Attitudes towards In- and Outgroups in South African Ethnic Groups: The Role of Essentialism and Universal-Diverse Orientation

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Abstract

Long after the Apartheid era in South Africa, the segregation of ethnic-cultural groups remains an issue. This study's objective was to assess the impact of one's ethnic group on the attitudes towards the ethnic ingroup and outgroups, and the moderating effect of essentialism and universal-diverse orientation. The added value of this research lies in the inclusion of individual worldviews in the study of well-known phenomena like ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation, and the application of this novelty in a diverse, relatively underexplored, yet scarred society such as post-conflict South Africa. We surveyed a homogeneous South African adult sample, performed a multivariate analysis of variance, and concluded that although the effect of belonging to a particular ethnic-cultural group on attitudes towards ingroup and outgroups is significant, its magnitude is very small. Regarding essentialism and universal-diverse orientation, we found that ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation are particularly – or even exclusively – present among those high in essentialist thinking and low in cultural open-mindedness. The main theoretical implication of these findings is that one's worldviews can shape the extent to which one likes ingroups and dislikes outgroups. The key practical implication is that policy makers should take into account these important individual differences when applying interventions that aim to promote tolerance and reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

Keywords: attitudes, ingroup, outgroups, essentialism, universal-diverse orientation

Introduction

During the Apartheid-era in South Africa, a distinction between four ethnic groups was created: Blacks, Whites, Indians, and Coloureds[1]. During that period, Whites were seen as superior to the rest; therefore, ethnic groups lived segregated lives and were treated unequally in public and private life. After adopting democratic legislation in 1994, progress in racial equality has been made. All ethnic and cultural groups have now received access to sociocultural and basic resources, and all groups are allowed entry into the formal economy (Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2010). Despite these adaptations, there is still evidence that segregation of an informal

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type persists. South Africa's major cities remain heavily segregated (Alexander & Tredoux, 2010). Although intergroup interactions and relationships are more common today, many groups still stick together. Research suggests that Whites and Blacks continue to self-segregate (Schrieff, Tredoux, Dixon & Finchilescu, 2005; Schrieff, Tredoux, Finchilescu & Dixon, 2010).

Defining Ethnic Groups in Contemporary South Africa

Firstly, there needs to be a consensus of what we consider to be an ethnic-cultural group. Often, skin tone is used as an argument to categorise a person to an ethnic group. However, differences in physical characteristics to classify people into ethnic groups, such as skin tone, also reflect intrinsic characteristics. During Apartheid, presumed biological differences justified the superiority of the Whites relative to the Blacks. Despite the physical characteristics that often differ between ethnic-cultural groups, the research identifies race as a social rather than a biological construct. Within his genetic studies, Zuckerman (1990) found far more differences within rather than between ethnic groups. Saperstein, Penner, and Light (2013) stated that ethnic categories should rather be seen as historically situated, context-specific, and subject to processes of both resistance and reproduction. Not only do physical differences make us decide to categorise individuals into specific ethnic groups, but also social norms, conventions, and laws play a fundamental role in classifying people (Banks & Eberhardt, 1998; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008).

The categorisation into Black, White, Coloured or Indian/Asian is still officially used in statistical publications and census data. However, mandatory registration and classification into ethnic groups have been replaced with ethnic self-identification. Gibson and Claassen (2010) showed differences in attitudes between these ethnic-cultural groups. They concluded that Black South Africans have become less reconciled to Whites over time, whereas White, Coloured, and Indian South Africans have become more reconciled to Blacks. In this study, we will use the four ethnic categories mentioned before because of their historical reality, because they are still used in daily life in South Africa, and because previous studies show that group differences may exist. Surely, this does not mean that we believe that these categories have essentialist attributions.

Essentialism

During Apartheid, the government categorised people into ethnic groups because of assumed innate characteristics. These assumed innate features were used as a

justification to make Blacks inferior. This is a historical example of essentialist thinking. Essentialism (ESS) is defined in psychological research as the belief that members of a particular social category share a fixed underlying nature or essence (Gelman, 2003; Haslam & Levy, 2006; Medin, 1989).

