

The Association between Racial Attitudes and Identity Styles in White Albanian students toward Roma and Egyptian minorities

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Author Note

This work would not have been possible without the contributions of all the students who participated, and colleagues who helped in data collection. This project is a voluntary initiative of the first author of this paper which started in September 2019. It investigates youth emotion regulation, identity, parental influences, mental health and well-being. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Abstract

In this study, the links between in-group racial attitudes, and identity processing styles will be examined. Youth racial attitudes will be tested as an outcome of identity styles. The participants are youths in Albania, where Romani and Egyptians are the most marginalized out-groups. Our findings can provide new insights of racial attitudes of youths' in-group (racial attitudes toward Romani and Egyptians), and links with identity processing styles and racial attitudes. Investigating patterns of racial attitudes in youths and identity styles, may support practices and policies aiming at social inclusion of minorities groups and toward identities development that protect youths from racism not only in the Albanian context, but further on, in other cultural contexts.

Keywords: Racial attitudes, identity styles, Roma and Egyptian minorities, social inclusion, Albania.

Introduction

Being diverse is part of being human, still many threats have been faced because of diversity. Racism is one of the threats of diversity even in the global era. Racism has generated many inequalities in societies with diverse cultural populations such as discrimination in employment and educational opportunities (Jones, 1997). Studies examining consequences of racism suggest that racism is associated with poorer mental health, less effective coping strategies, and increased risk for psychopathology due to higher markers of stress reactivity activated in people suffering racism (Brownlow et al., 2019). Although, forms of racism have changed during history, racism is still a very concerning issue in the modern times, where most forms of racism are shown with hidden messages and behaviors which may be unintended (Gaertner et al., 2005). These forms of racism are called aversive and symbolic racism, forms

in which people from the ingroup (a group which one identifies and has a sense of belongingness and is different from other groups) do not expose obvious beliefs about minorities (see Brigham, 1993). Many times, people are unaware of their racial hidden messages (Gaertner et al., 2005). Some theorists suggest that aversive racism is shaped due to a conflict of egalitarian values but also negative feelings and beliefs about minorities during the socialization process (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Gaertner et al., 2005; Brigham, 1993). Accordingly, Whites have become racially egalitarian in principle, so the social norms support equality between races, and more hidden ways of racism may have developed in modern times, embodying both negative feelings toward racial minorities but also some conservative non-racial values (Sears & Henry, 2003). Because racial attitudes may have been shaped during the socialization process and later on, the main hypothesis tested in this study is that identity processing styles in ingroups may be critical in racial attitudes. Identity formation is a process of establishing values in youth (Berzonsky et al., 2011). Thus, this is a critical period to establish diversity values. Many studies have focused on ethnic identity, racial attitudes, and racism from the perspective of the marginalized groups (e.g. Litam & Oh, 2022). Therefore, there is a need to study racial attitudes from the perspective of the dominant groups in the society, their values of ethnic identity (see Holt & Sweityer, 2020). Research studies have examined how identity development is closely linked with coping and adaptability. In one of the recent studies, Berzonsky and Kinney (2019), found that diffuse-avoidant identity style was associated with more denial and immature feelings, whereas informational identity style was positively related with better coping styles. Also, an informational identity style was positively linked with self-reflection and an awareness of internal states versus diffuse-avoidant and normative identity style that were positively linked with rumination (Berzonsky, & Luyckx, 2008). According to Berzonsky (1994), individuals with informational identity style are focused on self-insight and motivated to learn more about themselves by gaining and processing relevant information about themselves and engage in more mentally effortful thinking, individuals with normative identity styles are more prone to automatically conform and internalize to social norms and have low tolerance for ambiguity, and individuals with diffuse-avoidant styles are more prone to procrastination and weak commitments (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005; Berzonsky, 2004). Based on these findings, informational identity style individuals are more prone to use more adaptive mechanisms compared to the other identity styles. The conceptual framework of aversive racism (Dovidio et al., 1997), suggest that individuals of the ingroups develop both egalitarian values and negative feelings for the outgroups during the socialization process, especially when facing with social categorization. Because of this conflicting emotional state, individuals may hide their negative feelings by being in denial, suppressive state, which can automatically activate racial attitudes toward the outgroups. Further, because the normative identity style is shaped upon internalized norms, and because of the low tolerance for ambiguity and suppression of negative feelings related to social norms conflicts, individuals with high suppressive emotional states are more oriented toward normative identity style, and thus pose a higher risk for youth to develop racial attitudes and aversive racism. For diffuse-avoidant identity style, it is expected that these individuals are in a state of

