Determinants of Social Prejudice and Factors Influencing Perception of Immigrant Groups in Georgia

Medea Despotashvili
Tbilisi State University, Georgia, medea.despotashvili@tsu.ge

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Tbilisi State University, Georgia

(medea.despotashvili@tsu.ge)

Abstract

Outgroup perception and prejudice as well as researched social cognition processes, still provide new perspectives of analysis. Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) and Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) constructs are proved to moderate prejudice formation. Our research aimed to look at these processes in specifically Georgian context. We duplicated experimental procedure offered by Duckitt and Sibley (2009), to look at the relationship between prejudice formation and RWA / SDO in different experimental conditions. Our data enabled to analyze this relationship in terms of overall social processes, where challenges facing particular groups of people (like generation in our case) can make certain qualities of outgroup more prominent in prejudice formation.

Introduction

Social psychology has a long history of prejudice study. Main reason for this is that prejudice and stereotypes give ground for oppression and restrictions; they feed most destructive aspects of human behavior. Numerous researches and programs have focused on prejudice reduction, but as embodied part of social perception they persist in giving direction to human relations. Especially considering globalization processes, more and more diversity is seen even in those countries where ethnic or racial diversity has not been so usual. Georgia can serve as an example here. Even though it has always been considered to be a multinational country, its national diversity was determined by neighboring countries of Caucasian region. Today, more and more tourists, international workers and exchange students arrive from Asia and Africa. From this perspective, when we speak about such a traditional and conservative country as Georgia, it is important to consider ingroup-outgroup perception as a possible moderator of social attitudes.

Studying prejudice and discrimination, social psychology emphasizes both intergroup processes, and personal characteristics, values and beliefs. Pettigrew (1998) offers Allport's intergroup contact theory to understand shaping intergroup contact by individual differences and social factors. Relative importance of personal and situational factors is one of the challenges in researching prejudice. Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) is considered as one of the possible sources of prejudice. It is a central concept of social dominance theory, (Pratto, et.al. 1994). SDO is presented as one of the sources for individual differences, which reflects personal preferences of one group being dominating over others.

Studies offer both implicit and explicit measures and questionnaires to describe and explain outgroup prejudice and discrimination (Brigham, 1993; Pettigrew and Meertens, 1995; Reynolds et.al, 2001). Some of the methods developed were quite innovative and flexible using computer based methods and experimental manipulations (*e.g.*, study by Michinov et.al. 2005). Social psychology has focused more on individual factors of racism, prejudice and discrimination, like frustration-aggression hypothesis, authoritarian personality theory, value conflict theory *etc.* (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; Sidanius et.al., 2004; Sidanius et.al., 2001). But more and more authors attempted to analyze these processes in wider perspective. For example, in her research, Hawley (1999) proved that individual qualities play an important role in SDO formation, but they are not "themselves social dominance". Dominant relationship is part of social life and should be considered in the light of broader social processes (Lalonde, 2007). Guimond et.al. (2003) discuss person vs. situation model, where SDO is a moderating variable.

Present study

Georgia has gone through quite intensive social changes since 1980s. Different generations face different social challenges and threats. Collapse of Soviet Union created new economic reality. Globalization brought more ethnic and racial diversity. Military attacks and occupation put certain social groups in more disadvantaged position than the others, causing more differentiated social balance. Focus of our interest was to contribute to the research in this area, look at SDO and RWA as starting point for prejudice in Georgian context, and see how these variables interplay in this particular case. We attempted to outline the role of different social circumstances and challenges confronting social groups in prejudice formation. For this purpose, we modified the procedure offered by Duckitt and Sibley (2009), and brought age as another variable in our analysis.

Duckitt and Sibley (2009) offered an interesting perspective in understanding social prejudice. They assumed that high RWA should correlate with prejudice towards groups that carry collective threat to ingroup. From the other hand, SDO should be more related with prejudice towards groups which may introduce imbalance in intergroup dominance. To test these hypotheses, Duckitt and Sibley (2009) developed an experimental design, presenting immigrant group of people in three different way to see what characteristics of outgroup would influence prejudice formation. They proved their hypothesis in their research conducted in New Zeeland.

The present study uses research procedure offered by Duckitt and Sibley (2009). We added age as another level of analysis. As we assumed that due to last decades of social changes, different experience of different generations would play its role in prejudice formation. We tested two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between RWA and SDO would be strong, as it was shown in previous studies. Though, specifics of Georgian culture affect the character

of relationship between these constructs and different perspectives on immigrant group characteristics.

