
ATTITUDES AND EMOTIONS TOWARD OUT-GROUPS WITH A DIFFERENT STATUS: THE ROLE OF REGULATORY FOCUS ORIENTATIONS

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The role of regulatory focus orientations on attitudes and emotions toward out-groups with a different status was tested on three different Italian samples. Previous research had shown that individuals in promotion focus display in-group favoritism, while individuals in prevention focus exhibit out-group derogation. We hypothesized that when the out-group is lower in status than the in-group, prevention focus should be associated with out-group derogation. On the other hand, when the out-group is higher in status than the in-group, promotion focus should be associated with out-group favoritism. Findings are discussed as a function of a goal compatibility hypothesis between groups involved in the intergroup context and individuals' regulatory focus orientations.

Key words: Regulatory focus; Intergroup bias; Group status; Out-group detraction; Out-group favoritism.

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INTRODUCTION

The tendency to favor one's own group over other groups (i.e., intergroup bias) has received robust evidence in social psychological research (Brewer, 2001; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Levin & Sidanius, 1999; Turner & Reynolds, 2001; Voci, 2006). This wide-spread phenomenon is largely observable in different settings, not only in minimal groups (Allen & Wilder, 1975; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971), but also in real social groups (e.g., national groups, regional groups). It is, therefore, not surprising that many studies have focused on how such bias varies among individuals, groups, and situations (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Hogg & Abrams, 2001). Previous research had isolated different variables that may increase or decrease such bias or even foster out-group liking (Levin, van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003). In this regard, scholars argued that intergroup bias may be moderated by identification (Perrault & Bourhis, 1999; Turner & Reynolds, 2001), threat (Brewer, 1999), group power (Bourhis, 1994; Brewer, 1979), and group status (Boldry & Kashy, 1999; Ellemers, & Barreto, 2001; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992; Mummendey, Otten, Berger, & Kessler, 2000; Otten, Mummendey, & Blanz, 1996; Rudman, Feinberg, & Fairchild, 2002). With respect to group status, the literature has suggested that high-status groups exhibit a more pronounced intergroup bias than low-status groups. Rudman et al. (2002), in a study conducted in the US, found that high-status minority

groups (Jews and Asians) showed more implicit in-group bias than low-status minorities (poor people) and that low-status groups exhibited an automatic preference for higher-status out-groups. Consistent with these findings, a growing body of research accumulated evidence that people in some circumstances display intergroup bias in terms of out-group favoritism (Boldry & Kashy, 1999; Jost, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994), especially among members of low-status groups. This phenomenon was ascribed to a legitimization of the existing social setting (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). People are motivated to justify the status quo even if this justification is artificial for their welfare (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Thus, depending on the circumstances and the groups involved, intergroup bias may take different forms. Even while recognizing the undeniable role of contextual variables, a different line of research has taken into account personality and individual difference variables that moderate the expression of intergroup bias. The literature has suggested that right-wing authoritarianism, the tendency to submit oneself to an established authority (Altemeyer, 1998), strong religious beliefs (Batson & Burris, 1994), and need for cognitive closure (Kruglanski, Shah, Pierro, & Mannetti, 2002; Shah, Kruglanski, & Thompson, 1998) are positively related with in-group bias; while egalitarian value beliefs are associated with the tendency to positively evaluate other groups (Wyer, 2010). Recently, researchers intimated that social dominance orientation – the desire to see one's own group dominate other groups (Pratto & Shih, 2000; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) – is strongly associated with increased stereotyping and prejudice. Individuals high in social dominance orientation promote the differentiation between their own groups and other groups and favor a position of domination of their own groups over the others. More recently, Higgins's (1997) regulatory focus theory was applied to the study of intergroup bias and highlighted motivational forces underlying intergroup bias that explain individual differences in its expression (Kessler, Sassenberg, & Mummendey, 2006; Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007; Sassenberg, Kessler, & Mumendey, 2003; Shah, Brazy, & Higgins, 2004). The present research feeds into this approach and aims to explore the influence of regulatory focus on attitudes and emotions toward out-groups with a different status. Before presenting our hypotheses, though, we find it appropriate to introduce Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT; Higgins, 1997).

REGULATORY FOCUS THEORY

Approaching a situation to accomplish a task, have a reward, reach a positive outcome or, alternatively, avoiding a situation, an action, or an emotion to prevent a negative outcome, are fundamental dimensions of the organism's response to the environment. Higgins's (1997) RFT defined these dimensions through the concepts of promotion and prevention focus, which vary both inter-individually (chronically) and situationally.

