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Does Tolerance Reflect a More Inclusive Self-Construal? A Comparison of Poland, East and West Germany

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Abstract

Past research suggests that Poland and Germany differ in the inclusiveness of their “moral universe”, i.e. the breadth of the community to which people apply moral values and rules of fairness (Schwartz, 2007). It seems likely that this difference is reflected in a more or less inclusive definition of one’s ingroup. The present study investigated (1) whether there are indeed differences in ingroup inclusiveness as manifested in differential construals of the self in East and West Germany and Poland and (2) whether those differences are reflected in differences in tolerance. As expected, participants in West Germany had the most inclusive self-construal, followed by participants from East Germany and then Poland – both in terms of their absolute scores on the most inclusive level (being a member of humanity), and in terms of the relative importance of the different levels. A relationship between a more inclusive self-construal and tolerance was observed in West Germany, but not in East Germany and Poland. The results suggest that more inclusive and abstract levels of the self-construal are more closely linked to other abstract constructs such as values rather than a true reflection of people’s ingroup. In countries with a communist past where universal values or the concern for humanity at large have been used for ideological purposes, these values may have lost their original meaning and psychological significance, and are less linked to intergroup attitudes such as tolerance towards immigrants.

Introduction

Traditionally, in Western Psychology the self has been viewed as an individual’s self-comprehension as a discrete, separate entity comprising a unique configuration of internal attributes and independent of any social context. However, over the last decades it has been recognised that individuals also derive a sense of identity from social relationships with others and the groups to which they belong. Dealing with this topic, there is an apparent convergence between research into categorizations within groups and research into construals of the self across cultures (Smith & Long, 2006). The former line of research goes back to Self-Categorisation Theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987), one of the most influential theories in social psychology, whereas the latter is mainly based on the work of Markus and Kitayama (1991) in cross-cultural psychology.

Social Psychological Research on the Self: Self-Categorisation Theory

Self-Categorisation Theory, focussing on the self in a group context, posits that individuals categorise themselves and derive from this a sense of self. Specifically, they can see themselves as a member of variously inclusive social categories; for example, as a unique individual (with him- or herself being the only category member), as a human being (where all other human beings are included), or as a member of a social group at

any intermediate level of inclusiveness (e.g., as a university student).

Self-categorisation leads to an accentuation of similarities within the self-category and an accentuation of differences from other relevant categories. As members of a social group, individuals will thus tend to see themselves as relatively interchangeable with other members of their group, and this depersonalisation is considered the core process underlying group phenomena, including cooperation and cohesiveness within groups (Turner et al., 1987). Because the process applies to social self-categories at any level of inclusiveness, individuals who may have been regarded as outgroup members before will be met with greater cooperation, empathy, or liking, once they are recategorised as members of a common ingroup, i.e., a higher level social category that includes ingroup and outgroup. Indeed, a large body of research has shown the positive effects of promoting a common identity in combating prejudice (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman & Rust, 1993).

Recently, social psychologists have shifted their attention from the study of single ingroup vs. outgroup scenarios to the more realistic scenario of multiple group memberships, which may become salient at the same time, resulting in different category combinations or crossed categorisations (Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). For example, depending on the situation, one category may dominate over the others, or there may be a hierarchy of categories, or all categories may be equally salient at the same time. Previous work has established the way different categories are combined may have unique effects on intergroup phenomena such as intergroup bias and prejudice (Urban & Miller, 1998). Those effects are primarily rooted in differences in ingroup inclusiveness, i.e. where we draw the line between in- and outgroup. The more categories are equally salient at the same time, the more the boundary between the various ingroups and the outgroup will become blurred possibly even to the point of becoming indistinguishable.

