum perception that one group can achieve its goals only to the detriment of the other group's goals.

On this theoretical and empirical basis, thus, we argued that the positive relation between the discrepancy that one's pro-in-group-biased evaluation or behavior produces and that leads to self-directed negative affect that previous researchers have found is qualified by the degree to which one perceives the in-group-out-group relations as conflictual. Specifically, investigators should observe greater self-directed negative affect when one's pro-in-group-biased evaluation involves a lower conflict out-group because (a) from the latter, investigators should expect FN conformity rather than violation to be applied by the out-group to its evaluation of in-group members and (b) one's FN violation applied to the evaluation of out-group members should produce the

aforementioned consequences of discrepancy (i.e., self-directed negative affect). Conversely, investigators should observe lower self-directed negative affect when one's pro-in-group-biased evaluation involves a higher conflict out-group because (a) from such an out-group, FN violation rather than conformity is expected to be applied to its evaluation of in-group members and (b) one's FN violation applied to the evaluation of out-group members should not produce the aforementioned consequences of discrepancy (i.e., self-directed negative affect). To test this notion, we manipulated perceived intergroup conflict by varying whether participants were asked to express an intergroup evaluation concerning a higher conflict out-group (high-conflict condition) or a lower conflict out-group (low-conflict condition).

However, Mummendey and Otten (1998) demonstrated that it is less socially acceptable to differentiate the in-group from a relevant out-group by negative dimensions (out-group derogation) than by positive dimensions (in-group favoritism). Moreover, during periods of relatively high intergroup conflict, it is out-group derogation rather than in-group favoritism that is most likely to be observed as an expression of group members' pro-in-group-biased psychological responses (cf. Henderson-King, Henderson-King, Zhermer, Posokhova, & Chiker, 1997). In keeping with the indications that this literature provides, our experimental predictions focused on out-group derogation rather than in-group favoritism.

Accordingly, in the present study, we predicted the following:

Hypothesis 1: Under conditions of low intergroup conflict, people feel more negatively toward themselves when they have derogated the out-group more than when they have derogated the out-group less.

In contrast, we also predicted the following:

Hypothesis 2: Under conditions of high intergroup conflict, people feel relatively negatively toward themselves, when they express intergroup ratings; and the degree of out-group derogation does not influence those negative feelings that are directed at the self.

Method

Participants

Participants were 77 female and 72 male high school students from South Tyrol ($N = 149$) who were aged from 18 to 19 years ($M = 18.63$, $SD = 0.52$), who volunteered to participate in this experiment, and whom we randomly allocated to conditions. All of them belonged to the Italian linguistic group, having Italian as their primary language. The distribution of male and female participants did not alter across conditions.

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Design

The design consisted of two manipulated factors—perceived intergroup conflict (low vs. high) and rating order of the target groups (in-group first vs. out-group first)—and one measured factor, out-group derogation. However, preliminary analyses showed that rating order did not have any main or interactive effect. As a consequence, we reduced the design by excluding gender from the model, pooled data across this variable, and conducted analyses (as we will report later in the present article) without it.

We manipulated intergroup conflict by asking participants to evaluate, in addition to the linguistic in-group (i.e., inhabitants of the participants' region of residence, South Tyrol, who spoke Italian as their primary language), the members of a higher conflict linguistic out-group or a lower conflict linguistic out-group that was present in the participants' intergroup context, namely, German-speaking inhabitants and Albanian-speaking inhabitants of the participants' region of residence, respectively. Pretesting that we had conducted in this territory showed the distinction between these two linguistic out-groups to be a functional, intergroup conflict differential.[2]

Procedure

We introduced the experiment to participants as a part of a larger international research project that was investigating European students' attitudes towards various objects. Participants then received a questionnaire. At the outset, we explained that the present study would focus on participants' perception of two social groups. All participants were then presented with an intergroup evaluation task. On a number of trait adjective items, participants were asked to evaluate members of the in-group and members of the out-group. The out-group was either a low-conflict group or a high-conflict group (depending on intergroup conflict condition). We counterbalanced the rating order of the in-group and the out-group within the conditions.

