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Are parental and filial ethnic attitudes toward Africans related?

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between parental ethnic subtle and blatant prejudice and filial attitudes toward the Africans in 21 pupil/parents pairs. Measures: for pupils, the short version of *Doll Clark's Paradigm* (Clark & Clark, 1947) and the Italian version of *Multi-response Racial Attitudes* (Doyle & Aboud, 1995); for parents, the Italian version of *Subtle and Blatant Prejudice Scale* (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995) referred to the Africans. Results showed positive relationships between maternal levels of prejudice and sons' preferences toward black dolls; between maternal levels of the anti-intimacy and daughters' refusals toward black dolls, and between paternal levels of the denial of positive emotions and daughters' refusals toward black dolls.

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1. Introduction

Scholars demonstrated that preschoolers displayed ethnic preferences for members of ingroup and refusals toward members belonging to outgroup (Aboud, 1986; Quintana, 1998; Chiesi & Primi, 2003; De Caroli, Licciardello, & Sagone, 2005; De Caroli, Falanga, & Sagone, in press). In a study carried out with Anglo-Australian children, Griffith and Nesdale (2006) highlighted that children expressed a more positive representation of ingroup than that of Aboriginals and Pacific Islanders (outgroups). Chiesi and Primi (2003) pointed out that white Italian pupils attributed negative actions (e.g. "to dirty" and "to beat") to Chinese children more than to Black ones. De Caroli et al. (2005) noted that White Italian preschoolers showed outgroup rejection toward Black children. Additionally, Sagone (2003) and, more recently, De Caroli et al. (in press) underlined the role of school context on pupils' ethnic attitudes, verifying that Italian pupils attending ethnically heterogeneous schools expressed more positive preferences toward outgroup members than those attending ethnically homogeneous schools. Among the variables that affected children's ethnic attitudes, such as school context and interethnic friendship (Tropp & Prenovost, 2008), one of the most important elements was represented by parental ethnic attitudes.

With reference to the relationship between parental ethnic prejudice and children's attitudes, researches carried out by Branch and Newcombe (1986) and by Aboud and Doyle (1996) pointed out moderate relations between children's and parents' ethnic attitudes and didn't offer conclusive outcomes. More recent studies analyzed several aspects and moderators of influence of parental prejudice on subjects in developmental age (Sinclair, Dunn, & Lowery, 2005; White & Gleitzman, 2006; Castelli, Zogmaister, & Tomelleri, 2009; Correia & Monteiro, 2010).

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In fourth and fifth-graders students, Sinclair et al. (2005) found out that parental racial attitudes affected their own children's racial prejudice in relation to the degree of children identification with parents. It meant that the more children had high identification with parents, the more prejudice expressed by children (in implicit and explicit form) was related to their parents' views. Analyzing cohesion, adaptability, and communication in family as moderating variable, White and Gleitzman (2006) found that subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice, expressed especially by mothers, was significantly related with prejudice showed by their children. In Italian families composed by parents and one of their pupils, Castelli et al. (2009) found out that maternal implicit attitudes (measured by the IAT, see Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) influenced children's playmate preferences and the attribution of positive and negative traits to the Blacks. Additionally, in a research involving children aged 6/7 and 9/10 and their mothers, Correia and Monteiro (2010) used implicit (analyzed by Implicit Ethnic Prejudice Supraliminal Priming, Fazio et al., 1995) and explicit measures to assess children's ethnic attitudes and explicit measures to evaluate maternal ethnic attitudes. They observed that children's explicit prejudice was positively related to maternal prejudice only for older children and that, for both age groups, children's implicit prejudice was related to maternal prejudice.

According to Pettigrew and Meertens' model (1995), the present study analyzed parental ethnic attitudes distinguishing two forms of prejudice: "subtle" prejudice, referred to a covert form of ethnic discrimination and "blatant" prejudice, linked to explicit rejection toward minority groups. Subtle prejudice was structured by the *Defence of traditional values*, the *Exaggeration of cultural differences*, and the *Denial of positive emotions*; blatant prejudice was defined by the *Threat and rejection of outgroup* and the *Anti-intimacy* (see Arcuri & Boca, 1996 for the Italian context). Pupils' ethnic attitudes were assessed by means of classical measures that evaluate preferences and refusals toward outgroups using the choice of dolls (consistent with sex of pupils) with overt ethnic physical traits (Sagone, 2003; De Caroli et al., in press) and with the same color of clothing to allow pupils to be focused only on ethnic aspects (see Guerrero et al., 2010).