In the most extreme case, all categories an individual holds may be salient at the same time (Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). In this case, category membership does not matter anymore and as a result, the development of superordinate social identities and a global identity can be fostered in order to reduce cognitive complexity. Using their social identity complexity model, Brewer and her colleagues could confirm that individuals who defined their ingroup in a more inclusive way were more tolerant of cultural and ethnic diversity. Along a similar line of thinking, Triandis (1988) suggests that because individualistic cultures have many specific in-groups, the boundary between ingroup and outgroup may be more blurred than in collectivistic cultures, where there are a few general in-groups and this in turn may have implications for intergroup attitudes.

The Self in Cross-Cultural Research: The Six-Fold Self-Construal Model

In an endeavour to integrate cultural values into conceptualisations of the self and merge empirical findings from crossed categorisation research and cross-cultural psychology, Harb and Smith (2008) propose a new six-fold self-construal model. The model extends the original conceptualisation of independent and interdependent self-construals by Markus and Kitayama (1991), which has been criticised in recent years as the dichotomy of an independent vs. an interdependent self-construal may be too broad to explain individual behaviour. The new model therefore takes into account the distinction between individual, relational, and collective identities which has been suggested by Brewer and her colleagues (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Brewer & Chen, 2007) and adds a fourth level, humanity. The humanity level is defined as a “*supra structure*” (Harb & Smith, 2008, p.183) in which the self is merely viewed by its belonging to the human species.

Those four levels of self-representations can be distinguished by their increase in inclusiveness: The focal-personal self is at the most individuated end, followed by the relational or interpersonal self (which is dyadic), the collective self (depersonalised member of a larger social category such as nationality), and humanity, which is built on a universal representation of the self.

The case of Poland, East and West Germany

Previous research suggests cultural differences between Poland, East and West Germany on a number of demographic and other variables which are potentially relevant to self-construals. First of all, there are religious differences between the three regions, with Catholicism being the dominant religion in Poland as opposed to

Protestantism in the regions to be studied within East and West Germany. Secondly, there are a number of differences between Poland and East Germany as former communist countries and West Germany. Those are manifested in differences in level and process of democratisation as well as differences in affluence and economic development. The latter is also very different in East Germany and Poland: Whereas the Polish economy suffered from an initial collapse immediately after 1989 and then annual growth rates slowly picked up, East Germany experienced an economic boom right after its reunification with West Germany with annual growth rates over 10% (International Monetary Fund, 2006; Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, 2008). It can therefore be concluded that social change after 1989 was faster in East Germany than in Poland.

Georgas, Van de Vijver and Berry (2004) demonstrated in their cluster analysis of 31 countries (including the ones of interest in the present study) that affluence was positively associated with individualism and negatively associated with power distance. A communist past on the other hand was negatively associated with autonomy and positively associated with uncertainty avoidance, whereby the latter was also associated with Catholicism. In general, religious involvement was positively related to power distance, hierarchy, and vertical relationships.

Differences in values of the three regions have also been addressed. Schwartz (2004) showed that Poland scores higher on values of hierarchy whereas East and West Germany score higher on egalitarian values. There is some evidence that the structure of values shows some differences between West Germany and the two former communist regions. Based on data that were collected soon after the fall of the communist regimes, Schwartz (2007) found that in East Germany and Poland egalitarian values mapped onto the same factor as benevolence values, whereas in West Germany they formed a distinct factor. He also found that in morally more inclusive societies (i.e. societies characterised by more universal values) those values significantly predicted people's perceived consequences of immigration and acceptance of immigrants, whereas in morally exclusive countries they did not. These findings would suggest that in East Germany and Poland, universality values could apply more to people's wider in-groups and less to humanity in general.