Hypothesis 2: Age is one of the moderating variables in prejudice formation: (a) higher the age of the respondents, higher the RWA and SDO ratings; (b) economic competition by immigrant group increases prejudice formation in younger generation, which is economically active and in process of carrier formation; (C) gender stereotypes are more prominent in higher age group.

Method

Participants

The research was conducted in 2011-2012 in Tbilisi, Georgia. Participants were 220 residents of Tbilisi. Recruitment criteria was Georgian ethnicity. Sample included participants of different demographics. The mean age of the sample was 46 years (SD = 5.2), 68.2% were female, 31,8% male.

The research was planned trough three stages:

1. Social Dominance Orientation Scale (Pratto *et al.*, 1994)
2. Right Wing Autoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer, 1996)
3. Experimental Manipulation
4. Manipulation checklist

Measures

At the first stage of the research participants completed demographic questions: age, gender, marital status, education and occupation. Demographic questions were followed by 18 SDO scale items (α = .65) and 22 RWA scale items (α = .63). The scales were not adapted in Georgian language, thus pilot study was conducted for scaling procedures. RWA and SDO significantly correlated (r = .372, n = 220, p < .0005).

SDO scale

SDO scale consisted of three blocks. Each of the blocks assessed attitudes towards different groups:

1. Ethnic minority
2. Gender
3. Age groups

Each block had 6 items which were rated on 9 point scales - from -4 (strongly disagree) to +4 (strongly agree), where higher rate reflected higher value of the statement.

RWA scale

RWA scale consisted of 22 items on different issues. Each item was rated on 9 point scales - from -4 (strongly disagree) to +4 (strongly agree), where higher rate reflected higher value of the statement.

Experimental Conditions

Three experimental conditions were developed. Each of them described a bogus immigrant group about to populate Georgia. Each of the condition provided different information on the immigrant group. Respondents read one of the descriptions where it was clearly noted that the information was not relevant to any real immigrant group and that it was specially designed for the research purposes. Though, the respondents were asked to consider the information as if it would be the reality and give further evaluations based on this assumption.

Information on immigrant group gave different perspectives on the group in each of the experimental condition:

1. Economic competition condition described the group as being similar to the mainstream population in terms of education and occupational skills. With their high competence in certain occupational skills members of this groups would be able to compete with mainstream population over jobs.

2. Social security threat condition described bogus immigrant group as very different in their values and lifestyle. This condition stressed on differences in crucial values and way of life.

3. Disadvantaged condition gave description of a group with history of poverty and low educational level.

4. Control condition provided neutral information of bogus immigrant group.

After reading one of the information, respondents were asked to evaluate the immigrant based on what they read. Evaluation was made on 8 statements: 2 about economic competition (these items had alpha of .70), 2 about social threat (these items had an alpha of .87), 2 about disadvantages of the immigrant group (these items had an alpha of .60), and 2 about their attitude about the fact of this group moving in their country. The last two items assessed resistance towards the group immigration of this specific group (these items had an alpha of .73). The statements were rated on scale from -4 (strongly disagree) to +4 (strongly agree).

Results

68.2% of the respondents were female, 31.8% - male. Average age of the participants was 36 (with minimal age 24 and maximal - 69). Age groups were categorized as: from 21 to 30 (44.5%), from 31 to 40 (19.5%), from 41 to 50 (19.5%), and above 51 (16.4%). 87.2% of the respondents had higher education, the rest were students.

Effect of experimental manipulation

Experimental manipulation affected evaluation of immigrant group. Unfavorable attitude towards immigrant group was lowest in control group ($M = -.30$, $SD = 0.9$). A one-way ANOVA was significant for all three experimental conditions: economic competi-

tion ($F = 2.5$, $p < 0.05$), disadvantaged ($F = 8.6$, $p > .001$) and social threat ($F = 10.7$, $p > .001$). Only for control group, ANOVA did not reveal any significant differences in these three evaluation criteria.