Measures

Participants expressed attitudes along a 6-point unipolar Likert-type scale (from 0 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*) with no neutral point. Participants' attitudes towards the target groups were operationalized as responses to four negatively valenced (*dislikable*, *sad making*, *repulsive*, *contemptible*; Cronbach's αs: in-group = .75; out-group = .78), randomly ordered trait items that we had taken from a study by Mucchi Faina, Costarelli, and Romoli (2002). From these items, we computed respondents' scores for out-group derogation (by subtracting respondents' negative ratings of the in-group from those of the out-group). To check the manipulation of intergroup conflict, after participants had completed the inter-

group ratings, we asked them to indicate the degree to which they perceived that members of the high- or the low-conflict linguistic out-group (depending on intergroup conflict condition) held conflictual relations with the linguistic in-group.

We assessed the degree of negative self-directed affect in participants by using items that Devine et al. (1991) had used (*angry at myself*, *guilty*, *disappointed with myself*, *disgusted with myself*, *ashamed*; $\alpha = .91$), all to be answered on scales that ranged from 0 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*. We instructed participants to "Indicate the degree to which each of the following adjectives describes how you feel now after evaluating your own and the other group" and instructed them not to think too much about their ratings and instead to give quick, gut-level responses.

When all participants were finished, they placed their questionnaires in a box in the front of the room. They were then debriefed and thanked.

Results

Manipulation Check

We performed an analysis of variance on the manipulation check of intergroup conflict. This analysis revealed that, as intended, people perceived the German-speaking inhabitants of the participants' region of residence ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.38$) as holding more conflictual relations with the linguistic in-group, compared with the Albanian-speaking inhabitants of the participants' region of residence ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 0.48$), $F(1, 148) = 4.94$, $p < .01$, $d = 5.72$. On the basis of this distinction, we defined the German-speaking inhabitants of the participants' region of residence as members of a higher or high-conflict out-group, whereas we defined the Albanian-speaking inhabitants of the participants' region of residence as members of a lower or low-conflict out-group.

Negative Self-Directed Affect

We expected that participants' perceptions of intergroup conflict would moderate the impact of out-group derogation on self-directed negative affect. Moderating effects of intergroup conflict were assessed by a moderated hierarchical multiple regression analysis. This analysis allowed us to examine the unique and interactive influences of the participants' perceived intergroup conflict and out-group derogation on participants' self-reports of following affect. To this end, we entered the dummy-coded score for intergroup conflict and the measured score for out-group derogation into Step 1 of a hierarchical multiple regression model and entered the 2-way interaction term into Step 2.

This analysis yielded only the significant interaction of perceived intergroup conflict and out-group derogation, $\beta = .24$, $p < .05$.

To decompose this interaction, we conducted and then compared the results of two separate sets of simple-regression analyses, one for the low-conflict group

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and one for the high-conflict group of participants. Inspection of the cell means revealed that, in the low-conflict group, out-group derogation yielded a unique contribution to the regression on self-directed negative affect, $R^2 = .66$, $F(1, 73) = 72.78$, $p < .001$. As we had predicted, the more the participants had derogated the out-group, the more negative self-directed affect was reported as, $\beta = .17$, $p < .01$. In contrast, as we had predicted, for the high-conflict group, out-group derogation did not yield a significant contribution to the regression on self-directed negative affect, $R^2 < 1$, $F < 1$, *ns*.

To sum up, under conditions of low intergroup conflict, people feel more negatively toward themselves when they have derogated the out-group more than when they have derogated the out-group less. When people have expressed intergroup ratings under conditions of high intergroup conflict, however, they feel relatively negatively toward themselves, and the degree of out-group derogation does not influence these negative feelings directed at the self.

Discussion

Prior researchers have found evidence for the idea that one's experience of a psychological discrepancy with one's own individual values that concern fairness elicits negative affects directed at the self (e.g., Devine et al., 1991; Devine & Zuwerink, 1994; Monteith, 1993; Monteith et al., 1993). The previous work, however, has not explicitly investigated the question of whether such effects are, in fact, dependent on any important elements that characterize the social context in which one's discrepancy occurs.

To fill in this gap of possibly relevant knowledge, the present investigators have sought to identify the conditions under which the tension between two important opposing motivations, namely, pro-in-group-biased evaluation and conformity to the fairness norm, may elicit differential levels of negative self-directed affect. The results of the present experiment consistently support our hypotheses. Among Italian South Tyroleans, those who expressed greater out-group derogation were led to experience greater self-directed negative affect when they rated a low-conflict out-group but not when they rated a high-conflict out-group, relative to participants whose out-group derogation was smaller.

