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## Subtle and Blatant prejudice toward Africans in Italian adolescents

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### Abstract

This research explored effects of sex, age, interethnic contact, and outgroup representation on subtle and blatant prejudice toward Africans in Italian adolescents attending ethnic heterogeneous/homogeneous Secondary Schools. Measures: *Subtle and Blatant Prejudice Scale* (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995) referred to the Africans and *Semantic Differentials* (Falanga et al., 2010) to analyze representation of Self, the Italians, and the Africans. Results showed that girls and the youngest adolescents expressed lower levels on some components of subtle prejudice and on blatant prejudice than boys and the oldest ones. Adolescents with friends from other ethnic groups and those attending ethnically heterogeneous schools displayed positive attitudes toward the Africans. Representation of the Africans had an impact on levels of subtle and blatant prejudice.

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*Keywords:* Subtle and blatant prejudice; contact hypothesis; adolescence; outgroup representation.

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### 1. Introduction

According to the well-established perspective focused on the study of ethnic attitudes, research pointed out that ethnic prejudice could be expressed into two different typologies: the traditional form of prejudice, consisting of explicit rejection of members belonging to other ethnic groups and the more latent and covert form, typical of western societies (Sears & Kinder, 1971; Mc Conahay, 1983), careful to social desirability and to have a positive public impression. In agreement with this distinction, Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) measured separately these two typologies of prejudice, termed *subtle* (Sp) and *blatant* (Bp), and hypothesized that levels of Sp were higher than levels of Bp. The authors considered Sp as a latent and indirect form of discrimination, expressed in acceptable ways in western societies and measurable in three components corresponding, respectively, to the *Defence of traditional values*, the *Exaggeration of cultural differences*, and the *Denial of positive emotions*. On the contrary, Bp was the expression of a direct refusal of members belonging to other ethnic groups and it was structured in two components: the *Threat and rejection*, linked to the perception of outgroup as a real risk, and the *Anti-intimacy*, consisting of rejection of sexual contact or intermarriage with outgroup members. The components of prejudice and the superiority of Sp respect to Bp were confirmed in the cross-national study carried out in Western Europe by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) and, in Italian context, by Arcuri and Boca (1996), Manganelli Rattazzi and Volpato (2001), and Pinnelli (2005). Analyzing the scores obtained in both subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice measures, the authors divided the subjects in three typologies: *Equalitarians*, with low mean values of subtle and blatant prejudice

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(Sp- and Bp-); *Bigots*, with high mean values of subtle and blatant prejudice (Sp+ and Bp+); *Subtles*, with high mean values of subtle prejudice and low mean values of blatant prejudice (Sp+ and Bp-).

Researchers detected several variables that affected subtle and blatant prejudice such as sex and age (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Laimeras Fernandez & Rodriguez Castro, 2001; Manganelli Rattazi & Volpato, 2001), interethnic contact and friendship (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; White et al., 2009; Voci & Hewstone, 2010; De Caroli, Falanga & Sagone, in press), and representation of outgroups (Neumann & Seibt, 2001; De Caroli et al., in press). In relation to sex and age, Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) found out that in France and Netherland older adolescents showed higher levels of Bp than younger ones; on the contrary, in Great Britain, younger adolescents expressed higher levels of Bp. Furthermore, in a research carried out with Spanish adolescents, Laimeras Fernandez and Rodriguez Castro (2001) verified that girls, especially older ones, expressed lower levels of Sp and Bp toward the Gypsies than the others. Likewise, in a study involving Italian adolescents, Manganelli Rattazzi and Volpato (2001) pointed out that girls showed lower levels of Sp and Bp toward immigrants than boys.

As regards interethnic contact and friendship, recently, Voci and Hewstone (2010) noted that the exaggeration of cultural differences and the defence of traditional values were negatively related to high levels of interethnic contact. Additionally, Pettigrew & Meertens (1995) pointed out that people with more and various intergroup friends scored significantly lower in Sp and Bp than the others. As well as, White et al. (2009) verified that Australian adolescents in contact with Asian friends reported lower levels of Sp and Bp toward Asian Australians than adolescents without Asian friends. In Italian context, De Caroli et al. (in press) showed that adolescents with friends belonging to other ethnic groups expressed lower levels of the Denial of positive emotions and the Anti-intimacy than those without friends from other ethnic groups.