procrastination and confusion that may lead them to use less adaptive coping strategies, so it is expected that these individuals will have higher levels of racial attitudes. Individuals oriented toward an informational identity style, are expected to use better adaptive coping mechanisms such as reflection, acquiring further knowledge when in ambiguity, because these individuals are oriented to gain information for self-insight and to make decisions based on actively being informed and aware of their situations and feelings, so they maybe more prone to modify their beliefs based on how they appraise their situations, so it is expected that they will show less racial attitudes. The study examines the role of identity styles in racial attitudes.

Thus, it is hypothesized that in regard to coping with diversity, and interaction with outgroups, informational identity style individuals would show less racial attitudes and racism compared to the other styles of identity. Because individuals with normative style of identity have lower tolerance for ambiguity, and are norms-oriented, it is hypothesized that will experience more denial, conflict and racial attitudes. Similarly, individuals with diffused-avoidant identity styles would show higher levels of racial attitudes.

Albanian context

Albania is situated in the southeast of Europe, in the Balkan region. Albania is a post-communist, upper middle-income country (World Bank, 2016) and shares borders with Montenegro in the Norwest, Kosovo, in the northeast, North Macedonia in the east, Italy in the west, and Greece in the south. In 2014, Albania became a candidate country for EU membership, and the country aspires to adhere the EU in the near future. Part of this alliance is advocacy for fundamental human rights, and the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. One of the most marginalized groups in Albania are Roma and Egyptian, which face racial attitudes, stigma by the majority of population, very poor living conditions, low school enrolment, higher levels of drop-out due to racism, bullying, lack of support, hidden racial attitudes in and out of school, and also face poverty twice higher than the majority of population (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2016). The situation of Roma and Egyptian pose a serious problem for integrating these minorities groups in society. The government of Albania developed a national action plan for the integration of Roma and Egyptians for the years 2015-2020 to support equal access to services and rights (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2016). In the latest report of the European Commission (2019), Roma children school enrolment has shown a positive trend (5% elementary school, 25% middle school, 27% high school, pre-university education by 22%), and there is a slight increase for Roma and Egyptians children in participating in early childhood education. But, accessing universities is quite challenging and still needs to be done to facilitate access to higher education. The employment rates remain very low, informal employment remains very high, health insurance coverage remains low. Housing has improved but still remains a critical problem for many Roma and Egyptians families (European Commission, 2019). All in all, Roma's and Egyptians' integration into mainstream society has progressed but still racial attitudes, discrimination and exclusion remain some of the critical issues that create

many gaps in equality and their well-being.

Methods

Participants

The sample consisted of 273 students attending the public "A.Moisiu" University, University of Tirana, and the Polytechnic University of Tirana. Approximately 4500 students were sent an email informing them for the study and the link to fill in the survey. The returning rate was 6%. Most of participants were females (79.9%). Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was guaranteed. Students did not profit extra class credit or monetary benefits. The participants recruited were studying in diverse fields such as education, social sciences, engineering, business management, economics, tourism, natural sciences. The age of participants varied from 18 to 36 years ($M=20.56$, $SD=2.73$).

Procedure

All students filled in an informed consent for taking part in the survey. They were informed and were required to fill in every item in the online platform, in order to exclude missing data and finish the submission of the survey. Students reported on demographic information, and completed the Whites' attitudes toward black ([ATB]; Brigham, 1993), and Identity Styles Inventory ([ISI-5]; Berzonsky et al., 2013). The instruments were translated in English and back translated in Albanian.

