Generalisation of Roma onto Romanians:

Evidence of the *Outgroup Projection* Effect

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Abstract

Outgroup projection is the tendency to generalise among members of different outgroups as if their members were all alike. The present study analysed this almost unexplored phenomenon and tested whether intergroup threat enhances the tendency to generalise the members of a negatively-valued outgroup (i.e., Roma) onto another larger (partially) inclusive outgroup (i.e., Romanians). Evidence showed that Roma are generalised to Romanians to a higher extent under realistic and symbolic threat conditions. Outgroup projection is discussed in relation to the ingroup projection bias and the ingroup over-exclusion effect.

Keywords: outgroup projection, intergroup threat, prejudice, Roma, Romanians.

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"They are all alike" (Brown, 2011, p. 49) is the way we often perceive and judge outgroup members. Such a bias stressing perceived interchangeability among members of an outgroup is at the core of the generalisation tendency on which stereotypes are rooted (e.g., Judd & Park, 1988). This is also what happened after the January 7th 2015 terrorist attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine in Paris leading some sections of public opinion to argue that 'Muslims are all terrorists', generalizing members of a negatively-valued outgroup—Islamic terrorists—onto the larger (partially) inclusive outgroup—Muslims—thus leading to enhanced prejudice towards Muslims and Arabs.

Another striking example of the phenomenon of generalisation among outgroups is the confusion between Roma and the national group of Romanians, of which *some* Roma are a minority subgroup. This phenomenon has been recently highlighted by Albarello and Rubini (2011) as the generalisation of the content of stereotypes from the negatively-valued minority outgroup of Roma to the larger (partially-) inclusive outgroup of Romanians. In a series of studies, they found that both Roma and Romanians are perceived as 'low-status' and 'not warm' outgroups—with Roma scoring lower than Romanians on both dimensions. Moreover, they found that compared to Romanians, Roma are perceived as less likeable and less prototypical of humans. Most importantly, they found that affective prejudice (Pettigrew, 1997) towards Roma was predicted by the extent to which Roma are perceived as prototypical exemplars of Romanians.

Building on such initial evidence, the current study aimed at providing further evidence of the outgroup projection tendency considering whether perceived intergroup threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) might increase outgroup projection.

Generalisation Processes

Rothbart, Fulero, Jensen, and Birrel (1978) showed the role of negative individual exemplars in shaping the perception of the group as a whole. They provided experimental evidence that group members who were most available in memory—being associated with extreme (deviant) negative behaviours—were disproportionately represented in the group impression. That is, participants overestimated the proportion of extreme negative behaviours performed by the group as a whole.

Whereas a considerable corpus of research is available on individual-to-group generalisation tendencies (e.g., Paolini, Crisp, & McIntyre, 2009), very few contributions report similar processes involving groups. One example is the work by Mummendey and colleagues (e.g., Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999) on the tendency to generalise distinct (positive) ingroup characteristics onto a superordinate category which includes both the ingroup and the outgroup. In this vein, the evidence collected by Albarello and Rubini (2011) suggested that, besides ingroup projection effects, *outgroup* projection tendencies can also be detected when negatively-valued minority outgroups are projected onto larger partially-inclusive outgroups.

Characteristics of Prejudice towards Roma and Romanians

Anti-Roma hostility is very high in Italy (Claps & Vitale, 2011; ODIHR, 2008) where many cases of discrimination and aggression have been reported (Amnesty International, 2008). Not only Roma, but also the national group of Romanians suffer

widespread prejudice in Europe more generally (e.g., Ion, 2011), as well as in Italy specifically (ECRI, 2012). Interestingly, Woodcock (2007) highlighted that a consistent portion of Romanians attribute the discrimination they suffer to the association with the Roma subgroup. This is indeed what seems to happen in Italy, wherein the numerical relation is 1.6 Roma individuals to 100 Romanians (European Commission, 2014). Moreover, among Roma within the Italian territory, only a minority seems to have Romanian origins (European Commission, 2014).

Besides the aforementioned contribution by Albarello and Rubini (2011), who addressed the relation between prejudice towards Roma and Romanians, other recent research focused on the distinct nature of the prejudice towards Roma. Ljujic, Vedder, Dekker, and Geel (2012) compared anti-Roma prejudice to Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-Chinese feelings. They found that, besides some communalities in terms of general negative attitudes towards minorities, evaluations of Roma loaded together on a separate factor. In view of this evidence they concluded that anti-Roma prejudice is different from general prejudice towards minorities.

In another more recent study Ljujic, Vedder, Dekker, and Geel (2013) analysed the role of perceived threat, nationalistic feelings and integrative orientations towards Roma comparing a Dutch and Serbian sample of high-school students. They found that Dutch adolescents perceived Roma as both economically and symbolically threatening (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) and that such perceptions mediated the effects of integration preference and nationalism on Romaphobia. Serbians, on the other hand, reported lower levels of economic and symbolic threat compared to Dutch adolescents.

