



Immigrants' generational status affects emotional reactions to informal social control : The role of perceived legitimacy of the source of control



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ABSTRACT

The study explores the emotional reactions and behavioral tendencies of people when they are told that their action deviates from current social norms. Of particular interest is the extent to which these reactions differ depending on the social controller's group membership. First- and second-generation North African immigrants in France (i.e., Maghrebians) were asked to imagine a situation in which they produced a counter-normative act and received disapproval from another Maghrebians immigrant or a member of the host community. They appraised the legitimacy of social control and the perception of being discriminated by this act of social control and rated their emotional and behavioral reaction to social control. First-generation immigrants reported less anger, more moral emotions, and a greater desire to repair their transgression when the social controller was presented as a member of the host society rather than a Maghrebian social controller. The results were reversed for second-generation immigrants. This asymmetry between first- and second-generation immigrants was mainly due to a mediating effect of the perceived legitimacy of social control, whereas perceived discrimination was not a significant mediator. This research demonstrates that the perceived legitimacy of social control based on the ethnic group membership of the social controller has profound effects on emotions and behaviors intended by the deviant.

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1. Introduction

In France, as in many other countries, the intake and settlement of migrants have been relatively important issues in recent years. With five million immigrants in 2008, representing 8% of the total population (INSEE, 2012), France is extremely diverse, and the likelihood of having an interaction with an individual of another ethnic identity is rather high. How well these interactions work out has become a central concern in many contemporary societies. Inter-group contact theory (see Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011) taught us that prejudice toward out-groups and inter-group harmony are highly determined by the quality of the contact experienced by individuals. It is thus crucial to understand the circumstances under which, in day-to-day life, intercultural contact can turn out positively (or at least not a major source of problematic behavior).

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Until recently, relatively little research has been conducted on ethnic relations and immigration in France (Schnapper, 2007). This is especially true when the question concerns possible generational differences between immigrants. However, it is clear that a distinction between first- and second-generation immigrants may potentially alter the experience of intercultural contact (Ait Ouarasse & Van de Vijver, 2005). Second generation immigrants are individuals born in the host society of immigrant parents as opposed to first-generation immigrants who are individuals born in another country. Second-generation immigrants' socialization and experiences with the majority are thus really different from those of newcomers, and the feelings and perceptions they have of the majority as well as their group behavior (e.g., intra- and inter-group relations) are also different (Berry, Phiney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). For example, in carefully controlled studies, Deaux et al. (2007) found that second-generation West Indian Immigrants in the U.S.A. react more strongly to a condition of stereotype threat compared to their first-generation counterparts. The aim of the present research was to examine the consequences of being an immigrant from the first or the second-generation on an inter-group contact that is originally made possible by a disturbing event, i.e., a situation in which someone violates a social norm and somebody else overtly disapproves of it.

This study investigated the case of Maghrebian immigrants in France. The Maghrebian community (i.e., Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) comprised 1.60 million of the French population in 2008 (INSEE, 2012). This community is also the main target of prejudice and discrimination. For example, national surveys conducted annually by the Human Rights Commission (CNCDH, 2009) showed that 63% of the French majority respondents agreed that there are too many Maghrebians in France while only 22% agreed that there were too many Asians. Beauchemin, Hamel, Lesné, Simon, and équipe TeO (2010) have shown that among 16,500 adults of Maghrebian origin in France, around 35% reported having experienced discrimination. Recently, European legislative election of 2014 has shown that 24.85% of the French population support extreme right racist party, such as Front National, which fights against immigration and especially against Muslim beliefs, that is, the predominant religion of Maghrebians. Consequently, Maghrebians can legitimately be suspicious about the dominant members' tendency to single out and stigmatize members of the Maghrebian minority during an interaction and especially in a situation involving the respect of social norms.

In everyday life, minorities, and especially immigrants, have to behave in ways that indicate respect for the social norms of the host society. Unlike other citizens, the failure to follow those social norms may prevent them from being accepted as group members and attaining opportunities for positive affiliations (e.g., Schachter, 1951). Counter-normative acts are often perceived as threatening to the stable and efficient functioning of the group or the society (Schachter, 1951). Consequently, individuals who engage in counter-normative behaviors are often victims of sanctions posed by other group members. Group members may convey their negative evaluation of a counter-normative act in a number of ways, including angry looks or negative comments (Brauer & Chekroun, 2005), a reduction in the allocation of group resources (Dedrick, 1978), shunning of the deviant (Janis, 1982), and even the exclusion of the deviant from the group altogether (Schachter, 1951). This process of sanctioning deviant behavior has been termed "informal social control" (Gibbs, 1981). Consistent with past literature (e.g., see Chekroun, 2008 for a review), here we define informal social control as any verbal or nonverbal communication through which individuals show to another person that they disapprove of his or her deviant (counter-normative) behavior.

Situations of social control are thus highly emotional and meaningful for individuals because in pointing out the deviant, they also allow them to focus on fundamental aspects of social livings, such as respect for others and moral values (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Scheff, 1988). According to functional theories of emotions (e.g., Keltner & Haidt, 1999), informal social control should induce negative moral emotions in the deviant, emotions such as embarrassment, shame, and guilt (Nugier, Niedenthal, Brauer, & Chekroun, 2007). These emotions are considered functional in that they serve to motivate reparative acts and discourage similar deviant acts in the future (Eisenberg, 2000). Thus, eliciting moral emotions in a group member who has engaged in a behavior that damages the group in some way should increase the member's inclination to make amends and to behave correctly in the future. The implied or explicit message is that a lack of behavioral change may result in exclusion from the group. Because the first generation of immigrants has a special interest in being accepted by the host population (Malewska-Peyre, 1982, 1990; Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994), they are likely to express intense moral emotions and adopt a more appropriate behavior when faced with social control.

The previous functional consideration of moral emotions suggests that social control is effective to the extent that the communication elicits moral emotion in the recipient (the deviant). However, social control can also elicit other emotions, and by consequence, be quite ineffective. Nugier et al. (2007) have shown that social control can also give rise to angry emotions (e.g., anger, hostility, indignation) in the perpetrator of the deviant act, especially when the control message is perceived as illegitimate. According to appraisal theorists, such anger-related emotions have a number of negative consequences for social interaction and group functioning (Frijda, 1986). Social control can thus be ineffective because it can elicit anger that is unlikely to result in reparation of the deviant act or greater adherence to social norms in the future. The consequence of such a situation is that the interaction between the deviant and the social controller becomes more negative and deleterious for inter-group relations. Thus, when the protagonists do not share the same social identity, the inter-group contact would be experienced as particularly negative. Knowing that such negative inter-group contact (i.e., inter-group social control) has received limited research attention, an important issue, then, is to define the conditions under which social control elicits moral emotions and inhibits or at least does not invite anger and hostility in inter-group interaction.

First-generation immigrants are newcomers, coming into a new country and experiencing a new cultural context prepared psychologically that they will have to manage new daily life events (Berry, 2005; Berry et al., 2006). They are also aware that they do not know very well the norms of the host society. Thus, when a first-generation immigrant inadvertently breaks a social norm, she or he should perceive the act of social control of the host society's member as particularly legitimate.

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