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Self, Ethnicity, and Social Group Memberships in Two Generations of Italian Canadians

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Ethnic identity in the context of social category memberships was examined in two generations of Italian Canadians. Ratings based on perceived value similarity between a number of categories (self, Canadians, Italians, immigrants, religion, family, friends, social class, age, and Americans) were made by 57 second-generation Italian Canadians and one parent of each. Multidimensional scaling analyses revealed a general distinction between Old World and New World values. First-generation self-identity was manifested in a distinct cluster including family, friends, and immigrants. The configuration for the second generation suggested a bicultural orientation, congruent with additional data on Italian language use across situations. The cross-generational transformation of ethnicity within a system of social categorizations is discussed.

An emergent theme in the study of ethnic identity has been that of change. Examples in the psychological literature include perspectives on ethnic identity in childhood development (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987) and as a function of social context (Christian, Gadfield, Giles, & Taylor, 1976). In sociology, there is a rich tradition of work concerning the "transformation" of ethnicity within the North American context (e.g., Alba, 1990; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970). Clearly, ethnic identity is a dynamic phenomenon involving an interplay between individual, social group, and sociocultural levels of analysis.

The present article focuses on differences in ethnic identity between first- and second-generation Canadians of Italian descent. Of interest here are two related questions. The first concerns the multidimensional nature of ethnic identity: How is the self conceived in relation to the ethnic group and to other relevant social categories? The second question relates to the transformation and maintenance of ethnic identity: Assuming that the effects of acculturation can be gleaned from a cross-

generational perspective, what changes occur in the system of social categorizations involving the self and the ethnic group?

ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION

The multidimensionality of ethnic identity can be explored using a variety of approaches. For example, ethnicity is manifested in involvement in the group's social life (see Phinney, 1990), including language use and religious participation (e.g., Constantinou & Harvey, 1985; Rosenthal & Hrynevich, 1985) and the choice of in-group friendships (Driedger, 1975). Regarding the components of ethnic identity, Phinney (1990) has suggested that self-identification, a sense of belonging, and pride in one's group are three facets common to all ethnic groups. Self-identification is of primary concern here.

From the perspective of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), ethnic identity can be conceptualized with respect to the contribution of social (ethnic) group membership to self-conception. Turner (1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) has proposed that the self-concept can be conceptualized in terms of a hierarchical form of classification, with personal identity as a unique individual at a subordinate level and

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social identity as a group member at a more inclusive level. The level of self-categorization is determined in part by the characteristics of a given situation (e.g., the salience of the social group). Thus, self-categorization as (say) an Italian Canadian may be, to some extent, context specific. Although Turner's ideas seem best suited for a situational analysis of the flexibility of ethnic identity, they are an important illustration of the personal-social distinction that may inform investigations of the dimensionality of identity (e.g., Taylor & Dubé, 1986; Widdicombe, 1988; Wong-Rieger & Taylor, 1981).

In the present study, we view ethnic identity as reflected in a constellation of social categorizations in which the self is located. This perspective recognizes that ethnic identification occurs variously at the interpersonal level (e.g., with family and friends) and at the more inclusive level of social categories (e.g., the ethnic group, religion, and nationality). The organization of these categories is not likely to be fixed; its shifting nature is particularly interesting in the context of acculturation.

ACCULTURATION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Acculturation refers to the changes that take place within cultures as they come into contact. At the level of the individual, psychological acculturation is manifested in changes in identity and values as a result of this process (Berry, 1990). The process of social identification for members of immigrant groups entails a negotiation involving various social categories, including that of their ethnic origin, that of the dominant culture, and the new category of "immigrant" (see Hutnik, 1991; Lalonde, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1992; Liebkind, 1986). An important theoretical issue concerns whether acculturation is necessarily associated with a decline in ethnic identification. Berry's (1984a) model of acculturation suggests that attitudes toward the maintenance of in-group identity and toward the fostering of out-group relationships may be independent of each other. Thus, an individual (or group) may wish to establish ties to the dominant culture while retaining a distinct ethnic identity (the option of integration, as opposed to assimilation).¹

The multidimensional nature of ethnic identity with respect to both ethnic heritage and dominant culture has been examined in a variety of groups, including Italian and Greek Australians (Rosenthal & Hrynevich, 1985; Rosenthal, Whittle, & Bell, 1989) and the Welsh in Great Britain (Christian et al., 1976). One purpose of the present study is to investigate acculturative influences on self-identification from a cross-generational perspective.