South African history demonstrates that believing in a fixed underlying nature can result in negative attitudes. Research has shown that essentialism can contribute to negative attitudes. Haslam, Rothschild and Ernst (2002) found positive correlations between White Americans' essentialist beliefs about African Americans and their anti-Black attitudes. In the same vein, Keller (2005) found that belief in genetic determinism among German majority participants predicted more negative attitudes towards Turks and greater endorsement of stereotypes of people of African descent. Jayaratne and colleagues (2006) also found in a representative survey of Americans that anti-Black prejudice was associated with holding a genetic explanation for racial differences. This effect was independent of other established predictors of prejudice such as age, political orientation, Southern residence, religiosity, and low education. This indicates that essentialist beliefs have a distinct role to play in accounting for attitudes towards other ethnic groups. Corroborating this, Chao, Chen, Roisman, and Hong (2007) found that essentialist majority group members from the United States held more negative and distancing attitudes towards Asian immigrants. Finally, even beyond ethnic group borders, Van Assche, Bostyn, De Keersmaecker, Hansenne, and Dardenne (2017) showed that higher essentialism was also positively related to more negative attitudes towards other linguistic groups. In sum, we can predict that essentialism will play a key role in South African communities' in- and outgroup attitudes.

Universal-Diverse Orientation

Imagine this scenario: Ahmed and Julia have a very different ethnic background, yet they are best friends. They met in kindergarten and grew up together. They cannot understand why people always comment that their friendship is strange because he is a boy and she is a girl, or he is Coloured and she is White. They say they focus more on what they have in common, rather than what makes them different. They know they are different in many ways, but they do not mind—they like each other. Ahmed and Julia are high in universal-diverse orientation (UDO). UDO can be described as an attitude towards all other persons that is inclusive yet

differentiating in that similarities and differences are both recognised and accepted. This shared experience of being human results in a sense of connectedness with other people and is associated with a plurality or diversity of interactions with others (Miville et al., 1999; Singley & Sedlacek, 2009).

Lowe (2011) found in the conflict zone of Bosnia-Herzegovina that UDO was positively related to positive intergroup attitudes. Fuertes and Gelso (2000) showed - in the specific case of counselling - that UDO plays a vital role in how clients perceive their Hispanic counsellor. Participants' perceptions of the Hispanic counsellors as attractive, expert and trustworthy, and their willingness to work with them in long-term therapy, were affected by the participants' UDO-level. This study again indicates the importance of UDO in explaining and predicting positive outgroup attitudes. Phillips and Ziller (1997) further found, in their study in which U.S. participants were asked to rate photographs of targets differing in ethnic background, that those high in UDO were more accepting and less discriminating between minority and non-minority control targets than less universally oriented participants. Likewise, Van Assche, Roets, Haesevoets, and Noor (2020) revealed that UDO was the most vital predictor of Belgian's attitudes towards apology and reparation for its colonial past. Finally, Bartikowski and Walsh (2015) also found that reluctance to purchase foreign products increases with national identity but does not increase with global identity. Universal-diverse orientation could account for this asymmetry and explain the underlying psychological processes. As such, we hypothesise that UDO will play a key role in explaining individual differences in intergroup attitudes in contemporary South Africa.

Study objectives

This study's objective was to investigate the impact of the self-identified ethnic group (Black, White, Coloured, or Indian/Asian) on the attitudes towards the ethnic ingroup and ethnic outgroups, and the moderating effect of essentialist attitudes and universal-diverse orientation herein. Indeed, although it is widely known that people tend to favour their own group over other groups, this tendency may be exaggerated among those with an essentialist mindset, and it may be absent in those with a culturally open-minded worldview. This study took place in Cape Town, South Africa, a setting where studying intergroup attitudes is highly relevant and salient.

