



Social identity and prejudiced personality

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ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that the relation between personality and prejudice varies as a function of identity salience but previous empirical results are not conclusive. Extending previous research, we conducted an experimental study ($N = 122$) with pre- and post-manipulation measures of personality, and a post-manipulation measurement of prejudice, under conditions of control (no identity manipulation), personal or national identity. The results revealed no differences in the magnitude of the personality–prejudice correlations across conditions, neither for the pre- nor post-manipulation scores. Correlations based on pre- and post-manipulation variables, within each condition, did not differ significantly either. This indicates that neither prejudice nor personality variables were affected by identity salience. Thus, the study provides no support for the contention that the personality–prejudice relation varies as a function of social identity.

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1. Introduction

Early psychological research on the antecedents of prejudice focused strongly on people's personality (e.g., Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). Today, most research in this tradition centers on right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer, 1981) and social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). RWA is a re-elaboration of the authoritarian personality (Adorno et al., 1950) and comprises conventionalism, authoritarian submission, and authoritarian aggression. SDO is an individual difference construct from social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and measures a general preference for equal versus hierarchical intergroup relations.

Despite its early dominance, the personality approach to prejudice has also been subjected to extensive criticism, much of which boils down to an issue of stability, or rather, lack of stability. It has been argued that personality explanations to prejudice fail to account for rapid changes in prejudice levels in entire populations (e.g., Brown, 1995). It has also been demonstrated that RWA and SDO tend to change in level because of contextual influences (e.g., Duckitt & Fisher, 2003). However, other researchers have distinguished between stability in level (as reflected in mean scores) and stability in relative position (as reflected in correlations). The implication is that individual differences are not necessarily irrelevant even when mean level differences are real (e.g., Pettigrew, 1958). Recently, we demonstrated that prejudice levels changed by manipulating social psychological variables although personal-

ity–prejudice correlations were unaffected (Akrami, Ekehammar, Bergh, Dahlstrand, & Malmsten, 2009).

As the personality status of RWA and SDO has been questioned (e.g., Duckitt, Wagner, Du Plessis, & Birum, 2002), interest has been directed to more basic personality constructs for explaining prejudice. Thus, much attention has been directed to the widely accepted five-factor (Big-Five) model and the factors Agreeableness and Openness have been found to be strong predictors of prejudice (e.g., Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). However, some social psychologists discard personality psychology altogether and promote self-categorization theory (SCT) as an alternative (e.g., Reynolds & Turner, 2006). According to SCT, people can categorize themselves as individuals in contrast to other individuals (personal identity) or they can categorize themselves as group members in contrast to members of other groups (social identity). When people think as group members they “lose” their individuality (depersonalization) and individual differences are argued to be attenuated or erased. Consequently, individual differences are switched on and off (or increase/decrease) depending on the situation (e.g., Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

From this perspective, it has been suggested that the relation between RWA and prejudice would fluctuate depending on salient identity. The logic behind this hypothesis is that groups can have consensual views regarding authoritarian and prejudiced attitudes, thus when people are depersonalized, a weak correlation is produced. As emphasized by Reynolds and Turner (2006), depersonalization will occur only if the salient identity is related to such attitudes. For example, salience to a national identity should affect ethnic prejudice but not necessarily sexism. Although previous re-

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search in this area has focused on correlations, it should be noted that the SCT theorizing about depersonalization and consensus also applies to variances. Statistically, depersonalization should be directly reflected in decreased variances, which in turn should produce weak correlations.

SCT theorists (Reynolds & Turner, 2006; Turner, Reynolds, Haslam, & Veenstra, 2006) have cited two papers (see Reynolds, Turner, Haslam, & Ryan, 2001; Verkuyten & Hagendoorn, 1998) in support of the hypothesis of fluctuating correlations. However, these theorists have not been observant to the fact that Heaven and St. Quintin (2003) were unable to replicate these effects despite a greater statistical power and a manipulation identical to that of Verkuyten and Hagendoorn (1998). Also, there are a number of problems with the statistics and methodology in the studies of Verkuyten and Hagendoorn (1998) as well as Reynolds et al. (2001). Verkuyten and Hagendoorn conducted two studies and predicted differences between a personal and national condition for ten pairs of correlations. However, when we recalculated the *z*-values for these differences we only obtained two significant effects. The most serious drawback in the study of Reynolds et al. is the choice of a design that was not justified by the sample size. With 97 participants in the study, it would have been more reasonable to use two conditions instead of the actual five to arrive at reliable results. Another problem was a confusion of effect coding and contrast coding in their regression analyses, leading them to conclusions about contrasts they never investigated (for a thorough review, see Bergh & Akrami, submitted for publication).