The Present Study – Hypotheses

Relating those findings to the present study, it is expected that Polish participants score highest on the collective levels of the self-construal, followed by East German and then West German participants. West German participants on the other hand are expected to score higher than East German and Polish participants on the personal and the humanity levels of the self-construal. No differences are expected on the relational level of the self-construal. With regards to intergroup attitudes, it is expected that humanity in particular is positively related to tolerance towards foreigners and more positive attitudes towards immigration issues. It is also expected that the relative importance of those aspects of the self-construal which imply a higher level of inclusiveness predicts more positive intergroup attitude. Finally, building onto research into the effects of intergroup contact (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and realistic group conflict theory (Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2002; Sherif, 1966), it is expected that participants in Poland and East Germany are less tolerant than participants from West Germany: First of all, they should have fewer opportunities for interethnic contact since the proportion of immigrants in those areas is still very small, and secondly, since resources are scarce (e.g., higher unemployment rates), they are more likely to hold negative attitudes towards immigrants who might be seen as competing for the same resources.

Method

Participants

A total of 490 participants were recruited in lecture halls at universities in Poland ($n = 193$), East Germany ($n = 159$) and West Germany ($n = 138$). Participants in all three locations belong to a similar social stratum within their society (despite differences in socio-economic status between locations); there are no tuition fees in either country and the percentage of young people attending university is relatively high in both countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008).

Materials

A questionnaire of 84 items (some of which are not reported in this study) was devised. The original language of all items was English and they were translated into Polish and German in two panels comprising of several native speakers of either language.

Self-construal. In order to assess cultural differences between the three subsamples, the 30-item Sixfold Self-Construal Scale (SSCS) by Harb and Smith (2008) was used. Participants were asked to answer five statements each concerning their relationship with their family (vertical relational), their friends (horizontal relational), their social group (vertical collective), students in their department / faculty (horizontal collective), humanity in general and themselves. Answers were provided on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (“to a very small extent”) to 7 (“to a very large extent”) and individual scores were calculated for each subscale in order to determine the relative strength of each level and dimension within participants’ self-construal.

Tolerance. Tolerance was measured using an 11-item version (Berry, 2006) of Kalin and Berry’s (1996) scale. Participants rated their agreement with all 11 statements on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “do not agree at all” to “agree completely”, with higher scores representing higher levels of tolerance.

Demographic information. In the final section of the questionnaire participants reported their age in years, gender, subject of study, nationality, country of birth and ethnic background. Finally, a subsample of the German respondents specified the federal state where they were born in order to distinguish between native East and West Germans. However, this question was only added at a later stage.

Results

Sample Characteristics

A closer examination of sample characteristics shows that the majority of participants in all three samples were female, with a slightly higher proportion in the two German samples than in the Polish sample. Also, German participants were on average about one year older than participants from Poland (see table 1 for details).

Table 1
Sample Demographics

Location	Gender (%)			Age (in years)		Nationality (%)		Ethnicity (%)	
	Male	Female	Unspecified	Average age	Range	Host	Other	Host	Other
PL	38	59	3	20.38	18 - 33	100	0	97	3
GER (E)	31	67	2	21.33	18 - 42	98	2	96	4
GER (W)	36	62	2	21.60	18 - 41	81	19	75	25

Note. $N_{PL} = 193$, $N_{GER(E)} = 159$, $N_{GER(W)} = 138$; PL = Polish sample, GER (E) = East German sample, GER (W) = West German sample.

In terms of nationality and ethnic background, the Polish sample was the most homogenous, followed by the East German and then the West German sample. Out of the German participants, 115 of those recruited in Jena and 82 of those recruited in Tübingen stated the federal state where they were born. Out of those, 81% of participants in Jena were born in the area of the former German Democratic Republic, whereas 97% of participants in Tübingen had been born in the federal states belonging to the Federal Republic of Germany before 1989.

Scale reliability and equivalence

Prior to the main analyses, reliabilities were compared across the regions and equivalence of the Polish and German scales was tested.