Thus research has highlighted a link between anti-Roma prejudice and the extent to which Roma elicit threat in other European national groups. In this vein, it would be

interesting to analyse the effects of intergroup threat on the tendency to project Roma onto Romanians, since no research to date has sought to relate these phenomena.

Potential Moderators of the Generalisation among Different Outgroups

Stephan and Stephan (2000) emphasized how threat, in addition to increased intergroup anxiety and negative stereotyping, predicts prejudice towards national outgroups in the U.S.A. The authors distinguished between *realistic threat* (i.e., threats to ingroup's existence, economic and political power, or physical or material well-being) and *symbolic threat* (i.e., threat related to outgroups' differential morals, values, beliefs and standards) and showed that both types of threat predict social prejudice towards immigrants.

More recently, Pereira, Vala, and Costa-Lopez (2010) further investigated the link between different types of threat and prejudice. Their results showed that realistic threat mediates the relationship between prejudice and opposition to immigration, whereas symbolic threat mediates the effects of prejudice on opposition to the naturalisation of outgroups. Such evidence suggests that perceived threat may lead to the legitimisation of discrimination. This is also supported by research showing that perceived intergroup threat aggravates the outcomes of intergroup relations (Pereira et al., 2010; Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

The Current Research

The present study investigates the phenomenon of outgroup projection, addressing perceived intergroup threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) as a factor that might enhance this tendency. The two groups of Roma and Romanians represent an interesting

case of possible outgroup projection since Roma are a very negatively-valued outgroup (Claps & Vitale, 2011; McGarry, 2012).

In order to assess the outgroup projection phenomenon, drawing on Rothbart et al.'s (1978, Exp. 3) procedure, participants were exposed to a set of images representing either a Roma or a Romanian individual and subsequently were asked to perform a memory task and to estimate the percentage of photographs of members of Roma out of the total amount of projected photographs. This procedure was chosen as exposure to facial cues leads very easily to category and stereotype activation (Mason, Cloutier, & Macrae, 2006). Since evidence exists that both symbolic and realistic threat can affect social discrimination (Pereira et al., 2010), and the present study investigates, for the first time, threat as a moderating factor in outgroup generalisation effects, both symbolic and realistic threat were included.

We expected that both types of threat would enhance participants' tendency to generalise Roma to Romanians (i.e., outgroup projection) leading to higher estimation of photographs of Roma out of the total amount of photographs they were exposed to.

Method

Participants and Design

Ninety-one undergraduate students (M_{age} = 20.37, *SD* = 4.42; females: 73.6%) at a University in Northern Italy participated in the study on voluntary basis. The study employed a univariate (threat condition: no-threat, realistic threat, symbolic threat) between-participants experimental design. Participants were randomly assigned as follows in the three experimental conditions: $n_{\text{no-threat}}$ = 33; $n_{\text{realistic threat}}$ = 27; $n_{\text{symbolic threat}}$ = 31.

Procedure and Materials

Participants were tested in small groups of 5-7 in a laboratory. They were informed that the study focused on impression formation about members of national groups and of their subgroups. By projecting a slide, they were told that the session concerned the group of Romanians, some of whom could also be Roma.

We manipulated the presence of threat and whether it was realistic or symbolic following Stephan and Stephan's (2000) work. Namely, participants were exposed to no information in the no-threat control condition, or were presented with one of two pre-tested scenarios (see Albarello & Rubini, 2017) in which intergroup threat was primed as triggered by immigrants, a group in which Roma and Romanians are included. This was done to prime intergroup threat without referring to a specific group at stake.

The *realistic threat scenario* read: "Recent research by the national statistical institute showed that during the last year unemployment increased for Italians (+3%) and 176.000 Italians lost their jobs. Conversely, immigrants' (among whom Romanians are the most represented group) employment level increased (+200.000). Moreover, immigration led to increased costs for public health, education and welfare policies aimed at promoting immigrants' integration". The *symbolic threat scenario* read: "Recent research by the national statistical institute showed strong cultural differences between Italians and immigrants. Immigrants (among whom Romanians are the most represented group) have different habits, traditions, ideologies and moral values when compared to those of Italians. Immigrants are also radically different in terms of their life-styles, the ways in which they behave at work and also at home, for instance, in terms of the children's educational policies they endorse". Participants were then asked to report the extent to which they felt threatened by the groups at stake on a 7-point

scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). This measure constituted our manipulation check.