GENERATIONAL STATUS AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

It has generally been reported that the strength of ethnic identification diminishes as an individual be-

comes further removed from the immigration experience (e.g., Constantinou & Harvey, 1985; Reitz, 1980). Ethnic language knowledge and use also decline from the first to the second generation (O'Bryan, Reitz, & Kuplowska, 1976; Sachdev, Bourhis, Phang, & D'Eye, 1987). With respect to Italians, a number of studies have supported the validity of these general trends (Alba, 1985, 1990; Isajiw, 1981; Reitz, 1980; Roche, 1982). Indeed, Alba (1985) has suggested that Italian Americans are entering the "twilight" of their ethnicity such that ethnic identification is increasingly becoming a matter of choice for the individual. Two factors may militate against the applicability of such a conclusion to the Canadian context in which the present study was conducted. First, Italian immigration is relatively recent in Canada, having occurred mainly during the 1950s and 1960s; this study concerns first- and second-generation Italian Canadians relatively close to the immigration experience. Second, Canada's policy of multiculturalism officially recognizes the importance of cultural diversity and encourages the maintenance of ethnic heritage, including language.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of Italian Canadians' "transformation" of ethnic identity through a generational lens. The data were collected as part of a more global investigation of acculturation strategies among four ethnic groups: Black Caribbean, Chinese, Greek, and Italian (Lalonde & Cameron, 1993). Additional data collected for the Italian sample are the focus of the present article; of particular interest were differences in the structure of the network of social categories and their relationship to the self. This comparison was achieved through multidimensional scaling analyses, which produced spatial representations of the relevant categories for each generation.

Although our analysis was primarily exploratory, we had several expectations. First, the interrelationships between the self and three categories most relevant to the acculturation experience (Italians, Canadians, and immigrants) were expected to reflect the effects of generational status. Specifically, it was predicted that first-generation Italian Canadians would perceive the self as more similar to "Italians" and to "immigrants" than their children would. Members of the second generation were expected to exhibit a social self-concept that was more bicultural.²

Studies of ethnic identity often focus almost exclusively on general cultural categories (i.e., the ethnic group) whereas other social collectives are ignored or remain implicit. To circumvent this limitation, social categories ranging from the interpersonal (friends) to

the macrosocial (social class) were selected. Whereas some of these categories were expected to have a direct bearing on ethnicity for the present sample (e.g., religion), it may be possible to identify the role of other social categories in the transformation of ethnic identity.

Finally, given the importance often ascribed to the role of language in the maintenance of ethnic identity (e.g., Clément, Gauthier, & Noels, 1993; Giles & Johnson, 1987), an additional measure was included in this study to assess generational differences in Italian language use across situations. This was intended to aid in the interpretation of the results as well as to extend prior research concerning intergenerational differences in ethnic language use (e.g., Sachdev et al., 1987).

METHOD

Respondents

Participants were 57 Canadian university students of Italian descent and one of their parents who had immigrated to Canada. The mean ages for the first- and second-generation samples were 46 and 20, respectively. Approximately 80% of students and 70% of parents were female. The majority of the students were born in Canada (92%) and lived with their parents (95%). The parents' mean length of residence in Canada was 31 years (87% were Canadian citizens).