Sixfold Self-Construal Scale. In the present study, 13 of the 30 items revealed item bias in an analysis of the six subscales using a regression technique (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Nine items showed uniform bias and four items showed nonuniform bias. However, only two revealed medium to large effects and were excluded.

ed from further analyses. Exploratory factor analyses (EFA) with principal axis factoring and varimax rotation were conducted in the Polish and German samples separately and mostly confirmed the six-factor solution. In order to test for structural equivalence, EFA with target rotation were carried out as recommended by Van de Vijver and Leung (1997). After a further three items were excluded, acceptable values for Tucker's phi could be obtained for all subscales. Individual subscales by country generally revealed acceptable to good reliability, with alphas ranging from .73 to .89. In three of the subscales, alpha coefficients significantly differed between Poland and Germany but the differences were very small and inconsequential. Reliability coefficients on the refined subscales by country and values for Tucker's phi are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Reliabilities of SSCS Subscales after Item Bias Analysis and Tucker's Phi

Scale (n remaining items)	Alpha by Country		Difference in Alpha	Tucker's Phi
	Poland (n valid cases)	Germany (n valid cases)		
Personal (3)	.73 (187)	.80 (258)	$p < .05$.87
VR (4)	.82 (183)	.88 (258)	$p < .05$.97
HR (4)	.91 (187)	.85 (258)	$p < .01$.95
VC (5)	.89 (187)	.89 (258)	<i>ns</i>	.95
HC (4)	.84 (187)	.86 (258)	<i>ns</i>	.93
Humanity (5)	.86 (187)	.83 (258)	<i>ns</i>	.97

Note. $N_{PL} = 187$; $N_{GER} = 258$; after excluding participants with nationalities other than German or Polish. VR = Vertical Relational. HR = Horizontal Relational. VC = Vertical Collective. HC = Horizontal Collective.

Tolerance. The scale was devised for use in a range of cultural settings and is currently tested in a number of countries (Berry, 2008). Five items were found to be culturally biased, with two showing nonuniform bias and three showing uniform bias. Out of those, two of the reversed items were excluded which showed medium and large effects. EFA with principal axis factoring were conducted in the Polish and German samples separately. After excluding one item that had a loading on a second factor in Poland, Tucker's phi was computed comparing the factor loadings in both countries; its value was .97, thereby supporting the structural equivalence of the scale. The reliability of the remaining eight items was good in both countries and the difference not significant, with $\alpha_{German} = .77$ and $\alpha_{Polish} = .78$.

Descriptive Statistics and Regional Differences

The vertical and horizontal dimensions of the relational and collective levels were merged to simplify the analyses and increase the focus of this study on inclusiveness. The resulting four subscales can be ranked along a continuum of ingroup inclusiveness. Interscale correlations and descriptive statistics for the four self-construal subscales and tolerance are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3
Correlations and Descriptive Statistics by Country

Location	Scales	Scales					
		Personal	Relational	Collective	Humanity	Inclusiveness	Tolerance
	Personal	-					
	Relational	.29**					
	Collective	.08	.34**	-			
	Humanity	.16**	.24**	.46**	-		
	Inclusiveness (slope)	-.46**	-.06	.50**	.78**	-	
	Tolerance	.02	.18**	.07	.14**	.09*	-
PL	M	6.07	6.08	3.76	3.83	-.90	5.51
	SD	.86	.82	1.11	1.34	.49	.97
	N	183	183	183	183	183	183
GE	M	6.17	6.26	3.83	4.02	-.89	5.48
	SD	.86	.78	1.03	1.13	.45	.88
	N	153	153	153	153	153	153
GW	M	6.21	6.32	3.78	4.28	-.83	5.42
	SD	.87	.62	1.09	1.22	.45	1.02
	N	103	103	103	103	103	103

Note. $N_{Total} = 445$ after excluding participants with nationalities other than German or Polish; PL = Poland, GE = East Germany, GW = West Germany; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, all two-tailed.

As a first step, a MANCOVA was conducted with participants' age and gender as covariates, region (three levels: Poland, East Germany, and West Germany) as independent variable, and the SSCS subscale scores as the dependent variables. Using Pillai's trace, significant multivariate effects were found for age ($F(6, 429) = 2.75, p < .05$, (partial) $\eta^2 = .04$), gender ($F(6, 429) = 3.78, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05$) and region ($F(12, 860) = 2.00, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$).