At this point participants were presented with a sequence of 20 slides (for 2 seconds each), each presenting a photo of either a Roma (n = 10) or a Romanian (n = 10) male. The categorical label ("Roma" or "Romanian") was added to the pictures in order to allow participants to see which category each exemplar belonged to. After presentation of all the photographs, participants were presented with a paper-and-pencil questionnaire in which they were asked to estimate the percentage of Roma individuals out of the total amount of presented photographs. The response represented our measure of outgroup projection. For instance, if a participant answers 100% (i.e., 20 photographs of Roma), the answer highlights a strong outgroup projection; if the answer is 0% (i.e., 0 photographs of Roma), there is no outgroup projection.

Pre-testing Roma and Romanians photographs. Thirty-two photographs of Roma and Romanian adult males, all front-view, without glasses or hat, and without facial hair, were retrieved from the web. The photographs were pre-tested on an independent sample of Italian undergraduate university students (N = 30, M_{age} = 21.33; SD = 4.82; females: 56.7%). Participants were asked to decide whether the portrayed person was a Roma, a Romanian, or both. Only the photographs on which all participants (i.e., 100%) agreed in assigning the portrayed person to either Roma or Romanians were retained. Among these (N = 23: 11 of Roma and 12 of Romanians), only 10 photographs of Roma and 10 photographs of Romanians were randomly chosen. An additional independent sample (N = 63 Italian undergraduate university students, M_{age} = 22.29, SD = 2.49; females: 63.3%) rated the likeability of each photograph, the physical attractiveness of the portrayed person, and the extent to which

it elicited pleasant emotions, on 7-point rating scales from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Participants also estimated the age of the portrayed person. All these ratings were obtained on single items for each of the ten photographs of Roma and of Romanians separately. Mean scores of the photographs of Roma and of Romanians were computed for likeability ($\alpha = .80$), physical attractiveness of the portrayed person ($\alpha = .79$), and pleasantness of the emotions elicited by the photograph ($\alpha = .62$).

The independent samples *t*-test (target belongingness: Roma, Romanian) showed no difference in terms of *likeability* ($M_{\text{Roma}} = 3.83$, $SD = 0.64$; $M_{\text{Romanians}} = 3.72$, $SD = 1.04$), $t(61) = -0.61$, $p = .606$, $\eta^2 = .004$. Importantly, mean scores did not differ from the mid-point of the scale for either the Roma or the Romanian targets—$t(29) = -1.47$, $p = .153$, $d = 0.27$, and, $t(32) = -1.57$, $p = .126$, $d = 0.05$, respectively—indicating a medium level of likeability.

Attractiveness of the portrayed person did not vary as a function of target's group membership ($M_{\text{Roma}} = 3.79$, $SD = 0.73$; $M_{\text{Romanians}} = 3.96$, $SD = 0.52$), $t(61) = 1.08$, $p = .285$, $\eta^2 = .019$. The average score of Roma did not differ from the mid-point of the scale, $t(29) = -1.59$, $p = .123$, $d = 0.09$. The same finding emerged for Romanians, $t(32) = -0.45$, $p = .655$, $d = 0.08$.

Pleasantness of the emotions elicited by the photographs did not differ between Roma and Romanians ($M_{\text{Roma}} = 4.02$, $SD = 0.35$; $M_{\text{Romanians}} = 3.86$, $SD = 0.49$), $t(61) = -1.43$, $p = .157$, $\eta^2 = .033$. Importantly, the scores for both Roma and Romanians again did not differ from the mid-point of the scale, respectively, $t(29) = 0.31$, $p = .757$, $d = 0.06$, and, $t(32) = 1.59$, $p = .123$, $d = 0.28$.

The independent samples *t*-test on the mean score of *estimated age* of the portrayed person showed no difference between the two groups (M_{Roma} = 45.97, *SD* = 1.02; $M_{Romanians}$ = 45.56, *SD* = 0.94), $t(61) = -1.67$, $p = .100$, $\eta^2 = .044$.

Taken together the results of these pre-tests support the notion that the stimulus photographs of Roma and Romanians did not differ on the relevant dimensions.

Results

Manipulation Check

The one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) (threat condition: no-threat, realistic threat, symbolic threat) on the measure of perceived threat showed a significant effect of threat, $F(2, 88) = 27.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .385$. Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc comparisons revealed that participants in the realistic (*M* = 4.92, *SD* = 1.21) and the symbolic threat (*M* = 4.60, *SD* = 1.60) conditions felt more threatened than those in the no-threat condition (*M* = 2.45, *SD* = 1.42; *p*s < .001) while the two threat conditions did not differ from each other (*p* = 1.00).

