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AGGRESSIVE AND AVOIDANT ACTION TENDENCIES TOWARDS OUT-GROUPS: THE DISTINCT ROLES OF IN-GROUP ATTACHMENT VS. GLORIFICATION AND COGNITIVE VS. AFFECTIVE AMBIVALENCE

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ABSTRACT

The current work argues that expressing out-group ambivalence based on cognitive information is a strategy to justify one's prejudice, which may ultimately "cover" the discriminatory nature of out-group-directed negative action tendencies, depending on individuals' in-group 'attachment' and 'glorification' levels. As expected, after expressing prejudice in a normative context inducing prejudice suppression (a) high-glorification participants were more prone to out-group-directed aggression, and (b) high-attachment participants were more prone to out-group-directed avoidance, when such action tendencies were self-reported after the expression of ambivalent beliefs but not emotions concerning the out-group.

INTRODUCTION

Out-group ambivalence is a peculiar type of attitude that occurs when the members of a group other than one's own are the target of a simultaneously positive and negative evaluation (Scott, 1966, 1969).

Prejudice expression, basis of out-group ambivalence, mode of in-group identification, and negative intergroup action tendencies

Only recently psychological theoretical and empirical work has focused on how, far from the reasonable and balanced bit of cultural knowledge they are often treated as, ambivalent attitudes targeting out-group members may actually represent a clandestine means proliferating prejudicial social beliefs. The theoretical foundation of this novel line of research is the Justification-Suppression model of prejudice expression (JSM: Crandall & Eshleman, 2003).

Importantly, according to this model, affectively-based out-group ambivalence is defined as a conflict between the negative emotions elicited by out-groups (i.e. prejudice) and the positive emotions that serve as their suppressors. Therefore, in the JSM, the expression of affect-based out-group ambivalence is viewed as lacking the potential to justify prejudice.

Yet ambivalence may also be a conflict between the positive and negative beliefs about the attributes of out-group members. In the JSM, cognitively-based out-group ambivalence is

defined as a “stable interlocking set of beliefs that allows some kinds of release from the otherwise stymied emotional expression” (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003, p. 434). In other words, the JSM views cognition-based out-group ambivalence as being capable at justifying the expression of prejudice.

Based on this theoretical work and consistent with previous correlational evidence (e.g., Fleming, Petty, & White, 2005), Costarelli and Gerłowska (2015) found that the expression of cognitive out-group ambivalence increases levels of following intergroup negative action tendencies. These researchers argue that this reflects feeling safe at overtly showing those action tendencies that are consistent with a sanctioned form of intergroup attitude (being prejudiced) that one has managed to voice in a covert way (seeming ambivalent). Accordingly, this pattern of findings should only be found when out-group ambivalence is functional to justify participants’ previous expression of prejudice and following consistent negative intergroup action tendencies.

The present research builds upon this theoretical and empirical work and aims to extend it in several directions by applying it to the investigation of the effects of out-group ambivalence on out-group-directed “aggressive” and “avoidant” action tendencies (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000). On the basis of the theoretical and empirical work reviewed above, the moderating role of (cognitive vs. affective) basis of attitudinal ambivalence will be considered. Since in-group identification can vary widely in the majority population, the moderating role of in-group identification will also be assessed. This methodological choice is driven by the theoretical argument that cognitive ambivalence towards minorities as a form of justification for expression of prejudice should be particularly functional for, and thus employed by, those majority members that, in line with Social Identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), greatly identify with one’s own group.

However, it can be anticipated that the strength of this statistical association is moderated by *mode* of in-group identification, a conceptual distinction recently proposed by Roccas and colleagues (Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006). According to it, group identification is composed of *glorification* of the group and *attachment* to it — two partially overlapping tendencies that have been found as positively related in prior research (e.g., Roccas et al., 2006). While in-group “glorification” is defined as viewing one’s group as superior to out-groups (group-based self-investment), in-group “attachment” reflects defining oneself in terms of membership in a group that is important to the self (group-based self-definition).

Of relevance for the scopes of the present research, research shows that in-group glorification, rather than attachment, drives the adverse effects of group identification on intergroup hostility and violence (e.g., Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009; Leidner, Castano, Zaiser, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010).

Hypotheses

Based on this reasoning, in the current research we expect to find, after expressing cognitive but not affective out-group ambivalence, to the extent that in-group glorification but not attachment increases, concurrent increases of “aggressive” but not “avoidant” action tendencies towards out-groups (*Hypothesis 1*).