Table 1

Means and standard deviations of experimental manipulation checklist scales in three experimental and control condition

Experimental Groups	Social Threat		Economic Competition		Disadvantaged	
	Rating		Rating		Rating	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Social Threat	2.3	2	1.1	2	1.1	1.9
Economic Competition	0.3	2.7	1.8	2	1.1	2
Disadvantaged	1.2	2.5	1.7	1.9	1.9	1.4
Control	-0.4	3	0.7	2.9	1.5	2

Thus, ANOVA for all three manipulation checklist ratings was significant. As it was expected, mean ratings for social threat, disadvantaged and economic competition measures were highest in relevant experimental conditions (for social threat, disadvantaged and economic competition conditions respectively). It indicates that experimental manipulation affected perception and evaluation of immigrant group. Unlike control condition, immigrant group was evaluated as disadvantaged in disadvantaged condition, creating economic competition at labor market in economic competition condition, and bringing social threats in their community in social threat condition.

It is worth noting that SDO correlated with age of the participants – higher the age of the participants, higher the SDO score. The same relationship was shown between age and RWA – higher age groups indicated higher scores on Right Wing Authoritarianism scale.

In disadvantaged conditions, respondents' attitudes towards immigrant group did not depend on their age. Age groups had significantly different results in economic and social threat conditions: in both conditions highest scores on experimental manipulation checklist measures was revealed in age group above 51. Though, it is interesting that least unfavorable attitudes in economic condition were reported in 31-40 age group, and in social threat condition in 21-30 age group.
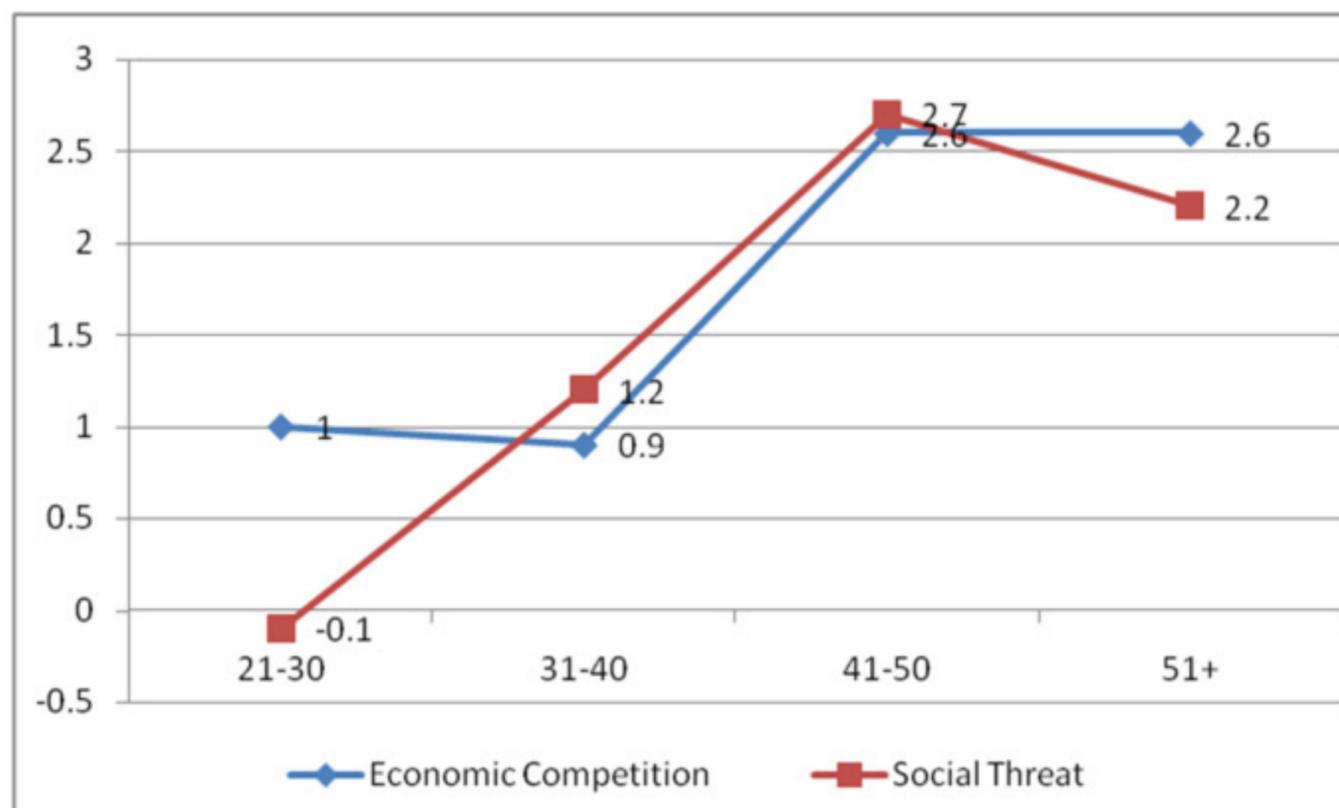
Figure 1
Age as moderating variable of experimental manipulation effect

