



Predictors of intergroup bias in Turkish Cypriots



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ABSTRACT

We investigated the role of certain individual and group processes on intergroup bias in the context of Cyprus, an island that has endured over 40 years of interethnic tension. One hundred and fifty Turkish Cypriots were asked to complete a survey which assessed intergroup contact and intergroup bias toward Greek Cypriots. Political affiliation, ingroup favoritism and intergroup contact played a role in predicting prejudice toward Greek Cypriots. Path analysis showed the relationship between ingroup favoritism and outgroup prejudice was partially mediated by low intergroup contact. The findings highlight the theoretical and practical implications for prejudice reduction techniques in Cyprus.

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1. Introduction

In long-term intractable conflicts, the parties involved have a long history of rivalry, aggression, and failed attempts at conflict resolution (Bar-Tal, 2001). Indeed, in most of these conflicts (e.g., the Middle East, Cyprus, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Chechnya, and Rwanda) an evolved “culture of conflict” that is dominated by societal beliefs of collective memory which are often selective, biased, and distorted function as a major obstacle to any peace process (Bar-Tal, 2007). However, it is contexts such as these that are most in need of interventions aimed towards reducing prejudice.

Research on prejudice suggests that intergroup bias, or, favorably evaluating one's own group can have negative consequences for intergroup relations. It is therefore critical to determine both individual and group processes as predictors of intergroup bias, particularly in real life contexts defined by conflict and dissolution. One such context is that of Cyprus where, despite the partial opening of borders, interethnic conflict and discord still exist. In the following study, we assessed the role of certain individual processes (i.e., political affiliation and level of religiosity) as well as group processes (i.e., intergroup contact) on intergroup bias, namely outgroup prejudice toward Greek Cypriots by Turkish Cypriots.

1.1. Intergroup bias

Intergroup bias refers to the systematic, group-serving tendency to evaluate one's own ingroup more favorably than those in the outgroup (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). This can include favoring the ingroup (ingroup favoritism) as well as denigrating the outgroup (outgroup derogation or prejudice). It also often includes an interpretative judgment on behalf of group members which can be unfair, or illegitimate, hence ‘biased’ in its nature (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Forms of intergroup

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bias can range from mild forms of bias such as prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, injustice, oppression, to more extreme versions including ethnic cleansing and genocide (Hewstone & Cairns, 2001).

Research findings have found inconsistencies in the positive relationship between ingroup bias and outgroup derogation. Many studies have found both ingroup and outgroups can be evaluated positively, however ingroups are often treated more favorably than outgroups (Brewer, 1979; Mummendey & Otten, 1998). For instance empathy, positive regard, trust, cooperation and the like positive emotions are extended to the ingroup, but not to the outgroup. This, while remaining to be a component of ingroup favoritism, should be distinguished from outgroup derogation which can include aggression and violence. Brewer (1999) has therefore suggested that ingroup love (or ingroup favoritism) is not necessarily equivalent to outgroup hate (or prejudice).

Research has therefore turned to identifying key moderators of intergroup bias. Ingroup identification (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Perreault & Bourhis, 1999); group characteristics such as size, power and status (Bourhis, 1994; Brewer & Brown, 1998; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992) and threat (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1997; Stephan & Stephan, 1985) are some of those variables that have been associated with intergroup bias. They have also been covered in terms of individual and group based processes (Hewstone et al., 2002).

1.1.1. Individual processes

Individual processes, including personality and individual-difference variables have been linked to intergroup bias (mostly prejudice). Although there is a long list of potential personality and individual-difference variables, the most relevant for this research is the role of right-wing political affiliation and religiosity. Research by Altemeyer (1998) and Batson and Burris (1994) have established a positive relationship between prejudice and both right-wing authoritarianism (following social conventions and authorities) and strong religious beliefs. Egalitarian values have generally been associated with more favorable responses to all groups whereas endorsement of protestant work ethic values has been found to predict rejection of outgroups (Biernat, Vescio, & Theno, 1996). Although religiosity has been associated with prosocial behavior it does not predict helping behavior universally and instead can predict antisocial behavior in those who do not support one's values (Preston, Ritter, & Hernandez, 2010). In a study by Jackson and Hunsberger (1999) it was found that religious individuals reported positive attitudes toward similar religious groups (showing ingroup favoritism) but negative attitudes to nonreligious others (i.e., outgroup derogation).

In a more recent study focusing on the relationship between religiosity and intergroup bias, Johnson, Rowatt, and LaBouff (2012) found that self-reported religiosity and spirituality correlated positively with more negative attitudes toward outgroups relative to ingroups.

1.1.1.1. Group processes. As for group processes implicated in intergroup bias, intergroup contact is thought to be one of the major contributors to reducing bias, emphasizing the need for increasing quantity and quality of intergroup contact (e.g., Pettigrew, 1998). Positive intergroup contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice and intergroup discrimination (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998). This is especially thought to be the case if the contact situation embodies equal status, common goals, co-operation, and institutional sanctioning (Allport, 1954).

Several studies have shown the benefits of intergroup contact between groups of different ethnic backgrounds. Islam and Hewstone (1993) showed dimensions of contact are related to intergroup anxiety, perceived out-group variability, and out group attitude in a group of Hindu and Muslim religious groups in Bangladesh. Greenland and Brown (1999) conducted research with British and Japanese nationals and found a relationship between quality of contact and negative outgroup affect and intergroup bias. In a study by Stephan, Diaz-Loving, and Duran (2000) American and Mexicans' attitudes of one another was assessed. It was found that the quality of intergroup contact (i.e., the extent to which contact is voluntary, positive, individualized and of equal status) played an important role in attitudes toward the other group. Voci and Hewstone (2003) investigated intergroup contact with immigrants in Italy. It was observed that contact had a positive effect on perceived outgroup attitudes and decreased subtle prejudice.

Similar results have been obtained with more indirect forms of contact, such as extended contact. Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Vope, and Ropp (1997) showed that White participants who had at least one ingroup friend with an outgroup friend reported less outgroup prejudice toward the target group compared to those participants who had no extended outgroup friends. Similarly, across two cross-sectional studies R. Turner, Hewstone and Voci (2007) observed that extended contact among Catholics and Protestants in North Ireland was associated with more positive outgroup attitudes and greater perceived outgroup variability. Research by Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, and Voci (2004) have found that in addition to direct intergroup contact, indirect or vicarious forms of cross-group friendships between Catholic and Protestants in North Ireland were associated with reduced prejudice toward the religious outgroup and increased perceived outgroup variability via an anxiety-reduction mechanism.

Research is now indicated that the simple mental simulation of a contact situation can provoke the cognitive mechanisms parallel to that of a real contact situation. Studies of imagined contact (Crisp & Turner, 2009) have been found to reduce prejudice in a number of different groups (for a recent narrative review see Crisp & Turner, 2012; for a meta-analysis see Miles & Crisp, 2014).

A recent meta-analysis of intergroup contact effects by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found that intergroup contact typically reduced intergroup prejudice. They observed a robust, highly significant effect of contact on prejudice. Their findings show

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