Conversely, after expressing cognitive but not affective out-group ambivalence, we expect to find, to the extent that in-group attachment but not glorification increases, concurrent increases of “avoidant” but not “aggressive” action tendencies towards out-groups (*Hypothesis 2*). This should be the case because in-group attachment reflects group-based self-definition, a proxy variable to group categorical distinctiveness and its behavioral by-product, namely, establishing and reaffirming intergroup boundaries by means of avoiding intermixing and association with out-group members. Unlike group-based self-investment, group-based self-definition is not directly related to the desire to maintain a positive in-group identity. As a consequence, after expressing cognitive out-group ambivalence, highly attached group members can be expected to be prone to a relatively milder form of negative intergroup behavior, that is, by avoiding intermixing with out-group members.

Importantly, based on prior empirical work (e.g., Costarelli & Gerłowska 2015), in the current research we expect to find these effects on the dependent variables after that an anti-prejudice “local” norm is made salient to participants.

METHOD

Participants and Design

One hundred-fifteen students of Caucasian ethnic-cultural background (58 women; age: $M = 20.70$, $SD = 3.22$) at the University of Sassari, Italy, volunteered to take part in the experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions manipulating the basis of the ambivalent attitude toward the out-group that they were asked to self-report via a priming procedure. In sum, the full experiment was a 2 (informational basis of out-group ambivalence: cognitive vs. affective) X 2 mixed factorial design, with mode of in-group identification (“attachment” vs. “glorification”) as a within-participants factor. The two dependent variables were “aggressive” and “avoidant” action tendencies (as adapted from Mackie et al., 2000) towards the out-group (i.e. African immigrants in Italy as a general category –a particularly salient social group because of the harsh political debate and local intergroup conflicts that a newly implemented immigration law has generated in the country).

Procedure

Before the start of a regular lecture, an experimenter invited students to volunteer to participate in the study. Subsequently, all respondents received a questionnaire. As a cover story, participants were told that the current questionnaire would be focused on their attitudes towards ethnic groups in their native country. Participants were asked to write down, in the first page of the questionnaire their responses to the “attachment” and “glorification” scales developed by Roccas and colleagues (2006), as adapted for the current target in-group.

Immediately afterwards, participants read a direct request to complete the following tasks ‘in line with the widespread societal agreement (according to recent research results) with the evaluative standard prescribing that one should not favor members of one’s own ethnic group over people of other ethnic groups when evaluating them on the basis of their characteristics and actions’.

Importantly, prior to completing the prejudice items, participants read in the questionnaire *Please answer the following questions regarding how you evaluate African immigrants living in Italy with respect to Italians* in order to maximize the salience of their subsequent prejudice expression.

Next, on a following page of the questionnaire, participants were presented with a task that was relevant to the preceding normative request. Specifically, they were given an opportunity to express their prejudice toward the out-group. Then, the manipulation of out-group ambivalence basis was introduced. To this end, half of the participants were assigned to a condition where cognitively-based ambivalence towards the out-group was primed, whereas the other half of the participants was primed with affectively-based ambivalence towards the out-group. The prime consisted in evoking in one condition an ambivalent attitude that was based on out-group-related cognitions but not one that was based on emotions (*Thinking about African immigrants, focus on your positive and negative opinions and ideas about them*), or vice versa in the other experimental condition (*Thinking . . . feelings and emotions about them*). Indices of cognition-based or affect-based ambivalence (depending on experimental conditions) were computed by averaging participants' ratings for the items (cognition-based out-group ambivalence: Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$; affect-based out-group ambivalence: $\alpha = .80$). Subsequently, all participants expressed their "aggressive" and "avoidant" negative actions tendencies towards the out-group (the dependent measures). Then, the manipulation checks of salience of anti-prejudice normative standard and out-group ambivalence basis followed. Finally, participants provided demographic data. After the data were collected, participants were debriefed.

Measures

Unless otherwise mentioned, the responses were given on a continuum ranging from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 7 (= *strongly agree*).

Attachment and Glorification Modes of In-group Identification

Participants were asked to write down, in the first page of the questionnaire their responses to the 'attachment' (e.g., "Being an Italian is an important part of my identity") and 'glorification' (e.g., "Italians are better than people from other countries in all respects") scales developed by Roccas and colleagues (2006), as adapted for the current target in-group. The attachment ($\alpha = .77$; $M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.14$) and glorification ($\alpha = .81$; $M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.09$) scales were averaged into two separate composite scores.