Methods

The population of interest for this research is all South Africans that are 17 years of age and older without exclusion of specific groups. Since areas still tend to be ethnically and economically homogeneous in South Africa, we chose cluster sampling to select the areas. The cluster sampling was based on income and ethnic-cultural background. This way, we were able to collect a diverse sample that represents all ethnic-cultural groups and all layers of the current South African society in terms of socio-economic status. We went to the area and asked face to face if people were willing to volunteer. Anyone who wanted to participate could do so. In the case of participation, no compensation was given. The ethnic concentration and composition of the Capetonian areas were taken into account and income when selecting areas for research. We used referral sampling for people living in townships, as they are difficult to access: respondents recruited future subjects among their acquaintances. Lastly, we also recruited students by contacting universities.

Materials

The questionnaire included four parts. The first part included the respondents' demographic data: age, gender, education level, profession, income level, familial living area, nationality, ethnic background, and mother tongue (see also Chen, Van Assche, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & Beyers, 2015).

The second part assessed the respondents' essentialism. To measure ESS, we used the Essentialist Entitativity (E.E.) scale (Van Assche et al., 2017). Respondents completed a series of self-report measures on a 7-point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Six items from the E.E. scale were selected to reduce the length of the questionnaire: two items from the subscale Uniformity, two items from the subscale Informativeness, and two items from the subscale Inherence (α =.77).

The third part questions the respondents' universal-diverse orientation. To measure UDO, we used the Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale – Short Form (MGUDS-S; Fuertes et al., 2000) because it covers three major dimensions of cross-cultural competence and because its reliability and validity is strong. This questionnaire also compromised a series of items on a 7-point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). In order to reduce the length of the questionnaire, nine items from the MGUDS-S were selected: three items from the

subscale Diversity of Contact, three items from the subscale Relativistic Appreciation, and three items from the subscale Comfort with Differences (α =.76).

The fourth part measured attitudes towards ethnic ingroups and outgroups. Ten one- item measures were used on a 10-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 10 = strongly agree), five items measured negative attitudes, and five items tapped into positive attitudes (based on Van Assche, 2018; 2019; Van Assche, Roets, Dhont, & Van Hiel, 2014; 2016). Respondents were asked to score the attitudes towards Whites, Blacks, Coloureds, and Indians/Asians separately. Assessment of the internal consistency of the attitude scale showed a possible inconsistency of one item (empathy) for each group. Therefore, we decided to exclude this item. The resulting nine items yielded a Cronbach alpha towards Whites, Blacks and Coloureds of respectively α = .76, α = .80 and α = .82.

Design and procedure

We conducted the study in multiple local Capetonian areas in South Africa. In order to test our hypotheses, we opted for a cross-sectional quantitative research design. We conducted a paper-based survey as well as an online survey in several communities in Cape Town. The online survey was completed in the respondents' private atmosphere, while participants who completed the paper-based survey were given the choice to complete the questionnaire independently or with the assistance of one of the researchers. If respondents asked about the purpose of the research, the researcher explained that the study is designed to explore the effects of personality on attitudes towards other ethnic groups. Respondents were informed about the confidentiality of the questionnaire.

Analyses

The main effects of ethnic groups on attitudes.

We performed a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test to see whether there is a difference in attitudes towards our four ethnic groups. We calculated Pillai's trace, a highly robust indicator for MANOVA's assumptions. We tested the assumption of equal variances across groups with Levene's test, and we calculated the F-value along with p-value. We also calculated the effect size estimate with ηp^2. To address the problem of multiplicity, we performed a Bonferroni correction method.

ESS and UDO as moderators.

Next, we performed a second MANCOVA model to investigate ESS and UDO as moderators of the effects of belonging to a particular ethnic group on attitudes.

