

Categorisation salience and ingroup bias: The buffering role of a multicultural ideology

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The current work sought to test the moderating role of a multicultural ideology on the relationship between categorisation salience and ingroup bias. Accordingly, in one experimental study, we manipulated categorisation salience and the accessibility of a multicultural ideology, and measured intergroup attitudes. Results show that categorisation salience only leads to ingroup bias when a multiculturalism (MC) ideology is not made salient. Thus, MC ideology attenuates the negative effects of categorisation salience on ingroup bias. These results pertain to social psychology in general showing that the cognitive processes should be construed within the framework of ideological contexts.

Keywords: Categorisation; Ingroup bias; Multiculturalism; Ideology.

Categorisation salience refers to the extent to which a (pre-existing) intergroup categorisation is the focus of current attention. In this sense, it overlaps with category differentiation and the strength and clearness of category boundaries but is distinct from intergroup similarity as it is simply focused on the salience of the group boundary, without affecting specific content of beliefs about the groups. This article tests whether the salience of a group categorisation per se is enough to affect the attitudes towards the groups involved in that categorisation. Thus, it is not whether the mere division of individuals into immigrants/native citizens, men/women or old/young creates ingroup bias, but whether the calling of attention to such a distinction, per se, affects intergroup attitudes.

A number of studies appear to show that categorisation salience increases ingroup bias. For instance, McKillip, DiMiceli, and Luebke (1977) examined intergroup bias as a function of the physical presence of ingroup and outgroup members, and found greater bias along gender lines in the conditions where the proportion of females and males resulted in what they assumed to be a greater categorisation salience of the gender distinction. Therefore, categorisation salience was *assumed* to follow from the relative proportions of men and women instead of being directly manipulated. Hensley and Duval (1976) directly manipulated categorisation salience by varying the discrepancy of attitudinal positions held by outgroup members and those held by the participant, showing more

bias in the condition of higher discrepancy of beliefs. On the contrary, more recently, Deffenbacher, Park, Judd, and Correll (2009) conducted two studies where they demonstrated that even though categorisation per se was enough to elicit ingroup bias, the subsequent increase of the strength of that categorisation did not provoke any increase in that bias.

Though the question remains unsolved, Park and Judd (2005) and Wolsko, Park, and Judd (2006) suggested that the relationship between categorisation salience and intergroup attitudes could depend on the accessibility of a multicultural ideology. Most literature on intergroup relations has focused exclusively on processes of categorisation and group identification without considering the role of differing ideological beliefs about the nature of group differences. But the need to take into account ideological beliefs was in fact present in Tajfel's early writings (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the potential role of a multicultural ideology in the relationship between categorisation salience and ingroup bias received preliminary support in Park and et al. studies.

The impact of multiculturalism on the relationship between categorisation salience and intergroup attitudes

Multiculturalism (MC) is a "social-intellectual movement that promotes the value of diversity as a core principle

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and insists that all cultural groups be treated with respect and as equals” (Fowers & Richardson, 1996, p. 609). Most studies about interethnic ideologies focused on the antecedents of the adherence to that ideology (Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker, & Obdržálek, 2000; Verkuyten & de Wolf, 2002). Some studies have, however, addressed the consequences of adhering to a MC ideology on intergroup attitudes, showing an association between MC and more positive intergroup attitudes (Barrete, Bourhis, Personnaz, & Personnaz, 2004; Ryan, Casas, & Thompson, 2010; Verkuyten, 2005).

We argue that the accessibility of a MC ideology and its positive spin may have an attenuating effect on the potential negative impact of categorisation salience. Though not attempting to address the unresolved issue of the relationship between categorisation salience and ingroup bias, we argue that even if categorisation salience may provoke an increase of ingroup bias, the accessibility of a MC ideology may “solve this problem”. In fact, even though a MC ideology does not dispute the idea derived from categorisation salience (about the existence of distinct groups), it does argue that each group has its own value. In fact, MC ideology is conveying the ideas present in the mutual intergroup differentiation model (Hewstone & Brown, 1986) as it points to the existence of distinct groups but that distinctiveness is because of the unique valuable identity of each subgroup.

The idea that MC may have an impact on the relationship between categorisation salience and ingroup bias has received some preliminary support: Wolsko, Park, Judd, and Wittenbrink (2000) showed that MC led to more positive intergroup attitudes compared with a control condition (of no ideology). More importantly, results showed that in the condition of MC the more positive attitudes coexisted with a greater (and more accurate) perception of intergroup differences (or category differentiation). Though this study showed that category differentiation and positive intergroup attitudes can coexist if MC is salient, there was no manipulation of categorisation salience. In fact, to our knowledge no study has ever experimentally examined the effects of categorisation salience and MC ideology accessibility on ingroup bias in the same context.