As mentioned above, a fluctuating correlation between, for example, RWA and prejudice should be a direct consequence of restrained variance on one or both of the variables. Reynolds and Turner (2006) similarly argued that the direction and magnitude of the correlation coefficient would depend on consensual views (depersonalization) on RWA and prejudice. However, Verkuyten and Hagendoorn (1998), as well as Heaven and St. Quintin (2003), placed RWA (and SDO) before the manipulation whereas Reynolds et al. (2001) placed both prejudice and RWA after the manipulation. In the first case, only prejudice scores could have been affected by the manipulation to alter the correlation. For Reynolds et al., on the other hand, both RWA and prejudice could have been affected but the separate effects on either variable remain unknown. Consequently, previous research has not convincingly shown how the personality¹ variables are affected by identity salience or distinguished between the effect on personality and prejudice.

1.1. Rationale and aims

Based on the inconclusive results in previous research, this study was designed to investigate the effect of identity salience on the relation between personality and prejudice. In line with the notion that weak correlations can be driven by decreased variance (due to consensual views), a major concern in this study was to examine the separate effects of depersonalization on prejudice and the personality variables. The present research investigated these effects by inducing a personal, national or control (no manipulation) identity and adopting a pre- and post-manipulation measurement of personality and a post-manipulation measurement of prejudice. In line with SCT, we expected significant personality–prejudice correlations in the personal and control but not the national condition. More important, we aimed to compare the coefficients based on the pre- and post-manipulation variables both *across* and *within* condition to assess the effects of identity

salience on prejudice and personality separately. Any differences (beyond random error) across conditions for correlations between prejudice and *pre*-manipulation personality variables should be attributed solely to the effect of the manipulation on prejudice. On the other hand, differences across conditions for correlations based on *post*-manipulation personality variables should reflect the combined effect on personality and prejudice. Consequently, differences between the correlations based on pre- and post-manipulation variables within each condition should indicate the unique effect of the manipulation on the personality variables. Finally, we extended previous research by introducing Agreeableness and Openness as further predictive variables in addition to RWA and SDO.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and design

Six individuals who were not ethnic Swedes were excluded from the study, leaving 122 participants. The sample (52% women) comprised nonpsychology students and nonstudents representing various academic disciplines and professions aged between 18 and 63 years (*Mdn* = 24 years). Participants received cinema vouchers (8€) for their involvement.

We employed a between-groups mixed design, stratifying for gender, with pre- and post-measurement of the predictive variables. Participants were randomly assigned to either the personal identity (*n* = 39), national identity (*n* = 42) or control (*n* = 41) condition.

2.2. Instruments

Participants were introduced to a computerized questionnaire that included the Agreeableness and Openness items of the official Swedish version of the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992), the Social Dominance Orientation scale (SDO₆; Pratto et al., 1994), the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale (Zakrisson, 2005), and a measure of ethnic prejudice (9 items, $\alpha = .87$; Akrami, Ekehammar, & Araya, 2000).

Participants responded to the Big Five personality items on a five-step Likert scale ranging from *Is absolutely not true* (1) to *Is absolutely true* (5) and answered the RWA, SDO, and ethnic prejudice items on a five-step scale ranging from *Do not agree at all* (1) to *Fully agree* (5). All scales were balanced and indexes were constructed based on average scores across respective items with higher scores indicating higher level of the measured construct.

To make possible a pre- and post-manipulation measurement of Agreeableness and Openness, each scale was split into two halves (24 items each) that were balanced for reversed items across facets. Cronbach alpha (α) reliability of Agreeableness was .71 and .80 whereas Openness showed a reliability of .72 and .81 for the pre- and post-manipulation data, respectively. The RWA scale was divided into three parts (5 items each) with pre-manipulation consisting of part 1 and part 2 ($\alpha = .78$) and post-manipulation of part 2 and part 3 ($\alpha = .79$). Similarly, the SDO scale was divided into three parts (5, 6, and 5 items, respectively). The pre-manipulation consisted of part 1 and part 2 ($\alpha = .81$) and the post-manipulation of part 2 and part 3 ($\alpha = .88$). The procedure of splitting the scales was employed to ensure a reasonable reliability and to avoid redundancy. The correlations (*r*) between the pre and post-manipulation scores for Agreeableness and Openness were .77 and .78, respectively. Corresponding correlations for the non-overlapping items of RWA and SDO were .66 and .71, respectively.

¹ Although the personality status of RWA and SDO is questionable we follow previous research in this area (e.g., Heaven & St. Quintin, 2003) and use the term *personality variables* in the present text.

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