Results

One hundred and sixty participants completed the questions concerning their own ethnic group and attitudes towards other groups. We will further briefly describe the distribution of the population in terms of the demographic variables. Forty-five people (28.1%) were White, 63 (36.4%) were Black, and 38 (23.8%) respondents were Coloured. Because of the small size of the Indian/Asian group (N = 10) and the "other" ethnic group (N = 4), we excluded them from the analyses. The mean age was 30.48, 81 (55.5%) were men, and 64 (43.8%) were women. Five participants (3.6%) finished primary education, 36 (25.9%) finished secondary education, and 98 (67.1%) finished higher education or were still studying. If we look at income levels, we see that 71 people (55.0%) earn less than the country average, 36 (27.9%) earn around the country's average, and 22 (17.1%) earn more than the country average. Eighty-eight participants (61.1%) live in urban areas, 17 (11.8%) live in rural areas, and 39 (27.1%) live in townships. One hundred and twenty-nine (88.4%) respondents were South Africans, while 17 (11.6%) indicated having another nationality.

The main effect of ethnic group on attitudes

We found a significant main effect (Pillai's trace = .23, $F(6, 238)$ = 5.13, p < 0.001, ηp^2 = .12; see Table 1). There were no group differences in attitudes towards Black people ($F(2, 120)$ = 1.60, p = .21), nor on attitudes towards Coloured people ($F(2, 120)$ = 2.80, p = .07). To examine whether specific group differences exist, we performed a posthoc Bonferroni comparison. The mean differences between the groups were shallow. The largest difference we found was between Whites' and Blacks' attitudes towards Whites (1.00 point on a scale of 10. 95% CI: -0.01 to 2.02; see Table 2).

Table 1: Mean attitudes towards each ethnic group

	Own ethnic group			All
	White (N = 39)	Black (N = 52)	Coloured (N = 32)	
Attitudes	Mean SD	Mea SD	Mean SD	Mean SD

Towards			n					
Whites	8.25	1.17	7.24	2.10	7.63	1.38	7.67	1.71
Blacks	7.33	1.91	8.04	1.36	7.17	1.78	7.59	1.69
Coloureds	7.30	1.88	6.93	2.02	7.33	1.91	7.15	1.94

Figure 1. Mean attitudes towards each ethnic group. Vertical bars indicate standard errors.
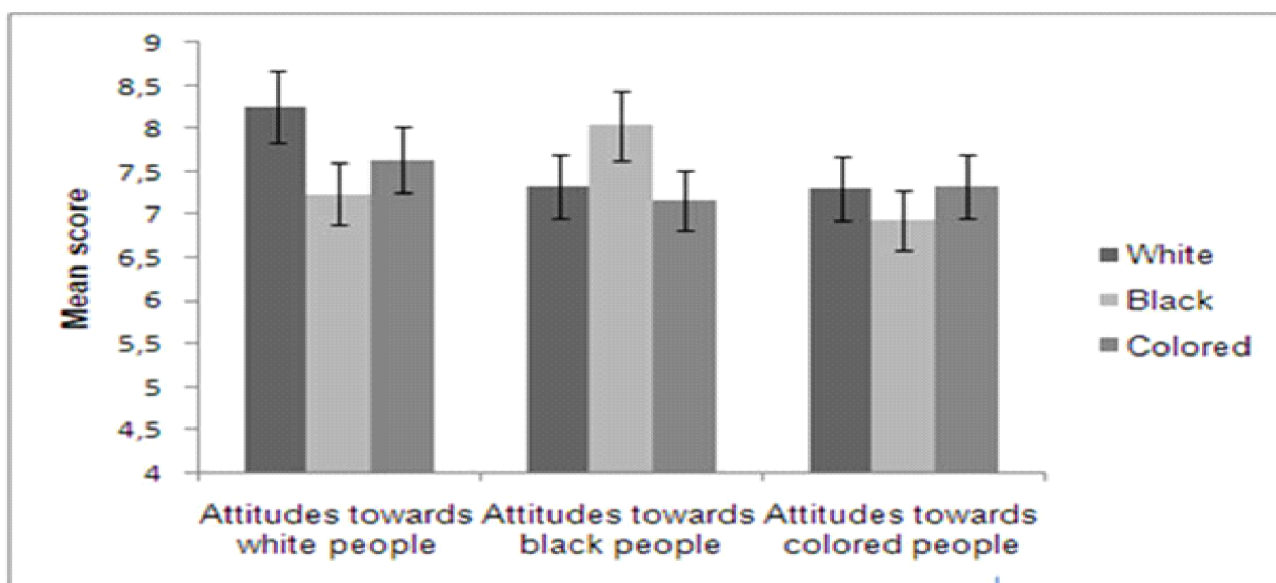