Univariate tests revealed significant main effects for region on the relational ($F(2, 434) = 4.85, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$) and humanity subscales ($F(2, 434) = 5.71, p < .01, \eta^2 = .03$). Only scores on the personal and the relational self were affected by age ($F_{personal}(1, 434) = 2.00, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$; $F_{relational}(1, 434) = 2.00, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$) and gender ($F_{personal}(1, 434) = 2.00, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$; $F_{relational}(1, 434) = 2.00, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$); younger participants scored higher on both and female participants scored higher on the relational self and lower on the personal self. Tolerance was only significantly related to gender ($F(1, 434) = 16.30, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$), with female participants reporting higher levels of tolerance.

Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc comparisons revealed significant differences between Polish and West German participants on the humanity ($p < .01$) and relational subscales ($p < .01$), with the Polish participants scoring lowest and the West German participants scoring highest on both. As expected, those differences were much smaller between Polish and East German participants and only the difference on the relational subscale reached significance ($p < .05$). There were no significant differences between the samples on tolerance.

The Relationship between Individual Levels of the Self-Construal and Tolerance

In order to examine the relationship between self-construal subscales and tolerance, a multiple regression with age and gender (0 = male, 1 = female) as control variables in the first step ($b_{age} = -.05, ns$; $b_{gender} = -.18, p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .03$) was conducted across the three regional samples. Across samples, higher scores on personal and collective self predicted lower scores on tolerance ($b_{personal} = -.08, n.s.$; $b_{collective} = -.05, ns$), whereas higher

scores on the relational self and humanity predicted higher levels of tolerance ($b_{\text{relational}} = .16, p < .01$; $b_{\text{humanity}} = .15, p < .01$). However, the positive relationships were much stronger than the negative ones and only the former reached significance. The combined self-construal scales could only explain an additional 1% of variance in tolerance.

Since humanity is at the most inclusive end of the continuum and it was expected that it would be most strongly linked to tolerance towards strangers, separate regressions with age and gender as covariates in the first step and humanity in the second step were conducted for the three regional samples. Interestingly, humanity only significantly predicted tolerance in West Germany ($b = .29, \Delta R^2 = .08, p < .01$) whereas it was unrelated to tolerance in East Germany ($b = .11, \Delta R^2 = .01, p > .05$) and Poland ($b = .10, \Delta R^2 = .01, p > .05$).

The Relative Importance of Self-Construal Levels

We were interested to what extent the relative importance of self-construals would be predictive of tolerance. All individuals can be expected to find the focal-personal aspect of self-construals most important, going from focal to humanity the strength can be expected to decrease. The level of decrease across the four self-construal scales could be associated with tolerance. Individuals with a smaller decrement can be expected to be more tolerant, as they differentiate less across inclusiveness levels. The reasoning was tested by computing a regression line through the four scale points. Each individual has his or her own regression line. The predictors were the levels of inclusiveness (here somewhat arbitrarily defined as linearly increasing from 1 to 4 across the four scales) while the dependent variable was the average of the scale scores of the individual.

The variable represented by the slope was termed inclusiveness. Since participants generally identified more strongly with the levels at the lower end of inclusiveness which are characterised by interpersonal relationships as opposed to more anonymous social categories, the average slope across participants on inclusiveness was negative (see Table 3 for descriptive statistics). Negative values closer to zero therefore represent flatter regression lines and thereby a stronger relative identification with the more inclusive levels of the self-construal.

Before analyzing the relationship relative inclusiveness and tolerance, an ANCOVA was conducted in order to test for cultural differences in inclusiveness. The means in Table 3 suggest small differences in the expected direction (the average West German slope was closest to zero); yet, the differences were not significant.