In relation to the last variable affecting on ethnic prejudice, the impact of outgroup representation was analyzed in Neumann and Seibt' study (2001) carried out with German university students: the strength of stereotypic associations (measured by the IAT) between negative adjectives and Turkish's photos was significantly and positively related to Sp and Bp. In Italian adolescents, De Caroli et al. (in press) found out that the representation of Chinese people affected levels of Sp and Bp toward this outgroup.

The present study was aimed to clarify the influence of sex, age, contact in three different conditions (no contact, acquaintance, friendship) and outgroup representation on levels of Sp and Bp toward the Africans expressed by Italian adolescents attending to ethnically homogeneous and heterogeneous Secondary Schools in Catania (Italy).

## 2. Methodology

H<sub>1</sub>- We expected that girls and older adolescents will express lower levels of Sp and Bp (H<sub>1a</sub>) and a more positive representation of outgroup than boys and younger ones (H<sub>1b</sub>) toward African people.

H<sub>2</sub>- We hypothesized that adolescents with friends belonging to other ethnic groups will show lower levels of Sp and Bp toward the Africans (H<sub>2a</sub>) and will express a more positive representation of outgroup than adolescents with acquaintance from other ethnic groups and adolescents without interethnic contact (H<sub>2b</sub>).

H<sub>3</sub>- We expected that adolescents attending ethnically heterogeneous schools will express lower levels of Sp and Bp toward African people (H<sub>3a</sub>) and will express a more positive representation of this outgroup than adolescents attending ethnically homogeneous schools (H<sub>3b</sub>).

H<sub>4</sub>- We hypothesized that adolescents showing a more positive representation of the Africans will display lower levels of Sp and Bp toward outgroup than the others.

### 2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 184 Italian students, 90 boys and 94 girls, aged from 14 to 20 ( $M=16.44$ ,  $sd=1.78$ ), attending ethnically homogeneous ( $n=94$ ) and ethnically heterogeneous ( $n=90$ ) Public Secondary Schools of Catania, Sicily (Italy). Students were divided into three age-groups: first group of adolescents ( $n=62$ ), aged from

14,03 to 16 ( $M=14.44$ ,  $sd=.53$ ); second group ( $n=60$ ), aged from 16 to 17 ( $M=16.41$ ,  $sd=.54$ ); third group ( $n=62$ ) aged from 17,07 to 20,11 ( $M=18.44$ ,  $sd=.89$ ). The 41,8% of adolescents had friends belonging to other ethnic groups, the 23,4% had an acquaintance with people belonging to other ethnic groups, and the 34,8% had no contact with people from other ethnic groups.

*Note:* The original sample consisted of 192 students. According to Manganelli Rattazzi and Volpato (2001), eight subjects were excluded because their scores in one or both subscales overlapped with the theoretical middle point.

## 2.2. Measures and procedure

### 2.2.1. Subtle and Blatant Prejudice Scale

This scale, proposed by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) and applied in Italian context by Manganelli Rattazzi and Volpato (2001), was constituted by 20 items, valuable on a 6-points Likert. It was divided in two subscales:

- ten items to explore subtle prejudice ( $\alpha=.70$ ), structured in the Defence of traditional values (e.g., “Africans living here teach their children values and skills different from those required to be successful in Italy”), the Exaggeration of cultural differences (e.g., “How different or similar do you think African people living here are to Italian people in their religious beliefs and practices?”), and the Denial of positive emotions (e.g., “How often have you felt sympathy toward African people living here?”, item reverse);
- ten items to analyze blatant prejudice ( $\alpha=.74$ ), structured in the Threat and rejection (e.g., “Most politicians in Italy care too much about African people and not enough about the average Italian persons”) and the Anti-intimacy (e.g., “I would not mind if an African person who had a similar economic background as mine joined my close family by marriage”).

### 2.2.2. Semantic Differentials

Three semantic differentials (Falanga et al., 2010), consisting of 36 pairs of bipolar adjectives (e.g., strong-weak, independent-dependent, and able-unable), each valuable on a 7-points scale, were used to assess the representation of Self (“Me as I am”), ingroup (“The Italians”), and outgroup (“The Africans”). Internal consistency reliability resulted to be satisfactory with Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  ranged from .78 to .86.