The influence of parental prejudice toward the Africans on pupils' ethnic attitudes was analyzed to clarify the role of ethnic prejudice, in hidden and explicit form, on the development of ethnic attitudes in early age. We expected a reduced influence of paternal prejudice toward the Africans on pupils' ethnic attitudes respect to maternal influence.

2. Methodology

The aim of present study was to explore the relationship between parental subtle and blatant prejudice and ethnic attitudes toward the Africans showed by pupils. We hypothesized that pupils will express a greater preference toward white dolls than black dolls (H_{1a}) and a greater refusal toward black dolls than white ones (H_{1b}). Moreover, we expected that the more the mothers will show low levels of subtle and blatant prejudice, the more their pupils will prefer black dolls (H_{2a}), and the more the mothers will show high levels of subtle and blatant prejudice, the more their pupils will refuse black dolls (H_{2b}).

2.1. Participants

The sample was formed by 21 families, constituted by mothers ($M_{age}=34.49$, $sd=5.17$), fathers ($M_{age}=36.97$, $sd=5.09$), and their preschool pupils (11 sons and 10 daughters; 3-5 years old), randomly chosen from two Public Kindergarten Schools (Eastern Sicily), Italy.

2.2. Measures and procedure

The Italian short version of the *Clark & Clark's Doll Paradigm* (Clark & Clark, 1947) and *Multi-response Racial Attitudes* (Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Chiesi & Primi, 2003) were administrated to pupils in individual setting by an expert researcher at school after parental consent for research participation. The first measure, composed by 5 question items and 4 dolls (2 male/2 female) differentiated only by physical ethnic aspects, was used to explore ethnic awareness (two items for "Which doll is most similar to an Italian/African pupil?"), self-identification ("Which doll was most like you?"), ethnic preferences ("Which doll do you like the most?"), and ethnic refusals ("Which doll do you dislike?"). The second measure, constituted by eight items, was used to explore the attribution

of 4 positive (e.g., “Which doll brings flowers to his/her mother?”) and 4 negative actions (e.g., “Which doll beats the other pupils?”) to the Africans.

Subtle and Blatant Prejudice Scale by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995), applied in Italian context by Manganelli Rattazzi and Volpato (2001), with Africans as the target category, was administered to parents in face to face setting. This scale was constituted by 20 items, valuable on a 6-points Likert scale, and divided in two subscales (Cronbach’s α ranged from .70 to .76). Half of the items explored the subtle prejudice (Sp), 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 Africans 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 for Africans living here?”, item reverse); another half of the items analyzed the blatant prejudice (Bp), arranged in the *Threat and rejection* (e.g.: “Most politicians in Italy care too much about Africans and not enough about the average Italian persons”) and the *Anti-intimacy* (e.g.: “I would not mind if an African who had a similar economic background as mine joined my close family by marriage”).

2.3. Data analysis

The original sample consisted of 39 Italian families, but 18 of them were excluded because of the failure of pupils on ethnic awareness/identification and parental scores in one or both prejudice subscales overlapped with the theoretical middle point (Manganelli Rattazzi & Volpato, 2001).

The Ethnic Preference Index (see De Caroli et al., in press) consisted of the mean scores obtained by summing the choices expressed by pupils in the preference item and in the four positive actions toward White (EPI-White) and Black dolls (EPI-Black) and dividing each sum for 5. The Ethnic Refusal Index consisted of the mean scores obtained by summing the choices expressed by pupils in the refusal item and in the four negative actions toward White (ERI-White) and Black dolls (ERI-Black) and dividing each sum for 5.

Levels of Sp and Bp were assessed by adding the scores obtained in items constituting respectively the two subscales; levels of prejudice for each of five components were computed by summing responses to the relative items and dividing them for the number of items. Using theoretical mid-point (equal to 35), subjects were divided in 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 of Bp <35.

The examination of data was carried out by SPSS 15 using the following t-tests, One Way Anova, and linear regressions with stepwise method.

3. Results

3.1. Parental ethnic prejudice and pupils’ attitudes

In relation to parental attitudes, mothers and fathers showed similar levels of Sp and Bp and of each of their components, even if both mothers (Sp: $M=38.62$, $sd=6.95$ vs. Bp: $M=29.05$, $sd=7.56$) ($t_{(20)}=9.02$, $p<.001$) and fathers (Sp: $M=40.81$, $sd=5.81$ vs. Bp: $M=30.23$, $sd=7.58$) ($t_{(20)}=8.82$, $p<.001$) showed higher levels of subtle prejudice than levels of blatant prejudice. With reference to the components of Sp (for mothers: $F(2,19)=9.46$, $p<.001$; for fathers: $F(2,19)=8.20$, $p=.001$), mothers and fathers expressed higher levels of the exaggeration of cultural differences (mothers: $M=4.36$, $sd=.81$; fathers: $M=4.62$, $sd=.82$) than the denial of positive emotions (mothers: $M=4.07$, $sd=1.05$; fathers: $M=3.83$, $sd=1.02$) and the defence of traditional values (mothers: $M=3.26$, $sd=1.06$; fathers: $M=3.67$, $sd=.79$). As for the components of Bp, no differences emerged between the threat and rejection and the anti-intimacy.