We found this interaction effect on the same dependent variable that prior researchers typically used for the topic that we focused on in the present study. This shows that our findings can complement and extend the relevant literature. Specifically, at the conceptual level, they highlight two interrelated motivational processes that are simultaneously at work. The first process is consistent with *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This theory proposes that individuals derive part of their self-concept, namely, their social identity, through their belonging to social groups. Hence, in line with a motivation to evaluate oneself positively, individuals try to achieve or maintain a positive social identity by establishing the in-group's positive distinctiveness, relative to relevant

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out-groups, through evaluative or behavioral intergroup differentiation. Our data indicate that participants engaged in this basic motivational process while completing the intergroup evaluation task, albeit to different degrees.

However, being relatively temperate in the public expression of one's own pro-in-group-biased intergroup evaluation and behavior has become the content of important normative prescriptions towards intergroup fairness. Consistent with this notion, van den Bos, Wilke, and Lind (1998) have found that fairness is a particularly salient issue precisely when people are concerned about potential problems that are associated with socially based identity processes. Furthermore, *Self-Categorization Theory* (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) suggests that individuals are motivated to be sensitive to the content of social norms because acting in accordance with social norms expresses one's identity at the group level of inclusiveness or one's social identity.

Consistent with this and other research (e.g., Costarelli & Palmonari, 2004; Devine et al., 1991; Devine & Zuwerink, 1994; Monteith, 1993; Monteith et al., 1993), our data highlight the operation of a second process. Specifically, to the extent that group-based motives give rise to the aforementioned expression of intergroup differentiation, nonconformity to social norms of nondifferentiation (fairness) may elicit negative affective consequences for the self. In other words, if people were motivated only to establish intergroup distinctiveness, in this experiment out-group derogation would not have statistically moderated (i.e., interacted with) the affective effects of perceived intergroup conflict. Rather, in this case, the expression of higher levels of out-group derogation should have led our participants to experience no differential degrees of negative affect directed at the self as a function of the level of conflict that they perceived to exist between their own group and the specific group target of their evaluation. Thus, the phenomena that differences in perceived intergroup conflict did elicit differential levels of self-directed negative affect is consistent with our argument that a second process was operative: normative conformity to the norm of intergroup fairness.

The findings of this study also offer some practical implications at the societal level. Specifically, they indicate that to understand the intergroup relations within a given community and to predict their evolution, investigators must take into account the extant degree of intergroup conflict. Having a highly salient content, social categories also serve, among others, the function of being social *metanorms* (cf. McGarty, 1999): They provide group members with the cognitive criteria to evaluate presence or absence of in-group membership in strangers. Hence, social categories normatively prescribe how one should evaluate and treat strangers. Consistently, any superordinate group membership that for political reasons is imposed on a given intergroup context—as happened in the case of formerly Austrian South Tyrol after World War I—has to face the history of the intergroup relations, up to that time, in that given territory. With respect to the context analyzed in the present study, for example, it can be expected that social change will be slow. Surely, the attitudes held by the members of the Italian-

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speaking group toward the members of the German-speaking one will become less prejudicial, thus eliciting less self-directed negative affect in the Italians. However, we can predict that this process will only happen to the extent that, over time, the heavy historical load of the past conflictual relations between the two groups becomes less salient. Some superordinate group memberships such as the "European" one might become capable of speeding up this process.

NOTES

1. Drawing from existing definitions of similar concepts at the individual level, we use the term *intergroup conflict* throughout the present article to describe the broader set of interrelated phenomena consisting of one's expectation that the out-group is a likely source of wrongdoing, one's relational view of one's self as being in opposition to the out-group, and one's desire to inflict harm on the out-group or to see it harmed.

2. It is important to state here that in the present research, the term *low intergroup conflict* has to be understood in relative terms: Intergroup conflict is described as low, compared with high, conflict as perceived by experimental participants toward out-groups that are present and salient in participants' intergroup context, but the conflict is supposed to be sufficiently high to elicit intergroup differentiation.

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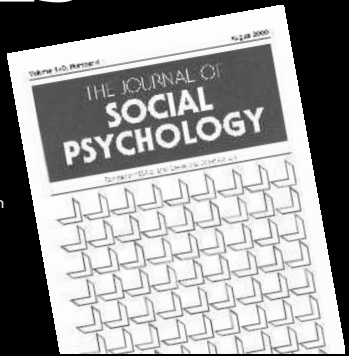
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