Promotion focus refers to a higher sensitivity to the presence or absence of positive outcomes and approach-related behaviors that help individuals pursue nurturance and growth needs. Promotion-focused individuals positively strive to accomplish their goals; achieve their dreams; reach their aspirations, and attain their wishes and ideals. They respond to success with cheerfulness-related emotions (happiness and enthusiasm), and to failure with dejection-related emotions (sadness and disappointment).

Prevention focus refers to a higher sensitivity to negative outcomes and avoidance-related behaviors that help individuals to pursue security and safety needs. This focus is linked to

and activated by uncertainty, threat, and punishment that create states of anxiety, vigilance, and avoidance of ambiguous, risky situations. Prevention-focused individuals are more prone to attain security and safety, to obey norms, and honor their duties and obligations. They respond to success with quiescence-related emotions (calmness and relaxedness), and to failure with agitation-related emotions (tension and nervousness).

The approaching motivation is triggered by an attempt to reduce the difference between the actual state and the desired state (i.e., pleasure), whereas the avoidance motivation is activated by the wish to increase the distance between the actual and the undesirable state (i.e., pain). Regulatory Focus relates to different strategies (or means) of goal pursuit: a promotion focus will be more concentrated on potential gains in moving toward a goal (i.e., obtaining pleasure); while a prevention focus will be more concentrated on potential trouble (i.e., losses) in moving toward an objective (i.e., avoiding pain).

REGULATORY FOCUS IN THE EXPRESSION OF INTERGROUP BIAS

Building on RFT, recent studies (Kessler et al., 2006; Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007; Sassenberg et al., 2003; Shah et al., 2004) proposed and tested the idea of a self-regulation process underlying intergroup bias that is related to the gratification of self-regulatory needs of security and nurturance. Persons striving for security needs will be more prone to avoid out-group members because they are perceived as a source of potential threat; on the other hand, persons striving for nurturance needs will be more open to out-group relations and, at the same time, more focused on their own groups' wishes and more inclined to achieve their own goals. More specifically, these studies tested the hypothesis that promotion focus and prevention focus may be related to different forms of intergroup bias. It was hypothesized that promotion focus individuals expressed intergroup bias in the form of in-group favoritism vs. out-group derogation ("promoting us"), whereas prevention focus individuals expressed intergroup bias through out-group avoidance and derogation vs. in-group favoritism ("preventing them"). A work by Sassenberg et al. (2003) fell into this research line. The authors found that promotion-focused individuals allocated more gains and rewards to in-group members than out-group members, and they did not distinguish between the two groups when distributing negative outcomes (i.e., losses); vice-versa, prevention-focused individuals allocated more negative outcomes (i.e., losses) to out-group members than in-group members, and they did not distinguish between the two groups when distributing gains. These results were replicated in a field setting by Kessler et al., (2006): participants with an approach goal (i.e., improving study conditions) allocated more increases in money transfers to their in-group than participants with an avoidance goal; conversely, participants with an avoidance goal (i.e., avoiding the impairment of study conditions) prevented more decreases in money transfers from occurring in their in-group than participants with an approach goal. Similarly, Shah et al. (2004) found that promotion-focused individuals approached and felt more cheerful toward in-group members (i.e., "promoting us"), whereas prevention-focused individuals preferred to avoid out-group members and felt less relaxed toward them (i.e., "preventing them"). The intergroup bias arises to promote either individuals' needs for growth and nurturance (promotion focus) or individuals' needs for security and safety (prevention focus). All these stud-

ies demonstrated that self-regulatory focus has implications for intergroup bias which are expressed both behaviorally and emotionally.