Procedure

Subjects were recruited from undergraduate psychology courses and through ads in a student newspaper. Apart from the requirement that the parent(s) had immigrated from Italy, participation was contingent on the availability of one parent to serve as a respondent.

The data were collected in one section of a more general questionnaire on ethnic identification and acculturation completed by students individually at our campus laboratory (see Lalonde & Cameron, 1993). This section involved ratings based on perceived value similarity between a number of categories: *myself, Canadians, Italians, immigrants, religion, family, friends, social class, people my age, and Americans*.³ The categories of religion and social class represented in-groups—that is, “people of my religion” and “people of my social class.” The following instructions preceded the ratings:

In this part of the questionnaire you are asked to compare a number of different groups to each other, as well as to compare these groups to yourself. Please make these comparisons in terms of the values that are shared by these groups and yourself. By values we mean the principles that people use to determine what is important in their life (for example, respect, freedom, equality, obedience).⁴

Subjects were then presented with a series of cards on which were printed all possible pairs of the categories listed above. The order of the cards was randomized for each subject. For a given pair of groups, a verbal response was given to the following question: “To what extent do the people in these two groups share the same values?” Responses were made according to a 7-point scale, ranging from *no values in common* (1) to *all values in common* (7); subjects were instructed to regard the midpoint as representing “half of the values in common.” If the comparison involved the self, the relevant question was “To what extent do you share the same values with this group?”

In an additional section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate what percentage of the time they used Italian in the following situations: with parents/children, with siblings, with friends, while shopping, at social occasions (e.g., weddings, parties), and with professionals (e.g., doctors, lawyers). Responses were indicated by circling a percentage figure (from 0% to 100%, in increments of 10).

The students were provided with a parental version of the questionnaire and were instructed in the administration of the cards. Although Italian questionnaires were available, the cards were provided in English only. On returning the parental questionnaire (which was administered to one parent), subjects were paid for their participation and given an oral and a written debriefing.

RESULTS

Multidimensional Scaling Analyses

Mean similarity ratings computed for the 45 possible stimulus pairs were used to construct matrices for the first- and second-generation samples. The matrices were then analyzed using a multidimensional scaling procedure (ALSCAL). Because of the relatively small number of stimuli, interpretation of the results was restricted to one- or two-dimensional solutions (Kruskal & Wish, 1990, p. 34). For the first-generation sample, a one-dimensional solution provided a satisfactory fit of the data ($R^2 = .96$, STRESS = .15). For the second generation, two dimensions best represented the configuration ($R^2 = .97$, STRESS = .08; a one-dimensional solution yielded $R^2 = .88$, STRESS = .20). To further elucidate the pattern of similarities among the categories, hierarchical cluster analyses were also performed, using the UPGMA strategy (unweighted pair-group method using arithmetic averages).

First generation. The one-dimensional solution for the first-generation Italians is presented in Figure 1. A striking feature is the distinct cluster involving the self and the following categories: immigrants, family, age,

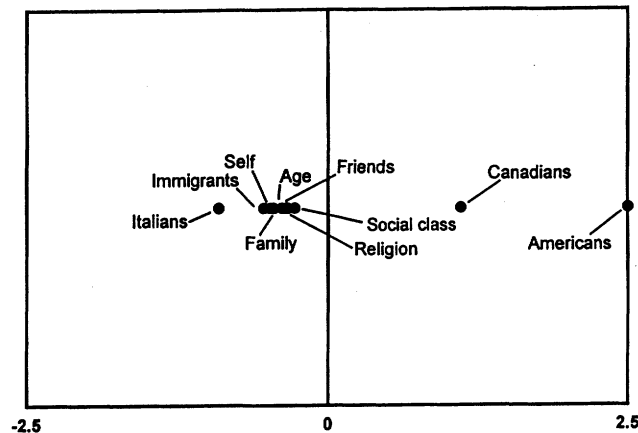


Figure 1 One-dimensional solution for the first generation.

friends, social class, and religion. The category of Italians is slightly removed from this cluster. Overall, it would appear that there is very little perceived differentiation of values among these particular groups and the self, suggesting that they are central social identifications. The clustered categories are distanced from Canadians and even more so from Americans. Whereas the main cluster is defined largely by the self and by various groups likely to be involved in day-to-day social interaction (i.e., family, friends, and people of similar age), it also contains the more inclusive social categories of immigrants and social class. The peripheral groups (Canadians, Americans, and Italians) are characterized by nationality.

