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FlashReports

Changing categorization of self can change emotions about outgroups

Devin G. Ray [a,*], Diane M. Mackie [a], Robert J. Rydell [b], Eliot R. Smith [c]

[a] Department of Psychology, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-9660, USA
[b] Department of Psychological Sciences, University of Missouri Columbia, Missouri 65211, USA
[c] The Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, Bloomington, IN 47405, USA

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on Intergroup Emotions Theory [Mackie, D. M., Maitner, A. T., & Smith, E. R. (in press). Intergroup emotions theory. In T.D. Nelson (Ed.), *Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination*, New York: Erlbaum.], we propose that a perceiver's emotional reactions toward other social groups can change in response to situationally induced shifts in self-categorization. American students were led to self-categorize as Americans or as students and reported their anger and respect towards Muslims and police. Results indicated that in reaction to Muslims, participants felt more anger and less respect when categorized as Americans than when categorized as students. In reaction to police, participants felt less anger and more respect when categorized as Americans than when categorized as students. These results support and extend IET, and suggest that in addition to prejudice reduction interventions that focus on recategorization of the target, perceiver recategorization of the self is a viable means of changing emotional reactions to social targets.

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"As a man I pity you, but as an official I must show you no mercy; as a politician I regard him as an ally, but as a moralist I loathe him". William James (1890/1983 p. 43).

As was so often the case, James appears to have intuited what has only recently begun to be confirmed by empirical results: that social categorization dictates emotional reactions. Although categorization of a target is known to determine its evaluation (Smith, Fazio, & Cejka, 1996), James focuses attention on the emotional consequences of the perceiver's social group membership: whether "you" are to be pitied or loathed depends on who "I" am at any given moment.

James's intuition draws on two ideas, a flexible self-definition informed by social categories, and emotional reactions that follow from those social categories. The idea of a flexible socially defined self is central to Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). SIT provided the critical insight that social category memberships can, at times, inform a person's self definition as much or more than idiosyncratic personal attributes. SCT demonstrated how situational pressures determine which of many different category memberships will be emphasized at a given moment (Hogg & Turner, 1987). In the context of James's intuition, SIT and SCT suggest that whether self definition reflects membership in the category politician or moralist can be predicted from momentary situational pressures.

That membership in a social group determines emotional reactions is axiomatic to Intergroup Emotions Theory (IET; Mackie, in press; see also Yzerbyt, Dumont, Wigboldus, & Gordijn, 2003). According to IET, activation of membership in a particular group results in events and objects being appraised and reacted to according to the costs and benefits to the group, whether the perceiver is individually affected or not. Several lines of research have demonstrated such changes in evaluation after changes in self-categorization. Gordijn, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus, and Dumont (2006) had participants read a proposal to raise tuition at a state-funded university. The increase would harm out-of-state students attempting to attend the university but would benefit state residents. Participants induced to think about themselves as students reacted more angrily than did those thinking about themselves as state residents. Thus self-definitions that included the group hurt by the proposal elicited more negative emotions than self-categorizations that included the group aided by the proposal.

Changing the categorization of the perceiver in this way also explicitly recategorizes the target group as an ingroup, a well-established strategy for improving outgroup evaluations (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989). In fact, in the case of multiple category memberships, positivity of evaluation typically increases in a stepwise fashion as targets move from double outgroup members to crossed ingroup and outgroup members to double ingroup members (Hewstone, Islam, & Judd, 1993).

Recategorization of the target as an ingroup member does not appear to be the change to which James alludes, however. It is not that friendship is aroused because the target is first seen as a fellow politician, but then changes to loathing because the target

* Corresponding author. Fax: +1 805 893 4303.
E-mail address: ray@psych.ucsb.edu (D.G. Ray).

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is categorized out of the moralist group. Neither is redefinition into shared ingroups necessary to change emotions from an IET perspective. IET posits that because of their consequences for particular ingroups, specific target groups should elicit different emotional reactions depending on the currently activated social categorization of the perceiver. When categorized as Americans, for example, many people may view Muslims as threatening and respond to Muslims with negative emotions. When the same perceivers are categorized as students, however, values of respect and tolerance might lead to more positive emotional reactions to Muslims. Importantly, these different reactions should occur without including or excluding Muslims in a common ingroup. IET thus suggests that, consistent with James' approach, activation of different social categorizations can dictate different emotional reactions to the same target group, and that such differences can be achieved without recategorization of the target as an ingroup member.

To test this hypothesis, we examined the impact of self definition as either an American or a student on emotional reactions to "Muslims" and "police". Initial testing with the relevant participant population indicated that Muslims are seen as having negative implications for Americans but positive implications for students. Thus, categorization as an American was expected to produce negative emotions towards Muslims, whereas categorization as a student was expected to produce positive emotions. In contrast, police are seen as having positive implications for Americans but negative implications for students, perhaps because of protective relations between Americans and police, and antagonistic relations between students and police.[1] Thus, categorization as an American or student was expected to produce emotional reactions to police opposite those expected in reaction to Muslims. We thus predicted a three-way interaction, such that participants would feel more anger and less respect towards Muslims after categorization as an American than after categorization as a student and less anger and more respect toward police after categorization as an American than after categorization as a student.