Effect of experimental manipulation on RWA and SDO scales

As it was shown in many previous researches, RWA and SDO had strong positive correlation. SDO significantly predicted attitudes in economic competition and social threat conditions. Whereas, RWA significantly predicted opposition towards immigrant group in all experimental conditions except economic competition one. Age group above 51 had highest scores both on RWA and SDO scales. Within Social Dominance Orientation, age correlated with gender and age component of the scale, but not with ethnical component. In gender stereotypes, age group above 51 had highest scores, and 31-40, the lowest. In age component, 41-50 age group had highest scores, and again, 31-40 age group the lowest.

Discussion and Conclusions

As it was predicted, our research duplicated the results by Duckitt and Sibley (2009), showing that describing immigrant group from different perspectives would evoke relevant attitudes towards the group. The difference in our result was in the effect of RWA. Unlike the study by Duckitt and Sibley (2009), where RWA correlated only with social threat condition, in our research this construct also predicted disadvantaged condition scores. As about SDO, Duckitt and Sibley (2009) assumed that it would predict disadvantaged condition scores, in our research it did not moderate the effect of experimental manipulation in any of the conditions. This may indicate that RWA as a personality and ideological variable has a bit different dynamics in Georgian community. As a construct indicating willingness to respect authorities, obedience to social rules and norms, RWA echoes with issues so actively discussed in the community and media – attitudes towards

authorities, rejection of non-conforming behavior, hostility towards those who do not share these tendencies. Universal and wide spread social cognitions from one hand, can be viewed in their culturally specific dynamics in Georgia.

If we assume that RWA has its culture specific diversity in Georgia, then the effect of SDO shown in our research can also be explained. These two constructs being in strong correlation, parallel their effect prejudice formation. Therefore SDO had strong correlation with prejudice towards immigrant group in General, but experimental manipulation did not show significant effect in moderating this relationship.

Age differences also bring an interesting light to our results. Higher was the age of the participants, stronger were opposition and unfavorable prejudice towards immigrant group. We could assume that younger persons usually share more liberal views. Though in age component of the scale, 41-50 age group had the highest scores. This is an age group of people who usually have established themselves in their carrier path. Younger generation studies from them, and the older generation holds position they strive for. It may explain these differences towards age stereotypes. Also, 31-40 age group had the lowest ratings in gender component of SDO. It would be more logical to assume that this component should have lowest indicators in younger generations. Though 31-40 age group is usually in the process of building their carrier. In this, they adapt to more diversity at the workplace including gender one. As about the younger group, gender roles are still strictly differentiated in Georgian community. Families socialize children stressing gender differences. Thus, younger generation might have learnt gender attitudes in their socialization process. Guimond (2000) brings longitudinal studies proving that through socialization people internalize negative intergroup attitudes and values (Guimond 2000).

These assumptions may be supported if we look how age moderated experimental manipulation effects. In disadvantaged condition, age did not show itself as a moderating variable. Though, economic competition and social threat conditions showed a differentiated picture. Highest age group still had highest scores in these conditions. But it is interesting to look at the lowest scores. In social threat condition, 21-30 age group had the lowest scores. In this young age we can assume that values are still in process of development. Persons still look at authorities and referent persons to define their values and attitudes. They are more flexible and adaptive on their views Besides, younger persons may not have clear understanding of social threat, thus not perceiving it as something relevant.

In economic condition, 31-40 age group had the lowest scores. From one hand, this age group is economically active and should be more precautious towards this condition. Though, usually at this age persons have determined their carrier line, gained skills to establish themselves and resilience to face challenges.

Our findings supported assumption that prejudice are created in combination of personal constructs like RWA and SDO, and social conditions, like the ones used in our ex-

perimental manipulations. We operated with universal constructs, but they were shown in a slightly different light, giving ground for assumption that culture and social environment may play their role in the dynamics of these constructs. Age differences in our results allowed us to assume that also motivation and goals of the person may moderate prejudice formation. Different age groups with their different challenges and interests showed an interesting diversity in their responses. Thus, this research gave an interesting perspective on well research processes and constructs and gave ground for further hypotheses and questions.

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