Estimation of Photographs

Another ANOVA (threat condition: no-threat, realistic threat, symbolic threat) was conducted on the estimated percentage of photographs of Roma out of the total amount of photographs and showed a significant effect of threat condition, $F(2, 88) = 4.78$, $p = .011$, $\eta^2 = .089$. Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc comparisons showed that compared to the no-threat condition (*M* = 37.91, *SD* = 15.75) participants under both realistic (*M* = 51.11, *SD* = 20.21) and symbolic (*M* = 51.61, *SD* = 23.52) threat conditions estimated a significantly higher percentage of photographs of Roma out of

the total number of presented photographs (respectively, $p = .038$, and $p = .022$). The two threat conditions did not differ from each other ($p = 1.00$).

Thus, in line with expectations, under threatening conditions, participants estimated a higher percentage of the negatively-valued outgroup of Roma than in the no-threat condition.

Discussion

The research presented here aimed at deepening knowledge on the unexplored phenomenon of *outgroup projection* (see Albarello & Rubini, 2011) considering the outgroup of Roma and the larger partially-inclusive outgroup of Romanians. The gathered evidence highlighted that outgroup projection was enhanced under threat conditions. We found that, under perceived threat, people estimated higher percentages of photographs of Roma out of the total amount of presented photographs. In other words, when they felt threatened people generalised to a higher extent a negatively-valued minority outgroup like Roma to a larger partially-inclusive and less negatively-valued outgroup like Romanians. These findings go beyond the evidence provided by Rothbart et al. (1978)—who showed generalisation of negative individual cases to the entire group—by showing that under threat this phenomenon also affects entire outgroups that are part of a larger inclusive outgroup.

We found no difference between the realistic and the symbolic threat conditions. As confirmed by the manipulation check, participants in the relevant conditions reported higher perceived threat than when no threatening information was provided. Very likely perceived threat led participants to focus more strongly on the negative characteristics of Roma (see Albarello & Rubini, 2011) and, as a consequence, a higher tendency to overestimate the proportion of Roma faces was observed.

The Outgroup Projection Phenomenon

One may wonder what the outgroup projection means and what its consequences might be. A suggestion may come from the *ingroup* projection effect (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999), which is due to a motivation to enhance one's ingroup through the claim of higher prototypicality of the ingroup over the superordinate positively-evaluated common group, thus maintaining intergroup differentiation (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). The *outgroup* projection tendency, instead, can be conceived as an opposite facet of the generalisation tendency, since it relies on projecting a negative outgroup prototype onto a larger inclusive outgroup. In this vein, it forms an enhanced *negativity bias* which leads to the over-exclusion of all outgroupers (e.g., Romanians) encompassed in the groups at stake. In this way, both the ingroup and the outgroup projection biases contribute to strengthening intergroup boundaries and may negatively impact intergroup relations. Additionally, by projecting negative characteristics of a minority outgroup onto a larger outgroup, the tendency is also to exacerbate the negativity of the target of the projection (here the Romanians).

Limitations and Future Directions

In this research we tackled the phenomenon of outgroup projection by considering Roma and Romanians, two groups that are currently suffering severe discrimination in Europe. Reality suggests that the outgroup projection phenomenon can be applied to other groups beyond the ones we considered here. One clear example is the generalisation of the Islamic extremist onto Muslims as a whole or Arabs in general. Further research should replicate these results extending this finding to different social groups, across various social contexts.

Besides this, it should be underlined that evidence partially supported the expectation that threat would lead to overestimation of Roma onto Romanians, since in the no-threat condition participants underestimated the percentage of Roma photographs (i.e., 37%). Indeed, their judgement might be enough accurate since it is in line with the evidence of Roma as a minority group within the larger group of Romanians in Romania (i.e., 8.63% according to a Romanian 2011 census) as well as in Italy (i.e., 1,6%; European Commission, 2014). Another explanation of this finding could be that our participants (i.e., university students) might be less prejudiced than other individuals because they are more exposed to democratic principles and social inclusion values. Moreover, under no-threat they might have adjusted their answers to social desirability norms. In contrast, the emotional activation elicited by threat manipulations (for a neurophysiological account of fear elicited by threat, see Mobbs et al., 2007) might have reduced such control over their answers, thus enabling appearance of the outgroup projection bias to a higher extent. Future work should tackle more closely the emotional underpinnings of the relation between threat and outgroup projection tendencies.

Besides this, since we aimed at tackling the overestimation of members of a negatively valued group onto another one, this study employed a single measure of projection, adapting the procedure employed by Rothbart et al. (1978). Future research could complement the present findings by employing additional measures of projection. One of these could be perceived prototypicality of members of one outgroup in comparison to the other. This index could give information on the social cognitive consequences of outgroup projection. Future research should also consider whether this tendency is moderated by relevant individual characteristics such as social dominance orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

In sum, although this contribution relies on a single study, we believe that the phenomenon of outgroup projection can serve to go deeper into the understanding of generalization outcomes within intergroup relations.

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