One general distinction apparent in the dimension presented in Figure 1 is that between Old World (e.g., immigrants, Italians) and New World (Canadians, Americans) values. The former lie on the left-hand side of the horizontal dimension, whereas the right-hand side is occupied only by the two main social categories defining the North American mainstream.

The cluster analysis generally supported the multidimensional scaling results, although Italians were more strongly linked than immigrants to the main cluster. A four-cluster solution indicated that immigrants, Canadians, and Americans were distinct from one another and from the large cluster comprising the remaining categories. Within the main cluster, the self, family, Italians, and religion were most similar to one another.

Second generation. The spatial pattern yielded for the second generation showed little clustering among the social categories compared with the first generation. It can be seen in Figure 2 that the self lies in close proximity only to the category of friends and thus appears to be less defined by social group memberships. The horizontal dimension is bounded at one extreme by immigrants and at the other by Canadians; this may reflect a "new

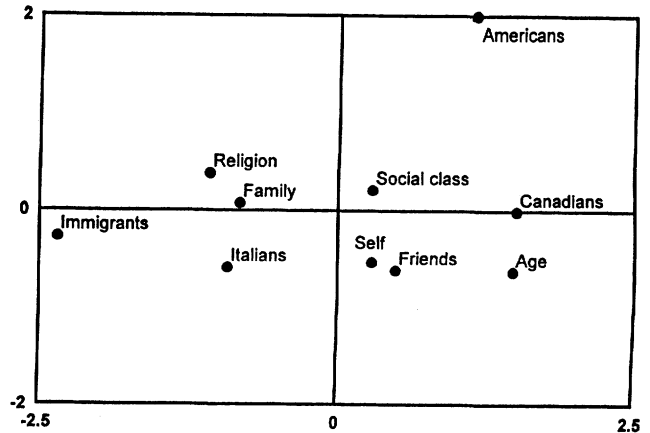


Figure 2 Two-dimensional solution for the second generation.

Canadian/established Canadian" continuum (Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1977). This is similar to the Old World/New World distinction noted above for the first generation. The difference here, however, is that the self (along with friends, age, and social class) is removed somewhat from the categories presumably representing Old World values (immigrants, Italians, family, and religion). It is noteworthy that the self appears to lie midway between Italians and Canadians. The American out-group again is marginalized; in this case, however, a second dimension is required to represent its relationship with the other categories (it is the only category substantially displaced on the vertical dimension).

The configuration in Figure 2 corresponds to the results of the cluster analysis. A four-cluster solution located the self, friends, people of similar age, Canadians, and social class in one cluster and Italians, religion, and family in another. Immigrants and Americans defined the remaining two clusters.

Generational Effects Involving Language Use Across Situations

A within-groups (2×7) analysis of variance ANOVA was conducted on ratings of the percentage of time that subjects speak Italian, as a function of both generation (first/ second) and situation (with parents/children; with siblings; with friends; when shopping; on social occasions; at work; with professionals). The analysis, which is based on 49 parent-child pairs, yielded significant effects of generation, $F(1, 48) = 105.48, p < .001$, and situation, $F(6, 288) = 21.55, p < .001$. The Generation \times Situation interaction was also significant, $F(6, 288) = 32.69, p < .001$. It can be seen in Table 1 that the main effect of generation arises from the parents' overall more frequent use of Italian. This is particularly evident in situations involving siblings, friends, and parties, in