Measures

White's attitudes toward blacks. The White's attitudes toward blacks The Knowledge of Infant Development Inventory ([ATB]; Brigham, 1993) is a 20-item Likert scale (10 positively worded and 10 negatively worded) that was used to measure racial attitudes. The scale has evolved based on items taken from other scales that measured symbolic/aversive racial attitudes (see Brigham, 1993). The original scale had a Likert scale from 1 to 7 and had a Cronbach's alpha .88. The ATB scale had four factors: 1) social distance measuring discomfort when interacting with blacks such as "I would rather not have blacks live in the same apartment building I live in", "I would probably feel somewhat self-conscious dancing with a black in a public place"; 2) affective reactions related to negative emotions related to blacks such as "Interracial marriage should be discouraged to avoid the 'who-am-I'?", "I get very upset when I hear a white make a prejudicial remark about blacks"; 3) governmental policy related to policy that support integration of blacks such as "Black and white people are inherently equal", "Black people are demanding too much too fast in their push for equal rights"; and 4) personal worry (a single item) which measured preferential treatment for blacks "I worry that in the next few years I may be denied my application for a job or a promotion because of preferential treatment given to minority group members". There are no data regarding Cronbach's alpha for each factor of the original scale. In the present study, the ATB was used as a general scale, the Likert scale was changed

to 1 to 5 (1-totally disagree to 5-totally agree), and the term blacks was changed to Roma and Egyptian. The Cronbach's alpha for the actual ATB scale was .74.

Identity Style Inventory ([ISI-5]; Berzonsky et al., 2013). ISI was used to measure participants identity styles, tapping 9-items for each identity style (informational, normative and diffuse-avoidant). Participants responded to the items on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). For informational scale sample items included: "When making important decisions, I like to spend time thinking about my options", "When facing a life decision, I try to analyze the situation in order to understand it", for normative style sample items included "I automatically adopt and follow the values I was brought up with", "I think it is better to adopt a firm set of beliefs than to be open-minded", for diffuse-avoidant items "When personal problems arise, I try to delay acting as long as possible", "I try not to think about or deal with problems as long as I can". For the original scale, the Cronbach alphas for the informational scale was .86, for the normative scale .82, and diffuse-avoidant scale .87. In the present sample the scales demonstrated lower internal consistency. However, all the subscales were within acceptable ranges for internal consistency. Specifically, the Cronbach alpha for informational scale was .64, for the normative scale .77, and diffuse-avoidant scale .66.

Results

Spearman's rank correlations were computed to assess the relationship between racial attitudes and identity styles. Table 1 shows the Spearman correlations for racial attitudes and identity styles. There was a negative correlation between racial attitudes and informational identity style, $r(273) = -.151, p = .012$, a positive correlation between racial attitudes and normative identity style, $r(273) = .251, p < .001$, and diffuse-avoidant style, $r(273) = .312, p < .001$. Informational identity style correlated positively with normative identity style, $r(273) = .213, p < .001$, and negatively with diffuse-avoidant identity style, $r(273) = -.164, p = .006$. Whereas normative style identity correlated positively with diffuse-avoidant identity style, $r(273) = .130, p = .031$. In summary, the correlation findings revealed that racial attitudes were positively correlated with normative style, diffuse-avoidant style, and negatively related to informational style. In addition, informational style was negatively correlated with diffuse-avoidant style, and positively correlated with normative style. However, the normative style was positively related with informational style and diffuse-avoidant identity style.

A linear multiple regression model was conducted, with racial attitudes as the dependent variables (DV) and informational, normative and diffuse-avoidant identity styles as the independent variables (IV). Table 2 shows the impact of identity styles on racial attitudes in students. The R^2 value of .14 revealed that the predictors explained 14% of the variance in the outcome variable with $F(3, 270) = 14.43, p < .001$. The Cohen's $f^2 = 0.16$, suggesting a medium effect size. The findings revealed that informational identity style ($\beta = -.186, p = .002$), normative identity style ($\beta = .246, p < .001$), and diffuse-avoidant style ($\beta = .187, p = .002$) are associated with racial attitudes outcomes. Results showed that each of the identity styles uniquely contributed in the levels of racial attitudes in students. Students reporting higher on informational

identity styles showed lower racial attitudes, whereas students reporting higher on normative identity styles and diffuse-avoidant styles, showed higher levels of racial attitudes toward Roma and Egyptian minorities.

Discussion

In the literature we have two fields of studies contributing to youth development and racial attitudes. On the one hand, many studies have examined the development of identity styles during youth and how these styles are linked with coping. On the other studies, studies have focused on racial attitudes in ingroups, links between racism and effects on mental health of outgroups members. Yet, the literature is scarce in studies examining the role of identity styles and racial attitudes. Therefore, the current study extends existing literature by examining this relationship, and by offering a unique contribution to the field.

