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“Why should I?” Adolescents’ motivations to regulate prejudice in relation to their norm perceptions and ethnic attitudes



Jochem Thijs*, Nadya Gharaei, Thomas de Vroome

Ercomer, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined native Dutch adolescents’ motivations to regulate their out-group prejudice, and tested the relations with their ethnic attitudes and the perceived multicultural norms of their friends and parents. Three types of anti-prejudice motivation were assessed using a slightly adapted version of the Motivation to be Nonprejudiced Scale (MNPS; Legault et al., 2007): a strongly self-determined motivation (involving an intrinsic appreciation of out-groups and a personal endorsement of equality and out-group acceptance), a weakly self-determined motivation (including concerns with negative reactions from self and others), and amotivation (the absence of a clear motivation). Only the strongly self-determined motivation was consistently related to less negative ethnic attitudes, and it partly mediated the link between the perceived norms and these attitudes. The perceived norms of the friends were positively associated with the weakly self-determined motivation but the latter was not effective. Practical implications are discussed.

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1. Introduction

In most modern-day societies there is a pervasive social norm against ethnic and racial prejudice (Crandall, Eshleman, & O’Brien, 2002) of which young people are generally aware. Research has shown that children as young as six regard racial exclusion as morally wrong (Killen and Stangor, 2001) and that they are motivated to inhibit racial bias when accountable to others (De França and Monteiro, 2013; Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005). Moreover, after middle childhood there is a general decline in prejudice (Raabe and Beelmann, 2011), and older children and adolescents no longer tend to report more bias in private conditions, where they cannot be held responsible, than in public conditions, where they can (Rutland et al., 2005). The latter finding indicates that by preadolescence youngsters have come to accept the prevailing anti-prejudice norm and use it to regulate and control their racial and ethnic attitudes. However, this private acceptance does not necessarily reflect full internalization. Even if youth hold it important to be non-prejudiced and nondiscriminatory they may have different reasons for doing so. On the one hand, they may have truly embraced the norm and come to regard prejudice as unethical and at odds with their core values. But on the other hand, they may also superficially adhere to it in order to avoid social scorn and negative self-feelings (Legault, Green-Demers, Grant, & Chung, 2007).

Several studies have examined the underlying motivations to regulate prejudice in adults (for a review, see Butz and Plant, 2009), but to the best of our knowledge there is no comparable research involving adolescents. This is rather unfortunate

* Corresponding author at: Ercomer, Utrecht University, Padualaan 14 2, 3584 CH Utrecht, The Netherlands.
 E-mail address: j.t.thijs@uu.nl (J. Thijs).

as adolescence is a critical period in the development of ethnic identity and ethnic group attitudes (Quintana, 1998). In adolescence, “basic democratic norms such as tolerance and equality are shaped and acquired” (Meeusen, 2014), but it is also a time during which native majority youth become increasingly critical about ethnic diversity in society (Gieling, Thijs, & Verkuysten, 2010). Such changes make it important to examine whether and why adolescents seek to control negative ethnic attitudes. Next, although the motivations to be non-prejudiced may have important implications for the expression of prejudice (Legault et al., 2007) or the non-acceptance of racist conduct (Crandall et al., 2002) we know little about their antecedents (Butz and Plant, 2009). One of these antecedents, however, may be the direct exposure to anti-prejudice norms in one’s immediate environment. And adolescents may be especially sensitive to such social norms (Berndt, 1979; Brown, Bakken, Ameringer, & Mahon, 2008).

In the present study, we examined the anti-prejudice motivations of native Dutch majority adolescents (aged 14–18 years) living in the Netherlands, to investigate whether the study of these motivations can help us understand how norms affect ethnic attitudes in this particular age group. We addressed three different goals. First, we investigated the relations between the adolescents’ anti-prejudice motivations and their ethnic attitudes. Second, we tested whether these motivations were dependent on the multicultural norms perceived to be upheld by friends and parents. Finally, we examined whether the anti-prejudice motivations played a (mediating or suppressing) role in the link between these perceived multicultural norms of friends and parents, and the adolescents’ ethnic attitudes.

We assessed how the adolescents evaluated four of the largest non-Western ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands – Turks, Moroccans, Antilleans, and Surinamese – and we measured the degree to which they made a negative evaluative distinction between these out-groups (immigrants by origin) and their Dutch in-group. This sort of ‘in-group bias’ measure is often used in the literature on intergroup relations (see e.g., Reynolds, Turner, & Haslam, 2000) and has the advantage of taking positive or negative response tendencies into account.¹ Additionally, we examined the adolescents’ biased ethnic attitudes in a less direct way by measuring their endorsement of the belief that a true Dutch person is someone who is born and raised in the Netherlands. Although it might still include second generation immigrants, this belief entails an exclusive ethnic view of Dutch national identity (Hjerm, 1998) and such views are conducive to anti-immigrant prejudice (Pehrson, Vignoles, & Brown, 2009).

1.1. *The motivation to be non-prejudiced*

Social psychological research on prejudice and group bias has demonstrated the importance of individual difference variables in addition to that of situational factors (Hodson and Dhont, 2015). Many current views on prejudice hold that there is a basic tendency to be at least somewhat prejudiced in most people, but that there are individual differences in the degree to which they are successful in suppressing this tendency (for a review, see Crandall and Eshleman, 2003). Despite their different conceptualizations, these so-called two-factor theories share the notion that “[o]ne explanation for the persistence of prejudice, even among those who renounce prejudice, may simply be that responding without prejudice is sometimes difficult” (Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002; p. 835). The focus in this approach is on individual differences in the suppression or expression of prejudice rather than its origins.

Plant and Devine (1998) developed a measure which distinguished between internal versus external motivation to respond without prejudice – a distinction which did not show up in previous research (Dunton and Fazio, 1997). Whereas their internal motivation scale measured the degree to which the expression of prejudice violates people’s personal values and self-concept, the external scale reflected concerns with disapproval and other negative reactions from others. Theoretically, the former should be stronger and more consistently related to the non-expression of prejudice than the latter, as it implies that individuals have truly adopted the norm to be non-prejudiced and personally think it is important to be unbiased and open to other groups. By contrast, external motivation reflects the tendency to comply with the standards of others and thus only a superficial adherence to the norm, which will be substantially weaker in the absence of perceived normative pressure (see also Deutsch and Gerard, 1955; Kelman, 1958). In line with these notions, it was found that the internal motivation scale showed considerable negative relations with various prejudice measures, whereas their relations were absent or even positive for the external motivation scale (Plant and Devine, 1998). More recently, researchers have relied on Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan and Deci, 2000) to examine the motivation to be non-prejudiced (Butz and Plant, 2009). SDT is a general theory of motivation and claims, among other things, that the internalization of motivation is a matter of degree, and that more internalized motivation leads to more effective regulation of behavior and to more successful goal pursuit (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Different studies among adults have used the combination of Plant and Devine’s (1998) internal and external motivation scales to apply this notion to the realm of prejudice control (see Butz and Plant, 2009). For instance, Devine et al. (2002) reasoned that prejudice control that is both internally and externally motivated is effectively less internalized than prejudice control that is solely internally motivated. Accordingly, they found an interaction between internal and external motivation when prejudice was assessed with implicit measures and thus difficult to control: Internal motivation was related to less race bias but only when external motivation was low (Devine et al., 2002). Results such as this support a self-determination

¹ Please note that this kind of in-group bias does not necessarily imply prejudice. Yet, it does indicate a relative animosity toward the out-group.

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