Methods

Participants and design

One hundred and thirty-two University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) undergraduates of American citizenship (102 females, 30 males) participated in a 2 (categorization: student, American) × 2 (target: police, Muslims) × 2 (emotion: anger, respect) mixed-model factorial design, with the first factor manipulated between-subjects and the remaining factors manipulated within-subjects.

Procedure

Participants were seated in separate rooms with a computer which delivered instructions, presented materials, and collected responses. To categorize participants as Americans or students, the study was presented as comparing either Americans and non-Americans or students and non-students (Doosje, Haslam, Spears, Oakes, & Koomen, 1998; Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty, & Hayes, 1992) and participants were asked to indicate to which category they belonged.

Dependent measures

Measures were administered for police and Muslims in counterbalanced order. Participants rated the extent to which they felt six emotions (angry, irritated, furious, admiring, appreciative, and respectful) towards Muslims and police on scales ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*). Responses to angry, irritated, and furious were averaged to form an anger index ($\alpha = .956$ for Muslims; $\alpha = .903$ for police) and responses to respectful, appreciative, and admiring were averaged to form a respect index ($\alpha = .858$ for Muslims; $\alpha = .872$ for police).

To check the effectiveness of the categorization manipulation, participants listed three traits that Americans or students (as appropriate to their categorization) typically possess, and reported the extent that they personally possessed those traits 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*). The process was then repeated for the other social identity (Americans or students; Hogg & Turner, 1987).

Results

Effectiveness of categorization manipulation

Responses on the self-stereotyping measure indicated a successful self-categorization manipulation. Participants rated themselves as relatively more like typical Americans after categorization as an American ($M = 4.01$) than after categorization as a student ($M = 3.53$) and as relatively more like typical students after categorization as a student ($M = 4.80$) than after categorization as an American ($M = 4.64$); the predicted self-categorization by trait interaction, $F(1,130) = 7.313$, $p = .008$).

Emotional reactions

We predicted that participants would feel more anger and less respect towards Muslims after categorization as an American than after categorization as a student and less anger and more respect towards police after categorization as an American than after categorization as a student. These predictions were confirmed. Three-way mixed-model ANOVA[2] revealed the predicted categorization by target by emotion interaction, $F(1,130) = 6.840$, $p = .010$ (Fig. 1). Participants felt relatively less anger towards police when categorized as Americans ($M = 1.81$) than when categorized as students ($M = 2.11$) and relatively more respect towards police when categorized as Americans ($M = 3.57$) than when categorized as students ($M = 3.21$). Participants felt relatively more anger towards Muslims when categorized as Americans ($M = 1.20$) than when categorized as students ($M = .84$) and relatively less respect towards Muslims when categorized as Americans ($M = 1.64$) than when categorized as students ($M = 1.95$; none of the individual comparisons among means was significant).

Discussion

Consistent with IET, these results demonstrated that situationally induced self-categorization, as an American or as a student, changed emotional reactions to Muslims and police. These findings demonstrate for the first time, just as James conjectured, that people's emotions about a given social group differ depend on the per-

[1] 49 UCSB students reported their beliefs about relationships among Americans, students, Muslims, and police. Questions were administered twice within subjects, once for each social identity, with order of categorization and target counterbalanced: "In general, how well or poorly do Americans (students) get along with Muslims (police)", −3 (*very poorly*) to +3 (*very well*); "In general, how good or bad are Americans (students) for Muslims (police)", −3 (*very bad*) to +3 (*very good*); "In general, how much do Americans (students) think Muslims (police) benefit or harm them", −3 (*very harmful*) to +3 (*very beneficial*). Results indicated that participants believed Americans to have a more negative relationship with Muslims ($M = -.39$) than do students ($M = .30$), $t(48) = -5.461$, $p < .001$ and that Americans have a more positive relationship with police ($M = .46$) than do students ($M = -.17$), $t(48) = 4.156$, $p < .001$.

[2] Order of target presentation yielded no effects.

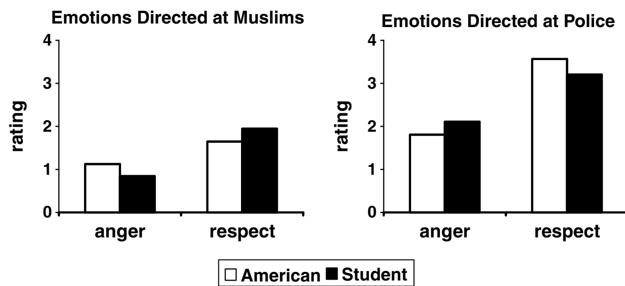

Fig. 1. Emotions directed at Muslims and police by self-categorization.

ceivers' self-categorization, and that such changes need not depend on explicit recategorization of the target as an in or outgroup member.