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The present research aimed to extend previous work by examining conditions in which self-regulatory focus orientations may lead to different forms of intergroup bias than that discussed above. More specifically, our purpose was to explore the influence on intergroup bias of individuals' self-regulatory focus orientations in interaction with the status of groups involved in the intergroup situation. To reach this goal, we selected three different out-groups (Northern Italians, Moroccans, and Albanians) in order to have one group of a higher status (Northern Italians) and two groups of a lower status (Moroccans and Albanians) compared with the in-group (Southern Italians). We chose Northern Italians as a higher-status out-group on account of the industrial and economic gap existing between Northern and Southern Italy since 1870 (see Capozza, Bonaldo, & Di Maggio, 1982). The economic growth of Southern Italy has always been one of the most critical problems in the political agenda of the Italian Government, but it has never found an adequate solution and the unbalanced situation is still evident today. With regard to this point, it is important to note that most young adults from the South emigrate to the North in search of a job or to study at Northern universities. Just to mention some data, in 2008 the unemployment rate was 12% in the South and 3.9% in the North (Istat – Italian National Statistical Institute, 2009). Therefore, many surveys have recorded the consensual nature of this economic differentiation between Northern and Southern groups (Battacchi, 1972; Capozza, 1968) and also the acceptance by the Southern group of its socio-economic inferiority or its “inferior status.” On the other hand, we chose Moroccans and Albanians as low-status out-groups because both are considered as citizens of developing countries, and both are a significant presence in Italy as a whole as well as in the area considered in the present research (Istat, 2010). Furthermore, these immigrant groups are typically the target of negative prejudice and stereotypes in Italian society (see La Barbera & Cariota Ferrara, 2010; Manganelli Rattazzi & Volpato, 2001; Vezzali & Giovannini, 2010). We suggested that there are certain conditions in which regulatory goals might be better achieved through different groups, and for this reason previous findings linked with the tendency to derogate out-groups by prevention focus and favor in-groups by promotion focus should be replicated in some circumstances, but not in others. In particular, because individuals in prevention focus strive for security and safety, and are more sensitive to negative outcomes, they should negatively evaluate groups that are not compatible with these needs or cannot ensure their gratification. Hence, low-status immigrant out-groups should be derogated by individuals in prevention focus (“preventing them”). Similarly, because individuals in promotion focus strive for gain and success, and are more sensitive to positive outcomes, they should positively evaluate groups that ensure the opportunity to achieve success and social prestige. Therefore, we assumed that the high-status Northern Italian out-group would be positively evaluated by individuals in promotion focus (“promoting them”). In other words, we supposed that favoritism (vs. derogation) toward a group would be guided by the regulatory needs the group is able to satisfy or by the compatibility between regulatory focus orientations and groups' opportunities to pursue their wishes (see Sassenberg, Jonas, Shah, & Brazy, 2007). In sum, we hypothesized that low-status out-groups (e.g., Moroccans and Albanians) would be the target of less positive attitudes

and emotions (out-group derogation) when prevention focus orientation is high (vs. low). On the other hand, the high-status out-group (i.e., Northern Italians) would be the target of positive attitudes and emotions (out-group favoritism) when promotion focus orientation is high (vs. low). For the same reason, no effects of promotion focus orientation should be found toward lower-status out-groups, because promotion-focused individuals do not find the fertile ground that is required to achieve their desires of social affirmation and success, and no effects of prevention focus orientation should be observed toward higher-status out-group, because this kind of groups is not related to security and the safety needs that are the guided routes of prevention-focused individuals.

METHOD

Participants

The present study investigated three sub-samples, totaling 296 participants (119 men and 177 women), from different areas (Calabria, Campania) of Southern Italy. The first sample comprised 120 participants (38 men and 82 women) from Calabria (Mean age = 23.85 years; $SD = 4.23$). The second sample comprised 91 participants (36 men and 55 women) from a different area of Calabria (Mean age = 24.15 years; $SD = 3.57$). The third sample comprised 85 participants (45 men and 40 women) from Campania (Mean age = 22.75 years; $SD = 1.90$).

Procedure

All participants completed the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ) described below. They then completed a number of questionnaires, including scales about attitudes and emotional state toward the out-group. The out-group target was different for the three samples: in the first, the out-group was formed of Northern Italians (high status); in the second, of Moroccans (low status); in the third, of Albanians (low status).

Measures

Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ). Just like the original RFQ developed by Higgins et al. (2001), the Italian version is an 11-item instrument designed to measure individual differences in the tendency toward promotion focus (six items; sample item, “How often have you accomplished things that got you *psyched* to work even harder?”) and prevention focus (five items; sample item, “Not being careful enough has gotten me into trouble at times”, reverse scored). Ratings are made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never or seldom*) to 5 (*very often*). A composite score for each dimension was computed by averaging across responses to the correspondent items. The reliability and validity of this instrument was established by several studies (see Grant & Higgins, 2003; Higgins et al., 2001). In the present research, the Cronbach α s for the promotion focus scale were .75, .69, and .71 for the first, second, and third samples, respectively. The Cronbach α s for the prevention focus scale were, respectively, .73, .71, and .70 for the three samples. The means for the promotion focus were 3.64 ($SD = .52$), 3.47 ($SD = .56$), and

3.50 ($SD = .54$) for the first, second, and third samples, respectively. The means for the prevention focus were 3.29 ($SD = .85$), 3.21 ($SD = .74$), and 3.38 ($SD = .59$) for the three samples, respectively.