## 2.3. Data analysis

The examination of data was carried out using the SPSS 15. The following statistical tests were used: t-tests, One Way Anova, Chi Square, and linear regressions with stepwise method. Sex, age groups, school context (ethnically homogenous vs. heterogeneous schools), acquaintance and friendship with people belonging to other ethnic groups were used as independent variables. Sp and Bp (with their components), and representation of Self, ingroup, and outgroup were counted as dependent variables. In relation to interethnic contact, we distinguished three conditions of contact, from the less to the most close: C1- no contact, C2-acquaintance (neighbours or people occasionally met), C3-friendship.

Levels of Sp and Bp were rated by adding the scores obtained in the items constituting respectively the two subscales; levels of prejudice for each of the five components were computed by summing responses to the relative items and dividing them for the number of items. High scores indicated high levels of ethnic prejudice. Using theoretical mid-point (equal to 35), subjects were divided into the three following typologies: *Equalitarians*, with levels of both Sp and Bp <35; *Bigots*, with levels of both Sp and Bp >35; *Subtles*, with levels of Sp >35 and Bp <35.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice

According to Pettigrew and Meertens’ model, all adolescents showed higher levels of Sp ( $M=38.80$ ,  $sd=5.86$ ) than those of Bp ( $M=27.49$ ,  $sd=7.75$ ) ( $t_{(183)}=27.88$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Significant differences among the three components of Sp were found: adolescents showed higher levels of the exaggeration of cultural differences ( $M=4.33$ ,  $sd=.73$ ) than those of the denial of positive emotions ( $M=3.73$ ,  $sd=1.06$ ) and the defence of traditional values ( $M=3.50$ ,

$sd=.76$ )( $F_{(2,182)}=63.66, p<.001$ ). No significant differences were observed between the two components of Bp, the threat and rejection ( $M=2.78, sd=.76$ ) and the anti-intimacy ( $M=2.70, sd=1.10$ ).

Differences for sex and age groups were found. For sex, only in relation to the denial of positive emotions ( $t_{(182)}=2.54, p=.01$ ), boys ( $M=3.93, sd=1.00$ ) expressed higher levels than girls ( $M=3.54, sd=1.07$ ); for age groups, as measured by post hoc analysis (Bonferroni's method:  $p<.05$ ), the first group of adolescents expressed lower levels of prejudice than the others on one component of Sp (exaggeration of cultural differences:  $F_{(2,181)}=3.57, p=.03$ ) and of Bp ( $F_{(2,181)}=3.13, p=.04$ ), specifically the anti-intimacy ( $F_{(2,181)}=4.70, p=.01$ ).

In relation to the conditions of contact, as confirmed by post hoc analysis (Bonferroni's method:  $p<.05$ ), adolescents with friends belonging to other ethnic groups showed lower levels (C3:  $M=3.47, sd=1.06$ ) of the denial of positive emotions ( $F_{(2,181)}=4.13, p=.02$ ) than adolescents with acquaintance from other ethnic groups (C2:  $M=3.91, sd=.86$ ) and those without interethnic contact (C1:  $M=3.92, sd=.96$ ). About blatant prejudice, there was the same trend (C1:  $M=29.81, sd=8.16$ ; C2:  $M=27.88, sd=6.98$ ; C3:  $M=25.34, sd=7.30$ )( $F_{(2,181)}=6.23, p=.002$ ) and, specifically, for the threat and rejection (C1:  $M=3.00, sd=.87$ ; C2:  $M=2.68, sd=.52$ ; C3:  $M=2.65, sd=.72$ )( $F_{(2,181)}=4.19, p=.002$ ) and the anti-intimacy (C1:  $M=2.95, sd=.95$ ; C2:  $M=2.94, sd=1.27$ ; C3:  $M=2.35, sd=1.03$ )( $F_{(2,181)}=7.18, p=.001$ ). Additionally, adolescents attending ethnically heterogeneous schools expressed lower levels of the exaggeration of cultural differences ( $t_{(182)}=2.70, p=.008$ ) and of Bp ( $t_{(182)}=3.70, p<.001$ ) than the others, specifically the threat and rejection ( $t_{(182)}=2.25, p=.03$ ) and the anti-intimacy ( $t_{(182)}=4.17, p<.001$ ).

