The effects of stereotype content on acculturation preferences and prosocial tendencies: The prominent role of morality

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ABSTRACT

This study provides experimental evidence about the effect of stereotypes on majority members' acculturation preferences and their prosocial behavioral tendencies toward minority members. This work aimed to understand the distinct effect of the stereotype dimensions of morality, sociability, and competence when predicting these variables. An experimental study was carried out with 201 British participants who read a news article in which Indian minority members were depicted as high (vs. low) on each of the three stereotype dimensions. After reading the experimental manipulation, participants reported their acculturation preferences by indicating their desire for culture maintenance and adoption among minority members, and their willingness to support positive institutional measures toward Indians. Only morality (vs. sociability or competence) had a direct effect on desire for cultural maintenance: majority members were more flexible about Indians' maintenance of their original culture when those were perceived as highly moral. Even if no direct effects of stereotypes were found on prosocial behavioral tendencies, morality was still the unique dimension that indirectly predicted prosocial tendencies through desire for maintenance. Once again, the prominent effect of morality was confirmed for intergroup relationships, playing a more important role than sociability and competence.

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1. Introduction

Negative intergroup attitudes are not something with relevance only in the past. They are very much alive and thriving in British society today. Opinion polls suggest that British respondents are quite wary of immigration. In a recent survey, 68% of British participants viewed immigration as a problem rather than an opportunity, 63% agreed that immigrants are a burden on social services, 58% agreed that immigrants take jobs away from British people, and 50% stated that immigration negatively affects British culture (Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, 2011).

To address these trends, it is important to understand the drivers of attitudes and behavioral tendencies of majority members toward minority members. The current experimental study aims to explore the distinct role played by three stereotype dimensions, namely morality, sociability and competence, about minority groups in shaping acculturation preferences and prosocial behavioral tendencies toward them. This contribution intends to fill some of the gaps in the study of stereotype content, acculturation preferences and prosocial behavioral tendencies, and to explore how they are related to each other.

1.1. The role of stereotypes when predicting majority members' acculturation expectations about minority groups

Acculturation is a concept of major importance when theorizing about the ways minority and majority groups can coexist. Acculturation is concerned with the mutual changes resultant from contact between groups with different cultures (Berry, 1999; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Within psychology, Berry's acculturation model (Berry, 1997) is the most influential contribution in this field. His framework encompassed two dimensions that underlie immigrants' acculturation preferences: the minority members' desire to maintain the original culture, and the desire to have contact with members of the majority society.

Subsequent theorizing has suggested that it may be better to replace the dimension of 'contact desire' with one encapsulating 'the desire to adopt the culture of the host community', because this new dimension provides a better match with the content of the former dimension (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997). While the original theorizing focused on minority members' preferences, theorists are now also interested in majority members' acculturation preferences, since majority members' desires also influence intergroup relations (Bourhis et al., 1997; Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker, & Obdrzalek, 2000; Zagefka & Brown, 2002). This current study concentrates on the majority perspective, specifically on predictors of majority members' desire for culture maintenance and culture adoption.

Several studies have focused on the variables related to acculturation preferences, such as perceived threat or prejudice (Kosic & Phalet, 2006; Piontkowski, Rohmann, & Florack, 2002; Tip, Zagefka, Gonzalez, Brown, & Cinirella, 2012; Zagefka, Binder, & Brown, 2010). Recently, it was briefly mentioned that stereotypes might also play a central role in influencing majority members' acculturation preferences (Lee & Fiske, 2006) alluding to indirect evidence (Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001, 2004). In this sense, the Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM, Bourhis et al., 1997) proposes that majority members' preferences differ according to the national origin of the immigrant group assessed, and according to whether immigrant groups are valued or devalued (Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001, 2004). Given that this valuation or devaluation of minority groups depends mainly on stereotypes majority members will have about them (Tchoryk-Pelletier, 1989), it may be inferred that stereotypes influence majority members' acculturation preferences. The Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM, Navas et al., 2005) also recognizes that it is important to differentiate various immigrant groups by ethnocultural origin, and that several psychosocial variables (e.g., the cognitive dimension of prejudice) may influence both minority and majority members' acculturation preferences.

Actually, stereotypes are highly relevant in intergroup contexts because they shape our expectations about different groups' emotions and behaviors; stereotypes have rich inferential potential (Worchel, 1999). Moreover, stereotypes about outgroups have been demonstrated to have the power to influence majority members' attitudes and behaviors (Bargh, 1999; Velasco González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008).

In spite of the promising idea that stereotypes affect acculturation preferences, to date there is not experimental evidence to support this. A recent study (López-Rodríguez, Zagefka, Navas, & Cuadrado, 2014) provides more direct evidence, showing that the majority's stereotypes about immigrants and their perceived threat mediate the effect of acculturation perceptions on acculturation preferences. However, the content of stereotypes should be more deeply explore when predicting acculturation preferences.

1.2. Different dimensions of stereotype contents

As Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002, p. 878) have asserted, "not all stereotypes are alike". The identification of two general dimensions that underlie personal and social perception has a long tradition (Peeters & Czapinski, 1990; Rosenberg, Nelson, & Vivekananthan, 1968; Wojciszke, 2005). In spite of using different labels, most scholars agree that one dimension is mainly related to agency or competence aspects (e.g., intelligence, skill), and the other one to communion or social qualities (e.g., friendliness, warmth).

The Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999) is considered one of the most important frameworks when studying stereotypes and their influence. Particularly, this model proposes the existence of two main dimensions which dominate our social perception of others (i.e., warmth and competence). According to this model, 'competence' helps perceivers to know others' capabilities in order to achieve their intentions. It incorporates such traits as efficacy, skill, confidence, and intelligence. On the other hand, 'warmth' is important to anticipate others' intentions in a given social context. It comprises such traits as morality, trustworthiness, kindness, and friendliness (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008).

Sometimes, such terms may be misleading. As can be seen, the dimension of warmth is a moral-social dimension. Traditionally, it has been also dubbed *morality* (e.g., Phalet & Poppe, 1997; Wojciszke, 1994), even if the traits which composed this general dimension were not always exclusively moral traits, but a mixed of social and moral features.

In spite of the importance of both dimensions in social perception, warmth judgments are thought to be primary. Certainly, the information about the moral–social dimension is more cognitively accessible, more predictive, and more heavily weighted in evaluative judgments (Cuddy et al., 2008). This might be because another's intentions for good or ill are more relevant to survival than whether the other can achieve those goals (Cuddy et al., 2008).

At the interpersonal level, Wojciszke, Bazinska, and Jaworski (1998) also support the idea that *morality* occupies a prominent position in impression formation. They argue that moral categories are more important than other concepts such as competence in locating others on the approach-avoidance dimension (i.e., to distinguish between persons who should be