Attitudes toward the out-group. Participants responded to three identical semantic differential scales for each of the target groups in order to indicate the extent of their positive attitudes toward them. Ratings were recorded on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*hostile, cold, unfavorable*) to 7 (*friendly, warm, favorable*). Because the three scores of each target-group were highly inter-correlated, they were combined to form an overall index of (positive) attitudes toward the out-group for each sub-sample. The Cronbach α s for this index were .94, .93, and .87 for the first, second, and third sample, respectively. The attitude means were 4.95 ($SD = 1.61$), 4.81 ($SD = 1.57$), and 3.99 ($SD = 1.51$) for the three samples, respectively.

Emotions toward the out-group. The emotional questionnaire listed 24 items and instructed participants to indicate the level of each emotional state they had experienced toward the target groups. Their responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*completely*). The 24-item emotional list comprised 13 positive-related items (e.g., *enthusiastic, trusting, satisfied*) and 11 negative-related items (e.g., *worried, insecure, suspicious*). Negative items were reversed. An overall index of the (positive) emotional state was computed for each sub-sample. The Cronbach α s for emotional state index were .91, .92, and .93 for the first, second, and third samples, respectively. The emotional state means were 3.41 ($SD = .68$), 3.01 ($SD = .65$), and 2.52 ($SD = .70$) for the three samples, respectively.

RESULTS

Attitudes and Emotions toward the Out-Group as a Function of Regulatory Focus

To test our hypotheses of the relationship between regulatory focus and out-group reactions, for each sample we performed two separate multiple regression analyses: one per reaction type (i.e., attitudes and emotions) toward the out-groups. In each analysis, out-group attitudes or emotions scores were regressed on promotion and prevention regulatory focus scores. Results are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1
 Attitudes and emotions (positive) toward out-groups with a different status
 (Northern Italians, Moroccans, and Albanians) as a function of Regulatory Focus Orientations:
 Summary of multiple regression analyses

Outgroups (samples)	Northern Italians Sample 1 ($N = 120$)		Moroccans Sample 2 ($N = 91$)		Albanians Sample 3 ($N = 85$)	
	Emotions	Attitudes	Emotions	Attitudes	Emotions	Attitudes
Promotion Focus	.44***	.27**	.17	.13	.08	-.07
Prevention Focus	.06	-.04	-.22*	-.26*	-.31**	-.24*
R^2	.21	.07	.07	.08	.09	.07

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

As can be seen from the table, the following was observed.

For the first sample, a positive and significant relationship is shown between promotion focus and attitudes ($\beta = .27, p < .01$) and emotions ($\beta = .44, p < .001$) toward the out-group (Northern Italians), with high (vs. low) levels of promotion focus being associated with positive attitudes and emotions toward this high-status out-group. No significant relationships emerged between preventive focus and the out-group attitudes and emotions.

For the second sample, a negative and significant relationship was found between prevention focus and attitudes ($\beta = -.26, p < .05$) and emotions ($\beta = -.22, p < .05$) toward the out-group (Moroccans), with high (vs. low) levels of prevention focus being associated with negative attitudes and emotions toward this low-status out-group. No significant relationships appeared between promotion focus and out-group attitudes and emotions.

For the third sample, a negative significant relationship exists between preventive focus and attitudes ($\beta = -.24, p < .05$) and emotions ($\beta = -.31, p < .01$) toward the out-group (Albanians), with high (vs. low) levels of prevention focus being related to negative attitudes and emotions toward the low-status out-group. No significant relationships were obtained between promotion focus and the out-group attitudes and emotions.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This work has been thought to assess how individual differences in regulatory focus can impact on attitudes and emotions toward out-groups with a different status. The idea was borrowed from the literature assessing the hypothesis that intergroup bias may depend on the underlying regulatory needs of achievement and success for promotion focus, and security and safety for prevention focus. Previous research (Kessler et al., 2006; Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007; Sassenberg et al., 2003; Shah et al., 2004) clearly showed that promotion-focused individuals favor their in-groups (“promoting us”) in order to achieve their wishes of social success and to gratify their needs of affirmation; while prevention-focused individuals derogate out-groups (“preventing them”) in order to prevent danger coming from other groups and to establish security and safety for their own groups. However, the literature on intergroup bias has proposed group status as a moderator and has suggested that sometimes the pattern of intergroup bias may even take the form of out-group favoritism especially for low-status groups (Boldry & Kashy, 1999; Jost, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994). Starting from this possibility, we explored the role of self-regulatory needs on intergroup bias and their impact on out-groups with a different status. It was hypothesized that the influence of regulatory focus orientations changes in relation to the status of groups involved in the intergroup context. Promotion-focused individuals, that generally exhibit in-group favoritism (Kessler et al., 2006; Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007; Sassenberg et al., 2003; Shah et al., 2004), should display their preference in the direction of the out-group when this group is of higher status, while prevention-focused individuals, that generally show out-group derogation, should dissipate this tendency when the out-group is of higher status. Results confirm our hypotheses: as already found in the literature, when the out-group has lower status (i.e., Albanians and Moroccans), prevention focus orientation is related to out-group derogation. In this case, prevention-focused individuals express intergroup bias by negative emotions and attitudes toward the out-group (“preventing them”). However, when the out-group has higher status (i.e., Northern Italians), promotion focus orientation is associated with out-group favoritism. We suggest that the