TABLE 1: Percentage of Italian Language Use by Situation and Generation

Situation	Generation	
	First	Second
Children/parents	47	42
Siblings	73	12
Friends	66	13
Shopping	46	12
Social occasions	62	9
Work	42	11
Professionals	22	6

which Italian is spoken more than 50% of the time. For the second generation, the heritage language is used less than 15% of the time in all situations except with parents, when Italian is spoken 42% of the time. The significant interaction effect is attributable to parent-child communication, the only context in which there is no substantial difference between the frequencies of Italian language use for the first and second generations.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Alba, 1990; Isajiw, 1981; Reitz, 1980), second-generation Italian Canadians exhibited less ethnic identification than their parents. Importantly, however, this generational difference is not adequately described simply by decline but by change and transformation. That is, ethnic identification may indeed decrease further from the immigration experience, but the meaning of identification itself is also likely to change within the context of the perceived relationships between the self and various social groups and categories.

Generational Differences in Ethnic and Social Identity

The most striking generational difference concerns the relative spatial (and, presumably, psychological) distances between the self and other categories. For first-generation Italian Canadians, the self is virtually indistinguishable (on value similarity) from a number of groups: immigrants, religion, family, friends, age, and social class. Among members of the second generation, in contrast, the self appears as relatively independent from the social groups, with the possible exception of friends. These features reflect underlying differences in the personal-social dimension of self-construal, the first generation exhibiting a more collectivist (see Triandis, 1989) or interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) orientation in which the person may be viewed "not as separate from the social context but as more connected and less differentiated from others" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227). This interpretation is also consistent with the finding of Lalonde and Cameron (1993)

that members of the first generation exhibited a collective acculturation orientation to a greater extent than their children (see Note 2).

One important aspect of any type of social identity is its potential for change across the life span; this is relevant in the context of the present study because generational status may be confounded with age. For example, one's self-defining relationships with family may change with age; when someone becomes a parent, family is more likely to be central in relation to the self. It is not apparent that such age differences play a central role in ethnic identification. Within a developmental perspective, differences in ethnic identity have been found between younger and older adolescents (Rosenthal & Hrynevich, 1985), but there is a dearth of research regarding possible changes in early adulthood (Phinney, 1990). Furthermore, it seems that there are no longitudinal studies addressing the changing nature of ethnic identity across the life span. The exploration of age effects independent of generational status was beyond the scope of the present study and needs to be addressed in future research.

An interesting feature of the configurations of both generations is the marked marginality of the American out-group. It is apparently important for these subjects to perceive a difference between the values of Americans in general and those of the groups and categories to which they belong (and which contribute to their self-definition). Indeed, it has been observed that a Canadian national identity is sometimes defined in a negative manner; that is, to be Canadian is "not to be American." From an intergroup perspective, this illustrates an important component of group differentiation—the maintenance of in-group distinctiveness (see Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The marginalization of perceived American values offers a striking example of this bias, given the large degree of cultural sharing between Canada and the United States (at least in terms of popular culture). It is noteworthy that the second generation differentiated the American category along a separate dimension; this suggests the development of a national (Canadian) identity.

Whereas the solutions for both generations can be interpreted as reflecting an Old World/New World distinction (e.g., Constantinou & Harvey, 1985), the configuration for the second generation most clearly reveals a "new Canadian/established Canadian" dimension (Berry et al., 1977), bounded by immigrants and Canadians at opposing poles. That the self occupies a central position on this continuum suggests an identity that can be described as bicultural and implies a flexible orientation toward cultural group membership. Rotheram and Phinney (1987, p. 24) define bicultural competence as "the ability to function in two different cultures by switching between two sets of values and attitudes." What is the

nature of this flexibility? The data on Italian language use suggest that ethnic identity may be situationally mediated.