The results showed that all identity styles contributed to racial attitudes of the participants. Based on aversive racism theory (Gaertner et al., 2005), those individuals who show aversive forms of racial prejudices have continuously experienced negative feelings related to outgroups but also have developed principles of egalitarianism, an inner conflict that if not resolved can be dangerous for the minorities' groups. These group of individuals may be more oriented toward normative or diffuse-avoidant identity styles. On the other hand, those individuals that when facing ambiguous interaction with the outgroups, increase their efforts to solve the ambiguity by reflecting, getting more information and reappraising, are more effective in coping adaptively (DeCuir-Gunby, Allen, & Boone, 2020; Gross, 2003). These individuals may be more oriented toward informational identity styles. The linear multiple regression model supports this theoretical framework related to racial attitudes. Pre-adulthood is a critical period for identity formation. Individuals with informational identity styles show more effortful thinking processing information about themselves, and the social norms, so they are more oriented to gaining more information to reassess situations and which may support the development of stronger commitments (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005). It may be possible that by using reflection and by being insightful, individuals may reduce their contradictory feelings for the outgroups, and also, they may become more aware of their internal conflicts and racial attitudes, by reassessing their norms and commitments and creating healthier boundaries for the outgroup members, and consequently reducing racial attitudes and racism. It is suggested that further studies need to be conducted to address potential emotional regulation variables and coping mechanisms that support youth to develop an interaction with outgroups that is less risky for racism.

Only informational style had a positive impact on racial attitudes, but normative and diffuse-avoidant styles had a negative impact as participants who reported on these styles had higher levels of racial attitudes. The finding is of surprise for the normative style, as many intercultural studies have reported that this style is adaptive for youth. It may be that individuals with high normative style can be more in denial and avoid unpleasant feelings (Berzonsky & Kinney, 2008; Piotrowski, Brzezinska, & Luyckx, 2020), and may present themselves as having the principles of egalitarianism when

filling the questionnaires. It is suggested that to test these hypotheses, other studies are needed that examine the potential contributions of other predictors, specifically of emotion regulation. The current studies have several limitations that need to be kept in mind. The response rate was very low, and especially males had a low representativeness, this may be related with the length of the survey and time needed to fill in (around 20-30 minutes). The online surveys were sent during the first week of quarantine in Albania, and went on until June 2020, which may have affected the motivation of students to fill in the surveys. Plus, many emails were returned back, as many students did not use their university email, but more private emails. Still, the data taken from the sample are adequate, and with no missing data.

Implications for Research, Policy and Practice

Identity processing styles may be important preventive factors for racism and for the reduction of racial prejudices in youth. This article advances this innovative field of research and gives insights on how informational style can be adaptive for youths in developing more equal relationships with outgroups, and may be a protective factor against racial attitudes and racism. Other studies are needed to investigate potential emotional factors, such as emotion regulation. Also, one limitation of the study was there was no observatory measurement of racial behavior, so further studies should take in consideration using observatory instruments for microaggression and racial discrimination. The results support youth oriented-policy, particularly policy that support youth identity development and the peaceful cohabitee of individuals in diverse communities. The results of this study promote policies for universal preventive services supporting youth identity formation and styles which support equality within ingroups and within outgroups. Also, the results of the study are applicable in programs aiming to increase equality between ingroups and outgroups, helping and supporting management of intergroup conflicts and increasing acceptance of being diverse.

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Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations between Variables

Variables	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Racial attitudes	273	2.05	0.47			

2. Informational Style	273	4.13	0.48	-.151*		
3. Normative Style	273	3.14	0.74	.251**	.213**	
4. Diffuse-Avoidant Style	273	1.99	0.57	.312**	-.164**	.130*

Note. *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation.

***p*<0.01 (2-tailed); * *p*<0.05 level (2-tailed); N=273

Table 2

Regression Coefficients for Identity Styles on Racial Attitudes

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95%CI
Constant	2.02	.28	7.32	.000	[1.48, 2.57]
Informational Style	-.18	.06	-3.12	.002	[-.30, -.07]
Normative Style	.16	.04	4.20	.000	[.08, .23]
Diffuse-Avoidant Style	.15	.05	3.17	.002	[.06, .25]

Note: CI = Confidence interval