The 63% ( $n=116$ ) of subjects were classified as subtles, the 22,8% ( $n=42$ ) as equalitarians, and the 14,1% ( $n=26$ ) as bigots. Significant differences only for type of school context emerged ( $\chi^2=8.79, df=2, p=.01$ ): the consistency of bigots was high in ethnically homogeneous context (76,9% vs. 23,1%).

### 3.2. Representation of Self, ingroup, and outgroup

All participants expressed a more positive representation of Self ( $M=4.81, sd=.52$ ) compared to the representation of the Africans ( $M=4.25, sd=.58$ ), and the Italians ( $M=4.01, sd=.67$ )( $F_{(2,182)}=89.46, p<.001$ ). Significant effects for age groups were observed only for representation of the Italians ( $F_{(2,181)}=3.29, p=.04$ ): the first group of adolescents ( $M=4.19, sd=.73$ ) evaluated more positively ingroup than the second group ( $M=3.92, sd=.61$ ) and the third one ( $M=3.93, sd=.64$ ).

With reference to the conditions of contact, significant differences emerged in representation of the Africans ( $F_{(2,181)}=3.27, p=.04$ ): adolescents with friends belonging to other ethnic groups ( $M=4.37, sd=.65$ ) expressed a more positive representation of outgroup than adolescents with acquaintance from other ethnic groups ( $M=4.13, sd=.56$ ) and adolescents without interethnic contact ( $M=4.17, sd=.49$ ).

About typologies of subjects, equalitarians ( $M=5.00, sd=.46$ ) evaluated more positively themselves than subtles ( $M=4.80, sd=.51$ ) and bigots ( $M=4.55, sd=.52$ )( $F_{(2,181)}=6.59, p=.002$ ); additionally, equalitarians ( $M=4.57, sd=.57$ ) expressed a more positive representation of the Africans than subtles ( $M=4.24, sd=.53$ ) and bigots ( $M=3.75, sd=.58$ )( $F_{(2,181)}=18.87, p<.001$ ). Post hoc analysis (Bonferroni's method) underlined differences all for  $p<.001$ .

### 3.3. Linear regressions between representation of outgroup and levels of ethnic prejudice

Analysis of linear regressions carried out with stepwise method pointed out that representation of the Africans affected the two typologies of ethnic prejudice and their components. The more positive was the representation of outgroup the lower were levels of Sp ( $\beta= -.42, t= -6.24, p<.001$ ), in detail of the defence of traditional values ( $\beta= -.32, t= -4.50, p<.001$ ), the exaggeration of cultural differences ( $\beta= -.27, t= -3.73, p<.001$ ), and the denial of positive emotions ( $\beta= -.34, t= -4.86, p<.001$ ). Additionally, the more positive was the representation of the Africans, the lower were levels of Bp ( $\beta= -.50, t= -7.88, p<.001$ ) and, specifically, the threat and rejection ( $\beta= -.41, t= -6.08, p<.001$ ), and the anti-intimacy ( $\beta= -.46, t= -7.06, p<.001$ ).

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study partially confirmed the  $H_1$ : girls denied positive emotions less than boys and this result is in accordance with Laimeras Fernandez and Rodriguez Castro (2001) and Manganelli Rattazzi and Volpato (2001). In relation to interethnic contact, as reported by Odell, Korgen, and Wang (2005), results underlined that its quality can make the difference in the expression of prejudice: in fact, adolescents with friends belonging to other ethnic groups denied positive emotions less than other adolescents, perceived the Africans as a risk for ingroup and rejected sexual contact or intermarriage with members of outgroup less than the others ( $H_{2a}$ ). Additionally, adolescents with friends from other ethnic groups expressed a more positive representation of the Africans than the others ( $H_{2b}$ ). Furthermore, adolescents attending ethnically heterogeneous schools exaggerated cultural differences between Africans and Italians less than the others and showed lower levels of Bp and, in detail, of the threat and rejection and the anti-intimacy than the others ( $H_{3a}$ ). The last hypothesis was confirmed: the more adolescents expressed a positive representation of the Africans the more they showed low levels of Sp and Bp toward this outgroup ( $H_4$ ).

Further research carried out with other age groups, adults and elderly people and with other target outgroups could clarify the role of the analyzed variables on the two typologies of prejudice.

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