It might be argued, however, that "police" were seen as an outgroup under student self-categorization but were implicitly recategorized as ingroup members when American group membership was activated, although such implicit recategorization seems far less plausible in the case of Muslim targets. To ascertain any possible role of such implicit recategorization in our findings we collected data to examine the group memberships of accessible Muslim and police exemplars under American and student categorization. These data confirm that participants categorized as students were very unlikely to see police as sharing ingroup membership, but that nearly everyone categorized as Americans saw "police" as fellow Americans, rendering implicit recategorization into a shared ingroup a viable mechanism for the increased positivity police enjoyed when viewed by Americans rather than students. In contrast however, "Muslims" were no more likely to be seen as ingroup members by students than they were to be seen as ingroup members by Americans, despite the more positive reactions they attracted when viewed by students compared to when viewed by Americans.[3] Thus, although the categorization-driven changes in emotional reactions to police might reflect recategorization into or out of the ingroup, categorization-based changes in emotional reactions to Muslims do not. Since the magnitude of differences in emotional reactions to Muslims and police was roughly equivalent, the results suggest that self-categorization-based changes in emotional reactions to a particular target can be comparable whether such changes also involve recategorization of the target into an ingroup or not.

These results leave unspecified the exact mechanism by which self-categorization changes emotional reactions to social groups. One possibility suggested by IET is that relationships between the ingroup and the target group are reappraised in terms of harm or benefit to current self-categorization, and emotional reactions follow. For example, Muslims are an outgroup often viewed as in direct conflict with Americans. Muslims and students, however, do not have a similarly antagonistic relationship even though they are, strictly speaking, outgroups. Consistent with our results, this mechanism suggests that emotional responses reflect the relative positivity and negativity of outgroups for the ingroup, rather than outgroup versus ingroup status alone. A second possibility is that group memberships carry with them chronic emotional reactions tied to specific targets. That is, the mere activation of American group membership might activate "how we feel about Muslims," just as SIT-based studies show that group membership activates typical ingroup attributes and traits, without requiring appraisal. Other possible mechanisms include the recruitment of different exemplars from the target category, or the attribution of different characteristics to the category, depending upon the perceiver's current categorization (Haslam et al., 1992). Although we did not assess the possibility, we anticipate that the operation of each of these mechanisms would be moderated by idiosyncratic identification with the currently activated self categorization (Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007; Gordijn et al., 2006). Each of these mechanisms warrants further investigation as possible means by which changes in self-categorization drive changes in emotional reactions to target groups.

Regardless of whether emotional reactions to other groups are equated with prejudice (Smith, 1993) or viewed as crucial precursors to prejudice (Esses & Dovidio, 2002; DeSteno, Dasgupta, Bartlett, & Cajdric, 2004), our findings suggest new strategies for changing prejudice. The self-categorization approach is particularly useful because it does not depend, as many of social psychology's strategies for prejudice reduction do, on recategorizing or decategorizing targets of prejudice. Rather, changing the perceiver's self-categorization changes prejudice. Imagine, for example, police in a college town anticipating a typical confrontation with partying students. Any strategy that activates another viable group membership for either police or students could change the mutual levels of anger and irritation they might feel for each other. Although activating a shared group membership ("*You're Americans (too)*") is one available avenue, our results show that self-categorization can reduce prejudice even without the appeal to ingroup status. Activating possible occupational categories for the students ("One day you'll be doctors and lawyers") might have similar beneficial effects. Nor do such changes in self definition need to be externally provoked: deliberate changes in self-categorization might provide individuals ways of regulating their own prejudiced reactions (Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002). When it comes to changing prejudice, then, we hold with James: in addition to changing how people think about the target, there is added value in changing how people think about themselves.

[3] After being categorized as Americans or students in the same way as our other participants, 45 UCSB undergraduates were asked to think about "Muslims" or "police" and to imagine a typical Muslim or police officer. Participants were then asked if this typical member was a student (yes/no) or an American citizen (yes/no). This procedure was repeated (counterbalanced) for each target. Only 9.1% of participants categorized as students imagined a typical police officer as part of the ingroup, but 100% of participants categorized as Americans did so, corrected $\chi^2 = 34.991$, $(1, N = 46)$, $p < .001$. In contrast, more similar percentages of participants categorized as Americans (13.6%) or as students (37.5%) imagined a typical Muslim to be an ingroup member, corrected $\chi^2 = 2.265$ $(1, N = 46)$, $p = .132$. Note that if anything, Muslims were more likely to be thought of as ingroup members by those categorized as Americans; the very group that reacted most negatively to the target group.

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