Prejudice

Participants were asked to answer a modified version of the General Evaluation Scale (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Rott, 1997). Specifically, they were asked to describe how they felt about members of the in-group and the out-group by using an eight-item scale (*cold, warm, positive, negative, nasty, friendly, contempt, respect*). Each of the items was administered to participants on a 6-point bipolar scale with no neutral point that allowed the direct expression of prejudice, ranging from 1 (= *It applies much more to Italians than African immigrants*) to 6 (= *It applies much more to African immigrants than Italians*). A composite scale score was created by averaging ratings across items ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 0.46$; $\alpha = .82$).

Out-group-directed Negative Action Tendencies

Measures of ‘aggressive’ and ‘avoidant’ action tendencies towards the out-group were adapted from Mackie and colleagues (2000). They consisted of *oppose them*, *argue with them*, and *confront them*, and *keep them at distance*, *avoid them*, and *have nothing to do with them*, respectively. Participants were asked to describe their usual reaction to members of the target out-group. Thus, they were asked to rate each action tendency on a 6-point bipolar scale with no neutral point, ranging from 1 (= *It applies much more to Italians than African immigrants*) to 6 (= *It applies much more to African immigrants than Italians*).

Two composite action tendency indices were computed, one measuring a negative aggressive action tendency ($\alpha = 0.71$; $M = 4.56$, $SD = 0.83$) and the other a negative avoidant action tendency ($\alpha = 0.76$; $M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.03$). Participants’ scores on these two measures were examined as dependent variables.

Anti-Prejudice Normative Standard Salience Manipulation Check

Participants had to answer the question *As you were completing the above tasks, to what extent did you feel as relevant the standard prescribing that one should not favor members of one’s own over those belonging to other ethnic groups when evaluating them on the basis of their characteristics and actions?*. Ratings were made on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (= *not at all*) to 7 (= *very much*).

Ambivalence Basis Manipulation Check

Participants had to answer the question *To what extent did you feel that the attitude concerning positive and negative sides of African immigrants you were asked to express regarded your feelings and emotions or your opinions and ideas?*. All ratings were made on one bipolar 6-point scale with no neutral point, ranging from 1 (= *It regarded much more my feelings and emotions than my opinion and ideas*) to 6 (= *It regarded much more my opinion and ideas than my feelings and emotions*).

RESULTS

Anti-Prejudice Norm Salience Manipulation Check

In order to rule out the possibility of having made salient a “local” group norm that participants did not actually perceive as being salient as they were self-reporting their prejudicial attitudes, we checked participants’ perception of norm salience. To this end, we conducted a preliminary Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the measure of the extent to which participants had perceived the content of the norm of prejudice suppression that was made salient to them as being relevant as they were completing the evaluation task. Specifically, we used the (mean-centered) in-group attachment, in-group glorification, and prejudice scores (see Aiken & West, 1991) as predictor variables. Yielding no main or interaction effects, $F_s(1, 114) < 1.18$, *ns*, the analysis revealed that participants’ perception of the salient “local” norm was independent from the predictors and

participants indeed perceived the relevant norm as being endorsed quite strongly by fellow group members ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.29$), that is, independently from their in-group attachment, in-group glorification, and prejudice levels.

Out-group Ambivalence Basis Manipulation Check

We performed an ANOVA on the measure of the extent to which participants had perceived the ambivalent out-group attitude that they were asked to express as evoking cognitions or emotions, testing the same model as in the previous analysis. We found a significant main effect for basis of out-group ambivalence manipulation, $F(1, 114) = 4.42$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .04$, and no other effects, $F_s(1, 114) < 1.45$, ns . Participants in the cognitive ambivalence condition perceived that the ambivalent attitude was based more on cognitions than emotions ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.43$). By contrast, participants in the affective ambivalence condition rated the ambivalent attitude as being based more on emotions than cognitions ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.79$). This confirmed that the manipulation of the attitudinal basis of out-group ambivalence had the desired effect, irrespective of participants' scores on the above predictors.