The distribution of parents in the three typologies of prejudice showed that the 52,4% ($n=11$) of mothers were classified as subtles, the 23,8% ($n=5$) as equalitarians, and the 23,8% ($n=5$) as bigots. Similarly, the 61,9% ($n=13$) of fathers were classified as subtles, the 19% ($n=4$) as equalitarians, and the 19% ($n=4$) as bigots.

Pupils obtained higher scores in Ethnic Preferences Index to white dolls than in Ethnic Preference Index to black dolls (EPI-White: $M=.46$, $sd=.35$ vs. EPI-Black: $M=.18$, $sd=.23$) ($t_{(20)}=2.59$, $p=.02$); furthermore, they showed lower scores in Ethnic Refusal Index to white dolls than levels of Ethnic Refusal Index to black dolls (ERI-White: $M=.12$, $sd=.16$ vs. ERI-Black: $M=.59$, $sd=.36$) ($t_{(20)}=-4.72$, $p<.001$). No significant differences for age and sex emerged.

3.2. Linear regressions between parental attitudes and pupils preferences and refusals

The analysis of linear regressions pointed out that maternal levels of Sp and Bp had an impact on the preferences and refusals expressed by pupils (especially, sons) toward black dolls. It meant that, only for sons, the more the mothers showed high levels of Sp the more their sons expressed low scores of EPI-Black ($\beta= -.72$, $t= -3.09$, $p=.01$). In detail, the more the mothers scored high on the exaggeration of cultural differences the more their sons obtained low scores of EPI-Black ($\beta= -.83$, $t= -4.55$, $p=.001$), and high scores of ERI-Black ($\beta=.82$, $t= 4.37$, $p=.002$). Furthermore, the more the mothers showed high levels of Bp the more their sons scored low on EPI-Black ($\beta= -.78$, $t= -3.70$, $p=.005$); in detail, the more the mothers expressed high levels of the threat and rejection the more their sons displayed low scores of EPI-Black ($\beta= -.88$, $t= -5.60$, $p<.001$), and high scores of ERI-Black ($\beta=.66$, $t= 2.65$, $p=.03$). Only for daughters, the more the mothers scored high on the anti-intimacy the more their daughters showed high scores of ERI-Black ($\beta=.71$, $t= 2.83$, $p=.02$) and the more the fathers expressed high levels of the denial of positive emotions the more their daughters attained high scores of ERI-Black ($\beta=.82$, $t= 4.00$, $p=.004$).

4. Discussion and conclusion

According to literature, our findings confirmed the first hypothesis: pupils expressed greater preferences toward white dolls than black dolls (H_{1a}) and, consistently, showed greater refusals toward black dolls than white dolls (H_{1b}).

The second hypothesis was confirmed with relevant differences for the sex of pupils. For sons, maternal levels of subtle prejudice toward the Africans affected on sons' preferences (H_{2a}) and refusals (H_{2b}) toward black dolls; in detail, the more the mothers exaggerated the cultural differences between ingroup and outgroup, the more their sons expressed reduced black dolls preferences and high black dolls refusals. In the same direction, maternal levels of blatant prejudice affected on sons' preferences (H_{2a}) and refusals (H_{2b}) toward black dolls: the more the mothers considered outgroup as a real danger to ingroup the more their sons expressed reduced black dolls preferences and high black dolls refusals. For daughters, the maternal anti-intimacy affected on refusals toward black dolls (H_{2b}): the more the mothers rejected sexual contact or intermarriage with members of outgroup the more their daughters expressed high black dolls refusals; moreover, the paternal denial of positive emotions affected on black dolls refusals (H_{2b}). In other words, the more the fathers denied admiration and sympathy feelings toward the Africans the more their daughters refused black dolls.

Future research carried out with children and adolescents could clarify the different impact of mother's prejudice on sons and daughters in developmental age in relation to parents' ethnic expectations and attitudes attributed by children to their parents (Castelli et al., 2007); furthermore, researches with families composed of mother, father, daughter, and son could deepen relations between mothers' and fathers' attitudes, respectively, with sons and daughters ethnic preferences and refusals.

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