AIMS AND HYPOTHESES

The goal of this research was to examine the potential moderating/attenuating role of a MC ideology accessibility on the relationship between categorisation salience and intergroup attitudes. Accordingly, we manipulated the salience of the categorisation of ingroup and several outgroups (white Portuguese vs. black Africans vs. Brazilian vs. Eastern European) and also manipulated MC accessibility. Then, participants were asked to indicate their

attitudes towards white Portuguese and black Africans as black Africans were the target group of interest.

We predicted that when a MC ideology is made accessible, categorisation salience would not lead to more ingroup bias.

METHOD

Participants and design

Fifty-one white Portuguese undergraduates (88% female) at the University of Coimbra participated in the experiment ($M = 20.16$, $SD = 1.92$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions on a 2 (categorisation salience: present vs. absent) \times 2 (MC accessibility: accessible vs. absent) between participants factorial design. The procedure involved the completion of a questionnaire that contained both experimental manipulations (categorisation salience and MC accessibility) and measures of the dependent variables.

Categorisation salience manipulation

Participants in the categorisation salience condition were introduced to a task where they were asked to sort several last names into four groups and give a name to each of the groups. The list included 12 last names representing four different social groups: white Portuguese, black Africans, Brazilians and Eastern European immigrants. This manipulation of categorisation salience was chosen simply to make salient intergroup categorisation without affecting the content group stereotypes or information one possessed about those groups. All participants correctly sorted the last names into those four groups. Participants in the no-categorisation-salience condition simply did not have this name-sorting task as part of their questionnaire.

MC accessibility manipulation

The manipulation of MC accessibility came next in the questionnaire. Participants were asked to read a half-page essay said to reflect the consensual opinion held by social scientists, regarding issues relevant to intergroup relations in the society. In the condition where MC was made accessible, participants read the following text:

It is the consensual opinion within social, life and political sciences that the best way to achieve intergroup harmony and reduce conflicts is to acknowledge the existence of cultural groups that are distinct in the fundamental aspects, to accept them as they are and to respect their right to keep their qualities, customs and culture. Thus, considering immigration in Portugal, we should appreciate the diversity of groups and see in those differences, indispensable

qualities to the creation of a culturally more diverse and richer society.

To reinforce the manipulation, after reading the essay, participants were asked to choose from four sentences the one that best mirrored the content of the essay that they had just read. All four sentences reflected and reinforced multicultural tenets. Participants in the control condition did not read any essay and went straight to the collection of the dependent variables. At the end of the questionnaire, in order to check the MC manipulation, we asked participants the extent to which they agreed (from 1 = totally disagree to 7 = totally agree) with a single item measuring the support to MC (“Harmony of Portuguese society depends on the recognition that the existence of groups with different cultures results in a stronger whole”). The MC accessibility effect on this measure was marginally significant, $t(50) = 1.64$, $p < .10$, demonstrating that support of a multicultural ideology was stronger in the MC accessibility condition ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.46$) than in the control condition ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.40$).

Dependent variables

Ingroup bias was captured by two kinds of measures: *Trait attribution* to the ingroup (white Portuguese) and outgroup of interest (black African immigrants) and *General favourability* of the targets.

Trait attribution

Participants were asked to estimate the percentage of white Portuguese and black Africans that are (a) delinquents, (b) aggressive, (c) intelligent and (d) civilised. First, for each estimated trait, we calculated ingroup bias subtracting the estimated percentages concerning to white Portuguese from estimated percentages for black Africans.¹ We then averaged the difference scores in order to obtain a more reliable ingroup bias in trait attribution. We averaged the first two traits (1 and 2) to create the negative trait attribution bias score and we averaged the last two traits (3 and 4) to create the positive trait attribution bias.² Higher scores in negative trait attribution bias indicate a more negative evaluation of black Africans than white Portuguese. Higher positive scores in positive trait attribution bias indicate a more positive evaluation of white Portuguese.

¹Trait attribution bias = % black Africans minus % white Portuguese for negative traits and % white Portuguese minus % black Africans for positive traits.

²Both the negative traits and the positive traits yielded reasonable internal consistency (for negative traits: $\alpha = .77$, $r = .55$; for positive traits: $\alpha = .54$, $r = .37$).