preference for higher-status out-groups by promotion-focused individuals, best serves promotion strategies of social affirmation (“promoting them”). Promotion focused individuals may foresee in higher-status out-groups the opportunity to reach goals of social affirmation. Apparently, there is more to gain by promotion-focused individuals from higher-status out-groups in terms of success and social desirability. Furthermore, prevention focus orientation is not related to out-group derogation toward Northern Italians (high-status group), probably because Northern Italians are not perceived as a threat. It must also be considered that Southern and Northern Italians share the same national identity, which might reduce the perceived (cultural and identity) distance between the two groups and may induce a sense of common fate. Southern and Northern Italians as groups, indeed, share a common future, they are both Italians and they are interconnected culturally and politically alike; this common fate within Italian society, in turn, contributes to building a sense of a super-ordinate common identity. This conclusion is well supported in a study by Gaertner et al. (1999), which found that the introduction of a common fate (an interdependence rewards condition) was associated with lower intergroup bias. Conversely, a major threat to in-group values, beliefs, and world views can be represented by Moroccans and Albanians (out-groups) even if they have lower status. These perceptions of identity difference threaten one’s own social identity group, and therefore people protect themselves and their own group identity by derogating the out-groups, both restoring security and protecting a positive group identity.

The present research is not without limitations. First of all, having conducted a correlational study, we cannot talk about the causality nature of the relationships hypothesized. However, other works (Boldry & Kashy, 1999; Ellemers & Barreto, 2001; Kessler et al., 2006; Mullen et al., 1992; Mummendey et al., 2000; Otten et al., 1996; Rudman et al., 2002; Sassenberg et al., 2003; Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007; Shah et al., 2004), separately manipulating regulatory focus and group status, found similar patterns of results that justify reasonable confidence in the consistency of our conclusions. In any event, further work (both field and experimental studies) is necessary to obtain robust evidence in this direction. Second, attitudinal and emotional response scales toward the out-groups in each sample were an explicit self-report measure; it would therefore be interesting to test what happens when attitudes and emotions toward other groups are implicit, because explicit or conscious responses may be biased by social desirability motives. Third, we conducted our studies in the South of Italy, and participants’ in-groups were always, in the three samples, Southern Italians. Therefore, it would be desirable to replicate the study on a Northern Italian sample. In this case, we would expect Northern Italians, as the higher-status in-group, to derogate Southern Italians as a lower-status out-group. The sense of a shared common fate might be perceived as an undesirable state: the Northern Italian higher-status group could benefit less than the Southern Italian lower-status group by shared identity and common fate. This possibility should be especially true for prevention focus orientation and would probably be absent for promotion focus orientation. Fourth, we focalized our attention only on attitudes and emotions toward out-groups. It would also be helpful to collect data regarding the in-group, or even in-groups that vary in status, in order to investigate the role of regulatory focus on attitudes and emotions toward the in-group. To conclude, this study provides evidence about the role of regulatory focus orientations in intergroup bias and helps to explain how and why individuals differ in attitudes and emotions toward out-groups. More precisely, to our knowledge, this is the first research that has taken into account the relationship between regulatory focus orientations and the status of target groups. Our results show that when individuals evaluate a high-status out-

group (e.g., Northern Italians), the typical prevention focus' tendency for avoidance by negatively evaluating the out-group, disappears, and, conversely, a tendency to positively evaluate or promote such a higher-status out-group by promotion-focused individuals appears. This latter result, in our view, may depend on the opportunity to gratify promotion focus' regulatory needs linked with gain and success, and it further explains why, sometimes, people from disadvantaged groups evaluate higher-status out-groups positively.

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