Table 2: Bonferroni comparisons for attitudes towards each ethnicity

Attitudes towards			Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
White	White	Black	1.00	0.42	-0.01	2.02
		Coloured	0.55	0.49	-0.66	1.76
	Black	Coloured	-0.46	0.47	-01.60	0.69
Black	White	Black	-0.76	0.34	-1.60	0.08
		Coloured	-.04	0.41	-1.04	0.96
	Black	Coloured	0.72	0.39	-0.22	1.67
Coloured	White	Black	0.34	0.44	-0.74	1.42
		Coloured	-0.05	0.53	-1.34	1.23
	Black	Coloured	-0.39	0.50	-1.61	0.82

ESS and UDO as moderators

Our results showed no significant multivariate effects of ESS (Pillai's trace = .03, $F(3, 109)$ = 1.28, p = .28, ηp^2 = .03) nor of UDO (Pillai's trace = .03, $F(3, 109)$ = 1.02, p = .39, ηp^2 = .03) on attitudes. The main multivariate effect of the ethnic group on attitudes remained significant (Pillai's trace = .15, $F(6, 220)$ = 2.88, p = .01, ηp^2 = .07). We found no interaction effect between ESS and UDO (Pillai's trace = .03, $F(3, 109)$ = 0.85, p = .47). Our results did show a significant interaction between ESS and ethnic group (Pillai's trace = .16, $F(6, 220)$ = 3.08, p = .006, ηp^2 = .08), between UDO and ethnic group (Pillai's trace = .15, $F(6, 220)$ = 2.96, p = .008, ηp^2 = .08), and a three-way interaction between ESS, UDO, and ethnic group (Pillai's trace = .16, $F(6, 220)$ = 3.22, p = .005, ηp^2 = .08).

In particular, the "ingroup favouritism" effect of being White on attitudes towards Whites was weaker among those high in UDO (b = -3.35, SE = 1.63, p = .04, ηp^2 = .02) and more pronounced among those high in ESS (b = 5.95, SE = 2.52, p = .02, ηp^2 = .03). Similarly, the "outgroup derogation" effect of being White on attitudes towards Blacks was higher among those high in ESS (b = 5.96, SE = 2.46, p = .02, ηp^2 = .03). In sum, we found minimal differences in attitudes towards the various groups in South Africa. There was a trend of each group preferring one's own group over ethnic-cultural outgroups (see also Van Assche, Politi, Van Dessel, & Phalet, 2020); this trend was particularly present among individuals with low scores on UDO and high scores on essentialism.

Discussion

Research in intergroup relations is timely and particularly relevant in post-conflict countries (Van Assche et al., 2020; Van Assche, Roets, De Keersmaecker, & Van Hiel, 2017). With South Africa mainly, the history of intergroup tensions offers a fertile ground for such investigations (Van Assche, 2012). In this study, although we did find a significant main effect of ethnic-cultural groups on intergroup attitudes, the magnitude of this effect was relatively low. Differences between ethnic groups were small and often negligible. Nevertheless, the significant interaction effects pointed out that such differences were found, especially among specific individuals, i.e., those high in ESS and low in UDO.

Individual rather than group differences

Theoretically, it seems vital not only to consider potential group differences, but also take into account the crucial role of individual differences (see Van Assche, Dhont, & Pettigrew, 2019; Van Assche, Roets, Van Hiel, & Dhont, 2019). Hence, we

propose a shift in focus from the group to the individual. Particular attention should then be paid to people with high essentialism scores. They tend to have firm and stable beliefs about group differences, the uniformity of characteristics that define a certain outgroup, and the inferences one can deduct from knowing the (ethnic) group a subject identifies with. Such stubborn beliefs often uphold stereotypes about outgroups and continue negative attitudes towards other groups one originally had. Indeed, although small, both the ingroup favouritism and the outgroup derogation bias appeared to happen exclusively among those high in essentialist entitativity. Policy makers should be wary of this potential danger (Van Assche & Pettigrew, 2016).