³This analysis strategy follows from our hypotheses. Nevertheless, the main and interaction effects are reported here. For *negative traits attribution*, there was a significant interaction ($F(1, 47) = 5.09$, $p < .03$) and a marginally significant main effect of MC ($F(1, 47) = 3.19$, $p < .08$). For *positive traits attribution* and for *favourability*, there were no significant effects.

General favourability

Participants were asked to indicate their general favourability towards ingroup and outgroup using a scale from 1 (not favourable at all) to 10 (very favourable). This allowed us to calculate a measure of ingroup bias subtracting the outgroup favourability from ingroup favourability where higher scores indicate more bias favouring the ingroup.

RESULTS

We tested our hypothesis through planned single degree of freedom contrasts.³ Results for the three ingroup bias measures used are plotted in Figure 1. Means and standard deviations of the ratings attributed to ingroup and outgroup are presented separately for each experimental condition in Table 1.

Negative traits attribution bias

As expected, categorisation salience led to higher levels of bias compared with a “no categorization” condition (Figure 1a) only for those participants who did not read an essay depicting MC, $F(1, 47) = 4.10$, $p < .05$; $\eta^2_p = .08$. For those participants who did read that essay, there was no effect of categorisation salience, $F(1, 47) = 1.05$, ns. Looking from the point of view of the specific effect of MC accessibility in both conditions of categorisation salience, the planned contrasts indicate that when categorisation was made salient, MC accessibility led to less bias than its absence, $F(1, 47) = 6.90$, $p < .01$; $\eta^2_p = .13$, but when this categorisation reinforcement was absent, there were no effects of MC accessibility, $F(1, 47) < 1$.

Positive traits attribution bias

Contrary to the hypothesis, there were no significant effects regarding the influence of MC ideology accessibility on the effects of categorisation salience. However, the pattern of means appear to indicate a trend where the accessibility of a MC ideology is associated with less pro-ingroup bias especially when categorisation was made salient (Figure 1b).

General favourability

The categorisation effect was marginally reliable when no ideology was made accessible, $F(1, 47) = 2.87$,

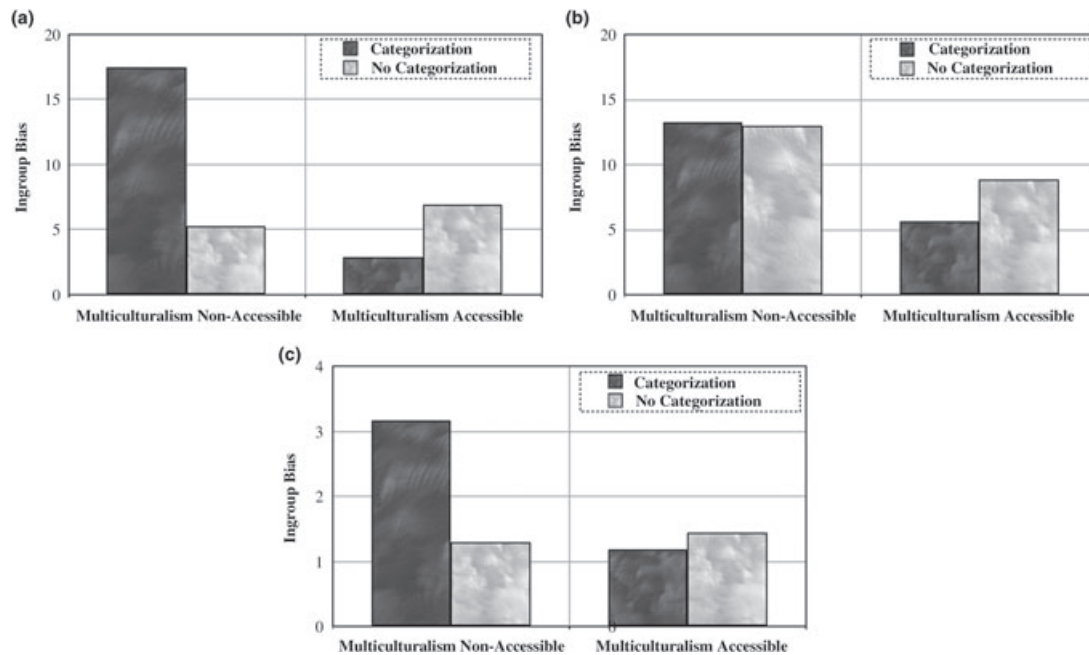


Figure 1. Different kinds of ingroup bias as a function of categorisation salience and multicultural ideology accessibility. (a) Negative evaluation, (b) positive evaluation, (c) favourability.

