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Subtle and blatant prejudice toward Chinese people in Italian adolescents and young adults: the role of “friendship” and “outgroup representation”

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Abstract

This study analyzed subtle and blatant prejudice toward Chinese people expressed by 276 Italian adolescents and young adults, with and without friends from other ethnic groups. Italian version of *Subtle and Blatant Prejudice Scale* referred to Chinese people (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Manganelli Rattazzi & Volpato, 2001) and three *Semantic Differentials* (Falanga et al., 2010) to analyze the representation of Self, the Italians (ingroup), and the Chinese (outgroup) were used. Young adults showed lower levels of subtle and blatant prejudice than adolescents; subjects with friends from other ethnic groups expressed lower levels in some components of subtle and blatant prejudice than the others; Chinese representation affected levels of ethnic prejudice.

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1. Introduction

From the 1970's, scientific literature proposed to distinguish two typologies of prejudice: the first, expressed in latent and covert discriminant attitudes, was named “symbolic” (Sears & Kinder, 1971), “modern” (Mc Conahay, 1983), and “aversive” prejudice (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998), while the second, showed in explicit rejection of members of other ethnic groups, was defined “old fashioned” prejudice (Mc Conahay, 1983).

In light of this distinction, Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) carried out a cross-national study in seven independent national samples from western Europe, and measured “subtle” prejudice, evoking the first typology (defined “cool, distant, and indirect” discrimination), and “blatant” prejudice, similar to the second typology (defined “hot, close, and direct” attitude). Subtle prejudice was considered by authors as a hidden form of prejudice, providing a positive public image and useful to build a self-representation suitable for the principles of socially accepted tolerance; on the contrary, blatant prejudice corresponded to an attitude rejection toward minority groups, not explicitly influenced by social desirability. Results pointed out that levels of subtle prejudice were higher than levels of blatant one and confirmed the existence of the two typologies constituted by several components: for subtle prejudice, 1) the *Defence of traditional values* was referred to the perception of outgroup values as unacceptable because they are different from ingroup traditional values and dysfunctional to succeed, 2) the *Exaggeration of cultural differences*

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was a mechanism that “attributes outgroup disadvantage to cultural differences” (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995, p.58), and 3) the *Denial of positive emotions* was an implicit attitude focused on the negation of admiration and sympathy feelings toward the outgroup; for blatant prejudice, 1) the *Threat and rejection of outgroup* consisted of perception of outgroup as a real danger and genetically inferior to ingroup, and 2) the *Anti-intimacy* was referred to the rejection of sexual contact or intermarriage with members of outgroup. In relation to scores obtained in the subtle and blatant prejudice measures it is possible to divide the subjects in the three following typologies: *Equalitarians*, with low levels of subtle and blatant prejudice; *Bigots*, with high levels of subtle and blatant prejudice; *Subtles*, with high levels of subtle prejudice and low levels of blatant prejudice.

Scholars confirmed the structure of this model in Italian context as well (see Arcuri & Boca, 1996; Pinnelli, 2005), the superiority of subtle ethnic prejudice levels over those of blatant ethnic prejudice (Manganelli Rattazzi & Volpato, 2001; White et al., 2009), and the differences in relation to: age-groups (White et al., 2009), interethnic contact and friendship (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Di Stefano, Falgares & Di Maria, 2003; De Caroli, Falanga & Sagone, 2008; White et al., 2009), and representation of outgroups (Neumann & Seibt, 2001; De Caroli et al., 2008). For example, in an Australian research carried out with adolescents and university students, White et al. (2009) noted that university students reported significantly lower levels of subtle and blatant prejudice toward Asian and Arab Australians than adolescents. About the effects of contact and friendship on ethnic prejudice, Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) showed that subjects who reported having more and diverse intergroup friends scored significantly lower on subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice. Di Stefano et al. (2003) noted that adults who had equal status contacts with people belonging to other ethnic groups showed lower levels in both typologies of prejudice than those who had unequal contacts with members of other ethnic groups. De Caroli et al. (2008) verified that Italian adolescents attending to ethnically heterogeneous schools showed lower levels of subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice (specifically, in the *Exaggeration of cultural differences* and the *Anti-intimacy*) than those attending to ethnically homogeneous schools; furthermore, adolescents with friends belonging to different ethnic groups expressed lower levels of the *Defence of traditional values*, the *Denial of positive emotions*, and the *Anti-intimacy* than those without friends from other ethnic groups; additionally, the consistency of *Equalitarians* was significantly higher in ethnically heterogeneous schools than in homogeneous schools while the number of *Bigots* was significantly higher in ethnically homogeneous schools than in heterogeneous schools. Similarly, White et al. (2009) pointed out that Australian adolescents who had contacts with Asian friends reported significantly lower levels of subtle and blatant prejudice toward Asian Australians than adolescents without Asian friends. Instead, Cariota Ferrara, Solimeno Cipriani, and Villani (2002) demonstrated that the accidental contact affected only the increasing of levels of blatant ethnic prejudice toward Singhalese immigrants. In reference to the outgroup representation, Neumann and Seibt (2001) analyzed, in a sample of German university students, the stereotypic associations (measured by the IAT) between adjectives and photos of Turkish and German people in relation to subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice: as reported by authors, “the stronger the association of Turks with a negative evaluation in the IAT the more prejudiced were the answers in the Blatant and Subtle Scale” (Neumann & Seibt, 2001, p.617). More recently, in a sample of Italian adolescents, De Caroli et al. (2008) found out that the more positive was the representation of the Africans, the less were the levels of subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice toward this outgroup.

