



The Functional and Identity Indispensability Scale (FIIS)[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This research further elaborated the concept of indispensability by developing and testing a new measure, the Functional and Identity Indispensability Scale (FIIS), to assess two dimensions on which groups can claim indispensability: functional indispensability and identity indispensability. In Study 1 we developed and validated the FIIS with a sample of 452 American college students. Results showed the expected two-factor structure and supported the prediction that identity and functional are two distinct, but related, forms of indispensability. FIIS showed a consistent structure across majority and minority members and the reliability of the two subscales was good. In Study 2, a sample of 154 White-American citizens evaluated the perceived indispensability (FIIS) of three minority groups: African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian-Americans. Results showed the scale's sensitivity. Participants attributed greater identity (vs. functional) indispensability to African-Americans, whereas the pattern was reversed for Asian-Americans. No differences were found for Hispanic-Americans. Criterion validity was supported by (a) positive associations with competence and warmth, (b) negative associations with negative emotions and with social distance towards all minority group targets. The psychometric properties of the FIIS suggest its potential to be valuable addition to the existing literature on common identities and intergroup relations.

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1. Introduction

Despite the strong evidence showing that minority groups actively contribute to societies in several domains (e.g., labor market flexibility, social contributions, innovation and economic growth), their full integration is often jeopardized by threat and low social acceptance in situations of close interpersonal relationships. However, social psychological research on intergroup attitudes did not traditionally focus on a functional perspective, where minority groups may be seen, and see themselves, to offer important and significant contributions to the society. Rather, most research focused either on the perspective of the majority groups, looking at how prejudice can be reduced, or on the perspective of the minority groups, looking at the promotion of collective awareness to challenge social inequalities (Dixon, Durrheim, Tredoux, Tropp, & Clack, 2010).

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The current research takes a functional approach that looks at the relation between minority and majority groups. We elaborated on a novel approach through which immigrants may be seen (and see themselves) as offering important social and economic contributions, that in turn can impact both attitudinal and adaptation outcomes (Guerra, Gaertner, António, & Deegan, 2015). Previous research showed that different forms of perceived indispensability of immigrants were associated with belonging to the same host country national group, thus reducing social distance, but did not examine the full validity of the two suggested dimensions (Guerra et al., 2015). The current research extends previous research by developing and testing a new measure, the Functional and Identity Indispensability Scale (FIIS), to assess two dimensions on which groups can claim indispensability: functional indispensability, by which groups can perceive themselves, and be perceived by others, as contributing some benefit to the host society (Guerra, António, Deegan, & Gaertner, 2013; Guerra et al., 2015), and identity indispensability, by which groups can perceive themselves and be perceived as contributing to a host society's identity (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010; Verkuyten, Matinovic, & Smeekes, 2014). The current studies focused on minority and majority relations, however, we wish to highlight that the scope of the FIIS is broader and it can apply to other social contexts (e.g., immigrant and host country groups, merger situations, age groups, etc.). For instances, given the high unemployment rate among youth in Europe (above 40% in Italy, Greece, or Spain, OECD 2016), it is likely that young and older people think about their group indispensability/contributions when competing in the job market, or even when reading articles about the future and stability of the social security system.

1.1. Types of indispensability that influence intergroup relations

Although we can trace the concept of *indispensability* back in the early twentieth century, specifically on the work of the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, the concept is relatively new in social psychology. The original formulation by Malinowski referred to the idea that “every type of civilization, every custom (. . .) fulfills some vital function, has some task to accomplish, represents an indispensable part within a working whole” (as cited in Merton, 1968). In social psychological literature, the concept of indispensability was primarily proposed as the perception that a group is a *necessary* element for defining a superordinate group (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010). Mirroring the original definition proposed by Malinowski, indispensability referred to the notion of all groups being necessary parts of superordinate category. The efficacy of creating superordinate identities to ameliorate conflictual intergroup relations has a long tradition in social psychology (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012). Because categorization is a basic process that is fundamental to intergroup bias, social psychologists have proposed different strategies to alter categorization that consequently reduce intergroup biases. Among others, the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner, Dovidio, Guerra, Hehman, & Saguy, 2016; Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989) proposed that recategorizing groups as either a single common group (e.g., a nation), or a more complex dual-identity representation, in which earlier group identities remain salient within the context of an inclusive superordinate identity, positively influences intergroup attitudes and behaviors (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009). There is strong evidence for the benefits of promoting inclusive common identities and, recently, research has been focusing on the conditions that illustrate when and why common identities are most efficacious (Gaertner et al., 2016). Less research, however, has focused on the factors that can elicit common identities. Since the seminal studies in 1989 and 1990, few studies have explored new intergroup factors that can promote the development of common identities. Subgroups' perceived indispensability to the common category is also a promising tool to promote common inclusive identities (Guerra et al., 2015; Verkuyten et al., 2014). By elaborating on the construct of indispensability, the current studies offer also new insights to the larger prejudice-reduction and common identity literature.

Despite the strong empirical support found for the efficacy of inducing superordinate identities, other work showed that dual-identities (i.e., a form of common identity) also increased intergroup bias. According to the ingroup projection model (Waldzus, Mummendey, Wenzel, & Weber, 2003), creating dual-identities allows members of each subgroup to define the common identity ethnocentrically as more similar to their subgroup than to another subgroup. This perceived relative ingroup to outgroup prototypicality has been related to more negative attitudes toward other subgroups (Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007).

The first social-psychological conceptualization of ingroup indispensability was built upon the ingroup prototypicality assumption. However, it was defined as a different, but related, construct, suggesting that perceived relative indispensability for a common identity could be considered as an additional process of ingroup projection (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2015). Specifically, Verkuyten and Martinovic (2015) proposed that “Indispensability is more likely for a category representation that is compositional and in which the different parts make up the overarching whole. Membership in compositional categories is not necessarily determined by prototypical similarity or resemblance but rather by indispensability of its diverse and dissimilar components” (p. 2). The first studies conducted to contrast directly the effects of relative ingroup prototypicality and relative ingroup indispensability revealed that relative ingroup indispensability, like prototypicality, was associated with higher intergroup bias for both majority and minority groups (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010; Verkuyten & Khan, 2012; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2015). Additionally, supportive of the ingroup projection approach, dual-identification was also related with higher relative ingroup indispensability (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010; Verkuyten & Khan, 2012).

Overall, research conducted with both majority and minority groups showed that relative ingroup indispensability and relative ingroup prototypicality are empirically distinct constructs that independently relate to negative outgroup attitudes. Nonetheless, perceived ingroup indispensability is also linked to positive intergroup outcomes. Recent research conducted with immigrant groups revealed that perceived ingroup indispensability to the national identity and to the functioning of the

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