Main Analyses

Preliminary correlation analyses ascertained that neither the ambivalence nor the prejudice index correlated with either in-group attachment or glorification (r s between 0.16 and -0.07, ns), which were also unrelated ($r = .14$, ns), thus allowing us to use these latter variables as independent variables in a General Linear Model (GLM) procedure. In two separate univariate GLM analyses, we treated the scores for out-group-directed avoidant action tendencies and aggressive action tendencies as a dependent variable, respectively. Following the procedure used in prior research on in-group attachment and glorification (e.g., Roccas et al., 2006), when controlling for each of the two identification mode when examining the interaction effects of the other identification mode with basis of out-group ambivalence, in the following analyses it was possible to isolate the interaction effects of initial attachment without initial glorification (and vice versa) and basis of out-group ambivalence on the dependent measures.

Out-group-directed avoidant and aggressive action tendencies scores were examined by testing an In-group Attachment X In-group Glorification (continuous predictors) X Basis of out-group ambivalence manipulation (affective = -1 vs. cognitive = 1) simultaneous multiple regression model (Parameter estimates of the GLM output). The categorical variable was effect-coded and the continuous ones were previously mean-centered in order for the analysis to produce orthogonal rather than correlated main effects and interactions (as it would be the case by using dummy-coding) (Aiken & West, 1991). Preliminary addition of out-group ambivalence and prejudice scores as additional mean-centered continuous predictors in the model established that out-group ambivalence and prejudice did not significantly account for variance in scores of the dependent variables, t s for main and interaction effects < 1.92 , ns . As a consequence, out-group ambivalence and prejudice were excluded from the reduced model and analyses were repeated.

Out-group-directed avoidant action tendencies

The analysis yielded no statistically significant main effects, t s $< |1.66|$, ns . More importantly, as

expected, the analysis revealed a reliable interaction of Ambivalence Basis with Attachment ($B = .25, SE = .12, t = 2.01, p = .049, \eta^2 = .07$), but not with Glorification ($B = -0.87, SE = .22, t = -1.70, ns$). Analyzing the in-group attachment simple-slopes revealed that out-group-directed avoidant action tendencies following the expression of ambivalence that was based on beliefs regarding the out-group became stronger as in-group attachment increased ($B = .25, SE = .12, t = 2.01, p = .049, \eta^2 = .07$). However, in-group attachment was not influential when out-group-directed avoidant action tendencies followed the expression of ambivalence that was based on emotions regarding the out-group ($B = .08, SE = .15, t = 0.55, ns$).

Out-group-directed aggressive action tendencies

The analysis yielded no statistically significant main effects, $ts < |1.95|, ns$. More importantly, as expected, the analysis revealed a reliable interaction of Ambivalence Basis with Glorification ($B = .36, SE = .18, t = 2.01, p = .047, \eta^2 = .04$), but not with Attachment ($B = .27, SE = .19, t = 1.38, ns$). Analyzing the in-group glorification simple-slopes revealed that out-group-directed aggressive action tendencies following the expression of ambivalence that was based on beliefs regarding the out-group became stronger as in-group glorification increased ($B = .21, SE = .08, t = 2.41, p = .020, \eta^2 = .11$). However, in-group glorification was not influential when out-group-directed aggressive action tendencies followed the expression of ambivalence that was based on emotions regarding the out-group ($B = .01, SE = .09, t = 0.16, ns$).

Results supported the present hypotheses as reported above.

DISCUSSION

The contribution of the current work is twofold. On the one hand, while being consistent with previous evidence on intergroup ambivalence-action tendencies relations (e.g., Costarelli & Gerłowska 2015), these findings add to this prior research by highlighting the moderating role of (glorification or attachment) mode of in-group identification on intergroup ambivalence-action tendencies associations.

On the other hand, while being also consistent with research showing that in-group glorification is associated with increased intergroup hostility and violence (e.g., Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Leidner et al., 2010), the present work further extends these findings by introducing the previous expression of cognitive out-group ambivalence in anti-prejudice normative contexts as an antecedent of the downstream negative effects of (glorification and attachment) modes of in-group identification on intergroup (avoidant and aggressive) action tendencies.

Importantly, the results from the current study suggest that individuals with ambivalent beliefs about the out-group perceive such ambivalence as an attitude that others will view as being a defensible, balanced, and realistic reaction to their appraisal of both the positive and the negative stereotypic traits of the out-group. In turn, this suggests that they could use expression of their ambivalence based on beliefs about these groups' members to feel justified (a) in their aggressions towards them if they strongly 'glorify' their own group, and (b) in their avoidance of them if they are highly 'attached' to their own group.

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