On the other hand, opposite processes occur among individuals with positive intergroup orientations, such as UDO. Such a general positive orientation towards diversity and multiculturalism embraces the true meaning of what Mandela labelled the Rainbow Nation and offers a most promising step towards intergroup harmony in a (previously) scarred country. Indeed, culturally open-minded people engage in contact with others that are different from themselves; they appreciate those differences and feel at ease around outgroups. Our findings highlight further the key role of UDO in reducing the ingroup favouritism bias.

Limitations and future avenues for research

The distribution of participants based on their income level was a fair reflection of the real population of South Africa. However, the distribution of the ethnic groups was less than optimal. Indians/Asians were underrepresented to assess our study objective. Given the underrepresentation of Indians/Asians, the applicability of our findings to the general population of South Africa is somewhat restricted. Furthermore, the sample size may have been too small to offer clear answers regarding our research questions tapping into the mitigating effects of ESS and UDO.

Also, the intergroup climate at the time of the research was unfavourable, setting up the planned university collaborations impossible. Another limitation was the positioning of the attitude scale in the ending section of the questionnaire, which resulted in lower quality data, probably due to participants getting tired or less focused towards the end of the questionnaire. Overall, this makes the quality of the evidence less than optimal. Finally, respondents volunteering may already have been more open towards diversity because of their willingness to participate

in this type of research[2]. Future studies could replicate our findings in larger samples where Indians/Asians are better represented (perhaps even oversampled) and where we have a wider variety of ideological and political attitudes (cf., Van Assche, Bahamondes, & Sibley, 2020).

Conclusion

Solely looking at the significant main effect of our study could mislead us. The effect of belonging to a specific ethnic-cultural group on attitudes towards ingroup and outgroups is minimal. Our findings suggest that different ethnic groups in South Africa have surprisingly similar attitudes towards each other (with a slight preference for their own group). Regarding essentialism and universal-diverse orientation, we found that these individual characteristics can moderate the small biases within groups.

It would be interesting to study, through interventional research designs, how essentialism and universal-diverse orientation levels can be manipulated. Specifically, we suggest using an awareness program in the form of a game or moderated peer talk groups. More generally, awareness programs should routinely incorporate strategies to measure their effectiveness towards changing real-world needs. This would facilitate the harmonisation between ethnic groups, as lowering essentialism and increasing cultural open-mindedness can reduce the ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation biases. Policy makers can use these available programs and apply them to specific individual targets that might otherwise be hostile towards the new, integrated South Africa. Together, such initiatives and such knowledge can help to build towards Mandela's dream of a true Rainbow Nation.

Notes

[1] Note that the usage of these artificial ethnic and racial labels in the South African context is heavily contested given the central role of these labels in perpetuating discrimination, oppression, and inequality during Apartheid. Neither the authors nor their affiliations acknowledge or endorse the legitimacy of these artificial labels. However, these terms are still used in South African national-level surveys and statistics, and we recognise the value of distinguishing between majority- and minority-status participants, as empirically supported in the literature.

[2] Future research should include sufficient participants belonging to each ethnic group to reflect actual population proportions. Contacting the Indian/Asian group was more difficult than anticipated, so we advise using referral sampling. Classical requirement techniques are still valuable, such as approaching university students to participate in their study curriculum. Questionnaires should focus on the minimum set of questions needed to address the study objective. This enhances the motivation of the participants to complete the questionnaire. Also, it is advisable to position questions addressing the study's primary objective in the first section of the survey, along with clear instructions. Proper funding and adequate manpower are needed to satisfy sample size requirements. To address possible study biases, a future research team should be ethnically diverse. We found that the sensitive topic of ethnic tensions requires a careful fit with the current intergroup atmosphere in the country.

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