Domains of Ethnic Identification

Consistent with several studies (Bourhis & Sachdev, 1984; O'Bryan et al., 1976; Sachdev et al., 1987), second-generation Italian language use was restricted primarily to the private domain (i.e., with parents). This finding supports the bicultural nature of the second-generation self-identity in that it indicates an ability to accommodate to situations involving both Italians and members of the majority culture. Rosenthal and Hrynevich (1985) also provide evidence regarding the situational variability of ethnic identification: Greek Australian and Italian Australian adolescents reported identifying strongly with the immigrant culture when they were with their family, at ethnic social events, or speaking their heritage culture language. The language data for the first generation, as well as the socially interdependent nature of self-identity, suggest a pattern of relationships with similar others in which ethnic identification is sustained. Thus, interpersonal relations in both the private and public domains of social interaction (e.g., with friends, family, and other Italians) presumably serve to maintain a set of beliefs and values defining cultural group identity.

CONCLUSIONS

The results lend support to a multifaceted conception of ethnic identity, in terms of both its components (e.g., social identification, language use) and its interrelationships with a variety of social categories. Importantly, the location of the self within a system of social categorizations relevant to ethnicity and nationality may change as a result of acculturation. A model of identification that accounts for attitudes toward both the maintenance of ethnic heritage and relations with the majority culture (e.g., Berry, 1984a; Hutnik, 1991) transcends a simple linear relation between ethnic identity and acculturation (see also Phinney, 1990). It is clear, however, that important issues remain, including the variety of relationships in which ethnicity may be sustained (e.g., with people of the same religion) and the contexts in which ethnic identification may be activated (e.g., children with their parents). Implicit here is the notion that social identity may be maintained or transformed in the context of both interpersonal and intergroup relations. Future research might investigate the nature of the cross-situational flexibility of ethnic self-categorization (e.g., Clément, Sylvestre, & Noels, 1991), particularly with respect to private versus public domains of interaction.

What is the nature of the cross-generational transformation of ethnic identity? Alba (1990, p. 300) points to

“a privatization of ethnic identity—a reduction of its expression to largely personal and family terms.” Although this conclusion is not incongruent with the results of the present study, it may be applicable only to ethnic groups in a minority position. Furthermore, individuals and groups may be expected to differ in identity retention because of sociostructural factors; in this vein, it is important to recognize the vitality of various ethnic groups given differences in factors such as demographic strength and institutional support (cf. Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977). Indeed, such a perspective illustrates the examination of identity at a number of related levels (personal, social group, and societal); it is clear that we must make compelling links between them to understand both the structure of ethnic identity and the ways it can change.

NOTES

1. Indeed, the strategy of integration (along with the notion of “hyphenated identities”) implies a dualism that resonates with the ideology espoused by Canada’s official policy of multiculturalism. This policy, implemented in the early 1970s, contains a number of interrelated components. As identified by Berry (1984b), these include own group maintenance and development, other group acceptance and tolerance, intergroup contact and sharing, and the learning of official languages.

2. Several measures obtained by Lalonde and Cameron (1993) are relevant to the present concern with the multidimensionality of ethnic identity and the effects of generational status. Scores on a *group identification* measure, which reflected the sense of belonging to the group and affirmation of ethnicity, revealed that parents exhibited stronger ethnic identification than their children. A second measure, reflecting an additional dimension of ethnicity, is that of *collective acculturation orientation* (i.e., a preference for a collective in-group strategy with respect to social mobility; see also Moghaddam, Taylor, & Lalonde, 1987). It was found that members of the first generation were more likely than their children to endorse strategies directed toward improving the social position of Italians as a group.

3. The category of sex was also involved in the ratings but was excluded from the analyses because it is conceivable that its position within a network of social categories and relationships could differ for males and females. In addition, given that most subjects were female, no gender comparisons were possible.

4. The link between social identification and perceived value similarity has been demonstrated by Wong-Rieger and Taylor (1981). The results of their study suggested that a unitary self-identity may be derived from membership in various social groups having different members but perceived to hold similar values.

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