TABLE 1

Means and standard deviations in brackets of the ingroup and outgroup evaluations as a function of the multiculturalism accessibility and the salience of categorisation

		Ingroup	Outgroup	Bias
<i>Negative traits attribution</i>				
Multiculturalism accessible	Categorisation	39.03 (16.16)	41.91 (19.00)	2.88 _b (6.26)
	No categorisation	34.31 (12.27)	41.25 (17.37)	6.94 _b (13.84)
Multiculturalism non-accessible	Categorisation	41.67 (12.91)	59.17 (17.15)	17.50 _a (17.54)
	No categorisation	42.75 (17.73)	48.00 (12.52)	5.25 _b (10.70)
<i>Positive traits attribution</i>				
Multiculturalism accessible	Categorisation	64.12 (10.93)	58.44 (12.15)	5.68 (6.02)
	No categorisation	60.03 (13.65)	51.17 (14.89)	8.86 (10.98)
Multiculturalism non-accessible	categorisation	65.83 (20.35)	52.50 (19.17)	13.33 (26.58)
	No categorisation	64.75 (13.86)	51.75 (10.47)	13.00 (9.84)
<i>Favourability</i>				
Multiculturalism accessible	Categorisation	8.35 (1.50)	7.18 (1.63)	1.18 _b (1.47)
	No categorisation	7.33 (1.85)	5.89 (1.94)	1.44 (2.62)
Multiculturalism non-accessible	Categorisation	9.33 (0.82)	6.17 (2.48)	3.17 _a * (2.56)
	No categorisation	9.00 (1.63)	7.70 (2.31)	1.30* (1.83)

Note: For each dependent variable, means with distinct subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$ according to planned contrasts.

*Means with the same asterisk indicate marginally significant differences at $p < .09$.

$p < .09$; $\eta^2_p = .06$, indicating higher levels of bias when categorisation was made salient than when categorisation was not salient (Figure 1c), as it was hypothesised. Moreover, the categorisation effect was not significant when MC was made accessible, $F(1, 47) < 1$, suggesting that the effect of categorisation on favourability bias was nullified by a multicultural ideology. Again, looking at the effects of MC accessibility in each condition of categorisation salience, planned contrasts indicate that MC accessibility effect was reliable when categorisation

was made salient, $F(1, 47) = 3.86$, $p < .05$; $\eta^2_p = .08$, demonstrating less ingroup bias in the MC accessibility condition compared with a “no ideology” condition. When categorisation was not made salient, the MC accessibility effect was not significant, $F(1, 47) < 1$.

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to test the moderating role of a MC ideology in the relationship between categorisation

salience and ingroup bias. Despite the low sample size and the low power associated to such a sample, results generally followed the hypotheses, that is, unless a multicultural ideology is made accessible to the individuals, categorisation salience does lead to more negative intergroup attitudes in terms of negative trait attribution and general favourability. When such ideology is made salient, categorisation salience does not have these effects.

Results also show that the accessibility of a MC ideology leads to less negative intergroup attitudes only when categorisation is made salient. These results strongly indicate that the salience of categorisation does create a problem in terms of intergroup attitudes and manipulating the accessibility of a multicultural ideology appears to “solve” it. However, results also showed that the accessibility of a MC ideology did not elicit significant positive effects in the attribution of positive traits. The reason for not confirming the hypothesis in this measure might be related with the content of the message present in a MC ideology. By talking about the unique value of all groups in a society, it was implicitly conveyed that one intends to reinforce the values of the minority groups that are usually targeted with negative attitudes and stereotypes and not so much influence the perception of the majority group.

These data do not allow us to distinguish between the cognitive effects of category accentuation (cf. Bruner, 1957) and ideological effects, but they do show that the discussion of the effects of categorisation salience cannot be complete without considering the influence of a MC ideology. In that sense, these results speak more broadly to social psychology as a whole about the role of ideological contexts in influenced cognitive processes (Vala & Costa-Lopes, 2012).

Despite that limitation and the marginal significance of the effects, this study constitutes an important first step in this line of research and allows us to think of practical implications. The positive effects on intergroup attitudes of an ideology such as MC call for a more structured and enlarged dissemination of the efforts of the national institutions devoted to these issues, namely through an extended media coverage. Moreover, considering that the accessibility of such an ideology can only have profound and lasting effects on intergroup relations when endorsed by the individuals, this dissemination should include a serious and structured argumentation for the rationale and suitability of this interethnic approach to this societal issue.

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