Few evidences in Italian context were found for the relationship between subtle and blatant prejudice and outgroup representation in adolescents and young adults, especially in reference to the recently immigrated Chinese people in our schools and academic context. For this reason, the present study was aimed to deepen the relations between outgroup representation and prejudice toward Chinese people, according to Pettigrew and Meertens’ model (1995), and analyze the effects of age-groups and friendship on levels of subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice.

2. Methodology

The aim of this research was to explore subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice toward Chinese people and the representation of ingroup (Italians) and outgroup (Chinese) in Italian adolescents and young adults with and without friends belonging to other ethnic groups. In detail, we hypothesized that:

H1- young adults will show lower levels of subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice toward Chinese (H1a) and will express a more positive representation of outgroup than adolescents (H1b);

H2- subjects with friends belonging to other ethnic groups will show lower levels of subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice toward Chinese (H2a) and will display a more positive representation of Chinese than subjects without friends from other ethnic groups (H2b);

H3- representation of Chinese people will affect subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice.

2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 276 Italian students, 105 boys and 171 girls, aged between 13 and 34 ($M=18.22$, $SD=4.39$), attending to Public Secondary Schools and the degree course of Psychology at University of Catania, Sicily, Italy. After parental consent for the participation to the study, subjects were divided into four groups: Gr-1 ($n=69$), aged between 13 and 15 ($M=14.09$, $SD=.31$); Gr-2 ($n=71$), aged between 15 and 17 ($M=16.01$, $SD=.38$); Gr-3 ($n=70$), aged between 17 and 19 ($M=18.05$, $SD=.44$); Gr-4 ($n=66$), aged between 21 and 34 ($M=25.08$, $SD=3.14$).

Note: The original sample consisted of 285 subjects. According to the model (see Manganelli Rattazzi & Volpato, 2001), 16 subjects were excluded because their scores in one or both subscales overlapped with the theoretical middle point.

2.2. Materials and procedure

Materials were administrated in small group setting and were constituted by the following scales:

I – *Subtle and Blatant Prejudice Scale* by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995), applied in Italian context by Manganelli Rattazzi and Volpato (2001), with Chinese people as target category. It was constituted by 20 items, valuable on a 6-points Likert scale, and divided in two subscales:

- 10 items to explore the subtle prejudice ($\alpha=.70$), structured in the *Defence of traditional values* (e.g.: “Chinese 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 Chinese people living here are to Italian people like yourself in their religious beliefs and practices?”), and the *Denial of positive emotions* (e.g. “How often have you felt sympathy for Chinese people living here?”, item reverse);
- 10 items to analyze the blatant prejudice ($\alpha=.80$), structured in the *Threat and rejection* (e.g.: “Most politicians in Italy care too much about Chinese people and not enough about the average Italian persons”) and the *Anti-intimacy* (e.g.: “I would not mind if a Chinese person who had a similar economic background as mine joined my close family by marriage”);

II - three *Semantic Differentials* (Falanga, De Caroli & Sagone, 2010), consisted of 36 pairs of bipolar adjectives (e.g., hot-cold, deep-superficial, and soft-hard), each valuable on a 7-points scale (with the intermediate value equal to 4), were used to assess the representation of Self (“Me as I am”), of ingroup (“The Italians”), and of outgroup (“The Chinese”). Internal consistency reliability resulted to be satisfactory with Cronbach’s α ranged from .79 to .89.