In the next step, a multiple hierarchical regression with age and gender as covariates in the first step and inclusiveness as the independent variable in the second step was conducted across the three regional samples. As expected, higher levels of inclusiveness significantly predicted higher levels of tolerance ($b = .12, \Delta R^2 = .01, p < .05$). However, when the analyses were conducted separately in the three subsamples, it appeared that the relationship between inclusiveness and tolerance was only significant in the West German sample ($b = .20, p < .05$) where inclusiveness explained another 4% of the variance in addition to the covariates. On the other hand, the relationship was non-significant and a lot weaker in the East German sample ($b = .08, \Delta R^2 = .01, p > .05$) and in the Polish sample ($b = .11, \Delta R^2 = .01, p > .05$).

Discussion

This study aimed at revealing the link between a more inclusive self-construal and more positive attitudes towards foreigners and immigration issues, bringing together research from social and cross-cultural psychology. German participants scored higher on the personal and the humanity levels of the self-construal than Polish participants, as expected; this difference was most pronounced for participants from West Germany. Surprisingly, the Polish participants scored lowest also on the collective self. East Germans scored higher than West Germans on the collective self, which was in line with expectations. However, German participants scored higher on all scales, which suggests the influence of response tendencies like acquiescence. We dealt with this problem by computing an inclusiveness score that was independent of acquiescence and that reflected the relative importance of the four levels for every individual. As expected, inclusiveness of the self was highest in West Germany, followed by East Germany and then Poland; yet, the differences were small and not significant.

A similar pattern of means that showed expected, though nonsignificant differences was found for tolerance. A first explanation for this finding could be that the hypothesized effect is very small and would require much larger sample sizes to reach significance. A second explanation might be higher levels of impression management in East Germany and Poland. East Germany in particular has a reputation of having problems with racism and violence against foreigners. Eastern German and Polish students, who were informed about the international context of this study and of the British affiliation of the principal researcher at that time, may have shown more socially desirable responding. An alternative explanation might be that attitudes held by West German participants are more “real” and less idealistic than they might be in regions where ethnic diversity is not really part of everyday life. Finally, the lack of differences in tolerance could be due to the nature of the sample; student samples may not show the differences in tolerance that were found in other parts of their societies.

Our hypotheses about the relationship between self-construal and tolerance were partly supported; as expected, people who felt more connected to humanity at large were also more tolerant. Similarly, people who are more inclusive are more tolerant. However, although both links were clearly existent in the West German sample and strong enough to be observed even in the overall sample, they were not found when the East German and the Polish samples were analysed separately. The relationship between cultural group, self-construal, and tolerance therefore does not seem to be mediational as expected but cultural group seems to moderate the relationship between self-construal and tolerance. This is in line with findings by Schwartz (2007) who reported that in some Eastern European countries, including Poland and the area of the former German Democratic Republic, universalism values were not linked to intergroup attitudes such as attitudes towards immigrants. He explained this as resulting from the communist past, where universalistic values had been part of the mainstream ideology. In support of this, Bardi and Schwartz (1996) found that in those countries universalism values often had a meaning similar to conformity. Since most of the former Eastern European countries were quite isolated from the rest of the world, it seems plausible that the ingroup to which people apply their moral values, or their “moral universe”, as Schwartz (2007) put it, was also narrower and more exclusive. When people thought of “humanity”, they may have thought of other Polish or German people but not necessarily immigrants moving to their country. This interpretation suggests that at least the higher levels of the self-construal should rather interpreted as abstract values than a true reflection of people’s ingroup.

As opposed to Schwartz’s (2007) research which was based on data from the early 1990s shortly after the breakdown of the former Soviet Union, this study was based on participants who are too young to even have memories of the time when their country was communist. However, the parents of the participants lived their entire lives in a communist regime and inevitably the values they teach their children – consciously and unconsciously – are still a reflection of the culture in the society in which they grew up.

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