2.3. Data analysis

The examination of the statistical significance of results was carried out using the SPSS 15.0 software (Statistical Package for Social Science), by means of the following tests: t-Student, One Way ANOVA, and linear regression with stepwise method. Age-groups and friendship with people belonging to other ethnic groups were used as independent variables; subtle and blatant prejudice (with their components), and representation of Self, ingroup, and outgroup were measured as dependent variables.

Levels of subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice 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 in the three following typologies: *Equalitarians*, with levels of subtle and blatant prejudice <35; *Bigots*, with levels of subtle and blatant prejudice >35; *Subtles*, with levels of subtle prejudice >35 and of blatant prejudice <35.

3. Results

3.1. Subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice

All subjects showed higher levels of subtle ($M=39.72$, $SD=6.20$) than blatant prejudice ($M=27.17$, $SD=8.55$) ($t_{(275)}=33.70$, $p<.001$), and this result was a confirmation of theoretical assumption indicated in Pettigrew and Meertens' model (1995). Significant differences emerged among the components of subtle prejudice ($F_{(2,274)}=227.94$, $p<.001$): subjects showed higher levels of the *Exaggeration of cultural differences* ($M=4.58$, $SD=.65$) than those of the *Denial of positive emotions* ($M=4.19$, $SD=1.12$) and the *Defence of traditional values* ($M=3.25$, $SD=.86$). No differences were observed in relation to the components of blatant prejudice: in fact, levels of the *Threat and rejection* ($M=2.71$, $SD=.77$) were very close to levels of the *Anti-intimacy* ($M=2.72$, $SD=1.23$).

Differences for age-groups were found, in the sense that young adults reached lower levels than the other groups on subtle prejudice ($F_{(3,272)}=2.76$, $p=.04$), specifically on the *Defence of traditional values* ($F_{(3,272)}=2.82$, $p=.04$), and on one component of blatant prejudice, that is the *Threat and rejection* ($F_{(3,272)}=4.68$, $p=.003$). Post hoc analyses carried out with Bonferroni's method underlined differences in levels of subtle ethnic prejudice between young adults and 15-17 years old adolescents ($p=.03$) and, specifically, in the *Defence of traditional values* between young adults and 15-17 years old adolescents ($p=.04$); finally, on the *Threat and rejection* between young adults and 13-15 years old adolescents ($p=.03$), young adults and 15-17 years old adolescents ($p=.03$), young adults and 17-19 years old adolescents ($p=.005$).

Statistically significant effects of friendship were found on the *Denial of positive emotions* ($t_{(274)}=3.16$, $p=.002$) and the *Anti-intimacy* ($t_{(274)}=2.28$, $p=.02$): it meant that subjects with friends belonging to other ethnic groups displayed lower levels of the *Denial of positive emotions* ("With"=4.40, $SD=1.05$ vs. "Without"=3.97, $SD=1.18$) and of the *Anti-intimacy* ("With"=2.88, $SD=1.28$ vs. "Without"=2.54, $SD=1.15$) than those without friends from other ethnic groups.

In relation to the three typologies, most of the subjects ($n=162$, 58,7%) was classified as *Subtles*, the 21,7% ($n=60$) as *Equalitarians*, and the 19,6% ($n=54$) as *Bigots*. Significant differences for age-groups were found only for *Equalitarians* ($\chi^2=11.33$, $df=6$, $p=.01$): the consistency of this typology of subjects was higher in young adults (43,3%) than in the other groups (13-15 years old adolescents=15%; 15-17 years old adolescents=21,7%; 17-19 years old adolescents=20%).

3.2. Representation of Self, ingroup, and outgroup

All subjects expressed a more positive representation of Self ($M=4.79$, $SD=.54$) than the Chinese ($M=4.23$, $SD=.58$), and the Italians ($M=4.04$, $SD=.73$) ($F_{(2,274)}=118.81$, $p<.001$), without significant differences for friendship.

Significant effects for age-groups were observed (Table 1), in the sense that young adults valued more positively the representation of Self, Italians, and Chinese people than all adolescents groups. Post hoc analyses, carried out by means of Bonferroni's method, confirmed differences in relation to age-groups: for Self, between young adults and 15-17 years old adolescents ($p=.003$); for Italians, between young adults and 13-15 years old adolescents ($p=.04$), young adults and 15-17 years old adolescents ($p<.001$), and young adults and 17-19 years old adolescents ($p<.001$); for Chinese, between young adults and 13-15 years old adolescents ($p<.001$), young adults and 15-17 years old adolescents ($p<.001$), and young adults and 17-19 years old adolescents ($p=.005$).

Table 1. Representation of Self, Italians, and Chinese people – Differences for age-groups

Representations	Groups	Means	SD	$F_{(2, 272)}$	p
Self	Gr-1	4.86	.53	4.84	.003
	Gr-2	4.64	.54		
	Gr-3	4.74	.51		
	Gr-4	4.96	.56		
Italians	Gr-1	4.19	.63	21.13	<.001
	Gr-2	3.73	.66		
	Gr-3	3.77	.71		
	Gr-4	4.51	.64		
Chinese people	Gr-1	4.06	.63	9.84	<.001
	Gr-2	4.13	.48		
	Gr-3	4.22	.62		
	Gr-4	4.54	.45		

With reference to typologies of subjects, *Bigots* displayed more positive representations of Self and Italians and negative representation of Chinese compared to other typologies of subjects (Table 2). Post hoc analyses, with Bonferroni's method, showed relevant differences in relation to the three representations: for Self, between *Subtles* and *Bigots* ($p=.001$); for Italians, between both *Equalitarians* and *Bigots* ($p=.008$) and *Subtles* and *Bigots* ($p=.03$); for Chinese, between *Equalitarians* and *Subtles*, *Equalitarians* and *Bigots*, and *Subtles* and *Bigots* (all for $p<.001$).

Table 2. Representation of Self, Italians, and Chinese people – Differences for typologies of subjects

Representations	Groups	Means	SD	$F_{(2, 273)}$	p
Self	<i>Equalitarians</i>	4.84	.56	7.21	.001
	<i>Subtles</i>	4.71	.54		
	<i>Bigots</i>	5.02	.47		
Italians	<i>Equalitarians</i>	3.90	.79	5.03	.007
	<i>Subtles</i>	4.01	.72		
	<i>Bigots</i>	4.31	.63		
Chinese people	<i>Equalitarians</i>	4.61	.47	35.45	<.001
	<i>Subtles</i>	4.24	.43		
	<i>Bigots</i>	3.79	.75		

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 Chinese people affected the two typologies of ethnic prejudice and their components, without differences for all independent variables. The more positive was the representation of outgroup, the lower were the levels of subtle prejudice ($\beta=-.50$, $t=-9.50$, $p<.001$), specifically of the *Defence of traditional values* ($\beta=-.38$, $t=-6.76$, $p<.001$), the *Exaggeration of cultural differences* ($\beta=-.26$, $t=-4.49$, $p<.001$), and the *Denial of positive emotions* ($\beta=-.49$, $t=-9.38$, $p<.001$). In addition, the more positive was the representation of outgroup, the lower were the levels of blatant prejudice ($\beta=-.53$, $t=-10.41$, $p<.001$), in particular of the *Threat and rejection* ($\beta=-.52$, $t=-10.12$, $p<.001$) and the *Anti-intimacy* ($\beta=-.43$, $t=-7.91$, $p<.001$).

4. Discussion and conclusion

The results of this study partially confirmed H1a, in the sense that young adults expressed lower levels than adolescents aged between 15 and 17 on the *Defence of traditional values*, and lower levels than all adolescents groups on the *Threat and rejection*; young adults perceived outgroup values and behaviors as less unacceptable and dysfunctional to succeed than adolescents, and considered Chinese people as genetically inferior and a real danger for Italians less than adolescents. Furthermore, as reported in H1b, young adults expressed a more positive representation of outgroup than all adolescents groups.

About the role of “friendship”, findings partially confirmed H2a, in the sense that subjects with friends belonging to other ethnic groups showed lower levels of the *Denial of positive emotions* and the *Anti-intimacy* than those without friends from other ethnic groups. It meant that subjects with friends belonging to other ethnic groups suppressed admiration and sympathy feelings toward outgroup and rejected sexual contact or intermarriage with members of outgroup less than the others. On the contrary, empirical evidences didn't support the impact of friendship on the representation of Chinese people (H2b).

Finally, results demonstrated that representation of Chinese people affected subtle and blatant ethnic prejudice toward this outgroup (H3), in the sense that the more the subjects expressed a positive representation of outgroup the less they reported high levels of subtle and blatant prejudice and of their components. It meant that subjects who perceived more positively Chinese people considered their traditional values less unacceptable and dysfunctional to succeed in Italian society, scarcely valued cultural differences as a source of outgroup disadvantage, poorly denied admiration and sympathy feelings toward Chinese people, narrowly estimated outgroup as a real danger and genetically inferior to ingroup, and weakly rejected intimacy with members of outgroup.

Further researches carried out with target outgroups characterized by different social *iter* of integration in Italian context could deepen the role of friendship and outgroup representation on prejudicial attitudes.

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